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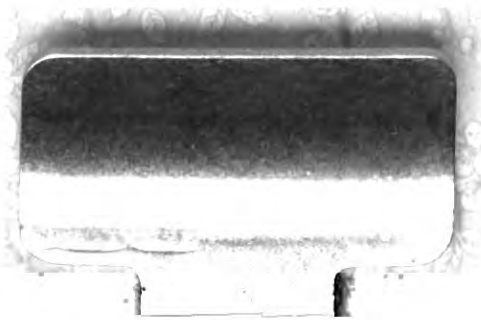
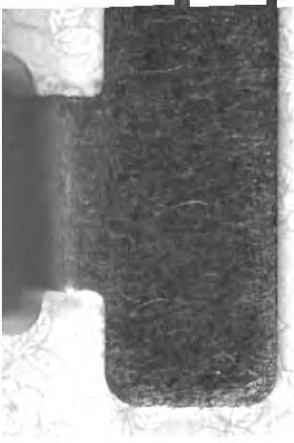
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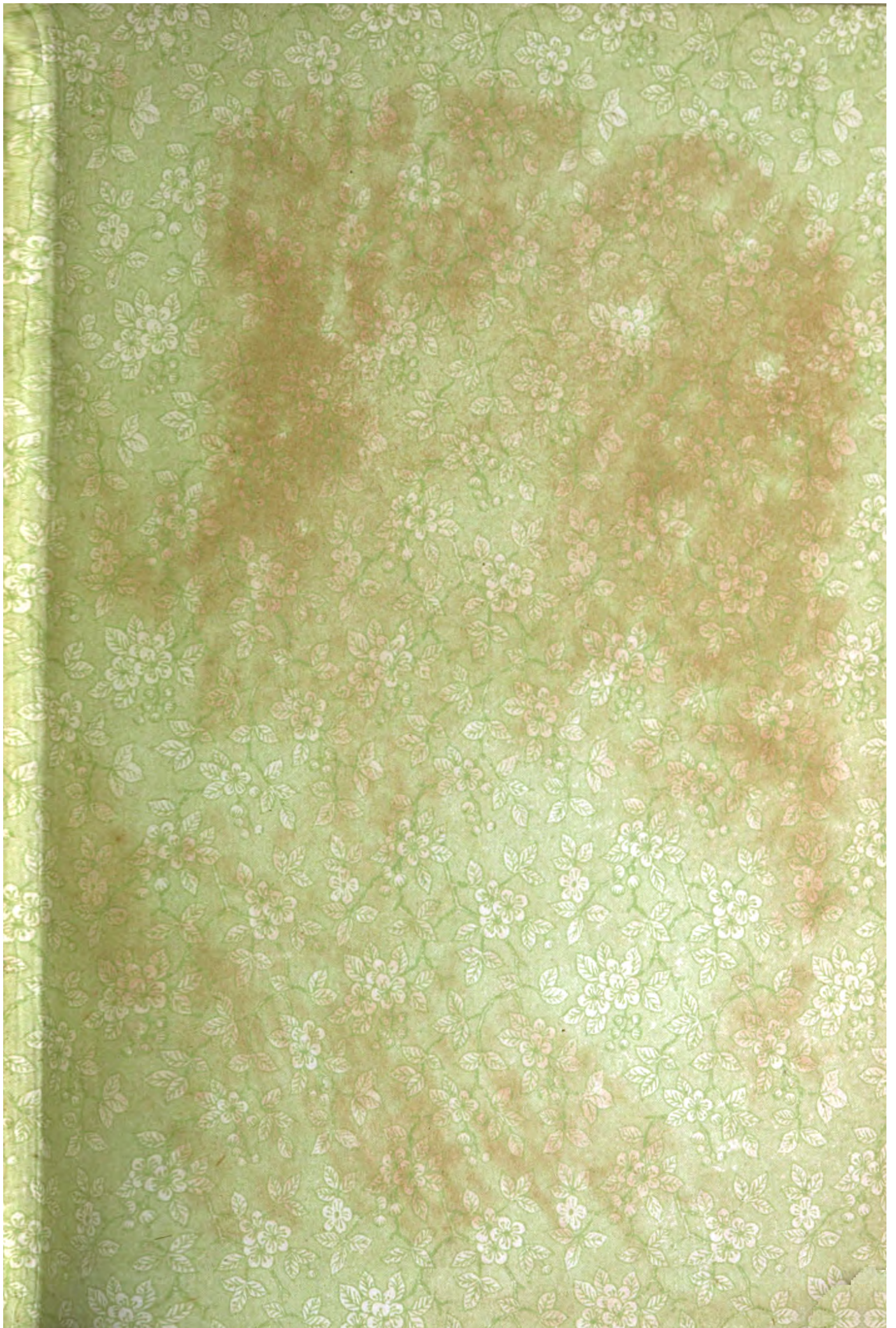
THE
INCA'S
RANSOM

STORY OF THE CONQUEST
OF PERU



BY
ALBERT LEE





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THE INCA'S RANSOM



"AT THE MAIDEN'S SIDE RODE A CACIQUE CLOTHED IN ALL THE BARBARIC SPLENDOR OF THE CHIEFTAINS." [p. 40.]

THE INCA'S RANSOM

A Story of the Conquest of Peru

BY

ALBERT LEE

AUTHOR OF "THE BLACK DISC," "THE PRINCE'S MESSENGER,"
ETC.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

IF the old saying be correct, that "Truth is stranger than fiction," it was never more strikingly exemplified than in the startling story of the Conquest of Peru.

It has been declared that it reads like the famous Eastern fables; and, in many a way, the deeds and daring of a handful of Spaniards surpass those of any other story that is inscribed on the historic rolls of the world. The wealth they won, the difficulties they encountered and surmounted, the persistency with which they pressed onward, and the bravery they displayed against overwhelming odds—these things speak for Spanish valour in those daring days so forcibly, that one wonders where fact ends and fiction begins. Nothing in the way of wealth, and nothing in the way of courage, can compare with that which is found in the history of the Conquest of Peru.

But, at the same time, it must be admitted that much wanton cruelty was perpetrated which had not

the sanction of the gentler of the nobles, and was, indeed, openly protested against by many. Such cruelty, and such greed for gold, mar the splendour of the achievements of the conquerors.

The writing of this romance has involved great research ; but readers will know as they proceed that I have had Prescott's famous book, as well as many others, before me while I wrote. In dealing with the fabulous wealth which the conquerors found, and their heroic deeds, I have followed those statements which have been corroborated by the old Spanish authorities, some of whom were with the army of invasion.

ALBERT LEE.

THE MANSE, WINDSOR.

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THE INCA'S RANSOM.

CHAPTER I.

DRIVEN FROM HOME.

THE home in which I was born was a stately one, and situated on the outskirts of the famous city of Cadiz. No prouder family—and no richer—dwelt in that part of Spain, for my ancestors had long stood by the throne, and had taken part in the most heroic fights, receiving honours and winning great wealth for all their pains. My grandfather and father had both fought in the famous wars which ended in the conquest of Granada, and the expulsion of the Moslem Moors from the lands they had wrested so many centuries before from the kings of Spain. It was in these great fights that my father won his spurs; and on returning from the wars he married the daughter of one of the nobles of Aragon. Some time after that I was born, and spent my days in the neighbourhood of the busy port of Cadiz until I reached the age of thirteen.

Sitting in one of the arbours of our richly-cultivated garden, we were able to watch the sea as it rolled in heavily from the west and broke upon the Spanish shores; or, when we chose to turn our attention nearer,

we saw the wonderful city itself, full of noble buildings, and gardens in which the choicest flowers grew. But none of the gardens were more beautiful than that in which we loved to sit, enjoying the cool breezes as they blew in from the broad Atlantic.

Yet with all this beauty and the possession of every comfort that wealth could afford, and the enjoyment of high honour by reason of our family greatness, there was sadness on the faces of my parents. The constant theme of their conversation was the shame and terror of the Inquisition, which was terribly active in every town and village throughout the land. And one afternoon they were particularly sad.

We were sitting out-of-doors sheltered in the alcove from the blazing heat, which made the very stones and gravel hot; and even the flowers themselves—that loved the warmth so well—looked thirsty in the glare. My father was reading in a low tone from a brass-bound book, which he had purchased with much secrecy and at an immense cost. It was a Bible, which the Spanish Inquisitor-General had declared was full of heresy, and the reading of which, he said, should carry any one, no matter what their rank, to the stake. Hundreds had died in the land, many of them Jews, some of them the best and truest of our own countrymen; and hundreds, even thousands, would yet die for daring to serve God according to their consciences, and not according to the orders of the cruel Inquisitors.

My father had just finished reading when my mother uttered a low and frightened cry, and looking up and in the direction in which she was gazing, we saw that which made our hearts stand still. Coming down the terrace steps were three men, robed in forbidding black. Over their heads were thrown the heavy cowls that hid their

faces, and they could only see by means of two slits in the cowl itself.

“Hide the book, Henriquez!” exclaimed my mother; but that was impossible. It was too large to thrust into one’s bosom, and there was no place in the alcove where it might be put out of sight. Almost before we could move hand or foot the three Familiars of the Inquisition were before us, and one of them, with outstretched hand pointed to the Bible as my father still held it, cried in a stern voice—

“What need we more by way of proof than that?”

A dead silence followed for a few moments, the Familiar still standing with his hand outstretched, my parents speechless and pale, and I dumb with terror. At last the same voice uttered the words which were surely a death warrant—

“Don Henriquez de Miguel, you were reported to us as being a heretic, and your lady here as well. Now we have seen with our own eyes the token of it, and you must come with us!”

Warrior as my father was—one who had once held twenty Moors at bay, and at another time had rushed into the very jaws of death, snatched the standard of Granada from the hands of its bearer, and then fought his way out of the throng of Moors again—he was now as helpless as a child; for there was no escape from the Inquisition. Young and old alike—the warrior and the gentlest girl, the highest noble in the land and the veriest beggar, even the royal princes themselves—were obliged to yield, and resistance was worse than madness.

“Let me wish my boy good-bye,” cried my mother, as she turned to kiss me.

“No!” thundered the Inquisitor. “Would you have

us look on and see your heresy-tainted lips upon his cheeks? Leave him, and come at once!"

My beautiful mother, whose face was wet with tears, turned away after she had given me a loving, longing look; and that look made me careless of every consequence. Darting forward I threw my arms about her neck and kissed her face, her hair, her lips, crying as I did so—

"My darling mother, may God even yet deliver you!"

It was the work of an instant, and a moment later rough hands tore me from my mother's arms, and I was flung violently to the ground. As I fell my head came with a crash against the stone step that led up to the alcove—and I knew no more.

When I came to myself I heard that the frightened servants had come out as soon as my parents had departed, and finding me lying senseless, had carried me into one of the shady rooms and dressed my wound, the mark of which I bear upon my forehead even now. In the group stood my dear old tutor, Father Boldoro, whose grave face was full of pity.

"My heart is pained, Don Alonso," said he; "and more so because I have just received orders to leave the house, and retire to the monastery of St. Agnes. Farewell, my son," he added; and there were tears in the old man's eyes as he stooped to kiss me. Then with heavy steps, and, I doubt not, a heavier heart, he passed away, and I have never seen him since.

Three days went by, and then I ventured into the city streets, hoping to hear some news of my parents. When I came to the street that led into the market-place I caught the sound of heavy tramping, and looking round, saw a long procession coming towards

the very spot where I was standing. Halting to see what it might be, I speedily guessed its meaning. By twos and twos there came the priests of the cathedral, in their gorgeous vestments. They were followed by the Archbishop and the Master of the Inquisition, while surrounding them were those who bore candles, or waved censers of incense, or carried silver crucifixes. Behind them was a long array of children—some two hundred, I should think—dressed in white, with crucifixes in their hands; and as they marched they sang songs, led by the monks who walked beside them. They were the choristers from the various churches. But there was that to follow which wrung my heart. For after the children came those who were to be the victims of a most dreadful ceremony—little children, and grey-haired men and women; men, too, in the prime of life, tottering, not from age, but from very weakness, brought on by the awful agonies they had endured in the torture chambers. Each of the martyrs was dressed in a yellow, sleeveless robe, on which were pictured the black figures of devils. Upon their heads they wore paper mitres, on which was represented a heretic, surrounded by imps that fed the flames. But there was not a sound from one of them, for they were gagged, so that their sighs or songs should not be heard on their last journey in this world.

I know not why I did so, but I gazed eagerly into every face, and then a cry escaped me. For the last two victims in that procession were my father and my mother!

“Hush, my lad!” said a man at my side, at the same time placing his hands upon my lips. “If yonder monks should hear you they would hurry you to death!”

“I care not! I care not!” I cried; but in that brief moment the dear ones had passed on, without so much

as lifting their eyes. Perhaps it was as well, for had they seen me it would have added to their pain.

I had not the heart to follow, nor could I bear to leave the spot. Where I stood I could see the immense scaffold, before which the procession drew up. The Archbishop mounted upon it, and preached to those who were about to die in this *auto da fé*. When he had ended, the victims went up the steps and stood there, ready for their death; but as I caught sight of those I loved so well, ascending solemnly to their doom, horror seized me, and with a despairing cry, and covering my eyes with my hands, I fled away.

I reached the shore, and walked up and down carelessly for hours, weeping till I could weep no more, and falling at last to the ground in very weariness. I lay there for a time, wishing that the waves would rise and carry me away.

But even when one is in trouble he gets hungry, and after a while I rose to my feet and walked homewards. When, however, I arrived there, I found the great iron-bound door closed, and two soldiers standing on guard before it.

"What do you here?" I asked in surprise.

"What is that to you?" was the insolent rejoinder.

"What is it to me?" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"It is everything to me, for this is my home. I am Don Alonso de Miguel, and would enter."

"That you cannot do," responded the second man kindly. "The Inquisition claims this house, and all that belongs to the heretics who suffered this morning at the *auto da fé*."

Thunderstruck, but too well versed in the ways of the Inquisitors to need to ask for explanation, I requested that I might go in just for a few minutes; but the only

answer I received was a stern refusal, and a peremptory order to move on, lest it should be much worse for me. I stood bewildered. To think that I, heir to one of the noblest names and estates in Spain, whose home had been filled with armed retainers, and who scarcely ever went into the streets of Cadiz without a splendid retinue, should now be little better than a beggar! I turned my back on the two soldiers and my home, and wandered along the city streets, hungry and almost penniless; for I had nothing but a few maravedis* in my pouch.

Entering a shop I bought some bread, and passing down the street saw at the street corner a man selling roasted chestnuts. Some of these I purchased, and thrusting them into my pocket passed on to the quay. There I sat down on a coil of rope and ate eagerly until I had satisfied my hunger. There was still a piece of bread left, and also a few chestnuts, and I was returning them to my pocket when, looking up, I saw the wistful eyes of a sailor watching me. He was pale and ragged, hungry and weak.

"Take this, friend," said I kindly, handing him the bread; for it smote my heart to see one so full of want. Then drawing forth a few small coins, I gave them to him.

"Thanks, señor," he said gratefully, eating hungrily, almost ravenously. "It is a long time since I broke my fast. May God reward you for being kind to Antonio del Benito." And then he passed on.

After a while the night came on, and I continued sitting on the quay, hopeless and heartbroken. I might have gone to many a home, especially to that which belonged to my old nurse, Carina Corral, who had married a trader in the city; but who could say what might be done to them for harbouring one whose parents had

* A maravedi is a small copper coin, used by the Spaniards.

been martyred? The good-souled woman would have suffered even to the death, I think, on my behalf; and I could not bring such sorrow to her. At last I rose to my feet and walked towards what was once my home, in the faint hope that I might find the way clear; but I was doomed to disappointment. Two other men were now on guard, and when I besought them to admit me, they beat me off, not merely with cruel blows, but shameful words that hurt me more.

Sitting down on a boulder some distance away, out of sight alike of those soldiers and any of the city watch, I fell asleep. It was broad daylight when I awoke, and shaking myself, I rose to my feet, wondering what I should do. As I did so, my thoughts turned to Father Gonsalvo, who dwelt in the hermitage of Saintorne, five miles away.

"I will go to him," I cried. "He will befriend me, I am sure, and tell me what to do with myself." And there and then I set out to find him. At another time I should have ridden, with servants to accompany me on the way, but not so now. I was still Don Alonso de Miguel, but without estate; and soon, when my paltry store of money should be gone, and my fine clothing had worn shabby, I should be no better off than many of the beggars I might meet in the streets or by the wayside.

The sun had risen in splendour, but as the time passed on, the glare of light upon the ground was dazzling, and what with the increasing heat and the dust, I felt the journey to be long and tiring. In due course I came to a path that broke off from the highway and led on towards the sea. Few ever passed that way, for the road ordinarily traversed by those who went to and fro between Cadiz and San Lucar did not come within half a league of Saintorne, and, but for the scattered hamlets


near, the recluse who dwelt there was almost as much alone as if he were out of the world.

As I drew near, the hot sun seemed to scorch me, and an unbearable thirst caused my tongue to swell, so that had I met anyone I could not have spoken. But presently, to my joy, I saw a brook running through a shady dell into which I had walked. Hurrying forward I fell on my knees, and bending down, drank greedily of the clear, cool water. Then I sat on the trunk of a tree to think.

What followed I do not know, for I lay insensible by the stream.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE HERMITAGE.

HEN I came to myself I found that I was lying in a chamber, the like of which I had never seen before. Walls, floor, and ceiling were all of rock, just as if someone had chiselled the place out of the great cliffs. In a recess was a crucifix cut out of the solid rock itself, and by its side was a niche, in which a lamp was burning. Beneath the crucifix was an altar, and opposite to it the doorway. But for a rude bedstead and a table there was no furniture, a stone seat being cut all round the walls, and serving instead of chairs. In the centre of the room lay a great oaken chest, and as my eyes fell upon it I saw someone kneeling there busily occupied in turning over some manuscripts with which it was nearly filled. As the light streamed in through the open doorway I knew that it was the hermit, and with a voice which was so weak that I did not know it as my own, I cried—

“Father Gonsalvo!”

The hermit-priest turned at once, and rising to his feet came hurriedly to my side.

“Thank God, I see you are conscious, my dear son,” he said, and his face, which I had always thought so solemn, was full of smiles.

“Where am I, Father Gonsalvo?” I asked.

“In my hermitage at Saintorne, my son.”

“But how came I here, good father?” I cried, unable to account for my presence there, and wondering why I was not in my own beautifully-furnished apartment in my father’s house.

“I found you, Alonso, lying insensible by the stream three weeks ago, and since then you have been hovering between life and death. But now you are yourself again, we will thank God.” And falling on his knees at my side he prayed. While he did so the memory of the past came back to me, and I wept bitterly; but he comforted me and made me tell my story.

“You must stay here awhile, my son,” said he tenderly, and so I did. As I grew stronger I joined him in the many little duties of the hermitage, and at last, to while away the time, sat at his side, and learnt to copy out some of the manuscripts which he kept in the great oak chest. One which I copied was a Latin Bible, many of whose passages I committed to memory.

In this way several months went by, and I grew into a fine, strapping youth of fourteen. During my days at home I had learnt how to handle a sword, and my father, a true warrior, had taught me much that would enable me to hold my own in warlike days, such as those in which it was our lot to live. To my astonishment, one day, Father Gonsalvo shut the door of the cell, and then drew from the chest two swords.

“Now, Alonso, since you will have to carve a way for yourself through the world, you had better see to it that you do not forget what swordsmanship your father taught you; so we will practise somewhat every day.”

This was to my mind exactly; for I would not be a

priest, and had a great longing to be a soldier. As I had walked up and down in the shady forest hard by, or looked out from the cliff upon the great ocean, whose turbulent waves washed the very feet of the rock, a longing came to live a soldier's life, and win back the home and broad lands that had been taken from me. I had heard of the New World which Christopher Columbus had discovered. There was gold to be found there, and I needed much of that, if I would buy back my own again. And glory, too, was to be won there, by all accounts; and I, Don Alonso de Miguel, the last one living of a most illustrious house, was eager to have glory, and ready to fight for it. I had told Father Gonsalvo of this wish, and when he drew out those swords, and practised with me all the arts of swordsmanship, I was content to stay with him until I was fully equipped for the real battles that would fall to my lot some day.

Father Gonsalvo was a fine swordsman; for he was an old warrior, like my father. When the Spaniards were besieging Malaga he had performed prodigies of valour against the desperate Moors, and had been one of the most famous of those who had captured the castles within the Moorish territories. To have him as my teacher was to have that which enabled me—boy as I was—to hold my own, and fight side by side with many of those who were in the quest for fame and wealth.

"Some day, Alonso, you will leave me," he once said, after we had been practising. "This cell is no place for a young nobleman of high degree, and you are capable now of taking your part in the world. How old are you?"

"Fifteen next month, father," I answered.

“That will do. You are now a good scholar, and an excellent fighter, so I must think about your future. But be patient, for you can afford to wait a while.”

* * * * *

One morning Father Gonsalvo opened the door of the hermitage, and we saw—rare thing for us to see in Spain—that the world was white. The bright sunshine, falling on the spotless and untrodden snow, made it glisten, and it sparkled as though the earth had been strewn with diamonds. But as the day wore on, the sun was hidden behind the dense grey clouds that ranged overhead, and great flakes fell. Hour followed hour, and still the snow came down, dancing wildly in the wind, then rushing on to find a quieter spot. The only place where it was baffled was out at sea; and we watched the rough waters tossing their challenge to the storm, and swallowing up the flakes with angry vigour.

That night the hermit did what I had never known him do before. He took his lamp from the shrine, and placed it in the window.

“Some poor child of God may be wandering in the storm to-night,” he murmured, as he watched the look of wonder on my face. And so the hours passed on while we worked at the manuscripts, I writing, while he illuminated one of the pages with a skill that made me marvel. At last he flung down his brush, exclaiming—

“I hear her voice!”

When I told him that I had heard nothing he sat down again, blaming himself for an idle fancy. But soon I found that he was right, and I was wrong, for a voice came on the air, a long, loud wail for help.

"It is her voice!" he cried once more, and throwing open the door, he rushed out into the night. A third time the cry came on the wind, and he turned towards it, beating his way against the tempest, I following, until at last, panting and breathless, we came upon a man and woman, lying, well-nigh frozen, on the sheltered side of an overturned carriage. They could not speak, so, covering her with the hermit's mantle, we carried the woman swiftly to the cell; then hurrying back, brought in the man. The two horses, also, were placed in the outhouse hard by.

Shutting out the night, we began the work of restoration; but while we did so, a strange look came on Gonsalvo's face. The woman was none other than his sister, who, despite his pleading, and his angry resistance, had married his greatest enemy. Presently he took a candle, and looked into the faces of the unconscious ones; then, in a voice such as I had never heard from him before, he cried—

"They shall die!"

But then, I think, the memory came to him of what we had read together the morning of that very day—
"Love thine enemy."

"It is enough!" I heard him mutter; and kneeling down he went on with the task, I helping all I could, and we rested not until we had brought them back to consciousness again.

As Isabella opened her eyes and saw her brother, she cried in astonishment—

"Gonsalvo?"

"Yes, sister!" And he stooped and kissed her lovingly.

"Is that forgiveness, my brother?" she exclaimed, her dark eyes gleaming with tears.

“ Yes, my sister !”

And then he reached forward and took the hand of his sister’s husband, the hand of his enemy.

“ Sandoval, let us be brothers !”

“ Be it so !” cried the other fervently.

A few days later Isabella de Guzman and her husband went on their way, and the old life proceeded as before.

CHAPTER III.

MY VOW.

SOME time after this the hermit said that he had made arrangements for me to go to Madrid, where, since I was resolved like my fathers to lead a soldier's life, I could perfect myself in the art of war, as well as add to the stock of learning which I had acquired during my stay at the hermitage.

War to me—as to every Spaniard of noble birth—was the only vocation in which I could indulge, and still retain my nobility; for it was an unwritten law in Spain, that if a man of high rank should ever engage in any toil like an artisan, or in trade of any sort, he disgraced himself and his family for ever. Father Gonsalvo smiled, and there was a fine sarcasm in his voice, when one day he said that Spain was mad on this point.

“Since you are of noble blood, Don Alonso, you must not soil your hands with honest work at the bench, or at the counter; and yet, should you choose to do so, since you must needs get a living somehow, you might go to my lord of Reyno, of yonder castle, and offer yourself as his scullion, or you may even train yourself to be his lackey.”

“Father!” I exclaimed, the hot blood mounting to my cheeks, “I should tenfold more stain my good name by

being a menial, than by doing an honest trade like Juan Corral in Cadiz!"

"Not so fast, my son," he responded gently. "The times are out of joint in more points than one, and it is, to my mind, a shame that trade is held in such disrepute, that a high-born Spaniard must not engage in it if he would keep his name untarnished. But as I look at you I would not have you turn lackey to any of the grandees round about; so think it well over, what you would care to undertake for your great life-work."

"I need not think, father," I responded firmly. "I have thought for many a month gone by, and I would fain be a soldier; and what is more, I mean to win back my father's home, which was so cruelly snatched from my hands by those murderers!"

"Then God speed you in the endeavour, my son," was the kind reply.

The hermit had evidently thought the matter over in the hours that passed while he was quietly busy with his manuscript; and when on that particular morning he spoke of his desire to send me to Madrid, I was filled with delight at his words.

"I have no doubt, Alonso, that you will find yourself already well-equipped, alike in swordsmanship and in book-lore; but you have the world before you, and time as well, so that every month will be an incalculable gain and make you still more fit for the fight of life."

I thanked him with all my heart when I received this additional token of his care for my prosperity; and in the afternoon hurried along the road to Cadiz, so that I might see my old nurse, Carina Corral, and her husband, and tell them of the scheme which the hermit had drawn up for my future welfare. I had often gone to them, after the excitement which followed the death of my parents, and

the sequestration of their estates, had subsided. None of the authorities seemed to trouble themselves about me, save when a priest dwelling in the city came out to Saintorne with a message from the Archbishop, bidding Father Gonsalvo take heed to my religious training, and so ensure that I should be a good son of the Church, and free from the devilish heresy that had brought my parents to martyrdom. The Archbishop himself, indeed, hearing that I was in the cathedral one day, had sent an acolyte to me, whom I followed into the prelate's palace close at hand. While I stood before him, awaiting his will, he warned me of the iniquity of the Reformers' pestilential doctrines, and besought me to follow closely all that the hermit of Saintorne might teach me.

I thanked the prelate, and looking him in the face, asked him whether I should ever regain the old home from whence I had been driven.

"No, my son," he answered decisively, and somewhat roughly, as it seemed to me. "Your parents forfeited their all, and you will never enter the old home as its master, unless you can purchase it back again. It has gone to a faithful son of the Church."

"To my father's bitterest enemy!" I exclaimed indignantly.

"Don Alonso, calm yourself," responded the Archbishop in a severe tone. "It is nothing to you as to whom the Church may dispense its gifts. It is true that Don Perez de Hurtabel has the estate; but that is our concern, and not yours."

I stood astonished; but the old spirit of the Miguels was within me, and before I left the palace I asked the prelate whether he would bless me in my resolution to search for wealth, with which to purchase the home that was very dear to me.

He looked at me a while, at first surprised, I think; and then his face softened, and bidding me kneel at his feet he placed his hand upon my head kindly, and gave me his blessing.

“The Lord prosper thee in the quest, my son,” he added, giving me, when I rose to my feet, a ring, in token alike of his approval, and as a remembrance of his resolution to plead my cause if ever I should be able to pay down the price demanded.

Yet, as I left him, my heart was heavy; for where could I, a penniless youth, dependent at present on another’s bounty, hope to find a fortune great enough to buy back what the Inquisition had so cruelly snatched from me and mine? At the least the Church might have given me a fair start; but no. They visited the iniquity of the fathers on the children then, as the world has ever done.

That particular afternoon, when I went to tell my old nurse Carina of my hermit-guardian’s plans for my education, I passed through the shop and into her kitchen below the stairs, and there explained how I was about to make a start in life. She sat at her husband’s side and listened; and as I warmed to the story of all that I meant to do some day, her face was a mingled picture of smiles and tears—smiles by reason of my enthusiasm, tears at the thought of my departure.

“We shall miss you sorely, Don Alonso,” she said, when I had ended; and the tears conquered then, for they ran down her good-natured face.

“But I shall come back again, my good Carina,” I responded, going to her side to comfort her. “I am simply going into training so as to fight my way through the world, and win back my father’s home.”

"God grant it," she said fervently. "If I could see the dear boy I nursed sitting once more as master in the house of his fathers, it would be the proudest moment of my life!"

"Then listen, Carina," I cried. "I am a Miguel, and I will never cease my endeavours to win the lost home back again!"

"Bravo, Don Alonso!" exclaimed Juan Corral, my nurse's husband, who had been looking on in interested silence. "My good housewife prays for such a thing to come to pass every night and morning of her life, and I will add my prayers to hers."

A week later I went down to Cadiz, and bade them farewell; but I did not leave them without many a token of their loving care. Juan Corral insisted upon supplying my wardrobe from his own shop, and had gone up to Saintorne to tell the hermit so. And now, as I kissed Carina, she buckled a wallet to my girdle.

"What you find in that wallet, my dear boy, take and use as you will. But it will please me and Juan better if you spend it in striving to equip yourself for the struggle of winning back your old estate."

And so saying she threw her arms about my neck and kissed me, and wept as if she could not let me go. But I tore myself away, and trying to smile, waved my hand in token of farewell; then ran up the stairs, and through the shop, and so into the street.

Some impulse drew me onwards to the old home. It was drizzling when I got into the street, and before long this turned into a driving sleet, the wet flakes beating up against me in the wind, and splashing on my face.

Once or twice the city patrol rode by, the clattering of the horses' hoofs upon the stony way filling the cold,

raw evening air with a noise that boded no good to anyone. Had the officer seen me loitering it would have been ill for me, for none were permitted to stand about in those suspicious times, lest they might be meditating mischief. But drawn back among the shadows, which became deeper every moment with the growing darkness, I stood unnoticed.

The place was ablaze with light, as it had been in my father's days; but strangers were within, while I, the rightful owner, the victim of an unscrupulous might that never cared for right—penniless save for that gift from my old nurse—was standing in the storm. Drawing back beneath some trees that skirted the roadside, I looked on for one long hour, lost in thought, and almost heedless of my discomfiting surroundings.

After a while I heard the approaching tramp of horses' feet. They came nearer and nearer, but presently the riders—full half a score of men—pulled up before the mansion, and one of their number hailed the porter. In obedience to the summons the gates rolled open. A flood of light burst forth upon the horsemen, and they entered hastily, as if they sought shelter from the sleet that fell so pitilessly. The last rider passed in, the gates were thrust together again with a clang that must have been heard far away, and I stood alone once more.

No sooner had the sound died away than I fell on my knees, and lifting my hands to heaven vowed solemnly never to slacken my efforts to win such wealth as could be honestly come by—enough to enable me to buy back the home from whence I had been driven.

I did not stay to consider whether the task to which my vow committed me was worthy or not. I saw not

how it could be otherwise than right, and it was my quick resolution to leave no stone unturned, and no course untried which was honest and worthy of my father's name and fame, that would serve to open those gates and admit me as the rightful master of all that lay beyond them. It rather came upon me as a duty, to neglect which was to prove myself an unworthy son.

CHAPTER IV.

MY FATHER'S ENEMY.

SCARCELY had I taken my vow when a terrible temptation fell in my way. There came upon my ears the sound of footsteps, and listening, I heard the jingle of spurs, as the heavy boots of a wayfarer clanged on the stones. So had I heard such sounds a dozen times since I bade Carina Corral and her husband farewell, and thought but little of them. Yet as this wayfarer drew nearer, a light which was streaming from one of the mansion windows—enough to show up the whole of that part of the roadway—fell upon his face, and I saw that the man was none other than my father's life-long enemy and my supplanter—Don Perez de Hurtabel. Carina had told me many things concerning him, as to how he had watched and waited for every opportunity of driving home some fatal charge against my father. By setting spies to work he had discovered his heresy, and thus had set the Inquisitors upon the track. In this way he wrought vengeance on the man who—alike in love and war—had been his successful rival; and so deadly was his revenge, that he even sacrificed my mother, the very woman he had wooed, but failed to win.

When I saw him so near to me, a wild thought flashed through my mind, and a longing to avenge the dead ones

leaped up within me. I even responded to it by drawing the broad, Italian dagger that was in my belt, and stepped forward passionately, intending to strike him in the dark, and unawares. As I did so some inward power held me back, and a thought sprang up instead that this was murder. Thrusting the dagger into its sheath, I begged God to forgive me.

But even as I stepped back a terrible thing happened. I saw a dark figure spring out from the black shadows of one of the buttresses of the mansion walls; I saw the flash of steel; I heard a muttered curse—and then a fearful cry, followed by a heavy fall. The assassin, whose face I did not see, waited not one moment, but turned and fled, and I heard the sound of his footsteps as he ran.

The thought of a fellow-creature dead, perhaps, or it may be in his death agony, caused me to forget all else, so that I hurried to the fallen man's side, and sought to aid him.

"Help me, friend," the wounded one gasped, "for I am sorely wounded. Run to yonder gate and pull the bell, then help will come."

Doing as he desired, and bidding the porter come at once, since his lord was in great danger, I hurried back to the victim of this outrage, whose flowing blood I sought to stanch by holding his scarf upon the wound; and this I did, even when they lifted him and carried him into his home. A strange feeling overcame me as I entered the old place from whence I had been so cruelly driven, and my eyes grew misty while I looked around on things that were familiar. Some articles were new to me, but mainly it was all as I had known it from my infancy.

When the servants laid the wounded man on his couch,

I stood close by watching the man of medicine do his work. There was no need for me to stay, but the place had a fascination for me, so that it was almost impossible to draw myself away. While everyone was busy, hurrying to and fro, obeying the behests of the doctor, my eyes wandered all around. I marked the spot where my mother used to sit. Above it still hung the guitar she played so skilfully, and close by was my father's Toledo rapier. Many another thing did I note, which, for dear memory's sake, acquired inestimable worth in my mind.

But presently I turned to the nobleman who was now the owner of this mansion and all that it contained. The wound had been skilfully treated, and he was lying quietly among the cushions. As he caught my eye he beckoned to me, and going to his side, I waited to hear what he might say.

"My young friend, I owe you much for your timely care. Pray tell me to whom I am indebted."

My heart throbbed quickly as I answered—

"I am Don Alonso de Miguel, and this was once my home!"

"What!" exclaimed Perez de Hurtabel. "The son of my ancient enemy? And did you know me when you came to my aid?" he added, looking at me with eyes expressive of amazement.

"Yes, señor. I caught sight of your face as the light from one of the windows fell upon it," I quietly responded.

He lay silent for a few moments, looking at me again and again.

"I wonder, Don Alonso," he said at last, "that you did not strike your own dagger deeper still."

"The thought did come, señor," was my candid

response, "but I conquered the temptation as my father would have done. Like him, I could do no murder."

How I looked I do not know, for my eyes became dim, and everything around was blurred. But I heard him speak, which was quite as well.

"Give me your hand, Don Alonso, and forgive me for my past cruelty. Your noble spirit has conquered me."

There was another interval of silence, as we thus held each other's hands, and after a while he called his steward, to whom he whispered. The man, turning to me with a quick glance of surprise, left the chamber, but speedily returned, bringing with him a bag of gold, which his master took from the servant's hand and held out for my acceptance. But the old cavalier pride was strong within me, and I refused it hotly.

"I am not a peasant, señor! Keep your gold! I will not have it!"

"Then what token will you receive of my good will?" he asked. "I would fain have you take something in remembrance of my keen appreciation of your nobleness."

"Let me have some small thing that was precious to my parents," was my response. "I have nothing that belonged to them, and as I fight my way through the world, I would gladly have some token that would remind me of those whom I have lost, but loved so well."

"Then be it so!"

And calling to the steward, he told him to lead me through the house, and suffer me to take whatsoever I would.

"There is no need, señor. I would, if they can be found, have my father's signet ring, and my mother's; I can carry them with me everywhere."

A few minutes later I had hung them round my neck, on a small, golden chain which Mendez brought me, so that they lay near my heart. Claspings him by the hand, I bade the wounded man farewell, and passing out of the house where I had spent the years of my childhood, returned slowly and thoughtfully through the driving sleet, which still fell pitilessly, to the hermitage of Saintorne.

CHAPTER V.

IN MADRID.

OF my life in Madrid I do not mean to say much, for, busy in acquiring not merely book-lore but those arts that go to make a soldier, I passed through four or five years, and then was pronounced capable of holding my own with the best swordsmen of the day. During that time I developed a stalwart frame, which, added to my swordsmanship, would make me a formidable antagonist in the wars in which I should engage.

As for Madrid, I cared but little for it. Its surroundings were so different from the country in the neighbourhood of Saintorne, which, high, pure-aired, and surrounded by myrtle and lemon gardens, had also sunny groves, and a tranquil luxuriance that made it almost a second Eden. But here, from this city on the Manzanares, one could only look across a treeless and sandy plateau, away to the distant snow-capped mountains of Guadarrama. And as for the climate, to me, after the balmy air of southern Spain, it was deplorable; I repeated the old proverb again and again, that the climate of Madrid was "three months of winter and nine months of fire," so scorching was the heat that floated in from the sandy plain outside for the greater portion of the year.

Still, it served my purpose well enough, better indeed

than any other place in Spain, since here I saw more of Spanish chivalry than could be seen elsewhere. Charles the Fifth had found it favourable to his health, and had determined, in consequence, to make Madrid his place of residence. But it was quite unlike Cadiz, which, so far—since I had not travelled much—was naturally my ideal city. Wealth and poverty, comfort and squalor, were elbowing each other everywhere, as they must have done, without a doubt, in my native place, only I would not see it.

But I made the most of my opportunities for enjoyment, and life generally was very happy to me. There were times for study, and then spells of recreation. Occasionally I went to the rooms of Father de Vargas, a Dominican friar, whose kind heart was full of schemes for my advancement. I suppose I was a favoured one, for I pursued my studies in his inner chamber, which was lighted by a copper lamp that hung from the ceiling, and in the evening-time threw its rays upon old books, papers, sphere, compasses, hour-glass, retort, cucurbit, jars, glass phials, and I know not what besides. I have since thought that if they had known all that was to be found in that chamber, there would have been some who would have said that Fray de Vargas was in league with the evil one, and guilty of sorcery. They might have said so, but I knew the good man far too well ever to have had such a thought.

But what most concerns me in this story is that which took place on one especial day; for it gave me a sight of one whose face and form became an inspiration to me in the perilous days which I have shortly to speak of.

It chanced, when I had been in Madrid some three or four years, that word went through the city that the King was coming; and everyone was resolute in giving him a hearty welcome.

The day of his arrival was a brilliant one, and the city streets were crowded alike with citizens and peasants from the country round. I took my stand at the entrance of the Plaza Mayor, an immense square surrounded by colonnades, but rendered infamous by the many *auto da fés* that took place therein. All sorts of people were present. Waiting there, I was elbowed by the crowd without any regard to my comfort or dignity. The balconies, richly draped with many-coloured curtains, partly to hide the beautiful women who peered down at the crowd, and also to shelter them from the glare of the scorching sun, were full; while the less fortunate, who had to stand and wait on the pavements below, were no less happy. Muleteers rolled out of the drinking-shops, and gave no small trouble to the alguaciles, or city constables, who sought to keep order and clear the way for His Majesty.

The weary time of waiting was passed in gossip and occasional horseplay. Sometimes we could hear the thrumming of the guitar, or the sharp, peevish note of the vihuela, a round, plump-bodied, stringed instrument, for which I never had any great liking. When the crowd grew denser no one cared for music, but only wished the King would come.

The talk with which the time was passed was anything but guarded, save when some Familiars of the Inquisition would walk down the middle of the street, or across the open space of the plaza; and then there was a painful hush and many a sigh, and not seldom a muttered execration.

"Hush thee, friend," I said to one close by. "Would you have the Inquisitors upon you?"

"What care I, señor? They have taken from me wife and child, and I would even follow them. What ho,

there! ye murderers of innocent women and children!" he cried, in sudden frenzy, though I clapped my hand upon his mouth. But it was too late. The black-robed ones halted and looked in our direction, then, walking slowly up to us, asked who had spoken.

"This man!" exclaimed a countryman, pointing to my neighbour, lest suspicion should fall upon himself.

"Then follow us, my son," said one of the Familiars; and the man, pale, but fearless, stepped forward, and walked away in their company.

At last there was the loud braying of trumpets, and everyone was hushed in eager expectation. It was the first sight I had ever had of the famous King, so that I looked for his coming with no small interest. First there passed a body of lancers, followed by an equal company of archers, halberdmen, and musketeers. These, richly appointed, and marching with a precision which no other soldiers in Europe could excel, or even equal, were the King's bodyguard. Then came the great dignitaries of the Church, followed by nobles of all ranks, among whom I saw Don Perez de Hurtabel. He caught sight of me as I passed, and saluted with a cordiality that went far to slay any remnants of ill-feeling that yet remained. Returning his greeting, I turned my eyes to our great ruler, who, as he sat upon his dark dun war-charger, looked every inch a king. He was not handsome, in fact, his heavy lower jaw and thick protruding under-lip made him almost ugly; but one thought little of that in consideration of the manly way in which he sat his horse. There was kindness in his dark blue eyes, and a fine intelligence in his face. But in every way he seemed born to command, and when he rode by, his broad shoulders were carried in a manner that quickened the martial bearing among his followers. Usually—according to the gossip in the crowd

—he wore a shabby suit of black; but now he was fully armed, and his silver-mounted armour was dazzling in the fierce sunlight.

He passed on, followed by other nobles, and then by one who robbed me of all thought of my surroundings. It was an Indian maiden, clothed in white, and while her palfrey bore her onward the faint breeze lifted her hair, which was flowing loosely over her shoulders. Some would have said of her that she was supremely handsome, but to me she was more, for in my eyes she looked supremely good. Whatever others may have thought, the feeling in my own heart was that I had never seen such beauty before; nor did woman ever possess a sweeter smile than she, as she gazed around upon the crowd. She ran the gauntlet of inquisitive eyes and open criticism with wonderful nerve and good nature, which served to increase the admiring murmurs of those who were looking on. But even now, as I attempt to set pen to paper, I am baffled, and the words I would use are clumsy ones with which to tell how she impressed me. Young as she was, there was a ripeness about her beauty; and the rich glow of the west, like that of the setting sun, seemed to light up her face, which, once seen, was never to be forgotten.

At the maiden's side rode a cacique, clothed in all the barbaric splendour of the American chieftains, the golden ornaments on head, and arms, and neck displaying his high rank and opulence. He was, as I discovered later, the damsel's father, and had come over with Cortez, the conqueror of Mexico, on a mission to the King.

As they passed me something startled the horse on which the cacique rode, and he pranced and kicked wildly, bounding at last with fearful force against the palfrey, which, being so much smaller, lost its footing and

fell. It was the work of a moment, but I saw the maiden's jeopardy, and, running forward to be of help, caught her in my arms just as her horse was falling, and so dragged her away from the reach of the plunging charger. Doubtless this saved her from a fatal blow. For a moment or two she clung to me, shrinking from the danger, and heedless of everything save the thought that I had drawn her out of peril. At last, however, the cacique succeeded in controlling his horse, and the palfrey, which had received one or two ugly kicks, was brought to our side. With my aid the Indian maiden mounted to her saddle again. When she had gathered up her reins she held out her hand to me, and, as I kissed it, said in broken Spanish, and with a smile that to me was ravishing—"The Lady Fulvia thanks you, brave Spaniard!"

Next moment she was gone, and I saw her no more that day. I loitered about the palace gates in the hope that I might catch sight once more of her sweet face, and the next day also; but on the third morning she rode forth with her father and his attendants, on her way out of the city. As she passed she saw me, and smiling, called her father's attention to me, while she drew up her horse and beckoned me to approach.

When I stood at her side, heedless of the sun that poured its fierce rays upon my bare head, she said to her companion, in the same broken Spanish, but ever so sweetly notwithstanding—"See, my father. This is the young Spaniard who saved me from mischief two or three days ago."

The stern face of the cacique relaxed, and with a smile he said, in such Spanish words as he could command—

"The Lady Fulvia has already thanked you, and I repeat her thanks. I should have rued the day when

I brought her across the seas had my daughter come to harm." And with a friendly salutation he passed on, his daughter following as she waved her hand, in token of farewell.

From that day the beautiful maidens of Madrid had no charm for me. The memory of Fulvia, daughter of Careta, cacique of Chuchama, never left me; and at last I confessed to myself that I was hopelessly in love with her. I might just as well have been in love with one of the goddesses of olden time, for how should I ever see her again? But still I loved her, and loved her all the more when I heard that she had sailed away to her home in the far-off New World. Time did not heal the heart-sickness, and when I completed my studies and returned once more to Saintorne to make my plans, I told Father Gonsalvo all about her, and of my increasing longing to see her again.

He looked at me kindly and smiled. But he said nothing.

CHAPTER VI.

“*ADIOS!*”

ONE day, just as we had finished our morning meal, there was a loud knocking at the door of the hermitage.

“Who comes hither?” cried Father Gonsalvo.

“Open, brother, in the name of the Church!” was the response.

Hearing these words the hermit flung the door open, and without there stood a company of horsemen, led by an abbot from a neighbouring town.

“Brother Gonsalvo, are you alone?”

“Yes, Father Abbot, save for this young noble, who, as the Archbishop knows, has just returned to me from Madrid.”

“Have you not some friends from Cadiz?”

“Friends! What friends should come to me?”

“Ask no questions, brother, but answer only what I put to you. Have you seen Sandoval de Guzman and his wife within the last few hours?”

“No, Father Abbot,” was the hermit’s quiet rejoinder.

The ecclesiastic looked at us distrustfully, but murmured, so that we both heard his words, “And yet this hermit should be faithful.” Then he added, “I must search the hermitage before I pass on.”

"Come in, Father Abbot," said Gonsalvo, and he drew back so that as many as chose might enter.

But the search was fruitless. Not a corner was missed, not an inch of space forgotten; but there were no fugitives in that cell, as I could have sworn; and I felt angry at the doubt that was cast upon the veracity of one who was the very soul of honour and truthfulness.

"Adios, brother, and God be with you," cried the Abbot, as he went out into the bright, spring sunshine and mounted his horse. "De Guzman and his wife are said to have passed this way, and we are searching for them, they being heretics of the foulest type. Should they come this way detain them, and send me word." And spurring away from the door the Inquisitors were lost sight of in the forest close at hand.

A few hours later we were sitting to our task at the manuscripts, in silence, when we heard a faint whisper. We started to our feet and listened, and again the whisper came.

"Brother, we are in peril! Let us in, and hasten, for the love of God!"

"My sister!" cried Gonsalvo, and passing quickly across the cell, he opened wide the door, and we beheld Isabella and her husband. Quick as thought the hermit put forth his hand and drew her in, beckoning to Sandoval to enter without delay. Then he closed the door, bolting and barring it, a thing he had not done for years, for what had thieves to do with a lonely recluse?

"Why do you come here?" he asked, his eyes glistening and his face pale. And then he added, "Know you not, my dear sister, that you are in deadly peril?"

"How do you know that, Gonsalvo?" cried Isabella.

"How should I *not* know, sister," he responded, "seeing that only a few hours since Abbot Carlos was here, and

searched every corner of the cell for you, declaring you both to be heretics?”

The terror of the hermit's sister and her husband increased when they heard this news, and Isabella falling on her knees took her brother's hand imploringly.

“Oh, brother, save us if you can! The Inquisitors have been after us for days! Can you not find us a safe hiding-place?”

“I can, Isabella, and by God's help you shall not fall into the hands of the tormentors.”

What followed filled me with amazement, for during my long stay in the hermitage I knew of no place where the good man could hide his sister. Going to his little bed he pulled it from the wall, and then we saw what the visitors of the morning had failed to see, a square stone, which with great difficulty he lifted, and as he did so we espied some steps cut in the living rock, and leading downwards into darkness.

“Come, Isabella,” he said, taking the lamp that hung over the altar and leading the way. We followed him down the steps until we came to a chamber nearly as large as that in which Father Gonsalvo spent his days and nights from year to year.

“You are safe here, and in a moment you will see the light.”

Saying these words the hermit went to one side of the room and threw open a shutter. Then through the window the glorious light streamed in, while before us, far below, were the glittering waters of the ocean.

“See,” said the good man presently. “If you should hear any sounds to startle you push with all your strength against this stone door, so!” And placing his shoulder against it, the mass of rock moved on the

pivot slowly, and closing the opening, left no sign of any entrance.

"I will leave you here awhile, Isabella," he said a few moments later. "I must go back to the cell, for should anyone knock, and I did not reply, it would be perilous for us all."

Then he and I passed up the steps, replaced the slab, and put back the bed again, so that the room looked as before. Scarcely had we done so when there was a loud knocking at the door, and my companion turned pale. But calming himself by a great effort, he cried—

"Who is there?"

"Open, brother!" came the response; and to our terror we recognized the voice of Abbot Carlos.

"Brother Gonsalvo," said he, as we stood in the open doorway, "we have searched the forest and the hamlets round in vain, and are now returning to Cadiz. See to it that if the heretics pass this way you let me know at once. Don Alonso, there, might well do the journey, and would win much praise by serving us. Adios!"

Gonsalvo had not trusted himself to speak, and we breathed with a great sense of relief as the party of horsemen moved on. Then, falling on our knees inside the cell, we thanked God that the peril had passed.

Two days later the hermit, after telling me what to do in case the hiding-place should be discovered during his absence, started for Cadiz, to make arrangements for the escape of the fugitives. In the meantime he and I had talked of my future, Father Gonsalvo declaring that it was high time, since I had come to man's estate, that I should set forth in quest

of the fortune I had resolved to win, so as to revive the family name that had fallen so low, and carry out my vow. The difficulty was to decide as to the exact course I should pursue; but that was partly settled when one of the peasants of a neighbouring village spoke to me one evening, concerning an expedition that was fitting out at San Lucar for the New World. The man was full of it, for while I was in Madrid, Hernando Cortez, the famous conqueror of Mexico, had returned to Spain, to tell his sovereign of the splendid empire he had won, and of its golden treasures, and the news had slowly spread. There was scarcely a village where the people did not get together to talk of the fabulous wealth already obtained, and of the gold and silver mines yet waiting to be worked. Not only so, but an expedition was actually planned, and volunteers were called for.

Here was a favourable opportunity that might never come again, and I went back to the hermitage to talk it over with Father Gonsalvo. Listening to all I had to say, he sat silent for a while, rather to my discouragement, but at last expressed his approval.

“I must go into Cadiz to-morrow, my son, to arrange for my sister’s escape, and while there, will purchase a few things for an outfit, so that you shall have as fair a start as possible.”

In the afternoon of the following day he returned from the city, accompanied by one of the villagers, whose mule was laden with goods and articles of food. On bringing them into the hermitage, Gonsalvo set one large package aside, declaring that what was contained therein was for my own especial use. As I opened it, my eyes must have gleamed with pleasure, and my face, I know, was full of smiles. For there I found a beautiful dagger of Toledo

steel, the handle of which was richly chased; a light coat of mail, so made that if I grew stouter and broader in my frame, it might be conveniently let out to fit me well, and also a steel cap, to say nothing of a good sword, and a dozen other things that were necessary for one who was likely to see some service in the field.

Such kindness moved me greatly, and I thanked Father Gonsalvo again and again.

“Only fight as Don Alonso de Miguel should, and I shall be satisfied, my son,” he answered with a smile on his kind face.

But I had not come to the end of all his thoughtfulness, for when I had tried everything, and found that I was suited to perfection, he went to the great oaken chest, and, kneeling at its side, drew out from beneath the heap of manuscripts a bag filled with gold. This he gave to me, bidding me divide the contents into three or four portions, so as to bestow them in different parts of my dress.

“It never does to put all one's eggs into one basket,” he said, with a smile. “If you lose one portion, you still have money left. So when you go, God speed you!”

There was just time for me to hurry down to Cadiz to say farewell to Carina and her husband, who, having heard from the hermit that I was about to leave, urgently besought him to send me to them. I needed no sending, for I would not willingly have gone away without seeing them. The visit was a short one, but they would not suffer me to leave them empty-handed. Juan Corral had selected an outfit suitable to my rank, and told me I could pay for it when I had achieved my fortune.

Hurrying back to Saintorne, I lay down for a few hours' rest; but at midnight Father Gonsalvo awoke me. Taking my belongings, I followed him down the stone

steps to the chamber where the fugitives were in hiding. They were ready and waiting. Then the hermit led the way through another hidden doorway in the rock, revealing steps that led downwards to the sea-shore. There a boat lay in readiness to take us to San Lucar.


“One word of prayer, dear friends,” said the hermit, “and then, perhaps, farewell on earth for ever.” And there we knelt in silent prayer a while; then, rising, we said good-bye.

“I shall never see you again, brother,” said Isabella, as she kissed Gonsalvo fondly. And tears rolled down her cheeks, while she thanked him again and again for his forgiveness and his love.

Then we stepped into the boat, and were soon bounding over the great sea towards liberty and new adventures.

CHAPTER VII.

FRANCISCO PIZARRO.

E arrived at San Lucar in the early morning, and went direct to a house hard by the little harbour from whence Magellan had sailed with the intention of going round the world. I had never been in the place before, and everything about me was full of interest; but, tired after a long night's voyage in an open boat, I was glad to lie down in the bed which was quickly made ready for me. I awoke at noon, and having eaten some food, went down to the harbour to see what preparations were being made for the new expedition to America. As I stood on the quay there appeared to be a great deal of noise and confusion, boats passing to and fro, carrying stores and provisions to four queer-looking ships that lay at anchor just outside the bar.

“Are those the vessels that are to go across the sea to America?” I asked of one who stood near.

“Yes, señor,” was the fisherman's rejoinder; “but they are crazy old tubs, and I hear that the Commissioners are likely to complain of them, should they come to report upon the preparations. I wonder what Pizarro means by fitting out such leaky things as they are?”

“Perhaps he cannot get any better,” I ventured to suggest.

“Well, I dare say there is a great deal in that. People

are grumbling because the King will not give any money towards the expedition, but expects a large share of the profits; and that, to my mind, is not the right thing. 'Nothing venture nothing win' is what I say. If Spain is to get glory and riches out of these great countries beyond the sea, the King should put his hand into his pocket and find some of the means."

"Exactly," said I, quite agreeing with the old fisherman's ideas. "And who is the leader?" I asked, anxious for as much information as possible.

"The leader? Francisco Pizarro. He went over to the New World sixteen or eighteen years ago, and has been through adventures enough to last a lifetime, even if he never sees another. While there, going from place to place, they say that he has had tremendous fighting, but plenty of pay as well, for he has found gold and jewels in abundance. Señor Gonzalo del Puerta was talking on the jetty yonder, only last night, of all that his master has gone through, and has taken the young fellows here by the ears. He showed us a costly dish of crystal, curiously chased, and worked with gold and gems, and said that it was but a small and valueless specimen compared with countless others, that only wanted the finding, and stout hearts to undertake the search."

As the old man talked on, I listened with breathless interest, for he seemed to have Pizarro's adventures at the very end of his tongue. He spoke of the different expeditions he had undertaken, of journeys through vast swamps, where the rains poured down almost ceaselessly, rendering the footing treacherous to the traveller. Then there were marches through great forests, and across extensive plains, where one suffered as much from thirst as he had been previously made wretched with deluging rains, while the ground was of such a rocky character

that the feet of the toilers were cut to the bone. But there was so much promise of wealth behind it all, since the meanest of the natives wore golden ornaments of enormous value, that nothing remained but the enlistment of a number of adventurous spirits, and the full permission and assistance of the King of Spain.

I listened eagerly, and thought to myself that here was the field in which I must toil, if I would buy back my home.

"Is the number of men wanted for the expedition complete?" I cried.

"Not yet, señor," the old man answered. "The Captain-General, as they call him, is now at Truxillo, his native place, where he expects to find some who are willing to join him in his new enterprise."

"Then I will seek out Pizarro the moment he arrives, and volunteer," I cried, nothing dismayed at the prospect of arduous marches, or of desperate fighting.

"What would you have with Pizarro?" exclaimed someone behind me, as if in answer to my words.

Starting round quickly, to know who this new-comer might be, and ask his right to question me in such a tone, I saw one who, by his general appearance, answered to the description that had been given to me of the great captain whom I wished to see. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, soldierly-looking man, burly and thick-featured, with black hair and beard, and altogether such as to give to me and others the impression of one who possessed a rough strength of character which made him fit to be a leader. At the time I met him thus I should judge that he must have been a little over fifty; but as for his true age, he never even knew it himself, since he had been left as a foundling at the door of one of the churches of Truxillo.

His dress was not a rich one, for, as I discovered on closer acquaintance, he was singularly careless in the matter of his personal appearance, discarding the gorgeous adornments which my countrymen have always loved to display. What he wore, as I looked upon him for the first time, was a plain and simple suit. His shoulders were covered with a cloak of rich black silk, lined with some purple material of a costly nature, while he also had on a broad-brimmed white hat, black silk hose, and purple-coloured riding shoes, to which were fastened some golden spurs. For one who had been to the New World, where gold was plentiful, he was strangely sparing of ornaments, since he wore no jewellery, save a small golden chain about his neck, holding a large-sized crucifix of the precious metal, studded with gems, while a costly ring, which an Indian cacique had given him, was on his hand. There was no pretension about him. He looked what he was—a soldier of fortune, who had sprung from the *ricos-hombres*, or the class next in standing to the nobles. Yet he was so true a soldier, and so capable a leader, that the proudest nobles of Spain were ready to follow him, in the hope of repairing their broken fortunes.

As I looked at him with some surprise, wondering whether he was really Francisco Pizarro or not, he smiled, and waiting in vain for an answer, asked again, "What would you have with Pizarro?"

"I would see him, señor, so that I might beg him to allow me to join in this brave expedition across the seas," I answered readily, hoping that the new-comer to whom I was speaking might not only be Pizarro, but willing to enlist me.

He looked at me with much curiosity, and then exclaimed—

"I am Pizarro. But what could so young a man as you do in the wars?"

"I could fight, señor," was my reply. "Try me, and you will find that I know something of swordsmanship, and what is more, I am a Spaniard, and the son and grandson of nobles who won much glory in the wars against the Moors. I am Don Alonso de Miguel, of Cadiz."

Again the captain looked at me, but did not speak for some time. At last, however, he broke the silence.

"I knew your father well, Don Alonso, and a braver soldier never fought under the banners of Spain. I saw him during the desperate assault on Alhama, and in his headlong career he rode close up to the city walls, where he became the target for the deadly missiles which the Moors hurled against him. But arrows, spears, stones—all glanced off his armour harmlessly, while he rode on and on outside the walls, searching for an entrance. A score of knights, fully armed, and another score of Spaniards in the ranks, followed him, and I amongst them, until we came to a breach, which had been made by the heavy guns which the Marquis of Cadiz had levelled. There your father had his horse shot under him; but springing to his feet, he mounted another, which one of the men offered him. That, too, fell, pierced with Moorish javelins; but again he mounted a third, and charging with us through the breach, fought the way round to the city gates, which, after a desperate struggle, we succeeded in opening, so as to admit the Marquis! If you are a worthy son, Don Alonso, to such a valiant soldier, you ought to be worthy to join in the expedition. But you seem to me too young; you cannot have had any experience, and I do not care to undertake such a responsibility as that of having you in my care in so perilous an undertaking."

I felt proud while he spoke of my father's valour, but was anxious when he thought that my inexperience was against me in this enterprise.

"Try me, Señor Pizarro!" I exclaimed.

"I will think it over, Don Alonso," he said presently; "but come to-morrow and look at the ships. Whether you go with me or not, you will see much that will interest you." And with a graceful salute he passed on.

That same night Isabella de Guzman and her husband left the port of San Lucar by a vessel bound for Holland, hoping by that route to reach Germany, which offered a safe asylum for those who adhered to the doctrines of the Reformers. She bade me an affectionate farewell, for we knew not whether we might ever meet again.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ADVENTURE WITH THE GUANCHES.

SO now, in a sense, I was once more alone in the world. Homeless, portionless, with no fortune save that which was contained in the purses which Father Gonsalvo and Juan Corral had given me, and no prospect of any, unless I could win it with my sword, I stood on the quay and watched the good vessel leave the port. As it rounded the corner of the jetty, and was lost in the darkness, I felt my utter loneliness, but grew that much the more resolute in my determination to prevail upon Pizarro to take me with him. If he would not take me as a gentleman of fortune, then I would go as a common sailor—anything rather than be left behind.

I was so resolved on this that when, after a sleepless night, I went on board the *Estremadura*—the leader's flagship—I carried with me all my worldly possessions, which truly went into very small compass. I would lose no opportunity for want of readiness, and if Pizarro saw that I was in earnest, he would accept my services.

He was standing on the deck when I got on board, and seeing me set down my cloak and my few belongings, asked me what I meant by bringing them there.

"I mean to go, Captain, and if not as a gentleman-adventurer, then as a common sailor; so I have brought

all that I have, with no intention of returning, unless you carry me ashore by main force."

Seeing that he still hesitated, although he smiled, I exclaimed—

"Look at me! I am more than twenty years old, with the blood of a noble race in me, am more than six feet in height, and a thorough swordsman! And if, Captain, you fear that I cannot take my part in fighting, bring forward one of your company, and let me show how I can wield my weapon."

"I will try you myself, Don Alonso," Pizarro cried, laughingly; and drawing his sword, he stood ready to test my skill. Without hesitation I answered to the challenge, and the friendly fight began. At first he stood on the defensive, but I so pressed him, trying all the arts of swordsmanship which Father Gonsalvo and my masters at Madrid had taught me, that he signed for the bout to end.

"That is well done, Don Alonso. Now stand on guard, and I will try your own defence." And he certainly did. Put upon my mettle, I not only held my own, but placed him likewise on his own guard. Growing excited, and not thinking of the dangerous consequences, I pressed him hard, and presently struck off his cap with my sword.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Of whom did you learn to fence, young master?"

"Of Father Gonsalvo, the hermit of Saintorne, and at the School of Arms in Madrid," I replied.

"Father Gonsalvo? No wonder you have done so well. He and I have had many a bout in the past, and priest or no priest, there are few in Spain who can beat him as a swordsman."

"And will you take me, Captain?" said I, anxious to have this matter settled.

“I will tell you to-morrow, Don Alonso,” he replied. “And meanwhile stay on board, or go ashore, as you may feel inclined.”

With these words he walked up to speak to a Spaniard—a nobleman by his bearing—who was one of the company that had gathered round to watch our fencing. As they went to the ship’s side I concluded that Pizarro was speaking of me, for I heard the other say presently, “Try him, Captain, since he knows so well how to hold his own.”

I lingered on board all that day, and even slept there, not caring to go on shore lest the Captain or Admiral, as some called him, might decide against me, on the ground of my inexperience; for, as I heard during the day, he had strenuously declined to take with him any who had not seen service of some sort.

In the morning some of the volunteers, of whom, unfortunately, there were far too few, came on board. It appeared to me that they did so somewhat hurriedly, and presently the explanation was forthcoming. The Admiral had gone on shore to further the preparations, and assign the volunteers their places on board the various ships, and at the same time send out messengers to hurry up the laggards who were coming in so leisurely. While standing on the quay, a horseman rode up, and delivered news that disturbed him considerably. The King had made certain terms with Pizarro, agreeing to the expedition, but under certain well-defined conditions as to the manning of the ships and the numbers in the company. These were not to be less than two hundred and fifty men, a hundred and fifty of whom must be found in Spain, and the other hundred in America. At the same time he was to take a certain quantity of arms and ammunition. It was unfortunate that the Spaniards were not much inclined for the expedition, notwithstanding the great

sensation it was causing in the cities and villages. To begin with, it was dangerous, and in the next place the people did not generally believe that there could be much gold in Peru, in spite of all that Pizarro said. Up to this time, therefore, the hundred and fifty men had not been obtained; so that when the horseman brought news that he had passed the King's officers on the way, and that they were coming to San Lucar expressly to see whether Pizarro was fulfilling all the conditions, the Captain-General, as he was termed in the royal agreement, feared lest they might put a stop to the enterprise.

An hour later, therefore, a few more volunteers came aboard from the harbour, and from the other ships, and Pizarro with them. As he climbed up the ship's side and stepped on the deck, he shouted out his orders to weigh anchor and set sail. Then slowly the *Estremadura* and another ship went across the bar of San Lucar, and stood out to sea. Keeping in the background, for fear I might be ordered ashore, I did not allow Pizarro to see me until we were fairly out of sight of land. Then I went towards the cabin, and loitered about until the Admiral should come on deck. Before long he did so, and saw me at once.

"What, Don Alonso! You here? I had quite forgotten you in my desire to forestall the King's officers, so that you belong to this expedition, whether I would or not. Well, if I read you aright I shall have no need to complain. All I expect of you is that you should not be slow to do any task that might fall in your way, and that you should be an obedient soldier. I want no gentlemen who are afraid of work, and I have plenty of that for brave soldiers."

"I will not fail you, Captain," I said. "Only tell me my duty, and I will not be found wanting."

A moment later I entered the cabin, and there a great surprise awaited me. When I went in somewhat hurriedly, I saw the figure of a priest. He looked up at me, and rose to his feet with an exclamation of astonishment.

“Don Alonso!”

And he came forward with open hands and a face all smiles. To my joy it was my kind tutor in Madrid—Fray de Vargas, who had been requested by the Cardinal to accompany the expedition, and look after the spiritual welfare of its members. And many a time in the after days did I profit by his kind counsel and encouragement.

After a pleasant voyage we anchored at Gomera, one of the Canary Islands; and landing there, waited for a while, in the hope that Hernando Pizarro—the Admiral's brother—might overtake us. He had been left behind to pick up the stragglers, and follow as early as possible, if the King's officers would permit.

On the morning after our arrival, most of our company were scattered over the islands, eager to explore this distant Spanish possession. Some climbed the barren, rocky, and sharp-peaked mountains, which, strangely enough, occupied the exact centre of each of the islands; and as it was now winter, their summits were covered with snow, looking very beautiful in the sunlight that shone freely and warmly alike on land and sea. But others preferred to wander along the fertile valleys, among the sugar canes and vineyards where grapes of surprising size and richness grew, producing wine that set that of Spain quite in the background.

During our voyage out to the Canaries I had found on board the *Estremadura* a handsome young Spaniard, a year or two older than myself—Don Pedro Avila, of Castile. By reason of our nearness in point of age, and a similarity of tastes, we became most friendly; and

when the various little parties set forth on journeys of exploration among the islands, Pedro and I hired a native skiff and pulled away to the island of Palma, not far distant, so that we might ascend the mountain of Caldera, which had once been a flaming volcano, but was now said to be extinct. When we landed on the lonely shore we drew our boat up the beach, and then set out for the mountain.

Resting for a while on the summit, we began our descent on the side opposite to that by which we had reached the spot where we obtained such a glorious view. Pedro, who was a few yards in advance, suddenly stopped. In response to his cry to me to hasten I hurried to his side, and saw the mouth of a large cave. Without any hesitation we entered, and as the broad daylight was streaming in, saw a strange sight, and a gruesome one. In this cave were niches cut in the rock, each being occupied by a coffin, shaped out of the hollowed trunk of a tree. Some of the coffins lay on the floor, and their covers having shifted, we saw the embalmed bodies, sewn in goat-skins. There was no musty smell in this abode of the dead, for from the open resting-places came the most agreeable odours, doubtless by reason of the spices which had been used in embalming. As the corpses lay there, still and silent, the forms of the bodies were easily distinguished; but when Pedro put forward his sword to feel one of them, the point chancing to pierce the skins, the whole of the body collapsed and fell to dust.

Not caring much for such a sight as part of a pleasure excursion, we hurried out of the catacomb and sought our boat, which we had left upon the shore; but to our consternation it was gone. Searching in all directions, we wandered about until the sun went down, and left us in darkness and alone.

Not knowing what to do, we journeyed up the valley that led to the centre of the island, hoping that we might come to a house where we should find shelter for the night; but we walked on and on, without meeting with any sign of life, save that of some frightened animals that fled at our approach. At last, however, we caught sight of the glare of a distant camp-fire, and suspecting no danger, made for it, sure that someone human must be there. But when we came round the corner in the pathway our hands instinctively went to our swords; for round the fire sat a score of gigantic savages, whose naked, olive-coloured bodies shone as the firelight fell upon them. They were eating huge strips of roasted goat-flesh, which they cut off from the carcass before the fire with long and cruel-looking knives. As they ate, devouring their food with savage vigour, one of their number rose to his feet and startled us with his prodigious stature, for he was between six and seven feet high, and his huge limbs and broad shoulders made him look a veritable giant.

“Who can they be?” I asked of Pedro in a whisper.

“The Guanches—natives of these islands—who were supposed to be conquered by the Spaniards thirty years ago, but who never refrain from murdering a Spaniard when they can find one. Let us get as far away from them as possible.”

Turning round we sought to retrace our steps by the light of the moon, which was just beginning to find its way through the dense foliage of the forest we had been traversing for the last half-hour. Unfortunately I tripped over a root, and fell with a heavy crash to the ground. The sound of my fall reached the ears of the Guanches, and with a yell they leaped to their feet. Snatching up their spears as they did so they rushed in our direction,

and by the time I had regained my footing, we were surrounded by the whole company of savages, who were brandishing their spears and creating an unearthly din, almost enough to awaken the dead.

"We must fight, Alonso," said my companion. "Two to twenty! but never mind. We are Spaniards. Let us not forget that."

These words put me on my mettle, and a furious fight began. Our armour saved us from the deadly spear-thrusts. Yet we could scarcely hope to come out of the fight victorious; two young fellows of stalwart stature, it is true, but against a score of giants, many of them seven feet high! As they pressed in upon us closely we were able to give a good account of ourselves, and three huge Guanches lay dead at our feet, while two or three had been rendered helpless by reason of the wounds we had inflicted with our good swords.

How long the fight lasted I cannot say.

"Let us charge through them," cried Pedro; and at the word we made a rush and cut our way past, laying two others low, dead or dangerously wounded, as we did so. But in a strange place, with no possibility of succour, and spent with the fight which had gone on for some time, our case grew desperate, for the Guanches followed us up closely, and finally darted to the front and stood between us and the distant beach.

"We must needs die, Pedro," I said at last.

"Die? Not so long as we have strength to fight," he responded. Almost while my companion spoke the leader shouted out a command, and in a moment, heedless of our swords, the Guanches rushed upon us in a solid body, and literally trampled us underfoot with their weight.

What followed I do not know, but when I came to myself we were tied hand and foot, so that the knotted

ropes of grass cut into our flesh. Looking about us we found ourselves in a grotto, the floor of which was nearly covered with coffins, such as we had seen in the cave on the side of Mount Caldera. From the opening in the rock, as we lay helpless and exhausted, we could see the valley sweeping downwards to the sea, and goats, rabbits, wild-fowl, and other creatures moving about with the utmost freedom, as if mocking us in our ghostly prison. At the end of the valley lay the ocean, sparkling in the sunlight, and not far distant could be seen the granite mountains of Gomera, and the port of San Sebastian, with the *Estremadura* and the other ship lying at anchor just outside.

“If we could but get quit of these bonds, Alonso,” said my companion, “we could make a rush for it, and perhaps get over to Gomera somehow. But here we must needs stay, I suppose, until they come to kill us.” And nodding in the direction where our swords lay, he suggested that we were not altogether helpless, if we could only break the thongs that bound us.

Wondering what could be done, a happy thought came to me, and I exclaimed—

“Pedro, let me loosen your bonds with my teeth, and when that is done, you can set me free also.”

“A splendid idea!” he cried. “Begin at once.”

Rolling over on my side, I put my teeth into the knots that fastened his hands behind him, and gnawed and pulled until my jaws ached and my head swam with the exertion. But since it was life or death, I went on. Bit by bit the strands loosened, and the knot at last was undone, so that Don Pedro's hands were free. Then putting a hand to his belt he drew his dagger, cut the bonds about his ankles, released my limbs, and helped me to my feet, for I had grown stiff with lying bound so long. Hurrying across the floor of the cave,

we snatched up our weapons, then, hearing no sound, went out stealthily, and reached the shelter of the forest that stood but a few yards distant. Our fear lest we might be seen whilst crossing the space that separated us from the trees was not realized, and we stood presently behind some great trees, looking about us to see whether anyone was near.

“I believe we were left there to die of starvation and thirst,” I said, when, discovering no signs of the presence of the Guanches, we turned and made for the valley.

“I should not wonder,” was Pedro’s response. “They have fought stubbornly for their liberty for the last thirty years, and have either starved or killed every Spaniard they could come across. But let us hurry, lest we should be missed by our captors.”

We were, however, too faint with hunger to make any quick progress, while an intolerable thirst was aggravated by the heat. After a time we came to a spot where all manner of fruits were growing. Bananas, peaches, and oranges were about us in profusion, and plucking them greedily, we ate as we sat in the sheltering shadows of the trees. Had we not been in peril of our lives the spot was one to tempt a long stay, for where we were sitting, a pleasant breeze, laden with delicious odours, came up the valley. Eating in silence, we watched the goats among the myrtle leaves, and listened to the birds, whose songs flooded the air with delightful music.

“This is very beautiful, Alonso ; but we are in danger, and must be gone,” said my companion after a while, and rising to his feet. As he did so a sound which set our hearts beating, came up the valley.

“Listen !” I exclaimed ; and as we stood in an expectant attitude, there came again the loud, long shout of some Spaniards calling us by name.

"They have come hither to search for us," cried Pedro; and rushing into the valley, we ran with all our speed down the open way, heedless of all the risks of discovery and pursuit. Again and again the shouts came, and without pausing in our headlong career, we cried out in answer with our full strength. After a while we caught sight of some Spaniards moving about in all directions, and before long recognized by their forms the men of the *Estremadura*. With hearts that bounded with delight, we expressed our pleasure to each other.

"Safe at last!" I shouted as I ran.

"Yes," responded my comrade breathlessly.

But the next moment we pulled up suddenly, and drew our swords. From among the trees to our left, a gigantic Guanche sprang forth, followed by another, and another, until five of them stood ready to bar the way.

"We will fight them, Alonso!" exclaimed Pedro; and then, with a loud shout, long and far-reaching, so that our comrades might hear us, we advanced shoulder to shoulder, alert for the onslaught.

"When I give the word, Alonso, make a rush, as we did last night."

"I am ready," was my response; and then we came within reach, and began afresh a fight like that which we had waged the night before. But the men who were confronting us had their attention divided. They, too, had heard the shouts of our countrymen, and had to be watchful to end the conflict with us before they should be assaulted from the rear. That division of attention on their part saved us.

"Rush!" cried Pedro before we had exchanged more than half a dozen blows with the enemy, and with our keen blades darting out in all directions we broke through the opposing bunch of men, and fled down the valley at

our topmost speed. Three spears came flying past us and stood trembling in the ground, but we were not wounded in any way, and five minutes later were sitting on a granite boulder, panting with our run, while our comrades rushed up the valley in a vain attempt to overtake the retreating Guanches. Seeing that pursuit was useless, they returned, led by Antonio Navarro, one of Pizarro's most capable officers.

"Whither have you been, my lords?" he asked as the party drew near; and when we told our story the soldiers of fortune who were grouped around watched us with admiration.

"That is a promising beginning to the campaign, Don Pedro, and Don Alonso has already, like yourself, proved his right to a place in the expedition," said Navarro jovially. "Well, come along. The Captain-General was anxious about you, and since you had been seen pulling in the direction of Palma, where many discontented Guanches dwell, he thought you might have come to some mischief, and sent us to find you."

Two or three times on the short march, Navarro stopped, and looked at us approvingly.

"And you two young sprigs of nobility actually fought a score of those olive-coloured, greasy Guanches, and came away safe and sound! Well, that promises grandly for what we shall all do when we get into the gold country. Come along, comrades!"

We got great praise when we stepped on board the *Estremadura*, Pizarro causing the best meal that could be had to be served in his own cabin, while he, and a few others of his company, sat and heard our story as we retold it.

"My masters!" Pizarro cried at last, "if these young Spaniards set the example like this, we shall cut our way into the heart of the country where those treasures await us."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE NEW WORLD.

ON the fourth day after our return from Palma, two ships arrived at San Sebastian, flying the Spanish flag, and they proved to be the remainder of the little squadron which had been left behind at San Lucar. As soon as they had anchored in the bay, Hernando Pizarro came on shore and told his brother what had happened after the hasty departure of the *Estremadura* and her consort. We had been gone about two days, when three officers arrived from Madrid, with orders to search the ships and review the forces of Pizarro, so as to see how far the regulations agreed upon had been complied with. At first the Spanish officials were somewhat astonished and angry to hear that the Captain-General had already sailed, but Hernando so won them over by judicious presents and plausible statements, that they gave him ready permission to sail whensoever he cared to do so. Resolute to do this before any countermanding orders should come from the Spanish Court, he weighed anchor next morning, and set sail for Gomera, the place agreed upon by the brothers when we hurried out of the harbour of San Lucar.

Anxious not to lose time, Pizarro ordered the stay to be cut as short as possible, only remaining off San Sebastian sufficiently long to take in a fresh supply of

water, some of the delicious fruits that grew in the islands, a few sheep and goats, and an extra supply of arms and ammunition, in case they should be difficult to obtain in America. He would have taken more horses, but there was no accommodation for them on board.

But before we left I had gained a recruit who rendered splendid service in the days that followed. While passing along the streets one afternoon, I met a stalwart Spaniard, who, looking at me long and earnestly, gave expression to a cry of astonishment, and thus attracted my attention. I remembered the face as I gazed at it searchingly, for it was none other than that of the hungry sailor to whom I had given bread in Cadiz, on that day when I was cast out of my home, and sent into the world penniless and a wanderer.

“Señor!” cried the man, “I do not think that I am wrong, for the badge upon your breast is the same. Do you remember me, a hungry wretch, almost on the verge of the grave, and you gave me bread in Cadiz? You were kind that day to Antonio del Benito!” And the memory brought a brightness to his eyes.

“Yes, I remember your face,” I answered. And when I told him of my errand to the New World, he asked if he might follow me, and be my servant. As we stood together he briefly told his story—how, on leaving me, he had found a ship, and then had made his way to the Canaries. He had never forgotten my small act of kindness—small on my part, but meaning so much to him in his extremity, and now, whatever dangers might come, he would, he said, willingly share them with me if I would engage him. This I did gladly, and as it proved, I had gained for Pizarro a fine, strong, brave-hearted Spaniard; but for myself, I found in Antonio del Benito one who returned my little deed of kindness a thousand-fold, not only by

faithful service, but by succour and support in hours of indescribable peril.

I must pass by the many experiences that came to us during our voyage across the sea, and our first journeys on New World soil. Nor do I need to deal with the many discouragements that awaited the General when he was making his final arrangements before quitting the Spanish port of Nombre de Dios, which lay on the Pacific shores of the Isthmus of Panama. When our little fleet set out on its voyage down the coast to find Peru, we numbered, not two hundred and fifty, as the King had decreed, but only a hundred and eighty men, and not more than twenty-seven horses. Of these, two handsome creatures belonged to me, for I had purchased them at great cost with some of the gold that Father Gonsalvo and the Corrals had given me before I left them. Tristan, a beautiful white charger, was for myself; the other I handed over to Del Benito for his especial use.

For thirteen days we were beaten about by contrary winds, but at last Pizarro led the way with the *Santa Maria* into a bay which Father de Vargas named the Bay of St. Matthew. There we landed, and leaving the ships to follow, kept in sight of the shore as we pushed onwards.

Fights were many in that long and weary march, only interrupted by a compulsory rest, when even the horses broke down from sheer fatigue. As we rushed upon the towns and villages that lay in our route, we came upon great storehouses of native arms, which served to prove the warlike character of the people we had come to conquer.

There came a long and weary day when we toiled through brake and bramble and miry fen, with the water often up to our girdles. An hour before sunset we emerged

on a sandy plain, across which we looked to the country beyond whose hills we were to find the gold that would more than pay for all our penalties. There were less than two hundred of us, but not many miles away we saw a village, and before it a huge army of Indians—full ten thousand of them. Whether they had seen us or not we could not tell, and we lay down to sleep upon our arms, ready to fight in case of a night attack. Fortunately our rest was undisturbed, and, rising in the morning, we breakfasted, Pizarro meanwhile signalling to the ships to land the large guns and all the men that could be spared. This was barely done when the Indians came rushing on us, armed with lances and bows and arrows. Some among them wielded battle-axes, while others rained in upon us volleys of sharp-edged stones, which they hurled forward with terrific force and skill from their slings.

They were the finest soldiers we had yet seen in America, and fought with desperate valour. The cacique who led them on foot—for horses were unknown to them—was struck down in the first charge, but when the confused mass of Indians rallied, they were led on again by a leader who had at once stepped in to fill the place of the dead chieftain. Four times did the natives rush upon us with overwhelming fury, but Pizarro, handling his troops with marvellous skill, turned them back with dreadful slaughter.

Don Pedro, Navarro, Del Benito, and myself, spurring our horses into the very thick of the fight, cut off the retreat of the Indian general, who, finding himself isolated, fought single-handed against us with wonderful courage, as if determined not to be taken alive. But Navarro brought him to his knees, and throwing his horse's reins to me, leaped to the ground, grappled with the cacique, and made him captive. When, however, we sought for

the general, we found that he had been wounded and carried unconscious to the shore. Our prisoner was accordingly taken to Hernando Pizarro, who called upon him to swear allegiance to the Spanish King.

"I am your prisoner, but will fight again if you set me free!" the Indian exclaimed fiercely.

What followed made me blush for my own countrymen; for, finding that the chieftain refused to come to terms, Hernando, gathering the soldiers in a great circle, placed the cacique and two other prisoners of note in the centre, and then let loose the bloodhounds that were with us, to tear them to pieces. The men fought desperately; but, unarmed, there was only one possible end to the struggle—a cruel death.

When it was too late the Spaniards around expressed their indignation.

"We want no needless cruelty," exclaimed Don Juan de Arguello, a young and fiery noble, angrily, and hearing expressions of approval of his words, he added expressively, "Orders or no orders from my superior officers, I will in future take no part in murder!"

"And so say I!" cried many another in the group, for their spirits had been stirred at the unwonted valour of these dead chieftains, whose only crime was, that they had defended their native land against invasion.

Hernando Pizarro, who was responsible for the cruel act which had brought such disgrace upon us, listened to these remonstrances with scorn, and cast so many slurs upon the courage and soft-heartedness of the Spaniards around, that several drew their swords and swore to kill him if he did not draw back his words.

"Hold!" cried Father de Vargas, who had just arrived upon the scene. "It would but add to the wrong for Spaniards to quarrel among themselves!"

“What is the matter, nobles of Spain?” said a well-known voice a moment later, and looking round we saw Pizarro himself, pale with loss of blood, and weak. He had heard nothing of what had transpired, but being told that the leaders were in hot dispute, had come as quickly as his wounds would allow, to enquire into the matter. When the story was told his anger knew no bounds.


“You cruel, merciless brute! unworthy to be my brother, since you do not know how to honour bravery on the battlefield! Comrades, you need never obey my brother in matters of wanton cruelty!”

And with a gesture of contempt, he turned upon his heel, and tramped back to the camp, weary and weak as he was, followed by the others, who left Hernando chafing and alone upon the plain.

That same night the General gave orders for the bloodhounds to be shot.

CHAPTER X.

A PERUVIAN TREASURE-HOUSE.

O far we had not obtained an ounce of gold, but had undergone infinite toil, and had run the risk of untold dangers. But we were soon to find that the stories which reached the ears of Francisco Pizarro were not exaggerated, so that the mission on which I had started, of restoring my lost fortunes, was likely to be crowned with success. We had in very deed come to a land that teemed with precious metals and emeralds of priceless value; but, like all other things in this life that are of worth, they had to be won, for few of the Indians were prepared to yield to the invaders tamely.

The story of the cacique's defeat and cruel death spread like wild-fire through the district, and we found some of the villages deserted, the people having fled away to a safe retreat. We marched one day through a forest, and on emerging into open ground saw, not far away, what appeared to be a populous town. Ordering the foot-soldiers to come on as rapidly as possible, the General advanced at the head of his little body of cavalry, and rode up to the gates. They stood open, and not a sign of life could be found anywhere. Riding cautiously along the narrow streets, so as to avoid anything like surprise, we came to an open space where booths were

standing, filled with market produce, but not a living creature could be seen. The faithful Del Benito, riding at my side, ever on the outlook to save me from harm, presently espied an old man sitting in the doorway of a house upon the other side of the market square, and spurring his horse, rode over to him.

By this time he had mastered some of the language of the country, enough at least to make his wishes known, so that when he pulled up before this decrepit Indian—too weak to fly with the rest—he was able to question him as to the meaning of this strange silence in the town.

Finding that the old man was not altogether unwilling to communicate his tidings, he leaped from his horse, and placing the tottering Indian in the saddle, walked at his side until he stood in front of Pizarro.

“General, I have brought this old man to you, so that he may answer your questions.”

“What place is this?” asked Pizarro at once through Felipillo, his interpreter.

“Calisayo,” responded the old man.

“Where are your countrymen?”

“Gone!” was the laconic reply.

“But whither?”

“To the forest.”

“Have they taken any treasure with them?” asked the General, for, judging from the size of the city—the largest we had yet seen in the New World—it must needs have been possessed of much that was valuable, if gold and jewels were to be found anywhere.

“I cannot say,” the old man answered slowly.

“Lead us to the spot where it would be kept,” exclaimed our leader, and Antonio, turning his horse round,

walked at the side of the Indian, who pointed out the way.

Going down the narrow streets, lined on either side with low, flat-roofed houses, some of them built of nothing better than clay and reeds, we met our countrymen, who had just entered the gates on foot. Falling in behind us, they, like ourselves, followed the old man's lead, until we came in sight of a huge building which covered a vast space of ground, and was built of immense blocks of stone hewn out of the quarry, and piled up one upon another with such skill that they needed no cement to hold them together. It was not a structure of any beauty, yet it showed us that we had come into a land where the art of building was by no means in its infancy.

Leaving a strong guard outside, Pizarro entered, followed by all who had not been placed on sentry duty. As we trod the long court we were astonished at what we saw. Great apartments stood on either side, lacking in ornament, it is true, but thoroughly adapted to the purposes they were intended to serve. We were in one of those storehouses or magazines which, as we discovered later, dotted the country over. Some of the rooms were filled with grain, so that in times of famine there was enough corn to serve the district for four or five years. In another apartment we found stores of arms—countless sheaves of arrows, tipped with copper; bundles of lances; bows and darts; heaps of swords, short and sharp; battle-axes innumerable—every weapon that was used in Peruvian warfare. Next to this lay another room filled with armour and military clothing, some of the casques which were intended for the superior officers being set off with gold and silver mountings. Farther on again were rooms filled with native clothing, made

of woollen and cotton stuffs, rich in texture, and ready for immediate use.

At last we came to a door which was heavily bolted and barred, beyond which it seemed impossible to pass. The old guide could not tell us how to open it, nor did he know of any other way of entrance. Del Benito, who had been walking close behind me, turned round without a word, and tramping down the passage, entered the chamber where the heavy battle-axes were stored. Bringing back an armful, he selected one, and calling on some others to do the same, began to batter down the copper-studded door with all the force of his strong arms. Three others joined him, and soon the wood splintered, and the door fell in with a loud crash. As it did so we saw a chamber into which the sunlight streamed through strongly-barred openings in the solid masonry, which was here at least ten feet thick.

But we had eyes for other things than this. All around us were ornaments of gold and silver, vases studded with costly stones, richly chased bracelets, rings, drinking-cups, and mirrors. Nor was this all. We were in one of the Inca's treasure-chambers, where, in addition to the articles manufactured from gold, we also found a quantity of emeralds, and a stack of golden ingots.

When the soldiers filed into the room and saw the gold glittering in its splendour, as the sunshine played upon it through the windows, I thought that some of them had gone quite mad with delight. Nothing but the masterly authority of Pizarro kept them from rushing forward to lay hands on the wealth before them; and in such a case as that there would have been a struggle that must have ended in mutual hatred, and perhaps death, even at the hands of old comrades.

"Soldiers," cried he, "there must be a fair division of this spoil. It shall be carried into the market-place and divided into shares before the whole company. I will myself strike down the first man who dares to appropriate more than his share, for here our interests are common."

This sobered the men down considerably, for it was reasonable; and those who had snatched greedily at the ornaments within reach, quietly replaced them, impatient, it is true, but prepared to wait for a fair division of the contents of the treasure-chamber.

Before sunset Pizarro caused all this spoil to be carried into the open space before the storehouse, and there a small company was chosen to make a division of the booty, the value of which came to no less than two hundred thousand castellanos.* Some scales were found in one of the chambers, and by their aid an equitable apportionment was made, sufficient to satisfy the most greedy.

Being thus secure alike for food and clothing, to say nothing of the vast wealth that had fallen into our hands, a council of war was held, and gold to the value of twenty thousand castellanos was sent back to Panama by one of the vessels lying off the shore, while it was determined to march on in sight of the sea, and thus await the outcome of this well-nigh certain proof of the country's riches. It was thought that when the Spanish colonists of central America should see with their own eyes the promise of still greater things, they would volunteer to serve under Pizarro's banner.

The waiting was a long and weary one, and involved so much of suffering that we were more likely to find our

* The value of a castellano equalled £2 12s. 6d.; so that the total value of the treasure found was £525,000.

graves than achieve the conquest of the country. Worn out with the weary marches amid the intense heat, we were forced at last to give up in sheer inability to go any further forward. Coming to a spot where a small forest afforded shelter from the sun's furious glare, we formed a camp and waited. But scarcely had we done so when a pestilence swept down upon us, not merely laying many low, and racking their bodies with pain, but robbing many of the strongest of life itself. But the scourge departed, and the enforced but almost hopeless waiting for reinforcements afforded us the opportunity of recruiting our strength.

One morning Don Pedro had wandered along the rocky promontory, looking idly at the restless sea, when we saw him suddenly wave his hands, as if to someone on the waters. Then turning round he made for the camp, crying as he came—

“A ship! a ship! It flies the Spanish flag!”

Forgetful of sickness and everything else, we hurried forward along the neck of land and gazed across the waters northward. Away in the distance we saw a ship, from the mast of which fluttered the flag of the old country. After a while it drew so near that we could see the faces of our countrymen on board, as they returned our salute and shouts of welcome. At last the vessel anchored in the bay, and a boat was pulled inshore. In it came five officials, sent over by the Council of the Indies in Spain to accompany the expedition, and see that the proportion of spoil due to the King was duly paid over to the royal treasurer.


I saw, while they were speaking with the General, that his face flushed with anger. Yet as they went on talking with him, his brow cleared and he looked pleased. Later, he gathered the whole of his followers together,

and told them who the new-comers were, and that they had brought with them a score of fighting men, a number of horses, some much-needed supplies of ammunition, and—equally as welcome—the news that still further reinforcements were on the way.

The treasure sent back from Calisayo had served to convince the halting ones that Peru was likely to prove a mine of wealth—a *Land of Gold*.

CHAPTER XI.

A CRUEL SURRENDER.

 FEW mornings later the camp became the scene of great excitement, Pizarro and the men rushing out of their tents, buckling on their armour, and giving or obeying orders, which resulted in the whole force being set in battle array.

“What can it be, Don Arbues?” I enquired of one of the cavaliers, who, like myself, was busy with his horse.

“Who can tell?” he responded, and then bade me listen to the sounds that had caused the sentinels to give the alarm. “It must mean an attack from the natives,” he added, pausing in his work of buckling the harness on his fiery charger.

Away in the distance we could hear a musical sound, accompanied by a beating of drums; yet, as far as the eye could reach, there was nothing to be seen but a stretch of desert, covered with sand, which here and there was thrown up into hillocks, some of them as much as twenty feet high, and capped with snowy-white patches. There were so many of these not far away that it was possible that the enemy might be hiding behind them in small detachments, and only waiting for a signal to gather into one immense force, and make a furious rush upon us, as they had done before, fifty warriors against one Spaniard. Waiting, and seeing nothing, but still hearing the war

notes, the General ordered the cavalry to form into three divisions, to scour the country beyond the sand-hills; and at the sound of the trumpet we dashed forward, our lances in readiness in case we met the enemy. But to our unbounded astonishment, as we rode on and on, reaching the rear side of hillock after hillock in our ride, we saw no sign of life, although the sound of beating drums went on with unabated vigour.

“It must be in yonder forest,” cried Pizarro presently, after we had halted and listened without any clue as to the enemy’s whereabouts. “Forward!”

When we drew near to the edge of the great wood the sound ceased, but we rode with caution among the noble trees, whose trunks were encircled with the woody and twisted stems of the climbers, which coiled like snakes around them. But, as in the open country, there was no sign of human life, nor did we discover any when a number of us penetrated a mile or two into the dense thickets, until we came to a small village. As the women saw us they screamed with terror and fled into the shelter which the forest afforded, while the men, too bewildered to offer battle, did nothing but grasp their war-hatchets and stare at us, while their limbs were trembling. Spurring his horse into their midst, Don Arbues suddenly bent downwards, grasped the curaca or head-man of the village by the arm, and drew him by force into the presence of Hernando Pizarro, who was in charge of this advance party.

The Indian pretending not to understand us, he was surrounded in order to prevent his escape, and taken back to the main body outside the wood, where the General awaited us. When we stood once more on the forest boundary, the sound that had aroused the camp broke out again, and this time it appeared to be coming from

the very spot where we had spent the night, and where, even now, our own countrymen—the foot-soldiers—were awaiting our return. Felipillo, one of our own interpreters, being of the party, questioned the curaca at Pizarro's desire.

“Where is this army whose war-drums we hear?”

The curaca listened stolidly for a while, and then a look, half of amusement, and half of scorn, spread over his face.

“There is no army, white chief. You do but hear the music of the *medanos*, which often comes across the desert at the dawn of day. Yonder *medanos*,” he went on, pointing to the hillocks before us, “make those sounds like war-cries. The sea-breeze blowing on the heated grains of sand upon the crests of the sand-hills, causes them to circle round and round, and as they move they send forth the sounds that resemble an advancing army with their drums.”

When we heard the Indian's words we knew not whether to smile or be angry, but Pizarro, pausing a moment to look round him, burst into hearty laughter, and ordering the curaca to be set free, struck spurs into his horse, and led the way back to the camp again.

These sounds, once begun, became tiresome by their repetition, for we dared not disregard them in an enemy's land, since the apparent beating of the war-drums might be more than a false alarm. Day by day for a full week, at the hour of dawn, a party rode forth to see that the country was clear while these sounds were disturbing us. It was an additional burden to us, for we had been travelling on and on along the coast in search of a road whereby we could make a resolute advance into the interior, of whose fabulous riches we heard yet more and more.

Our journey ended for a time when we came to a spot where an island lay off the coast, which, by reason of its fertility and beauty, seemed to afford a resting-place. Preparing to cross over the narrow strip of water that divided Puna from the mainland, Pizarro told us that he purposed waiting here a while, so that he might give time for the arrival of the Spanish reinforcements, and also send a message to the Inca of Peru, expressing his wish to visit him in his capital. Some of the men—greedy for gold, and having no patience—grumbled at the decision, but the majority welcomed the intimation that they should have a prolonged rest after such a weary march.

After we had been on the island some time, there came one day from the mainland a number of caciques and their followers, belonging to the city of Tumbez, just opposite, whose inhabitants were the sworn foes of the islanders. When they landed on the shore they asked, with angry and insulting words and gestures, for the white men, and spat in the faces of the people who thronged the beach, but drew back sullenly to allow their unwelcome neighbours to pass.

Pizarro met them at the door of the cacique of Puna's house, which had been placed at his disposal, and scarcely had they settled down for a palaver, when the visitors began to warn the Spanish General of the perfidy of the people among whom he had elected to stay.

“They meditate even now your destruction, white chieftain!” exclaimed the cacique Zemaco, a handsome Indian of stalwart build, and some thirty years of age. When Pizarro received his news with a scornful gesture, Zemaco drew himself up haughtily, and pointing to the house where the cacique of Puna now lodged, exclaimed passionately—

“Even now the false-tongued Coyba holds counsel with his chiefs, and plots your destruction!”

I saw the colour mount into the General's face, and an angry exclamation escaped his lips. Drawing his sword, he turned to such of us as were about him, and cried—

“Comrades, we must be first to show fight in this matter! Follow me!”

And striding down the pathway that led through a plantation of cacao, followed by every one of us with drawn swords, in case we should be running into mischief, the General left the men from Tumbez to do as they would—to follow, or to stay where they were. They chose to follow, Zemaco stepping forward and walking at Pizarro's side. Bursting into the house we surprised a dozen of the chieftains of the island, holding counsel with Coyba. As we went into the midst of this assembly—although they had taken no precautions to hide the fact of their meeting, having gone in open day to the cacique's house—the Indians sprang to their feet in dismay, and drew their battle-axes, as if expecting attack. While they stood thus, I had taken up my stand close to the group, so that I saw all that passed. Face to face with Coyba stood Pizarro, his countenance pale with anger.

“Coyba, what means this secret council?” he cried.

“It is nothing, white chieftain, but a meeting of my brothers to consider how we might add to the comfort of our warlike visitors.”

“It is false!” cried Zemaco with an angry gesture.

“False, said you, Zemaco?” responded Coyba, trembling now, not with fear but hate. “False? so it is! We would fain have found a way to save our white-faced visitors from the perfidy of the men of Tumbez!”

"He lies, Pizarro!" was Zemaco's reply to this outburst, and he turned to the General. "Ever since the day when you landed here, the men of Puna have been plotting your destruction, and this meeting which I heard of is but one of many. Ten thousand warriors are even now ready to fall upon you, as soon as Coyba gives the word!"

While Zemaco spoke, he and his life-long enemy gazed into each other's face with hatred that was unspeakable. Then with an angry gesture, the cacique from Tumbez spat in the face of Coyba, who, without a word, raised his battle-axe, and aimed a furious blow at the head of his insulting enemy. But Pizarro, intercepting it with his sword, cried out—

"Cavaliers, take these men prisoners!"

There was a short struggle, and the conspirators—if they were really such—unable in that crowded hut to wield their weapons in self-defence, were speedily overborne and dragged helpless into the open air. Whenever the memory of what followed comes back to me, I am filled with shame, for my countrymen, in my opinion, were wickedly unjust. They refused to listen to the cacique and nobles of Puna, who reiterated, again and again, that their only desire was to add more and more to the comfort of the Spaniards. I have many a time felt that Pizarro and some of those who took part in his councils, were only waiting for some excuse to strike terror into the hearts of this warlike people. If so, they well deserved the perils to which their injustice exposed them.

"Silence!" cried Pizarro presently. Around us stood some two hundred Indians from Tumbez, every one of them fully armed, and gazing savagely at the leaders of their hereditary enemies.

"Zemaco," the General said, when silence fell on the

crowd—for many of the men of Puna had gathered round—“is this story of Coyba’s false or true?”

“False!” cried the cacique.

“It is not false!” was the emphatic rejoinder of the accused chieftain. “We did but seek your comfort.”

But his words availed him nothing, and Pizarro, turning to the cacique of Tumbez, exclaimed—

“Zemaco, judge these men for yourselves, and do with them as you will.”

It was their death-knell, for as Felipillo interpreted the General’s words, Zemaco, wielding his war-hatchet, sprang forward, followed by his people, and laid Coyba and his followers dead at their feet. It was a cruel surrender—a base thing on Pizarro’s part; for we had received nothing but kindness, and had no evidence of treachery, save that which was spoken of by Zemaco, whom many of the cavaliers distrusted.

“The treachery that Zemaco spoke of, Don Alonso, he will be guilty of himself ere long,” said Antonio, as we lingered at this spot; “and if I had my will I would hang him up on the nearest tree, and rid the world of him for good and all!”

Pizarro heard the words, and turned round with an angry scowl upon his face; but my faithful Del Benito did not shrink one jot.

“General,” he exclaimed, “that sleek-mannered Indian will do us injury some day, and I would warn you to beware of him. He has already forsworn himself, for I well believe the cacique Coyba was sincere.”

The General did not say a word, but turned away, and entered the hut where Coyba had been surprised.

Half an hour later Antonio uttered a word which caused me to look up quickly. He was gazing at something in the distance, and I turned my own eyes in

the same direction. Suddenly, pointing to a spot a mile away, he cried to Pizarro, who was now standing at the door of the hut—

“See, General! To arms! The islanders are upon us!”

Pizarro, hearing the words, dashed out into the open space where we stood, and gazing in the same direction, cried aloud—

“To arms! To arms!”

Antonio, without waiting for instructions, put his trumpet to his lips and blew a loud blast that brought the Spaniards forth in haste.

“To arms!” again shouted the General, as they appeared. For, looking to the spot which Antonio had indicated with his outstretched hand, he saw a mass of Indians swelling moment by moment, by reason of tens and hundreds that hastened from all directions to join in the war-cry that we now heard ringing far and wide. Those who had seen how Pizarro had surrendered their chiefs to their inveterate enemies, and had witnessed what was nothing less than wanton murder, had disappeared, and rousing their comrades by their tale of wrong, the men had proceeded to an appointed spot, to prepare for a resolute attack upon the white men and their cruel allies, as the men of Tumbez were supposed to be.

Already expert in mustering on emergency, the Spaniards formed themselves into line and awaited the onslaught, which was not long delayed. The General had so placed us, that however the enemy should rush, they would be impaled on the long pikes of the front rows of kneeling Spaniards, while a third rank stood with loaded muskets, ready to pour in a destructive fire when the Indians should sweep down upon our little band. The cavaliers, mounted on their war-horses, and

armed with lance and target, waited behind these, ready to follow the lead of Hernando Pizarro, who, whatever his faults, was a splendid soldier, and an indomitable leader, to whom overwhelming odds were as nothing.

Waiting for the beginning of the conflict, we knelt on the ground while Father de Vargas prayed. When he had ended we listened to the General's final instructions as to the order of the fight. Face to face with tremendous odds, with death perhaps to all, or many, there before us, we were in no mood to look lightly on the dense mass of Indian warriors who now began to advance upon our little army of two hundred men. The ground seemed to shake under their tread, although they were bare-footed; and at last, with a fearful war-whoop coming from the throats of thousands, and brandishing their war-clubs, or sending flights of arrows into our midst, they were upon the Spanish foot-soldiers. But above the din came Pizarro's stentorian shout of "Fire!" and volley after volley of musketry and the heavier guns tore through the ranks of the Indians.

Undaunted, the men of Puna came on, until the foremost of them were impaled upon the pikes and fell dead. Presently the General rode towards us, and gave the command for the cavalry to charge. Hernando Pizarro, turning to us as we waited to join in the fray, our horses excited with the sounds of battle, and eager to be away, cried—

"Comrades, the odds are nothing to Spanish cavaliers! Santiago, and at them!"


We responded with the war-cry, and spurring our horses, charged into the wild and confused mass of Indians, who were maddened at the murder of their chieftains. From end to end our horses ploughed their way, making a path with their iron hoofs, and leaving scores

of maimed and bleeding Indians behind us. Then back again, and yet again, until our hands were weary of the strife. At last a huge Indian barred my way, and, laying hold of Tristan's bridle, sought to strike me down with his war-club. My charger needed no encouragement, for rearing, he struck out with his iron hoofs and beat my assailant to the earth, then dashed onward to overtake his fellows.

"Good Tristan!" I cried, as he bounded on; but scarcely had I spoken when an arrow pierced my body, causing me unspeakable pain—and I knew no more.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CACIQUE AND HIS DAUGHTER.

HEN I recovered consciousness it was night, and the moon was sailing overhead in a cloudless sky. But I saw nothing of it. All my surroundings were strange to me, the only things familiar being the face and form of the faithful Antonio. How faithful he was I found out later, when I heard the story from Don Pedro. For then I discovered that in the desperate fight—the most terrible our little army had yet engaged in—the arrow that had found its way through the joint of my armour, had caused me to fall to the ground in the very midst of the men of Puna, who would have slain me but for the bravery Del Benito had displayed. On seeing Tristan dash onward riderless he pulled up his own steed, calling on Don Pedro and another cavalier to ride back and search for me, if haply I might be found alive. He knew that they would not have far to return, for he had caught sight of me not many moments before. Not waiting to count the odds, they turned and dashed into the dense mass of Indians.

It was a desperate thing to do, for they spurred their horses into what seemed the very jaws of death, disregarding their own safety, and indifferent to the awful possibilities that accompanied that noble attempt to save "The Young Cavalier," as I was called by the men of our little army. Arrows were flying thick and fast around

them, dashing against their armour, while some of the Indians, well-nigh mad in their desire to avenge the murdered chiefs, clung to my rescuers' legs, and even to the horses' hoofs, in the desperate effort to throw them down and slay their riders. But Spanish chivalry was at its best that day, and nothing could resist the resolute return to save me. Horses and men, fighting alike for dear life, reached the spot where I lay, and Antonio, leaping to the ground, snatched me from it, drew the arrow from the wound, and, heavy as I was, flung me across his saddle, sprang again upon his horse, and turning, spurred away through the dense throng until he and his comrades joined the cavaliers, who were now about to make their final charge. Neither horse nor rider appeared to note the extra burden my helpless body must have been when they rode once more in the ranks, and with the others completely broke down the resistance of the Indians, who turned and fled in confusion before the repeated onslaughts of the unconquerable cavaliers, and the no less indomitable and irresistible infantry.

At last the fight was over, and then Antonio watched over me almost with a mother's care. He nursed me day and night, refusing to quit my side, even for sleep; but, when rest was absolutely necessary, wrapped his cloak around him and lay down beside me, ready to rise at once if I should need him. And when at last he saw me look around, big tears of gladness started from his eyes and fell down his cheeks. He even stooped and kissed my face, and thanked God that the crisis was past.

"Where am I, Antonio?" I asked feebly, as I gazed about me, wondering to see a dim lantern swinging from a beam overhead, while there were all the signs and sounds at hand of life on board a ship.

"We are on the waters of the Pacific, Don Alonso,"

was his reply. "The General, many days ago, left me to watch over you, and a few others remained to hold the city of Tumbez, which we took possession of during Zemaco's absence. Pizarro went forward a week later with his forces, and a welcome reinforcement of quite a hundred men and many horses, that arrived under the command of the famous Hernando de Soto. Now we are on our way to join our comrades at a spot where Pizarro intends to found a settlement, and then pass on to conquer the empire of Peru."

A day or two later we joined our companions. We found them at a place which lay a little inland, on the banks of a beautiful river that ran down to the sea through the fertile valley of Tangarala, and as they carried me thither from the coast we saw thousands of Indians engaged in building the city of San Miguel, which Pizarro had planned and compelled the natives to work upon. Timber from the forests close at hand was fashioned into shape, while huge blocks of stone were drawn across the land from the great quarries not far distant; and swiftly, under the combined efforts of such an army of workers, a Spanish city came into existence, having its cathedral, its hall of justice, its magazine for public stores, and a fortress, affording a place for retreat in case of necessity.

"You must remain here, Don Alonso, until you have fully recovered," said the General, when he came to see me on the morning of his departure inland to undertake the task of invasion and conquest. "Del Benito says that he must stay also, which shows me that he loves you well, for he is an insatiable fighter, and cares not to be quiet. You owe him much, my friend, since he has done you inestimable service. I saw him charge the Indians when he espied your horse dashing onward riderless, and

it was the bravest deed I ever witnessed—save when your father rushed into the breach at Alhama,” he added. “Had I but a few more of Del Benito’s spirit, I should soon compel the Inca of Peru to come to terms. Farewell, and may God send you speedy recovery! When He does, come on after us as quickly as you will, and share in our spoils. I have set aside your portion of what we found in Tumbez.”

Before long I was sufficiently recovered to quit my bed, and walk along the streets of the newly-made city, the appearance of which filled me with wonder, as to the work that energy and labour can accomplish when so disposed. The toiling Indians, used to such tasks, had raised the massive walls with surprising skill, and few would have believed that the buildings now in progress were the result of but a few weeks’ labour.

But a greater surprise than this awaited me. I was standing at the gate of the city one morning, looking down the fertile valley, when I saw in the distance a company of Indians making their way towards San Miguel. I called the attention of Navarro to their approach, and he, to guard against surprise, sent word to his small company of soldiers to place themselves in readiness, in case this approaching body of Peruvians should prove hostile. As they drew nearer, however, those who were somewhat in advance hurried forward, bearing the emblems of peace, in order to secure themselves against attack, and also to assure us of their pacific intentions.

Before much time had passed the procession approached sufficiently near for us to see that it consisted of some fifty warriors, all well armed and richly dressed, while there were also several litters, the canopies of two of them gleaming with gold and silver. By this time the

advanced party had reached us, and one of their number, speaking, to our great surprise, in broken Spanish, besought a kind reception for the great chieftain Careta, cacique of Chuchama, and his daughter Fulvia, they being on their way to the court of the Inca Atabalipa.*

When I heard the man's words, I gave expression to a cry of amazement, and questioned the Indian eagerly as to the names of the chieftain and his daughter. He repeated them, so that there could be no mistake, and my heart bounded with astonishment and delight. Could it be possible that I was again to see the beautiful maiden I had met in the streets of Madrid? All through the weary years that had gone by I had dwelt upon the memory of that event, and her face and form were before me continually, until I had no thought for any other woman in the whole wide world. She had crossed my path and robbed me of my heart, but had passed out of my sight, as I feared, for ever. I had never dared to hope that I should see her any more; but now she was within a few hundred yards of me, unless there were two Fulvias of Chuchama.

Navarro's horse was standing near, and, craving his permission, I leaped into the saddle and galloped down the valley, only drawing up at the side of one of the gorgeous litters. As the horse's feet clattered on the way the unwonted sounds fell upon the ears of the occupant, and a dainty hand and arm appeared drawing back the woollen curtains. As the maiden looked out and caught sight of me she gave expression to a cry of pleasure.

"Don Alonso de Miguel," she exclaimed, "how came you here?"

* Some historians call the Inca Atahualpa, but old Spanish chroniclers, some of whom took part in the conquest, call the monarch by the name here given—Atabalipa.

"I came hither, Lady Fulvia, with Pizarro, on his mission to Peru," I answered, my heart beating with gladness when I discovered that I was not forgotten, although so long a time had passed. When I put out my hand she clasped it in her own, while with bright smiles upon her lovely face, she looked up and told me how glad she was to see me once more, and in her own land.

By this time the procession had halted, and Careta, having stepped out of his litter, came to my side. He recognized me at once, although he did not remember my name as his daughter had done. But even that ignorance pleased me, for it caused me to think that she had sometimes thought about me, and so had forgotten neither my name nor my face.

Dismounting, and giving my horse into the care of one of the attendants, I walked beside Fulvia's litter, the cacique being at my other side; and thus we slowly made our way onwards to the gates of San Miguel, passing the time in asking and answering many questions as to the land of my birth, and the reason for being so far from home.

I was sorry when the gates were reached, but was charmed to think that the cacique was wishful to journey to Cuzco in company with the cavaliers, when I told him that some of us were shortly leaving, in order to overtake Pizarro. Navarro, hearing from me as to our former acquaintance—passing though it had been—gave Careta and his daughter a hearty reception, setting aside for their use the best apartments which the newly-made city could afford.

Before many days had passed, I started with Antonio and half a dozen other cavaliers to overtake the army in advance; and in our company were Careta and his

daughter. Tristan pawed the ground impatiently when I mounted and waited the word to advance, and it needed all my skill to hold him in, so delighted was he to enter on active service once more, after such a long period of enforced idleness.

We had looked forward to our journey with no small trepidation, but the determination of Careta had placed quite a different complexion upon our affairs and prospects. We were a strong party now, for Careta's attendants were excellently armed, and the very pick of his choicest troops, so that, all told, we numbered some sixty strong, to say nothing of the carriers who carried the litters in which Fulvia and her maidens were borne, and each of these could fight upon emergency, for every Peruvian was more or less a soldier.

When we set forward, I, like my countrymen, was astonished at the wonderful sights displayed at every turn. For three or four days we toiled across the barren wastes of sand, which in this part of the country extended from the sea to the base of the mighty mountain range—some sixty miles or more. But after that troublesome and monotonous journey had been accomplished, we began the ascent to the uplands, among the rounded red-brown mountains, where we looked into vast gorges, sheer down for hundreds of feet, and at the turbulent streams at their base that ran on and on towards the distant sea.

At other points new views opened before us—vast fields of snow that glistened in the sunshine, rising more and more until they ended in a dazzling summit which pointed to the clouds, and even pierced them, like a spear chiselled out of one huge diamond.

Our way led along the magnificent roads which the Incas had laid down, alike across the plains and up the gentler mountain slopes—broad causeways from twelve

to twenty feet wide, paved with smooth slabs of stone and with streams of water running along their sides, where travellers might quench their thirst.

There was never any need to encamp in the open, for at the end of every tenth mile a tambo was built—in other words, a caravansary or inn, in which the traveller might rest, and where the keeper provided him with food. The tambos were enormous structures—huge forts, in fact, capable of accommodating five thousand men and all their stores. In each of them we found a gorgeous set of apartments, the walls richly decorated with hangings, and even embellished with gold and precious stones, while costly mats lay upon the inlaid floors. These rooms were provided with richly-carved couches and other articles of furniture which added to the comfort of the Inca, if, in his progress through the land, he passed by that way, and lodged there.

In most cases Careta sent messengers ahead to give notice of our coming, but invariably we were shown into these apartments by the keepers. All through the early part of our journey, we were treated with princely hospitality. The best that could be produced from the country round was laid upon the tables with a lavish hand, so that it was hard to believe that we were in an enemy's country.

Doubtless the Inca, who had issued orders that the best of care should be taken of the Spaniards, believed that we were what Pizarro had declared us to be—a company of soldiers from the far-off East, bearing messages of friendship from our own sovereign, and desiring to help the Peruvian monarch in his wars.

If so, there was to be a rude awakening some day.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE CARAVANSARY.

ONE evening we drew up at a tambo among the mountains, whose sides had been formed into glorious gardens designed to please the eye of the Inca. The air was filled with delicious odours from the flowers, while the sights and sounds on every hand were entrancing. It seemed to be a paradise on earth, a spot where it was hard to believe that anything like evil passions could be displayed.

On entering we were surprised to come face to face with Zemaco, the cacique of Tumbez, who had so cruelly slain the lords of Puna. When Fulvia saw him her face grew grave, and a look of fear appeared to sweep across it.

"I would that we had not met Zemaco, Don Alonso," she said to me quietly; "and I would warn you to be on your guard, and tell Don Ovando so."

"But why?" I asked in surprise, seeing that Pizarro had trusted him.

"Because he is false, my friend. So beware. His smiles do not mean friendship."

But she said no more, for she dropped the curtains of her litter, as if to pass into the tambo unseen by the cacique.

Turning to gaze at Zemaco, I observed a strange look upon his face when his eyes fell on Careta; but there was

no sign of friendship between these two chieftains, although they greeted each other with the courtesy that belonged to the Court of the Inca. As the cacique of Tumbez turned to us, however, his face was all smiles, and he cried—

“Welcome, cavaliers! The great white General is not far ahead—only a few marches now; but while you are here, I bid you welcome in the Inca’s name.”

Then beckoning to us, and turning, he led the way, until we reached the chambers specially set apart for the ruler of Peru.

First bathing in the royal bath-room, glad to feel the cool waters about our limbs after the dust and toil of the long day’s march, we entered the banquet-hall, ready for the refreshment which Zemaco had promised to provide. I looked for Fulvia and her father, but they were not there. They preferred to stay in their own apartments, so Zemaco said. During the meal we drank nothing save the water brought in from the stream that ran along the roadside. But at its close the golden goblets were carried in and set upon a side-table, Zemaco declaring that it was desired by the Inca that all honour should be shown to his white friends.

Yet, with all the easy vivacity and genial smiles that lighted up the face of the Indian chieftain, there was something behind his kindness which aroused in me, and I suppose in my comrades also, a sense of suspicion. I found myself wondering whether his tones of cheerful friendship were sincere; and after a while the idea of meditated treachery began to grow upon me. Before the light wine was brought forward from a table that stood behind Zemaco’s stool, the Indian rose and went over to the golden goblets. The novelty of everything caused me to watch him curiously, but he turned his back upon

us, and seemed to be considering what wines he should offer his guests. Evidently he thought himself and his movements unobserved; but on the wall in front of him hung a massive copper mirror, framed in gold, and adorned with precious stones. By its means I watched Zemaco's face, and what I witnessed startled me. The mirror reflected every little action, and I saw him place his hand in his bosom, and draw out a small package wrapped round with a large leaf. He opened it, and dropped into all the goblets, save one, a portion of a dark powder, returning the leaf with its remaining contents to his bosom.

Turning round swiftly to my companions, I saw at a glance that most of them had been watching Zemaco, one or two, their faces flushed with wrath, fingering the daggers in their belts. I knew that they had also seen what I had observed, when the chieftain, begging to be excused a moment or two, left the apartment, to give some orders to the attendants without.

"He has poisoned the goblets," exclaimed Philip de Ovando, drawing his dagger as if he meditated an assault upon the treacherous cacique on his return.

"All save one," I added.

"That is true," said Del Benito; "but say nothing, comrades; leave it to me. When he places the goblets on the table I will contrive to attract his attention, and do you, Señor Ovando, change your goblet for his, on the instant."

"Agreed," was the answer; and at that moment Zemaco returned, with the same bland smile upon his face.

"Cavaliers," said he easily, his treacherous face the picture of hospitality and goodwill, "I would do you honour, and serve you myself with wine." And going to the spot where he had previously been standing, he

poured out the rich, red wine, and brought a full goblet to each one of us. Last of all he filled his own, first looking into it carefully to see that it was empty. Then he brought it in his hand, and set it down before him while he took his seat.

"Zemaco," exclaimed Antonio lightly, "may I look at those chaste vessels from which you poured the wine? They are so beautiful and costly that we never saw the like in Spain."

"Ah, is that so?" said the Indian with a smile, and rising. "Come and see them. They were given to the Inca by his queen upon his natal day, which chanced to fall when last he came this road."

And speaking thus, he walked with Antonio to the side-table to show them to him. As he did so, Ovando quickly took Zemaco's goblet, placing his own in its stead; then leaned back in his seat with an unconcerned look upon his face. Evidently Antonio was determined to give us time, for he lingered awhile asking many questions, which the chieftain answered with as much readiness as his knowledge of the Spanish tongue would allow. Wondering what would be the effect of this change of drinking-cups, we awaited the return of the two men to the table with some impatience; but when they were seated once more, the cacique, taking his goblet in his hand, called upon us to drink.

"Not so, Zemaco," responded Ovando. "In Spain our host drinks first, so as to honour his guests; and as you stand in the place of the Inca, whose visitors you say we are, you must needs be first to pledge us."

"Then be it so, cavaliers," responded the Indian with a smile, and lifting the goblet to his lips, he drained it. But as he lowered it again he uttered a cry of fear, and dashed the vessel to the ground. Used though we were

by this time to death on the battlefield, we gazed at the cacique with half-subdued horror, a thrill running through every one of us. When the wine-cup rolled upon the floor, battered by reason of the force with which it had been flung there, Zemaco's face became convulsed with pain, and springing to his feet with a piercing shriek, and clutching at his bosom, as if in unspeakable agony and terror, he fell prone upon the ground, where he lay motionless.

"He has paid with his own life for that meditated treachery," exclaimed Ovando.

The agonising cry brought in a score of attendants, who doubtless expected to find the strangers in their death-throes. They looked at us as they entered, but when they saw their master lying prostrate they trembled, and turning to gaze upon us, with alarm and wonder on their faces, slunk out of the apartment as if they felt that we, in escaping the effects of that deadly poison, were more than human.

"Come back!" cried Rodrigo de Roldan, a cavalier, who had contrived to learn the language of Peru better than any other of the party; and at his words the attendants, trembling more than ever, but afraid to disobey, returned.

"You have nothing to fear so long as you do well," said De Roldan, while they stood awaiting his commands. "Take that body away at once!" he added, pointing to the prostrate chieftain.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

WHEN, an hour or two later, we passed to the chamber where the keeper of the caravansary had prepared our beds, I caught sight of some Indians whose faces I recognized as being in the party that accompanied Zemaco on his visit to Pizarro in Puna. They were gazing after us with the bitterest expressions of hatred upon their faces.

“See, De Roldan!” I exclaimed to my companion, “those Indians are from Tumbez.”

“Ah!” he cried, turning sharply round to gaze in the direction I had indicated. “So they are, and I like not their looks. Yonder slim youth seems to me to play somewhat savagely with his dagger, as if he meditated mischief. I will warn our comrades when I have had a word with the keeper of the place; for we must needs make him responsible for our safety, and it may do him good to give him a word of reminder as to vengeance from Pizarro, if any harm comes to us.”

And saying this he left me, to seek for the keeper.

When De Roldan returned, he told his companions of the possibility of trouble in the night, but added that the keeper would doubtless see to it that we came to no harm, since he had spoken to him on the matter.

“Think you, De Roldan, that the smooth-tongued

Indian will take any heed to your words?" exclaimed Ovando, with a scornful laugh.

"Aye, indeed, he will!" responded the other, with a gesture full of meaning. "I told him that Pizarro knew of our coming, and would soon discover whether we fell into mischief. And if so——" And the speaker laughed.

In spite of De Roldan's assurances as to our safety, Ovando, who was acting as our chosen captain, resolved to appoint watches of two hours each, so that the company might sleep in greater confidence. Scarcely had he done so when a messenger came from Fulvia's father, bidding us be on our guard, since he feared that Zemaco, from many little signs, was not to be trusted. "But," added the man, "my lord has bidden me say that, if you desire help, he will come at once to your assistance."

"Go back and thank him," was Ovando's response, and the Indian departed.

* * * * *

I was in the midst of a deep sleep when a hand was laid upon my shoulder, and I awoke.

"Don Alonso, your turn has come to watch," said Ovando, who had just completed his two hours' term; for although he was captain, he did not shrink from his share of duty.

Springing to my feet, I went to the spot which had been pointed out as best for discovering any possible danger, since the door stood full before me, so that none could enter unobserved. Not a sound was to be heard anywhere, save the lusty snores and heavy breathing of the tired Spaniards, who, face to face with danger so continually, were rarely deprived of sleep, however great the peril

might be. To mark the entrance of any foe, however, was not a difficult task, for the moon, which was early that night, was shining into the darkest corners of the apartment.

Convinced that we were in danger, after what had happened in the banquet-chamber, and more and more assured that one attempt having been foiled another would be made, if looks of hate such as I had seen on the Indians' faces meant anything, my eyes wandered round the room continually. But the peril was nearer than I thought. The wall behind me was covered with richly-coloured hangings, made of the finest wool which had been sheared from the backs of the llamas, of which we had seen thousands and tens of thousands on our way. I had looked behind these hangings when we searched to see whether there were any Indians in hiding, but had noticed nothing that could arouse suspicion. But unexpectedly I heard a slight click behind me—ever so faint. Had I not been specially alert it might have passed unobserved. Again the sound came, and placing my ear to the curtain I could hear a stealthy movement, and then another, and yet another. Drawing my dagger swiftly, I struck it into the rich hangings with deadly force, and as the keen blade went tearing through, a shrill scream of pain aroused my sleeping comrades, who sprang to their feet, their weapons in their hands.

“This way!” I cried, drawing my dagger back and striking with my fullest force at another spot where I had also heard a sound. The blow was followed by a second cry. By this time my companions were at my side, and tearing down the hangings they saw an open door, filled with Indians more startled than we by the screams and their own discovery.

Rushing upon them, Antonio and Ovando struck right

and left with their swords, while others of our number, standing at the sides of this unsuspected doorway, thrust their lances into such as sought to enter, laying them dead or wounded at our feet. It was a sharp, short fight, which ended in the Indians turning to fly, since they judged the Spaniards to be invincible.

Drawing in some of the bodies, so that we might find egress and follow the retreating Indians, we saw at the bottom of this heap of slain and wounded ones the keeper of the tambo, and at his side lay the young Indian I had spied when we walked into the bedchamber. These were they whom I had laid low with those two dagger-thrusts. They were not dead; but judging them to be too far spent to need any close attention, we left them there, while we passed through this secret door, and followed in the wake of the flying men, whose course we traced by means of the blood-tracks along the way. That way led on and on along narrow passages, which were lit by silver lamps that had doubtless been set burning by the keeper, and ended in the full and open space of moonlit country outside the caravansary. Our assailants had escaped us, and further pursuit would have been so much toil in vain.

“What shall we do with those wounded ones?” exclaimed De Roldan, as we turned to retrace our steps.

“Hang them up at the doorway of the tambo, as a warning to any others who may meditate treachery against us or our countrymen,” answered Ovando; and Bobadillo, a gentleman of Castile, expressing approval, declared his readiness to act the part of executioner. But when we returned to the chamber where we had been so recently disturbed, the Indians were gone!

Some might have wondered that we neither heard nor saw anything of the cacique of Chuchama during these

startling experiences; but the reason was not hard to find. The keeper of the tambo, acting under Zemaco's instructions, had bestowed our Indian companions in quarters at the most distant part of the caravansary, so that none of the sounds of the conflict could possibly awaken them. But now we went in a body through the building, until we came to the room where Careta slept. When he heard our story he was furious, and calling on his attendants to guard the Lady Fulvia well, selected a score from among them to follow him, and returned with us to our sleeping-chamber.

Looking to our arms, and each carrying one of the silver lamps, which we took down from the walls of the secret passage, we set forth with Careta and his attendants to explore the caravansary, in order to discover what further perils threatened us. Antonio, whose spirit never appeared to quail at danger, led the way, passing from chamber to chamber. The gorgeously-furnished rooms were undisturbed, as if they were held sacred to the use of the monarch, before whom the mightiest of his nobles were wont to tremble. But when the humbler apartments were visited, all the order and beauty that had made us marvel were absent. Even here, however, the greatest cleanliness prevailed, the spotless floors seeming to indicate that filth and squalor, such as I had seen in the lowest quarters of Cadiz, were intolerable in this great empire we had come to conquer.

Returning to the room where we had supped and so strangely escaped death, we set our lamps upon the table and stood to consider what next we should do. The fear was—as Careta said—lest the servants of the caravansary might have gone to gather the mountaineers together, and fall upon us with a force which no amount of bravery and resolution could withstand. The cacique of Chuchama

made no secret of the fact that Zemaco, having the most deadly hatred for him, by reason of his refusal to bestow his daughter's hand upon him, would have been perfectly ready to sacrifice him with ourselves.

"So far as you were concerned," said Careta, "he was patriotic, and sought to cut off you and all your countrymen, since he deemed you enemies of his country; but as for me, he would have welcomed my death, so that he might carry away my daughter Fulvia to one of his strongholds, and force her to become his wife. But since he is dead, we have no more to fear from him; our chief concern is with his followers, who will seek to avenge him. That makes me think that we shall have a fierce fight."

But what could such a little company—even when we included the friendly cacique's followers—do against the swarms of natives that might be brought from the many hamlets we had passed so recently, or from those that dotted the mountain sides on every hand? On one thing we were sternly resolved—to fight, if needs be, to the last, selling our lives as dearly as possible, and as became the sons of Spain. This was the only conclusion at which we arrived, when presently Ovando, moving carelessly on the polished floor, slipped, and catching quickly at what appeared to be a silver bracket, on which a lamp stood, barely saved himself from falling. But the next moment there was a cry of amazement from all, for a portion of the wall against which he was leaning moved slowly but silently outwards. Hurrying to Ovando's side as by one impulse, we gazed into the chamber which became revealed to us. It was brilliantly lighted, a hundred silver lamps sending forth their clear rays, which costly stones and panels of burnished gold reflected gorgeously. The chamber itself was four-

square, and in each of the sides were doors inlaid and beaded with the precious metals. The ceiling was supported by eight pillars, standing in pairs, profusely decorated with gold, silver, and polished copper, and studded with esmeraldas—jewels which were oftentimes as large as a pigeon's egg. Over what I suppose would be the altar was a huge shield representing the sun—for the Peruvians were sun-worshippers—and this also was of gold.

As we gazed upon this unwonted scene—the panels, the beadings of the pillars, all of gold, and the very floor itself inlaid with slabs of this rich metal—we were filled with unbounded astonishment, and turned to Careta inquiringly.

“This is one of the Temples of the Sun, but I did not know of its presence here,” he said, as we looked and marvelled; “and since you seek it, here should be gold enough for a king's ransom.”

And so, indeed, it proved to be. The great caravansary had once been a palace of one of the Inca nobles of Peru; but this temple attached to it had been rendered secret by reason of its marvellous wealth, so as to safeguard it from the cupidity of any who might not hesitate at desecration. Possibly the entrance was only known to the priests, whose duty it was to keep the lamps burning night and day; but they had fled.

Crossing the floor to look at some of the golden goblets that stood upon the altar, Bobadillo stumbled and fell. As he rose slowly to his feet he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

“See, comrades, there must be a vault beneath this temple!” he cried; and approaching the spot where he was kneeling, we saw that one of the many slabs of stone that made up the floor had a ring of metal attached to it

of the same colour as the stone itself. Bobadillo had caught his foot against it, and so had fallen.

Ovando was about to raise the slab when Careta suggested that it would be best to secure ourselves from surprise, in case the Indians should return to renew their attack upon us. Taking the lamps in hand again, we retraced our steps to the principal entrance, and leaving Bilbao, a cavalier of few words but matchless bravery, with half a dozen Chuchamans to guard the secret doorway of our sleeping-chamber, and give the alarm if any Indians sought to enter, we went into the courtyard to see how our horses fared.

“It would be well to take them into the great hall, lest anyone should do them harm,” suggested Bobadillo, and the proposal was too wise to be neglected. Leading the chargers thither, and placing heaps of fodder at their feet, we secured the gates, thrusting the great bolts into the sockets, so as to exclude our enemies in case they should seek to surprise us. This done we were content as to our safety, for the gates were so massive that it seemed to us that even Pizarro’s artillery would make but small impression on them. The only other point of danger was that secret door in our bedchamber, which we fastened up as best we could, and leaving the six Chuchamans there we returned to the temple.

Raising the slab, which required the united efforts of three of the strongest of our party, a cold, dry air, laden with perfumes, met us; but the crypt, or vault, or whatever else we might care to call it, looked dark and forbidding. At our feet were some steps, cut out of the solid rock, leading down no one knew whither, nor did the lamps we carried help us at all. No one seemed inclined at first to volunteer the descent; but at last Bobadillo and Bilbao, receiving assurances that we would

come at their call, descended step by step. Slowly and cautiously they went down into what seemed the very bowels of the earth, neither turning to the right hand nor to the left. As they went we counted forty steps. Then they stopped and gazed around them. Presently Bilbao took something from the wall close by him, and looking at it saw that it was a lamp. He lighted it and replaced it on the bracket. Looking again he saw another and another, and as he lighted these and several others which he found, we obtained a view of a great portion of the subterranean chamber. No longer hesitating, the whole of the party now followed the pioneers, and by the time we had reached the bottom of the stony stairs, Bilbao and his comrade had lighted many another lamp, so that we were able to peer into the deepest recesses of the place.

CHAPTER XV.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

AND here, too, awaited for us another remarkable experience; for we were in a chamber of the dead. The place was probably a natural cave in the rock, which had been enlarged by the persistent industry of men, so that it was now some thirty yards long, and nearly as many broad—a huge place cut into the solid quartz, where we could see the thin veins of gold, as they ran in all directions. There had doubtless been a double purpose in excavating this great chamber in the earth's bowels—to get the precious metal, of which there seemed to be abundance, and to provide a sepulchre worthy of a noble of the highest rank. Careta, forming his judgment by indications on every hand, declared that the owner must have been of the order of the Incas—an Orejon—and therefore related to the monarch of his day.

At first, however, we questioned each other as to why this vault had been made, and even Careta could offer no suggestion; but as we travelled to the farthest end we came to the corpse of the Orejon himself, who had in bygone days lorded it over the mountain palace and the country round. The body, embalmed—not with spices, but by being exposed to the clear, cold, dry air of the mountains, or by some other method which as yet we

did not understand—lay back upon the couch at ease, just as it had often done when the proud noble was alive. About him, reclining in the same attitude, were his three dead wives, while close at hand lay costly changes of raiment for them all. Not far away stood some golden goblets filled with wine, together with provisions, so prepared as to resist the action of time. The nobleman's garments, of the richest material, bespoke his rank, while costly ornaments bedecked his hands and neck and ankles.

As to his almost boundless wealth, we had evidence of it everywhere, for solid bars of gold, vessels showing the most beautiful workmanship—treasure which, as we afterwards discovered, was worth not less than a hundred and fifty thousand castellanos*—all were lying there ready for the nobleman's use, if ever the spirit should return to the body from whence it had fled! If Pizarro suffered us, as finders of this treasure, to keep it, we were already on the way to wealth of which, in our wildest moments, we had never dreamed. In my own heart I exulted greatly, for I already saw the realization of my hopes—the buying back of the estates which the Inquisitors had taken from me when they thrust my parents into the torture-chambers, and led them later to the place of execution.

The spirit of exploration now fairly possessed us, and none more so than the cacique of Chuchama. We began to search the walls, to see whether there was any entrance other than that by which we ourselves had entered. Presently we came to a door, standing in the shadows behind the dead, so that we had not noticed it before. But now as we stood in front of it, hushed and wondering what other revelation might await us, our very hearts stood

* Nearly £400,000 of present money value.

still. Upon the other side of the closed door could be heard the faint clanking of a chain, and then a weak cry—

“Help us, for pity’s sake!”

The words were spoken in our own Spanish tongue, and I knew the voice at once. Without waiting to ask what should be done, Antonio burst open the door by hurling himself against it, and entering in a body, our lamps in hand, we saw two of our own countrymen chained to the wall. One was lying senseless on the floor; the other, standing and looking at us, but scarcely able to see, by reason of what was to him a blaze of light after such utter darkness, was so manacled that the only movements possible were those of lying down or standing up in a sort of stooping posture.

A cry of horror and astonishment escaped our lips, for the prisoners were Spaniards who had gone forward from San Miguel with Pizarro’s main body.

“Pedro!” I cried, rushing forward. “Pedro, my friend! my brother! what do you here?”

Without replying to my question, the poor prisoner merely whispered faintly, as if all strength had left him, “Alonso! Alonso! Thank God!” And laying his head upon my shoulder, the young don wept. He would have fallen had I not placed my arms about him and suffered him to sink gently to the ground; and there, kneeling at his side, I too wept with him.

Bilbao had watched us for a few moments, and then without a word disappeared. Before long he returned with a leathern bottle and some of the food which still lay upon the table where we had eaten before Zemaco died.

“Don Pedro,” he said kindly, and kneeling at the young Spaniard’s side, “drink this”; and he held a

cup to his lips, while Ovando and Bobadillo attended to the unconscious Arbues.

Taking the cup from Bilbao's hand when Pedro had drunk an eager draught, they poured its contents between the lips of their prostrate comrade; and after a while he opened his eyes, and gazed around him. Astonishment at seeing so many familiar faces deprived him of speech for a time, and all that he could do was to gaze around him in amazement.

"I thought we were in the dungeon!" he exclaimed at last, and he looked into our faces as if he thought that he must be dreaming.

"And so we are, Arbues!" said Ovando cheerily. "But in the goodness of God we have found you, and none too soon!"

Then stooping, he lifted his old friend to his feet. Perhaps in the whole of Pizarro's squadron there was no more stalwart cavalier than Arbues, but now he seemed as weak as a little child, and, leaning against Ovando helplessly, asked to be placed upon the floor again.

"I am faint with hunger," he said, the cold sweat upon his forehead giving token of his weakness as he spoke.

"With hunger, friend? Bilbao, come this way with that food!" cried Ovando, and so saying he took some from the man-at-arms and gave it to his famishing comrade, who ate it greedily. So also did Pedro. In a little while, having taken off the edge of their appetites, they expressed their willingness to go forward into liberty. But the question arose as to the chains, and how they could be loosened from the hands and feet of the prisoners. Leaving De Roldan and myself to talk to them and bear them company—to defend them if there should be any need—the remainder of the cavaliers went forth with the cacique to search for tools with which to break the fetters

and set them free. They were away some time, and during their absence Arbues told us how it was that he and his companion had come to be thrust into this dungeon.

“We were sent back by Pizarro, after leaving the caravansary some days ago, to search for five of our party who were missing, and were thought to have come to harm while passing along the narrow mountain paths. Pizarro had halted at this place for the night, accompanied by Zemaco, the treacherous cacique of Tumbes, whom we had met on the road. He said that he had been to see the Inca, and was now returning; but in my own secret mind I was sure that he had gone forward to give information as to the size of our army, and ask permission to oppose our progress in the dangerous mountain passes. Yet he seemed so oily-tongued that this was scarcely possible, and many laughed at me for expressing my fears.

“‘You are turning faint-hearted, Arbues,’ cried Juan de Garabito.

“‘Faint-hearted?’ I cried. ‘Not so, but cautious, if you please. I have no faith in that false-faced Zemaco, and I am sure that his smiles mean mischief. If he can entrap us in the mountains, he will.’

“But all in the company appeared to be infatuated with him, and placed themselves in his hands implicitly. As we wheeled out at the great gateway I saw an evil look of satisfaction on his face, and, spurring my horse, I reached Pizarro’s side.

“‘General,’ I cried, ‘take Zemaco with you! There is a look upon his face that means mischief, and he will find a way to cut us off in the mountains, where we should be helpless if he opposed us with but a handful of men.’

“But the General smiled. I always thought him a good reader of character, but he failed in this instance surely. Turning back in anger from him, for he scorned my fears,

I took my place in the rear, resolute in the determination to strike Zemaco down should he show himself again with that sinister look upon his face. An hour later, however, Pizarro rode back to my side, and with an outstretched hand, cried—

“‘Arbues, forgive me for treating so brave a cavalier with scorn. I did not mean to insult you.’ And he grasped my hand in such a way that I forgot the slight which he had done to my pride.

“‘Take Don Pedro and Garabito with you and look for five of our comrades, who were not seen, I am told, after sunset last night. They are possibly in trouble in the hills.’

“Turning back at once, accompanied by the two cavaliers, we arrived at the caravansary, but met with none of our missing comrades by the way. Zemaco was at the gate as we rode up, and was effusive in his welcome.

“‘We have come back to look for some of our missing comrades, Zemaco,’ said I, in answer to his question.

“‘They are here,’ he responded, turning and leading the way into the open square. ‘Come, friends, and join them.’

“Dismounting, we followed him along many passages and through the gorgeously-furnished apartments which we had occupied the night before. At last we came into a small room, the walls of which were embellished with so much gold and silver that we gazed before us in astonishment, having neither eyes nor ears for any other thing. But that astonishment was our undoing. Suddenly we were leaped upon from behind, at a cry from Zemaco, and borne to the ground. Then chains were brought and fastened to our limbs, after which, receiving goads from many a spear-point on the way to urge us onward, we

were hurried along some dark passages and thrust into this dungeon, where we have been lying ever since, without light or food."

"And where is Garabito?" cried De Roldan, for the cell contained two prisoners only when we entered.

"I do not know. Pedro and I called to him when we were left in the darkness, but received no answer. Then we groped along the walls and across the floors so far as our chains would allow, thinking we might find him senseless, or dead, but he was not with us, neither have we seen nor heard of him since."

Scarcely had Arbues ended his words when we heard the heavy tramp of spur-booted soldiers, as if they bore some burden; and, jumping to my feet and looking into the great catacomb where the Peruvian noble and his consorts lay, I saw my comrades coming forward bearing someone on their shoulders.

"Whom have you there?" I cried.

"Whom should you think, Don Alonso?" said Bobadillo; but his tone was such that the dread which passed through my mind, lest the man they brought was dead, died away.

"Garabito!" I cried.

"What do you know of Garabito?" exclaimed Ovando.

"Everything," I answered, "for Arbues has told me that he came here with Pedro and himself."

And so, indeed, it was Garabito, who, as they gently laid him down upon the floor, was in as sorry a plight as Arbues and Pedro, and unable to stand upon his feet unaided. But the strange thing was that the Indians had not deprived any of the prisoners of their arms, and the only explanation that suggested itself was that they thought escape or rescue impossible, and death by starvation certain.

By this time it was nearly daydawn; and raising the rescued ones after having broken off their fetters, and then supporting them on either hand, we led them to the banquet-chamber, where, seated at the table, we set food before them, and not merely watched, but, being hungry ourselves, joined them in the meal.

This done they felt wonderfully refreshed, and after bathing in the clear waters that flowed into the Inca's bath along the silver pipes, they declared themselves confident of being speedily ready to resume their journey with us.

The sun had already risen and was shining gloriously over the snow-capped hills, and lighting up the deep and fertile valleys.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN APPARITION.

TO resume our journey with three sick men on our hands was more than we felt equal to, having regard to the perils which might beset us in the mountain passes. The privations of so many days—while they had not caused their courage to abate—had lowered our comrades' strength so much that, even on horseback, they could scarcely reach the next caravansary, more than three leagues away. Holding a war-council as soon as the early morning meal was over, we decided to hold the palace of Tubanama against all odds, until the rescued cavaliers were in travelling condition. Then, if their horses could be found, we would set forth and overtake the main body, now many days' journey in front of us, unless Pizarro had halted for any length of time upon the way.

The question of the horses was a serious one, for their value in such a campaign as we were now engaged in was almost incalculable. As De Roldan put it, they were just then worth their weight in gold. Looking first to our defences, so as to guard against surprise, we began our search for the chargers that had borne the imprisoned men to Tubanama. For a long time we feared that Zemaco had removed them from the

neighbourhood, for while we searched right and left we could not find them.

"They may be underground somewhere," I ventured to suggest, when we had looked into every corner in vain, but most of my companions laughed at the bare idea, and gave up the search completely.

"You will have to follow Pizarro on foot," exclaimed Ovando as we returned to tell of our failure.

"I do not believe it," was Garabito's response. "When we first met Zemaco he expressed a longing to have a horse, and sought to buy one, offering a fabulous price for it. Since he lingered here, and you found him on the spot last night, depend upon it he stabled all three of the horses in some secure place but close at hand, and where any passing Spaniards would not find them."

And feeling better after a good meal and a long rest—during which the vigorous ones of our party had examined the defences as well as prosecuted the search—Garabito rose to his feet to look into places which we had thought impossible.

"I will come with you," said Arbues.

"And I also," exclaimed Pedro.

"Shall we ask Careta to accompany us?" said one of our number, for the chieftain of Chuchama, seeing that we were secure, had gone back to his own quarters at daybreak.

"No, do not trouble him," answered Ovando. "Should the caravansary be surprised he will be there to defend it, and we can easily beat a retreat if any danger threatens during our search."

With these words he moved forward, and the whole of our party went over the old ground, passing down every flight of steps that led to the subterranean chambers, but all in vain. It was clear that the

horses were gone, and their loss was a source of deep regret.

At noon someone suggested that it would be well to trace out the secret passage along which our assailants of the previous night had fled, in order to lessen the possibility of any further surprise from that direction. The proposal was received as a very wise one, and taking the silver lamps again and filling them with oil, of which there was an abundant supply, we commenced the journey of investigation. For a long distance the passage led slowly downwards, sometimes descending by flights of steps cut out of the quartz, still rich in gold, until we came into a great chamber—a huge, natural cavern, at the farthest end of which we could see daylight. Making for the light, we emerged at a spot where a massive door stood open. Across the threshold lay the body of the keeper of the caravansary, who had hoped to find a place of refuge, but had fallen dead in the midst of his flight. Stepping over him we came into the broad, green fields, in which grazed herds of llamas. On and on the prospect stretched before us, displaying mountains whose slopes were covered with inaccessible forests, with here and there glimpses of beautiful valleys, where little hamlets nestled, and Indian peasants were toiling, heedless of the scorching sunshine that poured down upon them. On and on before us mountain ranged beyond mountain, until the most distant summit faded away and was scarcely seen above the horizon.

It was a glorious scene, which called forth our admiration, but presently Pedro, who had wandered out of sight, came running back, his whole appearance indicating such excitement as to cause us instinctively to draw our swords.

"Our horses! our horses!" he cried, when he came within speaking distance; and Bobadillo and Bilbao running to meet him, he turned back and led them in the direction whence he came.

"We dare not all go, or we may be cut off," exclaimed Ovando, and we waited therefore and watched for their return.

Before long Pedro appeared leading his own beautiful, coal-black steed that had borne him so splendidly in our fights while on the coast, and a few moments later the other two men came in view, bringing the horses that belonged to Arbues and Garabito. Weak as the cavaliers were by reason of their cruel imprisonment and privations, they hastened forward, and in their joy at seeing their steeds again fairly embraced them, while the faithful creatures manifested their own delight in a fashion that was almost human.

To lead the horses along the intricate passages by which we had come was impossible, and as their masters were not equal to a fight, if one should come, it was decided that Antonio, Bilbao, and Bobadillo should take them round to the main entrance of the caravansary, while De Roldan and I retraced our steps to admit them. This done we barred the gate again, and hearing from the Chuchamans on the tower that there was no sign of any of the enemy outside, stabled the recovered horses with the rest. After that we hurried back to the distant end of the secret passage.

On our arrival Ovando suggested that we should have a look round the cavern, to see whether any of the natives were lurking there.

The first thing we espied were the saddles and harness of the horses—a discovery that gave us the keenest satisfaction. But the other sights were gruesome.

The cavern appeared to be a burial-place; for we were startled, as we looked around us, to see men and women in a sitting posture, their knees drawn up to the chin, and their hands clasped in front of their legs. They were dead, and sat there in grim silence. Most of them were embalmed who rested thus, but others, possibly menials in the palace during life, lay on their backs, and were merely preserved by the strange effects of the mountain air.

Beside each body we found everything that could be deemed necessary for a long and perilous journey into the land of spirits. There were water-jars, baskets of food, knives and spoons made of copper, fishing tackle, the necessary apparatus for cooking, and the same for weaving, in case the dead one needed a fresh supply of clothing on the way. There were also weapons of war, cups and platters, some of them of mere clay, but not a few of solid gold. And while the supposed wants of the dead ones' bodies were thus provided for, their religious needs were not neglected, for lying close at hand were idols. Even the ornaments which the dead had worn during their lifetime were not forgotten, for we saw many a string of beads, and rings of varying value.

Judging by numerous tokens the Indians were not all dead when they came here, but had been brought into the cavern to die or live, as the case might be. When Fulvia told me later some of the ways of the people, I learned that when one was deemed ill enough to die he was taken either to a cave, or to the woods, and set down on the ground, with food and water well within reach. Before the so-called mourners left him they began a dance which lasted many hours; that done they bade the sick one farewell, and left him to his fate. Sometimes the sickness was not unto death, and then the poor

creature, after spending four days and nights in this gruesome spot, crawled back to his old home, where he was received with much ceremony and rejoicing, and nursed back to health again.

But I am wandering, and must needs come back again to tell of our adventures.

There was no sign of treasure here save the few ornaments and cups that lay near the bodies, and these, compared with what we had already found, were not worth taking. Quitting the place, therefore, and closing the doors that separated the cavern from the long passages, bolting and barring them with care, we partook of a hearty meal in the banquet-hall, and then sought for Careta, to whom we told what we had seen and done. All this searching had occupied many hours, so that night had come when we reached the apartments reserved for the cacique and his daughter.

As for Fulvia and myself, we left the Spaniards in her father's company, and wandered through the vast building which her attendants had lighted up at her desire. The beautiful appointments of the mountain palace exceeded anything I had yet seen in Peru, and as she said, and truly, there was much in what we saw that, for splendour and for workmanship, Spain itself could not excel. After a while we mounted the steps of the tower over the great gateway, and looked for a long time in silence across the country on which the pale light of the moon was falling.

"Yonder lie the mountains we shall have to cross before you can see the Inca or your countrymen," said Fulvia, as she pointed to the distant hills, whose snow-capped summits were distinctly visible in the moonlight.

"And then I fear, Fulvia, we shall have to part company," I said regretfully.

“Alas! yes, Don Alonso, perhaps never to meet again,” she answered, and her beautiful face grew sad; and as she glanced upward at me, I thought that her eyes were gleaming with a sudden rush of tears.

We were alone, so taking her hand in mine, as we stood against the wall, I told her the story of my life and of my vow, and when that was done I went on to tell her of my love—how, ever since I had seen her in Madrid, she had been in my thoughts, and that I had prayed that I might meet her again and hear her tell me of her love.

“Then, Alonso, your prayers are answered, for I love you!” she responded simply, gazing into my face. She looked so bewitching in the moonlight that I waited for no more, but putting my arms about her kissed her fondly, while she no less lovingly returned my caresses. Before we left the tower she had promised to be my wife.

“And when you go back to sunny Spain, Alonso, I too will go. As your sacred book puts it, ‘Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.’”

Then for the first time I discovered that when she had visited Spain she had thrown aside her heathenism and had embraced the Christian faith. The very knowledge made me doubly glad, for now I knew that in this, as in regard to birth and other things, we should not be unequally yoked.

* * * * *

“Sleep, comrades, and I will keep watch,” said Arbues when we went to rest that night, for he saw that we were weary, and knew that we had had but little rest the night before; and accepting his kind offer we lay down and were soon fast asleep.

Morning had come when Arbues awoke us to communicate some startling news.

"Comrades," he cried, "this place is honey-combed with secret passages, for a few moments since, while you were all sleeping, I heard some sounds that made me start to my feet, alert and listening. They seemed to come from yonder corner," and he pointed to a spot where some rich curtains of Peruvian wool were hanging on the walls. "Watchful and ready," proceeded Arbues, "I listened for the sounds to come again, and they came ere long—sounds as of a door opening slowly but uneasily, as if the hinges were somewhat rusty. With my heart beating I waited, ready to give an alarm in case it turned out that I was not dreaming. Then I saw the curtains move, and a moment later a swarthy face appeared. Looking at the gloomy and malignant visage I was fascinated, affrighted, and trembling from head to foot, for it was the face of one whom we all thought dead—Zemaco!"

"Zemaco!" we shouted, springing, as by one impulse, to our feet. "Zemaco!" It was too much to believe, since we had seen him lying on the floor dead beyond a doubt.

"Where is he now?" cried Ovando.

"I know not," answered Arbues, "for as the cacique's eyes wandered round the apartment he saw me, and when I raised my musket to fire he disappeared. Then I roused you."

"He may be still behind those curtains," exclaimed De Roldan, rushing forward and piercing them with his sword. But the weapon went through the heavy folds and struck the wooden wainscot with a dull thud. Tearing down the hangings, that we might examine the wall more thoroughly, we searched for the signs of any opening in the woodwork, but in vain. There appeared to be no crevice to give us any clue as to the whereabouts of the secret door by which

the cacique—if he were really alive—had entered the chamber.

“It must have been your fancy, Arbues,” said Ovando at last. “The tension to which you have been put by your imprisonment has made you see what has no existence, for if ever a man was dead Zemaco was, and the Indians dragged his body away to bury it.”

“Ovando, I am not given to dreaming, and I am certain I was not deceived,” answered Arbues, somewhat angered at the suggestion. “His eyes wandered round this room, and they were positively gleaming with hate; but without a doubt he was startled when he met my gaze. Although we cannot see any traces of a door, he was there, and there he disappeared, for I heard the door close and the click of a latch as it did so.”

“I will settle the matter, cavaliers,” said Antonio, drawing a battleaxe from his belt. Then, requesting us to stand back out of his way, he brought down the weapon with terrific force upon the heavy wainscot. But the blow scarcely made any impression on the woodwork, since it was composed of vera wood, or *lignum vitæ*, so hard as to turn the edge of the sharpest and most powerful tools. The axe, blunted with the blow, slipped aside, merely indenting the spot where it fell.

Not caring to be beaten, Antonio struck again and again, aided in his attack by Hurtado, another of our company, and the lusty blows of these two stalwart men began at last to make some impression. Slowly the woodwork gave way before the onslaught, and an opening was made, disclosing the fact that Arbues had not been dreaming, but must have seen Zemaco or some other, whom he thought to be the poisoned cacique. The door thus weakened was finally broken down and a dark passage was revealed, before which we stood in wonder. It was

evident that the nobles who had dwelt in such splendour here had lived in peril also, so that secret ways of escape were absolutely necessary.

“What new wonders have we in store now?” exclaimed De Roldan, his face, like those of his companions, the picture of amazement.

“Let us go forward and see without delay,” said Ovando, taking a silver lamp from a niche in the wall—an example followed by every one of us—and saying as he did so, “Who will undertake the search with me?”

“Every one of us,” responded Garabito, “for we must come to the bottom of this new mystery.”

CHAPTER XVII.

BESIEGED.

FULL-ARMED, not knowing what might be before us, and each bearing a flaming lamp in his left hand, we followed Antonio, who begged to be allowed to lead the way, as being the strongest and most stalwart of the party. Advancing with caution, we walked along a dark passage, going on and on until we began to wonder whether we should ever come to the end of it. After an hour's careful examination, looking well about us to guard against being entrapped in any way, we found that the passage suddenly bent off to the right and ended a few yards farther on at a door, made of the same hard lignum vitæ which had already given us such trouble. It was neither barred nor bolted when we came up to it, and opened readily when Antonio laid his hand upon it.

As he thrust it outward the morning light displayed a scene of splendour. Before us ranged a garden of surpassing beauty. It was a portion of a glorious valley which lost itself in the distance among the mountains. About us were flowers, sending forth delicious odours, while trees were bending with the weight of fruit, which, even in our astonishment at the scene before us, we were glad to pluck and eat. Here and there were shady groves, in which we saw life-like figures of men and women

carved in stone and bedecked with ornaments of gold and silver. They stood there mutely, yet as if looking down with pleasure on that fair scene. Dotted about were little arbours, which commanded fresh and enchanting views of the country we had come to conquer; deep chasms, from whence issued the sound of dancing streams, eager to reach the far-off sea; fair valleys, clothed with grasses, thick-flowering bushes, tall and shady trees. Not far away a river rushed in clouds of foam and mist along its rocky bed, then dashed through a deep gorge, overgrown with shrubs and overtopped with lofty trees. Watching its career we saw it disappear at last in mist and spray with a terrific roar, which echoed again and again from the surrounding hills. And as the sunshine lit up the spray it displayed all the gorgeous colours of the rainbow, so that even here, in this land of the heathen, the promise of the olden time held good.

Sitting at the side of a fountain, we watched. A mile away lay the palace of Tubanama, where Fulvia—first in my thoughts and everything to me, in spite of untold peril—was doubtless sleeping. The subterranean passage had led us on and on until we came to a spot where we could see from a distance the massive structure, before which our famous castles in Spain were as nothing for size and strength. Had Pizarro's army been there he could have held it against all the forces of the Inca, even had they been countless thousands of his bravest warriors.

But presently Bilbao, who had been standing far away, called out to us, and going to him we followed the direction of his hand with our eyes, as he pointed to a narrow, level, upland valley, stretching on for many a mile. What we saw set our hearts beating quickly. Half a mile distant from the very spot where we now stood was a

mass of Indian warriors, whose weapons gleamed as the morning sunlight played upon them. They stood in battle array, while a cacique, magnificently dressed, his helmet sparkling with gold and precious stones, passed along the lines. There must have been many hundreds of them, and without a doubt the chieftain was Zemaco.

“Back, comrades, at once! They mean to attack us, either by an onslaught on the palace or by this secret way!” cried Ovando; and while he spoke he darted through the garden towards the door from whence we had emerged some little time before. But we were already too late. Our retreat was cut off. A score of warriors stood before us ready to dispute the way.

But what were a score to Spanish soldiers who, in the earlier parts of this enterprise, had faced such tremendous odds? We made a dash as Ovando led the way, heedless of the volley of arrows that fell harmlessly on our armour and targets, passing right through this little body of men without a scratch ourselves, but leaving some of them maimed and bleeding, while not a few fell dead before the sudden fury of our advance. Those who might still have resisted us turned and fled, leaving us to effect our escape in peace. Entering the great doorway, we bolted and barred it, making it so secure as to remove all anxiety as to its capability of resisting attack. Then, snatching up our lamps, we hurried back to the palace by the long subway, wondering whether we should be in time to arouse Careta and his followers. It was a race in which the strongest won, Arbues, Garabito, and Pedro, not having yet recovered strength after their many privations, coming on but very slowly.

More than equal in speed to any of the party, and spurred on by anxiety for Fulvia's safety, I was the first to reach the hall, where Tristan and his companions were

contentedly munching the grass that we had set within their reach the night before. A glance showed me that the gates were barred securely, and I shouted back to the others that we were in good time. Looking through the watchman's grating in the gate, we could see the valley in which Zemaco had marshalled his forces, and, to our relief, found that they had not yet started. Then I dashed onwards to the apartments where Fulvia and her father were at their morning meal, and told them what we had seen. The cacique, starting to his feet at the news, hurried out to call his followers to aid in the defence, leaving me to follow. But I lingered a moment to snatch a kiss from Fulvia, and then ran after him.

The only place from whence the attack could come—since we had made the secret way secure—was by this main gateway, for the palace had been so built as to allow no foothold for any attacking force elsewhere. The massive walls stood so closely on the edge of the precipice that in most places they appeared to be a part of the very rock itself, which descended for full a hundred feet into the gorge. Brave hearts, therefore, could well accomplish the task that was before us, and the thought that gave us most trouble was as to whether our bodily strength could hold out against an attack that might last for many hours.

Meanwhile Antonio and Hurtado had disappeared, the latter, a man-at-arms of splendid courage, rarely speaking, lest his superiors should deem him presumptuous. But these two were acting to some purpose, for before long they brought a huge basket of provisions, to which we yet had time to do full justice. But for the fruit we had plucked in the garden we had not broken our fast, and it was best that we should go to our fighting with full stomachs. While we stood eating, having neither

time nor care for ceremony just then, Hurtado and Bilbao, taking their share of food with them, mounted the tower over the gateway by means of the steps cut in the stonework, and there kept watch, eating heartily as they did so.

While we were thus engaged Fulvia came to see us, and her presence put new heart into everyone. There was a wondrous gentleness about her, although now, when danger threatened, she met the peril with all the bravery of a man; and had there been a need for it, I think she would have fought with a resolution worthy of the stoutest of her father's warriors. Indeed, in the jewelled belt about her waist she carried a Toledo dagger which the King of Spain had given her when she left him at Madrid, and she showed us more than once that she knew how to use it.

Even while she smiled upon us, and encouraged me by her cheerful words, Hurtado's strong voice was heard.

"We can save our ammunition for a while, cavaliers. There are scores of these ready for hurling on our assailants." And stooping as he spoke, he lifted a stone as large as a man's head.

"That is well," answered Ovando. "My masters, we shall fight these Indians with their own weapons." So saying, he mounted the tower and stood at Hurtado's side. Then looking down the valley, his soldierly instinct impelled him to draw his sword, while he cried—

"They come!"

Hurrying up the steps we looked upon the body of men now advancing to the attack. They came in martial array. Some were bare-limbed, having little clothing on at all; but others wore richly-coloured garments, leaving their limbs free, while ornaments of silver, and not a few of gold, upon their heads and arms and ankles, glittered

in the glowing sunlight. At their head came Zemaco, magnificently dressed, as became a cacique and territorial lord of the Empire of Peru. On his head he wore a helmet encircled with a band of gold, while the feathers that surmounted it were bedecked with precious stones. The white robe which covered him was edged with silver, and on his breast was a golden badge—the image of the Sun, the object of every Peruvian's worship. It blazed in splendour as the sun fell on it, so that he looked every inch a chieftain. But when he drew nearer we could see the old vindictive look upon his face, and there appeared to be an almost wolfish eagerness to avenge himself upon his enemies.

“Shall we give them a musket-volley, Ovando?” cried Arbues, who, in spite of his impaired strength, was impatient to begin the strife.

“Let them draw nearer yet, and do not fire until I give the word,” was the answer.

Standing there upon the gate with loaded muskets, we awaited the command. Without a halt the Indians came on, chanting their war-cry, until at last they began their rush, as if they thought to burst in the gates by the sheer weight of their attack.

“Fire!” cried Ovando; and a well-directed volley laid several men low.

“Load and fire again!” came the cry, and once more the loud report of musketry was heard, and again a number of Indians bit the dust.

Then, as the enemy began to batter at the gates with their axes, the Chuchamans, under the direction of the cacique, hurled the great stones upon them, and as they crashed on heads, and arms, and shoulders there soon lay on the ground a heap of dead and wounded. Now and again we sent another volley into their midst, until at

last the besiegers wavered and fled in a confused mass into the valley.

“How are we off for wounded ones?” cried Ovando, as he looked around. “Glorious! not a scratch on one of you! Ah, Garabito, are you hurt?” he added, as the cavalier went slowly down the steps with a broken arrow sticking out from his shoulder.

But I believe we half envied him when we saw how he was presently faring under the tender and skilful treatment at Fulvia’s hands. She cleverly drew out the arrow, and examining it carefully, looked into Garabito’s face with an encouraging smile, as if to assure him that it was not poisoned. Binding up his wound, she entreated him to retire, but thanking her for her gentle services, he insisted on mounting to the tower again. We cheered his pluck, and then turned our eyes in the direction of our foes.

Their retreat was only for a time. Zemaco, active as ever, rallied his forces, and presently detached a body of men—a hundred in number, as it seemed to me—who ran to a cluster of trees close by. After a while they returned with huge beams of timber, and forming at the head of the attacking party the second advance began, the same wild war-cry ringing out with unabated fury.

“We must shoot those men down, or with such rams as they carry, they will burst in the gate!” shouted Ovando above the din. “Fire at those in front, then they will fall and spoil the rush!”

Lying prone upon the stonework of the gateway, so as to lessen our chances of being struck by the arrows that came hurtling past us, we levelled our muskets at the men who bore these heavy rams. They were within forty yards of the gate, coming on at a swift trot, which grew faster as they moved—some fifty men or more to

each beam—when again Ovando gave the word to fire. The shots told. The leaders fell, the beams at the battering end plunged into the soil, other Indians following tumbled over their prostrate comrades, and the heavy timbers crashing on them mangled the fallen, and bruised and maimed the limbs of those who still clung to them.

“Ovando, what say you to a cavalry charge?” cried De Roldan. “We could hold ourselves in readiness to dash out when they make the next rush.”

“What say you, comrades?” said Ovando to us as we crowded round.

“Let us charge!”

“Then be it so!” answered our Captain, running down the steps, followed by all save Garabito, who, being wounded, was told to keep watch and tell us of the movements of the enemy. Then we ran to the horses, which were speedily harnessed for a battle-charge. We were ready and waiting when Garabito's voice was heard—

“They come!”

“Then draw the bolts, Del Benito,” shouted our leader, “and Careta, do you and your warriors, who have fought so splendidly, stay here and keep the gate, should any of the Indians pass us!”

The cacique of Chuchama nodded approval, and at that moment another cry came from Garabito—

“They are a hundred yards away!”

“Throw open the door!” came Ovando's cry, and when the Chuchamans did so the order followed—


“Charge!”

Spurring our horses almost needlessly, for they were eager for the fray, we rushed into the astonished mass of Indians, whose eyes had been turned upwards to the

tower, as if expecting and dreading another discharge of musketry. The stamping of our furious chargers, that seemed to fight as well as ourselves, the thrusts of the lances, the rattling of our corselets—it was like the sound and fury of an avalanche which was irresistible. And when the Indians saw us and our plunging steeds in their midst they turned with cries of terror and fled, leaving us victors.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN AN INDIAN PRISON.

WO hours later, when we had bathed our tired limbs and taken food, we sat down to rest, and after so much of battle it was inexpressibly welcome. But it was destined to be a rest of short duration, for Hurtado, who was at the porter's grating, came in to say that three Indians waited at the gate, desiring to see our leader.

"Admit them, Hurtado," was Ovando's response.

The gate swung open slowly and the three men entered, bearing with them as a peace-offering a curiously-wrought basket of gold and silver containing a dozen pearls of great beauty, and of marvellous richness alike in colour and lustre.

"It is a present fit for a king!" said Ovando, looking at the precious stones with astonishment. Then he asked of the Indians—

"What are these for?"

"Peace," was the answer.

"Peace? from whom?"

"Peace from the mighty chieftain, Zemaco."

"Go back and tell your master that we will only grant peace if he himself will come to us and ask for it. Bid him come without fear, for we will not harm him."

Laying the basket at Ovando's feet, the Indians went

away with downcast eyes and weary gait. We recognized them as three of the most fearless and untiring in the recent fight, and respected them for their splendid bravery.

"For, after all, comrades, they do but fight for their homes," said our leader, watching these men with their muscular frames and brave appearance admiringly. "What think you, Careta? Will Zemaco come?"

"I think not, Ovando," was the cacique's reply, which fitted in with each one's thoughts.

But to our surprise, not long after, Bilbao, who had relieved Hurtado at the gate, declared that Zemaco stood outside awaiting admittance, and almost alone, since he brought but three attendants with him.

The boldness of this chieftain bewildered us. He had attempted our lives and had led a great force against us, with the design of encompassing our destruction; yet now he had the effrontery to appear before us and, single-handed, sue for peace. So far Pizarro had kept his word in every particular, and doubtless Zemaco felt assured that his followers would do the same.

Without a shade of fear upon his face, graceful as a panther, with lean but steely muscles under his smooth, dark skin, and with eyes that seemed to take in every look upon our faces, he came forward with as much ease as if he were coming to a banquet, instead of approaching as a suppliant who had just been defeated with slaughter. As he entered he saluted the Spaniards who were present, but he turned and gazed on Careta with a malignant look.

"Zemaco, how dare you venture hither, into the very circle of your enemies?" exclaimed Ovando sternly.

"Because my enemies are Spaniards, and they keep their word," was the reply.

"But know you not that you sought to murder us?" said our leader severely.

"To murder you?" responded Zemaco with well-feigned surprise.

"Yes, by poison; and we call that murder," replied Ovando pointedly.

Whatever the cacique's face was as a general rule, it looked the very picture of injured innocence now.

"Cavalier, I know not what you mean!"

"You know not what I mean?" cried the Captain, astounded, like the rest of us, at this man's audacity. "You placed poison in every cup save one when you entertained us in the banquet-chamber, and when I myself changed the goblets, giving you mine, you drank and fell senseless—dead, as we thought—upon the floor! And yet you say that you did not mean to poison us!"

"Nor did I, Ovando. It chanced that as I drank an awful spasm of pain shot through me, and I fell as one dead; but I am often like that."

"Then why were we attacked in the night by the secret way? And why did you, this very day, lead your forces against us, besieging us in the very palace to which you had bidden us welcome? Zemaco, you are treacherous, and if you had your deserts you ought to be hanged at the gate, so that your Indian followers might know how the Spaniards punish treachery."

"He shall die when I meet the Inca," cried Careta, unable to control himself; but Zemaco looked at him contemptuously, notwithstanding the fact that the cacique of Chuchama was of higher rank than himself, and turned to Ovando.

"Peace, Spaniard, peace!" responded Zemaco, taking no heed of Careta's angry words, and undisturbed in spite

of all this evidence of treachery. "Of the night attack I know nothing. How could I, since I was so ill? Possibly my own people, seeing me senseless, and thinking that you had practised some foul play upon me, sought to have revenge, which I do not think is anything to wonder at. As for the attack this day, I did but obey the orders of my royal master, the Inca of Peru."

"Then what about our comrades, Zemaco?" cried Ovando angrily, and justly impatient at this long string of falsehoods. "They came through the mountain passes, and since you had professed friendship with our General, they ought to have been safe. But you took them prisoners and thrust them into a dark cell, manacled like murderers, and left them there for many a day to suffer a cruel death by slow starvation!"

"Cavalier!" cried Zemaco deprecatingly.

"Stay, cacique! Listen to what I have to say. They came back to seek for some of their missing comrades."

Still the same stolid look was upon the Indian's face, as though he was ready to brave out every accusation, owning to nothing that he could possibly deny, and offering a plausible excuse where denials were impossible. He looked around him, gazing into each face until his eyes fell upon Arbues, Garabito, and my comrade Pedro.

"Ah!" he exclaimed unguardedly, when he saw them, "then they are not dead!"

"No, Zemaco," cried Garabito, his hand fingering his dagger—a movement which, I noticed, was observed by the cacique, for his fortitude seemed to desert him, but only for a moment. Drawing himself to his full height, he spoke—

"Hear me! I thrust them into the dungeon by my royal master's command. The Inca's messengers passed them on the way, bringing me word that I should do thus

to them; and so I did, and otherwise I dared not do. But as for their missing comrades—I know nothing of them, so let us turn to the question which I have come to the palace of Tubanama to discuss.”

There was an insolent disdain in his reply which stirred the proud Spanish spirit in every one of us, and Arbues, unable to control himself, sprang to his feet menacingly.

“You lying dog!” he cried, “you know where our comrades are! I see it in your false face. We traced them back as far as this mountain palace, and you have either killed them or thrust them into another hole like that in which you placed me and my companions.” And turning to Ovando, and yet playing with his dagger, and his dark eyes flashing fire, while the hot blood mounted to his forehead, Arbues cried—

“Ovando, this scoundrel knows where they are, and I swear that if he does not tell me where they are to be found I will drive this dagger into his heart!” And stepping forward he flourished the keen blade so closely to the cacique, that the stolid Indian was moved to fear, and stepped back hastily as if to avoid the blow.

“Zemaco,” exclaimed Ovando, when the fiery Spaniard had returned to his seat at a sign from our leader, “what my comrade Arbues says I fully believe. You have lied so much, and proved so treacherous, that we do not believe your words. Send one of these men at once with orders to bring up your prisoners—our brothers in arms—or you yourself shall die!”

Zemaco, although greatly disturbed, and realizing that his excuses were not likely to avail him anything, still protested that he did not know of their whereabouts.

“How many were there?” he asked, turning to Arbues.

“You know as well as I,” was the Spanish hidalgo’s haughty reply. “Send for them, every one, at once!”

"I myself will go and seek them," the cacique responded, turning to go.

"No, Zemaco!" cried Antonio, springing to his feet, and drawing his sword with a gesture which showed the Indian that if he moved it would be at his peril.

"Del Benito is right," said Ovando. "You stir not from this place, cacique, until our missing comrades stand before us alive in this very room. Send a messenger for them instantly."

Whispering to one of his companions, Zemaco turned after some delay, and said—

"I knew not that they came hither, but my servant here tells me that three men came, and were placed in the chamber beneath the gate. They must be there even now, and he shall fetch them."

"There were five," cried Arbues. "Five, were there not, Garabito?"

"Yes, Arbues, five, and if this cacique produces less he shall feel the sharpness of my dagger."

The Indian did not reply, but sat down on one of the cushioned couches, indifferent as to any thoughts we had concerning him. As for the attendants, they turned and looked to him for instructions.

"Go, Tumaco, and find them," said Zemaco, signing to one of his companions.

"Shall I go with him, señor?" asked Antonio, turning to Ovando.

"Yes, Del Benito, and take two others with you, for I have no faith in these false-hearted men," responded our Captain. "Don Alonso, you look as though you would like to go. What, and you also, Don Pedro? Very well."

With this permission we followed Tumaco, who led the way to the great hall, now turned into a stable for Tristan and his companions.

"Remove those creatures," said the Indian sullenly; and, taking Tristan by his mane, and three other horses that were standing at the spot he indicated, we led them to another corner.

As soon as the chargers were removed the man stooped, and brushing away the rough grass that made a bed for them, he took hold of a copper ring which we had not noticed before. It was attached to a heavy stone which he, though stalwart and muscular, was scarcely able to move; but at last the steely muscles of his supple wrists and arms succeeded in raising it. As he suffered the slab to fall backward on the hall floor we looked down into darkness—how deep we knew not. Taking some lamps from the shelf close by, and trimming them with a deliberation that taxed our patience greatly, he gave one to each of us, and having a fourth himself, began to descend. Step by step we went down into the vault, where all sorts of noisome vermin crawled, and the very air seemed foul. Out of this horrible place there led a short passage, at the end of which was a door. Unbolting it Tumaco threw it open, and we followed as he entered. We had scarcely expected such a sight as that which our flaring lamps revealed. Side by side lay three captives, who were chained to the wall. They looked at us with eyes that were wild with despair, but which, even in the dim light of the lamps, were almost blinded after enduring such intense darkness for so many days.

"Comrades," cried Antonio, "we have come to set you free!"

"Ah, thank God! thank God! but you have come almost too late!"

Glancing around this fearful place my hair seemed to stand on end with horror, and I grasped Antonio's strong arm with a convulsion of fear. Three or four hideous-

looking skeletons lay on the floor, scarcely an arm's length from the imprisoned Spaniards. They were doubtless the remains of poor creatures who had died a lingering death in this awful darkness, with nothing to relieve the terrors or to stay the pangs of thirst and hunger. Stooping to look into the prisoners' faces, his own countenance filled with an infinite pity and concern, Del Benito sought to discover who they were.

"Blas de Etienza, Hernando Colmenares, and Bartolome Valdivia. Only three! Where are the others, Tumaco?" he cried savagely, and laying a heavy hand on the Indian's shoulder.

"I know not, señor," exclaimed the man, terrified at the fierce anger which he saw in the Spaniard's face.

"Loose them instantly!" said Antonio, and drawing a key from his bosom, the Indian unlocked the fetters and set the poor captives free. But they were too weak to stand unaided—weaker far than Pedro and his companions were, for they had been so much longer without food. Stooping down, Antonio placed his strong arms around Etienza and stood him on his feet; then did the same for each of the others.

"Can you manage to walk with help, friends? If not, we will carry you."

But even as he spoke they tottered, and would have fallen had we not held them; then we suffered them to slip back gently to the floor.

"Run, Don Alonso, and ask the Captain to send two or three strong ones to lend their aid, and tell him these poor brothers of ours will require food."

Snatching up my lamp from the floor, I dashed along the passage, across the outer chamber, and up the steps, rushing into the presence of the cavaliers, and crying as I entered—

“Send three strong men to help our comrades, and get them food in readiness!”

Then turning back again, followed by the half of those in waiting, I hurried across the hall and back to the prison cell. Astounded at what they saw, the new-comers stooped, and lifting the emaciated Spaniards in their arms, carried them—as a mother would her child—up into the daylight again, and into the presence of the cacique Zemaco. There the rescued ones were slowly fed with nourishing food—the first that had passed their lips for many a weary day.

When this was done Ovando suffered the released captives to speak, for he would not hear them until they had eaten. Stimulated with the light and food, they looked around them with an expression of unspeakable gladness in their faces.

“The blessed light! the infinite goodness of God in sending deliverance!” exclaimed one of them, clasping his thin hands in the attitude of prayer; and none of us who stood around could speak, so great was our emotion, so glad at heart were we, so thankful to think that we had not ignorantly left our brethren to die.

But Garabito spoke at last. He had cast angry glances at Zemaco, and refused any longer to keep silence.

“Ovando, there were five; but here are only three!” he cried. “Zemaco, where are the other two?”

“I know not,” was the cold rejoinder. “I only know of three.”

“He lies, my brothers!” said Bartolome Valdivia, with such strength as he could command. “He lies; for he himself condemned us all, and separated us from our companions! Was it not so, Colmenares? Was it not so, Etienza?”

“It was!” they answered who were thus appealed to.

Finding evasion no longer possible, Zemaco called Tumaco to his side and spoke to him. Then he, with the other two Indian attendants, left the chamber, closely followed by Antonio, Hurtado, and Bobadillo. Before long the missing ones were brought forth and fed, and tended with equal joy, and cheered with equal sympathy.

"Now, comrades," said Ovando sternly, when the wants of the released captives had been supplied, "what shall we do with this treacherous cacique?"

"Thrust him into the same dungeon, he and his companions, and judge him to-morrow, when he has had a taste of the horrors of an Indian prison," cried Arbues.


"You had far better slay him at once, and toss his body out for the vultures to feed upon, for otherwise he will escape you," exclaimed Careta, who had so far listened in angry silence.

"We will imprison him, Careta, so that he shall not escape us," was the stern rejoinder; and laying strong hands upon Zemaco and the others, the Spaniards thrust them into the cold, noisome, darkened chamber, where so many horrors lingered. Closing the door upon them and barring it securely, we turned and left them, spending the remainder of the day in hearing the pitiful story of our rescued countrymen.

The night passed by in undisturbed rest, and morning broke in upon us, finding us ready to consider what punishment should be meted out to the treacherous chieftain. But when Antonio and his three companions entered the chamber into which we expected them to bring the prisoners, they communicated the startling news that Zemaco and his attendants were gone, and that the prison cell was empty!

CHAPTER XIX.

A LETTER FROM ABIBEYBA.

E lingered several days at the palace of Tubanama, to enable our weakened comrades to recover their strength, seeing that our journey across the mountains was far beyond their powers in their present condition.

The time passed pleasantly enough, and no further attack was made upon us by the Indians, although Zemaco was at large. Twice a day a mounted party of six or eight of our number rode down into the valley, visiting the villages and hamlets on the way, to discover whether any attack was threatening, and also to gather in supplies of fresh food, alike for ourselves and our horses. But it was not all stern business. There were pleasures for us also; and often did Fulvia and I, accompanied by her father's warriors, go abroad on short pleasure excursions.

At first the toilers in the fields fled at our approach, but seeing that the horsemen did them no harm, and that we merely sought for provisions; and also that we had a cacique of Careta's rank with us, they were induced to carry up provender to the palace, and many a dainty that added to the comfort of our companions, whom starvation had brought very low. Having mastered some words of the native language, we entered into conversation with

the peasants, and found that the majority of the people groaned under the exactions that were made upon them by caciques like Zemaco. There was oppression here, and indeed everywhere in Peru, for according to the laws of the land, the people possessed nothing, their time being their own only so far as was necessary to cultivate the small plots of land which were allotted to them by the officers of the Inca.

And yet there was one thing which was in happy contrast with what could be seen any day in Spain, and Fulvia, much as she liked my native land, could not refrain from drawing the comparison. There was no poverty in the sense that any poor creature was starving. Every person in the country had so much ground parcelled out to him, and so much also for his wife, and every child—enough at least to provide the bare necessities of life—whereas in Spain the streets were beset with beggars who clamoured for bread, and often lay down to die of sheer starvation.

On the day of his marriage a man received his wife's share of land, a fanega and a half, which was as much as would suffer a hundredweight of Indian corn to be sown. For every child that was born an additional grant of land was made, of the same size if the child were a boy, and half that quantity if a girl. But this, even in such a fertile soil, left nothing for the cultivation of luxuries. The plot produced just enough to keep body and soul together, and no more. All the wealth of the country—the gold, the silver, the fruits, and the ten thousand luxuries that were to be found in profusion, went to the Inca or the priests. As for the nobility—the caciques, and others who were in attendance on the sovereign—they received great gifts of land and gold from the Inca, and thus lived in

magnificent state, calling on the peasants to do all their work for them free of charge, in addition to what was demanded of them from the monarch.

This, indeed, was something remarkable in our estimation. A man of the lower orders—that is to say, one who was not a noble or an officer of state—was rarely master of his own time. For a certain period, even before they did a stroke of work for themselves, the people went to the great tracts of land that had been set apart as belonging to the Sun and cultivated that. They were then obliged to return to their villages and till the soil of those who had grown too old to work, or of the widows and orphans, or of the sick and helpless in their neighbourhood—all free of charge. When that had been done, and not before, a man might look after his own piece of land, at which he had to toil hard in order to produce enough to live. The old saying was never truer than in Peru, "If any would not work, neither should he eat," and the work was hard at the best of times, considering the many demands upon the peasant for the benefit of others.

It touched my heart to see the weary look upon these people's faces, toiling in the blazing sunshine, never knowing what it was to taste the fruit they had to cultivate, or sit and enjoy an hour of quiet rest. Life was one long-continued grind, an overseer standing by them while they wrought for the priests or nobles, and starvation staring them in the face if they did not work for themselves, so that they dared not be idle.

While we were lingering at Tubanama, and Fulvia and her father were absent in a neighbouring village, the *Fête of the Inca* took place. We were just awakening after a night's sound sleep when a mighty trumpet-blast went ringing and echoing up the valley. Dressing hastily,

and fearing that it meant attack, we hurried to the gateway and looked abroad. At that moment a native whom we knew passed by and gave us greeting.

“Halt, Ponca, and tell us what that trumpet means,” cried Arbues.

“It is the call to the Inca’s Fête, señor,” was the man’s response.

“And what may that mean?”

“That every Peruvian in the valley and on the heights must go forth and cultivate the Inca’s land, señor.” And the man went on quickly, fearing to be late.

It was to us an unusual sight, for the like of this was never known in our own land. Just as our own people sallied forth in Spain for some great festival—for a bull-fight, or a fair—clad in their holiday attire, and singing gaily the songs of Spain, so did these Peruvians make holiday of the season when they went to work upon the Inca’s land. We could see them—men and women, and even tiny children—streaming out of their little huts, and passing down the hill-sides to the most fertile stretches in the valley. They were dressed in the best they had, and bedecked with gaudy ornaments, which they had managed with much scraping to buy of the pedlars that came from the large towns. As they went they sang, and when at last the various little companies met, the burst of music from so many throats floated in the air, falling on our ears as we stood looking on the pleasant scene. What the songs were we did not know until Ponca returned at sunset, and then he told us that they recounted the heroic deeds of the living Inca, and of royal warriors long since dead.

“And do you love these days of festival, Ponca?” I asked, for the man’s face looked anything but joyous.

"Alas! no, señor," he answered sadly.

"And yet you sing, for we heard the songs."

"Ah, master, if we did not sing the whip would curl about our flesh, leaving pain upon our bodies, and striking deeper still into our souls. We do not sing from choice. We work too hard for that!"

And the man walked on to his little hut, wearily and dejected.

"If you should conquer this land, Alonso," said Fulvia, who had just returned, and was standing at my side, "I trust that your countrymen will make the lot of the people an easier one than it is now under the Inca's rule." And her sweet face was full of sympathy.

One morning there came a messenger from an Inca noble, or Orejon, as he was called, being a near kinsman of the monarch. He was named Abibeyba, and ruled the district through which we should have to pass on our way to join Pizarro. When questioned, the Indian said that he bore a letter from his chieftain, which he besought Ovando to read. With this he handed the Captain a cord about two feet long, composed of threads of different colours, tightly twisted together, and with a number of smaller threads suspended from it in the manner of a fringe.

"What is this, my friend?" asked Ovando, turning the cord over and over in his hands, and looking at it with much astonishment.

"It is the guipu, señor—the letter which my master Abibeyba sends, and to which he desires an answer."

It was our first acquaintance with a Peruvian letter, and not one of us could interpret the meaning of this knotted cord. Had Careta been at hand he would have explained it, but he and Fulvia had gone that day to a distant village, and would not be back for some hours.

“We do not know what this means, friend,” said Ovando at last, after it had passed from hand to hand throughout our company. “Can you interpret it?”

The man shook his head, declaring that he could not read.

“Then since you cannot read, nor any of us here, I fear you must return to your master and ask him to send us a message by word of mouth,” responded Ovando, returning the guipu to the Indian.

The man took it, and holding it listlessly, stood by a while absorbed in thought. At last his face brightened.

“Señor, suffer me to depart a while, and I will go to yonder village”—pointing to a large one three miles away—“where I shall find an officer of the Knots, who will tell you the meaning of the letter. May I go?”

“Go, and return with all speed,” answered our leader; and the Indian, placing the guipu in the Captain’s hand, darted off in the direction he had indicated. We saw him running onwards, scaling precipices, racing through the valley and up the hill-side, his bare, brown limbs seeming to make light of every obstacle; and then he passed out of sight. Before long he reappeared, and this time accompanied by another man, clothed in the official dress of a village magistrate. In spite of the impatience of Abibeyba’s messenger the curaca would not hurry. Doubtless he deemed haste to be derogatory to his dignity; but after a while the journey was over and the two men stood before us.

“What would the Spaniards have me do?” said the curaca with much ceremony.

“We would have you read this letter to us,” answered Ovando.

Taking the guipu into his hands the officer of the Knots looked at it with much attention, taking up each

separate thread and counting the tiny knots with care. At last, glancing around him as if to command attention, and evidently considering himself an individual of much importance, he began to speak in language which, by now, we each one understood.

“Spaniards, the Orejon Abibeyba sends to you greeting thus:—

“Spaniards,

“Your countrymen have passed through my lands, serving us with justice and showing no enmity. Your General has bidden me be kind to you and further your cause, and I would fain respond. Come! you shall find food and shelter. You shall have rest. You shall pass through my lands without molestation, and go forward to your great General in safety. I have five horses here, which must belong to some of your people. I will keep them for you.

“I give you greeting, and also the cacique of Chuchama, who is with you. I bid him welcome.

“ABIBEYBA.’”

When the curaca had ended his reading of this strange epistle—if such it might be termed—he handed it back to Ovando, who thanked him in courteous terms.

“Shall I send an answer to the Orejon?” he said presently.

“Yes, friend, say thus to him:—

“The Spaniards at Tubanama send you greeting. They will come to you shortly, and thank you with their own lips for your offer of hospitality. The horses belong to them.

“OVANDO, Captain.’”

With dexterous fingers the curaca untied the knots which Abibeyba's officer had tied, and knotted up the cords in such a way as to convey the message which Ovando had dictated. Then receiving a small gift of beads he went back to his village, feeling himself more than repaid for his trouble.

The thought of regaining their horses had a wonderful effect on the released cavaliers, who had given them up for lost; and in a day or two they were impatient to be gone. Consequently we considered what should be done with the immense treasure which had fallen to our lot by right of conquest, as I might put it. For had we not been molested we should have done as we had done before at other halting-places—suffered the valuables there to remain untouched for the General to deal with at his discretion. But here we were in jeopardy, and considered what was in the palace as our rightful spoil.

We were now sixteen in number, and although many of our companions had done nothing towards obtaining it, it was considered just that they should share it, since they, like ourselves, had been in such peril on this very spot. The spoil was great enough to render us willing to divide it into sixteen parts, and this Ovando did in the presence of every one of us. Whenever anything came before us that was costly, and yet could not be divided without ruining it, its value was appraised by general vote, lots were drawn, and the ownership decided.

Noble and man-at-arms shared alike, for our perils had been so great that a spirit of brotherhood had dispelled everything that suggested inferiority; so that Hurtado, Bilbao, and Antonio took equal shares with the proudest hidalgo of our company.

Then came the question as to what should be done with the treasure which, added to what we already

possessed, was sufficient now to make each one of us wealthy—enough to cause many to envy us had they known. It was agreed to bury it, and this we did in the garden from whence we had espied the army of Zemaco. To mark the burial-place, and also to erect some token of our gratitude to God for our wonderful preservation in the midst of so many dangers, Ovando caused a tall tree to be cut down and wrought into a cross; and this was elevated on the spot beneath which our treasures were deposited.

Calling in the aid of the natives of the hamlets round about, we raised a huge mound of granite boulders outside the palace gates, and made it serve as a monument of our struggle there. Not only so, but on the trees around we carved the name of the Spanish king, in token that henceforth this palace and all the country round belonged to Spain.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE WAY TO QUARAGUA.

NEXT morning Bobadillo, who was formally appointed trumpeter to our company, sounded the trumpet, and the loud blast went ringing on and on along the valley, echoing from hill to hill, and causing the natives to come out and watch our departure. The march before us was a hard one, but friends at our journey's end were anxiously awaiting us, so that we left the scene of such desperate peril to us all, and of so much suffering to the half of our party, without a regret. Indeed, we were glad to get away; and, but for the treasure we left behind, should have been well content never to see the palace of Tubanama again.

But the gladness was only on our side, for the curacas of the neighbouring villages entreated us to delay our departure.

“Stay with us, cavaliers. When you are gone our misery will begin again, for Zemaco will sweep down and punish us with many stripes for having supplied you with food.”

Such was the burden of their cry, but we could not yield to it. Pizarro expected us, and was doubtless anxious for our coming. For in a land where two hundred men were attempting to effect a conquest, which the Inca could resist with an army, it was said,

of two hundred thousand men, and even more, every hand was needed; and none could tell how soon the desperate struggle might begin. The fear was lest we might even now be too late to render any help; and in that case our own fate would be assured.

At last we started from Tubanama, the strongest of our party doing the journey on foot, and the weakest riding the horses, which were full of life and ready for anything in the way of toil.

Biru, the curaca who had read the letter for us from Abibeyba, stood at Ovando's side, and pointed out the way he had seen Pizarro take. It stretched on towards the east, mountain beyond mountain marking the pathway; and beyond them, he said, we should find inexhaustible riches.

"But stay with us, chieftain," he added with an imploring gesture.

"I dare not, Biru. Pizarro needs us, and we must go. If Zemaco does you injury we will requite him when we return! Farewell."

At first the journey lay up the valley, which was rich and beautiful. Here and there we saw dense forests, for in those regions of heat and moisture Nature revelled in building up great trees, and vegetation appeared in its utmost magnificence. Beautiful as we thought Spain to be, there was much here to call forth admiration and make us deem the conquest desirable, apart from its gold and precious stones.

"Would you like life in Spain, Fulvia, seeing that there is so much beauty in your native land?" I said one afternoon.

"Yes, Alonso, for I should have you there," she answered, giving me a look that everyone in the company would have envied could they have seen it.

But in time the valley ended, and our mountain travel began again. Once we came upon a little body of Indians, armed with bows and arrows and war-clubs, preparing to give us a warm reception; but at the first plunge of our horses and the report of our muskets they turned and fled with screams of fear, throwing down their weapons as they ran.

One day we entered a deep gorge, so narrow and dangerous that we might easily have been cut off by a small but resolute force of Indians, had the leader but laid a skilful ambush among those passes of the Andes. If Zemaco chose, now was the time, and this the place, for exercising his fierce energies and satisfying his implacable hatred. Half a league farther on we expected to find a caravansary, in which defence would be possible; but here, shut in on either hand, we felt our utter helplessness. It was, therefore, our great desire to push on and reach this place of refuge before any attack should be made upon us. Whilst so doing, alert for every sight and sound, I espied an Indian on a jutting crag.

“See, Ovando!” I cried, and at the same moment pointing to the dusky form that stood out bold and distinct against the sky—“an Indian!”

Without a word Antonio, walking at my side—for we dared not ride on the treacherous rocks—raised his musket and fired. The ball struck the man, causing him to leap upwards convulsively; then falling on the narrow platform he rolled over the edge, sheer down the precipice, crashing at last upon the rocks not far away from where we stood. Seeing that he was dead we hurried on, since Ovando realized that the presence of this spy implied that we were in danger of attack.

A sudden turn in the gorge gave us a view of a caravansary, similar to many another that we had met with

on our way; but while we were glad to see it, we discovered at the same moment that we were likely to have a fierce fight before we could effect an entrance. Between us and this grateful shelter we saw a body of troops, some four or five hundred in number, drawn up on a plain half a mile away.

Meanwhile, Antonio, Bobadillo, and Etienza had climbed up a broken pathway so as to obtain an idea, if possible, of the chances of avoiding the steep path such as lay before us, in order to reach the level, open ground. They, too, had caught sight of the body of Indians, who looked as though they were preparing for a dash upon our little band. With our attention somewhat divided, wondering whether our comrades had found out anything of service to us, and preparing to receive the Indians in their onslaught, we were likely to come into no small trouble; but a minute or two later Antonio came dashing down the rocky path, and pausing when within speaking distance, cried out—

“Captain, send three or four strong men, and meanwhile fall back a hundred yards. When the Indians make their rush a few of us can hurl huge stones upon them, which have evidently been set there for the purpose of saving the pass.”

Without waiting to say more he hurried back again, slipping and scrambling among the rocks, and presently stood clear and bold against the sky, and at the side of his companions.

“Who will join them?” cried Ovando.

“I,” came from a dozen throats, and without waiting for permission Colmenares, Valdivia, and Bilbao, each of them fleet of foot and of herculean strength, dashed after Del Benito. Calling the others back who had essayed to follow, Ovando gave the word for a quick retreat, and

going back a hundred yards, or thereabouts, we mounted our horses, and stood in battle array, ready to receive the Indians when they made their charge, if Antonio's company did not check their progress. While we waited thus Careta sent forward a score of his warriors, so that they—used as they were to mountain fighting—might the more readily ensure disaster to the attacking force. They formed a welcome reinforcement to our comrades on the heights, and having no great love for Zemaco were ready for the fight.

Before long we could hear the Indians shouting their war-cry as they came, but suddenly there was a pause in their advance, and then a yell of disappointment, since we were not at the spot where their spies had declared that we were stationed. The halt, however, was only momentary, and they advanced again until they were fairly in the gorge, where they caught sight of us. On and on they came with defiant shouts, and even shooting their arrows at us, although they were as yet far out of range.

While face to face with conflict and even with death, I could not help looking around on my companions with pride, by reason of their martial display. They seemed not to reckon of odds, and battle was a welcome thing to them. As for Ovando, he was an ideal cavalier—a bold and graceful horseman, an excellent foot-soldier, dexterous with every sort of weapon—a born warrior, noted for his strength and agility. If any man could lead us through a fight this was he, who, mounted on his war-horse, and armed with lance and target, now waited for the moment of conflict. But from him my thoughts returned to Fulvia, my promised bride, for whose sake and in whose sight I was ready to brave all things, and even die if that would serve her.

“Now is the time,” Ovando shouted at last, and putting

the trumpet to his lips he blew a loud blast to warn Antonio, and indicate as well that we were ready.

Suddenly we heard a thundering sound as of an avalanche, and saw a shower of huge stones leaping down the sides of the gorge upon our astonished foes. They crashed into their midst, laying the Indian warriors low, maiming, bruising, and slaying scores, and throwing the whole body into inextricable panic and confusion.

"You are agile, Don Alonso," cried Ovando at last. "Run and tell the brave Del Benito to cease his volley the moment I sound the trumpet, for here where the grass is growing is the place for a charge!"

Quickly as my feet could carry me I dashed up the rocky steep, slipping on hands and knees, as I clambered from spot to spot, heedless of the bruises which I met with by the way, until I stood at Antonio's side and gave my message. Scarcely had I done so when the trumpet pealed, and the heavy thud of horses' hoofs was heard in the gorge.

Great as the panic was before, now confusion became worse confounded, as the little band of Spanish horsemen, followed by Careta and his warriors on foot, dashed into the frightened mass of the enemy, some of whom were transfixed with lances, and others killed with the great battle-axes. The fight was short and the victory complete. While we watched from the rocky platform on which we stood, we saw our companions ride up the hill after the fugitive Peruvians, and they halted not until they drew up outside the caravansary. The gate was open and the hall deserted, save for a few women who crouched in terror before the Spaniards when they rode their horses in. A quarter of an hour later we, who had been left behind, arrived breathless, but rejoicing at the victory that had been so splendidly won.

CHAPTER XXI.

ABIBEYBA.

THE daylight faded away after a while, and satisfied that there were no enemies within the gates, save these frightened women, who, however, waited on us with alacrity when they discovered that the Spaniards would do them no harm, we lay down to rest, the sentries being on guard to give warning of any treachery or night attack. But the night passed without alarm, and the morning broke upon us in all its glory.

Two hours before noon Bilbao, who watched upon the gate, cried out that a body of Indians, some fifty strong, was approaching along the eastern road, flying a banner of peace.

“Which may mean treachery, comrades,” said Ovando, calling us together, “so let us be prepared for them.”

When the Indians came within two hundred yards and saw the Spanish banner floating on the tower, they halted, and a little later four of their number, bearing in their hands some baskets, approached with every token of friendship.

“Go forth and question them as to their errand, Arbues, and you also, De Roldan. Take Don Alonso with you,” Ovando added.

Mounting our horses we cantered across the grassy plain, while the four messengers and their countrymen who halted behind them watched with amazement the splendid spirit

which our chargers displayed, as we bore down on them. When we drew nearer we saw that the Indians' faces were full of fear, and that they were more ready to turn and fly than await our coming. Falling on their knees they held up their baskets in the right hand, as if desirous of propitiating us. At the same moment they flung away their weapons to show that their mission was a peaceful one.

"What is your errand?" cried Arbues, as, at a word from him, we drew up our horses almost upon their haunches, greatly to the relief of the messengers, who, seeing us approaching with such speed and coming so closely to them, had given themselves up for lost.

"We come from the Orejon Abibeyba, who is in the company behind us, bearing his gifts and desiring your friendship," was the response. With these words the Indians set down the baskets, while, still kneeling, they watched our faces with eyes that showed a deep anxiety as to the sort of reception their chieftain was likely to receive.

"Go back to your master and bid him approach without a fear. Our Captain will be pleased to meet him," answered Arbues, after a moment's consultation with De Roldan; and while the messengers rose to their feet and returned with swift strides to their great chief, the cavalier bade me ride back and tell the Captain what the Indians had said.

"That is well," exclaimed Ovando when he heard my message. "Still, comrades, it will serve us best to be on our guard. We do not know this Abibeyba, and he may be but another Zemaco." And calling Colmenares and three others, with myself, to follow him, he rode out slowly to meet the Peruvian. Presently we saw the chief approaching somewhat in advance of his warriors, and coming nearer we were able to distinguish not merely his general appearance but his countenance.

A few minutes later we were face to face with Abibeyba, who gravely saluted us and bade us welcome into his territories. The salute was returned with all the ceremony of Spanish chivalry, and then Ovando, moving a few paces forward, held a short palaver with this high-placed noble, in whose veins there ran the blood of many a generation of Incas.

The conversation, conducted thus apart, gave us an opportunity of observing the Orejon, who had not merely sent us a friendly message, but had likewise come to meet us, so as to assure us of a safe passage through the lands over which he ruled as viceroy. There was something almost kingly about him, quite apart from his apparel. He approached on foot, having alighted from the litter in which he had been borne throughout his journey, and holding his head at its full height seemed to scorn the thought of showing anything in the way of fear, in spite of the marvellous prowess of the Spaniards against overwhelming odds.

He was truly a splendid man, stalwart and muscular, bearing himself not merely with a royal air, but also with a fearlessness of danger, which had been cultivated and encouraged by his hard discipline and trying ordeals while a novice in the School of the Orejons at Cuzco. His own fine figure was set off by the splendour of his dress. In his ears were rings of gold of marvellous size, of exquisite workmanship, and of almost priceless value, for the precious stones in them blazed in the sunshine and flashed at every movement. His garment, drawn in at the waist with a girdle glittering with gold and emeralds, was spotlessly white. No less costly were his sandals. On his head he wore a circlet of gold, richly chased and set with pearls, indicating his royal rank and his close relationship with the Inca. But most gorgeous of all this barbaric splendour

was the golden badge upon his breast, which was almost blinding as the sun—which it represented—fell on it.

The interview was not a long one, for in a little while Ovando, calling on us to advance, rode onward, side by side with Abibeyba, who turned and walked back to where his warriors awaited him. As the Orejon stepped into his litter he gravely saluted us, and the Indians moved across the green-sward towards their home, and before long passed out of sight.

Next morning, as Ovando led us to expect, a company of some three hundred warriors, armed with bows and arrows, partisans and slings, and moving with every evidence of discipline and warlike courage, came to the caravansary to conduct us to the Castle of Quaragua, which was one of Abibeyba's strongholds. But to our surprise as they approached we saw in their company two horsemen and five horses, led by as many Indians, these animals being the chargers which belonged to Etienza and his fellow-prisoners, and of which Abibeyba had spoken in his letter.

But who were these cavaliers? Were they prisoners, to be held as hostages? And were these Peruvian warriors after all approaching with sinister intent, in spite of their master's friendly protestations the day before? We had found Zemaco so perfidious, so smooth-tongued, and yet so cruel and treacherous, that we were full of doubt. But the doubts were not of long duration, for presently the dense column of Peruvians divided, and the two Spaniards galloped towards us, followed, as quickly as the swift-footed Indians who led them could run, by the horses that had been lost by our comrades. Eager to obtain their old friends—for the Spanish cavalier always treated his war-horse as something nearly akin to human—Etienza and the other dismounted cavaliers ran forth to claim the chargers from whom they had been so

long separated. The horses, as they recognized the voices of their masters, could scarcely stand still while the cavaliers mounted them, and then pranced about with wildness and for very pleasure at being in their owners' hands again. Fulvia, usually so self-controlled, clapped her hands when she witnessed the delight which the faithful animals displayed, and even the grim-visaged Careta smiled.

There was soon no need to ask who the cavaliers were, for before Etienza and his companions reached their steeds, our countrymen had approached so near as to be recognized. One was Gonzalo de Navarrete, a famous knight of Aragon, and one of Cortez's companions in the famous conquest of Mexico, while the other was Don Pascual de Muñoz, no less renowned for his prowess in the wars of Granada. As we gathered round them we cheered again and again, and so keen was our delight at seeing the faces of our comrades, and at the prospect of hearing how our countrymen fared who had gone before us into this marvellous empire, that, precious as our ammunition was, we fired a volley as an expression of our joy. The startling sound, coming on the ears of the warriors of Peru so unexpectedly, filled them with alarm. They wavered for a while, as if they meditated flight, but seeing that we did not advance to molest them, they regained their equanimity and came forward with a studied unconcern.

"What want you in this direction, señors?" cried Ovando, as soon as the commotion had somewhat subsided.

"We want our comrades, Ovando," answered Navarrete, his face beaming with satisfaction as he looked around. "The General was anxious at the lack of news, and feared that you had come to some harm, in which case not only yourselves, but the whole expedition, would have suffered greatly. He sent us back to get some news concerning you, and if we found you well to bid you hurry on, while

we were then to journey to the coast and see whether any reinforcements had arrived."

De Muñoz, when his companion had ended, added, with a ring of pleasure in his voice,—“And Pizarro will be proud and fortunate to have such a welcome addition to his force when he sees this gallant band.”

“And prouder still,” cried Etienza, “when De Muñoz and Navarrete return.”

There was some clever, good-natured banter after this, and an hour or two of pleasant intercourse, during which the news from the main army was told, while we recounted our startling adventures.

“We must be going now,” said Navarrete, at the hour of noon. “If I remember aright the gorge yonder is a difficult one, and however hard we travel we shall barely reach the open ground by sunset.”

A short delay occurred while the officer in charge of Abibeyba's troops divided his company into two parties, reserving one half as a guard of honour for ourselves, and the other as an escort for Pizarro's messengers on their way to the coast, so as to secure them from the mischievous interference of the treacherous Zemaco.

“Adios, my countrymen,” cried they, as having mounted their chargers they commenced their journey. Little did we know, however, that we looked upon them for the last time, and that the brave-hearted warriors were doomed to die. But for us also there were some terrible experiences in store, and the wonder was that any of us should remain alive to tell our story.

Waiting until our friends had passed down the hill and disappeared in the gorge, where we had encountered so much peril, we sprang into our saddles and, accompanied by the Peruvians, turned our horses' heads towards the place where Pizarro lay encamped.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT QUARAGUA.

THE fortress in which Abibeyba dwelt lay some four leagues distant, and completely away from the road alongside of which the caravansaries were built. But the journey—in spite of the sun that was blazing down upon us, trying the horses and exhausting us beneath the weight of our helmets and armour—was full of interest. The officer in charge of the escort, seeing that we suffered from the heat, called a few of his warriors to his side, and they, having received instructions, ran across the open country and disappeared into the forest. They were not gone long before they returned, bearing in their hands some cool-looking head-coverings, which they had prepared by plaiting light branches covered with leaves. Slinging our steel helmets on the saddles, we wore these improvised ones, and they proved wonderfully pleasant and cool. But not only so; the men flung light leaf-coverings over the horses' heads, so that the poor creatures took the rest of the journey in much greater comfort.

After a while our course led through a vast forest, where we saw much that surprised us. All around, trees of gigantic growth stood up proudly, and sent their branches in all directions, making it impossible for us to ride. Dismounting, we led our horses, and trod a pathway that

at times was full of difficulty. The woody and twisted stems of great creeping plants crossed the way continually. In some places many of them united together to make huge, cable-like obstructions, which, to afford room for our horses, the Indians had to cut away with their axes, since they sometimes ran across from tree to tree, waist and even shoulder high.

But when the forest ended there opened out before us a level, upland valley, fourteen to twenty miles in width, through which a broad and glittering river slowly wound its way. The valley itself, which was covered with grass that waved in the gentle breeze floating down it, was a rich feeding-ground for countless flocks of llamas, the possession of which went far to determine the extent of a Peruvian noble's wealth.

Away to our right was a beautiful expanse of meadow, fresh and green as the best cultivated fields in Spain. At the border of this meadow-land rose a smooth-faced cliff, commanding a view of the country round for many a league, and surmounted by a huge fortress stronger and more commanding than anything of the same nature we had yet set eyes on. The gates, fashioned out of copper from the mines hard by, blazed in the glowing sun and added a splendour to the place. Cliffs and precipices lent it every advantage, while the massive walls of the castle rose from the very edge of the rock, full thirty feet, with scarcely a sign as to how the giant blocks were fitted into their places, so wonderful was the workmanship of the builders who had wrought upon this mighty stronghold. We had seen nothing like it in our journeyings in the New World. Unless the powerful cannon of Spain could be brought against it, it was absolutely impregnable, for the most destructive implements of warfare which the

Peruvians possessed were puny things with which to assail a place like this.

“Give us this castle of Quaragua, Ovando, and plenty of provisions, and a handful of Spaniards would hold it against the Inca and his two hundred thousand warriors!” exclaimed Etienza, looking at the fortress with admiration.

“True, Etienza; and had Abibeyba chosen, he could have caused those gates to clash together in our very faces and bid us do our worst, in spite of all our Spanish chivalry,” responded the leader of our party. “Nothing but dauntless courage could carry us through in such a case as that.”

“And that carries a Spaniard through everything,” said Careta, who was near at hand.

There was a brief halt, sufficient only for the cavaliers to express their admiration at the skill with which the Peruvians had utilised the natural advantages which this great cliff afforded, and then we moved on again.

The road to the gates was so steep and winding that we had to dismount and lead the horses by their bridles, and as we drew nearer we saw how absolutely we were at the mercy of Abibeyba or any other chieftain who should chance to be in command. Huge blocks of stone were in position, only waiting the movement of the great timber levers to be hurled down the decline with crushing force. Valour would have availed us nothing, for had the Orejon chosen to exercise his power, the enormous masses would have rolled down upon us, sweeping horses and cavaliers alike out of the road and out of life. The outcome of the startling events that followed plainly showed an error of judgment on the part of the chieftain whose hospitality we were about to partake of.

While these thoughts of our possible peril passed

through our minds, the great gates rolled open and the Orejon came forth, accompanied by a number of servants, all of whom were unarmed, so as to remove from our minds any feeling of doubt as to the reality of the welcome. With Abibeyba also walked a youth about sixteen years of age, and with a bearing so exactly like that of the Inca chieftain as to leave little doubt that the two were father and son. He was dressed, like his father, in a full suit of Indian armour, a helmet of gold upon his head, a breastplate of polished copper, set off with bars of gold and silver, shielding his body, and capable of warding off the poison-tipped arrows that might be shot at him in time of battle. But he was not yet old enough to be more than a novitiate, and therefore had not the blazing sun of gold upon his breast, which would indicate his royal rank.

To me, as he approached with his feet shod in golden sandals, he looked the very image of a youthful warrior, capable of wielding his weapons with force and skill, although so young. About his neck he wore a string of beads, alternately of gold and copper, the golden portions being long bugles worked out of the precious metal. On his arms and legs were rings of silver, and the handle of the heavy spear which he carried was inlaid with silver also.

But I liked his face, apart from his costly adornments, which in themselves, bedecked as he was with jewels of surpassing value, were fully worth a Spanish knight's ransom. For an Indian he was fair in complexion, as was Abibeyba. His hair was a dark brown, his eyes were blue, and his lips parted with a kindly smile, displaying a set of beautifully white teeth. Indeed he was—take him as he stood there at his father's side, astonished at the unwonted sight of so many Spanish cavaliers and horses

—a youth with beauty such as might have made many a woman envious.

Yet one could quite understand that he was capable of fighting his country's battles, and later in the day I discovered that he had done so. For, as his father once lay on the field, desperately wounded during an encounter with some Indian rebels, he had rallied the forces that prepared to fly when they thought their chieftain dead, and so had turned probable defeat into splendid victory.

While I was thus attracted to this young cacique, he and his father had been approaching us on foot, several Indian girls preceding them, bearing in their hands goblets of deliciously-cool water, which, with pleasant gestures and many smiles, they invited us to drink—after first tasting it themselves, so as to assure us that we might do so without any fear of poison.

“Welcome, Spaniards! and you also Careta, and your charming daughter Fulvia!” said Abibeyba with quiet dignity as he approached, after we had emptied the goblets. “I bring my only son, Taxmar, with me, so that he may look upon the faces of the white men from beyond the sea. Unfortunately your great General took the Inca's road, and did not pass this way, so that my boy did not see them in their warlike array.”

A few moments later Abibeyba journeyed back to the castle, walking side by side with Ovando; for we had all dismounted long before we caught sight of the Indian prince. As if by a natural impulse, Taxmar—passing by the older cavaliers, merely glancing at their horses and accoutrements, but giving a friendly smile to Fulvia, who drew back the curtains of her litter—came to my side and greeted me.

“The white warriors' horses are unspeakably beautiful,” he remarked, when he had stroked Tristan, marvelling at

his smooth and glossy coat, although starting back with a slight cry of alarm when my charger pranced and reared, as if proud to show off before a princely stranger.

"Do not fear, prince," I exclaimed, and seeing that Tristan quieted down, he came up to his side again, asking questions continuously while we approached the castle gates.

At last we entered; but when we did so, Ovando, like ourselves, halted involuntarily and looked around.

"Be on your guard, comrades!" he exclaimed, in the Spanish tongue, so that none besides ourselves understood his words; and then, drawing himself up to his full height, looking every inch the man of war that he was, he proceeded with apparent unconcern by the side of Abibeyba. It was not to be wondered at that he should question himself as to whether we had not run into the very jaws of the lion, for we saw that which made our hearts beat quickly with apprehension. The great hall within the mighty gateway was crowded with Indian warriors, clad in full armour; but we passed on, alert, yet otherwise with an appearance of indifference as to any possibility of danger, and apparently scorning any thought of meditated treachery. Along the passages of the fortress were two rows of men in armour, javelins in the right, and a spear in the left hand of each Indian. But they stood there mute and stern, not one of them showing, either by any look or gesture, the slightest curiosity concerning the Spaniards, who were, as we had never been before, completely in their power. In the field, with plenty of room for our horses, we might stand, as we had already done, against tremendous odds, but what could the bravest men do while hemmed in in these narrow corridors?

At last we entered an apartment more beautiful than

anything I had ever seen before. So as I was of one of Spain's richest nobles, and brought up to luxury that was almost kingly, I had never conceived it possible that such wealth could be lavished on a home; still less had I ever expected to find so much of it here in the heart of the empire of Peru.

We were in the banquet-chamber. A long table, made of porphyry, into which some designs were beaten in gold and silver, stood in the centre, laden with dishes and platters of inestimable value, while knives with jewelled handles, and spoons of gold and silver, lay in readiness for each guest's use. Magnificent vases were placed here and there along the centre of the table, wrought of quartz, glistening with golden grains, and rimmed with gold and silver. These were filled with the most beautiful flowers. The walls were hung with what seemed to us to be silk brocade, but it was really the wool of llamas wrought into exquisite hangings, all bordered with native gold, beaten out into long strips, and beautifully chased with all the skill of the cleverest gold-workers.

Through the open doorway, opposite that by which we entered this banquet-chamber, we saw another apartment.

It was a bathroom, whose water, after that long and weary journey in the blazing sun, seemed to be tenfold more delicious and refreshing as it plashed upon the cool granite floor.

Leading us thither, Abibeyba bade us enjoy our ablutions, and declared that refreshments awaited us as soon as we were ready. With this assurance he left us to the care of some attendants, who waited on us in perfect silence. Removing our helmets and the heavy armour that had borne us down so distressingly during the day, we plunged our arms and faces into the great ewers of cool water which the Indians held in their hands above

their heads as they knelt before us. Then, as we were about to re-enter the banquet-chamber, they brought us richly-scented garments fringed with gold, and beautifully embroidered, while they removed our heavy riding boots and replaced them with sandals made of llama wool.

"We appear but little like Spanish warriors, methinks," exclaimed Del Benito, as, with an odd look of amusement upon his face, he gazed first at himself and then at his companions. "Still, so long as I know that there are so many armed retainers in the palace, I shall keep my weapons well within reach and be ready for emergencies."

"And there, Del Benito, you do wisely," said Ovando, who caught the words, and thus expressed approval. Then, when the servants had withdrawn, he bade us keep a sharp look-out, lest this kindness might be but a prelude to treachery such as Zemaco had practised on us at Tubanama.

Thus alert we returned to the banquet-chamber, where Abibeyba and his son, Taxmar, awaited our arrival. Fulvia and her father were already there, and as I entered she beckoned me to take my seat beside her at the table.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TREACHERY.

THE banquet proceeded gaily, and did not end until the sun had gone down. Guarding against all possible surprise, we refrained from drinking deeply of the wine, which was served by the Indian maidens; but Abibeyba's whole desire seemed to be to set us at our ease, and assure us that we had nought to fear. When Ovando told him of the poisoned goblets, the chieftain, as the women brought the cups, commanded them first to drink of them, and seeing that they did this without hesitation, we were convinced that we had nothing to fear from poison.

Before the wine was brought, however, Fulvia arose to retire with her attendants for the night. She was weary, she said, and would gladly be excused. Abibeyba graciously smiled approval, and giving my hand a gentle pressure and whispering me "good-night" she left the chamber.

But after a while weariness had its way alike with the Orejon and ourselves, and Ovando, glancing round and seeing that his companions looked more disposed for sleeping than for feasting, asked that we might be allowed to retire for the night. The permission was readily granted, and we rose to our feet.

"Cavaliers," said Abibeyba, "I doubt not that you feel

that here you are in some sense at my mercy, surrounded as I am by thousands of warriors. Yet judging from your prowess against overwhelming odds, such as Zemaco has brought against you, you do not, I know, allow that to disturb you. But since I would fain prove my sincerity, you shall hold my son Taxmar as hostage for your safety during the night. Should any seek to molest you, he is in your hands, for life or death. Follow him, and hold him as your surety."

Thanking him for this expression of his wish for our safe-keeping we saluted the Orejon, and Taxmar accompanying us led the way along the passages, until he came to a great courtyard. In its very centre stood a stronghold, which we, a small company, could have held against heavy odds, for it was of great strength, the walls, which were high, being very massive, and the only possible place of assault being the door by which we presently entered. This, however, we discovered capable of being so secured that a battering-ram might beat upon it without much chance of breaking it in.

"Captain," said Taxmar as we stood at the door, "my father lodges you here for the night, so that you may rest secure; and he bids me take you through every apartment, that you may know that no Peruvian besides myself is in the place. As for me, my life is in your hands." And as if to emphasize his assurances of sincerity the young noble took off his belt, in which his weapons were secured, and handed them to Ovando. He even went further, and stripped off the armour, so that he stood before us, as we might well suppose, absolutely defenceless.

"You have no one to fear save Zemaco, and he has no power in my father's territory," he added, and turning led the way, walking now at Ovando's side. Passing

from room to room he flung open every door save two, and these, he said, were occupied by the Lady Fulvia and her father. When at last we had gone through each apartment, some ten or twelve in number, in addition to the places set apart for our horses, we entered a commodious chamber, which was furnished with a number of sleeping-couches. Telling us that here we might rest for the night, Taxmar knelt a while, and gazing at a small golden ornament which he held in his hand—a jewelled image of the sun—muttered a short prayer. Then throwing himself upon a pile of llama skins he left us to ourselves, and was soon asleep.

It was clear that we had nothing to fear, either from the prince or his father, so that we prepared for a rest that was more than welcome. It was arranged, however, that there should be successive double watches of an hour each—one of our number to keep an eye on Taxmar, so that he should not escape us, and the other to keep guard at the door by which we had entered this little central fortress.

The lot first fell to De Roldan and Del Benito, and knowing that they were reliable men we lay down, and were soon fast asleep. It was time for my watch to begin when Arbues came to my side and awoke me, shaking Pedro also by the shoulder, so as to rouse him to undertake his share of that night's vigil.

“So far, Don Alonso, all is well. The young prince has not stirred, nor has anything chanced to arouse suspicion. I ought to say this much, perhaps, that the cacique came out of his room not long since, and in a whisper bade us keep a watch upon Taxmar, since he seemed to make too many protestations. See to your arms, therefore, and keep a sharp look-out, although for my own part I see no reason why Careta should be anxious.”

Half an hour went by, and no sound had come save that of the heavy breathing of the sleepers. In an hour or two it would be broad daylight, but now the night was black, and the darkness in the chamber only broken by the dim light of the lamp that hung upon the wall. The door of the sleeping-apartment stood open, and the passage leading to the entrance of this inner castle was lit up by a lamp, which barely showed me the form of Pedro as he stood in the corner leaning on his musket, and listening for any token of danger.

But presently I heard a sound that roused me to attention. Glancing along the corridor I saw that Pedro had not heard it, so that I began to think it must be fancy. Again it came, and this time, eager to know from his own lips whether Pedro had heard anything, I hurried down the passage silently and stood at his side.

"Did you hear any sound, Pedro?" I asked, somewhat startling him by my sudden appearance.

"A sound?" he exclaimed, quickly recovering himself. "No. The only sound I have heard was that of the horses in the chamber opposite, as they shifted their feet from time to time."

There was much reason for Pedro's words, for Ovando, cautious as well as skilful, had insisted on having our steeds in close proximity, on the plea that the Peruvians did not know how to manage them, and that they called for constant attention.

But my companion had scarcely finished speaking when he gripped me by the arm, pointing at the same time up the passage that led to the room where our comrades slept. What we saw filled us with alarm. Through the doorway there came towards us a white figure, ghostly in the dim light of the solitary lamp, and halting for a moment half-way down the corridor, suddenly disappeared.

Running forward we came to the spot, but the figure was nowhere in sight. Hurrying on into the room where the Spaniards slept, I saw at a glance that Taxmar was gone!

What could have become of him? But without staying to consider the matter I called aloud—

“Cavaliers, awake!”

Instantly the sleepers, accustomed to lie in readiness for a night alarm, sprang to their feet, looking to us to know why we had roused them from their slumbers.

“Taxmar is gone!” I cried.

“Taxmar? Where? How?” exclaimed everyone; and realizing the terrible meaning of his disappearance, since he came with us as a hostage. Then the thought flashed into my mind that while Pedro was here at my side, the young Indian might be meditating treachery, and would perhaps, even now, be opening the door to admit his people.

“Run, Pedro, and see that the door is safe!” I cried, and he, realizing the possibilities, hurried down the long passage to be sure that it had not been tampered with. Meanwhile I began to declare what I had seen; but scarcely had the words passed my lips when there came up the corridor a yell of agony. Dashing forward in the direction from whence the cry proceeded, followed by Ovando and others, I came near to the spot where Pedro and I had held our consultation, when my foot caught against something lying in the way, and I fell headlong. Heedless of the force with which my face came into contact with the stone floor I leaped to my feet, and turning to see what caused my fall, found my comrades stooping over a body that lay still upon the ground. By the dim light I saw that it was Pedro, in whose arm was

thrust a dagger, and by its jewelled handle I knew at once that it belonged to Taxmar.

"He is not dead, but stunned by the fall on the stones while recoiling from the blow the young Indian dealt him," said Arbues, who was kneeling over Pedro listening to his breathing.

At that moment an exclamation came from Antonio's lips, and leaping past me he sprang to the door, which none of us had observed to be now standing wide open. It closed with a crash as he laid his strong hands upon it, and when it fell into its place he thrust bolt after bolt into the sockets.

"Carry Don Pedro back and prepare for the defence, for I hear the approach of men!" he cried, heedless of ceremony in such a time of desperate peril.

"Stay here, Arbues, with Del Benito, while I arrange our movements, for we are caught in a trap," said Ovando. At the same time he stooped down, and taking the unconscious Pedro in his arms, carried him to the sleeping-chamber. "They think they have caught us, comrades, but we shall beat them yet!"

Far from being depressed, the little band of Spaniards received his words with a loud cheer, while De Roldan, as fine a soldier as any of us, cried—

"Tell us what to do, Ovando, and we will do it! We will even sally forth and storm this Abibeyba in his own den, if you will give the word!"

"No, De Roldan, that will not do yet. Come here, Hurtado, you understand wounds," exclaimed the Captain. "Bring this young hidalgo to his senses and attend to him." Then he cried, "We must look around us. If this place is not honey-combed with secret passages like Tubanama, we can hold our own, and possibly drive this treacherous Orejon out of his castle!"

“And confiscate his treasures for his treachery!” cried Colmenares.

“Time enough for that when we find ourselves free to look for wealth. At present we have to see how we can save our lives. Etienza, take Bobadillo and three others to defend the door, and watch the passage along which that young Indian escaped. If you see or hear anything that seems suspicious, let me have word at once. But send Arbues and Del Benito to me.”

With these words Ovando passed from room to room, searching everywhere with care, examining the place which had been converted into a stable, and finally calling upon Etienza and his comrades to patrol the lower apartments, to guard against any surprise from secret passages, which were our greatest danger in these Peruvian strongholds. Then bidding the remaining Spaniards follow him, he mounted to the battlemented walls, and looked into the great courtyard below.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE COURTYARD.

WHILE all this was going on, my thoughts turned to Fulvia, who, like ourselves, was involved in the desperate perils that beset us. In any circumstances I should have fought as befitted a noble Spaniard; but affection lent extra courage and determination, and I was resolved that death should come to me before injury should overtake the maiden to whom I was betrothed. Going to the door of her apartment I knocked loudly, and instantly it was opened by Fulvia herself. I could see her women crouching in the room in terror, but she, fully dressed, was bold and resolute.

“We are in peril, Alonso?” she exclaimed inquiringly.

“Yes, Fulvia. The young Prince Taxmar, who came to us as hostage for our safety, has disappeared, after having stabbed Don Pedro seriously; and even now there is every indication of an attack from without. Thank God, I find you safe! Leave your door open so that we may know that you are not confronting other dangers.”

“But, Alonso, I may be useful. My women here shall come with me and see to the wounded, should there, unhappily, be any. Then all the men will be free to fight. Alas! our own warriors are without somewhere, and their lives also are in jeopardy.” Giving my hand a loving pressure, and drawing down my face to kiss my

lips, she turned back to bid her maidens be ready to afford their aid when the fight should begin. Seeing this I turned from her and hurried to the walls, whither by this time my other comrades, save the five who remained to guard the door and the lower apartments, had gone.

Knowing as we did how many retainers the Orejon had in the castle when we entered, I was even then startled at the sight that met my gaze when I looked down into the courtyard. Hundreds of torches cast their glare upon all that was going on; and as we gazed, we saw that we were literally hemmed in by Indians drawn up in fighting order, armed to the teeth, and only waiting the word to advance to the attack.

Not far away were Abibeyba and his son, and with them, clad in full armour, such as we had seen him wear before, was Zemaco, our inveterate foe, who seemed resolved to compass our death rather than suffer us to join Pizarro. As the light of the torches fell upon them we could also distinguish the faces of some with whom we had already been in deadly conflict. Knowing that Zemaco was pursuing us with relentless hate, and having no longer any doubt as to Abibeyba's treachery, we were resolute in the determination to sell our lives as dearly as possible, and inflict the heaviest blows that lay in our power upon the Indians.

Yet, all told, reckoning Careta and his two attendants, we were only nineteen in number, one of whom was already disabled. If Spanish bravery could not speedily avail to open out a way, we were likely to fall victims to the Peruvians by reason of starvation, since there was no food in our prison. The very thought of this quickened us to more desperate plans. We could but die either way, and far better was it to fall in battle than perish after the horrors of famine.

"Shall I pick off the Orejon and Zemaco, Captain?" asked Antonio, who was the best shot in our company.

"Yes, Del Benito, if it comes to fighting, but let me first try negotiation." And with these words Ovando shouted at the top of his voice, so that every syllable could be heard by our besiegers—

"Abibeyba, what means this treachery? Withdraw your forces and suffer us to go free, and we will leave you unmolested."

But Abibeyba, who before had been so courteous, now responded with an insulting gesture, and as he did so turned and called upon his soldiers to send forth a volley of arrows into our midst. Hearing the order we bent our heads just as hundreds of the barbed weapons came flying past us.

The fight had now begun. Above all the din and clamour of it came the hoarse cries and screams of hate from Zemaco and the people round him, for Abibeyba, even in battle such as this, did not forget his dignity. It appeared to me as though a company of fiends had been let loose into that courtyard, and there was that in the yells, and screams, and execrations, and all the clamour, which showed how terrible would be our fate if we fell into the hands of those Indians who lusted for our blood. And when I noted this and thought of Fulvia, my heart was filled with horror, and a new energy nerved me to the conflict.

"Fire at the chieftain, Del Benito," cried Ovando, and Antonio, heedless of the arrows as they came in dense clouds, took steady aim and fired. There was a loud report, a scream of pain—and Abibeyba lay still on the ground.

"Now try Zemaco," shouted the Captain, and taking advantage of the lull in the attack—for the Indians,

seeing their master fall, gathered round him, wondering whether he was dead or not—we stood up and leant boldly over the battlements to see what effect the next shot would have.

“Steady, Del Benito,” cried Colmenares, “and if you miss, my own shot may strike the mark.” Even as he spoke he had taken aim at Zemaco, who had turned his back upon us and was gazing intently at his fallen countryman. Almost at the same moment the sound of two shots came, and as we looked Zemaco threw up his hands wildly, and fell across the body of Abibeyba.

“Two enemies the less,” cried Ovando, as a howl of rage came from the courtyard. “And now two shots more from every one of us, and then, before they have time to recover from their dismay, we will dash into their midst with our horses and scatter them. Try and pick off the officers.”

Scarcely waiting for Antonio and Colmenares to reload, we aimed at the dense mass, already alarmed at this unexpected fall of the leaders.

“Fire!” came Ovando’s call, and loud yells of pain and terror followed.

“Again!” cried the Captain, and every one charged his musket afresh and awaited the order to fire. As the second volley crashed in among the startled Indians, a sudden panic seized them, and the once splendid array of Peruvian soldiers became a mass of wild confusion. Several of their leading officers had fallen, and those who remained were powerless to head any attack against us.

“To your horses!” shouted Ovando, dashing down the steps and bursting into the stable where every man’s horse stood saddled and ready, owing to the

foresight of Etienza, who, with his companions, had occupied his time in preparing them in case of emergency.

"A ride round the courtyard will do the animals no harm, comrades," he said with a laugh, for tremendous though the odds were, it was not a Spaniard's habit to anticipate failure, or indulge in fear. Even while Ovando came rushing down into the passage, his horse was ready to be brought out.

"Bravo, Etienza!" cried the Captain, and in two or three minutes our war-chargers stood in the long corridor, each one mounted by his master, who waited for the word to ride through the doorway, and into the midst of the panic-stricken throng outside. Silently the bolts were shot back, Antonio and Colmenares meanwhile remaining on the walls to keep up their fire, thus serving to lessen the chances of any restoration of confidence.

"Stay here, Don Alonso, and you also, Bobadillo, to guard the women," said Ovando. "And when we have gone, call to Colmenares and Del Benito to follow up our movement. Now open the door! Cavaliers, are you ready?"

"Lead on!" was the responding cry. And as the door swung open the horses moved out swiftly, one by one, the riders stooping low so as to avoid the stonework of the doorway overhead. Ready for the slightest touch, the horses, well trained in warlike evolutions, and eager as their masters for the fray, formed into line, and when Ovando gave the order to advance they needed no spur, but dashed forward as if they gloried in the fight. The wild war-cry rang out loud and clear, and was the first indication of our approach. Taken unawares the Indians screamed with terror and fled. They dashed wildly through the great

gateway by which many of them had silently and stealthily entered during the night. They massed together, not for resistance, but in panic, trampling each other underfoot, and throwing away their weapons in their eagerness to get away.

When the last horseman dashed through the doorway, Bobadillo secured the door and mounted the walls to mark the progress of the fight, and be ready to admit our comrades if they were driven back. As for myself, I ran to Fulvia's chamber to bid her be of good courage, and tell her what had already happened. She turned and followed me as I ran up the steps to look at the fight below, and standing at my side gazed at the scene. Her father had not quitted the walls, for he would have been powerless in the *mêlée*, having no war-charger, and death would then have been certain.

At last the courtyard was empty of Indians, save for the dead and wounded, and as we watched we saw Ovando ride to the spot where the Orejon and the cacique lay. Leaping from his saddle he stooped, and by the aid of a torch that lay burning close at hand, looked into their faces.

"They are not dead," we heard him say in his powerful voice, "and if we can keep them alive they will serve us well as hostages for our safety."

"You are safe now, Fulvia," I exclaimed. "I must leave you and see if I can be of any service yonder." And quitting her side, I hurried to the courtyard and joined my comrades.

While some of the cavaliers lifted the two unconscious Indians and carried them into Abibeyba's own apartment, preceded as they entered the castle by some of the Orejon's women, who had not been able to escape, Ovando sent half a dozen of his men to secure the gates

and search the place to see that none of our enemies were in hiding. As Bilbao and Antonio thrust the outer gates together with a clang that must have been heard far away, our hearts beat more freely, and a sense of great relief came over us. Leaving these two to guard the entrance, we began our search, aided in it by some of the women, who, when they found that we meant to do them no harm, and were desirous of the recovery of their chief, were ready to show us every room and passage in this great Peruvian fortress. At the end of a gloomy corridor we found a strong door, bolted and barred, on which some men inside were beating furiously. Shouting to them to know who they were, they proved to be Careta's attendants, who had been fastened in the place to prevent them from taking any part in the night's doings. They were speedily released, and as they rushed out, anxiously enquired as to the welfare of Careta and the Lady Fulvia.

"They are safe," we answered, and hearing this they calmed down with a sense of great relief.

We found more than a score of Abibeyba's warriors in hiding. They had flung their weapons away and had sought safety in places we should never have dreamed of searching had not the women aided us, but they were eager to do anything, if thereby they could make their master's lot the easier. Binding these trembling men with stout cords, we led them to Ovando, and waited to hear what he would do with them.

Calling upon us to follow him and bring our prisoners with us, he led the way into the magnificent bed-chamber of the Orejon, who was now restored to consciousness, and lay weak and helpless among the cushions which the women had piled about him.

"Abibeyba," exclaimed Ovando sternly, as he looked

at the treacherous prince, whose face was wet with the sweat drops induced by so much pain.

“What would you have with me?” was the response of the wounded man, in a voice far different from that with which he had addressed us when we had first entered his castle; for the loss of blood had weakened him considerably, and his words were faintly and laboriously spoken.

“I would have you send these men forth to tell their countrymen that I hold you and Zemaco as hostages for our safety. Tell them that if they dare to molest us in any way, either while we are here or while we seek to overtake the Spaniards who have gone before us, we will slay you both and leave your bodies on the mountains for the vultures to feed upon. You lured us here under the promise of friendship, but now, if any harm should come, you shall pay for it with your life; and Zemaco too!” Ovando added, his proud face flushing with anger, as he thought of the meditated treachery that had so nearly led to our destruction.

The prisoners drew near as Abibeyba made a sign for their approach, and he gave them the desired message. This done, they were led to the castle gate, the thongs about their waists were cut loose, and they were thrust out to carry the Orejon's message through the country. As we opened the gates the sun was beginning to rise in all his splendour upon a world which, but for Spanish valour and a watchful Providence, we should never have looked upon again.

CHAPTER XXV.

SILVER-SHOD.

NOT caring to linger more than was necessary, being eager to join Pizarro, who in an enemy's country must be sadly in want of reinforcements, we arranged for our advance at the earliest possible moment. But some delay was inevitable. Don Pedro's wound proved to be more serious than had been at first supposed, and he suffered much from fever. The wounded chiefs were progressing favourably under the care of the women; but, as with Pedro, some days must needs elapse before they would be fit to travel. To go without them would be madness, whereas their presence would enable us to march through an army, should we meet one, even though it should be a hundred thousand strong.

After the first day or two Abibeyba expressed the utmost contrition, declaring that he meant well by us, but was over-persuaded by Zemaco, whose resolution to hinder our progress exceeded anything the most experienced of our party had ever known. Yet, now that I think of it and am away from the conflict, I can scarcely find it in my heart to blame the cacique for any patriotic attempt to hold us back; but his perfidy was such throughout that we had not sufficient grace to excuse him, and anything like sympathy for the wily

chieftain was treachery to our comrades. But there was not much chance of sympathy, for he was like a wild beast at bay, and even as he lay wounded it appeared to be his aim to goad us to such exasperation that we should slay him and Abibeyba, thereby bringing upon us the avenging hosts of Peru, who would no longer have to consider the safety of their chiefs.

"Say nothing to him. Answer him not one word, my men; but watch him well, or he will elude us even now," said Ovando, when he saw how some of our company grew restless under the Indian's repeated and unspeakable insults.

"Let us die, Abibeyba," said the cacique on the second day, when Ovando permitted him to be brought into the Orejon's chamber in response to his entreaties.

"Of what avail would that be, Zemaco?" was the response.

"Of all avail, for then our countrymen would be free to act, and finding us dead they would assail these Spaniards with ten-fold fury, and avenge us by sweeping them off the face of the earth!" was Zemaco's response; and looking round upon me and Hurtado—for we were now on guard—he shook his fist at us in the extremity of hate.

"Zemaco, I love life too well to quit it with my own consent. I am no coward, as you know full well; but I shall live and serve my country better than by self-destruction," he replied in a low voice, lest we might hear him. But we heard plainly, being alert for every word.

"You are mad, Abibeyba," said Zemaco with passion, and holding his hand to his breast as if in pain. "These Spaniards will now force us to accompany them in our litters, and with their swords drawn ready to plunge them

into our hearts if we try to escape; or if our countrymen attempt our rescue, they will pass clean through our own hosts, even though they be as numerous as the sands of the desert. I would die, but of what avail would that be if you die not also? If we would save our cause we must both be sacrificed; then these Spaniards will have no hostages, and our people will fight with the recklessness of despair."

But Abibeyba, whose courage none could impugn, seeing that he had done so many daring things on the battlefield, lay back upon his couch apparently unmoved by the entreaties of his companion. After a prolonged silence he lifted his eyes, and looking his companion in the face, said slowly—

"Zemaco, leave me. I care not to die. I shall serve my royal kinsman best by living." And saying this he waved his hand, as if he wished to be alone.

Zemaco's face was full of fury at this refusal and dismissal. He looked around him as if he sought for something, then—to our astonishment, knowing how sorely he was wounded—seeing a heavy mace which belonged to Abibeyba and indicated his royal kinship, he dashed forward suddenly and snatched it from the wall on which it hung. Apparently ignoring our presence, he concentrated his whole attention on the Orejon, who lay helpless and gazed at him with startled eyes.

"Traitor!" cried the cacique, his eyes fierce and shining, while he swung the mace to and fro to gather up his force; "traitor and coward! thou wilt not choose to die for thy country's good, but die thou shalt!" And with these words, and raising the heavy mace aloft, he rushed forward as if to brain the prostrate chieftain where he lay.

But Hurtado and I were both watchful, and while the

Indian advanced we instantly, and as by one impulse, shouted aloud for help from without, then, with swords drawn, dashed across the floor to intercept him. We met each other with a terrific crash, the force of the collision causing us all to fall in a confused heap upon the marble floor. Leaping to our feet, lest the chieftain should elude us, we laid our hands upon him; but Zemaco lay still, while the blood flowed slowly from his mouth.

“What is this?” cried Ovando, who entered at that moment, followed by three or four others. Then looking at Zemaco and bending over him, he exclaimed—

“He is dead! How came this, Don Alonso?”

We briefly told the story, and when it was ended, turned and gazed at the fallen chief. But he was not dead. Before long he looked around him, his eyes flashing, and his face as full of passion as before.

“Accursed Spaniards!” he cried, but feebly, “I will avenge my country even yet!” And slowly raising himself to a sitting posture, he shook his hand menacingly at Abibeyba.

“Carry him away,” said Ovando, “and let him be loaded with chains. He must no more see Abibeyba face to face, nor must he be left alone. We cannot afford to suffer our hostages to escape us.”

The next morning we began to take steps for our departure. At our request the Orejon had sent out scouts to search the country round, to bring back word as to where Pizarro lay encamped, and also to take a message to him from us. This message, however, we found later, was never delivered, in spite of many promises. Finding resistance useless, and realizing that he was completely in our power, having nothing to gain by treachery but everything to lose, Abibeyba settled down among the cushions and suffered us to do our will, while he looked

on in sullen anger. From that mood he presently passed to another and sought conciliation, but Ovando would have none of it.

"No, Orejon. You lured us here with offers and promises of friendship and hospitality. We came, trusting you, but you basely deceived us. Spaniards are not to be deceived a second time."

"But I will buy your friendship on your own terms," said the chieftain.

"It is not to be bought," was the short and stern reply.

"What, then, shall I do to win your regard?" said the Orejon.

"Nothing, save to remember that you are now in our power, and at the first sign of treachery I will plunge my sword into your heart," was the angry response. "There are no terms with those who practise treachery, and thus you remain our prisoner until we have done with you."

"But you shall have my treasures, and they are great, if you will but come to terms," pursued the Indian, and glancing into the Spaniard's face, as if to read his thoughts.

"Your treasures, Abibeyba? They are ours already by right of conquest, so that our friendship is not to be bought by what is our own. Had you treated us with honourable hospitality, and not with treachery, we should have passed on, leaving you to your wealth and to your peace. But not so now."

At these words the Orejon's face clouded over, and with a look of despair he threw himself back, as if resigned to his fate, whatever that might be.

The treasure to which he and Ovando had referred was vast, so great, indeed, that it was impossible to remove it unless we enlisted the services of many native bearers;

and that was impracticable, since our chief aim now was to ward off attack and guard our prisoners if there should be any attempt at rescue. The only thing possible was to do as we had done before—divide and bury it, trusting to find some means of conveying it to the coast at a later day. Great as the amount of treasure had been at Tubanama, Abibeyba's cellars were equally as full of wealth. Not merely was there a vast quantity of gold and silver, either in the shape of massive ingots or in richly-wrought vessels and ornaments, but the store-chambers were filled with cloth, out of which the women, accustomed to the needle, made us suits which replaced our clothing, which had become dilapidated during our toilsome journeys in mountain passes and through the thorny forests.

As for our horses, we were in no small trouble concerning them. The hard rocks and continuous service had worn their shoes, and we feared lest they would fall lame and become incapable. The idea was an extravagant one, and we laughed at it at first, when Garabito suggested that our chargers should be thickly shod with silver.

"It can be done, Captain," said Hurtado after the sally of laughter that greeted the suggestion which Garabito had put forward in all seriousness. "Bilbao and I have often wrought as farriers on our marches, and if you will give the word we will shoe the horses in a workmanlike manner, if we can but find some nails."

"Then I can help you there, Hurtado," cried Bobadillo. "I saw some in Abibeyba's armoury yesterday, wrought in copper."

"What say you, comrades?" asked the Captain presently. "Shall we set forth with our horses silver-shod, as Garabito suggests?"

"How otherwise would you set forth?" exclaimed

Arbues, who, while he had laughed the loudest, was now among the first to pray Garabito to forgive him, and own that the suggestion was a valuable one.

"Then be it so," responded Ovando. "Cavaliers, we shall henceforth ride like kings, and astonish our comrades when we overtake them." And turning to Hurtado and Bilbao, he besought them to undertake their task without delay.

Meanwhile the treasure was divided into sixteen equal portions by three of our number, whom we appointed, and hiding it under the floor of one of the store-chambers—not forgetting the shares of our farrier comrades, who came at Ovando's call to see that they were treated justly—we sealed the door, so as to discover on our return whether it had in any way been tampered with.

A day or two later one of the women went out with a message from Abibeyba, and next morning at sunrise twenty Indians stood, unarmed, outside the gate of the castle of Quaragua, waiting to act as bearers of their royal master and Zemaco, who was furious at his continued captivity. Never was any caged animal more restless and intractable than that fiery-blooded chieftain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A NIGHT IN A PERUVIAN CONVENT.

IT was a glorious morning when we sallied forth to seek our comrades, who, from the scouts' reports, were not far ahead. But we did not get away from the castle without some trouble from Zemaco, who, on the plea of illness, declared that he was unfitted for the journey.

"The journey cannot hurt you, since you will travel in a litter; and your countrymen, who are well acquainted with the roads, and used to the task, will carry you with such gentleness that you will be as comfortable on the road as you are here," was the Captain's response to these remonstrances.

Evidently the cacique had resolved to delay our departure; and when Ovando came back and told us, as we sat at our morning meal, Garabito expressed his belief that Zemaco meditated some mischief, which made him desire to detain us.

"All the greater reason that we should start at once," cried De Roldan. "But what if he should refuse to stir?"

"Then he must be carried out against his will," answered our leader; and turning to quit the room, he called on some of our number to expedite the preparations of the unwilling cacique. But Zemaco abso-

lutely refused to move hand or foot, nor would he suffer any of the Indians to touch him.

"Then my men must remove you by force," said Ovando resolutely; and turning to those who stood near, he gave the word for taking the cacique to the litter without waiting any longer.

Seeing that we were resolute in our determination to start without any further delay, Zemaco begged to be allowed a little time for preparation, and half an hour later one of the Indians came to say that the chieftain was ready for the journey. As we came to the gateway he was awaiting us in his litter, but an angry scowl—out of all harmony with the bright world around—was on his face, and he muttered some imprecations which his timid attendants listened to with alarm, glancing at us from time to time to see whether we understood, and if so, whether we should punish him for his contumacy.

"Pay no attention to him, comrades," said Ovando. "He must needs spit out the venom that possesses him." And even as our leader spoke the angry Indian, throwing aside all caution, suffered his passion to have full sway. He cursed us one and all, vowed fearful vengeance as soon as his own day should come, and singling us out by name, called on his gods to curse us and blast our enterprise. Seeing that angry looks were coming into his companions' faces, and that some, in all their Spanish pride and petulance, might punish the cacique, perhaps repaying his vicious bearing with death, Ovando interposed.

"Zemaco, cease at once, or I will have you gagged and still more heavily chained! And as for you, my comrades," he added, "take no notice. Angry words kill no one; and after all, he is naturally filled with wrath at his humiliation and helplessness. Bilbao, throw open the gate and let us go forth."

Bobadillo, placing the trumpet to his lips, blew a long, loud blast, which startled the birds that were near, while it set our silver-shod horses prancing and eager to be on the march after so long a season of inactivity.

Walking at our horses' heads, bridle in hand, careful against surprise, and in all the panoply of war, we sallied forth from the place where we had been so terribly near to death. The order of our going was that which secured the safe custody of the chiefs, whose escape might be counted on as bringing to us certain destruction. Starting from the castle gates by the narrow road that was so steep as to make riding dangerous, we went on foot, six cavaliers walking in couples at the front. Then the litters—borne by unarmed attendants, and having Spaniards on either side—were followed by the remainder of our gallant band. Behind the carriers, who marched in sullen unwillingness, came Careta's litters with his followers full-armed, and ready to make a brave fight, if needs be, for their noble master and the lovely Fulvia.

After a while we reached the low meadow land, where we received orders to mount. As we sat in our saddles—a courageous company bent on a desperate errand, and never quailing, because we felt that our countrymen at home would expect to hear that we had fought as Spaniards could, and because also we would not suffer the idea of defeat to cross our minds—our horses chafed at the delay, and their silver-shod feet beat upon the sod in their impatience to be gone. But the halt was somewhat prolonged, while Ovando gave his final directions as to the method of our advance.

Turning to Abibeyba, and speaking to him as he lay in his litter, he warned him against any attempt at escape, declaring that hostage though he was he should be shot down instantly. It was a haughty Spaniard speaking to

a no less haughty chieftain, who, master of untold wealth, and leader of countless thousands of tried warriors, had in his veins the royal blood of many generations of Incas—the proudest race in the New World.

“Cease, Spaniard!” cried Abibeyba, with an angry gesture. “I am your prisoner, and as long as I am such, am at your mercy. What care I for your threats? Proceed, and leave me at peace.” And so saying the Orejon turned his back upon the Spanish noble, and looked on the country from the other side of his open litter.

The day passed by in an uneventful manner, Del Benito and Bilbao acting as scouts, and scanning keenly every spot where there was likely to be any attempt at attack, or any possible ambush. Now and again we passed through a village, the street of which was lined with Indians, who gazed with awe upon our horses, whose prancing feet raised clouds of dust as we rode along. Sometimes the people appeared indifferent, showing no concern for the captive chieftains; but at other places they wept. It needed but a word from the Orejon, and there would have been a murderous fight, the end of which might have been the annihilation of our gallant band. At other times we saw the people toiling in the fields, as we had often seen them, but their songs had died away, and they worked in the blazing sun with all the old weariness about their movements.

Late in the afternoon we passed a religious dwelling, where many hundreds of priests and virgins of the Sun dwelt, and performed the functions of their great religious order. Zemaco wished to enter, but we preferred to journey on rather than trust ourselves to the fanatical dwellers, who would have deprived us by stealth, or fight, of these most precious hostages—the only beings

who served to save us from disaster in this desperate enterprise.

As we followed the winding road we came at last to what seemed to us a large plantation; but a gruesome sight showed us that it was a place of execution. The priests were wont to punish sacrilege and any other offence against their religion with death, and the condemned were brought here to expiate their crime.

“See!” cried Garabito, pointing to the trees where we had thought, when first we saw it in the distance, to rest and eat; for our journey under a blazing sun had been long and exhausting. Moreover, out of this little forest there ran a cool stream which, as it glistened in the sunlight, seemed to entice us to linger a while and drink. Looking in the direction in which the cavalier pointed, we halted, and saw a sight that filled our hearts with rage; for before us were two of our countrymen. Their arms were bound closely to their sides, their feet were tied together, and by these they hung from the trees, heads downwards. Their hair just missed the ground, and they were dead. Doubtless they were stragglers—or perhaps messengers from Pizarro to hurry us forward—and someone had taken vengeance on them with startling cruelty; for their breasts were gashed with hideous wounds, while arrows were transfixed in arms and legs and bodies. Their weapons and armour were gone, and they were so disfigured that we could not tell who they were.

There was some excuse for the imprecations that escaped our lips, and for the vengeance we threatened, when, savage at heart, we rode on our way.

We came to a convent just as the sun was about to set. The building was small but massive—a place where we could rest in some security, and which we could hold, if needs be, against any assailants, however numerous.

Antonio, who had halted with Bilbao to receive instructions, rode up at Ovando's word and thundered on the door with the handle of his sword. Presently a Peruvian priest came to see who it was that was so noisy in his call for admission. Gazing at us with a face full of wonder, he did not wait to ask any questions, but turned back and called to the other members of the community, who came out to look upon us with curiosity and alarm.

"Abibeyba, bid them provide us hospitality," said Ovando, riding to the litter, where the Orejon had reclined the whole day without once breaking the silence.

"I will not!" he answered haughtily. "If you need hospitality, secure it for yourselves." And he turned away, as he had done at the commencement of that day's journey.

But Ovando was not to be hindered thus, and turning from the chieftain with an angry gesture, he rode up to the convent door and demanded admission and hospitality. The principal personage among the priests listened in mute astonishment, and as he spoke quietly to those about him they retired in haste, leaving him alone.

"Stranger," he responded, after he had looked some time at us and the Indians in our company, "this is a sacred place, and none are admitted but the men and women of our order. You must pass on!"

"But that cannot be!" cried Ovando, about whom several of our number had now gathered, so as to hear what was going on.

The old man, however, mildly but firmly answered as before: "This is a sacred place, and none are admitted but the men and women of our order. You must pass on!"

“And I say again, Sir Priest, that that cannot be! We must and will lodge here to-night!” thundered our leader, whose anger rose at this refusal.

Looking up into Ovando's face, the old man saw that the Spaniard was resolute. He gazed long and silently, and at last began to move backwards slowly. Then with a sudden movement he shut the heavy door in our faces and pushed the bolts. But he had not noticed that Antonio—who had been watching him intently—had held his lance in readiness. As the prior—if I may call him such—pushed the door together, Antonio put his spear forward in such a way as to prevent the door from closing. The bolts, therefore, did not go into the sockets.

“Thrust it open!” cried Ovando; and at his word a dozen of us leaped from our saddles and dashed forward. It was useless to resist our rush, although the priests had come to the aid of their superior, for the sturdy Spaniards, men of iron as they proved to be, forced the door back on its hinges, and entered the sacred place, heedless of the protestations of the priests, whom they overturned and trampled underfoot. To my comrades no place was sacred that belonged to heretics, as all these Indians were in their eyes, and therefore they were troubled by no scruples.

Once within the convent, Ovando ordered us to search each apartment and bring all whom we met with, whether monk or nun, into his presence, while Bobadillo and Antonio, with one or two others, watched the horses outside until a place could be found to serve as a stable for the night. In the space of half an hour some seventy persons, or thereabouts, were brought to the Captain, who asked them to provide for our hospitality. Every Peruvian in the company looked to the old prior, but he

absolutely refused either to lift hand or foot to serve us, since this was a holy place, to which infidels, such as we were, had no right to come.

"And what will happen, Sir Priest, if we persist in staying?" asked Ovando.

"Then, Spaniard, I will call down the curses of the deity—the sun, the moon, his sister wife, and all the stars—upon you! They will send their dread ministers, the lightnings and thunders, to destroy you!" was the stern reply.

"And how can that be?" questioned the Captain.

"We shall pray and offer sacrifices while you sleep," was the fearless rejoinder.

Ovando sat and considered; then consulted with the cavaliers.

"What say you, comrades? Shall we suffer these monks and nuns to compass our destruction, as they pretend to do under the guise of religion, or shall we thrust them out until we have departed?"

"Thrust them out, Ovando," cried Etienza. "Kneeling before their altars and practising their incantations all the night, our lives will be in jeopardy, and sleep an impossibility. After such a toilsome march I am weary, and want rest; so also do my companions," he added, looking around him.

"True, Etienza," responded the others.

Thus the matter was settled, and Ovando communicated our decision to the dwellers in the convent, who gazed at us thunderstricken at the thought of being excluded from the sacred place which had so long been their home.

"And you must go at once!" said the Captain, signing to them to withdraw. But they did not stir.

"Heard you not my words?" he said presently, seeing that they made no movement towards departure.

"We did hear, but this is our home, and we shall remain," answered the old man fearlessly.

"But you shall not remain!" cried Ovando. "We have had more than enough of Peruvian perfidy. De Roldan, Garabito—all of you!—remove these people! Gently if you can; but go they must, since we dare not repeat the terrible experiences of Tubanama and Quaragua."

Still they refused to move, until the heavy hands of the Spaniards were laid upon them, and they were forced by sheer weight towards the door.

"Spaniards!" cried the prior, wresting himself from Garabito's grasp and approaching Ovando, after eluding the others in their attempts to keep him back—"hear me! I call down on every one of you the curses of the gods!" And he uttered such fearful imprecations that the strong warriors, who never quailed when face to face with thousands of enemies, trembled, while Fulvia turned pale and clasped her hands in terror. Truly if these priests would not fight, they knew at least how to invoke the wrath of Heaven.

"Listen not to him, comrades," said the Captain. "He is but a heretic, and Heaven will never heed him! The same God who has saved us so far will protect us still. Expel them, and we will pray."

Then thrusting them out, the cavaliers brought in their horses, and finding fodder such as served the llamas and sacred sheep that had their home in the convent, they made the steeds comfortable for the night. A search was then made for quarters in which to lodge Fulvia and her women, and that being done the cavaliers gathered together in the chapel where the priests were wont to worship.

On the western wall was a great sun, wrought of burnished gold. To us it would have been rank idolatry to


have worshipped before it; so we tore it down, amid the loud execrations of Zemaco, who became so violent at this sacrilege, as he termed it, that worship was impossible while he was present, and he was removed from the room. Abibeyba looked on in silent scorn, a mocking smile stealing over his face when we knelt upon the floor, and a solemn chant rolled forth in the place where offerings to idols had been so often presented for many a century gone by.

When the chant had ended, Sarmiento—once a priest, but now a soldier, uniting for the time being the two offices in one—led the prayers. That done, a watch was set, and the tired company lay down to rest. Nothing transpired to spoil our sleep. The two Peruvian chieftains were guarded well, and their attendants—quite as willing to be ruled by Spaniards as by their own countrymen, since they could never hope for any better fate, and certainly could expect no worse from us—lay down and slept, thoroughly worn out with the toil of that hard day's travel.

It was well, for there was that to follow that tried at once our strength and courage.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DISASTER.

T sunrise the trumpet sounded. We broke our fast, looked to our arms, and after Sarmiento had again led our devotions, set forth in the same order as on the previous day.

When we departed we saw a procession of white-robed priests of the Sun marching towards the convent. Halting a while to watch them, we began our journey afresh as the last one disappeared through the door from whence we had but just emerged. But we had not gone a hundred yards before we heard screams of rage, and looking behind us saw the whole company rush out in a perfect frenzy, tearing their garments and their hair, while they called the furies upon us in voices that trembled with passion, because we had torn down the emblem of their deity. We shuddered with horror as we heard their blasphemies, and proceeded on our way. They followed in our wake for more than a league with cries of unrelenting hate, only leaving us when we passed into the gorge by which we approached the last mountain passage before we should overtake Pizarro. Then they disappeared, having, as we thought, gone home again; but we were rudely surprised before an hour had passed.

Unexpectedly they appeared on the heights above, and catching sight of us again screamed out their rage and

curses. Had it not been for the presence of Abibeyba and Zemaco, they would have aroused the people of the district against us, and resolute though we were, and all well-tried soldiers by this time, we should have been cut off to a man had the Peruvians chosen to stop the pass.

Once when Colmenares and Etienza rode forward to see that the way was clear, a loud shout of triumph came from those above on seeing our comrades separated from us. At first we did not understand their jubilation, but before long, and to our horror, we saw huge rocks dashing down the mountain side into the gorge, leaping from spot to spot, tearing away the trees as they bounded on. Should one of these mighty blocks fall on them, horse and rider would be ground to powder. Spellbound, not one of us able to cry out in warning, we gazed helplessly, expecting these enormous boulders to crash upon them. Colmenares, who was riding on the outside, and therefore not shielded as Etienza was by the jutting crag under which he was at that moment passing, looked up and saw his danger. As he drove in his spurs, the horse, stung by the sudden pain, gave one wild and startled bound forward, slipped on the shining rock, and fell with a crash. But the movement saved both horse and rider, for the great rock leaped down upon the very spot which Colmenares had quitted but a moment before, then bounded deeper down into the depths below. Both horse and rider lay motionless, and we thought them dead; but Antonio and Arbues dismounting, ran forward and found that they were living. The sudden leap and the heavy fall had robbed them of all power of movement, from which, however, they presently recovered.

While we watched our comrade a scream came from behind. Turning swiftly we saw that a huge fragment of rock had dislodged a tree, and the great trunk had fallen

upon some Indians who had been relieved from carrying Zemaco's litter but a few minutes before. It lay across the narrow path, pinning down five of the poor creatures. Going back to afford them relief we found that for four of their number we were too late; death came even while our willing hands lifted the heavy burden from their crushed and mangled bodies. The fifth was sadly bruised, but able to limp on with the aid of his companions.

"This will never do!" cried De Roldan. "Captain, what do you say to our making these priests scarce?"

"How?" was the eager question.

"Send half a dozen of us to drive them back, or toss them down into the ravine that they seem so anxious to convert into a death-trap for us."

"Be it so," responded Ovando.

"Then follow me who will!" cried De Roldan, leaving his horse to take its own way, and springing up the steep mountain side with wonderful celerity. Half a dozen sprang after him, the scabbards of their swords clanking against the rocks as they climbed. They were dexterous climbers, most of them having been born in the mountain districts of Spain, and therefore able to scale the heights without fear. Careta's warriors did not stir, nor could we blame them, since it would have been sacrilege on their part to lift a hand against any of the priesthood of their own religion. As for myself, I dared not follow them, for, brought up in the city of Cadiz and unused to the rougher tasks and sports of mountaineers, my brain never acquired that steadiness which enabled me to move on carelessly amid the yawning chasms of the Cordilleras. Moreover, I am free to confess that I was loth to leave Fulvia, lest in my absence some mischief might befall her. We who remained behind watched our comrades with breathless

interest, and raised a loud cheer when we saw them mount the topmost height and stand among the priests. But as they reached the green and level space the Peruvians, as if by concerted action, rushed at them and sought to hurl them back into the abyss out of which they had just emerged.

Happily they made their rush too late to prevent De Roldan and his companions from making their footing sure. The swords flashed out in an instant, and the Spaniards stood on the defensive. But heedless of this their assailants came on, and clung to arms and legs, as if they sought by sheer weight to throw them down, and hurl them back to us.

It was a fearful moment of suspense, but casting aside their swords our countrymen drew their daggers, and plunged them into the bodies and arms and hands of those who had fastened on them. We watched Bilbao, who had been attacked by the old priest with all the vigour of a young man. The prior's rage lent him energy, and careless of life he sought to push back the Spanish man-at-arms to the precipice. Locked in the old man's arms and slipping on the treacherous grass, Bilbao fell, carrying his assailant to the ground with him. But suddenly the priest sprang upon his feet, and began to drag the prostrate man towards the edge of the cliff. Nearer and nearer to it they came; another foot and they would be over! Without warning Bilbao sprang into a sitting posture, and lunged at the priest with his dagger. The weapon ran into the stooping man's arm, and with a gesture of pain he leaped back, forgetful of his nearness to the abyss. The unguarded movement was his undoing, for with a loud yell he came crashing down from one jutting crag to another, and fell with a dull thud right at my own feet. A look of inexpressible hatred came

into his face as he saw us standing near, and then he closed his eyes. When I stooped I saw that he was dead.

Meanwhile the fight was going on, the Spaniards having broken through the company of priests, and in their turn become the assailants. One after another the Peruvians came crashing down, as in their frenzy they sought to pull the Spaniards with them, hanging on in spite of dagger-blows, and only falling back when unendurable agony made them unclasp their hands and drop away. Such a fall, so near the edge of the precipice, completed the work which the Spanish daggers had begun, for the rocks on which they dashed beat out what little life they had remaining. It was a marvellous thing that there should be such a desperate struggle, for not one of those Peruvian priests had a single weapon. Rage and despair at the desecration of their sacred chamber made them fight with all the energy of well-armed men.

But worst of all for us was the tragic end of Bilbao. The brave cavalier now fell a victim to these frenzied priests. Finding that they could not get near to the others they turned, and seeing Bilbao rising to his feet after the conflict with their prior, they left the other Spaniards and sprang upon him. Slowly, disregarding the frantic efforts of his countrymen to pull them back, they thrust him closer and yet closer to the edge. He fought desperately, but inch by inch he lost ground, which they never suffered him to regain. At last his feet were overhanging. Then with a final rush, heedless of the slippery platform on which they stood, they lifted him bodily and tossed him out into the air. But he did not whirl through space alone. He had gripped two of his assailants round their necks, so that when he came down into the abyss he bore them with him.

Even while we watched with horror this awful descent, another native, who had lost his footing, came flying after them, and a few minutes later four mangled bodies lay near us, and dead! It had been our most disastrous fight, for we had lost a comrade we could ill afford to lose. Generous-minded as he had always been, there was not one in the company who did not regard Bilbao highly, even if not with affection. As for myself, while I saw him lying there, and thought of his manly bearing when alive, and of the many kindnesses he had shown to me, I could have surrendered much of the hoard of wealth that I possessed if it would have brought him back to life.

As for those upon the heights, the Spaniards, furious at the loss of their comrade, sought to avenge him, but the priests, finding themselves incompetent any longer to contend with their foes, and disheartened by the death of their prior, turned and fled. The Spanish cavaliers, in their weighty armour, and by no means so fleet of foot as the Peruvians, who were at home among the hills, were unable to keep pace with them, and were left hopelessly behind. They then turned their attention to the task of descending to the narrow path on which we were awaiting them, and after many hair-breadth escapes on the treacherous rocks they stood in our midst, breathless and full of wrath at their comrade's death.

Zemaco, lying in his litter, jeered at us all as we gathered afresh about the body of Bilbao. His taunts and curses were exasperating beyond endurance, and at last Bobadillo, in furious anger at the insults heaped upon the memory of his late companion-in-arms, turned, and striding up to the cacique's litter, drew him out from among his cushions, shook him as a dog would shake a

rat, and then flung the Indian to the ground with a force that rendered him insensible.


Sympathising with Bobadillo's outburst of rage at the Indian's conduct, none in our little band expressed regret at seeing the cacique lying motionless and bleeding; not even the natives who were there to bear his litter. For theirs was a service of compulsion, and Zemaco's name stank in the nostrils of thousands and tens of thousands of the down-trodden people who served him, not from any sense of loyalty, but in a spirit of abject fear. None, therefore, stepped forward to assist him; and when Ovando ordered the bearers to lift up the chieftain and replace him in the litter whence Bobadillo had so savagely dragged him, they did it roughly, and without a word of remonstrance from Abibeyba. Judging from the Orejon's looks and those of his countrymen there was little concern whether Zemaco revived or died.

Eager to press forward, but determined not to leave Bilbao in the mountain passes to be food for the condors that sailed overhead, or to bleach in the mountain air, Ovando gave directions for the improvisation of a litter from the branches of trees that were strewn on the way. On this the soldier's body was laid with reverent hands, and the Indians raising the fresh burden to their shoulders, carried it along the narrow mountain path, until we should come to a spot where the soil would permit us to dig a grave.

When we halted at the next tambo, where we decided to shelter for the remainder of the day, we dug the grave ourselves and in secret, so that there should be no possibility of the resting-place being desecrated, and the body disturbed by the Peruvians at any time. That done Bilbao's body was lowered into it, and Sarmiento prayed while the little band of Spaniards knelt around.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN IRREPARABLE LOSS.

E were yet kneeling at Bilbao's grave when Hurtado, who had been standing on guard at a spot which commanded an extensive view of the valley, cried out that two horsemen were approaching from the direction of Pizarro's camp. Springing to our feet with excusable haste, we ran to the sentry's side, while he pointed out the spot on which, not a minute before, he had seen the moving figures of his countrymen.

"I see no one, Hurtado," said Ovando.

"No, Captain; they have disappeared in that clump of trees, but watch carefully and you will see them reappear." And scarcely had the man-at-arms spoken when there was a general cry—

"See! they come!"

They were too far away for us to distinguish their faces, but near enough to enable us to see by their shining armour that they were Spaniards, coming on as fast as their weary horses could carry them.

"Shall I go forward and meet them, Captain?" I cried, eager, like my companions, to know what their business was, and to hear the news.

"I am afraid your horse is too tired," was the response.

"Oh, no, Captain. Tristan can do another league or two. Pray let me go!"

"And me!" cried Pedro, whose bandaged arm by no means lowered his spirit.

"Very well, but be careful how you go, and see that you have your arms in readiness before you start. Not that you are likely to have any fighting, but it is always well to be prepared."

Walking quickly to the tambo to fetch our horses, we were surprised to find the gates closed against us. We placed our shoulders against them, but they would not move. Then we beat on them with our swords, shouting to Valdivia, who had been left on guard, to admit us. But no response coming I ran back to our comrades, who were still watching the approach of the horsemen, leaving Pedro to renew the efforts to rouse Valdivia, supposing that he had gone to sleep at his post.

The distance I had to run was a good half-mile, but I covered it in a very short time, shouting as I went, so that while I was yet some distance from them my comrades heard me. Turning, and seeing me running at the top of my speed, they concluded that something was wrong, and hastened to meet me.

"The gate of the tambo is closed and we cannot rouse Valdivia," I shouted, and waiting to say no more turned and hurried back to Pedro, lest alone he might be in jeopardy. When I arrived at the gate it was to find Pedro still beating upon it with the heavy handle of his sword. I was yet panting with my run when the others came up, breathless like myself, and full of confusion at the thought of what might have transpired during their absence.

At first we tried to force the gates, but being wrought of heavy timber, and thickly cased with copper, nothing would break them in but a cannon, or a heavy battering-ram. Some suggested that a fire should be lighted against

them, but this would have been a slow process, and not likely to avail much, since the copper sheeting was of many folds and very thick.

The tower itself was fully forty feet high, so that it was impossible for any of our number to be hoisted up in any way, nor could the walls be scaled, since the face was as smooth as labour could make it, short of putting on a surface like polished marble. The massive blocks of granite fitted each other so perfectly that there was little indication of any join, and even the stoutest implements would have failed to remove them from their places. Confounded as we were, we could not refrain from admiring the skill of the builders who had reared this mountain caravansary.

The utmost consternation filled me when Ovando suggested that something must be wrong within, for surely Valdivia could not be asleep amid so much turmoil. My thoughts instantly went to the maiden who was my promised wife, for, weary with her journey, she had gone to her chamber immediately on our arrival. But how any harm could possibly come we could not imagine. Careta was there with all his attendants, picked men, and seasoned warriors, and we knew that he would guard the daughter who was dear as life itself to him. The whole thing was a mystery, and all that we could think was that, worn out with the journey, everyone had fallen into heavy sleep, and did not, so far removed as their apartments were, hear our thundering blows upon the gate. This thought served to reassure me somewhat, but we did not relax our efforts to obtain an entrance, and find out whether anything was amiss.

At last a happy thought struck Arbues, who had been wandering about, turning over in his mind the various methods of entrance that might be tried. At his feet lay

a tree that had doubtless fallen during a storm, and had been left where it fell until it should be wanted. Calling to Ovando, he suggested that it might be reared against the tower, and made to serve the purposes of a ladder. The proposal was received with satisfaction, and one and all bent their energies to the task of rearing it against the walls. Light as the wood was, the tree was large and much longer than was necessary, as well as full of branches. The vigorous use of our axes, however, served to remove all these, and then the long, slim upper portion was marked off to the length that was necessary, and the trunk at that point chopped asunder.

While this was being done the travellers, approaching from the east, arrived, and were greeted with gladness, for they proved to be messengers despatched by Pizarro to see how we fared, and to conduct us to the camp, which now was only a day's march farther on. Hearing our story, Martin Fernandez and Velasquez de Cabrera joined us in our efforts, and finally, by dint of perseverance, the trunk of the tree stood against the walls, enabling anyone who could climb to effect an entrance into the place from whence we were now excluded.

Antonio, having been a sailor, mounted this improvised ladder with a readiness that won for him a hearty cheer, and before long he stood upon the tower, looking down into the courtyard of the tambo. Coming back to the tree again he shouted down to us the welcome news that the horses were standing safe and unharmed in the place where we had left them. As he did so I, light of foot, and skilful in all sorts of athletic efforts, and more than that, spurred on by love, had climbed the tree and stood by his side.

"We had better wait for one or two more, Don Alonso," said Antonio, as he smiled approval on my

willingness to face whatever dangers might be in store; and shouting down once more, called for three or four volunteers, to provide against emergencies. One of the new-comers—Fernandez—eager to share in any danger that was going, came up at once, followed by the sturdy Hurtado and Bobadillo. As soon as the latter had mounted, we descended the flight of stone steps that led into the great courtyard.

Nothing could be heard save the snorting and restless movement of our hungry horses; and as for human life, we neither saw nor heard any sign whatever. Presently we stood on the pavement, looking cautiously around with our swords in readiness; then, passing to our horses, found them just as we had left them.

“We had better open the gates at once, Del Benito,” said Fernandez; and turning in that direction as he spoke, we witnessed a distressing sight. Valdivia lay full length upon the floor, his sword grasped in one hand and a dagger in the other, while about him were six strange Indians, fully armed, but all dead or dying. There seemed to be some life in our fallen comrade, for when we knelt at his side he was still breathing. As Antonio poured some drops of wine between his lips from the flask he carried at his side, Valdivia opened his eyes and gazed about him, even lifting his sword, as if to strike another blow in self-defence. Bobadillo raised him into a sitting posture, and then he knew us and began to speak, while we listened eagerly to his faintly-spoken words.

“Some Indians, not of our company, came on me with a rush, and I had a fight with them for dear life. See!” he added, pointing with his sword to the dying and the dead about him. “I fought my hardest and my best; but one felled me with a blow from behind with a battle-axe, and the fight was over.”

And saying this he fell back into Bobadillo's arms—dead.

Springing to our feet we ran to the gates, and drawing back bolts and bars, made a way for our comrades outside to enter.

“What news?” cried Ovando, as he rushed in and saw Valdivia in Bobadillo's arms.

“Another loss, Captain,” answered Antonio solemnly; and when the others crowded round he repeated Valdivia's dying words, and pointed to the ghastly proofs of his hard, last fight.

“Search for the Lady Fulvia and the chieftains,” cried the Captain, after a look of deep concern at the gallant cavalier; and so saying, he set forth for the chamber where Abibeyba and Zemaco had been left securely chained and bolted in. But the chains were lying against the sides of the cell door, the bolts were drawn, the door itself stood wide open, and the chamber was empty!

All this, however, was as nought to me. In a perfect frenzy of anxiety I dashed on before my comrades towards the quarters where I had seen Fulvia and her women go; but when I turned into the passage, followed by Antonio, who, like myself, had a dread anticipation of some coming sorrow, I cried out with anguish. Across the way lay half a dozen Indians, and foremost among them all was Careta. He, like the other Chuchamans, was dead, but their blood-stained weapons showed that they had not died without a struggle. Leaping over their bodies I dashed down the dark passages, stumbling sometimes over a prostrate Indian—whether friend or foe I did not stay to discover. At last I came to the apartments set aside for Fulvia's use, and without waiting for any ceremony hurried in, only to stare in wild bewilderment, and with a heart that throbbed with agony and

the bitter sense of irreparable loss. The room was empty, save for one poor girl who lay upon the floor with a terrible wound across her body. She was not dead, and kneeling at her side I asked where her mistress was.

"Gone!" she answered faintly. "The cacique Zemaco came in with a score of men all armed and tore her from us. I sought to hinder them, and the cacique cut at me cruelly with his sword and laid me low." And forgetful of her own pain, the maiden wept and bewailed the loss of her mistress, who had ever been so kind to her.

As I knelt at the poor girl's side I was too bewildered to know what to do. I thought I should have gone mad, and vowed solemnly to requite Zemaco if harm came to my beloved one, or if ever he crossed my path.

But the exigencies of that hour called me back from my personal sorrow, since there were perhaps untold perils yet in store for us. I did what I could to bind up the wound of the maiden, and laying her on the couch close by, hurried back to see how my comrades fared. They were going from room to room, but saw no sign of any Indians, for the only fighting had been at the gate and in that passage, where a desperate attempt had been made by Careta and his warriors to defend Fulvia.

Presently we came to an opening in the wall of the tambo. It was the first time we had ever seen a second entrance or exit from any caravansary save that of Tubanama. As we looked it was clear to us that it was by this door that the missing chieftains and their attendants had escaped. Passing out we gazed into a deep valley, and then to some hills, where our horses could never find a footing. At a spot a mile away, but unapproachable, we saw four or five score of fully-armed Peruvians, whose spears glistened in the sunlight that fell upon the group. They were halting, as if seeking

to discover whether they were being pursued. When they saw us emerge from the caravansary, they shook their spears or waved their war-axes defiantly, and down the long valley in that clear cold air we could hear their shouts of challenge.

Long after the others had re-entered the tambo I remained at the door, in the vain hope that I might discover some token of Fulvia's presence in the company. It might have been my fancy, but I thought I saw the litters that had become so familiar during our eventful journey from the coast; but I could not be certain. Then with a heavy heart I turned back to join my comrades, and get through the night as I could. To me everything was dark and cheerless. The glorious sunset had no beauty in my eyes. My heart's peace was gone, and war and passion raged. In my fierce sorrow I felt as if I could cross the intervening valley and scale the heights, and single-handed fight the overwhelming force that had robbed me of the one woman I loved, even as I loved my very life. But Ovando, to whom I spoke of this, put his hand upon my shoulder and restrained me kindly.


"Wait your time, Don Alonso. You will recover her even yet."

"But how?"

That, however, he could not tell. Nor could I. And feeling my impotence, I had to pass the remainder of the day and the long night in unavailing regret, and in tormenting my heart with plans for her restoration.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PIZARRO'S CAMP.

 LATER examination showed us that the door by which our hostages had escaped was a secret one, wrought out of solid rock, and made to move upon a pivot, closing in the aperture with such nicety as to make it impossible to discover its existence without special information. Fortunately it was left open, and we were assured that Abibeyba and his companion were in reality gone, thus saving us from any further and fruitless search. Apart from Fulvia's abduction their escape was a disaster, should they be able to attack us on our journey on the morrow; but our hope was that they would have a long distance to traverse in the dark night that would soon set in, before they could meet with any of their countrymen, and collect them in sufficient force to impede our progress.

Our only course was to bury Careta and Valdivia at once, and in the same grave as that in which Bilbao had just been laid; then, securing ourselves in the tambo, as far as precaution would enable us to do so, go early to sleep and rise before the sun, so as to be able to start at the first sign of dawn. In this way we might outmarch the enemy, should they seek to intercept us in a country which, as the new arrivals stated, was as difficult as any we had yet traversed. Pizarro, they said, was only two

leagues away, lying with his forces in the fertile country at the base of the mountain slopes, awaiting our arrival before he marched any farther into the interior. But the two leagues were full of appalling dangers, as we found when, next morning, after an undisturbed night of rest, we obeyed the trumpet-call, and set out on the last stage of our memorable journey among the giant hills of this land that we had come to conquer.

There were two ways open before us. One was the high road of the Incas—a narrow path by which Fernandez and Cabrera had come, but trying in the extreme alike to the courage of man and horse, since a false step would result in an awful plunge into an abyss, at the bottom of which the river rolled on tumultuously. The other road meant a journey back again on the old path for a league or so, gradually descending until the river itself was reached, and then a march beside it, along a valley which was gloomy and sunless, and in many places almost as dark as night.

The first way had the double terror of a journey in giddy passes, and the continual danger of being crushed by rolling masses of rock, hurled down by Zemaco, should he be in the neighbourhood. The second had the telling disadvantage of being longer, and very gloomy and depressing. Not only so, we might find it necessary to spend the night there. But, on the other hand, Zemaco would never dream that we should retrace our steps for three long miles, and choose a way which was so full of horrors for a superstitious Peruvian.

We decided, therefore, upon the river path, with which Velasquez de Cabrera was well acquainted, taking with us double rations, and a quantity of corn for our horses. Then, having commended ourselves to God, we set forth on our way.

It was a gloomy start for every one of us, for not only had we to leave two brave comrades behind us, but there was the loss of the noble-minded cacique Careta to be added. And more to me—far more than all—there was the uncertain fate of my promised bride. Zemaco had long sought to win her, and now had carried her away. Each cavalier sought to encourage me by his sympathy, and one and all promised vengeance when they had the opportunity. But my sorrow did not rob me of alertness, nor shorten my desire for life. Riding out with the rest, I was ready to combat any dangers, and resolute to overcome whatever difficulties might beset us on the way. But discover Fulvia I would, if that were within the range of possibility. She was far too precious to be surrendered tamely.

But our plans were altered at the last moment. The sun broke out as we sallied forth from the gates and turned our horses' heads towards the river path. But before we had gone many yards Ovando shouted—

“Halt!”

Far away on the hills, towards which we had seen Abibeyba and Zemaco journeying the day before, and towards which the Captain was now pointing with his lance, we descried a formidable body of Indian warriors. We saw at a glance that, march as they would, they could not overtake us from that spot if we kept to the mountain pass. Had we ventured on the path up the stream they would have seen us, and possibly would overtake us; but as it was, by keeping well out of sight—and happily we were now screened by a clump of trees—we could watch their movements, and, in that clear mountain air, distinguish the banner of their leader. Gazing intently we saw the Sun and Panther emblazoned upon it as it waved in the breeze—enough

to assure us that our mischievous foe, Zemaco, was in command.

By keeping well behind the trees that skirted the path for some distance, it was possible so far to gain upon our enemies as to advance leisurely. We could thus minimise the danger either to our horses or ourselves. So much depended on keeping calm and avoiding hurry; and knowing that Zemaco could not overtake us if we made good use of our time, it was decided that the pass should be tried.

To tell the story of that journey is but to repeat the account of the toils we had already undergone, and which are here recorded. We passed by little hamlets that had been deserted long before, the Indians who had dwelt in them having fled at the approach of Pizarro, and knowing of his close proximity they had feared to return.

The first league was the most perilous. We had started at daybreak; it was high noon before we halted, little more than three miles from the plain where the ascent began. Then we sat down, hungry, and trembling with the continuous exertion of keeping on our feet, but happy in the thought that we had lost neither horse nor man.

"The rest of the journey is in more open country, where we can hold our own readily should we be attacked," said Cabrera, as we rested and gazed about us when our meal was over.

Ovando would not suffer us to linger, and after a halt of not more than an hour and a half, we led our horses on again. And now, difficult though the pathway was, the journey became full of interest. We began our descent into warmer regions, and before long, and suddenly, came to a spot which caused our hearts to glow, and made us forget our toils and perils. Almost at our feet, as it

were, and not more than a league away, we saw Pizarro's camp, and the welcome gleam of Spanish armour in the sunshine. The sight was so grateful to us that we stood and raised a loud, long cheer, while we fired a volley from our muskets. Evidently the sounds, carried by the breeze that blew from behind us, reached the ears of our countrymen, for we saw them come to the doors of the huts which Pizarro had caused the natives of the district to build, and look along the pathway winding up the mountain side. When we drew nearer they caught sight of us, for our helmets glittered as the sun's rays fell upon them. Then they waved their swords and shouted out their welcome. From the whole of the gallant little army on the plain the shouts came up the slopes, and reached our ears as pleasant music—music we had been longing to hear for many a day gone by.

An hour later we were embracing the old comrades from whom we had parted so long before.

But glad as I was to grasp their hands that day, there was none whose face so cheered me as that of the kind Fray de Vargas, my old tutor of Madrid. As the evening shadows fell I walked with the priest through the camp, and told him of my betrothal to Fulvia, and my bitter loss. The same old spirit of sympathy was displayed, and before he left me at his tent door I knelt while he gave me his blessing, and promised that he would pray for my happiness and the restoration of my loved one.

The very thought of this good man's intercession lifted a load of sorrow from my heart, and sent me back to my quarters with a new hope springing up within.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WHITE CITY.

WHEN we had fairly settled down in Pizarro's camp, we told of the startling adventures that had befallen us on the way, and then listened to the story of the Spaniards' doings since they had bivouacked upon the fertile plains of Peru, where now we found them. The perils that had overtaken our little band had been altogether escaped by the main body of the invading force; and added to the fact that the various embassies from Atabalipa, the Inca, had been so distinctly friendly, we concluded that the dangers that had beset us at Tubanama and elsewhere were due to an inveterate hatred which Zemaco had conceived for the invaders. Ovando even hinted that jealousy, on account of Fulvia's love for a Spaniard, had borne no small share in the terrible endeavours he had made to annihilate us. Undoubtedly, on his escape from the dungeon in the palace of Tubanama, the cacique had succeeded in inducing Abibeyba to co-operate with him to cut us off, and thus weaken Pizarro and save the empire. Evidently he considered that the Inca did not realize that the Spaniards had come to conquer the country, and despoil it of its boundless treasures.

Strange to say, while Pizarro with his cavalry and infantry were crossing the mountains they scarcely unsheathed their

swords. They lodged night after night in the tambos, and were served with willing hands by the keepers, who declared that they had been ordered by Atabalipa to do all in their power to make their march easy and secure.

But the Spanish General was none the less cautious, and in spite of all the kindness went forward as if in an enemy's dominions—as indeed he was—and in hourly danger of an attack from an overwhelming army. While he marched on slowly he heard continually of the mighty power of Peru, and of the gigantic armies which the Inca was able to bring into the battlefield. It was told him repeatedly that at very short notice Atabalipa could mass in any district two hundred thousand warriors, fully equipped and armed with lance or dart, with battle-axe or slings, and bows and arrows, which weapons they were able to use with deadly skill.

Once in camp we listened incredulously to the story our comrades told us, that not one skirmish had come to their lot after they had left the coast, and that their only troubles came from the perils of the road that skirted those yawning abysses among the mountains. In the end they descended into the plain, where they rested for many days, waiting for any reinforcements that might come before they began the real work of conquest.

Before they crossed that last tremendous ridge we had just traversed in such trepidation, an embassy arrived at the tambo from whence Zemaco had escaped. It came from Atabalipa, bringing many magnificent presents to Pizarro, but angrily protesting against the action of the Spaniards in plundering the store-houses of the various great towns, which they had turned aside continually to despoil, and also requesting to know the object of this visit to Peru.

I must confess that Pizarro's reply was far from truth-

ful, for he declared to the ambassadors that, having heard of the fame of the mighty and valiant Inca of Peru, and how he was beset with enemies and troubled with civil war, he and his companions had come in the hope that they could be of service to him, by helping to fight his battles.

As Sandoval told me of this I turned to him in astonishment. "But, Sandoval, is this really true? I thought we had come to conquer the land and to win wealth, since we knew that the country teemed with it!"

Sandoval and those around who heard me, laughed at my simplicity, as they chose to term my honesty of purpose.

"This young cavalier does not understand policy, even if he knows how to fight!" exclaimed Miguel Diaz, patting me good-naturedly on the back; "and after all, I am not sure that he is not a great deal the better for it."

"Policy?" I cried. "Is it policy to tell the ambassador what is absolutely false?"

"Certainly, my friend," was the response.

"Then I do not believe in it!" I exclaimed hotly. "It is nothing but an absolute lie! We came here to conquer the land, and not to fight for the Inca. I like not these false doings."

A laugh followed, but I heeded not their expressions of pity by reason of my simplicity.

Whatever our intentions were, and however Pizarro and his followers might conceal them, we were convinced before long that the Inca did not believe in our pretensions, and that he was slowly but surely gathering a mighty army together, without arousing our suspicions, to sweep down upon us some day and annihilate us by mere weight of numbers, if not by military skill.

One morning a scout came in declaring that he had heard from a friendly curaca of a distant village that the Inca was approaching with a vast body of warriors, in spite of

the declaration of the envoy that his royal master was glad to avail himself of the proffered help against his enemies.

Calling Ovando to his side, Pizarro desired him to select a number of Spaniards and scour the country in one direction, while he would send Hernando Pizarro, his brother, and De Soto elsewhere to discover what dangers threatened us. Ovando chose the gallant comrades of his famous march, and we set forth, ready, if needs be, to fight, but chiefly concerned in reconnoitring the enemy's position.

Riding across the valley, which stretched full five leagues before us and was three leagues broad, we came to a broken ridge, the sides of which we climbed with a skill that was won of recent and long-continued experience. When we reached the summit the sight before us filled each one with wonder, and at the same time caused our hearts to beat more quickly.

Words fail me when I try to picture the scene. Beautiful as was the spot in which we had been encamping, it scarcely compared with this. A magnificent river wended its way across the land, bordered with trees and verdure of the greatest beauty. Great flocks of llamas and alpacas fed on the grass-clothed fields. Fan palms, with their broad-leaved crowns, towered above verdant groves of laurel, amyris, and elm-like robles, while here and there were shining lakes, whose waters were alive with aquatic birds. The clear atmosphere enabled our eyes to range over the country for many a league, and we thought as we looked upon it that here indeed was an empire worthy to be added to those over which our august monarch already swayed his sceptre. But as our eyes swept the great expanse we saw a small but beautiful city, on whose roofs the glowing sun fell and was reflected with a dazzling whiteness. Its true name was Caxamalca, but we ever after called it the *White City*. Farther on again—a league or thereabouts

—stood a building whose many pinnacles, as they pointed skyward, glistened in the sun. The roof was of silver, and bathed in sunlight, like the polished marble walls that supported it, dazzled our eyes so that we could not look upon it. All this filled us with admiration, and caused us to think of the wealth in store if we proved equal to the task of conquest in the coming days.

But the struggle would be keen and desperate, and we were the more assured of this when we saw, stretching between the city and the palace, tents that were countless in number. They indicated the presence of a mighty army, and to the practised eyes of Ovando and his older companions—soldiers who had fought against the Moors in Spain and Indians in Mexico—the great encampment contained not less than fifty thousand men.

Fifty thousand! Nor were these all. In the far distance we espied dense masses of Indians marching on towards Caxamalca. They streamed down the mountain sides, and as they advanced the sunlight fell upon their waving banners, on the casques of the soldiers, on the many-coloured costumes, and on the glittering spears and other weapons with which the approaching warriors were armed.

I gazed around to see how my companions bore themselves in face of such overwhelming possibilities, but they showed no fear. Why should they? They were Spaniards who had set forth in God's name, and so far every battle and skirmish had been won. Why should they think of the next battle as capable of being lost? My own heart beat with anxiety, but I looked again at my valiant comrades who had fought so splendidly in the mountain passes; I thought of the victories on the reaches by the sea, I remembered how Cortez and his gallant little army had conquered Mexico, and my fear died away. I could but trust in God, and like a Spaniard, fight my best.

There was great excitement in the camp when we brought in our news, and the parties under Pizarro's brother and De Soto confirmed our report. Everyone had turned out of his tent to hear the results of our reconnoitre, and Pizarro, like the rest, looked grave. When the reports were received—for the various parties had chanced to meet outside the camp and rode in together—the General turned to his men. His face, it is true, was serious, but there was not a trace of consternation. His eyes seemed to glance fire, and drawing himself up to his full height, he cried: "Comrades, tens of thousands of Indians await us in the camp beyond the mountains. What say you? Shall we return to Spain, or go forward and achieve the conquest?"

Each sword flashed from its scabbard as he ended, and a shout burst from every throat: "Lead us onward!"

"Then be it so!" answered Pizarro. "To-morrow we will set forth to meet the Inca!"

At day-dawn the camp broke up, and the little army set forth in battle array and in three divisions. It was noon when we reached the spot where Ovando's reconnoitring party had drawn up to examine the distant prospect and had viewed the Inca's hosts. As we halted there our minds must have dwelt, without exception, on the thought of overwhelming odds. Having regard to the fact that a strong garrison had been left at San Miguel, at most we were not more than two hundred men, while yonder there lay an army swollen to such an extent since yesterday that we could safely say that the Indians numbered five hundred to every one of us. Pointing to the mighty host with his sword, the General gave us a final choice. "Say, once for all, Spaniards, shall we go on?"

"Go forward!" was the answering shout.

"If anyone's heart should fail him," cried Pizarro, "let

him turn back now. As for me, I shall go forward, even though the greater number of you should elect to retreat while you yet have the opportunity."

"Go forward!" was the repeated cry. "We have come to conquer!"

"Spaniards could give no other answer!" exclaimed Pizarro, as he shook the reins of his charger.

And we went forward, our banners streaming in the breeze that sprang up as we began our march down the mountain slopes. The bright sunshine gleamed upon our armour and on the glossy coats of our steeds, so that even as we looked around us the martial display of our own company alone put heart into us, to say nothing of the glory we should win as the conquerors of Peru.

At last we drew near to Caxamalca, ready at any moment for battle; but not one Indian warrior drew near, although we saw so many watching us from their camp. When we halted outside the open gates of the city, so that the General should be assured that we were in full readiness for a fight, and give us final orders in case we might meet with opposition in the streets, there was a profound silence. Glancing through the gates and along the thoroughfares we saw that they were empty. The roofs held no one, although it was the usual custom of the natives of the New World to assail an invading force from that place of vantage with darts and stones.

Caxamalca, like Calisaya—that city on the coast which we had entered and found so full of treasure—seemed to be a city of the dead. When we marched through the gates and down the streets, the horses' hoofs rang upon the stones, and the tramp of the infantry sounded formidable. There might have been ten thousand people in the White City that morning, but now, as the sun was declining, the only inhabitants were the Spaniards.

Fastening the gates behind us, when it was found that the inhabitants and garrison had really deserted Caxamalca, Pizarro led the way to a fortress, strong and impregnable, lying on that side of the city where a full view of the Indian camp and the royal palace could be obtained. The castle was built in a style as massive and impregnable as anything we had yet seen. The walls that encircled it were fully nine feet thick and forty feet high, being smooth on the outer side, so that no climber, however agile, could scale them. Inside stairs of granite led up to the battlements, from whence great stones could be hurled upon the assailants below. As for the gates themselves, they were defended from the towers on either side; but quite apart from this, any attempt to force them would have been hopeless. Formed of copper and stout timber, there were no less than four, one placed behind the other, and so constructed as to slide along, thus avoiding the weakness of hinges. Not one of those gates was less than a foot in thickness, and any of them would have been sufficient to hold back an army, and resist the strongest battering-rams that could be brought against them. And yet so nicely were they made that these ponderous gates rolled along with the exertion of four or five men, and as they clanged against the opposite walls huge bolts of solid copper slipped down the grooves and into the loops to secure them. The only way of entrance when once they were thrust into place was to smash down these mighty doors—a task almost beyond the power even of European artillery to accomplish.

Within the outer wall stood the fortress itself, built on no less massive a scale, and absolutely impregnable. Had all the Inca's thousands assailed us we could have held them back for all time, provided we had a sufficient supply of food for our horses and ourselves. The peculiarity of its

construction was this—that the walls began at the entrance, and wound round and round like a screw, with gates at intervals across the ascending pathway. It was a marvellous building, affording every advantage to the defenders, and exposing those who ventured upon the assault to terrible risks.

Some of the chambers within gave one the impression of a prison, so dark and gloomy were they, being lighted only by narrow slits in the solid masonry. But there were here, as in the treasure-house at Calisaya, many chambers full of arms and armour, and clothing, with provisions in sufficient quantity to supply an army and to stand a siege for many months.


Our eyes glistened with pleasure when we saw this, for should Atabalipa besiege us here, we should not be brought to experience the horrors of starvation. Even our horses would be provided for, for there was dried grass in abundance, and corn was stored in the chambers, evidently for the llamas, that would be driven in in large numbers by the defenders if ever a siege were threatened.

High up in this fortress, out of the reach of missiles, were magnificent apartments, gorgeous as any of those which were set apart for the Inca's use in the tambos at which we had halted in our progress from the coast. The costly furniture, the decorations of the walls with richly-coloured tapestries, and the unusual abundance of gold and silver plate, showed us that this fortress had been provided for the safety of the monarch, in case he should ever be hard pressed by his enemies.

Thus at the end of a long day's journey we found everything to hand for our comfort, and more than that, we were filled with a sense of security, since we were able to make this stronghold the base of our operations in the coming task of conquest.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN EMBASSY TO THE INCA.

UR rest that night was undisturbed, but we were up betimes in the morning, and ready for any commands that the General might issue.

Noon came, but no sign, either of hostility or friendship, from the Inca. The camp, as we looked upon it, appeared to wear its every-day aspect, just as if the Peruvians ignored the fact that a Spanish force was close at hand. The day was cold, for it was now November, and hail and rain had been falling freely after sunrise. As the weather cleared, however, and the sun came out again, Pizarro resorted to the bold expedient of sending an embassy to Atabalipa. Calling Hernando de Soto to his side, he told that cavalier to take a company of fifteen horsemen and proceed at once to the Inca's camp. In this little squadron were several of my companions in the recent march, and as they set forth I looked after them longingly.

"Would you not have liked to accompany them, Alonso?" said Don Pedro, drawing near.

"Ah, that I would, Pedro!" I replied; "but I suppose the General would only send his ablest-bodied men, so that there would be no chance for young fellows like us."

"And yet we should know how to fight," said Pedro proudly.

Just then Antonio drew near.

"The General wants you, Don Alonso, and you, Don Pedro also," he said.

Turning round quickly we saw that Pizarro's eyes were on us, and when we drew near he exclaimed—

"I see, my lords, that you have been looking with longing eyes after your countrymen, who are riding towards the palace to convey my message to the Inca. Mount at once and accompany my brother Hernando, who is about to set out to strengthen De Soto. And do you go also, Del Benito, and watch well over the safety of these venturesome young nobles." And, anxious as he must have been, he smiled when he saw the looks of satisfaction on our faces.

A few minutes later we were galloping with the reinforcing party—twenty of us in all—along the causeway that connected the White City with the Indian camp, which was nearly a league away. We went forward at a great pace, overtaking De Soto, who halted as the younger Pizarro's trumpeter sent forth a loud blast to bid them await our coming. Then, making up a gallant band of five-and-thirty, we went forward with all the splendour which burnished armour, flying pennons, and high-spirited horses could display.

The camp, as I have already stated, lay between the city and the palace, but the arrival of so many reinforcements had resulted in the army forming all round the Inca's dwelling, so that the monarch rested securely amid these countless thousands of his own warriors.

When we drew near, the magnificence of what we saw astounded us, although we assumed an air of unconcern as we were gazed upon by the great nobles who made up the Inca's court. Riding along the terrace that led to the bower where the monarch was sitting, we passed through double rows of soldiers, standing mutely, with

their long spears erect, and their eyes looking straight before them. Yet as our horses' feet thundered on the pavement, and our steel armour rattled at every movement, we could detect signs of fear in spite of all that apparent stolidity.

Mounted on our war-chargers we had an extended view of the pleasure grounds, and spread around us was a display of magnificence which either proved the immensity of the country's wealth, or bore witness to a crushing tyranny.

Beyond the military guard we saw a crowd of pages and others who did duty in the palace. Nearer yet to the palace itself we found nobles, who were doubtless officers of the royal household. At last by a word from De Soto, who was in command, we halted suddenly in the very presence of Atabalipa, Inca of Peru, famous as the greatest of his long race, and yet destined to be the monarch who was compelled to surrender his empire to an invading Spanish army.

He was seated on a low couch of ebony, inlaid with gold and silver and precious stones, and around him were ranged the great officers of state—the Orejons and caciques who had come up from their distant provinces, with their contingents of warriors, at their royal master's call.

Gazing at the crowd of nobles, I marked with astonishment two faces, although they were far apart. Close by Atabalipa, and to his right hand, was Abibeyba, his presence there showing how near his kinship to the monarch was. But he stood in stolid silence, gazing at us with an easy unconcern, and exhibiting no sign that he had ever known any of our number, or had been a prisoner, although he must have recognized Ovando and Arbues, and many another who had accompanied

him on that trying march in the mountains. Farther away, and to the left of the monarch, we discerned the scowling face of Zemaco. When he saw that my eyes were upon him a malicious look of triumph flashed across his face, which only made me more resolute than before to avenge myself for Fulvia's loss.

The very sight of this Indian, who had proved to be my evil genius throughout this expedition, awakened the thought that possibly the lost one might be in the group of nobles around the Inca, or somewhere within sight. Since Zemaco and Abibeyba were there, why should not my promised bride be also close at hand? The thought filled me at once with mingled feelings of hopefulness and despair. She was near and yet so distant from me, for how could I hope to regain her from amid that mighty throng? But while I looked in all directions I sought in vain, for she was not in the group of maidens that took their stand not far behind the monarch.

By a resolute effort I fixed my eyes upon the Inca himself. He might have been made of dark-hued marble, so still did he remain. Notwithstanding the fact that the Spaniards had defeated his armies on the coast, and had overcome every obstacle, advancing into the very heart of his country without once hesitating—irresistible as he must have heard we were from the chieftains who had escaped us—he showed no interest whatever. He might have been gazing into space for any emotion or surprise that he displayed, for his whole appearance was one of apathy. He sat there like a king who was so familiar with magnificence and marvellous sights that the presence of a handful of Spaniards was as nothing to him. He did not even speak when De Soto and the General's brother, accompanied by Ovando and Arbues, rode slowly forward, and drew so near that the foam from

their horses' mouths actually flecked the royal robe. A page seeing this went forward and wiped it away, but Atabalipa made no sign either that his visitors should speak or withdraw.

I was struck with the appearance of the monarch, for he differed so much from my expectations. Strangely enough Fulvia, who knew the Inca well, had never spoken to me about him, and I had imagined a monarch with long and flowing beard, white with age, and altogether of venerable appearance. Instead of that I saw a stalwart young man of thirty, or thereabouts, with a black and well-trimmed beard, fine aquiline features, a high and intellectual brow, bordered with black locks that were well thrown back, and almost reached his square and massive shoulders. His eyes were dark and quiet; but when he saw the timorous looks of some of his courtiers, as the Spaniards displayed their prowess on their war-chargers, later in our visit, those same eyes flashed fire, and the impression came to every one of us that here was a king who kept in restraint forces which, when aroused, could make him truly martial and worthy of the fame that had spread among the neighbouring nations.

De Soto was not well versed in the Peruvian language, and therefore Felipillo, Pizarro's interpreter, spoke the message which De Soto brought from the General and now dictated. The native interpreter concluded, but the monarch made no response until Hernando Pizarro asked Atabalipa what answer he should take to his brother concerning the invitation that De Soto brought—that the Emperor of the Peruvians would deign to visit the Spaniards at Caxamalca.

Then for the first time the Inca raised his eyes and looked upon his visitors, and for a moment or two his face lost its apathy.

“Go, Spaniard, and tell your master that I am keeping a fast which will end to-morrow morning, and that I will then visit him with my chieftains. In the meantime let him occupy the public buildings in the square, and no other till I come, when I will order what shall be done for his comfort.”

After this he displayed some interest in what was before him, and watched our war-steeds, whose reckless champing had attracted the attention of all who stood around the throne. As the horses curvetted proudly the soldiers of the Inca who were standing near started back in terror—an act which caused the monarch to frown ominously at what he doubtless considered a display of cowardice. Next day we heard that as soon as we had departed Atabalipa had ordered them to be put to death. He scorned, he said, to have warriors in his army who could show fear in the presence of those who might prove to be the deadly enemies of Peru.

A few minutes later we wheeled round, in order to carry back the Inca’s reply to Pizarro’s message.

“Stay, cavaliers!” exclaimed a cacique, approaching De Soto. “The Inca desires that you would remain a while and refresh yourselves at his table.”

“What say you, Hernando?” said the cavalier before he responded.

“Decline, De Soto. It would never do for us to dismount, for who can tell what treachery this Indian monarch may meditate?”

“True. Such a thought passed through my own mind.” And turning, the Captain asked the Indian nobleman to convey his thanks to the monarch, but say that we must needs be gone, since the General would be awaiting our return.

But when the cacique carried back De Soto’s reply

there was a movement in the crowd of nobles about the throne, and a number of beautiful maidens clothed in white appeared. Their necks, waists, ankles, and arms were encircled with costly ornaments, while their sandals were richly jewelled. Their head-dresses had each a brilliant of surpassing splendour, which flashed forth dazzling rays at every movement. Each damsel bore in her hands a golden goblet filled with sparkling wine, such as was used at the Inca's own table. As we handed back the cups to these dark-skinned beauties the same cacique came forward again and spoke to De Soto.

"My royal master desires to witness the evolutions of these beautiful animals which you ride, and of which he has heard so much."

"Then I pray you clear me all this plain, and it shall be as the Inca desires," was the Spaniard's response, and in a few minutes where thousands of soldiers had been standing under arms we were wheeling round and round, our horses galloping amid the bray of trumpets and the clash of armour.

It must have been a startling spectacle, for our horses shook the very earth, while we ourselves shouted the famous war-cries of Spain in our mimic warfare. There was a scream of dismay from those who stood about the throne as our company spread out and galloped with levelled lances up to the very spot where Atabalipa sat. But the well-trained chargers by a mere touch drew up in their full career within a spear's length of the Inca and his nobles. Then with a parting salute the squadron wheeled round and journeyed back to the White City.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DESPERATE PLAN.

THERE was little sleep that night for some of the Spaniards, for Pizarro called the leaders together for what might well be termed a war council. De Soto and the General's brother had told him of all that they had seen, and the report they gave of the splendour of the Inca's court, and the magnificent display of the serried ranks that made up the Peruvian army, convinced him that some desperate scheme must be resorted to if he and his comrades in arms were to emerge from the coming conflict victoriously.

Pedro and I were with Pizarro when the hidalgos and others who were invited to the council came in one by one. We had been talking excitedly to him of all that we had seen that day—the magnificence of the Inca's court, the wonderful discipline of his warriors, the proud stolidity of the monarch, the inexhaustible resources of which we saw evidence on every hand, but as the cavaliers began to enter we turned to quit the chamber.

“You need not go,” said Pizarro. “It will do you good to know how soldiers meet in council, and perhaps you will better understand what will be expected of you when we resolve upon our course of action. Stand back, my young lords, and listen in silence.”

When all had come who were expected, Pizarro turned to Hernando de Soto.

"Tell us now and here, De Soto, what you told me of your visit to the Inca, since so many of us had not the privilege of accompanying you."

In as few words as possible De Soto told the story, and when he had done this, he went on to repeat what he had ventured to suggest to our General. As he looked around him he said he could not forget how small a force we were, and how mighty the kingdom we had resolved to conquer.

There was a strange stillness in the chamber, and men scarcely breathed when the brave Captain pointed out that instead of endeavouring to conquer a nation of savages, we were face to face with a people of unrivalled civilization in the New World, countless in point of numbers, splendid in discipline, and apparently invincible against the bravery and chivalry of our own small army.

"Some other method of fighting these Peruvians must be resorted to, comrades, if we are to escape annihilation," were his closing words.

For a long time no one spoke, until Pizarro invited a free expression of opinion.

"There must be no thought of retreat, General, now that we have come so far!" exclaimed the brave Ovando, and his words were received with loud expressions of approval.

"Retreat? Rather than go home, confessing ourselves beaten, it would be more worthy of Spaniards to die in the thick of battle," he went on. "And what is more, the attempt to return would be the signal for an onslaught from the Peruvians, which would end in certain death for everyone. Even supposing that we succeeded in reaching the mountains, we should but enter a terrible death-trap,

from whence there would be no escape. Therefore, I say, let us go onward, resolute to conquer or to die! Cortez won Mexico. Let us win Peru!"

Ovando's words were greeted with enthusiasm, and he had seemed to say all that needed to be said. It only remained for us to make a bold bid for conquest, or if needs be, perish.

But presently blank amazement marked every face when Pizarro unfolded his own scheme.

"Comrades, I now see why our little army was allowed to advance into the very heart of Peru. But for the onslaughts on Ovando's gallant band our progress through the mountains was not retarded in any way. Down by the coast we were met by armies and fought desperate battles, but suddenly all opposition ceased. More and more it is evident to me that Atabalipa altered his plans and left us to ourselves, so that when once he saw us on this side of the mountains he might cut off our retreat, fall upon us with his immense forces and take possession of our horses and our arms, while putting every Spaniard to death. He may do that yet, however nobly we may fight. Listen, then, to my plan of action. We must fight the Inca with different weapons. Do you remember how Cortez took the Emperor of the Aztecs prisoner, and then grasped the whole of that vast empire for himself and his followers? To-morrow the Inca comes to see us in this city. At a given signal we will make him our prisoner. Then we can hold him hostage for our own safety, and secure what terms we will!"

It was a daring plan, and to not a few it seemed to be an iniquitous one.

"Pizarro, it is wicked," said the good priest who was present—Fray Juan de Vargas. "How, think you, can we prosper, or hope to win God's blessing, if we suffer

the Inca of Peru to come to us, supposing himself to be secure and free from molestation, and then to find himself a prisoner?"

"There is much in what you say, good father," answered Pizarro gently, "but bethink you! Atabalipa has lured us into this land purposing to slay us. We do not intend to kill him, but hold him hostage for our lives and those of our brave followers who may even now be taking their last sleep on earth. Where is the greater wrong—to hold the Inca in our own hands, and so secure our own deliverance, or suffer him to hurl his hosts upon us, so that we and our comrades shall die? It is our only resort, and I pray you think of it as honestly meant."

"Then be it so, my son," said the priest, "but I do not like it. It has a savour of treachery about it, yet be it so, since the lives of our brothers are in jeopardy."

This ended the council so far as the majority of us were concerned, and we retired to rest, a few of the leaders only remaining to formulate the plan for the desperate enterprise of the following day. As I lay down side by side with Pedro I asked him what he thought of this design.

"It is treachery, Alonso, and I would that I could avoid having any part in it. But we are under bond to obey our leaders, and the cause, they say, is lost unless we seize the Inca. What say you?"

"The same, Pedro," I responded, and then I sought to forget this treachery in sleep. Who could say whether we should ever lie down in peace upon our beds again, in face of the fact that to-morrow was to witness such desperate deeds against such overwhelming odds? While I loved the excitement of the campaign in which we were engaged, I was full of shame to think that life must needs

be purchased at the cost of perfidy. For was it anything other than that?

Next morning Pedro and I, as we dressed, talked over the contemplated doings of the day.

"Let us go to Father de Vargas, Alonso." And as soon as we were dressed we sought him in his chamber. He was kneeling in prayer when we entered, and we stood back and waited in silence. But presently he rose from his knees, and turning to us, said—

"What is your will, my children?"

"We were present at the council, father."

"Yes, my son," he answered, and waited for my next words.

"The plan resolved upon troubles us."

A look of pain shot across the pale face of the priest, but without hesitation he answered: "Follow your leaders, is all that I can advise. In such a time of jeopardy, when the life of every Spaniard hangs in the balance, we must needs follow the only plan that I fear is left to us. Do not forget, my children, that the Inca, if we fall into his power, will slay us without remorse. We do not mean to slay him, but hold him hostage for our safety. Leave me now, and may God protect you. Bethink you, as you enter on the duties of this day, that if we can but win this land for Spain we shall also win the people for Christ, so that all will work out for the country's good and the glory of God."

And we left the good father, our hearts at rest, while he once more went down on his knees in prayer.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WAITING FOR THE INCA.

THE Inca was due to arrive in Caxamalca at noon, but long before that hour everything was in readiness for his seizure.

The trumpet roused the invaders just as the sun was beginning to show himself among the far-off eastern hills, and by the time the valley was flooded with the early morning light the Spaniards were gathered together on the summit of the great fortress in which we had slept.

Not a whisper had gone forth as to Pizarro's design, for all who had been present at the council the night before had been bound over to absolute secrecy. Yet everyone in our gallant little army was conscious that the day which had now opened would be fateful, alike for ourselves and for the empire we had come to conquer. Antonio and Bobadillo—who knew nothing of the proposal made in the council-chamber—were standing near me, watching the Peruvian camp in the distance, and conversing in tones which caused me, whether I would or not, to hear every word.

“What think you, Del Benito? Should not the General make us secure by holding the Inca as hostage for our safety?”

“But how would he do that, Bobadillo? Think you we could march through a hundred thousand well-armed

warriors and bring the Inca in as prisoner, or hold him as we did Zemaco and Abibeyba?"

"No, friend. I would, if I were Pizarro, find an easier way than that. Is not the Inca coming hither some time to-day? I would seize him, just as Cortez did Montezuma, the Emperor of Mexico, and hold him fast as a hostage against any mischief to our army. The men were talking about it last night, and if Pizarro gave the word Atabalipa would sleep to-night in this fortress and his army be afraid to molest us, since the Inca's life would be forfeited. Bethink you, Del Benito," continued the cavalier, "the army yonder is more than five hundred to one, and in spite of Spanish valour we must succumb sooner or later. Were I Pizarro I would seize the monarch when he comes hither to-day and treat him kindly, but hold him in possession until we have made our footing firm. Then he should go free."

"It is an excellent suggestion, comrade, and I should be glad to hear that Pizarro contemplated it. Otherwise we are all dead men."

Just then Pizarro came out, and, standing near the battlements, with all the Spaniards around him save the sentinels, he unfolded his plans, just as he had done in the council the night before. As he spoke he looked about him with an anxiety he sought to hide, but before long saw that the army was with him. No sooner had he declared his intention of seizing the Inca, to keep him in honourable captivity until our position was secure, than the whole assembly cheered his words, and expressed a readiness to undertake any duty that would serve to ensure success in one of the most daring acts of history.

To have the hearty co-operation of the soldiers was half the battle, and now Pizarro began to place his men to execute his scheme. Several hours remained in

which to carry out the arrangements. There was every possibility of a terrific struggle, for it was scarcely likely that Atabalipa would venture into the Spanish quarters without surrounding himself with a strong bodyguard, and considering the fact that the Inca was held in such absolute reverence by every rank, the nobles and soldiers who accompanied him would fight with heroic determination.

Face to face with danger as we were, night and day, there was little to be done in the way of preparation of arms. Every Spaniard saw that his armour was in complete condition, and his whole equipment ready for conflict, every morning since we had left the ships on the coast; consequently within an hour of the General's intimation as to the day's doings each man was ready, and each horse in order for a desperate charge.

As our steeds came forward, full of spirit, and eager for battle, they created an unusual noise. Hernando Pizarro, in searching the great store-houses that bordered on the city square, came across some loud-toned bells, such as were hung on the llamas' necks during the religious festivals. He suggested to his brother that they should be fastened upon the harness of the horses, so that their noise, added to the battle-shouts of the Spaniards and the clank of armour, would serve to inspire the natives with awe and add to their consternation. Corn was then brought from the store-houses wherewith to feed the chargers, while the men found abundance of food in the empty houses of the deserted city, without encroaching on the supply in the fortress.

As the hour of noon approached we gathered together in the great Plaza where the Inca was to be seized. By Pizarro's command, Father de Vargas led the service that followed, aided by the other priests; but it seemed to me

that his rich voice trembled, and as I looked into his face, so earnest and so good, I saw that it was pale and full of pain. He was struggling with himself as to whether he should denounce the plan, but he was face to face with the awful alternative, that to forbid would be to imperil the lives of all about him. It was clear that he was exceedingly unhappy.

Presently as we knelt, our drawn swords in our hands and uplifted, we broke into a solemn chant, and on the air there rose the words, "Rise, O Lord, and judge Thine own cause."

When the service was ended we went to the places assigned to us. The Plaza was surrounded on the four sides by great public buildings, one of which I have already mentioned—the military store-house. The other three opened out upon the square by gateways, which admirably served Pizarro's purpose. Had the designers of this portion of the White City desired to provide a place where everything would favour the seizure of their Inca, they could not have improved upon what was now to our very hand.

Into the palace of the cacique of Caxamalca, De Soto took his company of cavaliers and waited inside the closed gates, mounted and ready for a dash into the square the moment a gun was fired. Hernando Pizarro took an equal body of cavalry into the government buildings on that side of the Plaza immediately opposite. The foot-soldiers occupied the House of the Serpent, a great structure on the third side of the square. Others were posted in the fortress, while the remaining twenty cavaliers were chosen to act under emergencies as the General might indicate, and be with him when the Inca entered the Plaza.

All this being done, we awaited the arrival of the

monarch, which, however, was long delayed. After a while Pizarro, turning to me, bade me go to the fortress, mount to the summit, and bring him word as to whether the Inca was far away.

Shaking Tristan's rein I galloped across the Plaza and down the short and narrow street that led to the fortress. There I dismounted, and leaving my charger in the care of one of the artillerymen, hurried up to the highest spot, where I obtained an uninterrupted view of all that was going on for many a mile.

As I reached the place the royal procession had just begun to move. First came some hundreds of men, who swept the great causeway, so that it should be clean for the coming of the Inca. A great space was kept between these and the procession itself, which was headed by about a hundred nobles walking four abreast, some of them carrying their golden rods, others huge maces of solid silver, and yet others bore great axes made of polished copper—all of which served to indicate the rank they held in the Peruvian order of nobility.

Behind these followed twenty caciques, on whose bosoms blazed the golden suns, which always formed a part of their adornment. Next came the Orejons—the kinsmen of the Inca—and then the Inca himself. The litter in which he sat was borne on the shoulders of nobles, and as the sunshine fell upon this costly chair of gold, surmounted by a canopy of richly-wrought tapestry that blazed with precious stones, the dazzling rays must have almost blinded the onlookers, had they ventured to raise their eyes to gaze on royalty.

Behind marched other nobles, full-armed, and clothed—like all the rest—in costly garments, and bedecked with ornaments which, as one of the men said, while he stood at my side, shone like the sun. Then followed thousands

upon thousands of armed men, indeed the whole host was in motion—a hundred thousand men advancing on the little city of Caxamalca, in which two hundred Spaniards were awaiting their arrival.

The Peruvians were yet half a league away, when I saw a man come through the ranks of the nobles, and running past the sweepers, dash along the causeway with amazing speed.

Not waiting any longer to watch the scene, I went down to the place where I had left Tristan, and mounting, galloped back to Pizarro to tell him all that I had witnessed. He instantly sent messengers to the separate bodies of troops, bidding them to be alert since the monarch was drawing near. Just then the footman whom I had espied came into the Plaza, and standing before Pizarro delivered his message, which Felipillo interpreted.

“Atabalipa, the mighty monarch of Peru, sends greeting to Pizarro, commander of the Spanish army. The Inca received his Spanish friends yesterday, and they were equipped as for battle. He will visit them to-day with all his warriors fully armed, but he comes in friendship and not in war.”

At these words the man fell on his knees, and bending low touched the General's feet with his forehead.

“Go, tell your royal master that we wait to welcome him with honour, and even as a brother,” responded Pizarro; and so saying he dismissed the messenger with a small gift.

Calmly as he bore himself in the Indian's presence, the news disturbed our leader, and he sent in haste for his principal officers.

“What say you?” he exclaimed anxiously, when he had told them that the Inca was coming with his host full-armed.

"Strike terror into their hearts, I say!" cried Pedro de Candia, a Greek cavalier and master of the artillery—such as it was. "The time for courtesies is gone; now he will win who strikes the first blow!"

"That will be murder," said Fray de Vargas, in clear and incisive tones.

"Be it what you choose to call it, father, it must be done," cried Pizarro; and without waiting for any further words from anyone, he issued orders that when the signal came the men should strike, and neither give nor take quarter. Remonstrances, however, were forced upon him by a few, but the General waved them aside with a haughty air of authority.

"If you fight not," he cried, "then you die, and your blood be on your own heads; for I will strike terror into the hearts of these Peruvians to-day!" And so saying he turned on his heel, and walking back to his old station in the Plaza, mounted his war-charger.

At last Atabalipa was at the very gates, but instead of entering Caxamalca he halted. Wondering at the monarch's delay Pizarro despatched Ovando, accompanied by Pedro and myself, to discover the reason. When we reached the gates we saw, to our surprise, that the country round had been converted into a great encampment. Pavilions were being erected everywhere, while the Inca himself was at that moment dismounting from his litter.

While we watched, with feelings amounting to consternation, lest this might mean the beginning of a siege, the messenger came to us desiring once more to see the Spanish commander. Bidding him follow us we galloped along the narrow streets, and told Pizarro what we had seen. The Peruvian, however, was not far behind us, and when we drew aside he delivered his unwelcome

message, that the Inca had resolved to stay outside the city for the night, and would visit the Spaniards on the morrow.

“That will never do!” exclaimed Pizarro passionately. “My men will lose their nerve if they have to wait a long night through. And more than that, who is to prevent the Inca from shutting us in this city like rats? He must come to-day! Go and tell your royal master,” he added, turning to the Indian, “that we have waited for his coming, and would fain have him visit us to-day. Tell him that all things have been made ready, and I would have him sup with me this night.”

Following the man to the gates to discover the effect of Pizarro’s message, if that were possible, Ovando, Pedro, and I saw the Inca, after some delay, re-enter his litter, and the procession once more moved on towards the gates of the White City. We dashed back to the Plaza, calling on the sentinel also to return, since alone he would be struck down as soon as the fight began. Even as our horses turned the Indians began to strike the royal pavilion, and we knew that the decisive hour was not far off.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A ROYAL HOSTAGE.

DRAWN up in four lines the little company of cavaliers that waited upon Pizarro sat silent in their saddles, the only sounds that could be heard for a while being the occasional snorting of the horses, or the restless movement of their feet upon the pavement, or the rattle of the harness and the ringing of bells as they tossed their heads and longed to be in action.

“Strike hard if blows come, my lads,” said Ovando, who was sitting between Pedro and myself. “Keep a firm seat in your saddles, and remember that you are Spaniards.”

The words kindled us, and we dismissed all thoughts, save those which made us resolute to quit ourselves as valiantly as any of our older comrades.

Just then we heard the heavy tread of men, and a few moments later the procession came in sight. The slaves were first, as when they crossed the causeway, clearing the narrow streets as they came. Then followed the nobles, no longer silent, for just before they came in sight they burst into song, weird and wild, yet with a rhythm that was musical and inspiriting.

“What is their song, Felipillo?” said Pizarro, turning to his interpreter; for, strangely enough, the General had always been slow to master the Indian tongue.

“The story of their warlike deeds, General, what in

your own country you call ballads," answered Felipillo, who, having gone to Spain with Pizarro, had heard the songs of our native land. "It is their song of triumph."

But whatever some may have thought of the songs, the sight that soon presented itself was dazzling, as the rays of the wintry sun fell upon the procession which slowly filed into the Plaza. The Orejons, clad in rich sky-blue garments, which sparkled with gold and emeralds; the nobles, clothed in pure white, with golden suns upon their breasts; the menials with dresses of varied colours—almost all that make up the rainbow—these ranged themselves before us, and then stood mute and still.

But most imposing of all was the Inca, whose apathy of the preceding day was now exchanged for active expectation of what he would see when face to face with the General whose fame had reached his royal ears. Borne aloft by nobles of the highest rank, save that of the Orejons, Atabalipa sat enthroned upon a stool far exceeding in beauty that on which he was seated when we visited his camp. Over him was a canopy of ebony decorated with tapestry and bedecked with pearls and plates of gold, surmounted by a golden sun. Within, this ornamental dome was lined with the feathers of birds so rare that their price was fabulous.

On the occasion of our visit to his camp the Inca was but plainly dressed, but now he was clad in garments that became the emperor of such a kingdom. Upon his head was a circlet of gold, out of which branched four feathers of a vulture called the *alcamari*. They had been sought for at the risk of desperate peril in the distant forests of the Amazon. Round his neck was a string of magnificent emeralds, and about his waist a belt of gold.

Even as he sat there his throne, his dress, and all about him, were alone sufficient to make our little army rich.

"General," he said presently in a rich voice, and looking our commander in the face with an imperious air, "I have come to see you, as you desired. Now tell me here, in the presence of my nobles, why you came hither?"

Pizarro answered through Felipillo that he had come to Peru to offer his services and those of his followers in the wars that Atabalipa was waging, and trusted that they would be readily accepted.

"And is that the whole of your errand?" exclaimed the Inca with an incredulous look upon his face.

"Not the whole of it," was the response. "We have come also to bring the true faith into your land—the religion of our fathers."

The monarch's eyes gleamed with anger at the words so bluntly spoken, for Pizarro could always fight better than he could frame courtly speech. But he said not a word, while Father de Valverde advanced and began to speak. The Dominican friar was an eloquent speaker, and had learnt the speech of the men of Peru, so that he was able to talk face to face with this proud heathen, who was ignorant of the Christian's God, and worshipped the sun and moon and stars. Standing before the Inca, he set forth the doctrines which his countrymen professed, dwelling long upon the story of the Cross. At last he spoke such words as these, and they fell upon the ears of all in an almost breathless stillness—

"But now that I have rehearsed to you the doctrines of the Christian faith, before which all other faiths are false and devilish, I charge you, as you love your own soul and hope for mercy, to cast aside your heathenism and become a follower of Christ. But not that alone, proud monarch. We bring a message from the mighty

King of Spain, calling upon you to own his allegiance and become his vassal!"*

So far the Inca had listened with apathy, but as the priest set forth the Spanish king's demand his whole frame quivered with anger, and starting to his feet he cried in unrestrained passion—

"Envoy, priest, or whatsoever you may be, take back my answer to those insolent messages. Tell your king that Atabalipa, Inca of Peru, Lord of the Mountains, and Master of the Four Quarters of the World, the greatest monarch in the earth, will be vassal to none! And as for my religion, I will not change it! Think you I would worship one who suffered his creatures to slay him? My god still lives. Behold him! He looks down upon me and my people now!" And as he spoke he pointed with his golden rod to the sun, that was hastening towards the west.

Such of us who could follow his words looked on in dread; for what might not this master of such legions of warriors do? He did not pause for many moments, for presently he turned again to the Dominican.

"Show me, priest, your authority for such high demands." And when the priest handed him the Bible, which he took from his bosom, the monarch turned the pages for a while, which, of course, he could not read. Then with a contemptuous gesture, and an indescribable look of scorn, he dashed the sacred volume to the ground.

A cry of horror burst from the lips of the priests as they witnessed this act, which they deemed an unpardonable insult to the Word of God.

"Call you that an authority?" the angry monarch cried, pointing with a hand that trembled, by reason of his passion, to the book that lay broken at the feet of

* The author has followed in this part of the story, and very closely, the telling account of the American historian, Prescott. The words spoken were taken, in the first instance, from the old chroniclers who were present at this famous interview.

the ecclesiastic, who, stooping, took it up reverently and returned it to his bosom. "I own no other authority than my own. Go, tell your royal master that! And tell these men around you, who have slain my people, and robbed my cities, and stolen the treasures of my subjects, that they shall answer for their deeds!" And seating himself once more on his throne, without deigning to glance at Pizarro or to say one word of farewell, he signed to his nobles to carry him back to his camp.

But Father de Valverde's face was white with wrath, and his voice and hands trembled with passion, when, turning to Pizarro, he cried aloud—

"Do you not see, Pizarro, that while we stand here wasting our breath in talking with this heathen dog, full of pride as he is, the city is filling with Indians? Set on at once!"

"Pizarro, stay, I implore you!" cried Father de Vargas, approaching the General. "Pause, ere you fall on these poor heathens. It is not yet too late to make terms with Atabalipa; and while the kingdom may be won without the shedding of blood, you may also win him to Christianity!"

But the impassioned words fell on deaf ears. At that moment I caught sight of Pedro de Candia, who was peering earnestly from the walls of the fortress, so as not to miss the signal which had been agreed upon. While Father de Vargas was pleading for a peaceful solution of the difficulty, if that were possible, Pizarro was busy in unfastening the scarf that was wound about his neck, and then waved it high over his head. Instantly Candia darted back from the wall, and a moment or two later the loud report of a small piece of ordnance rang throughout the Plaza, answered immediately by Spanish war-cries from every hand. The great doors of

the House of the Serpent swung open, and the close mass of infantry burst out, cutting a way through the ranks of startled menials and nobility, who, taken unawares, were filled with panic, and sought to fly they knew not whither. Simultaneously the gates of the buildings where the cavalry were in hiding rolled back, and with flashing helmets and swords that glittered in the light of the setting sun the cavaliers galloped into the midst of the throng of Indians that surrounded the Inca. Meanwhile the falconets from the fortress swept a way into the mass of human life, laying many a stalwart Indian low.

But although the massacre had now begun, and the Indian warriors were apparently at the mercy of the Spaniards, they sold their lives dearly, and thought of no danger in their frenzied attempts to save their monarch from captivity or death. Out of the densest portion of the crowd that was now forced into the sacred circle, where the nobles supported the litter of the Inca, there sprang forth a cacique, who cried to his countrymen to strike the white men down and save their royal master.

It was Zemaco. His eyes ablaze with martial fury, his great battle-axe gleaming in the air, he called upon those about him to follow his lead; and when some, panic-stricken, still continued to seek for safety in flight, he cried in savage tones—"Ye cowardly dogs! will ye forsake your Inca?" And with his own weapon he struck down many who still crushed on to find a way of escape.

This served to stay the wild confusion and allay the panic, and forming the broken and disordered ranks afresh, Zemaco, yelling forth the famous war-cry of Peru, rushed with deadly force upon our foot-soldiers, who were between him and the Indian monarch. Shot after shot laid many of his warriors low, as the infantry, brought to bay for a while, turned to defend themselves.

But the strife went on, even until Zemaco stood upon a heap formed of the dead bodies of his countrymen. More than once he stood alone, seeking, even without waiting for his followers, to cut a way to his royal master's side. Perfidious and cruel though he was, one could not but admire the faithful fury with which he sought to save the Inca.

But fear fought on our side that day. Despite the heroic endeavours of Zemaco, and other chieftains—among them Abibeyba—the soldiers whom they sought to rally fled whenever the horses and their riders came dashing into their midst. The loud clangour of the bells, the clash of armour, the fearful blows from the horses' hoofs, as they plunged madly and excitedly in the fight, filled the Indians with an awful dread, and such as could not fly fell to the ground, or across the dead bodies of their comrades, senseless with terror, and were trampled underfoot.

The fight throughout was unequal. Taken unawares, most of the Peruvians had not even presence of mind to draw their weapons from their belts. They fought the Spaniards, when they came to close quarters, with their hands. They hung upon them, and gripped them in a deadly embrace, seeking to drag them from their saddles, but the cavaliers, now so dexterous in their combats with such warriors, thrust their swords into the hearts of their adversaries, who fell back lifeless on the growing heaps of slain. Others, who sought to throw the horses by gripping their plunging limbs, were hurled to the ground, and maimed or slain, for horse as well as rider fought that day.

Zemaco's efforts, seconded by Abibeyba, who came to his side and fought, almost succeeded, however, in saving Atabalipa from capture. As the fight proceeded the nobles who bore the royal litter retreated towards the opening leading to the street by which the Plaza had been entered not long before. If once they succeeded in

getting there we were doomed, for the Inca would assuredly escape and shut us in with his overwhelming army.

Seeing this, Pizarro rallied all his forces, and sending his infantry in one direction, he led the cavalry in a fearful charge, right through the throng that rallied round the Emperor. As we dashed on Zemaco flung himself upon me, for I was in the outside rank, behind Antonio. Leaping up with astounding agility, he wrapped his arms about my body, leaving only my sword arm free. My good horse, Tristan, plunged forward with the others, carrying his double burden, and Zemaco, whose eyes gleamed madly, sought to crush me in his awful embrace, if he could not unseat me. His grip was terrible. It held my left arm against the armour with an energy that numbed it, and his finger-nails coming upon me at a spot where there was no steel for my protection, pressed into my body with maddening persistency, forcing from me an exclamation of pain. But I was not to be overcome like this, nor did I fear. I could do nothing with my sword in the way of striking with its edge upon the cacique's body, and discovering that the blows with which I assailed him were futile, and that his grasp did not relax, I made a dagger of the weapon. Then, with what strength I had left to me in this exhausting fight, I plunged it into his neck. He gave one short, convulsive cry, his fingers loosened, and he fell back among his panic-stricken countrymen.

"At last I am revenged!" I cried exultantly, and even in the din of battle Antonio, hearing my words, turned round to look at me.

While this struggle had been going on Tristan bore on his way, keeping in the ranks, and hurling down all who sought to intercept him. As Zemaco fell back I looked up and around me. My good horse had brought me, with

my comrades, up to the very spot where the Inca stood, thunderstruck. He was a prisoner. The nobles about him had carried him as far away as they could, but, beaten down by Spanish battle-axes, or transfixed by our lances, they had fallen dead one by one, until the litter, with its royal occupant, was thrown violently to the ground.

Atabalipa was more than ever a king as he stood there proudly, his eyes still flashing defiance on his perfidious conquerors; and when Miguel Estete laid hands upon him and tore the imperial crown from his temples, he drew his dagger, and sought to repay the brutal assault with a deadly blow. The weapon barely missed the man, and next moment was snatched from the Inca's grasp.

Seeing that their monarch was a prisoner, the nobles round threw down what arms they had, expressing their intention of sharing the Inca's captivity. Such devotion stilled the passion of Atabalipa, and brought tears to the eyes that a few moments before had been blazing with offended fury. As his nobles knelt before him he was speechless, and tears ran down his cheeks. It was some time before he could speak.

"My children, I thank you for your devotion, and for your loyal endeavours to protect your sovereign. It is the will of God! The treacherous strangers have been too strong for me, but you have done nobly, and your brethren—my faithful subjects—who now lie dead, have lovingly given their lives for me."

Then, walking at Pizarro's side across the Plaza, which was covered with heaps of dead and dying, he entered the House of the Serpent, now not a guest, as he had thought to be, but a captive.

When Atabalipa had been placed in the charge of a strong guard Pizarro called together his forces, that he might see what casualties there were. Not a man

was missing, whereat, considering the desperate nature of the fight, each one marvelled. Nor was that all. The only wounded one in the Spanish army was the General, and that wound, strange to say, did not come from the Peruvians. A Spaniard struck a blow at the Inca contrary to orders, and the General, seeing the dagger descending, raised his hand to intercept it, and so received the glittering blade into his own arm.

But the cost to the Indians was terrible. The Plaza contained the bodies of three thousand of them. Others, in their frenzy, had burst through a wall that stood between them and escape, for at that point the Plaza was close to the meadows. The very force of the struggling crowd broke down the rampart, and hundreds escaped that way and told the story of the massacre to their countrymen outside. Hernando Pizarro needlessly pursued them. He led his company of cavaliers through the opening, and cut down scores as they fled towards the army half a league away. But there were hundreds upon hundreds who were trampled to death in the narrow streets, and these were to be added to the long slaughter-roll of that dreadful day.

When night fell, and we who were not on guard were dismissed to take our rest, my heart smote me at the thought of the treachery which robbed the fight of glory, and covered the day with unparalleled infamy. I have read deeply into the history of my own and other times, but I do not find anywhere a page so black, so murderous, as that which tells of the manner in which Pizarro betrayed the Inca of Peru.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RANSOM OF THE INCA.

NEXT morning there was much rejoicing in the White City, for news had been brought in by the scouts that rode out at daybreak that the army of the Inca, hearing of the capture of the monarch, had fled to Cuzco, the capital, having no leader to direct them in an assault upon Caxamalca. As we looked across the country from the tower of the fortress, we saw the causeway strewn with the bodies of dead Indians, but the army of Peru had vanished.

Long before noon I formed one of a company of thirty cavaliers who rode out to the palace we had visited a day or two before, the object of our journey now being to gather up such treasures as the palace contained, and bring in the servants, who should wait upon their captive master. To our surprise we found that while the army itself had fled, those who comprised the Peruvian court had not departed. Young nobles were there by hundreds, they having been left behind when Atabalipa paid his visit to Caxamalca. Hearing of the Inca's capture, they lingered on in the hope that they might yet be able to serve him, even if they could not fight on his behalf. They listened to the message De Soto brought from the Inca, and set the slaves to the task of collecting the priceless ornaments that were now the spoil of the victors.

While these were being collected from the various apartments, Abibeyba, who had been sent with us by Atabalipa, ordered four thousand slaves to go into the city in order to carry out the dead and bury them, and that being done, to cleanse the streets, which bore so many ghastly tokens of the recent struggle.

Remembering the former treachery of Abibeyba, Ovando advised De Soto not to suffer us to scatter through the palace in search of treasure; and consequently we halted outside for three long hours, still seated in the saddle and alert for any reprisals, while the costly booty was brought out by the slaves and laid on the green-sward before us. It was astonishing in its quality and quantity. Pile upon pile of rich stuffs lay there, whilst the Orejon, accepting the inevitable, and knowing that treachery would mean death to his kinsmen, pointed to the droves of llamas that fed in the meadows and on the distant hills, countless thousands of which had been driven thither by the Inca's herdsmen to furnish food for the vast army that had been brought to Caxamalca to withstand the invaders.

But our eyes dwelt mainly on the more costly treasures, as we in our lust for gold deemed them, the vases of precious metal, and the fast-increasing heaps of spoil. There were all sorts of curious toys wrought in silver or in gold, and priceless by reason of their beautiful workmanship, if they could be disposed of in Europe. There were the spoils of the dead caciques and nobles that had been left behind them in the palace, to say nothing of the ornaments which had yet to be taken from their bodies. There were also the beautiful tiaras of their wives, studded with jewels; collars powdered, one might almost say, with precious stones; armlets, rings, bracelets, and chains; flimsy, but beautiful armour, inlaid with precious

metals; statuary wrought in solid gold, fans of the same precious substance, and little trinkets of most delicate construction; magnificent vessels in gold and silver, some standing three or four feet high, and costly platters that were used at the monarch's table. As the servants bore them before us along the causeway, we felt that here alone was more than a mighty king's ransom—more than enough to have purchased Atabalipa's liberty, had it not been for our inordinate greed.

Reaching the White City, we awaited Pizarro's instructions, and when the Indians filed past the long rank of Spanish soldiers, who had crowded out to see what spoils had come, some of our countrymen snatched at the ornaments which the weeping Peruvians carried. Nothing but the stern attitude assumed by the General served to prevent a wild scramble for the wealth within reach. Indeed, so insubordinate did some prove even then, tearing treasures from the Indians' hands in the very sight of the General, and in defiance of his orders, that Pizarro, resolute to be obeyed, shot down one of them. A shout of approbation followed, and dropping what they had clutched at, the impatient ones fell back into the rank, cowed and silent.

The booty was divided as fairly as possible next day, and so great was its value that the poorest man amongst us was well-to-do, by reason of his share. Already I was fast approaching that amount which would enable me to buy back the home and estates of my fathers.

Atabalipa was present when this division took place, and although he sat on his golden stool, apparently indifferent to what was going on, he did not fail to note how eager the Spaniards were, whatever their rank, for gold. Some of us were standing by him, "a guard of honour" so-called, to save him from unnecessary pain,

but in reality a guard to prevent his escape. At his side stood the Orejon, who now and again engaged in conversation with his kinsman.

"Abibeyba," I heard the Inca say, after he had watched the scene listlessly, "methinks these Spaniards have an inordinate greed of gold. What think you? Will they release me if I offer them a great ransom?"

The Orejon's eyes flashed with scorn as he looked around on my countrymen.

"Try them, my royal kinsman. I have long thought that gold is all that they desire. It is assuredly more to them than conquest, more precious than honour. They know full well that if they sought to hold the land, valiant as they are, they would eventually be overpowered. Try them! Buy your liberty and let them quit the country. Then you will reign in Cuzco again."

"Then I will do it," said the Inca with a heavy sigh.

That same night Pizarro supped with his royal captive in the banquet-chamber of the House of the Serpent, and Pedro and I, who were now in constant attendance on Pizarro, were present. The slaves had all withdrawn at a signal from the Inca, none being in the chamber but a chosen few of his nobles and some of the leading Spaniards.

"General," said Atabalipa, in response to Pizarro, who had just drunk the Emperor's health, "your main object appears to me to be the gathering in of gold, and I verily believe that you have come to Peru to find it. What say you to my ransom?"

Pizarro sat silent for a while, but at last looked keenly into the Inca's face to see whether he was in earnest or merely jesting. But Atabalipa's countenance bespoke his sincerity.

"What offer do you make?"

"Nay, Pizarro, name your own terms," was the curt response.

"That I will not do, but you shall name a sum, and I will then think the matter over."

Atabalipa sat back proudly and silent as if the matter ended; but the General, after long waiting, asked again—

"What offer do you make?"

The Inca hesitated before he replied. "Consider, Spaniard, what spoil you have already found — a sum sufficient for my ransom."

"Not sufficient ransom for the Inca of Peru!" exclaimed Pizarro, breaking in upon the monarch's words.

"Then I will add to that, although it is enough. I will cover the floor of this spacious apartment with gold, and then you shall set me free."

The General glanced along the room, as if marking its length and breadth. The chamber measured twenty-two feet in length, and its breadth was seventeen feet. It was a great space to cover in the eyes of anyone but a Spaniard who had already handled Peruvian gold, and knew of its abundance, and Pizarro merely looked up and smiled, as if he thought the offer a paltry one.

The Inca's visage clouded over, and for a while he sat without a word, his head on his breast, and his eyes down-cast. He was deep in thought, which no one ventured to break in upon. At last he looked the General in the face.

"Pizarro, let me be plain with you. I know that you want gold, but I also want my liberty. If you keep me here I will never help you in the conquest. I would rather die. If I die you can never hope to conquer the land, for my armies are too mighty—numberless as the sands of the desert, so that even Spanish valour cannot stand against them. And more than that. If you keep me here the people, at my word, will dethrone me, and

set up my brother in my stead. Huascar now lies in Cuzco a prisoner, for he has been my rival. If you will not return me my liberty at the price of a vast ransom, such as I will name, Peru shall throw off her allegiance to me, and another Inca shall fight you.

"Still," he continued, "I would rather live than die—for I suppose that in your anger you would slay me if I frustrated your designs—and thus I make an offer such as was never heard of before." And rising to his feet Atabalipa walked across the apartment and stood against the wall.

"Listen, Pizarro, and you who are his followers. I offered just now to cover the floor of this apartment with gold. I will make my final offer now. If you will not accept it I will meet my fate, and leave you to the Peruvians, who shall avenge me. Even my enemies will do that, since I am the Inca, while you are intruders on our soil!"

Then speaking slowly, so that every word should be understood, and so that Felipillo should convey the meaning without possibility of mistake, Atabalipa proceeded—

"I will fill this room with golden vessels and plates of gold as high as I can reach." And drawing the dagger from his girdle he stood on tiptoe and cut a mark in the tapestry on the wall.

Astounded at the magnitude of the offer, Pizarro and those about him started to their feet, scarcely able to believe that they had heard aright.

"Repeat your words!" exclaimed the General, and the Inca complied.

"Call in Xerez, my notary," cried our leader, "and we will talk this matter over. Still, bethink you, for we must have some silver too. I pray you follow me, and see what I now propose."

And side by side with Atabalipa, Pizarro walked down

the apartment and threw open the door of another room, which was lighted by silver lamps. Standing within, and looking around, the General said—

“You have offered me so much gold. You must fill this chamber and another of equal size with silver, and then you shall go free, and we will quit the country.”

“And how long will you give me for such a task?” exclaimed Atabalipa, almost aghast at the greed of his gaoler, for such in very deed Pizarro was.

“A month!”

“A month? It is impossible. It would take as long for my couriers to reach the uttermost parts of my dominions, and I shall have to send everywhere to raise this monstrous ransom, which will almost deplete my country of gold. I must have three months, and not an hour less.”

“Then be it so,” answered Pizarro unwillingly.

That night the terms were defined by the notary, and next morning couriers were despatched in all directions with instructions to the caciques to strip the royal palaces, the temples, and other places of their treasures, and send them on at once to Caxamalca.

Had a stranger visited the White City during that weary time of waiting, he would have found it difficult to believe that Caxamalca held a royal prisoner. The House of the Serpent was his palace. He was carried about the streets in his litter; he held his court, to which his nobles had free access; he went sometimes to his palace outside the city—he did everything that a king might do, save dismiss the fact that he was a captive, guarded jealously wherever he went by a chosen band of Spanish cavaliers. They did not intrude upon him, but the Inca always knew that they were at hand, ready to shoot him down if he attempted to escape. And not a few were willing to renew the horrible massacre on the slightest pretext.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON THE WAY TO PACHACAMAC.

MANY days went by, but the apartments that were to contain the treasure were very slow in filling. When Pizarro remonstrated the Inca besought him to be reasonable, for, while his posts could travel swiftly from end to end of his dominions, the slaves, who had to carry the precious burdens along the wild mountain passes, were only able to cover a few leagues daily.

“What do a few days extra concern you so long as you get your gold, Pizarro?” he answered angrily one day when the General had expressed himself as being doubtful as to the Inca’s good faith. And whenever I look back to those days I can but think that we were unreasonable in this, as well as in many other things that concerned our dealings with Atabalipa and his country.

One evening as I was walking down the narrow streets, which were no longer deserted, but occupied as of old by the quiet citizens, I heard Arbues talking. Presently he came in sight, conversing earnestly with his no less eager companion, Ovando. Seeing me he called across the street—

“Come hither, Don Alonso. You are the one we seek.”

Going forward and standing before them, I asked what their business might be.

"Ovando will tell you, and then perchance you will be glad," exclaimed Arbues, turning to his companion, who spoke at once.

"To-morrow at daybreak the General's brother starts with twenty horse to Pachacamac to stir up the lazy Indians who are so slow in collecting the ransom for the Inca. He says that he would like the same company that came up from the coast under my charge, since we all had such experience of fight and travel in the passes. What say you, Alonso? Will you come with us?"

"That will I, and gladly too!" I answered, delighted at the prospect of seeing more of this wonderful country.

"Then get Tristan in travelling order, and be in the Plaza at daybreak. So fare you well. But stay! Should you see any of our old company, tell them, and bid them let me know at once whether they will go with us." And so saying Ovando and his comrade went forward to find the others.

I was glad of the diversion which this journey would afford, for my heart was growing sick with waiting, hoping against hope that I might gain some news of Fulvia. She was not in the Inca's palace outside the city, since I had searched every chamber. Nor had she been there, for I questioned some of the young nobles, and they declared that Zemaco and Abibeyba had brought no maidens with them when they arrived. Possibly in my journey I might meet with her, but it was a very slender hope indeed.

The sun had scarcely risen when we set forth on our way, but we galloped out of the Plaza, and along the streets, and through the now well-guarded gates, with great relief, for we had grown weary beyond expression of what was little more than garrison life. We were

going into the very heart of the country, and to a place which was the shrine of all that the Peruvians held sacred. For Pachacamac contained the great national temple, and in it was lodged the idol that had been the oracle of Peru for many a century.

But after a while we began to encounter difficulties among the passes of the Cordilleras, that made the dangers of our previous journeys appear almost as nothing by comparison. Sometimes we travelled along causeways which were wide enough to enable a dozen cavaliers to ride abreast, but at other parts the roads narrowed down so much that even when the horses touched the rock on one hand, they could look down into the terrific gorges on the other, and watch the torrents dashing along, hundreds of feet below. Many a time we had to wade through a torrent that neither man nor horse could stand against alone, but at these ferries were natives who stretched ropes across, which helped us to keep our foothold. We did not wonder now that Atabalipa should ask for longer time, for burdened Indians might well go slowly in such a country.

We met with no adventures by the way worth mentioning, and there was nothing but kindness shown on the part of those who had received orders from the Inca concerning our treatment. Sometimes we saw a cacique, whose proud lip curled in scorn, for it was everywhere noised abroad that the famous warriors from across the seas were mere gold-hunters, and stooped to the basest trickery in order to secure the means of forcing the Inca to open his treasure-houses. At times, however, when we passed through a city, we were invited to stay and rest, since the Inca had sent express commands by his couriers, that the best the city could produce should be placed at the disposal of the white men. They even

sought to buy our goodwill with costly gifts, fearing lest we might scatter death in the streets. The thing so shamed us that at last we begged the donors to withhold their presents, since we meant to be kind, and had no desire to sell our mercy. Happily this company that travelled to Pachacamac, with good Father de Vargas as our spiritual adviser, was made up of some of the noblest of Pizarro's band, and not of the wanton, reckless set of which there were so many left behind at Caxamalca.


Repeatedly, as we passed through the little hamlets amid the mountains, the villages that dotted the plains, and the larger centres of population, women, and even men, came out, and, falling on their knees, pleaded with us to set the Inca free.

"He is our father; he loves us. If he dies, or lingers in captivity, our hearts will be sad, and the sun will cease to shine," they wailed.

"No harm shall come to your Inca if only his ransom is paid in," exclaimed Ovando kindly, for the brother of Pizarro did not speak a word. Splendid soldier as Ovando was, he had a tender heart, and had he had his way he would have suffered the Inca to go free at far less a price. Indeed, he had protested from the first against the perfidy which, he said, would cause our countrymen in Spain to despise us, and the Peruvians to hate the very name of Spaniard.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A WONDERFUL DELIVERANCE.

T last we saw Pachacamac in the distance. In the very centre of the city, and on the summit of a hill, stood a massive building, plainly built and roofed with straw, since nothing more substantial was needed in an almost rainless region. It was to the Peruvian what Mecca is to the Mahomedan, or what Jerusalem is to the pious Jew, or Rome to the devout Catholic. It was the Peruvian's sacred city by reason of the god that was there.

It was sunset when we entered, and the cacique, meeting us at the gate, conducted us to a house that stood hard by the temple, where everything was prepared for our reception. When the horses had been stabled, and sentries placed, we took our evening meal; and just as the midnight hour was come I went out to relieve Antonio, who had been keeping watch for the last two hours.

"I do not like to leave you, Don Alonso. I care not for the looks of these priests who have been passing and re-passing for the last hour, casting furtive glances, as if they would discover how best to fall upon us."

"But the cacique, Antonio, is he not most friendly?" I responded.

"And was not Zemaco friendly at Tumbes, and at the palace of Tubanama? And did not Abibeyba seek to throw us off our guard with his kindness at Quaragua?"

Keep a watch, and a keen one, Don Alonso, and do not fail to rouse us if things look suspicious, even though you should run the risk of a false alarm. Far better that we should have a short night's rest, than fall into a sleep from which one never wakes on earth."

Half an hour later Antonio came back again.

"Is all right, Don Alonso?"

"Yes, Antonio. I have heard no sound, nor have I seen anyone; and in a few moments the moon will rise."

Left alone again I stood and watched, and when the moon had shed her pale light on everything around, I was able to peer into the darkest corners of the small plaza. I had never known a clearer night, for the moon lit up the city as though it were day. But presently there came a sound as of a footstep, and looking round in haste I saw an Indian crossing the open space, but gazing on me as he moved. Looking at him intently, a sudden dread came upon me; the sweat stood on my brow, and my hair, too, stood on end. My knees smote together. In the terrible fight in the Plaza of the White City I had struck down Zemaco, and, as I thought, he had fallen back dead from the blow I had dealt him with my shortened sword. Yet here was the cacique of Tumbes right before me, gazing at me with those sinister eyes.

After a while he stood still, as if he cared little whether I fired on him or not. He simply stood and looked, all the hatred that could be crowded into one face filling it. And I, terror-struck at seeing this dead man standing right before me, not more than three yards distant, could not speak, nor could I move. I would have fired my musket, so as to rouse my comrades, but Zemaco—or his spirit, for I knew not which it was—held me spell-bound; and even as I gazed upon him I was seized from behind, a heavy cloth was thrown over my head, and gripped by

men I could not see, I was lifted from my feet and carried away I knew not whither.

Helpless in the grasp of those who bore me, I could not cry out, for the heavy folds of the cloth that was thrown about me were drawn so tightly that I was well-nigh smothered. At last I was flung down with a heavy crash upon the stones, and there I lay. What followed for a while I do not know, for the force with which I had been hurled to the ground stunned me.

When I came to myself again, and looked around, it was only to shudder at my surroundings. I was in a chamber some twenty feet square, and as many high. It was so dimly lighted that it took some time for me to see what the place was like. In a niche in the wall stood a figure carved in wood, whose face was more like that of the devils I had seen portrayed on the caps of the victims of that terrible *auto da fé* in Cadiz.

That, however, was the least terrible thing there. Around me were instruments of torture, and for a while I thought that I must be in one of the dungeons of the Inquisition. On a stone slab in front of the idol burned a fire, kept alive by the constant dropping of oil from a vessel suspended over it from the ceiling. There was no other light in this hideous apartment than that which came from this small flame ; but it was sufficient to show up the unspeakable horrors of the chamber. In the very centre of the room was a huge block of stone, on which lay something that filled me with dread. Going nearer to gaze upon it, thinking that it was the body of some animal offered in sacrifice, I recoiled with a cry of horror. It was the body of an Indian maiden, and she lay still in death. Through her chest ran a spear, and on the topmost end was a golden sun, that shone redly in the flickering firelight.

Scarcely had I returned to the spot where I had found myself lying, when a sound fell upon my ears. Then a door opened on the opposite side of the room, and four men entered, followed by Zemaco. The men were priests of the Sun. White garments fell from their necks as low as their knees. Their arms and legs were bare, but their feet were shod with silver sandals. About his waist each priest wore a belt of gold, into which was thrust a huge knife, with a handle of the same precious metal.

Walking to the altar they knelt before it and chanted some words, which I could not understand; then, after remaining silent for a while, they rose to their feet.

"Zemaco," said he who had been the first to enter the chamber, "you have brought us a Spaniard for sacrifice?"

"Yes, Brayoan," the cacique answered. "You told me that for six succeeding days you had offered up a maiden, the fairest you could find in Pachacamac, to appease the oracle; and, as you know, that oracle declared that the Inca could never be free, nor Peru be rid of the invaders, until one of the white foes of the empire was offered on the altar of the Sun-god. I have brought you such a one, and here he is. Were it for nothing else than that he is a Spaniard, I should rejoice to see him die; but I shall be the better pleased because he has won the heart of the Lady Fulvia, so that she will not listen to my pleadings. See, he stands yonder!"

While the cacique spoke thus he laid one hand on Brayoan's shoulder, and with the other, which trembled with ill-suppressed passion, pointed to me.

Yet, deadly as my peril was, the words of Zemaco seemed to put new heart into me. I had heard enough to convince me that Fulvia lived, and that she had steadfastly refused the advances of the cacique.

The priest came to me, when Zemaco had ended his

words, and gazed eagerly into my face; then, with a look of satisfaction, turned his back upon me and walked once more to the cacique's side.

"It is well," said Brayoan. "Had all the caciques of Peru been as brave as thou hast been, our Inca had not been made to suffer all this shame. But fear not, Zemaco. A Spaniard on the stone of sacrifice will serve to win back quietness, and Atabalipa will once more sit upon his throne in Cuzco. Now leave us, for we must begin our work."

"Then fare you well, Brayoan," answered the other. "Should this sacrifice fail I will find yet one more." And standing before me, ere he left the chamber of death, he glared on me with cruel looks of pleasure.

"At last, young Spaniard, one of your number dies! And you, whose sword went scorching into my neck, drawing, as I thought, my very life-blood, will feel the searching pain of the dread knife of sacrifice. How happy will Fulvia be when I tell her of her lover's fate!" And gathering himself together, as it were, for one supreme look of hatred, since now he dared not lay a hand upon one reserved for sacrifice, he spat in my face and turned away.

I had the will but not the power to resent the insult, for as I rushed forward with my drawn dagger the strong arms of the priests were folded about me, and I was helpless. Zemaco turned with a taunt and a smile, then went out, drawing the door together after him.

"Remove the body of that maiden from the altar," said the priest presently, and his companions at once obeyed.

"It is done," said they on returning, after a short absence from the chamber from whence they had borne the dead.

"Cleanse the altar," said Brayoan, who knelt once more before the fire as if in prayer.

While he did so the other priests followed his instructions. The blood-stained stone was washed and scoured slowly, and all the time I stood there watching the preparations for my own death. Heedless of my mental agony, the priests went through their task deliberately, removing the blood-stains by scraping the rock until it gleamed in the light of the lantern which they brought, to examine whether their task was done aright. There were even then some spots, for they scoured the altar afresh, and did not cease their efforts until the work was ended satisfactorily. And all that I could do in my extremity was to cast myself on God's mercy.

When one of the subordinates went to Brayoan's side and spoke to him, he rose from his knees slowly and came towards me.

"Bind him, Chiruca," said he in solemn deliberation; but when the man essayed to carry out the task my Spanish blood was fired. Why should I perish thus tamely? Since I must die, I could surely sell my life dearly, and drawing my sword—for in their shortsightedness they had not disarmed me—I stepped forward and thrust my weapon into the heart of Brayoan, who fell with a groan to the floor, and there lay dead. As he fell the others gave expression to cries of rage, and drawing their huge knives from their belts, rushed upon me. Retiring slowly, to get my back against the wall, thus holding myself secure from any assault in the rear, I stood on guard a while and met their savage blows until they tired. Then, as Chiruca suffered his great knife to hang at his side, while he sought to regain his breath, I lunged forward with my whole strength, and the sword entering his body he fell with a loud cry across Brayoan.

Seeing this the other priests drew back slowly towards the door, and watching their opportunity, opened it and

fled. I, too, hurried across the floor to follow them and regain my liberty, but the heavy stone rolled together and shut me in a prisoner.

Never was a captive more completely cut off from escape, for the doorway of the chamber of sacrifice was of immense dimensions, and the door itself fitted into it with marvellous nicety, one huge mass of well-squared rock rolling with such ease in the sockets that a child could move it if he knew how. It was air-tight, and no sounds could penetrate it, so that the screams of the victims were never heard outside. So far as I could judge, and I am sure I do not exaggerate at all, the stone was full thirteen feet high, some seven feet broad, and nearly five feet thick.

Filled with despair at finding the vast rock immovable, I went back to the old spot where I had stood so long awaiting my end. Heedless of the two dead bodies at my feet, I fell on my knees, and burying my face in my hands, prayed for deliverance. Surely my companions would miss me, unless my own surprise and capture had enabled the Indians to rush in upon the cavaliers, and slay them while they slept. That thought added to my agony, but made me pray the more that it might not be so.

In the very midst of my prayer a sound fell on my ears that brought me back again to this awful danger in which I stood. Looking up, I once more saw the great door roll slowly open, and on the threshold stood the two priests who had escaped me, followed by Zemaco and three other Indians fully armed. When they saw me sword in one hand and dagger in the other, all alert and vigorous, they hesitated; but Zemaco, while he would not venture to leave the doorway, did not fail to curse me.

How long we stood thus, looking at each other across

the chamber that was truly one of horrors, I do not know. But after a while there came low and sullen murmurs right at our very feet, growing louder and louder, just as rolling thunder does. Following this was a furious crashing of rock, and a sound as of heavy cannonading. But the sounds were not all that filled our hearts with an awful dread, and made us, enemies that we were, forget each other in the thought of this fearful thing that was coming upon us. The floor of the hall of sacrifice moved to and fro, and the walls themselves appeared as though they would fall together. Then the great idol tumbled from its pedestal, and crashed in a thousand pieces where it fell.

It was all the work of a few brief moments; and while I stood with my back to the wall, feeling it moving as I leaned against it, and struck dumb with wonder, the floor split at my very feet; the altar on which I was to die disappeared in the yawning chasm; the great door rolled out of its place, and, crashing outwards, fell with fearful force, crushing Zemaco and his companions in its fall, so that they lay dead beneath the ponderous mass.

As for myself, I know not how it chanced, but when the walls of that dreadful chamber fell together like a pack of cards, I was hurled I knew not where, having lost all sense of my surroundings. When I recovered consciousness, I was lying upon the door that hurried Zemaco and the other Indians out of life.

Staring around me, I saw what remained of the chamber from whence I had been hurled. It was no longer dark, but flooded with light. Since the roof had gone the daylight was streaming in, and scattered about in all directions were the remnants of the shattered idol, but the sacrificial fire still burned. A great rent was in the

floor, and the deep chasm thus formed had swallowed up most of the roof and walls.

Rising to my feet and leaping from the rock, I caught sight of Zemaco's face—all that could be seen of him, for his body was lying shapeless beneath so many tons of granite. I remember that as I saw him I thought of the certain fact that the cacique could never more trouble me in this world, and the assurance of this, despite my surrounding perils, was a great relief.

"If only I could meet with Fulvia!" I cried; for in the midst of so much danger she was foremost in my thoughts, as she had ever been since that day of her disappearance.

Gathering up my weapons and climbing the broken stairway, bruising myself as I passed over the *débris* that almost blocked the way, I came presently into the open plaza, where I had stood on guard I knew not how many hours before. There I caught sight of my comrades, who were gazing about in bewilderment, for this earthquake, coming on with such sudden fury, had robbed them of all power of action.

But the sight of me, whom they had all thought dead, put life and activity into them, and they ran towards me with a loud shout of welcome. Antonio and Pedro outstripped the others in the race, and when they drew near, the former, faithful in every service, caught me in his arms just as my senses left me. The terrible strain of the last few hours, the long agony of anticipating death while the priests slowly prepared for my sacrifice, and then this fearful earthquake, had been altogether too much for me.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FULVIA.

ON the following day we made preparations for our return. Hernando Pizarro, the leader of our expedition, found that the journey to Pachacamac had been nearly, but not altogether, fruitless. Zemaco, whose escape on the day of the Inca's capture was a marvel, anticipated our arrival, and had persuaded Brayoan and the other priests to hide the immense treasures which were there. The secret died with them, and the burial-place of so much wealth has never been discovered.*

Still, we did not return empty-handed, for the rending rocks revealed a treasure-chamber, which contained gold to the value of eighty thousand castellanos, which might well have satisfied anyone but the Spaniards, who were smitten with such greed that they bitterly complained that their journey had been so unprofitable.

Hernando Pizarro's brow was dark as we retraced our steps along the mountain paths, and the poor Indians who bore the treasure we had found often felt the sting of the lash with which he urged them on. They had abundant reason during that weary journey to anticipate

* Prescott says that long afterwards great stores of gold were found buried in the neighbourhood, and doubtless this was the treasure which the priests had hidden.

the Spanish occupation with feelings of dread, since reasonable wealth did not suffice with the invaders. Nor would Hernando desist, although Ovando angrily protested against such wanton brutality.

But his face brightened one morning when an Indian scout brought in the news that Challeuchima, the great Peruvian general, lay with an immense army in the valley that surrounded the city of Xauxa.

"Bethink you, cavaliers," Hernando cried, turning his horse upon the treacherous path at the risk of rolling down into the abyss below, "we have lost the greater portion of the treasures of Pachacamac, for which we toiled so painfully over these mountains, but here is a prize of greater moment still—the general that is meditating a rush on Caxamalca to release the Inca! Put on your best courage, comrades, for we will capture him, and carry him into his royal master's presence!"

We listened in astonishment. The suggestion seemed to render us breathless, so that for a time no one spoke a word.

"It is absolute madness!" exclaimed Arbues at last; and surely he was no coward. His words were taken as the wisest and the best, and they found an echo in every heart.

"Madness?" cried Hernando disdainfully. "Nothing is madness for a band of Spanish cavaliers! Will you tell me that a Spaniard needs to consider odds when Peruvians are in the question? Nay, but we will capture this Challeuchima, and take him with us to my brother." And without waiting to hear any further words from us he rode onwards, calling us to follow. There was no desire on anyone's part to hold back, since the leader of our party was prepared to face the odds.

At last, after an arduous march, beset with perils,

we came in sight of Xauxa, before which we saw the tents of an army full thirty-five thousand strong.

"Bethink you, Hernando, ere it be too late!" cried Arbues, reining in his charger, as a sudden turn in the road displayed the mighty force that bivouacked in the valley—a terrible army for a score of men to face, however valiant they might be.

"Arbues, if you are afraid, turn back. I want none in my company who have any fear," the leader exclaimed in disdainful retort.

"Pizarro," cried Arbues, the hot blood mounting to his face, at what was nothing short of wanton insult, "no man ever yet called me coward, nor shall you do so!" And he laid his hand upon his sword.

Hernando saw at once that he had gone too far, and he hastened to stay Arbues' passion.

"Cease, Arbues! I would not call you coward, nor anyone among my comrades here. But if you do not care to come with me, go on to Caxamalca with the carriers. As for me, I mean to visit Challcuchima, and make him my prisoner." Then calling an Indian to his side, he bade him be fleet of foot, and take a message to the camp, that Hernando Pizarro intended to visit the Peruvian general.

Seeing that he was resolute, we followed Hernando Pizarro as he rode boldly forward. Three hours later we entered the camp, heedless, to all appearance, of the scowls and threatening gestures of the nobles who loitered at their tent doors. Halting outside a magnificent pavilion, wrought in richly-coloured llama wools, Hernando requested an audience with the Peruvian commander. He came out to meet us—a fine, stalwart man, soldierly in look and gesture, and full of dauntless courage; a well-trying warrior, as the many scars he bore upon his face and arms would indicate.

It was no part of the younger Pizarro's purpose to waste any time in pretended courtesies, for as the Indian general stepped forth unsuspecting, and stood stolidly at our leader's side, to ask the reason for this unexpected visit, he—thinking himself surely safe in the midst of his own thousands of warriors, and in the very heart of his camp—was surrounded in an instant, and his hands bound down at his sides. He was made a prisoner, to his own surprise, and to the consternation of his captains, many of whom were standing near.

“Stir neither hand nor foot for his rescue,” cried Hernando, leaping into his saddle, “or Chalcuchima shall be slain before your eyes! He is my prisoner, and must accompany me to Caxamalca, where he will find the Inca!”

Slowly and sullenly, at our leader's command, the Peruvian officers withdrew to their tents, while, as it was fast approaching the hour of sundown, our little company took counsel as to the arrangements for spending the coming night. It was decided that since the great pavilion would accommodate us all, and the one which stood close by would serve as shelter for our horses, Chalcuchima should be placed in our midst and safely guarded, so as to stand hostage for our safety while we slept.

That being settled, I accompanied Antonio to the pavilion which was to be appropriated as the stable, in order to warn whoever might be there to quit, and leave it for our use. But I little knew what awaited me. Putting aside the heavy woollen curtain that served as a door to the tent, we entered cautiously, lest we might be taken unawares. The spacious pavilion was divided into sections by richly wrought hangings, but the place into which we first entered was empty. Standing a

moment, to be sure that we were not menaced by danger, we heard voices, soft and low—unwonted sounds for a camp, where none but warriors were supposed to be.

“I hear women’s voices,” said I to my companion.

“The general’s wife and her attendants, perhaps,” responded Del Benito.

Even as we spoke there was a hush, as if those within had heard and were listening. Nothing was to be gained by loitering, and therefore we went forward. Drawing back the curtain, I saw that which filled me with astonishment, and caused me to cry out in wonder. Before us were half a dozen Indian maidens, and in their midst, reclining on rich cushions, was one whom I had wept for and prayed about for many a weary day. As I stood in the doorway she looked up. Then, with a cry of joy, she rose to her feet and ran towards me. My arms were open to receive her, and in a moment my lost and beautiful Fulvia was clasped to my breast, while we kissed each other amid alternate tears and smiles.

How great our joy was I cannot hope to put into words. Our hearts were too full for speech, and we stood there silent, but thrilling with unspeakable gladness, to think that after all hope of ever meeting each other again had died away, our prayers had been answered, and we were face to face once more. The maidens, who remembered us, retired with Antonio, and left us to ourselves, so that in secret we could enter into the full enjoyment of our reunion.

That night I did not sleep, but paced about outside the tent unceasingly, to guard that one whose love was almost more than life itself to me, and to lose whom again would be to endure the agony of death.

When morning dawned the trumpet pealed, to give us warning to be in speedy readiness to set out for Caxa-

malca. As Hernando quitted his pavilion, accompanied by Chalcuchima, he saw the Indian captains and their soldiers standing around in sullen silence. Paralyzed by our audacity, and fearing lest any attempt at rescue would result in their great commander's death, and serve to add to the perils of their Inca, the officers had prepared for his departure. There was no alternative but to submit to the inevitable, and own themselves outdone by the daring of the Spaniards.

The order of our marching was speedily arranged. First came, two and two, half a dozen of our cavaliers. Then followed the litters in which rode Fulvia and her maidens. She was guarded on either side by Antonio, Pedro, Arbues, and myself. Behind came Hernando Pizarro and the other cavaliers, and in their midst a litter, in which lay the Peruvian general, still bound, lest he should attempt escape. A hundred of his principal captains followed, but unarmed, for Pizarro would not trust them with their weapons, lest they should succeed in effecting a rescue. But they suffered a still further indignity, for their hands were bound, so that fighting was impossible. Last of all came a large retinue of servants, whose business was to attend to the wants of their masters, who were already enduring the pains and penalties of captivity in their native land.

Again the trumpet rang shrill and clear throughout the camp. It was the signal for departure, and next moment the procession was in motion.

It was with this prize—more welcome to the Spanish general than all the wealth we could have brought from the temple of Pachacamac—that, a few days later, we entered the city where our comrades awaited our arrival.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DIVISION OF THE SPOIL.

THE day after our arrival the treasures accumulated in the rooms of the House of the Serpent were examined and found to have reached the mark agreed upon by Atabalipa. As the Inca sat upon his golden stool in the Plaza, Chalcuchima standing sadly at his side, the Spaniards were drawn up in fighting order, ready for any emergencies, under the direct command of the General. Hernando Pizarro was deputed with five other cavaliers to superintend the carrying of the spoil into the square, so that a due division might be made; and then, as he fondly hoped, Atabalipa was to set forth for his capital—free.

As for myself, Pizarro, knowing our story, suffered me to be released from duty for the day, so that I might enjoy myself in Fulvia's company. She had told me on the way of the desperate fight that had taken place in the tambo, when her father, eager to save her from falling into Zemaco's hands, had lost his life. In spite of all our care, the cacique had contrived to send a messenger before him, and his confederates were thus in waiting at the tambo, ready to effect the release of our prisoners. Discovering the absence of the Spaniards at Bilbao's funeral, they had attacked Valdivia, bolted and barred the gates, slain Careta in the fight, and then,

hastening to Fulvia's apartments, succeeded in bearing her and her maidens to the distant hills by means of a secret exit. From thence Zemaco carried them to Xauxa and disappeared; but after the capture of the Inca he came back sorely wounded, and caused her to be conveyed to the camp of Chalcuchima, outside the city. There a little later she was joined by Zemaco. Day after day he besought her to be his wife, but she refused him, since she was betrothed to the Spanish Don Alonso.

"But he is dead, Fulvia!" he exclaimed one day. "I saw him fall in the desperate fight in Caxamalca, when the Spaniards seized the Inca"; whereat she wept, and then declared that if her lover had fallen she would marry no one.

At last he left for Pachacamac, whither he went to stimulate the priests in the sacrifices, if so be the country might be thereby saved. Her heart was set at rest when she heard of his death, and she now felt that she had nothing more to fear.

This day when the division of the spoil began we watched the scene in the Plaza from the roof of one of the houses. Hundreds of slaves engaged in the task of carrying out the gold and silver that had come from every quarter of the Inca's dominions, and soon the Plaza was filled with such an array of riches as history has not the like to tell of. There were great piles of thick golden sheets that had been stripped from the walls of temples and palaces; there were cornices of pure gold that had been torn from their places in order to swell the bulk of the astounding ransom; there were vessels richly chased and of marvellous size; there were golden chairs that had been brought from the tombs of the Incas; golden shields, belts, bracelets, and ten thousand ornaments of the same precious metal; there were tiles of

gold that had been taken from the floors of the Temples of the Sun, and golden slabs that had formed the pavements in the palaces; there was a candelabrum so richly wrought that it seemed a sin that such exquisite workmanship should be destroyed, and the inestimable treasure be flung into the melting-pot; there were ewers and goblets, platters and lamps; flowers wrought in gold, so true an imitation of those that grew in the gardens of Peru, as to fill the conquerors with astonishment and become the talk of Spain when specimens were exhibited there.

And there it all lay, glittering in the sun, dazzling us with its beauty and brilliancy. Yet the thought of treasure had been so much with us of late, and our expectations had run so high, that while it formed such an astounding display of wealth, I do not think that many were satisfied. Even with so much, the craving for wealth had so possessed them that they wished it had been more.

At last the labour of the carriers was ended, and silence fell upon the Spaniards, while we looked to see what would next be done. But something very much like a sob drew my attention away from this display of wealth to my companion. I looked round, and saw that she was in tears.

"My dear one," I cried, taking her hand in mine, but for a while she could not speak.

"Alonso, if I did not love you so, I should hate these countrymen of yours. I believe they would sell their very souls for gold. See!" she cried, extending her hand in the direction of my countrymen, "watch the hungry look in some of their faces! Their hands itch that they may clutch the spoils of my country! And look, oh! look at my beloved Inca! He, the most

famous of a glorious line, must needs be captive, and suffer all this base indignity, simply that those creatures yonder should be rich !”

My face burned with shame as she spoke these words, for I, too, had come to this land to build up my fallen fortunes.

Following this display of the treasure, there came the work of melting it down into ingots, so that it might be readily divided and easily carried. Such a task was necessarily a long one — lasting over many days — and the end of it was impatiently awaited. But it came in due season, and when the weight was ascertained the value was thereby estimated.

When Pizarro came out from the House of the Serpent, in which the work of weighing had been carried out, he bore in his hand a piece of parchment on which were many figures. The whole of the Spanish party was once more drawn up in the Plaza, everyone eager to know what the report would be ; and as Pizarro stood before us we listened in a silence that was painful in its intensity.

“Comrades,” said the General, after having gazed intently on the parchment, “the amount of the treasure collected for the ransom of the Inca has been ascertained, and those whom you appointed to act as commissioners have made the division resolved upon in our agreement at the beginning of the expedition. The gold that has been melted down is valued in Spanish money at one million, three hundred and twenty-six thousand, five hundred and thirty-nine *pesos de oro*.* The silver is worth fifty-one thousand, six hundred and ten marks.”

* A *peso de oro* was, at the time of the conquest, equal to a *castellano*, the value of which, in English money, was £2 12s. 6d. sterling. Hence the amount of treasure in gold alone was £3,482,164 17s. 6d. As for the value of the silver, the amount to be divided was about £35,000. Here was treasure worth more than three and a half millions sterling.

There was a movement of excitement as these words fell from Pizarro's lips, and the soldiers found it difficult to keep in the ranks and not crowd round the General, but he held up his hand as if to stay them when they moved with this intention. Slowly and distinctly he read out each man's share, and then suffered us to disperse.

My heart swelled with gladness when I crossed the square to seek for Fulvia. I had vowed to buy back the home of my fathers. It was for this alone that I had come to the land of gold; and now my share of the gold, which was 8880 *pesos de oro* and 362 marks of silver, added to the stores of treasure I already possessed, was sufficient. It only needed that I should go back to Spain at the close of the expedition, and lay down my purchase-money.

Fulvia smiled as I told her once more the story she knew so well, and declared that she admired my persistency. Then, as it was drawing on towards sunset, we walked out into the meadows, and talked of our plans for the coming days.

But while we had our gold we had not got rid of our difficulties. I have not yet stated that while we were taking part in the expedition to Pachacamac a reinforcement had arrived from the coast. It consisted of a finely-equipped body of a hundred and fifty foot-soldiers and fifty cavaliers, under the command of Diego de Almagro, Pizarro's old comrade. When the division of the ransom was to be made they demanded their share, but they had not fought in a single skirmish, and therefore had no claim, whereas we had been in constant jeopardy. It was finally agreed that they should each receive a small sum, and take their share of any spoil that should in future fall into their hands.

I mention this because it goes some distance towards accounting for the decision to which I and a few others came before many hours were gone. The day following that on which the division was made there was a sudden clamour in the Plaza. Going out to discover what it might mean, I saw the Inca in his litter, preceded and surrounded by his slaves and nobles. Pizarro, who had just entered the Plaza, after having ridden to the neighbouring palace outside the city with Almagro and some other cavaliers, rode up and asked the monarch what he intended by being thus early in his litter, and without the usual Spanish escort.

"I go back to my own people, Pizarro," was the calm rejoinder.

"To your own people?" exclaimed the General with sudden anger. "What mean you by that?"

"Have I not paid my ransom, Spaniard? and am I not thereby free to come or go as I may please?" And turning calmly to his people he bade them proceed.

"Pizarro," cried Almagro, "this shall not be! We too, who have had no share in the spoil, want something from this Inca. Bid him stay, or I will call out my men and stop him with force."

Pizarro, not loth to oblige his comrade-in-arms, called aloud for the procession to halt, but it went slowly on its way, the Inca not deigning to give a look or word to his captors. Seeing this the General spurred his horse, followed by his companions, and, reaching the front, compelled the Peruvians to stand still.

"I am sorry to detain you longer," he said to Atabalipa, whose dark and handsome face was even black with indignation at being thus hindered, after having honourably fulfilled his contract in the matter of so great a ransom.

"To detain me?" he cried in anger, starting to his feet,

while the litter trembled with his movement. "Stand back, Spaniard! I have paid my ransom, and will go!"

"That you will not!" shouted Pizarro with equal passion. "Though you have paid your ransom you are yet in our power, and will only depart when we are willing." And he drew his sword as if to emphasize his words. The action was copied by most of his companions, to indicate their readiness to repeat the awful massacre that had ended in the Inca's long captivity.

"Turn back, my children," said the royal captive sadly. "I would not have you come on sorrow or death for my sake. These Spaniards are monsters of perfidy, and we must fain submit."

And slowly the slaves and nobles turned and carried back their royal master, still a prisoner, to the House of the Serpent.

CHAPTER XL.

A RUPTURE WITH PIZARRO.

WHEN Fulvia heard of the indignity to which the Inca had been subjected she burst into a passion of grief, and nothing that I could say or do would comfort her. For a full hour her grief and indignation rendered her speechless, and she sat and sobbed and rocked herself to and fro in an agony akin to despair.

“Oh, Alonso!” she exclaimed at last, drying her eyes and speaking in a voice that thrilled with emotion, “if I did not love you I would curse these countrymen of yours. But I love you so that I even forget the claims of loyalty.”

What could I say? My own heart was rebellious, and shame filled me at what was nothing less than iniquity, and a further proof of what a lust for gold had rendered gallant cavaliers capable of doing. To detain the Inca after a solemn agreement to accept his ransom was an act that cast infamy upon those who sought to evade the contract; and as I thought the more I could not see how, if I still joined in aiding the detention of Atabalipa, I was any the less guilty of this infamous procedure. I sought, it is true, to excuse the act to Fulvia, for during the last few days reports had been abroad that the Inca was conspiring for the massacre of the Spaniards. For my own part I did not believe it, so that I rehearsed the story with but little spirit, and certainly did not say much to allay the grief of my loved one.

When I ended she looked into my face with an expression of scorn that startled me.

"Alonso! are you mad? or are you also as false as the majority of your countrymen, that you should tell me of that lying story? You know as well as I do that Felipillo, the Indian interpreter, seeks the death of the Inca, so that he may possess himself of one of the monarch's wives. He has industriously circulated reports among your countrymen to that effect, concerning an Inca whose honourable fulfilment of his promises ought to be responded to generously."

And bursting afresh into tears she buried her face in her hands, and refused to be consoled.

"Leave me, my dear Alonso, for I love you too well to quarrel with you. If the love between us broke I should die."

I stooped and kissed her, while she, responding, flung her arms about my neck and sobbed upon my breast. When I left her I went to Ovando's quarters, where I found a number of cavaliers excitedly discussing the detention of the Inca.

"It is monstrous," exclaimed Ovando, his dark eyes flashing with anger, and his hands trembling with excess of emotion. "I will no longer stay in this place if this ill-served monarch is not set free!"

"What will you do, then, Ovando?" cried Arbues.

"I will tell Pizarro that if he holds the Inca prisoner, after the solemn compact to release him, I will be no party to the perfidy, but will return to the coast."

"And there, too, will I go!" said Arbues, whose face flushed with shame, by reason of his belonging to a company that had sold everything—honour, honesty, all that was of worth to manhood—for gold.

"And I go with you, if I may," I cried. "It was surely enough to hold the Inca in safe keeping until the

price was paid; but he has paid it to the last peso, and by every right is free to return to his own people."

"Then I go with you, Don Alonso," said Antonio, whose honest face was the picture of indignation. "And if they want it back, they shall have my gold. Of what profit will it be to us, if we hold the price of perfidy?"

"And if so many of you go, I go also," said Pedro, with no less emphasis.

We spent an hour in deliberation, and then crossed the Plaza to Pizarro's quarters, which, since the Inca's resolution to leave Caxamalca had been made known to him, had been changed to the House of the Serpent, in order to keep a stricter watch upon the monarch's movements. We were ushered into the chamber without delay, and Ovando and Arbues, acting as our spokesmen, told the General of our determination. He received us roughly, and with such scorn that it seemed to me that Ovando would have challenged him there and then to combat; but Arbues whispered in his ear, and he returned his half-drawn sword to its scabbard.

"And when will you start, good friends?" exclaimed Pizarro, after a long pause, during which we had stood looking at him in silence; but the question was a galling one, by reason of the sneer upon the General's face.

"The day after to-morrow, if you will not set the Inca free," responded Ovando in our name.

"Then start when and how you will, for I have not yet done with my royal captive. He is far too good a card in my hands to part with, so fare you well, gentlemen!" And turning on his heel with a passionate gesture he left us standing there.

"The day after to-morrow, comrades, at daydawn, we set forth," said Ovando, as we separated.

The others went their way, but I took several turns

round the Plaza, revolving in my mind the things that had just transpired, and the possibilities that lay before me. I found it difficult to decide upon one or two important points, but at last arrived at a conclusion thereon. Crossing the great square, I went to Fulvia's apartment, hoping that she had not retired for the night; and to my great relief she was sitting with her maidens. As I entered she came across the chamber to greet me. There must have been a strange look upon my face, for she took me by the hand, and gazing at me wistfully, said, almost in a whisper—

“My beloved Alonso, what is on your mind?”

“A great thing, Fulvia—great to me, I mean”—was my response. “Send your maidens away, so that I may speak with freedom.”

She turned at once and bade them leave us, and when the curtains fell, and we were alone, she drew me down, and, kissing my lips, whispered again, “Tell your dear one what is on your mind.”

“I am going back to Spain, Fulvia, and I have come, not merely to tell you this, but to ask you to go with me as my wife to my native land.”

“To Spain?” she cried in great amazement. “To Spain, Alonso? But why?”

And then I told her, whereat she rose to her feet, for we had been sitting side by side while I rehearsed the story of the interview with Pizarro, and our resolution. When I rose also she put her arms about me, and said such words as she had spoken once before. They thrilled me as they fell so softly and lovingly from her lips—“Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

God bless the dear one! She had given me my answer, and was throwing in her lot with mine, for good or ill.

For a while there was a hush, but at last I dared to say what had cost me a pang to resolve upon while I walked the Plaza after that stormy interview with the General, for it brought me painfully face to face with the vow I had made to win back my father's home.

"You know full well, Fulvia, I vowed to buy back my home, and so I will. But how can I carry back this gold which was won by perfidy? If I win the family estates with it, I fear me that God's frown would come, and no blessing. Therefore I renounce my share of the gold that was the price of the Inca's liberty, and must needs turn to other fields to find the great sum yet needed."

I had scarce finished when she took me by the hand, and gazed into my face with eyes that were ablaze with love, such as I had never seen before.

"Brave, noble-souled Alonso! worthy of a better woman's love than mine!" she cried. "You shall have my own wealth, which is far greater than that which you have renounced, so that the splendour of your house shall exceed what it would have been if you had kept the Inca's gold, and had never known your Fulvia." And she flung her arms about my neck and kissed me again and again in a passion of affection.

And so it was. The next day I took back my share of the ransom to Pizarro, and told him I could not take the price of perfidy.

"Be it so, Don Alonso," he said quietly; but as I turned to leave him he called me back. Taking my hand, he grasped it warmly, while his lips were trembling.

"Would that I had your courage, Don Alonso!"

And then, dropping my hand, and without a word of farewell, he turned and left me. I thought, as the sun lit up his face, that his eyes were bright. Had he not been a stern man of war I should have said that they were bright with tears.

Next morning we were ready to start, but before we took our departure I had the right to call Fulvia mine in a dearer sense, for she had become my wife. Father de Vargas, when he heard that I was to sever myself from the expedition and return to Spain, and that Fulvia was returning also, some day to be my wife, suggested that we should marry at once, so that in the possible perils of the journey I should be better able to watch over her safety. And that afternoon Fulvia and I were made one. By this first marriage of a Spaniard on Peruvian soil the famous house of the Miguels had once more a lovely mistress, and one in whose veins ran some of the richest blood of Peru.

We were not a small company. Five of us were Spanish cavaliers, and the others my newly-wedded wife and her six maidens, with their litter-bearers, as well as the fighting men whom Fulvia's father had brought with him as an escort, and the carriers of the treasure of my comrades. Careta's warriors we had found at the camp outside Xauxa.

But when we rode out of the gateway of Caxamalca, not suffering ourselves to say farewell to our old comrades, since we knew that they would greet us with derision, we heard the clatter of horses' hoofs behind, and turning saw Father de Vargas, accompanied by De Roldan and Garabito, riding towards us. Doubtless they came thus in their endeavour to overtake us, lest we might have gone far upon the way.

"My children," cried the ecclesiastic when he reined in the steed he rode—one that he had leaped upon as it stood in the Plaza—"I have come to give you a parting blessing. I have pleaded with Pizarro for many a day gone by to be just and honourable, but he prefers gold to honour, and riches are more to him, I fear, than a quiet conscience. I would fain go with you, as if to express

my disapproval of a deadly sin, but I dare not. There are these heathen who need to be taught, and Spaniards too, who, in their lust for gold, will need daily prayers."

And while the good father's eyes streamed with tears, and his voice trembled with emotion, he besought a blessing for us on our homeward way. When his prayers were ended he embraced us one by one. And so, too, did De Roldan and Garabito, whose eyes glistened as they pressed our hands.

"Think kindly of us, comrades," said these men of war when they turned to ride back to their quarters. "We honour your conduct," added De Roldan, "but I fear me that we lack moral courage to take a noble stand such as you have done."

And a moment later they were gone. From that day to this we have not seen them, nor shall we ever do so in this world, for they both fell in battle a few weeks later.

Our journey to the coast was uneventful, for the people appeared to be afraid to oppose us, though we were but a few, and they so many. At the two palaces where we had left our treasure in hiding we halted, sought out our own especial shares, leaving the others untouched since they were not ours to use, and then moved on, hired porters bearing the burden of wealth for us. At last we came in sight of the low, level plain, and looked again upon the sea. Behind us was the majestic mass of mountains, through whose passes we had fought our way in the dangerous march to Caxamalca. Miles away to the north-west lay the city of San Miguel, which Pizarro had founded, and which was now garrisoned by those whose health or lack of courage would not suffer them to face the dangers that lay among the mountains.

In due time we came to the gates, and when we marched into the city, our horses' weary feet rousing

the sleepers with their trampling on the stones—for it was midnight when we arrived—the whole of the Spaniards turned out to bid us welcome. As for myself, I watched over the comfortable lodgment of my bride and her companions; then, with the others, tired though we were, gave my horse into safe keeping, and sat up through the night, telling of the wonders we had seen, the fights we had taken part in, and the perils that had beset our way. Even while we talked we fell asleep for very weariness.

Two weeks later we embarked, taking our horses with us, since we were loth to part with the fine creatures that had served us so faithfully, and had shared with us so many dangers. I looked forward to the time when Tristan should carry me through the lovely vales of Spain, or rest in comfort in the stables in Cadiz, if I could prevail upon Perez de Hurtabel to part with my old home.

A day or two before we set sail a great surprise awaited us. We saw riding across the low-lying country that stretched away for seventy miles to the base of the mountains, a company of horsemen, followed by a long procession of Peruvians. Going forth to meet them, wondering who they were and what their coming meant, we came at last face to face with Hernando Pizarro, Etienza, Colmenares, and ten other cavaliers.

“I give you greeting, comrades!” cried the General's brother, as we halted and embraced the new-comers.

“And how is it that you come hither?” responded Ovando.

“Ha! there lies a long story, my friend. Almagro and I could not hit it well together. You know we never did! And my worthy brother Francisco deemed it well to dismiss me politely, by sending me back to Spain to see the King, to tell him of the splendid empire that is about to be added to his dominions, and beg of him to send

further forces to complete the conquest. And see these Indians! They bring a selection of the treasures, so that His Majesty may know that the country is full of wealth. Methinks our story will eclipse that which Cortez was able to tell on his return from the conquest of Mexico."

"And how came you here, Etienza? and you, Colmenares?" cried Arbues, as soon as Hernando had ended.

"The same reason is behind our coming that prompted you to leave the Spanish camp," answered Colmenares. "They have strangled the Inca after a shameful trial, pretending that he plotted their destruction. But the real reason was that Atabalipa was so incensed at their perfidy in accepting the ransom and refusing to set him free, that he absolutely declined to give orders for another ounce of gold to be brought in. Well, we protested against the shameful thing, for it was nothing but wanton murder, and the result was that we were called upon to choose either to approve the doings of our countrymen or leave for Spain. That is why we are here."

"And a good thing, too," exclaimed Hernando, who had, in spite of his ill-temper, taken sides with the unfortunate Inca. "Atabalipa was honourable, and if my brother had made fair terms with him, the conquest would have been complete ere this. But now the Spanish army has all the forces of Peru to combat with, and the people, when they hear of the death of their monarch, whom they revered as a god, will be exasperated to the pitch of madness."

When I told the story, as I heard it, to Fulvia, she was speechless with indignation, and it needed all my tact and love to soothe her. She had just cause to express her unabating scorn for Pizarro and those about him, who, in the Land of Gold, had buried honour and everything of which a Spaniard might well be proud.

CHAPTER XLI.

ON SPANISH SOIL AGAIN.

MANY months passed before we set foot on the soil of our native land, but when, after a somewhat stormy voyage, our ship entered the port of Cadiz, my heart beat wildly at the thought that before long I should be able to show to Fulvia the massive walls that encircled the mansion in which I was born. We passed by cape and promontory that loomed up in the moonlight, which came occasionally from behind the broken clouds; and one morning, a few hours after sunrise, the ship ran in alongside the quay. It was delightful to leap ashore, and, leaving everything to take its chance for a time, wander along the streets which I had traversed so often in my boyhood.

Fulvia begged me to leave her with her maidens in the cabin for a time, and then she would walk through the streets of Cadiz with me, to purchase such things as she might need. She knew how I longed to see the city of my birth, and with her usual thoughtfulness bade me go forth a while, and look up my old acquaintances.

Years had passed since I gazed at leisure into the shop windows where the beautiful workmanship of Spain's artisans was displayed; but now, as I passed down the streets, I seemed to forget myself in the delight of looking at the curios and costly goods that were waiting for a buyer.

I came at last to a shop I knew so well, where I could purchase better clothing, for the suit I wore was travel-stained, my armour battered, and my coat of mail much broken. I looked more like a cavalier whose clothes had gone to seed, rather than one of Spain's proudest dons, who held possession of wealth enough to revive the fallen splendours of the house of Miguel, and was the husband of one more beautiful than any of the dark-eyed women of my native land.

Entering with a spirit of light-hearted mischief in me, I desired the dealer there to show me the best he had, but he looked at me as if he doubted my ability to pay.

"It is not for me to waste my time, my master, in disturbing my wares to no purpose. They lie better where they are than on this counter, where they can only be scanned by idle and inquisitive eyes."

"Nay," I answered, "now I call that churlish. It is because my clothes are worn that you think you can measure my ability to pay. But what say you to these? Will they induce you to serve me?" And I drew a score of gold pieces from my pouch, as if to assure him that I was able to pay for what I asked.

At the sight of so much gold the trader altered his attitude, and from unwillingness passed on to overwhelm me with attention. He drew from his dark closets magnificent articles that would have suited the greatest of the nobles, and out of the stock I chose such things as became my person and my rank. Going into a little ante-room I arranged myself in my new apparel, and when I came forth again into the shop, the trader drew back, and looked on me in admiration.

"Why, my master, you might be a nobleman, you look so well!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands as he marked

the contrast between what I had been when I entered his shop, and what I now was.

"A nobleman? And so I am, Master Corral. Do you not know me?" I asked, as I buckled on my sword.

"No," he replied.

"Then I must needs tell you. I am Don Alonso de Miguel——"

But before I could say another word he came from behind the counter and grasped my hands and kissed my cheeks, bearded man though I now was. Nor could I find it in my heart to stay him.

Turning from me at last, he went to the old staircase that I knew so well, and shouting "Carina," bade his wife come up at once, for here was the young don, so long lost, come back again. The very name was enough, and in a moment or two dear, buxom, dark-eyed Carina was before me, declaring that, noble and bearded though I was, she must needs kiss my handsome face, if only for the memory of the love she had borne me many a day gone by. And her eyes gleamed with gladness as she put her arms about me and kissed me till I begged her to be merciful, and, for my wife's sake, not to smother me.

At my words she stood back and gazed at me with a face so strangely amazed that I burst into laughter.

"Your wife, Don Alonso? You do not mean to say that you are married?" she cried at last.

"Yes, Carina, and to the most lovely woman that ever touched the soil of Spain—to a beautiful Indian maiden, with noble blood running in her veins, and rich enough to be a queen."

"Why did you not tell me before, Don Alonso? Then I would not have taken the liberty of kissing you. What will she say when she knows?"

“Say, my good old nurse? What should she say? Have you not been to me as my mother in the past?” I answered; and my eyes grew hot at the quick, sad memory. “Give me another kiss, Carina. To-morrow I will bring the Doña Fulvia to see you, and when I tell her what you have been to me she will suffer you to kiss me at your own sweet will.”

Her kind face brightened at my words.

“But will you not come into the old kitchen as you were wont to do, Don Alonso?” she said presently; and turning, she led the way, while I, not loth to follow, went down the stairs I knew so well, Juan Corral bringing up the rear. Without staying to ask whether I was hungry, she cleared the table of her sewing, and spread a cloth with such dainties as her home provided; and for me, to whom the ship’s rough fare had become nauseous, it was a real feast that I sat down to.

After a while I went to the ship on a two-fold errand. One was to discover when Hernando Pizarro intended to start for Madrid, since I was anxious to buy back my home; and to do that I must needs find my way into the King’s presence. But for the second part of my errand, it was my wish to bring my wife from the close and uncomfortable cabin of the ship, into the handsomely furnished rooms which Carina Corral offered to place at her disposal if, as she said, the Doña Fulvia would condescend to use them.

As to the first of these, I found that Pizarro would not start for a few days, because he needed a strong escort in order to convey so much treasure to Madrid. And when I mentioned all that had transpired at Carina Corral’s home to Fulvia, she looked round the dingy cabin and declared that a change would be delightful, the more so since, although the home was humble, she

would be among those who had been kind to me in the days of my adversity.

That same afternoon I took my wife to Carina's home, where we settled down for a few days of happiness. When the night shadows drew around us I told my old friends that I intended to go on the morrow to the hermitage of Saintorne, so that I might see Father Gonsalvo, and tell him how I had fared in my search for fame and fortune.

"Alas!" exclaimed Carina, "that cannot be!" And looking round as if to see that no one was lurking near to hear her words, she added in a low voice: "The dear man is gone home. The Inquisitors hurried him there!"

"Then he is dead?" I cried, with pain at my heart.

"Yes," she answered tearfully. And she told the story—too long to tell here—of his death at the stake by reason of his heresy.

The news of my dear old friend's death was a great blow to me, and a bitter disappointment. Scores of times in the perilous experiences in the New World, and more and more repeatedly as I watched the weary waste of waters when the ship was making for the Spanish shores, I had thought of his pleasure when he should hear how I had prospered and carved a way in the world with the sword he taught me how to use. But now, alas! he was gone, and I should see him no more, nor would he ever hear the story of my life in the land across the seas.

* * * * *

A few days later we set out with Pizarro for Madrid, accompanied by my cavalier comrades. Fulvia rode at my side, charmed at the fresh beauties of the land as we passed from place to place. Sometimes the great gorges

of the mountains reminded her of her own country; and even while traversing the very edge of frightful declivities she smiled to think that there was something here in common with the land of her birth.

There were no adventures by the way, for we were a party far too strong to be attacked by the brigands among the mountains, who cast longing eyes upon our treasures. When we reached Madrid we wended our way to the palace, followed by the long string of Indians, who had been shipped from Peru. They carried the magnificent tokens of the far-off country's wealth, amid the acclamations of the people, who, having heard of our coming, thronged the streets to see us pass. Strange to say, the last crowd I had seen in Madrid was one in which Fulvia had been gazed upon admiringly. Then I first saw her. Now she was no longer watched from a distance by me, but at my very side, and held the dearest place in my heart. She was then a stranger, now she was my wife—the best a Spanish noble ever had!

We passed the spot where she had been in such peril.

"See, Fulvia! do you remember this street?" I said.

"Shall I ever forget the place where first I met my brave lord?" she answered, looking into my face with a happy smile.

Brilliant as the reception of Cortez had been, that which was accorded to us was none the less impressive; for, if anything, the wealth we had with us exceeded any that had yet been brought across the seas. When we halted at the city gates a company of nobles had met us, and conducted us to the King—now Emperor of Germany, as well as ruler of Spain. His Majesty's manner was kind in the extreme to every one of us. When Hernando had briefly told the story of the conquest, and of the might and wealth of the empire of Peru, he

caused the Indians to file in, and lay their costly burdens at the Emperor's feet.

The story told, Charles the Fifth's eyes wandered over the group of cavaliers who had taken such a prominent part in the conquest, and at last he gazed intently on my wife.

"I have seen the face before," he said, after a pause; "and if I remember aright, it is the Lady Fulvia, daughter of the cacique of Chuchama. Is it not so?"

"It is, my liege," exclaimed Fulvia, approaching, and bending low before the monarch. "I have come hither with my husband, Don Alonso de Miguel of Cadiz."

The King looked up in much astonishment when he heard these words.

"And where is he?" he cried.

"May it please your Majesty, I am he," I answered, stepping forth, and bending the knee at my wife's side.

There was silence for a moment, and a pang of pain shot through my heart—a feeling almost of dismay, lest I should even now, in spite of my share in the conquest, be an outcast from the court. But I had misread the Emperor's silence.

"Ah," said he, "the son of Henriquez de Miguel. Alas! he was a heretic, and I grieve to think of the manner of his death. But he was a brave knight, a magnificent soldier, and it went to my heart when I heard that he had forfeited life and estates. You hold the name, Don Alonso, but I suppose you know that the Church took possession of the lands and castles?"

"Alas! your Majesty," I responded, my voice trembling with emotion, "I know it too well. The old home which my father maintained in such splendour had passed into the hands of the Church when I was but a boy, and

thence into the possession of Don Perez de Hurtabel. All through the campaign—right on, in fact, through my young life, even up to this present moment—I have been gathering together gold and substance, whereby I hoped, if it could be arranged, to buy back my father's home, and I come hither to beg your good office in the fulfilment of my wish. The good Archbishop of Cadiz gave me his blessing when I told him of my desire, and gave me this ring also, in token that he would plead my cause, if necessary, when my quest for gold was over. He will speak for me. May it please your Majesty to favour my suit?"

"I will do so, my young lord," the Emperor responded kindly. "Less than a month ago Don Perez de Hurtabel fell into disfavour, and his estates are forfeit. If you can satisfy the amount of the Church's claim, to which they have reverted, they are yours. I am proud to know that valour is not dead among my people, and that young warriors are growing up around me who can fight their country's battles. Come to me to-morrow."

When I went to the palace on the morrow I received from His Majesty a document which, on payment of a far less heavy sum of money than I had supposed, secured to me the return of the old mansion, and the vast estate which had passed away on that fatal day when my father and mother had died for conscience' sake.

"I am proud to do this for you, Don Alonso, and pleased to think that you have won the heart of one so supremely beautiful and of such high degree as the Doña Fulvia. She will always be welcome at my court. Is there anything undone that I might yet do?" the Emperor added kindly.

"May it please your Majesty, I am deeply sensible of

the high esteem in which you held my father, and of your kindness in suffering me to return to the home of my ancestors. There is yet one other favour. I would fain have seen Antonio del Benito's services recognized."

And then I told the Emperor of the brave deeds he had accomplished.

"Send him to me to-night, and he shall be requited, Don Alonso," was the gracious reply. "I need brave men about me, and such as he are always welcome."

When Antonio returned from the palace his eyes were gleaming, and his face was all smiles.

"This was more than kind, Don Alonso, alike of yourself and of the King. He has raised me to the rank of hidalgo, so that now I may with all propriety ride at your side when we follow the monarch in his wars."

And in the days that followed we rode side by side on many a battlefield.

THE END.

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