

**LA BELLE
SAN ANTONE**

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La belle San Antone by Johonnas Bennett

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L A B E L L E S A N A N T O N E

By
JOHONNAS BENNETT



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La Belle San Antone

CHAPTER I

The beautiful, boundless, and breezy realm of old Texas! How well beloved by her own since the first days of her coming to us, full of wild possibilities and daring adventure; her escutcheon baptized in the blood of the Spanish and Mexican wars, and the period of her annexation, so rife with the stench of unparalleled atrocities in the murder of her noble martyrs, her banners tattered and torn, and the star of her destiny, rising Phoenix-like from the ashes of the past, to grow for a brighter fate, a better day.

Come with me, and as we tread the bloom of her flower-strewn prairies and the burning sands of her lonely plains I will tell you about the hearts of her men and women, so true and loving and so unchanging in their fidelity; faithful, courageous and enduring; ever ready to extend their hospitality to the strangers at their doors, or to let their life-blood flow for loved ones endangered. For the beginning of the story herein told we find ourselves harking back to the days when she first began making history

for herself, days when she was yet a Spanish province, and ruled by a Spanish monarch.

It was a hundred years ago, and more, that a bold herdsman, seeking as did Jason "the golden fleece," found the end of his journeyings as he reached the boundless plains of the beautiful Southwest. Fresh from adventures by sea and land, with a stout heart, a strong arm, and a splendid constitution, Theodore Hackett found himself tarrying for a day from his travels at a little semi-barbaric town far to the southwest. While he tarried his feet took root in the soil, and he grew to be a part of the place, its surroundings and its people. It was a place filled with mixed breeds of men, Spanish and French predominating, and the town was called indiscriminately by the two separate names given it by the predominating forces of Spanish or French, as the case might be. To-day it was de Bajar, as the old French explorers would have it, to-morrow it was San Antonio, so called for the head of the Franciscan Brotherhood, San Antonio Valges, who had established his mission here in the year 1716. From its earliest days the town was the scene of uprisals, fights, and dissension. It was most of the time the capital, and always an important military encampment; its settlement had grown out of the fierce rivalry between Spain and France for the possession of the town.

Probably no foot of ground in the great Empire State of the Southwest was ever so bitterly

contested as was this old French and Spanish military camp. By a royal decree in the year 1730 an effort was made by the King of Spain to colonize the new Southwest, and something near twenty families were brought from the Canary Islands for this purpose. To each family was given a large grant of land, and the heads of the families were raised to the dignity of a hidalgo.

The new colonists established the pueblo, or village, near the presidio, then more commonly called Plaza-de-las-Yslas. From these families sprang native-born men and women, who grew into maturity in the very midst of a "hand at the sword hilt" sectional feeling, and about them clung the air and bearing of a people accustomed to danger, and who fostered and engendered deep feelings, be it love or be it hatred, as the occasion should demand.

Among the colonists were men and women of good origin who had intermarried with the Spanish and French habitants of the town, whose coming had preceded that of the colonists, and the outcome of these unions was the founding of noble families.

Fourteen years later the old mission of San Antonio Valges was moved farther east, to the site occupied by the chapel of that mission, which is now known as the Alamo. Those were dreadful days when the historic old town gave its first habitation to man and began making history for herself.

During the long revolutionary war of Mexico with Spain the old town witnessed many scenes of strife and bloodshed. Revolutionist against Royalist engaged in bitter contest for the possession of the town, amid scenes of unparalleled atrocity. If to-day the Royalists won the victory, they turned upon their enemies with a thirst for revenge that appeased itself in bloody butcheries; if to-morrow the Revolutionists were victorious, it was but a cruel repetition of murdering their captives.

As though seeking to augment the reign of terror, the town became a favorite haunt for Spanish buccaneers and freebooters, who pillaged the place during the frequent uprisals.

Gay, reckless, devil-may-care fellows, by the witchery of their handsome faces and reckless mien they won the hearts of the young and beautiful señoritas of the old provincial town. Some of them married, and won from their lawless quest for booty by the glamour of love, settled into law-abiding men, while others wooed but for a day, and in the wake of their departure left sorrowing hearts and blighted lives to mark, as ghastly milestones, their lawless pilgrimage through life.

The town, all the time under military rule, was controlled by the faction in power. The citizens had become accustomed to the war-like spirit of the times, and men, women and children felt a consequent pride when their respective banners were waving victoriously over the town.