The Rosary of San Antonio

By Katharine P. Woods

THE setting sun, in his descent behind the wide prairie, had drawn bars of translucent orange across the ethereal blue of the Texas sky. Towards the cloudless zenith climbed the crescent moon of December; the mesquite-bushes had lost all but a few of their long, needle-like, waxen-green leaves; here and there the yellowish green of the prairie was broken by the darker green of a clump of prickly pear, or the glow of a few red cactus-berries. There was nothing left of the beauty and voluptuous fragrance of the catclaw save its long brown branches, armed with pitiless thorns. A flight of curlews towards the south, and in the north a lurid glow above a dense bank of blue haze, promised more than a capful of wind before morning.

Over the smooth, hard road from Domingo, the county town, came a two-horse buggy, bowling along with the steady, sure swiftness which Don Cunningham's bays could maintain for a thirty-mile stretch—a speed which stood in no real need of accentuation from the sharply lashed whip, swung at fullest sweep of Don Cunningham's powerful arm. And their driver knew it. The shrill whistle with which he occasionally cheered them on was all the encouragement they needed; in fact, the whiplash scarcely touched them; their very gait showed enjoyment of their own free, swift motion. The swing of the arm, the snap of the lash, and the occasional smack of the lines on their strong brown backs were partly characteristic of Don Cunningham and partly a Texas manner of driving, thoroughly in harmony with the exuberant vitality, courage, and endurance of Texan life.

Tall, strong, and muscular, brown as a Mexican from the sun and wind, with a spare, keen face, a mustache bleached lighter than his skin, and the brilliant blue eyes and flashing, defiant smile of a mediæval berserker, Don Cunningham was a man from whom one might expect anything, even conventionality, when it suited his purpose; but chiefly he prepared one to expect the unexpected.

His acquaintance with the man who sat beside him was but a few hours old, and the speculations of each concerning the other would have been very pretty reading could they have been put on paper. For the one was absorbed in a futile endeavor to formulate, satisfactorily to his previous experience of human nature, the mental and moral make-up of this man, who had undertaken, through the representations of a mutual friend, to become his host for the winter; while the other speculated what in blank this consumptive divinity student, broken down in the midst of his seminary course, was likely to make of himself, Don Cunningham, and of people and things in West Texas. He relished in anticipation the effect of the "language" which the "boys" were most unlikely to restrain, since this unfledged "padre" could not claim the protection of a cloth to which he was not yet entitled; he looked forward to the new moral ideas his guest was likely to acquire; to his probable discovery that good was less white and evil less black than the East was accustomed to paint them, and with equal pleasure to the return of the hues of health to the pale, grave face beside him. For Don felt a kindly interest in all things human, even a preacher, and his practiced eye had noted certain signs and tokens in Edward Boyd whence he concluded that consumption, like the padrehood of his guest, might still be averted by an out-of-door life and timely precautions.

"I don't drive too fast for you, Ned?" he said presently.

He had resolved to call the young man Ned from the start, in order to put down any symptoms of "brag" or "biggity" on account of his incipient rights of clergy; but he would have felt it indelicate to inquire more plainly whether the pace at which they were going was too severe for weak lungs.

Boyd turned his fair, still face, with a smile on the thin lips and a sparkle in the thoughtful gray eyes, that answered the question; and the Texan continued, without awaiting further reply:

"If your hair and teeth are fastened on

pretty tight, I guess you can stand it. It's queer, anyway, about you parsons; you ain't no more alike than so many cowmen."

"What a blessing that we are not!" said Edward Boyd; "what would life be worth if one had to fit one's self to a pattern?"

It was Cunningham's way to be too much engaged with his own train of thought to attend very closely to the replies of his interlocutor. Otherwise, in connection with Boyd's previous history, the young man's words might have revealed to him a nature peculiarly sensitive to the very influences that were likely to be brought to bear upon it. As it was, he went on with his story, as if his guest had not spoken.

"Now there was old Parson Lee, the fighting parson, as we used to call him; it's a fact that he could outride, outswear, and outdrink 'most any man in West Texas. But when he called 'Halt!' the boys fell into line, you bet; and that's so! Oh! he did lots of good. But some of 'em—Say, did I ever tell you 'bout the time I fetched home the Methodist soul-doctor to baptize my family?"

"Not in all the time I have known you," said Boyd, gravely. He had not flinched at the "soul-doctor," for it had seemed to him—from a faith, more or less well founded, in his own ability to understand the dealing of Providence with himself and his friends—that his studies had been broken in upon for some wise purpose; and if that purpose were that he should act as missionary to this wild country, it behooved him not to begin by being too scrupulous.

Cunningham smiled gleefully.

"Well, sir," he said, "all the family I've got is one kid; but *as* a family, so far as it goes, it's *all* right. And when that kid had the croup, m' wife she was as much put out as if there was a dozen of him. So she got onto a notion that he had to be baptized, if it took the whole of West Texas to do it. Well, I hated the worst way to leave the kid; but if he was a-goin' to live, baptizin' wouldn't hurt him, and if 'twould give him a better show in the next world, I didn't grudge the trouble; and the doctor was on hand, anyway, and likely to stop as long as the grub lasted. So I jumped on Greased Lightning—this is him, this near horse—and away I went, with a lariat coiled on the pommel of my saddle, to round up all the parsons in Tom Green County, and cut out the one with the Methodist brand on him. Git ap, there!"

The whip whirled madly and came down upon the flank of Greased Lightning, seemingly with force enough to cut him in two, while Cunningham's daring blue eyes stole a look at his companion.

"Well, sir," he continued, pleased, yet half disappointed that no comment was offered, "I tore up the whole face of the earth for a thirty-mile radius round Domingo, goin' round and round the town, and widenin' the circle every time; and at last I got the man I wanted. He was drivin' what I knew to be a pretty good team, for they was a pair of grays that m' wife had coaxed me into sellin' him for about half-price. And there he was, goin' just the right way to ruin 'em, joggin'along, about a mile an hour, with the reins on his knee, the whip in the stock, and his blamed old eyes fixed on the heavenly Jerusalem.

"Says I, 'Hello, parson! you're the very man I want.'

"Says he, 'Brother Cunningham, I hope I see you well. How is Sister Cunningham? and how is the dear little lamb whom the Lord has intrusted—'

"'Blank it to blank,' says I"—Cunningham did not spare Boyd the exact expression used—"'they're all dead, and you're a-goin' to the funeral. Whip up them horses lively now.'

"'The Lord forbid!' says he; and he gethered up the reins so fumblin'-like that it turned me cold all over. So I never said a word, not even the kind you don't care to repeat, but I just stepped into the buggy, took the reins in one hand and the whip in the other, and set out to beat the record, with lightning tied on behind. And as I took my seat, the parson he says, says he, 'Brother Cunningham, if they are all dead,' says he, 'it is a grievous visitation, but where is the need of haste?' for you know I've got the name for bein' a kind of reckless driver in this part of the country. Don't know how it happened, but that's so!

"Well, I didn't make no reply to the parson's remark, except to slap the horses with the reins right on top of the back. The wheels hit all the high places, you bet, but most of the time they just seemed to whirl round plumb up in the air; the

parson he held on for dear life to the side of the buggy, and he didn't say much, but what he did say was kinder jolted out of him. Like this—

"'Dearbroth-er Cunning-HAM, theneckof the horseyouhave *tied* be-HIND will assuredly be BROKEN!'

"But he never got a word out of me till we came in sight of my house. Then, when I see m' wife standin' at the window with the kid in her arms, says I—'Well, parson, seein' you kept your seat so pretty, maybe we'll have a christenin' 'stead of a funeral,' says I.

"And he says, says he, 'Brother Cunningham, when you sold me them horses, I fear I got the best of the bargain. I never knew what a fine team they was till you took an' drove 'em,' says he.

"Hello! that's my outfit! But you Manuel! What the ——"

These exclamatory remarks were called forth just as the bays reached a point where two roads met at the ford of the Concho. That to their left had been hidden by a long, smooth swell of the rolling prairie; they were now able to see that along its course came, slowly and lumberingly, a team of six sturdy mules, harnessed in pairs, and drawing three low, white-topped, heavily laden wagons. The whole was driven by a tall Mexican, with the beautiful, irresponsible face of a child, beside whom sat a boy of perhaps ten years, with a pitiful, deformed figure, a crutch at his feet, and on his brow the cares of thrice his age.

It was evident, even to Boyd, that, at sight of his employer, Manuel had seized the reins from the boy, in exchange for the guitar that now lay across the child's knee; he was not, therefore, surprised at the language which Cunningham permitted himself; and only questioned the good-natured laugh which quickly followed.

"You smooth-tongued fool," he said, "you know mighty well that if I had been at the ranch some other fellow would have gotten the job. I would not trust a white man to bring such a load as that from Redwood, with no help but the boy's."

"Ah! he helps much, the little Jesusito," said the man.

Boyd had sprung to the ground to examine the freighter's outfit, but had paused by the side of the boy, vaguely attracted by the large, pathetic eyes.

"Hhesusito?" he said, inquiringly; for, though a fair student of book-Spanish, Mexican names and ways were strange to him.

"In your American, it says, 'little Jesus,'" answered the child, with soft gravity.

A singular impulse came upon Boyd; his hand involuntarily sought his coat-pocket, encountering there an object which his fingers recognized. His journey to Texas had been by the sea route to Galveston; and he had visited several of the towns in that section of the State before seeking his winter home. In San Antonio he had found himself just in time for one of the innumerable Mexican holidays; and as a memento of the occasion he had purchased a rosary, to the telling of which were attached, by the blessing of the Holy Father himself, many privileges, both celestial and terrestrial.

Boyd had experienced humorous doubts of the personal acquaintance of the Pope with that particular rosary; but its purchase had been followed by scruples of conscience yet more unwarranted. For he doubted whether it were right to hold, as a toy or a curio, something which to another might have been a sign of faith and a means to devotion; and at the sight of the Mexican boy's small brown face these doubts suddenly crystallized into the impulse which led him to place it in the little hard brown palm. When he had done so, his heart was lighter, and the radiant countenance of the child, the sudden glory that flashed into the large trustful eyes, made him ashamed.

"Ned," said Cunningham, as they drove on, "I hope you don't object to cussin'! It's such a blame habit with me that I don't hardly see how I could stop, unless ladies are present, you know; and, by George! that's as much a habit as the other! But—well, it's like this. My religion is like my family; mighty little of it, but what there is is the right kind. And from what I see of you, your religion is cut off the same piece, only in larger quantity. So if cussin' really does hurt your feelin's, just say so, and I'll name it to the boys."

Boyd tried faithfully to say the right thing without appearing sanctimonious. Perhaps he would have thought even less well of his success than he did, in this

particular, had he noticed a certain quizzical look which presently mingled with the gravity with which Cunningham listened; but in his heart was a great joy, for he felt that his views of Providence were borne out by the facts, and that his mission to West Texas was well begun.

The blazing sun of January shone high overhead; the fitful breeze lightly stirred the long yellow blades of the Johnson grass, or rustled those, still crisply green, of the clumps of Spanish dagger; to the right, a long ditch, flecked with patches of green slime, crept round the wide fields of the truck farm—fields now enjoying a brief January vacation. To the left, the clear waters of the Concho splashed and sang over the innumerable pebbles of the ford; beyond was a faint track of wagon-wheels, representing the road to the ranch-house. On the further side of the river, so as to be away from the precious slope of land watered by the irrigating ditch, a long line of adobe huts, of one room each, formed the homes of the Mexican laborers, who, reckoned by families, thrice outnumbered the number of the huts. On either side of the river the pecan-trees were leafless and bare; but a mingling of dwarf cedars maintained the green tint of the landscape and afforded cover to the game—or perhaps the hunters—which might there seek refuge. And, on the edge of the farm-land, Edward Boyd, with his coat off, and a new glow of health upon his cheek, lent vigorous aid to the construction of a tent and the laying down of a dancing-floor for the "*baile*," which, in celebration of a harvest unusually abundant, Cunningham had resolved to give to his "friends and employees."

The scene was one of busy preparation; pits were dug everywhere, in some of which were baking *calabazas*, or pumpkins; in another a beef was barbecuing over the glowing embers; *frijoles* and *tamales*, the latter in their corn-husk overcoats, were boiling in emptied gasolene cans, while similar vessels stood ready for the forthcoming coffee. And, with their stone mills and molding-boards, the Mexican women were preparing *chile* for the soul-searching *chile-concarne*, or rolling out the crushed maize into the flat, thin cakes called *tortillas*.

Boyd, with the new, glad life throbbing in his veins, rejoiced when the sun-rays slanted across the prairie, sparkling in the clear, dry air, and when the last nail was driven into the smooth boards of Texas pine. With a boyish run and slide to test the quality of his work, he stooped to laugh into the small, dark face of Jesusito, who had remained with him, the last of all his helpers.

"Done, Jesusito, and well done," he said; "a floor to put life into a tailor's dummy. And I'm hungry, boy, hungry! Think of that! Will not Mateo of the wooden leg spare me a cup of the finest coffee in the world? Have we not earned a supper, you and I?"

His speech was Spanish, correct though slightly halting; he had already learned to understand the patois of mingled Spanish and Indian in which the boy gravely and categorically replied:

"Earned? But the señor needs not to earn; he is lord of all here. Chiquita will be happy if she may bring him to eat."

A bent, brown old woman who stood near the entrance of the tent assented, with a flash of her bright black eyes and a smile, to the words of the boy. There was a scarlet shawl over her black matted hair, and an orange petticoat clung about her withered limbs.

Boyd threw himself at full length on the ground to await her return. The air was like spring.

"To think," he said, "that in my home, Jesusito, they shiver around the dismal openings from a ghastly furnace! Horrible!"

"It is because the señor is absent," said the boy. "The señor is like the sun; all are happy on whom he shines."

Boyd laughed; but in his glance there was a vague trouble.

"If that were true—" he began.

"But it is very true," said the boy. "For behold all that is come to Manuel, my Manuelito. Is it now needful that I, the small Jesusito, watch over Manuel, lest he touch his mandolin to the neglect of driving his mules? But Manuel is now become very diligent; and it is a very fine new house that he has built him down by the ford."

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Whether or not because the last weeks had revealed to him the existence of new and unsuspected territory in his own being, Edward Boyd stood beneath the starlight of that Texas night in January with a strange, new sense of nakedness. He felt "bare to the bone" beneath the hemisphere of stars that overarched him; oh! so many stars! not mere "patines of bright gold," as Shakespeare saw them in his northern island, but globes of lambent fire, whence long, keen rays—Ithuriel spears—pierced him through joint and marrow, to the very ground of the heart.

The waning crescent of the old moon climbed among them tranquilly enough, intent only on reaching the point of her going down at the hour appointed her; nor to the rest of the world did the stellar canopy appear to offer any spiritual inconvenience. For there was mirth and jollity, though of a grave and sedate character, both within the tent and without it. Around the long tables of uncovered plank, supported on trestles, the light of flaring, torch-like lamps, set here and there among piles of white bread, flashed back from the cups and plates of new tin and the dark, bright eyes set like gems in the brown faces of the convives. The features of these were mingled of the widely differing races whence they sprang—Spanish and Aztec, with here and there a trace of the African—in all degrees of comeliness, from hideousness to beauty. Some had the height and stateliness of the Indian, added to clear olive skin and liquid brown eyes that could darken with passion or sparkle with fun and vivacity; others were swart and squat, with features whose indescribable repulsiveness recalled gruesome tales of Torquemada and heretics burned alive; of captives tortured under the burning African sky; or of prisoners sacrificed, on the summit of pyramid temples, to the glory of the Mexican sun-god. And between these extremes were all gradations of feature, coloring, and expression.

They ate, as they danced, in silence; chiefly they drank, what Boyd had not very unjustly called the "finest coffee in the world;" then faces and figures melted away into the darkness, and new combinations took form in the flaming torchlight. Here and there sounded the loud, cheerful voice of Don Cunningham, greeting, ordering, inciting to renewed energy and enjoyment.

Boyd stood as if spellbound, gazing into the dancing-tent. Close to the canvas walls were rows of benches crowded with muffled figures and dark, attentive faces. Babies, rolled in brilliant or dingy blankets, lay asleep at their feet, upon the hard dry earth; now and again one or another was trodden upon by a careless passing foot, and broke in upon the music of the dance with a loud remonstrant wail. At the head of the tent, on the raised seat of the musicians, the face of Manuel Aldoret was marked out by a certain vivid intensity, a childlike enjoyment of his own music. On all the scene fell the light of the torch-like lamps; the smoke drifted in whirls across the tent, and escaped through the openings in the canvas roof. Through one of these the moon gazed down with silvery tranquillity.

Jesusito could not spare even a glance for the moon; her clear rays shone straight down upon the tangled mass of his hair, and illumined his dark profile, as he gazed, rapt and motionless, into the face of Manuel. He was far from comprehending the ecstasy that possessed him, as the wild, sweet music thrilled through the soft night air, and the tread of the dancers fell, beat with beat, in absolute accord. A moment ago Rosita had smiled on Manuel; in his bosom the holy rosary lay warm against his heart; and those long brown fingers of his brother's seemed tangled in his very heartstrings.

The spell of the music floated out into the night and touched the soul also of Edward Boyd, even while he strove to escape it by analysis of its power. It was, perhaps, the spontaneity of it, he thought, that made it so take hold of one; the strains, so wildly and plaintively gay, had become, by use and heredity, a part of the consciousness of dancers as well as players; hence the perfection of the *tempo;* hence they played and danced without notes or words of direction; and hence the undeniably strong psychological effect upon himself.

And even as he thus thought, the rhythm of the sensuous, softly swaying waltz

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They ate, as they danced, in silence; chiefly they drank, what Boyd had not very unjustly called the "finest coffee in the world;" then faces and figures melted away into the darkness, and new combinations took form in the flaming torchlight. Here and there sounded the loud, cheerful voice of Don Cunningham, greeting, ordering, inciting to renewed energy and enjoyment.

Boyd stood as if spellbound, gazing into the dancing-tent. Close to the canvas walls were rows of benches crowded with muffled figures and dark, attentive faces. Babies, rolled in brilliant or dingy blankets, lay asleep at their feet, upon the hard dry earth; now and again one or another was trodden upon by a careless passing foot, and broke in upon the music of the dance with a loud remonstrant wail. At the head of the tent, on the raised seat of the musicians, the face of Manuel Aldoret was marked out by a certain vivid intensity, a childlike enjoyment of his own music. On all the scene fell the light of the torch-like lamps; the smoke drifted in whirls across the tent, and escaped through the openings in the canvas roof. Through one of these the moon gazed down with silvery tranquillity.

Jesusito could not spare even a glance for the moon; her clear rays shone straight down upon the tangled mass of his hair, and illumined his dark profile, as he gazed, rapt and motionless, into the face of Manuel. He was far from comprehending the ecstasy that possessed him, as the wild, sweet music thrilled through the soft night air, and the tread of the dancers fell, beat with beat, in absolute accord. A moment ago Rosita had smiled on Manuel; in his bosom the holy rosary lay warm against his heart; and those long brown fingers of his brother's seemed tangled in his very heartstrings.

The spell of the music floated out into the night and touched the soul also of Edward Boyd, even while he strove to escape it by analysis of its power. It was, perhaps, the spontaneity of it, he thought, that made it so take hold of one; the strains, so wildly and plaintively gay, had become, by use and heredity, a part of the consciousness of dancers as well as players; hence the perfection of the *tempo;* hence they played and danced without notes or words of direction; and hence the undeniably strong psychological effect upon himself.

And even as he thus thought, the rhythm of the sensuous, softly swaying waltz

passed swiftly and silently over the fragrant brown beads of his rosary.

But Manuel saw only Boyd and Rosita; they saw not even him.

Mighty good pickin' in the sandy lands,
Mighty good pickin' in the sand!

sang the music within the tent. The cheerful, wholesome, courageous melody braced heart and soul to strength and purity; though Boyd was unconscious of that to which he listened.

"*Half* an American!" he said. "But it is not well, Rosita, to be half anything, I think; and surely we must be *one* with any people, if we would truly bear their griefs and carry their sorrows, to their redemption and our own."

"The redemption of *this* people!" she said, but not very scornfully, for something in the words or his manner moved her against her will.

"If it were only a little," he said; "if one or two might live a little cleaner, just a little more strongly and purely! Oh! it is very much to lay hold on the lives of the children. If each generation were lifted only a little—we grow so fast, here in America—"

"What do I care!" she broke in. "I have been shamed before my friends! Perhaps it is that you believe that I love you, Señor Boyd? I! who love only Manuel! I have denied it? Yes! I have blushed to think that I loved him; for I wished to be an American—free, happy!—and his love dragged me back; it bound me to the people of my mother. So, when you came, I said: 'This one, who is wise and holy, who is half a padre, who has the face of a saint—he will help me—tell me—show me how to live my life—how—'"

Her passion choked her. It was a full minute before she went on. In that minute Manuel had remembered something in the hip-pocket of his teamster's clothes, left for the night in the new adobe house beside the ford of the Concho.

"But at last you say well," Rosita continued; "I *will* be one with my people; one with him! If my love degrade me, that is best of all; it will drag me down, to be nearer him. I shall be still the beloved of Manuel!"

The girl was half sincere, and, by some subtle insight, some new sincerity of his own that had perhaps reached his soul through the piercing of the star-beams, Boyd answered to that sincerity alone, leaving the rest to perish as it deserved.

"Does love degrade, therefore?" he said; "is it not rather like the rays of the blessed sun, Rosita, piercing that it may draw upward to itself? *Adios*, child, *adios;* once more, forgive me. Would to God, if only for your sake, that I had been all that you believed. Give me your hand, and good-by!"

From Manuel, behind him in the shadow, his face was hidden; there was something in it for Rosita that awed and compelled her. She placed in his strong white palm her slender olive-tinted fingers; then the tears came, and the darkness swallowed her; she had escaped, under its shelter, to the tiny frame cottage near the schoolhouse, where she lived with the family of the American foreman who managed the farm.

"It is very dark at the ford," whispered Manuel to his own heart; "there are black shadows there, under the little cedar-trees. And if a shot came, who is to tell the hand?"

But as for Jesusito, he said nothing save upon the beads of his rosary.

Four hours later, in the mirk darkness before the dawn, the swift, sure stride of Cunningham's bays approached the black waters of the river.

"Yes, queer people," said their owner's cheerful voice; "as you say, Ned, a queer people. Ready to shoot you one minute, and the next, if you are kind to them, they forget all about it. A Mexican hasn't backbone enough to bear malice long."

But under the blackest shadow there was a gleam of polished metal, as a stray beam of the pale light found its way through the thick cedar boughs. The finger on the trigger was strong and sure. And of what avail that only a few yards away, on the very edge of the river, Jesusito lay hidden, even from Manuel? Of what avail that the carved brown beads dripped through his fingers, as the waters of the Concho over the stones in the river-bed? Could Jesusito, by any alarm, deliver up his brother to Cunningham's pitiless justice?

"It is well that the boy sleeps, yonder, in the house that I builded for Rosita," ran the thoughts of Manuel; "those eyes of his would make my hand unsteady. But

he knows nothing; and it was true that the team needed my care. Jesusito sleeps!"

("Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners,
Now, and in the hour of our death.")

The feet of the bays had entered the cold waters. One of them stumbled, and his owner repaid him with a hearty curse, before he remembered to beg Boyd's pardon.

"It's very good of you to say so," returned the young man, with some bitterness; "I wish, Cunningham, that I deserved the respect you pay me."

"Oh! that's all right, Ned," replied the other, easily. "That's *all* right. I respect you right enough, too. I remember one time when I was courting m' wife—she was visiting on a ranch out Knickerbocker way—and blame me, if I didn't get lost on the prairie, on my way to see her, and ride all night without ever finding the house. And, sir, when it come morning, I found by the sun that the confounded ranch was about a mile or so behind me; and I had to turn plumb round in my tracks before I could strike the spot."

"One minute more," said Manuel; "the horses are at the bank. It is well that the boy sleeps. Jesusito sleeps."

("And the Life Everlasting. Amen.")

"And, sir, that's what's the matter," pursued Cunningham, cheerfully. "Turn round in your tracks, Ned, just turn plumb round—Great God A'mighty! what's that!"

There had been a rustle in the bushes on the edge of the stream; but not for any rustle would Greased Lightning so have swerved and plunged, before both horses mounted the last ascent of the bank at a plunge, and then dashed forward at the top of their speed. The buggy swayed from side to side; Boyd held on for very life; even the ranchman's iron wrist could not control the frightened pair, until the river had long been passed, and they stood more than a gunshot away upon the open prairie, under the swift dawn of the southern sky. Then, handing the reins to his companion, Cunningham sprang to the ground and ran to Lightning's head.

"What in thunder made you put up such a fool game as that on me, Lightning?" he said, in remonstrance. The next moment he gave a long, shrill whistle and was silent.

"Anything wrong?" asked Boyd, with, however, but slight interest in the reply.

"Just a little matter between me and Lightning," said Cunningham.

He made two long steps back to his place beside the young man; his lips were closely pressed together; several times during the remainder of the drive he said "Good Lord!" and once he broke into wild laughter.

But not to Boyd nor to any one except the owner, to whom he carefully restored it, with the remark that he could throw pretty straight for a small boy, did Cunningham ever reveal that he had found, tangled in Lightning's bridle, the small, fragrant beads of a carved brown rosary.

The Birds of Bethlehem

By Richard Watson Gilder

[Reprinted from "In Palestine and Other Poems" by special permission of the author and of the publishers of that book, The Century Company, of New York.]

I.

I heard the bells of Bethlehem ring—
Their voice was sweeter than the priests';
I heard the birds of Bethlehem sing
Unbidden in the churchly feasts.

II.

They clung and swung on the swinging chain
High in the dim and incensed air:
The priests, with repetitions vain,
Chanted a never-ending prayer.

III.

So bell and bird and priest I heard,
But voice of bird was most to me;
It had no ritual, no word,
And yet it sounded true and free.

IV.

I thought Child Jesus, were he there,
Would like the singing birds the best,
And clutch his little hands in air
And smile upon his mother's breast.

Bethlehem, Holy Week, 1896.