

# **THE VALIANT RUNAWAYS**

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The valiant runaways by Gertrude Atherton

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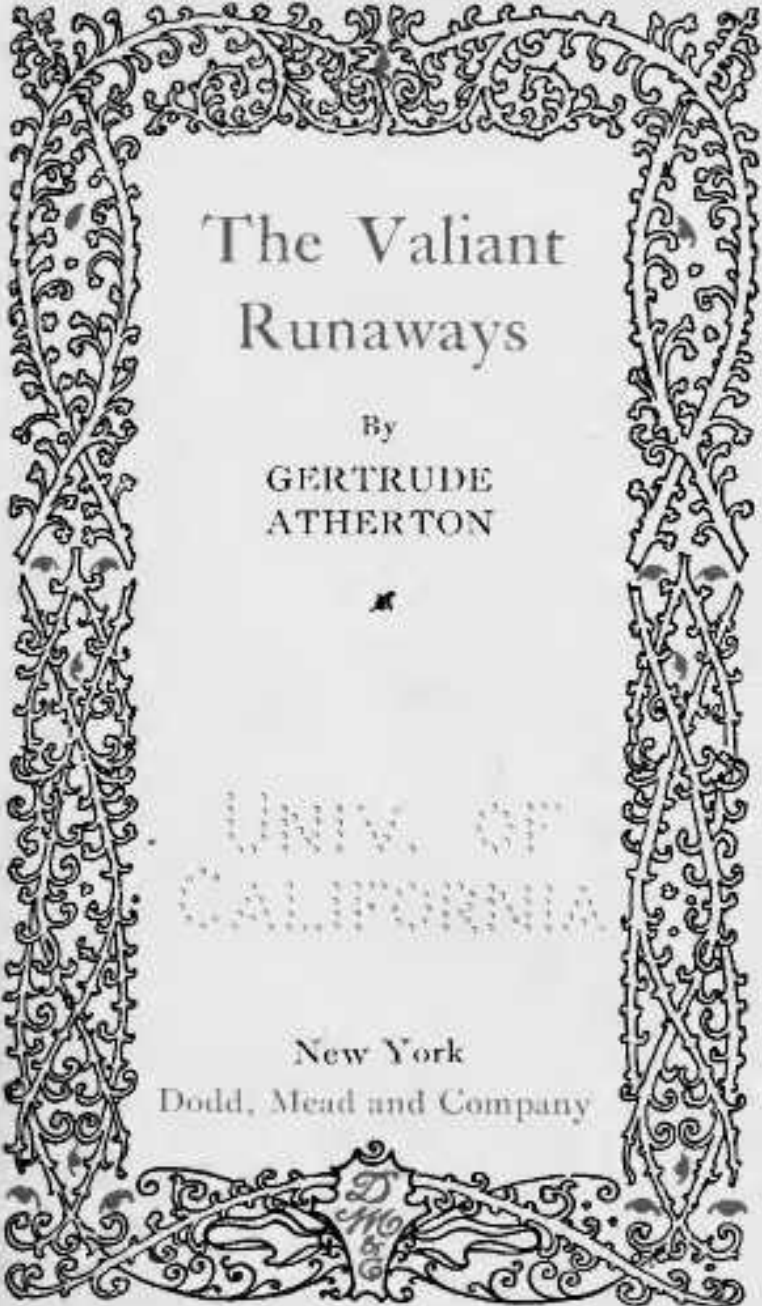
**GERTRUDE ATHERTON**

**THE VALIANT  
RUNAWAYS**



NO. 1111





The Valiant  
Runaways

By  
GERTRUDE  
ATHERTON

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

New York  
Dodd, Mead and Company

PS1047  
V35  
1898  
MAIN

TO

GEORGE AND GILBERT JONES

*Of New York*

WITHOUT WHOSE ENCOURAGEMENT THIS YARN WOULD  
NEVER HAVE BEEN FINISHED

261328

## The Valiant Runaways



### I

**R**OLDAN CASTAÑADA walked excitedly up and down the verandah of his father's house, his thumbs thrust into the red silk sash that was knotted about his waist, his cambric shirt open at the throat as if pulled impatiently apart; the soft grey sombrero on the back of his curly head making a wide frame for his dark, flushed, scowling face.

There was nothing in the surroundings to indicate the cause of his disturbance. The great adobe house, its white sides and red tiles glaring in the bright December sun, would have been as silent as a tomb but for the rapid tramping of Roldan and the clank of his silver spurs on the pavement. On all sides the vast Rancho Los Palos Verdes cleft the horizon: Don Mateo



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Castañada was one of the wealthiest grantees in the Californias, and his sons could gallop all day without crossing the boundary line of their future possessions. The rancho was as level as mid-ocean in a calm; here and there a wood or river broke the sweep; thousands of cattle grazed. Now and again a mounted vaquero, clad in small-clothes vivified with silver trimmings, dashed amongst tossing horns, shouting and warning.

But Roldan saw none of these things. There was reason for his disquiet. News had arrived an hour before which had thrown his young mind into confusion: the soldiers were out for conscripts, and would in all probability arrive at the Rancho Los Palos Verdes that evening or the following morning. Roldan, like all the Californian youth, looked forward to the conscription with apprehension and disgust. Not that he was a coward. He could throw a bull as fearlessly as his elder brothers; he had ridden alone at night the length of the rancho in search of a pet colt that had strayed; and he had once defended the

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women of the family single handed against a half dozen savages until reinforcements had arrived. Moreover, the stories of American warfare which he had managed to read, despite the prohibition of the priests, had stirred his soul and fired his blood. But army life in California! It meant languishing in barracks, hoping for a flash in the pan between two rival houses, or a possible revolt against a governor. If the Americans should come with intent to conquer! Roldan ground his teeth and stamped his foot. Then, indeed, he could not get to the battlefield fast enough. But the United States would never defy Mexico. They were clever enough for that. His anger left him, and he gave a little regretful sigh. Not only would he like that kind of a battle, but it would be great fun to know some American boys. Then he shook his head impatiently and dismissed these tourist thoughts. The present alone was to be considered.

There were two ways to avoid conscription. One was to marry — Roldan sniffed audibly; the other lay in flight and elud-

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ing the men until their round was over for the year.

Roldan did not like the idea of running away from anything; he and several of his father's vaqueros had once made an assault upon a band of cattle thieves and hunted them into the mountains: that was much more to his taste. Nevertheless there was one thing he liked less than showing his heels, and that was giving up his liberty. Not to gallop at will over the rancho, or sleep in a hammock, to coliar the bulls and shout with the vaqueros at rodeo, to be the first at the games and the races, to wear his silken clothes and lace ruffles, and eat the delightful dishes his mother's cooks prepared! And then he was a very high-spirited young gentleman. Although the same obedience, almost reverence, was exacted of him by his parents that was a part of the household religion in California, yet as the youngest child, who had been delicate during his first five years, he had managed to get very badly spoiled. He did not relish the idea of leading a life of monotony and discipline, of performing