

When you are a day's journey away from the haunts of others of your kind, the advent of any new "human" is a matter of excitement.

We all turned our eyes in the direction Pedro's stick was indicating, and there, thousands of yards away as yet, but clearly discernible in every detail in that pure air, was a man on horse-back, a man in a red and orange manteau, shaded by a broad yellow hat, a man riding slowly and wearily, on a horse that stumbled now and then, as if at the end of its strength.

The master of the house rose, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stepped out into the sunshine. Pedro followed, in exact imitation of his idol.

"He is a stranger," said the master, "and he is carrying a child."

"A stranger," echoed the boy, "carrying a child."

We were all eagerness now. Petronella and Mercedes dropped their tinkling, the lady of the house laid aside her shell-work, and we all stood anxiously awaiting the new arrival, like a South Sea group posing for a picture, to be entitled "Expectation." And presently the stranger was before us.

He had dismounted and walked on foot the latter part of his journey, dragging, rather than leading, his tired steed, and now parched, exhausted, sorrowful, emaciated, his arm trembling with the fatigue of holding the sleeping child, was an object calculated to rouse our sincerest compassion and concern.

"Senor," he said, addressing the master, after greeting all respectfully, "you are the Dueño of this Hacienda?" "I am," replied the master, "I have heard of you, Senor," the man continued, "and I come in the name of God and of the Holy Virgin, to ask your help and protection."

"Por Dios, man, you shall rest first, and tell your errand afterwards," exclaimed the master, gazing compassionately at the ghastly face before him. "Here, Trinity," calling to the children's nurse, "take the niño-hombre" (child-man—infants are quaintly designated men and women, hombres and mojes, from their cradles), and care for him as you would for my son." And he lifted the sleeping baby, in its miniature manteau and enormous sombrero, into the compassionate arms of the ancient servant. "And you, Senor," he continued, turning to the stranger, "come with me and be welcome as my guest."

And the purple shadows were long on the golden sands, the sun was low over the sapphire sea before we heard that traveller's tale.

Oh dramas of reality, so much more tragic in their simplicity than anything imagination can invent! That humble tale the stranger told us in the shade of the Chilian farmhouse, could well be the basis of a tragedy, that, in the hands of the true poet, should stir the hearts of many men to echo its grief! And—as we found afterwards—no word of it, but was borne out by fact.

"We lived," said the stranger, "over by the Cerro, two days journey from here. My father, a Frenchman, who had gained our little estate by hard work and economy as a gardener's assistant in Santiago, my wife, my sister and four children. All dead now—all dead—all but I and this youngest child."

No one interrupted the pause that followed, and presently he continued:

"It seems impossible that a week ago we were happy, working hard, and planning for the future; my father, who had come over after the troubles of '71, talking of the old country, praising its merits, as he always would, and twisting grass to bind the roses,

that my wife was busy in the house, my sister teaching the little ones (for she was learned, and, a saint on earth), and the children as pretty and cheery as children can well be."

Again that awful pause of pain, and then, in short, broken sentences, the agony of which I cannot render, he gave us the following account of his experiences.

"I was away wood cutting when it happened, and almost arrived too late to find the last alive. God! That return! The silent house, no children running in the garden, no wife to smile a welcome, and no warning, no thought of what I should find!"

It was characteristic that, although several of the audience were weeping silently, no one ventured on words of condolence for such a sorrow.

"I thought, I thought," groaned the unhappy man, "they were playing me a little joke, had seen me and were hiding, and would bound out laughing. Heaven! I entered that house of death laughing myself! Then—"

We had to wait some time before the unfortunate Frenchman could regain some sort of composure, and then the natural artistic sentiment, unconscious dramatic power blended with his natural emotion, made what he told us far more real and terrible than any words of mine can convey an idea of.

He had found—to cut a sad story short—his entire family dead, as he had said before. Only the old father and the infant in its cradle were alive, the latter rosy and well, the former almost mad with horror and exhaustion.

It seems that shortly after the unfortunate Frenchman left his house, the entire family (with the exception of the old father and the baby), were attacked more or less simultaneously by some mysterious malady, rather, it seems to me, due to accidental poisoning than as our narrator himself suggested, to dysentery or a local outbreak of cholera—no one will ever clearly know. There was no one with professional knowledge within reach. The sick people seemed to have had no idea of the right thing to do, though the poor mother and aunt vainly tried to save the little ones, while they were dying themselves, perhaps—who knows?—in their loving ignorance accelerating the evil they wished to cure. Anyhow, all who were attacked died one after another; the saintly aunt first, then the children, and (cruel fate!) the mother last of all.

This was the old father's account, wrung from his half-crazed brain, bit by bit, by his unhappy son.

The mother was found lying on the ground by the bedside of her children, as she had died, trying to help them to the last. The old father succumbed to shock three days ago.

Of course, such things happen all over the world. People are poisoned by injudicious mushroom-eating in populous Surrey and cultured Cambridge. Whole families have been swept away by similar accidents in learned Germany. Such a disaster is not common to Chili; yet, it seems to me, the extermination of those worthy settlers, in that lonely hacienda, far from the knowledge and help that might have saved them, will appeal to the sympathies of my English sisters as it did to ours.

Long before the tale was finished the main part of the audience was in tears. Petronella was unconsciously making a footstool of her beloved guitar, on which she stamped her little foot as she wept, while the eyes of the beautiful Mercedes were red with the

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