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DEATH  
IS  
INCIDENTAL

*A Story  
of  
Revolution*

*illustrated with block prints*

*by Heath Bowman and  
Stirling Dickson*



*Gratefully dedicated*  
*to our three good friends*  
*in San Miguel de Allende*

José Mojica  
Leovino Zavala  
Jesús Fuentes



# Preface

Death is incidental to men in the throes of revolution. One may argue the causes, the promises, the fulfillments of revolution, but one can never deny the numberless, unwritten personal tragedies that accompany it wherever it goes.

This book intimately describes four such tragedies — of Jesús, who asked only to spend his life in the service of his master, Don Fernando; of that small landowner himself, who wanted nothing of the revolution and tried in vain to stay aloof from it; of the peon Juan, reared in the tradition of the church, who later fought against it; and of Padre Dominguez, a priest caught up in the revolution as it swept through the beautiful mountain town of San Miguel de Allende in the great central plateau of Mexico. Yet this story might have happened anywhere that revolution has visited. It could have occurred when Rome was young and men fought and gave their lives for a republic; it could have happened yesterday during the American Revolution, or the French; or it could have been born in the dawn of today in cold Slavic Russia, or this very noon in warmer Latin Madrid. It is a story that illuminates momentarily the long Mexican revolution as a flash of lightning might reveal a forest in the midst of a night of storm.

Heath Bowman is the writer and Stirling Dickinson the illustrator, who has received so much critical praise for his striking block prints.

This story is a natural progression from the authors' other books, which are personal accounts of their own travels. Based on true happenings in San Miguel de Allende, it is the product of their second sojourn of several months in the historically important and beautiful mountain town of San Miguel. Named after one of the propounders of Mexico's



independence from Spain, Don Ignacio Allende, and situated within a few kilometers of the spot where that declaration was first enunciated — the Sanctuary of Atotonilco, where part of the story is laid — the town was formerly the home of wealthy colonial landholders, hacendados, a fact which explains the beauty of its churches and convents. Stirling Dickinson has built a home upon the mountainside to which he will return to continue his painting of landscapes.

## **1. Padre Miguel Hidalgo, Priest or Revolutionary?**

Who is Father Hidalgo, the main character of the 2nd and 3rd chapters in this book? (The writer uses the first chapter to introduce the main ideas of the book.) He is not the friendly parish priest you might expect. Instead he is a revolutionary in the spirit of George Washington. Just as George Washington freed his country from England, Hidalgo was trying to free his country from Spain in 1810-1811.

But Hidalgo failed. After winning some initial battles, he lost a major battle to the Spanish, was captured and executed.

So that is why the second chapter starts in 1810. 1810 was the year Padre Don Miguel Hidalgo launched the first attempt at liberation from Spain.

Another unexpected fact about Hidalgo's life was the combination of church and wealth. Apparently, Hidalgo did not take a vow of poverty. He and his family had vast land holdings called haciendas threatened by taxes from Spain.

How the Church became the largest landowner in Mexico is beyond this introduction but it seems to play a major part in Mexican history. Each acre owned by the Church is one not owned by farmer who wanted his or her own land.

You will see later in the book, a denunciation of the wealth of the Church: "The Church, Juárez had affirmed, was too powerful; it owned half the real estate of the entire country, it had become a great money-lender. Mexico, the leader had added, was Catholic through fear and oppression, ruled not by an ideal but by a great institution which endangered the state instead."

Benito Juárez, of course, is the great Mexican leader of the 1850s and worthy of a separate study himself.

Juan, a peasant farmer, is one of the central characters of the second half of the book. The tension between the Church's spiritual role and its economic and political role will

influence the life of Juan in a major way. He still believes in his religion and goes to the priest for confession, but he is seeking economic salvation: the land which the next revolution promises.

How do you make revolution against a priest who is your spiritual leader? Imagine you are a Mexican peasant, essentially a debt-slave to the landlord or the Church who owns the land you work. What are you willing to risk to change the situation? You are penniless for most of the year, and lack enough food for your family.

This is one description of the situation. “Before the 1910 Mexican revolution that overthrew Porfirio Díaz, most of the land was owned by a single elite ruling class. Legally there was no slavery or serfdom; however, those with heavy debts, Indian wage workers, or peasants, were essentially debt-slaves to the landowners. A small percentage of rich landowners owned most of the country's farm land. With so many people brutally suppressed, revolts and revolution were common in Mexico.”

As you will see in the book, the decisions about land have consequences. As a poor peasant in San Miguel in Mexico, would you have encouraged the Zapatista revolutionaries to attack the landowner, Don Fernando, as Juan did?

## **2. Who was Ignacio Allende, a traitor or a hero?**

He turned against the Spanish army he belonged to and was executed for it.

“In 1810, the revolutionary army came to San Miguel from the nearby town of Dolores, known as the Cradle of the Mexican Independence. Ignacio Allende joined the army as the chief lieutenant of the Priest Don Miguel Hidalgo as well as Juan Aldama.”

“In October 13, 1810, the Priest Hidalgo was excommunicated by the Holy Inquisition for protecting the rights of the poor. This was the beginning of the Mexican Independence. Both were captured and executed in less than a year.”

Would you have joined Hidalgo and Ignacio Allende in the struggle against Spain at the

possible cost of your life?

### **3. The Shifts in Time**

And why does the book jump from 1810 to 1911? At first glance, this is disorienting. But this is how the book pulls us into Mexican history at major decision points. As mentioned, 1810 was the beginning of the revolt against Spain, an attempt which failed. Mexico later achieved independence in 1821.

The revolution starting in 1910 was a reaction against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. A number of leaders from different regions rose up against Díaz and later against each other. You will see the armies of Zapata, Carranza, Villa and Obregón in the second half of the book.

But the writer, Heath Bowman, in the end, is not interested in teaching us the details of the second Mexican revolution and its leaders. He wants to talk about death and revolution, and who suffers in revolutions it seems to me. As Jesús stabs his best friend Juan to death in a disagreement over politics in the end of the book, you see Bowman's frustration with revolution. But he does not tell us if he thinks that the revolutions are necessary. You can decide that.

And you can also push further into the causes of revolutions if you and your teachers like.

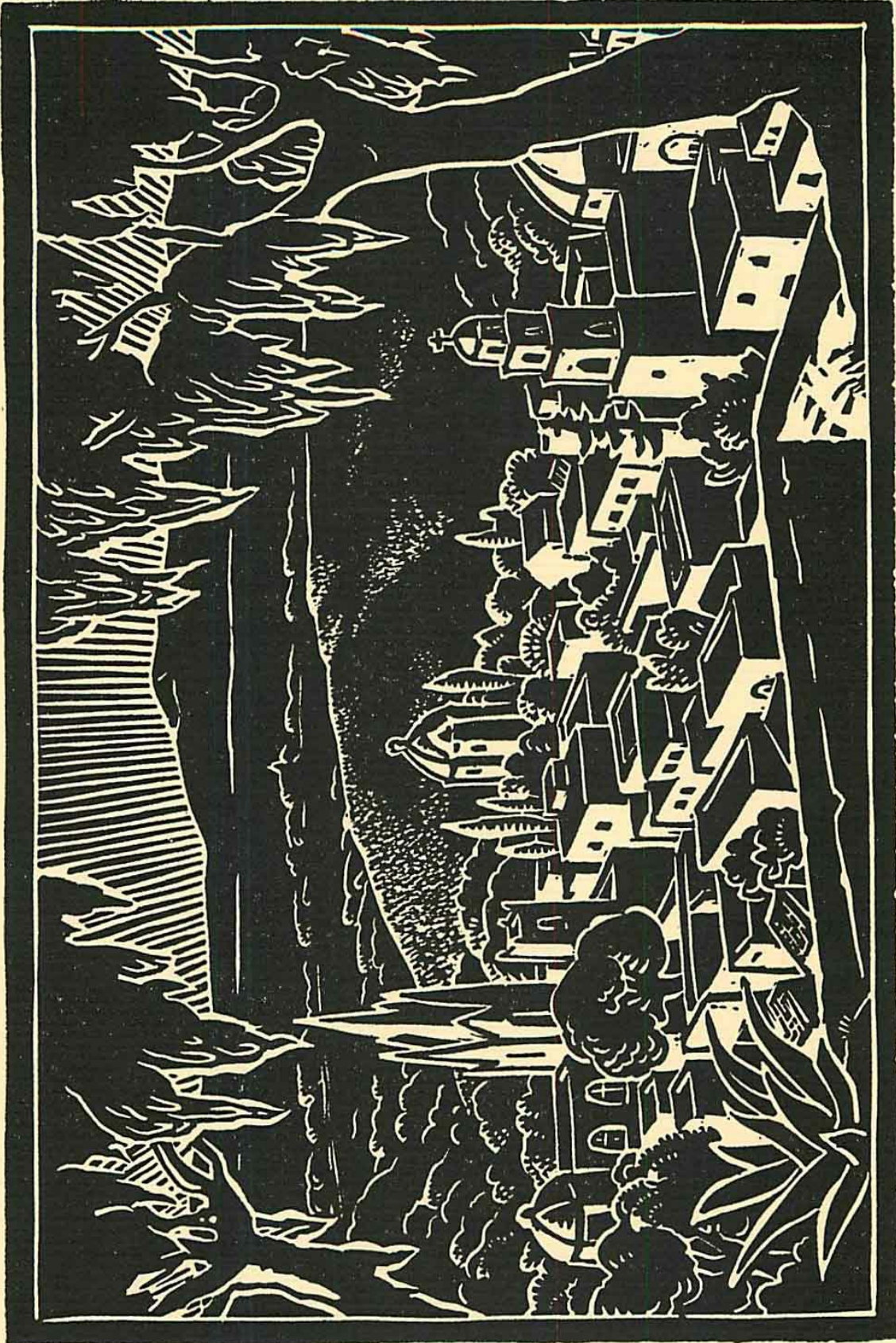
Land in Mexico was opportunity and thus the source of conflicts. Each country handles opportunity differently and faces the challenges of updating opportunity as times change. Today, which nations are the leaders in providing opportunities for non-college youth in the post-industrial world? How, for example, do opportunities for apprenticeships differ from Germany to the United States? I am sure that you and your teachers will be able to generate many writing topics about opportunity, death and revolution, and civic responsibility. The reason that I have included topics for writing, is that the writing skills

you acquire in high school matter. College will be more enjoyable if you don't have to spend a year in remedial community college classes in writing, reading, and math.

We hope that you enjoy this book which uses simple and straightforward language to ask sophisticated questions. We also hope that you enjoy the illustrations. The illustrator, Stirling Dickinson, who created the block prints in this book became well-known in Mexico for his support of the arts in San Miguel de Allende and of the town in general.

Please send your comments, corrections, and suggestions for additional writing topics to include in a future edition to us at [info@ebooksforstudents.org](mailto:info@ebooksforstudents.org).

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January, 2015



San Miguel de Allende



# The Birthplace of Mexican Independence

## A Mountainside Above San Miguel de Allende

*The Revolution will commit errors. But now and always we shall have to recognize the indisputable merit of having had immense faith in the Mexican pueblo, which has been our unique support and to which we owe all our aims. — Jesús Acuna, secretary of state, December, 1916.*

*The Revolution is not yet popular in Mexico. The greater part of the Mexican people is still against the Revolution; the upper class, some of the intellectual element, a part of the middle class, and some of the laboring class, are against the Revolution. . . . We are still a minority. — A delegate to the Constitutional Convention, February, 1917.*

IT WAS not yet dawn. The cold, lifeless grey, which was all that came from that other part of the world where there was already light, made only two elements on the earth's surface distinguishable — sky and mountains. Vast, enveloping, amorphous, the cloud masses hung over darker, rounded shapes of earth which rose above gullies, canyons and deep, expansive valleys. A faint breeze was sucked up the mountain slopes, wet by the heavy dew from below and cooled by the altitude. There was no sound, save for the lonely, faint murmur of rivers, or the charging of foaming streams cast downward in their rocky courses, or the nearly imperceptible trickle of gathering dew, dripping, and the gentle stirring of an occasional weeping willow rubbing its many leafy hands together. No man-



sounds were yet audible. This mountain world was dead, lifeless.

From a great high plateau these mountains reared for endless leagues into the greyness and mist. Yet on one mountain slope, above a grey jumbled mass which in the light of day was a town, sat a man.

He was shivering, his muscles trembled with spasmodic jerks, but not only from the cool wetness, although he had sat there through the black night. Now this vast, half-perceived scene added to his terror. He was utterly alone, an outcast, in this land to which he had been born. For he knew that he was denied by the God who sat in his great heaven above these clouds.

In one night this man, this Indian peon, had lost both his worldly master and his God. He was a murderer.

This Indian, who yesterday had been free to move among men, speak to them and eat with them and kneel in the great church like the rest, was called Jesús. Perhaps he would no longer need a name, in this new loneliness. . . .

Yet death is incidental in the chaotic times of conflict. And this particular Indian who had a name, who sat upon a certain mountainside, might have been anywhere that revolution had visited. His personal tragedy could have occurred when Rome was young and men fought and gave their lives for a republic. It could have happened yesterday during the American Revolution, or the French; or it could have been born in the dawn of today in cold Slavic Russia, or this very noon in warmer Latin Madrid.

Revolution is motivated by ideals. And from the beginning of time man has laid down his life for ideals. In every case it is the same: death is incidental to the goal. Those who are innocent bystanders, who try to avoid the struggle, those who have no reason to be killed, pay for the zeal of others with their lives. It is not always a certainty that right is triumphing: that very question brings about the inevitable conflict, and the tragedy.

This is the story of four such tragedies. Of the Indian Jesús, who asked only to spend his

life in the service of his master, Don Fernando; of that small landowner himself, who wanted nothing of the Revolution and tried in vain to stay aloof from it; of the peon Juan, reared in the tradition of the Church, who later fought against it; and of Padre Domínguez, a priest caught up in the Revolution as it swept through San Miguel de Allende.

This is the story of unnecessary death or disaster to these four lives. In the broad view, they are as nothing. And this tale is a mere speck on the large page of the Revolution in one country — Mexico. Yet by chance these actual events go far to explain what Revolution means to Mexico. For there were, and still are, two ideals in the Mexican's life: Christianity and the Rights of Man, to call them by the abstract terms of philosophers' invention; in Mexico they are known as the Roman Catholic Church and Revolution. Founded upon two similar ideals which sprang from the one desire of their first propounders — to see men work side by side with greater equality. And yet, these two ideals have split asunder, have so far diverged that they could come together again only in the midst of bloodshed.

It is not an easy matter to carry out an ideal, to keep it a bright and shining thing like the freshly polished shield of some fervent crusader. There comes a time when the shield has lost its gleam, its smooth surface; when it is used not always for the best of possible aims.

. . . Ideals change into hard and fast doctrines — which means only that the realm of theory merges gradually with that less beautiful realm of rough practice, and that the ideal which has become most firmly implanted, which has stood the longest, has the greater hold and the greater power. It is therefore in Mexico not simply the Church and the landowners against the Revolution and the peons, against all progress; it is one institution, one pattern of thought long known and revered, against a newer set of principles — and both sides encrusted with endless irrelevancies.



Portrait of a Revolutionary

These four incidental tragedies symbolize the lives of many other men who lived far from the place where these events occurred. But the place is that grey jumbled mass on the mountainside from which the Indian Jesús was outcast, the little town of San Miguel de Allende on the great Central Mesa. . . .

Jesús pulled his *sarape* closer around him and waited miserably for the morning sun. Now and then he glanced backward toward the solitary cross that marked the hilltop shrine, hoping that the sun's rays had found it; and more than once, when he heard an early marketgoer pass on the path below, he shrank back against a tree trunk lest someone see him. Gradually the forms of houses below him took shape and the mantle of mist which had obscured the scene slowly lifted to become bands that floated above the town and encircled the many-towered churches. Far across the valley the first sunlight was turning the low-lying ridge of mountains into a blue ribbon flowing across the broad horizon, its new-found color contrasting with the sky whose grey was washed with rose. Slowly the light crept across the valley toward the town, infusing blue-greens and yellows into the undulating slopes, bringing out the thousand form modulations that the sun daily etches in the earth.

This scene was Jesús' whole world, this great valley, the Bajío — which means a shoal or shallow place. Located on the Central Mesa, the strength of Mexico, it lay hemmed in by mountains, the eastern and western

Sierra Madres, which to the south, not two hundred miles by rail, converge in the famous snow peaks of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl.

Now there were sounds that came up the mountainside, rising to the spot where Jesús watched: a cock crowing, the wooden bray of a burro, and presently the mellow chiming of the many bells calling to early mass. The mist evaporated, and in its place were wisps of smoke from wood or charcoal fires. A little child cried out in a high voice. The world was

coming alive once more: man was returning to the scene.

The sun rose higher and crawled down the gilded dome of Las Monjas, the convent in the distance; it brought out the color of the pink stone pinnacle of the *parroquia*, the curious Gothic façade of the parish church, an anomaly in the midst of all these Spanish domes and towers. To the right was the great San Francisco, built like a medieval fortress with its grey stone walls, but given grace by its carved red façade and graceful bell tower, and the blue and white tiled dome which now glistened in the morning light. Still farther to the right stood the Oratorio of San Felipe Neri, with its delicate pink chapel, looking almost too fragile to be real, dedicated to the Virgin of Lareto.

Beneath these dominant notes, crowded around the many towers, the town lay flat and submissive. Jesús could see few of the bright-colored walls from his vantage point, only the flat-topped roofs. Yet there were also the magnificent vertical accents of the cypress trees that stood before each church. They were so dark as to seem almost black, framing the façades, flattering the soft pinks and reds by their strong contrast. And there were other greens, the warm rich color of the fruit orchards and the nearer fields, and the dusty bluish-green of the mesquite which lay like scattered chords on the distant fields.

Certainly it would never have occurred to Jesús — for he had never heard anyone mention it — that this town of San Miguel had changed very little throughout the years, even as Mexican towns go, or that, once it was fully built, even once the Franciscan friar Juan de San Miguel had given the first impetus to its building, it had remained what it had begun to be four centuries before — a perfect colonial *pueblo*.

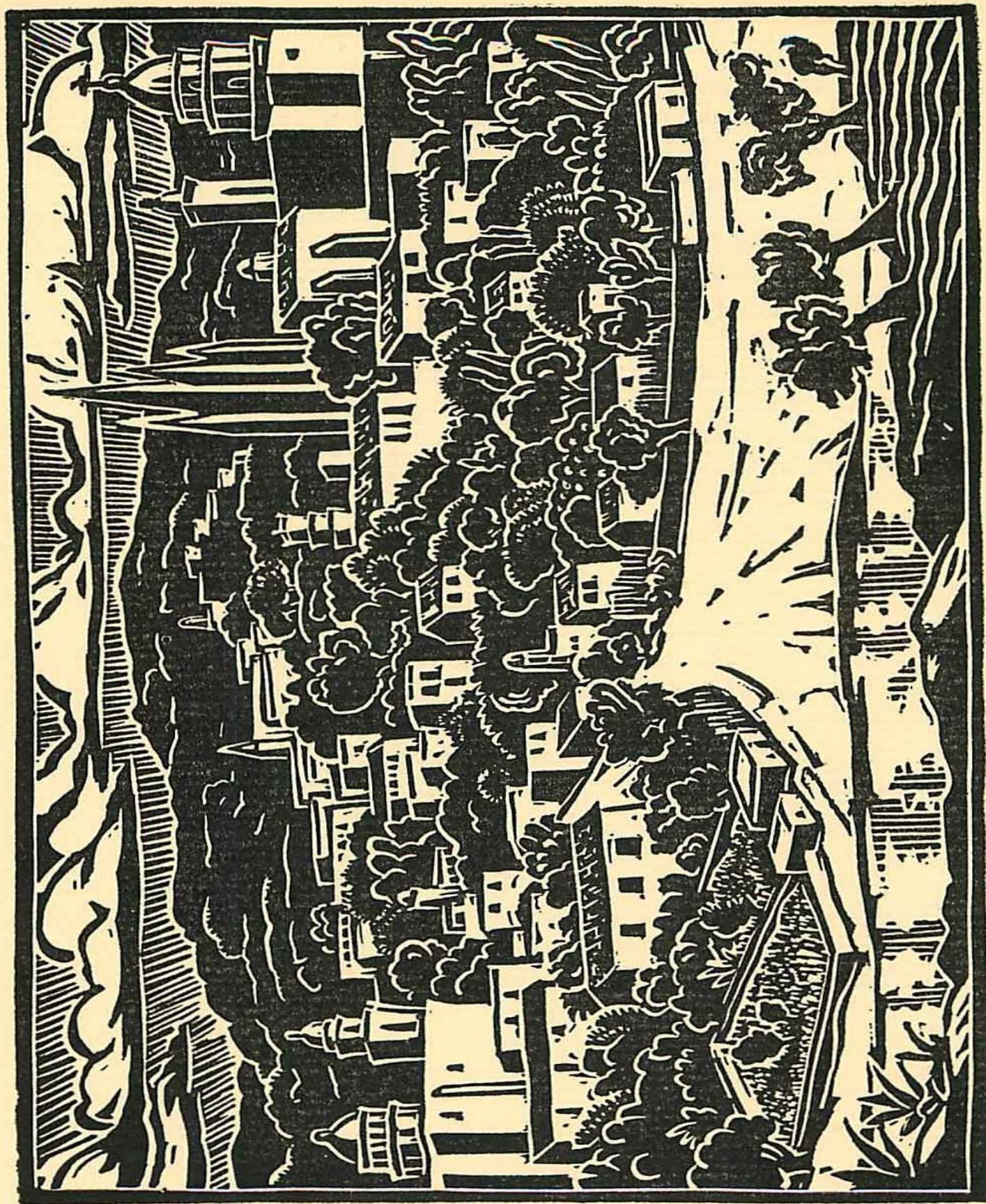
Now, of course, the road on the far side of town crossed the bridge over the little river and wound on to the railroad; but even so the station was three kilometers removed, as if the town stood aloof from such an innovation. Up from the other side of the river, too, began the road which led to Dolores Hidalgo, the very birthplace of Mexican independence, and on its way — the blue-shaded butte under which it lay was visible to

the right on the horizon — the road came upon the Sanctuary of Atotonilco, where Jesús was born and where Padre Domínguez preached to the thousands who came to this famous shrine for the succession of retreats which lasted throughout the year. Even, with interruptions, in these times of revolution. . . .

This is the setting for the four tragedies, this peaceful town caught in the cross fire. For it so happened that San Miguel de Allende was situated in the center of Mexico, close to the battlefields of all the conflicting revolutionary forces. Like a bystander swept into a riot, harried by countless cross-purposes, invaded by every banner-raising party, the town of San Miguel lay in a perfect geographical position to be the scene of these events.

Yet the real beginning of the tale of Jesús, Padre Domínguez, his brother Don Fernando and the Indian Juan dates back to the time when the first blow for independence, for freedom from oppression, was struck — to the time of Mexico's first great patriots, Padre Hidalgo and Allende. Well over a century and a quarter ago. . . .

On the upper corner of the town plaza, its balconies overlooking the parish church, still stands the house where lived Don Ignacio Allende, the father of Mexico's primary revolution. The house is typically grand colonial: thick, cool walls about a flowered patio reaching to the sky. The ceilings of the rooms are high and from them hang beautiful old chandeliers. Yet on the floor are *petates*, grass mats woven by the Indians. About each balcony are handsome wrought-iron railings, and the grey walls are trimmed at every window and door with pink stone *maicos*, or architraves, all of them carved by Indian craftsmen. . . .



*San Miguel on the Road to Delores*





1810

September Fifteen

## The Town of San Miguel

*We are resolved to enter into no arrangement which has not for its basis the liberty of the nation, and the enjoyment of those rights which the God of nature has given to all men — rights inalienable, which must be sustained by the shedding of rivers of blood if necessary.* — Padre Miguel Hidalgo, 1810.

UPON a balcony of the grand colonial house stood a man, looking out at the plaza. He was in the prime of life: there was an undeniable harmony between this point in his existence and the season, the middle of September. The leaves of the great trees which bent over to brush his house shone bright in the slanting afternoon sun. The downpours of the rainy season had diminished now to only a gentle shower each day; below him the cobblestones were dark with this slight wetting, but the air was balmy and warm. At this time of year the dry land denied itself, for the rains had brought a vast carpet of green, and of blossoming flowers. The earth was ripe, fertile.

The rather short stature of this man was accented only by the tall window behind him; for in his uniform he was curiously imposing. There was something definitely reminiscent of a Lord Byron about him. The similarity went further: his house was that of an aristocrat, one of the finest of those facing the Plaza de Armas; only the sumptuous mansion of the present Count of la Canal exceeded it in grandeur. He was wearing the stiff and well-tailored uniform of a captain of the regiment of the queen of Spain. His

fashionable sideburns, his long aquiline nose and his thin mouth were all decidedly Spanish. Equally Spanish was his reputation for having a way with the ladies. Only recently he had become a widower, and his wealthy spouse upon her death had left him a considerable fortune.

Yet this man, Don Ignacio Allende, hated with all his mind and body even the name *gachupines* — the ‘spur-wearers,’ the Spanish landowners. For over a year he had been secretly planning. He had no misgivings — he was not the sort to have them — but he knew the situation to be delicate. To further his conspiracy against the dominance of Spain, to engender the idea that this yoke of oppression must be cast aside, he had spoken to many people, taken them into his confidence. Under the guise of loyal *juntas*, or *councils*, in back rooms while the lighted parlors were gay with dancing, he had fostered his ideal in all the towns around. *If one should turn against him. . . .*

Allende tossed his head as if in disdain at such a thought. Nothing must go wrong; he wanted this goal too intensely to have it vanish. Some people, he knew, might question his reckless, free-living past as a gay officer and a ladies' man, but none would doubt his veracity and sincerity. He had won them over. And the rich, full life he had led left him now more ready to follow one set, determined course — to give up all else, all the rest of his life, to a great cause.

Suddenly through the quiet of this siesta hour he heard the sound of a horse's hoofs. Not a detachment of the queen's cavalry, but the foreboding sound of one rider. The sixth sense of an alert soldier made him run from his balcony just as the lone messenger came up the steep street. Allende was at the door himself, and had opened it so that the man and his animal could enter the patio, before a *mozo* appeared.

‘Pancho Lojero! he cried. ‘What ill thing brings you here? *Madre de Dios*, you look tired! You have news from Querétaro? It is important!’

‘Senor Capitan, I have never had such a ride! My horse has lamed himself and I am

ready to drop. But Dona Josefa — this message — ’

Allende snatched the paper from him, broke open the seal and read. There were few lines: ‘ Ignacio: The secret has been discovered. A sergeant in our confidence betrayed us in order to escape court-martial. The news is abroad, we await your advice. Me and my husband the mayor and all of us you can count on as always. You have no more traitors here. — Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez. ’

The captain was on the battlefield now. Sharply he snapped at his *mozo*: ‘ Let food be prepared for Senor Lojero. *iÁndele* — go! — fetch Don Juan Aldama, in the house of the Señoras Cabezas. ’

Aldama found his friend pacing the room. Allende had become calm again, his pacing denoted merely impatience. ‘ The secret is out, ’ he said without preface, and handed the note to Aldama who began to expostulate.

‘ But Ignacio, everything is ruined! We had planned to move in December! And now — three months before — ’

‘ It is done. Unless we strike now, while they still do not expect us, we must abandon all and run for our lives. We have talked long — now we must act. Are you ready to ride to Dolores with me? We must apprise Padre Hidalgo immediately. He is the one who should know first. ’

‘ You are right. We cannot rise without the Church; we need its help. Give me five minutes to prepare. In four hours on fresh horses we should be at his door. . . . There is nothing else you wish to say? ’

‘ No, ’ Allende answered. But he laid his hand upon Aldama's arm. ‘ There will be little time for words from now on, he added gently. ‘ As we have talked together, so must we now act together — until the end. ’ And he let him go.

Their horses were good animals, imported from Spain at enormous expense. They rode

like the wind, skirting the cobblestoned road as they left town, riding through the cactus which came higher than their heads: it was easier there than on the slippery stones. Behind them the white-faced tiers of San Miguel rose steeply against the deep green of the mountainside: again with the virile accents of the *parroquia*, of Las Monjas and San Francisco, but from this angle showing more plainly that it was a mountain town, one house piled on another until high above the main cluster of buildings was the culminating bell tower of Santo Domingo. . . . Quickly they left this scene behind, coming soon to the cross that marked the halfway to Atotonilco; they raced on, rode up the hill that looked down upon that sanctuary, one marvelously red-orange tower rising above all the others, set in a thicket of brilliant green. But they did not stop.

Only on the sandy beach that lined the stream beside the Hacienda de la Petaca — they had avoided the ranch house — did they dismount to let their horses drink sparingly. The sun was setting in bright glory, catching only the topmost branches of the cottonwoods, and for one instant Allende allowed his mind to absorb its beauty. A sudden overwhelming emotion of satisfaction came to him: this incomparable land! Something to fight for. . . .

‘ *Vamonos* — let's go, ’ Allende commanded.

So they rode on, two Mexican Paul Reveres, repeating the North American legend a generation afterward. Yet beginning a revolution which would never seem to end. . . .



Don Ignacio Allende

from an old painting



1810

September Fifteen

## The Village of Dolores

SIT DOWN, my friends, sit down. You are tired and hungry. You can think better after you have eaten.' Padre Don Miguel Hidalgo was old and spare, his long white hair reaching to the shoulders of his black cassock. Beside these two impatient captains in their gold braid he seemed a very old and weary figure.

' I have been thinking, Allende began, paying no attention, ' that the thing to do is to tell the members of our junta here, and let them start at once to the towns — to Mexico, Guadalajara, Guanajuato — '

' In time, my son, in time. Let us eat first. '

' But we must act quickly, padre! '

The priest spread his hands upon the table. ' Ignacio, I do not want to take advantage of my age. But listen for one moment. I know in your fine military heart you are wondering why I am not more enthusiastic, more filled with zeal. First let me reiterate that I am with you and value your counsel. But you know I have been hoping long for this day. Ever since I came to this parish I have tried to mitigate the lot of my poor Indians. Few men, I am sorry to say, have fostered the native crafts as I have. I do not boast; it was only my duty. I have felt it my duty to read books, too, which are condemned by the Inquisition. . . . Here comes the food. Sit down, and eat. ' Allende and Aldama obeyed this time, and the padre went on: ' These books I have read, of the French Encyclopedists and the many other philosophers, have always seemed to me to advocate only what our Lord Jesus

Christ preached. *The Church must stand for the original ideals of Christianity!* The rights of man, true brotherhood — these thoughts, these ideals, are so akin, I can see them but as one. And — ’

Allende put down his bread. ‘ I agree, father, I agree. But now is the time for action! We are in a perilous state. Because we knew you would be in danger, we came — ’

‘ Let the padre speak, Ignacio, ’ Aldama remonstrated.

‘ Just one more thing, ’ Padre Hidalgo continued. He placed his hands flat upon the table. His eyes were dreamy — the eyes of the visionary. ‘ I have long imagined this day. And it has been a battle within me, as it must have been to you both, to forsake allegiance to Spain. I know also that the archbishop will not be pleased. I am fortified by two things. When he was bishop of Michoacán, ten years ago, he proposed great land reforms. It was his plea that the Indians should receive royal land free. Each one should be given a plot of ground to cultivate, and they should be allowed to till the unused portions of the great *haciendas*. That is the crux of the matter, to me. For I have seen the conditions. And my blood boiled when the authorities here tore down our grapevines. You know why. Spain alone has the monopoly on wine, say they. . . . These unspeakable tyrannies make me all the more determined, fortify me. Even more because I deeply feel that God is with us. ’

‘ Amen, ’ said Aldama.

The padre rose. ‘ I have said what is in my heart, ’ he told them. ‘ Now, Ignacio, you want action. I advise that we visit the authorities tonight to tell them the country is rising and that for their own protection they should place themselves in our hands — in short, to arrest and imprison them. ’

‘ But we have no armed forces yet, padre! ’ Allende looked at him with amazement.

‘ We have friends who will go with us, ’ the padre answered, ‘ and tomorrow we shall have a force — you will see. It is Sunday and the people will be coming to mass from the ranches all about. We shall enlist them for the cause! ’



‘ You cannot conquer with words alone. Father, this is war. ’

‘ Use the tools at hand, my son. Here is the action you wanted. ’

Allende stood up and pushed away his chair. ‘ I respect your orders, padre. Send for our friends and let us begin. ’



1810

September Sixteen

## The Sanctuary of Atotonilco

‘IT WOULD be wise,’ Padre Hidalgo said to Allende, ‘to stop at the sanctuary and let the men rest.’

They were approaching the towers of the Sanctuary of Atotonilco, twenty-four hours after Allende and Aldama had ridden swiftly by. Behind them on foot came the badly dressed and worse armed troops they had gathered at Dolores. Yet they had already made their first triumph, early this morning in the plaza of that village. And with them, as prisoners, they were bringing the Spanish lords. The Revolution had begun, the first army had been recruited. The bells of the padre's church had rung out the cry of independence.

When they came to the portal of the sanctuary it seemed that word had already preceded them; it was known why they were here, and what had happened. The padre shook the dust from his cloak as he dismounted from his horse. A sexton had come forward and begged them to come inside for some chocolate.

‘The padre is no doubt tired,’ he said.

‘Not at all,’ Hidalgo replied. ‘First we should pray,’ he suggested; turning to the other men, he led them toward the most holy chapel of the Virgin of Lareto, the patrón saint of the sanctuary.

But some ranchers, the dark-faced ones in the *charro costume of tight trousers, short jackets and great embroidered felt sombreros, did not follow. Instead they turned aside to the main nave of the church, where they might pray to another saint. . . .*

*Outside, sprawled in the hot dust, which was chalk-white, with dark spots here and there from the short afternoon rain, lay the curious band of fifteen hundred men. As many as could had sought shelter in the sparse shade of the mesquite trees along the road. There the leaders found them when they came out again upon the terrace. Allende touched the padre's sleeve.*

*'They would be strengthened if you spoke to them here, once more,' he intimated.*

*The padre nodded, and standing against the balustrade before the entrance to the sanctuary he clapped his hands, beckoning all the men forward. Under one tall cypress tree he waited for them, while Allende and Aldama and the hacendados who had joined the cause dropped back into the shadow.*

Old as he was, the priest had no trouble reaching with his voice the very edge of the crowd, which fell silent at his first words. 'My children,' he began, and allowed the hush to add weight to his speech, 'I want to tell you once again that on this clay, this holy Sunday, comes to us a new dispensation. Are you ready to receive it? *Will you be free?* Will you make the effort to recover from the hated Spaniards the lands stolen from your forefathers three hundred years ago?' He stopped while they cheered, hundreds of ragged sombreros waving over their black-haired heads. Then he went on, his voice rich with the earnestness he felt:

'In the discharge of our duty we will not lay aside our arms until we have wrested the jewel of liberty from the hands of the oppressor. We have resolved to enter into no arrangement which has not for its basis the liberty of the nation, and the enjoyment of those rights which the God of nature has given to all men — rights inalienable, which must be sustained by the shedding of *rivers of blood* if necessary. . . . Children, we will conquer in the name of God and Christ his only-begotten Son —'

A loud voice cried out to interrupt him: 'And in the name of our patrón saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe!' Above the heads of the peons a picture of the Virgin was suddenly raised.

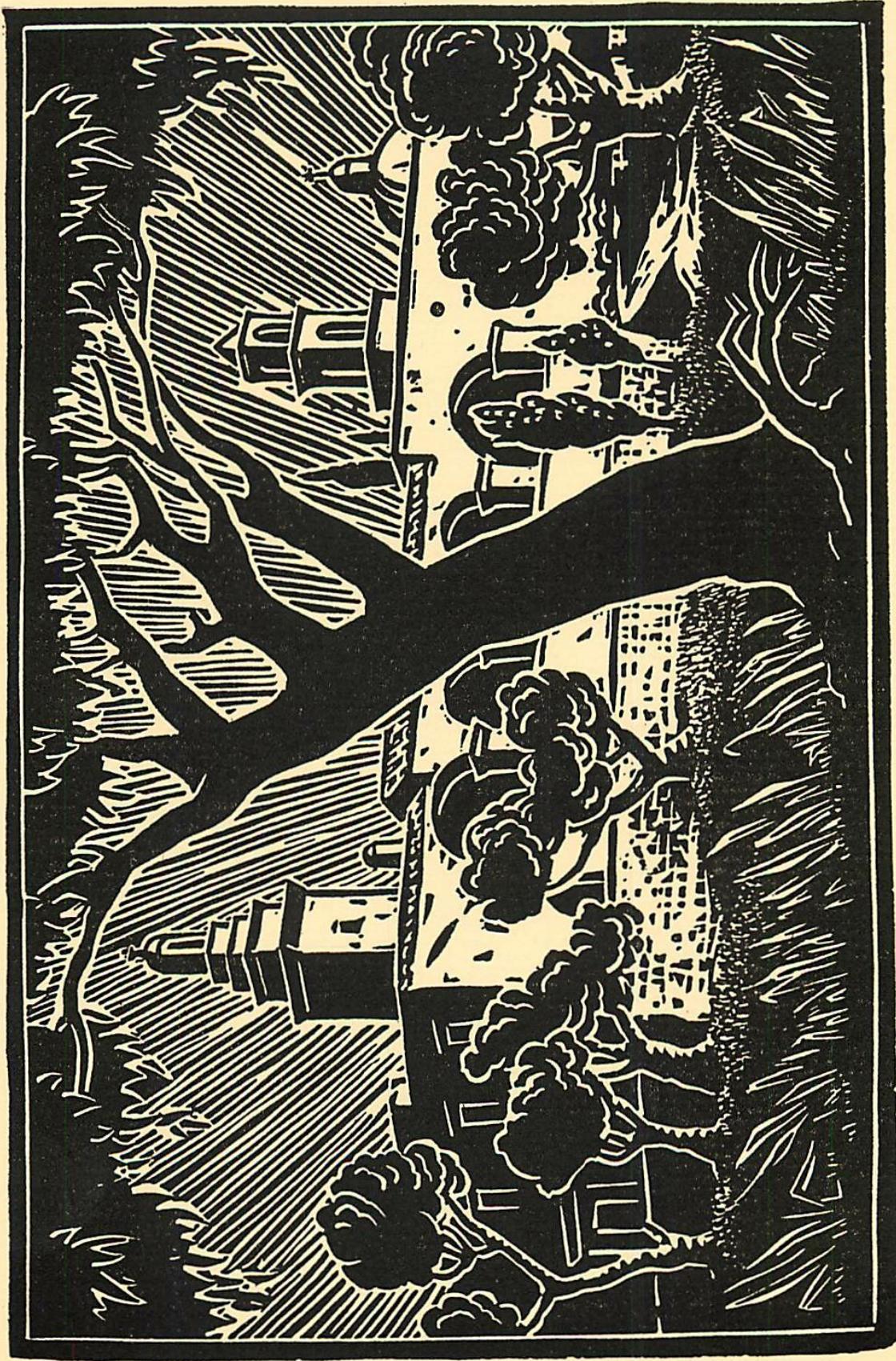
Held on a lance, it was in the hands of one of the ranchers who had turned aside to pray.

Then pandemonium broke loose. Every sombrero was off, and the cry went up, ‘ *¡Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe! ¡Mueran los gachupines! Death to the Spaniards! ¡Viva la independencia y viva la Virgen!* ’

Padre Hidalgo frowned, and Allende stepped forward as if to stop them. But the shouting continued, gaining force. The older man caught his companion by the sleeve.

‘ Stay, Ignacio my boy, ’ he advised. ‘ They mean no sacrilege. It is the saint we gave them long ago, the dark-faced Indian Virgin. They will fight the better with her protection. This will become their cry. ’

And the padre looked away because his eyes were filling with tears. All he had taught them had not been in vain. They had rallied to the Church. And by this act, unwilling by him, they had corroborated his dictum: God and Revolution were one. . . .



The Sanctuary of Atotonilco, from the fields



1911

May Eighteen

## The Sanctuary of Atotonilco

*When a society like ours has had the misfortune to pass through years of internal upheavals, it is seamed through with vices whose profound roots cannot be extirpated either in a single day or by a single measure. — Benito Juárez, 1857.*

JUAN WAS not different from many Indians. The *gente de razón*, the ‘people of reason,’ still call him and all his race *cerrados*, those whose brains are closed. They grant him the desire and ability to steal, but not to carry on revolution. Particularly in this Central Mesa region, they like to assert, he is docile and satisfied. Why the Revolution, they say, when the Indian himself does not want his land or his freedom?

But Juan was not satisfied. His burning resentment — for that was all it was at this time — seared him only, it is true, in spasms. Here at the Sanctuary of Atotonilco, on the *finca*, or farm, where he had always lived, he was uncertain whether anyone else felt as he did; he hardly dared talk of his feelings.

Yet until recently he had been content — if such a word may be applied to a life which has had no opportunity for comparisons with other ways of existence. The farm land around the sanctuary was the finest in all the great valley; here there was no real dry season, you had only to divert the water from one of the little streams to irrigate the fields. To Juan its eternal greenness made it the most lovely spot he could imagine, and in the evenings he often bathed in the hot springs that bubbled up beneath the giant fresno



trees.

His story varied little in the beginning from that of hundreds of thousands of his race. As a small boy he had followed his father behind the two slow white oxen, believing his life good. Every day the sun shone, every day he had enough to eat, every night he slept on his straw *petate* upon the floor of the *casa*. He knew only earth and blue sky and the mountains; the elements were his life blood. Every year before the planting, when the *juntas* were held, he helped his father decorate the yokes of the oxen with strings of oranges, limes and bright paper festoons, and went through the ceremony, with all the peons and oxen, which signified the fertility these big, awkward and sexless animals helped engender in the soil, and the sanctity of this simple kind of life. When he grew older and his father's beard grew white he took the wooden plow himself, and the long spike which urged his animals down the furrows.

Often on the occasions of the *juntas* he saw Don Fernando Domínguez. He was the tall, stern brother of Padre Domínguez, the priest of the sanctuary, and seemed always present, riding over from San Miguel de Allende with Jesús, his mozo, or servant: in that town Don Fernando was a prominent landholder, a *patrón*. Juan had played with Jesús when they were very young, before Don Fernando had taken him away to his house, and when Jesús came again they frequently talked together.

But Juan could never understand Don Fernando, the *patrón* of his friend. He was such a formidable man, standing at the edge of the field in his tight *charro*, trousers and great sombrero. His arm seemed always to be pointing far across the fields, he was always engaged in earnest conversation with his brother the padre. Whenever Juan came near them Don Fernando habitually grew silent, and it was the padre who spoke; he seemed the more human man — a man of God, the reverend and very famous preacher in this great retreat; yet he was always kindly.

Juan remembered that day when the two brothers had come to his humble *casa*. His

father had not gone to the fields once during that year's harvest. All day he would lie querulously upon his *petate*, swearing at his old and wrinkled wife, demanding that Juan fetch him an *olla* of *mezcal* or *pulque*. By this time Juan was a young man, physically mature with the lithe, almost unseen muscles of an Indian. As he came home in the twilight this day, came across the threshold and saw his mother kneeling before a little image of the Virgin, he suddenly knew that he was about to become head of the household. He had sent his younger sister to summon a priest — not Padre Domínguez himself, but any one of the fathers who attended the sanctuary.

Yet the padre himself had come, and with him Don Fernando. The two brothers were near the same age, but Don Fernando seemed taller and younger; Juan himself could not have explained the reason he felt this, which was simply that the holy father appeared more mellow, more full of wisdom. Still, both of them were strong men.

Only the padre entered the *casa*. Later, after the last sacrament had been given, he led Juan out of the house to his brother, away from the dark and stuffy adobe room with its dirt floor, where Juan's mother and sisters were sobbing loudly.

Don Fernando had looked the young Indian over carefully. His face was stern and emotionless. He spoke to his brother. ' Tell him, he said, ' that now he should look for a wife. He is the head of a family, his mother is old and cannot grind the maize well or cook the beans. ' It was as if he were speaking in a different language which the padre must translate.

The priest put his arm upon Juan's shoulder. ' My son, you are strong. I have watched you. We know each other. Your father was a good, devout man and you have served well. You must have masses said for his soul. And presently, take a wife. Come and tell me when you have found a good woman. '

Numbed by his grief, Juan had hardly replied, had hardly understood the padre's words. Days afterward, when the funeral was over and the masses were said, he remembered. He

would be faithful to the Church because of the padre's kindness. But he would work hard because he feared, he was awed by Don Fernando. And yet what had the brother to do with this *finca* which was supervised by the Church? Men talked of laws, saying that the Church no longer really owned the land, but Juan did not understand. . . .

Thenceforth he worked harder, for he had been told that he must pay for the masses and the funeral. Still he harbored no resentment. And that resentment might never have come had they not counseled him to take a wife.

Naturally, he would have married in any case. Yet for so long he had been content alone. Life in Atotonilco was never dull. There were so many fiestas to be celebrated; and because he played the drum well Juan was always commissioned to take part in the dances, and on Maundy Thursday, just before Easter, he played right in the church itself, simulating the Roman soldiers who had sung songs before the jail where Christ was imprisoned.

He danced, too — danced out the story of the Moors and how they were subjugated by the Christians in a country he had never seen; he danced for the pleasure of his own *patrón* saint, the dark Virgin of Guadalupe, who four centuries ago, the priests told him, had appeared to one of his own race. He danced endlessly and finished the day by drinking *pulque* or *mezcal* until he was wrapped in a blissful, forgetful haze.

And, although Juan and his race had forgotten much through four centuries, there were in the Church rites many resemblances to the religious customs of his ancestors. The flowers with which he decorated himself and his house, the dancing and eating and drinking, the propitiation of one or another image, also made up the ritual of the old Aztecs. Had not this race sacrificed a young man, who was worshiped at the very time of the Christian Easter? And was not the old spring festival always observed, even now, upon *Viernes de Dolores*, turning the mournful Friday of Sorrows during Lent into rejoicing, with altars in every small house, decorated with fresh green barley shoots, and oranges

with gilt paper flags, and sweet-smelling grasses?

For these religious feast days he and his kind paid dearly; paid perhaps all that they earned — to be baptized, to marry, even to die. Yet what would they do without their beautiful, beautiful churches? What would this little collection of huts at Atotonilco be like without those masterful domes and towers of the sanctuary? What would San Miguel de Allende have seemed to Jesús, upon that mountainside, if its five great churches and many lesser chapels had been obliterated from the scene?

Time after time, too, Juan had helped when there was a particularly large gathering for the retreats at the sanctuary — the eight days of confession and sermonizing which followed one upon the other throughout the year.

Then Juan felt himself a part of the world which lay beyond his mountains. For people came from all over the country, and some weeks, as at Easter this year, there were as many as five thousand. On these occasions the tiny village was alive, and Juan liked to watch the noisy machine which ground the corn for the *tortillas*, and the great copper pots where the red beans were stewing, and the huge kettles which boiled the milk for *café con leche*. At night he could hear the sounds of hundreds of snoring noses, and by day the murmur of prayers or the resounding voice of the padre, whose words Juan had heard even as far away as the bridge near the railroad tracks. And more than once he had helped take away some screaming penitent who had lost all reason in his excess of fervor and self-condemnation. This happened so often that a regular small hospital had been equipped for treatment of such cases.

The memory of those hysterical ones had puzzled Juan, and afterward at night he had often lain awake, his eyes still full of the horrible picture. Yet to him the church of the sanctuary had always been beautiful, and it was a comfort to look across the fields toward the great orange-red tower and the domes with the cypress trees beside them, piercing the deep blue sky. There were so many fine paintings inside on the walls and ceilings!

Pictures of battles in far-off Spain, and of saints, and of sins, too, which one must beware of; to say nothing of the statues of Christ and the Virgin Mary and the soldiers on Calvary, real as life. But best of all Juan liked the drawings, near the entrance, of the heroic figures who represented the four great continents of the world.



**BEBE BEBE PIERDE EL SESO  
ENBRIAGADO CON EL VINO  
QUE EN EL INFIERNO LO HAY FINO!**

from a Fresco in the Sanctuary

"Drink, drink, lose your mind  
When you're drunken with wine,  
That down in Hell is very fine."

His own world grew larger, for it came to him here at Atotonilco, in this pleasant, always green valley on the plateau, some eighteen kilometers from the nearest *pueblo*. Juan talked to many pilgrims—not the wealthy ones who arrived in state and had private rooms to themselves, but to the humble folk who slept in great dormitories, who often could not even pay for their food, yet who had walked half-way across Mexico to repent them of their sins. From the far, dry cattle country of Chihuahua they came; and from the warm coastal valleys of Veracruz, or the steamy jungles of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. They came from the great volcanic mountains in the Federal District, too; and Juan heard what the capital was really like. In short, this was his school and these pilgrims his teachers. And among them he found Angela, who came from the neighboring state of Jalisco, and had promised to become his wife.

This was in the spring of 1911. Juan had made his plans to journey to Lagos, where Angela lived, to bring her to his house. However, before he left he must have a new sombrero, of the *charro* type, with fine weaving and leather trimmings. And, yes, he really should have a better *sarape*, and sturdy *huaraches*, sandals, for he would have to walk back beside the burro his bride would be riding. Then there were new *ollas* and *petates* and a dozen other things to buy for the house. Juan counted up the cost on his fingers. Including the money that he must give the padre it amounted to as much as he would make in a whole year. With definite misgivings, he went to see the *mayordomo* of the farm.

But it was all so very simple! The next day, as he started off to San Miguel to make his purchases, his belt was heavy with the shining silver pesos he had borrowed. The *mayordomo* had been all smiles and had just noted down the sum in a book, laughed at him and had been stern only when he reminded Juan not to drink too much *mezcal*, or spend his money in a foolish manner.

It was the middle of May. The rains had not yet started, but the cactus was full of tunas

and bright with red and yellow and purple blossoms which presage the beginning of the fertile time. This year they were abundant, which meant good crops later. Juan began to sing, substituting the name of Angela for the one in the song. Perhaps he could buy a guitar and let some of the other dull purchases go. . . .

At the half-way mark of the road he reverently tipped his sombrero as he passed the cross. Here was the one place where Padre Alfaro, who had built the sanctuary one hundred and fifty years ago, had stopped to rest in his weekly pilgrimage to San Miguel, carrying a great heavy cross of black wood to show his people how Christ had suffered on that fatal Friday. Juan himself had always joined the annual procession which during Lent carried the images at midnight to the parish church in San Miguel.

His thoughts were full of his marriage and his eyes full of the distant vista of San Miguel climbing the mountain toward the lofty Los Picachos, "the Peaks," when he met a friend who was following his burros along the stony road. From the shape of the sacks upon the animals, he gathered they were carrying callime.

*' ¡Adios, ' Lupe! ¿Cómo le va?*

Guadalupe shook his head. ' Not good, things are not going well. '

Juan was in high spirits, but he tried to appear serious. ' I know, ' he answered, ' there is talk now of revolution. People from Mexico say Don Porfirio may not be president much longer, that this fellow Madero — ' Juan tried to recollect the talk he had heard from various pilgrims to Atotonilco. How some had told him that Don Porfirio Díaz had been a dictator for a generation and should be replaced by someone from the Liberal party; yet others pointed to the railroads which had been built, the great number of North American dollars — one billion of them, whatever that meant — which had come to Mexico. All of that signified nothing to Juan, certainly not on this exciting day.

' That is not all, ' Guadalupe interrupted him. ' Times are troubled and people will not spend their money. This fighting has made them afraid. I might as well not take my



burros into town today. But why in the name of Our Lady are you coming in on a Thursday? There's no real market until Sunday, you know that. '

Juan laughed. ' Yes, but I must hurry. I'm going to be married, you see. '

Guadalupe shook his head. ' You'd better save your money, ' he said glumly.

' It isn't my money, ' Juan laughed again. But he shut his teeth down upon the words. It was his money, only he must pay back every *centavo*. That, and the rest of the funeral expenses which he still owed. Suddenly he realized how long it would take him to repay all the money which was now so heavy in his belt. He had never given that a thought until this moment. Why, he would be a slave for years!

Nursing this fact he proceeded sorrowfully along the road with Guadalupe until they passed over the bridge and began to climb the cobbled street toward the plaza. Little boys were running past them, yelling, and ahead they saw a huge crowd had gathered. What was this? Usually on Thursday the shops were closed by this time in the afternoon, and the streets were dead. Guadalupe murmured fearsomely and prodded his burros up the first side street. Excited, Juan hurried on. A great crowd was gathered before the municipal palace. Men were packed in the street and upon the tall rounded steps which led to the public garden — on this side of the square it was a man's height above the street.

' ¿Qué paso? What's happened? ' he asked a man.

The man put his arm about Juan affectionately. His breath smelt strongly of mezcal and he leaned heavily upon Juan.

' This is a day of celebration! ' he cried. ' Come, *compadre*, let's have a drink. ' And Juan found himself being led to the crowded *cantina* on the corner.

The room was jammed with men, the brims of their great sombreros rubbing one against the other. Everyone was talking, shouting, gesticulating; nobody wanted to listen to anyone else, each man had his own ideas, his own explanations. But it was plain they

were all excited about something, something that was well worth celebrating.

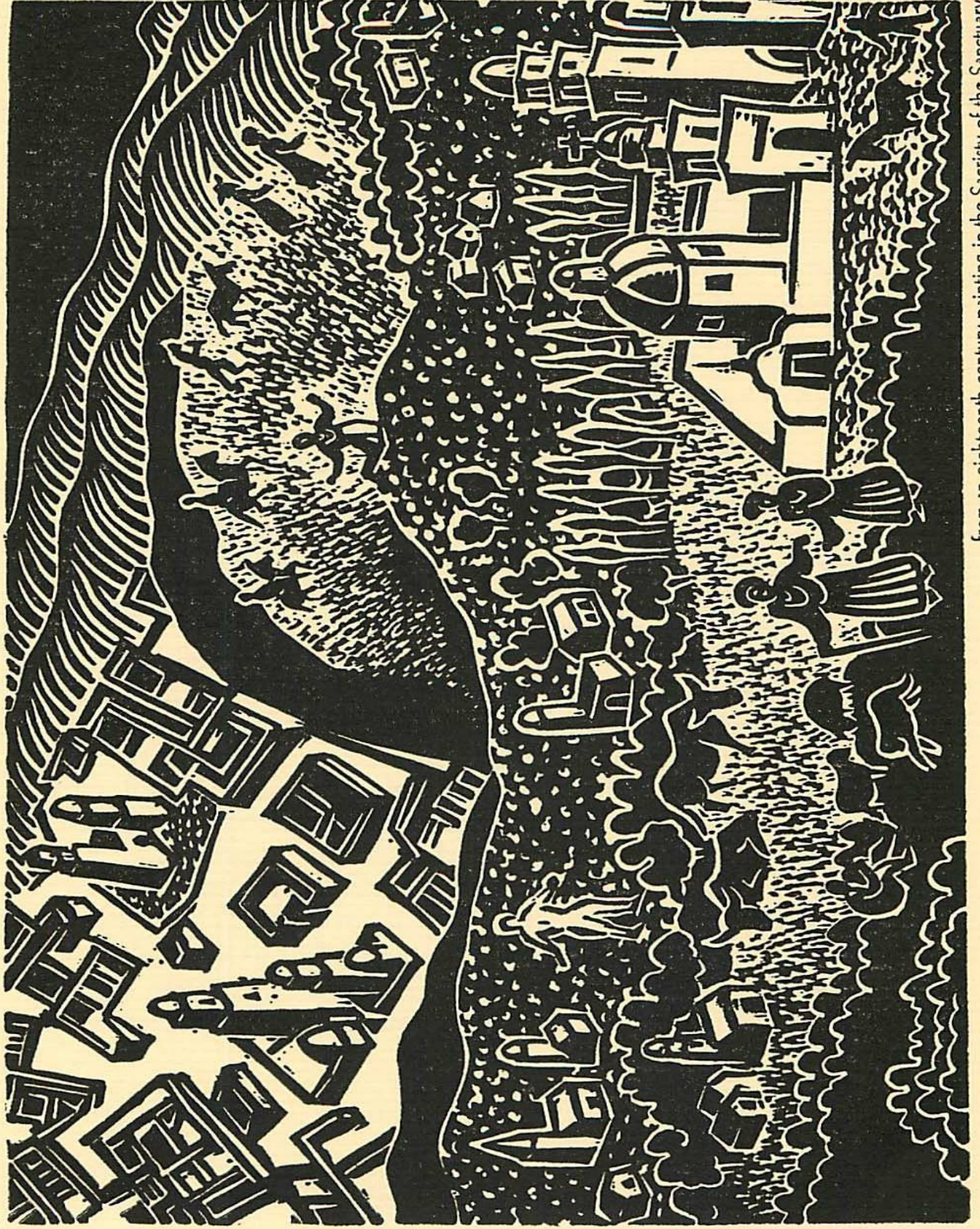
Juan timidly shook the arm of a man next to him and asked what it was all about. The other looked incredulous for a moment, not believing that anyone could be so ignorant.

‘ ¡Carramba! Today is declared an armistice, ’ he bellowed, ‘ between the forces of Porfirio Díaz and Don Francisco Madero. ’

‘ Does it make any difference? ’ Juan asked, and was overwhelmed by a flood of angry protestations and guffaws.

‘ Make any difference! Listen, joven, young fellow, it makes all the difference in the world! Don't you know what Don Francisco is going to do for us? No more tyrants like Díaz! The land will be ours, we are going to get back our communal property, our *ejidos*! We will be free men. ¡Canamba! ’ And all the men began to laugh at him.

Juan pushed his way through the crowd, looking to see if there were friends of his in the cantina. He had heard vague talk of this kind before, although those who came to Atotonilco for the retreats generally did not like this man Madero. But he could not put one phrase out of his mind: get back our *ejidos*. It had never occurred to him that he had any right to the land. Had his father ever had land of his own, he wondered.



from an eighteenth century painting in the Sacristy of the Sanctuary

The Road to San Miguel de Allende

Just as he was turning to go out into the plaza his first friend shoved his way through the crowd with a soda bottle filled with *mezcal* for him. ‘ Have a drink of this, *compadre*, ’ he said, and grabbed Juan by the arm. ‘ In a little while we're going to show this town who runs it, ’ he boasted. ‘ We're going to let out all the prisoners at the jail. Come on, drink. There's lots more, and besides, we're making the *patrón* of the *cantina* buy the drinks. ’ Juan took two long swallows of the *mezcal* and felt the fire cleansing the dust of the road from his parched throat. Soon he was leaning against the bar, trying to laugh with all the others, and gradually, with the help of more *mezcal*, a warm glow spread through his body. Suddenly someone shouted, ‘ To the prison! ’ and in a minute the room was in a turmoil, everyone jostling and shoving, trying to be the first out into the street. The cry was taken up: ‘ To the prison! To the prison! ’ and Juan was carried out of the *cantina* in a great surge that shot him through the swinging doors.

Some man in a black suit was leading them; he looked like a *patrón*, Juan thought. It was said that he was a lawyer from the capital, a follower of Madero. Juan began shouting with the rest. This was fun; this was better than playing the drum in church. And with his young strength he surged ahead until by the time the mob had reached the jail he was almost in the fore. In a moment they had broken down the doors — but there inside stood the armed guard. Those in front tried frantically to escape, but the tide behind swept them forward into the courtyard. The guards raised their rifles, one of them fired. Juan ducked instinctively and tried to worm his way back, but the crowd milled forward, stepping over a body, not stopping to see if the man were dead. Then with a rush they were fighting, overpowering the guard by sheer numbers, while Juan heard the voice of the *jefe* in charge beseeching the guard to fall back, to cause no more bloodshed. The next thing he knew the crowd was turning again toward the street, and in a moment they were out again, the prisoners among them.

From nowhere a woman had appeared to lead them, together with the black-suited

lawyer. Not until much later did Juan discover that this was the most notorious woman in San Miguel: María Vidal, a prostitute. La Pistioja, 'the blinking one,' she was called after that day, when her eyelashes were burned off. . . . Not an ordinary whore, they said; even the wealthy men in town went to her. Juan did not think she was beautiful, yet in this instant there was something compelling about her manner. Her dress was torn, she was drunk and her hair was coming down, but she led the mob and urged them on. The revolution, he heard her shout above the tumult, had triumphed.

Once more they were in the plaza, and the mob grew in size as La Pistioja and the lawyer shouted to them. But Juan could not hear what they were saying, and fought his way out. By now the sudden twilight of the mountains was settling on the town, the first stars were showing like white pinpricks in the deep blue sky. A scene that had a short while before been painted in the bright colors of daylight now took on the eerie blacks and whites of night. Still the crowd grew and the noise of shouting swelled to a great crescendo. Flares and torches appeared, casting inky shadows across the figures, singling out the white clothes of the peons. No one knew what was happening or what might come. But suddenly there was a hush, a moment of suspense and expectation.

Then Juan heard a crackling, sickening noise, and simultaneously the mob let out a sort of gasp and fell back toward the center of the plaza: a great roll of smoke and yellow flame belched from an upper window of the municipal palace. Now the flames reached higher, and the people fell back farther from the inferno, their faces red with the firelight in the darkness. Even across the plaza with its cool sound of water from the dripping fountains Juan felt the intense heat and heard the constant crackle of timbers falling and burning. The very leaves of the India laurel trees began to wither under this hell-fire.

Standing there, Juan experienced a curious elation. He could never have explained it; it was as if someone had lifted a tremendous load off his back, a load which he had scarcely realized was there until that very afternoon. For the first time in his life he could stand

erect.

What had happened to him? He hardly knew, except that he remembered what they had said about the *ejidos*, about the promises of Don Francisco Madero. . . .

Three days later Juan was kneeling in the confessional at Atotonilco while the padre's voice droned on. ' So you were in San Miguel last Thursday,' the father said. ' With your own lips you have admitted you were with the godless mob who attacked the institutions of law and order. You were present at the firing of the municipal palace. You were led by a drunken whore! And now you come for absolution, for permission to marry a good and clean woman. Do you think I should grant you absolution from your past sins? My son, do you repent? Do you understand your sin? ' Juan felt as if tight fingers were clutching his throat. Until this moment he had felt so carefree, so sure that everything would be all right. Now, in answer to this question, he could not speak. The whole vision of that day rose before him. Something had changed. Inside him. If a whore, his mind was dimly working, could fire the municipal palace, then why could he not have his bit of land and be free of debt? Why should he owe the *mayordomo* for doing what every man should do — marry? What was his sin?

'But I do not understand,' he finally managed to say. ' I was only there, padre. I did not help fire — '

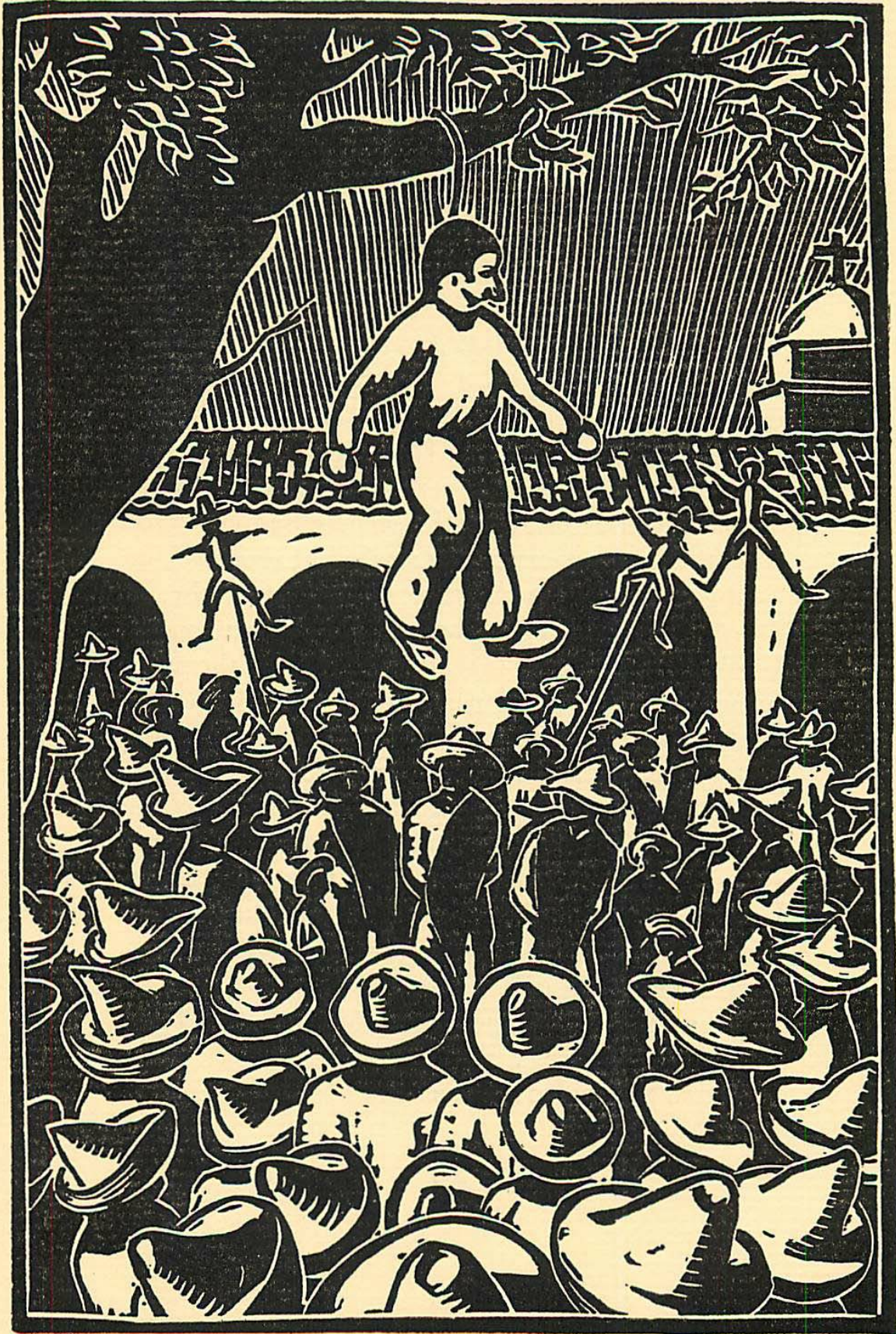
' My son, you will be condemned to hell if you do not cut this error from your soul. Go and do penance: I shall prescribe it for you. . . . Ask not God for absolution now while this sin rests upon you. Try to ask his forgiveness. You cannot marry while still you hold this evil in your heart. Go, and repent, following these instructions. . . . '

That was three years ago. Juan was not married even now. For three Easters he had watched another man take his place beating the drum in the church. He had not been asked again to dance or play the drum in the fiestas. He had grown hollow-eyed. He had a sin in his body; he almost felt the weight of it now. But he could not make himself go into

the church nor follow out the penance prescribed. Day by day he grew more depressed and yet more determined, for he would not do the penance. Still, his heart struggled with that feeling which he had experienced in San Miguel. Then he was wrong, then this strange burning desire was the sin the padre said it was? But there was no doubt; Juan knew it was sin, for the padre was wise.

In the many sleepless hours he now spent on his lonely *petate* he began to reason dimly: Only the padre knew his sin; so, if the padre could be. . . . No, he could not put his thought into words. But perhaps the padre himself was not without sin. Now and then on the finca there was grumbling: that Don Fernando, the padre's brother, was giving money to the church, that the padre had great chests of gold in his room. Esperanza, one of the *criadas*, had told Juan she had seen the padre counting money one morning when she came in to sweep. Perhaps, if Don Venustiano Carranza would send part of his great army to Atotonilco, there could be vengeance. . . .

And so Juan bided his time.



Hanging the effigy of Judas





1914

July Twenty-seven

## The Sanctuary of Atotonilco

FOR THREE long years Juan had to wait. Then at last word came that soldiers were on the road to Atotonilco, more soldiers than ever before, more than the band under Allende and Padre Hidalgo that had rallied to the Virgin of Guadalupe here at the sanctuary one hundred years before.

Since that memorable day of the burning of the municipal palace in San Miguel, Juan had often heard news of the revolution. Don Porfirio Díaz had finally been ousted and the little man Madero had become *presidente* of the republic. His photographs, which Juan had seen, were most unprepossessing, and they said that the politicians had been surprised at the way he had roused the people to his side. Yet Juan's heart had warmed to this leader from the start. Why, only six years ago Madero had been thrown into prison like an ordinary peon, in San Luis Potosí, a city only a few hours north of San Miguel. Still he was a wealthy man, a hundred times more wealthy than a *patrón* like Don Fernando, it was said; and Juan could not understand why Madero should shout the words 'Effective suffrage and no reelection' — the phrase meant nothing to his Indian ears.

In any event Don Francisco Madero had become president. And then they had shot him. That was over a year ago, in February. From a man who had come to retreat Juan heard the story of the *decena trágica*, the tragic ten days, which everyone was soon talking about. It was very complicated; even the ambassador of the great United States of the North had something to do with it, the man had said. There had been fighting in the

Zócalo, Mexico City's great square which faced the cathedral and the national palace. The rebels had tried to overthrow the government, there had been bloody skirmishes and they had shot many of the generals, so that Madero had been forced to place a new one, Victoriano Huerta, in charge of the troops loyal to the government.

Then the dog Huerta had proven a traitor. Juan's informer said that he had seen it all: when Madero's friends had gone to the general and been faithfully assured that the former president's life would not be threatened, Huerta had pointed to the medal of the Virgin of Guadalupe he wore about his neck. It was an emblem given him by his mother, he said, and he vowed by her memory and before the sacred image that he would permit no one to harm Señor Madero.

But he had violated his oath: his men had murdered Don Francisco in cold blood. . . .

Most of the Indians at the *finca* of Atotonilco shrugged their shoulders when they heard the news; one president more or less, what was the difference? It was an old, old story to them. Yet for some reason Juan's blood boiled. Other men, he heard, felt as he did, for Don Venustiano Carranza had formed a great army to avenge Madero: he became the *Primer Jefe*, the First Chief, of the Constitutionalist Army. And watching the trains which rumbled past the colonial pile of the sanctuary Juan vowed that some day he would ride to join the army and the revolution. He was no longer given work to do on the *finca*, so that there was every reason to go, to show his stupid friends and neighbors what a soldier he could become — perhaps even an officer: there were many tales these days about a certain Pancho Villa from northern Chihuahua who had been nothing but a peon and was now a great general. Tomorrow, *mañana*, Juan had said to himself for these last four or five months, he would go.

Lately, however, news had come that some of the army would undoubtedly be marching this way. The great general Alvaro Obregón had swept down the whole west coast of Mexico with his Army of the Northwest, heading toward the capital to help Carranza. Only

a week or two ago a man had come through with the word that Obregón was in Guadalajara, not many leagues from Atotonilco as the crow flies. And in Mexico City the Carrancistas had at last routed the traitor Huerta. Everywhere now there was fighting, and another Carrancista general, Murguía, Juan heard, was marching his troops along the road from Dolores Hidalgo to San Miguel: they would have to pass through Atotonilco. . . .

This very day, the twenty-seventh of July, they were at last approaching the sanctuary. They were a noisy, boisterous, self-confident lot, these soldiers, marching in disarray along the steaming, muddy road, often mired up to their knees where a rainy-season river crossed their line of march. For it was the month of sudden showers and blazing sun, when in the midafternoons great thunderheads piled up behind the low blue mountains on the distant horizon of the Bajío, loosing deluges of cool rain, leaving the steaming earth under clear skies at sunset.

Now as the advance column neared the sanctuary a sublieutenant saw Juan approaching them down the road. As they met he reined in his horse and accosted the peon.

‘ This is the famous sanctuary? ’ he asked, indicating the great church ahead of him.

‘ *Si, patrón.* I will show you.’ Juan trotted along beside the horse. Something about his manner, the sublieutenant decided, set him apart from the ordinary peon, although he wore the same tattered white clothes, with the superfluous loin cloth about his middle — relic of pre-Hispanic days and an inevitable part of the garb of these Central Mesa natives. His worn *huaraches* flapped, loose-heeled, as he ran.

‘ What is your name? ’ the sublieutenant asked. It was curious that this fellow was so friendly; most of the Indians they had met on their march through Guanajuato were either openly hostile or at least indifferent.

‘ Juan, *patrón.*’

‘ Well, Juan, take me to the padre. There are troops coming. . . ’

‘ Si, patrón.’ Juan held the bridle while the officer dismounted at the balustraded terrace before the church entrance. ‘ I should like to ask you, ’ the Indian went on hesitantly, ‘ if you needed an orderly, I should like- ’

The officer laughed. ‘ You? And why should I take you? ’

‘ Because I can tell you that there is a great deal of money here. The padre — ’

‘ Fool, I know that! All padres have money. . . . But why the devil are you telling me?

Why don't you take it yourself? ’ the officer asked slyly.

‘ I do not want all of it, ’ Juan explained. His eyes were black with hatred. ‘ I want only enough to pay the padre. They will no longer let me work on the *finca* here, and I owe money. ’

The sublieutenant laughed again. ‘ Well, perhaps we'll slit his throat, and that will relieve you of the debt, won't it? What do you think we're fighting for? ’

The rest of the guard had drawn up and dismounted. Juan looked about him, suddenly frightened. ‘ I — I — ’ he stammered, ‘ I cannot go into the church. The padre will give you money. ’ And he slipped through their ranks and was gone.

Juan had scarcely fled when the main body of the detachment appeared at the far end of the wide road that led past the sanctuary. Some of the soldiers rode mud-splattered nags picked up along the line of march; the rest ambled along on foot, or beat and cursed the mules that pulled the caissons through the mire. The officers and a few lucky privates wore khaki uniforms topped with great felt Texan sombreros, but there were many new recruits, and old campaigners too, who still wore their blue overalls or, in the case of the lowest peons, white *calzones* and *huaiaches*. And as always, there were women, the *soldaderas*, the women of these peons, and often enough the companions of the officers who had left their wives behind.

As they came into view of the towers of the sanctuary a great roar went up. Juan, hiding under a low mesquite in the field, heard them jeering. ‘ *¿Abajo los sacerdotes!* Down with

the priests! Viva Juárez and the Laws of Reform! ’

Yet neither Juan nor these tired, muddy soldiers quite understood what they were saying. The sublieutenant might have offered a few catch phrases; his superiors, the colonels and generals, could have explained all the immediate events and little more. All of them would have vilified the Church. And all the padres and the landowners, such as Padre Domínguez here at Atotonilco and Don Fernando of San Miguel, would have replied hotly that Mexico was a Catholic country. . . .

A hundred years of revolution: burning slowly for a century, now the struggle seemed to have flared up higher than ever, with new participants and new alignments. Yesterday, before this very sanctuary, Padre Hidalgo and Allende had invoked both the ideals of Church and Revolution. In their minds these two were as one.

On this Central Mesa, Juan had often heard the name of the great patriot Hidalgo; but Juárez, the name they were shouting now, was only a vague sound. In this peaceful region he had never heard that Benito Juárez, coming from the pleasant Valle de Oaxaca far south of Mexico City, had given utterance to the same resentment which Juan had felt these last three years. But that had been long ago, scarcely fifty years after the time of Hidalgo and Allende. When Juárez had become president he had pushed through the famous Reform Laws of 1857. From that time on, the *finca* of the Sanctuary of Atotonilco, together with all properties throughout the republic not used exclusively for churches or convents, had not been a legal chattel of the Church. The Church, Juárez had affirmed, was too powerful; it owned half the real estate of the entire country, it had become a great money-lender. Mexico, the leader had added, was Catholic through fear and oppression, ruled not by an ideal but by a great institution which endangered the state itself. And he became, in this land of thousands upon thousands of churches, a Free Mason. . . .

‘ *iAbajo los sacerdotes! iViva Juárez y las leyes de reforma!* ’ the soldiers were

chanting.

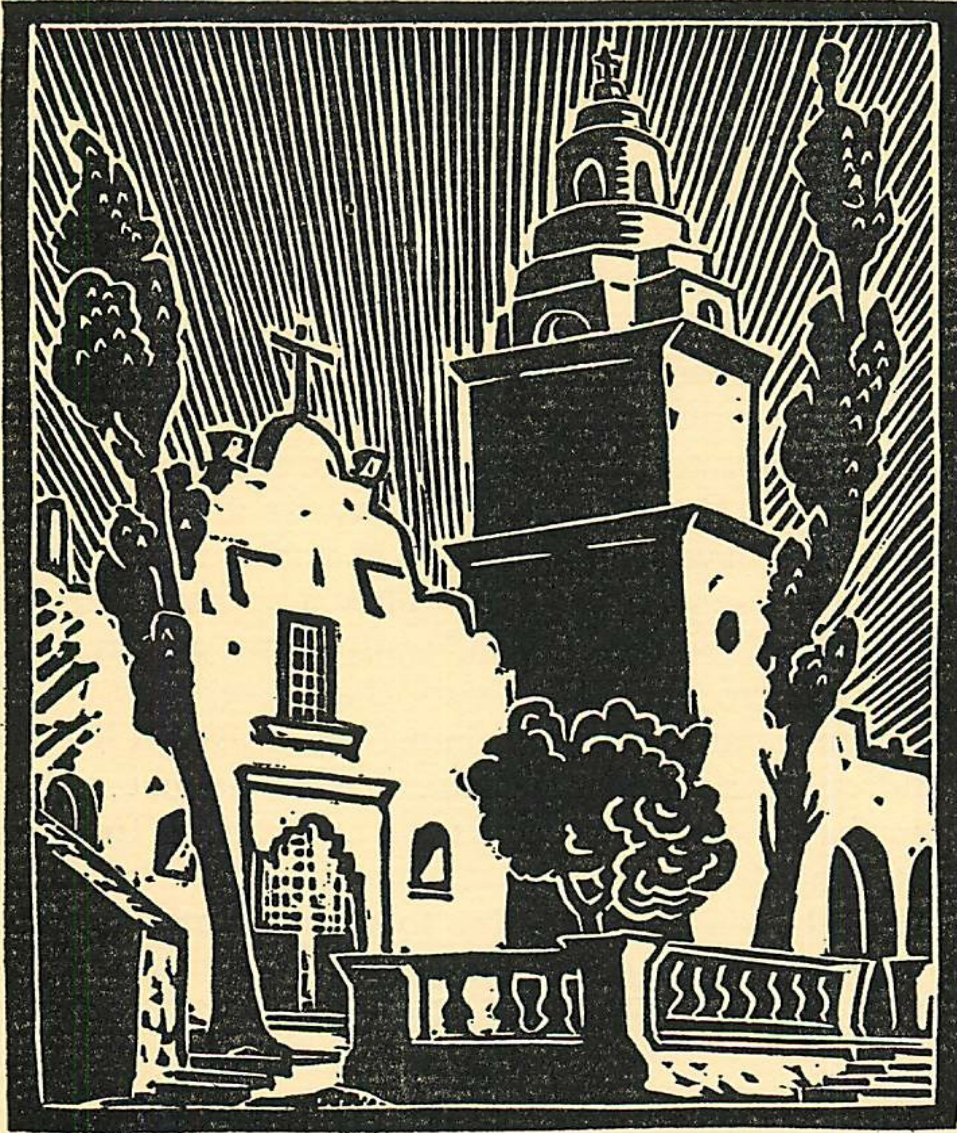
Juan, watching them from beside the mesquite tree, only smiled. He could not know that now two ideals were fighting one against the other, that the name Juárez was most responsible for the new alignment, for one hundred years of revolution. . . .

Padre Domínguez had gone to a window in the sacristy when Refugio, his sexton, reported that the revolutionary forces were coming. Refugio had climbed the orange tower and beheld a great straggling column approaching. Then he had come running to the padre, his legs fairly trembling.

‘ Father, you must hide! ’ he besought the priest. ‘ They are Carrancistas! And you know what is said about them — that they are sacrilegious, that they are defilers of the Church! ’

The padre motioned a denial with his hand. He was a small man, his hair just turning grey at the temples. But he was possessed of a strong frame. His heavysset neck showed above his cassock and even under that robe his large shoulders and deep chest were evident. ‘ I am not afraid, ’ he said firmly.

And he was not. God, he felt confidently, was watching over him and the Sanctuary of Atotonilco; he would protect the padre, and give him strength, as he always had. How else could the priest have coped with the thousands who came to retreat, week upon week? The padre could remember the first day he had ever given a sermon in this place. Even then he had been unafraid. As he had begun to speak, his resonant voice echoing against the richly painted walls of the nave, he had seen how he could sway his congregation, how he could guide their collective feelings like a conductor directing a mighty orchestra. An orchestra of thousands of souls. . . .



The Façade of the Sanctuary



‘ These *revolucionarios* know not what they do, ’ he mused, rather to himself than to the sexton, who still remained. ‘ For after all, man has slight control over himself. I have seen men go mad during the sermons — and so have you, Refugio. They have beaten themselves, they have shouted and wailed until we have had to carry them out. We know that we can touch off their emotions — perhaps almost too easily. They are children, to be guided. You see what happens when they find the wrong leaders. . . . But it is time for mass again. ’

‘ Surely you are not going to say mass at this time, padre? ’ The sexton was aghast.

‘ Certainly. Why should I not? ’

There were not many people at the service, for it was late in the morning. When the sublieutenant whom Juan had met entered the church the padre's back was turned to him and he was intoning. Instinctively one of the soldiers made a motion to take off his sombrero, and the officer cuffed him resoundingly on the ear.

The padre heard that sound, yet he did not falter, only lifted his voice higher until it filled the nave. He heard the footsteps approach, the cries of the congregation, the scream of a woman. His voice was like thunder when finally they came to him, seized his arms and pinioned them behind him. One of the soldiers ripped his lace surplice down the front. But he did not try to resist.

‘ May God forgive you for this! ’ he prayed.

The sublieutenant stood off from him, his hands on his hips. He was a swarthy young man with a faint mustache upon his upper lip, which was now curled slightly in amused contempt.

‘ Hold this man here, ’ he commanded his guard, ‘ until we have further orders. ’ And he turned on his heel and left, brushing aside the frightened Indians of the congregation.

Juan, still viewing the arrival from a safe distance, again recalled the day when the mob had burned the municipal palace. These men were soldiers, and yet it was much the same. No one seemed to know what to do; officers were galloping back and forth on their horses, issuing useless orders or canceling those of some other. Only the soldiers appeared unmoved. They flopped down in the mud of the road or on the stone wall that ran along the one short street. Juan noticed that the sublieutenant had come out of the church and was pushing his way through the confused mob to a group of officers who were about to enter a house.

Meanwhile the padre had been released by another officer, with the order to prepare food for them. 'You should have plenty, from what we hear,' the man sneered. 'See that we are fed well, father, or you shall be sorry.'

It seemed that officers were everywhere now, setting up headquarters in little groups, each one barking officious orders. The padre was at last taken to a Colonel Quintana. That man was now seated before the priest's writing desk. Beside him was a peon, sombrero in hand, who trembled as he saw the padre enter.

'Padre Domínguez,' the colonel began abruptly, 'we are told that you are an inciter of the region, that you lead these people to fanaticism. For that you are going to die. First, of course, I shall be glad to help you regulate your affairs and draw up your will, if you choose.'

A cold chill ran down the padre's spine. For a moment he could not believe his ears. There was nothing dramatic about the announcement: he felt the steely contempt of the men facing him. Never before in his life had he faced a group who so defied the Church. There had been recalcitrants, but not this. With an effort he controlled his voice. 'Let me give instructions to my servants,' he requested.

When they came, the padre found with a kind of wonder that he was comforting them, that his voice, not theirs, was the calm one. 'Give these men food,' he instructed. 'And

here are the keys. Remember God, and this day, and pray for our souls. Now go, quickly.’ And he made them go, even without kissing his hand, so that they might not incur the further hatred of these godless men. ‘ I am ready now, ’ he said.

At that moment the sublieutenant came in and saluted the colonel. ‘ General Murguía requests your presence with the padre in charge of Atotonilco,’ he said.

They found the general surrounded by his men, to whom he was giving orders in a quick, decisive voice. His great shock of black hair and his full, upturned mustache framed a pair of dangerous, dark eyes. Before him also were the other priests of the church, whom the padre had not seen since the coming of the soldiers. ‘ Colonel Quintana, ’ he ordered, without even a glance at the padre, ‘ it will be wise to conduct these priests to San Miguel. Take them away now. ’

‘ I beseech you, general, we have not eaten this day, and it is already three o'clock, ’ the padre interposed. ‘ In God's name I ask you that I and my brothers be first allowed to eat. ’

With a nod the general agreed, and the colonel, obviously enraged, led them off to the great dining room which was being set for the officers. The servants leaped to serve their masters. Colonel Quintana stood over them, his eyes smoldering with indignation. They had hardly taken a mouthful of soup when he thumped his fist upon the table. ‘ Enough! ’ he roared. ‘ You devils deserve no food. And at any rate, you shall not live long enough to digest it. Get up. ’

With soldiers behind them they were marched out into the blazing sunlight, into the road filled with the whole army, and ordered into a carriage. The side curtains were drawn, but in front, by the driver's seat, sat several soldiers, their rifles pointing at the padre and the other priests. One of the padres began saying his rosary.

‘ The end has come, ’ Padre Domínguez thought. But the men did not fire. Nor did the carriage start off for San Miguel. This was maddening, worse than an execution on the

spot. What would happen?

Finally they heard an officer's voice commanding the guard to put down their arms and let the priests go. With alacrity they stepped out. Everywhere there were soldiers, but no one paid them the slightest attention. Yet it was only a game, a tantalizing hope, for as they started to walk away they were stopped with a crisp command and taken once more before Murguía.

This time the young sublieutenant was with the general. The general was nodding his head and smiling. 'Very well, Arnulfo. Which is the one? You pick him out, and let the others go free.'

Arnulfo pointed to the padre. 'We shall need no guard,' he remarked, and taking the padre by the arm led him off through the cloisters. When they had come to a quiet place he stopped and smiled. 'You should be obliged to me, padre,' he said. 'I have saved your life.'

'I am grateful to you, my son.'

'You should be. Now, if you will only turn over the money, there will be no more trouble.'

'What money?'

'This is no time for such talk,' the sublieutenant answered sharply. 'You know armies need money. And we have come to you because you have taken it from the people.'

'My son, you have been misinformed. I have nothing but what I collect from the pilgrims who come to retreat. Such lying stories have been told before. I assure you on my word of honor I have nothing. Do you know,' the padre went on earnestly, 'how much these poor people pay? Six pesos! For nine days of food and lodging. And if they have nothing we accept them just the same. How far do you think that money goes?'

Arnulfo sneered at him. 'Your own servants have told me! You cannot conceal the fact. . . *iOye!*' he suddenly shouted, and a soldier appeared. 'Bring that girl to me.'

The soldier came back in a moment with a young girl. She was a pretty child with fine black hair and a dark Indian face.

The sublieutenant confronted her. ‘ Now tell us, *muchacha*, once more. You say you saw the padre counting money? ’

‘ *Si, senor.* ’ She raised her eyes to Arnulfo's face.

The padre sighed. Only two nights ago he had taken her in because her mother had been afraid that marauding bands of soldiers might rape her. Already she was doomed, he could see that.

When she had gone he handed the sublieutenant the one key he had not given to his servants. ‘ This is to the part of the house where I live, ’ he told him. ‘ You may search for yourself. ’

But when they came to his rooms they found soldiers had already broken down the door, having heard that he kept great wealth there. The place was topsy-turvy. His clothing lay scattered upon the floor, the drawers of his bureau were gaping, even his mattress had been pulled from his bed and ripped open. At every corner in which the soldiers searched in vain, their anger rose. Finally the young officer spat upon the floor. ‘ This bastard has deceived us, ’ he raged. ‘ Here, Antonio, ’ he motioned to a huge ape-like man, ‘ take him out and do what you like. *iCarramba!* ’

The huge man grinned. ‘ *Con mucho gusto*, with great pleasure, ’ he answered, and pulled the padre out into the street. There he took a lariat from his horse that was tied outside and, fastening it roughly around the padre's neck, mounted, pulling the priest behind him. At the main portal of the church they were stopped by a soldier who said Murgufa wanted to see him again. This time, at last, the padre thought, God would make the general save him.

But Murguía was stiffly abrupt now. ‘ The lieutenant has informed me, ’ he said, ‘ that you have tried to trick us. This is your last chance. Either bring forth the money, or you

die. That is my last word. ’

‘ Senor general, if I had it, I would gladly give it to you. Do you think I value gold more than my very life? ’

‘ I think you padres do, ’ the general answered grimly, and turned to his officers again. Antonio took this as a signal. Again the rope was fastened around the priest's neck, and he was hauled off to the place where the officers' women were sitting.

At the sight of him they began to jeer, ‘ *iAbajo los sacerdotes!* Down with the priests! ’ One of them rushed up and spat in his face. ‘ This roué! ’ she yelled to the others. ‘ How many pregnant women are there who have been put in that condition by this holy father? Plenty, I'd say! What will we do with him! ’

‘ *iCastrelo!* Castrate him, that's what he deserves! ’ someone shouted, and leaping forward they began tearing off his cassock.

This last humiliation was more than the padre could stand. While the women tried to tear off his clothes, scratching and kicking him, he hit out blindly with his fists. Now he was fighting not only for his life but for his honor, against this worst of all insults both to him and to the Church. They were nearly getting their way when Arnulfo, the sublieutenant, intervened.

‘ *iQuítase* — stop, you harridans! ’ he stormed at them. ‘ This *hombre* can do us more good than by serving as your bait. Let him go, I tell you! Now, padre — for the last time! The general has relented. Just give us the money, and you go free. ’

The padre clenched his fists with his last strength. ‘ In the name of Christ and the Virgin Mary, I swear to you I have none. Search my house — everywhere! ’

‘ Then hang him! ’ Arnulfo turned to the big fellow, who still sat astride his horse. ‘ Raise him to that tree and hang him till he's dead! ’ And he walked away.

The game was up now, there was no hope. The end of the lariat which was about the padre's neck was thrown over the limb of a tree, and the woman who had first shouted at

him fastened it to the pommel of the big fellow's saddle. Then with a fiendish scream she thwacked the horse, which started away with such violence that the padre's head struck violently against the branch of the tree above. He no longer knew what was happening, except at moments when he dimly heard the crowd shouting to raise him again. He was like a plaything to them, a papier-maché Judas such as they hang and burn at the street corners on Good Friday. Feeling left him, he no longer had the sensation of being lifted, then lowered into the mud of the road. . . .

When he lost consciousness he had a vision that he was already in heaven, that his troubles were over. He was being lifted up —

‘ Can you believe it, the old fool is still breathing! ’ he heard someone say. And he realized that his agony had not yet ended, that he was being lifted to a standing position by four officers, one of them Arnulfo again. As he gathered consciousness he heard the shouts of orders to continue the march. They were going to San Miguel.

At the first hill the padre thought he would no longer be able to breathe. With the rope still about his neck the agony was unbearable. Somehow he dragged himself level with the officer.

‘ Let me die here, ’ he pleaded. ‘ Let me die at this spot. You will only drag a corpse into San Miguel. ’

But they only cursed him. And God did not let him die.

The human body has more endurance than we realize, until suddenly we find ourselves fighting to keep alive, with an enormous reservoir of strength at our disposal. Even so, if the padre had not been strong beyond the average he would never have seen the towers of San Miguel that evening. At the bridge was a great number of people awaiting the troops, for a small advance guard under Colonel Quintana had ridden ahead. Just at that moment General Murguía rode by, reviewing his men before they marched on.

‘ General, a word! ’ the padre called, and he stopped. ‘ General, do not, if you value your cause, show the spectacle you have made of me to these townsfolk. I know the religiousness of these people, and how easily their enthusiasm for your arrival can be turned to bitter hatred. Believe me, I know! And remember this: Madero was received everywhere with jubilation because he respected the beliefs of the Mexican pueblo. ’

The general gazed down at him soberly. ‘ I, too, respect them, ’ he answered.

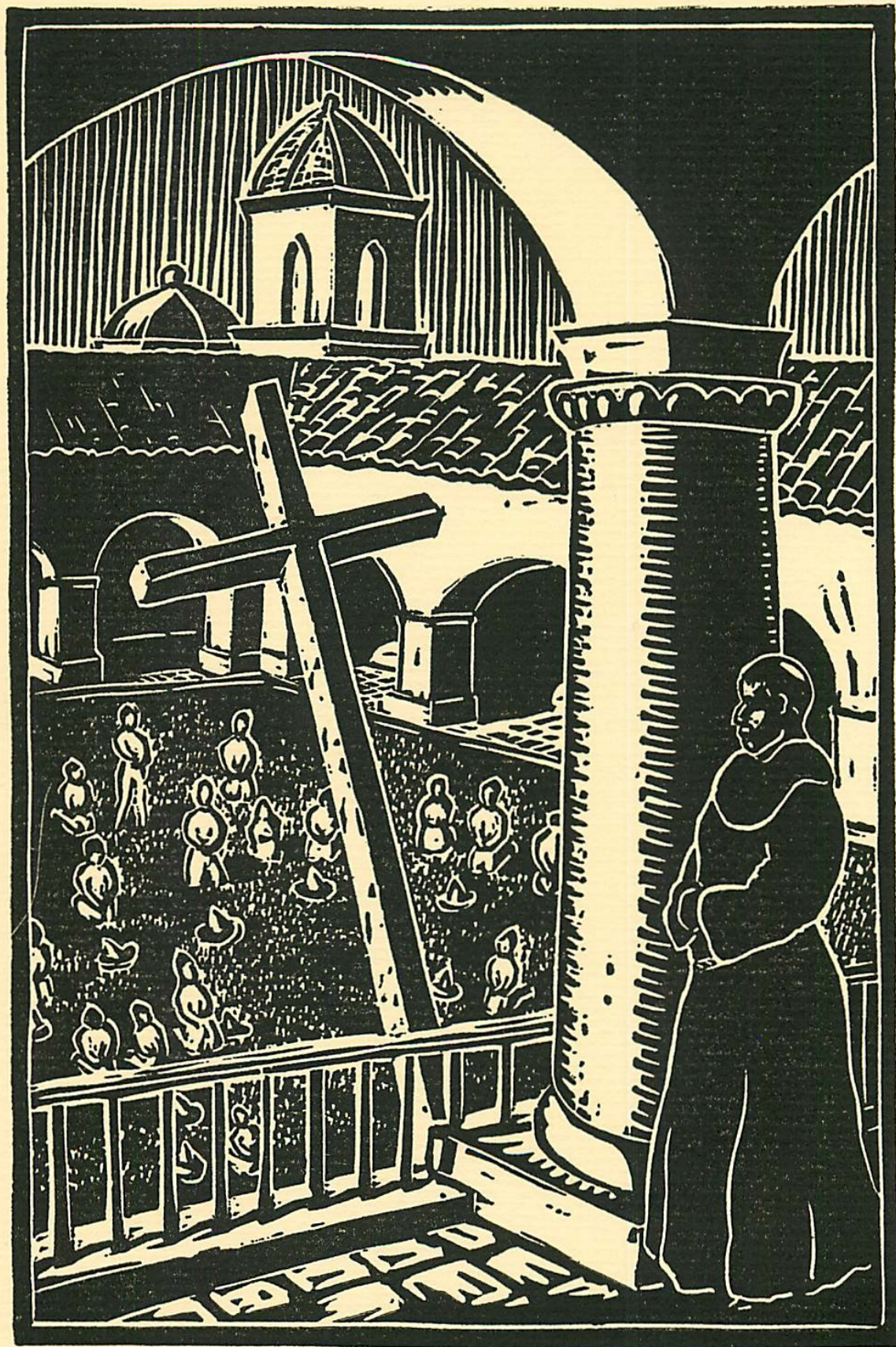
‘ Then respect them by sending me up a back way, so that they shall not see what you have done. ’

Murguía did not reply, but wheeled his horse and rode to the head of the column.

But it was as the padre foretold. As they crossed the river, a voice shouted, ‘ Look! They are bringing Padre Domínguez! ’ and as if by magic the people began to disperse, so that they marched through silent, deserted streets. San Miguel had rejected the Revolution. In this action, by this incident, it had been repelled. It had seen an ideal dragged down. The townspeople had observed this one deed with their own eyes. Not for them now was there an argument on the other side. To them it made no difference that the Church had grown too powerful, that its land had grown despite laws which demanded confiscation. Now the other side of the scale was rising, power was shifting hands. . . .

They got money from the padre, after all. In the dead of night a friend came to him in the jail where they had thrown him. Don Jesús Carranza, brother of the *Primer Jefe* of all the revolutionary forces, had conceded the priest's freedom upon the payment of a thousand *pesos*. And as the first morning cocks began to crow the padre, having no money, signed away his house in San Miguel. Then they allowed him to go free, and he dragged through the dark streets to the home of Don Fernando, his brother. Yet there were some who knew where he was going, and remembered that.





The Priest and the Indians



1915

April One

## San Miguel de Allende

*The present conflict being a struggle of the impecunious against the abuses of the powerful . . . the Divisions of the North and the Northwest solemnly pledge themselves to . . . set up democratic institutions in our country, to bring welfare to labor, financial emancipation to the peon by an equitable apportionment of the land and other means tending to solve the agrarian question; to correct, chastise and hold to their responsibilities such members of the Roman Catholic clergy as may have lent moral or physical support to the usurper, Victoriano Huerta. — Generals Francisco Villa and Alvaro Obregón, July, 1914.*

NO, IT IS unthinkable for me. I simply cannot do it, Pepe. ' Don Fernando Domínguez continued to pace the tiled floor of his parlor as he spoke. Standing at one end of the room, beneath a gilt-framed picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe, was an officer in khaki uniform, Colonel José Núñez. The two men were of nearly the same age, perhaps just under forty, but Don Fernando was the more handsome. His bronze face and dark abundant hair signified that he had more than a little Indian blood in his veins.

It was nearly a year since the attempted hanging of his brother the padre at Atotonilco. The morning before that fatal afternoon Don Fernando had sought refuge with his family in Querétaro. But he was not a man to be afraid; he and his brother were cut from the same mold. All of his small landholdings were near San Miguel, his business of buying

and selling seed was here; this was his home. Therefore he had soon returned, after the first alarms were over, with his frail, beautiful wife and his small children.

The colonel was growing impatient. ‘ Let me appeal to our old friendship, then, Fernando,’ he put in. ‘ We certainly didn't go through all those years at military college for nothing. Now is the time — ’

‘ That's an unfair way to put it, Pepe. No, my convictions are too strong. I favor no part of the revolution, I tell you. I left the college before Díaz was finally put out. I had a business here, I was through with the army. I still am. ’

‘ How can you say that? ’ exclaimed the colonel. ‘ How can you say that, when your country is torn with strife, wallowing in blood? Is it anything less than your *duty*, man? What about the time you spent training men to go to Veracruz, only last year? ’

‘ To do that I didn't have to leave San Miguel. Besides, those were different circumstances, and you know it. We were fighting the United States, a foreign power. For the same reasons my father fought against Maximilian and the French back in the sixties. There's one point where I do agree with Carranza — his stand against foreign intervention — even when President Wilson wanted to be on his side. I firmly believe in Mexico for the Mexicans. ’

‘ Carranza! ’ the colonel fairly spit out the word. ‘ That is something I cannot understand about you, Fernando. After what the Carrancistas did to your brother, after their avowed persecution of the Church — ’

Don Fernando checked the excited gestures of his visitor. ‘ That is the difference between you and me these days, ’ he explained. ‘ You come from the battlefield, straight from Pancho Villa. I have told you frankly I do not trust the man. I would not join his forces under any conditions. For one thing, I don't like what he did last October when he called the convention of generals at Aguascalientes. It smacked of treachery, of opportunism. I am sick of it all, Pepe. For four years we have had no peace. Last year it

was the Carrancistas. They came demanding money. Now your side is here. If it had not been for your arrival I should have had to mortgage my very soul to them. Because they are sure I am rich. To them I am one of the *catrines*, one of the *gente de orden*. And therefore I, who belong to the very class no revolution could possibly benefit, must pay for it! I should think it fairly obvious why I want to take no sides, Pepe. ’

The colonel could hardly wait for him to finish. ‘ But you do take sides! ’ he exploded. \* You are sitting on dynamite, man! If you are wise you'll see the handwriting on the wall before it's too late! Mexico will never be the same easygoing country it once was. You can help yourself best, if you want to put it that way, by helping this struggle to end quickly. ’

The other ignored this argument. ‘ Just why, ’ he asked curiously, ‘ did you happen to join with Pancho Villa? Mind you, I fully appreciate your going into battle. You are a professional soldier, Pepe, you had to choose a side —the good Lord knows there are enough to choose from these days! But why Villa? ’ ‘ You believe the stories of his being a bandit, and nothing else, Fernando. If you had seen him in Mexico last December you would know why I chose his side! They tell rotten lies about what he has done. Some of his underlings are coarse and crude — I'll admit that. But are you shrinking from them? And what, on the other hand, was Carranza? A paid deputy, a tool of Díaz in the old days! But Villa stood by Madero and now is carrying out Madero's own ideals. ... For one thing, we believe in the sanctity of the Church — that alone should convince you. Haven't we made guarantees? ’

Don Fernando shook his head sadly. ‘ That is, I am afraid, only a political expedient, ’ he reluctantly answered. ‘ I have seen too many guarantees broken already. . . . And every day I see my country torn further apart by a dozen scheming generals. They have become a caste unto themselves, Pepe. The battle sounds have drowned out logic from your ears. Here in this peaceful town — ’

‘ It is not peaceful, you know that! You are subject to one raid after another. You live in

fear, you ruin your integrity by bowing first to one side and then the other. If I were any other Villista colonel, not a personal friend, you would have to be more circumspect in your remarks. . . . That is no way to live. ’

‘ I have spoken my mind often — perhaps too often.’ Don Fernando began to pace the floor again. ‘ I have a family to consider, Pepe. . . . ’

‘ And a handsome one! Have I told you how beautiful I think your wife is? I was so intent upon this mission — ’

‘ Thank you. As I say, having a family, I have a very real desire to live! But to make you realize my position, my feeling, I must take the risk of offending you — you will understand that I mean nothing personal, Pepe? ’

‘ Of course, of course. ’

‘ Well, then. You speak of integrity. It seems to me I could most easily lose my integrity if I became a military. For I would be bound to watch for the main chance, to advance myself or be crushed. That would mean changing sides as the battle went one way or the other. I have pledged myself, by the acquisition of a family, to success. I know how that can be achieved in the army, especially in these times. Be a traitor to your leader, go over to the other side — and you are raised one rank, or even two. Money comes your way — ’

‘ Stop, stop that, Fernando! ’ The colonel was almost angry now. ‘ I am disappointed in you, my friend. You speak of the exception and turn it into a generalization! I should think that an ideal — ’

Don Fernando laughed shortly. ‘ I fail to see the ideal. And I shock you because I have honestly stated what I know to be true. ’

‘ You have grown a cynic. You no longer care for your country. You are like all the Sanmiguelenses. ’

‘ Perhaps so. . . . Still, that should not make us quarrel. I have hardly told you I am glad to see you again. Let me listen now, as a neutral spectator. I am really hungry for news. ’

You think there will be a battle between Villa and Obregón soon?'

' In a week, inevitably. And very near here. It is the end for one of us! And I predict that you will no longer have to kiss a Carrancista boot. Villa is — '

' May I interrupt? ' they heard a voice say. At the doorway stood Señora Domínguez. She was small and slight and her black mantilla accentuated the olive pallor of her skin. The soldier, so accustomed to the coarseness of campaigning, thought he had never seen anyone quite so beautiful. For she had the saintly beauty of a consumptive, one who hovers near this world and may vanish without warning.

' I am enraging your husband, ' the colonel apologized, going to her. ' Please make us stop. '

' Yes, you must, because it is twilight, and time to go see the monuments. '

' The what — ? What day is this? '

Don Fernando chuckled. ' Maundy Thursday, man! The soldier has forgotten that Easter is almost here. '

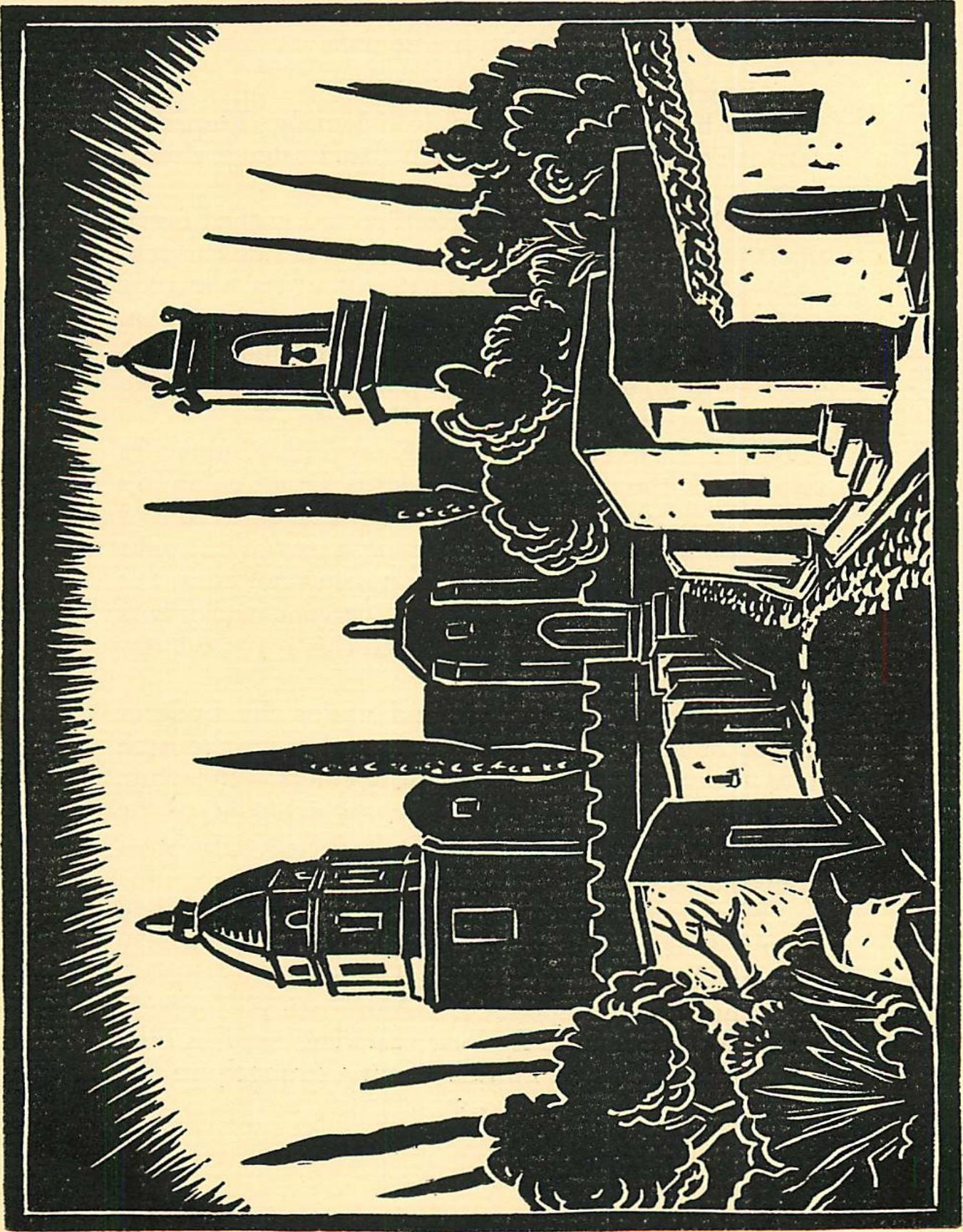
The three left the house together and walked down the street, past the plaza, to the church beside the convent with its tall thin cypress trees about the soft blue and pink portal. The streets were crowded as if on some fiesta day, for it is the custom on Maundy Thursday to visit all the churches, to pray at each one where the holy sacrament is on view at the altar.

Behind them at a respectful distance, his *huaraches* slapping on the stones, followed Jesús, Don Fernando's *mozo*. He was dressed in clean white clothes, and across his shoulder was a new *sarape*, a part of its bright red and purple diamond-center starting out from the grey and white of the wool. Everyone today was dressed in his finest, for in Mexico this is more a day of parade than Easter.

The church was packed, and under the brilliant strings of light which were festooned from the high nave it seemed there were only three colors — the white dress of the peons,

the blue rebozos which covered the heads of their wives, and the black clothes of those of higher caste.





The Convent of Las Monjas, in San Miguel

The colonel, whose mind for so many months had been intent only upon campaigning, experienced a curious shock as he entered. Deep within him his Catholic heart responded. Automatically, conditioned by the familiarity long years had bred in him, he knelt and crossed himself, feeling strangely in this moment that he was at the same time a small boy, a young man, and the young officer he had been only yesterday. Yet a new sensation mingled with this old emotion: almost unwillingly his mind was conscious of the tremendous theatrical effect. The church was at once a theater and a drama. There was no service, and the padre stood at the door, bowing or exchanging a word with such as the Domínguez family, and directing the people who grew confused in the great crush which door to enter by — for the Indian often instinctively passes to the left rather than the right.

All attention had been skillfully directed toward the great altar; the side altars, covered with purple to conceal the images during Holy Week, diverted none of the attention from the stage. Reaching from the high vaults long diaphanous streamers of white bunting stretched to the gleaming central altar. And beside it were the monuments — Christ robed in purple, his head crowned with thorns, ropes about his body.

The three of them knelt by a side altar. But the colonel could not keep his eyes from the image of Christ. He was silent as they emerged and walked back to the *parroquia*, the parish church, and entered by its great Gothic portal. Here there was even more light. And from the transept he heard the wheedling tone of the Indian flute and the monotonous, hollow beat of the drum: the peons imitating the Roman soldiers, as Juan had been accustomed to do in the Sanctuary at Atotonilco....In the Santa Escuela, next to the great church, the music was even louder, and in the dim light, broken only by a few candles, the colonel could make out the painted scenes along the walls, depicting all those grim hours of Christ's agony. Here the image was behind actual bars, the musicians were concealed somewhere inside. As each Indian entered he came to this image, and with the end of the

rope which bound the only-begotten Son, made the sign of the cross upon himself.

It was quite dark as they once more came outside and proceeded to the clean, chaste nave of San Francisco, and then on to the Oratorio of San Felipe Neri — which was in the hands of the same monastic order to which belonged Father Alfaro, the founder of Atotonilco. Its intricately carved pink stone facade, with only its bell tower surmounting the lofty cypresses, was now barely distinguishable in the darkness which made the brightness inside all the more dazzling. They approached the altar, here pungent with the sweet, lemonlike smell of a newly sprouted grass which had been placed in shallow boxes all about it. The air was heavy with this scent, and with candle smoke, and with the smell of many bodies crushed together.

And all the time the colonel was silent. His ears seemed never to be empty of the insistent whine of the pagan flute and the heavy, throbbing beat of the drum; and his eyes always searched out the purple-robed image of the Saviour.

At last as they came out of the Oratorio he spoke. ‘ The Church is very influential here, isn't it? ’ he asked.

Don Fernando was surprised at this obvious question. ‘ Of course. What do you mean? ’

‘ I mean,’ said the colonel slowly, ‘ that it exerts a great influence over everyone — not only these Indians, but over you. You have always believed it firmly — the creed, the faith. Have you ever for a moment doubted, Fernando? ’

‘ These are very strange words from you, Pepe. What are you talking about? ’

‘ Simply, I was thinking that the ideal of Christianity is two thousand years old. That we all take it for granted now. We worship, particularly during Holy Week, the agony of the One who died for an ideal. I think we forget, really, that everyone was against him then. There was Doubting Thomas. And on *Sábado de Gloria*, Glorious Saturday, we still burn effigies of Judas Iscariot. . . . Sometimes we lose track of those simple beginnings. The ideal has become a creed which we believe — and forget the ideal! I wonder if we have

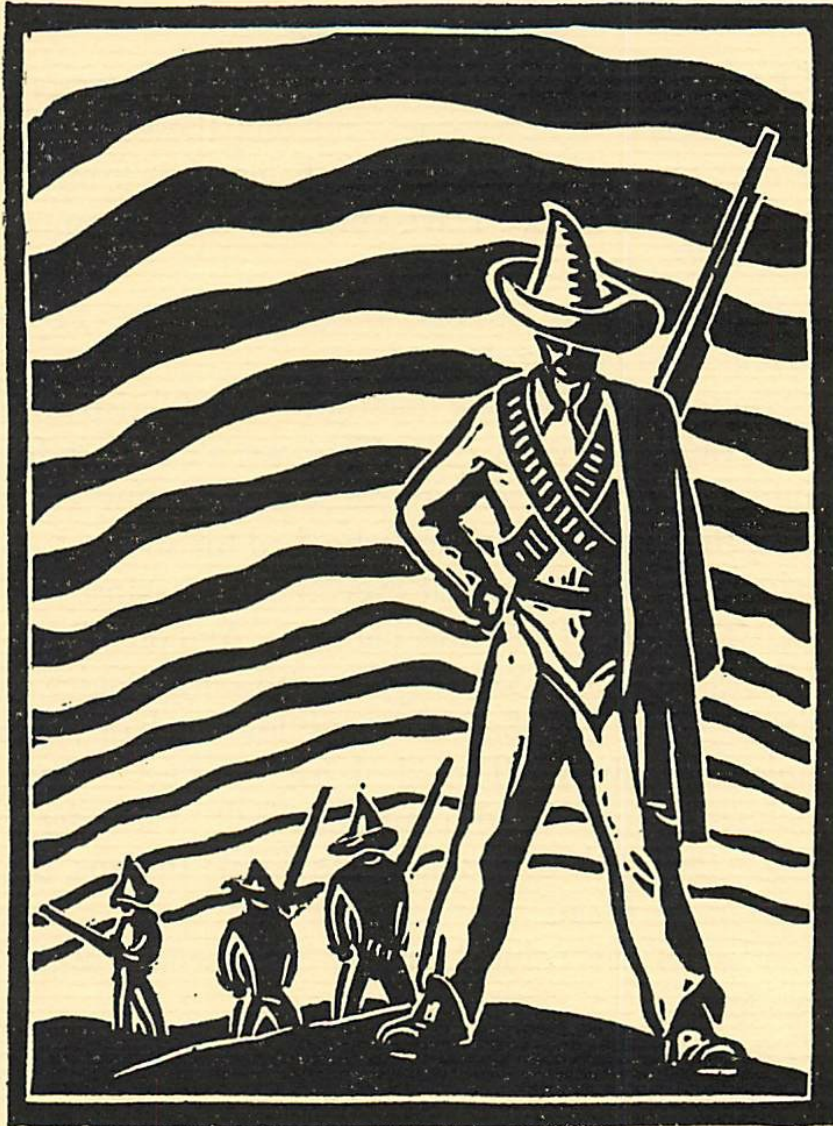
taught these people, these simple Indians, the dogma or the ideal. ’

‘ What is the colonel saying? ’ the señora asked, mystified.

Don Fernando laughed. ‘ He is only tired and probably he needs a good supper. Come along, Pepe. ’

‘ You will be caught, Fernando, ’ the colonel warned him. ‘ Heeding no questions, taking no sides — you cannot keep on like this, you cannot remain aloof forever! ’

‘ Perhaps I could have believed in the ideal, but never in this unholy execution of it, ’ Don Fernando told him sternly.



Carrancistas



1915

June Four

## San Miguel de Allende

CROUCHED in the courtyard dust beside a small house on the mountainside, looking down on the lower half of the town, an Indian woman, her head covered with a blue *rebozo* to ward off the hot afternoon sun, was fanning a small fire and grumbling. For the life of her she could not see why she and her husband should be made to put up with this fellow her brother Jesús had brought. He had been here six weeks now, eating more than her whole family, moaning about his leg and talking of revolution. She stirred the beans in the earthen pot, and then taking a lump of dough between her hands began patting it back and forth in her palms — the most familiar, unmistakable sound in all Mexico. Her figure, crouched here in this little dirt yard surrounded by spindly fence cactus, was like something from the frescoes of Giotto — or from the murals, not even conceived of at this moment, which ten years later would grace the public buildings in the capital above the names of Rivera, Siquéiros, Orozco. She mumbled to herself, talking half aloud, yet her broad dark face with its high cheekbones showed no expression. And not once did she stop work.

In that one of the hut's two dark rooms which served as living, dining and bed room, Jesús was talking with his sister's unwelcome boarder, who sat on a low chair, one bandaged leg stretched out straight before him. He wore the faded and shrunken khaki tunic of a soldier, and upon his upper lip and about his chin was the scraggly growth of sparse black hairs which is all many Indians, particularly the Otomies of the Central

Mesa, can claim for mustache and beard. Yet although his appearance had changed in this respect it was not difficult to recognize Juan of Atotonilco. While he talked his hands were busy with a knife, carving something out of a piece of rich brown mesquite wood.

‘ What would your *patrón*, Don Fernando, think, ’ he remarked, ‘ if he knew that you had found me a place to live and came to see me? ’ He laughed and looked at Jesús with shrewd eyes. The *mozo*, he knew, did not like the thought. ‘ You're too kind-hearted, Chucho, ’ Juan went on, giving him the familiar nickname for Jesús, ‘ and you had no reason to be so. Why did you pick me up the day you found me stumbling along the road from Atotonilco? ’

He liked to bait the slow-witted Jesús; it had become his only pleasure to try to fire the mind of his docile friend. It was easy to laugh about the experience, now that it was done and he had a place to sleep and something to eat. His self-pity and the worst of the agony of his wound were gone now, and he remembered only that he was a veteran of the revolution who had taken part in the glorious battle of Celaya, not so far below San Miguel, when General Obregón had defeated Pancho Villa. He had told the story so frequently to Jesús, and to his sister and her husband, and to whoever would listen, that now it had become a proud memory. Although at the time, as he had lain all night on the battlefield among stinking corpses and groaning men who would die before dawn, he had cursed God and himself that he had ever joined the cause.

Now he even enjoyed living over the agony of that ride in the freight car back to Atotonilco, and of the terrible hours of dragging himself to his old house, only to be discovered there by the *mayordomo*. If he had had a rifle, if his leg had not made him weak as a child (he told Jesús time and again), the *mayordomo* would never have whipped him off the *finca* and started him limping along the road to San Miguel, where luckily Jesús had found him, and brought him here.

‘ Yes, you are too kind, ’ he repeated to Jesús. ‘ You should have left me to die and be



eaten by the zopilotes, the buzzards. ... You should have left me to them, because of course we are enemies now.'

' We were children together at Atotonilco ' Jesús naively reminded him. He was watching Juan's nimble fingers as he carved. Now he was more than a little afraid of and certainly bewildered by this man, who used to be like the rest of them. He could not understand why Juan talked as he did now, why he was always speaking of enemies. And although Jesús knew it was wrong for him to come to see him, that Don Fernando would have given him reasons why, as Juan suggested, he should have left his friend to rot in the sun, still he was fascinated. A little fearfully, at times, he wondered if he should tell the padre when he went to confession.

' What are you making?' he asked presently, as Juan had not answered his last remark.

Juan held up the piece of wood so he could see. ' A crucifix ' he explained. ' You should be able to sell it for me. Your *patrón* ought to buy it. If you don't sell it there's no way I can pay your sister. '

Jesús made a suitable expression of approval — ' ¡Qué bonita! ' — and hoped that Juan was perhaps forgetting the godless revolution; he had never heard that his friend had informed against Padre Domínguez. ' By the way, I heard that Angela had asked about you, ' he added.

' Angela! ' Juan spat upon the floor. Before he had decided to join the forces he had received word from her that she would never marry him or live with him if he did not go to the padre and once more ask absolution from his sins. ' As if I cared for her any more! ' he retorted vehemently. ' You'd think she was the only woman in the world. *¡Dios!* I've had plenty of girls since I last saw her! And in Celaya. . . . Most females like a soldier's uniform, Chucho. '

' Still, you should go to confession,' Jesús said.

' Church! To hell with Church! If you'd heard the tales I have. . . . Why, do you know, in

Irapuato last year they found padres actually fighting with the federals! A holy lot they are! I tell you, the Church has kept us from our rights, Chucho.'

Jesús was shocked. ' You blaspheme! ' he cried. ' Do you think Padre Domínguez would — '

' Who knows what that sly dog would do? Selling the *finca* of Atotonilco to his brother! Do they think we're all fools? We can see through their tricks. '

' You have been listening to soldiers' lies! '

' Lies! ' Juan smiled at his dull-witted friend. ' Listen, ' he said more calmly, ' you don't understand, Chucho. I have seen things, I have killed men with a rifle. Why? Because I like to? No, to set myself free — and you! In Atotonilco we should have an *ejido*, a tract of land that we can till ourselves. It is ours by right! It was our forefathers' before those rotten Spaniards ever came to Mexico! And by law it will be returned to us! '

' That would be stealing, ' Jesús argued stubbornly. ' The land belongs to Don Fernando. '

' Stealing! What do you think he has done to us but steal? Is he one bit better than you or I? Look at his face! He has Indian blood, plenty of it. But he isn't proud of it. He goes with the white men and their church! '

Jesús was too astounded to answer. These were words; he understood each one separately as Juan uttered it, but together they made no sense at all. ' Don Fernando is an educated man, ' he finally managed to say. ' He can write his name and read out of books. '

' And why can't you? ' Juan challenged him. ' Because they don't want us to go to school! Oh, yes, we can learn the catechism, but do they tell us how to farm or how to count profits? No, the *mayordomo* can do all the counting — of our debts! '

' All right, then, ' Jesús spoke with sudden brightness, ' if you can't do this, what is the use of talking? Me, I'm satisfied. I have a *petate* to sleep on, and I get three meals a day. '

What more would you ever get? ’

Juan spat again and shrugged his shoulders. ‘ What's the use of talking to you? ’ he grumbled disgustedly, and went back to work on his figure. It gave him great pleasure to think that by carving this crucifix he would make a little money from what the Church had taught.

They had sat in obstinate silence a long while when Felipe, Jesús' brother-in-law, came bursting in the door. ‘ News! ’ he cried to them. ‘ Listen to the news! ’ He strutted importantly. Both Juan and Jesús disliked his manner, for he was a *mestizo*, with part-white blood in his veins, and would become contemptuous of them when he was angry. But today he was all friendliness, for they could be his audience. ‘ Villa has been defeated for good this time, ’ he crowed. ‘ They've put the bandit in his place at last. It happened yesterday, at the Hacienda Santa Ana — so close here, can you believe it? It might have been San Miguel. . . . Really, it was at Trinidad where they trounced Pancho. Your battle of Celaya was nothing to this, Juan! Then, at Santa Ana, when they were having a conference, some Villistas surprised the generals. And Obregón was wounded — by a hand grenade, they say. . . . ’

‘ What! ’ Juan exclaimed. ‘ How badly? ’

‘ Just his arm. I guess they had to cut it off. ’

Juan bit his lip, for it was trembling. He had seen his general only from a distance upon two occasions, the last one the day before the battle of Celaya. He had been thrilled then as never before in his life. Here at last, he had felt, was a man to respect, to fight for to the death. He was a stocky little soldier who hardly looked the part of a general, yet Juan had responded to his words. He forgot that as he had lain wounded in the darkness he had called down God's curse upon this man who had fired him thus — for in those hours he had thought he was dying. . . .

‘ Too bad he wasn't killed, ’ he heard Jesús say, and in a moment his sentiment was

gone.

‘ A finer man than any of your rotten Domínguez family! ’ he roared. ‘ I’ve heard their story. Your beloved *patrón* was too yellow to fight! They came and asked him to join and he would not go! ’

‘ That’s a lie! ’ Jesús returned hotly. He felt sick and weak when Juan made such accusations. Not that he believed a word of them, but they made him wish he were back home listening to Don Fernando’s calm voice excoriating all the rebels.

‘ This definitely means that Don Venustiano Carranza will be president, ’ Felipe put in. ‘ The Carrancistas have won for good now. Perhaps we’ll have peace. ’

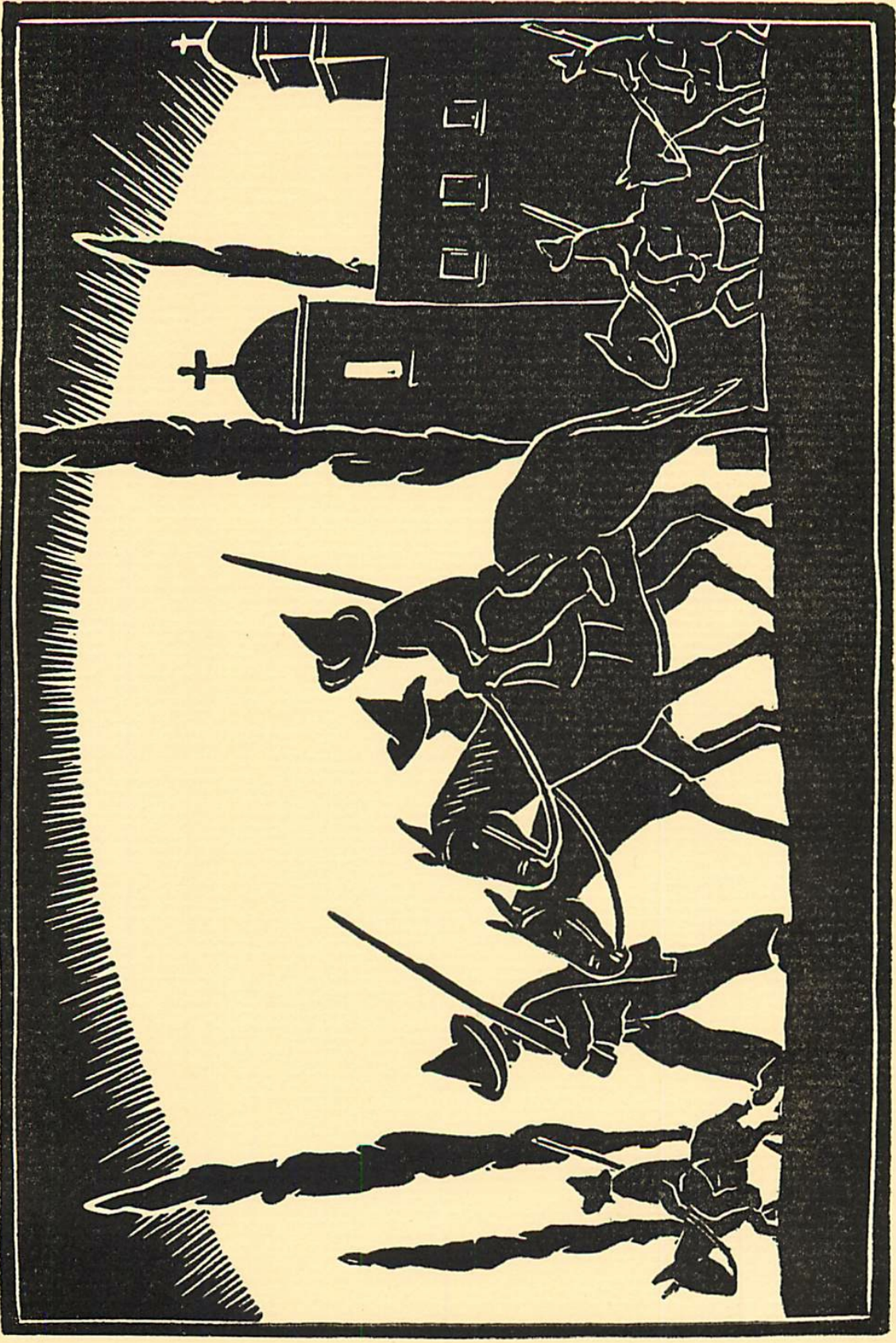
‘ He would not have won without Obregón, ’ Juan said truculently. ‘ There is the man who should be president of the republic. ’

Jesús put on his sombrero. ‘ I’m going, ’ he said, although no one seemed to be paying him any attention. He edged toward the door. ‘ *Adios*, ’ he said, ‘ *hasta mañana*. ’ But he knew that he did not feel like returning tomorrow.

Juan did not reply. His leg was beginning to throb again, as it always did when he became excited. He felt as if he had no friend in all San Miguel, that everyone was against him.

He wanted to shout, to run out and shout to the sky. And with this useless leg, what could he do? What had he ever done to deserve this? When men like Obregón and Carranza said it was right that he and his fellows should have their share. And look at the poor fool Jesús. Going along, never thinking of injustice, letting himself be ordered about, being called a fool if he did not jump quickly. And still — perhaps Jesús was right. He had three meals a day and a *petate* to lie down upon at night.

And without Jesús, Juan thought bitterly, he himself would not have as much. But the revolution would triumph — now, it must! It was his only consolation.



Zapatistas entering San Miguel de Allende



1916

July Thirteen

## San Miguel de Allende

SEÑORA Domínguez had stepped to the door on the shady side of the patio to see if her baby was sleeping peacefully in the cradle which the young Indian girl tended. Ever since her youngest had been weaned she had felt that times were really better, that life would resume its calm evenness again. And now she suddenly realized how beautiful the flowers were about the patio; for months and years, it seemed, she had half forgotten their existence, although the great ferns, set in pottery vases between each of the arches so that they nearly obscured the view of the central fountain, had needed and received her attention.

The roses were blooming well; the heavily sweet perfume filled the afternoon air. And one glorious orange tree, its bright fruit gleaming between fresh green leaves like golden baubles on a Christmas tree, seemed more luxurious than ever. The señora thought that they might have orangeade when Don Fernando came home for his late afternoon dinner.

Peace had in fact begun to settle over the Central Mesa. There were weeks now when it seemed as if nothing had ever happened. Since the terrible battle of Trinidad the sounds of rifle and cannon had not even echoed faintly in the distant mountains. And the señora had heard that up at the little chapel of San Jose, the most charming *capilla* of the town, the neighbors had subscribed the money for a new pink stone fountain. That certainly meant that people were more at ease, were turning their thoughts to domestic affairs again as they should do.

Although she had not paid very good attention to what her husband said or read to her out of the newspapers from Mexico City, the señora knew that the dreadful Villa was far to the north now. In March the United States of the North had sent a general (his name was Pershing) and a small army after the Chihuahua bandit. A 'punitive expedition,' her husband said it was called, and he had been very bitter against the *norteamericanos* for crossing into Mexican territory. That attitude did not seem very sensible to her because he admitted that he would like to see Pancho Villa in his grave.

Pachita, the fat, immobile-faced Indian cook, came waddling toward her mistress. 'Again there is no corn, señora,' she complained.

'Then send word to Don Fernando at the store,' the señora said. This year, after so long a time of revolution, very few fields had yielded grain: there were not enough men to work them and many feared to try.

Now in San Miguel, as they said was being done in every town, a committee had been appointed. All grain was forcefully requisitioned, and this special group dealt out a fair amount to each family. Don Fernando was the head of the committee in San Miguel.

'When I sent Jesús yesterday the *patrón* gave him only a handful,' Pachita told her.

'Very well, I shall speak to him. Here he is now,' she added as she heard the street door open and close.

Don Fernando came striding across the patio as if he might pass them by without noticing. Absently he kissed his wife upon the forehead. His face wore a hard scowl.

'What is wrong?' she laughed at him.

He sank down in a chair beside her. 'Those damnable fools!' he exploded. 'They have been trying to cheat again! Coming yesterday for grain, and then when they came today, thinking I would have forgotten their faces! And whining about it. I almost wish I hadn't accepted this hateful job. God knows, I get no thanks.'

The señora looked at him apprehensively. 'Fernando, you spoke harshly to them,' she



guessed.

‘ And why not? ’

‘ My dear, you must be more diplomatic. You are always saying things which you regret. I know, I know, ’ she forestalled him, ‘ they probably deserved it, everything you said. But you mustn't get into trouble about it. ’

For the first time his scowl slowly disappeared, and he nearly smiled. ‘ For your sake, and the children's, I should be more careful, ’ he confessed. ‘ But this hasn't happened once, it's every day! ’

He fell silent, and the señora was left with a queer unsettled feeling. Just when she had been so happy! When they were called to dinner she tried to rouse her husband.

‘ I am sure conditions are better — aren't they? ’ She pleaded for his reassurance.

‘ I hope so, I sincerely hope so. But I was talking to my brother yesterday — he's come in from Atotonilco for a few days. There is a new kind of trouble now. Not arms, but laws. The new reforms of Carranza bode no good for the Church. Making the divorce laws more lenient! That strikes at the very moral fiber of our society! And these new municipal elections that have been ordered for the whole republic — who knows what riffraff we may have ruling us? ’ He broke open a roll viciously. ‘ At least, I'm glad I sold the *finca* at Atotonilco to my sisters. There was too much talk. . . He looked up to see Jesús at the door. ‘ Yes, what is it? ’ he asked, for the *mozo* seemed disturbed.

‘ *Patrón*, they say there are more soldiers coming into town. They are Zapatistas! ’

‘ Zapatistas! Incredible! ’ But Don Fernando's face became grave. This army of Zapata had the same bad odor as Pancho Villa's had to many men: brigands, they were called, and the name of the rancher of Morelos had rallied too many peons to his side with promises of free land. ‘ They have never come anywhere near this far north before, ’ Don Fernando said, as if convincing himself. ‘ Jesús, you are mistaken. ’

‘ *No sé, señor*, but there is a General Navarro in command. . . . ’

‘Navarro! Then they are Zapatistas! I've heard his name.’

The señora looked frightened. ‘ Fernando, you're not going to see — ? ’

He laughed reassuringly. ‘ They're just a crew of pirates, out for what they can get, he deprecated them. ‘ If they want grain I'll give it to them. I keep telling you, my dear, ’ he added, reversing his own pessimism, ‘ that the worst is over. We have a president and a regular government now. This can be nothing, nothing at all. ’

The *Cantina Venustiano Carranza* was full to overflowing. Don Raúl, the proprietor, was beginning to wonder if the newly painted name over his door was not a great mistake, had perhaps been a little previous. If he had a *centavo* for every soldier he had served in the last five years he would be a rich man indeed. And these fellows — they were a new brand entirely, certainly not Carrancistas. Very privately, Don Raúl was contemptuous, although his alacrity at dispensing *cervezas*, expensive bottles of beer, or in opening the *tequila añejo*, gave no indication of his scorn. Zapatistas, these fellows called themselves, and seemed very proud of the name.

To him they looked no better than peons. That's all they were — Indians in white *calzones*. If they had not had cartridge belts strung crisscross over their chests, if they had not stacked their rifles in the corner, he would not have called them soldiers at all. He could remember back to the days when the *federales* were here, in their nice blue uniforms. And the Carrancistas and the Villistas — even they were better. Not very good payers, any of them. But at least the others looked more respectable.

He smiled unctuously as he poured out more beer. These fellows were great talkers, to hear them you'd think each was a *jefe* himself. And speaking of *jefes*: what a general they had! Vicente Navarro, who had killed the chief of police already this evening, just to be able, Don Raúl thought, to put on his shining boots and good uniform. The second in command was the best joke of all: General Sosa, they called him, but he was dressed in

white clothes and a *sarape* just like the rest. And they called themselves part of a great army! Still, they were dangerous-looking men. If Don Raúl had paid more attention to things revolutionary he would have known the Zapatistas well enough; they were a people's, a peons' army as no other force had been, and their leader, misdirected or not, had an ideal no less vital or sincere than that of Francisco Madero. . . .

Don Raúl smiled again, his fat face wrinkling up under his full mustache. A few townspeople had come in and were invited to drink by the soldiers. Don Raúl wondered if he could possibly charge part of the expense to them. But they were the poorest, most worthless men in town; they would not even pay for their own drinks.

Presently a man limped in. Don Raúl did not know him, but he was Juan. Without invitation he sat down at one of the tables. The Zapatistas glared at him, but shoved a bottle of beer in his direction.

‘ If you drink with us, you are a friend, ’ one of the soldiers told him.

Juan looked at him steadily. ‘ I am a *revolucionario*, ’ he answered, ‘ but I fought against your comrades the Villistas in the battle of Celaya. ’ He still retained his old braggart manner, but now with a difference, almost as if he were defiantly courting death. In the last year he had grown increasingly melancholy. His leg had healed but he would always limp. No longer, he found, was he a hero. On Sunday evenings he could not swagger around the plaza eyeing the girls; they would have nothing to do with a cripple, much less with an ex-soldier. And for those very reasons he had found almost no work. By now Felipe and Jesús' sister had grown accustomed to him, and the brother-in-law deigned to allow him to do odd jobs for his food and lodging. But it was a dog's life. Juan felt that he had fought for something in vain, until now in his heart he was sure that he would never see his patch of ground, his part of the *ejido*, at the *finca* of Atotonilco. No one else wanted land. . . .

The soldier whom he had addressed was already drunk enough to be friendly, not far

enough gone to take offense. ‘ If you fought for the cause we forgive you, ’ he said indulgently. ‘ Have some *mezcal* — that beer will get you no place. ’ And he went on explaining to a townsman: ‘ We are followers of the great Zapata. *Tierra y Libertad*, Land and Liberty, that's our cry. Madero would not listen to us. Carranza has done nothing. Villa has forsaken us. So we come. We will show the *catrines*! ’

The townsman looked skeptical. ‘ All of you soldiers are alike, ’ he said contemptuously. ‘ We have heard nothing but promises for years now. Nothing happens. ’

Don Raúl held his breath. That might be cause for a fight. But the Zapatista only banged his fist upon the table. Quickly Don Raúl came forward with another bottle.

‘ We Zapatistas, ’ the man roared, ‘ do not give mere promises! We stand for action. What is wrong? What grievances do you have? Tell us and we'll fix it up. That's why we're here — eh, boys? ’

At that a general growling affirmation went up, and the townsman rubbed his chin.

‘ In this town you'll find all they do is pray, ’ Juan spoke up. He raised his voice as if he were addressing a great crowd. ‘ And where do they pray? ’ he went on. For the first time in months he had an audience, and all the stored-up venom rushed forth in his words. ‘ They pray at Atotonilco! And who is the padre? The brother of Don Fernando Domínguez, one of your wealthy *catrines*, who owns the church's *finca* there — all the land around the sanctuary! They're not in league, are they, he and the padre? They don't make money out of their land and their church, do they? Oh, no! Not much! ’

‘ Yes! ’ one of the townsmen interrupted him. ‘ I have been to retreat there. And what do they give you to eat? A few cold *tortillas* and beans, and soup not fit for a dog! ’

‘ And who gets the profits? ’

‘ They say Don Fernando got rich from it! ’

‘ How about the padre, too? ’

‘ To the devil with the padre. It's Don Fernando who pockets the money! ’

Don Raúl's hand shook as he poured out more drinks. These fools were working themselves into a state, fostered by so many lies. At least he felt sure they must be lies, although he had heard the same stories before. But of course they were lies; Don Fernando was the finest man in town. A good, God-fearing gentleman.

Juan had fallen silent. His leg hurt him again, sending arrows of pain up through his body, and even though his boldness in speaking out had brought him another drink of *mezcal*, he did not very much care. The liquor which had made him burst forth now only depressed him, and he subsided into the silent bitterness which often seized him these days. What was the use of talk? The fellow who had spoken out was right: nothing but promises from any side.

But the accusations, once started, went on. The flame, once kindled, found quite enough material to soar higher and more fiercely. Now everyone had a claim against Don Fernando. Someone mentioned the distribution of grain. Why, they did not have enough to make *tortillas* for their noonday meals! Don Fernando was responsible: he was hoarding the grain which every man with a field had been forced to contribute; he was using the money he collected for himself; he was waiting until they were half starved, and then he would charge them double the price. Or perhaps he was secretly shipping the grain to Mexico City. *¿Quien sabe?* He played favorites, giving to some more than to others. He was a thief, a blackguard, a scoundrel!

One of the townsmen thumped his fist upon the bar. He had grown bolder with many drinks. He spat upon the floor. ' That's what we think of your revolution! ' he shouted. ' What have we got out of it? We are starving to death! The precious gentlemen of our fine town are worse than skinflint Spaniards! To hell with revolution! Why should we fight? All of you *revolucionarios* are the same — big promises, little deeds! '

The Zapatista who had spoken before threw out his chest. ' That's a challenge! ' he declared in a great, drunken voice. ' We'll show you what justice is! The cause of the

revolution is not lost! What do you want? Just show us where this Don Fernando lives! ’

Don Raúl hastily extended another bottle. ‘ Here, *mi capitan*, have another drink, ’ he tried to mollify him. ‘ It is late at night. Tomorrow you can — ’

‘ Shut your trap, you old fool! ’ One of the soldiers knocked the bottle to the floor. They began collecting their rifles and jamming toward the door. In a few moments there was no one left but Don Raúl and Juan. For a second they eyed each other, then Juan shrugged his shoulders, got to his feet and limped out the door.

There was a wrought-iron lantern above the pink stone doorway of the *saguán*, or entranceway, to the house of Don Fernando, so that they picked out his place easily. One of the soldiers hammered on the door with the butt of his rifle.

Inside, Don Fernando was holding his baby daughter in his arms. She had gone to sleep and he was talking quietly with his wife. At the sound of knocking he rose to his feet.

‘ They have come to me, then, ’ he said, almost as if he had been expecting them.

The señora looked at him with frightened eyes. ‘ Don't let them in! ’ she begged. ‘ Don't go to that door, Fernando. ’

‘ I must see what they want. Probably money again. I would rather give it to them now. ’

‘ But these Zapatistas — ! ’

‘ Don't be alarmed, my dear. We should be accustomed to these raids by now. And why should I be afraid? My conscience is clear, I have done nothing. ’

He left the room, his child still in his arms. Jesús was running toward the door. ‘ Open it, ’ Don Fernando said quietly.

The *mozo* opened it a crack, but immediately it was thrust backward, pushing him against the wall.

Outlined in the doorway against the background of the moonlit street were the handful of Zapatistas with their rifles.

‘ That's the man! Don Fernando! ’ someone shouted.

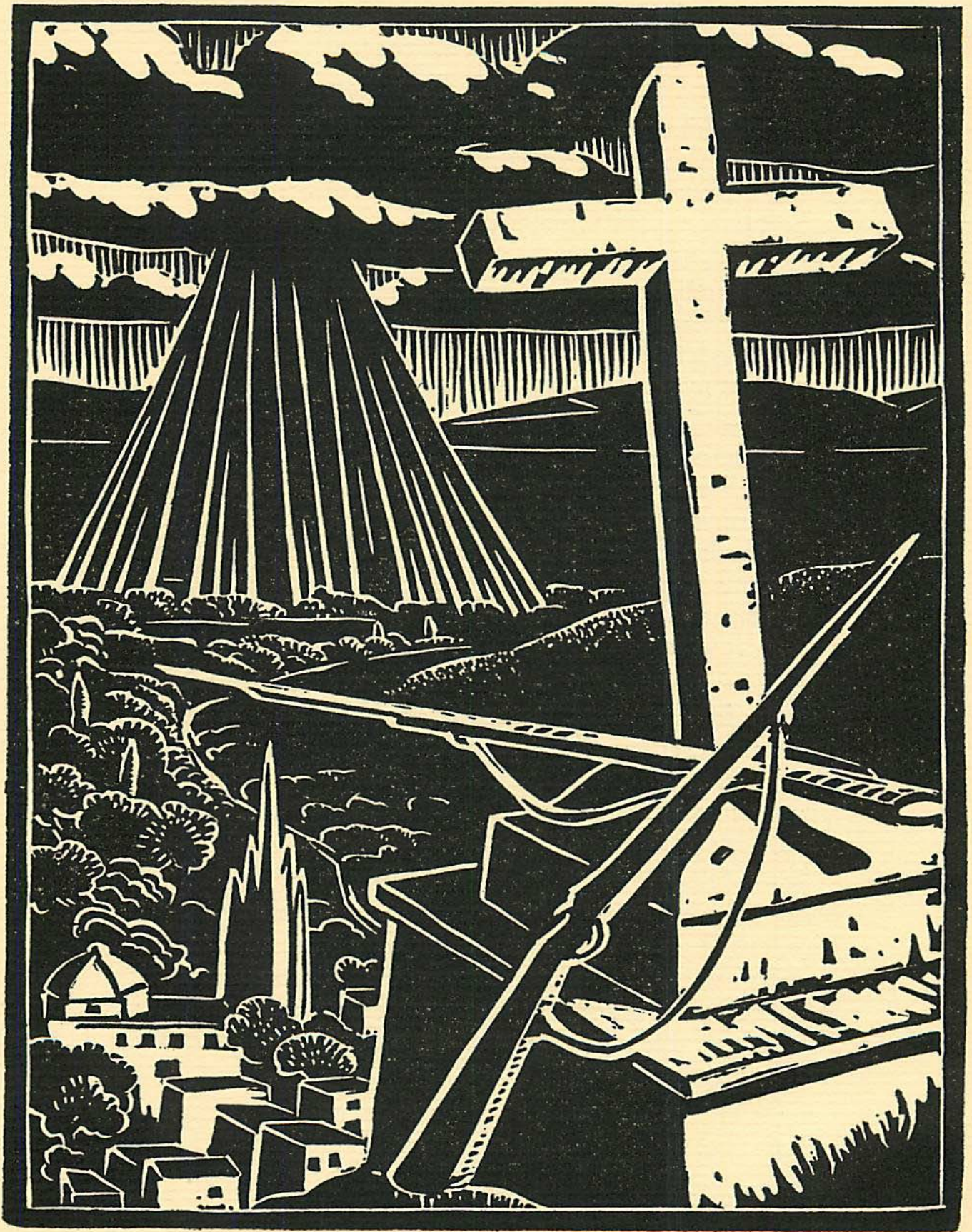
One of them aimed, and fired: just a little spurt of yellow flame, and a loud noise, echoing through the *saguán* and the patio beyond. Then came another report, and another. Don Fernando fell without a sound, blood streaming down his face.

Suddenly there was silence, the men at the doorway had gone. And the baby began to cry. . . .

Jesús was still transfixed, he had not moved, when the señora came running across the patio. He waited for her to scream, to cry out. But she did not. Falling on her knees, she embraced her husband, sobbing pathetically. That sound, and the baby's whimpering, was all the noise there was in the still night. As if everyone else in the world had suddenly died. . . .

Finally she seemed to remember Jesús was there. ‘ Get the padre, ’ she begged. ‘ Tell the father to come — quickly, quickly. ’

But even as he started running down the street Jesús knew there was no use. Don Fernando, his *patrón*, would never take the last sacrament. . . .



"In Hoc Signo"



The streets were quite deserted. Evil hung from the cold fronts of the indifferent houses, and Jesús began to walk faster after he had left the padre's house, his eyes blinded with hot tears, his *huaraches* loudly slapping the stone pavement, echoing behind him like some ghostly pursuer. Once, plagued by this sound, he turned fiercely and abruptly. A silent, staring street confronted him. He muttered a curse and went on faster. Not knowing where he went, his mind writhing in thoughtless agony, until beneath the turmoil began to seethe a hatred. A hatred of himself — he was a coward, he should have rushed upon those low dogs with their rifles — and a hatred of all people.

Even the padre had lost his calm in this moment. When Jesús told him, he lifted his hands to heaven and poured out a strange anathema: ‘ May God, ’ he prayed, ‘ visit a curse to the seventh generation upon these miserable creatures who have slaughtered in cold blood! May he forever damn the word “ revolution ” in whose name these crimes are committed! ’

And the padre's *mozo*, saying ‘ Amen ’ to the terrible curse, pressed a knife into Jesús' hand. It was not safe for him to go abroad without protection, he said. . . .

Jesús felt the knife in his belt now as he turned another corner and saw his shadow lengthen out before him, cast by the street light. Presently he realized he had come to the Chorro, the place of the public baths and the troughs for washing under the great shadowing trees. He could hear the water rushing down, mingling with the low moaning sound of a breeze through the thick foliage. It was nearly pitch dark, clouds had hidden the moon and the tree arms were only blurred writhing outlines against the sky.

As he came closer the water-sound swelled to a roar in his ears, and in the darkness he did not see a figure approaching him.

The figure came closer, then seeing Jesús stepped to one side. When they were opposite each other it gave a low hissing sound. Jesús jumped, his nerves trembling with the shock.

‘ Ssst! Chucho! ’ he heard a familiar voice call softly. And he knew it was Juan even before he saw him. ‘ Where are you going at this hour? ’ Juan asked.

‘ They have killed the *patrón*, ’ he answered heavily.

Juan gave out a kind of snort. ‘ I knew that! ’ he breathed. ‘ They have killed the dog at last. . . . What you need is a drink, *compadre*! Why, you should celebrate! You are a free man at last, Chucho! ’ And he broke into a *quéer* laugh. A sudden gust of wind whistled through the trees as if they were laughing too.

In sudden uncontrollable anger Jesús gripped the other's arm. He could smell the *mezcal* upon Juan's breath. ‘ You told them to! ’ he cried insanely. ‘ You told them lies about Don Fernando! You are *the murderer!* ’

Juan swayed drunkenly, trying to pull away. ‘ Look here, Chucho! ’ He was frightened now. ‘ Be careful what you do, you are the greatest of fools. I said only what I knew. You know yourself — ’

With an oath Jesús had pulled his knife from his belt. ‘ May you rot in hell, you and your revolution! ’ he shouted. He felt his hand upon the other's throat, and they fell heavily, Jesús on top. With all his strength he drove his knife down. ‘ Now we will see who is an enemy! May you rot in hell! ’ he repeated wildly, and struck again, and then again. The body beneath him made no sound; it was limp upon the cobblestones.

Then Jesús was on his feet, and without a backward glance he began running. Up the steep path beside the Chorro, past the bathhouse. There he might have turned to the left, down a street, but instead he slid between the old chapel and a wall, climbing higher on up the mountainside. His mind was filled only with a nameless kind of dread, and he ran like the rising wind, cutting his legs upon the unseen rocks, scratching his face and tearing his clothes upon the cactus. Now he was on more level ground at last, far above the town. He had lost one *huarache* and his lungs seemed to be breathing fire. But he ran on blindly until he stumbled again, and lay there, too weak to rise. Sweat dripped down

his face and ran in little tricklets down his back. Yet he shivered, his whole body suddenly shaken and contorted like that of a man in the last convulsions of death. Then he lay still, his blurred eyes hardly seeing the faint lights of the town below him. He could hear his own hot labored breath, gradually subsiding to more even tempo.

What had he done? What had he done? Dear God, was he lost from this world forever? But he had shown them! They could not do violence to his *patrón* in the name of this godless revolution!

Then, slowly, cold terror gripped him. His stomach contracted in physical nausea. He had murdered! And murder is a sin. The padre would call down a curse upon him, even as he had upon those Zapatistas. No matter that this death had been done to avenge — the sin remained the same. The Church would reject his soul as the revolution would his body. . . .

And so it ends — the story which began one hundred and six years before this tragic night. Or perhaps it has only begun. For now, more than twenty years after that thirteenth of July, 1916, there is no sure sign that the struggle is over.

San Miguel de Allende lies peacefully today. Its outward aspect has not changed. In time tourists will probably discover it and exclaim over its colonial character: the pink stone *marcos* about every doorway, the towers and domes of its many churches rising above the magnificent dark groups of trees that dot the town. And only yesterday every church bell rang out: a new governor was taking office, a man of the revolution, one of the advisers of President Cárdenas. Has there been a reconciliation at last, are the two great ideals once more joined together? Or is this merely an armistice? In a sense it can be only that. The instruments of these two ideals, Church and Revolution, have fought too long to be easily reconciled. One of them must eventually hold the upper hand.

And for all this men have been killed needlessly and rivers of blood have flowed too

frequently. There have been too many little tragedies, too many bystanders caught up in the struggle. For one may argue its causes, its promises, its fulfillments, but one can never deny the numberless, unwritten personal tragedies, the pathos, accompanying all revolution. Yet it was bound to be; that is the least you can concede, for in such cases reason is colored by emotion, there is no chance to keep the issues well defined. In a sense it will never be otherwise in Mexico. Despite the clear mountain air of this Central Mesa one may be only the more easily aroused, may the easier see the violence, be intoxicated with the brilliance and the promise of the land.

But has the Revolution been entirely in vain? In San Miguel they are willing to say, 'Yes.' Yet this little town is not all Mexico. More has been done than the mere writing of the great constitution of 1917. Ten years after this night, three and a half million acres of farmland had been distributed to the peons. In the state of Guanajuato, where lies San Miguel, it is true that little has passed into their hands. But there have been accomplishments for the country as a whole: that can be proved. Long as is the way she has still to go, Mexico stands above most of her sister Latin American republics. And her strength has always been the recognition that death must be incidental to her strivings. ...

One lone Indian upon the great, expansive landscape of mountains. . . . Jesús is quite unconscious that he and his race are the cause of it all. Aware only of his own personal problems. Unaware that he will be taken and molded to fit the way either of the Church or of Revolution. Uncomforted by the fact that there are hundreds of thousands like him. That, because of two great ideals of the white man, which have been split asunder over him, he must eternally be dominated, through even more generations. . . .

Jesús still shivered upon the dark mountainside even as the air dried his sweat and soothed him gently. A sound floated up through the air. It grew louder, more insistent, augmented by more human voices. Jesús was too far removed to make out the words, but

he knew what they were shouting:

‘ *iTierra y Libertad!* Land and Liberty! *iViva la Revolucion!* *iTierra y Libertad!* ’ And presently came the strains of singing — Adelita, marching song of the Zapatistas.

Land and Liberty: what would he do with these if he had them? No, such things were not for him; nor now, for him, the Church. And upon the dark mountainside, staring down at the faint lights of San Miguel de Allende, birthplace of independence, Jesús shivered miserably. . . .

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