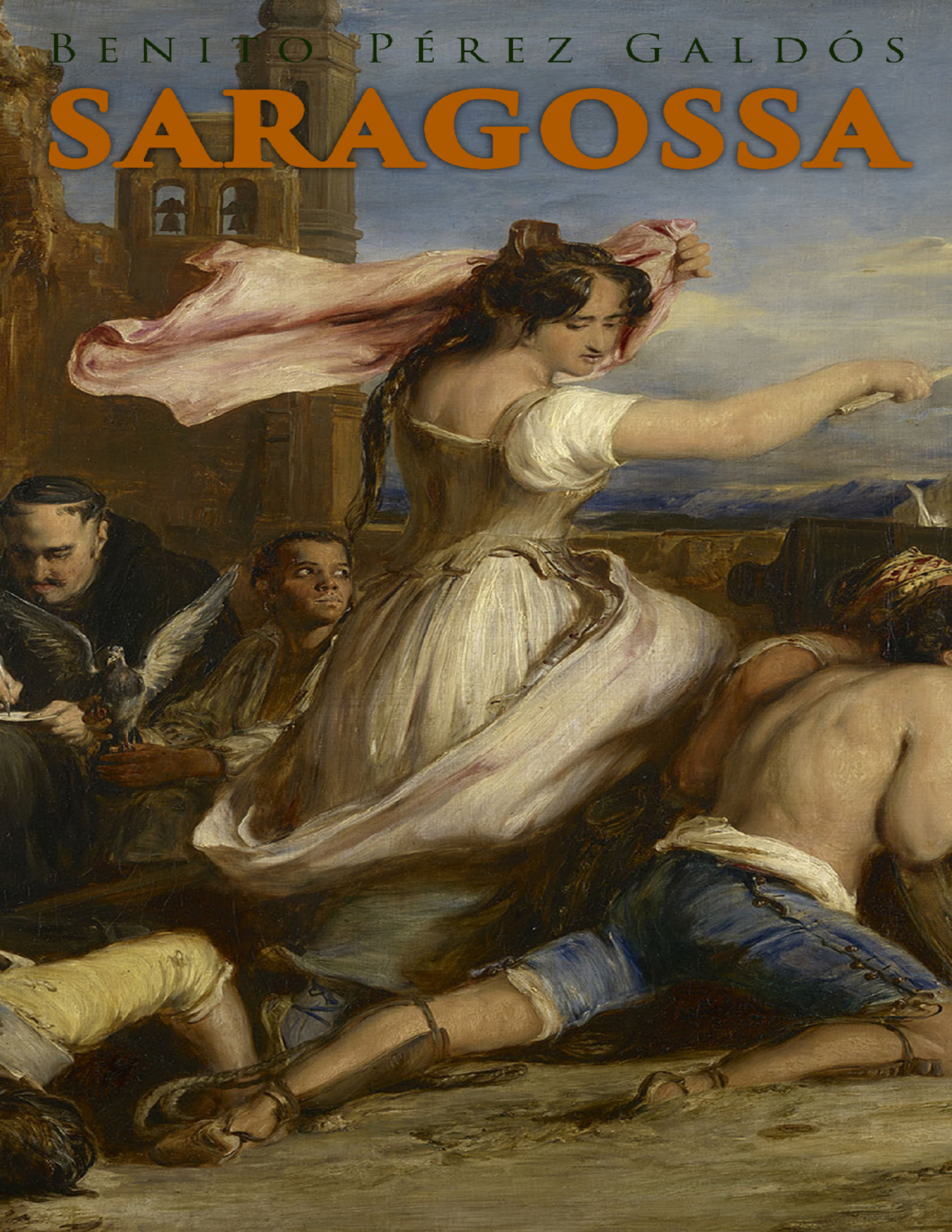


BENITO PÉREZ GALDÓS

# SARAGOSSA



**Benito Pérez Galdós**

# **Saragossa**

**A Narrative of Spanish Valor (Historical Novel)**

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# CHAPTER I

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It was, I believe, the evening of the eighteenth when we saw Saragossa in the distance. As we entered by the Puerta de Sancho we heard the clock in the Torre Nueva strike ten. We were in an extremely pitiful condition as to food and clothing. The long journey we had made from Lerma through Salas de los Infantes, Cervera, Agreda, Tarazona, and Borja, climbing mountains, fording rivers, making short cuts until we arrived at the high road of Gallur and Alagon, had left us quite used up, worn out, and ill with fatigue. In spite of all, the joy of being free sweetened our pain.

We were four who had succeeded in escaping between Lerma and Cogollos by freeing our innocent hands from the rope that bound together so many patriots. On the day of the escape, we could count among the four of us a total capital of eleven reales; but after three days of marching, when we entered the metropolis of Aragon and balanced our mutual cash, our common wealth was found to be a sum total of thirty-one cuartos. We bought some bread at a little place next the Orphanage, and divided it among us.

Don Roque, who was one of the members of our expedition, had good connections in Saragossa, but this was not an hour to present ourselves to any one. We postponed until the next day this matter of looking up friends; and as we could not go to an inn, we wandered about the city, looking for a shelter where we could pass the night. The market scarcely seemed to offer exactly the comfort and quiet which our tired bodies needed. We visited the leaning tower, and although one of my companions suggested that we should take refuge in the plaza, I thought that we should be quite the same as if altogether in the open country. The place served us, none the less, for temporary refuge and

rest, and also as a refectory, where we despatched happily our supper of dry bread, glancing now and then at the great upright mass of the tower, whose inclination made it seem like a giant leaning to see who was running about his feet. By the light of the moon that brick sentinel projected against the sky its huddled and shapeless form, unable to hold itself erect. The clouds were drifting across its top, and the spectator looking from below trembled with dread, imagining that the clouds were quiet and that the tower was moving down upon him. This grotesque structure, under whose feet the overburdened soil has settled, seems to be forever falling, yet never falls.

We passed through the avenue of the Coso again from this house of giants as far as the Seminary. We went through two streets, the Calle Quemada and the Calle del Rincon, both in ruins, as far as the little plaza of San Miguel. From here, passing from alley to alley, and blindly crossing narrow and irregular streets, we found ourselves beside the ruins of the monastery of Santa Engracia, which was blown up by the French at the raising of the first siege. The four of us exclaimed at once in a way to show that we all thought the same thing. Here we had found a shelter, and in some cosy corner under this roof we would pass the night!

The front wall was still standing with its arch of marble, decorated with innumerable figures of saints which seemed undisturbed and tranquil as if they knew nothing of the catastrophe. In the interior we saw broken arches and enormous columns struggling erect from the debris, presenting themselves, darkling and deformed, against the clear light flooding the enclosure, looking like fantastic creatures generated by a delirious imagination. We could see decorations, cornices, spaces, labyrinths, caverns, and a thousand other fanciful architectural designs produced by the ruins in their falling. There were even small rooms opened in the spaces of the walls with an art like that of Nature in forming grottos. The fragments of the altar-piece

that had rotted because of the humidity showed through the remains of the vaulting where still hung the chains which had suspended the lamps. Early grasses grew between the cracks of the wood and stone. Among all this destruction there were certain things wholly intact, as some of the pipes of the organ and the grating of the confessional. The roof was one with the floor, and the tower mingled its fragments with those of the tombs below. When we looked upon such a conglomeration of tombs, such a myriad of fragments that had fallen without losing entirely their original form, and such masses of bricks and plaster crumbled like things made of sugar, we could almost believe that the ruins of the building had not yet settled into their final position. The shapeless structure appeared to be palpitating yet from the shock of the explosion.

Don Roque told us that beneath this church there was another one where they worshipped the relics of the holy martyrs of Saragossa; but the entrance to this subterranean sanctuary was closed up. Profound silence reigned, but, penetrating further, we heard human voices proceeding from those mysterious deeps. The first impression produced upon us by hearing these voices was as if the spirits of the famous chroniclers who wrote of the Christian martyrs, and of the patriots sleeping in dust below, were crying out upon us for disturbing their slumbers.

On the instant, in the glare of a flame which illuminated part of the scene, we distinguished a group of persons sheltering themselves, huddling together in a space between two of the fallen columns. They were Saragossa beggars, who had made a palatial shelter for themselves in that place, seeking protection from the rain with beams of wood and with their rags. We also made ourselves as comfortable as might be in another place, and covering ourselves with a blanket and a half, prepared to go to sleep.

Don Roque said to me, "I know Don José de Montoria, one of the richest citizens of Saragossa. We were both born in

Mequinenza. We went to school together, and we played our games together on the hills of Corregidor. It is thirty years since I have seen him, but I believe that he will receive us well. Like every good Aragonese, he is all heart. We will find him, fellows; we will see Don José de Montoria. I am of his blood on the maternal side. We will present ourselves to him. We will say—"

But Don Roque was asleep, and I also slept.



# CHAPTER II

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The place where we lay down did not by any blandishments invite us to sleep luxuriously until morning, and certainly a mattress of broken stones is conducive to early rising. We wakened with the dawn; and as we had to spend no time in making a toilet before a dressing-table, we were soon ready to go out and pay our visits.

The idea came to all four of us at once that it would be a good thing to have some breakfast, but at the same time we agreed unanimously that it was impossible, as we had not the wherewithal to carry out such a high purpose.

"Don't be discouraged, boys," said Don Roque; "because very soon I will take you all to the house of my friend, who will take good care of us."

While he was saying this, we saw emerging from our inn two men and a woman, of those who had been our companions there. They looked as if they were accustomed to sleep in the place. One of them was a cripple, a poor unfortunate who ended at his knees, and put himself in motion by the aid of crutches, swinging himself forward on them as if by oars. He was an old man, with a jovial face well burned by the sun. As he saluted us very pleasantly in passing, wishing us a good-morning, Don Roque asked him in what part of the city was the house of Don José de Montoria. The cripple replied:—

"Don José de Montoria? I know him as if he were the apple of my eye. It is twenty years since he used to live in the Calle de la Albardería. Afterwards he moved to another street, the Calle de la Parra, then—but you are strangers, I see."

"Yes, my good friend, we are strangers; and we have come to enlist with the troops of this brave city."

"Then you were not here on the fourth of August?"

"No, my friend," I answered him; "we were not present at that great feat of arms."

"You did not see the battle of Eras?" asked the beggar, sitting down in front of us.

"We did not have that felicity either."

"Well, Don José Montoria was there. He was one of those who pulled the cannon into place for firing. Well, well, I see that you haven't seen a thing. From what part of the world do you come?"

"From Madrid," said Don Roque. "So you are not able to tell me where my dear friend Don José lives?"

"Well, I should think I can, man, well, I should think I can!" answered the cripple, taking from his pocket a crust of dry bread for his breakfast. "From the Calle de la Parra he moved to the Calle de Enmedio. You know that all those houses were blown up. There was Stephen Lopez, a soldier of the Tenth Company of the First Regiment of Aragon Volunteers, and he alone, with forty men, himself forced the French to retire."

"That must have been a fine thing to see!" said Don Roque.

"Oh, if you did not see the fourth of August you have seen nothing," continued the beggar. "I myself also saw the fourth of June, because I was crawling along the Calle de la Paja, and I saw the woman who fired off the big cannon."

"We have already heard of the heroism of that noble woman," said Don Roque; "but if you could make up your mind to tell us—"

"Oh, of course. Don José de Montoria is a great friend of the merchant Don Andrés Guspide, who on the fourth of August was firing from near the narrow street of the Torre del Pino. Hand-grenades and bullets were raining all about him, and my Don Andrés stood like a rock. More than a hundred dead lay about him, and he alone killed fifty of the French."

"Great man, this one! And he is a friend of my friend?"

"Yes, señor," replied the cripple; "and they are two of the best gentlemen in all Saragossa, and they give me a little something every Saturday. For you must know that I am Pepe Pallejas, and they call me Sursum Corda, as twenty-four years ago I was sacristan of the Church of Jesus, and I used to sing—But this is not coming to the point, and I was going on to say I am Sursum Corda, and perhaps you have heard about me in Madrid?"

"Yes," said Don Roque, yielding to his generous impulses; "it seems to me that I have heard the Señor Sursum Corda mentioned there, haven't we, boys?"

"Well, it's likely, and you must know that before the siege I used to beg at the door of this monastery of Santa Engracia, which was blown up by the bandits on the thirteenth of August. I beg now at the Puerta de Jerusalem, at the Jerusalem Gate—where you will be able to find me whenever you like. Well, as I was saying, on the fourth of August I was here, and I saw Francisco Quilez come out of the church, first sergeant of the First Company of fusileers, who, you must already know, with thirty-five men, cast out the bandits from the Convent of the Incarnation. I see that you look surprised—yes! Well, in the orchard of the convent at the back is where the Lieutenant Don Miguel Gila died. There are at the least two hundred bodies in that orchard; and there Don Felipe San Clement, a merchant of Saragossa, broke both his legs. Indeed, if Don Miguel Salamero had not been present—don't you know anything about that?"

"No, sir, my friend," said Don Roque; "we don't know anything about it, and although we have the greatest pleasure in your telling us of so many wonders, what most concerns us now is to find out where we are going to find my old friend Don José. We four are suffering from a disease called hunger, which cannot be cured by listening to the recounting of sublimities."

"Well, now, in a minute I will take you where you want to go," replied Sursum Corda, offering us a part of his crust; "but first I will tell you something, and that is that if Don Mariano Cereso had not defended the Castle Aljaferia as he did defend it, nothing would have been done in the Portillo quarter. And this man, by the grace of God, this man was Don Mariano Cereso! During the attack of the fourth of August, he used to walk in the streets with his sword in its antique sheath. It would terrify you to see him! This Santa Engracia quarter seemed like a furnace, señors. The bombs and the hand-grenades rained down; but the patriots did not mind them any more than so many drops of water. A good part of the convent fell down; the houses trembled, and all this that we see seemed no more than a barrier of playing cards, by the way it caught fire and crumbled away. Fire in the windows, fire at the top, fire at the base! The French fell like flies, fell like flies, gentlemen. And as for the Saragossans, life and death were all the same to them. Don Antonio Quadros went through there, and when he looked at the French batteries, he was in a state to swallow them whole. The bandits had sixty cannon vomiting fire against the walls. You did not see it? Well, I saw it, and the pieces of brick of the wall and the earth of the parapets scattered like crumbs of a loaf. But the dead served as a barricade—the dead on top, the dead below, a perfect mountain of the dead. Don Antonio's eyes shot flame. The boys fired without stopping. Their souls were all made of bullets! Didn't you see it? Well, I did, and the French batteries were all cleaned out of gunners. When he saw one of the enemy's cannon was without men, the commander shouted, 'An epaulet to the man who spikes that cannon!' Pepillo Ruiz started and walked up to it as if he was promenading in a garden among butterflies and may flowers, only here the butterflies were bullets, and the flowers were bombs. Pepillo Ruiz spiked the cannon, and came back laughing. And now another part of the convent was falling down. Whoever was smashed by it,

remained smashed! Don Antonio Quadros said that that did not bother him any, and seeing that the enemy's batteries had opened a large hole in the wall, went to stuff it full of bags of wool. Then a bullet struck him in the head. They brought him here; he said that was nothing either, and died."

"Oh," said Don Roque, impatiently, "we are sufficiently astonished, Señor Sursum Corda, and the most pure patriotism inflames us to hear you relate such great deeds; but if you could only make up your mind to tell us where—"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the beggar, "who said I wouldn't tell you? If there is any one thing I know better than another, and have seen most of anything in my life, it is the house of Don José de Montoria. It is near the San Pablo. Oh, you did not see the hospital? Well, I saw it. There the bombs fell like hail; the sick, seeing that the roofs were falling down, threw themselves from the windows into the street. Others crawled or rolled down the stairs. The partitions burned, and you could hear wailings. The lunatics bellowed in their cages like mad beasts. Many of them escaped and went through the cloisters, laughing and dancing with a thousand fantastic gestures that were frightful to see. They came out into the street as on carnival day; and one climbed the cross in the Coso, where he began a harangue, saying that he was the River Ebro, and he would run over the city and put out the fire. The women ran to care for the sick, who were all carried off to Del Pilar and to La Seo. You could not get through the streets. Signals were given from the Torre Nueva whenever a bomb was coming, but the uproar of the people prevented their hearing the bells. The French advanced by this street of Santa Engracia. They took possession of the hospital and of the Convent of San Francisco. The fighting began in the quarter of the Coso, and in the streets thereabouts. Don Santiago Sas, Don Mariano Cereso, Don Lorenzo Calvo, Don Marcos Simono, Renovales, Martin Albantos, Vicente Codé, Don Vicente Marraco, and



others fearlessly attacked the French. And behind a barricade made by herself, awaited them, furious, gun in hand, the Countess de Bureta."

"What a woman, a countess, making barricades and firing guns!" cried Don Roque, enthusiastically.

"You did not know it?" he returned. "Well, where do you live? The Señora Maria Consolacion Azlor y Villavicencio, who lives near the Ecce Homo, also walked through the streets, saying words of good cheer to those who were discouraged. Afterwards she made them close the entrance to the street, and herself took the lead of a party of peasants, crying, 'Here we will all die before we will let them pass!'"

"Oh, what sublime heroism!" exclaimed Don Roque, yawning with hunger. "How much I should enjoy hearing those tales of heroism told on a full stomach! So you say that the house of Don José is to be found—"

"It is just around there," said the cripple. "You know already that the French had entangled themselves and stuck fast near the Arch of Cineja. Holy Virgin del Pilar, but that was where they killed off the French! The rest of the day was nothing beside it. In the Calle de la Parra and the Square of Estrevedes, in the Calles de los Urreas, Santa Fe, and Del Azoque, the peasants cut the French to pieces. The cannonading and the roar of that day still ring in my ears. The French burned down the houses that they could not defend, and the Saragossans did the same. There was firing on every side. Men, women, and children—it was enough to have two hands to fight against the enemy. And you did not see it? You really have seen nothing at all! Well, as I was saying, Palafox came out of Saragossa towards—"

"That's enough, my friend," said Don Roque, losing patience. "We are charmed with your conversation; but if you can take us this instant to the house of my friend, or direct us so that we can find it, we will go along."

"In a minute, gentlemen. Don't hurry," replied Sursum Corda, starting off in advance with all the agility of which his crutches were capable. "Let us go there. Let us go, with all my heart. Do you see this house? Well, here lives Antonio Laste, first sergeant of the Fourth Company of Regulars, and you must know he saved from the treasury sixteen thousand, four hundred pesos, and took from the French the candles that they stole from the church."

"Go on ahead, go on, friend," I said, seeing that this indefatigable talker intended stopping to give all the details of the heroism of Antonio Laste.

"We shall arrive soon," replied Sursum; "on the morning of the first of July I was going past here, when I encountered Hilario Lafuente, first corporal of fusileers of the Parish of Sas, and he said to me, 'To-day they are going to attack the Portillo;' then I went to see what there was to see and—"

"We know all about this, already," said Don Roque. "Let us go on fast. We can talk afterwards."

"This house which you see here burned down and in ruins," continued the cripple, going around a corner, "is the one that burned on the fourth, when Don Francisco Ipas, sub-lieutenant of the Second Company of fusileers of the parish of San Pablo, stood here with a cannon, and these—"

"We know the rest, my good man," said Don Roque. "Forward, march! and the faster the better."

"But much better was what Codé did, the farmer of the parish of La Magdalena, with the cannon of the Calle de la Parra," persisted the beggar, stopping once more. "When he was going to fire the gun, the French surrounded him, everybody ran away; but Codé got under the cannon, and the French passed by without seeing him. Afterwards, helped by an old woman who brought him some rope, he pulled that big piece of artillery as far as the entrance of the street. Come, I will show you!"

"No, no, we don't want to see a thing. Go along ahead."

We kept at him, and closed our ears to his tales with so much obstinacy, that at last, although very slowly, he took us through the Coso and the Market to the Calle de la Hilarza, the street wherein stood the house of the person whom we were seeking.

# CHAPTER III

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But, alas! Don José de Montoria was not in his house, and we found it necessary to go a little way out of the city to look for him. Two of my companions, tired of so much going and coming, left us with the idea of trying on their own account for some military or civil situation. Don Roque and myself therefore started with less embarrassment on our trip to the country house, the "torre," of our friend. (They call country houses torres at Saragossa.) This was situated to the westward of the town; the place bordered on the Muela road, and was at a short distance from the Bernardona road. Such a long tramp was not at all the right thing for our tired bodies, but necessity obliged us to take this inopportune exercise. We were very well treated when we at last met the longed-for Saragossan and became the objects of his cordial hospitality.

Montoria was occupied, when we arrived, in cutting down olive-trees on his place, a proceeding demanded by the military exigencies of the plan of defence established by the officers in the field, because of the possibility of a second siege. And it was not our friend alone who destroyed with his own hands this heritage of his hacienda. All the proprietors of the surrounding places occupied themselves with the same task, and they directed the work of devastation with as much coolness as if they were watering or replanting, or busy with the grape harvest.

Montoria said to us, "In the first siege I cut down my trees on my property on the other side of the Huerva; but this second siege that is being prepared for us is going to be much more terrible, to judge by the great number of troops that the French are sending."

We told him the story of the surrender of Madrid, and as this seemed to depress him very much, we praised the deeds done at Saragossa between the fifteenth of June and the fourteenth of August with all sorts of grandiloquent phrases. Shrugging his shoulders, Don José said, "All that was possible to be done was done."

At this point Don Roque began to make personal eulogies of me, both military and civil, and he overdrew the picture so much that he made me blush, particularly as some of his announcements were stupendous lies. He said, first, that I belonged to one of the highest families of lower Andalusia, and that I was present as one of the marine guards at the glorious battle of Trafalgar. He said that the junta had made me a great offer of a concession in Peru, and that during the siege of Madrid I had performed prodigies of valor at the Puerta de los Pozos, my courage being so great that the French found it convenient after the capitulation to rid themselves of such a fearful foe, sending me with other Spanish patriots to France. He added that my ingenuity had made possible the escape of us four companions who had taken refuge in Saragossa, and ended his panegyric by assuring Don José that for my personal qualities also I deserved distinguished consideration.

Meantime Montoria surveyed me from head to foot, and if he observed the bad cut of my clothes and their many rents, he must also have seen that they were of the kind used by a man of quality, revealing his fine, courtly, and aristocratic origin by the multiplicity of their imperfections. After he had looked me over, he said to me, "Porra! I shall not be able to enlist you in the third rank of the company of fusileers of Don Santiago Sas, of which I am captain, but you can enter the corps where my son is; and if you don't wish to, you must leave Saragossa, because here we have no use for lazy men. And as for you, Don Roque, my friend, since you are not able to carry a gun, porra! we will make you one of the attendants in the army hospital."



When Don Roque had heard all this, he managed to express, by means of rhetorical circumlocution and graceful ellipses, the great necessity of a piece of meat for each one of us, and a couple of loaves of bread apiece. Then we saw the great Montoria scowl, looking at us so severely that he made us tremble, fearing that we were to be sent away for daring to ask for something to eat. We murmured timid excuses, and then our protector, very red in the face, spoke as follows—

"Is it possible that you are hungry? Porra! Go to the devil with a hundred thousand porras! Why haven't you said so before? Do I look like a man capable of letting my friends go hungry? porra! You must know that I always have a dozen hams hanging from the beams of my storeroom, and I have twenty casks of Rioja, yes, sir. And you are hungry, and you did not tell me so to my face without any round-about fuss? That is an offence to a man like me. There, boys, go in and order them to cook four pounds of beef and six dozen eggs, and to kill six pullets, and bring from the wine-cellar seven jugs of wine. I want my breakfast, too. Let the neighbors come, the workmen, and my sons too, if they are anywhere about. And you, gentlemen, be prepared to punish it all with my compliments, porra! You will eat what there is without thanking me. We do not use compliments here. You, Señor Don Roque, and you, Señor Don Araceli, are in your own house to-day, porra! to-morrow and always, porra! Don José de Montoria is a true friend to his friends. All that he has, all that he owns, belongs to his friends."

The brusque hospitality of the worthy man astonished us. As he did not receive our compliments with good grace, we decided to leave aside the artificial formalities of the court, and, assuredly, the most primitive fashions reigned during the breakfast.

"Why don't you eat more?" Don José asked me. "It seems to me that you are one of these compliment-makers who expect to live on compliments. I don't like that sort of thing,

my young gentleman. I find it very trying, and I am going to beat you with a stick to make you eat. There, despatch this glass of wine! Did you find any better at court? Not by a long way. Come now, drink, porra! or we shall come to blows." All this made me eat and drink more than was good for me; but it was necessary to respond to the generous cordiality of Montoria, and too it was not worth while to lose his good will for one indigestion more or less.

After the breakfast, the work of cutting down trees was continued, and the rich farmer directed it as if it were a festival performance.

"We will see," he said, "if this time they will dare to attack the Castle. Have you not seen the works that we have built? They will find it a very complicated task to take them. I have just given two hundred bales of wool, a mere nothing, and I would give my last crust."

When we returned to the town, Montoria took us to look over the defensive works that were built in the western part of the city. There was in the Portillo gate a large semi-circular battery that joined the walls of the Convent de los Fecetas with those of the Augustine friars' convent. From this building to the Convent of the Trinitarios extended a straight wall, with battlements along all its length and with a good pathway in the centre. This was protected by a deep moat that reached to the famous field of Las Eras, scene of the heroic deeds of the fifteenth of June. Further north, towards the Puerta Sancho, which protected the breastworks of the Ebro, the fortifications continued, terminated by a tower. All these works, constructed in haste, though intelligently, were not distinguished by their solidity. Any one of the enemy's generals, ignorant of the events of the first siege, and of the immense moral force of the Saragossans, would have laughed at those piles of earth as fortifications offering material for an easy siege. But God ordains that somebody must escape once in a while the physical laws that rule war. Saragossa, compared with

Amberes, Dantzig, Metz, Sebastopol, Cartagena, Gibraltar, and other famous strongholds, was like a fortress made of cardboard.

And yet—!

# CHAPTER IV

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Before we left his house, Montoria became vexed at Don Roque and me because we would not take the money that he offered us for our first expenses in the city; then were repeated the blows on the table, and the rains of "porras" and other words that I will not repeat. But at last we arrived at an arrangement honorable for both parties.

And now I begin to think I am saying too much about this singular man before I describe his personality. Don José was a man of about sixty years of age, strong, high-colored, of over-flowing health, well placed in the world, contented with himself, fulfilling his destiny with a quiet conscience. His was an excess of patriotic virtues and of exemplary customs, if there can be an excess of such things. He was lacking in education, that is to say, in the finer and more distinguished training which in that time some of the sons of such families as his were beginning to receive. Don José was not acquainted with the superficialities of etiquette, and by character and custom was opposed to the amenities and the white lies which are a part of the foundations of courtesy. As he always wore his heart upon his sleeve, he wished everybody to do the same, and his savage goodness tolerated none of the frequent evasions of polite conversation. In angry moments he was impetuous, and let himself be carried to violent extremes, of which he always repented later. He never dissimulated, and had the great Christian virtues in a crude form and without polish, like a massive piece of the most beautiful marble where the chisel has traced no lines. It was necessary to know him to understand him, making allowances for his eccentricities, although to be sure he should scarcely be called eccentric,