

BIRD ROBERT MONTGOMERY

THE INFIDEL; OR, THE
FALL OF MEXICO. VOL. I.

Robert Bird

**The Infidel; or, the
Fall of Mexico. Vol. I.**

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– Un esforcado soldado, que se dezia *Lerma*– Se fue entre los Indios como aburrido de temor del mismo Cortes, a quien avia ayudado a salvar la vida, por ciertas cosas de enojo que Cortes contra èl tuvo, que aqui no declaro por su honor: nunca mas supimos del vivo, ni muerto, mala sospecha tuvimos.

Bernal Diaz Del Castillo —Hist. Verd de la Conquista.

No hay mal que por bien no venga,

Dicen adagios vulgares.

Calperon —La Dama Duende.

CHAPTER I

The traveller, who wanders at the present day along the northern and eastern borders of the Lake of Tezcuco, searches in vain for those monuments of aboriginal grandeur, which surrounded it in the age of Montezuma. The lake itself, which not so much from the saltness of its flood as from the vastness of its expanse, was called by Cortes the Sea of Anahuac, is no longer worthy of the name. The labours of that unhappy race of men, whose bondage the famous Conquistador cemented in the blood of their forefathers, have conducted, through the bowels of a mountain, the waters of its great tributaries, the pools of San Cristobal and Zumpango; and these, rushing down the channel of the Tula, or river of Montezuma, and mingled with the surges of the great Gulf, support fleets of modern argosies, instead of piraguas and chinampas, and expend upon foundering ships-of-war the wrath, which, in their ancient beds, was wasted upon reeds and bulrushes. With the waters, which rippled through their streets, have vanished the numberless towns and cities, that once beautified the margin of the Alpine sea; the towers have fallen, the lofty pyramids melted into earth or air, and the palaces and tombs of kings will be looked for in vain, under tangled copses of thistle and prickly-pear.

The royal city of Tezcuco is now, though the capital of a republican state, a mean and insignificant village. It was originally the metropolis of a kingdom once more ancient and powerful than that of Mexico; and which, when it had shared the fate of all others within the bounds of Anahuac, and acknowledged the sway of the Island Kings, still preserved the reputed, and perhaps the real possession of superior civilization. Its princes, in becoming the feudatories, became also the electors, of Mexico; and thus added dignity to an independence which was only nominal. The polished character of these barbarous chieftains, as the world has been taught to esteem them, may be better understood, when we know, that they sowed the roadside with corn for the sustenance of travellers, and the protection of husbandmen, built hospitals and observatories, endowed colleges and formed associations of literature and science, in which, to compare small things with great, as in the learned societies of modern Europe and America, encouragement was given to the study of history, poetry, music, painting, astronomy, and natural magic. The various mechanical trades were divided into corporate bodies, and assigned, each, to some particular quarter of the city; courts and councils were regularly established, and the laws which they dispensed, digested into uniform and written codes, some of which are still preserved. The kings of Tezcuco themselves mingled in the generous rivalries which they fomented: there are still in existence, – at least, in the form of translation, – several of the odes of Nezahualcojotl, a royal Tezcucan poet; and his hymns to the Creator, composed half a century before the advent of the Spaniards, were admired and chanted by the Conquerors, until devoted by misjudging and fanatical missionaries to the flames which consumed the written histories and laws of the kingdom, as well as the idolatrous rituals of the priests, with which last the others were unfortunately confounded.¹

¹ These poems, we presume, were handed down *orally*. We know not how far the picture-writing of the Mexicans (the art of interpreting which appears to be now lost,) was capable of conveying any such thoughts as could not be represented by an absolute *portrait*. No system of writing that is not essentially *phonetic* or *dialectical*, (i. e. representative of sounds, or of language,) can be made to express abstract ideas, which may be defined to be such as admit of no ideographic or metaphoric representation. If they could, mankind might, at once, enjoy the benefits of the *universal language*, (or, to speak strictly, a substitute for it; for it would convey ideas not words,) which Leibnitz dreamed of, and Bishop Wilkins, and many others after him, so vainly attempted to construct. When, therefore, we relate any very curious and marvellous matters, appertaining to Mexican *literature*, though we speak upon the authority of historians, we invite the reader to receive our accounts with some grains of allowance. With the exception of a few arbitrary symbols, expressive of numerals, and a few other objects of constant recurrence, the picture-writing of Mexico spoke in ideas, not words; and it may therefore be assumed, that it could express nothing that did not, or by a stretch of ingenuity, could not be made to, address and explain itself to the eye.

A few ruins – a cluster of dilapidated houses – a galloping Creole on his high Spanish saddle, with glittering *manga* and rattling *anquera*, – and, now and then, an Indian skulking moodily along, in his squalid *serape*,² – are all that remain of Tezcuco.

In the spring of 1521, the year that followed the flight of the Spaniards from Mexico, the city of the Acolhuacanese presented all its grandeur of aspect, and, to the eye, looked full as royal and imperishable as in the best days of its freedom. But the molewarp was digging at its foundations; and the cloud which had ravaged the Mexican valley, and then passed away into the east, where it lay for a time still and small, 'like to a man's hand,' had again crept over the mountain barriers to its gates, and was now brooding among its sanctuaries. A group of Christian men sat under a cypress-tree, without the walls, regarding the great pyramid, on whose lofty terrace, overshadowing the surrounding edifices, floated a crimson banner of velvet and gold, on which, besides the royal arms of Spain, was emblazoned, as on the Labarum of the Constantines, a white cross, with the legend, imitated from that famous standard of fanaticism, *In hoc signo vincemus*. If other proof had been wanting of the return of the Spaniards to the scene of their discomfiture, their presence in Tezcuco, and their unchangeable resolution to complete the work of conquest so disastrously begun, it might have been traced abundantly in the strange spectacle, which, equally with the desecrated temple, divided the attention of the group of Castilians at the cypress-tree. They sat on a little swell of earth, – a natural mound which jutted into the lake, whose waters, agitated by a western breeze, dashed in musical breakers at its base; while the rustling of the leaves above, mingled with these sounds of waves, a tone that was both melancholy and harmonious. The beautiful prospect of Tezcuco, rising beyond fertile meadows in the livery of spring, flanked, on the right hand, by a sheet of dark and glossy water, – with white towers, turrets, and temple-tops, painted, as it seemed, on a background of mountains of the purest azure, was enough of itself to engross the admiration of a looker-on, had there not been presented, hard by, a scene still more singular and romantic.

A train of warriors, artificers and labourers, the latter bending under such burthens as had never before descended to the verge of Tezcuco, was seen passing, at a little distance, towards the city, into which, as was denoted by a sudden explosion of artillery and the blast of trumpets on the top of the pyramid, the leaders were just entering, while the rear of the procession, extending for miles, and winding like some mighty snake, over hill and meadow, was lost among distant forests.

The martial salutation from the town was answered by the whole train with a yell, filling the air, and causing the distant hills and lakes to tremble with the reverberation. In this, the ear might detect, besides the war-cry of Indians, "Tlascalala, Tlascalala!" the not less piercing shouts of Spaniards, "In the name of God and Santiago!" as well as the flourish of bugles, scattered at intervals among the train. If the broad Sea of Anahuac trembled at the sound, it was with good reason; for the clamour of triumph indicated the approach of those unknown naval engines, which were to plough its undefiled bosom, and convert every billow into the vassal of the stranger. On the shoulders of eight thousand Tlascalans, were borne the materials for the construction of thirteen brigantines, with which the unconquerable Spaniard, capable of every expedient, meditated the complete investment and the certain reduction of Tenochtitlan. The iron, the sails, and cordage of that fleet which he had caused to be broken up and sunk in the harbour of Vera Cruz, were added to planks, spars, and timbers from the sierras of Tlascalala, and to pitch and rosin from the *pinales*, or pine-forests, of Huexotzinco, – a gloomy and broken desert, notorious, in the present day, as the haunt of bandits, the most brutal and merciless in the world.

The brawny carriers of these massive materials were protected, on the front and in the rear, by legions of their countrymen, armed, after their wild and romantic way, and clad in tunics of cotton or maguey cloth, with tiaras of feathers; who passed by in successive bodies of spearmen, archers,

² The Manga and Serape are Mexican cloaks worn scapulary-wise, the one of richly embroidered cloth, the other of blanket, or some such coarse material. The Anquera is a leather housing, embossed and gilt, with a jingling fringe of brass or silver ornaments.

slingers, and swordsmen, arranged and divided in the manner of their Christian confederates. Besides these guards of front and rear, of whom the historian Herrera asserts, there were 180,000, while even the modest Clavigero computes their numbers at full one-sixth of this vast host, there were on either flank, bodies of picked warriors, marching in company with small bands of Spaniards, and personally led by distinguished Christian cavaliers. A military man may form a juster estimate of the numbers of the train, by being told, that it formed a line more than six miles in length, the whole marching compactly, and in strict order, so as to be best able to resist an attack of enemies.

The Spaniards under the cypress-tree, surveyed this striking spectacle with interest, but not with the grave wonder and absorbing admiration of men unfamiliar with such scenes. On the contrary, it was evident, from the tone of the remarks with which they wiled away the time of observation, (for it was many a long hour before the last of the train drew in sight,) that they were of that levity of spirit, or in that wantonness of mood, which can find matter for ridicule in the most serious of occurrences. Thus, they beheld, or fancied they beheld, somewhat that was diverting in the persons, or motions, of the stern and warlike Tlascalans, and especially in the zealous eagerness with which these barbarians strove to imitate the bearing and gait, as well as the evolutions, of their disciplined associates. Nay, their raillery was extended even to the Spanish portion of the train; and, sometimes, when a comrade passed by, if near enough to be made sensible of the jest, he was saluted with some such outpouring of wit, as put to the proof either his gravity or his patience.

These happy individuals, to whom we desire to introduce the reader, were five in number, and, with a single exception, though betraying none of the submissiveness of inferior personages, were evidently of no very exalted rank in the Christian army. Their attire was plain, and consisted, for the most part, of the cumbrous escaupil, or cotton-armor, over which, in the case of one or two, at least, were buckled a few plates of iron. Most of them had on their heads, helmets, or rather caps, of the same flimsy material, sometimes so thickly padded as to assume the bulk, as well as the appearance of rude turbans; all wore swords, and two had crossbows hanging at their backs. No distinction of station could have been inferred from their manner of discoursing one with another; and it was only by the morion of bright steel, richly inlaid with gold, on the head of one, and the polished hauberk on his chest, worn more for display than for any present service, that the wearer would have been recognized as of a grade superior to that of his companions. He was a tall and athletic cavalier, with a long chin, and cheeks broad and bony; and a singular and rather unpleasing expression was added to his countenance by eyes disproportionably small, though exceedingly black, keen, and resolute. A small, sharply peaked beard, – mustaches so thin, long, and straight, that they looked rather like the drooping locks of a woman than the favourites of a vain gallant, – a narrow but lofty forehead, on either side of which, divided and smoothed with effeminate care, fell masses of straight black hair, touched, yet almost invisibly, with the traces of matured manhood, – a small mouth, – a prominent nose, – and a complexion exceedingly dark, yet rather of the hue of iron than mahogany, completed a visage which a stranger would not have hesitated to attribute to a man of decided character, but without daring to determine whether that was of good or evil.

The individual who would have been the second to attract the notice of a wayfarer, owed this distinction rather to his personal deformity than to any other very striking characteristic. He was a hunchback, with much of the saturnine and sour expression which distinguishes the countenances of the deformed, and yet of a spirit so much belied by his looks, that he heard, recognized, and constantly replied to, without anger, the nickname of *Corcobado*, or the humpbacked, to which his misfortune exposed him. The most observable peculiarity in his countenance, was the uncommon length of his nose, which so far intruded upon the lower part of his visage, as to give this a look of age, which was contradicted, not only by other features, but by the prodigious muscularity of his shoulders and arms. It must be confessed, however, that his lower extremities were entirely unworthy to compare with the upper, being both so short and thin, that when he stood upon his feet, his arms crossed behind, – which was their ordinary position, – with the stout iron plates protruding from both back and breast,

he looked rather like a bundle of armour and garments, exposed to the air and supported above the earth on two broken pikestaves or javelins, than a living and human creature.

The next individual was a man of good stature, who would have been considered, notwithstanding his grey hairs, the strongest man in the company, had it not been for his general emaciation and an expression of suffering on a countenance over which disease, contracted among the hot and humid swamps of the coast, had cast the sickliest hues of jaundice. Indeed, this discolouration, on a visage naturally none of the fairest, was of so deep a tint, that it had gained for the invalid, as well as for a whole ship's crew of his companions, the significant title of *Ojo Verde*, or the Green Eye. And here we may as well observe, that, in the army of Cortes, the wit which shows itself in the invention of such distinctions, was so prevalent, that there was scarce a man, from the general down to his groom or scullion, who had not been honoured by at least *one* sobriquet.

The fourth personage was a man of indifferent figure, remarkable for little save the marvellous sweetness of his eyes, which were set among features exceedingly sharp and harsh, and the volubility of his tongue.

The fifth sat apart from the others, a little down the slope of the hillock, with tablets in his hands, yet so plunged in abstraction, or so much wrapped up in the contemplation of the dark lake, the little piraguas dancing over its billows, and the far-distant turrets of the infidel city, that he seemed to have forgotten, not only the presence of his companions, and the passing procession, but the purpose for which he had drawn forth his writing implements.

The sound of the cannon, as we have said, was immediately responded to by the shouts of the train; which, commencing at the gates of the city, were continued and prolonged by the various bodies that composed the huge and moving mass, until they died away in the distance, like peals of rolling thunder. At the same time, the Indians struck their tabours, and sounded their conches and cane-flutes, in rivalry with the Spanish buglers; and a din was made, which, for a time, put a stop to the conversation of the four Castilians. It also startled the solitary man from his meditations, but only for an instant. He rose, turned his eye listlessly towards the procession, and then again resuming his seat, he was presently sunk in as profound abstraction as before.

In the meanwhile, the cavalier of the helmet had bent his gaze upon the pyramid, from the top of which the cannon-smoke was driving slowly away like a cloud, and revealing the proud banner, which it had for a moment enveloped. He could see, even at this distance, that the two stone turrets, – the idol-chambers, – on the summit, were crowned with crosses, and that the flag-staff, – a tall cedar, that might have made a mast for an admiral's ship, – was surrounded by a tent, or rather pavilion, of native white cloth, broadly striped with crimson, which glittered brilliantly at its foot. As he looked he stroked his beard, and muttered, addressing himself to the hunchback,

"Harkee, Najara, man! give me the benefit of thy thoughts, and care not if they come out like crab-apples. What thinkest thou of Cortes now? Is there not something over-stately and very regal-like in the present condition of his temper?"

"Why dost thou ask that of *me*, when thou hast Villafana at thy elbow?" replied the hunchback, with a voice worthy the acerbity of his aspect: "if thou wilt have dirty water, get thee to the ditch."

"You call me *Gruñidor*, and grumbler I am," said he of the sweet eyes, with a laugh. "I grumble when I am in the humour; and I care not who knows it. Am I a ditch, old sinner? I'faith, I must be, when I have such ill weeds as thyself growing about me. Wilt thou have *my* thoughts, señor Guzman, on this subject? I can speak them."

"Be quick, then," said the cavalier; "for Corcobado is digesting an answer to thy fling, which will leave thee speechless."

"Pho, I will bandy mudballs with him at any moment," said Villafana: "I care not for the buffets of a friend. As for the noble señor, the Captain General, what you say is true. The king's letter hath set him mad. While the Bishop of Burgos was still in power, and his enemy, he was e'en a good

companion, – a comrade, and no master. Demonios! 'twas a better thing for us, when his authority rested on our good-will, and no royal patent."

"Ay," said Guzman; "when we were but rebels and exiles, denounced by the governor, cursed by the priest, and outlawed by the king, Cortes was the most moderate, humble, and loving rogue of us all. I do think, he is somewhat altered."

"Oh, señor, there is no such bond for our friendship as a consciousness of dependence upon those who love us; and nothing so efficacious in cooling us to friends, as the discovery that we can do without them. His authority is no longer our gift; the bishop has fallen; the king has acknowledged his claims, and sent him, besides a fair, lawful commission and goodly reinforcements both of men and arms, a letter of commendation written with his own royal hands. May his majesty live a thousand years! but would to heaven his letter were at the bottom of the sea. It has brought us a hard master. Can your favour solve me the riddle of the king's change? What argument has so operated on his mind, that he now does honour to a man he once condemned as a traitor, and advances him into such power as leaves him independent even of the Governor of the Islands?"

"The very same argument," replied Guzman, "which has turned thee – a friend of Velasquez – into the most devoted, though grumbling adherent of our Captain —*interest*, sirrah, interest. It is manifest, that this empire was made to be won; and equally apparent, that the man who could half subdue it, though trammelled and opposed by all the arts and power of Velasquez, was the fittest to conclude the good work; and what was no less persuasive, it was plain, our valiant Don was fully determined to do the work himself, without much questioning whether the king would or not."

"Why, by heaven!" cried Villafana, "you make out the general to be a traitor, indeed!"

"Ay; – for, in certain cases, there is virtue in treason."

"Hark now to Villafana!" cried the hunchback, abruptly: "he will thank you for the maxim, as if 'twere a mass for his soul."

"I, curmudgeon?" exclaimed the grumbler. "There were a virtue in it, could it bring such fellows as thyself to the block. What I aver, is, that the king's honours have spoiled our general. By'r lady, I see not what good can come of sending us a Royal Treasurer, Franciscan friars with bulls of St. Peter, and Lady Abbesses to build up nunneries, unless to make up more state for our leader."

"Then art thou more thick-pated than I thought thee," replied the cavalier. "The bulls will make us somewhat stronger of heart, and therefore better gatherers of gold in a land where gold is not to be had without fighting. La Monjonaza will sanctify our efforts, by converting the women; and the king's Treasurer will see that we do not cheat the king, after we have got our rewards, as, it is rumoured, we have done somewhat already."

"Santos! I know what thou art pointing at, Don Francisco," said Villafana, significantly. "The four hundred thousand crowns that have vanished out of the treasury, hah! This is a matter that has stained the General's honour for ever. And as for La Monjonaza, thou knowest there are dark thoughts about her."

"Have a care," said Don Francisco. "We are friends, and friends may speak their minds: but I cannot hear thee abuse Don Hernan."

"Hast thou never been as free thyself?" cried Villafana, with a laugh, which mingled a careless derision with good-humour. "Come, now, – confess thou wert pleased to be appointed Grand Guardian and Chamberlain, – or, if thou wilt, Grand Vizier, – to his god-son, the young king of Tezcucó; and that, since he gave thee Lerma's horse, thou hast been better mounted than any other cavalier in the army."

"Thou art an ass. Cortes has ever been my friend; and when I have complained, as I have sometimes done, it was only like a good house-dog, who howls in the night-watches, because he has nothing better to amuse him. But hold, – look! the carriers are passed. The rear-guard approaches. Now is my friend Sandoval yonder, betwixt the two Tlascalan chiefs, glorified in his imagination. 'Slid! he would have had me exchange my brown Bobadil for his raw-boned Motacila! – Come,

Najara, rub up thy wit; fling me some sweet word into the teeth of the Tlascalan generals. Dost thou perceive with what solemn visages they approach us?"

"I perceive," said Najara, "that Xicotencal is in no mood for jesting. It is said, he comes to join us with his power reluctantly. Dost thou see how he stalks by himself, frowning? A maravedi to a ducat, he would sooner take us by the throat than the hand!"

"Why then, be quick, show him thy scorn in a fillip."

"Hast thou forgotten it has been decreed a matter for the bastinado, to abuse an ally?"

"Ay!" cried Villafana, "there is another fruit of a king's patent. One may neither laugh nor scold, gamble nor play truant, but straight he is told of a decree. Faith, when Cortes was our plain Captain, it was another matter: if there was aught to be done or not to do, it was then, in simple phrase, 'I commend to your favours,' or, 'I beg of your friendships, do me this thing,' or, 'do it not,' as was needful. But now the Captain-General deals only in decrees or proclamations, wherein we have commands for exhortations, prohibitions in place of dissuasions, and, withal, a plentiful garnishing of stocks and dungeons, whips and halters, all in the king's name. By Santiago! there is too much state in this."

"Pho! thou art an Alguazil; why shouldst thou care?" said the Cavalier. "The decrees are wholesome, the restrictions wise. It is right, we should not displease the Republicans: they are our best friends, – very quick and jealous too; and we were but a scotched snake without them."

"If they fight our battles," said Villafana, "they divide our spoil. In my mind, that black-faced Xicotencal is a villain and traitor."

"Thy judgment is better, in such matters, than another's," said the hunchback.

"Right!" cried Guzman; "the Alguazil will be presently in his own stocks, if thou dost heat him into a quarrel. We are not forbidden to abuse one another. Let the red jackalls pass by unnoticed; we have mirth enough among ourselves, – we will worry our Immortality. Look, Najara, man; dost thou not see in what perplexity of cogitation he is involved, – yonder dull Bernal? Rouse him with a quip, now; pierce him with a jest. Come, stir; rub thy nose, make thy wit as sharp as a goad, and prick the ox out of his slumber."

"Ay, good Corcobado," cried Villafana, turning from the procession, and mischievously eyeing their solitary and abstracted companion, "fling out the legs of thy understanding, like a rough horse, and see if thou canst not strike fire out of his flinty brain. All the scratching in the world will not do it."

"Now, were you not both besotted, and bent upon self-destruction," said the deformed, regarding the pair with a commiserating sneer, "you would not ask me to disturb our Immortality; who is, at this moment, meditating by what possible stretch of benevolence he can hand your names down to posterity; a thing, which if *he* do not effect, you may be sure, nobody else will. Señor Guzman, 'twas but a half-hour since, that he asked me, if I could, upon mine own knowledge, acquaint him with any act of thine worthy of commemoration."

"Ay, indeed!" said the cavalier, laughing; "was Bernal of this mind, then? He asked thee this question? By my faith, have I not killed as many Indians as another? Have I not encountered as many risks, and endured as many knocks? Out upon the misbelieving caitiff! he asked thee this question? Thy reply now? pr'ythee, thy learned answer to this foolish interrogatory? What saidst thou, now, in good truth?"

"In good truth, then," replied Najara, with a sour gravity, "I told him, I had it, upon excellent authority, though I believed it not myself, that thou wert a cavalier, equal to any, in the virtues of a soldier, – bold, quick, and resolute, – cool and fiery, – a lover of peril, a relisher of blood; one that had won more gold than he could pocket, more slaves than he could make marketable, and more renown than he cared to boast of; a prudent captain, yet a better follower, because of the ardour of his temper, which was, indeed, upon occasion, so hot, that, sometimes, it was feared, he might take Cortes by the beard, for being too faint-hearted."

"Oh, thou rogue, thou merry thing of vinegar, thou hast belied me!" cried Guzman; "thou knowest, I would sooner eat my arms, – lance, buckler, and all, – than lift my hand against the General: I would, by my troth, for I love him. But come, now, – thou saidst all this, upon good authority? You jest, you rogue, – we are all jealous and envious. We have good words from none but Cortes. – What authority?"

"Marry, upon that of thine own lips," replied the hunchback; "for I know not who else could have invented so liberally."

"Out!" cried the cavalier, somewhat intemperately; "you presume –"

"Ha! ha! a truce, a truce, Don Francisco!" exclaimed Villafana; "a fair hit – no quarrelling; for captain though thou be, thou knowest I am sworn Alguazil, as well as head-turnkey, chief executioner, and the Lord knows what beside. No wrath among friends – A very justifiable, fair hit! Najara must have his ways. Thou wilt see, by and by, how he will lay *me* by the ears. Come, Corcobado, begin. – He who plays with colts, must look to be kicked. – Come now, be sharp, fear not; I am a dog, and love thee all the better for cudgelling."

"I know thou art, and I know thou dost," said Najara; "for I remember, that ever since Don Hernan had thee scourged, for abusing the Tascalan woman, thou hast been a more loving hound than any other of the Velasquez faction."

"Fuego de dios! Pho, – Good! Ha! ha! very good!" exclaimed Villafana, laughing, though somewhat disconcerted. "I confess the beating; but then I have a back to endure it – Hah! A Roland for an Oliver, a kick for a buffet! Thou liest, though, as to the cause: 'twas for taking the old senator they call Maxiscatzin by the beard, when he had given me the first sop of the Maguey-liquor. I was drunk, sirrah, broke rules, disobeyed orders, and so deserved my guerdon. Wilt thou be satisfied? By this hand, I grumble not. I should trounce thee for the like misdemeanour, – that is, if I could find whereon to lay my scourge. Aha! wilt thou pull noses with me? Come, what saidst thou of me to Bernal? I bear thee no malice, man; – no, no more than the general. – Drunk indeed? He should have struck my head off!"

"I told him," said Najara, "that thou wert, in some sense, worthy to be chronicled."

"Many thanks for that," said Villafana, "were it only on account of the beating."

"For though thou wert as naturally given to grovelling as a football, yet wouldst thou as certainly mount, at every kick, as that same bag of wind."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the Alguazil, with a roar of delight, in which he was joined by Guzman; "thou art as witty and unsavoury as ever, and thou dingest me about the ears as with a pine-tree. What else, cielo mio? what else saidst thou to Bernal?"

"Simply, that thou hadst more boldness than would be thought of thee, more dreams than would be reckoned of thy dull brain, and such skill at rising, notwithstanding the clog of thy folly, that it was manifest thou wouldst not be content, till thy feet were two fathoms from the earth, and thy crown as near to the oak-bough as the rope would."

"Oh, fu! fy!" said Villafana, "hast thou no better trope for hanging? Have you done? Am I despatched? Get thee to better game, then; and see thou art more metaphoric. Hast thou no verjuice for our good friend here, Camarga?"

The individual thus alluded to, though giving his attention to the conversation, had maintained a profound and unsympathetic silence during all. He stood leaning against the tree, folding over his breast, and even wrapping about his chin, the long cloak of striped cotton cloth – the product of the country, – the bright and gaudy colours of which contrasted unnaturally with the sickly hue of his visage. Throughout all, when not particularly noticed, his countenance wore an expression of as much mental as bodily pain; but when thus accosted by Villafana, it changed at once, and in a remarkable degree, from gloom to good-humour, and even to apparent gayety. It is true, that, at the moment when his name was pronounced, he started quickly with a sort of nervous agitation; and a sudden

rush of blood into his face, mingling with its bilious stain, covered it with the swarthiest purple: but this immediately passed away – perhaps before any of his comrades had noted it.

"I cry you mercy, señor Villafana," he said; "I am as unworthy to be made the butt of wit as the subject of history. My ambition runs not beyond my conscience; the month that I have spent in this land, – and it is scarce a month, – has been wasted in disease and idleness. A year hence, I shall be more worthy your consideration. But tell me, good friends, is it true, as you say, that yonder worthy soldier hath been appointed the historian of your brave exploits? By mine honour, his head seems to me better fitted to receive blows than to remember them, and his hand to repay them rather than to record."

"He is, truly," said Villafana, "our Immortality, as we call him, or our Historian, as he denominates himself. As to his appointment, it comes of his own will, and not of our grace; but we quarrel not with his humours. He conceives himself called to be our chronicler. Who cares? He can do no harm. I am told, he doth greatly abuse Cortes, especially in the matter of the slaves, and the gold we fetched from Mexico in the Flight. By'r lady, I have heard some sharp things said about that."

"You said them yourself," muttered Najara. "It is well you are in favour."

"Ay, by my troth," cried Guzman; "*Cuidado*, Villafana! Don Hernan will be angry. Good luck to you! You are the lion's small dog: seize not his majesty by the nose."

"Pho, friends! here's a coil," said the Alguazil, stoutly: "Don Hernan knows me: I will say what I think. I have maintained to his face, that there was foul work with the gold, and that we have been cheated of our shares; I have told him what ill work was made of both Repartimientos, – the partition of the slaves, – at Segura-de-la-Frontera, and here at Tezcucó, – scurvy, knavish work, señores: One may fetch angels to the brand, but, ay de mi! the iron turns them into beldames!"

"Ay, there is some truth in that," said Guzman, a little thoughtfully. "No man honours Don Hernan more than myself; and yet did he suffer me to be choused out of the princess I fetched from Iztapalapan."

"Ay, the whole army witnessed it, and there was not a man who did not cry shame on you for taking it so –"

"Good-humouredly," interrupted the cavalier. "Rub me as thou wilt for a jest, Villafana; but touch me not in soberness."

"Pshaw! can I not abuse thee as a friend, without the apology of a grin? Thou hadst been used basely, had not Cortes made up the loss with Lerma's horse. I have heard thee complain as much as another; and even now, thou art as bitter as any against this mad scheme of the ships. Demonios! our general will have us rot in the lake, like our friends of the Noche Triste!"

"Thou errest," said the cavalier, gravely. "I have changed my mind, on this subject: I perceive we shall conquer this city."

"Wilt thou be sworn to that?" exclaimed the Alguazil, earnestly. "I tell thee, as a friend, we are all mad, and we are deluded to death. If we launch the brigantines, we are but gods' meat – food for idols and cannibals. We were fools to come from Tlascala. Would to Heaven we had departed with Duero! We are toiled on to our fate, to make Cortes famous: he will win his renown out of our corses. What sayst thou, Najara, mi Corcobado, mi Hacedor de Tropos?"

"Even that the will-o-th'-wispes, the *Ignes-fatui*, rising out of our decaying bodies, will forsake each honest man's corse, to gather, glory-wise, about the head of our leader. – Is that to thy liking?"

"Marvellously! Thy wit explains and gives tongue to my thoughts. Thou seest things clearly – I am glad thou art of my way of thinking. This is our destiny, if we continue our insane enterprise."

"A pest upon thee, clod!" cried the Hunchback; "I did but supply thee a simile, in pity of thine own barrenness. *I* of thy way of thinking? Dost imagine I will hang with thee? *I* see things clearly? Marry, I do. Give tongue to thy thoughts? Ratsbane!"

As Najara spoke, he bent his sour and piercing looks on the Alguazil; who, much to the surprise of Camarga, grew pale, and snatched at his dagger, in an ecstasy of rage, greatly disproportioned

to the offence, if such there could be in what seemed idle and unmeaning sarcasms. The wrath of Villafana, however, was checked by the mirth of the cavalier, Don Francisco, who exclaimed with the triumph of retaliation,

"A fair knock, by St. Dominic! Art thou laid by the heels, now? Sirrah Alguazil, if thou showest but an inch more of thy dudgeon, I will have thee in thine own stocks, – ay, faith, and on thine own block, into the bargain. Forgettest thou the decree? Death, man, very mortal death to any one who draws weapon upon a christian comrade: thy hidalgo blood, (if thou hast any, as thou art ever boasting,) will not save thee. Pho! thou art notoriously known to be a plotter. Why shouldst thou be angry?"

"*Hombre!* I am not angry *now*: but, methinks, Corcobado hath the art of inflaming whatever is combustible in man's body. A good friend were he for a poor man, in the winter. Why, thou bitter, misjudging, remorseless, male-shrew, here is my hand, in token I will not maul thee. Why dost thou ever persecute me with thy hints? By and by, men will come to believe thou art in earnest. *What* dost thou see, that I care not to have exposed? I am a plotter? I grant ye; so Cortes hath called me to my face a dozen times, or more. I am a grumbler? So he avers, and so I allow. I must speak what I think; ay, and I must growl, too. All this is apparent, but it harms me not with the general: he scolds me very oft; but who stands better in his favour?"

"Thou takest the matter too seriously," said Guzman. "Hast thou no suspicion that thy self-commendations are tedious?"

"In such case, hadst thou ever any thyself?" demanded the unrelenting Najara. "Pray, let him go on. Let him draw his dagger, if he will, too. What care I? I have a better fence than the decree."

"Pshaw, man," said Villafana, "why dost thou take a frown so bitterly? I will not quarrel with thee. But I would thou couldst be reasonable in thy fillips: call me a knave openly, if thou wilt; thy insinuations have the air of seriousness. But come; you have robbed the señor Camarga of his diversion with Bernal. Lo you now, if our wrangling have disturbed him a jot! He sits there, like an old horse of a summer's day, patient and uncomplaining; and, all the time, there are gadfly thoughts persecuting his imagination."

"Methinks, señores," said Camarga, "you should be curious to know in what manner the good man records your actions. For my part, I should be well content to be made better acquainted with them; especially with those later exploits, since the retreat from Mexico, of which I have heard only confused and contradictory accounts. Will he suffer us to examine his chronicles?"

"Suffer us!" cried Guzman; "if you do but give him a grain of encouragement, never believe me but he will requite you with pounds of his stupidity. What, have you any curiosity? – Harkee, Bernal, man! – You shall see how I will rouse him, – Bernal Diaz! Historian! Immortality! what ho, señor Del Castillo! Are you asleep? Zounds, sirrah, here are three or four dull fellows, who, for lack of better amusement, are willing to listen to your history."

CHAPTER II

At these words, the worthy thus appealed to, woke from his reverie, and staring a moment in some little perplexity at his companions, took up a long copper-headed spear, which rested on the ground at his side, and advanced towards them. Viewed at a little distance, the gravity of his countenance gave him an appearance of age, which vanished on a nearer inspection. In reality, if his own recorded account can be believed, (and heaven forbid we should attach any doubt to the representations of our excellent prototype,) he did not number above twenty-six or twenty-seven years, and was thus, as he chose to call himself, 'a stripling.' Young as he was, however, there was not a man in the army of Cortes who had seen more, or more varied service than Bernal Diaz del Castillo. His exploits in the New World had commenced seven years before, among the burning and pestilential fens of Nombre de Dios, – a place made still more odious to an aspiring youth by the ferocious dissensions of its inhabitants, and that bloodthirsty jealousy of its ruler, which had rewarded with the block the man³ who disclosed to Spain the broad expanse of the Pacific, and led his subaltern, Pizarro, to the shores of Peru. With the two adventurers, Cordova and Grijalva, who had preceded Cortes in the attempt upon the lands of Montezuma, (discovered by the first,) Bernal Diaz shared the wounds and misadventures of both expeditions; and he was among the first to join the standard of Don Hernan, in the third and most successful of the Spanish descents.

The hardships he had endured, the constant and unmitigated suffering to which he had been exposed for seven years, had given him much of the weatherbeaten look of a veteran, which, added to the sombre gravity of his visage, caused him to present, at the first sight, the appearance of a man of forty years or more. His garments were of a dusky red cloth, padded into escaupil, with back and breast-pieces of iron, over which was a long cloak of a chocolate colour, well embroidered, and, though much worn and tarnished, obviously a holiday suit. To these were added a black velvet hat, ornamented with three flamingo feathers, striking up like the points of a trident, with the medal of a saint, rudely wrought in gold, hanging beneath them. His person was brawny, his face full and inexpressive; his dull grey eyes indicated nothing but simplicity and absence of mind, or rather inattentiveness; and it required the presence of many scars of several wounds on his countenance, to convince a stranger that Bernal actually possessed the fortitude to encounter such badges of honour.

He approached the group with a heavy and indolent tread, bearing in his hand a bundle of leaves of maguey paper, such as served the purposes of the native painters and chroniclers of Anahuac, and with which he was fain to supply the want of a better material.

"Dost thou hear, señor Inmortalidad?" cried Don Francisco de Guzman, as the martial annalist took his seat serenely among the Castilians; "art thou deaf, dumb, or still wrapt in thy seventh heaven, that thou answerest not a word to my salutations? Zounds, man, I will not ask thee a second time."

"What is your will?" said Bernal Diaz, "what will you have of me, señores?" he repeated, surveying each member of the group, one after the other. "I did think that this being a day of license and rejoicing to so many of us, I might have an opportunity, not often in my power, of putting down some things in my journal which it will be well to do, before setting out on the circuit of the lake, wherein there may happen some passages to drive from my memory those which are not yet recorded. But, by my faith, you have talked loud and much, and so disturbed my mind, that I have entirely lost some things I intended to say. I would to heaven you would find some other place to your liking, and leave me alone for a few hours."

"Why, thou infidel!" said Guzman, "if thou likest not our company, why dost thou not leave it? Dost thou forget thou hast the power of locomotion? Wilt thou wait for us to depart before thou bethinkest thee of thine own legs? By'r lady! thou art not yet in thy senses!"

³ Vasco Nuñez de Balboa.

"By my faith, so I can!" said the historian, abruptly, as if the idea had just entered his mind: "I will go down to the lake shore, where the sound of the waves will drown your voices. There is something encouraging to contemplation in the dashing of water; but as for men's voices, I could never think well, when they were within hearing. I beg your pardon, all, señores: I will go down."

"What! when here are four fools, who are in the humour of listening to thee for some seven minutes, or so? ay, man, to thy crazy chronicles! When wilt thou expect such another audience? Lo you, the señor Camarga has desired to be made acquainted with your learned lucubrations. Come, stir; open thy lips, exalt thyself, while thou art alive; for after death, there is no saying how short a time thou wilt sleep in cobwebs."

"You jeer me, señor Guzman; you laugh at me, gentlemen," said the soldier, gravely; "and thereby you do yourselves, as well as me, much wrong. Is it so great a thing for a soldier to write a history? The valiant Julius Cæsar of Rome recorded, with his own hand, his great actions in France, Britain, and our own Castile, as I know full well; for when I was a boy at school, I saw the very book; and sorry I am that the poverty of my parents denied me such instruction, as might have enabled me to read it. Then, there was Josephus, the Jewish Captain, who wrote a history of the fall of Jerusalem, as I have heard from a learned priest. Besides, there were many Greek soldiers, who did the same thing, as I have been told; but I never knew much concerning them."

"And hast thou the vanity to talk of Julius Cæsar?" cried Guzman, laughing.

"Why not?" said the soldier, stoutly; "I have fought almost as many battles, and I warrant me, my heart is as strong; and were it my fate to be a general and commander, instead of a poor soldier of fortune in the ranks, I could myself, as well as another, lead you through these mischievous Mexicans; who, I will be sworn, are much more valiant heathens than ever Cæsar found among the French. As far as he was a soldier, then, I boast to be as good a man as he; ay, by mine honour, and better too! for I am a Christian man, whereas he was a poor benighted infidel. As for my history, I will not make bold to compare it in excellence with his; for it has been told me, that Cæsar was a scholar, and possessed of the graces and elegancies of style; whereas, I have myself none of these graces, being ignorant of both Latin and Greek, and knowing nothing of any tongues, except the Castilian, and some smattering of this Indian jargon, which I have picked up with much pains, and, as I may say, at the expense of more beating than one gets from the schoolmaster. Nevertheless, I flatter myself, that what I write will be good, because it will be true; for this which I am writing, is not a history of distant nations or of past events, nor is it composed of vain reveries and conjectures, such as fill the pages of one who writes of former ages. I relate those things of which I am an eye-witness, and not idle reports and hearsay. Truth is sacred and very valuable. In future days, when men come to make histories of our acts in this land, their histories will be good, because they will draw them from me, and not from those vain historiographers who stay at home, and write down all the lies that people at a distance may say of us. This is a good thing, and will make my book, when finished, a treasury to men; but what is better, and what should make it noticeable to yourselves, it will not, like other histories, say, 'The great hero Cortes did this,' and 'the mighty commander did that,' giving all the glory to one man alone; but it will record our achievements in such a way as to show who performed them, relating that 'this thing was done by the Señor Don Francisco de Guzman, and this by the valiant soldier Najara, and this by myself, Bernal Diaz del Castillo,' and so on, each of us according to our acts."⁴

"What the worthy Del Castillo says, is just," said Camarga; "and whether his history be elegant or unpolished, he should be encouraged to continue it. For my own part, I shall be glad when I have performed anything worthy to be preserved, to know, we have with us a man who will see that the credit of the act is not bestowed upon another. And, in this frame of mind, I will stand much indebted

⁴ The historical reader will find that the worthy Bernal has incorporated many of these judicious sentiments in the work he was then composing, and some almost word for word.

to the good señor, if he will permit me at once, to be made acquainted with the true relation of certain events, with which I am not yet familiar."

"What will you have?" said Bernal Diaz, much gratified by this proof of approbation. "You shall hear the truth, and no vain fabrication; for I call heaven to witness, and I say Amen to it, that I have related nothing which, being an eye-witness, I do not *know* to be true; or which, having the testimony of many others, actors and lookers-on, to the same, I have not good reason to believe, is true. What, then, will you have, señor Camarga? Is there any particular battle you choose to be informed of? Perhaps, I had better begin with the first chapter, which I have here, written out in full, and which –"

"Fire!" cried Guzman, starting up, "will you drive us away? Zounds! do you think we will swallow all?"

"Read that chapter," said Najara, "in which you celebrate the exploits of the señor Guzman."

"I have not," said Diaz, with much simplicity, "I have not yet had occasion to come to Don Francisco."

"Hear!" cried Villafana, clapping his hands with admiration, in which the cavalier, after looking a little indignant, thought fit to join.

"Unless indeed," continued the historian, "I should have resolved to relate the quarrel betwixt his favour, and the young cornet Lerma, (whom may heaven take to its rest; for there were some good things in the young man.) But as to this feud, I thought it better for the honour of both, as well as of another, whom I do not desire to mention with dispraise, that the matter should be forgotten."

"Put it down, if thou wilt," said Guzman, with a stern aspect. "What I have done, I have done; and I shame not to have it spoken. If I did not kill the youth, never believe me if it was not out of pity for his years; and out of regard to Cortes, with whom he was a favourite."

At these words, which were delivered with the greatest gravity, the historian raised his eyes to Don Francisco, and regarded him, for a moment, with surprise. Then shaking his head, and muttering the word 'favourite,' with a voice of incredulity, and even wonder, he held his peace, with the air of one who locks up in his breast a mystery, which he has been on the point of imprudently revealing.

"A favourite – I repeat the word," exclaimed Don Francisco, with angry emphasis; "a favourite, at least, until his folly and baseness were made apparent to Cortes, and so brought him to disgrace."

"Strong words, Don Francisco!" said Villafana, with a bold tone of rebuke; "and somewhat *too* strong to be spoken of a dead enemy. And besides, without referring to your share in the matter, there are those in this army, who have other thoughts in relation to the lad. It has been whispered, – and the honour of Cortes has suffered thereby, – it has been whispered –"

"By Villafana," exclaimed the hunchback, abruptly and sharply; "by thyself, certainly, Sir Alguazil, if there be anything in it against the credit of the general."

"Pshaw! wilt thou buffet me again?" cried Villafana, springing up and stamping on the earth, though not in anger. "Dost thou know now what thou art like?"

"Like a thorn in the foot, which, the more you stamp, the more it will hurt."

"Rather like a stupid ball tied to my leg," said the Alguazil, "which, without any merit of its own, serves but the dead-weight purpose of giving me a jerk, turn whichever way I will."

"Right!" cried Najara, with a sneer; "you have clapped the ball to the right leg. We do not so shot honest men."

"Gentlemen, with your leave," said Camarga, willing to divert the storm, which it seemed Najara's delight to provoke in the breast of the Alguazil, "with your leave, señores, I must not be robbed of my curiosity. It was my purpose to ask the señor del Castillo to read me such portions of his journal as treated, first, of occurrences that happened after the Noche Triste, and battle of Otumba, and then of the history and fate of this very young man, whose name is so efficacious in laying you by the ears. But as I perceive the latter subject is hateful to you all, – ." Here he turned his eyes on Guzman.

"You are deceived," said Don Francisco, drily. "I bear the young man no malice: the wolf and the dog may roll over carcasses – I have no anger for bones. He slandered me: being no longer alive, I forgive him. Ask Bernal what you will, and let him answer what he will: I swear by my troth, I care not."

"What needs that we should look into noisome caves, when we have green, wholesome lawns before us?" said Bernal Diaz, hesitating; for, at that moment, the eyes of all except Guzman, were fastened eagerly on his own. "I could speak of the quarrel, to be sure, between his favour Don Francisco and the young colour-bearer; for though, as I said, and for the reasons stated, I have not put it down in my history, yet do I remember it very well. But, should I get thus far, I should even persist with the whole story; for, I know not how it is, I never begin a relation, and get well advanced in the same, but I am loath to leave it, till I have recounted all."

"Ay, I'll be sworn, thou art," said Villafana: "thy stories are much like to a crane's neck; 'tis but a head and bill at first, and an ell or two of nothing stretched out after."

"Nor am I able," said the worthy Bernal, without stopping to digest the simile, "to read a full account of those actions the señor Camarga speaks of, which took place subsequently to our flight from Mexico and our great victory on the plains of Otumba, for the good reason that I have not yet composed them; the failure of which is, in a great measure, the consequence of your loud talking just now, whilst I was addressing my mind to the same. But, if you will have a verbal relation, señor Camarga, I will do my best to pleasure you, and that right briefly, and in true words; for I defy any man to detect falsehood or exaggeration in what I write."

"Ay, by'r lady!" cried Guzman, who had recovered his good-humour, and now laughed heartily, – "in what you *write*, honest Bernal; but in what you say, you are not so infallible."

"You would not let me finish what I was about to say," murmured the historian.

"No, faith; you would make a day's work of it; whereas I, who am no wire-drawer of conceits, can despatch the whole thing in a minute. Do you not see? the rear of the procession is in sight: in half an hour we shall be summoned into camp. Be content then, scribbler; I quote thy words, which should be honour enough: 'I defy any man to discover falsehood or exaggeration in what I say.' Know then, señor Camarga – after our victory at Otumba, nine months since, we retreated to Tlascalala, four hundred and fifty in number, at which city we rested five months, curing our wounds, recruiting our forces, and preparing to resume the war. During this time, the only remarkable incidents were, – first – the meeting of those goodly knaves who had come with Narvaez, sworn faith to Cortes, looked at Mexico, and now, being satisfied with blows and honour, demanded to be sent back to Cuba, to the great injury and almost destruction of all our hopes. Among the foremost of these turbulent fellows, was our friend here, Villafana; who, although he came not with Narvaez, but was sent soon after us by Velasquez, was ever found consorting with the disaffected, until his good saint, in some dream of the gallows, brought better thoughts into his mind, and converted him from an open enemy into a doubtful friend. Peace, Villafana! I am now playing the historian, and must therefore tell what I believe to be the truth."

At these words, Villafana, who had opened his mouth to speak, checked the impulse, nodded, laughed, and composed himself to silence.

"The defection of these men," resumed the cavalier, "and the reduction of our numbers that followed, (for we were e'en forced to discharge the more importunate of them,) were requited to us by happy reinforcements of men, horses, and arms; some of them sent by the foolish Velasquez – "

"Señor Guzman," said Bernal Diaz, "the Governor Velasquez is my relation. My father was an hidalgo, and his wife, my mother – "

"Oh, I forgot!" said Guzman, nodding to the historian: – "Some sent by the *sagacious* Velasquez to his captain, Narvaez, who was in chains at Villa Rica; some by De Garay, Adelantado of Jamaica, to rob us of our northern province, Panuco, – and it is supposed that thou, señor Camarga, with thy crew of sick men, though thou comest so late, and apparently of thine own good will, wert equipt by

the same inconsiderate commander; and some by the merchants of the Canaries and of Seville, to be exchanged for our superfluous spoils, which were not then gathered; – no, by'r lady, nor yet, either. In fine, we became strong enough, by these means, to recruit our forces among the natives of the land; which we did, by attacking divers provinces in the neighbourhood of Tlascala, and compelling their warriors to join our standard, along with the Tlascalans, who were willing enough, – all save their generalissimo, Xicotencal. Thus, then, with no mean force of Spaniards, and with several armies of Indian confederates, we came, 'tis now more than three months since, to yonder city, Tezcuco, and raised to the throne, (in place of his brother, who fled to Mexico,) a king of our own choosing; of whom I have the honour to be chief counsellor and minister, that is to say, guardian, regent, sponsor, or master, as you may think fit to esteem me. Here, it has been our good fortune to receive other and stronger reinforcements, and, as Villafana said, from the king's own royal bounty, with commissions and orders, priests and crown-officers, and so on; which circumstances have caused our army to be reorganized, the whole reduced to a stricter discipline, and civil officers to be appointed, for the better enforcing of martial law. Here, too, we have been preparing for the siege and blockade of yonder accursed metropolis, by bringing ships, (they are on the shoulders of these crawling pagans,) to give us the command of the lake; and by attacking and destroying the neighbouring towns, so as to secure possession of the shores. In the meanwhile, the young cub of an Emperor, Guatimozin, who has succeeded Cuitlahuatzin, the successor of Montezuma, has been equally busy in concentrating the warriors of all his faithful provinces in the island, and providing vast stores of corn and meat, for their subsistence, – as resolute to resist as we are to assail. The materials for our vessels being arrived, it is now known, that the time of constructing and launching them, will be devoted to an expedition, led by Cortes himself; in which we will make the circuit of the whole lake, destroying the rebellious cities on the main, and driving to the island all who may think fit to resist. When they are thus caged, we shall have them like pigeons in a net; and good plucking there will be in store for all. – This is my history, and methinks it should satisfy you."

"It wants nothing to be complete save the episode of the Cornet Lerma," said Villafana, with a malicious grin; "and, in requital for the good turn you have done me, when speaking of the mutiny Tlascala, I will relate it, – ay, by St. James, I will! frown and storm as you may. The señor Camarga has avowed his curiosity in the matter. Our dull Bernal, who is so frequent at boasting he tells naught but truth, has confessed that he dares not tell *all* the truth; which, I think, will be somewhat of a qualification to the belief of his future admirers. Najara, here, will say naught of any one but myself, and that with a crusty and bitter obstinacy, – wherein he seems to me to resemble a silly ox, who rubs his stupid head against a tree, much less to the prejudice of the bark than his skin. And as for thyself, señor Don Francisco, thou hast but thine own fashion of telling the story. But I told thee before, there are those in the army who have another way of thinking; and I am one – I will not boggle at a truth, like Diaz, because it is somewhat discreditable to Cortes, or to a chief officer."

"Speak then," said Guzman, gravely; "I have said already I care not. I know full well how your knavish companions belie me. I say again, I care not. What you aver as your own belief, I will make free to hold in consideration: for the reported imputations of others, I release you from responsibility."

"Oh, I speak not on my own knowledge, nor of my own personal belief," said Villafana, "and therefore, (but more especially in consequence of the decree, señor, the decree! – we will not forget the decree,) I shall fear neither dagger nor black looks. You called Lerma a 'favourite' of the general: pho! even Bernal smiled at that!"

"What I have said in that matter," replied Guzman, with composure, "I will condescend to support with argument. The young man was received into the household of Cortes, while Cortes was yet a planter of Santiago: he picked him up, heaven knows where, how, or why, a poor, vagabond boy. It is notorious to all, that, in those days, Don Hernan employed him less as a servant than as a son, or younger brother, and as such, bestowed upon him affection and confidence, as well as the truest protection. Thou knowest, and if thou art not an infidel altogether, thou wilt allow, that the

sword-cut on the general's left hand was obtained in a duel which he fought with a man, ('twas the señor Bocasucia,) who had thrown some sarcasm on the youth's birth, and then ran him through the body, when he sought for satisfaction."

"I allow all this," said Villafana; "I confess the youth was an ass, to match his boy's blade against the weapon of the best swordsman in the island; and I agree that it was both noble and truly affectionate in Cortes, to take up the quarrel, and so baste the bones of Bocasucia, that he will remember the correction to his dying day. I allow all this; and I add to it the greater proof of Don Hernan's love for the youth, that when Velasquez granted him his commission to subdue these lands, (I would the sea had swallowed them, some good ten years since!) the captain did forthwith entrust to the boy the honourable and distinguished duty of recruiting soldiers for him, in Española, in which island he was born."

"Ay," quoth Guzman, dryly, "and one may find cause for the general's anger, in the diligence with which the urchin prosecuted his task, and the success that crowned it."

"By my faith," said Bernal Diaz, unable any longer to restrain his desire to take part in a discussion of such historical moment, "the young man sped well; and that he came to us empty-handed was no cause of Don Hernan's displeasure, as I have heard Don Hernan say. It was, in the first place, our haste to embark, when we discovered that the governor was about to revoke our captain's commission, that caused Lerma to be left behind us; and, secondly, it was the governor's own act, that Lerma was not permitted to follow us, with the forces he had raised and brought as far as Santiago. It is well known, that these men were arrested on their course, and disbanded by Velasquez, – for some of them came afterwards with Narvaez, and have so reported. The youth was thrown into prison, too, where he fell sick, – for he had never entirely recovered from the effects of his wound, – and it required all the exertions of Doña Catalina, our leader's wife, backed by those of her friends, to procure his release. His fidelity was afterwards shown in his escape from Cuba, which was truly wonderful, both in boldness of conception and success of accomplishment."

"His fidelity truly, and his folly, too," said Villafana; "for, I think, no one but a confirmed madman could have projected and undertaken a voyage across the gulf, in an open *fusta*,⁵ (by'r lady! I have heard 'twas nothing better than a piragua,) with a few beggarly Indian fishermen for his crew. But this he did, mad or not; and if Cortes were angry, he took but an ill way to punish, since he gave him a horse and standard, and kept him, for a long time, near to his own person. His favourite for a time, I grant you he may have been, having heard it so related; but when I myself came to the land, there were others much better beloved."

"If I am not mistaken," said Don Francisco, "he was in favour at that time; and I have heard it affirmed it was some news of thy bringing, or some good counsel of thy speaking, which first opened the eyes of Cortes."

"I, indeed! —*my* news, and *my* counsel!" cried Villafana, with a grin. "I was more like, at that period, to get to the bastinado than the ears of Don Hernan. I, indeed! – I loved not the young man, I confess; and who did? He had even the fate of a fallen minion; all spoke of him with dispraise, – all hated him, or seemed to hate him, save only the Tlascalan chief, Xicotencal, who loved him out of opposition; and I remember a saying of this very crabbed Corcobado, here, on the subject, namely, that a hedgehog was the best fellow for a viper."

"Ay, by my faith," said Najara; "yet I meant not Xicotencal for the animal, but a worthy Christian cavalier; who was, at that time, rolling the snake out of his dwelling." As Najara spoke, he fixed his eyes on Guzman.

"I understand thee, toad," said the latter, indifferently. "It was natural, the young man should be somewhat jealous. But this leads us from the story. If it be needful to find a reason for Don Hernan's change, I can myself give a thousand. In the first place, mere human fickleness might be

⁵ *Fusta*– a sort of galley, very small and open, with lateen sails.

enough, for no man is master of his affections. It might be enough too, to know, that the youth was no longer the gay and good-humoured lad he had been described, but a sour, gloomy, and peevish fool, exceedingly disagreeable and quarrelsome; and, perhaps, it might be more than enough, to remind you, that, as was currently believed, this change of temper was the consequence of certain villanous acts, committed after our departure, and which were thought to furnish a better and more probable reason for the voyage in the fusta than any particular zeal he had in the cause of Cortes. If this be not enough," continued the cavalier, looking round him with the air of one who feels that his arguments are conclusive, "then I have but to mention what you seem to have forgotten, – to wit, that this petulant and meddling boy did presume to make opposition to, and very arrogantly censure, certain actions of the general; and, in particular, the seizure and imprisonment of king Montezuma, and the burning alive of the Cholulan prisoners, as well as the seventeen warriors, who had fought the battle with Escalante, at Vera Cruz." – In the last of these instances, Don Francisco made reference to the barbarous and most unjust punishment of Quauhpopoco, – the military governor of a Mexican province near to Vera Cruz, – and of his chief officers, who had presumed to resist with arms, and with fatal success, the Spanish commandant of the coast, in an unjustifiable attack.

"All this is true," said Villafana, "and it is all superfluous. What I desired to establish was, that Lerma was no favourite, when sent on the expedition, as would have been inferred from your words. I come now, señor Camarga, to speak of that occurrence in relation to this boy, Juan Lerma, (I call him a boy, for, at that time, he was not thought to exceed nineteen years of age.) which, as Bernal Diaz says, touches the honour of Don Hernan, and which, others think, bears as heavily upon that of Don Francisco. The señores must answer for themselves: I only give what is one version of the story."

"And, I warrant thee, it is the worst," said Najara. "Thou hast very much the appetite of a gallinaza, who chooses her meat according to the roughness of the savour."

"Among the daughters of the captive Montezuma," said Villafana, nodding to the hunchback, in testimony of approbation, "was one, the youngest of all, and, in truth, the prettiest, as I have heard, for I never beheld her, who was called Cillahula, – "

"Zelahualla," said Bernal Diaz. "It is a word that signifies – "

"It signifies nothing, so long as you give it not the proper accent," said Guzman, with infinite composure. "Her true name was Citlaltihuatl; or, at least, it was by that the Mexicans designated her; for they of the royal family have, ordinarily, a popular title, in addition to that used at court. The name may be interpreted the Maiden of the Star, or the Celestial Lady; for so much is expressed by the two words of which it is compounded."

"I maintain," said Bernal Diaz, stoutly, "that the word Zelahualla is more agreeable of pronunciation, as well as much more universal in the army."

"I grant you that," said Guzman. "Nor is the corruption so great as that of many names you have recorded in your journal: but I leave these things to be examined by your admirers hereafter. We will call the princess, then, Zelahualla; that being the better and more common title. – And now, Villafana, man, get thee on, in God's name; and start not, señor Camarga, at the damnable inventions of slander, which will now be told you."

"Pho!" said the Alguazil, "I will not abuse thee half so much as the General. Know, señor Camarga, that there arose, between the young fool Lerma and the excellent cavalier Don Francisco de Guzman, a quarrel, very hot and deadly, concerning this same silly daughter of Montezuma; with whom Don Francisco chose to be somewhat rougher and more tyrannical, in displaying his affection, than was proper towards a king's daughter and a captive."

"Dost thou speak this upon thine own personal averment?" demanded Don Francisco, with a countenance unchanged, but with a voice preternaturally subdued.

"No, faith," said Villafana, hastily, and with an air that looked like alarm; "I repeat the innuendoes of others, which may be slanders or not, – I know not. But it is certain, the young man

so charged thee to Cortes; affirming that, but for his interference, the villany meditated – But, pho! thou growest angry! So much, certainly, he brought against thee?"

"He did," replied Guzman, smiling as if in derision; "and I know not how any could have been induced to believe him, except that man, – each man, – being naturally a rogue himself, doth rather delight to entertain those aspersions which bring down his neighbour to his own level, than the commendations which acquaint him with a superior. He did! – He was a fool! I can explain this thing to your satisfaction."

"Basta! it does not need," replied Villafana. "The rear-guard is passing, – there is a stir on the temple-top, and presently we shall hear the trumpet, which, like a curfew-bell, will command us to put out the fires of our fancy and the lights of our wit, on pain of having them, somewhat of a sudden, whipped out with switches. I must tell mine own story; the señor Camarga looks a little impatient. The end of this quarrel," continued the Alguazil, "was a duel; in which neither of the rivals in love and the general's favour, came to much hurt; since they were speedily seized upon and introduced to the Calabozo, for fighting against the express orders of the general. Then, being released, they were separated, – our excellent friend Don Francisco being sent on some duty to Tlascalala, and the boy Juan to – heaven."

"Saints!" exclaimed Camarga; "he was not executed?"

"Not on the block or the gallows, to be sure," said Villafana; "but in a manner quite as effectual. He was sent on some fool's errand of discovery, or exploration, to the South Sea, which, it was told us, washed the distant borders of this mighty empire; – his companions, two unlucky dogs of La Mancha, and one Leonese of Medina-del-Campo, –"

"Ay," said Bernal Diaz, with a groan, – "Gaspar Olea; he was my beloved friend and townsman, and –" But Villafana was in no humour to be interrupted:

"All three, like himself, out of favour," he continued. "Besides these, the young man had with him a band of knavish infidels, from the western province Matlatzinco; and his guide and counsellor was an old chief of the Ottomies – a half-savage, (they called him *Ocelotl* or *Ocelotzin*, that is, the Tiger,) who had been domesticated among Montezuma's other wild beasts. Now, señor, you may make your own conclusions, or you may take those of men who are true friends of Cortes, and yet will speak their mind. It was said, at the time, that the young man was sent to his death; for the western tribes are fierce and barbarous; it was an easy way to get rid of him – and so it has been proved. This happened fourteen months ago: neither the young man, nor any of his companions, were ever heard of more. The thing was understood, and it was called a cruel and unchristian act."

"Thou doest a foul wrong to Cortes, to say so," exclaimed Don Francisco, "imputing to him such sinister and perfidious motives. Such expeditions were at that time common; for we were then at peace, and each explorer was furnished by Montezuma with some royal officer by way of safe-conduct. Did not Don Hernan send his cousin, the young Pizarro, to explore the gold-lands of Guaztepec, at that very time? Were not others sent to search for mines, in the southern and northern provinces? I affirm, that this expedition of Lerma, fatal though it has proved, was not thought more, or *much* more dangerous than Pizarro's: – thou knowest, Pizarro lost three of his men. – Moreover, thou doest the general an equal wrong, in the matter of the three Spaniards, that went with Lerma. Olea, at least, – Gaspar Olea, the Barba-Roxa – was notoriously a favourite and trusted soldier, and was sent with the youth, as being the fittest man who could be spared, to aid his inexperience."

"The history is finished," said Villafana, rising; "the trumpet flourishes; and, like hounds at the horn of the hunter, we must e'en get us to the general, and add our howls to the yells of these curs of Tlascalala. The history is finished; and I have only to add, by way of annotation, that the hatred you bore the youth, (I have heard some say, he had the better in the duel!) will supply you good reasons for defending his punishment."

"I say to you again," cried Guzman, "I have forgiven the youth, and I hate him not."

"Oh! the brown horse, Bobadil, that was sent to him from Santo Domingo, a month since, and given to your own excellent favour, as to his proper heir, is a good peace-maker!"

"Thou art a fool," said Don Francisco; "I lament his death as much as another. – "

"Have masses then said for his soul, for, by heaven and St. John, his spirit is among us!"

These words, pronounced by the hunchback, Najara, suddenly, and with a voice of extreme alarm, caused the cavalier, who, with Villafana and Camarga, had already begun to walk towards the city, to turn round; when he instantly beheld, and with similar agitation, the apparition which had drawn forth the exclamation of the deformed.

CHAPTER III

As the Castilians followed the eyes of Najara, they beheld, approaching them from behind, three men, in whom, but for the direction given to their thoughts by the exclamation, they would have seen nothing but the persons of Indians, belonging to some tribe more wild and savage than any which inhabited the valley. Their garments were coarse and singular; their gait – at least, the gait of two of them, – not unlike to that of barbarians; and the look of wonder with which they surveyed the long train of the rear-guard, in which the high penachos, or plumes, and the copper-headed spears of Tlascalan chiefs, shone among the iron casques of Spanish cavaliers, was similar to the childish admiration of natives, unused to such a spectacle. Their dark countenances and long hair, their vestments and arms, were all of an Aztec character; yet a second and more scrutinizing glance made it apparent, that one, at least, if not two of them, was of another and nobler race.

The foremost, or leader, of the little band, was undoubtedly a savage; as was seen by the depressed forehead, the high cheek-bones, the eye of a peculiar form, and the skin of even uncommon swarthinness, which distinguished him from his companions. His stature was short, almost dwarfish; his toes were turned inwards; and as he moved along with a shuffling gait, with advanced chest, and head still more protruded, his long locks, grizzled as with extreme age, fell from either side of his face, like patches of gray moss from the bough of a tree, and almost swept the ground. A coarse cloth was wrapped round his loins; another of a square shape, – its opposite corners tied round his neck, – hung like a mantle, or rather a shawl, from his shoulders, over which were also strapped a bow and quiver of arrows; and a thick mat of cane-work was secured by thongs to his left arm, in the manner of a buckler, and swung at his side, or was laid upon his breast, as suited his mood or convenience. In other respects, he was naked, – though not without the native battle-axe of obsidian. This weapon consisted of a rod, or bludgeon, of heavy wood, (it was sometimes of copper,) at the extremity of which, and on either side, were fastened six or seven broad blades, or flakes, of volcanic glass, standing a little apart from each other. Its native name, *maquahuil*, was speedily corrupted by the Spaniards into *macana*, – a name that is applied, in Castile, to a sabre of lath; and which, being more practicable to civilized organs of speech than the original title, is worthy of being preserved. The appearance of this aged warrior presented none of the infirmities of years. His stooping carriage was rather the result of habit than feebleness; his step was quick and firm, though ungainly; and his eye rolled with the piercing vivacity of youth over the scene, which occupied so much of the attention of his followers.

Of these, that one whom the Castilians at the cypress-tree hesitated, for a moment, whether to esteem an Indian or a Christian man, was of a figure more remarkable for sturdiness than elegance. The roll of cloth round his body extended from his waist, where it was secured by a leathern girdle, to his knees. The mantle about his shoulders was more capacious than his fellow's, but it left his brawny chest in part exposed, and thereby revealed a skin fairer than belonged to the natives of Anahuac. His hair, though very long, was of a reddish-brown colour, and waving rather than straight; and a rough beard of a ruddy hue, though so short that its growth seemed to have been permitted for not more than the space of a week, was another phenomenon not to be looked for in a barbarian. But the indications of civilized origin offered by these characteristics, were set at naught by the step and bearing of the stranger, which were to the full as wild and peculiar as those of his more ancient companion; like whom, he carried a buckler and macana, though without the bow and quiver. His eye rolled with a like wildness; but his features were European; and instead of being entirely barefoot, like the senior, his feet were defended by stout sandals of untanned skin.

The third, and by far the most remarkable of all, was he who had first caught the eye of Najara, and upon whom was now concentrated the gaze of the whole party. A figure of the most majestic height, and noble proportions, though, at the present moment, greatly wasted, was rather set off to advantage than concealed by a costume as spare and primitive as that of the red-bearded man. His

skin was much tawnier than his companion's; indeed, it was of the darkest hue known among the southern provinces of Spain and Portugal, where the blood of Europe has mingled harmoniously with the life-tides of Africa. His lofty stature was more obvious, perhaps, since he adopted not the bearing or gait of the others, but moved along erect, with a graceful demeanour, and a step of natural ease and dignity. He had but one characteristic of a Mexican; and that was the long hair, straight, and of an intense blackness, that fell from his temples to his breast, with much of a wild and savage profusion, concealing, in part, a cheek of the finest contour, though somewhat hollowed by hardship, and, perhaps, suffering. The puffs of wind, blowing aside this sable curtain, disclosed an elevated forehead, crowning a visage in which every feature was of the mould of Castile, and after the happiest model of that order of beauty, each being sculptured with a touch that preserved delicacy, even while giving boldness. His age would have been a question wherewith to puzzle a physiognomist: there was much in the smoothness of his brow, and the unaltered freshness of a mouth, over which was sprouting a mustache, short and bushy, as if as lately submitted to the tonsure as the beard of his companion, that spoke of youth just verging into maturity; while, on the other hand, the complete development of his frame, and the seriousness of his countenance, would have conveyed the impression of an age many years farther advanced. This seriousness of expression was, indeed, more than mere gravity; it indicated a melancholy, or even sadness, which, though of a gentle cast, was become a settled and permanent characteristic.

As he approached, his eyes were, like his companions', fixed with curiosity upon the long and dense body of Tlascalans, from whom they were only withdrawn, when the exclamation of Najara attracted them suddenly to the group at the cypress. The confusion of these personages was so manifest, and they handled their arms with an air so indicative of hostility, that the old warrior and the red-bearded man came to an instant halt, and looked, as if for instructions, to their taller and more noble-visaged companion. He instantly stepped before them, and waving his hand to Najara, who was hastily fitting a bolt to his crossbow, and to the historian, who presented his partisan with greater alacrity of decision than would have been anticipated from his sluggish appearance, cried aloud,

"Hold, friends! We are not enemies, but Christians and Castilians."

"Art thou Juan Lerma? and art thou truly alive? or do I look upon thy phantom?" cried the hunchback, with an agitated voice.

"Out, fool! we are good living men," exclaimed the red-bearded man, angrily; "and with flesh enough upon our bones, to cudgel thee into better manners, I trow. Is this the way you receive old friends, returning from bondage among infidels? What, Bernal Diaz, thou ass! dost thou not know Gaspar Olea, thine old townsman of Medina-del-Campo, thy brother-in-arms and sworn friend? nor yet the señor Don Juan Lerma, my captain and friend in trouble? nor Ocelotzin, the old Ottomi rascal, our guide here?"

"Ay, oho! old rascal, old friend; all friends, all rascals," cried the Indian, looking affectionately towards the Castilians, who still stood in doubt, and using the few Spanish words with which he was familiar; "good friends, good rascals, – Castellanos, Cristianos; – friends, rascals."

While the rest were hesitating, the cavalier Don Francisco de Guzman suddenly stepped out from among them, and, advancing towards the young man Lerma, with a smiling countenance and extended hand, said,

"Though I am not thought to be the most loving of thy friends, I will be the first to bid thee welcome, señor Lerma, in token that old feuds do not mar the satisfaction with which I behold a Christian man rescued so happily, and as it appears to me, so marvellously, from the grave."

The emotions and changes of countenance with which the young man heard these words, were various and strongly marked. At the first tones of Guzman, he started back, as if a serpent had suddenly crossed his path, and grew pale, while his eyes flashed a ferocious and deadly fire. At the next, the blood rushed over his visage, and throbbed with a visible violence in the vessels of his temples; while he half raised the macana, which he carried, in lieu of a better weapon, as if to

cleave the speaker to the earth. The next instant, the angry suffusion departed, his brows relaxed their severity, the deep melancholy gathered again in his eyes, and he surveyed the cavalier with a patient and grave placidity, until the latter had finished his salutation. Then, bending his head, and folding his hands upon his breast, he replied, mildly, and without a shadow of anger,

"I have, as thou sayest, returned from the grave, in the sight of which I strove, as a Christian should, to make my peace with man as well as with heaven. I have done so; I am at peace with all; I am at peace with *thee*— But I cannot give thee my hand."

The cavalier Don Francisco received this rejection of his good-will with no sign of dissatisfaction, that was distinguishable by others, beyond a smile or sneer; but inclining his head towards Lerma, he muttered in his ear —

"The strife is unequal; but I accept thy defiance. Thou art but a broken-legged wolf, and wilt fight a fatted tiger — I am content."

So saying, or rather whispering, for his words were only caught by the ears of Juan, the cavalier turned upon his heel, and without condescending to exhibit his mortification in the vain air of pride and scorn, assumed by ordinary men on such occasions, he began to walk towards the city. He was presently followed by the señor Camarga; who, having fastened upon Juan, for a few moments, a look of intense curiosity, flung, when he had satisfied himself, his cloak over the lower part of his visage, and thus departed.

"You give me but a cold welcome, good friends," said Juan, looking after the retreating man with a sigh. "Will no one else in this company offer his hand to one who burns with joy at the sight of Christian faces?"

"When thou art better acquainted with the bounty of the compliment, doubtless, but no sooner," said the hunchback, who had surveyed the youth with an interest which was belied by his present scorn. "A good day to you, señor Juan Lerma, and God keep you well. There is a good path over the mountains, northward, by the way of Otumba. If you like not the company of heathens, there are fair maids enow in Cuba."

With these hints, which the young man listened to with a disturbed aspect, and which the hunchback accompanied with sour and contemptuous looks, he turned away, and began to hobble after his companions.

"Now God be our stay!" exclaimed Juan, with some emotion, "there is not a man who has a tear for our sorrows, or a smile for our joy. It were better we had perished, Gaspar!"

"I am not ashamed to give thee my hand," said Bernal Diaz, shaking off his amazement, and advancing, "though I know not how far thou art deserving of such countenance. But I must first claim to embrace my old friend and brother, Gaspar; whom, by my faith, I can scarce believe that I see living before me! How didst thou thus learn to turn thy toes in, Gaspar?"

"Away, thou dog-eared, ill-blooded block!" cried the red-bearded Gaspar, who had watched the turn of proceedings with indignation, and now poured forth his accumulated wrath upon the worthy historian. "Ashamed! —*thou* ashamed! —*thy* countenance! — deserving of *thy* countenance, thou ill-mannered, bog-brained churl and ass! Thou wilt give the young señor thy hand! If thou dost but lift it, I will smite it off with my battle-axe. Curmudgeon! *I* thy friend and brother? — I discard thee and forswear thee; I do, marry — "

"Peace, Gaspar," said Lerma, mildly; "quarrel not with thy friend on my account; thou hast no offence on thine own. It is plain, there is but cold cheer in store for me: make none for thyself."

"Oh, señor!" said Gaspar, sharply, for his anger was waxing hot and unrespective, "I am no servant, no grinning lackey, to be told, 'do me this,' and 'do me that,' by your excellent favour; no, by your leave, no; — I am your soldier, not your foot-man. I will quarrel when I like, and I will not be chidden. I am your soldier, señor, your soldier — "

"My friend, I think," said the young man; "though thou dost now afflict me more than those who seem my enemies."

"Afflict! – enemies! —*I* afflict!" cried Gaspar, fiercely; "I quarrel with your enemies! – ay, à *outrance*, as the Frenchmen, say. I have fought them in Italy. Fuego! enemies! – call this knave by the name, and if I do not smite him to the chine, townsman though he be – "

"Peace, Gaspar, if thou art my friend, as, I trust this good Bernal is, – "

"Go to," said Bernal Diaz, in high dudgeon, addressing himself to Gaspar, "thou art turned heathen, or thou wouldst not so abuse me. I care for you not; I have nothing to do with you, nor with any of your companions. By and by you will repent. God be with you, and make you wiser."

With these words, the historian followed the example of the others, and was straightway stalking, with impetuous strides, towards Tezcucu.

"Now art you not ashamed, Gaspar, to have given way to this boy's wrath? Wilt thou be womanish, too?"

"Ay," said Gaspar, shaking his head with the fury of a mastiff, rending some meaner animal, and thus dashing away certain tears of rage or mortification, that were starting in his eyes: "it doth make a woman of me, to think we have escaped from dangers such as were never dreamed of by these false traitors, – from infidel prisons and heathen maws, and come, at last, among Christian men, whom I could have hugged, every ill loon of them all; and not one to stretch forth his hand, and say God bless me! You were right, señor; it were better to have remained slaves with the King of the Humming-bird Valley, than to have left him for such hangdog welcome."

"Thou wouldst have had nothing to complain of, hadst thou bridled thy impatient temper. These men meant not to provoke *thee*."

"Bad friends, bad rascals!" said the Ottomi, who, during these several passages, had been staring from one Christian to another in unconcealed amazement: "bad friends! no good rascals!" he muttered in Spanish; then instantly changing to Mexican, which though not his native tongue, was more familiar to him, and was besides well understood by Juan, he continued,

"Itzquauhtzin, the Great Eagle," (for thus he chose to designate the youth,) "has settled upon the hill of kites. Where are his wings? Malintzin is angry; he sends his young men to frown. Here is another: he laughs with his eyes. – Ocelotzin is an old tiger, – Techeechee is a dog without voice; but the *itzli*⁶ is sharp in his hand. Shall he strike?"

The wild eyes of the barbarian (for the Ottomies, or mountain Indians, were the true savages of Anahuac,) were bent with the subtle and malignant keenness of the tiger whose name he bore, upon the Alguazil, Villafana, who, standing a little aside, and for a time unseen, had watched the salutations, and, finally, the departure of his companions, without himself saying a word. He now stepped forward, disregarding the evil looks of the Indian, as well as those of Gaspar, whose feelings of mortification were thirsting for some legitimate object whereon to expend their fury: and stretching forth his hand in the most friendly manner, said to Juan,

"How now, señor? drive this old cut-throat dog away. – I claim to be an old acquaintance, and, at this moment, not a cold one. The foxes being gone, the goose may stretch her neck. – Here am I, one man at least, heartily glad to find you coming alive from the trap, and not afraid to say so. – Does your favour forget me? Methinks you have the gift of rejecting the hands that are offered, howsoever you may covet those that are withheld."

"You do me wrong – I remember you well," said Juan, taking the hand, from which he had first recoiled with a visible reluctance: "I thank you for your kindness. Yes, I remember you," he repeated, with extreme sadness: "Would I did *not*."

"Come, señor Gaspar," continued the Alguazil, turning to Olea. "You and I were never such friends as true men should be; but, notwithstanding, I give you my true welcome and most Christian congratulations."

⁶ *Itzli*, the obsidian or volcanic glass.

"I ever thought you a knave," said Gaspar, clutching Villafana's hand, with a sort of sulky thankfulness, "being but an eternal grumbler and reviler at the general. But I see you are more of a Christian and man than any other villain of them all. Fire and blood! why do they treat us thus?"

"Oh, you shall soon know. But how now, señor Lerma, what is your will? Will you walk with me to the city? We have royal commanders now: 'tis a matter for the stocks, and, sometimes, the strappado, to loiter beyond the lines, after the trumpet's call. Will you walk to Tezcuco? or do you choose rather to betake you to the hills, as Najara advised you? Cortes is another man now, señor, and somewhat dangerous, as you may have inferred from the bearing of his favourites. If you would be wise, go not near him. It is not too late."

"Señor Villafana," said Juan, "what I have seen and heard has filled me with trouble; for, like Gaspar, I looked for such reception as might be expected by men returning from among heathen oppressors, to Christian associates and old friends. I know not well what has happened during the fourteen months of my absence from the army, save what was darkly spoken to me by a certain king, in whose hands I have remained, with my companions, many months in captivity. He gave me to believe that my countrymen had all fallen in a war with Montezuma, whom I left in peace, and in strong, though undeserved, bonds. I perceive that I have been cajoled: I rejoice that you are living men; but I know not why I should fear to join myself again among you. I claim to be conducted to your general."

"It shall be as you choose; but, señor, you are no longer in favour. As for Gaspar and the Indian, it will be well enough with them: a good soldier like Gaspar is worth something more than hanging; and such a knave as this old savage can be put to good use. Señor, shall I speak a word with you? Bid the two advance: I have somewhat to say to you in private."

The young man regarded the Alguazil with an anxious countenance; and then, desiring his companions to lead the way towards Tezcuco, followed, at a little distance, with Villafana.

CHAPTER IV

For a few moments, the two walked together in silence, and at a slow pace, until the others were beyond earshot; when Villafana, suddenly stopping and casting his eyes upon Juan, said, with but little ceremony,

"Señor Juan Lerma, I am your friend; and by St. Peter, who was once a false one, you need one that is both plain and true. Does your memory tax you with the commission of any act deserving death?"

To this abrupt demand, the young man answered, with an agitated voice, but without a moment's hesitation,

"It does. Thou knowest full well, and perhaps all others know, now, that I have shed the blood of my friend, the son of my oldest and truest benefactor."

"Pho!" cried Villafana, hastily; "I meant not *that*. Your friend, indeed? Come, you grieve too much for this. At the worst, it was the mishap of a duel, – a fair duel; and, I am a witness, it was, in a manner, forced upon you. You should not think of this: there are but few who know of it, and none blame you. What I meant to ask, was this – are you conscious of any crime worthy of death at the hands of Cortes?"

"I am not," said Lerma, firmly, though very sadly; "no, by mine honour, no! I am conscious, and it is a thing long since known to all, that I have entirely lost the favour with which he was used to befriend me. Nay, this was apparent to me, before I was sent from his presence. I hoped that in the long period of my exile, something might occur to show him his anger was unjust; and, with this hope, I looked this day, to end my wanderings joyfully. I am deceived; everything goes to prove, that neither my long sufferings, (and they were both long and many,) nor my supposed death have made my appeal of innocence. But I will satisfy him of this: I will demand to know my crime. If it be indeed, as I think, the death of Hilario – "

"Pho! be wise. He counts not this against thee, – he has been himself a duellist. Say nothing of Hilario, neither; no, by the mass! nor be thou so mad as to question him of his anger. Thou art very sure, then – I must be free with thee, even to the dulness of repetition: – thou art very sure, thou hast done nothing to deserve death at his hands?"

"I call heaven to witness," said Juan, "that, save this unhappy mischance in the matter of Hilario, which is itself deserving of death, I am ignorant of aught that should bring me under his displeasure."

"Enough," said Villafana: "But I would thou shouldst never more speak of Hilario. He is dead, heaven rest his soul! He was a knave too; peace, then, to his bones! – I am satisfied, thou hast done naught to Cortes, deserving death at his hand. I have but one more question to ask you: – Has Cortes done nothing to deserve death at thine?"

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" cried Juan, starting as much at the sinister tones as the surprising question of the Alguazil.

"Do you ask me? what, *you*?" said Villafana, "Come, I am your friend."

As the Alguazil pronounced these words, with an insinuating frankness and earnestness, he threw into his countenance an expression that seemed meant to invite the confidence of the young man, and encourage him to expose the mystery of his breast, by laying bare the secrets of his own. It was a transfiguration: the mean person was unchanged, – the insignificant features did not alter their proportions, – but the smile that had contorted them, was turned into a sneer of fiendish malignancy, and the peculiar sweetness that characterized his eyes, was lost in a sudden glare of passion, so demoniacal, that it seemed as if the flames of hell were blazing in their sockets. It was the look of but an instant: it made Juan recoil with terror: but before he could express a word of this feeling, of curiosity, or of suspicion, it had vanished. The Alguazil touched his arm, and said quickly, though without any peculiar emphasis,

"Judge for yourself: Heaven forbid I should breed ill-will where there is none, or plant thorns in my friend's flower-garden. Judge for yourself, señor: if, being innocent of all crime, Cortes has yet doomed you, basely and perfidiously, to death, – "

"To death!" exclaimed Juan, with a voice that reached the ears of his late companions, and brought them to a sudden stand; "Heaven be my help! and do I come back but to die?"

"You went forth but to die!" said Villafana; "and, you may judge, with what justice. Come, señor, – the thing is said in a moment. The expedition was designed for your death-warrant."

"Villain!" exclaimed Juan; "dare you impute this horrible treachery to Cortes?"

"Not, – no, not, if it appear at all doubtful to your own excellent penetration," replied the Alguazil, with a laugh. "I do but repeat you the belief of some half the army – had it been but before the Noche Triste, I might have said, *all*: but, in truth, we are now, more than half of us, new men, who know but little of the matter."

"Does any one charge this upon the general?" said Juan, with a look of horror.

"Ay, – if you call them not 'villains,'" replied the soldier.

"I will know the truth," said Juan. "I will find who has belied me."

"You will find that of any one but Don Hernan. Señor Don Juan, I pity you. You have returned at an evil moment; your presence will chill old friends, and sharpen ancient enemies."

"If he seek my life, it is his: but, by heaven, the man who has wronged me, – "

"Get thy horse and arms first. Wilt thou be wise? Thou shalt have friends to back thee. Listen: A month since, there came for thee, in a ship from the islands, two very noble horses, and a suit of goodly armour, sent, as was said, by some benevolent friend, whom thou mayst be quicker at remembering than myself."

"Sent by heaven, I think," said Lerma, "for I know not what earthly friend would so supply my necessities."

"Oh, then," said Villafana, "the rumour is, they were sent thee by the lady Catalina, our general's wife."

"May heaven bless her!" exclaimed Juan; "for she is mine only friend: and this bounty I have not deserved."

"In this matter," said Villafana, dryly, "she will prove rather thine enemy; that is, if thou art resolute to demand the restoration of her gifts."

"The restoration!"

"In good truth, they were distributed among thine heirs; the horse Bobadil, thought by many to be the best in the army, falling to the share of thy good friend Guzman."

"To Guzman?" cried Juan, angrily. "Could they find no better friend to give him to? I will have him back again; yea, by St. Juan, he shall ride no steed of mine!"

"Right!" exclaimed Villafana; "for if thou hast an enemy, he is the man. Thou didst well, to refuse his hand. He offered it not in love, but in treachery. Thou wilt ask Cortes for thy maligner? It needs not: remember Don Francisco."

"I will do so," said Juan, with a sigh. "I thought, in my captivity, when I despaired of ever more looking upon a Christian face, that I had forgiven my enemies. I deceived myself, – I hate Don Francisco. I will proclaim him before the whole army, if he refuse to do me reparation."

"I tell thee, thou shalt have friends," said the Alguazil, with an insinuating voice, "to back thee in this matter, as well as in all others wherein thou hast been wronged. But thou must be ruled. Speak not to Cortes in complaint: he will do thee no justice. Send no defiance of battle to Guzman, for this has been proclaimed a sin against God and the king, to be punished with loss of arms, degradation, and whipping with rods, – sometimes with the loss of the right hand. You stare! Oh, señor Juan Lerma, you will find we have a master now, – a master by the king's patent, – who makes his own laws, beats and dishonours, and gives us to the gallows, when the fit moves him, without any necessity of cozening us to death in expeditions to the gold mines, or the South Seas."

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