

CHAPTER VII

THE SILKEN SCARF

OF the many godly enterprises set afoot for exploration and conquest in New Spain of the sixteenth century, not all have chronicles important enough for the historian to make much of. But there were goings and comings of which no written record reached the archives. Things forbidden did happen even under the iron heel of Castilian rule, and one of the hidden enterprises grew to be a part of the life of the Pō-sōn-gé valley for a time.

Not that it was unchronicled, but there was a good reason why the records were not published for the Spanish court.

It was a pretty romantic reason also — and the usual one, if we may trust the world's judgment of the foundation of all trouble. But a maid tossing a blossom from a Mexic balcony could not know that the stranger from Seville to whom it was thrown was the son of an Eminence, instead of the simple gentlemen named Don Ruy Sandoval in a royal letter to the Viceroy. With him travelled his tutor whose tutelage was past, and the position a difficult one for even the Viceroy to comprehend.

Since the youth rebelled at the habit of a monk — he had been given a space for adventure under godly surveillance. The godly surveillance limped a trifle at times. And because of this did Don Ruy walk again in the moonlight under the balcony and this

time more than a blossom came to him — about the stem of a scarlet lily was a flutter of white! The warm light of the Mexic moon helped him to decipher it — a page from Ariosto — the romance of Doña Bradamante — and the mark of a pen under words uttered by the warrior-maid herself — words to warm a cooler youth than this one from over seas: — “*Why seek I one who flies from me? — Why implore one who deigns not to send me reply?*”

Whereupon there was no further delay as to reply — there was found an open gate to a garden where only stars gave light, where little hands were held for a moment in his — soft whispers had answered his own — and he was held in thrall by a lace wrapped senorita whose face he had not even looked on in the light. All of Castile could give one no better start in a week than he had found for himself in three days in the new world of promise

For there were promises — and they were sweet. They had to do with a tryst two nights away — then the lady, whom he called “Doña Bradamante” because of the page torn from that romance, would enlighten him as to her pressing need of the aid of a gentleman, and courage would be hers to tell him why a marked line and a scarlet lily had been let fall in his path — and why she had trusted his face at first sight — though he had not yet seen her own — and why —

It was the usual thing — the page of a poem and a silken scarf as a guerdon of her trust.

He found the place of the tryst with ease for a stranger in the Mexic streets, but a glimmer of white robe was all he saw of his unknown “Doña Bradamante.” Others were at the tryst, and their staves and arms lacked no strength. He heard a woman

scream, then he heard her try again to scream and fail because of a hand on her throat, and beyond that he knew little for a night or two, and there was not much of day between.

Monkly robes were the next thing in his range of vision — one face in particular, sallow and still with eyes glancing sideways, seeing all things; — divining much! soft steps, and bandages, and out of silence the excited shrillness of Don Diego Maria Francisco Brancadori the tutor: — the shepherd who had lost track of his one rather ruffled lamb.

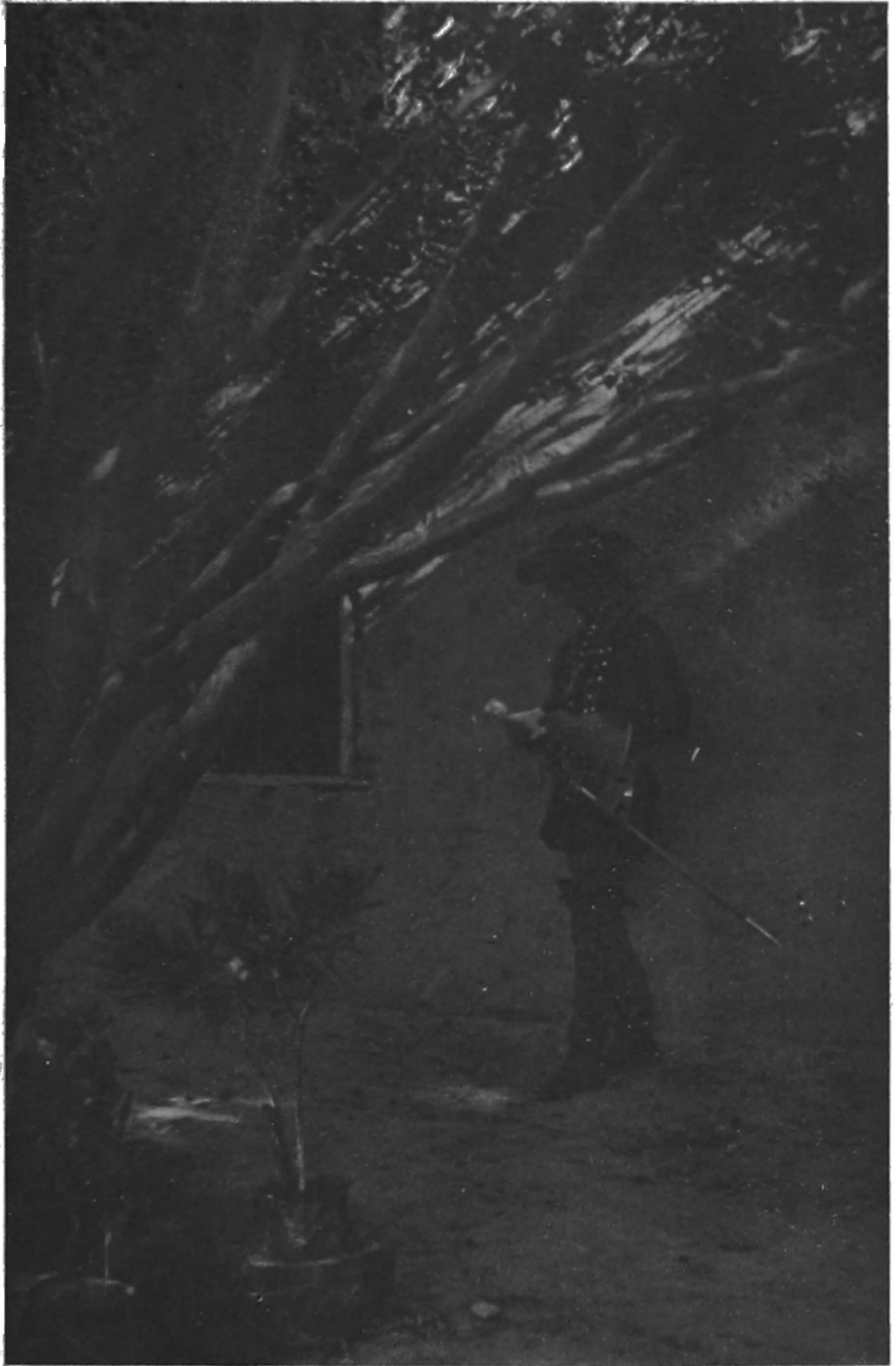
Pious ejaculation — thanks to all the saints he could think of — horror that the son of an Eminence should be thus abused — prophecies of the wrath to come when the duchess, his mother — At this Don Ruy groped for a sword, and found a boot, and flung it, with an unsanctified word or two, in the direction of the lamentation.

“ You wail worse than a dog of a Lutheran under the yoke,” he said in as good a voice as he could muster with a cut in his lip. “ What matter how much Eminence it took to make a father for me — or how many duchesses to make a mother? I am labelled as plain Ruy Sandoval and shipped till called for. If you are to instruct my youth in the path it should tread — why not start in with a lesson on discretion? ”

At this hopeful sign of life from the bundle of bandages on the monk's bed, Maestro Diego approached and looked over his illustratious charge with a careful eye.

“ Discretion has limped far behind — enterprise, else your highness would cut a different figure by now — and —

“ Choke back your infernal highnesses! ” growled



*T*O DON RUY, A MESSAGE IN THE MOONLIGHT

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the younger man. "I know well what your task is to be here in this new land: — it is to send back reports of duty each time I break a rule or get a broken head. Now by the Blood, and the Cross, if you smother not your titles, and let me range free, I tell you the thing I will do: — I will send back a complaint against you to Seville — and to make sure that it goes, no hand shall carry it but your own. Ere they can find another nurse maid for my morals, I'll build me a ship and go sailing the South seas for adventure — and your court tricksters will have a weary time in the chase! I like you better than many another godly spy who might have been sent, and I promise myself much joy in the journal of strange travels it is in your mind to write. But once for all, remember, we never were born into the world until a week ago!"

"But your Excellency —

"By the Great Duke of Hell! Will you not bridle your tongue when the damned monks are three deep at the key hole?"

By which it will be seen that the travels of the pious Don Diego were not all on paths of roses.

A little later the still faced priest of the stealthy glances came in, and Don Ruy sat on the side of the bed, and looked him over.

"You are the one who picked me up — eh? And the gentlemen of the streets had tossed me into a corner after discreetly starting my soul on its travels! Warm trysts your dames give to a stranger in this land — when you next confess the darlings, whisper in their ears to be less bloodthirsty towards youth and innocence!"

The man in the robe smiled.

"That unwise maid will make no more trysts," he

said quietly,—“not if she be one important enough to cause an assault on your Highness.”

“Did they —?”

“No — no — harm would not be done to her, but her destiny is without doubt a convent. The men who spoiled your tryst earn no purses as guard for girls of the street,—sacred walls will save them that trouble for a time — whether maid or wife I dare promise you that! It is as well you know. Time is wasted seeking adventure placed beyond mortal reach.”

“Convent — eh? Do your holy retreats teach the little tricks the lady knew? And do they furnish their vestals with poems of romance and silks and spices of Kathay?”

He drew from an inner pocket a little scarf of apple green with knotted fringes, and butterflies, various colored in dainty broidery. As the folds fell apart an odor of sweetness stole into the shadowy room of the monastery, and the priest was surprised into an ejaculation at sight of such costly evidence, but he smothered it hastily in a muttered prayer.

After that he listened to few of the stranger's gibes and quips, but with a book of prayers on his knee he looked the youth over carefully, recalled the outburst of Don Diego as to origin, and the adventurer's own threat to build a ship and sail where chance pointed. Plainly, this seeker of trysts, or any other thing promising adventure, had more of resource than one might expect from a battered stranger lifted out of the gutter for the last rites.

The priest — who looked a good soldier and who was called Padre Vicente “de los Chichimecos” (of the wild tribes) read further in his book of hours, and then spoke the thing in his mind.

“For a matter of many years in this land of the Indies I have waited for a man of discreet determination for a certain work. The virgin herself led me to the gutter where you groaned in the dark, and I here vow to build her a chapel if this thought of mine bears fruit.”

“Hump! My thanks to our Lady,— and I myself will see to the building of the chapel. But tell me of the tree you would plant, and we’ll then have a guess at the fruit. It may prove sour to the taste! Monkly messes appealed to me little on the other side of the seas. I’ve yet to test their flavor on this shore of adventure.”

Padre Vicente ignored the none too respectful comment — and took from his pocket a bit of virgin gold strung on a thread of deer sinew.

“Your name is Don Ruy Sandoval,” he said. “You are in this land for adventure. You content yourself with the latticed window and the strife of the streets — why not look for the greater things? You have wealth and power at your call — why not search for an empire of — this?”

Then he showed the virgin gold worn smooth by much wearing.

Don Ruy blinked under the bandage and swore by Bradamante of the adventure that he would search for it gladly if but the way was shown.

“Where do we find this golden mistress of yours?” he demanded, “and why have you waited long for a comrade?”

“The gold is in the north where none dare openly seek treasure, or even souls, since Coronado came back broken and disgraced. I have waited for the man of wealth who dared risk it, and — at whose going the Viceroy could wink.”

“Why wink at me — rather than another?”

“That is a secret knotted in the fringes of the silken scarf there —” said Padre Vicente with a grim smile. “Cannot a way be found to clear either a convent or a palace of a trouble breeder, when the church itself lends a hand? You were plainly a breeder of trouble, else had you escaped the present need of bandages. For the first time I see a way where Church and the government of the Indies can go with clasped hands to this work. In gold and converts the work may prove mighty. How mighty depends whether you come to the Indies to kill time until the day you are recalled — or improve that time by success where Coronada failed.”

“And if we echo his failure?”

“None will be the wiser even then! You plan for a season of hunting in the hills. I plan for a mission visit by the Sea of Cortez. Mine will be the task to see how and where our helpers join each other and all the provisioning of man and beast. Mine also to make it clear to the Viceroy that you repent your—

“Hollo!” — Don Ruy interrupted with a grimace. “You are about to say I repent of folly — or the enticing of a virgin — or that I fell victim to the blandishments of some tricky dame — I know all that cant by rote! — a man always repents until his broken head is mended, but all that is apart from the real thing — which is this: — In what way does my moment with a lady in the dark affect the Viceroy of the Indies? Why should his Excellency trouble himself that Ruy Sandoval has a broken head — and a silken scarf?”

Padre Vicente stared — then smiled. Ruy Sandoval had not his wits smothered by the cotton wool of exalted pamperings.

“ I will be frank with you,” he said at last. “ The Viceroy I have not yet addressed on this matter. But such silken scarfs are few — that one would not be a heavy task to trace to its owner.”

“ Ah! — I suspected your eminence had been a gallant in your time,” remarked Don Ruy, amicably — “ It is not easy to get out of the habit of noticing alluring things: — that is why I refused to do penance for my birth by turning monk, and shrouding myself in the gown! Now come — tell me! You seem a good fellow — tell me of the “ Doña Bradamante ” of the silks and the spices.”

“ The destiny of that person is probably already decided,” stated the priest of the wild tribes, “ she is, if I mistake not, too close to the charge of the Viceroy himself for that destiny to be questioned. The mother, it is said, died insane, and the time has come when the daughter also is watched with all care lest she harm herself — or her attendants. So I hear — the maid I do not know, but the scarf I can trace. Briefly — the evident place for such a wanton spitfire is the convent. You can easily see the turmoil a woman like that can make as each ship brings adventurers — and she seeks a lover out of every group.”

“ Jesus! — and hell to come! Then I was only one of a sort — all is fish to the net of the love lorn lady! Maestro Diego would have had the romance and the lily if he had walked ahead instead of behind me! — and he could have had the broken head as well!” The he sniffed again at the bit of silk, and regarded the monk quizzically.

“ You have a good story, and you tell it well, holy father,” he said at last, — “ and I am troubled in my mind to know how little of it may be truth, and how

much a godly lie. But the gold at last is true gold, and whatever the trick of the lady may be, you say it will serve to win for me the privilege to seek the mines without blare of trumpets. Hum! — it is a great favor for an unknown adventurer.”

“Unknown you may be to the people of the streets, and to your ship mates,” agreed the Padre. “But be sure the Viceroy has more than a hint that you are not of the rabble. The broils you may draw to yourself may serve to disquiet him much — yet he would scarce send you to the stocks, or the service of the roads. Be sure he would rather than all else bid you god speed on a hunting journey.”

“But that you are so given to frankness I should look also for a knife in the back to be included in his excellency’s favors,” commented Don Ruy. “Name of the Devil! — what have I done since I entered the town, but hold hands with one woman in the dark — and be made look as if I had been laid across a butcher block on a busy day! Hell take such a city to itself! I’ve no fancy for halting over long in a pit where a gentleman’s amusements are so little understood. If the Doña of the scarf were aught but an amiable maniac the thing would be different. I would stay — and I would find her and together we would weave a new romance for a new world poet! But as it is, gather your cut throats and name the day, and we’ll go scouring the land for heathen souls and yellow clinkers.”

Padre Vicente de Bernaldez was known by his wonderful mission-work to be an ecclesiastic of most adventurous disposition. Into wild lands and beyond the Sea of Cortez had he gone alone to the wild tribes — so far had he gone that silence closed over his trail

like a grave at times — but out of the Unknown had he come in safety!

His fame had reached beyond his order — and Ruy Sandoval knew that it was no common man who spoke to him of the Indian gold.

“Francisco de Coronado,” stated this padre of the wilderness, “came back empty handed from the north land of the civilized Indians for the reason that he knew not where to search. The gold is there. This is witness. It came to me from a man who — is dead! It was given him by a woman of a certain tribe of sun worshippers. To her it was merely some symbol of their pagan faith — some priestly circle dedicated to the sun.”

“It sounds well,” agreed Don Ruy — “but the trail? Who makes the way? And what force is needed?”

For a guide the Padre Vicente had a slave of that land, a man of Te-hua baptized José, for five years the padre had studied the words and the plans. The man would gladly go to his own land, — he and his wife. All that was required was a general with wealth for the conquest. There were pagan souls to be saved, and there was wealth for the more worldly minds. The padre asked only a tenth for godly reasons.

Thus between church and state was the expedition of his Excellency Don Ruy Sandoval ignored except as a hunting journey to the North coast of the Cortez Sea — if he ranged farther afield, his own be the peril, for no troops of state were sent as companions. The good father had selected the men — most of them he had confessed at odd times and knew their metal. All engaged as under special duty to the

cross: — it was to be akin to a holy pilgrimage, and absolution for strange things was granted to the men who would bear arms and hold the quest as secret.

Most of them thought the patron was to be Mother Church, and regarded it as a certain entrance to Paradise. Don Ruy himself meekly accepted a role of the least significance: — a mere seeker of pleasure adventures in the provinces! It would not be well that word of risk or danger be sent across seas — and the Viceroy could of course only say “god speed you” to a gentleman going for a ride with his servants and his major domo.

And thus: — between a hair brained adventurer and a most extolled priest, began the third attempt to reach the people called by New Spain, the Pueblos: — the strangely learned barbarians who dwelt in walled towns — cultivating field by irrigation, and worshipping their gods of the sun, or the moon, or the stars through rituals strange as those of Pagan Egypt.

Word had reached Mexico of the martyrdom of Fray Juan Padilla at Ci-bo-la, but in the far valley of the Rio Grande del Norte — called by the tribes the river Pō-sōn-gé, — Fray Luis de Escalona might be yet alive carrying on the work of salvation of souls.

The young Spanish adventurer listened with special interest as the devotion and sacrifices of Fray Luis were extolled in the recitals.

“If he lives we will find that man,” he determined. “He was nobly born, and of the province of my mother. I’ve heard the romance for which he cloaked himself in the gray robe. He should be a prince of the church instead of a wandering lay brother — we will have a human thing to search for in the world beyond the desert — ours will be a crusade to rescue him from the infidel lands.”