

BIRD ROBERT MONTGOMERY

CALAVAR; OR, THE
KNIGHT OF THE
CONQUEST, A ROMANCE
OF MEXICO

Robert Bird

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Conquest, A Romance of Mexico**

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Robert Montgomery Bird Calavar; or, The Knight of The Conquest, A Romance of Mexico

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

It is now thirteen years since the first publication of "Calavar," which, apart from the ordinary objects of an author, was written chiefly with a view of illustrating what was deemed the most romantic and poetical chapter in the history of the New World; but partly, also, with the hope of calling the attention of Americans to a portion of the continent which it required little political forecast to perceive must, before many years, assume a new and particular interest to the people of the United States. It was a part of the original design to prepare the way for a history of Mexico, which the author meditated; a design which was, however, soon abandoned. There was then little interest really felt in Mexican affairs, which presented, as they have always done since the first insurrection of Hidalgo, a scene of desperate confusion, not calculated to elevate republican institutions in the opinions of the world. Even the events in Texas had not, at that time, attracted much attention. Mexico was, in the popular notion, regarded as a part of *South America*, the *alter ego* almost of Peru, – beyond the world, and the concerns of Americans. There was little thought, and less talk, of "the halls of the Montezumas;" and the ancient Mexican history was left to entertain school-boys, in the pages of Robertson.

"Calavar" effected its more important purpose, as far as could be expected of a mere work of fiction. The revolution of Texas, which dismembered from the mountain republic the finest and fairest portion of her territory, attracted the eyes and speculations of the world; and from that moment, Mexico has been an object of regard. The admirable history of Prescott has rendered all readers familiar with the ancient annals of the Conquest; and now, with an American army thundering at the gates of the capital, and an American general resting his republican limbs on the throne of Guatimozin and the Spanish Viceroy, it may be believed that a more earnest and universal attention is directed towards Mexico than was ever before bestowed, since the time when Cortes conquered upon the same field of fame where Scott is now victorious. There is, indeed, a remarkable parallel between the invasions of the two great captains. There is the same route up the same difficult and lofty mountains; the same city, in the same most magnificent of valleys, as the object of attack; the same petty forces, and the same daring intrepidity leading them against millions of enemies, fighting in the heart of their own country; and finally, the same desperate fury of unequal armies contending in mortal combat on the causeways and in the streets of Mexico. We might say, perhaps, that there is the same purpose of conquest: but we do not believe that the American people aim at, or desire, the subjugation of Mexico.

"Calavar" was designed to describe the first campaign, or first year, of Cortes in Mexico. It was written with an attempt at the strictest historical accuracy compatible with the requisitions of romance; and as it embraces, in a narrow compass, and – what was at least meant to be – a popular form, a picture of the war of 1520, which so many will like to contrast with that of 1847, the publishers have thought that its revival, in a cheap edition, would prove acceptable to the reading community. The republication has, indeed, been suggested and called for by numerous persons desirous to obtain copies of the book, which has been for some time out of print.

The revival of the romance might have furnished its author an opportunity to remove many faults which, he is sensible, exist in it. Long dialogues might have been contracted, heavy descriptions lightened or expunged, and antiquated phraseology modernized, with undoubted benefit. But, after a respectful consideration of all critical suggestions, friendly or unfriendly, the author has not thought

it of consequence to attempt the improvement of a work of so trivial and evanescent a character; and he accordingly commits it again to the world precisely as it was first committed, with all its faults – would he could say, its merits – unchanged; satisfied with any fate that may befall it, or any reception it may meet, which should either imply its having given some little pleasure, or imparted some little information, to its readers.

R. M. B.

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INTRODUCTION

Nature, and the memory of strange deeds of renown have flung over the valley of Mexico a charm more romantic than is attached to many of the vales of the olden world for though historic association and the spell of poetry have consecrated the borders of Lemman and the laurel groves of Tempe, and Providence has touched both with the finger of beauty, yet does our fancy, in either, dwell upon objects which are not so much the adjuvants of romance as of sentiment; in both, we gather food rather for feeling than imagination, – we live over thoughts which are generated by memory, and our conceptions are the reproductions of experience. But poetry has added no plenary charm, history has cast no over-sufficient light on the haunts of Montezuma; on the Valley of Lakes, though filled with the hum of life, the mysteries of backward years are yet brooding; and the marvels of human destiny are whispered to our ears, in the sigh of every breeze, – in the rustling of every tree which it stirs on the shore, and in the sound of every ripple it curls up on the lake. One chapter only of its history (and that how full of marvels!) has been written, or preserved; the rest is a blank: a single chain of vicissitudes, – a few consecutive links in the concatenation of events, – have escaped; the rest is a secret, strange, captivating, and pregnant of possibilities. This is the proper field for romantic musings.

So, at least, thought a traveller, – or, to speak more strictly, a rambler, whose idle wanderings from place to place, directed by ennui or whim, did not deserve the name of travels, – who sat, one pleasant evening of October, 183-, on the hill of Chapoltepec, regarding the spectacle which is disclosed from the summit of that fair promontory.

The hum of the city came faintly to his ear; the church-towers flung their long shadows over the gardened roofs; the wildfowl flapped the white wing over the distant sheets of water, which stretched, in a chain, from Chalco to San Cristobal; the shouts of Indian boatmen were heard, at a distance, on the canal of La Viga, and the dark forms of others, trotting along the causeway that borders it, were seen returning to their huts among the *Chinampas*. Quiet stole over the valley; the lizard crept to his hole; the bat woke up in the ruined chambers of the viceroy's palace, that crowns the hill of Chapoltepec, or started away from his den among the leaves of those mossy, majestic, and indeed colossal, cypresses, which, at its base, overshadow the graves of Aztec kings and sultanas. At last, the vesper-bells sounded in the city, and the sun stooped under the western hills, leaving his rays still glittering, with such hues as are only seen in a land of mountains, on the grand peaks of Popocatepetl and the White Woman, the farthest but yet the noblest summits of all in that girdle of mountain magnificence, which seems to shut out Mexico from the rest of the world.

As these bright tints faded into a mellow and harmonious lustre, casting a sort of radiant obscurity over vale and mountain, lake and steeple, the thoughts of the wanderer (for the romance of the spectacle and the hour had pervaded his imagination,) crept back to the ages of antiquity and to those mystic races of men, the earliest of the land, who had built their cities and dug their graves in this Alpine paradise, now possessed by a race of whom their world had not dreamed. He gazed and mused, until fancy peopled the scene around him with spectral life, and his spirit's eye was opened on spectacles never more to be revealed to the corporeal organ. It opened on the day when the land was a wilderness, shaking for the first time under the foot of a stranger; and he beheld, as in a vision, the various emigrations and irruptions into the vale, of men born in other climates. They came like the tides of ocean, and, as such, passed away, – like shadows, and so departed; the history of ages was compressed into the representation of a moment, and an hundred generations, assembled together as one people, rushed by in successive apparitions.

First, over the distant ridges of Nochistongo, there stole, or seemed to steal, a multitude of men, worn with travel, yet bearing idols on their backs, in whose honour, for now they had reached their land of promise, they built huge pyramids, to outlive their gods and themselves; and, scattering

over the whole plain, covered it at once with cornfields and cities. The historian (for this unknown race brought with it science as well as religion,) sat him in the grove, to trace the pictured annals of his age; the astronomer ascended to the tower, to observe the heavens, and calculate the seasons, of the new land; while the multitude, forgetting the austere climes of their nativity, sat down in peace and joy, under the vines and fruit-trees that made their place of habitation so beautiful. Thus they rested and multiplied, until the barbarians of the hills, – the earlier races, and perhaps the aborigines of the land, – descended to take counsel of their wisdom, and follow in the ways of civilization. Then came a cloud, bringing a pestilence, in whose hot breath the rivers vanished, the lakes turned to dust and the mountains to volcanoes, the trees crackled and fell as before a conflagration, and men lay scorched with the leaves, as thick and as dead, on the plain; and the few who had strength to fly, betook themselves to the hills and the seaside, to forget their miseries and their arts, and become barbarians. – Thus began, and thus ended, in Mexico, the race of *Toltecs*, the first and the most civilized of which Mexican hieroglyphics, – the legacy of this buried people to their successors, – have preserved the memory.

But the rains fell at last, the lakes filled, the forests grew; and other tribes, – the *Chechemecs* and *Acolhuacans*, with others, many in number and strangers to each other, – coming from the same distant North, but bringing not the civilization of the first pilgrims, sat in their seats, and mingling together into one people, began, at last, after long seasons of barbarism, to emerge from the gloom of ignorance, and acquire the arts, and understand the destinies of man.

To these came, by the same trodden path, a herd of men, ruder than any who had yet visited the southern valleys, — *Aztecs* in family, but called by their neighbours and foes, *Nahuatlacas*, or People of the Lakes, – consisting of many tribes, the chief of which was that which bore upon a throne of bulrushes an image of the god Mexitli, the Destroyer, from whom, in its days of grandeur, it took its name. From this crew of savages, the most benighted and blood-thirsty, and, at first, the feeblest of all, – so base that history presents them as the only nation of bondmen known to the region of Anahuac, and so sordid that, in the festivals of religion, they could provide for their deity only the poor offering of a knife and flower, – fated now to fight the battles of their task-masters, and now condemned to knead the bread of independence from the fetid plants and foul reptiles of the lake; – from this herd of barbarians, grew, as it seemed, in a moment's space, the vast, the powerful, and, in many respects, the magnificent empire of the Montezumas. In his mind's eye, the stranger could perceive the salt Tezcuco, restored to its ancient limits, beating again upon the porphyry hill on which he sat, and the City of the Island, with her hundred temples and her thousand towers, rising from the shadows, and heaving again with the impulses of nascent civilization. It was at this moment, when the travail of centuries was about to be recompensed, when the carved statue, the work of many successive Pygmalions, was beginning to breathe the breath, and feel the instincts of moral animation, that a mysterious destiny trampled upon the little spark, and crushed to atoms the body it was warming. From the eastern hills came the voice of the Old World – the sound of the battle-trumpet; the smoke of artillery rolled over the lake; and, in a moment more, the shout of conquest and glory was answered by the groan of a dying nation.

As this reverie ended in the brain of the stranger, and the conqueror and the captive of the vision vanished away together, he began to contrast in his mind the past condition of the new world with the present, and particularly of those two portions, which, at the time of their invasion, had outlived the barbarism of nature, and were teeming with the evidences of incipient greatness. As for this fair valley of Mexico, there was scarcely an object either of beauty or utility, the creation of Christian wants or Christian taste, to be seen, for which his memory could not trace a rival, or superior, which existed in the day of paganism. The maize fields, the maguey plantations, the orchards and flower-gardens, that beautify the plains and sweeping slopes, – these were here, long ages ago, with the many villages that glisten among them, – all indeed but the white church and steeple; the lakes which are now noisome pools, – were they not lovelier when they covered the pestilential fens, and when the rose-garden

floated over their blue surface? The long rows of trees marking the line of the great *Calzadas*, or causeways, the approaches to Mexico, but poorly supply the place of aboriginal groves, the haunts of the doe and the centzontli, while the calzadas themselves, stretching along over bog and morass, have entirely lost the charm they possessed, when washed, on either side, by rolling surges; even the aqueducts, though they sprang not from arch to arch, over the valley, as at the present time, were not wanting; and where the church spires of the metropolis pierce the heaven, the sacred tabernacles of the gods rose from the summits of pyramids. The changes in the physical spectacle among the valleys of Peru were perhaps not much greater; but what happy mutations in the character and condition of man, what advance of knowledge and virtue, had repaid the havoc and horror which were let loose, three hundred years ago, on the lands of Montezuma and the Incas? The question was one to which the rambler could not conceive an answer without pain.

'The ways of Providence,' he murmured, 'are indeed inscrutable; the designs of Him who layeth the corner-stone and buildeth up the fabric of destiny, unfathomable. Two mighty empires, – the only states which seemed to be leading the new world to civilization, – were broken, and at an expense of millions of lives, barbarously destroyed; and for what purpose? to what good end? How much better or happier are the present races of Peru and Mexico, than the past? Hope speaks in the breath of fancy – time may, perhaps, teach us the lesson of mystery; and these magnificent climates, now given up, a second time, to the sway of man in his darkest mood, – to civilized savages and Christian pagans, – may be made the seats of peace and wisdom; and perhaps, if mankind should again descend into the gloom of the middle ages, their inhabitants will preserve, as did the more barbarous nations in all previous retrogressions, the brands from which to rekindle the torches of knowledge, and thus be made the engines of the reclamation of a world.'

The traveller muttered the conclusion of his speculations aloud, and, insensibly to himself, in the Spanish tongue, totally unconscious of the presence of a second person, until made aware of it by a voice exclaiming suddenly, as if in answer, and in the same language —

"Right! very right! *pecador de mi!* sinner that I am, that *I* should not have thought it, for the honour of God and my country!"

The voice was sharp, abrupt, and eager, but very quavering. The stranger turned, and perceived that the words came from a man dressed in a long loose surtout or gown of black texture, none of the newest, with a hat of Manilla grass, umbrageous as an oak-top. He looked old and infirm; his person was very meager; his cheeks were of a mahogany hue, and hollow, and the little hair that stirred over them in the evening breeze, was of a sable silvered: his eyes were large, restless, exceedingly bright, and irascible. He carried swinging in his hand, without seeming to use it much, (for, in truth, his gait was too irregular and capricious to admit such support,) a staff, to the head of which was tied a bunch of flowers; and he bore under his arm, as they seemed to the unpractised eye of the observer, a bundle of books, a cluster of veritable quartos, so antique and worn, that the string knotted round each, seemed necessary to keep together its dilapidated pages. The whole air of the man was unique, but not mean; and the traveller did not doubt, at the first glance, that he belonged to some inferior order of ecclesiastics, and was perhaps the curate of a neighbouring village.

"Right! you have said the truth!" he continued, regarding the traveller eagerly, and, as the latter thought, with profound veneration; "I must speak with you, very learned stranger, for I perceive you are a philosopher. Very great thanks to you! may you live a thousand years! In a single word, you have revealed the secret that has been the enigma of a long life, made good the justice of heaven, and defended the fame of my country. God be thanked! I am grateful to your wisdom: you speak like a saint: you are a philosopher!"

The traveller stared with surprise on the speaker; but though thus moved by the abruptness of the address, and somewhat inclined to doubt its seriousness, there was something so unusual in the mode and quality of the compliment as to mollify any indignation which he might have felt rising in his breast.

"Father," said he, "reverend father – for I perceive you are one of the clergy – "

"The poor licentiate, Cristobal Johualicahuatzin, curate of the parish of San Pablo de Chinchaluca," interrupted the ecclesiastic meekly, and in fact with the greatest humility.

"Then, indeed, very excellent and worthy father Cristobal," resumed the stranger, courteously, "though I do not pretend to understand you – "

The padre raised his head; his meekness vanished; he eyed the traveller with a sharp and indignant frown:

"*Gachupin!*" he cried; "you are a man with two souls: you are wise and you are foolish, and you speak bad Spanish! – Why do you insult me?"

The stranger stared at his new acquaintance with fresh amazement.

"Insult you, father!" he exclaimed. "I declare to you, I have, this moment, woke out of a revery; and I scarcely know what you have said or what I have answered, or what you are saying and what I am answering. If I have offended you, I ask your pardon."

"Enough! right!" said the curate, with an air of satisfaction; "you are a philosopher; you are right. You were in a revery; you have done me no wrong. I have intruded upon your musings, – I beg your pardon. I thank you very heartily. You have instructed my ignorance, and appeased my repining; you have taught me the answer to a vast and painful riddle; and now I perceive why Providence hath given over my native land to seeming ruin, and permitted it to become a place of dust and sand, of dry-rot and death. The day of darkness shall come again, – it is coming; man merges again into gloom, and now we fall into the age of stone, when the hearts of men shall be as flint. This then shall be the valley of resuscitation, after it is first *plenus ossibus*, full of skeletons, an ossuary – a place of moral ossification. Here, then, shall the wind blow, the voice sound, the spirit move, the bone unite to his bone, the sinew come with the flesh, and light and knowledge, animating the mass into an army, send it forth to conquer the world; – not as an army of flesh, with drum and trump, sword and spear, banner and cannon, to kill and destroy, to ravage and depopulate; but as a phalanx of angels, with healing on their wings, to harmonize and enlighten, to pacify and adorn. Yes, you have taught me this, excellent sage! and you shall know my gratitude: for great joy is it to the child of Moteuczoma, to know there shall be an end to this desolation, this anarchy, this horror!"

Vigilare metu exanimis, noctesque diesque
Formidare: —

Came I into the world to watch in sorrow and fear for ever? *Hijo mio!* give me thy hand; I love thee. The vale of Anahuac is not deformed for nothing; Christian man has ruined it, but not for a long season!"

The Cura delivered this rhapsody with extreme animation; his eye kindled, he spoke with a rapid and confused vehemence; and the stranger began to doubt the stability of his understanding. He flung his bundle to the earth, and grasped the hand of the philosopher, who, until this moment, was ignorant of the depth of his own wisdom. While still in perplexity, unable to comprehend the strange character, or indeed the strange fancies to which he had given tongue, the padre looked around him with complacency on the scene, over which a tropical moon was rising to replace the luminary of day, and continued, with a gravity which puzzled as much as did his late vivacity, —

"It is very true; I regret it no longer, but it cannot be denied: The cutting through yonder hill of Nochistongo has given the last blow in a system of devastation; the canal of Huehuetoca has emptied the golden pitcher of Moteuczoma. It has converted the valley into a desert, and will depopulate it. – Men cannot live upon salt."

"A desert, father!"

"*Hijo mio!* do you pretend to deny it?" cried the Cura, picking up his bundle, and thumping it with energy. "I aver, and I will prove it to your satisfaction, out of these books, which – But hold!

Are you a spy? will you betray me? No; you are not of Mexico: the cameo on your breast bears the device of stars, the symbol of intellectual as well as political independence. I reverence that flag; I saw it, when your envoy, attacked by an infuriated mob, in his house in yonder very city, (I stole there in spite of them!) sprang upon the balcony, and waved it abroad in the street. Frenzy vanished at the sight: it was the banner of man's friend! – No! you are no fool with a free arm, a licentious tongue, and a soul in chains. Therefore, you shall look into these pages, concealed for years from the jealousy of misconstruction, and the penal fires of intolerance; and they shall convince you, that this hollow of the mountain, as it came from the hands of God, and as it was occupied by the children of nature, was the loveliest of all the vales of the earth; and that, since Christian man has laid upon it his innovating finger, its beauty has vanished, its charm decayed; and it has become a place fitting only for a den of thieves, a refuge for the snake and the water-newt, the wild-hog and the vulture!"

"To my mind, father," said the American, no longer amazed at the extravagant expressions of the ecclesiastic, for he was persuaded his wits were disordered, "to my mind, it is still the most charming of valleys; and were it not that the folly and madness of its inhabitants, the contemptible ambition of its rulers, and the servile supineness of its people, – in fine, the general disorganization of all its elements, both social and political, have made it a sort of Pandemonium, – a spot wherein splendour and grandeur (at least the possibilities and rudiments of grandeur,) are mixed with all the causes of decline and perdition, I should be fain to dream away my life on the borders of its blue lakes, and under the shadow of its volcanic barriers."

"True, true, true! you have said it!" replied the curate, eagerly; "the ambition of public men; the feverish servility of the people, forgetful of themselves, of their own rights and interests, and ever anxious to yoke themselves to the cars of demagogues, to the wires wherewith they may be worked as puppets, and giving their blood to aggrandize these – the natural enemies of order and justice, of reason and tranquillity; is not this enough to demoralize and destroy? What people is like mine? Wo for us! The bondmen of the old world wake from sleep and live, while we, in the blessed light of sunshine, wrap the mantle round our eyes, sleep, and perish! Revolution after revolution, frenzy after frenzy! and what do we gain? By revolution, other nations are liberated, but we, by revolution, are enslaved. 'Nil medium est' – is there no happy mean?"

"It is true," said the American. "But let us not speak of this: it is galling to be able to inveigh against folly without possessing the medicament for its cure."

"Thou art an American of the North," said the Cura; "thy people are wise, thy rulers are servants, and you are happy! Why, then, art thou here? I thought thee a sage, but, I perceive, thou hast the rashness of youth. Art thou here to learn to despise thine own institutions? Why dost thou remain? the death-wind comes from the southern lakes" – (in fact, at this moment, the breeze from the south, rising with the moon, brought with it a mephitic odour, the effluvium of a bog, famous, even in Aztec days, as the breath of pestilence;) "the death-wind breathes on thee: even as this will infect thy blood, when it has entered into thy nostrils, disordering thy body, until thou learnest to loathe all that seems to thee now, in this scenery, to be so goodly and fair; so will the gusts of anarchy, rising from a distempered republic, disease thy imagination, until thou comest to be disgusted with the yet untainted excellence of thine own institutions, because thou perceivest the evils of their perversion. Arise, and begone; remain no longer with us; leave this land, and bear with thee to thine own, these volumes, – the poor remnants of another Sibylline library, – which will teach thee to appreciate and preserve, even as thy soul's ransom, the pure and admirable frame of government, which a beneficent power has suffered you to enjoy."

"And what, then, are these?" demanded the traveller, curiously, laying his hand on the bundle, "which can teach Americans to admire the beauty of a republic, and yet are not given to thine own countrymen?"

"They are," said the curate, "the fruits of years of reflection and toil, of deep research and profound speculation. They contain a history of Mexico, which, when they were perfect, that is, before

my countrymen," (and here the Cura began to whisper, and look about him in alarm, as if dreading the approach of listeners,) – "before my countrymen were taught to fear them and to destroy, contained the chronicles of the land, from the time that the Toltecas were exiled from *Huehuetapallan*, more than twelve hundred years ago, down to the moment when Augustin climbed up to the throne, which Hidalgo tore from the Cachupins. A history wherein," continued the padre, with great complacency, "I flatter myself, though Mexicans have found much to detest, Americans will discover somewhat to approve."

"What is it," said the rambler, "which your people have found so objectionable?"

"Listen," said the padre, "and you shall be informed. In me," – here he paused, and surveyed his acquaintance with as much majesty as he could infuse into his wasted figure and hollow countenance, – "in me you behold a descendant of Moteuczoma Xocojotzin."

"Moteuczoma what?" exclaimed the traveller.

"Are you so ignorant, then?" demanded the padre, in a heat, "that you must be told who was Moteuczoma Xocojotzin, that is, *the younger*, – the second of that name who reigned over Mexico? – the very magnificent and unfortunate emperor so basely decoyed into captivity, so ruthlessly oppressed and, as I may say, by a figure of speech, (for, literally, it is not true) so truculently slain, by the illustrious Don Hernan Cortes, the conqueror of Mexico? Perhaps you are also ignorant of the great names of Tizoc, of Xocotzin, and of Ixtlilxochitl?"

"I have no doubt," replied the American, with courteous humility, "that in the histories of Mexico, which I have ever delighted to read, – in the books of De Solis, of Clavigero, of Bernal Diaz del Castillo, and especially in that of Dr. Robertson, – I have met these illustrious names; but you must allow, that, to one ignorant of the language, and of the mode of pronouncing such conglomerated grunts, it must be extremely difficult, if not wholly impossible, to rivet them in the memory."

The curate snatched up his bundle, and surveyed the stranger with a look in which it was hard to tell whether anger or contempt bore the greater sway.

"De Solis! Diaz! Clavigero! Robertson!" he at last exclaimed, irefully. "*Basta! demasiado?* What a *niño*, a little child, a *pobre Yankee*, have I fallen upon! That I should waste my words on a man who studies Mexican history out of the books of these jolterheads!"

The padre was about to depart, without bestowing another word on the offender. The American was amused at the ready transition of the curate from deep reverence to the most unbounded contempt. He was persuaded the wits of the poor father were unsettled, and felt there was the greater need to humour and appease him: and, besides, he was curious to discover what would be the end of the adventure.

"Father," said he, with composure, "before you condemn me for acquiring my little knowledge from these books, you should put it in my power to read better." – The padre looked back. – "What information should be expected from incompetent writers? from jolterheads? When I have perused the histories of father Cristobal, it will then be *my* fault, if I am found ignorant of the names of his imperial ancestors."

"*Ay de mi!*" said the curate, striking his forehead; "why did I not think of that before? *Santos santísimos!* I am not so quick-witted as I was before. I could forgive you more readily, had you not named to me that infidel Scotchman, who calls the superb Moteuczoma a savage, and all the Tlatoani, the great princes, and princesses, the people and all, barbarians! But what more could you expect of a heretic? I forgive you, my son — *you* are a Christian?"

"A Christian, father; but not of the Catholic faith."

"You will be damned!" said the curate, hastily.

"A point of mere creed, perhaps I should say, mere form – "

"Say nothing about it; form or creed, ceremony or canon, you are in the way to be lost. Open your ears, unbind your eyes – hear, see, and believe! – Poor, miserable darkened creature! how can

your heretical understanding be made to conceive and profit by the great principles of philosophy, when it is blind to the truths of religion?"

"Reverend padre," said the traveller, drily, "my people are a people of heretics, and yours of Catholic believers. Which has better understood, or better practised, the principles of the philosophy you affect to admire?"

The padre smote his forehead a second time: "The sneer is, in this case, just! The sin of the enlightened is greater than the crime of the ignorant, and so is the punishment: the chosen people of God were chastised with frequent bondage, and finally with expatriation and entire dispersion, for crimes, which, in heathen nations, were punished only with wars and famine. But let us not waste time in argument: as babes may be made the organs of wisdom, so may heretics be suffered as the instruments of worldly benefaction. What thou sayest, is true; unbelievers as ye are, ye will comprehend and be instructed by truths, which, in this land, would be misconceived and opposed; and from you may the knowledge you gain, be reflected back on my own people. In these books, which I commit to you for a great purpose, you will learn who were those worthies of whom I spoke. You will perceive how Ixtlilxochitl, the king of Tezcuco, was descended from the house that gave birth to Moteuczoma. This illustrious name inherit I from my mother. With its glory, it has conferred the penalty to be suspected, opposed, and trampled. Three historians of the name, my ancestors, have already written in vain; jealousy has locked up their works in darkness, in the veil of manuscript; the privilege of chronicling and perverting the history of the land is permitted only to Spaniards, to strangers, to Gachupins. Twenty years since, and more, the books I composed, wherein the truth was told, and the injustice of Spanish writers made manifest, were condemned by ignorance and bigotry to such flames as consumed, at Tezcuco, all the native chronicles of Anahuac. But what was written in my books, was also recorded in the brain; fire could not be put to my memory. Twenty years of secret labour have repaired the loss. Behold! here is my history; I give it to you. – My enemies must be content with the ashes!"

The padre rubbed his hands with exultation, as the traveller surveyed the bundle.

"Why should you fear a similar fate for these volumes, now?" said the latter. "Times are changed."

"The times, but not the people. Hide them, let no man see them; or the pile will be kindled again; all will be lost – I cannot repair the loss a second time, for now I am old! Five years have I borne them with me, night and day, seeking for some one cunning and faithful, wise like thyself, to whom to commit them. I have found thee; thou art the man; I am satisfied: *buen provecho*, much good may they do you, – not you only, but your people, – not your people alone, but the world! Affection for country is love of mankind; true patriotism is philanthropy. – Five years have I borne them with me, by night and by day."

"Really, I think that this betokened no great fear for their safety."

The padre laughed. "Though the Gachupin and the bigot would rob me of a Spanish dissertation, yet neither would envy me the possession of a few rolls of hieroglyphics."

As he spoke, he knelt upon the ground, untied the string that secured one of the apparent volumes, and, beginning to unfold the MS., as one would a very nicely secured traveller's map, displayed, in the moonlight, a huge sheet of maguey paper, emblazoned in gaudy colours with all kinds of inexplicable devices. As he exhibited his treasure, he looked up for approbation to the American. The '*pobre Yankee*' surveyed him with a humorous look:

"Father," said he, "you have succeeded to admiration, under this goodly disguise, not only in concealing your wisdom from the penetration of your countrymen, but, as I think, the whole world."

The padre raised his finger to his nose very significantly, saying, with a chuckle of delight, – the delight of a diseased brain in the success of its cunning, —

"This time, I knew I should throw dust in their eyes, even though they might demand, for their satisfaction, to look into my work. You perceive, that this volume, done up after the true manner of

ancient Mexican books, unrolls from either end. The first pages, and the last, of each volume, contain duplicates of the first and the last chapters, done in Mexican characters: the rest is in Spanish, and, I flatter myself, in very choice Spanish. *Hoc ego rectè*— I knew what I was about. — One does not smuggle diamonds in sausages, without stuffing in some of the minced meat. — Here is the jewel!"

So saying, and spreading the sheet at its full length, so as to discover his hidden records, the padre rose to his feet, and began to dance about with exultation.

"And what am *I* to do with these volumes?" said the traveller, after pondering awhile over the manuscripts.

"What are you to do with them? Dios mio! are you so stupid? Take them, hide them in your bosom, as you would the soul of some friend you were smuggling into paradise. Leave this land forthwith, on any pretence; bear them with you; translate them into your own tongue, and let them be given to the world. If they do not, after they have received the seal of your approbation, make their way back to this land, they will, at least, serve some few of the many objects, for which they were written: they will set the character of my great ancestors in its true light, and teach the world to think justly of the unfortunate people from whom I have the honour to be descended; and, in addition, they will open the eyes of men to some of the specks of barbarism which yet sully their own foreheads. As for my countrymen, were it even possible they could be persuaded to spare these pages, and to read them, they would read them in vain. They are a thousand years removed from civilization, and the wisdom of this book would be to them as folly. The barbaric romance which loiters about the brains even of European nations, is the pith and medulla of a Mexican head. The poetry of bloodshed, the sentiment of renown, — the first and last passion, and the true test, of the savage state, — are not yet removed from us. We are not yet civilized up to the point of seeing that reason reprobates, human happiness denounces, and God abhors, the splendour of contention. Your own people — the happiest and most favoured of modern days, — are, perhaps, not so backward."

The heretic sighed. — The padre went on, and with the smile of generosity, — tying, at the same time, the string that secured the volume, and knotting it again into the bundle.

"The profits which may accrue from the publication, I freely make over to you, as some recompense for the trouble of translation, and the danger you run in assuming the custody. Danger, I say, — heaven forbid I should not acquaint you, that the discovery of these volumes on your person, besides insuring their speedy and irretrievable destruction, will expose you to punishment, perhaps to the flames which will be kindled for them; and this the more readily, that you are an unbeliever. — Pray, my son, listen to me; suffer me to convert you. Alas! you shake your head! — What a pity, I am compelled to entrust this great commission to a man who refuses to be a Christian!"

"Buen padre, let us say nothing about that: judge me not by the creed I profess, but by the acts I perform. Let us despatch this business: the moon is bright, but the air is raw and unwholesome. I would willingly do your bidding, not doubting that the world will be greatly advantaged thereby. But, father, here is the difficulty: — To do justice to your composition, I should, myself, possess the skill of an author; but, really, I feel my incompetency — I am no bookmaker."

"And am I?" said the descendant of Moteuczoma, indignantly; "I am an historian!"

"I crave your pardon; — but *I* am not."

"And who said you were?" demanded the historian, with contempt. "Do I expect of you the qualifications or the labours of an historian? Do I ask you to write a book? to rake for records in dusty closets and wormy shelves? to decypher crabbed hands and mouldered prints? to wade through the fathoms of stupidity, until your brain turns to dough, and your eyes to pots of glue? to gather materials with the labour of a pearl-diver, and then to digest and arrange, to methodise and elucidate, with the patient martyrdom of an almanac-maker? Who asks you this? Do I look for a long head, an inspired brain? a wit, a genius? *Ni por sueño*, — by no means. I ask you to read and render, — to translate; — to do the tailor's office, and make my work a new coat! Any one can do this!"

"Father," said the traveller, "your arguments are unanswerable; do me the favour to send, or to bring, your production to the city, to the Calle – "

"Send! bring! *Se burla vm.?*" cried the padre, looking aghast. "Do you want to ruin me? Know, that by the sentence of the archbishop and the command of the viceroy, I am interdicted from the city: and know that I would sooner put my soul into the keeping of a parrot, than my books into the hands of a messenger!"

"A viceroy, did you say, father? It has been many long years since a king's ape has played his delegated antics in Mexico. To please you, however, I will bear the sacred treasure in my own hands; earnestly desiring you, notwithstanding your fears, which are now groundless, and the prohibition, which must be at this period invalid, to do me the favour of a visit, in person, as soon as may suit your conveniency; inasmuch as there are many things I esteem needful to be – "

The padre had seized on the hands of the speaker, in testimony of his delight; but before the latter had concluded his discourse, he was interrupted by a voice at a distance, calling, as it seemed, on the Cura; for this worthy, starting with fear, and listening a moment, suddenly took to his heels, and before the traveller could give vent to his surprise, was hidden among the shadows of the cypress trees.

"May I die," said the philosopher, in no little embarrassment, "but this lunatic Cura has left me to lug away his lucubrations, – his hieroglyphical infants, for which I am to make new coats, – on my own shoulders! Well! I can but carry them to the city, and seek some means of restoring them to his friends, or commit them to a more fitting depository. Pray heaven I meet no drunken Indian, or debauched soldado on my way."

By great good fortune, he was able, in a few days, with the assistance of a friendly Mexican, to solve the secret of the padre's confidence.

"You have seen him then?" said the excellent Señor Don Andres Santa-Maria de Arcaboba, laughing heartily at the grave earnestness with which his heretical friend inquired after the eccentric padre. "He offered you his hieroglyphics? Ah, I perceive! No man passes scot-free the crazy Cura. Ever his books in his hand, much praise with the offer, and seven times seven maledictions when you refuse his bantlings."

"He *is* crazy, then?"

"*Demonios!* were you long finding it out? Ever since the old archbishop burned his first heathenish volumes, he has done naught but – "

"I beg your pardon. – Burn his books? – the old archbishop? – Pray enlighten me a little on the subject of the good father's history.

"'Tis done in a moment," said Don Andres; "the only wonder is that he did not himself give you the story; that being, commonly, the prelude to his petition. The mother of Don Cristobal was an Indian *damisela*, delighting in the euphonical cognomen of Ixtlilxochitl; a name, which, I am told, belonged to some old pagan king or other, the Lord knows who – as for myself, I know nothing about it. But this set the padre mad, or, what's the same thing, it made him an historian. – 'Tis a silly thing to trouble one's noddle about the concerns of our granddads: let them sleep! rest to their bones — *Así sea!* – They made him a licenciado, and then Cura of some hacienda or other, out among the hills – I know nothing about it. He wrote a book, in which he proved that the old heathen Montezuma, the great Cacique, was a saint, and Hernan Cortes, who conquered the land, a sinner. It may be so — *Quien sabe?* who knows? who cares? This was before the revolution – that is, before the first: (we have had five hundred since; – I never counted them.) Somehow, the viceroy Vanegas took a dislike to the book, and so did the archbishop. They set their heads together, got the good old fathers of the Brotherhood – (We have no Brotherhood now, – neither religious nor social: every man is his own brother, as the king says in the English play. – Did you ever read Calderon?) They got the old fathers to vote it dangerous, – I suppose, because they did not understand it. So they burned it, and commanded Johualicahuatzin – (that's another Indian king – so he calls himself. – His father was the Señor Marhojo, a creole, a lieutenant in the viceroy's horse, a very worthy Christian, who was hanged

somewhere, for sedition. But Cristobal writes after his mother's name, as being more royal.) – What was I saying? Oh, yes! – They ordered the licentiate back to his hacienda. Then, what became of him, the lord knows; I don't. – Then came Hidalgo, the valiant priest of Dolores, with his raggamuffin patriots, – (I don't mean any reflection, being a patriot myself, though no fighter; but Hidalgo had a horrid crew about him!) Where was I? Oh, ay, – Hidalgo came to knock the city about our ears; and Cristobal, being seized with a fit of blood-thirstiness, joins me the gang. They say, he came with an old sabre of flint – I don't know the name; it belonged to some king in the family. Then Calleja, whom they made viceroy – the devil confound him! (He cut my uncle's throat, with some fourteen thousand others, at Guanaxuato, one day, to save powder.) – Calleja chased Hidalgo to Aculco, and, there, he beat him. Cristobal's brother (he *had* a brother, a very fine young fellow, a patriot major;) was killed at Cristobal's side; Cristobal was knocked on the head, – somebody said, with his own royal weapon: – I don't know, – where's the difference? They broke his skull, and took him prisoner. *Y pues?* what then? Being a notorious crazy man, and very savagely mauled, they did not hang him. Ever since, he has been madder than ever. He writes histories, and, to save them from viceroys, (he takes all our presidents for viceroys: to my mind, they *are*; but that's nothing. You know Bustamente? a mighty great man: Santa Anna will beat him – but don't say so!) Well, to save his books from the president-viceroys, or viceroy-presidents, Cristobal offers them to every body he meets, with a petition to take them over the seas and publish them. – That's all! – The Indians at the hacienda love him, and take care of him. – Ha, ha! he caught you, did he? What did he say?"

"He gave me his books," said the traveller.

"*Fuego!* you took them? Ha, ha! now will the poor padre die happy!"

"I will return them to his relations."

"Relations! they are all in heaven; he is the last of the Ixtlilxochitls! Ha, ha! I beg your pardon, amigo mio! I beg your pardon; but if you offer them to any body, never believe me, but folks will take you for Cristobal the Second, *el segundo maniatico*, or some one he has hired to do the work of donation. Ha, ha! cielo mio, pity me! say nothing about it; – burn them."

"At least, let us look over them."

"*Olla podrida!* look over a beggar's back! a pedler's sack! or a dictionary! – Any thing reasonable. Burn them; or take them to America, to your North, and deposit them in a museum, as the commonplace books of Montezuma. *Vamos; que me manda vm.?* will you ride to the Alameda? – Pobre Cristobal! he will die happy – "

The traveller returned to his own land: he bore with him the books of Cristobal. Twenty times did he essay to make examination of their contents, and twenty times did he yawn, in mental abandonment, over their chaotic pages, – not, indeed, that they seemed so *very* incoherent in style and manner, but because the cautious historian, as it seemed, with a madman's subtlety, had hit upon the device of so scattering and confusing the pages, that it was next to impossible that any one, after reading the first, should discover the clue to the second. Each volume, as has been hinted, consisted of a single great sheet, folded up in the manner of a pocket map; both sides were very carefully written over, the paragraphs clustered in masses or pages, but without numbers; and, but for the occurrence, here and there, of pages of hideous hieroglyphics, such as were never seen in a Christian book, the whole did not seem unlike to a printed sheet, before it is carried to the binder. The task of collating and methodising the disjointed portions, required, in the words of the padre himself, the devotedness which he had figured as 'the patient martyrdom of an almanac-maker;' it was entirely too much for the traveller. He laid the riddle aside for future investigation: but Cristobal was not forgotten.

A year afterwards, in reading a Mexican gazette, which had fallen into his hands, his eye wandered to the little corner which appeals so placidly to the feelings of the contemplative, – the place of obituaries. His attention was instantly captivated by a name in larger characters than the others. Was it? could it be? Pobre Cristobal! – '*El Licenciado Cristobal Santiago Marhojo y Ixtlilxochitl, Cura de la Hacienda de Chinchaluca, ordinariamente llamado El Maniatico Historiador*' – . The same! But

what is this? the common immortality of a long paragraph? – The heretic rubbed his eyes. "Several MSS., historical memoirs, relating to the earlier ages of the Aztec monarchy, the work of his own hand, have been discovered; and a lucky accident revealing the expedient which he adopted to render them illegible, or at least inexplicable to common readers, they have been found to be in all respects sane and coherent, the work less of a madman than an eccentric but profound scholar. The pages are arranged like those in the form of the printer; and, being cut by a knife without unfolding – "The heretic started up, and drew forth the long-neglected tomes. – "It is said that a North American, a year ago, received, and carried away, many of the volumes, which the eccentric clergyman was accustomed to offer to strangers. It is hoped, if this should meet his eye – " 'Enough! if thy work be at all readable, departed padre, it shall have the new coat!'

Great was the surprise of the philosopher, when having, at the suggestion of the gazetteer, cut the folded sheet of a volume, he beheld the chaos of history reduced to order. There they were, the annals of Aztecs and Toltecs, of Chechemecs and Chiapanecs, and a thousand other *Ecs*, from the death of Nezahualcojotl, the imperial poet, up to the confusion of tongues. "Here's a nut for the philosophers," quoth the traveller; "but now for a peep at Montezuma! – Poor Cristobal! what a wonderful big book you have made of it!"

How many days and nights were given to the examination of the history, we do not think fit to record. It is enough, that the inheritor of this treasure discovered with satisfaction, that, if Cristobal had been mad, he had been mad after a rule, – dramatically so: he was sane in the right places. A thousand eccentricities were, indeed, imbodyed in his work, the result, doubtless, of a single aberration, in which he persuaded himself that men were yet barbarians, and that civilization, even to the foremost of nations, was yet unknown. Under the influence of this conceit, he was constantly betrayed, for he was a philanthropist, into sharp animadversion upon popular morals; and he stigmatized as vices of the most brutal character, many of those human peculiarities which the world has consented to esteem the highest virtues. In other respects, he was sane, somewhat judicious, and, as far as could be expected in an historian, a teller of the truth.

His work consisted of several divisions; it was, in fact, a series of annals, relating to different epochs. Of these, that volume which treated of the Conquest of Mexico, had the most charms for the traveller; and he thought it would possess the most interest for the world. It was this which he determined to introduce to the public. It differed greatly from common histories in one particular; it descended to minutiae of personal adventure, and was, indeed, as much a general memoir of the great *Conquistadores* as a history of the fall of Tenochtitlan. Of this the writer was himself sensible; the running title of the division, as recorded in his own hand, being, "*Una Cronica de la Conquista de Megico, y Historia verdadera de los Conquistadores, particularmente de esos Caballeros á quienes descuidaron celebrar los Escritores Antiguos. Por Cristobal Johualicahuatzin Santiago Marhojo y Ixtlilxochitl;*" – that is to say, 'A Chronicle of the Conquest of Mexico, and true History of the Conquerors, especially of those Cavaliers who were neglected by the ancient authors.'

The first portion of this, – for there were several, – treated of those events which occurred between the departure of the first army of invasion from Cuba, and its expulsion from Mexico, and this portion the executor of Cristobal resolved to present to the world.

In pursuance of this resolution, he instituted a long and laborious comparison of the MS. with the most authentic printed histories; the result of which was a conviction, (which we beg the reader constantly to bear in mind,) that, although the good padre had introduced, and upon authority which his editor could not discover, the characters of certain worthy cavaliers, of whom he had never heard, the relation, in all other particulars, corresponded precisely with the narratives of the most esteemed writers. The events – the great and the minute alike – of the whole campaign were, in point of fact, identical with those chronicled by the best authors; and in no way did this history differ from others, except in the introduction of the above-mentioned forgotten or neglected cavaliers, such as the knight of Calavar and his faithful esquire, and in the recital of events strictly personal to them. It is true,

the narrative was more diffuse, perhaps we should say, verbose; but Cristobal lived in an age of amplification. It was here alone that the traveller felt himself bound to take liberties with the original; for though the march of mind and the general augmentation of ideas, have made prolixity a common characteristic of each man in his own person, they have not made him more tolerant of it in another. He shaved, therefore, and he cut, he amputated and he compressed; and he felt the joy of an editor, when exercising the hydraulic press of the mind.

This will be excused in him. He expunged as much of the philosophy as he could. The few principles at variance with worldly propensities, which he left in the book, must be referred to another responsibility. – The hallucinations of philanthropy are, at the worst, harmless.

For the title adopted in this, the initial chronicle, he confesses himself answerable. The peculiar appetites of the literary community, the result of intellectual dyspepsia, require and justify empiricism in nomenclature. A good name is sugar and sweetmeats to a bad book. If it should be objected, that he has called the *Historia Verdadera* a romance, let it be remembered, that the world likes romance better than truth, as the booksellers can testify; and that the history of Mexico, under all aspects but that of fiction, is itself – a romance.

Note. – It was said by the learned Scaliger, of the Basque language, 'that those who spoke it were thought to understand one another, – a thing which he did not himself believe.' For fear that the reader, from the specimens of Mexican words he will meet in this history, should imagine that the Mexican tongue was not meant even to be *spoken*, we think fit to apprise him, that all such words are to be pronounced as they would be uttered by a Spaniard. In his language, for example, the G, when before the vowels E and I, the J always, and, in certain cases, the X, have the value of the aspirate. Thus, the name of the city, the chief scene of our history, has been spelled, at different times, *Mexico*, *Mejico*, and *Megico*; yet is always pronounced *May-he-co*. The sound of our W he represents by HU, – as *Huascar*, for *Wascar*; and, indeed, JU has nearly the same sound, as in *Juan*. The names Johualicahuatzin, Anahuac, Xocojotzin, Mexitli, and Chihuahua, pronounced Howalicawatzin, Anawac, Hocohotzin, Meheetlee, and Chewawa, will serve for examples. But this is a thing not to be insisted on, so much as the degree of belief which should be accorded to the relation.

Esto importa poco á nuestro cuento: basta que en la narracion de el, no se salga un punto de la verdad. —*Don Quijote*.

CHAPTER I

In the year of Grace fifteen hundred and twenty, upon a day in the month of May thereof, the sun rose over the islands of the new deep, and the mountains that divided it from an ocean yet unknown, and looked upon the havoc, which, in the name of God, a Christian people were working upon the loveliest of his regions. He had seen, in the revolution of a day, the strange transformations which a few years had brought upon all the climes and races of his love. The standard of Portugal waved from the minarets of the east; a Portuguese admiral swept the Persian Gulf, and bombarded the walls of Ormuz; a Portuguese viceroy held his court on the shores of the Indian ocean; the princes of the eastern continent had exchanged their bracelets of gold for the iron fetters of the invader; and among the odours of the Spice Islands, the fumes of frankincense ascended to the God of their new masters. He passed on his course: the breakers that dashed upon the sands of Africa, were not whiter than the squadrons that rolled among them; the chapel was built on the shore, and under the shadow of the crucifix was fastened the first rivet in the slavery of her miserable children. Then rose he over the blue Atlantic: the new continent emerged from the dusky deep; the ships of discoverers were penetrating its estuaries and straits, from the Isles of Fire even to the frozen promontories of Labrador; and the roar of cannon went up to heaven, mingled with the groans and blood of naked savages. But peace had descended upon the islands of America; the gentle tribes of these paradises of ocean wept in subjection over the graves of more than half their race; hamlets and cities were springing up in their valleys and on their coasts; the culverin bellowed from the fortress, the bell pealed from the monastery; and the civilization and vices of Europe had supplanted the barbarism and innocence of the feeble native. Still, as he careered to the west, new spectacles were displayed before him; the followers of Balboa had built a proud city on the shores, and were launching their hasty barks on the surges of the New Ocean; the hunter of the Fountain of Youth was perishing under the arrows of the wild warriors of Florida, and armed Spaniards were at last retreating before a pagan multitude. One more sight of pomp and of grief awaited him: he rose on the mountains of Mexico; the trumpet of the Spaniards echoed among the peaks; he looked upon the bay of Ulua, and, as his beams stole tremblingly over the swelling current, they fell upon the black hulls and furled canvas of a great fleet riding tranquilly at its moorings. The fate of Mexico was in the scales of destiny; the second army of invaders had been poured upon her shores. In truth, it was a goodly sight to look upon the armed vessels that thronged this unfrequented bay; for peacefully and majestically they slept on the tide, and as the morning hymn of the mariners swelled faintly on the air, one would have thought they bore with them to the heathen the tidings of great joy, and the good-will and grace of their divine faith, instead of the earthly passions which were to cover the land with lamentation and death.

With the morning sunbeam, stole into the harbour one of those little caravels, wherein the men of those days dared the perils of unknown deeps, and sought out new paths to renown and fortune; and as she drew nigh to the reposing fleet, the hardy adventurers who thronged her deck, gazed with new interest and admiration on the shores of that empire, the fame of whose wild grandeur and wealth had already driven from their minds the dreams of Golconda and the Moluccas. No fortress frowned on the low islands, no city glistened among the sand-hills on shore: the surf rolled on the coast of an uninhabited waste: the tents of the armourer and other artisans, the palm-thatched sheds of the sick, and some heaps of military stores, covered with sails, and glimmering in the sun, were the only evidences of life on a beach which was, in after times, to become the site of a rich and bustling port. But beyond the low desert margin of the sea, and over the rank and lovely belt of verdure, which succeeded the glittering sand-hills, rose a rampart of mountains green with an eternal vegetation, over which again peered chain after chain, and crag after crag, with still the majestic Perote and the colossal Orizaba frowning over all, until those who had dwelt among the Pyrenees, or looked upon

the Alps, as some of that adventurous company had done, dreamed what wealth should be in a land, whose first disclosure was so full of grandeur.

Of the four-score individuals who crowded the decks of the little caravel, there was not one whose countenance, at that spectacle, did not betray a touch of the enthusiasm, – the mingled lust of glory and of lucre, – which had already transformed so many ruffians into heroes. Among this motley throng might be seen all sorts of martial madmen, from the scarred veteran who had fought the Moors under the walls of Oran, to the runagate stripling who had hanelled his sword of lath on the curs of Seville; from the hidalgo who remembered the pride of his ancestors, in the cloak of his grandsire, to the boor who dreamed of the crown of a pagan emperor, in a leather shirt and cork shoes: here was a brigand, who had cursed the Santa Hermandad of all Castile, and now rejoiced over a land where he could cut throats at his leisure; there a gray-haired extortioner, whom roguery had reduced to bankruptcy, but who hoped to repair his fortune by following the pack of man-hunters, and picking up the offals they despised, or cheating them of the prizes they had secured; here too was a holy secular, who came to exult over the confusion and destruction of all barbarians who should see nothing diviner in the crucifix than in their own idols. The greater number, however, was composed of debauched and decayed planters of the islands, who ceased to lament their narrow acres and decreasing bondmen, snatched away by the good fortune of some fellow-profligate, when they thought of territories for an estate, and whole tribes for a household. Indeed, in all the group, however elevated and ennobled, for the moment, by the excitement of the scene, and by the resolute impatience they displayed to rush upon adventures well known to be full of suffering and peril, there was but one whom a truly noble-hearted gentleman would have chosen to regard with respect, or to approach with friendship.

This was a young cavalier, who, in propriety of habiliments, in excellence of person, and in nobleness of carriage, differed greatly from all: and, to say the truth, he himself seemed highly conscious of the difference, since he regarded all his fellow-voyagers, saving only his own particular and armed attendants, with the disdain befitting so distinguished a personage. His frame, tall and moderately athletic, was arrayed in hose and doublet of a dusky brown cloth, slashed with purple: his cap and cloak were of black velvet, and in the band of one, and on the shoulder of the other, were symbols of his faith and his profession, – the first being a plain crucifix of silver, and the second a cross of white cloth of eight points, inserted in the mantle. In addition to these badges of devotion, he wore a cross of gold, pointed like the former, and suspended to his neck by a chain of such length and massiveness, as to imbue his companions with high notions of his rank and affluence.

The only point in which he exhibited any feeling in common with his companions, was in admiration of the noble prospect that stretched before him, and which was every moment disclosing itself with newer and greater beauty, as the wind wafted his little vessel nearer to it. His cheek flushed, his eye kindled, and smiting his hands together, in his ardour, he dropped so much of his dignity as to address many of his exclamations to the obsequious but not ungentle master.

"By St. John! señor Capitan," he cried, with rapture, "this is a most noble land to be wasted upon savages!"

"True, señor Don Amador," replied the thrice-honoured master; "a noble land, a rich land, a most glorious land; and, I warrant me, man has never before looked on its equal."

"For my part," said the youth, proudly, "I have seen some lands, that, in the estimation of those who know better, may be pronounced divine; among which I may mention the Greek islands, the keys of the Nile, the banks of the Hellespont, and the hills of Palestine, – not to speak of Italy, and many divisions of our own country; yet, to be honest, I must allow I have never yet looked upon a land, which, at the first sight, impressed me with such strange ideas of magnificence."

"What then will be your admiration, noble cavalier," said the captain, "when you have passed this sandy shore, and yonder rugged hills, and find yourself among the golden valleys they encompass! for all those who have returned from the interior, thus speak of them, and declare upon the gospels

and their honour, no man can conceive properly of paradise, until he has looked upon the valleys of Mexico."

"I long to be among them," said the youth; "and the sooner I am mounted on my good steed, Fogoso, (whom God restore to his legs and his spirit, for this cursed ship has cramped both;) I say, the sooner I am mounted upon my good horse, and scattering this heathen sand from under his hoofs, the better will it be for myself, as well as for him. Hark'ee, good captain: I know not by what sort of miracle I shall surmount yonder tall and majestic pinnacles; but it will be some consolation, while stumbling among them, to be able at least to pronounce their names. What call you yon mountain to the north, with the huge, coffer-like crag on its summit?"

"Your favour has even hit the name, in finding a similitude for the crag," said the captain. "The Indians call it by a name, which signifies the Square Mountain; but poor mariners like myself, who can scarce pronounce their prayers, much less the uncouth and horrible articulations of these barbarians, are content to call it the Coffin Mountain. It lies hard by the route to the great city; and is said to be such a desolate, fire-blasted spot as will sicken a man with horror."

"And yon kingly monster," continued the cavalier, "that raises his snowy cone up to heaven, and mixes his smoke with the morning clouds, – that proudest of all, – what call you him?"

"Spaniards have named him Orizaba," said the master; "but these godless Pagans, who cover every human object with some diabolical superstition, call that peak the Starry Mountain; because the light of his conflagration, seen afar by night, shines like to a planet, and is thought by them to be one of their gods, descending to keep watch over their empire."

"A most heathenish and damning belief!" said the youth, with a devout indignation; "and I do not marvel that heaven has given over to bondage and destruction a race stained with such beastly idolatry. But nevertheless, señor Capitan, and notwithstanding that it is befouled with such impious heresies, I must say, that I have looked upon Mount Olympus, a mountain in Greece, whereon, they say, dwelt the accursed old heathen gods, (whom heaven confound!) before the time that our blessed Saviour hurled them into the Pit; and yet that mountain Olympus is but a hang-dog Turk's head with a turban, compared to this most royal Orizaba, that raiseth up his front like an old patriarch, and smokes with the glory of his Maker."

"And yet they say," continued the captain, "that there is a mountain of fire even taller and nobler than this, and that hard by the great city. But your worship will see this for yourself, with many other wonders, when your worship fights the savages in the interior."

"If it please Heaven," said the cavalier, "I will see this mountain, and those other wonders, whereof you speak; but as to fighting the savages, I must give you to know, that I cannot perceive how a man who has used his sword upon raging Mussulmans, with a sultan at their head, can condescend to draw it upon poor trembling barbarians, who fight with flints and fish-bones, and run away, a thousand of them together, from six not over-valiant Christians."

"Your favour," said the captain, "has heard of the miserable poltroonery of the island Indians, who, truth to say, are neither Turks nor Moors of Barbary: but, señor Don Amador de Leste, you will find these dogs of Mexico to be another sort of people, who live in stone cities instead of bowers of palm-leaves; have crowned emperors, in place of feathered caciques; are marshalled into armies, with drums, banners, and generals, like Christian warriors; and, finally, go into battle with a most resolute and commendable good will. They will pierce a cuirass with their copper lances, crush an iron helmet with their hardened war-clubs, and, – as has twice or thrice happened with the men of Hernan Cortez, – they will, with their battle-axes of flint, smite through the neck of a horse, as one would pierce a yam with his dagger. Truly, señor caballero, these Mexicans are a warlike people."

"What you tell me," said Don Amador, "I have heard in the islands; as well as that these same mountain Indians roast their prisoners with pepper and green maize, and think the dish both savoury and wholesome; all which matters, excepting only the last, which is reasonable enough of such children of the devil, I do most firmly disbelieve: for how, were they not cowardly caitiffs, could this rebellious

cavalier, the valiant Hernan Cortes, with his six hundred mutineers, have forced his way even to the great city Tenochtitlan, and into the palace of the emperor? By my faith," and here the señor Don Amador twisted his finger into his right mustachio with exceeding great complacency, "these same Mexicans may be brave enemies to the cavaliers of the plantations, who have studied the art of war among the tribes of Santo Domingo and Cuba; but to a soldier who, as I said before, has fought the Turks, and that too at the siege of Rhodes, they must be even such chicken-hearted slaves as it would be shame and disgrace to draw sword upon."

The master of the caravel regarded Don Amador with admiration for a moment, and then said, with much emphasis, "May I die the death of a mule, if I am not of your way of thinking, most noble Don Amador. To tell you the truth, these scurvy Mexicans, of whose ferocity and courage so much is said by those most interested to have them thought so, are even just such poor, spiritless, contemptible creatures as the Arrowauks of the isles, only that there are more of them; and, to be honest, I know nothing that should tempt a soldier and hidalgo to make war on them, except their gold, of which the worst that can be said is, first, that there is not much of it, and secondly, that there are too many hands to share it. There is neither honour nor wealth to be had in Tenochtitlan. But if a true soldier and a right noble gentleman, as the world esteems Don Amador de Leste, should seek a path worthy of himself, he has but to say the word, and there is one to be found from which he may return with more gold than has yet been gathered by any fortunate adventurer, and more renown than has been won by any other man in the new world: ay, by St. James, and diadems may be found there! provided one have the heart to contest for them with men who fight like the wolves of Catalonia, and die with their brows to the battle!"

"Now by St. John of Jerusalem!" said Amador, kindling with enthusiasm, "that is a path which, as I am a true Christian and Castilian, I should be rejoiced to tread. For the gold of which you speak, it might come if it would, for gold is a good thing, even to one who is neither needy nor covetous; but I should be an idle hand to gather it. As for the diadems, I have my doubts whether a man, not born by the grace of God to inherit them, has any right to wear them, unless, indeed, he should marry a king's daughter: but here the kings are all infidels, and, I vow to Heaven, I would sooner burn at a stake, along with a Christian beggar, than sell my soul to perdition in the arms of any infidel princess whatever. But for the renown of subduing a nation of such valiant Pagans as those you speak of, and of converting them to the true faith! *that* is even such a thought as makes my blood tingle within me; and were I, in all particulars, the master of my own actions, I should say to you, Right worthy and courageous captain, (for truly from those honourable scars on your front and temple, and from your way of thinking, I esteem you such a man,) point me out that path, and, with the blessing of Heaven, I will see to what honour it may lead me."

"Your favour," said the captain, "has heard of the great island, Florida, and of the renowned señor Don Ponce de Leon, its discoverer?"

"I have heard of such names, both of isle and of man, I think," said Don Amador, "but, to say truth, señor comandante, you have here, in this new world, such a multitude of wonderful territories, and of heroic men, that, were I to give a month's labour to the study, I think I should not master the names of all of them. Truly, in Rhodes, where the poor knights of the Hospital stood at bay before Solyman *el Magnifico*, and did such deeds as the world had not heard of since the days of Leonidas and his brave knights of Sparta, – I say, even in Rhodes, where all men thought of their honour and religion, and never a moment of their blood, we heard not of so many heroes as have risen up here in this corner of the earth, in a few years' chasing of the wild Indians."

"The señor Ponce de Leon," said the captain, without regarding the sneer of the proud soldier, "the señor Ponce de Leon, Adelantado of Bimini and of Florida, in search of the miraculous Fountain of Youth, which, the Indians say, lies somewhere to the north, landed eight years ago, with the crews of three ships, all of them bigger and better than this little rotten Sangre de Cristo, whereof I myself commanded one. Of the extraordinary beauty and fertility of the land of Florida, thus discovered, I

will say nothing. Your favour will delight more to hear me speak of its inhabitants. These were men of a noble stature, and full of such resolution, that we were no sooner ashore, than they fell upon us; and I must say, we found we were now at variance with a people in no wise resembling those naked idiots of Cuba, or these cowardly hinds of Mexico. They cared not a jot for swordsman, arcubalister, or musketeer. To our rapiers they opposed their stone battle-axes, which gushed through the brain more like a thunderbolt than a Christian espada; no crossbowman could drive an arrow with more mortal aim and fury than could these wild archers with their horn bows, (for know, señor, they have, in that country of Florida, some prodigious animal, which yields them abundant material for their weapons;) and, what filled us with much surprise, and no little fear, instead of betaking themselves to their heels at the sound of our firelocks, as we looked for them to do, no sooner had they heard the roar of these arms, than they fetched many most loud and frightful yells, to express their contempt of our warlike din, and rushed upon us with such renewed and increasing violence, that, to be honest, as a Christian of my years should be, we were fain to betake ourselves to our ships with what speed and good fortune we could. And now, señor, you will be ashamed to hear that our courage was so much mollified by this repulse, and our fears of engaging further with such desperadoes so urgent and potent, that we straightway set sail, and, in the vain search for the enchanted Fountain, quite forgot the nobler objects of the voyage."

"What you have said," quoth Don Amador, "convinces me that these savages of Florida are a warlike people, and worthy the wrath of a brave soldier; but you have said nothing of the ores and diadems, whereof, I think, you first spake, and which, heaven save the mark! by some strange mutation of mind, have made a deeper impression on my imagination than such trifles should."

"We learned of some wounded captives we carried to the ships," continued the master, "as well, at least, as we could understand by their signs, that there was a vast country to the north-west, where dwelt nations of fire-worshippers, governed by kings, very rich and powerful, on the banks of a great river; and from some things we gathered, it was thought by many that the miraculous Fountain was in that land, and not in the island Bimini; and this think I myself, for, señor, I have seen a man who, with others, had slaked his thirst in every spring that gushes from that island, and, by my faith, he died of an apoplexy the day after his arrival in the Habana. Wherefore, it is clear, that marvellous Fountain must be in the country of the fire-worshippers. But notwithstanding all these things, señor, our commander Don Ponce, would resolve upon naught but to return to the Bahamas, where our ships were divided, each in search of the island called Bimini. It was my fortune to be despatched westward; and here, what with the aid of a tempest that blew from the east, and some little hankering of mine own appetites after that land of the fire-worshippers, I found myself many a league beyond where any Christian had ever navigated before, where a fresh and turbid current rolled through the deep, bearing the trunks of countless great trees, many of them scorched with fire: whereupon I knew that I was near to the object of my desires, which, however, the fears and the discontent of my crew prevented my reaching. I was even compelled to obey them, and conduct them to Cuba."

"Señor Capitan," said Amador, who had listened to the master's narrative with great attention, "I give you praise for your bold and most commendable daring in having sailed so far, and I condole with you for your misfortune in being compelled to abide the government of a crew of such runagate and false companions, whom I marvel exceedingly you did not hang, every man of 'em, to some convenient corner of your ship, as was the due of such disloyal knaves; but yet, credit me, I see not what this turbid and fresh flood, and what these floating trees, had to do with the gold and the diadems, of which you were speaking."

"Señor," said the Captain earnestly, "I have navigated the deep for, perhaps, more years than your favour has lived; and it was my fortune to be with the Admiral – "

"With Colon!" cried the youth.

"With his excellency, the admiral, Don Cristobal Colon, the discoverer of this new world!" replied the master proudly, "in his own good ship, when we sailed into the Serpent's Mouth, which,

we knew not then, laved the shores of the great Continent; and I remember that when the admiral had beheld the trees floating in the current, and had tasted of the fresh water of that boiling gulf, he told us that these came from a great river rolling through a mighty continent. And, in after times, the words of the admiral were proved to be just; for there his captain, the young Pinzon, found the great river Oronoko."

"There is no man," said Don Amador, "who more reverences the memory of the admiral than I; and I feel the more regard for yourself, that you have sailed with him on his discoveries. Moreover, I beg your pardon, insomuch as I have been slow to unravel your meaning. But now, I perceive, you think you had reached that river of the infidel fire-worshippers, whom God confound with fire and flame! as doubtless he will. And hath no man again sought the mouth of that river? I marvel you did not yourself make a second attempt."

"I could not prevail upon any cavaliers, rich enough for the undertaking," said the master, "to league with me in it. Men liked not the spirit of the northern savages; and, in truth, there were a thousand other lands where the barbarians could be subdued with less peril, and, as they thought, with a better hope of gain. And yet, by our lady, that river bore with it the evidences of the wealth on its banks; for what were those scorched trees, but the relics of the fires with which the kings of the land were smelting their ores? and what quantity of gold must there not have been where such prodigious furnaces were kindled!"

"By the mass!" said Amador, with ardour, "you speak the truth; it is even a most wonderful land; and if a few thousand pesoes would float an expedition, by my faith, I think I could find them."

"A few thousand pesoes, and the countenance of such a leader as Don Amador de Leste, a knight of the holy and valiant order of San Juan – "

"A knight by right, but not by vow," said Don Amador, hastily: "I give you to understand, señor Capitan, that I am not a sworn brother of that most ancient, honourable, and knightly order, but an humble volunteer, attached, for certain reasons of my own, to them, and privileged by the consent of his most eminent highness, the Grand Master, to wear these badges, wherein I am arrayed, in acknowledgment that I did some service not unworthy knighthood in the trenches of Rhodes."

"Your favour will not lead the less worthily for that," said the Captain; "I know an hundred cavaliers who would throw their ducats, as well as their arms, into the adventure prescribed by the señor Don Amador; and a thousand cross-bows, with three or four score arquebusiers, would flock to the standard as soon as we had preached through the islands a crusade to the fire-worshippers, and a pilgrimage to the Waters of Life."

"And is it truly believed," said Amador, eagerly, "that such waters are to be found in these heathen lands?"

"Who can doubt it?" said the Captain; "the Indians of the Bahamas have spoken of them for years; no Spaniard hath ever thought of questioning their existence; and at this moment, so great is the certainty of finding them, that my old leader, Don Ponce, is collecting round him men for a second expedition, with which he will depart I know not how soon. But I know Don Ponce; the draught of youth is not for him; he will seek the fountain on his great island of Florida, and find it not: it will bubble only to the lips of those who seek it near the great river of the great continent."

"By heaven!" said Don Amador, "what might not a man do, who could drink of this miraculous fountain! A draught of it would have carried the great Alejandro so far into the East, as to have left but small work for the knaves of Portugal. And then our friends! Dios mio! we could keep our friends by us for ever! But hold, señor Capitan – a thought strikes me: have you ever heard the opinion of a holy clergyman on this subject? Is it lawful for a man to drink of such a fountain?"

"By my faith," replied the master, "I have never heard priest or layman advance an argument against its lawfulness: and I know not how it should be criminal, since Providence hath given us the privilege to drink of any well, whose waters are not to our misliking."

"For my part," said Amador, "I must say, I have my doubts whether Providence hath given us any such privilege; the exercise of which, in general, would greatly confound the world, by over-peopling it, and, in particular, would seem, in a measure, to put man in a condition to defy his Maker, and to defeat all the ends of divine goodness and justice: for how should a man be punished for his sins, who had in him the power of endless life? and how should a man keep from sinning, who had no fear of death and the devil? and, finally, how should we ever receive any of the benefits of the most holy atonement, after drinking such a life-preserving draught? – for it is my opinion, señor Capitan, no man would wish to go to heaven, who had the power of remaining on earth."

"By my soul," said the captain earnestly, "this is a consideration which never occupied me before; and I shall take counsel upon it with the first holy man I meet."

"At all events," said the cavalier, "there is inducement enough to make search after this river, were it only to fight the fire-worshippers, convert them to the true faith, and see what may be the curiosities of their land. Yet I must give you warning, it will rest with another whom I am now seeking, whether I may league with you in this enterprise or not. Give me his consent and leading, and I will take leave of these poor rogues of Tenochtitlan, as soon as I have looked a little upon their wonders; and then, with the blessing of God and St. John, have at the valiant fire-worshippers, with all my heart! – But, how now, señor Capitan? What means your pilot to cast anchor here among the fleet, and not carry us forthwith to the shore?"

"I dare not proceed farther," said the captain, "without the authority of the señor Cavallero, admiral of this squadron, and governor of this harbour of San Juan de Ulua. It is necessary I should report myself to him for examination, on board the *Capitana*, and receive his instructions concerning my cargo and fellow-voyagers."

"His instructions concerning your fellow-voyagers!" said Don Amador, sternly. "I, for one, am a voyager, who will receive no instructions for the government of my actions, neither myself nor by proxy; and, with God's blessing, I will neither ask permission to disembark, nor allow it to be asked for myself, or for my grooms; and the señor Cavallero, or any other señor, that thinks to stop me, had better grind both sides of his sword, by way of preparation for such folly."

"Your favour has no cause for anger," said the master, moderately. "This is the custom and the law, and it becomes the more necessary to enforce it, in the present situation of things. Your favour will receive no check, but rather assistance; and it is only necessary to assure the admiral you do not come as a league and helpmate of the mutineer, Cortes, to receive free license, a safe-conduct, and perhaps, even guides, to go whithersoever you list throughout this empire. This, señor, is only a form of courtesy, such as one cavalier should expect of another, and no more."

"Truly, then, if you assure me so," said Don Amador, complacently, "I will not refuse to go myself in person to his excellency, the admiral; and the more readily that, I fancy, from the name, there is some sort of blood-relationship between his excellency and myself. But, by heaven, I would rather, at present, be coursing Fogoso over yon glittering sand, than winding a bolero on my cousin's deck, though he were a king's admiral."

CHAPTER II

Don Amador de Leste was interrupted in the agreeable duty (the last to be performed in the little caravel,) of inquiring into the health and condition of his war-horse, Fogoso, by a summons, or, as it was more courteously expressed, an invitation, to attend the admiral on board his own vessel. Giving a thousand charges to his attendants, all of which were received with due deference and humility, he stepped into the boat, which, in a few moments, he exchanged for the decks of the Capitana, – not, however, without some doubt as to the degree of loftiness he should assume during the interview with his excellency, the admiral, his kinsman. His pride had already twice, or thrice, since his appearance among the islands of the New World, been incensed by the arrogant assumption of their petty dignitaries to inquire into, and control, the independence of his movements: and he remembered with high displeasure, that the royal adelantado of Cuba, the renowned Velasquez, a man of whom, as he was pleased to say, he had never heard so much as the name until he found himself within his territories, had not only dared to disregard the privileges of his birth and decorations, but had well-nigh answered his ire and menaces, by giving him to chains and captivity. Nor, when, at last, the pious exertions of the good friars of Santiago had allayed the growing storm, and appeased his own indignation, by urging the necessity their governor was under to examine into the character and objects of all persons, who, by declining to visit the new El Dorado under the authority of the commander, might reasonably be suspected of a desire to join his rebellious lieutenant, – not even then could the proud Amador forget that, whatever might be the excuse, his independence *had* been questioned, and might be again, by any inflated official whom he should be so unlucky as to meet. His doubt, however, in this case, was immediately dispelled by the degree of state and ceremony with which he was received on board the Capitana, and conducted to his excellency; and the last shadow of hesitation departed from his brow, when he beheld the admiral prepared to welcome him with such courtesy and deference as were only accorded to the most noble and favoured.

"If I do not err," said the admiral, with a bow of great reverence, and a smile of prodigious suavity, "I behold, in the señor Don Amador de Leste, a gentleman of Valencia, whom I make free, as I shall be proud, to welcome as my countryman and kinsman?"

"Señor Almirante," replied Amador, with equal amenity, "my mother was a Valencian, and of the house of Cavallero. Wherefore, I take it for granted, we are in some sort related; but in what degree, I am not able to determine: nor do I think that a matter very important to be questioned into, since, in these savage corners of the earth, the farthest degree of consanguinity should draw men together as firmly as the closest."

"You are right, señor cavalier and kinsman," said the admiral: "affinity of any degree should be a claim to the intimacy and affection of brotherhood; and although this is the first time I have enjoyed the felicity to behold my right worthy and much honoured cousin, I welcome him with good will to such hospitalities as my poor bark and this barbarous clime can afford; marvelling, however, amid all my satisfaction, what strange fortune has driven him to exchange the knightly combats of Christendom for the ignoble campaigns of this wild hemisphere."

"As to that, most noble and excellent cousin," said the cavalier, "I will not scruple to inform your excellency, together with all other matters, wherein, as my kinsman, you are entitled to question; previous to which, however, I must demand of your goodness to know how far your interrogatories are to bear the stamp of office and authority, the satisfaction of my mind on which point will materially affect the character of my answers."

"Surely," said the admiral courteously, and seemingly with great frankness, "I will only presume to question you as a friend and relative, and, as such, no farther than it may suit your pleasure to allow. My office I will only use so far as it may enable me to assist you in your objects, if, as I will make bold to believe, you may need such assistance in this land of Mexico."

"I thank your excellency," said Amador, now receiving and pressing the hand of the commander with much cordiality, "both for your offers of assistance, which, if I may need it, I will freely accept; and for your assurance you do not mean to trouble me with your authority: – a mark of extreme civility and good sense, which virtues, under your favour, I have not found so common among your fellow-commanders in these heathen lands, as I was led to expect."

The admiral smiled pleasantly on his kinsman while replying, "I must beg your allowance for the presumption of my brothers in command, who, sooth to say, have had so much dealing with the wild Indians and rough reprobates of these regions as somewhat to have forgot their manners, when treating with gentlemen and nobles. My superior and governor, the worthy and thrice-honoured Velasquez, (whom God grant many and wiser counsellors!) is rather hot of head and unreasonable of temper; and has, doubtless, thrown some obstructions in the way of your visit to this disturbed land. But you should remember, that the junction of so brave a cavalier as Don Amador de Leste with the mutinous bands of the señor Cortes, is a thing to excite both dread and opposition."

"I remember," said Amador, "that some such excuse was made for him, and that my assurance that my business had no more to do with that valiant rebel than with his own crabbed excellency, was no more believed than the assertion of any common hind: a piece of incredulity I shall take great pleasure, at some more convenient period, of removing, at my sword's point, from his excellency's body."

"I am grieved you should have cause to complain of the governor," said the señor Cavallero; "and verily I myself cannot pretend to justify his rash and tyrannical opposition, especially in the matter of yourself; who, I take it for granted, come hither as the kinsman of the knight Calavar, to search out and remove that crack-brained cavalier from these scenes of tumult and danger."

"The knight Calavar," said the young soldier sternly, "like other men, has his eccentricities and follies; but if God has smitten him with a sorer infirmity than others, he has left him so much strength of arm and resoluteness of heart, and withal has given him friends of so unhesitating a devotion, that it will always be wise to pronounce his name with the respect which his great worth and valiant deeds have proved to be his due."

"Surely," said the admiral, good-humouredly, "it is my boast that I can claim, through yourself, to be distantly related to this most renowned and unhappy gentleman; and, while I would sharply rebuke a stranger for mentioning him with discourtesy, I held myself at liberty to speak of him with freedom to yourself."

"I beg your pardon then," said Amador, "if I took offence at your utterance of a word, which seemed to me to savour more of the heartless ridicule with which the world is disposed to remark a mental calamity, than the respectful pity which, it is my opinion, in such cases should be always accorded. Your excellency did right to suppose my business in this hemisphere was to seek out the knight Calavar; not, however, as you have hinted, to remove him from among the savages, (for I give you to understand, he is ever capable of being the guide and director of his own actions;) but to render him the dutiful service of his kinsman and esquire, and to submit myself to his will and government, whether it be to fight these rogues of Mexico, or any other heathens whatever."

"I give you praise for your fidelity and affection," said the señor Cavallero, "which, I think, will stand the knight in good stead, if it be his pleasure to remain longer in this wild country. But tell me, Don Amador: – as a Cavallero of Valencia, I could not be ignorant of the misfortune of our very renowned cousin; yet was I never able to compass the cause of his melancholy. I remember that when he fleshed his boyish sword for the first time among the Moors of the Alpujarras, he was accounted not only of valour, but of discretion, far beyond his years. There was no patrimony in all Granada so rich and enviable as the lordship of Calavar; no nobleman of Spain was thought to have fairer and loftier prospects than the young Don Gines Gabriel de Calavar; none had greater reason to laugh and be merry, for before the beard had darkened on his lip, he had enjoyed the reputation of a brave soldier; yet, no sooner came he to man's estate, than, utterly disregarding the interests of his

house and the common impulses of youth, he flung himself into the arms of the knights of Rhodes, vowed himself to toil and sorrow, and has, ever since, been remembered by those who knew him in his boyhood, as the saddest and maddest of men."

"So much I have heard, and so much I know, of the good knight," said Amador, with a sigh; "little more can I add to the story, but that some calamity, the nature of which I never dared to inquire, suddenly wrought this change in him, even in the midst of his youth, and led him to devote his life to the cause of the faithful."

"Thou hast heard it suggested," said Cavallero, significantly, "that, in the matter of the Alpujarras, his heart was hotter, and his hand redder than became a Christian knight, even when striking on the hearth of the Infidel?"

"Señor cousin and admiral," said Amador decidedly, "in my soul, I believe you are uttering these suggestions only from a kinsman's concern for the honour and welfare of the party in question; and therefore do I make bold to tell you, the man who, in my hearing, asperses the knight Calavar, charging his grief of mind to be the fruit of any criminal or dishonourable deed, shall abide the issue of the slander as ruefully as if it had been cast on the ashes of my mother!"

"So shall he win his deservings," said the commander. "Nevertheless doth Calavar himself give some cause for these foolish surmises, of which indiscreet persons have occasionally delivered themselves; for the evident misery of heart and distraction of head, the austere and penitential self-denial of his life, nay, the very ostentation of grief and contrition, which is written in his deportment and blazoned on his armour, and which has gained him, in these lands, the appellation of the Penitent Knight, seem almost to warrant the suspicion of an unquiet and remorseful conscience, brooding over the memory of an unabsolved crime. But I say this not so much to justify, as, in part, to excuse those idle impertinents, who are so free with their innuendoes. I have ever pondered with wonder on the secret of the brave knight's unrest; yet, I must confess to thee, I was struck with no less astonishment, when, returning from Nombre de Dios to Santiago, I heard that a famous Knight Hospitaller, and he no other than Don Gines Gabriel de Calavar, had arrived among the islands, frenzied with the opportunity of slaying pagans at his pleasure, and had already followed on the path of Cortes to Mexico. It gave me great pain, and caused me no little marvel, to find he had come and vanished with so little of the retinue of his rank, and of the attendance necessary to one in his condition, that two or three ignorant grooms were his only attendants."

"I have no doubt," said Amador, "I can allay your wonder as to these matters. Your excellency need not be told that the banner of the Turk now floats over the broken ramparts of Rhodes, and over the corpses of those noble knights of San Juan, who defended them for more than two hundred years, and at last perished among their ruins. This is a catastrophe that has pealed over all Christendom like the roar of a funeral bell, and its sound has even pierced to these lands of twilight. No knight among all that band of warriors and martyrs, as I am myself a witness, did more brave and heroic actions throughout the black and bloody siege, than my lord and kinsman, Calavar. But the good and ever-gracious Saint, the patron of this most ancient and chivalric brotherhood, saved him, with a few other knights, out of the jaws of destruction, and restored him again to his own country. Rhodes was fallen, there was no longer a home for the destitute knights; they wandered over Europe, whithersoever their destinies listed, but particularly wheresoever there was an infidel to be slain. Our monarch of Spain contemplated a crusade among the Moors of Barbary, the descendants of that accursed – (why should I not say wretched? for they are exiles;) – that wretched race who had once o'ermastered our own beloved land; the knight Calavar entered into this project with alacrity, and set himself to such preparations as should win him good vengeance for the blood of his brothers lost at Rhodes. I did myself, in obedience to his will, betake me to the business of seeing what honest Christians might be prevailed on to fight under his banner; and while thus engaged, at a distance from my beloved lord, with, perhaps, as I should confess with shame, less energy and more sloth than were becoming in his follower, I suffered certain worldly allurements to step between me and my duty, and, for a

time, almost forgot my renowned and unhappy kinsman. Now señor," continued the youth, with some little hesitation, and a deep sigh, "it is not necessary I should trouble you with any very particular account of my forgetfulness and stupidity: it was soon known that the enthusiasm of our king was somewhat abated touching the matter of the African crusade, – perhaps swallowed up in the interest wherewith he regarded the new world which God and the great Colon had given him; the enthusiasm of his subjects diminished in like manner: there was no more talk of Africa. This, señor, may perhaps in a measure excuse my own lethargy, but you may be assured I awoke out of it with shame and mortification, when I discovered that the good knight, left to himself, and deprived of that excitement of combat, or the hope of combat, so necessary to the well-being of his mind, had suddenly (doubtless, in one of those paroxysms of eccentricity, – or delirium, as I may call it to you,) departed from the land, and was now cleaving the surges that divided us from the new hemisphere. There was nothing left for me but to follow him in the first ship that sailed on the same adventure. This I have done: I have tracked my leader from Palos to Cuba; from Cuba to this barren coast; and now, with your good leave and aidance, I will take the last step of the pursuit, and render myself up to his authority in the barbaric city, Tenochtitlan."

"I respect your motive, and praise your devotion, most worthy cousin," said the admiral with much kindness; "and yet you must forgive me, if I dare to express to you some degree of pity. My long acquaintance with these countries, both of isle and main, has well instructed me what you have to expect among them; and I can truly conceive what sacrifices you have made for the good knight's sake. In any case, I beg leave to apprise you, you can command all my services, either to persist in seeking him, or to return to Spain. My advice is, that you leave this place forthwith, in a ship which I am to-morrow to despatch to Andalusia; return to your native land; betake yourself to those allurements, and that lethargy, which I can well believe may bring you happiness; commend yourself to your honourable lady-love, and think no more of the wild Calavar. Here, if you lose not life, before you have looked on your kinsman, as there is much fear, you must resolve to pass your days in such suffering and misery, and withal in ignoble warfare with naked savages, supported by such mean and desperate companions, as, I am sure, you were never born to."

"What you counsel me," said Amador coolly, "is doubtless both wisdom and friendship; nevertheless, if your excellency will be good enough to reconsider your advice, you will perceive it involves such selfishness, meanness, and dishonour, as cannot be listened to with any propriety by a kinsman of the knight of Calavar. I do not say I come hither to condescend to this ignoble warfare, – though if it be worthy my good knight, I shall have no reason to scorn it. I bear with me, to my kinsman, the despatch of his most eminent highness, the Grand Master of the most illustrious order of San Juan, wherein, although it be recommended to him, if such warfare seem to him honourable and advantageous to the cause of Christ, to strike fast and well, it is, if such strife be otherwise, strongly urged on him to return without delay to Europe, and to the Isle of Malta; which, it is announced, our monarch of Spain will speedily give to the good knights. It is therefore," continued the cavalier, "from the nature of things and of mine own will, clearly impossible I should follow your advice; in default of which, I must beg such other counsel and assistance of your excellency as your excellency may think needful to bestow; only premising, that as I have many a weary league of sand and mountain to compass, the sooner you benefit me with these good things the better."

"Your journey will be neither so long nor so wearisome as you imagine," said Cavallero: "but, I fear me, will present more obstructions than you may be prepared to encounter. I take it for granted, the governor Velasquez has furnished you with no commands to his general Don Panfilo de Narvaez, since he gave you none to myself."

"This is even the fact," said Amador; "I entered the caravel which brought me here, as I thought, in defiance of his authority, and not without apprehensions of being obliged to cut off the ears of some dozen or two of his rogues, who might be ordered to detain me. Nevertheless, I left the island without a contest, and equally without aidance of any kind from this discourteous ruler."

"I must give thee some counsel, then," said the admiral, "for I apprehend the governor did, very perfidiously as I esteem it, when he ceased his opposition, rest much hope on that of his general. Thou art acquainted with the character of Narvaez?"

"By my faith, I am so ignorant of all matters appertaining to these climates, that, saving thine own, and the knight Calavar's, and one or two others which I acquired this morning, I am familiar only with those of two other persons, – to wit, – of Velasquez, whom I consider a very scurvy and ill-bred personage, and of Cortes, a man whom I hold in much esteem, ever since I heard he burned his fleet to keep his followers from running away, and made prisoner of the great Mexican emperor in his own capital. In addition to this, I know the aforesaid governor doth very hotly hate, and hath disgraced with the titles of rebel and outlaw, this same respectable and courageous Cortes; but for what reason, as I have been kept in somewhat too great a passion to inquire, I am yet altogether ignorant."

"For one who may soon share an important part in the events of this region, I think thou showest a most princely indifference to them," said the admiral, smiling. "I will not say the safety, but the facility, with which thou mayest traverse these lands, will be greatly increased by knowing some little of their history; and that knowledge I will hasten to impart to thee, and with what brevity I can. If I should be led to speak with more freedom of certain persons than may seem fitting in an inferior and a colleague, I must beseech thee to remember I am doing so to a kinsman, and for his especial information and good. Know then, señor Don Amador, the person whom it pleased our viceroy, the son of Colon, to set over us, and whom it has since pleased his most devout majesty, the emperor, to confirm in the government of Cuba, and even to that to add the further dignity of ruler of the kings of Mexico, is, as I hinted to thee before, afflicted with so irascible a temper and so jealous a fancy, that, were I not restrained by the office I hold under him, I should say he was, at the least, as mad as any other man in his dominion. The desire of immortalizing himself by some great exploit would be commendable in him, were it not accompanied by the ambition to achieve it by the hands of another. Ever since the discovery of this fair empire of Montezuma by the señor Cordova, he has thirsted for the glory of subduing it; and has taken all the steps necessary to such a purpose, except the single one of attempting it in person; – an omission not in itself important, since there are an hundred other cavaliers more capable of the task, only that, besides the other munitions with which he furnishes his lieutenant, he follows him ever with so plentiful a store of distrust, that it is utterly impossible his officer should have a chance to immortalize him. After much seeking of a man whose ambition should extend no further than to the glory of winning a crown for the purpose of seeing his excellency wear it, he fixed upon the worthy hidalgo, Hernan Cortes, a gentleman of Medellin in Estremadura, and despatched him on the business of conquest. Now, no sooner was his general gone, than this jealous imagination, whereof I spake, instantly presented to his mind the image of Cortes as a conqueror, suddenly laying claim, before the emperor and the world, to the sole merit of the conquest; a spectacle so infinitely intolerable, that without delay he set himself at work to hinder Cortes from making any conquest at all."

"Surely," said Amador, "this governor Velasquez is a fool, as well as a knave!"

"Heaven have him in keeping! You should mention him with respect: but as you are speaking in the confidence of blood-relationship, I cannot take notice of your sarcasm," said the admiral. "The señor Cortes, however," continued Cavallero, "was by no means disposed to second the disloyal frenzy of the governor: (disloyal I call it, since it threatened to deprive his majesty, the emperor Charles, of the opportunity of adding a new empire to his diadem.) On the other hand, Cortes was fully determined to do his duty, and thought the governor could do nothing better than to follow his example. But in the end, this same Cortes, though of as meek a temper as is desirable in the commander of an army, became greatly incensed at the sottish and grievous distrust of his governor; and calling his army together, and representing to them the foolish predicament in which his excellency had placed them, he threw down his truncheon with contempt, and told them that as Velasquez had left them without a leader, the wisest thing that remained for them was to find

another as soon as possible: as for himself, he disdained to hold his commission longer under such a commander."

"By heaven, a most proper-spirited and gallant gentleman!" cried Amador. "I honour him for the act, but chiefly for the contempt it argued of this jackfeather ruler."

"I must beg of your favour," said the admiral, gravely, "to remember that his excellency is my chief and commander; though, in justice, I think you have some reason to censure him. – What remained for the army of Cortes, now no longer having a general? They were loath to leave the fair empire that appeared almost in their grasp, and enraged at the governor, who seemed determined to rob them of it. There was only one way to secure the conquest for their royal master: they absolved themselves of their allegiance to the governor, swore themselves the soldiers and subjects of the emperor alone, and erecting themselves into a colony, forthwith elected Cortes their governor and commander-in-chief; and despatched advice of the same to Don Carlos, with a petition for permission to pursue and conclude the conquest of Tenochtitlan in his name."

"A very loyal, defensible, and, indeed, praiseworthy action," said Don Amador, with emphasis; "and I marvel your jealous governor did not stab himself forthwith, out of pure chagrin, to be so sharply and justly outwitted."

"Instead of that," said the admiral, "boiling with vexation and rage, and devoting Cortes to the fiend who had first suggested him as a proper lieutenant, his excellency equipped a second army, more than twice as strong as that he had ordered Cortes to raise; and this, one would have thought, he would have commanded in person. But the old whim of conquering by lieutenants, and becoming famous by proxy, still beset the brain of his wisdom. He gave the command of an army of more than a thousand men to the señor Panfilo de Narvaez, a Biscayan, of whom the best I can say is, that he swore eternal fidelity to Velasquez, – resolving privately in his own mind that, as soon as he had subdued Cortes, he would follow his example, and throw off the authority of his distrustful commander."

"I should call this treachery," said Amador, "but that I think the absurdity of the chief a full excuse for the defection of the follower."

"The wisdom of the proceeding is now made manifest," continued the admiral. "It is scarce a month since it was my misfortune, as commander of the naval division of this expedition, to land the forces of Narvaez on this shore. Here I learned with much admiration, that Cortes, notwithstanding the meagerness of his army, had, absolutely, after certain bloody combats with savages on the wayside, marched into the great city, taken possession of the body of the barbarous emperor, and, through him, virtually, of all the lands which acknowledged his sway; and you may understand how much, as a true and reasonable subject of our Catholic monarch, I was afflicted to learn, in addition, that the sending of the new force by Velasquez, only served the purpose of snatching the conquest out of our hands. For Cortes, under a delusion which may be pardoned him, on account of its loyalty, regarding himself, in obedience to the command of his followers, as the only true representative and general of our king, and ourselves, by consequence, as traitors and rebels to his majesty, did forthwith resolve to drive us from the land; to do which, it was needful he should withdraw his forces from Tenochtitlan; and therefore, Tenochtitlan is lost."

"Thou sayest, the señor Cortes hath an army not half so powerful as the Biscayan's?"

"Nay, 'tis much short of five hundred men, and weakened by a year's campaign, and still further diminished by the necessity of maintaining a garrison in his port of Vera Cruz, which he doth humorously denominate the Rich City, and leaving another of more than a hundred men, with one of his best captains, in the goodly city, out of a hope, which I myself reckon both vain and foolish, still to retain possession of it."

"And with this shattered and pitiful handful, which I think cannot exceed three hundred men," said Amador, "the brave Cortes is resolute to resist the Biscayan, and his thousand fresh combatants?"

"It is even so," replied Cavallero.

"I give him the praise of a most dauntless and heroic leader," cried Amador; "and I am eager to proffer him the hand of friendship."

"Not only resolute to resist," said the admiral, "but, from the most undeniable tokens, impatient to attack; as, indeed, are all his people. As an evidence of which, I may tell thee, that Narvaez having quartered his host at an Indian city called Zempoala, within a few leagues of this aforesaid stockade and Rich City of the True Cross, he straightway despatched certain officers, military, civil, and religious, to demand the surrender of the same at the hands of the very young and very simple-minded señor, Don Gonzalo de Sandoval, its commandante. What answer, thinkest thou, was made by this foolish captain, so many leagues separated from his commander, and so far from all assistance? Faith, he flings me the envoys into certain bags of net-work, as one would live quails, and tossing them upon the backs of lusty savages, in lieu of asses, despatched them forthwith over the mountains to his general. And this is the only answer my colleague and most excellent friend the general Narvaez, ever received to his summons for the surrender of the Rich City of the True Cross."

"A spirited and ever-to-be-commended youth, this same bold Sandoval," said Amador earnestly; "and I begin to bethink me, I shall not be loath to remain for a time in the company of a leader, who hath such worthy spirits for his companions. But tell me, señor cavalier and cousin, hath Cortes yet struck a blow for his honour and his right?"

"By our Lady, no," said the admiral: "and yet, upon reflection," continued he, "I must confess, that though he has not yet drawn a Christian sabre on the Biscayan, he has done him much hurt with a certain weapon of gold, the use of which he learned at Mexico, and whose blows, by the operation of a kind of magic, have the virtue to paralyze the wrath, without spilling the blood, of an adversary."

"This is a weapon of the devil!" said the young cavalier indignantly, "which I marvel much should be used by so worthy a soldier. Nevertheless, as it does not shed blood, the use of it may be justifiable in a contest between brothers and countrymen; wherein humanity and mercy are always more Christian qualities than the rage and blood-thirstiness of another warfare. But notwithstanding all this, if such enchanted arms (if such indeed exist, as I cannot believe,) be in vogue among the followers of Cortes, I swear to God and Saint John, I will eschew them as I would the gifts of the fiend; and, if compelled by the command of my good knight, to fight in their company, it shall be with such sword and spear as I can use with a free conscience, and an honest arm."

"I commend your honourable resolution," said the admiral, amused with the literal straightforwardness of his kinsman, but without thinking fit to undeceive him; "but how long the cavalier Cortes will employ so bloodless a rapier, is more than I can determine. He now lies within a few leagues of my colleague, the Biscayan; and although apparently more ripe for negotiation than combat, I shall be much mistaken if he do not, at some convenient season, so fling his crew of desperadoes at the head of Narvaez, as shall make his excellency stare. Indeed there is now little hope of pacification; for Narvaez has very grievously insulted Cortes, by proclaiming him a rebel and an outlaw, and setting a price on his head; and such is his hotheadedness, that, it was but yesterday, he compelled me to ship to Cuba the king's *oidor*, Vasques, whom he had arrested for daring to speak to him of amicable treaty. I look daily for intelligence of a battle."

"I vow to heaven!" said Amador, his eyes sparkling with animation, "I vow to heaven! I have no desire to mingle in a civil fray of any kind; but if these mad fellows must be e'en at it, I see no reason why I should not stand hard by, to be a witness of their bravery. Wherefore most excellent cousin, I must entreat of your favour to despatch me without delay, with such guides, or instructions, as will enable me to reach the Señor Cortes before the combat begins."

"If it would suit thee as well to survey this spectacle from the camp of Narvaez," said Cavallero, "I could gratify thee without any difficulty. But I must apprise thee, that to reach Cortes, it will be necessary to pass the lines of Narvaez; and what obstructions he may choose to throw in thy way is more than I can very satisfactorily determine, though I may counsel thee how best to overcome them."

"Please heaven," said Amador proudly, "he shall make me no opposition which he shall not answer to the cost of his body. For I am here, a free hidalgo of Spain, knowing no authority but the king's will and mine own; a neophyte (and, as I may add, a knight by right, though unsworn,) of the illustrious order of San Juan, bearing the instructions of his most eminent highness, the Grand Master, to a vowed knight, and therefore liable to the command of no other man, save only, as before excepted, the king; and he who thinks to hinder me in my passage, besides provoking the wrath of the aforesaid privileged order, must, as I said before, do it under the peril of mine own sword."

"It would not become me to question your privileges, or the danger with which they might be invaded," said the admiral, "nor will I repeat to you in how little regard these matters may be had by a man who has presumed to arrest and imprison the representative of his majesty himself, and who, surrounded by an army, and separated from the sway of the laws, is beyond the present responsibility of any government but that of his own conscience. I can only remind you that, as an emissary of the holy order, you are doubly bound to avoid a quarrel with a Christian and countryman; especially when, as will presently be your case, you are in the lands of the infidel. I must beg to remind you, too, that the Biscayan, holding, as he believes, the authority of the king, and compelled to act as may seem to him necessary for the preservation of the king's interest, should be respected accordingly; and his humours, as well as his rightful commands, borne without anger or opposition."

"May his majesty live a thousand years!" said the cavalier. "It is no part of my principle to oppose his pleasure; wherefore, if contesting the authority of this Biscayan general be such disloyalty, I will refrain from it; that is, as long as I can. But nevertheless, I will protest against any authority that may hinder my present journey."

"Moderation, and the exercise of patience," said Cavallero, "will doubtless secure you from restraint and insult. It is quite necessary you report the object of your travel to the commander Narvaez; and even to desire his permission (a courtesy that has in it nothing of degradation) to continue your journey."

"Doubtless," said Amador, sarcastically, "you will tell me, as did the señor Gomez, the captain of the caravel, that this submission of myself to his commands will be nothing more than the rendering of a customary compliment to his dignity. If there be any way by which I may pass by the camp of Narvaez, I shall be much bound to your excellency to inform me of it; and I will pursue it, be it ever so rough and long, with much more satisfaction than I can ever make my entreaties to him."

"There is no other way," said the admiral. "The Indian city, Zempoala, where Narvaez has established his head-quarters, lies immediately on the path to the Villa Rica; and the scouts of Narvaez, occupying all the intermediate ground, render it impossible you should pass him without observation, or them without their leader's commands. I am now about to despatch to Narvaez certain reinforcements, in whose company I recommend you to travel, and with whom I will send such representations to the general as, I think, will secure you his instant permission and, doubtless, aid, to join your kinsman, the good knight, without delay. Only let me entreat of you, as your true friend and relation, not wantonly, by any overbearing pride, to exasperate the peevish temper of my colleague."

"I will take your advice," said the cavalier, complacently, "and treat the Biscayan with as much respect as he may seem to deserve. Only, as it may be a long day's journey to this Zempoala, I must entreat your excellency to give orders for the instant debarkation of my horses and attendants, and permit me to follow them as soon as possible."

"This shall be instantly done," said the admiral. "In the meanwhile, I must beg to entertain you with the sight of one of those personages who will be your companions on the journey."

CHAPTER III

At the signal of the admiral, an officer made his appearance, received certain commands, the most agreeable of which to the young cavalier were those in reference to his own liberation, and then immediately withdrew.

"Thou wilt now see, worthy cousin," said Cavallero, "a man, whom, although a base Moor and infidel, thou shouldst regard with some sort of admiration; since, from the reports of those who brought him hither, he is endowed with a spirit and pugnacity worthy even of a Christian."

While the admiral spoke, the door of the cabin was darkened by the bodies of several men, who, at his beck, advanced, and stood full in the view of the neophyte. He perceived in these, besides two or three officers of the ship, nothing more, with a single exception, than the rough figures of ordinary sailors. This exception presented itself in the bronzed visage and wildly attired person of the Moor; and Amador almost started, when the bright eyes of the pagan rolled from the admiral to himself in a brief but most penetrating stare. In person, the Moor was somewhat above the ordinary stature, but his limbs, though hardy and active enough, were much attenuated. His face was emaciated and bony, and the long black locks falling wildly over it, gave it an appearance exceedingly haggard, – a character greatly augmented by the white eyeballs flashing like stars in its almost Nubian blackness. Something perhaps was to be allowed for the effect of his uncouth and savage attire, which was composed almost entirely of skins, seemingly of dogs or wolves, a portion of which encircled his loins as a tunic, while the remainder lay, like a cape or short cloak, about his shoulders. Under this latter garment, however, was a shirt of cotton, stained with bright colours; and a kerchief of similar material glittered, not so much like a turban as a fillet round his head. Rude sandals, strapped as high as the midleg with shreds cut from his cloak, completed the primitive costume of the barbarian.

"This fellow," said the admiral, turning from him to one who seemed as chief of the seamen, – "this fellow is then the commander of that Sallee pirate, you took among the Canaries?"

"Commander or not, I cannot say," said the sailor, with a shrug; "but chief varlet at the gun, as I am free to maintain; and freer was he at that same ordnance than was like to be safe for the good snow, *La Encarnacion*, as her ribs may yet testify. But the knave speaks Spanish; and if your excellency chooses to ask him, can tell you his rank and condition."

"No commander – no pirate!" said the Moor, with a voice whose soft and harmonious accents contrasted strangely with his rude appearance. "No commander – no pirate," he repeated in good Castilian; "but a poor Morisco of Fez, voyaging in a harmless trader to the Gibbel-al-Tarik."

"The Gibbel-al-Tarik," said the admiral, dryly, "would have been much beholden for the new visit of an infidel."

"No commander, no pirate, no infidel!" said the Moor, earnestly; "but a poor shepherd of Fez, brought to a knowledge of the true faith, and driven from the home of his fathers for the exercise of it, to the land of his fathers' enemies."

"Moor," said the admiral, composedly, "there are three reasons why I should not believe thee: First, because thou *art* a Moor, and therefore born to be a liar and deceiver; secondly, because, unless God should have worked a greater miracle for the good of a besotted heathen than he often vouchsafes to prayerful Christians, there is no possibility thou couldst be converted to the faith among the sands of Barbary; and thirdly, because the fact that thou art skilful in the management of ordnance, is sufficient proof thou canst not be an ignorant shepherd of Fez, whose hands are more commonly trained to the spear and arrow, than to the quoin and linstock."

"He manages them," said the sailor, "as if he had been born with them in his hands; as I have made proof, sometimes, for my amusement, during the tedium of the voyage."

"If my lord will listen to me," said the Moor eagerly, though humbly, "I will make it apparent that I speak nothing but the truth. – My father drew his first breath among the Almogavars of the desert; his son opened his eyes among the hills of Granada."

"Ha!" cried the admiral; "thou art then one of the accursed tribe of mine own land!"

"A Morisco of the Alpujarras," said the Moor, submissively; "whom, in my very early youth, it pleased my father to have baptized in the holy faith, as was the command of his most faithful and ever-blessed majesty, the king Fernando, the conqueror of the kings of Granada. This will show, my lord, that I speak the words of a Christian. As an Almogavar, I was born to be a soldier, and so trained to all arms of an Almogavar, the knife and dart, the spear and axe, the cross-bow and musket, as well as other weapons of Christians. This will show my lord how it came that I was found skilful at the cannon."

"Thou speakest like a cunning and most honest man," said the admiral, gravely; "but all this revelation does not show me how an Almogavar of Granada became a herdsman of the desert; and, after that, how the herdsman of the desert was transformed into the gunner of a Sallee corsair, or, as thou callest her, a harmless trader, on her innocent voyage to Gibraltar."

"May it please my lord," said the Almogavar, bending for a moment his troubled eyes on the admiral, as if to resolve himself whether or not these questions were put to him in mockery, and then casting them instantly on the floor; "may it please my lord to remember that after the fall of Granada and the subjugation of the Alpujarras, many Moors, Christian as well as pagan, preferring rather to lament their miseries at a distance than in their own enslaved country, chose to accept the merciful permission of the king, and withdrew from the land altogether. This did I, my lord's servant and slave. I fled to the country of my father; and although, there, I suffered many indignities and hardships, as well as constant peril, as being suspected to be an apostate to the faith of the land, I had been content to drag out a wearisome life, but for one grief that was sharper than others."

"I will shrive thee as patiently as thy confessor," said the admiral; "but while thou art speaking the sharpest of thy calamities, it will be much proof to me of the sincerity of thy religion, if thou use language somewhat of the briefest."

"My son," said the Moor, hurriedly, "my son, that was the lamp of my eye-sight, the perfume of my nostrils, the song and music of my soul, was in great danger to be led astray, and converted back to infidelity. To save him from the contagion of heathenism, I resolved to return to Granada, where, though he might grow up to bondage, he should be free from the thrall of darkness: it was better he should be a slave than an infidel. With these thoughts and these hopes in my heart, I embarked in the Sallee trader; when it was my hard fate to be arrested in my course by these men of the Canaries."

"Thy course," said the admiral, "was none of the straightest; and how thou couldst find thy way to Gibraltar by way of the Fortunate Isles, is much more than my nautical experience can teach me to understand."

"A great storm," said the Moor, with the deepest humility, "drove us from our course; and it was the will of God that when the tempest subsided, we should find ourselves beset by two strong ships, which nothing but the fears and desperation of our captain could have tempted him to think of resisting. We fought, and were subdued; the lives of my son and myself were preserved out of the horrors of that combat. The ships were traders of the Isles, bound to these new lands; they brought us hither; where there is nothing left us but to claim the privileges of our faith, acknowledge ourselves the thrall and bondmen of his majesty the king, and entreat of my lord to send us, when it may suit his good pleasure, to our homes and our altars in Granada."

The Moor concluded his speech with a degree of eagerness approaching almost to vehemence. The admiral indifferently rejoined: —

"Thy name is Abdalla – ?"

"Abdoul al Sidi," said the Moor, hastily. "When my father gave me up to be baptized, he called me, in token of his true devotion and humility, Esclavo de la Cruz; but in my days of darkness I was known as Abdoul al Sidi, a poor Almogavar, but descended from the ancient lords of Fez."

"Sidi Abdalla, or sir Slave of the Cross, whichever it may please you to be called," said the admiral, coolly, "in respect to your lordly descent and most dignified title, which I think no Christian has dared to assume since the days of the Cid Rodrigo, I will, before determining how far I can make your fate agreeable to your wishes, condescend to compare your story with that of the brave sailor, master of the Encarnacion, who captured you."

"If I am to say any thing," said the master, gruffly, "it will be first to pronounce this same Abdalla, or Esclavo, as he calls himself, a hypocrite and knave not to be trusted. It is true there was a great storm, which might have driven his piratical galley into the neighbourhood of the Canaries; but that he showed any extraordinary ardour to escape, as long as my consort was out of sight, is a matter not to be believed. Trusting to his skill in the management of the great *mangonneau*, with which the galley was armed, and not doubting to cripple me with some lucky ball, before I could approach him, he fell to with right good will; and it was not until my consort joined in the *melée* that I was able to lay him aboard. Even then, when our crews were springing on his decks, and his fellow-pirates had fled in dismay below, I saw him, this very knave Abdalla, with mine own eyes, lay match to the last charge which thundered against us; immediately after which, with a most devilish spirit of desperation, he snatched up his boy, as one would a kitten, and springing to the opposite side, was in the act of dashing himself into the sea, when he was brought down by a pistol-shot."

"I thought they would have murdered my poor Jacinto," said the Almogavar, in a low voice; "and, in my desperation, desired he should rather die the easy death of the deep, than be mangled by cruel daggers."

"There was much fear of that," said the master; "for my sailors had marked him at the linstock with no great love. In faith, there were some five or six cutlasses aimed at his prostrate body; but I could not bear they should slay the boy, who lay on his breast; and therefore I commanded them to hold."

"Thou art a right worthy and noble heart!" said Amador ardently, interrupting him; "for there is no reason a brave soldier, even in the heat of blood, and with a pagan under his foot, should strike at the life of a boy: and hadst thou done otherwise, I swear to thee, I was so much moved by the relation, I should have gone nigh to slay thee for thy barbarity!"

"And besides, señor," said the master complacently, "I was beset with the idea, that if I preserved his life, and brought him to this land of Mexico, I might sell him at a good price as an able cannonier; such a man, as I had good reason to know, being worth the value of a dozen bloodhounds. And besides," he continued, without regarding the expression of disgust and contempt which drove the look of benevolence from the visage of the cavalier, "I had greater reason to applaud my clemency, when I discovered that the boy Jacinto, besides being a comely and very dexterous stripling, was so great a master of the Moorish lute, singing withal in a most agreeable manner, that I was well assured some noble cavalier among the invaders would not scruple, at any price, to have him for a page."

"I am a Christian! the boy is a Christian!" cried the Moor, hurriedly; "and neither of us can be sold to bondage, except at the command of his most faithful and merciful majesty, the emperor and king; to whose gracious will and pleasure I desire, with my boy, to be rendered."

"Good Cid," said the admiral, "that is a matter wherein, if his majesty's will were certainly known, thou shouldst not have to complain of our negligence; but, under present circumstances, we must make our own judgment the representative of the royal wisdom, and dispose of thee in such manner as we may think most conducive to his majesty's interest. We are resolute thou wilt serve him better by directing the thunders of his cannon against the heathen hordes of Mexico, than by cultivating his vines and fig-trees on the hills of Granada. We must send thee to the commander Narvaez, whom if thou please, he will doubtless advance thee to the command of a falconet,

wherewith thou mayst divert many of thy Almogavar propensities for battle and bloodshed. As for the boy, it not appearing to me that the strumming of his strings, or the uplifting of his voice in ballad and redondilla, are, in any wise, necessary to the conquest of this barbarous empire, I may be able, if thou insistest upon that, to send him to Spain."

"I take my lord at his word!" said Abdoul, trembling with eagerness and anxiety; "let the boy be sent to Spain – to Granada – to either of the ports Algeciras, Malaga, or Almeria; and he will find some friends there, to protect his youth and inexperience; while I submit to my harder fate in Mexico."

"To Almeria?" said Amador quickly. "I have myself some acquaintance with that town; and it may perhaps advantage thee to make me thy confidant, if there be any secret friend there thou wouldst send the boy to; or to take my counsel as to what Christians may be persuaded to show him kindness."

The Moor regarded Amador for an instant with a disturbed but piercing eye. His answer was, however, prevented, by the admiral saying,

"Sir Slave of the Cross, (With the consent of my very noble kinsman); to cut short all needless discussion on this subject, I may as well inform thee, first, that if thy boy be sent to Spain, it will not be to any port of thy choosing, but to such an one as may seem most fit to other persons, and which will most probably be the port of Seville; wherefrom thou canst better imagine than myself, how thy boy will be helped to Granada. In the second place, as I deem it but honesty to acquaint thee, if the youth be taken from this land, he will first be sent to the excellent señor, the honourable Don Diego Velasquez, governor of Cuba, to be disposed of by him as may seem most agreeable to his judgment; and I warn thee, if the lad be an adept at the lute, as is asserted, Don Diego will find him such employment in twangling to the ladies of our brave cavaliers, as will leave it uncertain how much sooner than doomsday he will bethink him to advance the poor youth on his voyage."

"It is enough!" said the Moor with a gloomy countenance. "God is with us; and it may be better to have the boy among the perils of death than the seductions of pleasure. Let my boy stay with me, and I am content to follow my lord's bidding."

He bowed his head upon his breast, and, at the signal of the admiral, was led away.

"Señor Capitan," continued Cavallero, addressing the master, who still lingered in the cabin, "I will satisfy thee for the armament thou hast brought, by acknowledgments, which thou must present to the governor. What more Moors hast thou brought with thee from the galley, capable of doing service in these exigencies?"

"The father and son are all," replied the master. "The others, as I told your excellency, had fled below from the fury of my sailors. To make all sure, while rummaging about their cabin, we had fastened down the hatches. We had not picked up many things of value, before there was a sudden cry that the pirate was sinking. Whether this happened from a shot she may have received, or because the accursed runagates below had knocked a hole in her bottom, was more than was ever determined. The alarm sent us scampering to our own vessel; and in our hurry, as was natural enough, we forgot the infidels in the hold; so that, when she went down, which she did as soon as we were well clear of her, her crew went along with her. – But your excellency has not told me whether I am to receive pay for Sidi and the boy?"

"I swear to heaven," said the admiral, "thou hast no more heart than thine anchor! Thou shockest me with the detail of a catastrophe, which, though affecting the lives of nothing but heathen Moors, is nevertheless both dreadful and pitiable; and yet thou dost abruptly demand me, 'Shall I have payment for the two lives I saved?' Thou wilt have payment, if it please the governor; and not otherwise. Betake thee to thy ship: I will send thee thy warranties, and the sooner thou leavest with them the better."

The master departed, and again Amador found himself alone with the admiral.

"Cousin," said Cavallero, "I am now able to comply with your wishes. I should have been rejoiced to keep you a prisoner on board the Capitana for a few days; but I will not invite you, when I perceive you are so impatient for freedom. Your horses are doubtless at this moment rolling on the beach; your grooms are with them, either combing the sand from their manes, or scraping the sea-

spots from your armour. A company of artisans, with a military escort, is on the eve of marching to the camp of Narvaez. I have given such commands as will secure you the company and friendly aidance of that escort; in addition to which, I will immediately send after you a trusty officer with despatches concerning yourself, to the general, and recommendations to him to assist you in joining your kinsman, the knight Calavar, without delay. You will easily reach Zempoala by night-fall. I beseech you to salute the general with courtesy; and to-morrow you will be in the arms of your leader."

"I am so overjoyed," said the Cavalier, "at the thought of once more bestriding my poor Fogoso, and exchanging the stupid pitching of a ship for the bound of his gallop and curvet, that I know not how I can do otherwise than treat the Biscayan with urbanity."

"A barge is ready to conduct you to the shore," continued the admiral, leading the young soldier to the side of the vessel. "I pray heaven to give you a prosperous journey, and to carry you with as much safety as honour through the weapons of the heathen multitude. Make my devoirs to his noble valour, the good knight of Rhodes; and say to the señor Cortes, that though fate has arrayed me against him as an enemy, I cannot forget the friendship of our past lives. Nay," continued Cavallero, with emphasis, "tell him, that though it does not become me, as an officer commissioned by Velasquez, to hold any communications with him excepting those of simple form and civility, I shall be well pleased when heaven has removed the obstruction, and left me at liberty to meet him with full friendship and confidence. This salutation," said the admiral significantly, "there is no reason thou shouldst impart to Narvaez; for he is distrustful and suspicious to that degree, that, I do not doubt, he would torture its harmlessness into a matured treason."

"I will do your bidding," said Amador blithely, "both to the Biscayan, and the cavalier of Medellin. And now, with a thousand acknowledgments for your favour and assistance, and as many wishes for your weal and comfort, I bid you the farewell of a kinsman and true friend."

And so saying, and heartily shaking the hand of his excellency, the young cavalier sprang into the boat, and was soon wafted to the beach.

CHAPTER IV

The rapture with which Don Amador de Leste exchanged the confined decks of the caravel for the boundless sands of Ulua, and these again for the back of his impatient steed, was fully as great as he had promised himself. Profound was his joy to find the demon of ennui, which had beset the cribbed and confined charger as sorely as the cabined master, flying from his dilated nostrils, and giving place to the mettlesome ardour which had won him the title of the Fiery. The neigh that he sent forth was like the welcome of the battle; the fire that flashed in his eye was bright as the red reflection of a banner; and when he reared up under his rider, it was as if to paw down the opposition of crouching spearmen. A few snuffs of the morning breeze, a few bounds over the sandy hillocks, and the beast that had pined in stupefaction in a narrow stall on the sea, was converted into an animal fit for the seat of a warrior.

The cavalier galloped about for a few moments, while his attendants made their preparations for the journey. Then returning, like a thoughtful leader, to inquire into their welfare, he beheld them with great satisfaction, both horse and man, in good condition to commence their adventurous campaign.

The elder of his followers was a personage of years and gravity; a mass of grizzled locks fell from under his iron skull-cap, and a shaggy beard of the same reverend hue ornamented his cheeks and throat. He had seen long and sharp service, for besides the many scars that marked his swarthy visage, one of which, from its livid hue, seemed to have been won in recent combat, a sabre-cut, extending over his left cheek and brow, had darkened the sinister eye forever. But his frame, though somewhat short and squat, was robust and even gigantic in proportions; and the muscles springing under the narrow cuishes, which, together with a heavy breast-plate, made nearly the whole of his defensive armour, did not seem less of iron than their covering. He was truly a man-at-arms worthy to follow at the heels of a valiant cavalier.

The second attendant, though armed with little more care than the former, had contrived, by the judicious distribution of riband-knots and sashes about his person, to assume a more gallant appearance: and in addition, he had the smoother features and gayer looks of youth. Both were provided with horses strong and not inactive; and both, as Amador returned, were busily engaged in disposing the mails and accoutrements of the cavalier about the bulky loins of their animals.

"Hearken, Lazaro, thou varlet, that flingest my mailed shirt over thy crupper, as if it were a vile horse-cloth," he cried to the younger follower, "have more care what thou art doing. Give my helmet to Baltasar, and let him sling it, with my buckler, over his broad shoulders. I will not entrust thee with such matters; nor, by 'r lady, with my pistols neither."

"If I may make bold to speak," said Baltasar, bending his eye bluffly, and with a sort of rude affection on his young lord, "I can advise a way to dispose of both casque and buckler more agreeably and usefully than on the back of either Lazaro or myself."

"Thou meanest upon mine own, no doubt," said Amador: "I have ever found thee fonder of carrying the arms of a dead foeman than of a living master, though it were the knight Calavar himself."

"That is very true," said the veteran, chuckling grimly at the compliment disguised in the sarcasm.

"I am never loath to do such duty: because, then, my conscience tells me I am bearing arms which can no longer be of use to their owner."

"And thou desirest now to intimate, that, if I were arrayed in my harness, I might put it to some use?"

"Quien sabe? who knows?" said Baltasar, looking around him with an earnest eye. "We are now in a strange land, possessed by barbarians, who are good at spear and bow, and fonder of fighting from an ambuscado than on an open field; and with no true companions that I can see, to look that they be not lurking among yonder woodlands, some of which, I take it for granted, we have to pass."

I should grieve sorely to see an arrow, even in a boy's hand, aimed at your honour's present hauberk of cloth and velvet."

"Well, thy wisdom will not perish for want of utterance," said Amador; "and, in very truth, I must own, it has sometimes stood me in good stead. I will therefore relieve thee of thy burthen, and Lazaro shall hang it to my own shoulders."

He descended, and the linked surcoat soon invested his person.

"I will also presume to recommend your honour to have these snapdragons hung to your saddle-bow," said Baltasar, extending the rude and ponderous pistols, – weapons then scarcely creeping into notice, but within twenty years, not uncommon in the hands of horsemen; "for if it should come to pass, that some cut-throat pagan should discharge a missile at us from the bushes, it will doubtless afford your honour much satisfaction to shoot him dead on the spot; a punishment that would not be so certain with the weapons in my own hands, or in Lazaro's. And before I could bring my cross-bow from my back, it is possible the knave might have another opportunity to do us mischief."

"In this matter also," said Amador good-humouredly, "I will follow thy instructions. But, I give thee warning, there is something in the feeling of my hauberk under this raging sun, that admonishes me how soon my brain would seethe, as in a stew-pan, under the cover of a steel helmet. Wherefore I will have thee carry that in thine own hands, until, from the change of atmosphere, or the appearance of an enemy, I may see fit to alter my resolution."

"I have ever found," said Baltasar, with the pertinacity of age, and, perhaps, of a favourite, "that, under a broiling sun, a well-polished casque of metal is something cooler than a cloth cap; a fact, the reason for which I do not myself understand, and which I should esteem too marvellous for belief, had I not oft-times put it to the proof."

"There is even much truth in what thou art saying," quoth the cavalier, "and I have perhaps philosophy enough to explain the marvel to thee, but that I know philosophy is not much to thy liking. There must be a cold head, however, under the bright cap; otherwise, and with a brain as inflammable as my own, I am very well convinced that bright steel would be just as ignitable as dull iron." And so saying, he again bestrode the champing Fogoso.

"It must be as your honour says," muttered the man-at-arms. "But, as we are all as well prepared now to begin our journey as we will be to-morrow, I would fain know of your favour whither lies our path, or where lags the jackanapes that is to guide us? I heard some talk in the caravel of a great troop of horse and foot, that was to accompany us; but unless it may have been the herd of vagabonds, who, a full hour since, took up their march along the sands, I know not where to look for them among these few tinkers and sailors that are strolling yonder among the huts of bamboo."

"I have much reliance on the friendship and courtesy of my cousin, the admiral," said Amador hastily; "but I must confess, that, saving the appearance of yonder bridled horse, (which may be in waiting for the officer he told me of,) it looks very much, now, as if he had left me to mine own guidance. Nay, I wrong the worthy señor," he cried quickly, as turning with some doubt and indignation towards the ship, he beheld a boat leave her, and approach the shore with all the speed of oars; "the guide he promised me is, without doubt, in that barge; and the bridled horse, which, as I can perceive even at this distance, is none of the bravest, is the beast whereon he will keep us company."

As Amador conjectured, the boat contained his promised companion, who instantly sprang upon the beach and on the caparisoned animal, and in a few moments was at the side of the cavalier. He was young and handsome, an adult in stature, but scarcely a man in deportment, for as he removed his cap to make the obeisance of an inferior, there was a strong tincture of confusion and trepidation in his countenance. This was perhaps owing, in part, to a consciousness of having merited a reprimand for over-delay, and in part also to his suddenly finding himself confronted with so warlike a personage as the neophyte. Amador of the caravel was a different person from Amador armed and mounted; and, indeed, as he sat on his noble bay, mailed and sworded, and with two goodly armsmen at his back, he was such a martial figure as might have moved an older messenger to reverence.

"Señor caballero," said the youth, with a stammering voice, "my master and patron, the admiral, has appointed me, his secretary, to be your guide to the Indian city Zempoala; and I have to beg your pardon, if, waiting for the letters wherewith it was his excellency's will to charge me, and to make some needful preparation of my own, I have detained your favour somewhat longer than was agreeable."

"I am ever bound to thank his excellency," said Amador; "and as I well suppose, your own preparations had some weighty relation to the business you have in charge, I will not take it upon me to express any dissatisfaction with your delay."

"In truth," said the secretary, ingenuously, "I was loath to depart without such armour about me as should beseem the attendant of a true cavalier; in the fitting of which I fell into some perplexity, as not finding a corselet that did not, in some manner, incommode my ribs; and besides, the sabres were all so unwieldy and rough about the hilts, I was in some despair I should never find one to my liking."

"Señor secretario," said Amador, with a smile of good-humoured contempt, surveying the youth, and observing the cuirass chosen with no discretion and donned without skill, "I am of opinion, that in the company of myself and my attendants, you will find no occasion for such troublesome apparel; and it is my advice, grounded on your admission of inexperience in such matters, that, should we, on our march, be beset by any enemies, you take post instantly behind my veteran Baltasar, whose broad breast will stand you in greater stead than your ill-chosen cuirass, and whose arm will do you better service than the sabre in your own hands."

"Señor," said the youth, colouring, "I am no soldier nor cavalier; I have ever had my breast more bruised by the scribe's table than the weight of a breast-plate, and my fingers have heretofore known more of the goose-quill than the sword. Nevertheless I am both willing and desirous to be placed where the knowledge of weapons may be obtained, and to encounter such risks as are the helpers to knowledge. It was from no lack of beseeching on mine own part, that his excellency has heretofore denied me permission to try my fate among the cavaliers ashore; nor should I have hoped that pleasure so early, but that I found his excellency was bent to do you honour, by making a confidential servant your attendant, and was therefore easily persuaded to give me the opportunity I have so long coveted, of looking a little into the strange sights of this marvellous land."

"I am to understand then," said Amador gravely, "that his excellency, the admiral, has entrusted the charge of guiding me to Zempoala to an individual who has never before put foot on the wilderness that divides us from it?"

"It is true, señor," said the secretary, "that I have never been to Zempoala. But I hope your favour will not doubt me for that reason, nor take offence at the admiral. I am enjoined to conduct you to the reinforcement that set out an hour ago. Its tracks are plain enough along the beach; and as it is composed principally of footmen, there is no doubt we will overtake it before another hour has elapsed. I am confident I can lead your favour without difficulty to the party; among which are guides well acquainted with the country."

"Let us set out then, in heaven's name," said the cavalier: "the day is wasting apace; the sun climbs high in the vault; and the sooner we are sheltered from its fury among some of yonder distant forests, the better will it be for us. St. John be our guide, and the Holy Virgin favour us. – Amen! Let us depart."

CHAPTER V

As the secretary anticipated, the tracks of the reinforcement were plainly discernible over the sandy downs and by the margins of the pestilent fens, which gave an air of desolation to this part of the Mexican coast, not much relieved by an occasional clump of palms, nor by the spectacle, here and there disclosed, of the broad ocean blackening among the low islets; though the hazy and verdant ramparts which stretched between these burning deserts and the imagined paradises of the interior, ever presented a field of refreshment and interest to the eyes of the travellers. The novelty of their situation, felt more or less intensely by all, was exciting: and many a dream of barbaric monarchs reposing on thrones of gold and emeralds, and canopied by flowers and feathers, – of dusky armies deploying among green valleys and on the borders of fair lakes, – and perhaps of themselves doing the work of heroes among these mystic multitudes, – wandered through their over-troubled fancies.

Such visions flitted over the brain of Amador, but mingled with others, with which the past had more to do than the present; for, despite the eager longing with which he looked forward to a meeting with his good knight and kinsman, and, notwithstanding his impatient ardour to gaze with his own eyes upon those scenes which were filling the minds of men with wonder, he looked back from a sand-hill to the distant ships, and sighed, as, in an instant of time, his soul was borne from them, over the broad surges to the pleasant hills of Spain.

But with the view of the squadron vanished his memory and his melancholy: the narrow belt of sand-hills along the coast had been exchanged for the first zone of vegetation; the mimosa afforded its shade; the breeze and the paroquet chattered together on its top; and when he came, at last, to journey among the shadows of a forest rich in magnificent and unknown trees and plants, with here a lagoon fringed with stately ceibas (the cotton-wood trees of Mexico) and gigantic canes, and there a water-course murmuring among palms and other tropical trees, he gave himself up to a complacent rapture. He remarked with satisfaction the bright plumage of water-fowl, – the egret, the pelican, the heron, and sometimes the flamingo, sporting among the pools; gazed with wonder after the little *picaflor*, or humming-bird, darting, like a sunbeam, from flower to flower; with still greater admiration listened to the song of the calandra and the cardinal, and to the magical *centzontli*, – the hundred-tongued, – as it caught and repeated, as if with a thousand voices, the thousand roundelays of other songsters scattered among the boughs; and it was not until the notes of a trumpet, swelling suddenly in the distance, invaded his reveries, that he roused from the voluptuous intoxication of such a scene.

"It is the trumpet of the soldiers, señor!" cried the secretary, joyously; "and it rejoices me much, for I know not how much longer I could have followed their obscure tracks through this forest. And besides, I find, as I must in honesty confess, I have in me so little of the skill of a leader, that I would gladly submit to be led myself, especially by your worship, though it were to follow you to battle as an humble esquire."

"I must commend your spirit, señor Lorenzo Fabueno," (for so the secretary had called himself,) "though I must needs believe your inexperience in all matters of war might render such an attempt exceedingly difficult, if not altogether impossible."

"Señor," said the secretary, eagerly, "I have the wish, and doubtless the ability, in course of time, to learn all the duties, and to acquire some of the skill, of a soldier; and under so noble a leader as your favour, I am sure I should advance much faster than ever I did in the learning of a clerk. And, in addition to the little service I might render with my sword, I have such skill with the pen as might be of good use to your honour."

"I have no certain assurance," said Amador, "that I shall have any occasion to use my own sword; it is utterly beyond my imagination to discover to what use I could put the inkhorn of a secretary; and finally, I know not how the course of events in these deserts may require me to add to the number of my associates. Nevertheless, señor Lorenzo, if it be the wish of his excellency the admiral, that

his secretary should be transformed into a soldier, I see not how I can refuse to give my assistance to the conversion."

"I know not why I should be dungeoned in a ship's cabin," said Lorenzo, with a sort of petulance, "when other youths are roaming at liberty among these brave hills; and gnawing a quill with disgust, when all my old schoolmates are carving out reputation with more manly implements. I am sure I was not born to slave forever at the desk."

"This may be all true, as, in my opinion, it is both natural and reasonable," said Amador, with gravity; "for, it seems to me, man was brought into the world for a nobler purpose than to scribble on paper. Yet you have not made it apparent that the admiral's wishes are in this matter consonant with your own."

"I know not that they are," replied the secretary, "but, as I now feel myself at liberty, with both horse and sword, I cannot help feeling that they ought to be. How I can ever have the heart to return to my bondage again, is more than I can tell; and I am confident, if it were your favour's desire he should grant me permission to follow you through this land, he would make no opposition, the more particularly that your favour is his kinsman."

"I doubt whether the consent would not be wrung from his courtesy; and I cannot well agree to rob him of one who may be a valuable servant. Neither, under such circumstances, can I think of encouraging you in your ardour, or recommending you, at present, to change your pursuits, for which you are better fitted than for mine. Nay," said the cavalier good-naturedly, observing the chagrin of the youth, "if you are resolutely bent on your purpose, it is my advice you make your petitions to his excellency; and when he has granted them, as doubtless he will, you can, with a free mind, seek the patronage of some cavalier engaged in these armies of invasion. – Hark! the trumpet sounds louder and nearer, and by my faith, I see on yonder rising ground the bodies of men and the glimmer of weapons! Spur thy horse a little; (and, I pr'ythee, fling thy shoulders a jot backwards, sitting erect and at ease; for I promise thee, this manner of riding, as if thou wouldst presently be hugging at thy nag's neck, is neither becoming nor advantageous;) – spur me up a little, and we will join company with them."

The long and straggling train with which the travellers caught up, just as it issued from the forest upon an open tract of low sandy hills and plains, was composed of motley materials. A few mounted men, who, by their armour and bustling activity, seemed the leaders and commanders, were scattered among a horde of footmen, a portion of whom were armed and ranked as a company of military, but the greater part being the ordinary native labourers, who served the office of mules, and bore on their backs the burdens of the invaders. Some five or six score of these swarthy creatures, followed by a dozen Castilian crossbowmen and a single horseman, brought up the rear. They stalked in a line one after another, each bending to his burden; and in their uniformity of equipment, gait, muscular figures, and solemn visages, added not a little to the singularity of the spectacle. A narrow strip of some vegetable texture, so rude and coarse that it seemed rather a mat than a cloth, was wrapped round the loins of each, leaving their strong and tawny bodies otherwise naked. No sandal protected their soles from the heated soil; and no covering, save only the long and matted locks swinging about their countenances, defended their heads from the scorching sun. A huge basket of cane, the *petlacalli*, or *petaca* of the Spaniards, carelessly covered with matting, and evidently well charged with military stores and provision, weighed upon the shoulders of each, while it was connected by a broad strap to the forehead. Thus burthened, however, and thus exposed to a temperature which, as the day advanced, seemed, in the open plains, nearly intolerable to their Christian companions, they strode on with a slow but vigorous step, each bearing a knot of gay flowers or of brilliant feathers, wherewith he defended his face from insects, and perhaps, occasionally, his eyes from the dazzling reflection of the soil. These were the *Tlamémé*, or carriers of Mexico.

The eye of Amador, though at first attracted by this singular train, dwelt with more surprise and curiosity on the crossbowmen, who were sweltering, in common with nearly every Christian

of the party, under the thick and uncouth investment of the *escaupil*, a sort of armour which the invaders of Mexico had not disdained to borrow from their despised enemies. This consisted of nothing more than garments of woollen or cotton cloth, cut as much after the fashions of Spain as was possible, quilted so thickly with cotton as to be able to resist the arrow heads and lance-points of the Indians; which virtue, added to the facility with which it could be obtained and adapted to every part of the body, gave the *escaupil* a decided preference over the few pieces of iron mail which the poverty of the combatants denied them the power of extending to the whole frame. In truth, so common had become this armour, that there were few among the cavaliers of the conquest, except those leaders who despised so unknighly and so unsightly an attire, who were provided with any other. Nevertheless many distinguished captains concealed garments of this material under their iron armour; and the common soldiers of Cortes, after long experience, had fallen upon the plan of quilting it in pieces imitative of morions and breast-plates, which were far from being uncouth or unwieldy. But its efficacy, though strongly explained and urged by the secretary Fabueno, could not blind Don Amador to its ungainliness, as seen in the fashions of raw recruits; and even the solemn gravity of Baltasar was changed to a grin of ineffable derision, and the good-humoured vivacity of Lazaro to a laugh of contempt, when the secretary advised the cavalier to provide his followers with such coats of mail.

"What thinkest thou, Lazaro, rogue?" said Don Amador, merrily. "Thou wert but a bitter groaner over the only cut it was ever thy good hap to meet: and that was by a fair and courteous pistol-shot, which hath something of an oily way about it: whereas these infidel flints and hard woods gash as painfully as an oyster-shell. What sayest thou? Shall I give thee an *escaupil*, to save thee from new lamentation?"

"May your honour live a thousand years!" said the serving-man. "The tortoise to his shell, the Turk to his turban: heaven never thrust a hornet into the cocoon of a caterpillar, nor a lion into a sheep's skin. Wherefore I will keep my sting and my claws free from the cotton bags; the only merit of which is, that when a man is wounded in them, he has lint ever ready at his fingers."

"For my part," said Baltasar, "I am, in this matter, much of Lazaro's way of thinking. Howsoever, please your favour, when I see these lubberly lumps fight more courageously than myself in my iron trifles, I will straightway change my mind on the subject."

"Hold thy tongue, then," said the cavalier, "lest thou give offence to some of these worthy cotton-coats, who have, in no manner, furnished thee with cause for a quarrel."

The cavalier rode on, followed closely by his attendants, courteously returning the salutations which were everywhere rendered to his apparent rank and martial appearance by the Spanish portion of the train; though not even the glitter of his mail, the proud tramp of his war-horse, nor the stout appearance of his followers, drew a glance from the Tlamémé. The dull apathy which the oppression of ages has flung over the spirits of Mexicans at the present epoch, had already been instilled into the hearts of this class of natives, which with some others, under the prevalence of the common feudalism of barbarians, were little better than bondmen. He rode slowly by them, admiring the sinewy bulk of their limbs, and the ease with which they moved under their heavy burdens.

The van of the train was formed by a score of footmen, all arrayed in the *escaupil*, and all, with the exception of some five or six, who bore firelocks, armed with sword and spear. A cavalier of goodly presence, and well mounted, rode at their head; and Amador, thinking he perceived in him the tokens of gentle blood and manners, pressed forward to salute him. The ringing of Fogoso's heels arrested the attention of the leader, who, turning round and beholding the gallant array of the stranger, instantly returned upon his path, and met him with many courteous expressions. At the very moment of meeting, Amador's eye was attracted by a figure, which, in making way for the steed of the leader, had well-nigh been trodden under the hoofs of his own; and in which, when removed from this peril, he instantly remarked the spare person and haggard countenance of the Moor. Holding fast to the hand of the *Almogavar*, and indeed, for an instant, while the danger lasted, wrapped anxiously

in his arms, was a boy, whose youth and terror might have won a second notice, had not the salutation of the officer immediately occupied his attention.

"The señor Amador de Leste," said he – "Thou varlet of an infidel, I will strike thee with my lance!" (This menacing objurgation was addressed to the Moor, at the moment when, most endangered, he wavered with his boy between the horses.) "The señor Amador de Leste," he continued, as the Moor, recovering himself, cowered away, "will not be surprised to find his coming expected, and his presence welcomed, by the general Narvaez, or by his excellency's humble friend and captain, Juan Salvatierra."

"Señor Salvatierra, I give you good thanks," replied Amador; "and although I know not what avant-courier has proclaimed the approach of so obscure an individual as myself, I will not, for that reason, receive your courtesy less gratefully."

"I have with me here," said Salvatierra, with a stately condescension, "several of your fellow-voyagers of the caravel; among whom it would have been strange indeed if any had forgotten the name of so honourable a companion."

"Those cavaliers of the caravel," said Amador, dryly, "who condescend to claim me as a companion, do me thereby a greater honour than I am desirous to do myself. Sly companions are, as you may see, my two men-at-arms; to which we will at present add the young señor Fabueno, whom, as the secretary of his excellency the admiral Cavallero, I am not indisposed to acknowledge."

There was something in the tone of the haughty and even arrogant neophyte, that might have nettled his new friend; but its only effect, beside bringing a little colour upon his rather pallid cheeks, was to rob his suavity of somewhat of its loftiness.

"It is for hidalgos and cavaliers of knightly orders," he said, "and not for ignoble adventurers, to aspire to the fellowship of a valiant knight of San Juan."

"I am no knight of San Juan," said Amador, "but a simple novice, who may one day claim admission to the illustrious order (by right of birth,) or not, as it may please the destinies and mine own humour. Nevertheless I have much pleasure to speak of the order and its valiant brothers, at every opportunity, and at the present moment I am moved to ask your favour, as relying much on your knowledge, what tidings have been last had of the good knight Calavar, an eminent branch of that most lordly, though thunder-stricken, stock."

"Concerning the knight of Calavar," said Salvatierra blandly, "it is my grief to assure you that his madness – "

"Call it his melancholy! or his humour!" said Amador, sternly; "and let it be some mitigation to your surprise, if my correction sound like a rebuke, to know that I am his kinsman."

Again did the colour mount into the cheeks of the cavalier, and again did his courtesy, or his discretion, get the better of the impulse that raised it.

"The kinsman of that valiant and renowned gentleman," he said politely, "shall command me to any epithet he chooses. The señor De Leste will doubtless lament to hear that his kinsman, with an eccentricity scarce worthy his high birth and knightly dignity, still stoops to be the follower of an inferior and rebel, the outcast and proclaimed outlaw, Hernan Cortes."

"As far as my own judgment is concerned in this matter, señor caballero," said Amador coolly, "I very much doubt whether I shall lament that circumstance at all. The knight Calavar will not disparage his dignity or his profession, by choosing to serve where a little-minded man might covet to command. Such a condescension in him, besides being a new proof of magnanimity and fidelity to his vows, whereby he is sworn never to make peace with the infidel, is only an evidence to me that the cavalier Cortes, whom you call a rebel and outlaw, must be a man worthy of much more respectful appellations; as indeed, methinks, your own reflections should show you must be the due of any associate of the knight of Calavar."

The unaffected surprise, and even consternation, with which the follower of Narvaez heard the neophyte thus speak of his leader's enemy, might perhaps have urged Amador to the utterance of

commendations still more unequivocal, had not his eye at that moment been caught by the shadow on the sand of a man striding nearer to the flanks of Fogoso than he had supposed any footman to be. His own position was near the side of the company of musketeers and spearmen mentioned before; his followers, not being willing to obtrude upon the privacy of the cavaliers, had fallen a little back; and the Morisco, as he took it for granted, was lagging some distance behind. His surprise was therefore not a little excited, when looking round, he beheld the Almogavar so close at his side as to be able to overhear all that was said, and drinking his words with an expression of the intensest interest.

"Son of a dog!" cried Salvatierra, who beheld him at the same time, and who was not unwilling to vent some of the gall that Amador had raised in his bosom, upon so legitimate an object, – "I will see if I cannot teach thee how to thrust thyself among soldiers and hidalgos!"

"Softly, señor Caballero!" cried Amador, observing the captain raising his lance; "strike not Abdalla; for I have it in my power to inform you, that, although in some sense your prisoner, and, to the eye of a stranger, a most helpless and wretched varlet, he has shown himself to be possessed of a spirit so worthy of respect, that you will do yourself foul shame to strike him."

The lance of the cavalier was turned away from the shrinking Moor.

"Don Amador de Leste shall command my weapon, whether it be to smite or to spare," said Salvatierra, smothering the rage which every word and action of the neophyte seemed fated to inspire, and advancing to the head of the train.

"Hark'ee, Sidi Abdalla," continued Amador, beckoning complacently to the retiring Morisco, "it is not in my nature to see indignity of any kind heaped upon a man who hath not the power of vengeance, and especially a man who hath in him the virtue of courage, without raising a hand in his defence."

"My lord speaks the truth," said Abdoul, with a subdued voice; "the Almogavar hath not the power of vengeance: – The strong man may strike him, the proud may trample, and he cannot resist; the cavalier may wound with the lance, the soldier may smite with the unthonged bow. – It is all one; – his head is bare, his breast open, his hand empty: – he can neither resist nor avenge."

"By St. John of Jerusalem," said the cavalier warmly, moved to a stronger feeling for the friendless Morisco, "I remember, as was confessed by that beast of a Canary captain, that when thine enemies were on thy decks, and thy friends fled from thy side, (for which they deserved to sink to the bottom, as they did;) thou hadst the courage to discharge thy mangonneau into the victorious trader; for which reason chiefly, but partly because thou hast avowed thyself a Christian proselyte, I will take it upon me, as far as it may be in my power, to be thy protector and champion."

"My lord is good," said the Moor, bending his head low on his breast; "and in the day of my death I will not forget his benevolence. The Almogavar was born to grief; trouble came at his first hour; his first breath was the sigh of Granada, his first cry was mingled with the groans of his enslaved people, his first look was on the tears of his father. Sorrow came in youth, anguish in manhood, and misery is in the footsteps of years. My lord is great and powerful; he protects me from the blow of a spear. – He can save me from a grief that strikes deeper than a thousand spears!"

"As I am a true gentleman and Christian," said Amador, "I will hold to my word, to give thee protection and aid, as far as my power lies."

"The feeble boy that totters over these scorching sands!" said the Moor, raising his eyes wistfully to the cavalier, and turning them for an instant with a look of unspeakable wildness to his son. – The cavalier looked back, in that momentary pause, and beheld the young Morisco. He seemed a boy of not more than twelve years. The soldier judged only from his stature, for a garment of escaupil of unusual thickness completely invested and concealed his figure; while his face drooping, as if from weariness, on his breast, was hidden by a cap slouching in disorder, and by long ringlets that fell in childish profusion over his shoulders.

"The boy!" continued Abdalla, turning again to the neophyte, and raising his clasped hands as if in supplication. "Is it fit his tender years should be passed among the horrors of a camp? among the

dangers of a wild war? among the vices and contaminations of a brutal soldiery? If it were possible," – and here the voice of the Almogavar trembled with eagerness; – "if it were possible that boy could be sent to Granada, – nay, to Barbary, – anywhere, where, for his father's sake, he should be granted a refuge and asylum; then might the curse be uttered, the blow struck, and Abdoul, receiving it as the payment of his debt, would not call upon his lord for vengeance."

"Thou heardest from the admiral," said Amador, "how impossible would be the gratification of such a wish; since, even were he parted from this shore, it rests with another, who, I can, upon mine own knowledge, assure thee, is not likely to help him on his way, whether he shall not waste his days among the planters of the islands; who, according to common report, are not a whit less wild and debauched than their friends here in Mexico."

"God is just!" cried the Moor, clasping his hands in despair.

"Nevertheless," continued Amador, "I will not fail to make thy petition, backed with my own request, to the señor Narvaez; and at the worst, it is not improbable some good cavalier may be found who will consent to receive him as a page, and treat him with kindness."

"God is just!" reiterated the Moor, with a gloomy sorrow; "and the arrow of the savage may save him from the wrong of the Christian."

"I tell thee again," said Amador, "I will not forget to do my best for his welfare, at the first opportunity. But tell me, Abdalla" – The Morisco was dropping behind: he returned. – "I had forgotten to ask thee a question for which I first called thee. I was speaking to this hot-tempered captain of the knight Calavar – By heaven! it was thus I saw thine eyes sparkle before! Is there any magic in the name, that it should move thee to such emotion?"

"The knight Calavar," said the Morisco, "was among the conquerors of the Alpujarras; and how can I hear his name, and not bethink me of the black day of my country? His name is in our Moorish ballads; and when the orphan sings them, he mourns over the fate of his father."

"That the knight Calavar did good service among those rebellious mountaineers, I can well believe," said the cavalier, hastily; "but that he did not temper his valour with mercy, is an assertion which no man can make to me with perfect safety. As to those ballads of which you speak, I am not certain if they be not the invention of some devilish magician, opposed to honourable war and glory; since it is their sole purpose to keep one thinking of certain sorrowful particulars, that may be a consequence of victory and conquest, such as tearful widows and destitute orphans; and I must declare, for mine own part, such is the mischievous tendency of these madrigals, that sometimes, after hearing them, I have had my imagination so enchanted, as to look with disgust at war, and almost to lament that I ever had struck at the life of a human being. I shall like well to have thy boy sing to me; but, as I will tell him beforehand, it must be of lovelorn knights, and of knights going to battle, and never a word about widows and orphans."

CHAPTER VI

At midday, the squadron, after having accomplished more than half the journey, halted for rest and refreshment on the banks of a little river, under the shade of pleasant trees. The Tlamémé threw down their bundles, and, apart from the rest, betook themselves to their frugal meal. A plaintain, a cake of maize, or a morsel of some of the nameless but delicious fruits of the clime, perhaps growing at their side, prepared them for the enjoyment of slumber; while the Spaniards, grouped among the trees, added to this simple repast the more substantial luxury of the *tasajo*, or jerked beef of the islands.

As for the cavalier De Leste, not having bethought him to give orders for the preparation of such needful munitions, he was glad to accept the invitation of the captain Salvatierra to share his meal; and this he did the more readily, that, having entered into farther conversation with the leader, after the affair of the lance, it was the good fortune of this gentleman to stumble upon no more offensive topics. In addition to this, he observed with great satisfaction, that Salvatierra, preserving among his subalterns the stateliness which he had veiled to the neophyte, did not mean to trouble him with their society; and it was only at his express desire that the secretary Fabueno was admitted to partake of their repast. The excellent taste of the worthy commander, or perhaps the wisdom of his attendants, several of whom, both Christian and pagan, being in constant waiting, gave him an appearance of great rank and importance, had provided a stock of food, which, in variety and quantity, might have satisfied the hunger of half the squadron. Here, besides the heavenly anana, the grateful manioc, and other fruits and roots with which the cavalier had become acquainted in the islands, he was introduced to the royal chirimoya, the zapote, and other fruits as new as they were delicious. But, above all these delights with which Providence has so bountifully enriched the lands of Mexico, did Don Amador admire the appearance of certain fowls, which, though neither reeking nor smoking with their savoury juices, but drawn cold from their covering of green leaves, were of so agreeable a character as to fill his mind with transport.

"Either this land is the very paradise of earth," said he, "or, señor Salvatierra, you have the most goodly purveyors among your household, that ever loaded the table of man. I will be much beholden to your favour to know the name of this fowl I am eating, which, from its bulk, one might esteem a goose, but which, I am sure, is no such contemptible creature."

"That," said the leader, "is a sort of great pheasant, the name of which I have not yet schooled my organs to pronounce, but which, being taken among the hills and trained in the cottages of the Indians, becomes as familiar and loving as a dog; and is therefore always ready when its master is hungry."

"By my life, then!" said Amador, "I am loath to eat it; for it seems to me, the creature that loves us is more worthy to be consecrated in the heart, than immolated to the cravings of the stomach. I will therefore desire to know something of that other featherless monster at your elbow, previous to determining upon its fitness for mastification."

"Your favour need entertain no scruples about this bird," said the captain; "for although domesticated, and kept by the Indians about their houses in great flocks, it hath too much affection for itself to trouble itself much about its masters. It is a kind of peacock, and without possessing any of the resplendent beauty of that animal, it is endowed with all its vanity and pride; so that, when strutting about with its shaven head and long-gobbeted beard, its feathers ruffled in a majestic self-conceit, our soldiers have sometimes, for want of a better name, called it *el Turco*."

"A better name could not have been invented," said the neophyte; "for if it be true, as is sometimes asserted by those who know better than myself, that heretics and infidels are the food of the devil, I know no morsel should be more agreeable to his appetite than one of those same pagans that give name to this foolish and savoury creature."

The thoughts of Amador, as he sat testing the merits of the noble fowl, which is one among the many blessings America, in after days, scattered over the whole world, wandered from Mexico to Rhodes, from the peaceful enjoyment of his dinner to the uproar and horror of a siege, from a dead fowl to the turbaned Turk; and then, by a similar vagary, jumped at once from the magnificent infidel to the poor Morisco who had lately trod the desert at his side. As the image of Abdoul al Sidi entered his brain, he looked round and beheld the proselyte sitting with his boy in the shadow of a palm, remote from the rest; and a pang smote him, as he perceived, that, among the scores who sat glutting their appetites around, not one had dropped a morsel of food into the hands of the Almogavar or his child.

"Hark'ee, Lazaro, thou gluttonous villain!" he cried, with a voice that instantly brought the follower, staring, to his side; "dost thou feed like a pelican, and yet refuse to share thy meal, as a pelican would, with a helpless fellow of thy race? Take me this lump of a Turk to Sidi Abdalla, and bid him feed his boy."

"I will suggest to your favour," said the captain Salvatierra, with a grin, "that Lazaro be directed to bring the urchin hither, with his lute, of which it is said he is no mean master; and before he eats he shall sing us a song, which, thus, he will doubtless execute with more perfection than after he has gorged himself into stupidity or the asthma."

"I agree to that, with all my heart," said the neophyte. "The boy can sing while we are eating, provided the poor fellow be not too hungry."

Lazaro strode to the Moriscos; and in an instant, as they rose, Amador beheld the Sidi take the instrument from his own back where he had carried it, and put it into the hands of his offspring. The boy received it, and, as Amador thought, removed the gay covering, with a faltering hand. Nevertheless, in a few moments, this preparation was accomplished, and, with Abdalla, the stripling stood trembling from weariness or timidity at the side of the group.

"Moor," said Salvatierra, before Amador had commenced his benevolent greeting, "the noble and valiant cavalier hath charitably commanded thou shouldst eat thy dinner at our feet; which whilst thou art doing, we will expect thy lad to entertain us with such sample of his skill in luting and singing as may make our own repast more agreeable."

"That is, if the boy be not too hungry," said the good-natured neophyte. "I should blush to owe my pleasures to any torments of his own, however slight; and (as I know by some little famine wherewith we were afflicted at Rhodes,) there is no more intolerable anguish with which one can be cursed, than this same unhumoured appetite."

"Jacinto will sing to my lord," said the Almogavar submissively.

But Jacinto was seized with such a fit of trembling, as seemed for a time to leave him incapable; and when, at last, he had sufficiently subdued his terror, to begin tuning his instrument, he did it with so slow and so hesitating a hand, that Salvatierra lost patience, and reproved him harshly and violently.

It happened, unluckily for the young Moor, that, at that moment, the eye of Amador wandered to Fogoso, and beheld him wallowing, with more of the spirit of a yeoman's hog than a warrior's charger, in a certain miry spot near to which he had been suffered to crop the green leaves. He called hastily and wrathfully to Lazaro, and, in his indignation, entirely lost sight of his dinner, his host, and the musician.

"Whelp of a heathen!" said Salvatierra to the shrinking lad: "hast thou no more skill or manners, but to make this accursed jangling, to which there seems no end? Bestir thyself, or I will teach thee activity."

The boy, frightened at the violence of the soldier, rose to his feet, and dropping his instrument in alarm clung to Abdalla. The wrath of the hot-tempered Salvatierra exceeded the bounds of decorum and of humanity. He had a twig in his hand, and with this he raised his arm to strike the unfortunate urchin. But just then the neophyte turned round, and beheld the act of tyranny.

"Señor!" he cried, with a voice even more harsh and angry than his own, and seizing the uplifted hand with no ceremonious grasp, – "Señor! you will not so far forget your manhood as to do violence to the child? Know that I have taken him, for this journey, into my protection; know also, thou canst not inflict a stripe upon his feeble body, that will not degrade thee into the baseness of a hind, and that will not especially draw upon thee the inconvenience of mine own displeasure!"

The heart of Salvatierra sunk before the flaming countenance of the cavalier: but observing that several of his nearest followers had taken note of the insult, and were grasping their arms, as if to avenge it, he said with an air of firmness,

"The señor De Leste has twice or thrice taken occasion to requite my courtesies with such shame as is hard to be borne, and in particular by interfering with the just exercise of my authority; and I have to assure him, that when the duties of my office shall release me from restraint, his injuries shall not be unremembered."

"If thou art a hidalgo," said the cavalier sternly, "thou hast the right to command me; if of ignoble blood, as from thy deportment to this trembling child, I am constrained to believe, I have, nevertheless, eaten of thy bread and salt, and cannot refuse to meet thee with such weapons and in such way as thou mayest desire; and to this obligation do I hold myself bound and fettered."

Some half-dozen followers of the captain had crowded round their leader, and were lowering ominously and menacingly on the neophyte. Lazaro and Baltasar beheld the jeopardy of their master, and silently but resolutely placed themselves at his side; nay, even the youthful Fabueno, though seemingly bewildered, as if doubting on which side to array himself, had snatched up his bloodless sabre; and it seemed for an instant as if this unlucky rupture might end in blows. The señor Salvatierra looked from his followers to the angry hidalgo; the flush faded from his cheek; and it was remarked by some of his soldiers, not a little to his dispraise, that when, as if conquering his passion, he motioned them to retire, it was with a hurried hand and tremulous lip.

"The señor de Leste is right," he said, with a disturbed voice; "I should have done myself dishonour to harm the boy; and although the reproof was none of the most gentle and honeyed, I can still thank him that it preserved me from the shame of giving too much rein to my ill-temper. I therefore forget the injury, as one that was merited, discharge my anger as causeless, and desiring rather to devote my blood to the subjugation of pagans, than to squander it in contest with a fellow-Christian, offer the hand of reconciliation and of friendship to Don Amador de Leste."

There was an appearance of magnanimity in this confession of fault and offer of composition, that won upon the good opinion of the neophyte; and he frankly gave his hand to the captain. Then turning to the innocent cause of his trouble, who, during the time that there seemed danger of a conflict, had exhibited the greatest dismay, he found him sobbing bitterly in the arms of Abdalla.

"Poor child!" said the benevolent cavalier, "thou art fitter to touch thy lute in the bower of a lady, than to wake it among these wild and troubled deserts. It is enough, Abdalla: conduct thy son to some shade, where he may eat and sleep; and when we renew our march, I will think of some device to spare his tender feet the pain of trudging longer over the sands."

The Moor laid his hand on his heart, bowed with the deepest submission and gratitude, and led the boy away to a covert.

CHAPTER VII

"Didst thou observe, brother henchman," said Lazaro, as, after having completed his meal, and taken good note of the tethers of the horses, he threw himself on the ground by the side of Baltasar, as if to imitate the other members of the party, who were making what preparations they could for the indulgence of the siesta, – "Didst thou observe, I say, old sinner, that, this moment, we were like to have made experience of the virtue of cotton corslets? By my faith, this gentle master mine will not suffer our hands to be idle, so long as there be savages to curse the faith, or hidalgos to cross his humours. I am ever bound to the magnanimous señor commander, that he thought fit to swallow his wrath, and send me those black-browed vagabonds back to their dinner: for otherwise, I assure thee, there was much fear of our supping in purgatory."

"For my part," said Baltasar, raising his head from the saddle, which served him for a pillow, and looking curiously round on the various groups, "I am of opinion, there was more discretion than dignity about that same captain, when he became so moderate of a sudden; for so sure as he was very foolish to get into a quarrel with the boy Amador, who, I am free to say, is no way unworthy to be a kinsman and esquire of my master the knight, so surely would the boy have dinged the feathers off his gilt casque with the first blow; and how much of his head might have followed the feathers, is more than I will take upon me to determine."

"Thou art so hungry after war," said Lazaro, "thou canst not perceive the valour of foregoing an opportunity of battle now and then. Hast thou never seen a man turn pale from anger, as well as cowardice?"

"Of a truth, I have," said the veteran; "and, provided there be a steady countenance along with it, this sickly hue is ever a sight to be dreaded more than the woman's blush, which some men fall into in their anger. But a coward's mouth is always playing him dog's tricks: I have sometimes seen the nether lip shake in a brave man; but when the trembling is all up in the corners, as I have learned to know, after divers lessons, it is a sign the heart is in a flutter. There are doubtless certain strings, whereby the heart is fastened to the mouth; and it is when the corners are writhing about in this cowardly snaky manner, that the heart is drawn up further than is comfortable; a thing, as I have no doubt, may have sometimes happened to yourself."

"If it have, may I become a Turk's slave!" said Lazaro, with great indignation; "and if it do, I hope it may be transformed, at that moment, from my own mouth to a dog's, to be made a dinner of!"

"Thou art an ass to be in a passion, at any rate," said Baltasar, coolly, "and a very improbable idiot, to deny, in thy vain-glory, what has happened to braver men than thyself; and, which I am free to confess, has sometimes chanced to myself, especially in my youth, when I first went to fight the Moors; and, I very well remember, that besides perceiving there was a sort of emptiness under my ribs, on such occasions, I could feel my heart beating at the back of my throat as plainly as I ever felt the arrow-heads tapping about my buckler. But it always went to its place again, when we were come to close quarters."

"May I die of the bastinado, if I ever felt any such thing!" said Lazaro, proudly. "I was born without any such gaingiving; and the only uncomfortable feeling I have had, under such circumstances, was a sort of cold creeping about the stomach, as if it were raining inside of me."

"Or as if there was a cold air brewing in your gizzard!" said Baltasar, triumphantly. "That is the very same thing, – the emptiness, I was talking about; and if you never felt the beating in your throat, it was because your heart was in such a fit of fright as to have no power of beating left."

"Ay! that may be," said Lazaro, with a grin: "that beating is a business I keep for my arm, and when that is in service, my heart is ever wise enough to be quiet. But concerning the captain, – Dost thou really esteem him a coward?"

"Who knows?" said the veteran. "A man may be once in fear, and strong-hearted ever after. Yet was there such a working about that cavalier's mouth, as made me think he longed to strike Don Amador, if he durst, and which still persuades he has some bitter thoughts about the matter of the insult: for, as you may remember, Don Amador said he was more of a hind than a hidalgo, with other such loving remarks as might stir a man's choler. For this reason, I am of opinion it will be good service of thee to thy master, to keep thine eyes open while he is taking his siesta, lest, mayhap, some mischief might come to him sleeping."

"I am ever bound to your good-natured discretion," said Lazaro, with a laugh. "I have no doubt it would be more profitable to sit for an hour or two, watching the sunbeams stealing through the wood, than, for the same time, to slumber and snore, without any other amusement than an occasional buffeting of one's nose, to keep the flies off. I will therefore surrender this agreeable privilege to thyself, as being my senior and better; while I nap a little, and that so lightly, that if an emmet do but creep near my master, I shall hear the rustling of his footsteps. But hark'ee, Baltasar: there is much wit about thee, for an old man that has endured so many hard knocks; and ever, about once in an hundred times, I have found thy conjectures to be very reasonable. What is thy opinion concerning those infidel Moors under the bush yonder? and by what sort of magic dost thou suppose they have so wrought upon our commander, that he will neither suffer lance-shaft nor cane-twigg to be laid upon them?"

"Ay, there they are!" said Baltasar, looking towards the father and son. "The boy lies with his head on Abdalla's knee, and Abdalla covers him with his skin mantle; and the mantle shakes, as if the boy were sobbing under it. – It is my opinion, the lad has been used to milder treatment than he seems likely to meet in these parts, unless Don Amador should see fit to take him into his own keeping; and it is also my opinion, if he be so much affected at the sight of a green twig, he will go nigh to die of terror at the flash of a savage's sword."

"That is an opinion I have, in part, formed for myself," said the junior coolly: "and one that I think is shared in common with every other person in this quilted company, that has looked in the manikin's face."

"It is as white," said Baltasar, "as that mountain top we saw from the caravel; whereas the children of common Moriscos are much the hue of my own weather-beaten boots."

"The boy was in a most pestilent fright," said Lazaro, "and therefore somewhat more snowy than was natural; nevertheless, I have seen darker skins among the damsels of La Mancha."

"And he is, in a manner, well figured and comely," said the veteran.

"If thou hadst said he was such a Ganymede as might hold the wine-cup and trencher to a princess, I should have thought better of thine eye-sight. By cross and spear! he has such eyes as I shall be glad to find in any wench I may be predestined to marry."

"And his hand," said Baltasar, "is as small as a hidalgo's son's. He hath an amiable countenance, and such gravity in it, when not disturbed, as belongs to older years; and he ever keeps it bent to the earth, as if to shun observation."

"Ay; I see what thou art driving at," said Lazaro, significantly. "Thou thinkest Sidi Abdalla is some infidel prince of Granada – a Zegri or Abencerrage –"

"I think no such thing," said Baltasar, gruffly. "I have fought, myself, hand to hand, with a Zegri, while my young lord Gabriel was cleaving the head of another; to which knightly and majestic infidels the wretch Sidi bears such resemblance as, in comparison, doth the hedge-hog to a leopard."

"Thou art of opinion then, doubtless," said Lazaro, "that the boy Jacinto is some Christian nobleman's son, stolen in his infancy by Sidi, to be made a sacrifice to the devil?"

"I am no such ass," said Baltasar, "to entertain any such notion."

"A bird's flight by his feather, a beast's rage by his claw, and a man's thoughts by his tongue," said Lazaro; "but how I am to judge thee, is more than I know. What a-God's name, dost thou think then of these Christian heathens?"

"I think nothing at all," said Baltasar, dryly: "I only wonder by what chance a Morisco boor came to have so tender and so handsome a boy."

"Well, heaven be with thee, old oracle," said Lazaro, laying his head on his saddle: "If I should resolve thy wonder in my dreams, I will enlighten thee when I wake."

The veteran gave a look to the horses, – to his master, who, by the attentions of the captain Salvatierra, had been enabled to enjoy the luxury of a hammock, slung between two trees, – to the Moor, who sat watching over his child, – to the Tlamémé, who slumbered by their packs, – to the Spaniards, who slept, as they had eaten, in groups, – to the few sentinels who stood nodding under the trees, – and then, dismissing all care, as if satisfied with the security of the motley encampment, he was not slow to follow the example of his companion.

CHAPTER VIII

Two or three hours before sunset, the sleepers were roused to renew their march. Horses were saddled and armour buckled, and Don Amador de Leste mounted his steed with great satisfaction at the thought of still further diminishing the distance that separated him from his knight. As the train began to ford the rivulet, he turned round and beckoned to Abdoul, who, with Jacinto, had taken the station assigned them behind the musketeers.

"Sidi Abdalla," said he, "I have thought it a great shame that thy weary boy should trudge over these sands afoot, when such men as myself and my people are resting our lazy limbs on horseback. I have therefore given order to my soldier, Lazaro, to take the youth behind him; whereby much discomfort and suffering may be avoided."

"My lord will scorn the thanks of the poor Morisco," said Abdoul, humbly. "Sleep, and the food which it pleased my noble lord to give to the boy, have so refreshed his strength and his spirits, that now, in the pleasant evening air, he will journey without pain, as he has often, of yore, in the deserts of Barbary. And let not my lord be displeased to know, that Jacinto will be of better heart at the side of his father, than on the saddle of my lord's servant."

"If it be as thou sayest," said the cavalier, "I am content. Heaven forbid I should take him from thee, but for his good; which, doubtless, thou must know better how to compass than myself. Yet if he should at any time grow weary, make me acquainted with it, and Lazaro shall be still prepared to give him relief."

The Moor bent his head to the ground, and fell back; while Amador, followed by his attendants and the secretary, rode to the head of the train.

No occurrence of moment interrupted the monotony of the journey, until a thunderstorm, accompanied by rain, drove them for shelter into a forest, where their march was interrupted for a time. But with a capriciousness equal to the fury with which they had gathered, the clouds parted and vanished in the sunbeams; the earth was gladdened; the trees shook the liquid treasure from their leaves; a breeze came from the distant surges; and, resuming their path, the train and cavalcade went on their way rejoicing.

As they advanced, and as the day declined, the country assumed a more agreeable aspect; the woods were thicker and more luxuriant; the mountains approached nearer to the sea, and the streams gambolled among piles of rocks, instead of creeping sluggishly through the sands; the flowers were more abundant, and the birds, resuming their songs, prepared their vespers for the sinking luminary. At last he set: the curlew wheeled his last flight; the plover sent his last whistle, from the air; and the stars, stealing out from the dusky arch, shed their celestial lustre over the path of the travellers. With these lamps of heaven, were also lit the torches of the cucujos, – those phosphorescent beetles, with which Don Amador had been made acquainted in the islands. But he did not the less admire the splendour of the spectacle, when he saw these resplendent insects glistening among the trees, or flashing by him like little meteors. The moon rose from the sea; and as her mellow radiance streamed over the tree tops, or sheeted itself on the sands, and as a thousand delicious scents came to the nostrils of the soldier, he thought he had never before, not even when watching the same planet in the calm bosom of the Levantine sea, looked upon a scene of more beautiful repose. The commander of the squadron had not, since the affair of the dinner, thought fit, frequently, to trouble Don Amador with his presence; but by the murmurs of satisfaction and curiosity which were breathed about him, the cavalier knew he was approaching the Indian city Zempoala. The party issued from the wood upon what seemed a fair waving plain, dotted, in certain places, with clumps of trees, and doubtless, in other spots, enriched with plantations of maize and bananas. In the distance, from a dark and shadowy mass, which might have been a lofty grove or a low hillock, and whose gloom was alike broken by

the glare of insects and the flash of many flambeaux, arose three lofty towers, square and white, and glittering in the moonbeams as if covered over with plates of silver.

"Zempoala!" whispered an hundred voices, as these gleaming fabrics came fairly into view. The languid horseman raised himself on his saddle; the foot-soldier strode onwards with a firmer and quicker step; and at each moment, as the three towers reflected the moonbeams with increasing brilliancy, more torches flickered and more structures were seen shining among the trees; and it was evident to Don Amador that he was approaching a city or town of no little magnitude.

The secretary had pressed to his side, and overhearing his exclamations of surprise, took the liberty of addressing him.

"Señor," he cried, "they say this pagan city is bigger and lovelier than Seville. I have often before heard of the Silver Towers; for truly, when the men of Cortes first saw them, they thought they were built of blocks of plate, and rode forward to hack away some samples with their swords; whereupon, to their great shame and disappointment, they discovered the brilliance to be owing to a certain white and polished plaster, with which these barbarians have the art to beautify their temples."

"Are these then the sanctuaries of the fiend?" said the neophyte, raising himself, and surveying the structures with a frown of infinite hostility: "It drives me to little esteem, to know that the señor Narvaez and his companions should rest in sight of these accursed places, without hurling them to the dust."

"They are no longer the houses of devils," said Lorenzo: "Cortes, the great rebel, tore the idols from their altars, and putting an image of Our Blessed Lady in their place, consecrated them forthwith to the service of God."

"I hear nothing of Cortes, that does not convince me he is a truly noble and faithful cavalier," said Amador, with emphasis.

"There can be no doubt of that," said the secretary; "nevertheless, if I may presume to advise your favour, I would beseech you not to mention the name of Cortes among these men of Narvaez; or at least, not with the respect which you may think his due."

"Dost thou know," said Amador, addressing Fabueno so sternly, as to cause him instantly to repent his presumption: "dost thou know, that what thou art saying is of so base and boorish a spirit, that, if it be the true prompting of thy heart, thou art utterly unworthy to take upon thee the arms, as thou art wholly incapable of winning the fame, of a soldier? Know thou, for it is good thou shouldst be told, that all hypocrisy is the offspring of cowardice, and is therefore impossible to be practised by a brave man: know also, that when thou art deceiving man, thou art lying to God, which is an impiety not to be thought of by an honest man: and know, in conclusion, that when thou art called upon for thy opinion, if thou givest not that which is in thy heart, thou art guilty of that hypocrisy which is cowardice, and that deceit which is perjury."

"I beg your worship's pardon," said Lorenzo, abashed and confounded, and somewhat bewildered by the chivalrous and fantastic system of honour disclosed in the reproof of the cavalier. "I meant only to let your favour know, that there could be no travelling beyond this Indian city, without the good will of Narvaez and his officers, which might not be gained by commending their enemy. And moreover, señor, if you will suffer me to justify myself, – while I confess it would be both cowardly and impious, as your worship says, to conceal or alter a sentiment, when it is called for, yet was I thinking it could be in no wise dishonourable to retain in our own mind opinions *not* called for, particularly when they might be disagreeable to those upon whom they were thus, as I may say, forced."

"By my faith, thou art, in a measure, very right," said Amador, "and I hereby recall any expressions which may have reflected on thy courage or thy religion; for, I perceive, thou wert only touching upon the obligation all men are under not to force their opinions upon others; an obligation of which I am myself so sensible, that, provided I am not called upon by the questions of these people,

or the enforcements of mine own honour, I shall surely utter nothing to displease them. But canst thou tell me, señor secretario, how far from this town lies the commander, of whom we were speaking?"

"I have heard, only at the distance of two or three leagues," replied Fabueno; "but I should think, considering the wisdom of Cortes, he would be fain to increase that distance, as soon as he came to know the strength of Narvaez. Your favour may see, by the many torches glimmering through the streets, and the many voices that go chanting up and down, that there is a goodly multitude with him."

"I see, by the same tokens," said Amador, "he has a set of riotous, disorderly vagabonds, who seem to think they are keeping carnival in Christendom, rather than defending a camp among infidels: and, by St. John, I know not any very good reason, why the valiant Cortes might not, this instant, with his knot of brave men, steal upon the town, and snatch it out of the hands of the Biscayan. There is, neither out-post in the field, nor sentinel in the suburbs!"

There seemed some grounds for this notion of the cavalier. As he approached nearer to Zempoala, there was audible a concert of sounds such as one would not have looked for in the camp of a good general. A great fire had been lit, as it appeared, among the Silver Towers, the ruddy reflection of which, mingled with the purer light of the moon, had given them so shining an appearance, even at a distance. In this neighbourhood, as Amador judged by the direction and variety of cries, was the chief place of the revellers; though in divers quarters of the town might be heard the voices, and sometimes the musical instruments, of idle soldiers, struggling in rivalry with the ruder songs and harsher instruments of the natives. Besides the bonfires among the temples, there was another in the quarter of the town which the train was just entering, and apparently upon the very street which they were to pass. The cavalier had, however, underrated the vigilance of the sentinels; for, just as he had concluded his denunciation, the trumpet with which Salvatierra announced his approach to his companions, was answered by a flourish from the fire; and there was straightway seen a group of armed men advancing to challenge the party. In fact, an out-post was stationed at the fire; the worthy warriors of which, in the absence of any important duties, had got together the means of amusement in the persons of certain Indian tumblers and merry-andrews, who were diverting them with feats of agility. Besides these tawny sons of joyance, there were others of the same race, whose business it was to add to the pleasures of the entertainment the din of the musical instruments common to barbarians; only, as it seemed to Amador, that if there was nothing superior in the tone or management of these which he now heard, they had an advantage, over those of the islanders, in being wrought with greater skill and ornamented with a more refined taste. Thus, of the little drums which were suspended to the necks of the musicians, and which were at least equal in sound to the labours of Europe, some were carved and painted in a very gay manner; while the flutes of cane, though not less monotonous than the pipes of other savages, had about them an air of elegance, from being furnished with pendants of rich flowers, or beautiful feathers.

As Amador rode by, his attention was in a measure diverted from the tumblers by the agitation of Fogoso, who regarded neither the great fire nor the wild looking artists with friendship; and when, having subdued his alarm, he turned to gratify his wonder, his eye was caught by the appearance of the Moor, who had stolen to his side, and now stood with a countenance even more disturbed than when shrinking from the blow of Salvatierra, and with hands upraised and clasped, as if to beseech his notice.

"My lord is benevolent to the friendless, and pitiful to the orphan," he cried anxiously, as soon as he perceived that Amador regarded him; "he has been the champion of the father, and the protector of the son; and when the heart's blood of Abdoul can requite his benefactor, Abdoul will not deny it."

"Good Sidi," said Amador, "that I have protected both yourself and your son Jacinto, from unjust violence, is more than can be denied; but why it is needful to thank me so many times for the favour, is more than I can easily understand. I must therefore command you to find some more novel subject for conversation."

"My lord is a knight of Rhodes," said Abdalla quickly, "and therefore by vow bound to charity, justice, pity, and all the other good virtues acknowledged as well by infidels as Christians?"

"I am no knight; a novice of the order I may be called," said Amador, "but no knight; though," he added with a most dolorous sigh, "how soon I may take the vows after returning from the lands of Mexico, is more than I can pronounce. I have therefore not bound myself by oath to any of those virtues of which you spoke; but had you been born of a nobler blood than I can account that of the lord of Fez, you should have known, that, being a gentleman and a Christian, I cannot release myself from any of their natural obligations."

"For myself," said Abdalla, "though insult and danger will come to me among these riotous soldiers, who are the enemies of my race, and these barbarians, who are surely the enemies of all, I can submit to my griefs; but Jacinto needs the arm of power to protect him. If my lord will take him to be his servant, he will be merciful to misfortune; the prayers of gratitude will ascend to heaven; and the love of a faithful boy will watch ever at his side like the vigilance of an armed follower."

"Art thou content the boy should be parted from thee?" demanded Amador. "I know not how, among these strange lands and unknown wildernesses, I may be able to take that care of his tender years which should be the duty of a good master; nor, to tell thee the truth, do I know in what manner I can make use of his services – "

"Let not my lord despise his skill," said the Almogavar, "because his fright and weariness palsied his hand, when he should have played before him. He hath good skill with the lute, and he has in his memory a thousand redondillas, with which he may divert the leisure of my lord. Besides this skill, he hath a fidelity which nothing can corrupt, and a loving heart which, once gained by kindness, no temptation can lure from his master: and in these qualities will I vouch for him with my head. I know not in truth," continued Abdalla, faltering, "since he has never before served a master, if he have any other qualifications. But he is quick to acquire, and perhaps – perhaps, he may soon learn to preserve the armour of my lord – yes, he will soon make himself useful to my lord."

"The cleaning of my armour," said Amador, in a very matter-of-fact manner, "is a duty which belongs particularly to Lazaro; whose fidelity, as well as that of Baltasar, is of so unquestionable a character, that it fully meets all the exigencies of my course of life. I would therefore receive thy son chiefly out of a hope to be comforted, at times, with his music; and partly out of pity for his forlornness. He will doubtless serve me as a page and cup-bearer; in which capacity, promising to give him as much protection and kindness as may be in my power, I consent to receive him."

"And my lord will permit that I shall often see him?" said Abdoul, eagerly.

"Surely I must desire thou shouldst," said Amador, "if it were possible thou couldst be in the same army."

Abdalla looked at the cavalier with a bewildered and confused countenance, as if not understanding him.

"I must acquaint thee, good Sidi," said Amador, "with one fact, of which thou seemest ignorant, and which may wholly change thy desires in this matter. Thy destination is to this town of Zempoala, and mine to the very far city Tenochtitlan; thy fate is to submit thee into the hands of the general Narvaez, as thou hast heard, to serve him as a cannonier, while mine is to betake myself to the general Cortes, his sworn and most indomitable enemy. Thou mayest therefore inquire of thyself, if thy boy go with me, whether thou wilt ever again look upon him; a question that I cannot myself answer in a satisfactory manner. Make thy election, therefore, whether thou wilt keep him at thy side, or entrust him to my guardianship; being assured, that if the latter be thy desire, I will bid thee call him, and straightway take him into my keeping."

"It cannot be!" said Abdalla, vehemently; – "I cannot trust him from my sight: it cannot be! God is just; and justice may come with misery!"

Thus lamenting, Abdoul al Sidi retired from the side of the cavalier; and Amador, whose pity was not a little touched, suffered his image to be crowded from his mind by the new and strange spectacles which were now opening upon him.

CHAPTER IX

While he still talked with the Morisco, Don Amador was able to cast his eyes about him, and to perceive on either side a great multitude of low houses of wickered cane, which seemed to him more to resemble gigantic baskets than the habitations of men; but which, even in these latter days, are found sufficient to protect the humble aborigines from the vicissitudes of that benignant clime. Each stood by itself in an enclosure of shrubs and flowers, and where it happened that the inmates were within, with torches or fires burning, the blaze, streaming through the wattled walls, illuminated every thing around, and disclosed the figures of the habitants moving about like shadows in the flame. Other buildings, equally humble in size, were constructed of less remarkable but not less romantic materials; and where the moonbeams fell over their earthen walls and palmy roofs, both were often concealed by such a drapery of vines and creeping flowers, perhaps the odoriferous vanilla and the beautiful convolvulus, as might have satisfied the longings of a wood-nymph. As he approached nearer to the centre of the town, these lowly and lovely cottages were exchanged for fabrics of stone, many of them of considerable size, and several with walls covered with the bright and silvery plaster which ornamented the temples. Each of these, the dwellings of the *Tlatoani*, or, as the Spaniards called them, in the language of Santo Domingo, the *Caciques* of the city, – stood alone in its garden of flowers, with vines trailing, and palm-trees bending over its roof, commonly in darkness, though sometimes the myrtle-taper of a fair Totonac, (for such was the name of this provincial people of the coast,) or the oily cresset of a Spanish captain, who had made his quarters wherever was a house to his fancy, might be seen gleaming from behind the curtains of cotton stuff, which were hung at the doors and windows. These sights had been seen by Amador, while yet engaged in conversation with Abdalla; but when the Morisco dropped sorrowfully away, he found himself on the great square of the city, immediately fronting the sanctuaries, and gazing upon a scene of peculiarly wild and novel character. The centre of the square was occupied by a broad, and indeed a vast platform of earth, raised to a height of eight or ten feet, ascended from all sides by half as many steps, – having the appearance of a low truncated pyramid, serving as a base to the three towers which crowned it. Upon its summit or terrace, immediately in advance of the towers, was kindled a great fire, the blaze of which, besides illuminating the temple itself and all the buildings which surrounded the square, fell upon sundry groups of Indian tumblers, engaged in feats of activity, as well as upon a host of cavaliers who surveyed them close at hand, and many throngs of common soldiers and natives who looked on at a distance from the square.

Here the detachment was halted; the burthens of the Tlamémé were deposited on the earth; the horses were freed from their packs; and Amador, at the suggestion of Salvatierra, dismounted, and leaving Fogoso to the care of his attendants, and these again to the disposition of the captain, ascended the pyramid, followed by the secretary. He was somewhat surprised, when this worthy commander, whom he looked for to conduct him to the general, resuming much of the stately dignity he had found it inconvenient to support on the march, made him a low bow, and informed him with much gravity he would find the commander-in-chief either on the terrace among his officers, or at his headquarters in the middle tower. The feeling of indignation which for a moment beset him, would have been expressed, had not Salvatierra with another bow retired, and had he not perceived, at the same moment, the young Fabueno draw from his girdle the letter which was doubtless to secure him the good-will of Narvaez. Checking therefore his anger, he straightway ascended the platform. Arrived at its summit, he now beheld the scene which he had imperfectly witnessed from below. The great fire, crackling and roaring, added the ruddy glare of a volcano to the pallid illumination of the moon; and in the combined light, the operations of the gymnasts and dancers, the athletes and jugglers, were as visible as if performed in the glitter of noon-day. For a moment Amador thought, as had been thought by all other Spaniards, when looking for the first time on the sports of these barbarous races,

that he had got among a group of devils, or at least of devilish magicians; and he crossed himself with an instinctive horror, when he beheld, so to speak, three piles of men, each composed of three individuals, half-naked, standing one upon the head or shoulders of another, whirling about in a circle, and each, as he whirled, dancing on the head or shoulders of his supporter, and tossing abroad his *penacho*, or long plume of feathers, as if diverting himself on the solid earth. This spectacle entirely distracted his attention from others scarcely less worthy of observation, – as was indeed that, where two men see-sawed on a pole, in the air, and, as might be said, without support, except that which was occasionally rendered by the feet of a sinewy pagan, who lay on his back, and ever and anon, as the flying phantoms descended, spurned them again into the air. Such also was that magical dance of the cords, brought from the unknown tribes of the South, wherein a score of men, each holding to a rope of some brilliant colour, and each decorated with the feathers of the parrot and the flamingo, whirled in fleet gyrations round a garlanded post, till their cords were twisted together in a net of incomprehensible complexity, but which, before the observer had leisure to digest his amazement, were again unravelled in the rapid and mysterious evolutions of the dance. A thousand other such exhibitions, similar in novelty but different in character, were displayed at the same moment; but the eyes of the neophyte were lost to all but that which had first astounded him; and it was not till the voice of the secretary roused him from his bewitchment, that he collected his senses, and observed an officer of the household of the general standing before him, and doing him such reverence as was evidently the right of his dignity. It was then that Don Amador looked from the dancers to the cavaliers whom they were diverting. The fire flashed over the walls of the square and lofty towers up to the shelving thatch of palm-leaves, under which they were grouped, making, with the glitter of their half-armed persons, a suitable addition to the romance of the scene. In the centre of that group which lounged before the middle and loftiest tower, in a chair, or indeed, as it might be called, a throne, of such barbaric beauty as was known only to the magnificos of this singular people, sat a cavalier, tall and somewhat majestic of stature, with a ruddy beard, and yellow locks falling over an agreeable countenance; in whom, not so much from the character of his deportment and the quality of his decorations, as from the evident homage rendered him by the officers around, Don Amador did not doubt he beheld the Biscayan general. At the very moment when his eyes fell upon this smiling dignitary, he was himself perceived by the general; and Narvaez started up with a sort of confusion, as if ashamed to be discovered in such trivial enjoyment by so gallant a cavalier. In fact, the glittering casque of steel had supplanted the velvet cap on the head of the novice; and as he approached in full armour, clad also in the dignity with which he was wont to approach his fellows in rank, Don Amador presented a figure, to say the least, equally noble with that of the commander, – and, what was no slight advantage in those days, with the additional manifestation of high blood, such as was certainly less questionable in him than in Narvaez. It seemed for a moment, as if the general would have retreated into the temple, doubtless with the view of assuming a more stately character for the interview; but perceiving that Don Amador had already recognised him, and was advancing, he changed his purpose, and making a step forward to do honour to his visiter, he stood still to receive him. The eyes of all those gallant adventurers were turned from the dancers to the new-comer; but Don Amador, not much moved by such a circumstance, as indifferent to their curiosity as their admiration, approached with a stately gravity, and, making a courteous reverence to the general, said, —

"I have no doubt it is my felicity at this present moment to offer my devoirs to the noble and very respected señor, the general Don Panfilo de Narvaez; on the presumption of which, I, Amador de Leste, of Cuenza, a novice of the holy hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, do not hesitate to claim the hospitalities, which, as an hidalgo of Spain, and kinsman of the noble señor, the admiral Cavallero, your excellency's confederate, I hold myself entitled to expect."

"The very noble and valiant señor Don Amador de Leste shall not claim those hospitalities in vain," said the general, with a voice whose natural and voluminous harshness did not conceal an attempt at amenity; "and I hope he will not anticipate in them too little of the roughness of a soldier,

by reason that he has seen us unbending a little from the toils of war to the foolish diversions of these ingenious barbarians."

"I will not take upon me to judge either of the tactics or the recreations of your excellency," said Amador, very coolly. "I will only demand of your favour to accept, at this present moment, such protestations of respect as become me in my function of suitor; and, in especial, to accredit my companion, the secretary Fabueno, the messenger of the admiral, who is charged with certain letters to your excellency, of which, I believe, I am myself, in part, the subject."

"I receive them with respect, and I welcome the very distinguished Don Amador with much joy," said Narvaez; "in token of which I must beg him to allow himself to be considered, at least so long as he honours my command with his presence, as my own peculiar guest: and that I may the sooner know in what it may be my happiness to do him service, I must entreat him to enter with me into my poor quarters."

With such superb expressions of etiquette, the common compliments of an over-chivalrous age and people, Don Amador was ushered into the interior of the temple. A curtain of a certain strong and checkered matting, that served the purpose of a door, was pushed aside, and, entering with the general and two or three of his most favoured officers, he found himself in the heathen sanctuary. A table covered with brilliant drapery of cotton – a product of the country – and strewn over with pieces of armour, as well as with divers vessels wherein glowed some of the rich wines ripened by the breath of the Solano, contained also a great silver cresset filled with oil tempered with liquidambar, which, besides pervading the whole atmosphere with a delicious odour, shed abroad such a light as enabled Don Amador to survey the apartment. It was of good height, and spacious: the walls were hung with arras of a sombre-hued cotton, and the floor covered with thick matting. In one corner was a ladder, leading to the upper chambers. Two sides of it were occupied by a low platform, on which lay several mattresses stuffed with the down of the ceiba; over one of which, on a small altar of wood, illuminated by tapers of the myrtle wax, was a little image of the Virgin. In this chamber, the chief adoration of the temple, where now flashed the weapons of the iconoclasts, stood once the altar of an idol, whose fiendish lips had been often died with the blood of human sacrifices. There were rude chairs about the table; and Amador, at the invitation of the general, did not hesitate to seat himself, and cast an eye of observation on his companions, while Narvaez, with the assistance of the secretary, proceeded to decipher the advices of the admiral.

The individuals with whom Amador found himself in contact, were of a genteel and manly presence: and though evidently burning with desire to make the acquaintance of the novice of Rhodes, and certainly also with curiosity to know what strange event had cast him among themselves, had yet sufficient breeding to conceal their anxieties, – excepting one, who, although of riper years than the rest, and even of more gravity of deportment, was nevertheless twice or thrice guilty of a very inquisitive stare. This Don Amador did himself at last perceive, and felt greatly moved to discover the cause of so remarkable a scrutiny. Nevertheless, before he had resolved in what manner to commence the investigation, and before the general had well looked into the advices of the admiral, they were both interrupted in their purpose by the abrupt intrusion of an officer, who, approaching Narvaez, said something to him in a low voice, of which all that Amador could distinguish were the words, twice or thrice repeated, of *nigromante* and *astrologo*. The officer received a direction equally obscure with his information; and Amador observed that as Narvaez gave it, his face flushed over with some sudden excitement. The speculations of the neophyte were soon terminated. Before the curtain had yet closed upon the retreating officer, the cavalier whose curious looks had attracted his own attention, rose and addressed the general.

"Señor general and governor," he cried, "I doubt whether this knavish impostor be worthy your attention. He is accounted both a liar and traitor, and he can tell us nothing that will not be spoken to deceive us."

"The señor Don Andres de Duero cannot be better persuaded of the man's character than myself," said the general; "and he will not assure me that a good general can refuse to listen to any intelligence of his enemy, though it be brought by a traitor. – The noble Don Amador de Leste will pardon me, if I make so free with him, as in his presence to introduce and examine a prisoner, or deserter, I know not which, on matters which it concerns me as a commander to know. And moreover," continued the Biscayan, with a laugh, "I know not what better diversion I can give my guest, than to make him acquainted with a man who pretends to read the mysteries of the stars by night, and to have a devil who gives him knowledge of men's destinies by daylight."

Before Amador could reply to this appeal, the señor Duero spoke again.

"Surely he can bring us no information of Cortes which we have not received at better hands; and as for his magical art, I think your excellency holds that in too much doubt and contempt to set much store by its crazy revelations."

"What may be my doubt, and what my contempt for his art," said the general, "is more than I have yet resolved: only there is one thing of which I am quite certain, and that is, that, with the blessing of Our Holy and Immaculate Lady, I defy the devil and all his imps, whether they come at the bidding of a heathenish magician or a Christian enchanter; and, moreover, that if there be any knowledge to be gained of the devil, without jeopardy of soul, one is a fool not to receive it. Señor," continued Narvaez, addressing himself again to Amador, "I may as well tell you, that the magician Botello, whom you will presently behold, is a favourite soldier and chief enchanter to that infidel rebel, Cortes, (whom God confound, with all his mutinous friends and upholders, high and low, strong and feeble, Amen!) – I say, señor, his chief magician," continued the general, speaking so rapidly and impetuously, as utterly to prevent Don Amador from making the amendment he meditated to the curse, and insisting that Narvaez should revoke it, as far at least as it concerned his kinsman, the knight, – "his chief magician, by whose aid, it is supposed, the runagate desperado has been enabled to imprison the Indian emperor. And, knave or not Don Amador, it cannot be denied, that when struck down, after surrendering himself, this morning, by the currish soldier, Caboban, he cursed the smiter with 'a short life and a long death;' which curse was fulfilled upon him on the instant; for striking Botello with his spear again, his horse plunged, threw him violently, and, falling, he was instantly spitted on the spear of a footman. He has been dying ever since; and sometime, doubtless, his agony will be over; but he is as good as a dead man now."

"I am by no means certain," said Don Amador, "that there was any connexion between the curse of the magician and the calamity of the soldier; though, as it appears to me, heaven could not visit with judgment any one more righteously than the dastard who strikes an enemy after he has rendered himself a captive. Nevertheless, and though I am somewhat impatient your excellency should determine upon my own affairs, I have such respect for the superior claims of your duties, that I will willingly defer my anxiety until your excellency has examined the prisoner."

There were several very meaning glances exchanged among the cavaliers at this speech, which seemed to imply a feeling of neglect and resentment on the part of the speaker; but Narvaez did not notice it, or if he did, the impression was immediately driven from his mind by the entrance of the enchanter, conducted by several soldiers and officers, among whom was the captain Salvatierra.

CHAPTER X

Amador surveyed the prisoner, though somewhat indifferently. He was, in figure and age, very much such a man as Baltasar, but in other respects very dissimilar. His face was wan, and even cadaverous; but this might have been the effect of the blows he had received from the dying soldier, as was made probable by the presence of several spots of blood encrusted over his visage. His cheeks were broad, and the bones prominent; his eyes very hollow, and expressive of a wild solemnity, mingled with cunning; his beard long and bushy, and only slightly grizzled, and a rugged mustache hung over his lips so as almost to conceal them. His apparel was of black cloth, none of the freshest, the principal garment of which was a long loose doublet, under which was buckled an iron breast-plate, – his only armour; for, instead of a morion, he wore a cloth hat of capacious brim, stuck round with the feathers of divers birds, as well as several medals of the saints, rudely executed in silver. Besides these fantastic decorations, he had suspended to his neck several instruments of the Cabala, – a pentacle of silver, and charms and talismans written over with mystical characters, as well as a little leathern pouch filled with various dried herbs and roots. This mystagogue, an agent of no little importance among many of the scenes of the Conquest, was led into the presence of the general, and approached him without betraying any signs of fear or embarrassment; nor, on the other hand, did he manifest any thing like audacity or presumption; but lifting his eyes to the visage of the Biscayan, he gazed upon him with a silent and grave earnestness, that seemed somewhat to disconcert the leader.

"Sirrah sorcerer," said he, "since the devil has deserted you at last, call up what spirits you can muster, and find me why I shall not hang you for a spy, early in the morning."

"*Tetragrammaton Adonai!*" muttered the warrior-magician in the holy gibberish of his art, with a voice of sepulchral hollowness, and with a countenance gleaming with indignation or enthusiasm. "In the name of God, Amen! I defy the devil, and am the servant of his enemy; and in the land of devils, of Apollyon in the air, Beelzebub on the earth, and Satan in men's hearts, I forswear and defy, contemn and denounce them; and I pray for, and foresee, the day when they shall tumble from the high places!"

"All this thou mayst do, and all this thou mayst foresee," said the general; "but nevertheless thy wisdom will be more apparent to employ itself a little in the investigation of thine own fate; which, I promise thee, is approaching to a crisis."

"I have read it in the stars, I have seen it in the smoke of waters and of blessed herbs, and I have heard it from the lips of dead men and the tongues of dreams," cried the professor of the occult sciences, with much emphasis. "But what is the fate of Botello, the swordsman, to that of the leaders of men, the conquerors of kings and great nations? I have read my own destinies; but why shouldst thou trifle the time to know them, when I can show thee the higher mysteries of thine own?"

"Canst thou do so? By my faith then, I will have thee speak them very soon," said Narvaez. "But first, let me know what wert thou doing when thou wert found prowling this morning so near to my camp?"

"Gathering the herbs for the suffumigation which shall tell me in what part of the world thou shalt lay thy bones!" said the magician, solemnly. "The moon, in the house Alchil, showed me many things, but not all; a thick smoke came over the crystal, and I saw not what I wanted; I slept under the cross, with a skull on my bosom, but it breathed nothing but clouds. Wherefore I knew, it should be only when the wolf spoke to the vulture, and the vulture to the red star, that Camael the angel should unlock the lips of destiny, and lead me whither I longed to follow."

"I am ever bound to thee," said the general, with a manner in which an attempt at mockery was mingled with a natural touch of superstition, "for the extreme interest thou seemest to cherish in my fate and again I say to thee, I will immediately converse with thee on that subject. But at present, señor nigromante, I warn thee, it will be but wisdom, to confine thy rhapsodies within the limits of

answers to such interrogatories as I shall propose thee. – Where lies thy master, the outcast and arch-rebel, my enemy?"

"My *master* is in heaven!" said Botello, with a devout and lofty earnestness, "and there is no outcast and rebel but he that dwelleth in the pit, under the foot of Michael; and *he* is the enemy!"

"Sirrah! I speak to thee of the knave Cortes," cried the general, angrily. "When wert thou last at his side? and where?"

"At midnight, – on the river of Canoes, where he has rested, as thou knowest, for a night and a day."

"Ay!" said the Biscayan fiercely; "within a league of my head-quarters, whither my clemency has suffered him to come."

"Whither God and his good star have drawn him," said the magician.

"And whence I will drive him to the rocks of the mountains, or the mangroves of the beach, ere thou art cured of thy wounds!"

"Lo! my wounds are healed!" said Botello; "the hand that inflicted them is stiff and cold, and Hernan Cortes yet lies by the river! Ay, the holy unguent, blessed of the fat of a pagan's heart, hath dried the blood and glued the skin; and yet my captain, whose fate I have seen and spoken, even from the glory of noon to the long and sorrowful shadows of the evening, marshals his band within the sound of thy matin bell; and wo be to his foeman when he is nearer or further!"

"Prattling fool," said the commander, "if thou hadst looked to the bright moon to-night, thou wouldst have seen how soon the cotton-trees of the river should be strung with thy leader and companions, and with thyself, as a liar and an impostor, in their midst!"

"I looked," said the veteran, tranquilly, "and saw what will be seen, but not by *all*. There was thunder in the temple, and peace by the river, and more wailing than comes from the lips of the Penitent Knight."

The angry impetuosity with which Narvaez was about to continue the conference, was interrupted by the impatience of the novice. He had listened with much disgust both to the mystic jargon of the soldier and the idle demands and bravadoes of the general. The interest with which he discovered how short a distance separated him from his kinsman, was increased to an irresistible excitement, when he heard the title with which, as the admiral had told him, the knight was distinguished among the invaders, on the lips of Botello. Rising therefore abruptly, he said,

"Señor Narvaez, I have to beg your pardon, if, in my own impatience to be satisfied in a matter which I have much at heart, I am somewhat blind to the importance of this present controversy. If your excellency will do me the favour to examine the letters of the admiral, you will discover that it is not so much my purpose to lay claim to your hospitable entertainment, the proffer of which I acknowledge with much gratitude, as to request your permission to pass through the lines of your army, to join my kinsman the knight Calavar. Understanding, therefore, from the words of this lunatic, or enchanter, whichever he may be, that I am within the short distance of a league from my good knight, to whom all my allegiance is due, I see not wherefore I should not proceed to join him forthwith, instead of wasting the night in slumber. I must, therefore, crave of your excellency to grant me, to the camp of the señor Cortes, a guide, to whom I will, with my life and honour, guarantee a safe return; – or such instructions concerning my route, as will enable me to proceed alone – that is to say, with my attendants."

The effect of this interruption and unexpected demand, on the countenances of all, was remarkable enough. The cavaliers present stared at the novice with amazement, and even a sort of dismay; and the secretary Fabueno, looking by chance at the captain Salvatierra, observed the visage of this worthy suddenly illuminated by a grin of delight. As for the general himself, nothing could be more unfeigned than his surprise, nothing more unquestionable than the displeasure which instantly began to darken his visage. He rose, thrust his hand into his belt, as if to give his fingers something to gripe, and drawing himself to his full height, said haughtily and severely,

"When I invited the cavalier De Leste to share the shelter of this temple, I did not think I received a friend of the traitor Cortes or of any of his people; nor did I dream an adherent of this outlaw would dare to beard me at my head-quarters with so rash and audacious a request!"

"The señor Narvaez has then to learn," said Amador, with a degree of moderation that could only be produced by a remembrance of his engagement to the admiral, and his promise to the secretary, not causelessly to provoke the anger of the general, – but nevertheless with unchanging decision, "that if I boast not to be the friend of Cortes, whom you call a traitor, I avouch myself to be very much the creature of mine own will; and that if I cannot be termed the adherent of an outlaw, I am at least a Spanish hidalgo, bent on the prosecution of my designs, and making requests more as the ceremonies of courtesy, than the tribute of humility. I will claim nothing more of your excellency than your excellency is, without claim, inclined to grant; and allowing therefore that you invited me to your lodgings under a mistaken apprehension of my character, I will straightway release you from the obligation, only previously desiring of your excellency to reconsider your expressions, wherein, as I think, was an innuendo highly unjust and offensive."

"Now, by heaven!" exclaimed the Biscayan, with all the irascibility of his race, and the arrogant pride of his station, "I have happened upon a strange day, when a vagabond esquire, wandering through my jurisdiction, asks my permission to throw himself into the arms of my enemy; and when I admonish him a little of his rashness, rebukes me with insult and defiance!"

"A very strange day indeed!" muttered a voice among the cavaliers, in which Amador, had he not been too much occupied with other considerations, might have recognized the tones of Salvatierra.

"Biscayan!" said he, with an eye of fire, "I have given you all the respect, which, as a governor's governor, and a captain's captain, you had a right to demand; I have also done you the homage of a guest to his host, and of a gentleman to a reputed hidalgo; but neither as a governor nor commander, neither as a host nor a nobleman, have you the privilege to offend with impunity, or to insult without being called to a reckoning."

"Is this another madman of the stock of Calavar, that the silly admiral hath sent me?" cried the infuriated leader, snatching up a sword from the table, and advancing upon the novice.

"Señor Panfilo!" cried Amador, confronting the general, and waving his hand with dignity, "unless thou force me by thine own violence, I cannot draw my sword upon thee on thine own floor, not even although thou add to thy wrongs a sarcasm on my knight and kinsman. Nevertheless I fling this glove at thy feet, in token that if thou art as valiant as thou art ill-bred, as ready to repair as to inflict an injury, I will claim of thee, as soon as may suit thy convenience, to meet me with weapons, and to answer thy manifold indignities."

"*Dios santísimo!*" cried the commander, foaming with rage and stamping furiously on the floor. "What ho! swords and pikemen! shall I strike this *galofero* braggart with my own hands? Arrest him!"

"The blood of him that stays me, be on his own head!" said Amador, drawing his sword and striding to the entrance. "I will remember thee, uncourteous cavalier, when I see thee in a fitter place."

The arm of the governor had been arrested by Duero; and in the confusion of the moment, though the door of the tower was instantly beset by a dozen gaping attendants, Don Amador would doubtless have passed through them without detention, notwithstanding the furious commands of Narvaez. But at the moment, when, as he waved his sword menacingly, the hesitating satellites seemed parting before him, Salvatierra stepped nimbly behind, and suddenly seizing his outstretched arm, and calling to the guards at the same time, in an instant Don Amador was disarmed and a prisoner. His rage was for a moment unspeakable; but it did not render him incapable of observing the faithful boldness of the secretary.

"Señor general!" cried Lorenzo, though with a stammering voice, "if your excellency will read this letter to the end, your excellency will find my master recommends Don Amador as of a most noble and lofty family, and, at this moment, raised above arrest and detention, by being charged with authority from the Grand Master of Rhodes."

The only answer of the general was a scowl and a wave of the hand, which instantly left Fabueno in the predicament of the cavalier. He was seized, and before he could follow the example of his patron, and draw his sabre, it was snatched from his inexperienced hand.

All this passed in a moment; and before the neophyte could give utterance to the indignation which choked him, he was dragged, with Fabueno, from the sanctuary.

CHAPTER XI

The dancers had fled from the terrace; the fire had smouldered away; but in the light of the moon, which shed a far lovelier radiance, Don Amador, as he was hurried to the steps, saw in place of the gay cavaliers, a few sentries striding in front of the towers, and among the artillery which frowned on either edge of the platform. Nevertheless, if his rage had left him inquisitive, he was not allowed time to indulge his observations. He was hurried down the steps, carried a few paces further, and instantly immured in the stone dwelling of some native chief, which, by the substitution of a door of plank for the cotton curtain, and other simple contrivances, had been easily converted into a prison.

In the meanwhile, the rage of the governor burned with a fury that was not much lessened by the remonstrances of his officers; and to the counsel of Duero, – the personal secretary of Don Diego Velasquez, accompanying the expedition less as an adviser than as a spy over the general, and therefore necessarily held in some respect, – he answered only with heat and sarcasm.

"I have ever found the señor Don Andres," he cried, without regarding the presence of Botello, "to be more friendly with the friends of Cortes than may seem fitting in the honourable and confidential secretary of Velasquez!"

"I will not deny that such is my temper," said Duero; "nor will I conceal from you that such leniency springs less from affection than interest. Sure am I, that had your excellency, from the first, held out the arms of conciliation, instead of the banners of vengeance, at this moment, instead of being arrayed against you in desperate hostility, the forces of Cortes would have been found enrolled under your own standard, and Cortes himself among the humblest and faithfulest of your captains."

"While I doubt that effect," said the general sharply, "I cannot but be assured of the strength of Don Andres's interest, while I listen to the whispers of his enemies."

Duero coloured, but replied calmly:

"It is not unknown to me, that certain ill-advised persons have charged me with being under the influence of a secret compact with Cortes, formed before his appointment to the command of the first army of invasion; whereby I was to share a full third of the profits of his enterprise. Without pretending to show the improbability of such an agreement, I will, for an instant, allow your excellency to take it for granted, in order that your excellency may give me credit for my present disinterestedness, in doing all I can to ruin my colleague; in which I reckon, as no slight matter, taking every opportunity to decoy away his followers."

"If thou wilt show me in what manner submission to the whims and insults of this insolent boy could have detached any of the mutineers from Cortes, I will confess myself in error, and liberate him forthwith," said the general.

"The insult has been passed, the blow has been struck," said Duero gravely, "and unless your excellency chooses to measure swords with him immediately after his liberation, nothing can be gained by such a step. I should rather counsel your excellency to have the prison watched with a double guard. But, in arresting him, you have, besides giving deep offence to your colleague, the admiral, for ever won the hate and hostility of the knight of Rhodes; and when this is told him in the camp of Cortes, it will harden the hearts of all against us."

"When it is told in the camp of Cortes," said Narvaez, with a bitter smile, "it shall be with mine own lips; and if I hang not upon a tree, afterwards, the knight Calavar himself, it will be more out of regard to his madness, than to the dignity of his knighthood. I will attack the rebel to-morrow!"

"Your excellency is heated by anger," said Duero temperately; "or you would observe you have a follower of the rebel for a listener."

"Ay! Botello!" cried the general, with a laugh of scorn. "He will carry my counsels to Cortes when the cony carries food to the serpent, and the sick ox to the carrion crow. Hark, sirrah, – thou hast read the fate of thy master: will I attack him to-morrow?"

"Thou wilt not," said Botello, with an unmoved countenance.

"Hah!" cried Narvaez; "art thou so sure of this that thou wilt pledge thy head on the prophecy? Thou shall live to be hanged at sunset, with thy old comrades for spectators."

"Heaven has written another history for to-morrow," said Botello, gravely; "and I have read that as closely as the page of to-day; but what is for myself, is, and no man may know it: The fate in store for the vain pride and the quick anger, may, in part, be spoken."

"Sirrah," said Narvaez, "remember, that though the vain pride might overlook one so contemptible as thyself, the quick anger is not yet allayed; and if thou wilt not have me beat thee in the morning, proceed forthwith to discourse of our destinies."

"Blows shall be struck," said the magician, earnestly; "but whether upon my own head or another's, whether in this temple or another place, whether in the morning or the evening, I am not permitted to divulge. Repent of thy sins; call in a confessor, and pray; for wrath cometh, and sorrow is behind! By the spirits that live in the stars, by the elves that dwell in stones and shrubs, by the virtues that are caged in matter where the ignorant man findeth naught but ignorance, have I been made acquainted with many things appertaining to thy fate, but not all. If thou wilt, I will speak thee the things I am permitted."

"Speak then," cried the general; "for whether thy knowledge be truth or lies, whether it come from the revelations of angels, or the diabolical instructions of fiends, I will listen without fear."

"*Adonai Melech!* under the heaven, and above the abyss, – with my hand on the cross, and the rosary in my bosom, – in Rome, near to the footsteps of his holiness, and with one who was his favourite astrologer, studied I mine art; and there is nothing in it that is not blessed," said Botello, with a solemn enthusiasm, that made a deep impression upon all. – "Give me a staff, that I may draw the curtain from this loop," he continued.

The sword of a younger officer was instantly extended, the curtain removed, and the moon, climbing the blue hills of paradise, looked down into the apartment. The cavaliers stared at the astrologer and magician, for Botello was both, some with an unconcealed awe, and others, the general among the rest, with an endeavour at looks of contempt not in good character with the interest they betrayed in all his proceedings. He raised his eyes to the beautiful luminary – enough to create by her mystic splendour the elements of superstition in the breast of a rhapsodist, – crossed himself devoutly twice or thrice, mumbled certain inexplicable words, and then said aloud, with a mournful emphasis,

"Wo to him that sits in the high place, when the moon shines from the house Allatha! But the time has not come; and I dare not speak the hour of its visitation."

"And what shall it advantage me to know my peril, if I have not such knowledge as may enable me to prevent it?" demanded Narvaez, with a frown.

"And what would it benefit thee to know the time of thy peril," said the astrologer, "when God has not given thee the power to avert it? What is written must be fulfilled; what is declared must be accomplished. Listen – the queen of night is in the eighteenth mansion; and under that influence, discord is sown in the hearts of men, sedition comes to the earth, and conspiracy hatches under the green leaf."

The general turned quickly upon his officers, and surveyed them with an eye of suspicion. They looked blankly one upon another, until Duero, laughing in a forced and unnatural manner, cried,

"Why should we listen to this madman, if we are so affected by his ravings? Señor general, you will straightway look upon us all as traitors!"

"There have been villains about us before," muttered the general, "but I will not take the moon's word for it; and the more especially that I must receive it through this man's interpretation."

"It is the influence, too, that is good for the friendless captive," continued the magician; "and many a heart that beats under bonds to-night, will leap in freedom to-morrow."

"Every way this is bad for us," said Duero, banteringly. "I would advise your excellency to clap chains on the legs of De Leste and the scribe, who are, I think, saving the few rogues of Cortes who have craved to enter into our service, the only prisoners in our possession."

"And dost thou think this gibberish will move me to any such precaution?" cried Narvaez, with a compelled smile. "Thou canst not believe I listen to it for aught but diversion?"

"Surely not, if your excellency says so. But still may we guard the prisoners, without fear of being laughed at for our superstition, – as long as we have faith in the discretion of all present."

"Guard them thyself, if thou wilt," said the general; "I am not moved enough for such condescension. – Continue thy mummeries, Botello," he went on, "and when thou art done with the moon, of which I am heartily tired, I will look for thee to introduce me to some essence that speaks a clearer language."

"What wouldst thou have?" cried the astrologer; "what plainer language wouldst thou have spoken? In the house Allatha is written the defection of friends, the dethronement of princes, the fall of citadels in a siege."

"Villain and caitiff! dost thou dare to insinuate that this citadel of Zempoala is in a state of siege?" cried the Biscayan, with a ferocious frown.

"I speak of the things that are to come;" said Botello. "What more than this wilt thou have?"

"It will doubtless be well," interrupted Duero, significantly, "to evacuate this city in the morning. By encamping in the fields, we can certainly avoid the danger of a besieged citadel."

"Dost thou gibe me, Don Andres?" said Narvaez, with a brow on which jealousy struggled with rage.

The secretary of Velasquez laid his hand on his heart, with a gesture of respectful deprecation.

"Ay! I see thou art stirred by these phantasms!" cried the governor, with a harsh laugh, looking from Duero to the other cavaliers. "What means this, my masters? Do ye all stare as if ye had got among you a dead Samuel, telling ye of your deaths on the morrow? Cheer up, – for, by'r lady, I intend, if this old fellow's command of the black art runs so far, to divert you with a more horrible companion. What sayest thou, Botello? It is whispered thou canst raise devils, and force them to speak to thee!"

"Ay!" said Botello, with a ghastly grin, staring the general in the face, until the latter faltered before him. "Wilt thou adventure then so far? Canst *thou*, whose eyes tremble at the gaze of a living creature, think to look upon the face of a fallen angel? Hast thou confessed to-day, and been absolved? hast thou been free, since the sunrise, of thoughts of treachery and feelings of wrath? The pentacle and the circle the consecrated sword and the crucifix, the sign of the cross and the muttered paternoster, will not protect the unshriven sinner from the claws of a raised demon."

"If thou canst raise him," said Narvaez stoutly, "do so, and quickly. I fortify myself in the name of God and the Holy Ones, against all spirits and devils. It will be much satisfaction to my curiosity to look upon one of the accursed."

"They are about us in the air – they are at our elbows and ears," said Botello; "and it needs but a spell to be spoken to bring them before us. But wo to him that hath thought a sin to day, when the Evil One looks on him!"

"Señor Narvaez," cried Duero, with a most expressive and contagious alarm, "if it be your inclination to raise the devil, you must indulge it alone. For my part, I confess there have been, this day, certain sinful thoughts about my bosom, which have unfitted me for such an interview; and – I care not who knows it – my valour has in it so little of the fire of faith, I would sooner, at any moment, speak with ten men than one devil. God be with you, señor, – I wish you a good evening."

"Tarry, Duero; stay, cavaliers!" cried Narvaez, losing much of his own dread in the contemplation of the apprehension of others. "Why, you are such a knot of sinners as I dreamed not I had about me! Faith, I am ashamed of you, and of you in particular, Duero; for I thought thy

shrewdness would have seen in this knave's attempt to frighten us from the exhibition, an excellent evidence of his inability to make it."

"I could show thee more than thou couldst see," said Botello, "and, I know, more things will come to thee than thou *shall* see. I know, with all thy vaunting, thou wouldst perish in the gaze of an angel of hell; for thy heart would be the heart of a boy, and it flutters already, even at the thought of the spectacle. – I will show thee an essence thou mayest look upon without alarm."

"Do so," said Narvaez, sternly; "and remember, while saying what may be necessary by way of explanation, that thou speakest to the chief and governor of these lands, who will whip thy head from thy neck, in spite of all the devils, if thou discourest not with more becoming reverence."

"My fate is written!" cried Botello, with neither indignation or alarm; and drawing calmly from his bosom an implement of his art, he advanced to the light, and displayed it freely to the cavaliers. It was, or seemed to be, an antique jewel of rock-crystal, not bigger than a pigeon's egg, set in the centre of a triangular disk of gold, on which last, were engraved many unknown characters and figures. Crossing himself twice or thrice, the enchanter swung it by a little silver chain to which it was pendent, in the full blaze of the lamp; so that either of the persons present might have handled it, had any been so disposed. But, in truth, the superstition of an age for which no marvel was too gross, no miracle too wonderful, was more or less shared by all; and they merely surveyed it at a distance with curiosity and fear.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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