

CHAPTER II.

EVENING IN THE STREETS OF LIMA.

Night had succeeded, almost without intervening twilight, the glare of day. The two women quickened their pace, for it was late; the young girl, still under the influence of strong emotion, maintained silence, while the duenna murmured some mysterious paternosters--they walked rapidly through one of the sloping streets leading from the Plaza-Mayor.

This place is situated more than four hundred feet above the level of the sea, and about a hundred and fifty rods from the bridge thrown over the river Rimac, which forms the diameter of the city of Lima, arranged in a semicircle.

The city of Lima lies in the valley of the Rimac, nine leagues from its mouth; at the north and east commence the first undulations of ground which form a part of the great chain of the Andes: the valley of Lungaicho, formed by the mountains of San Cristoval and the Amancaës, which rise behind Lima, terminates in its suburbs. The city lies on one bank of the river; the other is occupied by the suburb of San Lazaro, and is united to the city by a bridge of five arches, the upper piers of which are triangular to break the force of the current; while the lower ones present to the promenaders circular benches, on which the fashionables may lounge during the summer evenings, and where they can

contemplate a pretty cascade.

The city is two miles long from east to west, and only a mile and a quarter wide from the bridge to the walls; the latter, twelve feet in height, ten feet thick at their base, are built of adobes, a kind of brick dried in the sun, and made of potter's clay mingled with a great quantity of chopped straw: these walls are calculated to resist earthquakes; the enclosure, pierced with seven gates and three posterns, terminates at its south-east extremity by the little citadel of Santa Caterina.

Such is the ancient city of kings, founded in 1534 by Pizarro, on the day of Epiphany; it has been and is still the theatre of constantly renewed revolutions. Lima, situated three miles from the sea, was formerly the principal storehouse of America on the Pacific Ocean, thanks to its Port of Callao, built in 1779, in a singular manner. An old vessel, filled with stones, sand, and rubbish of all sorts, was wrecked on the shore; piles of the mangrove-tree, brought from Guayaquil and impervious to water, were driven around this as a centre, which became the immovable base on which rose the mole of Callao.

The climate, milder and more temperate than that of Carthagená or Bahía, situated on the opposite side of America, makes Lima one of the most agreeable cities of the New World: the wind has two directions from which it never varies; either it blows from the south-east, and becomes cool by crossing the Pacific Ocean; or it comes from the south-west,

impregnated with the mild atmosphere of the forests and the freshness which it has derived from the icy summits of the Cordilleras.

The nights beneath tropical latitudes are very beautiful and very clear; they mysteriously prepare that beneficent dew which fertilizes a soil exposed to the rays of a cloudless sky--so the inhabitants of Lima prolong their nocturnal conversations and receptions; household labors are quietly finished in the dwellings refreshed by the shadows, and the streets are soon deserted; scarcely is some pulperia still haunted by the drinkers of chica or quarapo.

These, the young girl, whom we have seen, carefully avoided; crossing in the middle of the numerous squares scattered about the city, she arrived, without interruption, at the bridge of the Rimac, listening to catch the slightest sound--which her emotion exaggerated, and hearing only the bells of a train of mules conducted by its arriero, or the joyous stribillo of some Indian.

This young girl was called Sarah, and was returning to the house of the Jew Samuel, her father; she was clad in a saya of satin--a kind of petticoat of a dark color, plaited in elastic folds, and very narrow at the bottom, which compelled her to take short steps, and gave her that graceful delicacy peculiar to the Limanienne ladies; this petticoat, ornamented with lace and flowers, was in part covered with a silk mantle, which was raised above the head and enveloped it like a hood; stockings of exquisite fineness and little satin shoes peeped out

beneath the graceful saya; bracelets of great value encircled the arms of the young girl, whose rich toilet was of exquisite taste, and her whole person redolent of that charm so well expressed by the Spanish word *donaire*.

Milleflores might well say to André Certá that his betrothed had nothing of the Jewess but the name, for she was a faithful specimen of those admirable *señoras* whose beauty is above all praise.

The *duenna*, an old Jewess, whose countenance was expressive of avarice and cupidity, was a devoted servant of Samuel, who paid her liberally.

At the moment when these two women entered the suburb of San Lazaro, a man, clad in the robe of a monk, and with his head covered with a cowl, passed near them and looked at them attentively. This man, of tall stature, possessed a countenance expressive of gentleness and benevolence; it was Padre Joachim de Camarones; he threw a glance of intelligence on Sarah, who immediately looked at her follower.

The latter was still grumbling, muttering and whining, which prevented her seeing any thing; the young girl turned toward the good father and made a graceful sign with her hand.

"Well, *señora*," said the old woman, sharply, "is it not enough to have been insulted by these Christians, that you should stop to look at a priest?"

Sarah did not reply.

"Shall we see you one day, with rosary in hand, engaged in the ceremonies of the church?"

The ceremonies of the church--las funciones de iglesia--are the great business of the Limanian ladies.

"You make strange suppositions," replied the young girl, blushing.

"Strange as your conduct! What would my master Samuel say, if he knew what had taken place this evening?"

"Am I to blame because a brutal muleteer chose to address me?"

"I understand, señora," said the old woman, shaking her head, "and will not speak of the gaucho."

"Then the young man did wrong in defending me from the abuse of the populace?"

"Is it the first time the Indian has thrown himself in your way?"

The countenance of the young girl was fortunately sheltered by her mantle, for the darkness would not have sufficed to conceal her emotion

from the inquisitive glance of the duenna.

"But let us leave the Indian where he is," resumed the old woman, "it is not my business to watch him. What I complain of is, that in order not to disturb these Christians, you wished to remain among them! Had you not some desire to kneel with them? Ah, señora, your father would soon dismiss me if I were guilty of such apostasy."

But the young girl no longer heard; the remark of the old woman on the subject of the young Indian had inspired her with sweeter thoughts; it seemed to her that the intervention of this young man was providential; and she turned several times to see if he had not followed her in the shadow. Sarah had in her heart a certain natural confidence which became her wonderfully; she felt herself to be the child of these warm latitudes, which the sun decorates with surprising vegetation; proud as a Spaniard, if she had fixed her regards on this man, it was because he had stood proudly in the presence of her pride, and had not begged a glance as a reward of his protection.

In imagining that the Indian was near her, Sarah was not mistaken; Martin Paz, after having come to the assistance of the young girl, wished to ensure her safe retreat; so when the promenaders had dispersed, he followed her, without being perceived by her, but without concealing himself; the darkness alone favoring his pursuit.

This Martin Paz was a handsome young man, wearing with unparalleled

nobility the national costume of the Indian of the mountains; from his broad-brimmed straw hat escaped fine black hair, whose curls harmonized with the bronze of his manly face. His eyes shone with infinite sweetness, like the transparent atmosphere of starry nights; his well-formed nose surmounted a pretty mouth, unlike that of most of his race. He was one of the noblest descendants of Manco-Capac, and his veins were full of that ardent blood which leads men to the accomplishment of lofty deeds.

He was proudly draped in his poncho of brilliant colors; at his girdle hung one of those Malay poignards, so terrible in a practiced hand, for they seem to be riveted to the arm which strikes. In North America, on the shores of Lake Ontario, Martin Paz would have been a great chief among those wandering tribes which have fought with the English so many heroic combats.

Martin Paz knew that Sarah was the daughter of the wealthy Samuel; he knew her to be the most charming woman in Lima; he knew her to be betrothed to the opulent mestizo André Certa; he knew that by her birth, her position and her wealth she was beyond the reach of his heart; but he forgot all these impossibilities in his all-absorbing passion. It seemed to him that this beautiful young girl belonged to him, as the llama to the Peruvian forests, as the eagle to the depths of immensity.

Plunged in his reflections, Martin Paz hastened his steps to see the saya of the young girl sweep the threshold of the paternal dwelling;

and Sarah herself, half-opening then her mantilla, cast on him a bewildering glance of gratitude.

He was quickly joined by two Indians of the species of zambos, pillagers and robbers, who walked beside him.

"Martin Paz," said one of them to him, "you ought this very evening to meet our brethren in the mountains."

"I shall be there," coldly replied the other.

"The schooner Annonciation has appeared in sight from Callao, tacked for a few moments, then, protected by the point, rapidly disappeared. She will undoubtedly approach the land near the mouth of the Rimac, and our bark canoes must be there to relieve her of her merchandise. We shall need your presence."

"You are losing time by your observations. Martin Paz knows his duty and he will do it."

"It is in the name of the Sambo that we speak to you here."

"It is in my own name that I speak to you."

"Do you not fear that he will find your presence in the suburb of San Lazaro at this hour unaccountable?"

"I am where my fancy and my will have brought me."

"Before the house of the Jew?"

"Those of my brethren who are disposed to find fault can meet me to-night in the mountain."

The eyes of the three men sparkled, and this was all. The zambos regained the bank of the Rimac, and the sound of their footsteps died away in the darkness.

Martin Paz had hastily approached the house of the Jew. This house, like all those of Lima, had but two stories; the ground floor, built of bricks, was surmounted with walls formed of canes tied together and covered with plaster; all this part of the building, constructed to resist earthquakes, imitated, by a skillful painting, the bricks of the lower story; the square roof, called asoetas, was covered with flowers, and formed a terrace full of perfumes and pretty points of view.

A vast gate, placed between two pavilions, gave access to a court; but as usual, these pavilions had no window opening upon the street.

The clock of the parish church was striking eleven when Martin Paz stopped before the dwelling of Sarah. Profound silence reigned around; a

flickering light within proved that the saloon of the Jew Samuel was still occupied.

Why does the Indian stand motionless before these silent walls? The cool atmosphere woos him with its transparency and its perfumes; the radiant stars send down upon the sleeping earth rays of diaphanous mildness; the white constellations illumine the darkness with their enchanting light; his heart believes in those sympathetic communications which brave time and distance.

A white form appears upon the terrace amid the flowers to which night has only left a vague outline, without diminishing their delicious perfumes; the dahlias mingle with the mentzelias, with the helianthus, and, beneath the occidental breeze, form a waving basket which surrounds Sarah, the young and beautiful Jewess.

Martin Paz involuntarily raises his hands and clasps them with adoration. Suddenly the white form sinks down, as if terrified.

Martin Paz turns, and finds himself face to face with André Certa.

"Since when do the Indians pass their nights in contemplation?"

André Certa spoke angrily.

"Since the Indians have trodden the soil of their ancestors."

"Have they no longer, on the mountain side, some yaravis to chant, some boleros to dance with the girls of their caste?"

"The cholos," replied the Indian, in a high voice, "bestow their devotion where it is merited; the Indians love according to their hearts."

André Certa became pale with anger; he advanced a step toward his immovable rival.

"Wretch! will you quit this place?"

"Rather quit it yourself," shouted Martin Paz; and two poignards gleamed in the two right hands of the adversaries; they were of equal stature, they seemed of equal strength, and the lightnings of their eyes were reflected in the steel of their arms.

André Certa rapidly raised his arm, which he dropped still more quickly. But his poignard had encountered the Malay poignard of the Indian; at the fire which flashed from this shock, André saw the arm of Martin Paz suspended over his head, and immediately rolled on the earth, his arm pierced through.

"Help, help!" he exclaimed.

The door of the Jew's house opened at his cries. Some mestizoes ran from a neighboring house; some pursued the Indian, who fled rapidly; others raised the wounded man. He had swooned.

"Who is this man?" said one of them. "If he is a sailor, take him to the hospital of Spiritu Santo; if an Indian, to the hospital of Santa Anna."

An old man advanced toward the wounded youth; he had scarcely looked upon him when he exclaimed:

"Let the poor young man be carried into my house. This is a strange mischance."

This man was the Jew Samuel; he had just recognized the betrothed of his daughter.

Martin Paz, thanks to the darkness and the rapidity of his flight, may hope to escape his pursuers; he has risked his life; an Indian assassin of a mestizo! If he can gain the open country he is safe, but he knows that the gates of the city are closed at eleven o'clock in the evening, not to be re-opened till four in the morning.

He reaches at last the stone bridge which he had already crossed. The Indians, and some soldiers who had joined them, pursue him closely; he springs upon the bridge. Unfortunately a patrol appears at the opposite extremity; Martin Paz can neither advance nor retrace his steps; without

hesitation he clears the parapet and leaps into the rapid current which breaks against the corners of the stones.

The pursuers spring upon the banks below the bridge to seize the swimmer at his landing.

But it is in vain; Martin Paz does not re-appear.