

## RAMONA.

## A Story.

By HELEN JACKSON.

## CHAPTER VI.—(CONTINUED.)

"Is it sure that Senor Felipe will get well?" asked Alessandro.

"I think so," replied Father Salvierderra. "These relapses are always worse than the first attack, but I have never known one to die after he had the natural sweat to break from the skin and got good sleep. I doubt not he will be in his bed, though, for many days, and there will be much to be seen to. It was an ill luck to have Juan Can laid up, too, just at this time. I must go and see him; I hear he is in most rebellious frame of mind, and blasphemes impiously."

"That does he!" said Alessandro. "He swears the saints gave him over to the fiends to push him off the plank, and he'll have none of them from this out! I told him to beware, or they might bring him to worse things yet if he did not mend his speech of them."

Sighing deeply as they walked along, the monk said: "It is but a sign of of the times. Blasphemers are on the highway. The people are being corrupted. Keeps your father the worship in the chapel still, and does a priest come often to the village?"

"Only twice a year," replied Alessandro; "and sometimes for a funeral, if there is money enough to pay for the Mass. But my father has the chapel open, and each Sunday we sing what we know of the Mass; and the people are often there praying."

"Ay, ay! Ever for money!" groaned Father Salvierderra, not heeding the latter part of the sentence. "Ever for money! It is a shame. But that it were sure to be held as a trespass I would go myself to Temecula once in three months; but I may not. The priests do not love our order."

"Ob, if you could, Father," exclaimed Alessandro, "it would make my father very glad! He speaks often to me of the difference he sees between the words of the Church now and in the days of the Mission. He is very sad, Father, and in great fear about our village. They say the Americans, when they buy the Mexicans' lands, drive the Indians away as if they were dogs; they say we have no right to our lands. Do you think that can be so, Father, when we have always lived on them and the owners promised them to us for ever?"

Father Salvierderra was silent a long time before replying, and Alessandro watched his face anxiously. He seemed to be hesitating for words to convey his meaning. At last he said: "Got your father any notice, at any time since the Americans took the country—notice to appear before a court, or anything about a title to the land?"

"No, Father," replied Alessandro.

"There has to be some such paper, as I understand their laws," continued the monk; "some notice, before any steps can be taken to remove Indians from an estate. It must be done according to the law, in the courts. If you have had no such notice you are not in danger."

"But, Father," persisted Alessandro, "how could there be a law to take away from us the land which the Senor Valdez gave us for ever?"

"Gave he to you any paper, any writing to show it?"

"No, no paper; but it is marked in red lines on the map. It was marked off by Jose Ramirez, of Los Angeles, when they marked all the boundaries of Senor Valdez's estate. They had many instruments of brass and wood to measure with, and a long chain, very heavy, which I helped them carry. I myself saw it marked on the

map. They all slept in my father's house—Senor Valdez, and Ramirez, and the man who made the measures. He hired one of our men to carry his instruments, and I went to help, for I wished to see how it was done; but I could understand nothing, and Jose told me a man must study many years to learn the way of it. It seemed to me our way, by the stones, was much better. But I know it is all marked on the map, for it was with a red line; and my father understood it, and Jose Ramirez and Senor Valdez both pointed to it with their finger, and they said, 'All this here is your land, Pablo, always.' I do not think my father need fear, do you?"

"I hope not," replied Father Salvierderra, cautiously; "but since the way that all the lands of the Missions have been taken away, I have small faith in the honesty of the Americans. I think they will take all that they can. The Church has suffered terrible loss at their hands."

"That is what my father says," replied Alessandro. "He says, 'Look at San Luis Rey! Nothing but the garden and orchard left, of all their vast lands where they used to pasture thirty thousand sheep. If the Church and the Fathers could not keep their lands, what can we Indians do?' That is what my father says."

"True, true!" said the monk, as he turned into the door of the room where Juan Can lay on his narrow bed, longing yet fearing to see Father Salvierderra's face coming in. "We are all alike helpless in their hands, Alessandro. They possess the country and can make what laws they please. We can only say, 'God's will be done;'" and he crossed himself devoutly, repeating the words twice.

Alessandro did the same, and with a truly devout spirit, for he was full of veneration for the Fathers and their teachings; but as he walked on towards the shearing-shed he thought: "Then, again, how can it be God's will that wrong be done? It cannot be God's will that one man should steal from another all he has. That would make God no better than a thief, it looks to me. But how can it happen, if it is not God's will?"

It does not need that one be educated to see the logic of this formula. Generations of the oppressed and despoiled, before Alessandro, had grappled with the problem in one shape or another.

At the shearing-shed Alessandro found his men in confusion and ill-humour. The shearing had been over and done by ten in the morning, and why were they not on their way to the Ortega's! Waiting all day—it was now near sunset—with nothing to do, and, still worse, with not much of anything to eat, had made them all cross; and no wonder. The economical Juan Can, finding that the work would be done by ten, and supposing they would be off before noon, had ordered only two sheep to be killed for them the day before, and the mutton was all gone; and old Marda, getting her cue from Juan, had cooked no more *frijoles* than the family needed themselves; so the poor shearers had indeed had a sorry day of it, in no wise alleviated either by the reports brought from time to time that their captain was lying on the ground, face down, under Senor Felipe's window, and must not be spoken to.

It was not a propitious moment for Alessandro to make the announcement of his purpose to leave the band; but he made a clean breast of it in few words, and diplomatically diverted all resentment from himself by setting them immediately to voting for a new captain to take his place for the remainder of the season.

"Very well!" they said hotly; "captain for this year, captain for next too!" It wasn't so easy to step out and in again of the captaincy of the shearers!

"All right," said Alessandro; "please yourselves! It is all the same

to me. But here I am going to stay for the present. Father Salvierderra wishes it."

"Oh, if the Father wishes it, that is different!" "Ah, that alters the case!" "Alessandro is right!" came up in confused murmur from the appeased crowd. They were all good Catholics, every one of the Temecula men, and would never think of going against the Father's orders. But when they understood that Alessandro's intention was to remain until Juan Canito's leg should be well enough for him to go about again, fresh grumbings began. That would not do. It would be all summer. Alessandro must be at home for the Saint Juan's Day fete, in midsummer—no doing anything without Alessandro then. What was he thinking of? Not of the midsummer fete, that was certain, when he promised to stay as long as the Senorita Ramona should need him. Alessandro had remembered nothing except the Senorita's voice while she was speaking to him. If he had had a hundred engagements for the summer he would have forgotten them all. Now that he was reminded of the midsummer fete, it must be confessed he was for a moment dismayed at the recollection; for that was a time when, as he well knew, his father could not do without his help. There were sometimes a thousand Indians at this fete, and disorderly whites took advantage of the occasion to sell whiskey and encourage all sorts of license and disturbance. Yes, Alessandro's clear path of duty lay at Temecula when that fete came off. That was certain.

"I will manage to be at home then," he said. "If I am not through here by that time I will at least come for the fete. That you may depend on."

The voting for the new captain did not take long. There was, in fact, but one man in the band fit for the office. That was Fernando, the only old man in the band; all the rest were young men under thirty, or boys. Fernando had been captain for several years, but had himself begged, two years ago, that the band would elect Alessandro in his place. He was getting old, and he did not like to have to sit up and walk about the first half of every night to see that the shearers were not gambling away all their money at cards; he preferred to roll himself up in his blanket at sunset and sleep till dawn the next morning. But just for these few remaining weeks he had no objection to taking the office again. And Alessandro was right, entirely right, in remaining; they ought all to see that, Fernando said; and his word had great weight with the men.

The Senora Moreno, he reminded them, had always been a good friend of theirs, and had said that so long as she had sheep to shear, the Temecula shearers should do it; and it would be very ungrateful now if they did not do all they could to help her in her need.

The blankets were rolled up, the saddles collected, the ponies caught and driven up to the shed, when Ramona and Margarita were seen coming at full speed from the house.

"Alessandro! Alessandro!" cried Ramona out of breath, "I have only just now heard that the men have had no dinner to-day. I am ashamed; but you know it would not have happened except for the sickness in the house. Everybody thought they were going away in the morning. Now they must have a good supper before they go. It is already cooking. Tell them to wait."

Those of the men who understood the Spanish language, in which Ramona spoke, translated it to those who did not, and there was a cordial outburst of thanks to the Senorita from all lips. All were only too ready to wait for the supper. Their haste to begin on the Ortega sheep-shearing had suddenly faded from their minds. Only Alessandro hesitated.

"It is a good six hours' ride to Ortega's," he said to the men. "You'll be late in, if you do not start now."

"Supper will be ready in an hour," said Ramona. "Please let them stay; one hour can't make any difference."

Alessandro smiled. "It will take nearer two, Senorita, before they are off," he said; "but it shall be as you wish, and many thanks to you, Senorita, for thinking of it."

"Oh, I did not think of it myself," said Ramona. "It was Margarita here, who came and told me. She knew we would be ashamed to have the shearers go away hungry. I am afraid they are very hungry indeed," she added ruefully. "It must be dreadful to go a whole day without anything to eat; they had their breakfast soon after sunrise, did they not?"

"Yes, Senorita," answered Alessandro, "but that is not long; one can do without food very well for one day. I often do."

"Often!" exclaimed Ramona; "but why should you do that?" Then suddenly bethinking herself, she said in her heart, "Oh, what a thoughtless question! Can it be they are so poor as that?" And to leave Alessandro from replying, she set off on a run for the house, saying, "Come, come, Margarita, we must go and help at the supper."

"Will the Senorita let me help too," asked Alessandro, wondering at his own boldness—"if there is anything I can do?"

"Oh, no," she cried "there is not. Yes, there is, too. You can help to carry the things down to the booth: for we are short of hands now, with Juan Can in bed, and Luigo gone to Ventura for the doctor. You and some of your men might carry all the supper over. I'll call you when we are ready."

The men sat down in a group and waited contentedly, smoking, chatting, and laughing. Alessandro walked up and down between the kitchen and the shed. He could hear the sounds of rattling dishes, jingling spoons, frying, pouring water. Savoury smells began to be wafted out. Evidently old Marda meant to atone for the shortcoming of the noon. Juan Can, in his bed, also heard and smelled what was going on. "May the fiends get me," he growled, "if that wasteful old hussy isn't getting up a feast for those beasts of Indians! There's mutton and onions, and peppers stewing, and potatoes I'll be bound, and God knows what else, for beggars that are only too thankful to get a handful of roasted wheat or a bowl of acorn porridge at home. Well, they'll have to say they were well feasted at the Moreno's—that's one comfort. I wonder if Margarita'll think I am worthy of tasting that stew! San Jose! but it smells well! Margarita! Margarita!" he called at top of his lungs; but Margarita did not hear. She was absorbed in her duties in the kitchen; and having already taken Juan at sundown a bowl of the good broth which the doctor had said was the only sort of food he must eat for two weeks, she had dismissed him from her mind for the night. Moreover, Margarita was absent-minded to night. She was more than half in love with the handsome Alessandro, who, when he had been on the ranch the year before, had dined with her, and said many a light pleasant word to her, evenings, as a young man may; and what ailed him now, that he seemed, when he saw her, as if she were no more than a transparent shade, through which he stared at the sky behind her, she did not know. Senor Felipe's illness, she thought, and the general misery and confusion, had perhaps put everything else out of his head; but now he was going to stay, and it would be good fun having him there, if only Senora Felipe got well, which he seemed like to do. And as Margarita flew about here, there, and everywhere, she cast frequent glances at the tall straight figure pacing up and down in the dusk outside.

Alessandro did not see her. He did not see anything. He was looking off