

The Earthquake in Chile (c. 1800s)

By Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811)

Born in Prussia, Kleist served in the Prussian army, spent time in one of Napoleon's prisons as an accused—probably wrongly—spy, and wrote a number of plays and stories. He died by suicide, having been a serious writer for only a decade. This story is translated from the German by David Luke and Nigel Reeves.

Study Questions

1. What elements makes this a Romantic story?
2. Why is Don Fernando “almost... glad” at the end of the story?

IN Santiago, the capital of the kingdom of Chile, at the moment of the great earthquake of 1647 in which many thousands lost their lives, a young Spaniard called Jerónimo Rugera was standing beside one of the pillars in the prison to which he had been committed on a criminal charge, and was about to hang himself. A year or so previously Don Enrico Asterón, one of the richest noblemen of the city, had turned him out of his house where he had been employed as a tutor, for being on too intimate a footing with Asterón's only daughter, Doña Josefa. She herself was sternly warned, but owing to the malicious vigilance of her proud brother she was discovered nevertheless in a secret rendezvous with Jerónimo, and this so aroused her old father's indignation that he forced her to enter the Carmelite convent of Our Lady of the Mountain.

A happy chance had enabled her lover to resume the liaison in this very place, and one quiet night the convent garden became the scene of his joy's consummation. On the day of Corpus Christi, the solemn procession of the nuns, with the novices following them, was just beginning when, as the bells pealed out, the unhappy Josefa collapsed on the cathedral steps in the pangs of childbirth.

This incident caused an extraordinary public stir; without any regard for her condition the young sinner was at once imprisoned, and her confinement was scarcely over when by the Archbishop's command she was put on trial with the utmost rigour. The scandal was talked of in the city with so much anger and the whole convent in which it had taken place was criticized on all sides with such harshness that neither the intercession of the Asterón family, nor even the wishes of the Abbess herself, who had conceived an affection for the young girl on account of her otherwise irreproachable conduct, could mitigate the strict penalty to which she was subject by conventual law. All that could be done was that the Viceroy commuted her sentence from death at the stake to death by beheading, a decision which greatly outraged the matrons and virgins of Santiago.

In the streets through which the culprit was to be led to her execution the windows were rented, the roofs of the houses were partly dismantled, and the pious daughters of the city invited their female friends to witness with them, in sisterly companionship, this spectacle about to be offered to divine vengeance.

Jerónimo, who in the meantime had also been imprisoned, went almost out of his mind when he was informed of this appalling turn of events. In vain he pondered plans of rescue: wherever the wings of his most reckless imaginings carried him, bolts and walls were in his way; when he attempted to file through the window bars this was discovered, and merely led to his being locked

up still more strictly. He fell on his knees before an image of the Holy Mother of God and prayed to her with infinite fervour, convinced that she alone could save them now.

Yet the fearful day came, and with it an inward certainty of the utter hopelessness of his position. The bells that accompanied Josefa's passage to the place of execution began to toll, and despair overcame him. Hating his life, he resolved to put an end to it by means of a length of rope which by chance had been left in his cell. He was standing by one of the walls under a pillar, as already related, holding the rope that would release him from this miserable world, and was in the very act of fastening it to an iron bracket attached to the cornice, when suddenly, with a crash as if the very firmament had shattered, the greater part of the city collapsed, burying every living thing beneath its ruins. Jerónimo Rugera stood rigid with horror; and as if every thought had been obliterated from his mind, he now clung to the pillar on which he had wanted to die and tried to stop himself falling. The ground was heaving under his feet, great cracks appeared in the walls all round him, the whole edifice toppled towards the street and would have crashed down into it had not its slow fall been met by that of the house opposite, and only the arch thus formed by chance prevented its complete destruction. Trembling, his hair on end, his knees nearly giving way, Jerónimo slid down the steeply sloping floor to the gap that had been torn through the front wall of his prison as the two buildings collided.

He was scarcely outside when a second tremor completely demolished the already subsiding street. Panic-stricken, with no idea of how to save himself from this general doom, he ran on over wreckage and fallen timber towards one of the nearest city gates, while death assailed him from all directions. Here another house caved in, scattering its debris far and wide and driving him into a side street; here flames, flashing through clouds of smoke, were licking out of every gable and chased him in terror into another, here the Mapocho river, overflowing its banks, rolled roaring towards him and forced him into a third. Here lay a heap of corpses, there a voice still moaned under the rubble, here people were screaming on burning house-tops, there men and animals were struggling in the floodwater, here a brave rescuer tried to help and there stood another man, pale as death, speechlessly extending his trembling hands to heaven. When Jerónimo had reached the gate and climbed a hill beyond it, he fell down at the top in a dead faint.

He had probably lain there quite unconscious for about a quarter of an hour when he finally recovered his senses and half raised himself up, his back turned to the city. He felt his forehead and his chest, not knowing what to make of his condition, and an unspeakable feeling of bliss came over him as a westerly breeze from the sea fanned his returning life and his eyes wandered in all directions over the fertile surroundings of Santiago. Only the sight of crowds of distraught people everywhere troubled him; he did not understand what could have brought them and him to this place, and only when he turned and saw the city levelled to the ground behind him did he remember the terrifying moments he had just experienced. He bowed his forehead to the very ground as he thanked God for his miraculous escape; and as if this one appalling memory, stamping itself on his mind, had erased all others, he wept with rapture to find that the blessing of life, in all its wealth and variety, was still his to enjoy.

But a moment later, noticing a ring on his finger, he suddenly also remembered Josefa, and with her his prison, the bells he had there heard tolling, and the moment that had preceded its collapse. Deep sorrow again filled his heart; he began to regret his prayer and to think with horror of the Being who rules above the clouds. He mixed with the people who, busy salvaging their possessions, were pouring out of all the city gates, and ventured a few diffident inquiries about

Asterón's daughter and whether the sentence against her had been carried out; but there was no one who could give him detailed information. A woman carrying an enormous load of household goods on her shoulders, bent almost to the ground and with two small children clinging to her breast, said as she passed, as if she herself had witnessed it, that Josefa had been beheaded. Jerónimo turned away from her; and since he himself, on calculating the time, felt no doubt that the execution had taken place, he sat down in a lonely wood and abandoned himself entirely to his grief. He wished that the destructive fury of nature might unleash itself on him once more. He could not understand why he had escaped the death which his afflicted soul desired, when in those very moments, on all sides, it had of its own accord been offering him deliverance. He firmly resolved not to flinch if even now the oak trees should be uprooted and their crests come crashing down upon him. Presently, when he had finishing weeping and in the midst of his hottest tears hope had come to him again, he stood up and began exploring the whole area. He visited every hill-top on which people had gathered; on every road along which fugitives were still streaming, he went to meet them wherever he caught sight of a woman's dress fluttering in the wind, there with trembling feet he hastened: but never was the wearer his beloved Josefa. The sun was going down and his hopes with it, when he reached the edge of a cliff and from there could look down into a wide valley to which only a few people had come. Not sure what to do, he passed quickly among the different groups and was about to turn back again when suddenly, beside a stream that flowed through the ravine, he noticed a young woman busy washing a child in its waters. And at this sight his heart leapt up: eager with expectation he ran down over the rocks, and with a cry of 'Oh, holy Mother of God!' he recognized Josefa as on hearing his approach she shyly looked round. With what ecstasy they embraced, the unhappy pair, saved by a divine miracle!

On her way to her death, Josefa had already nearly reached the place of execution when suddenly the buildings had begun crashing down and scattered in all directions the procession that was leading her to the block. Her first terrified steps carried her towards the nearest gate of the town; but almost at once, regaining her presence of mind, she turned round and rushed back to the convent where she had left her helpless little son. She found the whole building already in flames, and the Abbess, who during those minutes which were to have been her last had promised to take care of her baby, was at the entrance crying out for help to rescue him. Josefa, undeterred by the smoke billowing towards her, dashed into the convent, which was already collapsing all round her and, as if protected by all the angels in heaven, emerged again uninjured at its gate, carrying her child. She was just about to embrace the Abbess when the latter, who had clasped her hands in blessing over her, was ignominiously struck dead by a falling gable, together with nearly all her nuns. Josefa retreated trembling at this dreadful sight; she hastily closed the Abbess's eyes and fled, utterly terrified, to bring to safety her beloved boy whom heaven had restored to her again.

She had taken only a few steps when she found before her the mangled body of the Archbishop, which had just been dragged from under the wreckage of the cathedral. The Viceroy's palace had collapsed, the law court in which sentence had been passed on her was in flames, and in the place where her father's house had stood there was now a seething lake from which reddish vapours were rising. Josefa summoned up all her strength to sustain her, hardening herself against all these distressing sights, and walked on bravely from street to street with her recaptured treasure. She was already near the gate when she saw the prison in which Jerónimo had languished: it too was in ruins. She reeled at this sight and nearly fell down in a swoon at the street corner, but at that very moment a building, its foundations loosened by the tremors, crashed down behind her and drove her

on, fortified again by terror. She kissed her child, dashed the tears from her eyes, and no longer heeding the horrors that surrounded her reached the gate. When she found herself in open country she soon realized that not everyone who had been inside a demolished building had necessarily been crushed beneath it.

At the next crossroads she paused and waited, wondering whether the person who, after her little Felipe, was dearest to her in the world, might yet appear. But since he did not come and more and more people thronged past, she continued on her way, and turned round again, and waited again; then turned aside, shedding many tears, into a dark pine-shaded valley to pray for his (as she believed) departed soul; and here in this valley she found him, her lover, and with him such joy that the valley might have been the Garden of Eden.

All this, in a voice filled with emotion, she now told Jerónimo, and when she had finished, gave him the boy to kiss. Jerónimo, with all the inexpressible delight of fatherhood, took him and hugged him, and, when his unfamiliar face made the little one cry, kept caressing him till he was silent. In the meantime the loveliest of nights had fallen, wonderfully mild and fragrant, silvery and still, a night such as only a poet might dream of. Everywhere along the banks of the stream, in the glittering moonlight, people had settled and were preparing soft beds of moss and foliage on which to rest after so harrowing a day. And since these poor victims of the disaster were still lamenting, one the loss of his house, another that of his wife and child, and a third that of everything he had possessed, Jerónimo and Josefa slipped away into a denser part of the wood, not wanting to give offence to anyone by the secret exultation of their own hearts. They found a splendid pomegranate tree, its outspread branches heavy with scented fruit, and high on its crest the nightingale piped its voluptuous song. Here, with Jerónimo leaning against its trunk and covering them with his cloak, they sat down to rest, Josefa on his lap and Felipe on hers. The tree's shadow with its scattered points of light passed over them, and the moon was already fading in the glow of dawn before they slept. For there was no end to what they had to talk about, the convent garden, their prisons, and what they had suffered for each other's sake; and it moved them greatly to think how much misery had had to afflict the world in order to bring about their happiness.

They decided that as soon as the tremors had ceased they would go to La Concepción, for Josefa had an intimate friend there, and with a small sum of money she hoped to borrow from her they would be able to embark there for Spain, where Jerónimo's relatives on his mother's side lived; there they could be happy for the rest of their days. Upon this thought, amid many kisses, they fell asleep.

When they woke, the sun was already well up in the sky, and they noticed not far from them several families busy making themselves some breakfast at a fire. Jerónimo was just wondering how he too could get some food for his child and its mother when a well-dressed young man, carrying an infant, approached Josefa and asked her politely whether she would be willing to feed at her breast for a while this poor little creature, whose mother was lying injured over there among the trees. Josefa was thrown into some embarrassment when she recognized him as an acquaintance; but when, misinterpreting her confusion, he continued: 'It will only be for a few minutes, Doña Josefa, and this child has not been fed since the time of the disaster which overtook us all ' she said, 'I had—a different reason for not replying, Don Fernando; in a terrible time like this no one can refuse to share whatever they may have.' So saying she took the little stranger, handing her own child to its father, and put it to her breast. Don Fernando was most grateful for this kindness and asked her to come with him to his own party, where breakfast was just being prepared at the fire.

Josefa answered that she would accept the invitation with pleasure and, since Jerónimo also made no objection, she accompanied Don Fernando to his family, where his two sisters-in-law, whom she knew to be young ladies of excellent character, received her most warmly and affectionately.

Doña Elvira, Don Fernando's wife, was lying on the ground with her feet seriously injured, and when she saw her sickly little boy at Josefa's breast she drew the latter down towards her and kissed her lovingly. Don Pedro, Elvira's father, who was wounded in the shoulder, also nodded to her in the most friendly manner.

In the minds of Jerónimo and Josefa strange thoughts began to stir. When they found themselves treated with so much familiarity and kindness they did not know what to think of the recent past: of the place of execution, the prison and the bells; or had all these been merely a dream? It seemed that in everyone's mind, after the terrible blow that had so shaken them all, there was a spirit of reconciliation. Their memories seemed not to reach back beyond the disaster. Only Doña Isabel, who had been invited by a friend to witness yesterday's spectacle but had declined the invitation, let her gaze rest pensively from time to time upon Josefa; but always her mind, having strayed only a little from the present, was snatched back into it as she heard the report of some new and ghastly misfortune.

There were stories of how, immediately after the first main tremors, women all over the city had given birth to children in the sight of all the men; of how monks, crucifix in hand, had rushed hither and thither crying out that the end of the world had come; how on the Viceroy's orders a guard had tried to clear the people out of a church, only to be told that there was no longer any Viceroy of Chile; how in the worst moments of the disaster the Viceroy had been obliged to have gallows erected to deter looters, and how one innocent man, escaping through a burning house by the back door, had been over-hastily arrested by the owner and strung up on the spot.

Doña Elvira, whose injuries Josefa was busily tending, had taken the opportunity at a moment when these very tales were being most excitedly exchanged to ask her how, on that terrible day, she herself had fared. And when Josefa, her heart filled with anxiety, outlined to her some of the main features of her story, she had the joy of seeing the lady's eyes fill with tears; Doña Elvira clasped her hand and pressed it, and with a gesture bade her say no more. Josefa felt as if she were in the land of the blessed. She had a feeling, which she could not suppress, that the preceding day, despite all the misery it had brought upon the world, had been a mercy such as heaven had never yet bestowed on her. And indeed, in the midst of this horrifying time in which all the earthly possessions of men were perishing and all nature was in danger of being engulfed, the human spirit itself seemed to unfold like the fairest of flowers. In the fields, as far as the eye could see, men and women of every social station could be seen lying side by side, princes and beggars, ladies and peasant women, government officials and day labourers, friars and nuns: pitying one another, helping one another, gladly sharing anything they had saved to keep themselves alive, as if the general disaster had united all its survivors into a single family.

Instead of the usual trivial tea-table gossip about the ways of the world, everyone was now telling stories of extraordinary heroic deeds. Persons hitherto held to be of little consequence in society had shown a Roman greatness of character; there were countless instances of fearlessness, of magnanimous contempt for danger, of self-denial and superhuman self-sacrifice, of life unhesitatingly cast away as if it were the most trifling of possessions and could be recovered a moment later. Indeed, since there was no one who on that day had not experienced some touching kindness or had not himself performed some generous action, the sorrow in every heart was

mingled with so much sweetness and delight that Josefa felt it would be hard to say whether the sum of general well-being had not increased on the one hand by as much as it had diminished on the other.

When they had both finished silently pondering these matters, Jerónimo took Josefa's arm and in a state of inexpressible happiness walked up and down with her under the shady boughs of the pomegranate trees. He told her that, the public mood being now as it was and the old order of things having undergone such an upheaval, he was abandoning his intention of embarking for Europe; that since the Viceroy had always been favourably disposed towards his cause, he would venture a personal appeal to him, if he should still be alive; and that he thus hoped to be able—and he kissed her as he said so—to remain with her in Chile. Josefa replied that similar thoughts had occurred to her; that she too did not doubt that if her father were still alive he would be ready to forgive her; but that instead of the personal approach he had suggested she thought it would be more prudent to go to La Concepción and address a written petition to the Viceroy from there; there they would in any case be within reach of the port, and after all, if their negotiations should achieve the desired result, they could easily return to Santiago. After brief reflection Jerónimo expressed his approval of this wise precaution; they strolled a little further along the avenues of trees, thinking with happy anticipation of their future, and then rejoined the company.

Meanwhile the afternoon had come, and since the tremors had abated, the fears of the wandering refugees had no sooner been somewhat calmed than the news spread that in the Dominican church, the only one the earthquake had spared, a solemn Mass would be read by the Prior of the monastery himself, who would implore heaven to prevent further disasters. Everywhere people were already setting out and streaming towards the city. Someone in Don Fernando's party raised the question of whether they too should not participate in this solemnity and join the general procession. Doña Isabel, with some embarrassment, recalled the terrible misfortune the church had suffered on the previous day; she pointed out that such services of thanksgiving would certainly be repeated and that then, with the danger less fresh in their minds, they would be able to respond more gladly and more easily to the mood of thankfulness. Josefa, rising at once enthusiastically to her feet, declared that she had never felt a stronger impulse to cast herself down before her Maker than at this very time, when His incomprehensible and sublime power was being made so evident. Doña Elvira emphatically endorsed Josefa's opinion. She insisted that they should hear the Mass and called upon Don Fernando to lead the party, whereupon all of them rose from their seats, including Doña Isabel. But the latter, in making the various small preparations for her departure, seemed to do so tardily and with her heart beating fast; and on being asked what was wrong with her she replied that she had an unhappy foreboding, though she could not tell of what. Doña Elvira calmed her and suggested that she should remain behind with her and her sick father. Josefa said: 'In that case, Doña Isabel, perhaps you will relieve me of this little darling, who, as you can see, has found his way to me again.' 'Gladly,' replied Doña Isabel, and reached out to take the baby; but when the latter wailed piteously at this infringement of his rights and would not consent to it on any terms, Josefa said with a smile that she would keep him and kissed him till he was quiet again. Then Don Fernando, who was charmed by the dignity and grace of her bearing, offered her his arm; Jerónimo, carrying little Felipe, escorted Doña Constanza; the others who had joined the party followed behind, and in this order they set off towards the city.

They had scarcely walked fifty paces when Doña Isabel, who had been having an animated private discussion with Doña Elvira, was heard to call out: 'Don Fernando!' And she ran forward to

catch them up, evidently in some agitation. Don Fernando stopped and turned round, waiting for her without letting go of Josefa's arm; but when she remained standing some distance away as if waiting for him to come and meet her, he asked her what she wanted. At this Doña Isabel approached them, though evidently with reluctance, and murmured some words in his ear in such a way that Josefa could not hear them. 'Well?' asked Don Fernando, 'and what harm can come of that?' Doña Isabel, looking quite distraught, continued to whisper sharply in his ear. Don Fernando flushed with irritation and replied: 'that will do! Tell Doña Elvira that there is no need for concern.' So saying, he continued to escort Josefa on their way.

When they arrived at the Dominican church the organ greeted them with splendid music, and an immense crowd was surging inside. The throng extended far beyond the portals into the square in front of the church, and inside it small boys had climbed up the walls and were perched against the frames of paintings, with their caps clutched expectantly in their hands. All the candelabra were blazing with light, the pillars cast mysterious shadows in the gathering dusk, the great rose window of stained glass at the far end of the church burned like the very evening sun that gleamed upon it, and now that the organ was silent, stillness reigned in the whole assembly as if everyone there had been struck dumb. Never did such a flame of zeal rise to heaven from a Christian cathedral as on that day from the Dominican church at Santiago, and no hearts nourished it with a warmer fervour than those of Jerónimo and Josefa.

The service began with a sermon delivered from the pulpit by one of the oldest canons, vested in ceremonial robes. Raising his trembling hands high up to heaven, with the wide folds of his surplice flowing around them, he began at once to give praise and glory and thanks that there should still be, in this part of the world that was crumbling to ruins, men and women able to raise up their faltering voices to God; he described how, at the will of the Almighty, an event had taken place that must scarcely be less terrible than the Last judgement; and when, nevertheless, pointing to a crack in the wall of the cathedral, he called yesterday's earthquake a mere foretaste of that day of doom, a shudder ran through the whole congregation. From this point his flood of priestly eloquence bore him on to the subject of the city's moral depravity: he castigated it for abominations such as Sodom and Gomorrah had not known, and ascribed it only to God's infinite forbearance that Santiago had not been totally obliterated from the face of the earth.

But what a piercing dagger-stroke it was to the hearts of our two unhappy friends, rent as they were already by the preacher's words, when he took occasion to dwell in detail on the outrage that had been perpetrated in the garden of the Carmelite convent! He condemned as impious the indulgence with which it had been treated by society, and even digressed, with copious imprecations, to mention the two sinners themselves by name and to consign their souls to all the princes of hell. Doña Constanza, plucking Jerónimo by the arm, called out: 'Don Fernando!' but the latter replied as emphatically and at the same time as surreptitiously as possible, 'Do not say a word, Doña; do not so much as move your eyes, but pretend that you are about to faint, and then we shall leave the church.' But before Doña Constanza had even executed this ingenious stratagem for their escape, a voice, loudly interrupting the canon's sermon, cried out: 'Citizens of Santiago, here stand those two godless sinners! Keep clear, keep well away from them!' And as a wide circle of people backed away in horror, a second terror-stricken voice asked: 'Where?' A third man replied: 'Here!' and filled with brutal fervour he seized Josefa by the hair and would have dragged her to the ground together with Don Fernando's child, if the latter had not supported her. 'Are you mad?' cried the young man, putting his arm round Josefa. 'I am Don Fernando Ormez, the son of the Commandant

of this city, whom you all know.' 'Don Fernando Ormez?' exclaimed someone who now came and stood right in front of him; he was a cobbler who had worked for Josefa and knew her at least as well as he knew her tiny feet. 'Who is this child's father?' he demanded, turning with shameless insolence to Asterón's daughter. Don Fernando turned pale at this question. By turns he glanced furtively at Jerónimo and scanned the congregation, to see if there was anyone who knew him. Under the constraint of this appalling situation Josefa cried out: 'This is not my child, Master Pedrillo, as you think'; and looking at Don Fernando in unspeakable anguish of mind she added, 'This young gentleman is Don Fernando Ormez, the son of the Commandant of this city, whom you all know!' The cobbler asked: 'Citizens, which of you knows this young man?' And several of the bystanders repeated: 'Who knows Jerónimo Rugera? Let him step forward!' Now it so happened that at this very moment little Juan, frightened by the uproar, began struggling in Josefa's arms and reaching out towards Don Fernando. At once a voice yelled: 'He *is* the father!' and another, 'He is Jerónimo Rugera!' and a third, '*These* are the blasphemers!' And the whole assembly of Christians in that temple of Jesus raised a cry of 'Stone them! Stone them!' At this Jerónimo now cried out: 'Stop! You monsters! If you are looking for Jerónimo Rugera, he is here! Set free that man, who is innocent!'

The furious mob, confused by Jerónimo words, hesitated; several hands released Don Fernando; and when at that moment a naval officer of high rank approached hurriedly and, pushing his way through the crowd, asked: 'Don Fernando Ormez! What has happened to you?', the latter, now quite free, replied with truly heroic presence of mind, 'Why, look, Don Alonzo, what murderous villains these are! I should have been a dead man if this worthy gentleman had not calmed the raging crowd by pretending to be Jerónimo Rugera. Be so kind as to take him into protective custody, and this young lady as well; and as for this scoundrel,' he added, seizing Master Pedrillo, 'arrest him, for it was he who started the whole commotion!' The cobbler shouted: 'Don Alonzo Onoreja, I ask you on your conscience, is this girl not Josefa Asterón?' And when Don Alonzo, who knew Josefa well, hesitated before answering, and several people, stung to new fury by this, cried out: 'It *is* her! it *is* her! Kill her!', Josefa placed both little Felipe, whom Jerónimo had hitherto been carrying, and little Juan in Don Fernando's arms, and said, 'Go, Don Fernando, save your two children and leave us to our fate!'

Don Fernando took both children and said he would sooner perish than allow any member of his party to suffer harm. He requested the naval officer to lend him his sword, offered his arm to Josefa, and told the couple behind them to follow him. And since in these circumstances the people made way for them with an adequate show of respect, they did indeed reach the door of the church, and thought themselves saved. But they had hardly entered the equally crowded forecourt when a voice from among the frenzied mob that had pursued them cried out: 'Citizens, this is Jerónimo Rugera, for I am his own father!' And the speaker, raising a cudgel, struck Jerónimo a colossal blow that felled him to the ground at Doña Constanza's side. 'Jesus! Holy Mother of God!' screamed Doña Constanza, fleeing to her brother-in-law's side; but immediately there was a cry of 'Convent whore!' and a second blow from another direction struck her down lifeless beside Jerónimo. 'Monsters!' cried an unidentified bystander, 'that was Doña Constanza Xares!' 'Why did they lie to us?' retorted the cobbler. 'Find the right one, and kill her!' Don Fernando, seeing Doña Constanza lying dead beside him, was maddened with rage; drawing and brandishing his sword, he aimed so furious a blow at the fanatical murderer who had instigated these horrors that it would have split him in half if the man had not dodged aside. But as he could not overpower the surging mass that

pressed in on him, Josefa cried out: 'Farewell, Don Fernando. Here I am, murder me, you bloodthirsty tigers!' and voluntarily threw herself into their midst, to put an end to the fighting. Master Pedrillo struck her dead with his club. Then, drenched with her blood, he shrieked: 'Send her bastard to hell after her!' and pressed forward again, his lust for slaughter not yet sated.

Don Fernando, filled with superhuman heroism, was now standing with his back to the church; on his left arm he held the children, in his right hand his sword, and with every blow he struck one of his attackers down, his blade flashing like lightning; a lion could not have defended itself better. Seven of the butchers lay dead in front of him, and the prince of the satanic rabble was himself wounded. But Master Pedrillo would not give up until he had seized one of the infants by its legs, dragged it from Don Fernando's grasp, and after whirling it round in the air above his head, dashed it against the edge of one of the pillars of the church. After this, silence fell and the whole crowd dispersed. When Don Fernando saw his little Juan lying at his feet with his brains oozing out, he raised his eyes to heaven in inexpressible anguish.

The naval officer now rejoined him, tried to comfort him and assured him that although his own inaction during this terrible incident had been for various reasons justified, he now keenly regretted it, but Don Fernando said that there was no cause for reproaching him, and only asked him now to help remove the bodies. Night was falling, and in the darkness they were all carried to Don Alonzo's house; Don Fernando followed, with little Felipe still in his arms and his bitter tears raining down on the child's face. He also spent the night with Don Alonzo, and for some time refrained, by means of pretexts and fictions, from acquainting his wife with the full extent of the calamity; firstly because she was ill, and also because he did not know how she would judge his own conduct in the episode. But before long, accidentally learning from a visitor everything that had happened, this excellent lady quietly wept out her maternal grief, and one morning, with the trace of a tear glistening in her eye, threw her arms round her husband's neck and kissed him. Don Fernando and Doña Elvira then adopted the little stranger as their own son; and when Don Fernando compared Felipe with Juan and the ways in which he had acquired the two of them, it almost seemed to him that he had reason to feel glad.