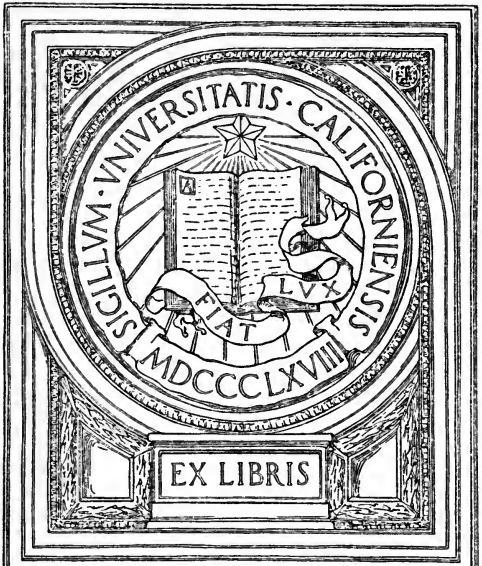
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THE INFIDEL;

OR

THE FALL OF MEXICO.

A ROMANCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CALAVAR."

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

BERNAL DIAZ DEL CASTILLO—*Hist. Verd de la Conquista.*

No hay mal que por bien no venga,
Dicen adagios vulgares.

CALDERON—*La Dama Duende.*

SECOND EDITION.

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THE INFIDEL.

CHAPTER I.

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

for in vain, under tangled copses of thistle and prickly-pear.

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

misjudging and fanatical missionaries to the flames which consumed the written histories and laws of the kingdom, as well as the idolatrous rituals of the priests, with which last the others were unfortunately confounded.*

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

In the spring of 1521, the year that followed the flight of the Spaniards from Mexico, the city of the Acolhuacanese presented all its grandeur of aspect,

* These poems, we presume, were handed down *orally*. We know not how far the picture-writing of the Mexicans (the art of interpreting which appears to be now lost,) was capable of conveying any such thoughts as could not be represented by an absolute *portrait*. No system of writing that is not essentially *phonetic* or *dialectical*, (i. e. representative of sounds, or of language,) can be made to express abstract ideas, which may be defined to be such as admit of no ideographic or metaphoric representation. If they could, mankind might, at once, enjoy the benefits of the *universal language*, (or, to speak strictly, a substitute for it; for it would convey ideas not words,) which Leibnitz dreamed of, and Bishop Wilkins, and many others after him, so vainly attempted to construct.

When, therefore, we relate any very curious and marvellous matters, appertaining to Mexican *literature*, though we speak upon the authority of historians, we invite the reader to receive our accounts with some grains of allowance. With the exception of a few arbitrary symbols, expressive of numerals, and a few other objects of constant recurrence, the picture-writing of Mexico spoke in ideas, not words; and it may therefore be assumed, that it could express nothing that did not, or by a stretch of ingenuity, could not be made to, address and explain itself to the eye.

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

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

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

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

The brawny carriers of these massive materials were protected, on the front and in the rear, by le-

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

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

some such outpouring of wit, as put to the proof either his gravity or his patience.

These happy individuals, to whom we desire to introduce the reader, were five in number, and, with a single exception, though betraying none of the submissiveness of inferior personages, were evidently of no very exalted rank in the Christian army. Their attire was plain, and consisted, for the most part, of the cumbrous escaupil, or cotton-armour, over which, in the case of one or two, at least, were buckled a few plates of iron. Most of them had on their heads, helmets, or rather caps, of the same flimsy material, sometimes so thickly padded as to assume the bulk, as well as the appearance of rude turbans; all wore swords, and two had crossbows hanging at their backs. No distinction of station could have been inferred from their manner of discoursing one with another; and it was only by the morion of bright steel, richly inlaid with gold, on the head of one, and the polished hauberk on his chest, worn more for display than for any present service, that the wearer would have been recognized as of a grade superior to that of his companions. He was a tall and athletic cavalier, with a long chin, and cheeks broad and bony; and a singular and rather unpleasing expression was added to his countenance by eyes disproportionably small, though exceedingly black, keen, and resolute. A small, sharply peaked beard, —mustaches so thin, long, and straight, that they looked rather like the drooping locks of a woman than the favourites of a vain gallant,—a narrow but lofty forehead, on either side of which, divided and smoothed with effeminate care, fell masses of straight black hair, touched, yet almost invisibly, with the traces of matured manhood,—a small mouth, —a prominent nose,—and a complexion exceedingly dark, yet rather of the hue of iron than mahogany, completed a visage which a stranger would not

have hesitated to attribute to a man of decided character, but without daring to determine whether that was of good or evil.

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

The next individual was a man of good stature, who would have been considered, notwithstanding his grey hairs, the strongest man in the company, had it not been for his general emaciation and an expression of suffering on a countenance over which disease, contracted among the hot and humid swamps of the coast, had cast the sickliest hues of jaundice. Indeed, this discolouration, on a visage naturally none of the fairest, was of so deep a tint, that it had gained for the invalid, as well as for a

whole ship's crew of his companions, the significant title of *Ojo Verde*, or the Green Eye. And here we may as well observe, that, in the army of Cortes, the wit which shows itself in the invention of such distinctions, was so prevalent, that there was scarce a man, from the general down to his groom or scullion, who had not been honoured by at least *one* sobriquet.

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

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

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

In the meanwhile, the cavalier of the helmet had

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

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

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

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

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

"Pho, I will bandy mudballs with him at any moment," said Villafana: "I care not for the buffets of a friend. As for the noble señor, the Captain General, what you say is true. The king's letter hath set him mad. While the Bishop of Burgos was still in power, and his enemy, he was e'en a good companion,—a comrade, and no master. De-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hast thou never been as free thyself?" cried Villafana, with a laugh, which mingled a careless derision with good-humour. "Come, now,—con-

fess thou wert pleased to be appointed Grand Guardian and Chamberlain,—or, if thou wilt, Grand Vizier,—to his god-son, the young king of Tezcuco; and that, since he gave thee Lerma's horse, thou hast been better mounted than any other cavalier in the army."

"Thou art an ass. Cortes has ever been my friend; and when I have complained, as I have sometimes done, it was only like a good house-dog, who howls in the night-watches, because he has nothing better to amuse him. But hold,—look! the carriers are passed. The rear-guard approaches. Now is my friend Sandoval yonder, betwixt the two Tlascalan chiefs, glorified in his imagination. 'Slid! he would have had me exchange my brown Bobadil for his raw-boned Motacila!—Come, Najara, rub up thy wit; fling me some sweet word into the teeth of the Tlascalan generals. Dost thou perceive with what solemn visages they approach us?"

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

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

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

"Ay!" cried Villafana, "there is another fruit of a king's patent. One may neither laugh nor scold, gamble nor play truant, but straight he is told of a decree. Faith, when Cortes was our plain Captain, it was another matter: if there was aught to be done or not to do, it was then, in simple phrase, 'I commend to your favours,' or, 'I beg of your friendships, do me this thing,' or, 'do it not,' as was needful. But now the Captain-General deals only

in decrees or proclamations, wherein we have commands for exhortations, prohibitions in place of dissuasions, and, withal, a plentiful garnishing of stocks and dungeons, whips and halters, all in the king's name. By Santiago! there is too much state in this."

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

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

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

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

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

"Now, were you not both besotted, and bent upon self-destruction," said the deformed, regarding the pair with a commiserating sneer, "you would not ask me to disturb our Immortality; who is, at

this moment, meditating by what possible stretch of benevolence he can hand your names down to posterity; a thing, which if *he* do not effect, you may be sure, nobody else will. Señor Guzman, 'twas but a half-hour since, that he asked me, if I could, upon mine own knowledge, acquaint him with any act of thine worthy of commemoration."

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

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

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

"Marry, upon that of thine own lips," replied the

hunchback; "for I know not who else could have invented so liberally."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The individual thus alluded to, though giving his attention to the conversation, had maintained a profound and unsympathetic silence during all. He stood leaning against the tree, folding over his breast, and even wrapping about his chin, the long cloak of striped cotton cloth—the product of the country,—the bright and gaudy colours of which contrasted unnaturally with the sickly hue of his visage. Throughout all, when not particularly noticed, his countenance wore an expression of as much mental as bodily pain; but when thus accosted by Villafana, it changed at once, and in a

remarkable degree, from gloom to good-humour, and even to apparent gayety. It is true, that, at the moment when his name was pronounced, he started quickly with a sort of nervous agitation; and a sudden rush of blood into his face, mingling with its bilious stain, covered it with the swarthiest purple: but this immediately passed away—perhaps before any of his comrades had noted it.

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

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

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

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

"Pho, friends! here's a coil," said the Alguazil, stoutly: "Don Hernan knows me: "I will say

what I think. I have maintained to his face, that there was foul work with the gold, and that we have been cheated of our shares; I have told him what ill work was made of both Repartimientos,—the partition of the slaves,—at Segura-de-la-Frontera, and here at Tezcuco,—scurvy, knavish work, señores: One may fetch angels to the brand, but, ay de mi! the iron turns them into beldames!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

out of our corses. What sayst thou, Najara, mi Corcobado, mi Hacedor de Tropos?"

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

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

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

As Najara spoke, he bent his sour and piercing looks on the Alguazil; who, much to the surprise of Camarga, grew pale, and snatched at his dagger, in an ecstasy of rage, greatly disproportioned to the offence, if such there could be in what seemed idle and unmeaning sarcasms. The wrath of Villafana, however, was checked by the mirth of the cavalier, Don Francisco, who exclaimed with the triumph of retaliation,

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

"*Hombre!* I am not angry *now:* but, methinks, Corcobado hath the art of inflaming whatever is

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

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

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

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

"Methinks, señores," said Camarga, "you should be curious to know in what manner the good man records your actions. For my part, I should be well content to be made better acquainted with them; especially with those later exploits, since the retreat from Mexico, of which I have heard

only confused and contradictory accounts. Will he suffer us to examine his chronicles?"

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

CHAPTER II.

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

* Vasco Nuñez de Balboa.

peditions; and he was among the first to join the standard of Don Hernan, in the third and most successful of the Spanish descents.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You jeer me, señor Guzman; you laugh at me,

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

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

"Why not?" said the soldier, stoutly; "I have fought almost as many battles, and I warrant me, my heart is as strong; and were it my fate to be a general and commander, instead of a poor soldier of fortune in the ranks, I could myself, as well as another, lead you through these mischievous Mexicans; who, I will be sworn, are much more valiant heathens than ever Cæsar found among the French. As far as he was a soldier, then, I boast to be as good a man as he; ay, by mine honour, and better too! for I am a Christian man, whereas he was a poor benighted infidel. As for my history, I will not make bold to compare it in excellence with his; for it has been told me, that Cæsar was a scholar, and possessed of the graces and elegancies of style; whereas, I have myself none of these graces, being ignorant of both Latin and Greek, and knowing nothing of any tongues, except the Castilian, and some smattering of this Indian jargon, which I have picked up with much pains, and, as I may say, at the expense of more beating than one gets from the schoolmaster. Nevertheless, I flatter myself, that

what I write will be good, because it will be true; for this which I am writing, is not a history of distant nations or of past events, nor is it composed of vain reveries and conjectures, such as fill the pages of one who writes of former ages. I relate those things of which I am an eye-witness, and not idle reports and hearsay. Truth is sacred and very valuable. In future days, when men come to make histories of our acts in this land, their histories will be good, because they will draw them from me, and not from those vain historiographers who stay at home, and write down all the lies that people at a distance may say of us. This is a good thing, and will make my book, when finished, a treasury to men; but what is better, and what should make it noticeable to yourselves, it will not, like other histories, say, 'The great hero Cortes did this,' and 'the mighty commander did that,' giving all the glory to one man alone; but it will record our achievements in such a way as to show who performed them, relating that 'this thing was done by the Senor Don Francisco de Guzman, and this by the valiant soldier Najara, and this by myself, Bernal Diaz del Castillo,' and so on, each of us according to our acts."*

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

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

true relation of certain events, with which I am not yet familiar."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

pity for his years; and out of regard to Cortes, with whom he was a favourite."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Right!" cried Najara, with a sneer; "you have

clapped the ball to the right leg. We do not so shot honest men."

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

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

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

"Ay, I'll be sworn, thou art," said Villafana: "thy stories are much like to a crane's neck; 'tis

but a head and bill at first, and an ell or two of nothing stretched out after."

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

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

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

"No, faith; you would make a day's work of it; whereas I, who am no wire-drawer of conceits, can despatch the whole thing in a minute. Do you not see? the rear of the procession is in sight: in half an hour we shall be summoned into camp. Be content then, scribbler; I quote thy words, which should be honour enough: 'I defy any man to discover falsehood or exaggeration in what I say.' Know then, señor Camarga—after our victory at Otumba, nine months since, we retreated to Tlascala, four hundred and fifty in number, at which city we rested five months, curing our wounds, recruiting our forces, and preparing to resume the war. During this time, the only remarkable incidents were,—first—the meeting of those goodly knaves who had come with Narvaez, sworn faith

to Cortes, looked at Mexico, and now, being satisfied with blows and honour, demanded to be sent back to Cuba, to the great injury and almost destruction of all our hopes. Among the foremost of these turbulent fellows, was our friend here, Villafana; who, although he came not with Narvaez, but was sent soon after us by Velasquez, was ever found consorting with the disaffected, until his good saint, in some dream of the gallows, brought better thoughts into his mind, and converted him from an open enemy into a doubtful friend. Peace, Villafana! I am now playing the historian, and must therefore tell what I believe to be the truth."

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

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

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

"Oh, I forgot!" said Guzman, nodding to the historian:—"Some sent by the *sagacious* Velasquez to his captain, Narvaez, who was in chains at Villa Rica; some by De Garay, Adelantado of Jamaica, to rob us of our northern province, Panuco,—and it is supposed that thou, señor Camarga, with thy crew of sick men, though thou comest so late, and apparently of thine own good will, wert equipt by the same inconsiderate commander; and some by the merchants of the Canaries and of Seville, to be exchanged for our superfluous spoils, which were not then gathered;—no, by'r lady, nor yet, either. In fine, we became strong enough, by these means, to recruit our forces among the natives of the land;

which we did, by attacking divers provinces in the neighbourhood of Tlascala, and compelling their warriors to join our standard, along with the Tlascalans, who were willing enough,—all save their generalissimo, Xicotencal. Thus, then, with no mean force of Spaniards, and with several armies of Indian confederates, we came, 'tis now more than three months since, to yonder city, Tezcuco, and raised to the throne, (in place of his brother, who fled to Mexico,) a king of our own choosing; of whom I have the honour to be chief counsellor and minister, that is to say, guardian, regent, sponsor, or master, as you may think fit to esteem me. Here, it has been our good fortune to receive other and stronger reinforcements, and, as Villafana said, from the king's own royal bounty, with commissions and orders, priests and crown-officers, and so on; which circumstances have caused our army to be reorganized, the whole reduced to a stricter discipline, and civil officers to be appointed, for the better enforcing of martial law. Here, too, we have been preparing for the siege and blockade of yonder accursed metropolis, by bringing ships, (they are on the shoulders of these crawling pagans,) to give us the command of the lake; and by attacking and destroying the neighbouring towns, so as to secure possession of the shores. In the meanwhile, the young cub of an Emperor, Guatimozin, who has succeeded Cuitlahuatzin, the successor of Montezuma, has been equally busy in concentrating the warriors of all his faithful provinces in the island, and providing vast stores of corn and meat, for their subsistence,—as resolute to resist as we are to assail. The materials for our vessels being arrived, it is now known, that the time of constructing and lanching them, will be devoted to an expedition, led by Cortes himself; in which we will make the circuit of the whole lake, destroying the rebellious cities on the main,

and driving to the island all who may think fit to resist. When they are thus caged, we shall have them like pigeons in a net; and good plucking there will be in store for all.—This is my history, and methinks it should satisfy you."

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

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

"Oh, I speak not on my own knowledge, nor of my own personal belief," said Villafana, "and therefore, (but more especially in consequence of the decree, señor, the decree!—we will not forget the decree,) I shall fear neither dagger nor black looks.

You called Lerma a 'favourite' of the general: pho! even Bernal smiled at that!"

"What I have said in that matter," replied Guzman, with composure, "I will condescend to support with argument. The young man was received into the household of Cortes, while Cortes was yet a planter of Santiago: he picked him up, heaven knows where, how, or why, a poor, vagabond boy. It is notorious to all, that, in those days, Don Hernan employed him less as a servant than as a son, or younger brother, and as such, bestowed upon him affection and confidence, as well as the truest protection. Thou knowest, and if thou art not an infidel altogether, thou wilt allow, that the sword-cut on the general's left hand was obtained in a duel which he fought with a man, ('twas the señor Bocasucia,) who had thrown some sarcasm on the youth's birth, and then ran him through the body, when he sought for satisfaction."

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

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

"By my faith," said Bernal Diaz, unable any

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I understand thee, toad," said the latter, indifferently. "It was natural, the young man should be somewhat jealous. But this leads us from the story. If it be needful to find a reason for Don Hernan's change, I can myself give a thousand. In the first place, mere human fickleness might be enough, for no man is master of his affections. It might be enough too, to know, that the youth was no longer the gay and good-humoured lad he had been described, but a sour, gloomy, and peevish fool, exceedingly disagreeable and quarrelsome; and, perhaps, it might be more than enough, to remind you, that, as was currently believed, this change of temper was the consequence of certain villanous acts, committed after our departure, and which were thought to furnish a better and more probable reason for the voyage in the fusta than any particular zeal he had in the cause of Cortes.

If this be not enough," continued the cavalier, looking round him with the air of one who feels that his arguments are conclusive, "then I have but to mention what you seem to have forgotten, —to wit, that this petulant and meddlesome boy did presume to make opposition to, and very arrogantly censure, certain actions of the general; and, in particular, the seizure and imprisonment of king Montezuma, and the burning alive of the Cholulan prisoners, as well as the seventeen warriors, who had fought the battle with Escalante, at Vera Cruz."—In the last of these instances, Don Francisco made reference to the barbarous and most unjust punishment of Quauhpopoco,—the military governor of a Mexican province near to Vera Cruz, —and of his chief officers, who had presumed to resist with arms, and with fatal success, the Spanish commandant of the coast, in an unjustifiable attack.

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

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

"Among the daughters of the captive Montezuma," said Villafana, nodding to the hunchback, in testimony of approbation, "was one, the youngest

of all, and, in truth, the prettiest, as I have heard, for I never beheld her, who was called Cillahula,—"

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

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

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

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

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

"Dost thou speak this upon thine own personal averment?" demanded Don Francisco, with a coun-

tenance unchanged, but with a voice preternaturally subdued.

"No, faith," said Villafana, hastily, and with an air that looked like alarm; "I repeat the innuendoes of others, which may be slanders or not,—I know not. But it is certain, the young man so charged thee to Cortes; affirming that, but for his interference, the villany meditated—But, pho! thou growest angry! So much, certainly, he brought against thee?"

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

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

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

"Not on the block or the gallows, to be sure,"

said Villafana; "but in a manner quite as effectual. He was sent on some fool's errand of discovery, or exploration, to the South Sea, which, it was told us, washed the distant borders of this mighty empire;—his companions, two unlucky dogs of La Mancha, and one Leonese of Medina-del-Campo,—"

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

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

"Thou doest a foul wrong to Cortes, to say so," exclaimed Don Francisco, "imputing to him such sinister and perfidious motives. Such expeditions were at that time common; for we were then at peace, and each explorer was furnished by Montezuma with some royal officer by way of safe-conduct. Did not Don Hernan send his cousin, the young Pizarro, to explore the gold-lands of Guaztepec, at that very time? Were not others sent to search for mines, in the southern and northern provinces? I affirm, that this expedition of Lerma, fatal

though it has proved, was not thought more, or *much* more dangerous than Pizarro's:—thou knowest, Pizarro lost three of his men.—Moreover, thou doest the general an equal wrong, in the matter of the three Spaniards, that went with Lerma. Olea, at least,—Gaspar Olea, the Barba-Roxa—was notoriously a favourite and trusted soldier, and was sent with the youth, as being the fittest man who could be spared, to aid his inexperience."

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER III.

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

The foremost, or leader, of the little band, was undoubtedly a savage; as was seen by the depressed forehead, the high cheek-bones, the eye of a peculiar form, and the skin of even uncommon swarthiness, which distinguished him from his companions. His stature was short, almost dwarfish; his toes were turned inwards; and as he moved along with a shuffling gait, with advanced chest, and head still more protruded, his long locks, grizzled as with extreme age, fell from either side of

his face, like patches of gray moss from the bough of a tree, and almost swept the ground. A coarse cloth was wrapped round his loins; another of a square shape,—its opposite corners tied round his neck,—hung like a mantle, or rather a shawl, from his shoulders, over which were also strapped a bow and quiver of arrows; and a thick mat of cane-work was secured by thongs to his left arm, in the manner of a buckler, and swung at his side, or was laid upon his breast, as suited his mood or convenience. In other respects, he was naked,—though not without the native battle-axe of obsidian. This weapon consisted of a rod, or bludgeon, of heavy wood, (it was sometimes of copper,) at the extremity of which, and on either side, were fastened six or seven broad blades, or flakes, of volcanic glass, standing a little apart from each other. Its native name, *maquahuitl*, was speedily corrupted by the Spaniards into *macana*,—a name that is applied, in Castile, to a sabre of lath; and which, being more practicable to civilized organs of speech than the original title, is worthy of being preserved. The appearance of this aged warrior presented none of the infirmities of years. His stooping carriage was rather the result of habit than feebleness; his step was quick and firm, though ungainly; and his eye rolled with the piercing vivacity of youth over the scene, which occupied so much of the attention of his followers.

Of these, that one whom the Castilians at the cypress-tree hesitated, for a moment, whether to esteem an Indian or a Christian man, was of a figure more remarkable for sturdiness than elegance. The roll of cloth round his body extended from his waist, where it was secured by a leathern girdle, to his knees. The mantle about his shoulders was more capacious than his fellow's, but it left his brawny chest in part exposed, and thereby revealed a skin fairer than belonged to the natives

of Anahuac. His hair, though very long, was of a reddish-brown colour, and waving rather than straight; and a rough beard of a ruddy hue, though so short that its growth seemed to have been permitted for not more than the space of a week, was another phenomenon not to be looked for in a barbarian. But the indications of civilized origin offered by these characteristics, were set at naught by the step and bearing of the stranger, which were to the full as wild and peculiar as those of his more ancient companion; like whom, he carried a buckler and macana, though without the bow and quiver. His eye rolled with a like wildness; but his features were European; and instead of being entirely barefoot, like the senior, his feet were defended by stout sandals of untanned skin.

The third, and by far the most remarkable of all, was he who had first caught the eye of Najara, and upon whom was now concentrated the gaze of the whole party. A figure of the most majestic height, and noble proportions, though, at the present moment, greatly wasted, was rather set off to advantage than concealed by a costume as spare and primitive as that of the red-bearded man. His skin was much tawnier than his companion's; indeed, it was of the darkest hue known among the southern provinces of Spain and Portugal, where the blood of Europe has mingled harmoniously with the life-tides of Africa. His lofty stature was more obvious, perhaps, since he adopted not the bearing or gait of the others, but moved along erect, with a graceful demeanour, and a step of natural ease and dignity. He had but one characteristic of a Mexican; and that was the long hair, straight, and of an intense blackness, that fell from his temples to his breast, with much of a wild and savage profusion, concealing, in part, a cheek of the finest contour, though somewhat hollowed by hardship, and, perhaps, suffering. The puffs of wind, blowing

aside this sable curtain, disclosed an elevated forehead, crowning a visage in which every feature was of the mould of Castile, and after the happiest model of that order of beauty, each being sculptured with a touch that preserved delicacy, even while giving boldness. His age would have been a question wherewith to puzzle a physiognomist: there was much in the smoothness of his brow, and the unaltered freshness of a mouth, over which was sprouting a mustache, short and bushy, as if as lately submitted to the tonsure as the beard of his companion, that spoke of youth just verging into maturity; while, on the other hand, the complete developement of his frame, and the seriousness of his countenance, would have conveyed the impression of an age many years farther advanced. This seriousness of expression was, indeed, more than mere gravity; it indicated a melancholy, or even sadness, which, though of a gentle cast, was become a settled and permanent characteristic.

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

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

"Art thou Juan Lerma? and art thou truly

alive? or do I look upon thy phantom?" cried the hunchback, with an agitated voice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Peace, Gaspar," said Lerma, mildly; "quarrel not with thy friend on my account; thou hast no

offence on thine own. It is plain, there is but cold cheer in store for me: make none for thyself."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ay," said Gaspar, shaking his head with the fury of a mastiff, rending some meaner animal, and thus dashing away certain tears of rage or mortification, that were starting in his eyes: "it doth make a woman of me, to think we have escaped from dangers such as were never dreamed of by these false traitors,—from infidel prisons and hea-

then maws, and come, at last, among Christian men, whom I could have hugged, every ill loon of them all; and not one to stretch forth his hand, and say God bless me! You were right, señor; it were better to have remained slaves with the King of the Humming-bird Valley, than to have left him for such hangdog welcome."

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

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

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

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

* *Itzli*, the obsidian or volcanic glass.

whereon to expend their fury: and stretching forth his hand in the most friendly manner, said to Juan,

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

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

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

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

"Oh, you shall soon know. But how now, señor Lerma, what is your will? Will you walk with me to the city? We have royal commanders now: 'tis a matter for the stocks, and, sometimes, the strappado, to loiter beyond the lines, after the trumpet's call. Will you walk to Tezcuco? or do you choose rather to betake you to the hills, as Najara advised you? Cortes is another man now, señor, and somewhat dangerous, as you may have inferred from the bearing of his favourites. If you

would be wise, go not near him. It is not too late."

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV.

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

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

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

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

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

"I am not," said Lerma, firmly, though very sadly; "no, by mine honour, no! I am conscious, and it is a thing long since known to all, that I have entirely lost the favour with which he was used to befriend me. Nay, this was apparent to

me, before I was sent from his presence. I hoped that in the long period of my exile, something might occur to show him his anger was unjust; and, with this hope, I looked this day, to end my wanderings joyfully. I am deceived; everything goes to prove, that neither my long sufferings, (and they were both long and many,) nor my supposed death have made my appeal of innocence. But I will satisfy him of this: I will demand to know my crime. If it be indeed, as I think, the death of Hilario—"

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

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

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

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

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

As the Alguazil pronounced these words, with an insinuating frankness and earnestness, he threw into his countenance an expression that seemed meant to invite the confidence of the young man,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The restoration!"

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

"To Guzman?" cried Juan, angrily. "Could they find no better friend to give him to? I will

have him back again; yea, by St. Juan, he shall ride no steed of mine!"

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

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

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

"Señor Villafana," said Juan, firmly, "I do not believe that, in this thing, Cortes designed me any wrong; nor will I permit myself to think of it any more. You seem to have something to say to me. Gaspar and the Indian are beyond hearing. If you will advise me as a friend, in what manner I shall conduct myself in this difficult conjuncture, I will listen to you with gratitude; and with thanks more hearty still, if you make me acquainted with a way

to redeem my honour and faith in the eyes of the general."

"I have but two things to counsel you: Make your report of adventures, good and bad, to the general, without words of complaint or suspicion; and, this done, demand of him, and care not how boldly, the restoration of your horses and armour."

"If they be the gifts of his lady," said Juan, with hesitation, "methinks, it will not become me to press this demand on him; but rather to leave it to his own honour and generosity."

The Alguazil gave the youth a piercing look; but seeing in his visage no embarrassment beyond that of a man who is debating a question of mere delicacy, replied, coolly,—

"Ask him, then. It is not certainly known that these horses came from Doña Catalina; and, perhaps, they do not. Yet it will be but courteous in thee to say, thou hast been so informed, and that thou dost so believe. Get thy horses, by all means: but again I say to thee, do nothing to incense the general. If he provoke thee, show not thy displeasure; at least, show it not now. I will give thee more reasons for what I counsel, as we walk through the city."

By this time the speakers had reached the gates of the city, where Gaspar and the Ottomi stood in waiting for them.

CHAPTER V.

THE walls of Mexico were the foaming surges of her lake. The cities on the shore, when much exposed by defencelessness of site, great wealth of inhabitants, or other causes, to the attacks of enemies, were surrounded by walls, commonly of earth, though sometimes, as in the case of Tezcuco, of stone. These were, ordinarily, of no great height or strength, but sufficient, when well manned, to repel the assaults of the slingers and archers of America.

The external fortifications of Tezcuco were, as became the ancient rival of Tenochtitlan, of a more imposing order. The walls were thick and high, with embattled parapets, and deep ditches at the base. The gates were protected in the manner common to the land, by the overlapping, so to speak, of the opposite walls; that is, being made, as they approached each other, to change from their straight, to a circular course, the one traversing upon a greater radius than the other, they thus swept by and *round* each other, in parallel curves, leaving a long and narrow passage between them, commanded not only by the walls themselves, but by strong stone turrets, built on their extremities.

Besides these defences, there was erected within the walls, and directly opposed to each entrance, a small pyramid, elevated fifteen or twenty feet above the walls, and crowned with little sanctuaries,—thus serving a religious as well as a military pur-

pose. In the one sense, these structures might be considered Chapels of Ease to the greater temples of the quarters in which they stood; in the other, they were not unlike the cavaliers, or commanding mounds, of European fortification, from the tops and sides of which the besieger could be annoyed, whilst without the walls, and arrested on his course, when within.

Thus, then, there were ready to his hands, fortifications, of which the Spanish commander, now the Captain-General of New Spain, as the unsubdued Mexico was already called, was not slow to reap the full advantage. A strong guard of Castilian soldiers was posted before each gate; a native watchman sat on each turret; and a line of Tlascalan sentries, stepping proudly along in their places of trust, occupied the lofty terrace of the walls.

The edifices disclosed to Juan, when he had, with his companions, passed through the staring warders into the town, were similar to those of Mexico,—of stone, and low, though often adorned with turrets. In all cases, the roofs were terraced, and covered with shrubs and flowers; and the passion of the citizens for such delightful embellishments, had converted many a spacious square into gardens, wherein fluttered and warbled birds of a thousand hues and voices.

Over these open spaces were seen, in different quarters, the tops of high pyramids and towers, scattered about the town in vast and picturesque profusion.

The roaring sound of life that pervades a great city, even when unassisted by the thundering din of wheeled carriages, gave proof enough of the dense multitudes that inhabited Tezcuco. The eye detected the evidences of a population still more astonishing, in the myriads of tawny bodies that crowded the streets, the gardens, the temple

squares, and the housetops, many of whom seemed to have no other habitation. In fact, the introduction of the many thousands who composed the train, or, as it was called, the Army of the Brigantines, added to the hosts of other warriors previously collected by Cortes, and the presence of the original inhabitants, gave to Tezcuco that appearance of an over-crowded, suffocating vitality, which is presented by the modern Babylons of France and Great Britain. The murmur of voices, the pattering of feet, the rustling of garments, with the sounds of instruments wielded by artisans, both native and Christian, made, together, a din that seemed like the roar of a tempest to the ears of one, who, like Lerma, had just escaped from the mute hills and the silent forests of the desert. At a distance—beheld from the cypress-tree,—the view of Tezcuco seemed to embrace a scene made up of tranquillity and repose. The same thing is true of all other cities; and the same thing may be said of human life, when we sit aloof and contemplate the bright pageant, in which we take no part. If we advance and mingle with it, the picture is turned to life, the peace to tumult, and we lose all the charms of the prospect in the distractions of participation.

As Juan, conducted by the Alguazil, made his way through the torrents of bodies which poured through every street, and became more accustomed to move among them, the excitement gradually subsided in his breast, the colour faded from his cheeks; and, by the time he had reached the end of his journey, there remained no expression on his visage beyond that of its usual and characteristic sadness. This was deepened, perhaps, by the scene around him; for it is the virtue of melancholy, where it exists as a temperament, or has become a settled trait, to be increased by the excitements of a city or crowd. Perhaps it was darkened also by the reflection, as he raised his eyes to the vast

palace in which Cortes had established his head-quarters, that among all its crowds,—the military guards at the door, and the lounging courtiers within,—there was not a single friend waiting to rejoice over his return.

The house of Nezahualcojotl, who has been already mentioned as the most famous and refined of the Tezcucan kings, possessed but little to distinguish it from the edifices of nobles around, except its greatness of extent. It was a pile or cluster of many houses built of vast blocks of basalt, well cut and polished, surrounding divers courts and gardens,—what might be termed the wings consisting of but a basement story, which was relieved from monotony by the presence of towers and battlements, and the sculptured effigies of animals and serpents on the walls, and particularly around the narrow loops which served for windows. The centre, or principal portion, had an additional story, loftier towers, and more imposing sculptures. The windows were carved of stone, so as to resemble the yawning mouths of beasts of prey; the battlements were crouching tigers; and the pillars of the great door were palm-trees, round the trunks of which twined two immense serpents, whose necks met at the lintel, among the interlocking branches, and embraced and supported a huge tablet, on which was engraven the Aztec calendar, according to the singular and yet just system of the ancient native astronomers.—Sixty years *after* this period, the sages of Europe discovered and adopted a mode of adjusting the civil to the astronomical time, so as to avoid, for the future, the confusion—the utter disjointing of seasons—which had been the consequence of the Julian computation. At this very moment, the barbarians of America were in possession of a system, which enabled them to anticipate, and rectify by proper intercalations, the disorders not only of years, but of cycles,—and how

much *earlier*, the wisdom of civilization has not yet divined.

On the whole, there was something not less impressive than peculiar in the appearance of an edifice which had sheltered a long line of Autochthonous monarchs; and as Juan passed from the square, in front of the artillery that commanded it, under the folds of the mighty serpents at the door, and into the sombre shadows of the interior, he was struck with a feeling of awe, which was not immediately removed even by the more stirring emotions of the instant.

The hall, or rather vestibule, in which he now found himself, was distinguished, rather than animated, by the presence of many Spaniards of high and low degree, some clustered together in groups, some stalking to and fro in haughty solitude, while others bustled about with an air of importance and authority; but all, as Lerma quickly observed, preserving a decorous silence,—conversing in whispers, and moving with a cautious tread, as if in the anteroom of a king, instead of the hall of a soldier-of-fortune like themselves.

A few of them bent their eyes upon the strangers, and stepped forward to survey their savage equipments. The keen glances which they cast towards him, the hurried and somewhat sonorous exclamations with which they pointed him out to one another, but more than all, the presence of Najara, of Bernal Diaz, and of the stranger Camarga, among them, convinced Juan that he was recognized. But with this conviction came also the sickening consciousness that not one had a smile of satisfaction to bestow upon him in the way of welcome. He remembered the faces of many; and, once or twice, he raised his hand, and half stepped forward, to meet some one or other who seemed disposed to salute him. He was deceived; those who came nighest, were only the most curious. They nod-

ded their heads familiarly to Villafana; a few returned the advances of Lerma with solemn and reverential bows; but none raised up their heads to meet the exile's advances.

"The curse of ingratitude follow you all, cold knaves!" muttered Gaspar between his teeth. The eyes of the Ottomi twinkled upon the groups, with a mixture of wonder and malignant wrath. Juan smothered his sighs, and strode onwards.

He stopped suddenly at a door, wreathed, like the outer, with snakes, though carved of wood, over which hung curtains of some dark and heavy texture, and behind which, as it seemed to him, from the murmuring of voices, was the apartment in which the Captain-General gave audience to his followers and the allied tribes of Mexico, who made up what may be called, as it seemed to be considered, his court. Here Juan paused, and turning to the Alguazil, said, calmly, and with a low voice,

"From what I have seen and now see, I perceive, it will not be fitting I should approach the general —especially in these weeds, which can scarce extenuate the coldness of my old companions,— without the ceremony of an announcement and expressed permission."

"Fear not," whispered Villafana, with a grim smile: "thy friend Francisco will have done thee this good turn. Remember—offend him not now: but, still, lay claim to the horses."

As he spoke, the Alguazil, pushed aside the curtain, and, in a moment more, the youth was in the presence of Cortes.

CHAPTER VI.

The apartment into which Juan now found himself introduced, was very spacious; and, indeed, had the height of the ceiling corresponded in proportion with the length and breadth, would have been esteemed vast. Without being so low as to be decidedly mean, it was yet depressed enough to show how little the principles of taste had extended among the natives, to the art of architecture; or, what is equally probable, how wisely provision was made against the earthquakes and other convulsions, so naturally to be expected in a land of volcanoes.

The huge rafters of cedar, carved into strange and emblematic arabesques, were supported, at intervals, by a double row of pillars of the most grotesque shapes. On the walls were hung arras, on which were painted rude scenes of battle and of sacrifice, with hieroglyphic records of history, as well as choice maxims of virtue and policy, selected from the compositions of that king, who had finished, and given name to the habitation, long since founded by his ancestors. It was lighted in a manner equally rare and magnificent. A considerable space in the further or western wall, from which the tapestry was drawn aside, was occupied by stone mullions of strange forms, between which were fixed large translucent blocks of alabaster, such as we now behold in the church windows of Puebla de los Angelos. Upon these were painted many incomprehensible figures, which would have deformed the beauty of the stone, but for the brilliancy and de-

licacy of their hues. As it was, the strong glare of the evening sun, falling upon this transparent wall, came through it, with the mellow lustre and harmonious tints of a harvest-moon, shedding a soft but sufficient light over the whole apartment, making what was harsh tender, and what was lovely almost divine.*

On the left hand, were several narrow doors, opening upon a garden, which was seen, sometimes, when the breeze stirred aside the curtains that defended them; on the right, were others leading to certain chambers, and carefully protected by a similar drapery.

The floor of this hall of audience was covered with mats stained with various colours.

At the farther extremity of the apartment stood a group of Spanish cavaliers, surrounding a platform of slight elevation, on which, sumptuously dressed, and leaning upon a *camoncillo*, or chair of state, stood Hernan Cortes. At his right hand, sitting and supported by two gallant cavaliers, was his royal godson, Ixtlilxochitl, now Don Hernan Cortes, the king of Tezcuco;—a young man of mild aspect; at whose feet sat his younger and more manly brother, Suchel, from whom was afterwards derived one of the noble families of New Spain. On the left of the general, were two Indians of a far nobler presence, and known by the singular loftiness of their plumes, if not by the commanding sternness of their visages, to be Tlascalans of high degree. They were, in fact, the military chieftains Xicotencatl and Chichimecatl, men of renown not only among their tribes, but the Spaniards. Behind each stood his page, or esquire, bearing the great shield of cere-

* Windows of this rich material were discovered in a Roman villa at Pompeii. The effect of a lamp in an alabaster vase will be familiar to the reader.

mony, whereon were emblazoned, in native heraldic devices, the various exploits of his master.

Besides these distinguished barbarians, there were others of note among the cavaliers, at the side of the platform.

All these several details of a spectacle both romantic and imposing, were seen by Juan at a single glance; for, almost at the moment of his entrance, a movement was made among those who stood on the left of the platform, in the direction of the great Conquistador, as if they desired to catch something that instant falling from his lips. As they left the view thus open, Juan saw that Cortes, instead of speaking, was bending his head and listening with eager interest to the señor Guzman, who had ascended the platform, and was now whispering in his ear. At the same moment, a prodigiously large dog, with shaggy coat, hanging lips, and ferocious eyes, roused by the motion of the general, at whose feet he had been sleeping, raised his head, and stared with the majestic gravity of a lion, upon the speaker and his master.

There was something in the interested and agitated eagerness with which the Captain-General drank in the words of Guzman, that went to the heart of Lerma. He doubted not, that Don Francisco was, at that moment, speaking of *him*,—of *his* return to the society of Christians, and to the arms of his benefactor,—for such had Cortes once been to him; and he read in the varying play of Don Hernan's features, nothing but refutation of the malign charges of Villafana, and full proof that the general was not indifferent to the friend of former years.

As these thoughts entered his mind, he rushed forward, under their impulse, with clasped hands, and with an exclamation that brought the looks of all instantly upon him. The huge dog raised himself half up from the platform, and uttered a savage

growl. He advanced yet another step, and the ferocious beast, with a roar that filled the whole chamber, dashed furiously from the platform, as against an enemy not to be doubted. The young man paused, but not at the opposition of the animal: he had, that moment, caught the eye of Don Hernan, and his heart failed as he beheld the frown of rage, and, as it seemed to him, hate, with which he was regarded.

"Down, Befo!" cried Cortes, with a voice of thunder.

But Befo, who had leaped forward with such ferocious determination, had, that instant, stopped before Juan, whom he now eyed with a look of wonder and recognition. Then, suddenly fetching such a yelp of joy as would have better become the playmate-cur of a child, than the grim blood-hound of a soldier, he raised up his vast body, flung his paws upon Juan's breast, and strove, evidently, to throw them round his body, in the mode of human embrace, whining all the time with the most expressive delight.

"Down, Befo! Thick-lips! thou cub of a false wolf!" repeated the general, irefully, yet with an expression that would have suited better, had he been commanding him to tear the youth to pieces; "Down, fool, down! I will stick thee with my rapier."

As he spoke, he half drew his sword from the scabbard.

"Harm him not,—call him not away," cried Juan, with a thick voice; "for by heaven and St. Mary, he is all, of a troop of Christian men, once my friends, who have any joy to see an old companion return from bonds and the grave!"

As the young man spoke, he flung his arms round the neck of the faithful beast, and bending his head upon Befo's face, gave way to a passion of tears.

"The shame of foul knaves and false companions be on you all!" cried the flaming Gaspar, without a whit regarding the presence in which he spake. His wrath was cut short, before it had been noticed by any but the Ottomi, who stood gaping, at a distance, with looks of visible alarm, first excited by the appearance of the dog.

Among most of the cavaliers now present, Juan had been once well known; and however their affections might be chilled and their respect destroyed, by untoward circumstances, there was something so painfully reproachful in the spectacle of his tears, that a strong impression was immediately produced among them. All seemed, at once, to remember, that he had been once esteemed, notwithstanding his youth, of a bold heart and manly bearing; and all seemed to remember also, that fourteen months' suffering among unknown pagans, was worthy of some little commiseration.

But there was one present of more fiery feelings and determination more hasty than any of the Christians. The elder and taller of the Tlascalan chiefs, distinguished as much by a haughty and darkly frowning visage as by an Herculean frame, stepped down from the platform, and laid his hand upon Juan's shoulder; in which position he stood, without speaking a word, but expressing in his countenance the spirit of one who avowed himself a patron and champion. The tall plume rustled like a waving palm, as he raised up his head, and the look that he cast upon Cortes, seemed to mingle defiance with disdain. But this hostile expression was perhaps concealed by the approach of a cavalier of gallant appearance, who stepped suddenly from the throng, and snatching up Juan's left hand from the dog's neck, cried with hasty good-will,

"Santiago! (and the devil take all of us that have no better hearts than a cur or a wild Indian!) I know no reason, certainly, why thou shouldst be

treated like a dog. God be with thee, Juan Lerma! I am glad thou art alive; God bless thee: and so hold up thy head. If thou hast no better raiment, I will give thee my fustian breeches and liver-coloured mantle, as well as a good sword of iron, which I have to spare."

This quick-spoken and benevolent cavalier was no less a man than the gallant Don Pedro de Alvarado, at this time called, almost universally, in memory of his famous leap over the ditch of Tacuba, in the Night of Sorrow, the *Capitan del Salto*. He gave place to another of still greater renown, who would have been perhaps the first to extend his hand, had he been as hasty of resolution as his more mercurial comrade. This was the good cavalier Don Gonzalo de Sandoval, better esteemed for his skill in arms than any peculiar elegance of conversation.

"Juan Lerma," said he, "I am not sorry thou art alive and well; and if thou wilt make any use of the same, to put thee into more Christian bravery, I will pray thee to take my gold chain, as well as six good cotton shirts, which an Indian woman made me."

To these friendly salutations and bountiful offers, as well as the advances of other cavaliers who now bustled around him, Juan replied with a manner more expressive of indignation than gratitude. He was ashamed of having exposed his weakness, and sensible that it was this alone which had obtained him a charitable notice. He raised his head proudly, as one who would not accept such compelled kindness, pushed Befo to the floor, though still keeping a hand upon his neck, acknowledged the presence of Xicotencal with a word, and turned towards Cortes a countenance now quite composed, though not without a touch of sorrowful resentment.

The emotion which had produced such an impression among the cavaliers, was not without its

effect even upon the Captain-General. His features relaxed their angry severity, he stepped forwards; and when Juan lifted up his eyes, he beheld a hand extended towards him, and heard the voice of Cortes say, in tones of concession, though of embarrassment,

"God be with you—you do us wrong in this matter: as a Christian man escaped from bondage, we are not unrejoiced to see you: as a soldier returning from a delayed duty, we will declare our thoughts of you anon."

There was nothing very gracious either in the words or tones of the speaker; but they were unexpected. They swept away the proud and angry resolutions of Juan, and restored to him the warm feelings of affection and gratitude, with which he had ever been accustomed to regard the general. He seized the proffered hand, pressed it to his lips, and seemed about to throw himself at Don Hernan's feet, when suddenly a noise was heard at a curtained door hard by, accompanied by what seemed the smothered shriek of a woman. At this sound the young man started up, with a look of fear, and yielded up the hand which was abruptly snatched from his own. He gazed round him and plainly beheld the thick cloth before the nearest passage, shaking, as if disturbed by the recent passage of some one,—but nothing else. He perceived no new countenance added to those of the many in audience, which were directed upon his own, with an universal stare of wonder. His attention was recalled by the voice of Cortes. He turned; the general was seated; a stern and iron gravity had taken the place of relenting feeling on his visage; and it was evident to the unfortunate Juan, that the hour of reconciliation had passed away, and for ever. The cavaliers retreated,—the Tlascalan and the dog were all that remained by his side; and, as if to make his disgrace both undeniable and intole-

rable, the señor Guzman maintained, throughout the whole scene, his post at the general's side, confronted face to face with his fallen rival.

"We are ready to hear thee, Juan Lerma," said the Captain-General, with a voice at once cold and commanding: "you went hence, to explore the lands of the west, and the sea that rolls among them. We argue much success, and great discoveries, from the time devoted to these purposes, and from the discretion you evinced in pursuing them for a whole year and more, rather than by returning with your forces, to share in the dangerous fights of Mexico. What have you to say? You had some good followers, both Christian and unconverted.—Stand thou aloof, Gaspar Olea! I will presently speak with thee.—Hast thou brought none back with thee but the Barba-Roxa,—Gaspar of the Red Beard?"

There was not a word in this address which did not sting the young man to the heart; and the insulting insinuation which a portion of it conveyed, was uttered in a tone of the most cutting sarcasm. He trembled, reddened, clenched his hand in the shaggy coat of Befo,—who still, though beckoned by Cortes, refused to leave the exile,—until the animal whined with pain. Then, smothering his emotions, like one who perceives that he is wronged, and, knowing that complaint will be unavailing, is resolute to suffer with fortitude, he elevated his lofty figure with tranquil dignity, looked upon Cortes with an aspect no longer reproachful, and replied,

"Besides Gaspar, who is worthy of your excellency's confidence and thanks, no one returns with me save the Ottomi, Ocelotzin,—the Tiger; a man to whom should be accorded the praise of having saved the life of Gaspar, which is valuable to your excellency, and my own,—which is worthless."

As he spoke, he pointed to the ancient barbarian, who stepped forward with the same affectionate

smiles and grimaces which he had bestowed upon the party at the cypress-tree, and with many uncouth gestures of reverence, saying, in imperfect Castilian, after he had touched the floor with his hand, and then kissed it,

"Ottomi I,—good friend, good rascal; but Ocelotzin no more. I am Techeechee,* the Silent Dog,—the little dog without voice,—Techeechee!"

As he spoke, he cast his eyes, with less of love than admiring fear, upon the gigantic beast, whose voice was to him, as well as to his countrymen, more terrible than the yell of the mountain tiger.

"I remember thee,good fellow," said the Captain-General.

Then, without bestowing any further present notice on him, he turned again to Juan, speaking with the same cold and magisterial tones:

"And where, then, are the two Christians of La Mancha, and the seventy warriors of Matlatzinco, who composed your party? the arms you carried? and the four good horses entrusted to your charge?"

"Your excellency shall hear," said Juan, calmly: "The two Manchegos were ill inclined to the expedition; and therein were my followers but unfortunately selected."

"They were mutineers!" cried Gaspar, whose anger was not mollified by being made a witness to the ill fate of his young captain: "they were mutineers; and so the devil has them."

"Hah!" exclaimed Cortes, starting up, with what seemed angry joy: "didst thou dare arrogate the privileges of a judge, and condemn a Christian man to death?"

"I am guiltless of such presumption," said Juan. "To their dissatisfaction, to their disobedience,—

* *Techichi*—a native animal of the dog kind, which does not bark. It was domesticated.

nay, to their frequent threats, and open disregard of the commands your excellency had yourself imposed upon us, not to provoke the Indians among whom we might be journeying,—I adjudged no punishment but the assurance that your excellency should certainly be made acquainted with their acts. With much persuasion, I prevailed upon them to follow me, until we had reached the sea, which it was your excellency's command I should first examine."

"Ay!" said Cortes, again starting up, but with an air of exultation; "thou hast found it then? and a port that may give shelter to ships of burthen?"

"Not one port only, but many," said Juan, with a faltering voice, mistaking the satisfaction of the leader for approbation. "In a space of seventy leagues, (for so much of the coast was I able to survey,) there are many harbours, exceedingly spacious, deep and secure; and some of such excellence, that I question whether the world contains any others to equal them. Near to some, there is much good ship timber, as well as lands amazingly fertile and beautiful."

"This is well," said the Captain-General, coldly. "Thou hast well devoted a year of time to the examination of seventy leagues of coast."

"Had that been the only subject of your excellency's orders," said Lerma, "you should have had no cause for dissatisfaction. This accomplished, it became me, as your excellency had commanded, to explore those gold lands to the northwest, and discover that kingdom of Huitzitzila, as it was erroneously called by Montezuma, which bordered upon his dominions, and had ever maintained its independence by force of arms."

At these words, many of the cavaliers looked surprised, as if made acquainted with this article of Juan's instructions for the first time, and some

exchanged meaning glances, which were not lost on Cortes. He frowned, and hastily exclaimed,

"You are wrong; I *commanded* you not. That kingdom being at enmity with Mexico, it was not fit your lives should be endangered, by rashly adventuring within its confines. You were advised, if you should find we had been deceived in the character of those infidels of Huitzitzila, to make yourself acquainted with them and their country: but this was left to your discretion."

"It is true," said Juan mildly, "your excellency did so advise me; and the fault which I committed was in thinking that I should best please you, by penetrating to that land, without much thought of difficulty or danger. In this, as in other things, as Gaspar will be my witness, I was opposed by those unhappy Manchegos; who deserted from me in the night, carrying with them, (to replace a horse which they had lost in a river,) the charger which your excellency had given to me for my own riding,—as well as their arquebuses,—which was still more unfortunate; for Gaspar's piece had been broken by a fall, and we were thus left without firearms, with but one horse, and no better weapon to procure us food, than mine own crossbow, and the arrows of the Matlatzincos."

"Now, by my conscience," said Cortes, "I know not which the more to admire,—the good vigilance that allowed these knaves to escape, or the rash-brained folly which led you to continue the expedition without them!"

The sarcasm produced no change in Juan's visage. He seemed to have made up his mind not only to endure injustice, but to expect it.

"Their desertion was neither unforeseen nor unopposed," he answered. "It is my grief to say, that they forgot the obligations both of discipline and Christianity, and desperately fired upon Gaspar

and myself; whereby they killed our remaining horse, and wounded myself in the side."

"And where then were thy knavish Indians, that thou didst not slay the false traitors on the spot?" cried Cortes, with an indignation, which, this time, had the right direction.

The answer to this added but another item of mischance to the young man's story. The arts of the Manchegos had spread disaffection among his Indian followers, many of whom had deserted with them. Following after the mutineers, he was, shortly after, abandoned by the rest; and then his little party, consisting only of Gaspar and the Ottomi, was attacked, by hostile tribes, driven back upon the path, and finally forced to take refuge in the dominions of that native monarch, whose reputed grandeur and wealth had so long since excited the curiosity of Don Hernan.

The relation of Lerma, though of such thrilling interest that it absorbed the attention of all present, and even so wrought upon the mind of Cortes, that he gradually discharged the severity of his countenance, and even at last ceased altogether to interrupt it with sarcasm or commentary of any kind, has too little, or at least too indirect a connexion with the present history, to require it to be given in the exile's words, or at any length. With the main facts,—his long captivity and final escape,—the reader is already acquainted; and it is not perhaps necessary to add more than that the kingdom of which so much has been said, was that of Mechoacan, and that its capital Tzintzontzan, (the Place of Hummingbirds,) corrupted by the Mexicans into Huitzitzila, lies yet, though dwindled into the meanest of villages, upon the beautiful lake Pascuaro. Juan knew nothing of the fate of the Manchegos. By a comparison of dates, it was discovered that the sudden outbreaking of hostilities, which had driven him into this remote land, had followed almost immediately upon

the tumults in Mexico, which had resulted in the death of Montezuma and the expulsion of the Spaniards; and it was not doubted, that the mutineers had met a miserable and speedy death. With the account of lands of unexampled beauty and fertility, of rivers of gold and hills of silver, we have nothing to do, except to remark that it determined the fate of Mechoacan as certainly as if the order had been uttered for its immediate subjugation. The whole account might have been omitted, except that it was necessary, as the means of explaining some of the feelings with which the young Lerma was regarded by the general and his chief followers.

There is no eloquence so persuasive as that of distress, uttered without complaint; and no story of hardship and peril fails of exciting sympathy, when recounted with truth and modesty. Accordingly, the narrative of the exile produced among the cavaliers a powerful impression in his favour, which was heightened into admiration by the consciousness that nothing but the greatest constancy of purpose, and mental resources beyond those of ordinary men, could have conducted him through his long and perilous enterprise. Many of those, who seemed to remember with most interest the breach between the general and one who had been formerly considered almost his adopted son, kept their eyes curiously bent on Cortes; and they did not doubt, from the changes of his countenance, that his better feelings were deeply engaged, and would perhaps restore the young man to the confidence and affection which all knew he had lost. This belief became universal, when, at the close of the story, the Captain-General arose, and addressing the throng, said,

"Cavaliers and friends, we will free all present from the tedium of this audience, saving only the gentlemen of the Secret Counsel, and these our returned friends.—Nay, by my faith, Gaspar of the

Red Beard, thou mayst depart likewise, to speak thy adventures to thine old friends, which thou art doubtless itching to do; or, if thou likest that better, get thee to Antonio de Quinones, our Master of the Armory, and choose thyself a good sword, buckler and breastplate. Thou art a true soldier, and, by and by, I have somewhat to say to thee.—The knave has the gait of an infidel!"

At this signal for breaking up the audience, which was pronounced with the grave and easy authoritativeness of one long accustomed to command, the individuals present, Christian and heathen, princes, chieftains, and cavaliers, took their departure, leaving behind them Sandoval, Alvarado, and a few other officers of high standing.

As Juan stood, embarrassed between hope and doubt, the señor Guzman descended from the platform, and, passing him, said with a low voice and a derisive smile,

"You mount, señor, and Bobadil neighs for you! It is better—the war is equal."

So saying, he passed on.

CHAPTER VII.

"Señor Juan Lerma," said Cortes, when the last of the assemblage had reluctantly departed:—He had descended from the platform, and spoke with a voice, which, if not decidedly friendly, was, at least, free from every trace of sternness:—"Señor Juan Lerma, I have to say, that for the result of your enterprise, however it has been attended by calamity, you deserve both thanks and honours; and it will rest upon your own determination whether you shall obtain them or not. Some things there are, growing out of this affair, of which it becomes me to speak; and thereby I shall give you an opportunity to remove certain stains not yet washed from your good name; and after that, to take off others that are thought to attach to mine. Hast thou not heard of those fierce and fatal wars, that broke out in Mexico shortly after thy departure."

"I have," said Juan; "the king's spies brought the news to Tzintzontzan; and they were not only lamentable to hear, but they caused us to be cast into cages, and devoted, as we feared, to die the death of sacrifice: For know, señor, the sanguinary Mexitli is the god of all this land."

"And hadst thou no suspicion, before departing, that these wars were brewing, and threatening us with destruction? Thou wert somewhat quicker in catching the heathen tongue than others, and wert not without counsellors and friends even among the household of Montezuma."

To this demand, the young man, though embar-

rassed by the innuendo that followed it, did not hesitate to answer:

"I had such suspicions, and I made them known to your excellency."

"You did indeed," said Cortes, musingly; "and I derided them, being somewhat heated at the time: but counsel to an irritated temper is even sharper than salt on a wounded skin.—This knowledge, señor," he went on, "some will impute to thee as good reason why thou shouldst loiter fourteen months in the wilderness, to avoid sharing in our perils, which were somewhat more horrible than have ever before beset Christian men."

"This," said Juan, firmly, and a little dryly, for there was something in the tone of the speaker, which, though he knew not why, impressed him unpleasantly,—"this is to make me a coward, which your excellency will not believe me to be."

"By my conscience, no!" said Cortes, with emphasis. "Without much thought of this present expedition of which we speak, there is no man will accuse thee of fear, who has heard of thy voyage in the fusta. By my conscience, a most mad piece of daring!" he continued as if in admiration, although it was observable, that, while he spoke, his countenance darkened, as though there were some disagreeable thought associated with the recollection. "No," he went on, "there will be more said of anger and ambition than of terror. Thou knowest, we have envy and detraction about us, that spare none. I can hear, already, how Villafana and other knaves of his peevish, malicious temper, will speak of thee.—They will speak of thy causes for resentment, of the promised favour of the plotting king, a principality among the lakes, with the hope of loftier succession, and the hand of the princely Maiden of the Star,——"

"And this," cried Juan, interrupting the general, "this is to make me a traitor and apostate!

Señor, I doubt not that the señor Guzman is at the bottom of all this slander: and I therefore claim to defie,—"

"Peace! wilt thou put thyself in opposition again? If thou dost but raise thy hand in wrath, save against an infidel enemy, thou wert better never to have been born!"

The sudden sternness with which these words were uttered, checked the impetuosity of the youth, and filled him again with anxious forebodings. The general, instantly resuming the milder tones with which he had spoken before, continued,

"So much will be said of *thee*. Before I offer thee my hand, in token that I desire to forget everything of the past, but that I once truly loved thee, and before I propose to thee a new and honourable duty,—hear,—not what will be, but what has been said of *myself*, in relation to thine expedition and to thee."

Here the general paused a moment, eyeing the youth intently, as if to read his most secret thoughts; then continuing, he said, with the utmost gravity,

"It has been said of me, señor Juan Lerma, that I sent thee upon thy enterprise of the South Seas, in the malicious thought that the blow of savages might execute the sentence of vengeance I cared not to commit to a Christian assassin. What thinkest thou of this?"

"Even that it is the blackest and insanest of slanders; and that it shows me, I have little cause to marvel at my own loss of credit, when I find that malice can aim even at your excellency's. Whatever may have been your anger, I never believed your excellency would conceal it, much less expend it, in secret vengeance upon a feeble wretch like myself."

"Thou hast but little worldly knowledge," said the Captain-General, half smiling, "or thou wouldst

know, that revenge is of a reptile's nature, crawling rather in secret among dark thickets than openly over sunny plains, and none the less venomous, that it can lie half a year torpid. Neither put thou much trust in innocent looks; which, to a shrewd eye, are like sea-water,—the smoother they lie, the deeper can they be looked into."

Having pronounced these metaphorical maxims with much gravity, his eye all the time bent on the youth, Cortes paused for a moment, as if for a reply; when, receiving none, for, in truth, Juan, not well comprehending them, knew not what to answer, he continued,

"Let us understand one another. There has been strife between us,—strife and ill-will. I have perhaps done you injustice: I thought I had cause. By my conscience, young man, I once loved you very well—I have been sorry for you."

"I have deserved your displeasure," said Juan, hurriedly, moved by the earnestness with which the general spoke; "but, I hope, not beyond forgiveness."

"Surely not, surely not," said Cortes; "but what I may forget as thy friend, I am still bound to consider as thy general. I am now the king's officer, and it becomes me, forgetting all private feelings, to know no friends but those who approve themselves true and valuable servants of his majesty. In this character, I must remember some of thy past acts with disfavour; but in both, it is not improper I should desire thou shouldst have opportunity fully to retrieve thy good name, and, in spite of envy and detraction, to deserve such friendship as I have shown thee in former years."

The exile pondered a moment over the words of the general, in more indecision than before. They spoke of friendship and kindness, and seemed to offer an apology for severity that was rather official than personal; and yet, in this apology, was a

degree of reproach, of which it appeared Cortes's resolution to keep him always sensible. Nevertheless, this very tone of complaint served to soothe the little exasperation of feelings which had remained in Juan's breast, while smarting under a sense of wrong and injustice. Anger both irritates and hardens the heart; reproach softens, while it distresses. It seemed obvious to Juan, that Cortes, while apprizing him that a full reconciliation had not yet taken place, was willing, nay anxious, that it should. He answered therefore with the greatest fervour,

"If your excellency will but show me in what manner I may regain your favour—at least your belief that I have not wantonly rejected it—I call heaven to witness, I will remember it as such an act of kindness as that which *this* must ever keep me in memory of."

As he spoke, he touched with his finger a rapier-scar on his right breast, which the narrowness and peculiar fashion of his mantle scarcely enabled him to conceal, even when so disposed.

At this sight, Cortes seemed disordered, if not offended, saying after striding to and fro for an instant,

"Let these follies be forgotten! Bury the past, and think only of the future. It is true, I avenged thy wrong—It gives me no pleasure to remember it.—Did I think this, when I made thee my son,—fed thee at my board, lodged thee on my couch, advanced thee, honoured thee, fought thy battles? did I think *this?* Pho! Juan Lerma, thou hast not repaid me well!"

"Señor!" said Juan, surprised and confounded by the sudden and reproachful bitterness of these words; "when I presumed to speak to you in opposition to your measures, it was with the boldness—the folly—of affection, jealous for your excellency's—your excellency's—"

"Honour!" said Cortes, sharply. "Let us speak of this no more. To business, señor, to business. Leave mine honour to mine own keeping: thou wilt find, I have it even in my thoughts. To business, to business. What say ye, Councillors? —Wilt thou truly steal my dog from me? If you rob me of naught else, it is no matter.—What say you, señor Capitan Del Salto? what say you, Sandoval? Is this young man fit to be entrusted with a captain's command? He was a good Cornet.—Can we confide to him a duty of danger and trust? His pilgrimage to the Hummingbird-land, methinks, was well conducted. What say you? I have a goodly thought for him—But I will abide your better judgment."

"By St. James," said Alvarado, "there is no braver lad in the army; and were he but of clear hidalgo lineage, I should say, give him a command with the best. But here is my thought: he is a good sailor, especially in piraguas and galleys: give him a brigantine. I will crave to have him in the squadron attached to mine own division."

"In my mind," said Sandoval, "he is good for the land service. It is needful we revenge the death of Salcedo and his eighty loons, who suffered themselves to be killed before Tochtepec. Lerma has the love of the dog Xicotencal, who loves nobody else. He can follow the young señor, with some twenty thousand or so of his bare-legs; and they can take the town among them."

"A good thought," said Cortes, "a good thought: for this is a command which, nobody coveting, there will be none to envy. What sayst thou, señor Lerma? wilt thou adventure upon a deed thought to be both dangerous and desperate? Choose for thyself: I will compel thee to nothing. I tell thee the truth.—No captain seeks after this employment, and three have refused, except upon condition that I give them, besides as many Indians

as they can raise, three hundred picked Spaniards. Thou canst not look for more than twenty, with some five or six horsemen."

The eyes of the exile sparkled.

"Your excellency honours me."

"Never think so; deceive not thyself," said Cortes, with apparent frankness. "The enterprise is dangerous, nay, as I have said, desperate; and by my conscience, it will be said of it, as of the South Sea journey, that it is devised for thy ruin. —If I honour thee, I must suffer thereby: no evil can happen to thee, that will not be maliciously imputed to wicked and premeditated design. By my conscience, there are many who think me but a hangman in disguise!"

"I hope your excellency will not think of these things," said Juan, fervently. "I will do battle with any one who presumes—"

"Peace: have I not told thee already that the duel is forbidden under heavy penalties? I swear to thee, they shall be enforced, in all cases of disobedience, were it upon my own brother.—I tell thee again, I can advance thee to no service which will not make me the mark of slander. There are fools about us, who, I know not why, have tortured anger into hatred, and will now interpret good-will into malignant treachery. But I care not for this: the tall tree catches the bolts that pass by the underwood,—the rock that rises above the sea, is lashed by breakers, while the grovellers at the bottom lie in tranquillity. It is thus with the condition of man;—peace abides with the lowly, envy shoots arrows at the high. Think of this, think of this, Juan Lerma, when thou hearest me maligned."

"I shall not need," said Juan. "The more dangerous the duty, the more must I thank your excellency for your confidence. I beseech, therefore,

that I may be permitted to undertake this present enterprise."

"Wilt thou march them on foot, and with no better arms than thy Indian battle-axe and buckler?" demanded the general, gravely.

"I have heard," said Juan, with hesitation, "that your excellency has in charge certain horses and arms, which of right are mine, as being the gifts of a bountiful friend."

"It is even so," said Cortes, "and the restoration of them, which thou canst justly claim, will cause some heart-burnings. I must crave your pardon for having presumed to bestow them away, as though they had been mine own property."

"Under your favour," said Juan, "considering that they were the gifts of your excellency's ever honoured and beloved lady—"

"Ha!" cried Cortes, with a darkening visage, "what fiend possessed thee with this impertinent conceit?"

"I beg your excellency's pardon for my presumption," said Juan, "which was indeed caused no more by rumour than by a belief that there was no other being in the world, who could thus far have befriended me."

"Why then," said Cortes, "if thou knowest not the donor, it is the more remarkable; for nobody else does. Very strange! Two horses, the worst of which is worth full nine hundred crowns, and Bobadil almost priceless;—a suit of armour so well chosen to thy stature, that never a man of us all but is as loose in the cuirass as a shrivelled walnut in the shell,—all very positively sent to *thee* from Santiago,—for thee, señor, and for nobody else!"

"They are saint's gifts," said Alvarado, devoutly: "the young man has suffered much, and has found favour with heaven."

"Señor," said Juan, mildly, "you are jesting with me. I will hope, by and by, to discover this bene-

volent patron. What I have to say now, is that my wants will be content with but one of the horses; the return of which will cause your excellency no trouble,—the same being in the hands of the señor Guzman, who has already signified his intention to restore him."

"Ha! has he so, indeed? Why thy very enemies have become thy friends!"

"As for the armour, señor," continued the youth, without thinking fit to notice the latter exclamation, "I will make no claim to it, if you have bestowed it away. A simple morion and breastplate,—or indeed a good cap and doublet of escaupil, if iron be scarce,—will content me, provided I have but a good sword and steed."

"Thou shalt have both," said Cortes, "and the plate-mail also; which being somewhat too gigantic for any cavalier, and too good for a common soldier, I have preserved, thinking some day to bestow it upon the Tlascalan Xicotencal.—Thou art not loath to undertake this business? I will give thee a day to think of it."

"Not an hour, señor," said Juan, ardently. "Give me but time to exchange these heathen weeds and sandals for good armour and a war-horse, and I will depart instantly, with whatsoever force you may think fit to entrust to me."

"Art thou really, then, so hot after danger?"

"God is my protection," said Juan; "I thank heaven, that this duty *is* the most dangerous your excellency could charge me with: it is, for that reason, the most honourable."

"Sayst thou so?" cried the Captain-General, quickly. "There is *one* duty, at least, I could impose upon thee, which thou wouldst not be so hasty to accept? No, faith; for the very name of it has caused the boldest soldier in the army to turn pale.—Get thee to the armory; rest and refresh thyself: to-morrow thou shalt to Tochtepec."

"Señor, for your love I will do what others will not: I have years of benefaction to repay. I claim to be appointed to that task which is so dreadful to others."

"By my conscience, no," said Don Hernan: "*this* would be sending thee to execution indeed. And yet I know none so well fitted as thyself: Thou art fearless, cunning, discreet,—at least thou canst be so; and thou art a master of the barbarous language, I think?"

"Your excellency once commended the success with which I laboured to acquire it: my year's wanderings in the west have made it familiar to me almost as the tongue of Castile."

"It is a good endowment," said Cortes. "What thinkest thou of an embassage to Tenochtitlan?"

As he spoke, pronouncing each word with deliberate emphasis, he bent his eyes searchingly on Juan, and a smile crept over his features, as he perceived the young man lose colour and start.

"The man that would do me *that* duty," he continued, gravely, "would indeed deserve well, not only of myself, but of his majesty, the king of Spain. But think not I mean to overtask thee,—or that I seriously designed to try thee with this rack of probation.—There are bounds to the courage of us all."

"Your excellency mistakes me," said Juan, dispelling all emotion with a single effort, and speaking with a voice as firm as it was serious: "if there be but one good can come of such an embassy—"

"There might be *many*," said the general, "not the least of which would be the conquest of the city, and thereby of the whole land, without the loss of Christian lives. Could I but find speech with the prince Guatimozin, I have that which will move him to peaceful submission. But this is impossible."

"Again your excellency is deceived," said Juan, with the composure of one who has taken his reso-

lution. "I will do your bidding,—I will carry your message to Mexico."

"Pho! I did but jest with thee. Three Indian envoys have I sent already: the infidel slew them all."

"And cannot your excellency answer why? Your envoys were Indians,—your excellency's allies, but his subjects, who, in the act of alliance, had committed the crimes of treason and rebellion; for which he punished them with death, as seemed to him right and just. A Spanish ambassador would be received with greater respect, and perhaps dismissed without injury. I will not, with a boastful vanity, proclaim that I fear nothing; but such fears as I have, are not enough to deter me; and again I say, I will do your bidding."

"My bidding!" cried Cortes; "I bid thee not; heaven forfend I should bid thee any such thing. But if thou really thinkest the danger is not great,—if thou art so persuaded—" He paused; his eyes sparkled; he strode to and fro in disorder. Then suddenly halting, he exclaimed, with a faint laugh, "No, by my conscience! no, by heaven! no, by St. James of Compostella! thou art the bravest fool of all, but thou shalt not die the death of a dog! I will not catch thee with tiger-traps!"

To these extraordinary expressions, Juan answered with emotion, but still with unvarying resolution,

"I wait your excellency's orders. I fear not death; I am alone in the world;—father or mother, brother or sister, kinsman or friend, there is not one to lament me, should I come to disaster. If I live, I will, as your excellency has said, have saved the effusion of Christian blood; if I die, heaven will remember the motive, and none will miss me.—I will go to Tenochtitlan."

"Thou art a fool," said Alvarado. "Señor Cap-

tain-General, this embassy may not be; I protest against it. The world will cry shame on us."

"I do oppose the same," said Sandoval, "as being the wilful throwing away of a Christian life."

The other cavaliers present were about to add their voices against the measure, when Cortes cut them short by saying, sternly,

"Are ye all mad, señores? Think ye, this thing was said seriously? I did but try the young man's mettle, and I do think he hath somewhat less of gaingiving about him, as well as much more folly, than any one here present. I must get me an ambassador; but, Juan Lerma, thou art not the man."

"To my thought," said Sandoval, "this old Indian, Ocelotzin, will be a much safer emissary."

Apparently the Ottomi, who had listened throughout the whole conference with great attention, and who understood just enough of it to know the course that affairs were taking, did not at all relish the suggestion of Sandoval. He started, flung the gray curtain of hair from his visage, and began to pour forth a torrent of such objurgations and remonstrances as he could find Spanish to express:

"I am not Ocelotzin, the Tiger," he exclaimed; "very weak and old I am,—no claw, no tooth, no roar."—And here the barbarian, by way of confirming his speech, set up a yell, so wild, shrill, and hideous, that the cavaliers started back, catching at their swords in alarm, and two or three soldiers from the ante-room rushed in, as if apprehending some act of treason. But the dog Befo, who had hitherto maintained his post at the feet of Lerma, now rubbing against his knees, now rearing against his breast, and sometimes, when pushed down and too long neglected, expressing his impatience or affection, by extending his vast jaws, as if to swallow the hand that repelled him,—the dog

Befo heard the cry of the savage with such indignation as he would have bestowed upon the howl of a rival. He replied with a lion-like growl, and stalking up to the Ottomi, he stood watching him, ever and anon writhing his lips so as to disclose his huge fangs, and seemed waiting the signal to attack, greatly to the terror of the orator.

A wave of the general's hand dismissed the intruding soldiers from the apartment; and at the voice of Lerma, the dog returned to him.

"I am Techeechee," said the orator, resuming his discourse, but with tones greatly subdued; "I am Techeechee, the Silent Dog,—the Silent Dog I am; Techeechee, the Silent Dog,—the Silent Dog I am.—Techeechee."—

All this time, he kept his eyes fixed upon Befo as if dreading an assault; and, in fact, his solicitude had somewhat overpowered his mind, so that he continued for some moments to reiterate the above phrases, without any seeming consciousness of their absurdity. At last, he fell into his vernacular language, and this happily releasing him from his trammels, he poured forth, with amazing volubility, a string of sounds, so harsh, guttural, inarticulate, and unearthly, that they seemed rather the basso chatterings of an ape than the meaning accents of a human being.

"What says the knave?" cried Cortes.

"He says," replied Juan, "that he is the little dumb dog of the hills, and will harm nobody; that Montezuma was a big dog, like Befo, (wherein he lies,) and that Guatimozin the prince is bigger still, and will eat him,—which is to be understood figuratively. He says, he is the Little Dog, and therefore not fit to be an ambassador; but—Ha! what sayst thou, Techeechee?"—

The young man spoke to the Ottomi in his own tongue, and receiving an answer, turned immediately to Cortes, saying,

"It becomes me to inform your excellency of his words; for savage though he be, this old man I have ever found to be marvellously shrewd, as well as faithful. It is his opinion, that the prince Guatimozin would not injure *me*, if I went on the embassy; wherefore, I beg your excellency to reconsider your resolution. He says, too, he will go with me."

"Your destiny, señor, is to the rebellious and bloody town Tochtepec," replied the general, quickly and decidedly."

"He adds," continued Juan, "that he is Techeechee and no ambassador; but that he is cousin to Quimichin, the Ground Rat, and that he will be your spy,—for *quimichin* is the word by which they express a spy throughout the whole land."

"I am Techeechee; I will be Quimichin," said the Indian, as if to confirm the words of Juan, and twisting his withered features into a smile, that was meant to express both cunning and affection.

"Dost thou think him faithful?" said Cortes. "I will find service for him. But go, amigo! I have kept thee till thou art as faint and weary as myself. Get thee to Quinones, and the armory. Make thy preparations and take thy rest. I will see thee on the morrow—perhaps to-night, and acquaint thee with thy force and instructions. God be with you—Nay, heed not the dog—Adieu, señores—He has much of your own fidelity, roam he never so much. Take him with you."

When the last of the cavaliers had departed from the chamber, the Captain-General, stepped upon the platform, and throwing himself into the chair of state, sat or reclined thereon, with the air of one worn out by exertion of mind and body, and on the eve of sinking into a swoon.

CHAPTER VIII.

According to the apologue, every man carries on his back a satchel, in which are deposited his infirmities and vices, and which, though thus concealed from his own eyes, lies very invitingly open to the inspection of his friends. Not satisfied with this exposure of foibles, there are some good-natured moralists, who would dive deeper into the secrets of their neighbours, and who lament, with the old heathen metaphysician, that heaven had not clapped windows into their breasts, so that they might detect even the iniquity of thoughts. This regret may be avoided by all who are willing to satisfy curiosity at their own expense; for heaven has fitted most bosoms with private loopholes, through which each man may survey at his leisure the workings of his own spirit. A peep through the secret casement will disclose something startling, if not humbling, to many, who, in the vanity of good works, are disposed to uplift themselves above their fellows;—such, perhaps, as rational principles, and even kindly feelings, taking their hue from 'that smooth-faced gentleman,'—that biassing spirit which is more comprehensively expressed in Shakspeare's phrase of *Commodity* than in the more familiar one of Interest; for it is true of us all, that virtues are sometimes nothing but passions in disguise, and that reason has a marvellous facility in acquiring the tones of worldly-wisdom. If the mere grovelling villain,—the robber, assassin, or slayer of man's peace,—can find some such spectacle near to his heart as the surgeon's knife ex-

poses in the breast of a cankered corse, what may *he* detect, whose sublimer villany has led, or is leading him, to distinction, upon a highway paved with the miseries of mankind? Methinks, the breast of the ambitious man is a labyrinth of some such caverns as perforate the bowels of a volcano, in whose depths are lost all the petty details of crime, committed or meditated,—in which there is no light but that which bubbles up from the lava of the vast passion,—and in which there is even no grandeur, that has not arisen from convulsions the most disorganizing and unnatural. Such a heart is, at least to the limited ken of others, a chaos,—but a chaos from which he who imbosoms it, and who alone can understand it, calls up,—less like a god than a demon,—the evil elements, which create the lurid sphere his greatness.

In the bosom of the Conquistador there was a corner, into which the blaze of ambition had not yet penetrated, and where the common passions of our nature were left to rage and struggle as in the heart of a meaner mortal. As he looked therein, he gave himself up to thoughts which devoured him, while his countenance betrayed, for a time at least, nothing beyond such lassitude and faintness as may have characterized the Spartan boy, while bleeding under the fangs of the beast he concealed in his bosom.

As he sat brooding in this apparently calm, yet deeply suffering lethargy, there glided into the apartment, from one of the curtained doors on the right hand, a figure, which, seen for the first time and in the dusky twilight already darkening around, might, to superstitious eyes, have seemed an apparition,—it was so strange, so fair, so majestic, and so mournful. It presented a stature taller than belongs to the beauty of woman, yet not inconsistent with the conception of a divinity; and to this a singular dignity was given by flowing and volu-

minous robes of a grayish texture, which, both in hue and fashion, bore an air of monastic simplicity, without precisely resembling those of any one order. A sort of hood, or veil, drawn a little aside and resting upon the brow, gave to view a female countenance of wonderful loveliness, and not without a share of that commanding dignity, which distinguished her figure. Her hair, shorn, or perhaps bound behind by a fillet, and thus almost altogether concealed by the hood, gave yet to the gaze two long locks, broad and black, which, falling over either cheek, were lost among the folds of the veil which her right hand held upon her bosom. A complexion dark, yet not tawny,—a chin and nostrils carved like the most exquisite statuary,—lips of dusky crimson,—a brow of marble, and an eye of midnight, made up a countenance both beautiful and characteristic, yet contradictory in the expression of its several parts, and sometimes even in the expression of the same features. Thus, the first impression made upon a spectator by the whole visage, was such as could only be effected by extreme gentleness of disposition; while the second, he scarce knew why, spoke of energy and decision, none the less striking for being concealed under a mask so captivating. Thus, also, the eyes, very large and set widely apart, conveyed, on ordinary occasions, the idea of a spirit passive, melancholy, and inanimate; though the slightest depression of the brow, the smallest motion of the lid, transformed them at once into the brightest torches of passion. If one could conceive the spirit of a Philomela —a compound of sweet tenderness and still sweeter melancholy—dashed with the fire of a Penthesilea, he might conjure up to his mind's eye a correct representation of the mysterious being, (alluded to by Villafana, under the name of La Monjonaza, or the Nun, the word being a sort of cant augmentative of *Monja*, a nun,) whom an extraordinary destiny had thrown among the warlike invaders of Mexico.

As she passed from the thick curtain and advanced towards the platform, on which sat the moody general, her visage presented none of its ordinary mildness; on the contrary, her brows were knit together, her lip retracted, and the look with which she regarded him whom all others were learning to fear, was bold, stern, and even fiercely hostile.

The rustling of the curtain, the light sound of her footstep, the bright glance of her eye, when she paused before him, all alike failed to make an impression on the general's senses. She perceived that he was in a waking dream, absorbingly profound and painful, and she stood in silence, from disdainful pride, or perhaps with a woman's curiosity, endeavouring to trace the workings of his spirit from the revelations of his countenance, which, by this time, had changed from a stony inexpressiveness to agitation and distortion. At this moment, the head of the Conqueror was bent forwards, and his eyes directed upon the floor; but she saw enough in the writhing features, and the forehead almost impurpled with blood, to know that the passions then convulsing his bosom, were dark and deadly.

At this sight, the frown gradually passed away from her own visage, and she stood regarding him for the space of several minutes, with a calm and melancholy intentness. Then, perceiving that his lips, though moving as if in speech, gave out no articulate sound, she exclaimed, with a voice that thrilled to his soul, though subdued to the lowest accents,

"Arise, assassin! It is *not* just, it is *not* expedient; and he shall NOT perish!"

It seemed as if she had read his heart. He started up, surprised and confounded; and his first act was to cross himself, as if to exorcise a fiend, con-

jured up by the mere spell of evil thoughts. He even gave voice to two or three interjections of alarm, before perceiving that the rebuke came only from lips of earth.

"Hah! hah! Santa Maria! Santos y Angeles! hah!—Ho! ho! Infeliz! Magdalena! fair conqueror of hearts! bright converter of souls that shalt be! is it thou, *Monja mia Santisima?* most devout saint of the veil?" he cried, recovering his self-possession, and banishing every trace of passion with astonishing address. "By thy bright eyes of heaven,—and thanks be thine for the good deed,—thou hast waked me from a dream of night-mare, a most horrible vision. These naps o' the afternoon are but provokers of Incubus,—ay, and Succuba into the bargain. I thank thee, bright Infeliz: it is better to be waked by thy voice, than by sweet music!"

"And dost thou think," said the lady, with a voice whose deep but not unfeminine tones suited so well with the mournfulness of her emphasis,—"dost thou think, I see not, this moment, into thy bosom? Visions and sleep! Speak of visions to thy dull conquerors: they who dream of immortal renown, can best appreciate a vision of bloodshed. Speak of sleep to thy duller victims: the stupid wretches who slumber with the chain at their necks, may well believe that the enslaver has also his seasons of repose. But talk not of these to *me*, who look upon thee neither with the eyes of follower nor of foe. Thou canst not sleep, thou dost not dream: thy head is too full of fame, thy foot too deep in blood, thy heart too black with evil thoughts—No, nevermore canst thou sleep, nevermore, nevermore!"

The last words were uttered with a cadence so extremely melancholy, and with a manner so much like that of one who apostrophizes self, that a stranger overhearing them, and marking the look and

gesture—the upturned eye and the folding of arms on the breast—would have naturally supposed they referred rather to herself than to another. This was, indeed, a suspicion, entertained, in part, by Cortes, who, somewhat confounded by the calm decision with which she rejected a deceitful attempt to explain expressions of countenance so ominous as those he had displayed, now recovered himself, and said, with an air of grave sympathy, in which earnestness could not conceal a vein of sarcasm and bagatelle, that were parts of his nature,

"Fair Infeliz, the Unhappy, (since by this lugubrious epithet you choose to be called,) it is now some two months since you dropped among us from the clouds, the fairest, shrewdest and strangest, as well as the most broken-hearted and self-accusing of all the angels that have fallen from paradise. For mine own part, however fervently I may thank heaven for sending me such a minister, I have not yet got over my amazement at your presence; which I indeed regard with much the same wonder wherewith I should behold the sun of heaven take up his quarters at my tent-door."

"In this particular," said the lady, with the utmost tranquillity, "you should have been satisfied, (had it accorded with your nature to believe any solution of a problem, that was not suggested by your own imagination,) that the deceptions of others, and no will of my own, brought me from Santiago to Mexico, in a ship which should have carried me to Jamaica.—Your allies do not fit out vessels openly for this land, under the eye of Velasquez.—But why ask you me this? Hast thou no better device to lure me from my purpose? I came, not to speak of myself, but of others. Thou couldst have played the lapwing more subtly, hadst thou dwelt upon the whispers, the nods, the smiles of contempt and the words of scorn, that heralded a compelled coming, and which requite an inevitable stay. But learn,

if thou hast not yet learned it, that these things are felt more than they are feared, and that she who has not deserved it, may sometimes have the courage to endure even a degrading misconstruction. Why hast thou not insinuated *this ?*" continued the singular being, with a voice that betrayed more feeling than her pride confessed: "this would have drowned every other thought in a true woman; for to woman, good name and fame are more than life-blood,—yes, more than life!—I save thee, however, the trouble; I am reminded of my condition,—a woman alone in thy camp, alone in thy hands;—and yet I return to my purpose, which concerns not myself, but another. Wilt thou have me speak further of myself? If it last till the midnight, be sure I will yet speak of that which I have in view."

"Of thyself, then, beauteous Infeliz," said Cortes, admiringly; "for I vow to heaven, thou art the marvel of womankind, whom I desire to understand even more than to adore. Sit thou upon my barbarian throne, and I will fling me at thy feet, in token that I acknowledge thy supremacy in wit, wisdom, subtle observation, determination, and all other virtues that can grace woman,—ay, or man either; for I swear by my conscience, I think thou art valiant also, fearing nothing that walks under heaven or above the abyss. To the throne then, as queen of my mystery."

"I will answer thee where I stand," said Infeliz, calmly disengaging the hand which the Conquistador had taken to lead her to the platform; "and think not, this gallant folly will make me a whit quicker of apprehension, or reply. Make thy demands, and gain thereby what time thou wilt to answer mine; for this is thy purpose."

"Well then," said the Captain-General, with a look of not less respect than curiosity, "make me acquainted with this. Wherefore, as thy coming

hither was so much against thy will, hast thou not once demanded to be taken back to the islands?"

"Because it is not yet my will to be discharged from your presence," replied the lady, calmly.

"Be thou of this mind for ever," said the general, with an air of sincerity. "Now let me know, I pray you, why it is that I am somewhat more forward in confiding to thy scrutiny my secret thoughts than to the best and wisest of my bold cavaliers?"

"Because thou knowest I neither love thee nor hate thee; because I lose not good-will by asking honours and spoils, nor by boasting of services and ability; but chiefly am I troubled with your confidence, because I am the only one who lists not to have it."

"By my faith, thou art very right, especially in the last reason of all," said Cortes, with a laugh; "for secrets are like gnats and musket-bullets, they ever crowd thickest after those who strive most to avoid them.—Tell me now, fair and most provoking Infeliz, why, when I have flung thee open the whole book of my confidence, thou givest me not a single chapter of thine?"

"Because it extends not beyond that single chapter," replied La Monjonaza, patiently, "hath neither beginning nor end, and is, beside, in a language which thou canst not understand."

"Pho, you put me off with nothing," said Don Hernan, again taking the hand of his remarkable guest. "I have but one more question to ask you. Why is it, (and I pray you to forgive me the question,) that, with the consciousness that your situation in this mad land and knavish army, exposes you not only to degrading suspicion, but even to absolute personal danger, you betray no apprehension of the wild reprobates among whom you are placed? that you show no dread even of me?"

"Because," said the maiden, removing her right hand, which she had, up to this moment, preserved upon her breast, and drawing aside the thick folds of veil and mantle,—"because, for the wretch who fears not the woman's arms of modesty and helplessness, I bear with me a weapon which will secure his respect."

And as she spoke, the eye of Don Hernan fell upon a naked and glittering poniard thrust through her girdle, and worn as if it had long formed a part of the habit.

There was something inexpressibly impressive in the calm and simple dignity with which, in the very gesture that pointed out a protection so insufficient, she acknowledged a weakness, in all other respects, unfriended. Cortes, in the multitude of his base and graspingly selfish attributes, was not without some traits of a more generous character; and especially admiring a courage so self-relying, so unaffectedly real, and perhaps so much akin to his own, he had enough of the old leaven of chivalric feeling, to understand and appreciate the claims of the sex to his compassion and protection. That he had other reasons for treating La Monjonaza with respect, cannot be denied.

"Give me thy hand, Magdalena," he said, with an action and voice rather indicating the familiarity of a patron than that of a presumptuous suitor: "Thou art right; thou art a creature after mine own heart; and I swear to thee, I will do thee no wrong, nor suffer it to be done thee by another. Heed not what may be said of thee; my dogs would bay an angel, should one condescend to pay them a visit. Thy cloister-like garments are not amiss; —there be more that venerate than malign thee, for this reason; and, thank heaven, the padre Olmedo finds no sin in thy wearing them. Wilt thou be seated? There is peace between us; let there

be confidence. What hast thou to ask of me, Magdalena? Thy revenge is at hand."

The maiden returned the scrutinizing look of the general with one which, if not so piercing, was at least quite as steady:

"Your excellency has thrice called me, who call myself Infeliz, by a name not authorized by any revealments of mine," she said: "you speak also of revenge,—of *my* revenge!—Yes," she muttered, with a quivering lip; "this is a thing to be thought of, not spoken."

She paused a moment, and Cortes, casting a quick eye round the apartment, said, in a voice confidentially low and insinuating,

"I would the story had come from yourself. But it matters not,—I have it; and disguise is no longer availing. You lose nothing by the change, for I see, thy spirit hath the elements of mine own. Ah! water in the desert! the first kiss of a lover! breath to the suffocating!—such is revenge to the soul of the mighty!—I know thee, thy history and thy purpose.—I have dandled the boy Hilario upon my knee!"

The strong and meaning stress laid upon the last abrupt words, only served to drive the colour from the maiden's cheeks and lips. In all other respects, she remained calm and collected, and replied gravely,—

"The tale comes from the Alguazil Villafana—"

"Hah!" said Cortes, in surprise; "how knowest thou that?"

"Because there is no other,—no other, save *one*, who will not speak it,—in all this land, who knows so much of me; and because, were there twenty, the man whom heaven has cursed with the industrious treachery of a spider, and the rage to entangle all things in his flimsy web, would be the first to betray me."

"Thou sayst the truth of Villafana," said Cortes, with a laugh of peculiar exultation. "In spirit and intention, he is the insect you have named; but yet he spins his web, less like the spider, with the chance of destroying, than the silken-caterpillar, that toils for his master, who will smother him in his work, as soon as it is perfected. Ay, thy penetration is clear, thy conception just; the knave is, in all things, a traitor,—a double, a triple,—a centupled traitor!"

"And you both spare him, and give him the means of multiplying his dangerous villanies?"

"I do, by my conscience!" said Cortes, vivaciously. "There is a charm in it, and no little policy. Dost thou think this little fly can deceive? can deceive *me?*—Wert thou a man, thou wouldst know, that even above the triumph of vengeance, is the joy of him who watches the nets that his foe is spreading, and, as he watches, fastens them softly down upon the ensnarer."

"And is the insect worthy to be toiled by the lion?"

"Ay,—when the lion is a *man!*—This is my diversion; it is also my profit. I would not for a thousand crowns, any harm should come to so serviceable a tool: a better decoy never circled the disaffected about him. He is the touchstone that reveals me the metal of the doubtful,—the diamond that cuts me the adamant of malignancy. I look through him, as through the philosopher's glass, and behold the million things of corruption that swarm in the hearts of the curs beneath him.—By heaven! it joys me, that I have one to whom I can speak these secret blisses. Thou art my vizier, my very familiar. Know then, that this very night, the dog meditates a treachery, with which I will be acquainted, and yet seem unacquainted. By my conscience, it delights me to tell thee, with what exquisite industry the poor knave works me a good,

while foolishly believing he is doing me an ill. Dost thou not remember that I have told thee, how much it concerns me to procure some trusty envoy, to go between me and the young infidel, Guatimozin of Tenochtitlan?"

"I am familiar with your wishes."

"Learn then, that, this night, Villafana himself procures me the emissary I have myself sought after in vain,—a Mexican noble of high rank.—I could kiss the dog for his knavery!"

"And wherefore does he this?"

"Faith, in the amiable wish to reconcile some of the jarring elements of his conspiracy; to wit, the Tlascalans and Mexicans; the latter of whom, this night, will, with his good help, show the black-cheeked Xicotencal the advantages to be gained by uniting with his mighty and royal enemy of Mexico, to secure the destruction of my insignificant self. Ha! ha! Is not the thought absurdly delightful! Ah, Villafana! Villafana! I have no such merry conceited good-fellow as thou!"

La Monjonaza beheld the exultation, and listened to the mirthful laugh of the Conqueror with much interest, and not a little surprise. It did indeed seem extraordinary, that he should be so heartily diverted by the audacity of a villany that aimed at his downfall, and perhaps his life. But this very merriment indicated how many majestic fathoms he felt himself elevated above the reach of any arts of human malevolence or opposition. It was as if the eagle, flapping his wings among thunder-clouds, shrieked with contempt at schoolboys shooting up birdbolts from the village-green.—It gave a clew to a characteristic which Infeliz was not slow to unravel. A deep sigh from her lips recalled the general from his diversion.

"Thou sighest, Magdalena?" he cried.

"It was for thee," she answered: "I sighed, indeed, to think how much and how truly *thou*, thus

elevated by a touch of divinity above the children of men, dost yet resemble this miserable, grovelling, befooled Villafana!"

"What, I? Resemble him? resemble Villafana?"

"Deny it, if thou canst," said the maiden, with rebuking severity; "and if thou canst not, then humble thyself, and confess the base similitude. Thou differest from him but in this,—that, whereas, in one quality, thou art uplifted miles above his head, thou art, in another, sunk even leagues *below* him.—Thou frownest? Hast thou discovered that anger adds aught to the state of dignity? Thou dost, this moment, even with the crawling venom of Villafana, with a rage still more abased, seek a life thou hast not courage openly to destroy."

"Santiago!" cried Cortes, in a heat; "by St. Peter, you are over-bitter. But pho, I will not be angry with thee. Dost thou think me this coward thing?"

"Hast thou not doomed the young man, Juan Lerma, a second time, to death?" cried La Monjonaza, with an eye that trembled not a moment in the gaze of the Captain-General; "and was it not with the embrace of a Judas? Oh, señor!" she continued, firmly, "say not that Villafana is either base or craven. *He* strikes at the strong man, who sits armed and with his eyes open: but thou, oh *thou*,—thou art content to aim at the breast of the friendless and naked sleeper!—Judge between thyself and Villafana."

It is impossible to express the mingled effects of shame and rage, that disfigured the visage and convulsed the frame of the Captain-General, at this powerful and altogether unexpected rebuke. He smote his brow, he took two or three hasty steps over the floor; when, at last, a thought striking him, he rushed back to the chider, snatched up her hand, and said, with an attempt at laughter, pain-

fully contrasted with his working and even agonized visage,

"Dost thou quarrel with me for fighting thy battles? Oh, by St. James, it is better to draw sword *on* a friend than *for* him: ingratitude always comes of it. Had I thought this of old, I had been a happier man, and thou never hadst mourned the death of Hilario;—no, by'r lady, Hilario had been a living man, and thou happy with him in the island!"

As he hurried over these words, the diversion they gave to his thoughts, enabled him rapidly to recover his self-command, in which, as in affairs of less personal consequence, he always exhibited wonderful power. This accomplished, he continued, with an earnest voice,

"Concealment is now useless: the time waxes, when I must think of other things: let us shrive one another even as two friars, and deceive one another no further than they. Methinks, what I do is for thy especial satisfaction.—An ill loon I am, to do so much for one who so bitterly censures me!—Who thou art, and what thou art, I know not: thou wert an angel, couldst thou give over chiding. The young Hilario del Milagro was the son of mine old friend Antonio:—a very noble boy,—I remember him well.—By heaven, thy hand is turned to ice! Art thou ill?"

"Do I look so?" said the maiden, with a faint laugh. Her face had of a sudden become very pale, yet she spoke firmly, though not without a visible effort. "I listen to thy confession."

"To mine! By my troth, I am confessing *thy* sins and sorrows, and not mine. Well, Magdalena," he continued, "thy emotion is not amiss: it is not every maiden can think calmly of the death of her lover, knowing that his slayer is nigh.—I knew Hilario, when a boy,—ay, good faith, and Juan Lerma, too, his playmate and foster-brother, or his

young page and varlet, I know not which. It was on Antonio's recommendation, that I afterwards took this foundling knave to my bosom, and made him—no, not what he *is!* for this is a thing of his own making. I sent him to Española to recruit: he loitered,—he returned to the house of Milagro—Shall I say more? Hilario, his brother, the son of his best friend and patron, was the betrothed husband of Magdalena; and him did the wolf-cub slay. Wo betide me! for it was I that taught him the use of his weapon.—Is not this enough? Accident hath brought thee to Mexico; thou seest the killer of thy lover; and, like a true daughter of Spain, thy heart is full of vengeance.—Is not this true? Disguise thy wrath in wild sarcasm no longer. Were he the king's son, he should——Pho! recall thy words: Is it not 'just?' is it not 'expedient?'"

To these sinister demands, Magdalena replied with astonishing composure:

"All this is well. Shrive now thyself—Hast *thou* any cause, personally, to desire his death?"

"Millions!" replied the general, grinding his teeth; "millions, millions! to which the death of Hilario, wringing at thy breast, is but as a gnat-bite to the sting of adders.—Millions, millions!"

"Give him then to death," said Magdalena, with a voice so grave and passionless, that it instantly surprised the Conquistador out of his fury; "give him to death,—but let it be in *thy* name, not *mine.*"

"Art thou wholly inexplicable?" he cried. "I read thee by the alphabet of human passions, and I make thee not out,—no, not so much as a word. Thy flesh warms and chills, thine eye swims and flashes, thy brow bends, thy lip curls, thy breast heaves, thy frame trembles; and yet art thou more than mortal, or less. When shall I understand thee?"

"When thou canst look to heaven, and say, 'I have done no wrong'—No, no! not to heaven; for what child of earth can look thitherward, and unveil the actions of life?—When thou canst lay thy hand upon thy bosom, and appealing, not to divine justice, but to that of human reason, say, 'What I do is just:'—in other words, *never*. You are surprised: you bade me repeat my words: I do:—'It is *not* just, it is *not* expedient, and Juan Lerma shall *not* die!'"

"Now by my conscience!" said Cortes, "this is the true dog-star madness! Wert thou not behind the curtain, and didst thou not shriek at sight of him? Mystery that thou art, unveil thyself—Wherefore tarriest thou in this land, suspected, scorned, degraded, if not to have vengeance on him? Wherefore, I say, wherefore?"

"To *save* him," replied the lady, boldly,—"to save him from the fury that has brought thee to the level of the Alguazil. Else had I long since returned to the islands. Revoke therefore thy commission, and, in any way thou wilt, so that it carry with it neither secret malice nor open insult, contrive to discharge him from thy service. His life is charmed—it is in my keeping."

"Oho!" said the Captain-General, surveying La Monjonaza with an exulting sneer; "sits the wind in that quarter? And thou art but a woman after all! Now was I but a fool, I trow, not to bethink me how the wife of Uriah forgot the death of her husband, when she saw a path open to the arms of his murderer. Is it so indeed? Thou hast fallen from admiration to pity."

"She who withstands evil thoughts and maligning words, will not weep even at the contempt of commiseration," said Magdalena, with a sigh.

"Villafana has then deceived me,—or rather, poor fool, has deceived himself, as is more natural," said Cortes, with a malicious grin. "Never believe

me, but thou shalt rule me in this matter, as in others. Juan Lerma shall thank thee for his life, even for the sake of the Maid of Mexico,—thy brown rival, Zelahualla."

As he spoke thus, he watched closely the effect of his words on Magdalena, and beheld a sudden fire light up in her eyes, succeeded by such paleness as had always covered her visage, when he referred to the death of Hilario. Nevertheless, she did not avert her glance, nor exhibit any other manifestation of feeling, except that she replied not a single word.

"It is the truth that I tell thee," he muttered in a low voice, taking up, as if in compassion, her hand, which was yielded passively, and was again cold and dewy; "she is very lovely,—very,—and a king's daughter. He fought for her love with Guzman. So, perhaps, he fought Hilario for thine. By my conscience! he makes love over bloodthirstily! When I spoke to him of Zelahualla,—nay, I mentioned not her name; I spoke only of his friends in the palace of Mexico—yet the colour flushed over his cheeks. Nevertheless, thou shalt rule me; thou shalt have time for consideration: the expedition to Tochtepec can be delayed. Dost thou think he would have consented to be mine envoy to Tenochtitlan, but for the hope of seeing his princess? I could tell thee another thing—(there are more rivals than one)—but it matters not,—it matters not! Thou wilt not be content with—pity!—Arouse thee, and speak.—Art thou marble?"

At this moment, and while it seemed indeed that the unhappy Monjonaza, notwithstanding that her countenance was still inexpressively placid, had been turned to stone, the curtain of the great door, or principal entrance, was drawn aside, and the cavalier Don Francisco de Guzman strode hastily into the apartment. The sound of his footsteps, more than the warning gesture of Cortes, recalled

her to her senses. She raised her hand to her brow, and the long hood falling over her countenance, she turned to depart through the door by which she had entered. The evening was already closing fast, and the shadowy obscurity of the chamber perhaps concealed her from the eyes of the intruder. Nevertheless, Cortes perceived, as she glided away, that her step was altered and tottering, and that her hands fumbled for a moment at the door curtain, as if she knew not how to remove it. It yielded, however, at last, and she vanished from his eyes.

"Poor fool," he muttered, with a feeling divided between scorn, anger, and pity, "thou hast discovered to me the broken postern of thy spirit: the walls are strong, but the citadel is in ruins. This is somewhat marvellous,—I will know more of it. It is a new and another thing to be remembered.—Come, amigo: it is over dark here for thy business. We will walk in the open air."

So saying, he took Guzman's arm, and departed from the chamber.

CHAPTER IX.

Some two hours or more after he had been discharged from the presence of the Captain-General, Juan Lerma sat musing in one of the many hundred chambers which composed the vast extent of the palace of Nezahualcojotl, a different being from that the reader beheld him returning from exile. The coarse *tilmaltli*, or native cloak, and the barbarous tunic, had been exchanged for raiment of a better material and fashion, a part of which,—the *bragas* and *xaqueta*, at least—were from the wardrobe of the general, while modesty, or reluctance to accept any further of such assistance than was absolutely necessary, had induced him to substitute for the plain but costly *capa*, or mantle, of velvet, the long surcoat of black cloth, very richly embroidered, which had, as he was told, accompanied the suit of armour, sent by his unknown friend. This valuable and well-timed gift lay upon a platform beside his matted and canopied couch, shining brilliantly in the light which a waxen candle diffused throughout the apartment. He sat upon a native stool, carved of a solid block of wood, and his fine countenance and majestic figure, besides the advantages they received from becoming garments, appeared even of a more elevated beauty, when seen by this solitary ray.

His only companion was the dog Befo, whose shaggy coat, yet gleaming with moisture, betrayed that he had shared with the young man his evening bath in the lake. The attachment of this beast was much more natural than remarkable. Five

years before, when Juan was but a boy in Santo Domingo, Befo had been his playmate and companion;—had followed him to Cuba, when the youth began to weary of dependence, and long for a life of activity and distinction; and was finally presented by the grateful adventurer to Cortes, as the only gift in his power to bestow; for, at that time, saving his youth, health, and good spirits, Befo made up the sum of his worldly possessions. In the change of masters, however, Befo did not trouble himself to acquiesce; nor did he perceive any necessity, while treating Cortes with all surly good-will and respect, to abate a jot of his love for the hand which had first sustained and caressed him. The dog is the only animal that shows disinclination to be transferred from one master to another. The horse cares not, the ox submits, and man makes no opposition. The dog has a will of his own, and acknowledges no change of servitude, until conscious of a change of affection.

The stirring and harassing events of the day, though they had exhausted the spirit of the youth, had yet brought with exhaustion that nervous irritableness which drives away slumber from the eyes of the over-weary. Twice or thrice, Juan had flung himself on the couch to repose, but in vain; and as he now sat questioning himself how far the substitution of soft mats and robes for a bed of earth, might account for his inability to sleep, he began to revolve in his mind, for the twentieth time, his change of fortunes, and wonder at the inauspicious, and, as it seemed to him, unnatural sadness, which oppressed his spirits.

"I have been restored," he muttered, half aloud,—and, as he spoke, Befo, roused by the accents from the floor, thrust his rough head over his knees, to testify his attention,—"I have been restored to favour, and, in great part, to the friendship of the General.—Thou whinest, Befo! I would I could

read the heart of a man as clearly as thine.—Yet has he not distinguished me with a high command,—a captain's? I trow, it is not every one who can so soon step into this dignity, especially when without the recommendation of birth, as Alvarado hinted.—I will show this proud cavalier, that God does not confine all merit to hidalgos' sons. If he give me but a capable force—Twenty foot and six horse?—'tis but a weak array for a field where eighty men have perished. Yet I care not: if I have but Xicotencal to back me, with some two or three *xiquipils** of his Tlascalans, it will be enough. If I fall,—perhaps *that* will be better: I am too faint-hearted for these wars. Villafana says, that he brands the prisoners too, and sells them for slaves. This is surely unjust—He was another man at Cuba."

At this moment, the dog raised his head and growled, and Juan heard steps approaching through the long passage, that ran by his door. Here they stopped, and Befo continuing to give utterance to his displeasure, the voice of Villafana whispered through the curtain,

"Put thy hand on the beast's neck, or box him o' the ears—He is no friend of mine."

"Enter," said Juan, "if thou art seeking me. He will do thee no harm."

"Ay, marry," said Villafana, coming in; "for at the worst, and when other things fail, I will stop him with my dudgeon, be he Cortes's, thine, or any one's else. It stirs my choler to be growled at by so base a thing as a dog."

"Put up thy weapon, nevertheless," said Juan, observing that Villafana had a poniard in his hand; "thou seest, the dog is quiet. In this he pays me

* *Xiquipil*—a military division of natives, consisting of eight thousand men.

the compliment of supposing I can protect myself. What is thy will with me, Villafana?"

"First," said the Alguazil, with a laugh, "to give thee my congratulations touching thy sudden rise from the abyss, and thy meditated flight heavenward. And, secondly," he continued, when Juan had nodded his thanks, "to ask, in the way of friendship, from how high a cliff thou canst tumble headlong, without danger of breaking thy neck?"

"This is but a silly question, friendly though it may be," replied Juan.

"Oh, señor," said Villafana, "you must remember, the first night we slept with the army, at the base of El Volcan, the mighty Popocatepetl, how much we admired the great stones, that the devils therein flung up against the stars! You nod again: good luck to your recollections! Did you observe any one of those ignited masses stick against the vault, and there hang among the luminaries?"

"Surely not," said Juan; "those that fell not immediately back into the crater, rolled down among the snows on the mountain-side, and were there extinguished."

"Very well, señor—When you are mounted, you can remember the fire-stones, and make your choice whether to tumble back into the fire of wrath, that now sends you upward, or to quench yourself for ever in the frozen bed of degradation.—You go to Tochtepec?"

"I do," said Juan, somewhat angrily; "and I warn thee, thy malicious metaphors will not make me less grateful for the kindness that sends me."

"God rest you—it were better you had accepted the embassy to Guatimozin."

"Hah!" said Juan, "how knowest thou of this? It was spoken only in secret council?"

"Oh," said Villafana, with a second laugh, "if thou wilt but scratch on one end of a long log, be

sure I will hear it at the other. There is something more in the world than magic."

He spoke with marked exultation; indeed Juan had already observed that his carriage was freer and bolder than common, and that he bore himself like a man who cares not wholly to conceal a triumph of spirit, which he thinks it not needful altogether to divulge.

"Harkee, señor Don Juan," he went on, abruptly and inquisitively, "thou art good friends with Xicotencal?"

"So far as a Christian man can be with one, who, though a very noble being, is yet a misbeliever."

"And thou wert sworn friends, at Mexico, with the young prince, Guatimozin?"

"Not so," said Juan: "the young man kept aloof from us all, being of the hostile party; and there was scarce one of us who had ever seen his face. I must confess, however, if I can believe Techeechee, that my preservation in the expedition was owing to his good act; for Techeechee avers, that it was through Guatimozin's good will that he was sent with me, to secure me from the death which was designed for all the rest of the party."

"Designed? dost thou allow it then?" cried the Alguazil, quickly.

"Ay," replied Juan, dryly; "designed by the Mexican lords, but not by Christian leaders."

"And art thou not sorry thou wert not despatched to him as envoy?"

"Why need we talk of this?" said Juan, hesitating. "Guatimozin the king, may be different from Guatimozin the prince."

"He is not *yet* the king," said Villafana. "He will not be crowned till the day of the great war-festival, and not then, unless he can furnish a Spaniard for the sacrifice. I'faith, he loves not the blood of his red neighbours."

"Villafana," said Juan, struck with certain uneasy suspicions, "thou seemest better acquainted with these things than becomes a true follower of Don Hernan."

"Not a whit, not a whit," cried the Alguazil, hastily: "this is but the common talk,—the common talk, señor; and I am but a fool to indulge in it, to the prejudice of other business more urgent. Come, señor,—will you walk in the garden? There is a friend to speak with you."

"What friend?" said Juan.—"Villafana, I half suspect you are engaged in some foul work. I will have naught to do with it."

"Lo you now," said the Alguazil, impatiently; "this is wild work. Do you think I will assassinate you? Ho! this is a thing thy best friend would entrust to another. Come, señor;—you have your rapier,—you can take your casque, too, if you have any fear. It is a friend, who has that to say which it concerns your life to know. You know not your danger. God be with you, and your blood be upon your own head! If you refuse, you will not repent you:—no, faith—you will not have time left for lamentation.—Farewell, señor,—"

"Stay, Villafana," exclaimed Juan, much disturbed: "Friend or foe,—it is not that which stays me, but the fear of being entrapped into something more to be dreaded than death. Thou art a schemer; it is thy nature: I will have nothing to do with thy plots, or with those who—"

"Pho! this concerns thyself alone, not me. My only plot is to help one who desires to drag thee out of the fire thou art so bent to burn in. I take you to your friend, and depart: I have other things to occupy me. I am but a messenger. Will you go? I must give you a token then.—You have not forgotten Hilario?"

At these words, muttered under breath, Juan started and turned pale, exclaiming,

"Saints and angels! and heaven forbid! Mine ears did not then deceive me? Oh wo to us all! Alas for thine ill news! Have I not pain enough of mine own?"

As he spoke, with a trembling voice, Villafana handed him his cap and sword, saying, as he put into his hand the latter, which was a light rapier,

"A good blade! and has hung at Don Hernan's girdle.—Leave the dog behind: he will but set up his cursed growling, and so bring upon you some one who may not relish the meeting."

"It is true, then?" cried Juan, with tones and aspect of the greatest distress: "So fair, so young, so noble, so fallen!"

"Back, cur! thick-lips! Befo!" cried the Alguazil, as the two left the chamber.—"He grumbles at me, as if to say *Ehem*, with disdain. Command him thyself: he is a superfluous companion."

The young man waved his hand to Befo; at which signal Befo threw himself upon his haunches, looking after Juan till he beheld him issue from the long passage into the open air. Then rising, with the air of a servant who understands his duty much better even than his master, he followed slowly after the pair into the garden.

CHAPTER X.

The royal garden of Tezcuco was an extensive piece of ground, fenced, on three sides, by the palace and its dependencies, and bounded on the fourth, by the waters of the lake, from which it was divided by a low wall, long since broken down by the Conquerors, by certain shadowy buildings, and by clumps of noble cypresses and other trees. The moon, not yet near her full, shone westward of the meridian, in a sky intensely azure and almost cloudless; and her beams could be traced, through the wall of cypresses, glittering and dancing on the light waves, as they rippled up merrily to the night-breeze. What taste was displayed in the plan and cultivation of the garden, could not be determined, at this hour, and in this insufficient, though beautiful, light. One could behold, indeed, obscurely, flower-beds and shrubberies, winding alleys and hanging groves, little still pools and even, here and there, a jetting fountain, scattered about in a manner which the imagination might believe was designed and judicious; but it seemed, at night, rather a wilderness, in which the nostrils had greater reason to be gratified than the eyes. A thousand odours fell from the trees, a thousand scents rose from the flowers, as the heads of the one and the petals of the other were shaken by the flitting gusts. It was a scene calculated at least to soothe exasperated feelings, and induce sentiment and melancholy in the breast of the contemplative.

To Juan's temperament, it would have been, at any other moment, saddening enough; but his

thoughts were, at present, far too much, and far too painfully, engaged, to permit any to be wasted upon it.

As he followed hastily at the heels of the Alguazil, he made one or two agitated attempts to draw from him some further tokens to remove or confirm his boding suspicions; but the Alguazil had on the sudden grown very cautiously or very maliciously silent, and answered only by pressing his finger on his lips, eyeing the youth significantly, and hurrying him more rapidly along.

He led him to a spot, almost in the centre of the garden, where a little oval-shaped pool lay embosomed among schinus-trees, whose long weeping branches, stirred by the wind, swept gracefully over and in the water, which was only agitated, when thus disturbed by the motion of a bough, or by the plunge of the fragrant berries, the harvest of a former year, which dropped at intervals from the cluster. A single moonbeam found its way into this solitary inclosure, falling upon a limited portion of a path which seemed to surround the pool. In other respects, all was dark and invisible, and not a ray could be seen on the water, save when the spectator, peering over the brink, beheld some faint star of the zenith glimmering down among the shadowy depths.

Upon this path, and in this moonbeam, the Alguazil paused, and pointing hastily to a nook—the darkest of all where all were dark,—Juan perceived obscurely what seemed a moving figure. The next moment, Villafana passed among the boughs, retracing his steps, and strode again into the moonlight. As he stood an instant shaking the dew-drops from his cloak, he beheld a dark object approaching slowly on the path. It was the faithful Befo, who, with his head to the ground, and his tail draggling in the grass, as if sensible of having committed a breach of discipline, yet crawled along

after his master, under the irresistible instinct of fidelity.

"This is ill thought on, and may be unlucky," muttered Villafana, with a subdued voice. "Here, Befo! you rascal! come with me, and you shall have a bone.—Ay, thou ill devil!" he continued, in the same whispered tones, as Befo, without stirring to the right or the left, and merely showing his teeth, when the Alguazil seemed disposed to check him with his hand, passed on towards the grove,—"go thy ways, and growl as thou wilt: thou art the only thing in the land incorruptible. But thou wilt be acquainted with my dagger yet, if thou hast no better appetite for my dinner."

He resumed his path. He had not taken a dozen steps, before he became sensible of the approach of another intruder: but this time the intruder was human. There was something in the fashion and sweep of the garments, which, even at a distance, apprized him of the character of the comer.

"The devil take these prying priests, monks, friars, and all!" he muttered irreverently betwixt his teeth.—"Holy father,——Hah! by the mass, is it thou, Camarga! my brother of all orders, monkish, mendicant, martial, and so on? Thy masking goes the wrong way: I told thee to meet me at the prison. 'Tis my palace, man; and the princes are in waiting.—Come, these damp mazes are ill for thy years and diseased liver. We will walk together."

"Señor Gruñidor, as they call you," said Camarga, flinging back the white cowl, and revealing his sallow features in the moonshine, "señor Alguazil, carcelero, rogue, conspirator, devil, and what-not, how I came to be so deep among your damnable devices, in the short month I have been in this land, I know not, except that I have, like thyself, a greater aptitude to be groping among caverns than journeying on kings' highways. But

know, sirrah, that besides *thy* subtleties, I have some whimseys of my own; to which, when the wind stirs them, yours must give place, were they ten thousand times more magnificent than your wit strives to make them appear. Begone, therefore; get thee to thy scurvy Tlascalan, whom thou art training to the gallows; to thy Mexican Magnifico, who is an ass to trust his neck to thy keeping; and to what vagabond Christians will give thee their countenance, who are e'en greater fools than thyself, and the Indians together. Get thee away: I have business of mine own; and I will come to you when it is despatched, or I will *not* come,—just as the imp urges me. So away with you, and leave me to myself."

"Under your favour, no," said Villafana, apparently too well acquainted with the man to be much surprised at a tone and manner so unlike to those which Camarga had used at the cypress-tree: "I must e'en have your saintly cowl and leaden cross, to swear the two infidels together: otherwise there is no trusting them.—They have much superstitious reverence for our priests and ceremonies. Come, señor; I tell thee, the Mexican will make our fortunes."

"Thine, rogue, *thine!*" said the disguised Camarga, impatiently: "Why talkest thou to me in this stupid wise? I am an older villain than thou.—I have a fancy for this lad of the Anakim, this thick-witted, turtle-brained young Magog. Thou makest a mystery of him, too. 'Slid! I will penetrate it; for I have a use to make of him, as well as thou."

"Demonios!" said Villafana; "are you seeking Juan Lerma?"

"Ay, marry. I dogged thee hitherward, I saw thee hide him in the bush, and by St. Dominic, (who will fry my soul to cinders, for defiling his garments—*peccavi!*) I will know what's i' the wind betwixt you, ere I stir a step further in your

counsels. Dost thou think I will be thine accomplice, and have anything hidden from me? Thou swearest, he is to be murdered to-morrow, too. There is no time to be lost."

"Thou art mad," said Villafana: "he is engaged on our business. I make no mystery; I will tell you all. It is well I met thee. He has company,—a good sword,—and would think no more of lunging through thy holy lion's skin, if he caught thee eavesdropping—"

"Hark! dost thou not hear tuck and corselet?" said Camarga, smiling grimly, and rattling the hilt of a sword against his concealed armour. "I must know his companion too. I tell thee, I will have all thy secrets, or I drop thee, perhaps denounce thee."

"Thou shalt have them," said Villafana, gradually drawing him further from the pool. "His companion is La Monjonaza."

"Ha! sits the wind there? I must have a peep at her: they say, she is lovely as a goddess."

"Thou wilt incense her," said Villafana, emphatically. "By heaven, thou knowest not the temper of this woman, which is deadly. Leave the two cooing fools to themselves. Our fortunes,—nay, faith, our lives, depend upon them. La Monjonaza is deep in our secrets,—"

"Knave!" muttered the pretended friar, in a low but furious voice, "hast thou trusted my life in the keeping of a woman?"

"Pho, she is an older conspirator than thou; a wiser, too, for she can keep her temper. Out of her love for the young man, we draw our truest safety and quickest success."

"Her love! oh fu! and is she of this corrupt fickleness, that she will have two lovers in one hour? But it is the way with these creatures!"

"They are old lovers, very old lovers, señor," said Villafana, endeavouring, as he spoke, but in

vain, to quicken the steps of Camarga. "You shall hear the story.—Juan Lerma's father was some low, poor, base fellow, killed in some tumult at Isabela. The old hidalgo, Antonio del Milagro, took the boy out of charity, first as a servant—"

"A servant? Dios mio!—Is he of no better beginning?"

"Not a jot; but the old fellow liked him, and, in the end, treated him full as well as his own son,—a knavish lad, called Hilario, some two or three years older than Juan."

'Slife!" said Camarga, "tell me no granddam's tale, with all tedious particulars. How came the youth into the hands of Cortes?"

"Even by setting out to seek his fortune, somewhat early, and getting to Santiago, where Cortes took him into keeping. You heard us say, that Don Hernan, when he received his commission from Velasquez, sent Juan back to his native island, to recruit forces. It was natural he should visit his old friends at Isabela. It was here he met with, and quarrelled about, Magdalena—"

"Magdalena!" said Camarga, with surprise. "You swore her name was Infeliz!"

"Ay; but the true one is Magdalena. When she came from Spain—"

"From Spain!" cried Camarga, starting: "is she not an islander?"

"Pho! didst thou ever see a creature of her beauty, born out of Andalusia?"

"I have not seen her—but I will,—yes, by all the saints of heaven, I will,—I must.—How came she to the island?"

"Oh, a-horseback, I think," said Villafana; "for the ship was never seen at Isabela: never question about that. The two young dogs, Hilario and Juan, found her somewhere, brought her to old Milagro, and, Juan being more favoured and better beloved than Hilario, who, to say truth, was both

ugly and vicious, they fought about her, and Hilario was killed. Thus, Juan was left the master of the beauty; but being tired of her, or afraid of old Milagro's vengeance, or perhaps both, he fled again to Cuba, and thence as you heard, came to Mexico in a fusta. What brought Magdalena after him I know not, unless 'twas mad, raging love; yes, faith, that's the cause; for she cares not half so much for Don Hernan. But they did say, at Isabela, she had a better cause; for the ship, it was well known—"

"Fool of all fools!" said Camarga, with a strange and unnatural laugh, "didst thou not say the ship was never seen at Isabela?"

"Ay, truly; but it was seen on the rocks at the Point of Alonso, not many leagues distant," replied Villafana; and then added, "I would thou couldst be more choice of thine epithets of endearment. These 'knaves,' 'rogues,' and 'fools,' do well enough among friends; but one may season discourse too strongly with them, even for the roughest appetite.—The ship was a wreck: there was said to be foul work about it; but that's neither here nor there. The girl was brought ashore by the young men, Juan being good in the management of a skiff,—indeed, a notoriously skilful and fearless sailor. What was said of Magdalena, was this," continued the Alguazil, with a low, confidential voice: "It was discovered, or at least conjectured, that the ship was no other than the Santa Anonciacion, a vessel sent from Seville with a bevy of nuns,—faith, some worshippers of thine own good St. Dominic,—who were to found a convent at the Havana. It was whispered, that the fair Magdalena was even one of the number, and therefore —But the thing must be plain! To be a nun, and to love young fellows *par amours*—this is a matter for the Inquisition. But thanks be to God, we have no good Brothers in Mexico!—I will tell thee more, as we walk, and show thee, if thou hast not the wit

to see it, how much it concerns us to have a friend like La Monjonaza."

"I have heard enough," said Camarga, with tones deep and hoarse; "enough, and more than enough. And this woman was, *then*, the leman of Juan Lerma, and, now, the creature of Cortes!"—Here he muttered something to himself. Then, speaking with an audible voice, he said,

"Get thee to thy den, and look to thyself: there is danger afloat, and full enough to excuse me from meddling with thee to-night. There is a force of men concealed near to the prison, and commanded by Guzman. Ask no questions—look to thyself: thou art suspected."

At these words, Villafana became greatly alarmed, and exchanging but a few words more with Camarga, hastily departed. He was no sooner gone, than Camarga, yielding to an emotion he had long suppressed, fell upon his knees and uttered wild prayers, mingled with groans and maledictions, all the while beating his breast and brows. Then rising and whipping out his sword, as if to execute some deadly purpose of vengeance, he strode towards the pool.

CHAPTER XI.

No sooner had the Alguazil departed from the enclosure, than the figure which Juan had beheld obscurely among the shadows, stepped slowly into the moonshine, looking like a phantom, because so closely shrouded from head to foot that nothing was seen but the similitude of a human being, wrapped, as it might be imagined, in a gray winding-sheet. The thick hood and veil concealed her countenance, and even her hands were hidden among the folds.

It seemed, for a moment, as if she were about to speak, for low murmurs came inarticulately from the veil. As for Juan himself, he was kept silent by the most painful agitation. At last, and when it appeared as if the unhappy being was conscious that no other mode of revealment was in her power, she raised her hand to her head, and the next moment, the hood falling back, the moonbeams fell upon the exposed visage of La Monjonaza. It was exceedingly, indeed deadly, pale; and the gleaming of her dewy forehead indicated how feebly even her powerful strength of mind contended with a sense of humiliation. She made an effort to elevate her head, to compose her features into womanly dignity, but all in vain; her hands sought each other, and were clasped together upon her breast, her lips quivered, her head fell, and her eyes, after one wild, brief, and supplicating glance, were cast upon the earth.

"Alas, Magdalena!" exclaimed Juan, with tones

of the deepest feeling, "do I see you here, do I see you *thus?*"

At these words she raised her head, with a sudden and convulsive start, as if the imputation they conveyed had stung her to the soul; and as she bent her eyes upon Juan, though they were filled with tears, yet they flashed with what seemed a noble indignation. But this was soon changed to a milder and sadder expression, and the flush which had accompanied it, was quickly replaced by her former paleness.

"Thou dost indeed see me here," she replied, summoning her resolution, and speaking firmly, "and thou seest me thus,—degraded, not in thine imagination only, but in the suspicions of all, down to the level of scorn. Yes," she continued, bitterly, "and while thou pitiest me for a shame endured only for thyself,—endured only that I may requite thee with life for life,—thou art sorry thy hand ever snatched me from the billows. Speak, Juan Lerma, is it not so?"

"It had been better, Magdalena," said the youth, reproachfully, "for, besides that the act caused me to be stained with blood, it afflicts me with a curse still more heavy. I do not mourn the death of Hilario, as I mourn the downfall of one whom I once esteemed almost a seraph."

"Villain that he was!" cried Magdalena, with vindictive impetuosity, "mean and malignant in life and in death! who, with a lie, living, destroyed the peace and the fame of the friendless, and died with a lie, that both might remain blighted for ever! O wretch! O wretch! there is no punishment for him among the fiends, for he was of their nature. And thou mournest his death, too! Thou cursest the hand that avenged the wrong of a feeble woman!"

"I lament that I slew the son of my benefactor," said Juan, with a deep sigh; and then added with

one still deeper, "but, sinner that I am, I rejoice while looking on thee, in the fierce thought, that I killed the destroyer of innocence."

"The destroyer of innocence indeed," replied Magdalena, with a voice broken and suffocating. "Yes, innocence!" she exclaimed more wildly, "or at least, the *fame* of innocence! for innocence herself he could not harm. No, by heaven! oh, no! for what I came from the sea, that I am *now;* yes, now, I tell thee, now! and if thou darest give tongue to aught else, if thou darest think—Oh heaven! this is more than I can bear! Say, Juan Lerma! say! dost *thou*, too, believe me the thing I am called? the base, the fallen, the degraded?"

"Alas, Magdalena," replied Juan, to the wild demand: "with his dying lips, Hilario——"

"With his dying lips, he perjured his soul for ever!" exclaimed Magdalena, "for ever, for ever!" she went on, with inexpressible energy and fury; "and may the curse of a broken-hearted woman, destroyed by his defaming malice, cling to him as long, scorching him with fresh torments, even when fiends grow relentful and forbearing. Mountains of fire requite the coals he has thrown upon my bosom! May God never forgive him! no, never! never!"

"This is horrid!" said Juan. "Revoke thy malediction: it is impiety. Alas, alas!" he continued, moved with compassion, as the singular being, passing at once from a sibyl-like rage to the deepest and most feminine abasement of grief, wrung her hands, and sobbed aloud and bitterly; "Would indeed that thou hadst perished with the others!"

"Would that I had!" said Magdalena, more calmly; "but thou hadst then been left to a malice like that which has slain me.—No, not like that; for it is content with thy *life!*—I would ask thee more of myself," she went on, more composedly,

after a little pause, "but it needs not. If I can show thee thou wrongest me concerning Hilario, canst thou not believe I may be even *here* without stain? Well, I care not; one day, thou wilt know thou hast wronged me. But let the shame rest upon me now; for it needs I should think, not of myself, but of thee. Listen to me, Juan Lerma; for fallen or not, yet am I thine only friend among a thousand enemies. Give up thy service, thy hopes of fame and fortune in this land, and leave it. Leave Mexico, return to the islands. Thou hast marvellously escaped a death, subtly and cruelly designed; and now thou art destined to an end as vengeful, and perhaps even more inevitable. Yet there is one way of escape, and there is one moment to take advantage of it. Leave Mexico: Cortes is thy foe.—Leave Mexico."

"These are but wild words, Magdalena," said Juan, with a troubled voice. "I would do much to remove *thee* from a situation, the thought whereof is bitterer to me than my own misfortunes."

"Wouldst thou?" said Magdalena, eagerly. "Go then, and I go likewise; go then, and know that thy departure not only releases me from a situation of disgrace, but enables me to make clear a reputation which thou—yes, *thou*,—believest to be sullied and lost. I am not what I seem—Saints of heaven, that I should have to say it! But by the grave of my mother, I swear, Juan Lerma, thou doest me as deep a wrong as others. Leave this land, and thou shalt see that the fame of an angel is not purer than mine own scorned name,—no, by heaven, no freer from a deserved shame. Thou shakest thy head!—I could kill thee, Juan Lerma, I could kill thee!"—she went on, with a strange mingling of fierce resentment and beseeching grief; "I could kill thee, for I have not deserved this of thee!" Then, changing her tone, and clasping her hands submissively, she said, "But think not of me, or

rather continue to think me unworthy of aught but pity: think not, above all, that what I do is with any reference to myself. No, heaven is my witness, I claim of thee neither affection nor respect; I am content to be mistaken, to be despised. All this I can endure, and will, uncomplaining,—so that I can rescue thee from the danger in which thou art placed. Leave this land: Don Hernan deceives thee; he hates thee, and thirsts after thy blood. He has confessed it!"

"God be my help!" said Juan, despairingly; "my life is in his hands. If this be true—"

"If it be true!" repeated Magdalena: "It is known to all but thyself."

"It is *not* true!" exclaimed the young man, vehemently: "I have done him no wrong, and he is not the detestable being you would make him. If he be, I owe him a life—let him have it; it is in his hands."

"Leave Mexico," reiterated Magdalena. "If thou goest to Tochtepec, thou art lost. I have it in my power to aid,—nay, to secure thy escape. Say, therefore, thou wilt consent, say thou wilt leave Mexico!"

"It cannot be," said Juan, with a sad and sullen resolution: "I will await my fate in Mexico!"

"And wilt thou stand, like the fat ox, till the noose is cast upon thy neck? till thou art butchered?"

"My life is nothing—I live not for myself: the redemption of others depends upon my acts. I have a duty that speaks more urgently than fear. My lot is cast in Mexico; I cannot leave it."

As he spoke, with a firm voice, he bent his looks expressively on his companion. Her eyes flashed fire, and they shone from her pale face like living coals:

"Sayst thou this to me?" she exclaimed, her voice trembling with fury, "sayst thou this to

me?" Then advancing a step, and laying her hand upon his arm, she continued, her accents sinking almost into whispers, they were so subdued, or so feeble, "Lay not upon thy soul a sin greater than stains it already. Leave Mexico; resolve or die: leave Mexico, or perish!—Oh, thou art guiltier than thou thinkest! Thou hast cursed Hilario for my fall: curse thyself,—not Hilario, but thyself; for but for thee, but for thee, I had been happy! yes, happy, happy!"

To these words, Juan, though greatly compassionating the distress of the speaker, would have replied with remonstrance; but she gave him no opportunity. She continued to repeat over and over again, with a kind of hysterical pertinacity, the words 'Leave Mexico! leave Mexico!' so that Juan was not only prevented replying, but confounded. He was relieved from embarrassment by a sudden growl, coming from the bushes at his side. La Monjonaza started at the sound, and in the moment of silence that succeeded, both could distinguish the steps of a man rapidly approaching the pool. At the same instant, another growl was heard, and Befo, issuing from the leafy covert, took a stand by his master's side, as if to defend him from an enemy. The veil of Magdalena fell over her visage; she paused but to whisper, in tones of such energy that they thrilled him to the soul, 'Leave Mexico, or die!' and then instantly vanished among the boughs. It was too late for Juan to follow her: he had scarce time to lay his hand upon Befo's neck and moderate his ferocity, before his eyes were struck with the strange spectacle of a tall man, in the garb of a Dominican friar, his face pale as death, his hand holding a naked sword, who strode into the inclosure and upon that part of the path which was illuminated by the moonbeams. No sooner had he cast his eyes upon Juan than he exclaimed, "Die, wretch!" and made a pass at him with his weapon. Had the lunge been skilfully

made, it must have proved fatal; for though Juan still held the sheathless rapier he had brought from his chamber, he was so much surprised at the suddenness of the apparition, that his attempt to ward it could not have succeeded against a good fencer. A better protection was given by the faithful Befo, who, darting from Juan's hand, against the assailant's breast, attacked him with a shock so violent, that, in an instant, the señor Camarga (for it was he who played this insane part) lay rolling upon his back, his grizzled locks streaming in the pool.

"In the name of heaven, what dost thou mean, and who art thou, impostor and assassin!" cried Juan, pulling off the dog, and helping Camarga to his feet. "Thou art mad, I think!"

There was something in the man's countenance, as well as in the murderous attempt, to confirm the idea; for Camarga's agitation was singular and extreme, and he seemed unable to answer a word.

"Who art thou?" continued Juan angrily, impressed with the certainty that he had seen the face of the assailant before, yet without knowing when or where. "Confess thyself straight, or I will have thee to the Alguazil, and see the friar's frock scourged from thy base body!"

However eager and foreboding the young man's curiosity, it was doomed to be disappointed by a new interruption. While he yet spoke, he was alarmed by a sudden discharge of firearms, followed by shrieks and cries, at the bottom of the garden; and presently the whole solitude was transformed into a scene of tumult and uproar. Lights were seen flashing among the trees, and men were heard running confusedly to and fro, calling to one another.

The last word had hardly parted from his lips, before the boughs crashed on the opposite side of the pool, and a new actor was suddenly added to the scene.

CHAPTER XII.

As the bushes parted, a tall figure sprang into the path, and running round the pool, would instantly have been at the side of the two Castilians, who were yet unobserved, had it not been that Befo, his ferocity greatly whetted by his former encounter, darted forward as at first, with a sudden roar, with equal violence, and with similar success. As the stranger fell to the earth under an attack so impetuous and unexpected, he uttered an exclamation in which Juan recognized the language of Mexico. He ran forwards, guided by the growls of the beast and the stifled cries of the man, (for the spot on which the two contended was covered with impenetrable gloom,) and, by accident, caught the stranger's arm, and felt that it wielded a heavy macana, now uplifted against the animal. As his other hand was stretched forward, again to remove the victorious Befo from a fallen antagonist, it fell upon the naked breast of a barbarian.—In a moment more, he had torn the dog away, and dragged the savage into the moonshine, where he had left Camarga standing, but where Camarga stood no longer. He had fled away in the confusion, unobserved, and now almost forgotten.

Here Juan released the captive from his powerful grasp, for his rapier was in his hand, and the macana of the Mexican he had already cast into the pool; and thus standing, confiding as much in the aid of Befo as in the menacing attitude of his weapon, he began to address his prisoner.

"What art thou?" he demanded, in the tongue which, as he had boasted, was almost as familiar to him as the language of Spain: "What art thou? and what dost thou here?"

Instead of answering, the Mexican, gazing over his conqueror's shoulder, seemed to survey, with looks of admiration and alarm, some spectacle behind his back. Juan cast his eye in the direction thus indicated, and beheld the visage of Magdalena, recalled by the tumult, gleaming hard by. In an instant more, she had vanished, and he turned again to the captive, who, when the vision, to him so inexplicable, had faded away, now directed his attention to an object equally surprising and much more formidable in his estimation than even the redoubtable Juan. As he rolled his eyes, in mingled wonder, trepidation, and anger, on the huge Befo, who now stood regarding him, writhing his lips and showing his tusks, in the manner with which he was wont so expressively to intimate his readiness to obey any signal of attack, Juan had full leisure to observe that the Indian was a young man not above twenty-three or twenty-four years old, of good and manly stature, and limbs nobly proportioned. His only garments were a tunic and mantle of some dark-coloured stuff, but little ornamented, the former extending from the waist to the knees, the latter, knotted, as usual, about his throat, but so disordered and torn by the teeth of the dog, as to leave the upper part of his body nearly naked. His only defensive armour was a little round buckler of the skin of the *danta* or tapir, not exceeding fourteen inches in diameter, strapped to his left arm. The loss of the macana had left him without any offensive weapon. As he raised his head at the second salutation of his capturer, he flung back the long masses of black hair from his forehead, and displayed a visage, as well, at least, as it could be

seen in the moonlight, not unworthy his manly person.

"Olin, the tongue of the Teuctli, is a prisoner."

As he pronounced these words, in his own language, signifying that he was an orator of his high class, and that he confessed himself a captive, he touched the earth with his hand and kissed it, in token of submission. The tones of his voice caused Juan to start.

He dropped his sword-point, advanced nearer to him, and perused his features with intense curiosity. His gaze was returned with a look of equal surprise, which betrayed a touch of fear; for the Mexican at once exclaimed, withdrawing a step backward,

"The Great Eagle fell among the archers of Matlatzinco!"

"The king is not wise—Guatimozin is in the hands of Cortes!" said Juan, with deep earnestness.

"Olin is the orator—the king is wise," replied the Indian, hastily.

"It is in vain," said Juan. "Thou art Guatimozin! and a captive, too, ere a blow has been struck, in the camp of thy foeman! Is this an end for the king of Mexico?"

"Quauhtimozin can die: there are other kings for the free warriors of Tenochtitlan," replied the young monarch, boldly and haughtily, avowing his name,—which is here given in its original and genuine harshness, that the reader may be made acquainted with it; though it is not intended to substitute it for its more agreeable and familiar corruption: "Guatimozin is a prisoner," he continued, with a firm voice and lofty demeanour, "but the king of Mexico is free.—When did the Great Eagle become the foe of Guatimozin?"

"I am not thy foe," replied Juan, "but thy friend;

so far, at least, as it becomes a Christian and Spaniard to be. I lament to see thee in this place—I am not thy foe."

"Raise then thy weapon," said the prince, dropping his haughty manner and ceremonious style, and speaking, as he laid his hand on Juan's arm, with fierce emotion; "strike me through the neck, and cast my body into the pool.—It is not fit that Guatimozin should wear the bonds of Montezuma!"

It must not be supposed that this conversation took place in quiet. During the whole time, on the contrary, the garden continued to resound with the voices of men running from copse to copse, from alley to alley, sometimes drawing nigh, and, at other moments, appearing to be removed to the furthest limits of the grounds. At the moment when the Mexican made his abrupt and insane appeal to the friendship of his capturer, a party of Spaniards rushed by at so short a distance and with so much clamour, that he had good reason to conceive himself almost already in their hands. They passed by, however, and with them fled a portion of Juan's embarrassment. As soon as he perceived they were beyond hearing, he replied:

"This were to be thy foe indeed. But, oh, unwise and imprudent! what tempted thee to this mad confidence?"

"The craft of Malintzin," replied the Mexican, making use of a name which his people had long since attached to Cortes,—"the craft of Malintzin, who ensnares his foe like the wild Ottomi, hidden among the reeds;—he scatters the sweet berry on the lake, and steals upon the feeding sheldrake; so steals Malintzin. He sends words of peace to the foe afar; when the foe is asleep, Malintzin is a tiger!"

"And thou hast been deceived by these perfidious and unworthy arts?" said Juan, the innuen-

does of Villafana and the monitions of Magdalena, recurring to his mind with painful force.

"Deceived and trapped!" replied the infidel, with fierce indignation; "cajoled by lies, circumvented by treachery, seduced and betrayed!—Is the Great Eagle like Malintzin?" As he spoke thus, sinking his voice, which was indeed all the time cautiously subdued, he again laid his hand on the young Christian's arm, and continued,

"Art thou such a man, and dost thou desire the blood of thy friend? What shall be said to the little *Centzontli*, the mocking-bird? The little Centzontli sang the song to Guatimozin, 'Let not the Great Eagle die in the trap!' What sings she now? Does the Great Eagle listen to the little Centzontli?"

"He does," replied Juan, on whom these metaphors, however mysterious they may seem to the reader, produced a strong impression. "Thou art *my* prisoner, not Don Hernan's; and it rests with me to liberate or to bind, not with him. Answer me, therefore, truly; for if thou hast been trained by treachery into this present danger, coming with thoughts of peace and composition, and not with an army, to surprise and slay, thou shalt be made free, even though the act cost me my life."

"I come in peace: does the leader of an army walk bareheaded and naked? My canoe lies hid among the reeds: my warriors are asleep on the island. The Christian sent for a lord of the city, to give his hand to the angry men of Tlascala. Guatimozin is not the king, but he brought them the hand of the king.—It was the lie of Malintzin! I am betrayed!"

"If I suffer thee to depart," said Juan, anxiously, "canst thou make good thy escape?"

"Is not Guatimozin a soldier?" replied the Mexican, with a gleaming eye. "Give me a sword, and hold fast the Christian tiger."—

"Hark!—peace!" whispered Juan, drawing the

prisoner suddenly among the boughs: "we are beset. Hist, Befo, hist!"

With a degree of uneasiness, which approached almost to fear, when he found that Befo, instead of following him into his concealment, remained out upon the illuminated path, where he attracted notice, while expressing fidelity, by setting up an audible growl, Juan heard a man crash through the boughs on the further side of the pool, all the while calling loudly and cheerily to his companions.

"Hither, knaves!" he cried; "the fox is in cover! Hither! quick, hither!"

It was the voice of Guzman. He had caught the growl of the dog, and responded with a shout of triumph, as he ran forward, closely followed by three or four soldiers armed with spears;

"The bloodhound for ever! he has the fox in his mouth, I know by his growling!—Hah, Befo, fool?" he continued, when he had reached the animal; "art thou baying the moon then?—Pass on, pass on: no Indian passes scotfree by Befo at midnight —Pass on, pass on!"

In a moment more, the nook was left to its solitude, and Juan reappeared, with the prince. The sight and voice of Guzman had stirred up his wrath, and he took his measures with a quicker and sterner resolution.

"He protects and loves this man, who is a villain," he muttered through his teeth. "There is nothing else left. Follow me prince: if we are seen, thy fate is not more certain than mine—Follow me in silence."

The garden was still alive with men; they could be seen running about in different directions, though the greatest numbers seemed to be collected at the bottom, near to the lake side. It was not from this circumstance, however, so much as from his ignorance of every portion of the grounds except that by which he had approached the pool, that he bent

his steps towards the wing of the palace he had so lately left. He advanced cautiously, taking advantage of every clump of trees, which could afford concealment from any passing group; and once or twice, to allay suspicion, adding his voice to those of the others, as if engaged in the same duty; in which latter stratagem he was ably seconded by the unconscious Befo, whose bark, excited by the shout of his master, was a sufficient warrant to all within hearing, of the friendly character of the party.

Thus assisted by the undesigned help of the dog, and by the imitative caution of the Mexican, he succeeded in reaching the wing of the palace, and the passage that led to his chamber, which was illumined by torches of resinous wood. A door, leading to the open square that surrounded the palace, opened opposite to that by which he entered from the garden. It was his intention, if possible, to pass through this into the city, not doubting that it would be easy to conceal the fugitive among the thousand barbarians of his own colour and appearance, who yet thronged the streets; after which, it would not perhaps be impracticable to find some way to discharge him from the gates. But, unfortunately, as he pressed towards it, he found the outer door beset by armed men, thronging tumultuously in, as if to join their comrades in the garden. There was nothing left him, then, but to seek his apartment, as hastily as he could, and there conceal the Mexican until the heat of pursuit was over. A motion of his hand apprized the fugitive of his change of purpose, and Guatimozin, darting quickly forward, was already stealing into the chamber, when a harsh voice suddenly bawled behind,

"Mutiny and miracles! here runs the rat with the viper! Treason, treason!"

It was the hunchback Najara, whose quick eye detected the vanishing hair, and who now ran forward in pursuit, followed by a confused throng

of soldiers, from among whom suddenly darted the cavalier Don Francisco de Guzman.

Juan had reached the door. The cry of Najara assured him that he was discovered; and conscious that his act of generosity was, or of right ought to be, considered little better than sheer treason, the varied passions of hope, grief, indignation and wrath, which had been, the whole evening, chasing one another through his bosom, gave place at once to the single feeling of despair. He felt that he was now lost.

At this very moment, while his brain was confused, and his heart dying within him, a laugh sounded in his ear, and he heard, even above the clamorous shouts of the soldiers, the voice of Guzman, exclaiming,

"What think'st thou *now*, señor? Art thou conquered?—Stand! I arrest thee."

He turned; the cavalier was within reach of his arm, and the malignant sneer was yet writhing over his visage. The words of scorn, the look of exultation, were intolerable; the rapier was already naked in his hand, and almost before he was himself aware of the act, it was aimed, with a deadly lunge, at Don Francisco's throat.

"The deed has slain thee!" cried Guzman, leaping backwards, so as to avoid a thrust too fiercely sudden to be parried, and then again rushing forward, before he could be supported by the soldiers, who had also recoiled at this show of resistance; "the act has slain thee; and so take the fate thou art seeking!"

As he spoke, he advanced his weapon, which was before unsheathed, against an adversary, whom the recollection of a thousand wrongs had inflamed to frenzy, but who could scarcely be supposed to have retained, during a year of servitude and suffering, the skill in arms, which once made him an equal antagonist. Nevertheless, Guzman's pass was turn-

ed aside, and returned with such interest, that, had the field been fair and unincumbered, it is questionable how long he might have lived to repeat it. As it was, the combat was cut short by the interposition of the bloodhound, who, whining, at first, as if unwilling to attack a cavalier so long and so well known as Don Francisco, and yet unable to remain neuter, at last added his fierce yell to the clash of the weapons, and decided the battle by springing against Guzman's breast. It was perhaps fortunate for the cavalier that he did. He had a breast-plate on; and, for this reason, Juan aimed the few blows that were made, full at his throat, with the fatal determination of one, who, hopeless of life himself, had sworn a vow to his soul that his enemy should die. It was but the third thrust he had made, (they had scarce occupied so many seconds,) and it was directed with such irresistible skill and violence, that the point of the weapon was already gliding through Guzman's beard and razing his skin, when the weight of Befo's assault, for the third time successful, hurled him from his feet, and thus saved his life, at the expense of a severe gash made through his right cheek and ear.

The whole of this encounter, from the first attack to the fall of Guzman, had not occupied the space of twenty seconds; and Don Francisco was at the mercy of his rival, before even the rapid Najara could advance a spear to protect him. It was not improbable that Juan would have taken a deadly advantage of the mishap, for, as he had declared, in a cooler moment, he hated Don Francisco, and his blood was now boiling. If such, however, was his purpose, he was prevented putting it into execution by another one of those opposing accidents, which seemed this night, to pursue him with such unrelenting rigour.

Before he could advance a single step, a cavalier, bareheaded and unarmed, save that he flourished

a naked sword, sprang from the throng of soldiers, followed by the señor Camarga, now without his masking habit, the latter of whom cried with fierce emphasis, all the time, "Kill him! cut him down! kill him!" until the soldiers caught up the cry, and the whole passage echoed with their furious exclamations. These served but the end of still further exasperating the choler of the young man, thus beset as it seemed by the tyranny of numbers; and seeing the bareheaded cavalier advancing against him, and already betwixt him and his fallen rival, he turned upon him with fresh fury.

"Hah!" cried the new antagonist, when Juan's weapon clashed against his own; "traitor! dost thou provoke thy fate?"

The words were not out of his lips, before Juan perceived that he had raised his rapier against the bosom of Cortes. He beheld, in the countenance which he had once loved, the scowl of an evil spirit, and the fire flashing from the general's eyes, was no longer to be mistaken for aught but the revelation of the deadliest hatred. He flung down his sword, resisting no longer, and the next instant would have been run through the body, but that Befo, fearing to attack, and yet unable to resist the impulse of fidelity, sprang up, with a howl, and seized the weapon with his teeth. Before Cortes could disengage it, and again turn it upon the unfortunate youth, the Mexican fugitive glided from the apartment, threw himself before the latter, and taking the point of the weapon in his hand, placed it against his own naked breast. Then bowing his head submissively, he stood in tranquillity, expecting his death.

At his sudden appearance, the soldiers set up a shout, and Cortes was sufficiently diverted from his bloody purpose, to smooth his frowning brow into an air of official sternness.

"Olin is the prisoner of the Teuctli," murmured

the captive, in words scarce understood by any one present, except Juan.

"Where bide mine Alguazils?" demanded the Captain-General, without condescending to notice the Mexican any further than merely by removing the rapier from his grasp. "Hah, Guzman! thou art hurt, art thou? By heaven,"—But he checked the oath, when he observed that Guzman, already on his feet, notwithstanding the frightful appearance that was given him by the blood running down his cheek and neck, and drippling slowly from his beard, replied to the exclamation with a smile of peculiar coolness: "Get thee to a surgeon. Where bide the Alguazils? Is there no officer to rid me of a traitor?"

"Señor General," said Juan, sullenly, "I am no traitor—"

He was interrupted by the appearance of two men, carrying batons, who bustled from among the crowd, and laid hands upon him. The readiest and the most officious was Villafana, who concealed a vast deal of agitation under an air of extravagant zeal.

"Ha, Villafana! art thou found at last?" cried Don Hernan, with apparent anger. "Hast thou no better care of thy ward on the water-side, but that spies may come stealing into my garden?"

"May it please your excellency," said Villafana, recovering his wit, "I was neither gambling nor asleep; but—'Slid, this is a pretty piece of villany! Oho, señor mutineer, this is hanging-work?—Speak not a word, as you love life."—This was spoken apart into Juan's ear.—"What is your excellency's will, touching the prisoner?"

"Have him to prison, and see that he escape not."

These words were pronounced with a coolness and gravity that amazed all who had witnessed the rage, which, but a moment before, had shaken

the frame of the Captain-General. "And you, ye idle fellows," he continued, addressing the soldiers, "get you to your quarters, to your watch, or to your beds. Begone.—Why loiter ye, Villafana? Conduct away the prisoner."

Juan raised his eyes once more to the general, and seemed as if he would have spoken; but, confused and bewildered by the extraordinary termination of the drama of the day, chilled by frowns, oppressed by a consciousness of having provoked his fate, his head sunk in a deep dejection on his breast, and he suffered himself to be led silently away.

A gleam of light, such as flares up at night from a decaying brand, just lost in ashes, sprang up in the leader's eyes, as they followed the steps of the unhappy youth, until, passing from that door, which he had so vainly sought to gain with the Mexican, he vanished from sight. Its lustre was hidden from all but the captive, who, maintaining throughout the whole scene, the self-possession, characteristic of all the American race, from the pygmies of the Frozen Sea to the giants of Patagonia, did not lose the opportunity thus afforded, of diving into the thoughts of the Invader.

As soon as Juan Lerma had departed, with the mass of the soldiers, Cortes turned to the Mexican, and with a mild countenance, and a gentle voice, which were designed to convey the proper interpretation of his Castilian speech, said,

"Let my young friend, the Tlatoani, be at peace, and fear not; no harm is designed him."

Then, making a signal to those who remained, to lead the captive after him, he passed into the garden, and thence, by a private entrance, into the hall of audience.

CHAPTER XIII.

It has been already mentioned, that the person of Guatimozin was familiar to few, or none, of the Spaniards. Intensely and consistently hostile to the invaders, from the first moment of their appearance in the Valley, he had ever kept aloof from them, and was one of the few princes of Mexico, whom neither force nor stratagem could reduce to thraldom. His youth, indeed,—his want of authority, (for though of the loftiest birth and the highest military fame, he enjoyed, at first, no independent command or government,) and, hence, his apparent insignificance,—had made the possession of his person of no great consequence; and it was not until he was seen leading the incensed citizens up against the guns of the garrison, and directing the assault which terminated in the life of Montezuma, that he began to be considered an enemy worthy to be feared. Even then, however, he was but one among the warlike followers of Cuitlahuatzin,—the successor of Montezuma,—and on the famous battle-field of Otumba, he fought only as a second in command. But from that time until the present moment, his name was constantly before the Spaniards, first as the king of Iztapalapan, then as a leader among those royal warriors, sent forth by Cuitlahuatzin, now to annoy the Spaniards, even among their fortresses on the borders of Tlascala, and now to chastise those rebellious tribes which were daily acknowledging allegiance to the Spaniard, and preparing to march with him against Tenochtitlan.

The death of Cuitlahuatzin had suddenly exposed him to view as the probable successor to the imperial dignity; and the act of the royal electors, (the kings of Mexico were chosen by the crowned vassals of the empire,) in bestowing the mantle and sceptre, had left nothing to be done to confirm his authority, save a solemn inauguration on the day of an august religious and national festival.

He had thus assumed the attitude which Montezuma had once preserved in the eyes of the Conquistador; and it was as much the policy of Cortes to attempt the acts of delusion with him, as it had been with his predecessor. The craftier and haughtier Guatimozin had, however, rejected his overtures with disdain; and, justly appreciating the character and designs of his enemy, he prepared for war as the only alternative of slavery. He had already concentrated in his city, and in the neighbouring towns, the whole martial force of the tribes yet valiant and faithful; he had laboured, with an address that was not always ineffectual, to regain the false and rebellious; and, rising above the weakness of national resentments, he had even striven to unite his hereditary foes in a league of resistance against the stranger, who, whether frowning or smiling, whether courting with friendship, or subduing with arms, was yet, and equally, the enemy of all.

Enough has been said to explain the purpose for which he so rashly threw himself into the power of the Conqueror. The certain assurance of disaffection in the invader's camp, not only among the allies, but among the Spaniards themselves, was enough to fire his heart with the desire of employing against Don Hernan a weapon which his foe had used so fatally against him; and, besides, the opportunity of detaching the Tlascalans from the Spanish interest, was too captivating to be rejected. These were advantages to be investigated and pro-

moted by himself, rather than by agents; and, confiding in his enemies' ignorance of his person, in his cunning, and in the interested fidelity of traitors, who had already grasped at bribes, and were eager to be better acquainted with his bounty, he did not scruple to direct his midnight skiff among the reeds on the lakeside, and, in the guise of a mere noble, trust himself alone in their power.

If the reader desire to know what could induce any of the followers of Cortes to treat thus perfidiously with the infidel enemy whose wealth was promised as the certain guerdon of war, he may be answered almost in a word. The *dangers* of the war were manifold and obvious to all, and the horrors of the five days' battles in the streets of Mexico, and more than all, the calamities of the midnight retreat, had given such a foretaste of what might be expected from a prosecution of the campaign, that full half the army looked forward to it with equal terror and repugnance. A majority of those who survived the Noche Triste, were followers of the unfortunate Narvaez, and some of them yet friendly to the deceived Velasquez. They remained with Cortes upon compulsion, and they hated him not only for their inability to return to their peaceable farms among the islands, for past calamities, and coming misfortunes, but for the superior favours showered so liberally, and indeed so naturally, upon those who had been his original, and were yet his faithful, adherents. In a word, they regarded the reduction of the Mexican empire as hopeless, and their own fate, if they remained, as already written in characters of blood. The bolder scowled and complained, the feeble and the crafty dissembled, but evil thoughts and fierce resolutions were common to all. They burned to be released from what was to them intolerable bondage, and the means were not to be questioned, even though they might involve connivance and collusion with

the foe. But such collusion was by no means known, nor even suspected, by any save the few desperadoes who had risen to the bad eminence of leaders. Even Villafana was ignorant of the true character of his guest, and esteemed him to be only what he represented himself,—Olin, the young noble, an orator, counsellor, and confidential agent of Guatimozin. It was not possible for the Captain-General to regard him in any other light.

Whatever may have been the young monarch's thoughts, his secret misgivings and self-reproaches, as he strode, closely environed by cavaliers, into the great hall, now dimly lighted by tapers of vegetable wax and torches of fragrant wood, they were exposed by no agitation of countenance or hesitation of step; and when Cortes ascended the platform to his seat, and turned his penetrating eye upon him, he preserved an air of the most fearless tranquillity. For the space of several moments, the general regarded him in silence; then commanding all to leave the apartment, excepting Sandoval, Alvarado, and another cavalier who officiated as interpreter, he said to Alvarado, with a mild voice, very strangely contrasted with the rudeness of his words,

"Look into the face of this heathen dog, and tell me if thou knowest him."

Alvarado had been, as the historical reader is aware, left in Mexico, the jailer of Montezuma and the warden of the city, during the absence of Cortes, when he marched against Narvaez. It was supposed, therefore, that Don Pedro was better acquainted with the persons of the principal nobles than any other cavalier. He examined the captive curiously, and at last said, shaking his head,

"Methinks his visage is not unknown; and yet I wot not to whom it belongs. The knave is but a boy. If he be a noble, never trust me but he

is one of Guatimozin's making, and therefore not yet of consequence."

At the sound of his own name, the only word distinguishable by the prisoner, Alvarado observed that his brow contracted a little. But this awoke no suspicion.

"Demand of him," said Cortes to the interpreter, "his name, and the purpose of his coming to Tezcuco?"

When this was explained to the Mexican, his brow contracted still further, but rather with inquisitiveness than embarrassment:

"I am Olin-pilli," (that is, Olin the Lord, or Lord Olin,) he replied, "the speaker of wise things to the king, and the mouth of nobles."

He then paused, as if to examine with what degree of belief he was listened to; and being satisfied, from the countenance of Don Hernan, that he was really unknown, he continued, with a more confident tone,

"And I come to the Lord of the East, the Son of the God of Air, to hear the words of his children. Did not the Teuctli send for me?"

"Not I," replied the Captain-General, sternly. "Speaker of wise things, I look into thy heart, and I see thy falsehood. Thou art a spy,—a *quimichin*,—sent by Guatimozin the king, to speak dark things to the men of Tlascala."

The captive, though somewhat disconcerted, maintained a fearless countenance:

"The Teuctli is the son of the gods, and knows everything," he answered.

"And charged also," continued Cortes, "to whisper in the ears of fools, who send good words to the king, that the king may enrich them with gold. Is not this true, Sir Quimichin?"

"Is not Malintzin the Son of Quetzalcoatl, the White God with a beard, who proclaimed from the

Hill of Shouting* and from the Speaking Mountain,† the coming of his offspring? and shall Olin know more things than Malintzin? Guatimozin thinks, that the Spaniard should not slay his people."

"Wherefore, then, sent he not thee to *me?*" demanded the Captain-General. "I will listen to his words. It was not wise to send his ambassador to the soldier, when the general sat by, in his tent.—Hearken to me, friend Olin," he continued, with gravity: "Hadst thou brought his discourse to me, thou hadst then been listened to with honour, and dismissed in peace. Art thou a soldier?"

"Olin is a counsellor," replied the Mexican, proudly; "but he has bled in battle."

"And is not Guatimozin a warrior?"

"He is the king of the House of Darts, and he has struck his foe."

"When the lurking Ottomi is found skulking in his camp; when the angry Tlascalan creeps up to his fort; what does Guatimozin then with the prisoner? what says he to the Ottomi? what wills he with the Tlascalan?"

"He binds them to the stone, and they die like the dogs of the altar!" replied the barbarian, with a fierce utterance.

"Thou hast spoken thine own doom," replied Cortes, sternly; "only that, instead of perishing according to thy damnable customs, a sacrifice to spirits accurst, thou shalt have such death as we give to the dogs of Castile. Thou hast crept into my camp, like the spying Ottomi; thou comest with sword and shield, like the bravo of Tlascala; and thou hast addressed thyself to traitors and conspirators, to make them mine enemies. Why then should I not hang thee upon a tree? or why," he continued, with an elevated voice, descending from

* *Tzatzitepec*, a mountain near Tula.
† *Catcitepetl*, a volcano.

the platform, and, with a single motion, unsheathing his rapier and aiming it against the captive's breast—"why should I not kill thee, thou cur! upon the spot?"

"I am a Mexican!" replied the young king, rather opposing his body to the expected thrust than seeking to avoid it; "I look upon my death, and I spit upon thee, Spaniard!"

"Hah!" cried Cortes, whose desire was to intimidate, not to slay, and who could not but admire the fearless air of defiance, so boldly assumed by the captive, "thou hast either a true heart, or a penetrating eye.—Fear not; thy life is in my hands, but I design thee no wrong: death were but a just punishment for thy villany, yet I mean not to enforce it. What wilt thou do, if I discharge thee unharmed?"

"I will know," said the barbarian, with a look of surprise, as soon as this was interpreted, "that Malintzin is not always hungry for blood; or rather, I will ask of my thoughts, what mischief to Mexico is meditated in the act of mercy."

"A shrewd knave, i'faith, a shrewd knave!" cried Cortes, admiringly: "by my conscience, this fellow hath somewhat the wit of a Christian politician.—Infidel," he continued, "hearken to what I say. I desire to speak the words of peace with my young brother Guatimozin. Wherefore will he not listen to me?"

"Because his ears are open to the groans of his children," replied the Mexican, promptly. "When Malintzin smiles, the brand hisses on the flesh of the prisoner; when he talks of peace, the great war-horse paws the breast of the dead. Let this thing be not, let his insurgent subjects be sent to their villages, and Guatimozin will listen to the Teuctli."

"He has slain my ambassadors," said Cortes.

"Shall the slave say to his master, 'I am the

bondman of another,' and laugh in the king's face? Let Malintzin send a Christian to Guatimozin. I will row him in my skiff, and he shall return unharmed."

"What thinkest thou of *this?* I will send him such an envoy, and thou shalt remain a hostage in his place. What will be said to him by the king of Mexico?"

"This," replied the captive, without a moment's hesitation: "The Christian is in Mexico, and Olinpilli in the prisons of Malintzin: let the Christian therefore die."

"Ay, by my conscience, he speaks well," said Cortes. "But were friendship offered, and twenty thousand hostages left behind, I should like to know what Spaniard of us all would perform the pilgrimage? There is but *one*.—But that is naught. By heaven and St. John, we will think of other things! we will think of other things!—Is it not death by the decree?"

"Señor!" cried Alvarado in surprise. Cortes started.—In the moment of entranced thought, he had stridden away from the group to some distance, and, he now perceived, they were gazing at him with wonder.

"We will entrust this thing to him, then, as I said," he cried, hurriedly, "and he shall return with the misbeliever's answer. We have no other choice. What think ye of it, my masters?"

"Of *what?*" said Alvarado, bluntly: "You have said nothing. By'r lady, and with reverence to your excellency, you are dreaming!"

"Pho!" cried the Captain-General, "did I not speak it? Our thoughts sometimes sound in our ears, like words. This is the philosophy of the marvel: Hast thou never, when thine eyes were shut, yet beheld in them the objects of which thou wert thinking? If thou couldst think music, never believe me but thou wouldst also hear it.—This, then, is the thought which I forgot to utter: I will

give this dog his freedom, and, for lack of a better, make him my envoy to Guatimozin. If he return, it will be well; if not, we are left where we were; and we can hang him hereafter."

"Let us first know," said Sandoval, coolly, "by what sort of charm he prevailed on this mad young man, Juan Lerma, to peril limb and life for him, and, what is more, honour too."

"Ay, by my conscience!" said Cortes, hurriedly; "this thing I had forgotten.—He shall die the death! Connive with a spy? conceal him from the pursuers? draw sword upon a cavalier? strike at an officer's life? Were he mine own brother, he should abide his doom. Who will say I wrong him *now?*—Hah! what says the dog? How came this thing to pass?"

While Cortes was yet pursuing the subject nearest to his heart, half soliloquizing, the question was asked and answered; and the reply, to Guatimozin's great relief, was received with unexpected belief.

"He was caught by the blood-hound; (An excellent dog, that Befo!)" said Alvarado; "and making his moan to Lerma, (whom heaven take to its rest! for I know not how he can be so brave, and yet an ass,) the young fool fell to his old tricks. When did an Indian ever ask him for pity in vain?—This is his story; it is too natural to be false; yet, Indians are great liars.—But you said something of making this cur your envoy?"

"Ay," replied Cortes: "What sayst thou, Olin, speaker of wise things! wilt thou bear my thoughts to thy master Guatimozin?"

"The lord of Tenochtitlan shall hear them," said Guatimozin, his eyes gleaming with expectation.

"And thou wilt return to me with his answer? Swear this upon the cross of my sword; ay, and swear it by thy diabolical gods also."

"Guatimozin shall send back to Malintzin a no-

ble Mexican; or, otherwise, Olin will return. How shall the Mexican noble know that the Teuctli will not take his life?"

"Does that deter you?" said Cortes: "I swear by the cross which I worship, that, come thou or another, or come Guatimozin himself, provided he come to me in peace, and with the king's message, he shall depart in safety, with good-will and with favours such as this."

As he spoke, he took from his own neck, and flung round the Mexican's, a chain of beads, which were neither of diamond, sapphire, nor ruby, but sufficiently resembling each and all, to gratify the vanity of a barbarian. The young king smiled—but it was at the thought of freedom.

"Thou shalt have more such, and richer," said Cortes, misconceiving his joy. "Why is not Olin the friend of Malintzin?"

"Malintzin is a great prince," said the prisoner, softly.

"Is Olin content to be the slave of Guatimozin?" pursued the Captain-General, insidiously. "Will Olin do Malintzin's bidding, and be the king of Chalco?"

"Shall Olin slay Guatimozin?" cried the prisoner, with a gleam of subtle intelligence, and so abruptly, that Cortes was startled.

"Hah! by my conscience!" he cried, "I understand thee: thou art even more knave than I thought thee.—Kill the king indeed? By no means; harm not a hair of his head: we will have no assassination. It is better this young boy should be king than another.—This is a very proper knave. Gentlemen, by your leave, I will bid you good-night: I will see the dog to the water-side. Antonio, do thou walk with us, and explain between us.—A very excellent shrewd villain."

So saying, the Captain-General turned to the door by which he had lately entered, and taking

the prisoner's arm, in the most familiar and friendly manner, he stepped forthwith into the garden. The Mexican's flesh crept, when it came in contact with that of the Spaniard; but this, the Spaniard doubted not, was the tribute of awe to his greatness. His voice became yet blander, as, walking onwards towards the lake, he poured into Guatimozin's ear his wishes and instructions.

As they passed by the little pool and its dark enclosure of schinus-trees, the infidel looked towards it anxiously and lingeringly, as if hoping to behold once more the pale and beautiful countenance which had shone upon it.—It lay in deep silence and solitude.

A few moments after, the Mexican had passed through the broken wall, and by the centries who guarded it, receiving the last instructions of the invader. The next instant he was alone, stalking towards a little green point, where a fringe of reeds and water-lilies shook in the diminutive surges. He cast his eye backward to the two cavaliers, and beheld them pass into the garden. Then, taking the chain of beads from his neck, and rending it with foot and hand, he cast the broken jewels into the lake. A moment after, his light skiff shot from its concealment, and the sound of his paddle startled the droning wild-fowl from their slumbers.

CHAPTER XIV.

When Ovid describes the memorable encounter between Perseus and the geat sea-monster of Ethiopia, he is at the pains to narrate with what fury the creature *snapped at the shadow* of the flying hero,—a circumstance of trivial importance in itself, though both striking and characteristic; nay, he even relates how the warrior, at the first sight of the fair Andromeda, chained to the rock, and waiting to be devoured, was so moved with admiration that he forgot, for an instant, to flap his wings,—another detail of more fitness than moment. Thus stooping to the consideration of trifles, the poet does not scruple entirely to pass by matters of the most palpable consequence. He disdains, for example, to tell us even whether the monster *died* or not in the encounter, leaving that to be inferred; and, in like manner, he scorns even to answer the question that might have been anticipated, namely, *why* Perseus, like a sensible soldier, did not whip out his gorgon's head, instead of his 'crooked sword,' and, by turning the beast into stone, save himself the trouble of despatching him with his steel.

The writer of historical works, like the present, must claim the privilege of the poet, and be allowed, while expatiating on events of interest so inferior that they have been almost rejected by his predecessors, to leave many others of manifest importance to be supplied, not indeed by the imagination, but by the learning of the reader. Our only desire

is to follow the adventures of two individuals, so obscure and so unfortunate, that the worthy and somewhat over-conscientious Bernal Diaz del Castillo has despatched the whole history of the first in the few vague fragments which we have prefixed to the story; while he has scrupulously abstained from saying a single word of the second.

If the reader will turn to the pages of this conscientious historian, of De Solis, or of Clavigero, he will be made acquainted with the stirring exploits of the eight or nine weeks that followed after the arrest of Juan Lerma. In this time, the Captain-General, at the head of all the Spaniards, save those who were left in garrison at Tezcuco, and the few sailors and shipwrights who remained in the dock-yards, to preside over Indian artificers, compelled to work at the brigantines—in this time, we say, and at the head of this force, assisted by many thousand Tlascalans, Cortes commenced and completed the circuit of the whole valley, storming and burning cities and towns without number, resisted valiantly in all that were not disaffected, and sometimes, as at the city of Tacuba, repulsed with great loss and no little dishonour. The whole campaign abounds with singular and exciting incidents, of which, however, it does not suit our purpose to mention any but one, and that almost in a word. At the city of Xochimilco, or the Garden of Flowers, (for this is the signification of the word,) where the resistance was sanguinary and noble, though, in the end, ineffectual, Cortes was wounded, surrounded, struck down from his horse, which was killed, and he himself, for a moment, a prisoner; and he owed his life and liberty only to the extraordinary valour of Gaspar Olea of the Red Beard, who, with the help of a few resolute Tlascalans, succeeded in bringing him off. The aid thus rendered by Olea

was sometimes even charged to be mutinous. In this last imputation, however, as far as it implied any treasonable thoughts or practices, the rude Gaspar was wronged. His dissatisfaction was caused solely by the fall and anticipated fate of his young captain. The heinousness of Juan's crime—the drawing his sword upon an officer in the execution of his duty, as Guzman had been, and, worse yet, the aiming of that at the breast of the General—had left it, apparently, impossible to be forgiven. It was universally expected that Juan would expiate the crime with his life; and the only wonder was, that he had not been immediately tried, condemned, and executed. His destiny was therefore anticipated with more curiosity than doubt, and apparently with less pity than either. Gaspar did not attempt to deny Juan's guilt; but when he remembered the sufferings and perils they had shared together, his heart burned with fury, to think how soon the brave and well-beloved youth should die the death of a caitiff. His dissatisfaction expended itself in anger towards the Captain-General; and hence the surprise of his comrades at his act of daring and generosity. But Gaspar had his own ends in view, when he saved the life of Cortes.

It was now many weeks since his arrest, and Juan yet lay in imprisonment, ignorant not so much of his fate, as of the causes which delayed it. On the fourth day of his captivity, he was apprized, by the sound of trumpets and artillery, the cries of men, and the neighing of horses, and, in general, by the prodigious bustle which accompanies the setting-out of an army from a populous city, that some enterprise was meditated and begun; but of its character he was kept wholly ignorant. The custody of his person seemed to be committed to Villafana and the hunchback Najara, conjointly; but it was observable, that, although Najara frequently entered

his den alone, Villafana never made his appearance without being accompanied by the Corcobado.

From Najara he gained not a word of intelligence, the hunchback ever replying to his questions with scowls, or with pithy sarcasms in allusion to the crimes of treason and mutiny. From Villafana, attended, and, as it seemed to Juan, watched, by the jealous Najara, he obtained nothing but unmeaning nods of the head, and sometimes looks, too significant to be doubted, and yet too oraculous to be understood.

After the first fortnight, Villafana failed to visit him altogether, and he saw not the face of a human being, except once each morning, when Najara was accustomed to make his appearance, followed by an Indian slave, bearing food and a jar of water. With this latter being, a decrepit old man, on whose naked shoulder was imprinted the horrible letter G, (for *guerra*, indicating that he was a prisoner of war,—in other words, a branded bondman,) he endeavoured to speak, using all the native dialects with which he was acquainted; but, though Najara made no offer to prevent such conversation, the barbarian replied only by touching his ear and then his breast, signifying thereby that, though he heard the words, he did not understand them. Though Najara permitted these little attempts at speech, with contemptuous indifference, Juan perceived that he ever kept his eyes fastened upon the Indian, as if to prevent any effort at communication of another sort. Thus, if any benevolent friend had endeavoured to convey a message by letter or otherwise, it was apparent that Najara took the best steps to insure its miscarriage.

Foiled thus in every attempt to exchange thoughts with a fellow-being, and reduced to commune only with his own, the unhappy prisoner ceased, at last, to make any effort; and, yielding gradually to a despair that was not the less consuming for being

entirely without complaint, he began, in the end, to be indifferent even to the coming and presence of his jailer, neither rising to meet him, nor even lifting his eyes from the floor, on which they were fixed with a lethargic dejection.

He became also indifferent to his food; and once, when Najara entered, he perceived that the water-jar, the dish of *tortillas*, or maize-cakes, the savoury wild-fowl, and the fragrant *chocolatl*, (for in regard to food, he was liberally supplied,) stood upon the little table, where they had been placed the day before, untasted and even untouched. He cast his eyes upon the youth, and, for the first time, began to feel a sentiment of pity for his condition. Indeed, the noble figure of the young man was beginning to waste away; his cheeks were hollow, his neglected beard was springing uncouthly over his lips, and his sunken eyes drooped upon the earth, as if never more to gleam with the light of hope and pleasure. The hunchback hesitated for a moment, and then growled out a few words,—the first he had uttered for a week. But these, though commiseration prompted them, he succeeded in making expressive only of scorn or anger.

"Hark you, señor Juan Lerma," he said, "do you mean to starve?"

At the sound of his voice, so unusual and so unexpected, the young man raised his eyes, but with a vague, wo-begone look, and answered nothing.

"I say, señor," continued Najara, somewhat more blandly, "is it your will to die by starvation rather than in any other way?"

"Ah, Najara! is it thou?" said Juan, rising feebly, or indolently, to his feet. "Heaven give you a good-morrow."

"Pshaw!" returned the jailer, gruffly; "pray me no such prayers: keep them for yourself. I ask you, if it be your purpose to starve yourself to death, out of a mere unsoldierly fear of hanging?"

"Thou hast not said so much to me, I know not when," replied the youth, not with any intention of shuffling off the question, but speaking of what was uppermost in his mind. His voice was very mild, and Najara, by no means without his weaker points, felt it as a reproach.

"I care not," he replied, "if I answer you any two or three questions, that may be nearest to your heart. But first give me to know, wherefore you have eaten nothing? Are you sick?"

"Surely I am, at heart; but, bodily, I am well."

"And you are not resolute to die of hunger, before the judgment-day?—Pho, if you have that spirit, perhaps it were better. But it is a death of great torment.—Yet, why should one be afraid of the shame? 'Tis nothing, when we are dead."

"Is this thy fear then?" said Juan, patiently. "It is not permitted us to commit suicide in any form. I will eat, to satisfy thee; but food is bitter in prison."

"What a pity," muttered Najara, as Juan ate a morsel of food, "that heaven should give thee such a goodly and godlike body, and such a brave soul, (for, o' my life, I believe thou art entirely without fear,) and yet make thee a madman and traitor!"

"A traitor!" said Juan, without taking any offence, for, indeed, he seemed to have been robbed of all the fire of his spirit. "It is not possible anybody can believe me a traitor."

"Pho! did I not, with mine own eyes, see thee lunge at Cortes? It is base of thee to deny it."

"I do not deny it," said Juan; adding, vehemently, "but I call heaven to witness, I saw not his face, and knew him not. He may persecute me to death, as I believe he is doing: Yet could I do him no wrong; no, I *think*, I could not.—But it is bitter, to feel we are trampled on!"

"Well, señor, it is better you should be in a passion than a trance. But be not utterly without

hope. If you can truly make it appear you knew not the general, it is thought by one or two, you may be pardoned. I have talked with Guzman; and I think he may be brought to forgive and even intercede for you."

"I will neither receive *his* forgiveness nor his intercession," said Juan, frowning. "And I wonder you mention to me his detested name."

"Oh, señor!" said Najara, sharply, "you may choose your own friends, and hunt them again among heathen Indians.—That you should sell your life for this dog of a noble!—Fare you well, señor, fare you well."

"Stay, Najara," said Juan, following him towards the door: "you said you would answer me such questions as were nearest my heart. Give not over the kindly thought. There are many things, which if I knew, my lot would not be so hard, my dungeon not so killing to my spirit. The army is gone—is Mexico invested?"

"Not so," replied the hunchback; "it has a month or two's grace yet.—The troops have marched against the shore-towns.—But for this mad fit, thou mightst have been with them, or making thyself famous at Tochtepec!"

Juan sighed heavily.

"And the Indian, of whom you spoke,—the young noble,—Olin the orator," he demanded, at first, not without hesitation.

"Oh, the cur," replied Najara; "I think Cortes was even as mad as thyself, touching the knave. But wit is like a river, sometimes too full, washing away its own banks—it may be said to drown itself.—He made the dog his ambassador, swore him to return faithfully from Guatimozin, and waited three days for him in vain. Such rogues are like arrows,—good weapons, when you have the cast of them, but not to be expected in hand again, unless shot back by a foeman."

It was fortunate, perhaps, that Najara had relaxed so far from his austerity as to resume the vein of metaphor common to his softer moments. Had he been as observant as usual, he must have been struck with suspicion at the sudden gleam of satisfaction, with which Juan heard the good fortune of the Mexican. But he marked it not.

"Tell me now," said Juan, "how thou comest to be my jailer; and why it is that Villafana seems to have given up his trust to thee?"

At this question, Najara's good-humour immediately vanished, and he replied, sourly,

"Oh, content you, you shall be in good keeping."

"I doubt it not," said Juan, calmly. "But Villafana is, or methinks he is, more friendly to me than you. I did but desire to know what changes had taken place in the government of the city, from the watchman up to the commandant, since my imprisonment."

"Ay, indeed!" replied Najara, grimly: "such changes, that hadst thou fifty friends waiting to aid thee, thou shouldst be caught, before getting twenty steps from the door. Know then, that I am made Alguazil, as well as Villafana; and what is more, I am captain of the prison. The Alcalde is Antonio de Quinones, master of the armory; and the Corregidor of the city is thy good friend Guzman,—an honour thou gavest him, by hacking his face so freely, and so leaving him in the hospital."

"You speak to me in sarcasm," said Juan, mildly: "I have not deserved it. And methinks you should be more generous of temper, than to oppress with words of insult, a fallen and helpless man.—Well, heed it not—I forgive you. I have but one more question to ask you.—The lady,—this lady, La Monjonaza—"

"Ay!" cried Najara, with singular bitterness,

"I have heard of that too. You were seen talking with her in the garden. You will play chamberer with Cortes! ay, and rival too! Pho, canst thou not be at peace? Meddle with the general's fancy. Why that were enough to hang thee. I had some soft thoughts of thee; but everything shows thou art unworthy. Farewell; think of these things no more; but repent and make your peace with heaven."

So saying, the hunchback flung out of the room, and securing the thick door of plank, Juan was again left to his meditations.

CHAPTER XV.

THEN followed another period of silence and dejection, in which the prisoner wasted away as much in body as in spirit, becoming so listlessly indifferent to everything, that he no longer betrayed any desire to draw Najara into conversation, nor even to meet the advances which his jailer now often made. The thought of escaping from confinement, perhaps, never entered his mind; for, had he been even less resigned to his fate, the strict watch kept over him, and the condition of his prison, added to his apparent friendlessness, must have been enough to banish all such thoughts. His chamber was neither dark nor damp, but made strong by its bulky door, barred on the outside, and by windows, high above the floor, so very narrow that no human being could hope to pass through them.

Narrow as they were, however, it was the jailer's custom to examine them very closely each morning; a degree of vigilance that Juan had, in the earlier days of captivity, remarked with some surprise. He became acquainted with Najara's object at last. One morning, he was roused out of his stupefaction by a harsh exclamation from his jailer, and looking up, he beheld him take from the floor, immediately under one of the loopholes, what seemed a slip of paper, tied to a little stick, which appeared, some time during the night, to have been thus thrust into the prison. What were its contents he never could divine; for Najara had no sooner cast his eyes over it, than mingling a laugh

of satisfaction at its miscarriage with some natural compassion for the profound wretchedness which had sealed the ears and eyes of the prisoner, he immediately departed with the prize.

From this time, Juan became more vigilant and wary; but the following night, he was admonished, by the clank of armour and the occasional sound of voices without, that sentinels were now stationed under the windows, thus precluding all hope of friendly communication from that quarter.

Before he had again entirely relapsed into his listless gloom, he began to have a vague consciousness that the Indian slave, who accompanied Najara, was becoming more officious than of old, in setting his meals before him, and particularly in placing the jar of water at his side, instead of depositing it on his table, as he had done before. His suspicion was confirmed, when, one morning, as Najara was making his wonted survey of the windows, the slave gave him a quick, impatient look, and shaking the jar as he set it down, made him sensible, by a rattling sound within it, that there was something besides the innocent element concealed at the bottom. As soon as Najara had departed, he made an examination of the mystery, and drew forth, with some astonishment, a plate of transparent obsidian, on which had been scratched by some hard instrument or precious stone, a few words which he was soon able to decypher. "If thou wilt leave Mexico, and live, take the stone from the pitcher."

He strode about the apartment for a moment in disorder; then, crushing the glassy temptation under his heel, and returning the fragments to the jar, he sat down again to brood over his despair.—The next morning the pitcher contained nothing but water.

Thus, then, the time passed away, in the ordinary listlessness of confinement,—the dull and

sleepy torture of solitude; until Najara, waxing more compassionate as his prisoner grew more obviously indifferent to light, to food, and to speech, bethought him of a mode of indulgence from which no danger could be apprehended, and accordingly introduced the dog Befo into the apartment.

The loud yells of joy with which Befo beheld his young master, recalled Juan from his lethargy; and Najara was touched still further with compunction at the sight of the animal's transports.

"He has been whining every day at the prison gate," he muttered; "and doubtless he would have whined full as much, though he were to be let in only to be beaten. Such a fond fool is this young Juan himself: he returns to his master, though he knows the scourge is ready. It were better he had taken my advice, and passed to the sea by Otumba: He should have known Cortes would never forgive him."

The presence of this faithful animal, if it did not recall Juan's spirits, at least preserved him from sinking further into stupefaction; and nothing gave him more evident delight, than when, each morning, having prevailed upon Najara to lead his dumb companion into the air for exercise, he could hear Befo, in the joy of a liberty which he did not share, dashing frantically through the garden, now coursing by the water-side, now prancing by the palace, and, all the time, yelping and barking with the most clamorous delight. From these daily sorties the dog was used to return, with fresh spirits and increased attachment, to share, for the remainder of the day, the confinement of his master, upon whom, at his entrance, he jumped and fawned almost as boisterously as when enjoying his sports in the garden.

One day, however, he returned with a much graver aspect than usual, and stalking up to where Juan sat, he stood, wagging his tail, and gazing up

with a look exceedingly knowing and significant. Somewhat surprised at this, and finding that Befo refused, even when invited, to begin his usual rough expressions of friendship, he took him by the leathern collar, by which the servants of Cortes had been wont to secure him at night, and pulled him towards him. The motion of the collar released a little packet, that had been carefully secured beneath it, and which now fell upon Juan's knee. As soon as the sagacious animal perceived that he had accomplished a task, not often committed to such a messenger, he returned to his usual demonstrations of satisfaction; and, for a moment, Juan was unable to examine the singular missive. When Befo became composed, he opened it, and read, with no little agitation, the following words: "Not for *me*, but for thyself.—There is but a day more to choose. Leave Mexico, and shed not thine own blood: make not thy friends curse thee.—Return but a fragment of the paper, or tie but a hair round the collar,—and thou shalt be saved.—Not for *me*, but for *thyself*."

The morning came, and Juan, taking the paper from his bosom, tore it to pieces. When Najara offered as usual to liberate the dog, he perceived that Juan held him fast by the collar.

"How now, señor, shall the dog play?"

"It is cruel to rob him of his hour's liberty," said Juan, with a subdued voice; "but, this day, suffer him to remain with me."

"Well, señor, as you will," said Najara; "but I would you had some better friend,—at least, some one who could counsel you. There are runners arrived from the northern towns; and, at midday, Cortes will march into the city."

"The better reason, then, that I should have this friend, who have no other," said Juan, calmly.

"Harkee, señor," said Najara, with a sort of pe-

tulant sympathy, "if you would but curse yourself and your foes, or bemoan your fate a little, I should like it better than this stupid, womanish resignation.—Hark ye,—I care not if I tell you: I thought you had come athwart the fancies of Don Hernan, in the matter of the Doña, not that Don Hernan had wronged your own: I knew not that there was any old love between you."

"What art thou speaking of, Najara?" said Juan, with a hasty and troubled voice.

"This does, in some sense, weaken the sin of drawing sword upon him," continued the hunchback, "for no man loves to be robbed of his mistress.—Well,—the señora is sorry for you.—She thought to bribe me to let her speak with you.—Bribe me!—And yet I pitied her, for she was sorely distressed."

"For God's sake," exclaimed Juan, in extreme suffering, "speak me not a word of her; let me not hear her name."

"Well, be not cast down; she has much power with the general, and, doubtless, she will plead for you. Well, fare you well.—I did think to let Cortes know of her acts: but that might harden him against you still more.—Why should I waste thought upon him," muttered the deformed as he passed from the prison. "It is hard, or it seems hard, that heaven should give up a frame so beauteous and majestical, to be marred by the hangman's axe or rope, and leave a deformed lump like me, to scare little Indian girls and boys, and to be jibed at by all the craven loons of the army. But this is naught: if I am crooked, I am neither fool, traitor, nor coward, as most others are, in one degree or other, and sometimes in all."

As Najara had foretold, the army returned to Tezcuco about noon, as was made evident to Juan, by the sound of trumpets and cannon, and other

warlike noises of rejoicing; which, continuing to fill the city for many hours, came to his ears like the tumult of a distant storm, and began to die away, only when the last twinkle of sunset, shooting through his narrow windows, had faded from the opposite wall.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was now midnight. Audience after audience, and council after council, in the great hall of the palace, had shown how rapidly were approaching to a climax the involved events and schemes, which had for their object the overthrow of the Indian empire, as well as some that looked to an end equally dark, though of less public import. The Captain-General had despatched several audiences entirely of a private nature, and hoped to be relieved of his toil, while discharging from his presence an individual already known to the reader as Gaspar of the Red Beard. Whatever might have been the subject of the conference, its conclusion was unsatisfactory to both parties; for Olea departed with a visage both sullen and vindictive, while Cortes strode to and fro, evidently affected by vexation and anger.

As Olea, who had long since got rid of the 'infidel gait,' which had drawn a remark from Cortes, and which, doubtless assumed to assist his disguise, only adhered to him through habit,—as he vanished through the great door, another character made his appearance, entering by one of those doors which opened from the garden. It was the señor Camarga; who, from the friar's habit, again flung over his armour, seemed to have been engaged, a second time, in his maskings.

"What news, señor? what news hast thou?" demanded Cortes, in a low voice, making a sign to the visitor to imitate his cautiousness. "Hast

thou gathered aught of my dog Villafana? By my conscience, we are at a fault; the fox is scared into virtue: Najara hath seen no ill in him, Guzman avers he hath detected no sign of guilt, and not a spy is there of all, who does not swear that his fright in the matter of Olin, (that knave, too, cajoled me!) has reduced him into submission and honesty. Hast thou found nothing?"

"Nothing to be thought of, perhaps," replied Camarga. "Villafana is either returned to his allegiance, as your excellency hints, or he is too deep in distrust, to confer with me any further. He swears, if one could believe him, that he has thought better of his schemes, and is now resolved that they were foolish and unjust,—and therefore that he has ended them."

"He lies, the rogue!" said Cortes; "you have pursued him too closely.—It was an ill thought to league Najara with him.—These things have made him suspicious, not penitent. I have taken the hunchback away, restored Villafana to his prisonward, and, in short, taken all means to seduce him into security. You will see the cloven foot again, and that right shortly."

"Perhaps what I have to say will make your excellency believe it is displayed already. He has admitted one to speak with the prisoner—"

"Hah!" cried Cortes,—"a file of spearsmen!—But no; it matters not. There is no fear of escape; and this were too aimless an explosion. Know you the person he has admitted?"

"I do not," said Camarga; "but from the glance of the garment, methought 'twas some such godly brother as myself. And yet 'twas a taller man than Olmedo."

"By my conscience," said Cortes, quickly, "methinks I can divine the mystery: but of that anon. Hark thee, friend Camarga, dost thou still burn for this wretched man's life? I tell thee, there is much

intercession made for him. It was but a moment since that the Barba-Roxa,—a good soldier, i'faith,—made certain fierce moans for him, mingled with divers mutinous reproaches. I vow to heaven, I could have struck the knave dead, but that he saved my life at Xochimilco."

"I have heard that Juan Lerma did the same thing, on the plains of Tlascala," replied Camarga, dryly.

"Thou art deceived!" exclaimed Don Hernan, with a sudden shudder. "The attempt, I grant you, the attempt he made; but I needed no help. Yet do I remember the act; and, by heaven, I would I might forgive him,—I would I might! I would I might! for the thought of judging him to death, is like a wolf in my bosom. Once I loved him as my son,—yes, as my very son," he repeated, with extraordinary agitation; "and when he played with my little children, I swear, I looked upon him but as their elder brother. What will men say of the act, since they cannot know the cause?"

Apparently Camarga looked upon this burst of relenting feeling, (for such it really was,) with too much dissatisfaction and alarm, to notice the allusion to a cause differing from any with which he was acquainted. He exclaimed, hastily, and with a darkening visage,

"If open mutiny and resistance be not excuse enough, have I not spoken an argument that should steel thy heart for ever? Shall I utter it again? I swear to thee then, that this miserable creature, Magdalena,—this wretch that even thou wouldst have made the slave of thy pleasures, and thereby added upon thy soul a sin never to be forgiven,—no, never!—is a true NUN,—forsworn, lost, condemned! Wilt thou refuse to punish the author of a horrible impiety? Would that I had strangled her, when an infant, though with mine own hand!—

Thou talkest of a wolf in thy bosom; couldst thou feel one fang of the agony, that this act of horror has planted in mine, thou wouldst deem thyself happy. Let the wretch die: ask not for further cause; think not of any."

"The cause is, indeed, enough," said Cortes, crossing himself with dread, "to ensure not death only, but a death at the stake of fire; and I am not one to think the punishment should be made easy. I could tell thee a story of the end of broken vows, and the vengeance of God upon the robber of convents; but it needs not.—Sleep in thy grave, poor wretch! and be forgotten." He muttered a few words to himself, and then banishing, with an effort, what seemed a mournful recollection, he resumed,—"Tell me but one thing, Camarga, and I am satisfied. The cause is enough, (though this is a crime to be judged by ecclesiastics,) to ensure the young man's fate; but it is *not* enough to explain the rancour of thy hatred. Speak me the truth—Is this unhappy creature child of thine?"

"Think so, if thou wilt," said Camarga, with a lip ashy and quivering, "but ask not, ask not now. Give the young man to the block, and commit the girl into my hands, with the means of leaving this land; then, if thou hast the courage to listen, thou shalt hear a story that will freeze thy blood.—Is he not guilty of this thing?"

"Is he not guilty of more?" muttered the Captain-General. "It is enough; thou hast steeled my heart. I leave him in the hands of the Alcaldes and De Olid, who have no such faintness of heart as confounds mine. Fare thee well, señor: I know thee better, and I like thee well. Turn not thine eye from Villafana."

Thus, mingling the suggestions of a native policy with passions not the less constitutional, Cortes dismissed his disguised visitant. The curtain of the great door had scarce concealed the retreating Ca-

marga, before he heard a footstep behind; and looking round, he beheld the figure of La Monjonaza steal in from the garden, and cross the apartment.

"What sayst thou *now*, Magdalena?" he cried, striding up to her, and viewing with interest a countenance sternly composed, yet bearing the traces of recent and deep passions. "Thou shouldst have told me of this.—Yet what sayst thou now?"

"Nothing," replied the maiden, calmly, but with tones deeper than usual,—"Nothing.—Do thy work."

With these brief and mystic expressions, she passed among the secret chambers; and the Captain-General, stalking into the garden, until the chill breezes from the lake had cooled his feverish temples, betook himself, at last, to his couch, to subdue, in slumber, imaginary empires, and contend with visionary foes.

CHAPTER XVII.

The day after the Feast of the Holy Ghost, or Whitsunday, early in May, 1521, opened upon the valley of Mexico with clouds and vapours, which, sweeping over the broad lake, collected and lingered, with boding fury, around the island city, discharging thunder and lightning, while the sunbeams shone clear and uninterrupted over Tezcuco, and the rich savannas which surrounded it. It was the morning of a novel and impressive ceremony. A rivulet, deepened by the labours of many thousand Indians, into a navigable canal, and bordered for the space of half a league on either side, by narrow meadows, separated the city from another scarce inferior in magnitude, but which yet seemed only a suburb. The whole space thus extending between the two cities, from the lake, as far as the eye could see, was blackened by the bodies of Indian warriors, armed and decorated as if for battle, while the housetops in the cities were equally thronged with multitudes of aged men and women and children. A narrow space was left vacant on each bank of the canal, from which the feathered barbarians, two hundred thousand in number, were separated by the Spanish army, drawn up in extended lines on either bank, the companies of footmen alternating with little squadrons of mounted cavaliers, from whose spears waved bright pennons.

As they stood thus, in gallant array, a flourish of

trumpets drew their eyes up the stream, and they could behold over the housetops, winding with the sinuosities of the canal, a line of masts and of sails half let loose to the breeze, advancing slowly towards the lake, drawn, as it presently appeared, by double rows of natives, gayly apparelled, who occupied the space on the banks left vacant by the military.

As they approached nigh and more nigh, it was seen that each vessel bore no little resemblance to some of those light and open brigantines which have been, from time immemorial, the chosen delights of Mediterranean pirates, and the scourge of the sea from Barbary to the Greek Islands. Each carried twenty-five men, twelve of whom were rowers, the others musketeers, crossbowmen, cannoniers, (for a falconet frowned over the prow of each,) and sailors. Besides a multitude of little pennons with which they were covered, two great banners waved over each, the one bearing the royal arms of Spain, the other being the private standard which had been assigned, along with an appropriate name and a solemn benediction, by a priest, at the dock-yard, after the celebration of the mass of the Holy Ghost; for with such ceremonies of religion and pomp, the fatal galleys were committed, that morning, to their proper element.

One by one they passed into the lake, and ranged in a line before the mouth of the little river, fourteen in number. At this point, the mummeries of celebration were concluded by another and final benediction, pronounced from the shore; which was succeeded by a combined uproar of artillery, trumpets, and human voices, more loud and tumultuous than any which had yet shaken the borders of Tezcuco.

When the smoke of the cannon had cleared away, the brigantines were seen parting and flitting along in different courses, like a flock of

wild-fowl, frightened and separated by the explosion. Their evolutions should be rather likened to the gambols of vultures, escaped from some dreary confinement, and now fluttering their wings in the joy of liberation, and the expectation of prey. Castilian navigators were at last lanched upon the sea of Anahuac, and they seemed resolved at once to confirm their dominion, by ploughing through each rolling surge, and penetrating to every bay and creek. As they divided thus, some standing out into the lake, and others darting along the shores, the admiring and shouting spectators began to observe and point out to one another certain pillars of smoke, rising one after the other, from the hills and headlands; by which was conveyed from town to town the intelligence of an event long since expected by the watchful infidels.

Another spectacle, however, soon withdrew the eyes of the lookers on from these signal fires. From the bank of vapours which still concealed the towers of Tenochtitlan, they beheld an Indian piragua, or gondola, of some magnitude, and no little splendour, come paddling into view, followed by three canoes of much lighter and plainer structure. An awning of brilliant cloths, running from stem to stern over the piragua, overshadowed and almost hid the rowers.

It was no sooner perceived from the fleet, than three or four brigantines gave chace, as after an undoubted enemy and legal prize. Still, its voyagers advanced on their course, fearlessly, and to all appearance disregardful of the commands of the captains to heave-to, even although one call was accompanied by a musket shot, discharged across their bows. Its director undoubtedly confided in his pacific character, indicated, according to the customs of Anahuac, by a little net of gold, mingled with white feathers, tied to the head of a spear, and displayed high above the awning.

"Well done for the dog, Techeechee!" muttered Cortes into the ear of an hidalgo, of stern appearance, mounted like himself and at his side; "Well done for Techeechee, the Silent Dog! he is worth twenty such hounds as Olin-pilli. He has brought me an embassy. By my conscience, it comes over late though, and I know not what good can spring of it, at this hour.—These fools of the brigantines are over-officious!—'Tis a confident knave; see, he steers for the palace garden! I must ride thither.—Hark thee, De Olid," he continued, still addressing the grim cavalier, but aloud, as if willing that all should hear: "let this thing be despatched: Thou wilt make, at the worst, a just judge. In this trial, it becomes neither my feelings, nor perhaps my honour, that I should myself sit in judgment. The chief Alcaldes will give thee their aid. Judge not in anger, but with justice; bring it not against the young man that he turned his sword upon me—And yet I see not how thou canst avoid it: nevertheless, if thou canst do so, let it be done. There is enough else to condemn him. His life is in thine hands: be just; and yet be not too rigid. If thou canst, by any justifiable leniency, admit him to mercy, do so. Yes, be merciful, if thou canst,—be merciful."

With these instructions, which were pronounced not without discomposure, Cortes put spurs to his steed, and rode into the city and to the palace, followed by some half dozen cavaliers.

He had scarcely assumed the state with which he thought fit to overawe the envoys of the different barbaric tribes, whom the fame of his power and greatness was daily bringing to his court, before an officer entered the audience-chamber from the garden, and acquainted him that ambassadors from Tenochtitlan humbly craved to be admitted to his presence.

"Let them be taken round to the front, that the

dogs may look upon the artillery," said the Captain-General; and perhaps added in his thoughts, "that they may creep up to my footstool, taking in my greatness from afar, until their humility dwindles into submissiveness."

Presently the curtain of the great door was pushed aside, and the Mexicans entered, preceded and followed by armed men; the old Ottomi being in advance of all. They were twelve in number, the chief or principal being a man of lofty stature and manly years, wholly differing from the orator Olin, for whom Cortes looked in vain among the others. To indicate the high rank of the ambassador, two attendants sustained over his head, on little rods, a gay canopy or penthouse of feathers. His green mantle (for that was the colour worn by an ambassador,) was of the richest material, the border being wrought into scroll-work with little studs of solid gold. His buskins, for such they might be called, were of crimson leather, and a crimson fillet was wound round his hair, which was, otherwise, almost covered with little tufts or tassels of cotton-down of the same hue. Each of these singular decorations was the evidence and distinguishing badge of some valiant exploit in battle; and it was therefore manifest to all in the slightest degree acquainted with the customs of Anahuac, even at the first sight, that the barbarian was a man of renown among the Mexicans. A cluster of rattling grains of gold, suspended to his nostrils, indicated that he belonged to the order of Teuctli, —a race of nobles inferior only to the *Tlamantli*, or vassal-kings; and the red fillets showed that he was a Prince of the House of Darts, the highest of the several chivalric branches into which this order was divided, the two next appertaining to the House of Eagles and the House of Tigers.—In introducing these barbaric terms, we have no desire to inflict upon the reader a dissertation on Aztec chivalry,

but simply to make him aware, that these singular infidels were, in their way, nearly as well provided with the vanities of knighthood and nobility as some of the European nations in the Middle Ages.

The general appearance of the ambassador was commanding; his features were bold and harsh, yet manly,—his forehead expanded, though inclined, and furrowed as with the frowns of battle,—and his eye had a touch of wildness and ferocity, at variance with his modest bearing while advancing towards the Captain-General, and still more strongly contrasted with that melancholy sweetness of mouth, which seems to be a characteristic of all the children of America.—Perhaps it is *fitly* characteristic, since the proclivity of their fate is equally mournful, throughout all the continent. He bore in his hand the gold net and white plume, hanging to a headless spear, which had been displayed and distinguished afar in the piragua,—as well as a golden arrow,—both being the emblems of a Mexican envoy. He was entirely without arms, as were all the rest.

Behind the canopy-bearers came three old men, with tablets of dressed skin, or maguey paper, in their hands, known, at once, to be writers,—secretaries or annalists,—who accompanied ambassadors, and other high officers, in expeditions of importance, to record their actions and preserve the proofs of treaties.

After these followed six *Tlamémé*, or common carriers, bearing presents, which, with Mexicans of that day, as with Orientals of this, made no small share of the matériel of diplomacy.

As this train was led forward up to the chair of state, Cortes fixed his eye with a smile of approbation on the Ottomi, but did not think fit to honour him with any further evidence of thankfulness. He had other matters to fill his thoughts; for, at the first glance, he recognized in the ambassador

a noble, famous even in the days of Montezuma, for skill, audacity, and unconquerable aversion to the strangers, and who, under the ominous title of Masquaza-teuctli,* or the Lord of Death, was known to have commanded bodies of reinforcement, sent to several different shore-towns, to oppose the arms of Cortes in the late campaign. In especial, he was known to have devised the plan of cutting the dikes of Iztapalapan, after decoying the Spaniards into that city, where they escaped drowning almost by a miracle; it was equally certain that he had commanded the multitudes of warriors, who, scarce ten days since, had repulsed the Spaniards from Tacuba with considerable loss; and he was even supposed to have been present in the sack of Xochimilco, where Cortes had been in such imminent peril. The appearance of this man was doubly disagreeable, as being heartily detested himself, and as showing the temper of Guatimozin's mind, who chose to send an envoy so little inclined to composition. A murmur of dissatisfaction arose among the Spaniards present, as soon as they were made aware of the ambassador's character; and if looks could have destroyed, it is certain the Lord of Death would have passed to the world of shades, before speaking a word of his embassy.

Without, however, seeming to regard these boding glances any more than he had done the hostile opposition of the brigantines, he began without delay the usual native forms of salutation. But before he could pass to those rhetorical and reverential flourishes of compliment, which constituted the exordium of an ambassador's speech, he

* The name is corrupted, as are all those handed down by the early historians. The suffixes, *pilli* and *teuctli*, indicate the title, and are therefore not a part of the name. We translate both *lord;* though it would be more germain to the matter, however ludicrous it might seem, to say at once Duke Death and Earl Olin.

was interrupted by Cortes, whose words were interpreted by the same cavalier who had officiated before, in the interview with Olin.

"Masquaza-teuctli, Lord of Death!" said the Captain-General, sternly, "what dost thou here in Tezcuco?"

The infidel looked up with surprise, and having eyed the Spaniard a moment, replied with another question, which was only remarkable as indicating the composure of the speaker, and as giving utterance to tones exceedingly soft and pleasant:

"Was Olin deceived, and did Techeechee lie?" he said. "I bring the words of Guatimozin to Malintzin, son of Quetzalcoatl, and Lord of the Big Canoes with legs of crocodiles and wings of pelicans."

"Art thou not stained with the blood of Castilians?" rejoined Cortes, but little pleased with the frank and unawed bearing of the envoy. "This thing is ill of Guatimozin: why does he send me an enemy from Tenochtitlan?"

The Lord of Death replied with what seemed a lurking smile, if such could be traced in a peculiar and slight motion of lips, always sedate, if not always melancholy;

"Has the Teuctli a *friend* in Tenochtitlan?—Let Malintzin speak his name: I will return.—My little children are yet awkward with the bow and arrow."

"Hark to the hound!" exclaimed the Captain-General, struck more by the hint conveyed by the last words than by the sarcasm so gently expressed in the first: "He would have me believe the very boys of Mexico are training to resist us! and that he thinks it better honour to encourage the young cubs to malice, than to speak to me for terms of peace.—Hearken, infidel: you spoke of the young man Olin. Why returned not he to Tezcuco?"

"Malintzin was in a hurry for the blood of Izta-

palapan: the king saw the glitter of spears on the lakeside, and said to his servant, 'Go not to Tezcuco with gold and sweet words, but to Iztapalapan with axes and spears.'—"

"Ay, marry; but Olin, what of Olin-pilli?—I warrant me, the knavish king discovered the craft of the knavish noble, and so killed him?—I was a fool to give him the beads.—What sayst thou, infidel! what has become of the Speaker of Wise Things? I sent him to Guatimozin for an envoy; and, lo you, this old savage, the Silent Dog, has brought me what Olin could not, or did not. Is Olin living?"

"How shall I answer? Ipalnemoani* is the maker of life; it is the king who takes it. Olin-pilli is forgotten."

"Ay then, let him sleep; and to thy work, infidel, to thy work. Will Guatimozin have peace? He is somewhat late of decision; but the great monarch of Spain, who sends me to speak with him, and to enforce the vassalage acknowledged by Montezuma, is merciful. Speak, then, and quickly. My ships are on the lake, my soldiers are thicker than the reeds on its banks, and fiercer than its waters, when the torrents rush down from the mountains. Will he have the blood of his people flow through the streets, as the waters of an inundation, when the dikes are broken? Speak then, Lord of Death; will Guatimozin acknowledge himself the king's vassal, pay tribute, and govern his empire in peace?"

"Hear the words of Guatimozin," said the ambassador, beckoning to the Tlamémé to open their packs: "The king sends you the history of his land,"—taking up, from among many books, which

* One of the titles of the Supreme God, (*Teotl*,) who was not worshipped directly, but through the medium of his agents, the inferior divinities.

made the contents of the first bundle, a volume of hieroglyphics, and displaying its pictured pages: "He has searched for the time when the king of Castile was the lord of his people; but it is not written. How then shall he kiss the earth before the Teuctli? He has sought to find to what race, besides the race of heaven, the men of Mexico have paid tribute: It is not written,—except this,—that once, when his fathers were poor and few, the men of Cojohuacan called on them for tribute, and they paid it in the skulls of their foes. The men of Castile call for tribute: Guatimozin sends them such tribute as his fathers paid; here it is—twelve skulls of the dogs of Chalco, taken in the act of rebellion." And as he spoke, the grinning orbs rolled under his foot against the platform.

"Hah!" cried Cortes, starting up, with as much admiration as wrath, for he was keenly alive to every burst of audacious and heroic daring, "is not this a merlin of a royal stock, that will try buffets with an eagle? But, pho! the young man is besotted."

"Hear, further, the words of Guatimozin," continued the envoy, taking from the third bundle two more books, and displaying them, as he had done the first: "the king remembers that the wild Ottomies came down from their hills, saying that they were foolish and pitiful, because Ipalnemoani had kept them in darkness, so that they robbed one another, and were blasphemers against heaven. The king gave them religion and laws; and, behold, those that live upon the skirts of the valley, are becomé wise and happy. The king says, 'Have not the Spaniards come like the Ottomies? and are they not very ignorant and miserable?' These are the king's words to Malintzin: 'Take this book, and learn how to worship the gods: religion is a good thing, and will make you happy. Take this

book also, and understand the laws of men: justice is a good thing, and will make you happy."

It would be difficult to express the varied feelings of wonder, anger, scorn, and merriment, with which the Spaniards hearkened to this extraordinary exhortation. Some stared, some frowned, some smiled, and a few laughed outright; but all immediately betook themselves to looks of sympathetic anger, when Cortes, again rising, stamped upon the platform, crying with a fierceness that was in part unassumed,

"Knave of a heathen and savage, dost thou pass this scorn upon the religion of Christ? this slight upon the laws of Castile? this slur upon religious and civilized men? Look upon this cross, and say to Guatimozin, that not a Spaniard shall leave his valley, till every slave that acknowledges his sway, has knelt before it, and, abjuring the fiendish idolatry of Mexitli, has sworn with a kiss, to worship naught else. Look, too, upon this sword, and say to thine insolent prince, that it shall not cease to strike and slay, until his whole people have acknowledged it to be the abrogator of the old, and the teacher of a new law, such as his brutish sages never dreamed of. In one word, give him to know, that my purpose in his land, is to bestow upon it the cross of heaven and the laws of Spain; and these I will bestow,—both,—so help me the sword which I grasp, and the cross that I worship!"

A murmur of satisfaction and responsive resolution passed through the assemblage, which had been considerably increased by the appearance of such officers, returning from the lake-side, as were privileged to enter the presence on such an occasion. But the stern voice of the Captain-General produced no effect on the Mexicans, except, indeed, that one of the three writers who had been all the

time busily engaged, as they squatted upon the floor, recording the speeches, in their inexplicable manner, raised his eyes, when the Christian's voice was at the highest, and eyed him askant for a minute or two. The Lord of Death kept his glance firmly fixed on the aspect of the general, while listening to the interpretation of his angry vows. Then, when Cortes had concluded, he turned to the fourth pack, and resumed his discourse, as if it were no part of his duty to reply to anything not immediately touching his instructions.

"Hear, further, the words of Guatimozin," he said, pointing to an ear of maize, a bundle of cacao-berries, a cluster of bananas, and divers other fruits, as well as nuts and esculent roots, which appeared in the pack: "Thus says the king of Mexico:—Is Castile a naked rock, where the food of man grows not? Malintzin said to Montezuma, 'The land is like other lands, with earth over the flint-stone, and with rivers to make it fertile; soil comes down from the mountains, and heaven sends frequent rains.' Look at Mexico: the sun parches it, till it becomes like sand, half the year; the other half, the sky turns to water, and drowns the gardens and corn-fields. But is man a dog, that he should howl when he is hungry, and run abroad for food? God gave these good things to the king; the king gives them to the Spaniard. Let him throw them upon the earth, and sit hard by in patience, while the rain drops upon them; and, by and by, he will have food for himself and his children: he will not be hungry, and run forth, like a dog, to strange lands, seeking for food.—Hear, further, the words of the king," continued the grave barbarian, observing the impatience of Cortes, and turning his anger into admiration, by suddenly displaying the contents of the fifth pack, which consisted of divers ornaments and jewels of gold, with a huge plate of extraordinary value, representing the sun:

"Is there no yellow dirt in Castile, to make playthings for the women and children? Thus says the king: 'Let Malintzin take these things to his women and children; and, lest they should, by and by, cry for more, let him send a ship to Guatimozin, at the end of the *Tlalpilli*,* and more shall be given him. Thus it shall be while Guatimozin lives; and thus it shall be hereafter, if the king wills,—for what is Guatimozin, that he should make a law for his successors?"

The admiration with which the Captain-General surveyed the gorgeous present, greatly moderated his disgust at the mode of making it. He stepped down from the platform, and taking the massive disk into his hands, gloated over its almost insupportable weight and dazzling splendour, with the relish of one who seemed never to have felt any passion less sordid than that of avarice. While thus engaged, ruddy at once with delight and with the effort of sustaining such a precious burthen, a paper was put into his hand, or rather held out for him to receive, while a voice murmured in his ear,

"The award of the judges, sent to your excellency for confirmation."

The golden luminary fell, with a heavy clang, upon the floor, the flush fled from his cheeks, and the look with which he turned to the untimely and ill-omened messenger, Villafana, was even more ghastly with affright than that which distinguished the aspect of the Alguazil.

"If your excellency thinks of mercy," continued the Alguazil, in the same low and hurried voice,—"it is not yet too late. They have him on the square, and are confessing him.—He has but a dog's life, and a gnat's death, who puts them in the hands of De Olid."—

* *Tlalpilli*—the quarter-cycle, or epoch of 13 years.

Cortes cast his eye upon the paper, and beheld, besides the date, a preamble of two lines, and the signatures of the judges, the following brief and pithy sentences:

"Concealing a spy and fugitive from justice—Guilty.

"Drawing sword upon a Christian—Guilty.

"Resisting with arms an officer in the execution of his duty—Guilty.

"Sentence—To be beheaded, his right hand struck off and nailed to the prison-door.—To take effect in half an hour.

"In the name of God and the king.

"De Olid,
"Marin,
"De Ircio."

"Butchers!" cried Cortes, with accents of unspeakable horror. "What ho, a pen! a pen, knave! a pen!"

The agitation and violence of his voice surprised even the stoical Mexicans; and the writers looking up, he became suddenly aware that the implements with which they practised their rude art, would answer all his purpose. Darting forward, he snatched from the hand of the nearest, one of the many reeds which he held. The barbarian, although apparently the oldest and most infirm of the three, mistaking the purpose of the assault, started to his feet with a vivacity of effort, which, at any other moment, would have drawn a sharp look of suspicion from the Captain-General. But his thoughts were too much excited to be diverted by any such seeming inconsistency.

It happened, by a natural accident, (for each reed was appropriated to its peculiar colour,) that that which Cortes had seized contained a dark crimson

ink. Still, natural as the circumstance was, it had no sooner touched the paper than he shuddered, and muttering 'Blood! blood!' seemed as if he would have cast it away. But recovering himself in an instant, with a faint and forced laugh, he subscribed the few words,

"Confirmed.—Respite for twenty-four hours.
"CORTES."

and putting the paper into Villafana's hands, he dismissed him with the hurried charge,

"Away—see to it."

He then flung the reed back to the writer who had already resumed his squatting attitude, and reascended the platform.

On those who surmised the cause of this sudden interruption, the agitation of Don Hernan had the good effect of banishing from their minds any lingering suspicions of his entertaining personal ill-will towards the unfortunate Lerma. All went to show that he was shocked at the young man's fate, and the necessity of ministering to it, even in the simple act of confirming a judgment, awarded by others; but, unhappily, the same feeling that exonerated the judge, still further increased the odium attached to the criminal. How great, they thought, must be the guilt of him whom it causes Cortes so much suffering to condemn.—But the Captain-General, recovering himself, gave them little time for such speculations.

"Well, infidel, thou speakest well," he cried, his voice becoming firmer with each syllable; "What hidest thou in the sixth bundle?—or rather, what if I should accept thy master's niggardly offer, and depart with these baubles for women and children, as thou hast rightly called them?"

"Hear the words of Guatimozin," replied the ambassador, with a careless emphasis, as if pro-

perly understanding the futility of the proposal, and, indeed, with a look of scorn, as if learning to despise one capable of Don Hernan's late weakness: "If Malintzin depart with the fifth pack, cast the sixth into the lake, and tell him, that, in its place, he shall have sent after him to the seaside, a thousand sacks of robes and four thousand sacks of corn, to clothe and feed his people as they sail over the endless sea. Say to him besides—"

"Pho," interrupted Cortes, "have done with this mummery, and get thee to the sixth sack, which I am impatient to examine. What hast thou there?"

"The riches which are more precious to Mexico than the trinkets of her children," replied the stately barbarian; and, as he spoke, he rolled upon the floor, arrowheads and spearpoints of bright copper, sharp blades of itzli and heavy maces of flint, which made up the contents of the last bundle: "Hear the words of Guatimozin," he continued, with a dignity of bearing that might have become a Spartan envoy in the camp of the Persian; "thus says the king: 'What is the Lord of Castile, that Guatimozin should call him master? what is Malintzin, that Guatimozin should make him his friend? The Teuctli burns my cities, murders my children, and spits in the face of my gods. His religion is murder, his law robbery: he is strong, yet very unjust; he is wise, yet he makes men mad. Guatimozin has called together the chiefs and the planters of corn, the wise men and the foolish, the strong and the feeble, the old men, the women and the children. He has spoken to them, and they have replied: 'Is not the sword better than the whip? is not the arrow softer than the brand? is not the fagot of fire pleasanter than the chain of captivity? is not death sweeter than slavery?' Thus says the old man,—'I am old; wherefore, then, should I be a slave for a day?' Thus says the little infant,—

'I am a little child; why should I be a slave for many years?' This, then, is the word of the whole people; it is Guatimozin who speaks it: 'If the gods desert me, what have I to yield but life? if they help me, as they have helped my fathers, what have I to do, but to drive away my foe? Let Malintzin look at my weapons, and put two plates of the black-copper of Castile on his bosom, for I am very strong in my sorrow, and I will strike very hard. Let Malintzin fear: the rebels of Tezcuco and Cholula, the traitors of Chalco and Otumba, are but straws to help him: can they look in the face of a Mexican? Let Malintzin fear: is he stronger than when he fled from Tenochtitlan, in the month of Mourning?* has not Mexico more fighting men than when the horn of the gods sounded at midnight, and the Teuctli sat on the stone and wept?—on the stone of Tacuba, by the waterside, when the morning came, and his people slept in the ditches? If Malintzin will fight, so will Guatimozin.' These are the words of the king; these are the words of the people: they are said. The gods behold us."

So spake the bold savage; and as if to show that even the basest and feeblest shared his courage, and sanctioned his defiance, the very Tlamémé looked around them with a show of spirit, and the three old men expressed their satisfaction with audible murmurs.

The Spaniards were surprised at the fearless tones of the Lord of Death, and not a few were impressed with alarm as well as anger, when he referred so unceremoniously to the events of the fatal Noche Triste. As for Cortes himself, though the frown with which he listened to the whole ora-

* Embracing a portion respectively of June and July, and devoted to austere and penitential preparation for a coming festival.

tion, had become darker and darker as the warrior-noble proceeded, yet, apparently, he had become sensible, both from the tenor of the discourse and the resolute bearing of the speaker, that it should be answered with gravity rather than anger. Hence, when he came to reply, it was in terms briefly impressive and solemn:

"My young brother Guatimozin is unwise, and he is digging the grave of his whole people. He has evil counsellors about him. I have somewhat to say to him; and, to-morrow, you shall be sent back with an answer, which will perhaps dispel his foolish dream of resistance."—He observed that the Lord of Death looked displeased and even alarmed, when the interpreter made him sensible that he was to be detained until the morrow. "Be not alarmed," he continued, sternly: "when didst thou ever hear of a Christian aping the treachery of thy native princes, and doing wrong to an ambassador? I tell thee, fellow, infidel though thou be, I will do thee honour, in respect of thy young master. To-morrow thou shalt eat at my board, for it is a day of banqueting; and to-morrow, also, shalt thou be made acquainted with my answer to the king's message, which it is not possible I should speak to-day. Rest you then content.—Hark thee, Villafana," (for the Alguazil had returned,) "have thou charge of this bitter-tongued knave and his dumb companions. Entreat them well, but see that they neither escape nor communicate with any one in this army, Christian or misbeliever. And look well to thy prison too.—This knave, Techeechee,—bring him to me when thou changest guards at the prison."

Then, breaking up the audience, he remained for a time in conference with a few of the chief officers, debating subjects of great importance, but which would be of no interest to the readers of this history.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Some two hours after nightfall, as the unhappy Lerma lay in darkness and solitude, (for Befo was no longer permitted to be his companion,) the door of the prison opened, and the Alguazil, Villafana, entered, bearing a lantern, which emitted just sufficient light to allow his features to be distinguished, together with what seemed a flask of wine—a luxury now to be occasionally obtained, since vessels arrived not unfrequently from the islands.

"How now, what cheer, señor?" he exclaimed, setting down the flask upon the table, and turning the light full upon Juan's face; "are you saying your prayers? Here's that shall give you better comfort,—something from the vineyards of Xeres de la Frontera,—stout Sherry, that shall make your heart bounce, were it broken twice over.—Come, faith, it will make you merry."

"I shall never be merry more," said Juan; "and why should I? It is better I should not. I thank you for your good-will, Villafana; but I would that, instead of this wine, if it be not contrary to your duty, you would fetch me the good father Olmedo, to finish the confession, begun upon the block, and so abruptly interrupted, this morning."

"Pho, be not in such a hurry: you have time enough. The priest is busy, and knowing he must shrive you to-morrow, he will be ill inclined to trouble himself superfluously to-night. Come, sit up, drink, laugh, and curse thy foes. Come, now,

—a merry God's blessing! may you live a thousand years!—Dzoog! bah! dzoog!—Now could I fight seven tigers!"

"It is better thou shouldst drink it than I," said Juan, observing the strong and somewhat fantastic gestures with which the Alguazil expressed his approbation, after having taken a hearty draught of the liquor; "yet bethink thee, Villafana,—"

"'Slid!" interrupted the jailer, "bethink thyself! and bethink thee that this will make thee a good fellow of a warhorse mettle, whereas, now, thou art but a sick lambkin. What makes a beggar a king, hah? a tailor's 'prentice a Cid Ruy Diaz of Castile, —a doughty Campeador? Pho, there is more of this, and to-morrow it will flow: Dost thou not know, Don Demonios, our king, has invited us to a banquet to-morrow? Thou shalt hear this banquet spoken of for a thousand years. Ah, the good ship! the good ship! there is a better thing she brings us than wine.—But that is neither here nor there. Why dost thou not drink?"

"Am I not condemned to death for the infraction of a decree?" said Juan, somewhat sternly, for he thought he perceived in Villafana's levity a symptom of undue excitement; "and dost thou not remember that there is a decree also against drunkenness? Thou hast suffered somewhat from this already."

"Dost thou suppose there is a hell?" said Villafana, with some such look as that which had appalled Juan, when he walked with him over the meadows beyond the city: "For, if thou dost, know then, that I make my promise to the infernal fiend, to broil with him seven times seven thousand years, if I do not, with a stab for every lash, make up my reckoning with the man who degraded me! *Ojala* and Amen!—So now, there's enough to keep thee quiet.—Hast thou any gall any where but in thy liver?"

"Thou art besotted, or insane, I think," said

Juan, angrily. "I am a dying man: begone, and suffer me to make my peace with heaven."

"Come, you think I am drunk," said Villafana, somewhat more rationally: "I grant you; but it is with a stuff stronger than strong drink;—ay, faith, for, to-morrow, I see my way to heaven!—Answer me, truly: have you no thirst for vengeance on those who have brought you to this pass?—You see I am sober, hah? One would not die like a sheep.—You may play the wolf yet. What if you had an opportunity—"

"Tempt me not, knave," said Juan, turning away his face—"Avoid thee, Satan!"

"What if I should knock open thy doors, and put a sword into thy hand?" said Villafana, bending over, so as to whisper into his ear; "what wouldst thou do with it?"

"Break it," replied the prisoner, wrapping his mantle about his head, as if to shut out all further temptation.

"Thou art a fool," said the Alguazil, with a growl, and left the apartment.

Juan heard his retreating steps, followed by the clanking of the chain, which, with a strong padlock, on the outside, secured the door of the prison; yet he neither raised his head, nor removed the mantle from his face, but endeavoured to drive from his heart the thoughts of passion, excited by the words of the tempter. From this gloomy task he was roused by a soft voice, murmuring, as it seemed to him from the air, for he was not aware of the presence of any human being in the apartment,—

"Does the Great Eagle fear the face of his friend?"

He started to his feet, and beheld in the light of the lantern, which Villafana had left on the table, the figure of an ancient Indian, standing hard by.

"Techeechee!" he exclaimed—"But no; thy

speech is pure, thy tongue is another's. Who art thou, gray-head of Mexico?"

"To-day, Cojotl, the cunning fox of scribes,—yesterday, Olin, the tongue of nobles,—but before, and hereafter, Guatimozin, the friend of the Great Eagle," replied the Indian, and as he spoke, he exchanged the decrepit stoop of age for the lofty demeanour of youth, and parted the gray locks which had hitherto almost concealed his countenance.

"Rash prince," said Juan, "will you yet wear the chains of Montezuma? Why dost thou again entrust thyself among Spaniards?"

"How came the Great Eagle into the place of Guatimozin?" demanded the young Mexican, expressively: "Shall he die for Guatimozin, and Guatimozin stand afar off?"

"Alas, prince," said Juan, "thy friendship is noble, but can do me no good. Leave this place, where thou art in great danger, and think of me no more. I am beyond the reach of help. Think of thyself,—of thy people, (for, surely, it is thy duty to protect them,) and depart while thou canst."

"And what am I, that I should do this thing?" said Guatimozin. "Listen to me, son of the day-spring: the children of Spain are wolves and reptiles; the iztli is sharp for them, and it must not spare. But thou, the young Eagle, shalt remain the friend of Guatimozin. Has not Malintzin eaten of thy blood? is he not like the big tiger that takes by the throat? and who shall draw him away? Canst thou remain, and smile on another sunset? I bring thee liberty."

"How!" said Juan; "is Villafana this traitor, that he will permit me to escape?"

"He is a rat with two faces," said the prince, significantly; "he fears the wrath of Malintzin; he loves gold, but he says thou shalt not go till to-

morrow, and to-morrow thou wilt be in Mictlan, the world of caves. But Guatimozin can do what the traitor Christian will not. The Eagle is very brave: he shall kill his foe."

As Guatimozin spoke, he drew from his cloak a Spanish dagger, long, sharp and exceedingly bright, —a relic of the spoils won from the invaders in the Night of Sorrow,—and offered it to the prisoner, adding,

"When I depart, a soldier will fasten the door. If thou art strong-hearted, thou canst rush by, dealing him a blow. At the water's edge, by the broken wall, thou wilt find a friend with a canoe; it is Techeechee. Is not Tenochtitlan hard by? Guatimozin, the king of Mexico, will make his friend welcome."

"Prince," said Juan, sadly, "this thing cannot be. Why should I strike down the poor sentinel? He has done me no wrong. What would become of thee? Thou couldst not escape. What would become of Villafana, who, knave though he be, has yet done much to serve me? And what, to conclude, would become of *me*, escaping from Christians, to take refuge among thy unbelieving people? I can die, prince, but I can be neither renegade nor apostate."

"Is there nothing in Tenochtitlan, that dwells in the thoughts of the captive? I will be very good to thee; and thou shalt drink the blood of thy foe."

"Prince," said Juan, firmly, "thine eye cannot search the soul of a Christian. Malintzin has done me a great wrong, yet would I not harm a hair of his head; no, heaven is my witness! I can forgive him even my death, however unjust and cruel."

"It is a dove of Cholula that speaks in the voice of my friend," said the infidel, struck with as much disdain as surprise at the want of spirit, which his

barbarous code of honour discovered in a lack of vindictiveness: "Is a man a worm that he should be trampled on?"

"No," said Juan, bitterly,—for he could not resist his feelings of indignation, when he suffered himself to consider his degradation in this light. "Had I resisted him in his first anger, had I resented his first injustice, had I provoked him by any complaint, then might I think of his course with submission. But I have not; I have been, indeed, as thou sayest, a worm, at all times helpless, at all times unresisting. Others have complained, some have defied him, but they passed unpunished. I, who have yielded, like a woman, escape not: I creep from the path of his anger, but his foot follows me, —turn which way I will, it crushes me. Even Befo will show his teeth sometimes—I have seen him growl when Cortes struck him—and by mine nonour, I think he struck him, because he was once mine!"

How far, by indulging such thoughts, he might have wrought himself into the very spirit which Guatimozin was surprised to find absent, we will not venture to say. He was interrupted by the sudden re-entrance of Villafana, who immediately exclaimed,

"Will you have my brother Najara diving in upon you? Pho, you talk too loud: 'tis well you were gabbling in Mexican. Hark ye, Olin, you knave, get you gone! to your den, sirrah!—Pray, señor Juan, tell this rascal, in his own gibberish, that he cannot remain a moment longer from his lock-up, without being discovered.—Come, fellow, come: you shall have more talk to-morrow."

So saying, the Alguazil conducted the Mexican away. A few moments after, he returned alone. Juan, still disordered and brooding over his wrongs, paced to and fro over the narrow limits of his cell.

His agitation increased with each step, and, at last, finding that Villafana did not speak, he exclaimed,

"Come, Villafana,—I know what thou wilt say,—am I not used dog-like? He disdained even to sit upon the trial, to ask me what I had to urge in excuse of my folly; but left this to judges, who were content to ask 'Didst thou this?' and 'Didst thou that?' without permitting me a word of defence. Surely, I had much provocation in the matter of Guzman; and as for the decree, it should have been remembered, that I was come into the camp too short a time to have made it as fast in my mind as others, who had heard it daily proclaimed for months. I must die for this!—die like a hunted assassin!—my hand stuck against the prison-door, my body given, perhaps, to fatten the lean hogs that will fatten my judges! Oh, by heaven, this is intolerable to think on!"

"Thou wilt believe, now, that thou wert sent to the South Sea for no good?"

"Ay, I will believe anything," said Juan, in increasing excitement. "And *this* too! scarce an hour returned from my sufferings, endured for him,—endured to regain his good-will! Ay, and before I had done speaking, he would have sent me to Mexico, to be sacrificed there!—before I had eaten and drunk! before I had rested my wearied body, before I had recruited my exhausted strength!—Tell me, Villafana! was it not by his design I was entrapped into giving shelter to—But, no! that could not be; in that, at least, he must be innocent. But, in the rest, it is oppression, grinding, intolerable oppression!"

"Well, I marvel he did not let thee off with a scourging," said Villafana, swallowing another draught from the neglected flask. "Come, drink, and we will discourse together."

"A scourging!" said Juan, seizing the Alguazil's

arm with a grasp which showed that imprisonment and sorrow had not altogether robbed him of strength; "dare you talk to me of scourging?"

"Ay, marry," said Villafana, whose object seemed to be to excite the slumbering fury of the young man, and who now, in the effect of a word used for another purpose, discovered a point on which his equanimity was not impregnable; "ay, faith; for the whole army cries out upon his barbarity, saying that he is murdering you; so that he already talks of letting you off with a scourging.—He was as good with me."

"By the saints of heaven!" cried Juan, snatching up the dagger which Guatimozin had left, and striking it into the table with a fury which split the plank in twain, "were it his own, I would drive this steel into the breast of the man that designed me such dishonour. Scourge me! Thanks be to heaven, that sends this weapon!"

"Oho, señor!" said Villafana, with counterfeited indignation, "you will resist, will you! Hah! and you have a dagger, too! Come, señor, give it up."

"Fool," said the prisoner, "thy bitter words have unchained me at last, and driven me to desperation. I will not yield this weapon but with my life. Wo betide him that comes to me with a scourge, were it Don Hernan himself!"

"You will resist him then?—Why now you are a man again! Sit down; fear not: you shall have a better weapon. Come, let us drink a little: 'tis a raw night, and rainy. Here's success to our vengeance—a quart of blood apiece! Methinks, you are more wronged than myself—Therefore, you shall strike the first blow. I give you this privilege, out of friendship. The second is mine."

While Villafana held forth in these extraordinary terms, Juan, shocked into composure, became aware that the wine, which the Alguazil plied with

characteristic infatuation, had already made serious inroads upon his brain. He ogled and smiled, with a stupid contortion of countenance, which was meant to be significant; his articulation was impeded, and his expressions coarser than usual; and without being positively drunk, he was reduced to that condition in which the natural propensities get the better of all artificial qualities. Hence, he became fierce and bloody-minded, without displaying any of the subtle cautiousness and cunning inquisitiveness, that were common to him in his sober hours. It was for this reason that he proceeded to unfold the secrets of his breast, without being in any degree abashed by the looks of horror, with which Juan heard him.

"Know then, brother Juan," said he, "that thou shalt lap the blood of Don Demonios to-morrow morning, at the banquet-table; and afterwards hang up Guzman with thine own hands. Thou art too white-livered, or thou shouldst have known of the matter earlier. Also, thou shalt have thy fair nun again, as before:—that is, upon condition she likes thee better than me; which may be, or may not, for who can tell whether the star will shoot into the marsh, or fall upon the mountain?—Bah! it is a pity I brought thee not another flagon. Busta! I will drink no more; for this is no time to be thick-witted.—Know then, *Juanito querido*, we have brought our conspiracy to a head; and out of the nine hundred Christians in this town there are two hundred and forty sworn on dirk, buckler, and crucifix, to our whole game,—three hundred, who will wink and stand by, till the play is over,—three hundred who will swear faith to the devil himself, when Don Demonios lies hid in his pocket,—and as for the rest, why we must e'en have some hanging and stabbing."

"In heaven's name," said Juan, "what dost thou

mean? Art thou really mad? Bethink thee what thou art saying!"

"Hah!" cried Villafana, "wilt thou skulk backwards, after all? Dost thou pretend to oppose us? We had some thoughts of making thee one of the three chief captains. This Olea stands to; for he swears thou art the best leader in the camp."

"Is Gaspar sworn among you?" said Juan, with a faint voice, his detestation of the bloody scheme arousing him to the necessity of sifting it to the bottom—for he forgot his captivity, and thought only of arresting the progress of a treason so fearful.

"Ay," returned the Alguazil; "and better men than he. Come, clap thy name to the paper, and I swear thou shalt have a command among us, though I should kill thy rival-candidate Gil Gonzales, with my own hand. Dost thou not know these fellows? We have hidalgos among us."

As he spoke, he pulled from his bosom a paper, on which Juan read with affright the names of several men of rank, mingled with those of common soldiers, with many of which he was familiar. His first thought was to secure this dreadful list, and calling to the guards about the prison, arrest the Alguazil upon the spot. A moment's consideration determined him to take further advantage of the communicativeness of the traitor, until made acquainted with all the details of the conspiracy. He bridled his anger, therefore, and concealing his horror under an appearance of doubt and hesitation, to which his trembling agitation gave no little force, he said,

"How is this? Are these names good and true?"—

"See you not Barba Roxa's sign-manual, near the bottom of the list? He subscribed it last night. He draws the figure of a knife well, as one who

knows how to use it. But as for thee, *niño mio*, thou art able to write thy signature in full."

"Stay," cried Juan. "What are you to do? You spoke of a banquet, and the morning. Assassination, hah?"

"Did I not tell thee before? Look," said the Alguazil, with a harsh laugh, displaying a letter, well secured with wax and fillet, on which was written the name of the Captain-General. "Know, that this letter, written carefully on the outside, by mine own hand, (for there is nothing within,) comes from the señor's sire, old Don Martin, whom the devil take to his rest, for fathering so ill-tempered a son. This letter, thou must know," he went on with a chuckle of self-approving craft, "came in the ship of Seville that brought this good wine, and was, by an evil accident, detained on the way. Know, sirrah, and this is my device: The general hath forgotten to invite me to his feast to-morrow, in honour of his saint-day, or some other thing—*Quien sabe?* It is very rude. But he has invited all my caballeros on this paper, and some four score soldiers, who are down likewise. The rest will take their ease in the vestibule, and on the square, to be ready. What do I then? Marry, this: I break in upon the revel with the letter in my hand, and a dagger in my sleeve; the others crowd round with congratulations, and I strike him under the ribs—Pho! I forgot; thou canst not have the *first* blow, as I promised thee; but thou shalt follow, cloaked up to the eyes, and be free to take the second.—What dost thou think of my plot, hah, dear devil? Hah!—"

"That it is the most damnable and dastardly ever devised by villain, and shall bring thee to a villain's death. Rogue! didst thou think thou couldst tell this to *me*, and live? I have thy treason in my hand, and will use it as it becomes an

honourable man and Christian. What ho, guards! treason, treason!"

Greatly astounded as Villafana was by this unexpected defection, the shock served rather to sober than affright him. He gave the prisoner a look of unspeakable malice, and whipping out his sword and calling for help as clamorously as Juan, he assaulted him with the utmost fury. At the same time, five or six of the guardsmen rushed in, and to Juan's utter dismay, instead of aiding him to secure the Alguazil, rushed upon him, some with their spears, to transfix him against the wall, while others, springing behind him, secured him in their arms, and hurled him upon the floor. In an instant, he had lost both the fatal list and the dagger of Guatimozin, and was at the mercy of Villafana, who knelt upon his breast, and shortened his sword, to despatch him with a thrust. But at the very moment when he had given up all hope, and was commending his soul to his Maker, the savage and exulting laugh with which the Alguazil aimed at his throat, was changed to an exclamation of alarm and pain. Up started the assassin, and Juan, springing also to his feet, he beheld, with surprise, the figure of La Monjonaza standing betwixt him and the assailants. The gray mantle had fallen from her head and shoulders, revealing a form of the finest symmetry, and a countenance convulsed into beauty, such as might have become a warring Bellona; to whom she might have been well compared, only that in place of the whip and torch which a moralizing mythology has put into the hands of the goddess, she held an emblem equally expressive, in a short dagger, gleaming with blood from the shoulder of Villafana.

"Villain!" she cried, after looking as if she would have repeated the blow, "art thou not yet requited? Begone!"

And the discomfited traitor, scowling and pointing at the blood trickling from his arm, and yet obviously quailing before her stern frown, left the prison, followed by the guards, who seemed even more terrified than himself.

CHAPTER XIX.

JUAN stood, for a moment, confounded in the presence of his preserver; and Magdalena, gradually exchanging her fierce expression for one more becoming her sex, appeared at last, as he had seen her before, pale, saddened, and subdued. As she sank into this softened temper, her eye fell upon the crimsoned blade; and it was curious to see with what feminine horror, disgust, and shame, she cast it from her, and to contrast this display of undissembled feelings with her late Amazonian bearing and act.

"Magdalena," said Juan, a thousand emotions at once contending in his bosom, "you have saved my life. Haste now and protect that of Cortes: for, be it dear to thee or not, yet it is not fitting he should be left to the knife of an assassin. Acquaint him from me—Nay, bear it not from *me;* for I will not seem as if I sought to purchase my life with the confession—Acquaint him that a dreadful conspiracy, headed by the knave Villafana, is about to burst upon his head. If he seize not the traitor to-night, let him beware who approaches the banquet to-morrow. Above all, let him be on his guard against any one who affects to bring letters from his father. Haste, maiden, haste! for perhaps Villafana, wrought upon by his fears, may discharge his train of horrors this very night."

"Dost thou thus seek to preserve him who has so basely compassed thine own life?" said Magdalena, less with surprise than sorrowing admi-

ration. "Think not of Cortes, but of thyself: thou hast not many hours for thought."

"Alas, Magdalena," said Juan, impatiently, "you do not believe me. I swear to you, that what I say is true: Villafana is a traitor, and is now on the point of assassinating the Captain-General."

"If he were about assassinating thee, and the Captain-General knew it, what aid wouldst thou expect from the Captain-General?" rejoined La Monjonaza.

"Maiden!" said Juan, frowning severely, "in this coldness of purpose, now that thou art acquainted with the act, thou art conniving at murder!"

Apparently this reproof touched Magdalena to the quick. She started, shuddered, and turned as if to leave the prison; but changing her purpose, stepping up to the light, and assuming a boldness which she did not feel, she falteringly asked,

"Is there no case, in which such connivance might be excusable? But a moment since," (and here she bent her head upon her bosom,) "I was about to *commit* murder—Had I slain Villafana, wouldst thou then have thought the act criminal?"

"Surely not, surely not," said Juan; "for, in this case, thou wert arresting the blow of a cutthroat, to kill whom in the act, were but sheer justice, and according to law. And yet I would that the blow had been struck by another. It is not seemly for a woman to carry a dagger, and still more improper that she should use it."

"What if she be attacked by a villain, and no helper nigh?" demanded the forlorn girl. "Heaven has given me no protector—My father, my brother, and my friend—they all lie in this little steel;" and as she picked up the weapon from the floor, as if no longer ashamed to bear it, a ghastly smile

beamed from her visage, like the flash of a Medusa amid the foam of a midnight billow."

"Speak no more of Cortes," she continued, observing that Juan was about to resume the subject of the conspiracy; "he is far better able to protect himself than thou. Were there twenty poniards in Villafana's hand, and were his arm as extended as his malice, yet could he not reach even to the heel of Don Hernan. His fate is written,—yes, more inevitably than thine; for thou hast yet one hope of deliverance, and Villafana has none.—Listen to me, Juan Lerma; it is perhaps the last time on earth that I shall speak to thee. If thou reject mine offer this night, I call heaven to witness that I will leave thee to thy fate."

"Magdalena," said Juan, firmly, "we have spoken of this before. God protect thee, for there is a wall of adamant between us."

"Be it so," said the lady; "and let it be higher than thy wishes, deeper than thy scorn, so thou wilt leave this land, and return to it no more."

"On the morrow, Magdalena, I die," said Lerma, with unabated resolution. "Hear then the counsel of a dying man, who can yet call himself your friend. Do what you have recommended to me: leave this land, and, in the gloom of a cloister, expiate—"

"Yet again?" exclaimed the maiden, with an eye of fire. "This is to distract me! Oh, if thou knew how unjustly thou hast planted daggers in my bosom—daggers to which this thing of steel is but as the thorn of a rosebud—thou wouldst kill thyself, rather than speak them again! But it matters not: whether thou livest or diest, still must thou know that I am wronged.—Listen to me—I will speak of Hilario.—"

"Let it not be so," said Juan; and then solemnly added, "Learn that, yesternight, the wretched Villafana, who, by some magical science, seems ac-

quainted with the secrets of all in this camp, gave me to know what I did not before dream. Magdalena, when I plucked thee from the wreck, I dreamed, for a moment, that I loved thee—" The maiden trembled from head to foot, and Juan was himself greatly agitated; "I beheld one, in whom, from the act of giving her a life, I might fancy a tie, such as did not exist between me and any other human being, from the time of the death of my poor father up to that happy hour. But had that affection ripened even into such as Hilario avowed,"—(Here Magdalena waved her hand impatiently;) "nay, had I plighted with thee faith and troth, and did we stand this moment before the altar, my passion would be at once changed to awe and horror, to know that I was wedding the spouse of Heaven. Magdalena, a life of penitence can scarcely remove the sin of broken vows!"

"Say not this," exclaimed the unhappy Magdalena, vehemently: "What knew I of earth or heaven, when, imprisoned in a cell from childoood upwards, I gave up the one for the other? Heaven broke the oath which oppressors exacted; else, wherefore was I saved of all the sisters, and thrown upon a land where cloisters were unknown? For these vows could I have procured a dispensation. Hast thou never heard of such being dissolved?"

"Surely I have," said Juan, mildly, desiring to allay the agitation of his visitor: "It was told to me, by Villafana, that the señor Camarga (an insane man, who made an attempt on my life,) was once a monk of St. Dominic and an Inquisitor, and permitted to revoke his vows for some worldly purpose, I know not what; and I have heard it also said, that the sister of Don Hernan was allowed to leave a nunnery, to wed some great nobleman of Andalusia."

"It is enough," said Magdalena, calmly, "the vow was suspended, not broken; it will be resumed,

when the purpose for which I now live, is accomplished, and would have been before, but for the accident which brought me to this land.—Juan Lerma, I will not ask thee why thou refusest life at my hands: but it is offered thee by one wronged and defamed, not degraded. If thou live, it is well thou shouldst know the truth, and remember me without contempt; if thou die, the grave shall not cover thee in ignorance. Hilario—Start not, frown not, tremble not, for the truth must be spoken—Hilario abused thy belief, that he might break my heart, and perhaps, also, thine; for he hated me, because I repelled his love with contempt, and thee, because he knew—because he suspected,—that thou wert the cause. You fought; he fell,—and, with what seemed his dying lips, (for, even in death, his spite was not diminished,) repeated the demoniacal falsehood; boasting of the degradation of one whose only shame was that she did not requite his presumption with a dagger!"

Again the figure of the unhappy girl was elevated by passion into the port of a destroying deity. But she perceived that Juan was shocked by a display of fire so unwomanly and, indeed, so fearful; and this instantly transformed her into another being:

"This too, *this* too," she cried, shedding tears of humiliation, "this, too, is a consequence of his malice, for it has converted me into the thing I am not,—into what seems a fury or a demon. Dost thou believe I am—dost thou believe I *was* a creature formed of passions, that should belong only to men? No! oh heaven, oh no! it is the madness that comes from the viper's tooth. Stung, vilified, robbed of respect and happiness, how even can a woman sit down in peace, unless she can die? unless she can die? She will have her vengeance, believe it; and well is it for her, when it is won by the hands of a brother or sire.—Yet, believe this, if thou wilt, for I am not what I was; believe aught,—anything, save the

lies of Hilario. With his dying lips he defamed me—with his dying hand he revoked the slander, and avowed himself a villain. Behold the refutation of calumny."

As she spoke, she drew from her bosom, with a trembling grasp, and put into Juan's, a scrap of paper, on which he read, with extreme surprise, the following words, traced with a hand feeble and agitated, yet well known to him,—

"What I have said of Magdalena del Naufragio," (or Magdalena of the Wreck, for by this name she was known at Isabela,) "is false. In malice and folly I have laid perjury on my soul; and, as I now speak the truth, I pray heaven to forgive me.—Amen.

"ANTONIO DEL MILAGRO."

"Good heaven!" said Juan, "is it possible Antonio could commit this dastardly crime? Alas, Magdalena, I *have* done you a grievous wrong, and I beseech you, pardon me.—This thing was not only wicked, but marvellous. The paper is stained with blood—The saints acquit me of his death, for it was I who shed it! I am glad he died penitent —What brought him to this justice? I held my dagger to his throat, yet he cried, with a devilish malice and courage, 'Strike, for—' But I will not repeat his sinful and exulting falsehoods.—Alas, that his blood should be upon my soul! the blood of his father's son!"

Magdalena surveyed the self-accusing looks of the prisoner, with much emotion; and twice or thrice she opened her lips, to give him comfort, or to continue her dark and singular story, and yet failed, as many times, to speak. At last, she clasped her hands upon her bosom, as if, by an effort of physical strength, to give support and resolution to

her heart, and said, with low and interrupted accents,

"Lament no more for a sin thou hast not committed. Thou wert deceived—Hilario died not by thy hands."

"Hah!" exclaimed Juan, "dost thou tell me the truth? Is Hilario yet living? God be thanked! God be thanked! for I am not a murderer!"

He fell upon his knees, and looking up to heaven with joy, beheld not the grief and trepidation with which his companion surveyed his raptures.

"I told thee, not that he lived, but that thou didst not slay him," said the nun, with an effort.—"Had my father come to my side, and looked upon this paper, after hearing the story of Hilario's baseness, what think you he should have done?"

"Killed him, I must allow," said Juan, rising to his feet; "for even his deep penitence could scarcely be permitted to stand as the sole penalty of such an offence.—Alas, Magdalena, my mind is beset with sore misgivings. How was that paper obtained? How did Hilario die? Thou growest pale! Heaven shield me! didst thou, didst *thou*—?"

He paused with terror. The maiden replied instantly, and almost with firmness:

"Hear the truth, even to the last syllable; for even *thy* good opinion I will not purchase by subterfuge. To Villafana,—a wretch, whose manifold villanies thou couldst not dream, (for know, that, being a sailor in the ship that bore the unlucky sisters, he devised and accomplished its destruction, that he might impiously obtain the holy vessels of silver and gold—Ay, it was Villafana, and not the tempest, that drove us upon the rocks of Alonso—) to Villafana, from whom I learned the cause of the duel and of thy flight, I committed the charge of obtaining this recantation.—Was this wrong?" she exclaimed, giving way to affright, for Juan's looks of horror could not be mistaken: "they were

two fiends together,—the villain struck the villain, —the—"

"Murderess! murderess!" cried Juan aloud, recoiling from her.

A ghastly smile passed over her countenance, and it grew into a faint laugh, which, to Juan's mistaken eye, (for he thought it the merriment of satisfaction or indifference,) seemed unnatural and dreadful, while she replied, her voice hysterically belying her feelings, as much as did her countenance,

"Thou dost not think I employed him to do murder? I appeal to heaven, I did not dream he would do aught but compel the recantation from the wounded man.—What! bid him kill one so defenceless! Had he been strong and well armed, then perhaps, indeed,—then perhaps, I might have thought it. I sought but for the paper; the rest was the deed of Villafana."

"Oh heaven! oh holy heaven!" cried Juan; "speak not another word: rather let me die than hear more. Away! avaunt! thou art not a woman, but a fiend! and all is now as it was, and worse.—What, blood-stained! blood-stained!"—

Magdalena strode towards him, striving to speak, but could only utter the words, 'Injustice! injustice!' mingled with the charge, 'Leave Mexico,' that still made a part of her perturbed thoughts. Had not Juan been entirely overwhelmed by his horror, he must have observed, that her mind was, at this moment, convulsed beyond the degree of any former agitation; that she was, in fact, in a condition both alarming and pitiable. Her countenance was most deathlike, her accents wholly unnatural, and there was something of delirium or idiotcy in the manner with which, while still muttering the broken reproof, 'Injustice,' and the charge, 'Leave Mexico,' she, all the while, extended the

blood-stained paper, as if entreating him again to receive and peruse it.

As it was, he gave utterance to his horror in the words,—

"Miserable woman! the denial forced from the lips of the murdered man, is of a piece with the spirit that compelled it—False, false, all!"

At these words, the paper dropped from her hands, another vacant smile distorted her visage, and she turned to depart; but before she had taken two steps, she tottered, and fell to the floor, with a dreadful scream, that instantly brought the guards into the prison.

The absorbing nature of their conversation had, for the last two or three moments, rendered both incapable of observing that some scene of altercation had suddenly arisen at the dungeon door. High voices might be heard, as of one alternately entreating and demanding admittance, which was gruffly denied by others. The shriek of Magdalena, ringing in their ears like a cry of death, brought the contention to an end; and all rushing in together, they beheld Juan endeavouring to raise the figure of his unhappy and lifeless guest from the floor.

"*Dios mio! y peccavi!* I will kill him where he stands," exclaimed one, rushing forward.

"Not so fast, señor Camarga," cried the hunchback, who was at the head of all, snatching the weapon from the hands of this individual, who seemed peculiarly to thirst for the blood of the young islander. "Here's work for the bastinado! Where's Villafana, ye treacherous dogs, that let women into the prison? He shall pay for it.—Harkee, señor Camarga; if you have any interest in this fair lady, you may help bear her to the palace. Poor fool! these women love as arquebuses shoot: if you make them any obstruction, they

burst in your hands—and this is truer still of a musket, if you thrust it into the earth. In mine own opinion, the young hound has scorned her."

While Najara gave vent to these growling observations, Magdalena was carried out of the prison. The hunchback had reached the door, before Juan, in the confusion of the moment, thought of calling him back, to impart to him the secret of the treachery. But Najara replied only with a malediction, and departed with the lantern; so that Juan was again left to night and solitude.

CHAPTER XX.

Meanwhile, a scene of still more tragical character was on the point of being represented within the walls of the palace.

It was a tempestuous night. The clouds, which had all day enveloped the pagan metropolis, were, at last, gathered over Tezcuco. The wind blew in gusts, with frequent rain; and as the distant thunderbolts rolled with a rumbling cadence over Mexico, vast sheets of lightning shot up in the west, illuminating sky, lake, and mountain, with a cadaverous glare.

Some five or six of the principal cavaliers were assembled with Cortes, in the great Hall of Audience, engaged in earnest and anxious debate. It happened, by accident, that the huge curtain, which, at night, was usually drawn over the window of alabaster, had been, this evening, neglected by the attendants; so that it remained, drooping in gigantic festoons from the great beam, carved into a serpent's head, which held it at the top, down to the lesser ornaments that supported it on the sides, of the casement. The strong cords, by which it could be dragged into its place, hung over the central beam, flapping occasionally against the alabaster wall, as the gust, puffing in through the great door, whirled the smoke and flame of the lamps and torches, from the walls and pillars, to which they were attached.

Thus, though the alabaster slabs were too thick

to transmit any ordinary ray, the brighter flashes of lightning made their way through, and added, at times, a ghastly glare to the light of the lamps; in which the countenances of the cavaliers, perturbed as they were, assumed such an unnatural hue as might have beseemed the ghosts of dead heroes, rising to earth, to meddle again in the sport of slaughter.

The visage of the Captain-General betrayed greater anxiety, mingled with sterner wrath, than appeared on any other; and when he spoke, it was in accents brief and low, and exceedingly emphatic.

"I tell you, cavaliers," he cried, "the mystery that shrouds this treason is more frightful than the treason itself. We are at fault, señores, we are at fault. We behold enough to show us that the devils are at work about us, but not to discover in what mode they are toiling. It is clear enough that Villafana is a dog, and one day he shall hang; but I know not, in what manner, nor at what time, he will bite. This is certain: he has suffered one of the Mexicans to leave his cell, and communicate with Xicotencal: it is certain, also, that this cur of Tlascala will leave the camp before daydawn; and how many of his warriors will follow after him, that I leave you to conjecture. This I have from a true mouth. He is incensed, first, on account of Juan Lerma; and, secondly, I doubt not, the Mexican has made the most of his growling temper and present discontent. What sayst thou, Sandoval? What hinders thee to lie in wait, and, following at his heels, so do with him, that his Tlascalans who desert afterwards, may be frightened on the path, and so return to us? There are good trees on the wayside!"

"Ay," replied Don Gonzalo, grimly, "when there is any executioner's work towards, I am sure to play jack-ketch. I am loath to deal with a man

that hath been so valiant; but if he be a traitor, it is right he should die. What if I give him the bastinado, Turk-wise? Methinks that would bring him into a sounder temper."

It would but inflame the choler of his proud people," said the shrewder general; "whereas his sudden death, dealt upon him in the act of desertion, will strike them with fear. Take thou a rope with thee, my son, and fear not to use it."

The young cavalier nodded assent; and the general went on:

"Concerning the ambassadors, thus secretly treating with a traitor, methinks they have forfeited all claim to protection?"

"Ay," said Alvarado; "and the bastinado, of which Sandoval spake, may serve the good purpose of opening their lips, and thereby revealing, not only the depth of the Tlascalan defection, but the length to which Villafana and his curs have gone with them. Let us send for them, and try the experiment. Or stay—here are cords enough on the curtain. One of these, twisted round the brow with a sword-hilt, I have known to bring out a man's tongue as far as his eyes."

The cavaliers turned to the window; and the bitter smile of the Captain-General was made deathlike, by a flash, brighter than usual, shooting through the wall.

"A good thought," he said; "but we will not be precipitate. We have them secured; and however Villafana may permit them to speak with others, he is somewhat too wise to set them free. We will have this thing considered in the morning."

At this moment, Don Francisco de Guzman made his appearance in the chamber, his visage disfigured by a black patch, and somewhat pale. But this, as it was soon discovered, was caused rather by care than sickness.

"Señor," he exclaimed, "I have been to seek the ambassadors—They have escaped!"

"Escaped!" echoed Cortes. "Thou art beside thyself! And the villain Alguazil, has he fled with them? I will tear his flesh with pincers! What! release the infidels, under my eye?"

"So please you," said Guzman, "this, I think, was no resolved treachery, but an effect of infatuation. The wine that came to us to-day, was too strong for the watchmen: where they got it, I know not; but I found them sound asleep at the open door."

"They shall be scourged, till they drop more blood than they have drunk wine," said Don Hernan, furiously. "And the prison-guards also? Hah? The prisoner has escaped?"

"Not so," said the cavalier: "all's well there, save—"

"And Villafana? Speak me the word—Has he fled?"

"Señor mio, no: he is in the prison, carousing with Juan Lerma, as the guards say. I heard his voice through the door."

"Carousing? does Juan Lerma take his death so merrily? By'r lady, devil as he is, it is a sin to slay him!"

"As to the prisoner," said Guzman, "I know not whether he be merry or not; but I myself (for I had mine ear to the door,) heard Villafana smack his lips, and vow he 'would drink no more, this being no time to be thick-witted.' But every one knows Villafana: his bibbing once brought him to the strappado."

"Ay; and it shall bring him to the gallows.—It is the fate of the can-clinker—all spoken in three words—drunk, whipped, and gibbeted!—Didst thou worm naught from the guards? They were of his own appointing."

"Not a syllable," replied Guzman: "I do believe

they have been too much frightened, and are now penitent men."

"It may be," said Cortes, "it may be; but I would I could look into the dreams of Villafana. If I punish him for the flight of the ambassadors, it may be that I disperse an imposthume before it comes to a head; or it may prove, that I drive the matter into the more vital organs of this body politic, till all be corrupted and consumed. What say ye to a little torture inflicted on Villafana himself? Yet he is a bold dog, and may not speak. They say he winced not under the lash. I swear to you, my friends, I am in a strait."

While Cortes thus admitted the difficulty in which he felt himself pressed, and the cavaliers were divided in their counsels, they perceived a common soldier intrude himself into the chamber, and boldly approach them.

"Hah!" cried Alvarado, ever hot of temper, "who art thou, Sir Gallows-bird, that bringest thy knave's pate among cavaliers in council?"

"Hold! touch him not; 'tis the Barba-Roxa!" exclaimed Don Hernan. "What impertinence is this, sirrah? Who bade thee hitherward?"

"God and my good saint," said Gaspar, flinging himself on his knees, and adding, with the greatest impetuosity, "Pardon, señor! pardon for two unhappy men! Or if that cannot be, why pardon then for *one;* and I care not how soon you hang up the others."

"What means the fool? Art thou distracted?"

"Señor!" cried the soldier, wringing his hands, "I am a knave and traitor. Grant me the life of Juan Lerma, who meant you no wrong, and I will give you, for the rope and sword, two hundred and forty such traitors as the world never saw, and myself among them; for I have signed my name with knife and arrow, and sworn myself to brother-

hood, under the pains of hell, which I care not how soon may came upon me."

"Let some one of you look to the door," said Cortes, quickly: "and see that the sentinels keep their eyes open.—How now, Gaspar! what is this thou sayst? Art thou indeed a villain? I should have struck on the mouth any soldier that had said it of thee."

"I am what I said," replied Gaspar; "your excellency refused to listen to me, when I pleaded for Juan Lerma; and I was incensed. I said to myself, señor, 'I have saved your life, and yet you deny me the life of my friend, who, in ignorance, broke a decree, yet knew no malice.' Besides, señor, you called me a dog,—'an officious, presuming dog;' whereas I was not a dog *then*, but *now*. Well, señor, while I was in a passion, the devil came to me, and tempted me, and I signed my name to my perdition."

"What!" said Alvarado, recoiling with devout horror, "hast thou really signed over thy soul to Satan? We will burn thee, thou devil's penitent, in a hot fire!"

"Speak on," said Cortes. "What meanest thou by this mummery? What devil is this? for, though Satan be walking now among us, yet, I think, it could not be he."

"It was Villafana," replied Gaspar; "and heaven pardon me, for I think it must be Apollyon in his likeness!"

At this communication, the cavaliers all stared at one another, and Cortes exclaimed,

"Two hundred and forty men! What! are there so many knaves of his party?"

"Ay, and many more, who will help, but will not put down their names upon paper," replied Gaspar. "But your excellency says nothing of Juan Lerma. If you will pardon him, your excellency shall hear all."

"How, sirrah!" cried Cortes, sternly, "Do you avow yourself a sworn traitor, and yet dictate to me terms of mercy? Speak, or you shall have that to your brows, which will bring out words with screams."

Gaspar sprang to his feet,—boldly, fearlessly, and even insolently, returning the look of the Captain-General:

"Your excellency has no heart, and I have," he cried. "Do your will upon us both; and reckon my death to your conscience, as you do that of Juan Lerma. You shall not have a word more. Here are my arms.—What cavalier will demean himself to tie them? I will meet your excellency at the judgment-seat."

"Thou art but a fool," said Cortes, moderating his anger,—or, at least, mollifying the severity of his accents; for his countenance yet gleamed with wrath. "Thou knowest, that, having saved my life at Xochimilco, I can, in no case, take thine."

"But I leave that to the laws, without asking any mercy," said the Red Beard, obstinately: "I ask the life of Juan Lerma, condemned without law."

"Dost thou impugn my justice, fellow?" cried the ferocious De Olid. "I swear to thee, when thou art brought to be judged, I will give thee a double quantity, for this very reason."

While the cavalier gave utterance to so excellent a proof of his equity, Alvarado, with whom Gaspar had been a favourite, whispered in his ear,

"Speak out, and fear not. It stands not with the captain's honour to barter men's lives for knave's confessions; yet he shall pardon the young man, thy friend, as I am thy guarantee."

"What say ye, cavaliers?" cried Cortes: "does it become me, to remit a sentence of death, at such mutinous intercession?"

Before any of the officers could reply, Gaspar,

confiding in the promise of Alvarado, threw himself again at the general's feet, crying,

"Señor, I am not a mutineer, but a penitent. I am mad to think that one,—so good a friend, so valiant a soldier, so true a follower, (for there is no falsehood in Juan Lerma,) should die for a small matter,—saving Don Francisco's presence,—when there are so many rogues about us, that go unpunished. But I leave him to your excellency's mercy, trusting that your excellency will reconsider the judgment, and release him. Therefore I will speak, in this trust; and I pray heaven to remember the act, be it merciful or be it cruel.—This is what I have to say: In my passion, I betook me to Villafana; who, promising to save Lerma's life, I signed with him; though the first act of guilt was to take your excellency's life. Holy mother of heaven! pardon me; but I was very much incensed. Well, señor, I found on the paper the names of two hundred and forty men, and I will tell you such as I remember; but if you will send to the prison, and suddenly seize the Alguazil, you will find the list in his bosom.—"

"Quinones, see thou to this," said Cortes, turning to the master of the armory, who made one of the council. "Take with thee none but hidalgos, and be sudden, making no noise and shedding no blood—Yet stay: this will not do, neither. Hark thee, Gaspar, man, when shall this precious earthquake rumble into the upper air?"

"To-morrow," replied the soldier; and then, to the horror and astonishment of all present, he divulged the whole scheme of assassination, as Villafana had himself spoken it in the prison.

"With a letter from my father, too!" cried Cortes, apparently more struck with the heartless barbarity of the stratagem, than with anything else in Gaspar's communication: "This is indeed

the Judas-kiss, the—Faugh! these were the words of Magdalena!"

While he muttered these words to himself, he was roused by a sudden voice at the great door, and heard distinctly the unexpected voice of Villafana, saying, as he wrangled with the guards,

"Oh, 'slid, you take upon you too much. I come at the order of the general."

"Admit Villafana," said Cortes, in tones that penetrated loudly to the farthest limits of the room, for the cavaliers were stricken into a boding silence at the accents of the Alguazil: "Admit my trusty Villafana." And Villafana entered.

He was evidently flushed with wine, and it was for that reason, doubtless, that he did not seem to observe the presence of his forsworn associate, nor the suspicious act of two cavaliers, who stole from the group, and took possession of the door by which he had entered. He approached with a reckless and confident, though somewhat stupid, air, exclaiming, after divers humble scrapes and salaams,

"I come at your excellency's bidding, according to appointment. This was the hour, please your excellency—But 'tis a scurvy night, with much thunder and lightning."

"Ay, truly," said Cortes, with a mild voice, while all the rest stood in the silence of death; "but, being so observant, Villafana, how comes it you have not remarked that you are here without the Indian Techeechee, whom I commanded you to bring hither at this hour?"

"Señor," said the Alguazil, a little confused, "that old Ottomi is a sly dog, and, I doubt me, not over-honest."

"I doubt me so, too," said Cortes, in the same encouraging tones; "yet, honest or false, sly or simple, methinks thou shouldst not have suffered him to escape."

"Escape! what, Techeechee escape!" cried Vil-

lafana with unaffected surprise: "Ho, no! I did but give the gray infidel a sop of wine, and straightway he hid himself in a corner, to sleep off his drunkenness. And,—and,—" continued he, with instinctive though clumsy cunning,—"and I thought it would be unbeseemly to bring him to your excellency, in that condition. I beg your excellency's pardon for making him acquainted with such Christian liquor; but it was out of pity, together with some little hope of converting him to the faith; and, besides, I knew not his head was so weak. I will fetch him to your excellency in the morning."

"Why, this is well," said the Captain-General, with such insinuating gentleness as characterizes the snake, when closing softly on his prey; "and I doubt not thou canst give me as good an account of the ambassadors. It is said to me, that they also have escaped."

"Good God!" cried Villafana, startled not only out of his confidence, but, in great measure, out of his intoxication, by such an announcement; "the ambassadors escaped? It cannot be!"

"Pho, they have hurt thee more than I thought, —even to the point of destroying thy memory," rejoined the Captain-General, with the blandishment of a smile. "There is blood upon thy shoulder: I doubt not, thou wert severely hurt, while attempting to prevent their flight. No one ever questioned the courage of Villafana."

"Yes, señor, yes—no—yes; that is,—I mean to say—Saints of heaven!"—And here the Alguazil paused, completely sobered,—that is, restored to his senses, but not to his wits; for he perceived himself in a difficulty, and his invention pointed out no means of escape. He rolled his eyes, haggard at once with debauch and alarm, over the cavaliers, and, though the lofty figure of Alvarado concealed Gaspar from his view, he beheld enough in the extraordinary sedateness of all present, to fill him

with the most racking suspicions. He turned again to Cortes, and commanding his fears as much as he could, went on, with an appearance of boldness,

"Alas, noble señor, if the ambassadors *be* escaped, I am a lost man,—for I trusted too much to the vigilance of others, and I should not have done so. Alas, señor," he continued with more energy, as his mind began to work more clearly, "I have committed a great offence in this negligence; but I vow to heaven, it was owing to my fears of Juan Lerma, who made many efforts to escape, and had strong friends to help him. Your excellency may see the necessity I was under, to give all my thoughts to him; for, some one having furnished him with a dagger, he foully attacked me, not on my guard, giving me this wound; and had it not been for the sudden rushing in of the guard, I should certainly have been killed."

Thus spoke the Alguazil, with returning craft, mingling together fiction and fact with an address which astonished even himself:

"Yes, señor," he continued, satisfied with the strength of his argument, and now elated with a prospect of providing against the effects of his imprudent disclosures in the prison; "yes, señor, and the young man, besides thus wounding me, swore he would have me hanged for a conspiracy; stating roundly, as the guards will witness, (I am certain that Esteban, the Left-Handed, heard him,) that, being a notorious grumbler, any such fiction would be believed of me. As if this would make me a conspirator! whereas, your excellency knows, according to the proverb, Barking dogs are no biters." And the audacious ruffian, relapsing into security, attested his innocence by a gentle laugh and the sweetest of his smiles.

"Again I say, thou speakest well," said Cortes, carelessly descending from the platform, on which

he had mounted at the approach of Villafana. "Thine arguments have even satisfied me of the folly of certain charges, brought against thee by this mad fellow, here, at thy elbow."

As he spoke, Alvarado, taking his instructions rather from a consentaneous feeling of propriety than from any hint of Don Hernan's, moved aside, and Villafana's eyes fell upon the figure of Gaspar.

"Think of it, good fellow," said Cortes, laying his hand upon Villafana's shoulder, as if to support himself a little; "the things he said of thee are innumerable, and excessively preposterous. He averred, for instance, that thou wert peevishly offended, because I had not invited thy presence to the festivities of the morning banquet, and wert resolved to come, whether I would or not, and that with a letter from my father in one hand, and a dagger in the other. Eh! is not this outrageous? He said, besides,—But, o' my life, thou hast bled too much from this wound! Juan Lerma strikes deep, when the fit is on him. I hope thou art not faint, man?"

To these benevolent expressions, the Alguazil replied by turning upon the general a countenance so bloodless, and an eye filled with such ecstacy of despair, (for if the poniards of all had been at his throat, he could not have been more perfectly apprized of his coming fate,) that Cortes must have been struck with some feeling of commiseration, had not his nature been somewhat akin to that of a cat, which delights less to kill than to sport with the agonies of a dying victim. As it was, he continued to torment the abandoned wretch, by adding, pleasantly,

"And what thinkest thou of this, too, my Villafana? Two hundred and forty conspirators, to rush in when the blow was struck!—doubtless to carve their dinners from the ribs of my cavaliers!—Ah,

Villafana, Villafana! thou shouldst have a care of thy friends. Our enemies are harmless, but our friends are always dangerous.—What dost thou say to all this, Villafana?—Knave! hadst thou twenty daggers in thy jerkin, thou wert still but an unfanged reptile!"

While he spoke, in this jestful mood, he was sensible that Villafana, (doubtless with an instinctive motion, of which he was himself unconscious, being apparently turned to stone,) was stealing his hand up towards his bosom, as if to grasp a weapon. The moment the member had reached the opening of his garment, Cortes caught him by the throat, and giving utterance to his last words with a voice of thunder, and employing a strength irresistible by such a man as Villafana, he hurled him to the floor, at the same instant placing his foot on his throat. Then stooping down, and thrusting his hand into the traitor's bosom, he plucked out, at a single grasp, a poniard, a letter, and the fatal list of conspirators. He pushed the first aside, read the superscription of the second with a laugh, and casting his eye upon the third, devoured its contents with an avidity that left him unconscious of the murmurs of the fierce cavaliers, and the groans of the wretched Alguazil, strangling under his foot.

"What, señor! will you rob the gallows of its prey?" cried Alvarado, pointing his sword at the prostrate traitor, as, indeed, did all the rest, (having drawn them at the moment when Cortes seized him by the throat:) "His crime is manifest to all: what need of trial? Every man his steel through the dog!"

"Hold!" cried the Captain-General; "this were a death for an hidalgo. Up, cur! up, and meet thy fate! Up!" And he spurned the wretch with his foot.

The Alguazil rose up, his face black with blood,

which, not perfectly dispersing even at release from strangulation, remained in leopard-like blotches over his visage, ghastfully contrasted with the ashy hues that gathered between them. As he rose, his arms were seized by two or three cavaliers; and Sandoval, as quick in action as he was sluggish in speech, snatching the rich sword-sash of samite from his own shoulders, instantly secured them behind his back.

"For the love of God, señores!" cried Villafana, finding speech at last, "what do you mean? what do you design? You will not kill an innocent man? Will you judge me at the charge of a liar? Gaspar is my sworn foe. I will make all clear.—Señor, I have been drinking, and my mind is confused: take me not at this disadvantage. Oh, for God's sake, what do you mean?—The list? what, the list? 'Tis for a merry-making—a rejoicing for my birthday. I will explain all to your excellencies.—I am an innocent man.—Gaspar is a forsworn caitiff—a caitiff, señores, a caitiff!—I claim trial by the civil judges."—

"Gag him," cried one.

"Strike him on the mouth," said another. And Villafana, gasping for breath, uttered, for a moment, nothing but inarticulate murmurs.

"De Olid, Marin, De Ircio," cried Cortes, rapidly, and with inexpressible decision, "ye are judges of life and death; Sandoval and Alvarado, by right of office, ye can sit in judgment; Quinones, Guzman, and the rest, I make you, in the king's name, special associates of the others.—Why, here is a court, not martial, but civil; and the dog shall have judgment to his content! He stands charged of treason.—Guilty, señores? or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" cried all with one voice: and De Olid added, "Let us take him into the garden, and hang him to the cedar-tree."

"To the window," said Cortes, pointing with his

sword to the stout cords, hanging so invitingly from the serpent's-head; and in an instant the victim was dragged upon the platform.

Up to this moment, his fears had been uttered rather in vehement complaints than in outcries; but now, when he perceived that he was condemned by a mockery of trial, doomed without the respite of a minute's space to pray, the rope dangling before his eyes, and already in the hands of a cavalier, who was bending it into a noose, he uttered a piercing scream, and endeavoured to throw himself on his knees.

"Mercy!" he cried, "mercy! mercy! I will confess—I can save all your lives—Mercy! mercy!"

Of all the sights of horror and disgust, villany, transformed at the death-hour, into its natural character and original of cowardice, is among the most appalling. Villafana was as brave as a ruffian could be; but when imagination is linked in the same spirit with vice, courage expires almost at the same moment with hope. With a weapon in his hand, and that at liberty, Villafana, perhaps, would have manifested all the valour in which despair perceives the only hope, and died like a man. As it was, bound and grasped in the arms of strong men, entirely helpless and equally without hope, his death staring him in the face, he gave himself up at once to unmanly fears, and wept, screamed, and prayed, until the guards, at watch in the vestibule, sank upon their knees and conned over their beads, to divert their senses from cries so agonized and so horrible.

As he strove to prostrate himself before his inexorable judges, he was pulled up by the cavaliers, and among others by Don Francisco de Guzman, whose countenance he recognized.

"Save me, Guzman! save me!" he cried; "for thou wert once of the party—Save me!"

"Peace, wolf—"

"Mercy! mercy! noble señor!" he continued, turning to Cortes: "I am but one of many. Guzman is as false as I; I charge him with treason: he has abused your excellency's ear!—Listen, señores, and spare me my life: give me a day—give me but to-night, to pray and confess, and you shall have all. There are cavaliers among us—Mercy, for the love of heaven!—Camarga, the Dominican,—Don Palmerino de Castro,—Muertazo of Toledo, Carabo of Seville,—Artiaga, Santa-Rosa, Bravo, Aljaraz, and an hundred more—"

"Peace, lying villain!" cried the Captain-General—"What ho, the rope! quick, the rope!"

"A moment to repent! a moment to repent!" shrieked the victim, struggling so violently to bring his hands before him, as if to clasp them in prayer, that the silken band crackled behind him, and his hands turned black with congested blood; "a moment to repent! for I am a sinner. What! would you condemn my soul, too? Saints, hear me! angels, plead for me! A priest, for the love of heaven! I killed Artiaga of Cadiz; I scuttled the ship at Alonso, drowned the nuns, and stole the church-plate—Call Magdalena—Where's Magdalena?—You are murdering me! Mercy! mercy! I killed Hilario, too—I poniarded him in the old wounds, inflicted by Juan Lerma—I have much to repent—A priest, for the love of God! A priest, oh, a priest!"

Thus raved the villain, stained with a thousand crimes; and if aught had been wanting to steel the hearts of his executioners, enough was divulged in the unavailing abandonment with which he accused himself of misdeeds, so many and so atrocious. While his neck was yet free from the rope, he struggled violently, but without any attempt to do a mischief to his unrelenting murderers; his resistance was, indeed, like that of a cur, under the

chastisement of a cruel and brutal master, which howls and contends, and yet fears to employ its fangs against the tyrant. But when he found, at last, that the cavaliers were actually putting the hasty halter about his neck, his struggles were not greater to escape than to inflict injury. He shook and tossed his head in distraction, and Don Francisco de Guzman, endeavouring to seize him by the beard, he caught the hand of the cavalier betwixt his teeth, and held it with the gripe of a tiger.

"Hell confound thee, wolf!" cried Guzman, groaning with pain, and striking him over the face with the hilt of his sword, but in vain: "Help me, cavaliers, or he will have my hand off!—Villain, unlock thy teeth.—"

"Stand aside—This will unloose thee," said one, thrusting his rapier into the thigh of the vindictive wretch; who no sooner felt the cold steel penetrate his flesh, than he opened his mouth to utter a yell. "Whip him up *now*.—So much for traitors!"

It was the last scream of the assassin. His lips uttered one more cry to heaven; the name of Magdalena was cut short, as the noose closed upon his throat, and ended in a hoarse, rattling, gulphing whine, that did not itself prevail beyond the space of a second. As he shot up to the top of the window, an intense glare of lightning flashed through the alabaster, and his figure, traced upon that lustrous and ghastly medium, was seen dangling and writhing in the death-agony. The next moment, the huge curtain was drawn over the dreadful spectacle: but those who paused a moment, to look back, could behold the convulsions of the dying miscreant giving motion, and sometimes protrusion, to the dark folds of the drapery.—When all was silent, in the darkness of the night, the watchmen in the vestibule could yet hear the pattering of

blood-drops falling from his mangled limb, upon the sonorous wood of the platform.

But there were other scenes now occurring, which, for a time, drove from their thoughts the memory of Villafana.

CHAPTER XXI.

The scene of death in which they were engaged, had so employed the thoughts of the cavaliers, that they were, for a time, insensible to many tumultuous noises in the city, which, beginning at the moment when the struggles and outcries of Villafana were fiercest and loudest, increased every instant, until all was uproar.

At first, as they rushed in disorder to the doors, they thought the din was caused by a renewal of the storm, or rather the sudden outbursting of a tornado; which, overwhelming the houses of some of the poorer citizens, and burying them among the ruins, might account for the screams and yells, that were mingled with other noises. But they soon exchanged this fear for one more stirring, when, as they rushed into the air, they heard an alarum ringing from the chapel-bell on the top of the pyramid, drums beating to arms, arquebuses firing in several different quarters, and were made sensible that a conflict was raging in the town.

"Dios!" cried one; "the conspirators are upon us! Let us back to the hall and defend ourselves!"

"My life upon it," said Gaspar, "the conspirators will not stir till Villafana opens his lips to them.—Heaven rest his soul!—Hark! these are the yells of Indians."

"On, friends!" exclaimed Cortes, perceiving the garden full of soldiers, rushing from various parts

of the palace, as if to seek the fray. "This is Tlascalan work—a knavery of Xicotencal. Hah! hark! see! 'tis an assault upon the prison! Ho, Castilians! ho, Christians! cavaliers and soldiers, to arms! haste, to arms!"

While the soldiers, collecting together at the well-known voice of the Captain-General, began to rush with him towards the prison, over which, besides hearing the shouting of the watchmen at the doors, they beheld three blazing arrows shot up into the air, their alarm was directed to another quarter, by a violent cannonade from the squadron, moored yet at the entrance of the little river; and looking that way, they perceived to their astonishment and fear, no less than four of the brigantines suddenly enveloped in flames.

"Guzman and Quinones!" cried Cortes, with instant determination, "to the prison, with what force ye can pick up on the way. Shoot all fugitives, as well as all assailants. The rest follow me to the river; for I would mine arms should be burned, rather than my vessels."

By this time, all the Spaniards who were capable of bearing arms, were in the open air, and following not less the shouts of Cortes than the crash of the falconets, ran hastily towards the fleet, which, it was now evident, was furiously beset by multitudes of Indians in canoes. The flash of the explosions and the flames bursting ruddily out from sails and cordage, revealed them clustering with impetuosity around the devoted vessels, whose crews, it was equally apparent, were making a gallant resistance. In this light, the houses bordering upon the water were seen covered with citizens, looking on with a tranquillity, which showed that their share in the unexpected hostilities, if indeed they had any, was entirely passive. A more agreeable sight was disclosed to Cortes, as he ran onwards, in the appearance of many thousand Tlascalans,

rushing down the narrow meadows which bordered the canal, with such alacrity of speed and such furious cries of 'Tlascala!' and 'Castilla!' as convinced him of their fidelity and affection.

"It is a Mexican device, after all," he muttered; "a plan of the ambassadors. Well done for thee, Villafana!—Bold varlets, these! What! down with your demi-culverins and sakers, Orozca! Where is my good cannonier, Juan Catalan? We will aid the vessels from the shore."

The mariners, however hotly engaged, replied to the cries of their friends with shouts of courage; and redoubling their exertions, they succeeded not only in repelling the assailants, whose obvious aim was to fire the whole fleet, from those ships not yet ignited, but even in extinguishing the flames in the less fortunate four. In this, they were doubtless materially assisted by the condition of the planks and timbers, which being of green wood, the flames would perhaps have confined their ravages to the more combustible sails and cordage, and soon expired for want of fuel. They weighed anchor also, and taking advantage of the gusts which still blew over the lake, six of the largest and strongest set sail, and boldly plunged among the canoes, overturning and sinking many, while the others, receiving assistance from the shore, betook themselves to the little harbour, dragging with them their disabled consorts.

In this manner, it soon became evident that the danger in this quarter was over; and Cortes, directing that the position of the brigantines should be strengthened by a temporary battery at the mouth of the river, returned to inspect the condition of the city in the neighbourhood of the palace.

The sounds of contention were over; and one passing through the garden, and listening to the moaning of the winds through the trees, could scarce have believed that half an hour before it had

been a scene of such warlike bustle. The bell rang no longer, the drums, trumpets, and arquebuses were silent, and the sentinels paced to and fro at their stations, as if nothing unusual had happened. The only sounds indeed that now vexed the calm of the night, were the occasional explosion of a falconet from some brigantine, afar among the shadows of the lake, still pursuing the retreating canoes. The attack was perhaps unpremeditated; or, perhaps, its only object was to taunt and defy. At all events, it was now over; and in less than an hour from the time of the first alarm, the cry of *all's-well* could be heard through the different quarters of the city.

Before this satisfactory conclusion of an evening so eventful, the Captain-General was doomed to have his equanimity put to the proof by a new trial. A double line of guards surrounded the prison, and Guzman, Quinones, and Gaspar Olea were among them, the last wringing his hands, and bewailing; but the prison-door was open, a thin smoke issued from it, and he could see, at a glance, that the only persons in the apartment were a few soldiers, dashing water over its partly consumed floor. Under the very threshold lay the bodies of two soldiers, fearfully mangled; another was writhing, gasping, and dying in the arms of his comrades; and a fourth, severely wounded, was narrating to Quinones the particulars of an assault, made, as he averred, by ten thousand devils, or Mexicans, who sprang suddenly out of the earth, killed or dispersed the whole guard, carried off the prisoner, or burned him, he knew not which, (for he lay upon the ground, counterfeiting death,) and then, setting fire to the building, vanished quite as suddenly as they came.

"Were these men Mexicans or Tlascalans?" demanded Cortes, without betraying any sign of feeling.

The soldier started at the sound of his leader's voice, and hastily replied,

"In good faith, señor, I know not, for I was somewhat overcome with fear."

"And with wine, sirrah!" exclaimed the General. "But it matters not—thou art too stupid to answer now. Have this fellow into the den, Quinones, and let him be brought to me to-morrow.—Señor Don Francisco, we will walk to the palace.

He put his arm into Guzman's, and dragging him to a little distance, where no beam of torch or cresset illuminated his visage, exclaimed, eagerly,

"Tell me the truth, Francisco:—has he perished by fire in the prison, or has he escaped me?"

"Señor," replied Guzman, "his star, or his devil, has helped him."

"Why then the fiends seize thee, and all false friends, who plague me!" cried Cortes, giving way to passion. "Is it thus I am to be cheated?"

"Señor," said Guzman, moderately, but without fear; "I have mine own cause of distress, for my hand is horribly mangled, and I have heard that the bite of a dying man causes mortification. So, with this pain of body and mind, I may not speak good counsel or good defence.—When I reached the prison, it was empty and on fire. Had not your excellency interfered with the execution this day—"

"Ay, there again!" muttered the Captain-General; "mine own hand is made to befool me; it pulls out of the pit faster than my foot tramples in. Hark thee, Guzman, dost thou not think this young man is protected by some special providence?"

"I, señor?"

"Why, look you, what could have carried him through the tribes of the West, to the South Sea, and back again?—(a device of thy scheming, too!) And, didst thou not see, I was about to run him

through, in the very act of mutinous resistance, when a brute and insensate dog seized my sword-blade in his mouth? And now, for the third time, what but his angel could have brought to his prison-door yonder infidels of Mexico—his only friends, I think?"

"Let your excellency question if this circumstance will not, without removing him from punishment, give a still stronger excuse for it? The scribe visited him in the dungeon; a paction with the enemy, sealed by the act of flight with them to their stronghold, has confirmed him thrice over a traitor."

"Ay, by heaven! it is true!" said Cortes, smiting his hands together; "and, by and by, I will take him out of his hiding-place, and crown the day of victory with a double triumph!"

"And who can affirm," quoth Don Francisco, "that the misbelievers have not taken him for a sacrifice? It is said, the coronation of Guatimozin is deferred only until he can provide a Castilian victim to do honour to the ceremony. By my faith, señor, there is a pleasant twitch in my cheek,—ay, in the scar of the rapier-wound—at the very thought of this retribution!"

"Now, by heaven," said Cortes, with an altered voice, "villain as he is, I cannot rejoice that such a dismal fate should befall him. Death, indeed, but not a death of horror! Dost thou think this, then, can be his doom? Alas, poor youth! had he but some one to lament him or to avenge, I were better satisfied with what I have done. I swear to thee, Francisco, we are e'en as base knaves as himself; for we have employed our strength—our cunning and our strength—against a creature that is utterly friendless. Alas, I say; for I remember me of the days of old; and surely I loved him once as my own soul."

This outbreaking of feeling did not at all surprise

Guzman, who had been familiar from the beginning with the ebbings and flowings of Don Hernan's hate, and who had several times seen him, when the destiny of Juan seemed already closed, affected so much that he shed tears, as he did at the present moment. But Guzman was acquainted with a spell which never failed to banish all compunction from the General's breast; and he did not scruple to employ it now.

"It is enough!" muttered Cortes, through his clenched teeth. "Heaven and my conscience acquit me, and I will think of it no more."

With these words, he seemed to discharge from his mind all thoughts of the youth so deeply detested, and addressing himself to the task of inspecting in person the condition of all assailable points in the city, betook himself at last, and at the day-dawn, to his repose.

END OF VOL. I.