

Hume Fergus

The Harlequin Opal: A Romance.
Volume 1 of 3



Fergus Hume
The Harlequin Opal: A
Romance. Volume 1 of 3

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23151339

The Harlequin Opal: A Romance. Vol. 1 (of 3):

ISBN <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/43187>

Содержание

CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	26
CHAPTER III	46
CHAPTER IV	64
CHAPTER V	81
CHAPTER VI	100
CHAPTER VII	120
CHAPTER VIII	139
CHAPTER IX	157
CHAPTER X	173
CHAPTER XI	186
CHAPTER XII	204

Fergus Hume

The Harlequin Opal: A Romance. Vol. 1 (of 3)

PROEM

The stone had its birth in the nurturing earth.
Its home in the heart of the main,
From the coraline caves it was tossed by the waves
On the breast of an aureate plain;
And the spirits who dwell in the nethermost hell
Stored fire in its bosom of white;
The sylphs of the air made it gracious and fair
With the blue of the firmament's height.

The dull gnomes I ween, gave it glittering sheen.
Till yellow as gold it became:
The nymphs of the sea made the opal to be
A beacon of emerald flame.

The many tints glow, they come and they go
At bidding of spirits abhorr'd,
When one ray is bright, in the bosom of white,
Its hue tells the fate of its lord.

For yellow hints wealth, and blue meaneth health,
While green forbodes passing of gloom,
But beware of the red, 'tis an omen of dread,
Portending disaster and doom.

CHAPTER I

CHUMS

Long years have passed since last we met,
And left their marks of teen and fret;
No longer faces plump and smooth,
Proclaim the halcyon days of youth.
But haggard looks and tresses white
Betray the ardour of the fight;
The same old friends: we meet once more —
But not the merry boys of yore.

"It is a great mistake," said Sir Philip Cassim, looking doubtfully at the piece of paper lying on his desk; "then we were foolish boys, now we are — I trust sensible men. Certainly it is a great mistake."

The piece of paper was yellow with age, a trifle grimy, and so worn with constant foldings, that it was wonderful the four quarters had not long since parted company, as had the four friends, each of whom carried a similar piece in his pocket-book. Often in his wanderings had Sir Philip pondered over that untidy boyish scribble setting forth the foolish promise, which he now, half regretfully, characterised as "a great mistake."

"Bedford Grammar School,

"24th July, 1874.

"If we live and are in good health, we promise faithfully to meet at Philip's house, in Portman Square, London, on the twenty-fourth day of July, one thousand eight hundred and eighty-nine, at seven o'clock in the evening.

"(Signed)

"Philip Winthorp Cassim,

John Duval,

Peter Paul Grench,

Timothy Terence Patrick Fletcher."

"That is quite fifteen years ago," said Cassim, smoothing the frail paper with tender fingers; "now it is the twenty-fourth day of July in the year eighty-nine. Six o'clock! I wonder if any of them will turn up. Jack is an engineer, building railways and bridges in China. Peter, as a respectable physician, doses invalids in Devonshire. Special Correspondent Tim, the stormy petrel of war, wires lies to London newspapers. I – I am a mere idler, given to wanderings among the tombs of dead civilisations. Peter may come. It means only a short railway journey to him; but Jack and Tim are probably thousands of miles away. Still, as I came from the Guinea Coast to meet them, they certainly ought not to miss the appointment. This is the day, the place, the hour, and I have

prepared the fatted calf, of which they will partake – if they turn up. Pshaw! I am a fool to think they will come. They have, no doubt, quite forgotten this boyish freak. Perhaps it is best so. It is a great mistake to arrange a meeting fifteen years ahead. Father Time is too fond of strange surprises."

Rising from his chair, he paced slowly to and fro with folded arms, and bent head, the droop of this latter being somewhat dejected. The idea that he was about to meet his old schoolfellows rendered him pensive, and a trifle regretful. Many years had passed since those halcyon days of youth, and, oh, the difference between now and then! He could hardly avoid speculating on their certain mutation. Had the wand of Time changed those merry lads into staid men? Would Jack still be ambitious as of yore? Tim's jokes were famous in the old days; but now, perchance, he found life too serious for jesting. Then Peter's butterflies! How often they had laughed at his entomological craze. Now, doubtless, he was more taken up with pills and patients. And himself, – he had out-lived his youthful enthusiasms, more's the pity. No wonder he felt pensive at the thought of such changes. Retrospection is a saddening faculty.

Cassim grew weary of these pessimistic fancies, and pausing in front of the fireplace, surveyed himself long and critically in the mirror. It reflected a dark, handsome face, reddened by the saltiness of wind and wave, boldly cut features, and melancholy eyes. Those eyes of Philip's were somewhat misleading, as they suggested a poetic nature, steeped in sentimentalism, whereas he

was a remarkably matter-of-fact young man, inclined to scoff at the romantic tendencies of his fellow-creatures. By no means expansive or apt to unbosom himself to his friends, this reticence, in conjunction with his romantic appearance, entirely deceived the world as to his true character. His Byronism lay in looks, rather than in actions.

"Thirty is by no means old," mused Sir Philip, absently stroking his moustache, "if anything, it errs on the side of youth, yet I look close on a hundred. Dark people never do wear well. Tim is five years older than I, Peter past thirty-three, but it's probable they look younger than I do. As to Jack – well, Jack is an infant of twenty-eight summers, and I suspect has altered but little. They would hardly recognise me. Possibly I shall have considerable difficulty in recognising them."

He resumed his walk and his soliloquy, reverting therein to his first idea.

"This meeting is a mistake. Beyond the fact that we were at school together, we have nothing in common about which to converse. Different lives, different ideas. We will simply bore one another. Perhaps they are married. Peter was just the kind of boy who would grow into a domesticated man. Jack was romantic, and has probably been captured by a pretty face. Tim! I'm not so sure about Tim. I fancy he is still a bachelor like myself!"

It was his own fault that such was the case, as many a maiden would have gladly married Sir Philip and his Kentish acres. The

baronet, however, with but little predisposition to matrimony, fought shy of the marriage ring, and preferred his yacht to all the beauties in Christendom. On rare occasions, he showed himself in Belgravia drawing-rooms, but in the main loved the masculine seclusion of his club, and the lurching deck of *The Bohemian*. It may be that some of his remote ancestors had intermarried with the Romany, and thus introduced a strain of wandering blood into the family; but certain it was that Sir Philip Cassim, in place of being a steady-going country squire, was an irreclaimable Arab in the matter of vagrancy. Cases of atavism occur in the most respectable families.

His nomadic instincts lured him into the dark places of the earth, and, as a rule, he preferred these to the more civilised portions. Humanity in the rough is more interesting than humanity veneered with culture, and in seeking such primevalism, Sir Philip explored many of those barbaric lands which gird our comfortable civilisation. Peru he knew better than Piccadilly; St. James's Street was unknown territory to him compared with his knowledge of Japan, and if his yacht was not skirting the treacherous New Zealand coast, she was certainly battling with the giant billows off the Horn.

Hating conventionalism, and the *leges non scriptæ* of London society, this vagabond by predilection rarely dwelt in the Portman Square family mansion. When he did pay a visit to town, he usually camped out – so to speak, in a club bedroom, and before his friends knew of his whereabouts, would flit

away without warning, and be next heard of at Pernambuco, or somewhere about Madagascar. On this special occasion, however, he occupied his town house for the purpose of keeping the appointment made with his three friends fifteen years before on the banks of the Ouse.

On this account, and to avoid the trouble of hiring servants for the few days of his stay, he brought his stewards up from the yacht. These, accustomed to such emergencies, owing to Sir Philip's whimsical mode of life, speedily rendered a few rooms habitable, and prepared the dinner, which was to celebrate the re-union of the quartette. It seemed strange that Cassim should take all this trouble to fulfil a boyish promise, but as he was a man who did not make friends easily, and moreover was beginning to weary of solitary wanderings, he greatly inclined to a renewal of these youthful friendships. Besides, he cherished a kindly memory of his old school-fellows, and looked forward with genuine pleasure to meeting them again. Yet, as his latter reason savoured of sentimentalism, he would not admit of its existence even to himself – it clashed with his convictions that life was not worth living.

Despite the fact that he was a cosmopolitan, Philip's nature, impressionable in the extreme, was deeply tinged with the prevailing pessimism of the day. He professed that facile disbelief in everything and in everyone, which is so easy to acquire, so difficult to relinquish. Human nature he mistrusted, friendship he scoffed at, and was always on his guard against

those with whom he came in contact. Thus living entirely within, and for himself, the real geniality of his disposition became encrusted with the barnacles of a selfish philosophy. This *noli me tangere* creed isolated him from his fellow-creatures – with the result that while he possessed many acquaintances he had no real friends. Thus he created his own misery, he inflicted his own punishment.

Adopting as his motto the saying of the Oxford fine gentleman, "Nothing's new! nothing's true, and no matter," Cassim schooled himself to suppress all outward signs of feeling, and passed through life with a pretended indifference to the things of this world. Pretended! because he really felt deeply and suffered acutely, though pride forbade his showing aught of such mental disturbances to those around him. Perhaps, in seeing so much of the world, he had early exhausted all emotion; but he certainly surveyed everything from Dan to Beersheba with calm indifference. The real man was a genial, kind-hearted creature; the false, a frigidly cold person who accepted all things with ostentatious stoicism.

He was by no means popular with men, as they greatly resented his reserve and haughty demeanour; but women professed to find him charming. Probably they, with the subtle instinct of their sex, saw below the mask of feigned cynicism, and judged him by what he was, not by what he appeared to be. Certainly he never laid himself out to gain their good opinion. He rarely troubled to make himself agreeable; he was not a

marrying man (than which there can be no worse crime in a woman's eyes), and led a solitary, vagrant existence; yet, in spite of such social disqualifications, women were his best friends, and defended him loyally from the clumsy sneers of his own sex. Assuredly he should have married, if only out of gratitude for such championship; but he preferred a single life, and in the main eschewed female society.

Withal he was not inclined to undervalue either his personal appearance or his mental capacity. No mean classical scholar, he seldom passed a day without dipping into the charming pages of Horace or Catullus. Of the two he preferred the Veronese, who with Heine and Poe formed his favourite trio of poets, from which names it can be seen that Sir Philip had a taste for the fantastic in literature. He was conversant with three or four modern languages, and was especially familiar with the noble tongue of Castille. A man who can read "Don Quixote" in the original is somewhat of a rarity in England. Those of Philip's acquaintances who could induce him to talk literature and art formed an excellent opinion of his abilities. Moreover, he was unique in one respect. He had circumnavigated the globe, yet had refrained from writing a book of travel.

As to his personal appearance, it was as smart and spruce as that of his yacht. Only those who know how a crack yacht is cherished by her owner can thoroughly understand this comparison. In spite of his solitary existence, Philip was always careful of the outward man, and this attention to his toilet was a

notable trait of his character. Yet he was by no means effeminate, foppish, or finical. To sum up, he was a well-dressed, well-bred, cultured Englishman – who had all the qualities – mental, personal, and physical – fitting him to shine with no mean lustre in society, yet he preferred to live the life of a nautical hermit – if such a thing be possible.

Walking constantly to and fro, he glanced every now and then at the clock, the large hand of which was close on seven. Given that all three guests were within a measurable distance of the rendezvous, he began to calculate, from what he knew of their idiosyncrasies, which one of them would be the first to arrive.

"I am certain it will be Peter," decided Cassim, after due reflection; "neat, orderly, punctual Peter, who never missed a lesson, and never came late to class. Tim is careless! Jack is whimsical! If anyone arrives, it will be Dr. Peter Paul Grench. And," he added, as the bell rang, "here he is."

His prognostication proved to be correct, for in a few minutes the door of the study opened to admit a precise little gentleman, in whom Philip had no difficulty in recognising his quondam schoolfellow. It was a trifle larger Peter – it was Peter in evening dress, twirling a pince-nez – Peter with mutton-chop whiskers and a bald head; but it was undeniably Peter Paul Grench, of Bedford Grammar School.

"'The child,'" quoth Philip, advancing to meet his guest, "'is father to the man.' It is just on seven, and you, Peter, keep your fifteen-year-old appointment to the minute. I am delighted to see

you."

"I am sure the feeling is reciprocal," responded Dr. Grench, primly, as he grasped the baronet's hand; "it is indeed a pleasure to meet an old schoolfellow after these many years."

Peter spoke in a Johnsonian manner, but his words were genuine enough and under the influence of this natural emotion, for the moment he forgot his primness. After a time, however, habit asserted its influence over nature, and Grench resumed his buckram civilities, while Philip, also recovering himself, relapsed into his usual nonchalant manners.

"So you kept this appointment, after all," said Cassim, as they settled themselves for a confidential conversation; "I thought it possible you might have forgotten about it."

"By no means," answered Grench, producing a piece of paper similar to that of Philip's. "I have often looked at this, and always intended, unless prevented by disease or death, to meet my old schoolfellows as agreed. Here we are, my dear friend; but Tim and Jack?"

"May be at the other end of the world, for all I know," responded the baronet, carelessly. "Special correspondents and engineers are the Wandering Jews of to-day. Still, as I came from the Guinea coast for this appointment, they will surely not grudge a lengthy journey for a similar purpose."

"Tim is in London," said Peter, unexpectedly.

"Ah!" remarked Philip, manifesting but little surprise, "you have seen him, then?"

"No! Since we parted at Bedford I have seen none of you; but I have heard of all three."

"Nothing good of me, I am afraid," said Cassim, with that amiable belief in his fellow-creatures which made them love him so.

"Nothing bad, at all events," answered Peter, serenely. "You are constantly travelling; you are still a bachelor; you open your heart to no one, and judge the world as though you were not its denizen."

"Which last remark is stolen from La Rochefoucauld. Yes! Your description is accurate if not original. However, let us not talk of Philip Cassim. I am terribly tired of him. What about Jack and Tim?"

"Of Jack I know nothing, save that he was last heard of in India. Tim, however, wrote to me the other day saying *he* intended to keep this appointment. Concerning his life, he volunteered no information."

"So like Tim! His private correspondence was always unsatisfactory. I like his newspaper letters however; the descriptions are so bright and vivid – plenty of gunpowder and adventure. Certainly Tim makes an excellent war correspondent. I wonder if he still has that strong brogue."

"Surely not. When he came to Bedford, he was fresh from Ireland; but now that he has been travelling so much, he must have lost his pronounced Irishisms."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Philip, with a smile, "Tim is

Irish of the Irish. I believe he loves his brogue. You can't educate the race nature out of a man. Believe me, my dear Peter, Tim will be as noisy and as warm-hearted as of yore. I am very fond of Tim."

"Yet I should think Tim, such as you describe him, would be the last person to suit a fastidious individual such as yourself."

"Come now, Peter, I am not quite so hypercritical as all that. Besides, Tim, with all his noise and brogue, is a thorough gentleman. It is your venerated person I object to. However, Tim may have changed. Meanwhile what about yourself?"

"Like Canning's knife-grinder, I have no story to tell. When I left Bedford I went to Cambridge – afterwards came to London. Passed my examinations, walked the hospitals, took my degree, and hearing that a doctor was wanted down at Barnstaple, I went there. For some years I practised with more or less success. Then I retired to give – "

"Retired!" interrupted Philip, in surprise. "Have you made your fortune?"

"By no means. Country doctors never make fortunes. No! I inherit five hundred a year from my father, and as there is no necessity for me to physic people for a livelihood, I devote myself – "

"To sticking pins through unoffending butterflies!"

"Now, how did you guess that?" asked the little doctor, in mild surprise.

"Easily enough. You had a butterfly and beetle mania at

school. If I remember rightly, we rolled you in nettles to cure you of entomology. Boys don't relish scientific urchins. So you are still at it. But five hundred a year and beetles. Peter, you are not ambitious."

"No," assented Grench, simply; "I am not at all ambitious. My entomology gives me great pleasure, or why should I not enjoy myself in my own way? Ah, Philip, you do not know what true enjoyment is."

"Certainly not – if it's butterflies."

"To see one of the *Callidryas* species for the first time is indeed a pleasure," said Peter, beaming with scientific rapture. "Then the *Papilios*, the *Hesperidæ* and the red *Timitis* – "

"Oh, oh!" yawned Philip, stretching himself, "how dry it sounds."

"Dry!" echoed Peter, indignantly; "the most fascinating pursuit in the world."

Philip looked kindly at the little man who appeared to be so satisfied with his simple pleasures.

"Decidedly, Peter, you are a happy person. Come with me on a cruise, and I will introduce you to the paradise of butterflies. Tropical America, Peter, where the insects are like flying flowers. Green butterflies, purple beetles, gilded moths – "

"Oh!" cried Peter, opening his eyes with delight, "I should like to go to South America. I would find a peculiar species there, the *Heliconidæ*. Why, Philip, if only – "

"Hark! there's the bell," exclaimed Cassim, rising with

alacrity, rather thankful to escape Peter's lecture. "Is it Jack or Tim?"

"Tim," said Peter, promptly, "no one else would ring so violently."

"Where did ye say they were?" cried a hearty Irish voice half way up the stairs.

"That settles it," remarked Philip, comically, as he opened the door; "no two persons can possess such a strong brogue."

And Tim it was. Tim, large and burly, roaring like a Bull of Bashan, who hurled himself into the room, and flung himself on Philip's neck.

"My dear friend! my dear boy!" he thundered, squeezing Cassim in his athletic embrace, "it's glad I am to see you."

"Gently, Tim, gently," gasped Philip, helpless in the hug of this bear; "don't crush me to a jelly."

"And Peter!" exclaimed Tim, releasing the baronet to pounce on the doctor, "you fat little man, how splendid you look."

Warned by the fate of Philip, the doctor skilfully evaded the embrace of the giant, and Tim was only able to demonstrate his affection by a handgrip. He threw all his soul into this latter, and Peter's face wrinkled up like a monkey's with pain. It was like a fly struggling with an elephant, and Philip, thoroughly roused from his ordinary placidity, laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"As soon as you've quite done murdering us, Tim," he said, placing a chair between himself and his too demonstrative friend,

"perhaps you'll give your hat and coat to the servant."

Tim, who had rushed upstairs without pause, meekly delivered the articles in question to the servant, who stood grinning at the door. Looking on this respectful grin as a liberty, Philip frowned at the poor man, who thereupon vanished, while Tim, overcome by his late exertions, fell so heavily into a chair that the room rocked.

"Phew!" he said, wiping his heated brow, "it's hot. I am, anyhow."

"That's scarcely to be wondered at," returned Cassim dryly, "considering the enthusiasm of your greeting."

"And why not?" retorted Tim, with the broadest of brogues; "am I not glad to see you both?"

"Of course; and we are glad to see you," said Peter, examining his crushed hand; "but you needn't maim us for life."

Tim roared with laughter in the most unfeeling manner, and Cassim, with a smile, placed his hand on the giant's shoulder.

"The same noisy Tim as of old," he said kindly; "you were a large boy, Tim, and now you are a large man. I wouldn't have recognised you, though, save for the brogue. It's as strong as ever."

"That's true, anyhow," acknowledged Fletcher placing his huge paw on Philip's slender hand as it rested on his shoulder. "Wasn't I but one term at the school, and that didn't turn it into cockney speaking. Besides, I've been to Cork since."

"To freshen up the accent, I suppose," said Grench, with the

air of a man who has made a cutting remark; "but a special correspondent should know more than one language."

"Especially if the language is Irish," finished Cassim, mischievously.

"Get along with you," replied Tim, with a twinkle in his eye, "why, it's a polyglot I am, French, Italian, Spanish, and a touch of Arabic. I can tell lies in any one of them. So here you are, lads. Where's Jack?"

"Lord knows!"

"He was in South America when I heard last; but I'll go bail he'll turn up soon. What is the time?"

"Half-past seven," rejoined Peter, consulting an eminently respectable watch of the family physician species.

Tim took out his piece of paper from a pocket-book commensurate to his size, and smoothed it carefully with his huge hand.

"Seven's the hour, and Jack's late. I never knew him early yet."

"Well, you were not renowned for punctuality at school, Tim!"

"True for you, Philip, and many's the hearing I've had for that same. But this is a special occasion, and Jack should be punctual. Confound him."

"Oh, he'll be here shortly," said Cassim, shrugging his shoulders. "We have plenty to talk about until he arrives. How are you, Tim? But I needn't ask, you look like the giant Goribuster."

"Six foot five in my stockings," replied Tim, complacently; "and a good thing it is for me that same. Special corresponding

isn't knocking about the world in a gentleman's yacht, sir."

"Or collecting butterflies," added Philip, with a sly smile at Peter.

"Are you at that rubbish still, Peter?"

"Of course I am," answered Peter, in mild surprise; "in fact, since my father left me five hundred a year, I've devoted myself entirely to entomology."

"And to eating!" said Tim, with a grin. "Why, Peter, you've a paunch like a priest."

"Oh, really!" began Peter, scandalised; but his further protestations were drowned in the laughter of Philip, on hearing which Tim nodded approvingly.

"Come now, my dear friend, that's better. You are more like a Christian than when I last saw you."

"At Bedford?" inquired Philip, still smiling.

"No! In London – no less. Didn't I see you at the theatre six months ago, looking for all the world as if you were attending your own funeral?"

"Why didn't you speak to me?"

"You looked so supercilious and stand-off-the-grass like that I couldn't bring myself to it at all."

"You idiot!" said Philip, colouring with vexation. "You know I am always glad to see you."

"Is that a Chinese invitation, Philip?"

"No; I assure you, Tim. Don't think me such a prig. Why, I came all the way from the Guinea coast just to meet you."

"It's a fine boy you are," said Tim, stretching out his huge hand; "it's only joking I am. If you didn't recognise an old friend, it's thrashing you I'd be, as once I did at school."

"If I remember rightly, it was you who had the worst of that little encounter," retorted Philip, gripping Tim's hand strongly.

"It was a draw," said Peter, suddenly; "I remember the fight quite well. But we can talk of these things again. I want to know what Tim is doing."

"And this is fame," grunted Tim, nodding his head. "Haven't you seen my letters about the Soudan War to *The Morning Planet*, and my account of the Transvaal ructions? Am I not a special correspondent, you ignorant little person?"

"Oh yes, yes; I know all that," replied Peter, impatiently; "but tell us about your life."

"Isn't that my life, sir? When I left school, I went to Ireland and became a reporter. Then I was taken up by a paper in London, and went to the Soudan – afterwards to Burmah, where I was nearly drowned in the Irriwaddy. They know me in Algiers and Morocco. Now I've just returned from Burmah, where I parted with my dear friend, Pho Sa. He's in glory now – rest his soul! They hanged him for being a Dacoit, poor devil."

"You seem to have been all over the world, Tim," said Philip, when the Irishman stopped for breath, "it's queer I never knocked up against you."

"Why, you never stayed one day in one place. That boat of yours is a kind of Flying Dutchman."

"Not a bit of it; she has doubled the Cape lots of times. I was just trying to persuade Peter to take a cruise with me."

"I am seriously thinking of the advisability of doing so," observed Peter, judiciously selecting his words.

"Are you, indeed, Mr. Lindley Murray. Well, if Philip asks me, I'll come too."

"Will you really, Tim?" asked Philip, eagerly.

"Of course I will. There's no war on at present, and I'm not busy. If those squabbling South American Republics don't come to blows again, I'll be free for six months, more or less."

"Then come with me, by all means."

"I tell you what," observed Peter, who had been thinking; "Jack, if he turns up at all, will have travelled home from South America. Let us take him back in Philip's yacht."

"That's not a bad idea anyhow," from Tim, patting Peter's head, a familiarity much resented by the family physician. "You've got brains under this bald spot."

"I am quite agreeable, provided Jack turns up," said Sir Philip, yawning; "but it is now eight o'clock, and I'm hungry. It's no use waiting any longer for Jack, so I vote we have dinner."

"He'll arrive in the middle of it," said Grench, as Cassim touched the bell. "Jack was never in time, or Tim either."

"Don't be taking away my character, you mosquito," cried Tim, playfully, "or I'll put you on the top of the bookcase there. It's a mighty little chap you are, Peter!"

"Well, we can't all be giants!" retorted Peter, resentfully. "I'm

tall enough for what I want to do."

"Collecting butterflies! You don't know the value of time, sir. Come along with me to the dining-room." And, in spite of Peter's struggles, he picked him up like a baby, and carried him as far as the study door. Indeed, he would have carried him into the dining-room had not the presence of the servant restrained him. Tim had no idea of the dignity of the medical profession.

The servant intimated that dinner was ready, so the three friends sat down to the meal rather regretting that Jack was not present to complete the quartette. Just as they finished their soup the servant announced —

"Mr. Duval!"

Simultaneously the three sprang up from the table, and on looking towards the door beheld a tall young fellow, arrayed in tweeds, standing on the threshold.

"Jack!" they cried, rushing towards him with unbounded delight. "Jack Duval!"

"My dear boys," said Jack, his voice shaking with emotion; "my dear old friends."

CHAPTER II

THE DEVIL STONE

Spirits dwelling in the zone
Of the changeful devil stone,
Pray ye say what destiny
Is prepared by Fate for me.
Doth the doubtful future hold
Poverty or mickle gold,
Fortune's smile, or Fortune's frown,
Beggar's staff, or monarch's crown?
Shall I wed, or live alone,
Spirits of the devil stone?

See the colours come and go,
Thus foreboding joy and woe;
Burns the red, the blue is seen,
Yellow glows and flames the green,
Like a rainbow in the sky,
Mingle tints capriciously,
Till the writhing of the hues,
Sense and brain and eye confuse,
Prophet priest can read alone
Omens of the devil stone.

Having finished dinner, they repaired to the library, and there made themselves comfortable with coffee and tobacco. Emotion at meeting one another after the lapse of so many years had by no means deprived them of their appetites, and they all did full justice to the excellent fare provided by Philip's cook. So busy were they in this respect that during the meal conversation waxed somewhat desultory, and it was not until comfortably seated in the library that they found time for a thoroughly exhaustive confabulation.

For this purpose the quartette drew their chairs close together, and proceeded to incense the goddess Nicotina, of whom they were all devotees save Peter. He said that tobacco was bad for the nerves, especially when in the guise of cigarettes, which last shaft was aimed at Philip, who particularly affected those evil little dainties abhorred by Dr. Grench. Jack and Tim, to mark their contempt for Peter's counter-blast, produced well-coloured meerschaum pipes, which had circumnavigated the globe in their pockets. Whereat Peter, despairing of making proselytes, held his tongue and busied himself with his coffee – very weak coffee, with plenty of milk and no sugar.

"What an old woman you have become, Peter," said Cassim, watching all this caution with languid interest. "You have positively no redeeming vices. But you won't live any the longer for such self-denial. Tim, there, with his strong coffee and stronger tobacco, will live to bury you."

"Tim suffers from liver!" observed Peter, serenely making a

side attack.

"What!" roared Tim, indignantly, "is it me you mean? Why, I never had a touch of liver in my life."

"You'll have it shortly, then," retorted Peter, with a pitying smile. "I'm a doctor, you know, Peter, and I can see at a glance that you are a mass of disease."

All this time Jack had spoken very little. He alone of the party was not seated, but leaned against the mantelpiece, pipe in mouth, with a far-away look in his eyes. While Tim and Peter wrangled over the ailments of the former, Philip, lying back luxuriously in his chair, surveyed his old schoolfellow thoughtfully through a veil of smoke. He saw a greater change in Jack than in the other two.

In truth, Duval was well worth looking at, for, without being the ideal Greek god of romance, he was undeniably a handsome young man. Tim had the advantage of him in height and size, but Jack's lean frame and iron muscles would carry him successfully through greater hardships than could the Irishman's uncultivated strength. Jack could last for days in the saddle; he could sustain existence on the smallest quantity of food compatible with actual life; he could endure all disagreeables incidental to a pioneer existence with philosophical resignation, and altogether presented an excellent type of the Anglo-Saxon race in its colonising capacity. Certainly the special correspondent had, in the interests of his profession, undergone considerable hardships with fair success; but Tim was too fond of pampering his body

when among the fleshpots of Egypt, whereas Jack, constantly in the van of civilisation subjugating wildernesses, had no time to relapse into luxurious living. The spirit was willing enough, but the flesh had no chance of indulging.

His face, bronzed by tropic suns, his curly yellow locks, his jauntily curled moustache, and a certain reckless gleam in his blue eyes, made him look like one of those dare-devil, Elizabethan seamen who thrashed the Dons on the Spanish Main. Man of action as he was, fertile in expedients, and constantly on the alert for possible dangers, Jack Duval was eminently fitted for the profession which he had chosen, and could only endure existence in the desert places of the world. This huge London, with its sombre skies, its hurrying crowds, its etiquette of civilisation, was by no means to his taste, and already he was looking forward with relief to the time when he would once more be on his way to the vivid, careless, dangerous life of the frontier.

Philip admired his friend's masculine thoroughness, and could not help comparing himself disadvantageously with the young engineer. Yet Cassim was no weakling of the boudoir; he also had sailed stormy seas, had dared the unknown where Nature fights doggedly with man for the preservation of her virgin solitudes. Still, withal, Jack was a finer man than he was. What were his luxurious travels, his antarctic explorations, in comparison with the actual hardships undergone by this dauntless pioneer of civilisation? Jack was one who did some good in the world; but as for himself – well, Philip did not care about pursuing the idea

to its bitter end, as the sequence could hardly prove satisfactory to his self-love. He irritably threw away his cigarette, moved restlessly in his chair, and finally expressed himself in words.

"Why do you come here, Jack, and make us feel like wastrels? A few hours ago and I rather prided myself on myself; but now you make me feel idle, and lazy, and selfish, and effeminate. It's too bad of you, Jack."

Brains were not Duval's strong point, and, unable to understand the meaning of this outburst, he simply stared in vague astonishment at Sir Philip. Tim and the doctor, pausing in their conversation, pricked up their ears, while Cassim, paying no attention to this sudden enlargement of his audience, went on speaking, half peevishly, half good-humouredly.

"I am the enervated type of an effete civilisation. You, my friend, are the lusty young savage to whom the shaping of the future is given. You are Walt Whitman's tan-faced man, the incarnation of the dominating Anglo-Saxon race, ever pushing forward into fresh worlds. As compared with mine, your primæval life is absolutely perfect. The Sybarite quails before the clear glance of the child of Nature. Take me with you into the wilderness, John Duval. Teach me how to emulate the Last of the Mohicans. Make me as resourceful as Robinson Crusoe. I am a prematurely old man, Jack, and I wish to be a child once more."

"What the deuce are you driving at, Philip?" asked practical Jack.

"It's from a book he's writing," suggested Tim, with a laugh.

"Melancholia," hinted Peter, who was nothing if not medicinal.

Philip laughed and lighted a fresh cigarette. Duval ran his hand through his curly locks, pulled hard at his pipe, and delivered himself bluntly.

"I suppose all that balderdash means that you are tired of London."

"Very much so."

"Why, you never stay two days in London," said Peter, in astonishment.

"Neither do I. Don't I tell you I'm tired of it? Be quiet, Peter; I can see that Jack is on the verge of being delivered of a great idea."

"Upon my word, that's cute of you, Philip," exclaimed Jack, admiringly. "Yes, I have a scheme to propound, for the carrying out which I need your assistance – in fact, the assistance of all three."

"This promises to be an interesting conversation," said Cassim, in an animated tone. "Proceed, John Duval, Engineer. What is it you wish us to do?"

"I had better begin at the beginning, gentlemen all."

"That's generally considered the best way," observed Peter, with mild sarcasm.

"Be quiet! you small pill-box. Let Jack speak."

"As I told you at dinner," said Jack, placing his elbows backward on the mantelshelf, "I have been all over the world

since I last saw your three faces. China, Peru, New Zealand, India, Turkey – I know all those places, and many others. I have made money; I have lost money; I have had ups and downs; but everywhere I can safely say I've had a good time."

"Same here," murmured Tim, refilling his pipe.

"At present I am in Central America," pursued Jack, taking no notice of the interpolation, "under engagement as a railway engineer to the Republic of Cholacaca."

"Cholacaca?" echoed Tim, loudly; "isn't it there the row's to take place?"

"Why, what do you know about it, Tim?"

"A special correspondent knows a lot of things," returned Fletcher, sagely. "Go on with the music, my boy. I'll tell you something when you've ended."

Jack looked hard at Tim and hesitated, but Philip, curled up luxuriously in his big chair, asked him to proceed.

"You're going to tell an Arabian Night story, Jack."

"Well, it sounds like one."

"Good! I love romance. It's something about buried cities, and Aztecs, and treasure, and the god Huitzilopochtli."

"Oh, bosh! You've been reading Prescott."

"It seems to me," observed Peter, plaintively, "that with all these interruptions we'll never hear the story."

"The first that speaks will be crushed," announced Tim, glaring around. "If you please, Mr. Duval, it's waiting we are."

Jack laughed, and resumed his story.

"While I was at Tlatonac – that is the capital of the Republic – I became mixed up in certain events, political and otherwise. I found I could do nothing I wanted to without assistance; so, as I suddenly remembered our promise to meet here this year, I came straight to London. In fact, I was in such a hurry to find out if you three had remembered the appointment, that I left my luggage at the railway station, and came on by a hansom to Portman Square. This is the reason I am not in evening dress."

"Oh, deuce take your evening dress," said Philip, irritably; "you might have come in a bathing-towel, for all I cared. I didn't want to see your clothes. I wanted to see you. Go on with the story of the buried city."

"How do you know my story is about a buried city?"

"I never heard a romance of Central America that wasn't."

"You'll hear one now, then. This isn't about a city – it's concerning a stone."

"A stone?" echoed his three listeners.

"Yes. An opal. A harlequin opal."

"And what is a harlequin opal, Jack?"

"Tim, I'm astonished at your ignorance. A special correspondent should know all things. A harlequin opal is one containing all the colours of the rainbow, and a few extra ones besides."

"Well, Jack, and this special opal?"

"It's one of the most magnificent jewels in the world."

"Have you seen it?"

Jack drew a long breath.

"Yes; once. Great Scott, what a gem! You fellows can't conceive its beauty. It is as large as a guinea-hen's egg. Milky white, and shooting rays of blue and green, and red and yellow like fireworks. It belonged to Montezuma."

"I thought those everlasting Aztecs would come in," said Philip smiling. "Well, Jack, and what about this stone?"

"Ah, that's a long story."

"What of that? The night's young, and the liquor's plentiful."

"I don't mind sitting up all night, if the story is interesting. Start at once Jack, and don't keep us any longer in suspense. I hate wire-drawn agonies."

"A year ago I was pottering about at Zacatecas, over a wretched little railway that wasn't worth bothering about. Being hard up, I went in for it in default of something better; but meanwhile kept my eyes open to see what I could drop into. After some months, I heard that the Republic of Cholocaca was about to open up the country with railways, so I thought I'd go there to get a job."

"Where is Cholocaca?"

"Down Yucatan way – not far from Guatemala."

"Oh, I know; looks on to Campeche Bay."

"No; on the other side of the neck. Washed by the Carribean Sea."

"I must get you to show it to me on the map," said Philip, finding his geographical knowledge at fault. "I have an idea of

its whereabouts, but not of its precise locality. Meanwhile let us continue your adventures."

"When I heard of this prospect at Tlatonac," continued Jack, without further preamble, "I left Zacatecas for Mexico, stayed a few days in the capital, to make inquiries about the Republic. These proving satisfactory, I went on to Vera Cruz, and, fortunately, found a coasting-vessel which took me on to Cholacaca. Considering the ship, I got to my destination pretty sharp. I didn't know a soul in the town when I arrived; but, after a few days, began to pick up a few acquaintances. Among these was Don Miguel Maraquando, a wealthy old Estanciero. He has great influence in Cholacaca, being a member of the Junta, and is regarded by many people as the future president of the Republic."

"That is if Don Hypolito stands out," said Tim, softly.

"Have you heard – " began Jack, when the journalist cut him short.

"I've heard many things, my boy. Later on I'll tell you all I know."

"You seem to be pretty well acquainted with what's going on in Cholacaca," said Jack, after a few moments' reflection; "but I'll tell my story first, and you can tell yours afterwards. Don Miguel became a great friend of mine, and I saw a good deal of him while I stayed at Tlatonac. He is greatly in favour of this railway, which is to be made from the capital to Acauhtzin, a distance of some three hundred and fifty miles. Don Hypolito Xuarez, the

leader of the Oposidores, objected to the scheme on the ground that it was utterly unnecessary to run a railway to Acauhtzin when ships could take goods there by water."

"And isn't the man right?" said Tim, indignantly; "what's the use of running a railway along the seacoast?"

"We'll argue that question later on," replied Jack, dryly; "I have my own ideas on the subject, and, as an engineer, I know what I'm talking about. Don Hypolito's objection sounds all right, I have no doubt; but if you look into the matter you will see he hasn't a leg to stand on. Besides, he's only objecting to the railway out of sheer cussedness, because Maraquando won't let him marry Doña Dolores."

"Ah, ah!" observed Philip, who had been listening to the story with great attention, "I was waiting for the inevitable woman to appear on the scene. And who is Doña Dolores?"

"She is Maraquando's ward," replied Jack, colouring a little.

"With whom you are in love?"

"I didn't say that Philip."

"No; but you looked it."

Peter chuckled, whereat Duval turned on him crossly.

"I wish you would stop making such a row, Peter; I can't hear myself speak."

"Well, what about Doña Dolores?" persisted Philip, maliciously.

"Doña Dolores," repeated Jack, calmly, "is the woman whom I hope to make my wife."

At this startling announcement there was a dead silence.

"I congratulate you, Jack," said Cassim, gravely, after a momentary pause. "I hope you will ask us all to your wedding. But what has this story of politics, railways, and love to do with the harlequin opal?"

"Everything. Listen. Don Hypolito is an ambitious man who wants to become Dictator of Cholacaca, and rule that Republic as Dr. Francia did Paraguay. Now, the easiest way in which he can obtain his desire is by marrying Dolores."

"What! Is she the heiress of the Republic?"

"No; but she is the lawful owner of the Chalchuih Tlatonac."

"What, in heaven's name, is that?"

"It means 'the shining precious stone,' in the Toltec tongue."

"The deuce!" murmured Philip, in an amused tone; "we have got past the Aztecs."

"I suppose this shining precious stone is the harlequin opal?" said Peter, inquiringly.

"Precisely. This celebrated stone is hundreds of years old. Tradition says it was the property of Quetzalcoatl."

"That's the Mexican god of the air," said Philip who knew all sorts of stray facts.

"Yes. You've read that in Prescott."

"No, I didn't. Bancroft is my authority. But how did it come into the possession of your Doña Dolores?"

"Oh, she is a direct descendant of Montezuma."

"An Aztec princess. Jack, you are making a royal match."

"I'm afraid there is very little royalty about Dolores," replied Jack, laughing; "but, as regards this stone. Quetzalcoatl gave it to Huitzilopochtli."

"Lord! what names."

"When Cortez conquered Mexico, he found the stone adorning the statue of the war god in his famous teocalli in the city of the Aztecs. One of the Spanish adventurers stole it, and afterwards married a daughter of Montezuma. When she found out that he had the opal, she stole it from him, and went off down south, where she delivered it to some native priest in one of those Central American forests."

"Where it remains still?"

"By no means. This woman had a son by the Spaniard, a Mestizo, as they call this mixture of Indian and Spanish blood. He, I believe, claimed the stone as his property whereon the high priest of Huitzilopochtli proposed to sacrifice him. Not being a religious man, he disliked the idea, and ran away, taking the stone with him. He reached the coast, and married a native woman. There they set up a temple on their own account to the god of war, and round it, as time went on, grew a settlement, which was called after the opal 'Chalchuih Tlatonac.' Then the Spaniards came and conquered the town, which they rechristened Puebla de Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion; but the name didn't catch on, and it is now known by its old Indian name of Tlatonac. Of course there are a good many Spaniards there still; descendants of the Conquistadores; but the majority of the population are

Indians."

"And what became of the opal?"

"Well, as the Spaniards tried to get hold of it, the Indians took it inland to one of their forest retreats. The descendants of Montezuma, however, are still supposed to be its guardians, and, when one owner dies, the opal is brought secretly to Tlatonac, and shown to the new possessor; then it is taken back to its forest sanctuary."

"Where did you see it?" asked Philip, curiously.

"That's the whole point of the story," answered Jack, thoughtfully. "The son of Montezuma's daughter married a native woman, as I told you; their son, however, married a Spanish lady, and so the race was continued. Off and on, they married Indian and Spaniard. This mixing of race isn't good, from a philoprogenitive point of view, and Dolores is the last descendant of the original owner of the opal. Therefore, she is its guardian, and that is the reason Don Hypolito wants to marry her."

"He wishes to obtain the stone as a wedding dowry?"

"Yes. This Chalchuih Tlatonac is an object of superstitious veneration to the Indians. They are supposed to be converted; but they all more or less cling to their old beliefs. In one of these mysterious forests stands a temple to Huitzilopochtli, and there a good many of them go in secret to consult the opal. How they consult it I don't know, unless by its changing colours. Now, if Hypolito marries Dolores, through her he might seize the stone.

If he becomes its possessor, he could do what he pleased with the Indian population. As they greatly outnumber the Spanish element, he would use them to raise himself to the Dictatorship of Cholacaca."

"Then he doesn't love the girl?"

"Not a bit," replied Jack, viciously; "all he wants is to marry her, and thus gain possession of the devil stone. Besides, apart from the use it would be to him, from a superstitious point of view, he would like to obtain the stone for its own sake. It is a magnificent gem."

"Has he seen it also?"

"Yes; at the same time as I did. Dolores' father died, and she became the ward of her uncle Don Miguel. I was a good deal about the house, and naturally enough fell in love with her."

"Jack! Jack!"

"You'll fall in love with her, yourself, Philip, when you see her; she's an angel."

"Of course. You say that because you are in love with her. Does she return your love?"

"Yes; she is as fond of me as I am of her."

"And what does Don Miguel, the proud hidalgo, say?"

"He says nothing, because he knows nothing," said Jack, promptly; "we haven't told him yet. However, when Dolores and myself found out we loved one another, she told me all about this Chalchuih Tlatonac, and how she expected it was to be shown to her, according to custom. A few nights afterwards the priest

arrived secretly, and showed her the stone. While she was holding it up, I entered the room suddenly with Don Hypolito. We saw the opal flashing like a rainbow in her hand. By Heaven, boys, I never saw such splendour in my life. We only had a glimpse of it, for as soon as the old priest saw us he snatched it out of her hand and bolted. I followed, but lost him, so the opal went back to the forest temple; and Lord only knows where that is."

"Doesn't Doña Dolores know?"

"No; nobody knows except the priests. They meet the worshippers on the verge of the forest and blindfold them before leading them to the shrine."

"And how did Don Hypolito find out Dolores was the guardian of the opal?" asked Peter, after a pause.

"Oh, the story is common property. But the opal isn't of much value to Dolores. She is called its guardian, but has nothing to do with it. Now I suppose she'll never see it again."

"It's a queer story anyhow," observed Tim, reflectively; "I would like to see that jewel."

"That's what I've come to see you all about," said Jack, excitedly. "I want you all to come with me to Cholocaca, and help me to marry Dolores, and get the devil stone."

The three remained silent, and a shade of disappointment passed over Duval's face.

"Of course, if you fellows don't care, I – "

"Wait a moment, Jack," interrupted Philip, slowly. "Don't jump to conclusions. You want us to go to Central America?"

"Yes."

"And upset Don Hypolito's little plans?"

"Exactly."

"Speaking for myself," said Philip, quietly, "there is nothing I should like better. I am with you, Jack. But Peter – "

"Oh, I'll come too," said the doctor, serenely, "if it's only to collect butterflies. While I'm on the spot, I may as well help. There's sure to be fighting, and I can attend to the wounded. You can depend upon me, Jack; I'll be your family physician, and physic the lot of you."

"Bravo!" cried Jack, his face lighting up as he grasped a hand of each. "And what do you say, Tim?"

"Your story is queer," remarked Tim, solemnly; "but mine is queerer. I'll go with the greatest of pleasure, Jack; but it so happens I'm going out to the same place for *The Morning Planet*."

"What?"

"It's a coincidence, anyhow, Jack. I told you I knew about Don Hypolito."

"You did."

"Have you seen the evening papers?"

"No; I was too excited at the idea of meeting you fellows to bother about reading."

"You are an ignorant person. While you've been fast in coming here, the telegraph's been faster. From all accounts, there's going to be a shindy in Cholocaca."

"Dolores!" gasped Jack, turning pale.

"Oh, you needn't be distressful," said Fletcher, hastily; "there's nothing much up as yet. I saw the telegram myself this morning. Don Hypolito has left Tlatonac, and gone to that other town – what d'ye call it? 'Tis on the tip of my tongue."

"Acauhtzin."

"Yes, that's the name. 'Tis said he's trying to stir up a row; but there's no news of any consequence, at all!"

"You've been ordered to the front, then, Tim?" said Philip, quickly.

"You've hit it, my boy! I was in the office this morning, and the editor called me in. 'D'ye want a trip?' says he. 'I don't mind,' says I. 'There's going to be trouble again in South America,' says he. 'What!' says I, 'are the Peruvians at it again?' 'No,' says he, 'it's Cholacaca.' 'And where's that?' says I. 'It's more nor I know,' says he. 'Find out on the map, and hold yourself in readiness to go.' So I left him at once, and looked up the map; found out all I could about the place, and at any minute I'm expecting to be sent off."

"Jove! how curious," said Jack, reflectively. "I didn't expect Don Hypolito to cause trouble quite so soon; but I saw things were shaping that way. It's strange, Tim, that you should be going to the very place I wish you to go to. But Philip and Peter won't like to come now."

"It doesn't make the slightest difference to me," said Philip, coolly. "In fact, like Xeres, I'm longing for a new pleasure. I've never been in a war, and should like the novelty of the thing. As to

Peter! he's coming to resume his profession on the battle-field."

"But what about my butterflies?" remonstrated Peter, who did not exactly relish the idea of being put in the forefront of the battle. He objected to the role of Uriah.

"Oh, you can do all that sort of thing between times. The main thing is to get the better of Don Hypolito, and help Jack."

"Very well, Philip," said the little man meekly. "I'll come."

"But your practice," hesitated Jack, not liking to be selfish.

"Why, the poor little man hasn't got one," laughed Tim, digging Peter in the ribs. "Hasn't he killed his patients long ago, and is now starving on five hundred a year, poor soul."

"It's very kind of you all!" said Duval, looking at his three friends. "But I feel that I'm leading you into trouble."

"Not me," declared Tim, stoutly, "'tis the *Morning Planet's* to blame, if I peg out."

"And I want some excitement," said Philip, gaily; "and Peter wants butterflies; don't you, doctor? We're all free agents in the matter, Jack, and will go with pleasure."

"How strange," said Peter, pensively; "we little thought at Bedford that –"

"Peter, don't be sentimental," interrupted the baronet, jumping up. "We little thought our meeting would bring us good luck, if that is what you mean. I'm delighted at this new conquest of Mexico."

"We must start at once, Philip."

"My dear Jack, we shall start the day after to-morrow, in my

yacht. She's lying down at Yarmouth, in the Isle of Wight, and is ready to get steam up at a minute's notice."

"Is she a fast boat?"

"Fast!" echoed Philip, indignant at the imputation; "she's the fastest steam-yacht afloat. Wait till she clears the Channel, then you'll see what a clean pair of heels she can show."

"The quicker the better. I don't want to arrive at Tlatonac and find Dolores missing."

"You won't find a hair of her head touched. You shall marry her, Jack, and inherit the harlequin opal, and go and be priest to Huitzilopochtli, if you like. Now have a glass of wine."

Tim, who was always handy when liquor was about, had already filled the glasses and solemnly handed them to his friends.

"To the health," said Tim, standing up huge and burly, "of the future Mrs. Duval."

The toast was drunk with acclamation.

CHAPTER III

"THE BOHEMIAN."

Come, lads, and send the capstan round,
Oh, Rio! Rio!
Our good old barkey's outward bound,
Oh, Rio! Rio!
So, shipmates, all look sharp and spry,
To Poll and Nancy say good-bye,
And tell them, if they pipe their eye,
We're bound for Rio Grande.

The old man drank his grog and swore,
Oh, Rio! Rio!
He'd stay no longer slack ashore,
Oh, Rio! Rio!
"Come, tumble up, my lads," sez he,
"An' weigh the anchor speedily,
In twenty days the Cross we'll see,
We're bound for Rio Grande."

"What do you think of her?" asked Philip, with justifiable pride.

"She's as near perfection as can be," replied Jack, enthusiastically; "no two opinions about that, old fellow."

The Bohemian was a superbly modelled craft, and well deserved their admiration as she lay in Yarmouth Harbour, Isle of Wight. Schooner rigged fore and aft, she was close on two hundred tons yacht measurement, and one of the smartest vessels of her kind in British waters. Putting aside her speed when the screw was spinning, she was renowned for her sailing capabilities. With all sails set, and a fair wind, she could smoke through the water at the rate of fifteen knots an hour. Thanks to her owner's wandering proclivities, she was well known in every civilised port, and a good many savage anchorages had also seen her graceful form glide into their smooth waters.

Some said that her engines were too powerful for her frame; and, indeed, when all her furnaces were going, the boat quivered from stem to stern at every rise and fall of the cranks. Philip, however, rarely used the full power of her screw, as it was quite unnecessary; but when she did fire up to the extent of her furnace accommodation, her speed was something wonderful. Sometimes the baronet used the screw, more often the sails; and, with her white wings spread like summer clouds, *The Bohemian*, leaning to leeward rode the surges like a Venus of the foam. Taper masts, splendid spars, cotton-white cloths, she looked a thing of beauty as she swirled through the sea in a smother of foam. She was the pride of Philip's heart, and whether becalmed in the doldrums or seething through troubled waters in the heel of the trade, was well worthy of her owner's admiration.

Jack was scarcely less enthusiastic. He knew more of the land

than of the sea, and this was the first time he had ever had the opportunity of inspecting a crack yacht. It was impossible not to admire her milk-white decks, her well-polished brasses, and the general spruceness of her whole appearance. Philip attended thoroughly well to her wants, and despite her frequent voyagings in stormy seas, she always looked as though she had just left dry dock. When the screw thrashed the water into silver froth, and the black smoke poured from the wide funnel, *The Bohemian* knew what was expected of her, and put her heart into her work. In such a craft it was impossible that a voyage could be otherwise than pleasant, and Jack looked forward to having a thoroughly jolly run to Yucatan with his old schoolfellows.

As has before been stated, they were at Yarmouth. Not that land-and-water Norfolk puddle, but the quaint little seaport in the Isle of Wight. It was famous enough in the old days, and in the reign of our second Charles, the governor of the island made it his head-quarters. Now his old residence is turned into an hotel, and in comparison with Cowes and Ryde, this once populous town is a mere village. With its narrow streets, and antique houses, and indolent townsfolk, it has an old-world air, and is still affected by some yachtsmen at the time when the Solent is full of graceful boats. Philip was very fond of this out-of-the-way seaport, and generally left *The Bohemian* in its harbour when he wished to run up to town.

After that famous dinner, the four friends separated in order to prepare for the voyage. As they had only one clear day in which

to do all things, there was little time to be lost. Peter started for Barnstaple by the early train, in order to arrange his affairs, and, to save time, Philip agreed to pick him up at Plymouth. The special correspondent went straight to his chief, and told him of his desire to start for Cholacaca at once; so, as it seemed pretty certain that the difference between Don Hypolito and the Government would culminate in a civil war, Tim duly received his orders. Now he was flying round town collecting needful articles for his campaign, and was expected down by the early train.

On his part, Jack had absolutely nothing to do in London. He already possessed all necessaries, and had neither the money nor the inclination to buy things he did not want. Indeed, leaving the bulk of his belongings in Tlatonac, he had arrived in England with but a single portmanteau, which had been left at the station. Philip carried the homeless wanderer to his club, and put him up for the night, and next day they took themselves and the solitary portmanteau down to Yarmouth, where they soon made themselves comfortable on board the yacht. All things being thus arranged, they only waited Tim's arrival to leave for Plymouth, from whence, after taking Peter on board, *The Bohemian* could bear away westward in the track of Columbus.

With all his indolence Philip was no dilettante yachtsman, to leave everything to his sailing master, and thoroughly believed in looking after things himself. After displaying the beauties of his boat to Jack, he busied himself with seeing about stores,

and making sure that all was in order for the voyage. While the baronet was thus engaged, Jack wandered over the yacht in a musing sort of fashion, thinking not so much of the scene around him as of Dolores and of the possible events now happening at Tlatonac.

He had good reason to mistrust Don Hypolito knowing as he did how treacherous and cruel was the nature of that would-be dictator. Half Indian, half Spanish, this Mestizo possessed the worst traits of both races, and, once his passions were aroused, would stop at nothing to accomplish his desire. It was true that it was principally on account of the opal that he desired to marry Doña Dolores; but he was also in love with her beauty, and adored her in a sensual, brutish fashion, which made Jack grind his teeth and clench his hands at the very thought. Yet he was undeniably a clever man, and skilled in diplomatic intrigue; therefore it might be that his revolt against the established Government of Cholacaca would end in his assuming the dictatorship. In such an event, he would certainly force Dolores to become his wife; and against his power the Englishman would be able to do nothing. Still, as he had now the aid of his three friends, Duval hoped, if it came to the worst, to escape with Dolores and the opal in Philip's yacht. Once on the open sea, and they could laugh at Xuarez and his threats. The engines of *The Bohemian* were not meant for show.

What Jack feared was that Don Hypolito might have resorted to strong measures, and carried off Dolores with him to

Acauhtzin. Hitherto there had been no suspicion that he intended to revolt; so, lulled by a sense of false security, Dolores might have permitted herself to be kidnapped, in which case Jack hardly knew what to do. Still, it might be that nothing had happened save the withdrawal of Xuarez to Acauhtzin, and Duval fervently hoped that he and his friends might arrive at Tlatonac before the out-break of hostilities. Provided he started fair with Xuarez in the game, Jack hoped to come off winner – Dolores, the opal, and the Republic, being the stakes.

"If we start to-morrow, it will not be long before we reach Chalacaca," thought Jack, as he leaned over the taffrail looking absently at the dull-hued water. "Once there, and I will be able to protect Dolores. If the worst comes, there is always Philip's yacht, and as to marriage, I am sure Maraquando would rather see his niece married to me than to that Xuarez half-bred."

"In a brown study, Jack?" said Cassim's voice, behind him. "I won't give a penny for your thoughts, for they are worth more."

"How do you know that?"

"Because you are thinking of Doña Dolores."

"It's a true bill," replied Jack, with an ingenuous blush. "I was hoping she had not been carried off to Acauhtzin by that scoundrel Xuarez."

"Oh, your friend Don Hypolito! Not a bit of it. If all you say is correct, he is in too serious a position, at present, to hamper himself with a woman. Don't worry, fond lover. *The Bohemian* will take us to Central America in less than no time, and if there's

going to be a row, we'll be there to see its genesis."

"I hope and trust so," said Duval, gloomily; "but I'm not so hopeful as you are."

"I hopeful! My dear lad, I'm the most pessimistic person in existence; but at this moment I look at things from a common-sense point of view. If Xuarez intends business, he has withdrawn to Acauhtzin to make his plans. To do so, he requires time. If he had kidnapped Doña Dolores, things would be brought to a head before his plans were ripe. Therefore he has not kidnapped her. Q.E.D. So come ashore, and don't talk nonsense."

"Have you finished your business?" asked Jack, following Sir Philip into his boat.

"Yes, everything is right. As soon as Tim arrives, we shall start for Plymouth, to pick up Peter. I wish Tim would come down to-night; but I suppose even a special correspondent must have time to collect his traps."

"What is your reason for going ashore?"

"In the first place, I wish to send a wire to my lawyer, as to my destination; and, in the second, I desire to stretch my legs. Let us have as much dry land as we can get. It will be nothing but sea for the next week or so."

"Have you been long ashore, this time?" asked Duval, as they went up to the telegraph-office.

"Only five or six days. I came from the Guinea coast, I tell you, to keep this appointment. I didn't then know it would result in a Central American expedition."

"I hope you are not regretting your determination?"

"My dear Jack, I am delighted. I have not yet seen a war, so it will be something new. Now then, Messrs. Bradshaw and Co.," he added, poising his pen over the telegraph form, "I had better tell you where I am to be found. How do you spell Tlatonac, Jack?"

"T-l-a-t-o-n-a-c," spelt Jack, slowly; "but why don't you write your lawyer a letter, instead of sending an unsatisfactory telegram."

"I have nothing to write about," replied Philip, signing his name with a flourish; "all they need know is where I am in case of my possible death, so as to make things right for the next-of-kin. They have no letters to forward. I always carry plenty of money, so I never bother my head about them, beyond giving my bare address."

"Don't they object to such unbusiness-like habits?"

"They did at first, but finding objections of no use, have quite given up such preachings. Don't trouble any more about them, but let us take a walk. 'You take a walk, but you drink tea,' saith Samuel Johnson."

"I don't see the connection," said Jack, soberly.

"Neither do I; but what matters. 'Dulce est desipere in loco.' There is a bit of dictionary Latin for your delectation."

"Peter said you were a misanthrope, Philip; but I don't think so myself."

"Peter is a – collector of butterflies," retorted Philip, gaily. "I

was a misanthrope; man delighted me not, nor woman neither; but now I have met the friends of my youth, I feel much better. The friends we make in life are never as dear as those we make at school. Since leaving Bedford I have made none. I have lived for my yacht and in my yacht. Now that I have you, and Tim, and Peter, I feel that I am rapidly losing the character for Timonism. Like Mr. Bunthorne, I am a reformed character."

"Who is Mr. Bunthorne? a friend of yours?"

"Jack, Jack! you are a sad barbarian. It is a character in one of Gilbert and Sullivan's operas. But you have lived so long among savages that you don't know him; in fact, I don't believe you know who Gilbert and Sullivan are."

"Oh yes, I do. I'm not so ignorant as all that."

"There is balm in Gilead then," said Cassim, satirically. "Jack, when you marry Dolores, and realise the opal, you must return to civilisation. I can't let the friend of my youth dwell among the tombs any longer."

"I am very happy among the tombs."

"I know you are. You would be happy anywhere," rejoined Philip, enviously. "Would I were as easily contented. Tell me how to be happy, Jack."

"Get married," returned Jack, promptly.

"Married!" echoed Cassim, as though the idea were a new revelation; "that is a serious question, Jack, which needs serious discussion. Let us sit down on this soft turf, my friend, and you shall give your opinions regarding matrimony. You don't know

anything about it as yet; but that is a mere detail."

By this time, owing to their rapid walking, they had left Yarmouth far behind, and having turned off the high-road, were now strolling across a field yellow with gorse. In a few minutes they arrived at a land-slip where the earth fell suddenly down to the beach. The brow of this was covered with soft grass, starred with primroses, and Philip threw himself down thereon with a sigh of content. Jack more soberly seated himself by the side of his friend, and for a few moments they remained silent, gazing at the scene. Below was the rent and torn earth, on either side a scanty fringe of trees, and in front the blue sea stretching far away towards the dim line of the Hampshire coast. A gentle wind was blowing, the perfume of the wild flowers came delicately on its wings, and they could hear the waves lapping on the beach below, while occasionally a bird piped in the near boughs. It was very cool, pastoral and pleasant, grateful enough to Jack's eyes, weary of the burning skies, and the gorgeous efflorescence of the tropics. Ah me! how often we sigh for green and misty England in the lands of the sun.

"There is no land like England," quoted Jack, absently smelling a pale primrose. "Ah! there is no doubt it is the most delightful country in the whole world. I have been all over the planet, so I ought to know."

"And yet you propose to leave the land you profess to love," said Philip, rolling himself over so as to catch his friend's eye. "Jack, you are inconsistent."

"I must earn my bread and butter. Everyone isn't born like you, with a silver spoon in his mouth. If I can't find employment in England, I must go abroad. Besides, there is always Dolores."

"Of course," assented Philip, gravely, "there is always Dolores. Is she pretty, Jack?"

"Pretty!" echoed Duval, with huge disdain; "if there is one adjective that does *not* describe Dolores it is 'pretty.' She's an angel."

"Such a vague description. Fra Angelica, Burne Jones, Gustave Doré, all paint angels differently."

"Oh, I don't mind being more minute, if you care to listen. But I do not wish to bore you with my love affairs."

"I like to be bored with love affairs – when they are those of Jack Duval."

Jack smiled thankfully. He was eager to talk of Dolores to Philip; but being somewhat sensitive to ridicule, hesitated as to whether he should do so. As a rule, a man's friends do not care about listening to a lover's ravings. Women are the most sympathetic in such a case; but as Jack had no female friend in whom to confide, he had either to hold his tongue or tell Philip. Philip, he thought, would not care for descriptions of the beloved one, so he kept silent; but now that he had been warmly requested to be as explicit as he pleased, he eagerly hastened to unbosom himself. At that moment, Jack thought Philip an angel of sympathy.

"Dolores," he began slowly, fixing his eyes seaward, "is rather

tall, with a charming figure. Her hair is purple black, her face oval, and her complexion inclined to be darkish. She has teeth like pearls, and a mouth like Cupid's bow. Her eyes – well, her eyes," said Jack, enthusiastically, "are like those velvety dark pansies when the dew lies on them."

"That's the first original epithet you've used, Jack. Teeth of pearl, and Cupid's bow for a mouth are old similes. Dew on pansies is distinctly good."

"Oh, if you are going to laugh – " began Jack, angrily, when Cassim hastened to disclaim any such discourtesy.

"I'm not laughing, my dear lad. I am only complimenting you on your ingenuity. I know exactly what kind of a woman Dolores is. She is like De Musset's Marquise – half fiend, half angel."

"I never heard of her," interrupted Duval, bluntly, as he produced a gold oval from his pocket; "but, to save further description, look at this picture. It was done for me by a Spanish fellow at Tlatonac."

Philip surveyed the portrait in the locket long and earnestly.

"Has Dolores a temper, Jack?"

"Rather!" replied Jack, laconically; "but what do you think of her?"

"She has an exquisite face, and, judging from her mouth, a fiery temper. I don't wonder you are in love with her, Jack. I hope she'll make you a good wife."

"You seem rather doubtful on that point," said Jack, half annoyed, as he restored the locket to his waistcoat pocket.

"No; but to tell you the truth, I'm doubtful of the advisability of mixed marriages in the matter of race. It may be all very well for the offspring, who, as a rule, are clever; but the husband and wife, having different trainings, do not as a rule hit it off. Race-nature again, my friend."

"Oh, as to that," rejoined Jack, equably, "I have lived so long in Mexico and South America that I am half Spanish in my habits, and so can suit myself to Dolores. Besides, when we are married, we will stay in Spanish America; it will be more advisable than coming to England."

"Yes; I agree with you there," said Philip, lazily; "in fact, I think the indolent Creole life of South America would suit me also. I also must find an Indian-Spanish spouse. And that reminds me, Jack, that we sat down to discuss my marriage prospects, whereas we've done nothing but talk about yours."

"Well, suppose you marry Doña Eulalia?"

"What, have you found me a spouse already?" cried Cassim, sitting up, with a ringing laugh. "And who, is Doña Eulalia?"

"The cousin of Dolores, and the daughter of Don Miguel."

"Is she as beautiful as her cousin? But there, I needn't ask that. Of course, in your eyes, no one is so perfect as Dolores. Well, I will consider the matter when I see Eulalia. It is too important a step to take without due consideration."

"What nonsense you talk, Philip."

"Why shouldn't I talk nonsense? Between you and me, Jack, I grow weary at times of very sensible people. We won't discuss

how that remark applies to you. Tell me how many more members there are of the Maraquando family."

"Only a son, Don Rafael."

"And what does the young hidalgo?"

"He is in the Cholacacan navy. A very jolly young fellow of twenty-five. We are great friends. Then there is a Doña Serafina."

"Another beauty?"

"According to her own idea, very much so," replied Jack, dryly. "She is the old man's sister, and acts as duenna to Dolores and Eulalia."

"Ah, an old maid. Good! We will marry her to Peter, and they can collect butterflies together."

"Oh, Doña Serafina would marry anyone; but why to Peter?"

"I don't know. Peter looks as if he needed a wife; so, as he won't choose one for himself, I must do so for him. Oh," yawned Philip, rising reluctantly to his feet, "what a pleasant talk we have had. I suppose it's time we returned to the boat? Come, John, I'll race you to the road."

Nothing loth, Jack accepted the challenge at once, and, though Philip ran like a deer, succeeded in beating him easily.

"Whew!" gasped Cassim, leaning breathless against a fence which verged on the high-road. "You're one too many for me, Jack. I thought I was a good runner, but you can beat me."

"You're out of training. Too much flesh. Too soft muscles."

"Well, I'll soon right all that at Cholacaca, when we run from the enemy. Constant life on a yacht isn't a good thing to develop

a fellow's running powers."

They jumped lightly over the fence, and walked soberly towards Yarmouth in the gathering dusk. The sun was setting, and there was a glory over sea and land somewhat tempered by the twilight. The friends strolled comfortably along, still talking. Indeed, since their meeting they had done little else but talk, more especially Philip, who was not like the same man. His reserve seemed to have melted away like dew before the sun of Duval's geniality, and he was more like the merry boy of old than the haughty, distrustful man of the present. The reason of this lay in the fact that he felt he could thoroughly trust Jack, and it was a great comfort to him that there was at least one man in the world to whom he could open his heart unreservedly. Secretly, he was much astonished at the pleasure he found in this friendship, and by no means displeased, for while in Jack's company the world seemed a goodly place in which to dwell. Yet Duval was decidedly a commonplace young man, smart enough at his business, yet by no means distinguished for intellectuality; withal, so warm-hearted and simple-natured, that Philip surrendered himself entirely to the influence of this pleasant friendship.

"You are doing me no end of good, Jack," he said as they walked through the town. "Before you came, I was gradually becoming a fossil; now I am renewing my youth."

"I am very glad to hear it," replied Jack simply. "But indeed, Philip, so far as I can see, you seem to be as jolly as a sandboy."

"I wasn't a week ago. It's the sunshine of your happy geniality,

Jack. I will stay with you until the cure is complete. Then I will see you safely married to Dolores; present you with the opal stone, as a dowry, and then – "

"And then!" repeated Jack, as his friend paused.

"Then I will take up the old discontented life again."

"I won't let you do that," said Duval, slipping his arm within that of Philip's. "No. I will cure you, as you say, and then you will marry Eulalia."

"Humph! That's doubtful."

"I'm not so sure about that, *mi amigo*. Meanwhile, I'm hungry, so let us go on board and have dinner."

"Oh, bathos," laughed Philip, but offered no opposition to so sensible a suggestion.

They sat up late that night talking of many things, but principally about Dolores and Tlatonac. Jack gave his friend a vivid description of the Cholacacan capital, and of the life therein, all of which was highly appreciated by Philip. The baronet's taste in existence, as in literature, leaned towards the dreamy and fantastical, so the languorous life of Spanish America in sleepy towns, amid the dilapidated pomp of former splendours, appealed greatly to the imaginative side of his nature. Hitherto his visits to these out-of-the-way places had been limited to a few days ashore, while his yacht was anchored in the harbour; but this time he determined to take Jack for his guide, and live the life of these strange people. It was a dream of the Orient in a new world. The Arabian Nights in the west.

Next morning they were up early in order to greet Tim, who duly arrived in a state of great excitement. He was delighted to be once more on the war-path, especially as he was to go through the campaign in the company of his old school-fellows. The business of putting his luggage on board took but little time, as Tim did not believe in special correspondents travelling with much impedimenta.

"You could have brought more luggage, if you had liked," said Philip, when they inspected Tim's modest kit.

"More! Haven't I got all I want," retorted Tim, indignantly. "What would I be stuffing up the boat with rags for. A tooth-brush and a clean collar is all I require."

"Hardly, if this is going to be a lengthy campaign," replied Philip, dryly. "I expect, before the end of the voyage, you'll be wearing Peter's clothes."

Peter was so small, and Tim so large, that the idea struck the latter as wonderfully ludicrous, and he sat down to laugh which he continued to do until the screw began to beat the water. Then he went on deck to superintend the departure.

In due time they arrived at Plymouth without accident, where they found Peter waiting with as much luggage as a bride would take on her honeymoon. It proved to be mostly articles for capturing butterflies, and cases for preserving them much to the disgust of Philip, who hated his yacht to be overloaded with such *débris*. With that painful candour which prevailed between them, he told Peter that he would only take half; but the meek doctor

waxed indignant, and refused to go without all these, what he called, "necessaries." So, in the end, Philip had to give in.

Then *The Bohemian* turned her prow westward, and dipping her nose in the salt brine, followed in the track of Columbus.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE TRACK OF COLUMBUS

Spread sails, out oars, the galley's beak
Points westward where the sunset dies.
The fabled land of gold we seek,
Which glows beneath the tropic skies, —
A jewelled land of Paradise;
The waters round our prow are curled,
White foam bells streak their turquoise blue,
We leave behind the ancient world,
To seek the new.

Spread sails, out oars, a path of gold
Streams from the sinking sun at eve,
As those bold mariners of old,
Again romances wild we weave,
Of splendours we would fain believe;
Yon path leads on to fairyland,
Which glows within the sunset's heart,
We anguish for that magic strand,
And so depart.

Notwithstanding the notoriety of the Atlantic Ocean for storms, *The Bohemian* met with little or no bad weather during

her voyage to Cholacaca. Blue skies, blue seas and fair winds, it was an ideal cruise, and had it not been necessary to reach Tlatonac with as little delay as possible, Philip would willingly have prolonged this ocean tramping for an indefinite period. Jack, however, was anxious to see Dolores; the special correspondent looked forward eagerly to the fierce delights of possible battles, and Peter hankered after the insect tribes of Central America; so, in deference to their wishes, Philip made his yacht act well up to her reputation as a fast boat. *The Bohemian* did not belie her fame, and made a bee-line straight for her destination.

Ignoring Lisbon, where boats generally touch on their way to South America, the yacht held on straight for the Azores, passed them in the night, and continued her course to Cuba, from whence she could drop down to Tlatonac in a few days. She touched at Havana, which was a trifle out of her course, at the express request of Jack, who had a few commissions to fulfil for Dolores; otherwise her nearest point of call would have been Kingston, in the Island of Jamaica.

Truly there are worse lots in the world than a lotus-eating existence on board a crack yacht, and none of the four friends found the voyage too long or too dull. Peter attended to his entomological traps; Tim, obeying his journalistic instincts, made notes of daily events for future use; and Philip, in conjunction with his sailing master, attended to the navigation of the boat. The only idle person on board was Jack Duval, who did

nothing but eat, sleep, drink, and think of Dolores, save when he amused himself by worrying his busier companions.

Thanks to the powerful engines of *The Bohemian* and the uniform speed at which they were kept the whole time, the voyage to the Carribean Sea was accomplished in a wonderfully short period. Occasionally, when the bearings of the engines became heated by constant friction, the screw was stopped and the sails were set, when the yacht, leaning slightly to one side, swirled through the waters under a cloud of canvas. They depended chiefly on steam power, however, and it was rarely that the drum of the screw ceased resounding through the vessel as she held on steadily westward in the eye of the sunset.

All four friends had plenty to do and plenty to talk about, so managed to get through the days in a sufficiently pleasant fashion. After dinner, which was the principal event of the twenty-four hours, they sat on deck chatting in the warm tropic nights, or else stayed in the saloon listening to Philip's piano playing and Jack's singing. Tim also sang in a pleasant tenor voice, and often favoured the company with a varied selection of ditties, ranging from pathetic Irish melodies to the latest music-hall songs of the day. Peter was the most unmusical member of the party, and, save talking, did little else to amuse his friends. It is true that he offered to give them a lecture on "lepidopterous moths," but the offer was promptly refused on the score that it would be dull. Peter could not understand such an adjective being applied to so interesting a subject.

It was at one of these symposiums that Jack gave them a description of the political situation in Cholacaca, information peculiarly acceptable to Tim, who was anxious to be thoroughly acquainted with the local affairs of the country. On reaching Tlatonac, he wrote a capital article embodying Jack's information, and sent it off at once to *The Morning Planet*, in whose columns it duly appeared, and gave the British public an excellent idea of Don Hypolito's reasons for rebelling against the Established Government of the Republic. Tim's articles were brutally plain and untempered by style.

The night was warm and cloudless. Westward the faint after-glow of the sunset; and in the east, the slender crescent of the moon, low down on the horizon. Overhead the constellations large and mellow burned like lamps in the purple sky, and mirrored their flashing points in the deep, so that the yacht cut her way through a glittering sea of planetary splendours. The sails were all furled, and a light breeze made humming noises in the taut hemp of the rigging. From the wide mouth of the funnel floated a faint trail of smoke, and the steady screw, with monotonous repetition, throbbed like a beating heart. The water hissing like serpents, streamed past the black sides of the boat, and at the prow the white foam boiled like a witch's cauldron, as she rose and fell on the heaving plain. It was all wonderfully charming, and the voyagers seated on deck felt it to be so. After a time conversation ceased, and they remained silent, drinking in the beauty of the night and the infinite magic of the sea.

Peter, nonromantic Peter, was the first to break the charm with a commonplace remark.

"I hope we shall get fresh milk in Cuba; I'm tired of this Swiss stuff."

"The heathen!" cried Tim, in a disgusted tone; "he thinks of nothing but his fat little paunch. Can't you admire the works of Nature, you little dunderhead."

"Well, I *do* want fresh milk," urged Peter, obstinately.

"You have no eye for beauty, Peter," said Jack, gravely; "look at the grandeur of the scene around you."

"It's very pretty."

"Pretty!" cried Philip, laughing. "I once heard a young lady call the Hallelujah Chorus pretty. You must be a relation of that young lady, Peter."

"Of all the adjectives in the English language," said Duval, with mock solemnity, "the one I most detest is 'pretty.'"

"Especially when it is applied to a certain damsel, whereof we wot," interjected Philip, mischievously; whereat Jack blushed and the others laughed.

"If Peter is so enthusiastic over all this," said Tim, waving his hand to indicate the same, "what will he say when he sees Doña Serafina."

"Bother Doña Serafina," retorted the doctor, growing red. "I wish you fellows would stop roasting me on the subject."

"She isn't a subject, Peter, but an object. Forty-five, and as plain as Tim there!"

"Is it me you mean, Jack. Why, I'm not bad looking, at all. I've had that same on the best female authority. We can't all be heathen gods, like you and Philip."

"I object to be compared to a heathen god," said the baronet, lighting a fresh cigarette. "There is ugly Vulcan as well as beautiful Apollo. Your compliment reads both ways, Tim."

"Oh, the vanity of the creature. But I'm not going to pass compliments, sir. No, it's my intention to request Mister Duval to deliver a speech."

"What about?" asked Jack, considerably taken aback at this cool request.

"On the politics of Cholacaca. I dursn't neglect my business, lads, and the first letter I have to send to my chief is a report of the cause of this shindy."

"The information will be useful to us all," said Philip, settling himself more comfortably in his chair; "we will then know which side to take, Don Miguel's or Don Hypolito's. Go on, Jack, and you, Peter, hold your tongue; interrupt, and I'll give orders for your removal overboard."

The doctor grinned and expressed his desire to know all that Jack had to say on the subject; whereat Duval, without wasting any time, plunged at once into the middle of the subject.

"It's a difficult task," he said, rubbing his chin in some perplexity; "but first you must know the geography of Cholacaca. It has more depth than breadth, being a strip of country lying south of Yucatan, about four hundred miles long and two

hundred broad. Tlatonac, the chief town, is in the south, and Acauhtzin, the second city, in the north, about three hundred miles intervening. There are other towns of more or less importance in the interior; but the most of Cholacaca consists of dense forests inhabited by Indians and dotted with buried cities."

"One of which contains the Temple of the Harlequin Opal, I suppose," said Philip, leisurely.

"Yes; I have an idea that the Temple of the Opal is not very far from Tlatonac; but of this I am not sure. Well, to proceed. The country is very mountainous, and there are comparatively few roads. I am engaged by the Government to construct a railway to Acauhtzin."

"How far have you constructed?"

"Fifty miles, or thereabouts, and now that this war is on the tapis, I expect the works will have to be abandoned. Failing this railway, the only way to get to the second capital is by water. So, you see, communication between the two towns is not so perfect as it might be."

"And thus offers good opportunities to Don Hypolito to make things nasty for the Government."

"There's no doubt of that, provided Don Hypolito can secure the allegiance of the navy."

"The navy!" said Peter, in surprise. "You don't mean to say, Jack, that Cholacaca has a navy?"

"A very good one, as South American navies go. They have three war-ships, named respectively, *The Columbus*, *The Cortes*,

and *The Pizarro*, all first-class vessels. The Government has also sent to England for two torpedo-boats, which are expected out shortly."

"Then, if Don Hypolito commands the navy, he can do what he likes."

"Not exactly. Tlatonac is well fortified, and the war-ships would have to keep well out of the range of the guns."

"Any army worth mentioning?"

"Yes; a capital army for this part of the world. Mostly Mestizos, you know; and, if needs be, I dare say the Government can secure the forest Indians as their allies. Fools if they do. No wise man trusts an Indian. That holds good of governments also, I take it."

"Judging from your opal story," said Philip, reflectively, "it seems to me that this Indian business depends on the stone."

"No doubt. If Don Hypolito secures Dolores and her opal, the Indians, out of sheer superstition, will side with him against the Government. In that case, they are too near Tlatonac to be pleasant."

"And what are the plans of this Don, if you please," asked Tim, who was scribbling shorthand notes in his pocket-book.

"Hum! you'll have to ask X Suarez about those, and then he won't tell you. So far as I can judge, he will win over the navy to his side, establish his head-quarters at Acauhtzin, and make things unpleasant all round. With the navy of three, he can blockade Tlatonac."

"What about the torpedo-boats?"

"They, no doubt, are on their way out from England. If the war-ships can stop them, they certainly will."

"Torpedo-boats are unpleasant things to handle."

"Yes; I don't suppose the war-ships will try force. Those in charge of the two torpedo-boats won't know of the disaffection of the navy; so possibly their commander will be decoyed on board the ships, and the rebels can place their own men in charge of the torpederas."

"In that case," said Philip, after a pause, "it would be as well to use this yacht to warn them before they enter the harbour."

"My dear Philip, if you tried on that game, the rebels would send a war-ship after you, and *The Bohemian* would be knocked to bits."

"Not if she gets a start. I'll back her speed against the whole Cholacacan navy. When *The Bohemian* has all her furnaces going, she is like a streak of greased lightning."

"But, after all," said Peter, yawning, "I don't see why we need anticipate evil. Don Hypolito may *not* have rebelled, and the navy may still be loyal to the Government."

"What!" cried Tim, sticking his chin in the air, "d'ye think I've come all these miles to see a flash in the pan. If Don Hypolito doesn't revolt, I shall consider myself deceived. I want war – blood red war, and plenty of it."

"Barbaric wretch!" said Philip, indolently. "War wasn't invented to fill the empty columns of your paper during the silly

season. Not that I would mind a war myself."

"You'll see all that and more," remarked Jack, confidently. "Xuarez is bent on becoming Dictator of the Republic, and as President Gomez won't care about being kicked out, it will be a case of war to the knife."

"What kind of a man is Xuarez?"

"He's like Napoleon: a wonderful man, I can tell you. You can see from his face that he was born to command. If he gains the day, he won't be content with playing at Dictator. Not he! He'll make himself Emperor, establish his capital in the neck of the Isthmus of Panama, and conquer South America. He won't attempt the north further than Mexico, in case the U.S. Government might make it hot for him. The Yankees object to foreign domination. Some people are so particular."

"The New World is not the place for empires," said Philip, decisively. "Monarchs are at a discount in the Americas. Maximilian failed; Iturbide failed; Dom Pedro had to leave Brazil. No; Montezuma was the last of the American emperors – there will never be another."

"Don't prophesy till you know, Philip. Don Hypolito is as cunning as the devil, and as clever."

"I don't care how clever he is. No one can depend on the half-baked lot that form the population of Spanish America. You have to form a nation before you can construct an empire."

"There's some truth in that."

"Still, if Xuarez appeals to their superstition through this

opal," said Peter, mildly, "there will be – "

"That only counts with the Indians. The Mestizos and the descendants of the Spaniards won't be led by such child's play."

"What about the Church?"

Jack flicked a spot of dust off his coat.

"The Church has that much power in Cholocaca now," he said slowly, "it's effete; it's worn out. The age of the Inquisition is past."

"If Don Hypolito does get to be Lord-Lieutenant," asked Tim, inquiringly, "what will he do for the downtrodden country?"

"According to his own showing – everything. Don't I tell you he wishes to found a monarchy. But when he's got the upper hand, I question whether he'll do much, save what chimes in with his own personal ambition. Besides, Cholocaca is going ahead now quite as much as is good for it."

"That refers to the railway, Jack."

"Partly, and to other things also. This railway will open up a lot of valuable country. It will run through from end to end. From Janjalla in the south to Acautzin in the north. Then lines will branch off here and there to the sea-coast on one side, to the mountains on the other. Thus the whole country will be a network of railways, bringing the population and towns within trading distance of one another."

"All of which visions are to be realised by Jack," said Peter, with mock sarcasm.

"Yes, realised by Jack," assented the engineer, good-

humouredly. "If Don Hypolito gets beaten, and things go on as now, I will have plenty of work."

"Much virtue in 'if,'" quoted Philip, smiling.

"It is certainly difficult to foresee the end. Still, Gomez has the army."

"And Don Hypolito has the navy. It's pretty even, I think."

"The combat will be decided by us four," said Tim, conceitedly, "and we'll fight on the side of Jack's choosing."

"Then we will assist the Government. I don't want to help Xuarez to marry Dolores, and get the Harlequin Opal."

"It's my opinion that the war has nothing to do with the Harlequin Opal," said Peter, decisively. "If the Indians have got it, the Indians will keep it."

"Unless I'm within stealing distance of it," replied Jack, promptly. "No; whatever comes and goes, I'm determined to get that opal. It belongs to Dolores."

"And Dolores belongs to you. You are an unselfish person, Jack."

Duval laughed good-humouredly at Philip's mild protestation, and began to talk of other things. Tim went down to the saloon to arrange his notes; Peter turned in, and the symposium broke up without further conversation.

This is only a sample of the many talks they had on the subject of Cholacaca. The information supplied by Jack was useful, as it showed his three companions plainly how matters stood. On their arrival at Tlatonac, they were thus well acquainted with

the causes of the war, and could follow future developments with great interest. And when this last conversation took place, Tlatonac was not far off.

After leaving Havana, where they only stayed a few hours for a run ashore, the yacht dropped down towards the Bay of Honduras, and drew steadily towards their destination. The nearer they came, the more excited did Jack become at the prospect of seeing Dolores once more. As a rule, the young engineer was a steady, cool-headed fellow; but this love had upset his brain, and he was as love-sick and inconsequent as any raw lad. Amused at this spectacle, Philip did his best to restrain Jack's impatience, and kept the engines at full speed, so that the lover might the sooner arrive within kissing distance of his beloved.

Within the circle of the Indian isles the heat grew almost unbearable. Blue sea, blue sky, and the burning eye of the sun grilling them constantly during the day. When the west flared red with his setting, and the waters heaved in billows of crimson, they were glad to welcome the cool night with serene moon and chilly, gleaming stars. The pitch bubbled sluggishly in the seams of the deck, the brasses burnt like fire when touched by an incautious hand, and the very air was tremulous with the heat. In vain, with linen suits, solar topees, and constant keeping in the shade, they endeavoured to find coolness; the sun found them out, and baked them with his fierce rays till they were half dead with exhaustion. The heat did not brown them as is customary in more temperate climes, but simply squeezed all the life out of their

poor bodies, until they waxed so indolent that did they nothing but lie about in shady corners all day, longing for the night. Even Peter abandoned his entomology; so, from such sacrifice, must the intense heat be judged.

Tim was a perfect god-send in those glowing days of heat and thirst. He was skilful at preparing drinks, and concocted beverages which enabled them to hold out during twelve hours of incessant sun glare. Occasionally they passed an island covered with masses of palms, cacti, and aloes, and sometimes a distant ship arose and fell against the line of the horizon; but they were too indolent to trouble about such trifles. It was nothing but eternal sunshine and eternal heat. But all things must come to an end, and so did this voyage.

"To-morrow," said Philip, thankfully, as he broiled in the shade. "To-morrow we will sight British Honduras. Then Tlatonac won't be far off."

"Perhaps it will be worse on shore than at sea," sighed Peter, mopping his bald head with a red-silk pocket-handkerchief. "Why, if –"

"For Heaven's sake, Peter, throw that handkerchief overboard," cried Jack, irritably; "the very colour makes me hot."

"But it's silk!"

"I don't care what it is. It's red, and that's enough for me."

"Don't lose your temper, Jack!" said Tim, soothingly. "Vamos a tomar las once."

This Spanish phrase, meaning, "Let us go and take the eleven,"

was introduced by Jack, and referred to "aguardiente" (brandy), which has eleven letters. It was in constant use, and when the familiar sound struck on their ears, Philip and Peter lifted their heads anxiously. It is but fair to state, however, that in the sense in which the saying was used on board the yacht, it referred to lemon squash, which also has that number of letters.

"I'll take one, if you prepare it."

"Carambo!" said Tim, viciously. "I won't. Brew one for yourself. I'm not a bar tender."

"Tim's getting up his Spanish for the ladies," murmured Philip, lazily.

"If he greets them with carambo, he'll be slung out of Tlatonac," retorted Jack, who frequently indulged in American slang.

"Oh, I also know how to make love in Spanish," said the Irishman, bluntly. "El hombre prevenido nunca fue vencido."

"Oh, shut up!"

"What does that mean?" asked Peter, who was profoundly ignorant of the Castillian tongue.

"It means, 'The prepared man is never conquered,' you ignorant creature. Peter, you'll have to learn Spanish, if only to flirt with old Serafina."

Peter deliberately arose from his chair, and walked down to the saloon.

"That's Peter's way of remonstrating," said Jack, smiling. "It's hot here; we had better follow his example."

They did, and in a remarkably short space of time were fast asleep. The siesta had also been introduced by Jack with such success that they slept all day and sat up all night, when it was cool. It was the only way they had of making life bearable.

The next morning they were within sight of Tlatonac. A long low line of sand appeared in the distance, topped here and there with a slender palm. As they drew nearer, they saw the frowning walls of the forts rising above the waters, and beyond, on a hill, the red-roofed houses of the city. Above all, the slender towers and high dome of the cathedral.

"Hullo!" said Jack, noting the absence of the war-ships. "No navy! This looks ominous."

"Do you think war has begun?" asked Peter, turning round in dismay.

"Lord knows! It looks like it."

"Well, at all events, the war-ships can't hurt us now," said Philip; "we are under the guns of the forts."

From the central part of the forts a long wharf shot into the blue waters. The bay was covered with boats; intensely green vegetation clothed the shores, and the white walls of the forts glistening like silver in the blazing sunlight. And this was Tlatonac.

"A most exposed situation," said Philip, thinking of the war. "If the war-ships start shelling those red roofs, there won't be much of them left."

He addressed Jack; but that young man did not reply. He was

thinking of Dolores. Philip turned towards Peter; but the doctor's mental eye was fixed on clouds of gorgeous butterflies. Tim!

"I'd like to see a naval combat in this bay," said Tim, gravely, "with war-ships and torpedoes."

"Three monomaniacs," said Philip, rising. "War, butterflies, and Dolores. We'd better go ashore now, lads. I'm tired of those three subjects."

CHAPTER V

DON MIGUEL IS COMMUNICATIVE

Why, look you, Señor, thus the matter stands:
When one is in a country dangerous,
And night is round him everywhere – 'tis wise
To venture nothing till the morning's light,
Lest, in the dark, some hidden pitfall lurk.
Thus stands our fortune. Traitors full of guile
Are in our midst – yet, keeping quiet their plans,
Would gull us into false security.
We know not where to strike – for here, and here,
Danger may lurk, and yet we dare not strike.

The house of Don Miguel Maraquando was situate on one side of the Plaza de los Hombres Ilustres, opposite to the Cathedral, and near the Calle Otumba. Like the generality of Mexican mansions, it was built in the Hispano-Moriscan fashion – a style of architecture peculiarly adapted to this equatorial climate. Walls of massive stone, impenetrable to heat, surrounded a patio paved with variegated tiles and brilliant with tropical flowers. From this patio doors opened into the various rooms of the house, while above were ranges of sleeping-chambers fronted by

a light iron-railed balcony running round all four sides of the courtyard. The roof – generally called the azotea – was flat, and in many houses is used for family gatherings in the warm nights or during a temperate day. In this case, however, the Maraquando family made use of the patio, where the heat, particularly at noon, was not so great.

It was a charming spot, cool, bright and airy, with plenty of brilliant-blossomed flowers standing round the sides in red, porous jars, and vividly green creepers which twisted round the squat pillars and clambered to the sunlight by the ladder of the balconies. An old Aztec sacrificial stone carved with ugly gods occupied the centre of the court, and here and there appeared misshapen statues of the same grotesque deities. A light awning, gaily striped with red and white, made the patio shady, and beneath this were cane chairs for the accommodation of the lazy, and small tables on which to place refreshments. It was a veritable castle of indolence, grateful to day-dreamers, and, as such, peculiarly acceptable to the Cholacacans, who are the least industrious people on this planet.

Outside, the mansion, with its massive doors and iron rejas, presented a gloomy and forbidding appearance, more like a prison than a dwelling house. On entering the door, however, and passing through the dim zaguan, the internal cheerfulness of the patio was accentuated by the dullness without. Indeed, the sudden emergence into the light was somewhat bewildering, as with blue sky above and flower-decorated patio below, it was

some time before the eye became accustomed to the blinding brilliance of the whole. Graceful architecture, hideous idols, the splendour of floral treasures, and silver glitter of the walls, the patio was a most charming spot, and eminently calculated to make life in this tropical zone remarkably pleasant.

Into this city paradise, created by the hand of man, Jack introduced his friends, and formally presented them to Don Miguel, Jefe Politico of Tlatonac, who, having been informed of their arrival, awaited them in his patio according to the etiquette of the country. He was tall and lean and dry, with a most astonishing resemblance to Don Quixote as delineated by the pencil of Doré. For coolness, he wore a white linen suit, and shaded his austere face with a broad-brimmed sombrero, which latter he removed with infinite grace on the appearance of the Englishman.

"Welcome, gentlemen, to Tlatonac," he said majestically, in Spanish; "my house and all therein is at your disposal."

After this hospitable greeting, he insisted that they should seat themselves in order to partake of some light refreshment. They had the greatest difficulty in assuring him that they were not hungry; as, indeed, they had just finished breakfast before leaving the yacht. Ultimately, in order not to offend their courteous host, they accepted some pulque, the national beverage of Mexico, and were sorry for the concession. Jack was used to the drink, and professed to like it; but the others pronounced it beastly. Those who have tried pulque for the first time will

heartily endorse this opinion.

"Oh, oh!" spluttered Peter, trying to conceal his distaste from their host; "it's like bad butter-milk."

"What would I not give for a glass of whisky! 'Tis pig-wash, this same."

"It is certainly not the milk of Paradise," said Philip, in disgust.

Don Miguel had retired for a moment in search of cigars for the party, so they could express themselves freely to Jack. They took full advantage of the opportunity.

"The Mexicans say the angels in heaven prefer it to wine," said Jack, who had finished his glass with great gusto. "They have a proverb:

"Lo beben, los angeles
En vez de vino."

"I can't say much for the angels' taste, then," retorted Philip, crossly. "Nastier stuff I never drank. Raki is bad enough, but it's nectar compared with pulque."

Jack laughed heartily at the wry faces made by his friends, and comforted them after the manner of Job's acquaintances.

"You'll have to drink it, however. Don Miguel will be offended if you do not."

They all promptly poured the liquor into some of the flower-bearing jars which happened, fortunately enough, to be handy.

"There," said Peter, triumphantly; "he'll think we have finished it."

"I'll bring a pocket-pistol next time," said Tim, gloomily. "I'll be having the cholera with this stuff."

"Hush! here is Don Miguel."

Their host returned with a good supply of cigars, which proved to be more acceptable than the pulque. Maraquando expressed great surprise that Peter did not smoke.

"What does he say?" asked Peter, woefully ignorant of Spanish.

"That you ought to smoke."

Peter shook his head in disgust.

"Tell Don Miguel tobacco is slow poison."

Maraquando laughed when this was translated to him.

"It must be very slow, Señor," he said, smiling. "I have smoked for forty years, and yet the poison has not overtaken me as yet."

All laughed at this speech save Peter, who could not appreciate jokes in the tongue of Castille. Indeed, he began to find his ignorance of Spanish somewhat annoying, as his friends, who acted as interpreters, played tricks on him. He became proficient in the tongue when Doña Serafina took him in hand; but that was many weeks later.

All this time Jack was wondering why Dolores did not appear to welcome him back. As it was not etiquette to ask directly for the ladies of the family, he made the inquiry in a roundabout way.

"Your family I trust are well, Señor?"

"They are in excellent health, I thank you, Señor Juan. At present I have but my daughter with me. Doña Serafina and

Dolores are staying for a few days at my estancio."

This was bad news for Jack; but as Don Miguel's eyes were fixed inquiringly on his face, he was forced to dissemble his sorrow.

"And Don Rafael?"

"Is at present with his ship at Acauhtzin."

"What! with Don Hypolito?"

The expression on Maraquando's face changed, and he seemed about to burst out into a furious speech; but, out of courtesy, restrained himself for the present.

"We will talk of this again," he said, gravely. "I am sure you do not care about our politics."

"Indeed we do," replied Jack, emphatically. "This gentleman" – indicating Tim – "is a special correspondent, sent here by a great English paper, to report on your war."

"Our war!" echoed the Spaniard, with some surprise. "How do you know there is to be a war?"

"The telegrams to Europe say as much!" interposed Tim, speaking in Spanish.

"Telegrams sent by Don Hypolito, I have no doubt," responded Maraquando, grimly. "There will be no war, gentlemen."

"*Carambo! Sacré! Damn!*" ejaculated Tim, who swore fluently in all three languages. "I have been tricked, then?"

"Wait a moment, Señor Corresponsal. You will have plenty to write about; I will tell you some astonishing news shortly.

Meanwhile, I must present you to my daughter, Doña Eulalia."

The girl who appeared at this moment caused them all to rise to their feet, and assuredly a more beautiful vision could not be seen anywhere. She was a little sparkling brunette, all eyes and smiles (as Tim afterwards phrased it), and when she beheld Jack, came forward eagerly to greet him with outstretched hands.

"Señor Juan," she said, in a deliciously sweet voice, "you have returned. Ah, how sorry Dol – Doña Serafina will be that she is not here to greet you."

She gave a side glance at her father on pronouncing the name of Doña Serafina; and, by that diplomatic substitution, Philip guessed that she was in the secret of the lovers.

"I trust Doña Serafina will return soon, Señora," said Jack, significantly, after exchanging courtesies. "I am anxious to see Doña Serafina."

Eulalia put her black fan up to hide the smile on her lips, and intimated that she expected her aunt back on the morrow. Nothing was said of Dolores; but Jack was not so dull a lover as not to know that, in this case, the lesser Serafina included the greater Dolores. Meanwhile, neither Tim nor Philip could keep their eyes off this Spanish beauty, and Don Miguel graciously presented them to his daughter. As for Peter, he was examining an ugly clay god at the other end of the court, which showed that he had no eye for beauty.

"At your feet, lady," said Philip, in his best Castillian.

"My hands for your kisses, Señor," she responded,

coquettishly, whereat the baronet felt a strange feeling about the region of his heart.

"Oh, Lord, Lord!" he muttered, as Tim was executing court bows to the lady. "Great Heaven! this cannot be love at first sight. It must be the pulque."

He caught Jack's eye at this moment, and saw a derisive smile on that young man's lips, whereat he smiled also, as if to intimate that he thought but little of the dainty beauty. Jack knew better, however. Then Peter was torn away from his Aztec deity, and presented in due form, making use, at the introduction, of all the Spanish of which he was master.

"Bueno! Bueno!" quoth Peter, in perplexity, when Philip came to his rescue.

"Say 'a los pies de usted,' Señora," he whispered quickly.

"I can't remember all that," protested the doctor.

"Try."

"A los pres ud worsted!"

Doña Eulalia put up her fan at the sound of Peter's Spanish; but understanding the drift of his remark, replied gravely enough:

"Bése usted los manos, Señor."

"What's that, Philip?"

"My hands for your kisses, Señor."

"Will I have to kiss them?" asked Peter, in dismay.

"No; it's only a matter of form."

At this assurance, the doctor was much relieved, and not feeling any profound interest in a dialogue carried on completely

in a foreign tongue, returned to his examination of the Aztec gods. Maraquando was already deep in conversation with Jack and Tim, so Philip had Doña Eulalia all to himself, and made good use of this solitude of two. He was glad he knew Spanish. 'Tis a pleasant language in which to talk gay nonsense.

On her side, Eulalia had no strong objection to the company of this eccentric American – all foreigners are Americans with the Cholacacans – and though he was a heretic, yet he spoke Spanish beautifully, and had no lack of pretty sayings at his command. Doña Eulalia would have flirted with a lepero in default of anything better; and as Don Felipe was a most desirable young man from every point of view, she lost no time in making herself agreeable. Philip, the cynic, enjoyed it greatly, thereby proving that a considerable portion of his misogamy was humbug. With the hour comes the eternal feminine. This was the hour – Eulalia the woman. It flashed across Philip's mind at that moment that he was playing with fire. Confident in his own imperviousness to fire, he went on playing. Then he burnt himself, and great was his outcry.

"I always understood," said Cassim to his charming companion, "that Cholacacan ladies were shut up like nuns."

"A great many of them are, Señor," replied Eulalia, demurely; "but my father is more liberal in his ideas. He delights in presenting us to his friends."

"How charming – for the friends."

"And how delightful – for us poor women. I assure you, Señor,

that I would not care to be shut up at all; neither would my cousin Dolores!"

"I have heard of Doña Dolores from Jack!"

Eulalia flashed a glance at him from her glorious dark eyes, bit the top of her fan, and made an irrelevant observation.

"My cousin admires fair people."

"And Don Juan is fair. Oh, never fear, Señora, I know all."

"All what, Don Filipe?"

"All about fair people!" replied Philip, skilfully, "though, for my part, I prefer dark ladies."

This last remark was too much even for the audacious coquetry of Eulalia, and she, glancing uneasily at her father, turned the conversation with a dexterity begotten by long practice.

"My aunt, Doña Serafina, is dark. She is our duenna, you know. I am sure you will find her very charming."

"Oh, certainly, Señora, on your recommendation I –"

"And Tlatonac is charming, also," interposed the lady, smartly. "Do you stay long here, Señor?"

"That depends on – shall we say – Señor Duval."

His intention was to hint Dolores; but Doña Eulalia evidently thought the acquaintanceship was becoming too intimate, and entrenched herself behind her fan and a smile.

"Rather does it depend on Don Hypolito."

"Ah! Is there, then, to be a war?"

"I do not know, Señor. My father thinks it likely. If there is,

of course you will go?"

"No! Why should I? Tlatonac has many attractions for me."

"My father will show you all over it to-morrow," rejoined Eulalia, with a mischievous smile. She knew quite well what he meant, but was not going to betray such knowledge at such an early period of her acquaintance. The proprieties must be observed – even in Cholacaca. Mrs. Grundy is not indigenous to Britain only. She flourished at Tlatonac under the name of Doña Serafina.

"You came in a steamer, did you not, Señor?"

"Yes; in my yacht, *The Bohemian*."

"Your vessel, Señor?"

"Yes."

Eulalia opened her eyes. This Americano must be very rich to own the boat she had seen steaming into the harbour. But, then, all Americanos were rich; though not all so nice as this one.

"You must do me the honour of coming on board, Señora," said Philip, eagerly. Then, seeing her draw back in alarm at this audacious proposal, "Of course, with Don Miguel and Doña Serafina. Likewise your cousin. My friend Don Juan is anxious to see Doña Dolores."

"Hush, Señor!" said Eulalia, quickly, glancing towards her father; "it is a secret. Do not speak of it now; but let us talk to the Señor yonder with the spectacles."

"He cannot talk Spanish."

"Oh yes, he can, Señor, I heard him."

She burst out into a merry laugh, and went towards Peter, followed by the reluctant Cassim. Philip was getting on excellently well, and rather resented the introduction of a third person into the conversation, even though it was but harmless Peter. That gentleman would much rather have been left alone to potter about the patio by himself; but Doña Eulalia, who saw his embarrassment, wickedly made him attempt Spanish, much to his discomfiture. Philip translated his compliments to Eulalia, whereon she smiled so graciously on the little man that the baronet grew restless, and Peter began to think there were other things in the world besides butterflies.

Meanwhile Don Miguel was having an interesting conversation with Tim and Jack concerning the state of affairs prevalent at Tlatonac. He was much flattered at the idea that a "gran'-diario" of England should take such an interest in Central American politics, and paid Tim, as the Señor Corresponsal, such attention, that Jack began to wish he were in the Irishman's shoes. He would then have a better chance of Dolores. As for Tim he discoursed blandly, quite unaware of the honours being showered on him, and when his Spanish failed, took refuge in French; when that gave out, he supplied his wants with Italian, so that his conversation savoured of the Tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues. However, with Jack's assistance, he managed to get along capitally, and gained a good deal of useful information from the Jefe Politico. Don Miguel himself was most eloquent on the subject, and particularly rabid against Xuarez, whom he

seemed to hate as only a Spaniard can hate. Dr. Johnson liked a good hater. He should have met Don Miguel.

"Don Hypolito is a dangerous man, gentlemen," he said, with cold malignity; "he wishes to become President of the Republic."

"And why should he not become President?" asked Tim, calmly.

"Because he would use his position to destroy the Constitution of Cholocaca. We have not forgotten Iturbide and Dr. Francia. Cholocaca shall never lie at the mercy of a tyrant, as did Mexico and Paraguay. No, gentlemen. It was not for such an end that we threw off the yoke of Spain. Republicans we are, Republicans we remain. If Don Hypolito succeeds, he will find Tlatonac in ruins."

"I don't think that will stop him, Señor," said Jack, lightly. "If he ruins the old Tlatonac, he can build up a new one."

"Not with peons and Indians," retorted Maraquando, fiercely. "We, Señor, are Spaniards, and will submit to the tyranny of no man, much less this Mestizo of a Xuarez."

"What do you propose to do, Don Miguel?"

"The Junta has already decided that. Don Hypolito is to be arrested, brought here for trial, and banished from the country."

"I don't see how you are going to capture him at Acauhtzin. It is the headquarters of his party."

Maraquando smiled grimly, and waved his hand contemptuously.

"Xuarez has no party. A few unimportant estancieros believe

in him, certainly; but the whole population of Tlatonac is in favour of the Government."

"But not the whole population of Cholacaca," said Duval, significantly.

"That is no matter. The Government hold Tlatonac, and, therefore, has all the power in its own hands. Acauhtzin! a mere village, whose adherence can do Xuarez no good."

"But if it comes to war?"

"It will not come to war, Señor Corresponsal. The fleet have gone to Acauhtzin to arrest Xuarez, and bring him here for trial."

"They won't do that easily."

Don Miguel laughed in a saturnine sort of manner, and pulled his moustache savagely.

"And why not, Señor?" said he slowly. "I think three war-ships, manned by brave men, are more than sufficient to arrest one traitor."

"That's so," replied Jack, dropping into Americanese, "if you can trust their crews."

"My son, Don Rafael, commands *The Pizarro*," he said, gravely. "The Government can trust him and his crew, if no others."

"'One swallow doesn't make a summer,' Don Miguel. That's an English proverb."

"And a very true one. Where did you hear that our navy was not to be trusted, Don Juan?"

"Here, and yonder!" said Jack, waving his hand all round the

compass. "I hear this and that, Señor, and think over things. The general opinion, I find, is that there will be a civil war."

"It needs no prophet to tell that. And afterwards?"

"Señor, it is said the army will support the Junta, but the navy will strike for Xuarez."

"If I thought so!" growled Maraquando, savagely, under his breath. "If I – but no, Señor, you are mistaken. My son, Don Rafael, is in the navy, and many of the officers are his personal friends. He only consorts with men of honour, Señor. I swear that there is no fear of the navy revolting. In a few days, our three ships will come back with Don Hypolito."

Jack shrugged his shoulders. He was a youth of few words, and saw no reason to waste breath on such obstinacy. All the same, he held to his opinion. Don Rafael or no Don Rafael, the three war-ships and their crews were not to be trusted. In spite of his refusal to believe in such treachery, it seemed as though Don Miguel also had his doubts on the subject.

"I will see the President about this you speak of, Señor. It is as well that all things should be guarded against."

"There is one other thing that should be guarded against," said Jack, gravely. "Doña Serafina and your niece are some distance from the city, at your estancia. As there may be a war, the country will not be safe. I suggest that you, Señor, should ride out and escort them back."

"I am afraid I cannot leave the city at this juncture."

"Then let me go, Señor," said Jack, eagerly. "In any event, I

will have to see the railway works; they are near your estancia, you know. Let me ride over to-morrow, and I will bring them back with me."

"It is too much honour, Señor," replied Maraquando politely. "Still, if you can spare the time – "

"Oh, that will be all right, Señor. It is settled, then, I will go to-morrow."

"I am your debtor, Don Juan, and accept the offer with a thousand thanks. But your friends – "

"Oh, we will look round Tlatonac," said Tim, putting up his pocket-book, wherein he had been making notes; "and if you will but introduce me to the President, Señor Maraquando, I shall take it as a favour. It will be useful to me in my letters to Europe."

"I am at your service, Señor Corresponsal. His Excellency will have much pleasure in receiving you, I am sure. Bueno!"

"That settles you, Tim," said Duval, in English "Philip can go with you, unless he prefers to remain with Doña Eulalia. But Peter?"

"Oh, send him after butterflies!"

Duval thought this a good idea, and, turning to Don Miguel, explained how anxious Peter was in pursuit of insects. Could Don Miguel send him beyond the city in charge of some one, to hunt for beetles? Maraquando reflected for a moment, and thought that he could do so. There was an Indian named Cocom, who would attend to Don Pedro. Unfortunately, he spoke no English.

"Never mind," said Jack, easily, "when my friend is hunting

the wily butterfly, he speaks to no one. All I desire is that he should have a guide, so that he be not lost."

"Bueno! I will see that Cocom goes with Don Pedro tomorrow."

Jack called Peter from his interesting conversation with Eulalia, and explained matters. The doctor was quite agreeable, and wanted to go at once to the yacht, in order to get his paraphernalia ashore. This ardent desire, however, was not gratified at the moment, as they could scarcely take leave of their courteous host in so cavalier a fashion.

"By the way, Jack," said Philip, at this moment, "are we to stay on board the yacht during our stay here?"

"By no means. We will go to my house."

"What! are you a landed proprietor, Jack?"

"I have a rough kind of diggings, but it's big enough for the lot of us. Don Miguel," he added, turning to their host, "I must now take my leave, with my friends, as we want to see about our house."

"My house is at the disposal of your friends, Señor."

"A thousand thanks. I kiss your hands, Señor Miguel; but for the present we will stay at my residence in the Calle Huascar."

It not being etiquette to press the invitation, Don Miguel gravely bowed, and wished them good-bye for the present. He had to go to a meeting of the Junta in order to confer about the fleet which had remained away from Tlatonac a long time.

"And it will remain a longer time," said Jack, as they emerged

on to the street. "The navy is going to revolt to Don Hypolito."

"I believe that's true, but the old chap doesn't think so. He'll have his eyes open soon, or my name's not Tim. Where's Philip?"

"Saying good-bye to Doña Eulalia," replied Jack, smiling. "Ah, by the way, here he is! Well, Sir Philip Cassim, Baronet, I see you are stabbed by a wench's black eye!"

"A little harmless conversation," protested Philip, guiltily; "don't make a mountain out of a mole-hill, Jack. I can take care of my heart; but your charming brunette friend has fascinated Peter."

"I don't see how that can be," said the doctor, dryly, "seeing I couldn't understand a word she was saying."

"The language of the eye, Peter. You must learn that. It is more interesting than butterflies."

"So you seem to think."

"Jack," said Tim, suddenly, "before we go to your cabin, take us to the telegraph-office, if there is one here."

"Of course there is one here. You want to wire to your editor?"

"Not yet! I want to arrange matters with the officials. There's going to be trouble here in a week, anyhow."

"So soon as that?" said Philip, starting. He had not heard the conversation with Don Miguel.

"Aye, and sooner," replied Duval, prophetically. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, Philip; for, as sure as I stand here, news is now on its way to Tlatonac of the loss of the navy."

"In that case," said the baronet, quietly, "it was a good thing

I brought all those arms with me. You'll have to learn how to shoot, Peter."

"Butterflies and beetles," said Peter, absently. He was thinking of the morrow's sport.

CHAPTER VI

CHALCHUIH TLATONAC

This is a country of magic; for, lo! in the heat of the noontide,
Silent and lone is the city, no footfall is heard in the highways,
Only the grasshopper shrilling, the tinkle of water clear
gushing,

And rarely the sigh of the breezes, that stir the white dust on
the pavements.

Magic! no magic but custom; for this is the time of siesta;
When sinks the sun, then the city will waken to love and to
laughter;

Lightly the gay señoritas will dance in the cold-shining
moonbeams,

Flirt fan, flash eyes, and beckon, to lovers who long for their
kisses,

Then will the castanets rattle, the little feet dance the bolero,
And serenades sigh at the windows, in scorning of jealous
duennas.

Magic is not of the noonday; when glimmers the amorous
twilight,

Then is the time of enchantment, of love, and of passionate
lovers.

Cocom was completely ignorant of his real age. He might

have been a hundred, and he certainly looked as though he had completed his century. Long ago he had left off counting the flying years and meditating on the mutability of human life. In fact, he had changed so little that it is doubtful whether he believed in mutability at all. Wrinkled he was, it is true, and slightly bent, but his black eyes twinkled with the fire of youth, and he enjoyed his meals. These things argue juvenility, and, as Cocom possessed them, he evidently knew the secret of immortality. Perhaps he had found that fountain of youth spoken of by Ponce de Leon. If so, it had affected his soul not his body. He looked like Methuselah.

Yet he was wonderfully active considering his years, and undertook to introduce Peter to the butterflies of Central America. Arrayed in his white cotton drawers and shirt, with his pink zarape gracefully draped over his bent shoulders, he smoked a long black cigar, and waited the orders of the "Americanos" in stolid silence.

Peter was affectionately handling his butterfly-net, Tim was finishing his breakfast, and Jack, in a smart riding-dress, was slashing his high boots with his whip, impatient to get away. They were looking at Cocom, who had just arrived, and waiting for Philip, who, as usual, was late for breakfast.

"He looks too old to be of much use," said the doctor, disconsolately; "why couldn't Don Miguel send me a man instead of a mummy?"

"Perhaps the mummy is well up in entomology!"

"He ought to be that same!" cried Tim, with his mouth full; "he's had plenty of time to learn, anyhow. Ask the old cocoanut his age, Jack."

"Don't you take liberties with his name, Tim. Cocom was a king of Mayapan; and this, I presume, is his descendant."

"Royalty out at elbows!" said Peter, blandly.

"It's a king, is it?" remarked Tim, staring at the Indian. "He looks a mighty second-hand sort of article. I should be a king myself. Wasn't one of my ancestors King of Cork?"

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Philip, entering at this moment; "where did you pick up Methuselah?"

"This is Cocom, my guide," said the doctor, proudly introducing Cocom, who removed his sombrero with a graceful sweep.

"Oh, you are going to hunt the ferocious beetle, are you not? What is he, Jack? An Aztec?"

"No; a descendant of the Mayas."

"A dethroned king – no less."

"You know the country round here, Cocom?" said Philip, taking no notice of Tim's joke.

"Yes, Señor Americano; all! all!" replied Cocom, with grave dignity. "Don Pedro will be safe with me."

"You can show him butterflies?"

"Señor, I can show him butterflies, ants, beetles, wasps; all the Señor desires to behold."

"That being so, Peter, you had better get away," said Jack,

impatently. "I want to be off, and must see you started first; you can't be trusted to run the show on your own account."

"I'm quite ready. Good-bye, boys; I will see you this afternoon."

"Not me," said Duval, brusquely; "I'm off to Maraquando's estancia."

"Take care of the sun, Peter," warned Philip, kindly; "your head isn't over strong."

Peter indignantly repudiated this imputation on his cranium, and forthwith followed Cocom out of the house, gleefully looking forward to a pleasant day. His ideas of pleasure were singularly limited.

"He's quite safe, isn't he, Jack?" said Philip anxiously. "I don't want Peter to get into trouble."

"Oh, Cocom will look after him. I know the old man well. He is devoted to Don Miguel, who once saved his life. Cocom will sit on a bank and watch Peter gasping after butterflies. The exercise will do the doctor's liver good."

"You are off yourself now, I suppose?"

"Yes, I've been waiting for you. Really, Philip, you are the laziest man I know."

"This house that Jack built is the castle of indolence," explained Philip, sitting down to table. "Go, my friend, and kiss Dolores for me!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort. I'll kiss her for my own sake! Adios caballeros."

"When will you return, Jack?"

"To-morrow! Meanwhile Don Miguel will look after you both. Take care of yourselves."

"Con dios va usted mi amigo!" said Cassim, graciously. "Now go away, and let me eat my breakfast."

Jack departed, and Tim went to the window to see him ride down the street.

"He is a fine boy," he said, returning to the breakfast-table. "Doña Dolores ought to be proud of having such a lover."

"I have no doubt she is, Tim. It is to be hoped the course of true love will run smooth with Jack; but what with Don Hypolito and the harlequin opal I have my doubts. What are your plans, Timothy?"

"It's writing I'll be, all day!"

"Nonsense. Come and see Tlatonac."

"I can't. Isn't my chief waiting a letter from me?"

"Such industry! Tim, you make me feel ashamed of myself."

"The devil I do. Then you write my letter, Philip and I'll flirt with Doña Eulalia. I'm a white-headed boy with the female sex."

"No, thank you. It's not a fair exchange."

"Ah, she's a dark-eyed colleen, Philip. You have lost your heart there."

"No," said Philip, a trifle doubtfully. "I have seen too many pretty faces to be captured at first sight by a new one. I have other things to think of besides marriage."

"You have, but you won't," retorted Tim, ungrammatically.

"Now get away with you, and leave me to my writing."

"I'll be back in two hours."

"If you are not, I'll come and look you up at the Don's. Make love to Doña Eulalia while you can, Philip, for it's mighty little time you'll have when the row starts.

"Do ye hear the cannon's rattle? do ye smell the smoke av
battle,

Whin the Irish bhoys are ridin' down the inimy so bould?

Do ye see the bullets flyin'? and your faithful Patrick dyin',

Wid ne'er a sowl beside him dear, to kiss his forehead
cowl'd?"

Tim, with that sudden transition from mirth to melancholy so characteristic of the Celtic race, threw so much pathos into the last two lines that Philip could not trust himself to reply, and went hastily out of the room. He drew a long breath of relief when he found himself in the hot sunshine, for that unexpected note of sorrow from jovial Tim touched him more nearly than he cared to confess. In spite of his cold demeanour and reserve, Philip was of a very emotional nature, and that melancholy strain had reached his heart. He was by no means prone to superstition, but at that moment a sudden question stirred his self-complacency. Never before had he heard Tim sing so pathetically, and the unexpectedness of the thing startled him. It seemed to hint at future sorrows. Poor Tim!

"Confound that Banshee song," he said, with a shiver, as he

strolled along towards the Calle Otumba; "it makes me think of death and the grave. These Irishmen take one at a disadvantage. I won't shake off the feeling the whole day."

He forgot all about it, however, when he reached Maraquando's house, for in the patio he found Eulalia, who greeted him with a brilliant smile. The charm of her society banished the melancholy engendered by Tim's pessimism, and, chatting gaily to this strongly vitalised being, who restlessly flashed round the court like a humming-bird, he recovered his usual spirits. There is more in juxtaposition than people think.

"And where are your friends, Don Felipe?" asked Eulalia, standing on tip-toe to pluck a gorgeous tropical blossom.

"Allow me to get you that flower, Señora," replied Philip, eagerly. "My friends," he added, as he presented her with the bud, "are variously employed. Don Pedro is out after butterflies with Cocom. Señor Corresponsal is writing for his 'diario,' and Don Juan – "

"I know where Don Juan is, Señor. Yes; my father told me of his kindness. He will bring back from the estancia Doña Serafina."

"And Doña Dolores?"

Eulalia flung open her fan with a coquettish gesture, and raising it to her face, looked over the top of it at Philip.

"You know, then, Señor, what you know."

"Assuredly," replied the baronet, tickled at this delicate way of putting it. "I know that my friend wishes to marry your cousin."

"Ay de mi. It can never be."

"He is not rich enough."

"He is not a Spaniard. My father will never consent. And then," she dropped her voice, and looked round fearfully. "The Chalchuih Tlatonac!"

"I know about that also. But it has nothing to do with this marriage."

"It has everything to do with it. The Indians look on my cousin as one of themselves, and, if she married an Americano, she would leave the country. Then there would be no guardian of the stone, and their god would be angry."

"Is your cousin, then, to marry as they please?"

"She must marry one of her own people. An Indian or a Mestizo."

"But suppose she does not?"

"The Indians will carry her to their forest temple, and keep her there in captivity."

"Impossible! How could they seize her in Tlatonac?"

Doña Eulalia nodded her head wisely.

"You do not know how strong are the Indians, Señor. They are everywhere. If they want Dolores at their temple, they will be sure to capture her if they choose."

"By force?"

"No, by stratagem! They could take her away at any moment, and none of us would see her again."

"But what does Don Hypolito say to all this?"

Eulalia spread out her little hands with a look of disgust.

"Don Hypolito wants to marry Dolores because of the Chalchuih Tlatonac! He is a Mestizo; so the Indians would not mind such a marriage. But she hates him, and loves Don Juan. Let your friend beware, Señor."

"Of whom! Of Don Hypolito?"

"Yes; and of the Indians. It is much feared that Don Hypolito is no good Catholic – that he has been to the forest temple and seen – oh," she broke off with a shudder. "I do not know what he has seen. But he hates Don Juan, and, if he captures him, will put him to death. Señor – "

At this moment, before she could say more, Don Miguel entered the patio. Whereupon Eulalia whirled away like a black-and-amber bird. Philip looked after her for a second, thinking how graceful she was, then turned to greet Don Miguel. That gentleman was as lean and dry and as solemn as ever. How he ever came to be the parent of this fairy of midnight, Philip could not quite understand. But doubtless she took after her mother – the female side of a family generally does, in looks.

"I was just conversing with Doña Eulalia," said Philip, responding to Maraquando's stately greeting "Your daughter, Señor."

"She is yours also, Señor," was Miguel's startling reply.

"Egad! I wish she was mine," thought Cassim, who knew this Spanish formula too well to be astonished. "By the way, Señor, my friend Don Pedro thanks you for sending Cocom," he added

politely.

"Don Pedro is welcome a thousand times to my poor services. And where is the Señor Correspoñsal?"

"Writing for his diario."

"Bueno, Señor. And Don Juan?"

"He is now on his way to your estancia."

"I am his servant, for such kindness," said Maraquando, gravely. "Will you take some pulque, Señor Felipe?"

"I thank you, no," replied Philip, remembering his former experience of the drink. "If not troubling you too much, I would like to see Tlatonac."

"I am at your service, Señor. Shall we depart at once?"

Philip signified his acquiescence, though he would rather have stayed in the cool patio, and flirted with Doña Eulalia. He knew, however, that Spanish fathers are not the most amiable parents in the world, and resent too much attention being paid by foreigners to their womankind; therefore he took leave of the young lady and departed with Don Miguel. Before Philip parted from that gentleman, he had explored the city thoroughly, and was quite worn out.

The Jefe Politico was a most conscientious cicerone. He took Philip to every building of any note, and gave him a minute history of all events connected therewith, from the earliest period to the present time. Fortunately, Tlatonac was not very old, or he would have gone on for a week without stopping. As it was, he took nearly all day in directing Philip's attention to

dates, Aztec idols, ruins of teocallis, sites of palaces, to battle-fields, and many other things too numerous to mention. This information was accurate but wearisome, and Philip felt it to be so. Maraquando was Prescott and Bancroft rolled into one, as regards knowledge of history, and, having found a willing listener, took full advantage of the opportunity. Cassim was too polite to object, but he heartily wished that Don Miguel would hold his tongue. The most pathetic part of the whole affair was that the poor man thought he was amusing his guest.

Tlatonac is built partly on the seashore and partly on a hill. Within the walls of the forts frowning over the waters are the dwellings of the flat portion inhabited by peons and leperos, with a sprinkling of low-caste mestizos. From thence the houses rise up to the top of the hill, which is crowned by the cathedral in the Plaza de los Hombres Ilustres. This is the heart of Tlatonac, the aristocratic quarter, and commands a splendid view of the surrounding country.

The Plaza was a very large square, fenced in on three sides by the houses of the Cholacacan aristocracy, on the fourth by the great cathedral. In the centre was the zocalo, a green oasis of verdure laid out in winding walks and brilliant flower-beds. Herein the aristocracy took their walks when the band played in the cool of the evening, using it as a kind of alameda, wherein to meet their friends and gossip. It was indeed a charming spot, and its green arcades afforded a grateful shade from the hot sun which blazed down on the white stones of the square outside. On

leaving the zocalo, they entered the church dedicated to Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion, which once gave its name to the town now more generally known by its Indian appellation of Tlatonac.

"The cathedral, Señor," said Don Miguel, as they stood beneath the glory of the great cupola, "is built on the site of a famous teocalli."

"That dedicated to the Chalchuih Tlatonac?"

"To the false god Huitzilopochtli, Señor," corrected the Spaniard, gravely. "I see you know the story. Yes, it was here that the son of Montezuma's daughter came with the shining precious stone which gives its name to the city. He worshipped his barbaric deities after the fashion of his mother, and built here a teocalli to the war-god, wherein was preserved the devil stone. Many years after, when the Conquistadores – our ancestors, Señor – arrived, the then possessor of the opal fled with it into the impenetrable forests, and thus the jewel was lost to the Crown of Spain. The Conquistadores pulled down the teocalli and built thereon this church to the glory of Our Lady, at the command of Fray Medina, who afterwards became the first Bishop of Tlatonac. Is it not beautiful, Señor? and all for the glory of God and the true cross."

It was indeed a beautiful old church, mellowed into restful beauty by the lapse of years. The floor was of marquetry, hued like a dim rainbow owing to the different coloured woods. Slender porphyry pillars sprang from the floor to the groined ceiling in two long rows, and at the far end, under a firmament

of sun and stars and silver moons, with ascending saints and wide-winged angels, arose the glory of the great altar, sparkling in the dusky atmosphere like a vast jewel. Before it burned a silver lamp like a red star. Tapestries, richly worked, depended between the pillars, gorgeous brocades were here, faded silken draperies there, and everywhere faces of saint, angel, cherubim, and seraphim. Gilt crosses, pictures of the Virgin, statues of the Virgin, side altars laden with flowers, silver railings, steps of Puebla marble, like alabaster, and throughout a dim religious light as the rays of the sun pierced the painted windows. The fumes of incense permeated the building; there was a sound of muttered prayers, and here and there a dark figure prostrate before a shrine or kneeling at the confessional.

All this magnificence was toned down by time to delicate hues, which blended the one with the other and made a harmonious whole. Dingy and old as it was, the whole edifice was redolent of sacred associations, and it required some imagination to conceive that where now reigned this quiet and holy beauty once arose a heathen temple, where the victims shrieked on the altar of a fierce deity. Religion did not seem very flourishing in Cholacaca, for on this day in the cathedral there were few worshippers – no priests.

"We have few priests now, Señor," explained Don Miguel, gravely, as they left the great building. "The Jesuits were once powerful in Cholacaca, but they were expelled some years ago. The priests *would* meddle with politics, and when the Church

clashes with the Government, well, Señor – one must go to the wall."

"So the Jesuits went?"

"Yes. They were unwilling to go, for Cholacaca is one of the richest mission fields. Not that I think they have done much good, for though the Indians are outwardly converted, yet I know for certain that they still secretly worship Huitzilopochtli and the Chalchuih Tlatonac."

"What makes you think so, Don Miguel?"

"Little things! The straws which show the wind's course. On the summit of some of these ruined teocallis beyond the walls, I have often seen fresh wreaths of flowers. Nay, in my own patio, before those statues of Coatlicue, Quetzalcoatl, and Teoyamiqui, I have found offerings of flowers and fruit. 'Tis also said, Señor," pursued Maraquando, dropping his voice, "that in the hidden Temple of the Opal the Indians still sacrifice human victims to the war-god. But this may be false."

"Very probably! I cannot conceive such horrors," replied Philip, with a shudder; "but, as regards priests, there are still some here, I presume?"

"Assuredly; but not of the Society of Jesus – save one. Yes, Padre Ignatius is still here. He was, and is, so beloved by all that the President had not the heart to banish him. So he yet works for the Faith in our midst."

"I should like to meet Father Ignatius?"

"You shall do so, Señor. He is a great friend of mine, and

the confessor of my children. Often does he come to my poor house. But let us walk on, Señor. There are many things to see. El Palacio Nacional, where dwells his excellency; the Market Place, and the alameda. We are proud of our alameda, Señor."

Thus talked on Don Miguel, and, amused by the novelty of the scene, Philip stared round him with great pleasure. They passed the pulquerias, which are the public-houses of Tlatonac, saw the Palacio Nacional, a huge stone building, above which flaunted the yellow flag of the Republic, with its device of a white stone, darting rays of red, yellow, green, and blue, in allusion to the opal, explored the prison, which held a fine collection of ruffians, and ultimately arrived at the Market Place.

It was the prettiest sight in Tlatonac, and Philip was sorry he had not the power to transfer the scene with all its varied hues and picturesque figures to paper. A square, little less large than the great Plaza, surrounded on all sides by gaily tinted houses. Reds, greens, yellows, pinks, the Plaza was girdled by a perfect rainbow, and under the gay awnings before these sat the dealers and their wares. Here were tropical fruits from the tierras calientes, comprising oranges, bananas, pineapples, melons, peaches, and an infinite variety of others, all piled in picturesque confusion on the stalls. As to flowers, the whole place was a mass of blossom, from gorgeous red cactus buds to modest bunches of violets. Owing to the geography of Mexico and Central America, the products of both temperate and tropical zones can be found flourishing at one and the same time.

Hence the violets, which Philip had scarcely expected to see. They put him in mind of English woods – of the day when in the Isle of Wight, Jack told him about Dolores.

"Yes, the Indians are fond of flowers," said Don Miguel, when Philip expressed his surprise at the profusion of blossoms. "It is a taste they inherit from their ancestors. The Aztecs, you know, were famous for floriculture. We love flowers just as passionately; and, go where you will in Tlatonac, you will find blooming gardens gay with flowers."

"It is a graceful taste, and one which the climate enables you to gratify to the full."

"Without doubt, Señor. We possess three climates in which flourish different products of Nature. Tlatonac is in the tierra caliente, or hot country. Higher up, on the table-lands it is less tropical, and is called the tierra templada, while the snow-clad mountain peaks, where flourish pine trees, oaks, and hemlocks, is known by the name of the tierra fria. Thus, you see, in our country we possess all the climates of the world."

"A rare advantage. Central America is a favoured country."

"In all save its rulers," sighed Maraquando, regretfully. "Nor is its population what it should be. I tell you, Señor, this land should be the most powerful in the world. It is the most favoured spot on earth – the garden of Paradise; but what with our incessant civil wars, our incompetent governors, and, of late, the tyranny of the Church, the whole continent is demoralised. Ah, if we but had the man who could weld all our foolish Republics into one

great nation! Then, indeed, would we be the glory of the earth."

"Don Hypolito Xuarez evidently looks upon himself as that man."

"Don Hypolito!" echoed Maraquando, scornfully. "No, Señor; he has the instincts of a tyrant. He would grind down the people as the Conquistadores did their ancestors. Were he pure minded and noble in his ambition, I – even I, Miguel Maraquando – would support him. I would lay aside all prejudices to aid him to make our country great. But I know the man, Don Felipe. He is a half-bred, a treacherous scoundrel, who wants to be the Santa Anna of the Republic. Let him beware of Iturbide's fate!"

"At all events, he intends to become Emperor," persisted Philip, calmly.

"No! The Junta has decided that he is to be banished from Cholacaca. Already the fleet is a Acauhtzin to arrest him, and to-morrow we send up a special message that he is to be brought to Tlatonac at once."

"Suppose he refuses to come?"

"He will be brought by force."

"Always provided the fleet do not support his cause."

"You, too, Señor," said Maraquando, thoughtfully; "so said Don Juan last night. It may be so, and yet I hope, for the sake of the country, that the affair may be ended at once. I believe the navy will continue faithful. My own son, Don Rafael, is in command of one ship; yet I mistrust Xuarez and his oily tongue. Yes, Señor, I have thought much since Don Juan and the Señor

Corresponsal spoke to me last night. I have conferred with His Excellency, the President. Therefore have we decided to send up a message to-morrow, ordering the return of the fleet with or without Xuarez. It does not do to trust him."

"You have another man-of-war, then, to go to Acauhtzin."

"No; we have a small steamer. But she is quick, and will go there and return in no time."

"That is if she is permitted to do so," thought Philip; but he did not say this aloud, lest Don Miguel should grow angry.

"Still, even if the fleet does revolt, we will have the torpederas," said the Jefe, cheerfully. "They are now on their way from England. His Excellency received a telegram yesterday."

"If you have the torpederas, you can do a good deal," replied Philip, lighting a cigarette: "and if there is a war, Don Miguel, my yacht is at the service of the Government."

"A thousand, thousand thanks, Señor!" said Miguel, smiling gratefully; "but I hope and trust there will be no occasion for us to ask you to make such a sacrifice. However, we shall soon know – in three days at the most. If the fleet are true to us, they will bring back Don Hypolito. If not, we shall know what steps to take to defend Tlatonac from being bombarded."

"By the way, Señor," said Cassim, thoughtfully, "you have a telegraph-station here. In which direction do the wires run?"

"Why do you ask, Señor?"

"Because the Señor Corresponsal wishes constant communication with England, should there be a war. Now, if the

wires go north to Acauhtzin, they can be cut by Don Hypolito."

"That is true, Don Felipe. Fortunately they do *not* run north. No; the wires run south to Janjalla which town will certainly remain faithful to the Government. From thence all messages can with ease be transmitted to England."

Philip was pleased at this, as he saw that Tim would be enabled to transmit messages to England with the greatest ease, and thus cover himself with glory. They conversed for a few minutes on the subject, and then left the market for the alameda.

It was a most delightful promenade. High trees on either side, whose branches formed a green arcade above the heads of the promenaders. Beds of roses in profusion – brilliant tropical plants, bronze statues, marble statues, and plenty of pleasantly situated seats. One portion was reserved for those who chose to walk, another for horses and their riders. Hither came all the aristocracy of the city, when they grew weary of the zocala of the Plaza de los Hombres Ilustres, and on this day the alameda was crowded.

In a gaily decorated bandstand, an excellent company of musicians played bright music, mostly airs from comic operas, and Philip was amused to hear Offenbachian frivolities sounding in this spot. They seemed out of place. The musicians had no sense of the fitness of things. They should have played boleros fandangos – the national music of Spain – instead of which they jingled the trashy airs of minor musicians.

The alameda was thronged by a motley crowd, presenting

more varied features than are to be seen in any other part of the world. Indian women squatting at the corners selling fruit and pulque, beautiful señoritas with black mantillas and eloquent fans, gay young cavaliers dashing along on spirited horses, in all the bravery of the national costume, and not seldom a sour-looking duenna, jealously watching her charge. Occasionally a priest in shovel-hat and black cassock – but these were very rare. The army was also represented by a number of gaily-dressed officers who smoked cigarettes, smiled at the señoritas, and clanked their huge spurs ostentatiously together. It was a gay scene, and Philip admired it greatly.

"I have never seen such a mixed crowd anywhere," he said, lightly, "save in the Strada Reale in Valetta."

"Well!" said Maraquando, after a pause, "and what do you think of Tlatonac?"

"It is a terrestrial Paradise," replied Philip, "and Hypolito is the serpent."

CHAPTER VII

DOLORES

Your eyes
Are dark as midnight skies,
And bright as midnight stars,
Their glance
Is full of love's romance,
When no hate loving mars.
Oh let those eyes look down on me,
Oh let those glances wander free,
And I will take those stars to be
My guides for life,
Across the ocean of wild strife,
Dolores!

My heart
Those looks have rent apart,
And now 'tis torn in twain;
Oh take
That broken heart, and make
With kiss it whole again;
Oh lightly from thy lattice bend,
Give but a smile, and it will mend,
Then love will love be till we end
Our life of tears,

For some sweet life in yonder spheres,
Dolores!

The next day Jack came back with Dolores and Doña Serafina. He was puffed up with exceeding pride at his good fortune, for it is not every young man in Central America who gets a chance of talking unreservedly with the girl of his heart. The Cholacacans treat their women folk as do the Turks: shut them up from the insolent glances of other men, and only let them feel their power over the susceptible hearts of cavaliers at the yearly carnival. Jack never did approve of these Orientalisms, even in his days of heart-wholeness, and now that his future hinged on the smile of Dolores, he disapproved of such shuttings up more than ever.

Fortunately Don Miguel was not a Turk, and gave his womenfolk greater freedom than was usual in Tlatonac. Dolores and her cousin were not unused to masculine society, and Doña Serafina was the most good-natured of duennas. Consequently they saw a good deal of the creature man, and were correspondingly grateful for the seeing. Still, even in Cholacaca it is going too far to let a young unmarried fellow ride for many miles beside the caleza of two unmarried ladies. So far as Doña Serafina was concerned, it did not matter. She was old enough, and ugly enough, to be above suspicion; but Dolores – ah, ah! – the scandal-mongers of Tlatonac opened their black eyes, and whispered behind their black fans, when they heard of Don Miguel's folly, of the Señor Americano's audacity.

As a rule, Don Miguel, proud as Lucifer, would not have permitted Jack to escort his sister and niece in this way; but the prospect of a war had played havoc with social observances. Don Rafael was away, Don Miguel could not leave the capital, and the ladies certainly could not return by themselves, over bad roads infested by Indians. Thus, the affair admitted of some excuse, and Don Miguel was grateful to Jack for performing what should have been his duty. He did not know that the gratitude was all on the other side, and that Duval would have given years of his life for the pleasant journey, obtained with so little difficulty. If he had known – well, Don Miguel was not the most amiable of men, so there would probably have been trouble. As it was, however, the proud Spaniard knew nothing, not even as much as did the gossips of Tlatonac; so Jack duly arrived with his fair charges, and was duly thanked for his trouble by the grateful Maraquando. Fate was somewhat ironical in dealing with the matter.

That journey was a glimpse of Paradise to Jack, for he had Dolores all to himself. Doña Serafina, being asleep, did not count. A peon, with a long cigar, who was as stupid as a stone idol, drove the caleza containing the two ladies. Doña Serafina, overcome by her own stoutness, and the intense heat, slept heavily, and Jack, riding close to the carriage, flirted with Dolores. There was only one inconvenience about this arrangement – the lovers could not kiss one another.

It was a long way from the estancia, but Jack wished it was longer, so delightful was his conversation with Dolores. She sat

in the caleza flirting her big fan, and cooing like a dove, when her lover said something unusually passionate. Sometimes she sent a flash of her dark eyes through the veil of her mantilla, and then Jack felt queer sensations about the region of the heart. A pleasant situation, yet tantalising, since it was all the "thou art so near and yet so far" business, with no caresses or kisses. When the journey came to an end, they were both half glad, half sorry; the former on account of their inability to come to close quarters, the latter, because they well knew they would not again get such a chance of unwatched courting.

Eulalia, who guessed all this pleasantness, received her cousin with a significant smile, and took her off to talk over the matter in the solitude of the bedroom they shared together. Don Miguel seized on his sleepy sister in order to extract from her a trustworthy report as to how things were at the estancia, and Jack departed to his own house, to announce his arrival and that of Dolores.

It was late in the afternoon, for the journey, commencing at dawn, had lasted till close on four o'clock, and Jack found his three friends enjoying their siestas. He woke them up, and began to talk Dolores. When he had talked himself hoarse, and Peter asleep, quoth Philip —

"What about the railway works?"

"I haven't been near them," said Jack, innocently; whereat Tim and Philip laughed so heartily that they made him blush, and awoke Peter.

"What are you talking about?" asked Peter sleepily.

"Jack's love affairs," replied Philip, laughing.

"And by the same token we'll soon be talking of your own," said Tim, cruelly. "If you only knew the way he's been carrying on with the black-eyed colleen, Jack!"

"Nonsense," retorted Cassim, reddening; "I walked about Tlatonac with Don Miguel yesterday."

"You flirted with Eulalia last night, anyhow."

"Don't be jealous, Tim. It's a low-minded vice."

"Oh, so that is the way the wind blows, Philip," said Jack, stretching himself. "I knew you would fall in love with Eulalia. Now, it's no use protesting. I know the signs of love, because I've been through the mill myself."

"Two days' acquaintance, and you say I love the girl! Try again, Jack."

"Not I! Time counts for naught in a love affair. I fell in love with Dolores in two minutes!"

"Ah, that's the way with us all," said Tim, reflectively. "When I was in Burmah, there was a girl in Mandalay –"

"Tim, we don't want any of your immoral stories. You'll shock Peter – confound him, he's asleep again, like the fat boy in Pickwick. Well, gentlemen both, I am about to follow the doctor's example. I've been riding all day, and feel baked."

"How long do you intend to sleep, Jack?"

"An hour or so. Then we'll have something to eat, and go off to Maraquando's to see the ladies. We must introduce Peter to

his future wife."

"Begad, I may fall in love with Doña Serafina myself!"

"It's possible, if you are an admirer of the antique," retorted Jack, and went off to his bedroom for a few hours' sleep. Even lovers require rest, and bucketing about on a half-broken horse for the best part of the day under a grilling sun was calculated to knock up even so tough a subject as Jack.

"Faith!" remarked Tim, when Jack's long legs vanished through the doorway, "if old Serafina smiles on Peter, and those girls flirt with you and Jack, I'll be left out in the cold. Another injustice to Ireland."

"Come to the alameda to-morrow, and pick out a señorita to be your own private property."

"What! and get a knife in my ribs. I'm more than seven, Philip. Why, there was once a girl in Cape Town who had a Boer for a sweetheart – "

"And you took the girl, and the Boer didn't like it. I know that story, Tim. It's a chestnut. You told it in that book of sketches you wrote. Go on with your work; I'm sleepy."

"Ow – ow!" yawned Tim, lazily. "I'd like to sleep myself, but that I have to write up this interview with Gomez. Did I tell you about it, Philip?"

"Yes; you've told me three times, and given three different versions. Keep the fourth for *The Morning Planet*."

"But the President said – "

"I know all about that," muttered Philip, crossly. "What you

said – what he said – what Maraquando said – and how you all lied against one another. Do let us sleep, Tim. First Jack, then you. Upon my – upon my word – upon – on!" and Philip went off into a deep slumber.

"I hope the interview with Gomez won't have the same effect on my readers," said Tim, blankly to himself, "or it's the sack I'll be getting. Come on with ye! 'There will be no war', said the President. That's a lie, anyhow; but he said it, so down it goes. Oh, my immortal soul, it's a liar I am."

Then he began scratching the paper with a bad pen, and there was peace in the land.

That night they duly arrived at Maraquando's house in order to ask how politics were progressing. This was the excuse given by three of them; but it was false, as Tim well knew. He alone took an interest in politics. Even Peter had ceased to care about Don Hypolito, and the opal stone, and the possible war. He – under orders from Jack and Philip, who wanted the girls to themselves – made himself agreeable to Doña Serafina. Unaccustomed, by reason of her plain looks, to such attentions, she enjoyed the novelty of the thing, and thought this fat little Americano delightful. It is true that their conversation was mostly pantomimic; but as the doctor knew a few words of Spanish, and Serafina had learnt a trifle of English from Jack, filtered through Dolores, they managed between them to come to a hazy understanding as to what they were talking about.

Never till that moment did Philip feel the infinite charm

of that languorous Creole life, so full of dreams and idleness. Sitting beside Eulalia in the warm gloom, he listened to her sparkling conversation, and stared vaguely at the beauty of the scene around him. In the patio all was moonlight and midnight – that is as regards the shadows, for the hour was yet early. Here and there in the violet sky trembled a star with mellow lustre, and the keen, cold shafts of moonlight, piercing the dusk, smote the flowers and tessellated pavement with silver rays. Pools of white light lay on the floor welling into the shadow even to the little feet of Eulalia. The court wore that unfamiliar look, so mysterious, so weird, which only comes with the night and the pale moon. And then – surely that was music – the trembling note of a guitar sounding from the shadowy corner in which Jack and Dolores were ensconced.

In the glimmering light Philip could see the grotesque gestures of Serafina and the doctor, as they pantomimed to one another on the azotea, and the red tip of Miguel's cigar, as he strolled up and down on the flat roof talking seriously with Tim. Through the warm air, heavy with the perfume of flowers, floated the contralto voice of Dolores. The song was in Spanish, and that noble tongue sounded rich and full over the sweeping music of the guitar. As translated afterwards by Philip (who dabbled in poetry), the words ran thus:

In Spain! ah, yes, in Spain!
When day was fading,

I heard you serenading,
While shed the moon her silver rain,
The nightingale your song was aiding,
My tresses dark I then was braiding,
When to my chamber upward springing
There came the burden of your singing,
Nor was that singing vain
In Spain – dear Spain.

From Spain! yes, far from Spain,
We two now wander;
And here as yonder
A hopeless love for me you feign.
Alas! of others thou art fonder,
And I, forsaken, sit and ponder.
Yet once again your voice is ringing,
I hear the burden of that singing.
Alas! I fled in vain
From Spain – dear Spain.

They applauded the song and the singer, Jack looking across to Philip as much as to say, "Isn't she an angel?" If Philip thought so, he did not say so, being busy with Eulalia. They were talking Chinese metaphysics, a pleasant subject to discuss with a pretty girl well up in the intricacies thereof. As to Jack and his angel!

"Querida!" murmured Dolores, slipping her hand into that of her lover's under cover of the darkness; "how lonely has my heart been without thee."

"Angelito," replied Jack, who was an adept at saying pretty things in Spanish; "I left behind my heart when I departed, and it has drawn me back to your side."

"Alas! How long will we be together, Juan? I am afraid of this war; should Don Hypolito conquer!" Here she paused and slightly shuddered.

"He shall not conquer, cara. What can he do with a few adherents against the power of the Government?"

"Still, the Indians – "

"You are afraid they will join with him. To what end? Xuarez cannot restore the worship of the Chalchuih Tlatonac."

"Juan!" said Dolores, anxiously, "it is not of Xuarez I am so much afraid as of the Indians. If there is a war, they may carry me off."

"Carry you off!" repeated Jack, in a puzzled tone of voice. "Why, how could they do that? and for what reason?"

"They could do it easily by some subtle device; bolts and bars and walled towns are nothing to them when they set their hearts on anything. And they would carry me away because I am the guardian of the Chalchuih Tlatonac."

"Who told you all this?"

"Cocom."

"But he does not worship the opal or the old gods. He is a devout Catholic."

"So says Padre Ignatius; but I think he is one of those who go to the forest sanctuary. He knows much."

"And says nothing. It is death for him to betray the secrets of that Aztec worship."

"Listen, Juan, alma de mi alma. The life of Cocom was saved by my uncle Miguel, and with him gratitude is more powerful than religion. He told me while you were away, that the opal has prophesied war, and on that account the Indians are alarmed for me. Should there be no guardian of the opal, Huitzilopochtli will be angry, and lest I should be killed in the war as soon as the revolt takes place, the Indians will carry me for safety into the heart of the country – into those trackless forest depths more profound than the sea."

"They shall never do so while I am at hand," said Jack, fiercely; "but I don't believe this story of Cocom's. You cannot be in such danger."

"I am afraid it is true; besides, that is not the only danger – Don Hypolito!"

"What of him?"

"He wishes to marry me, Juan."

Duval laughed softly, and pressed the little hand, that lay within his own.

"You talk ancient history, querida; I thought we settled that I was to be the favoured one."

"It is true! ah, yes, thee alone do I love," whispered Dolores, tenderly; "but when you departed, Juan, he came to me, this Don Hypolito, and spoke of love."

"Confound his impudence!" muttered Jack, in English.

"What say you, Juan? Oh, it was terrible! He said, if I became not his wife, that he would plunge the country into war. I did not believe that he could do so or would dare to do so. I refused. Then he spoke of my love for you, and swore to kill you."

"He'll have to catch me first, Dolores."

"'There will be war,' said this terrible one, 'and I will tear down the walls of Tlatonac to seize you. This Americano will I slay and give his body to the dogs.'"

"All idle talk, mi cara," said Duval, scornfully; "I can protect myself and you. What more did he say?"

"Little more; but it was the same kind of talk. When he departed, I spoke to my uncle; but Don Hypolito had by that time gone to Acauhtzin."

"Was Don Miguel angry?"

"Very angry! But he could do nothing. Don Hypolito was far away on the waters."

"And will return with fire and blood," said Jack, gloomily; "but never fear, Dolores. My friends and myself will protect you from this insolent one. If we are conquered, we shall fly to my own land in the vessel of Don Felipe!"

"But what of Eulalia?"

"Ah!" replied her lover, waggishly; "I think you can trust Don Felipe to look after Eulalia."

"Do you think there will be a war, Juan?"

"It looks like it. However, we shall know for certain when the messenger comes back from Acauhtzin."

"Yes; my uncle told me the boat had gone up to-day to bid the fleet return."

"A wild-goose chase only," thought Jack, but held his peace, lest he should alarm Dolores.

Fearful of attracting her uncle's attention by speaking too much to Jack, the Spanish beauty crossed over to where Philip and Eulalia were sitting.

"Señor Felipe!" said Dolores, gaily, "wherefore do you laugh?"

"It is at Don Pedro and my good aunt," replied Eulalia, before Philip could speak. "Behold them, Dolores, making signs like wooden puppets."

Dolores turned her eyes towards the couple leaning over the azotea railing, and began to laugh also. Then Jack came over and demanded to be informed of the joke. He was speedily informed of the performance going on above; so that the two actors had quite an audience, although they knew it not. Indeed the affair was sufficiently grotesque. It was like a game of dumb crambo, as Peter acted a word, and the old lady tried to guess his meaning.

For instance, wishing to tell her how he captured butterflies, Peter wagged his hands in the air to indicate the flight of insects, then struck at a phantom beetle with an imaginary net.

"Pajaros!" guessed Doña Serafina, wrongly. Peter did not know this was the Spanish for 'birds,' and thought she had caught his meaning. The lady thought so too, and was delighted with her own perspicuity.

"Bueno, Señor! You catch birds! To eat?"

She imitated eating, whereon Peter shook his head though he was not quite sure if the Cholocacans did not eat beetles. Foreigners had so many queer customs.

Seeing Peter misunderstood, Doña Serafina skipped lightly across the azotea, flapping her arms, and singing. Then she turned towards the doctor, and nodded encouragingly.

"Birds!" she said, confidently. "You eat them?"

Now Peter knew that 'comida' meant eating; but quite certain that Doña Serafina did not devour beetles, set himself to work to show her what he really meant. He ran after imaginary butterflies round the azotea, and, in his ardour, bumped up against Tim.

"What the devil are you after?" said Tim, displeased at his conversation with Maraquando being interrupted. "Why can't you behave yourself, you ill-conducted little person."

"Do they eat beetles, here?" asked Tim, eagerly.

"Beetles! they'd be thin, if they did," said Tim, drily. "I don't know. Do you eat beetles, Señor?" he added, turning to Don Miguel.

The Spaniard made a gesture of disgust, and looked inquiringly at his sister.

"Los pajaros," explained Doña Serafina, smiling.

"Oh, 'tis birds she's talking about!"

"Birds!" replied the doctor, blankly. "I thought I showed her butterflies. This way," and he began hovering round again.

Tim roared.

"They'll think you have gone out of what little mind you possess, Peter!"

"Ah, pobrecito," said Serafina, when the meaning of the pantomime was explained, "I thought he was playing at a flying bird."

"You'll never make your salt as an actor, Peter," jeered Tim, as they all laughed over the mistake. "I'd better call up Philip and Jack to keep you straight. Jack, come up here, and bring Philip with you."

"All right," replied Jack, from the depths below, where they had been watching the performance with much amusement; "we are coming."

The quartette soon made their appearance in the azotea, where Peter's mistake was explained.

"Do it again, Peter," entreated Philip, laughing; "you have no idea how funny you look flopping about!"

"I shan't," growled the doctor, ruffled. "Why can't they talk English?"

"Doña Dolores can talk a little," said Jack, proudly "Señorita talk to my friend in his own tongue."

"It is a nice day," repeated Doña Dolores, slowly; "'ow do you do?"

"Quite well, thank you," replied Peter, politely; whereat his friends laughed again in the most unfeeling manner.

"Oh, you can laugh," said Peter, indignantly; "but if I was in love with a girl, I would teach her some better words than about

the weather, and how do you do!"

"I have done so," replied Jack, quietly; "but those words are for private use."

At this moment Dolores, laughing behind her fan, was speaking to Doña Serafina, who thereupon advanced towards Peter.

"I can speak to the Americano," she announced to the company; then, fixing Peter with her eye, said, with a tremendous effort, "Darling!"

"Oh!" said the modest Peter, taken aback, "she said, 'darling'!"

"Darling!" repeated Serafina, who was evidently quite ignorant of the meaning.

"That's one of the words for private use, eh, Jack?" laughed Philip, quite exhausted with merriment. "A very good word. I must teach it to Doña Eulalia."

"It's too bad of you, Doña Dolores," said Jack, reproachfully; whereat Dolores laughed again at the success of her jest.

"Did the Señor have good sport with Cocom," asked Don Miguel, somewhat bewildered at all this laughter, the cause of which, ignorant as he was of English, he could not understand.

"Did you have a good time, Peter," translated Tim, fluently, "with the beetles."

"Oh, splendid! tell him splendid. I captured some Papilionidae! and a beautiful little glow-worm. One of the Elateridae species, and – "

"I can't translate all that jargon, you fat little humming-bird!"

He had good sport, Señor," he added, suddenly turning to Don Miguel.

"Bueno!" replied the Spaniard, gravely, "it is well."

It was no use trying to carry on a common conversation, as the party invariably split up into pairs. Dolores and Eulalia were already chatting confidentially to their admirers. Doña Serafina began to make more signs to Peter, with the further addition of a parrot-cry of "Darling," and Tim found himself once more alone with Don Miguel.

"I have written out my interview with the President," he said slowly; "and it goes to England to-morrow. Would you like to see it first, Señor?"

"If it so pleases you, Señor Correspoñsal."

"Good! then I shall bring it with me to-morrow morning. Has that steamer gone to Acauhtzin yet?"

"This afternoon it departed, Señor. It will return in two days with the fleet."

"I hope so, Don Miguel, but I am not very certain," replied Tim, significantly. "His Excellency Gomez does not seem very sure of the fleet's fidelity either."

"There are many rumours in Tlatonac," said Maraquando, impatiently. "All lies spread by the Oposidores – by Xuarez and his gang. I fear the people are becoming alarmed. The army, too, talk of war. Therefore, to set all these matters at rest, to-morrow evening his Excellency the President will address the Tlatonacians at the alameda."

"Why at the alameda?"

"Because most of them will be assembled there at the twilight hour, Señor. It is to be a public speech to inspire our people with confidence in the Government, else would the meeting be held in the great hall of the Palacio Nacional."

"I would like to hear Don Francisco Gomez speak, so I and my friends will be at the alameda."

"You will come with me, Señor Correspoñsal," said Miguel, politely; "my daughter, niece, and sister are also coming."

"The more the merrier! It will be quite a party, Señor."

"It is a serious position we are in," said Maraquando, gravely; "and I trust the word of his Excellency will show the Tlatonacians that there is nothing to be feared from Don Hypolito."

At this moment Doña Serafina, who had swooped down on her charges, appeared to say good night. Both Dolores and Eulalia were unwilling to retire so early, but their aunt was adamant, and they knew that nothing could change her resolution, particularly as she had grown weary of fraternising with Peter.

"Bueno noche tenga, Vm," said Doña Serafina, politely, and her salutation was echoed by the young ladies in her wake.

"Con dios va usted, Señora," replied Tim, kissing the old lady's extended hand, after which they withdrew. Dolores managed to flash a tender glance at Jack as they descended into the patio, and Philip, leaning over the balustrade of the azotea caught a significant wave of Eulalia's fan, which meant a good deal. Cassim knew all those minute but eloquent signs of love.

Shortly afterwards they also took their leave after refusing Maraquando's hospitable offer of pulque.

"No, sir," said Tim, as they went off to their own mansion; "not while there is good whisky to be had."

"But pulque isn't bad," protested Jack, more for the sake of saying something than because he thought so.

"Well, drink it yourself, Jack, and leave us the crather!"

"Talking about 'crathers,'" said Philip, mimicking Tim's brogue, "what do you think of Doña Serafina, Peter?"

"A nice old lady, but not beautiful. I would rather be with Doña Eulalia."

"Would you, indeed?" retorted Cassim, indignantly. "As if she would understand those idiotic signs you make."

"They are quite intelligible to –"

"Be quiet, boys!" said Tim, as they stopped at the door of Jack's house, "you'll get plenty of fighting without starting it now. There's going to be a Home Rule meeting to-morrow."

"Where, Tim?"

"In the alameda, no less. His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant is to speak to the crowd."

"He'll tell a lot of lies, I expect," said Jack, sagely. "Well, he can say what he jolly well pleases. I'll lay any odds that before the week's out war will be proclaimed."

He was a truer prophet than he thought.

CHAPTER VIII

VIVA EL REPUBLICA

No king have we with golden crown,
To tread the sovereign people down;
All men are equal in our sight —
The ruler ranks but with the clown.

Our symbol is the opal bright,
Which darts its rays of rainbow light,
All men are equal in our sight —
Prophetic of all coming things,
Of blessing, war, disaster, blight.

Red glow abroad the opal flings,
To us the curse of war it brings;
All men are equal in our sight —
And evil days there soon shall be,
Beneath the war-god's dreaded wings.

Yet knowing what we soon shall see,
We'll boldly face this misery,
All men are equal in our sight —
And fight, though dark our fortunes frown,
For life, and home, and liberty.

Padre Ignatius always said that his flock were true and devout Catholics, who believed in what they ought to believe. Strictly speaking, the flock of Padre Ignatius was limited to the congregation of a little adobe church on the outskirts of the town, but his large heart included the whole population of Tlatonac in that ecclesiastical appellation. Everyone knew the Padre and everyone loved him, Jesuit though he was. For fifty years had he laboured in the vineyard of Tlatonac, but when his fellow-labourers were banished, the Government had not the heart to bid him go. So he stayed on, the only representative of his order in all Cholacaca, and prayed and preached and did charitable works, as had been his custom these many years past. With his thin, worn face, rusty cassock, slouch hat, and kindly smile, Padre Ignatius, wonderfully straight considering his seventy years, attended to the spiritual wants of his people, and said they were devout Catholics. He always over-estimated human nature, did the Padre.

So far as the Padre saw, this might have been the case, and nobody having the heart to undeceive him, he grew to believe that these half-civilised savages were Christians to the bone; but there was no doubt that nine out of every ten in his flock were very black sheep indeed. They would kneel before the gaudy shrine of the adobe chapel, and say an Ave for every bead of the rosary, but at one time or another every worshipper was missing, each in his or her turn. They had been to the forest for this thing, for that thing; they had been working on the railway fifty miles inland, or

fishing some distance up the coast. Such were the excuses they gave, and Padre Ignatius, simple-hearted soul, believed them, never dreaming that they had been assisting in the worship of the Chalchuih Tlatonac in the hidden temple of Huitzilopochtli.

The belief in the devil stone was universal throughout Cholacaca. Not only did the immediate flock of Padre Ignatius revere it as a symbol of the war-god, but every person in the Republic who had Indian blood in his or her veins firmly believed that the shining precious stone exercised a power over the lives and fortunes of all. Nor was such veneration to be wondered at, considering how closely the history of the great gem was interwoven with that of the country. The shrine of the opal had stood where now arose the cathedral; the Indian appellation of the jewel had given its name to the town; and the picture representation of the gem itself was displayed on the yellow standard of the Republic. Hardly any event since the foundation of the city could be mentioned with which the harlequin opal was not connected in some way. It was still adored in the forest temple by thousands of worshippers, and, unknown as it was to the padres, there were few peons, leperos, or mestizos who had not seen the gem flash on the altar of the god. Cholacacans of pure Spanish blood, alone refrained from actual worship of the devil stone, and even these were more or less tinctured with the superstition. It is impossible to escape the influence of an all-prevailing idea, particularly in a country not quite venerated by civilisation.

On this special evening, when President Gomez was to address the populace, and assure them that there would be no war, the alameda presented an unusually lively appearance. It had been duly notified that His Excellency would make a speech on the forthcoming crisis, hence the alameda was crowded with people anxious to hear the official opinion of the affair. The worst of it was, had Gomez but known it, that the public mind was already made up. There was to be war, and that speedily, for a rumour had gone forth from the sanctuary of the opal that the gem was burning redly as a beacon fire. Everyone believed that this foreboded war, and Gomez, hoping to assure the Tlatonacians of peace, might as well have held his tongue. They would not believe him as the opal stone had prophesied a contrary opinion. But beyond an idle whisper or so, Gomez did not know this thing, therefore he came to the alameda and spoke encouragingly to the people.

From all quarters of the town came the inhabitants to the alameda, and the vast promenade presented a singularly gay appearance. The national costumes of Spanish America were wonderfully picturesque, and what with the background of green trees, sparkling fountains, brilliant flower-beds, and, over all, the violet tints of the twilight, Philip found the scene sufficiently charming. He was walking beside Jack, in default of Eulalia, who, in company with Dolores, marched demurely beside Doña Serafina. This was a public place, the eyes of Tlatonac gossips were sharp, their tongues were bitter, so it behoved discreet

young ladies, as these, to keep their admirers at a distance. In the patio it was quite different.

Tim had gone off with Don Miguel, to attach himself to the personal staff of the President, and take shorthand notes of the speech. It had been the intention of Peter to follow his Irish friend, but, unfortunately, he lost him in the crowd, and therefore returned to the side of Philip, who caught sight of him at once.

"Where's Tim?" asked the baronet, quickly; "gone off with Don Miguel?"

"Yes; to the Palacio Nacional."

"I thought you were going?"

"I lost sight of them."

"An excuse, Peter," interposed Jack, with a twinkle in his eye.

"You remained behind to look at the Señoritas."

Peter indignantly repudiated the idea.

"His heart is true to his Poll," said Philip, soothingly; "thereby meaning Doña Serafina. Darling!"

Philip mimicked the old lady's pronunciation of the word, and Jack laughed; not so Peter.

"How you do go on about Doña Serafina?" he said fretfully. "After all, she is not so very ugly, though she may not have the thirty points of perfection."

"Eh, Peter, I didn't know you were learned in such gallantries; and what are the thirty points of perfection?"

The doctor was about to reply, when Cocom, wrapped in his zarape, passed slowly by, and took off his sombrero to the party.

"A dios, Señores," said Cocom, gravely.

"Our Indian friend," remarked Jack, with a smile. "Ven aca Cocom! Have you come to hear the assurance of peace."

"There will be no peace, Señor Juan. I am old – very old, and I can see into the future. It is war I see – the war of Acauhtzin."

"Ah! Is that your own prophecy or that of the Chalchuih Tlatonac."

"I know nothing of the Chalchuih Tlatonac, Don Juan," replied Cocom, who always assumed the role of a devout Catholic; "but I hear many things. Ah, yes, I hear that the Chalchuih Tlatonac is glowing as a red star."

"And that means war!"

"It means war, Señor, and war there will be. The Chalchuih Tlatonac never deceives. Con dios va usted Señor."

"Humph!" said Jack, thoughtfully, as Cocom walked slowly away; "so that is the temper of the people, is it? The opal says war. In that case it is no use Gomez saying peace, for they will not believe him."

During this conversation with the Indian, Philip had gone on with Peter, so as to keep the ladies in sight. Jack pushed his way through the crowd and found them seated near the bandstand, from whence the President was to deliver his speech. As yet, His Excellency had not arrived, and the band were playing music of a lively description, principally national airs, as Gomez wished to arouse the patriotism of the Tlatonacians.

The throng of people round the bandstand was increasing

every moment. It was composed of all sorts and conditions of men and women, from delicate señoritas, draped in lace mantillas, to brown-faced Indian women, with fat babies on their backs; gay young hidalgos, in silver-buttoned buckskin breeches, white ruffled shirts, and short jackets, and smart military men in the picturesque green uniform of the Republic. All the men had cigarettes, all the women fans, and there was an incessant chatter of voices as both sexes engaged in animated conversation on the burning subject of the hour. Here and there moved the neveros with their stock of ice-creams, grateful to thirsty people on that sultry night, the serenos keeping order among the Indians with their short staves, and many water-carriers with their leather clothes and crocks. Above the murmur of conversation arose the cries of these perambulating traders. "Tortillas de cuajuda," "Bocadillo de Coco," and all the thousand and one calls announcing the quality of their goods.

Many of the ladies were driving in carriages, and beside them rode caballeros, mounted on spirited horses, exchanging glances with those whom they loved. The air of the alameda was full of intrigue and subtle understandings. The wave of a fan, the glance of a dark eye, the dropping of a handkerchief, the removal of a sombrero, all the mute signs which pass between lovers who dare not speak, and everywhere the jealous watching of husbands, the keen eyes of vigilant duennas.

"It is very like the Puerta del Sol in Madrid," said Philip in a low whisper, as he stood beside Eulalia; "the same crowd, the

same brilliance, the same hot night and tropic sky. Upon my word, there is but little difference between the Old Spain and the New."

"Ah!" sighed Eulalia, adjusting her mantilla; "how delightful it must be in Madrid!"

"Not more delightful than here, Señorita. At least, I think so – now."

Eulalia cast an anxious glance at her duenna, and made a covert sign behind her fan for him to be silent.

"Speak to my aunt, Don Felipe!"

"I would rather speak to you," hinted Philip, with a grimace.

"Can young ladies speak to whom they please in your country?"

"I should rather think so. In my country the ladies are quite as independent as the gentlemen, if not more so."

"Oh, oh! El viento que corre es algo fresquito."

"The wind which blows is a little fresh," translated Philip to himself; "I suppose that is the Spanish for 'I don't believe you.' But it is true, Señorita," he added quickly, in her own tongue; "you will see it for yourself some day."

"I fear not. There is no chance of my leaving Tlatonac."

"Who knows?" replied Philip, with a meaning glance.

Eulalia cast down her eyes in pretty confusion. Decidedly this Americano was delightful, and remarkably handsome; but then he said such dreadful things. If Doña Serafina heard them – Eulalia turned cold at the idea of what that vigorous lady would

say.

"Bueno!" chattered the duenna at this moment; "they are playing the 'Fandango of the Opal!'"

This was a local piece of music much in favour with the Tlatonacians, and was supposed to represent the Indian sacred dance before the shrine of the gem. As the first note struck their ears, the crowd applauded loudly; for it was, so to speak, the National Anthem of Cholacaca. Before the band-stand was a clear space of ground, and, inspired by the music, two Mestizos, man and woman, sprang into the open, and began to dance the fandango. The onlookers were delighted, and applauded vehemently.

They were both handsome young people, dressed in the national costume, the girl looking especially picturesque with her amber-coloured short skirt, her gracefully draped mantilla, and enormous black fan. The young fellow had castanets, which clicked sharply to the rhythm of the music, as they whirled round one another like Bacchantes. The adoration of the opal, the reading of the omen, the foretelling of successful love, all were represented marvellously in wonderful pantomime. Then the dancers flung themselves wildly about, with waving arms and mad gestures, wrought up to a frenzy by the inspiring music. Indeed, the audience caught the contagion, and began to sing the words of the opal song —

Breathe not a word while the future divining,

True speaks the stone as the star seers above,
Green as the ocean the opal is shining,
Green is prophetic of hope and of love.

Kneel at the shrine while the future discerning,
See how the crimson ray strengthens and glows;
Red as the sunset the opal is burning,
Red is prophetic of death to our foes.

At this moment, the carriage of the President, escorted by a troop of cavalry, arrived at the band-stand. The soldiers, in light green uniforms, with high buff boots, scarlet waistbands, and brown sombreros, looked particularly picturesque, but the short figure of the President, arrayed in plain evening dress, appeared rather out of place amid all this military finery. The only token of his Excellency's rank was a broad yellow silk ribbon, embroidered with the opal, which he wore across his breast. Miguel Maraquando and Tim were in the carriage with the President, and the Irishman recognised his friends with a wave of his hand.

"Tim is in high society," said Peter, with a grin. "We will have to call him Don Tim after this."

"We'll call you 'Donkey' after this, if you make such idiotic remarks," replied Jack, severely. "Be quiet, doctor, and listen to the speechifying."

The President was received with acclamation by those in the alameda, which showed that Tlatonac was well disposed towards

the established Government. It is true that one or two friends of Xuarez attempted to get up a counter demonstration; but the moment they began hissing and shouting for Don Hypolito, the serenos pounced down and marched them off in disgrace. His Excellency, attended by Don Miguel and several other members of the Junta, came forward, hat in hand, to the front of the band-stand, and, after the musicians had stopped playing the "Fandango," began to speak. Gomez was a fat little man, of no very striking looks; but when he commenced speaking, his face glowed with enthusiasm, and his rich, powerful voice reached everyone clearly. The man was a born orator, and, as the noble tongue of Castille rolled sonorously from his mouth, he held his mixed audience spell-bound. The listeners did not believe in his assurances, but they were fascinated by his oratory.

It was a sight not easily forgotten. The warm twilight, the brilliant equatorial vegetation, the equally brilliant and picturesque crowd, swaying restlessly to and fro; far beyond, through a gap in the trees, in the violet atmosphere, the snow-clad summit of Xicotencatl, the largest of Cholacacan volcanoes, and everywhere the vague languor of the tropics. Gomez, a black figure against the glittering background of uniforms, spoke long and eloquently. He assured them that there would be no war. Don Hypolito Xuarez had no supporters; the Junta was about to banish him from the country; the prosperity of Cholacaca was fully assured; it was to be a great nation; he said many other pleasant things, which flattered, but deceived not the Tlatonacians.

"Yes, señores," thundered the President, smiting his breast, "I, who stand here – even, I, Francisco Gomez, the representative of the Republic of Cholocaca – tell you that our land still rests, and shall rest under the olive tree of Peace. We banish Don Hypolito Xuarez – we banish all traitors who would crush the sovereign people. The rulers of Cholocaca, elected by the nation, are strong and wise. They have foreseen this tempest, and by them it will be averted. Believe not, my fellow-countrymen, the lying rumours of the streets! I tell you the future is fair. There will be no war!"

At this moment he paused to wipe his brow, and then, as if to give the lie to his assertion, in the dead silence which followed, was heard the distant boom of a cannon. Astonished at the unfamiliar sound, the Tlatonacians looked at one another in horror. Gomez paused, handkerchief in hand, with a look of wonderment on his face. No one spoke, no one moved, it was as though the whole of that assemblage had been stricken into stone by some powerful spell.

In the distance sounded a second boom, dull and menacing, there was a faint roar far away as of many voices. It came nearer and nearer, and those in the alameda began to add their voices to the din. Was the city being shelled by the revolting war-ships; had Don Hypolito surprised the inland walls with an army of Indians. Terror was on the faces of all – the clamour in the distance came nearer, waxed louder. A cloud of dust at the bend of the avenue, and down the central walk, spurring his horse to its full speed, dashed a dishevelled rider. The horse stopped dead in front of the

band-stand, scattering the people hither and thither like wind-driven chaff; a young man in naval uniform flung himself to the ground, and ran up to the astonished President.

"Your Excellency, the fleet have revolted to Don Hypolito Xuarez! He is entrenched in the rebel town of Acauhtzin. I alone have escaped, and bring you news that he has proclaimed war against the Republic!"

A roar of rage went up to the sky.

"The opal! The prophecy of the Chalchuih Tlatonac!" cried the multitude. "Viva el Republica! Death to the traitor Xuarez!"

Gomez was listening to the messenger, who talked volubly. Then the President turned towards the people, and, by a gesture of his hand, enjoined silence. The roar at once sank to a low murmur.

"What Don Rafael Maraquando says is true," said Gomez, loudly. "This traitor, Xuarez, has seduced the allegiance of the fleet – of Acauhtzin. The Republic must prepare for war – "

He could speak no further, for his voice was drowned in the savage roaring of the multitude. Everyone seemed to have gone mad. The crowd of people heaved round the band-stand like a stormy sea. A thousand voices cursed the traitor Xuarez, lauded the Republic, and repeated the prophecy of the harlequin opal. The whole throng was demoralised by the news.

"War! War! To Acauhtzin!" roared the throats of the mob. "Death to Xuarez! Viva el Republica! Viva libertad!"

Gomez made a sign to the band, which at once burst out into

the Fandango of the Opal. A thousand voices began singing the words, a thousand people began to dance wildly. Ladies waved their handkerchiefs, men shouted and embraced one another, and amid the roar of the mob and the blare of the band, Don Francisco Gomez entered his carriage and drove away escorted by the cavalry.

Tim fought his way through the crowd down from the bandstand, and reached the Maraquando part, where he found the three ladies, more excited than frightened, standing for safety in the circle formed by the five men. Two of the men were embracing – Don Miguel and his son.

"It's a great day for Cholocaca," cried Tim, excitedly. "I wouldn't have missed it for a fortune. Viva el Republica! Ah, Peter, my boy, this is better than the butterflies."

"My son! my son, how did you escape?" said Don Miguel, throwing his arms round Rafael's neck.

"I will tell you all at the house, my father," replied the young man. "Let us go now with the ladies to our home. Señores," he added, turning to the Englishmen, "you will come, too, I trust?"

It was no easy matter to get through the crowd, but ultimately the five men managed to push a path to a caleza for the ladies, placed them therein, and when it drove off, hastened themselves to the Casa Maraquando.

The whole city was in commotion. In the Plaza de los Hombres Ilustres a crowd had collected to salute the great yellow standard of the Republic, which streamed from the tower of the

Palacio Nacional.

"The opal! the opal! The prophecy of the Tlatonac Chalchuih," roared the crowd, stamping and yelling.

"They will believe in that stone more than ever now," whispered Philip to Jack, as they entered the zaguan of Maraquando's house. "What do you think of it, Jack?"

"Oh, it's easy to prophesy when you know," retorted Jack, scornfully. "Of course, X Suarez told the Indians he was going to revolt, and the priests of the temple have used the information to advertise the stone. Of course it grew red, and prophesied war under the circumstances. That is all the magic about the affair."

In the patio the ladies were waiting for them in a state of great excitement, and welcomed Don Rafael as one returned from the dead. He embraced his sister, cousin, and aunt; which privilege was rather envied by the four friends, as regards the first two, and was then formally introduced to the Englishmen. His eye flashed as he saluted Tim and heard his vocation.

"You will have plenty to write about, Señor Correspoñsal," he said, fiercely; "there will be a war, and a bitter war too. I have barely escaped with my life from Acauhtzin."

"Tell me all about it, Señor," said Tim, taking out his pocket-book; "and the news will go off to London to-night."

"A thousand regrets, Señor Correspoñsal, that I cannot give you a detailed account at present, but I am worn out. I have not slept for days!"

"Pobrecito," cried the ladies, in a commiserating tone.

"I will, at all events, tell you shortly," resumed Rafael, without taking any notice of the interruption. "I commanded *The Pizarro*, and went up to Acauhtzin to arrest Xuarez, according to the order of the Government. As he refused to surrender, and as the town had declared in his favour, I thought we would have to bombard it. But think, Señores, think. When I came back to my ship, I was arrested by my own crew, by my own officers. Seduced by the oily tongue of Xuarez, they had revolted. In vain I implored! I entreated! I threatened! I commanded! They refused to obey any other than the traitor Xuarez. The other ships behaved in the same way. All the officers who, like myself, were known to be true to the Government, were arrested and thrown into prison, I among the number."

"Ay de mi," cried Serafina, in tears, "what an indignity!"

Don Rafael was choking with rage, and forgot his manners.

"Carambo!" he swore roundly, "behold me, gentlemen. Look at my uniform! Thus was it insulted by the rebels of Acauhtzin, whose houses, I hope, with the blessing of God, to burn over their heads. I swear it!"

He wrenched a crucifix from his breast, and kissed it passionately. It was a striking scene: the dim light, the worn-out young fellow in the ragged uniform, and his figure black against the lights in the patio, passionately kissing the symbol of his faith.

"How did you escape, my son," said Maraquando, whose eyes were flashing with hatred and wrath.

"There was a man – one of my sailors, to whom I had shown

favour – he was made one of the prison guards, and, out of kindness, assisted me to escape; but he was too fearful to help any of the others. In the darkness of night, I cut through my prison bars with a file he had given me. I climbed down the wall by a rope, and, when on the ground, found him, waiting me. He hurried me down to the water's edge, and placed me in a boat with food for a few days. I rowed out in the darkness, past the ships, and luckily managed to escape their vigilance. Then I hoisted the sail, and, as there was a fair wind, by dawn I was far down the coast. I need not tell you all my adventures, how I suffered, how I starved, how I thirsted – cursed, cursed, Xuarez!"

He stamped with rage up and down the patio while the ladies exclaimed indignantly at the treatment to which he had been subjected. Then he resumed his story hurriedly, evidently wishing to get it over —

"This morning, I fortunately fell in with the steamer sent up by the Government, which picked me up. I told the captain all, and he returned at once with the news, arriving at Tlatonac some time ago. I ordered him to fire those guns announcing my arrival, and hearing his Excellency was addressing a meeting at the alameda, jumped on a horse and rode here. The rest you know."

"Good!" said Tim, who had been busily taking notes, "I'm off to the telegraph-office, Señores. Good night."

Tim went off, and the others were not long in following his example. Overcome by fatigue, Don Rafael had fallen, half-fainting, in a chair, and the ladies were attending to him; so,

seeing they were rather in the way, Jack and his friends, saying good night, left the house.

The city was still heaving with excitement. Bands of men went past dancing and singing. The bells clashed loudly from every tower, and every now and then a rocket scattered crimson fire in the sky. War was proclaimed! the whole of Tlatonac was in a state of frenzy, and there would be no sleep for anyone that night.

"We're in for it now," said Jack, jubilantly, "hear the war-song!"

A band of young men with torches tramped steadily towards the Square, singing the National Anthem of Tlatonac. Philip caught the last two lines roared triumphantly as they disappeared in the distance:

Red as the sunset the opal is burning,
Red is prophetic of death to our foes.

CHAPTER IX

THE CALL TO ARMS

Ta ra ra! Ta ra ra!
The trumpets are blowing,
And thrice hath their brazen notes pealed.
To battle! to battle the soldiers are going,
To conquer or die on the field.
On, soldiers! brave soldiers, who venture your lives
You fight for your country and sweethearts and wives.

Ta ra ra! Ta ra ra!
The drums roll like thunder,
And women's tears falling like rain.
For lovers! for lovers are parted asunder,
Till victory crowns the campaign.
On, soldiers! brave soldiers go forth to the fray,
And close with the foe in their battle array.

Ta ra ra! Ta ra ra!
The banners are flying,
And horses prance proudly along,
For women! for women are bitterly crying,
As passes the red-coated throng.
On, soldiers! brave soldiers! soon homeward you'll ride,
Encircled with bay leaves and greeted with pride.

At this eventful moment of its history, Cholacaca woke from its slumber of years, as did the Sleeping Beauty from her century sleep. No more the lethargic life, the indolent enjoyments, the languorous dreamings in an enchanted city. A sharp breath of war from the north swept away the sedative atmosphere; the thunder of the cannon roused Tlatonac to unexampled excitement. Rebellion and preparation for invasion at Acauhtzin, indignation and preparation for defence, for punishment in the capital of the Republic. In these days of alarm and danger, the city resembled one vast camp, and the descendants of the Conquistadores, the posterity of the Mayas, proved themselves to be not unworthy of their glorious traditions, both Spanish and Indian. It was a turning-point in the history of the Republic.

The two persons most desirous for the speedy commencement of this fratricidal war were Tim and Don Rafael: the former as he wished information for his journal, the latter because he was burning to revenge the insults and indignities to which he had been subjected by the rebels at Acauhtzin. Jack was rather dismayed at the near prospect of hostilities, fearing lest harm should result therefrom to Dolores at the hands of Don Hypolito, or those of the Forest Indians. For their part, Philip and Peter assumed a neutral position, the one from indolence, the other because he was entomologically engaged. What was the hunting of men compared with the hunting of butterflies, the capture of rebels with the capture of rare beetles? No, Peter preferred

science to war.

The loss of the fleet was a great blow to the strength of the Government, as it, comparatively speaking, placed the capital at the mercy of the rebel, X Suarez. Communication between the two places was only possible by water, owing to the roughness and savagery of the interior, so the Government were unable to march their troops to Acauhtzin, and nip the rebellion in the bud. On the other hand, as soon as X Suarez had completed his plans, he would doubtless come south with his ships and bombard Tlatonac from the sea. Most of the city being built on the hill, topped by the vast fabric of the cathedral, offered considerable advantages to the besiegers, and as their vessels would keep well out of the range of the forts, it would be difficult to silence their guns.

From this point of view the outlook was certainly not encouraging, but the Junta did its best by every possible means to guard against possible contingencies. The army was drawn up in the Plaza de San Jago, and reviewed by the President in person. He made a brilliant speech, reminded the troops of their glorious predecessors, who had thrown off the yoke of Spain, implored them not to disgrace the Flag of the Opal, and promised them a speedy victory over these audacious rebels if they would but be true to their leaders. The troops received this patriotic oration with acclamation, cheered the brave little man at the conclusion of his address, uncovered to salute the flag of Cholacaca, and swore, one and all, to leave no rebel alive in Acauhtzin or elsewhere. It was a scene of tremendous

excitement, and patriotism was at fever-heat in Tlatonac the whole of the day.

The great banner of the Republic, only seen on special feast-days, was on this occasion brought forth from the Treasury by order of Gomez and displayed to the troops. It was truly a gorgeous flag. Composed of yellow silk, covered with featherwork, after the manner of the Aztecs, it glittered in the sunlight like a vast jewel. The sacred stone in the centre was represented by a cluster of real opals from Queretaro, and the red, green, blue, and yellow rays therefrom were composed of ruby, emerald, turquoise and topaz stones. It was the sacred ensign of Cholacaca, the palladium of the Republic, and in the estimation of the inhabitants was held to be as sacred as the holy standard of the Osmanli. When its splendours streamed in the warm air, with flash of feather and glitter of jewel, a shout arose from soldiers and civilians alike which might have been heard at Acauhtzin. With that flag waving over them the Tlatonacians could not think of anything but victory.

"It is like the standard of Harold at the Battle of Hastings," said Philip, looking at the splendid flag. "It is to be hoped it will not bring Gomez such bad luck."

"Not a bit of it, my boy," replied Tim, who was busy with his inevitable note-book. "We're going to be the death and glory lads this time, anyhow."

"You quite identify yourself with the Government, I see, Tim," remarked Peter, who was standing by the caleza of Doña

Serafina.

"What!" shouted Tim, playfully, "have we a traitor here? Away with ye, Peter, or I'll stick a pin in you, like one of those butterflies you're so fond of impaling. Don't I come of a fighting family myself."

"Is the Señor Correspoñsal angry?" asked Dolores of Jack, in alarm.

"No, Señorita; he is patriotic. His nation always make a noise when they grow patriotic. Sing the 'Wearing of the Green,' Tim," he added, in English.

"By St. Patrick! 'tis the 'Opal Fandango' I'll have to learn, sir. Be quiet, Jack. The troops are marching past the saluting-point."

The great standard was waving over the heads of the Presidential staff, near which were the Maraquando party and their friends. Don Miguel himself was with His Excellency, mounted on a fiery steed, which he managed with the consummate ease of a practised rider. The band was playing the "March of Zuloaga," in allusion to the hero who had founded the Republic. To its stirring strains the troops marched past, saluting Gomez and his officers as each regiment came abreast of the flag.

The Plaza de San Jago, a vast clear space used for the parade-ground of the Cholocacan army, was quite filled with the troops, as there could not have been less than two thousand present. This was not the full power of the army, for Janjalla, Chichimec, Puebla de los Naranjos, and many of the inland towns, were

garrisoned with troops. Already messages had been sent to the commandants of these outlying garrisons to march with their full strength of men to the capital, but as yet they had not arrived, and the two thousand soldiers present in the great plaza represented all the men at the immediate disposal of the Government.

It was a splendid sight to see these soldiers marching past the saluting-point, as, with few exceptions, they were a fine body of men. The uniforms were gaudy, and somewhat fantastical, and each regiment had its special flag and appellation. There was the Regimiento de los Pajaros, whose banner, like that of the Republic, was composed of humming-bird's feathers; the Regimiento de Zuloaga, who marched under the pictured face of the founder of Cholocaca; the Regimiento de Fray Medina, bearing the pennant of the Church, embroidered with the cathedral of which that monk was the builder; and many others, all looking ready and fit for work in the field. The eyes of the President flashed with enthusiasm as file after file of men ranged past and the inspiring music of the "Zuloaga March" added not a little to the patriotism of his feelings.

"X Suarez is already conquered," he said to Maraquando, who rode beside him. "He can oppose no troops to ours."

"With the exception of the Regimiento de Huitzilopochtli, which is at present at Acauhtzin and has doubtless embraced his cause."

"True, Señor, and he also will stir up the Indians!"

"I do not care for the Indians," replied Maraquando, quietly,

"they cannot stand against troops armed as ours. If he attacks Tlatonac by land he will be beaten, but Xuarez is too crafty to venture so rashly. He has the fleet, and will blockade the city."

"Let him do so," retorted Gomez, in a fiery tone; "we do not depend on foreign countries for our food. He cannot starve us out."

"True enough; but while he has the fleet he can prolong the war to an indefinite period. Unless we can march our troops to Acauhtzin, and crush him at his head-quarters, there is no way of bringing the rebellion to a conclusion."

"And we have no ships! Carambo! It is unfortunate. But no matter. The Republic is rich; she has money! We will send for ships of war, for guns, for engineers, and sooner or later will invest Acauhtzin. Then Xuarez will meet with the fate he deserves."

At this moment the crack cavalry regiment of Cholacaca passed proudly by, with waving plumes and prancing horses. Deprived of his ship by Xuarez, Don Rafael had asked for and obtained a commission in this corps, and was now riding at the head of his men with his brother officers. Accustomed from childhood, like all American Spaniards, to horses, he had no difficulty in exchanging the deck for the saddle, and looked a gallant figure as he dashed past on his fiery mustang.

"Egad, Jack, we must enlist also, like Don Rafael," said Philip, gaily, as they saw the young man gallop past. "Doña Dolores," he added, turning to her, "we are going to become soldiers."

"In the Regimiento de las Señoritas!" exclaimed Doña Eulalia, clapping her hands.

"What, señorita! A regiment of women?"

"Oh no!" interposed Doña Serafina, with a fascinating smile; "it is a corps raised in the last war by the ladies of Tlatonac. See! here come the valiant ones."

"Foot soldiers!" said Jack, in disgust, as the regiment filed past; "no, Doña Serafina. Nothing less than a cavalry corps will suit us."

"But can Don Pedro ride, Señor?"

"What's that about me?" asked Peter, overhearing his name.

"Doña Serafina wants you to enlist," explained Philip, maliciously.

"No," replied Peter, firmly; "I will physic the soldiers, and cut off their legs and arms; but I am a man of peace, and I will not enlist."

"You little duffer!" said Tim, reverting to his school-boy phraseology, "we'll make you doctor of the regiment. I'd like to enlist myself, but the editor would never hear of such a thing. It's my walking ticket I'd be getting if I did."

"Well, Philip and myself shall enlist," observed Jack, brightly. "You, Peter, shall attend to us when we are wounded, and Tim shall cover us with glory in the columns of *The Morning Planet*. He shall be the bard to celebrate our deeds."

This scheme was explained to the ladies and found much favour in their sight. In fact, the whole female population of

Tlalonac was seized with a violent attack of "scarlet fever," and no one who was not a soldier found any favour in their eyes.

"You will be as valiant as the Cid," said Dolores, looking tenderly at Jack from behind her black fan.

"With you to smile on me, I can scarcely be a coward," he replied, in a low tone so as not to reach the vigilant ears of the duenna. "I will ask His Excellency for a commission in your cousin's regiment."

"And you also, Don Felipe," said Eulalia, vivaciously. "El Regimiento del Caballeros is the finest in the army. You would look so well in the uniform." She flashed a bewitching look at Philip, which sent that young man's blood spinning through his veins. He had quite given up fighting against his fate, and was fathoms deep in love. Doña Eulalia could use her eyes with great effect, and Philip had now surrendered at discretion. It is only fair to say that the victress took no undue advantage of her conquest. Indeed, Philip did not know yet if she returned his love. Eulalia was a born coquette, and he was terribly afraid lest she should be only amusing herself. This enlistment in the army might clinch the matter, and induce her to smile on his suit.

"For your sake, I will play the bear," he whispered, alluding to a foolish custom of the Cholacacans whereby a young man walks up and down in front of the window of his beloved like a bear.

"No; I do not care for you to play the bear, Señor. Fight in the regiment of my brother, and when you return victorious – well, who knows?"

Philip looked, Eulalia smiled significantly. They thoroughly understood one another, in spite of Doña Serafina and the restrictions of Cholacacan courtship. Eyes can speak as eloquently as can tongues, and are quite as intelligible – to the initiated.

"Kismet!" muttered Philip, as he went off the parade-ground with the ladies and his friends; "it is, written."

"What is written?" asked Peter, who was always overhearing what was not meant for his ears.

"Your marriage to Doña Serafina," laughed Philip, promptly; whereat the doctor shook his head.

"A man can't marry his grandmother."

Philip said no more; but returned to the side of Doña Eulalia, who had placed herself as far away from her duenna as was possible. This precaution was scarcely needed, as Doña Serafina had eyes for no one but Peter. She had not yet given up all hope of marriage, even at the mature age of five and forty. Peter was young and innocent; therefore Doña Serafina selected him as her victim, and under the guise of teaching him Spanish, strove to entangle him in her elderly meshes. Her eyes were still brilliant, and long experience had taught her how to use them. It was so much waste time as regards Peter. He was so impossible.

On leaving the Plaza de San Jago, the troops marched to their several quarters in the forts, and his Excellency the President went to inspect the defences of the city. Tlatonac was completely girdled by strong stone walls, and defended by heavy metal

cannon, so that in the event of a sortie, particularly by a horde of naked Indians such as Xuarez's force would be, there was but little doubt that the invaders could be easily repulsed with great slaughter. As regards a land attack from the interior, this was well enough, but if Xuarez bombarded the town there was no doubt that he could speedily reduce Tlatonac to a heap of ruins. Gomez trusted to the impassable forests between the capital and Acautzin to protect him from an inland invasion, and as the sea-forts were defended by heavy guns, hoped to cripple the ships of the enemy before they could do much harm.

The forts defending the coast were therefore the most important in his eyes, and, after examining the interior defences, he rode down to the sea front to inspect the preparations for keeping the ships of Xuarez beyond bombarding distance of the town. Thanks to English engineers, and a lavish outlay of money, the forts were superb pieces of workmanship; and their lofty walls frowning over the bay, with the muzzles of guns protruding from their embrasures, promised a difficult task to the invaders.

Between the two principal forts was the gate of the town, which opened into a low stretch of land covered with fishing-huts, through which a road ran down to the wharf. *The Bohemian* was lying close under the guns of the city, so that in the event of their being discharged, she would sustain no damage; and as His Excellency rode out of the city gate, his eyes rested admiringly on the beautiful little craft.

Only momentarily, however, for at that instant a cry burst from

the lips of his aide-de-camp; and Gomez looked seaward.

"*The Pizarro!*" he cried in surprise.

It was indeed the old ship of Don Rafael, which was steaming slowly southward, a white flag fluttering at her mainmast head. Rafael uttered an ejaculation of rage, and Gomez turned his horse to ride back into the city, not knowing with what intentions the war-ship had come.

"One moment, Señor," said Tim, catching the President's horse by the bridle; "the vessel has a white flag, so she has come with a message from Acauhtzin."

"Por Dios, we do not treat with rebels, Señor Correspoñsal."

"Do not be rash, Excelencia. It is as well to know all these dogs have to say. See! they are lowering a boat."

This was indeed the case. A quarter of a mile from the shore, *The Pizarro* cast anchor, fired three guns with blank cartridge, and then the boat already lowered was seen pulling straight for the wharf.

"Bueno! Señor Correspoñsal," said Gormez, sorely against his will; "let it be as you say. We will wait here for their leader. But I am sorely tempted to order the forts to open fire on that boat."

"A mistake, Excelencia," interposed Maraquando at this moment; "we are civilised people, and must observe the rules of war. Besides," he added significantly, letting his eyes rest on Tim, "have we not here the Correspoñsal? and all we do he will write off to England."

"Bueno!" said the President again; "we will wait."

The thunder of the cannon had brought a tremendous crowd to the walls, and down on to the beach. From the Presidential staff up to the gate, was one black mass of people, heaving with excitement. All kinds of rumours were flying from lip to lip. *The Pizarro* had come to bombard the town, and her consorts were now on their way for the same purpose. The vessel had returned to its allegiance, and had brought Xuarez to Tlatonac for punishment. All were disturbed, startled, puzzled, and watched with lynx eyes the little boat with the white flag at its stern now drawing steadily near to the wharf.

"What's up now, Tim?" asked Philip, pushing his way through the crowd.

"A message from Don Hypolito, no less," replied Fletcher, without turning round. "See! he is standing up in the boat. Be Jove! it's a priest."

"It must be Padre Ignatius," cried Jack, who had a remarkably keen sight. "He went up to Acauhtzin, on some Church business, a week or so ago. Shovel-hat, white hair! Carambo! It *is* Padre Ignatius!"

The name of the priest speedily became known, and the crowd cheered, for the Padre was well known in Tlatonac. Gomez swore.

"Carrajo! He sends the Padre to make terms!"

"Terms with those dogs!" cried Don Rafael, stamping his foot. "Excelencia, I would hang them all."

"Como, no!" muttered the President, his fingers closing

viciously on the bridle-rein; "but we will hear what the Padre has to say."

By this time the boat had reached the wharf, and Padre Ignatius, nimble as a young man, sprang up the wooden steps leading from the water. The moment he was out of the boat it turned seaward again, and before the onlookers could recover from their surprise, the oars were flashing in and out of the waves as it sped back to the war-ship. A roar of rage burst from the lips of all.

"Por Dios!" swore Maraquando, livid with wrath, "they have only landed the Padre, and now take themselves out of danger. Order the forts to open fire, Excelencia!"

Gomez had only to throw up his hand and the cannon would vomit fire. Knowing this, Jack stepped up impulsively to the President.

"Be not hasty, Señor, I beg of you. See, the Padre carries a white flag! He brings a message from Xuarez! First hear what it is, and then decide."

His Excellency moved uneasily in his saddle, and bit his nether lip. He would dearly have liked to have pounded the rebel war-ship into matchwood for her insolent daring in thus defying the Government of Cholocaca, but he could not but see that such an extreme measure would be impolitic. Therefore he restrained his rage, and waited the approach of the Padre, who was now near at hand. Gomez, a true son of the Church, uncovered as the priest paused before him. The Padre raised his hand in token of

benediction, and the staff also uncovered. With the atheistical opinions now prevalent in Cholacaca they would not have done this for any priest save Padre Ignatius, who was much beloved by rich and poor. As for Tim, he had his note-book out, and a greedy little pencil, ready to take down every word of the forthcoming conversation.

"Vaya usted con Dios Excelencia!" said the Padre, gravely. "I come from Acauhtzin – from Don Hypolito Xuarez, with a message to the Junta."

"A message to the Junta from rebels, Reverend Father?"

"It is my duty to prevent this fratricidal war, if possible," replied Ignatius, mildly. "I have spoken with Xuarez, and have persuaded him to send me hither with a message of peace."

"And that message?"

"Cannot be spoken here, my son. Let us go to the Palacio Nacional!"

"By all means, my father. Will you not ride thither. One of my officers will give you his horse."

Three or four of the officers at once dismounted, and begged Padre Ignatius to mount; but he refused their offers gently with a wave of his hand.

"No, my children. I will walk thither. Ride on, Excelencia I will be with you soon."

"But *The Pizarro*, Padre!"

"Will lie off there till my message is delivered and the answer given. If the terms are accepted, one gun will be the sign; if

refused, two guns, and the war-ship will return to the north."

"Ah!" said Gomez, with a meaning smile, as he turned his horse's head towards the gate, "they are afraid to trust themselves in the lion's mouth."

CHAPTER X

PADRE IGNATIUS

With cross in hand, the pious father goes
From camp to camp on Heaven's errand bent;
Soothing the wretched, overborne with woes,
And to the weary bringing sweet content.

Oh, gentle soul, too kind for this rude earth,
What virtues doth thy being comprehend;
Thou shouldst have lived in times of peaceful mirth,
When war was not, and man ne'er lacked a friend.

Of what avail those peaceful words of thine,
When for the battle armies are arrayed;
What use thy mission of good will divine,
When to the foe war's standard is displayed.

The drums are beaten, trumpets shrill resound,
Two gifts alone thou canst bestow on all;
Salute with smiles all those with honour crowned,
And for the dead a single tear let fall.

Tim was ubiquitous. He seemed neither to eat nor sleep, but, note-book in hand, followed the President about everywhere,

with the idea of gathering material for his letters to *The Morning Planet*. From the Plaza de San Jago he had gone down to the sea gate of Tlatonac, where the meeting with Padre Ignatius took place, and from thence returned to the Palacio Nacional, at the heels of Gomez. In view of the message from Xuarez, the Junta had been hastily convened, and now the great hall of the palace was crowded with deputies waiting to hear the words of the Padre.

Owing to the influence of Don Miguel, which was supreme in Tlatonac, Jack and Philip were admitted to the meeting, and they, in company with Tim, who was present by virtue of his office, watched the scene with great interest. It is not every day that one has the chance of seeing the naked machinery of the Government. In this vast chamber was the motive force which kept the machine going. Now, the Governmental machine was out of order, and Padre Ignatius, as a moral engineer, was trying to put it right again. He advocated delicate handling of the suasive kind. Gomez, rough work, in the manner of blows, and brute strength. As to Xuarez – well, he was the wheel which had put the engine out of gear; and, until that wheel was forced back into its proper position, or taken out of the Cholacacan machine altogether, there was but little chance of the reversion to the old smooth running. This is a parable to illustrate the importance of that hastily convened meeting. Tim was the only one of the four friends who understood the matter thoroughly.

Don Francisco Gomez took his place in the Presidential chair,

which stood beneath a gorgeous yellow satin canopy of anything but Republican simplicity. The opal arms of Cholacaca were above this drapery, the seat of power below; and therein sat President Gomez, with a fierce light in his eyes, and an ominous tightening of his lips. He was in a critical position, and he knew it. The ship of the Republic was among the breakers, and he, as helmsman, had to steer her into open sea again. With a disorderly crew, this was no easy task.

The members of the Junta took their seats in silence. They were like a class of schoolboys before their master, and, as Gomez cast his eyes over their ranks, he could pick out here and there the men whom he knew would be troublesome. To understand his difficulty, it is necessary to explain the exact position of politics in Cholacaca. Tim was doing this in a low, rapid voice to Philip, pending the appearance of Padre Ignatius. Jack listened to the explanation with interest, and every now and then threw in a word of enlightenment.

"As in England," said Tim, speaking in Philip's ear, "there are two political parties, broadly speaking. The Liberals and Conservatives. These, again, are sub-divided into smaller parties. On the Conservative side, there is the party now in power, the aristocratic party, who believe in electing one of their own order as President, and think the common people should have nothing to do with politics."

"That is the party of Don Miguel and the President?"

"Yes; their political programme is to govern on oligarchical

principles. Cholocaca and its loaves and fishes, for the aristocrats only. That is one party. The other is the clericales, who would govern through the Church, and place the supreme power of the Republic in the hands of priests. Since the expulsion of the Jesuits, however, this party is defunct, and a good thing, too. I'm a true son of the Church," added Tim, relapsing into his brogue; "but I don't believe in the priests meddling with politics."

"Then there is a third party," said, Jack, taking up the explanation; "what we may term the Liberal-Conservative party, if such a thing be possible. They believe in aristocratic government, with the consent of the people. That is, the people can elect as President one of the aristocrats, but not one of themselves."

"And what about the Liberals?" asked Philip, deeply interested.

"Oh, one party of the Liberals want democracy – pure unadulterated Republicanism. A second party desire military rule, which would be nothing more or less than despotism, supported by a standing army under the thumbs of a few martinets in power. Then there is a Free Lance party, where each individual desires the loaves and fishes for himself."

"Then the party of Don Xuarez?"

"Is not here," said Tim, waving his hand towards some empty seats; "they have all gone to Acauhtzin, and are now regarded as rebels by the Government. They desire a kind of civil despotism as opposed to the military party – a dictator with supreme power,

who can act as he damn well please."

"Seven political parties!" observed Cassim, derisively. "If too many cooks spoil the broth, too many political parties will certainly spoil Cholocaca. But they all seem to be afraid of one another. Don Xuarez has at least the courage of his opinions."

"That is because his party is now strong enough to show fight. The others are all split up into small bodies, who quarrel among themselves and disagree with the President."

"I presume they will all oppose Don Hypolito."

"Naturally. They are dogs in the manger; they can't get the supreme power of Cholocaca themselves, and won't let Xuarez have it. I wonder what proposition the Padre brings from Acauhtzin."

"Hush! here he is."

Padre Ignatius, in his rusty black cassock, advanced, holding his shovel-hat clasped to his breast. Pausing in front of the President, where he could command the attention of all, he cast up his eyes to heaven, as if seeking for strength to sustain him in his difficult task of reconciling the factions which threatened to involve Cholocaca in civil war. With his pale, refined face, his silver locks, and tall, slender figure, he looked a remarkably striking personage, and put Philip in mind of a picture he had once seen of Las Casas, the great Indian missionary.

When he paused and thus sought inspiration in silent prayer, Gomez struck a silver bell on the desk before him. Instantly there was a dead silence, the murmur of voices was stilled, and every

eye was turned towards the gentle priest.

"My children," said Padre Ignatius, in a weak voice, which gathered strength as he proceeded, "some weeks ago I went to Acauhtzin on the business of our Holy Church. There I found Don Hypolito Xuarez, who was not then in arms against the Junta. I knew, however, that he was a restless spirit, and, observing signs of dissatisfaction in the town, dreaded lest he should fan these embers of discontent into the flame of civil war. To Don Hypolito did I speak, but he disclaimed any intention of doing aught to break the peace of the Republic. In this, my children, he spoke falsely."

A sullen murmur ran through the chamber.

"Noting these signs of discontent, I did not return to Tlatonac, but waited to see if aught should occur. Nothing took place till the arrival of the fleet to arrest Xuarez. Ah, my children, that was a fatal mistake. It roused him from discontented quietness into a state of open rebellion. He convened a meeting in the market-place of Acauhtzin, he told the populace he was to be arrested as a traitor, and called on them to stand by him in his peril. What promises he made use of I can hardly tell you, they were many and false; but those of the town believed him, and swore to assist his cause. The officers and crews of the fleet had already been tampered with by Xuarez before he left Tlatonac, and to a man they all went over on his side on hearing that Acauhtzin had done so."

"Not all! Not all, my father," cried Don Rafael, springing up

from where he sat by Maraquando; "there are many who still remain faithful to the Junta – I among the number. We were cast into prison, and, by a miracle, I escaped, to bring the news to Tlatonac. I am free; but my friends – my faithful friends – are in the prison of Acauhtzin."

Padre Ignatius looked sadly at the young man.

"They were faithful when you escaped," he said, gently. "They were in prison my son; but now they are free, and have joined the rebels!"

"Carrajo!" swore Don Rafael, stamping with rage. "The traitors! the dogs! Canalla! I spit on them."

"I call the Señor to order!" cried Gomez, for the sake of formality, though his sympathies were with those of the young man.

"I ask the pardon of His Excellency, and that of this Honourable Assembly," replied Rafael, sitting down; "but my friends to be traitors! Por Dios! if I meet with them, I will show no mercy."

"Reverend Father," said the President, when the young man had resumed his seat, "all that you have said is the way in which Suarez has revolted. Tell us of his message!"

"I went to Don Hypolito, when I heard these things," said the Padre, slowly. "I went to him, Señores, and prayed him not to plunge the country into civil war. At first he refused to listen to me, saying he was strong enough to crush the Republic to the dust!"

"Carambo! Carrajo! Canalla!" cried a hundred voices, and many of the members sprang to their feet to speak. A Babel of voices ensued; but at length, by repeated ringing of his bell, the President secured silence for a few minutes, and Padre Ignatius went on with his speech.

"Don Hypolito said he had the aid of Acauhtzin; of the Regimiento de Huitzilopochtli, of the fleet, and, if needs be, could secure the help of the forest Indians!"

"The opal! The Chalchuih Tlatonac!"

"Yes!" cried the priest, emphatically; "by making use of that unholy stone! Xuarez is no true son of the Church, my children. He is a heretic, an idolater! He told me plainly that he worshipped and believed in the opal of Huitzilopochtli, and would make use of the superstition it engendered among the Indians, to further his own ends."

Another roar of wrath arose from the assemblage which the President was quite unable to quiet. Padre Ignatius lifted his thin hand in token of entreaty, and the tumult ceased.

"I need not say what he said to me, what I said to him; but I forced him to make an offer to the Junta, which, if accepted, will suspend all hostility. I implore you, Señores, to accept this offer, and avert this fratricidal war!"

"The offer! the message!"

"As you know, Señores, the Presidency is held for four years, and that he who has been our ruler cannot be re-elected! His Excellency, Don Francisco Gomez, has now held this honourable

office for three years and a half. In six months it becomes vacant, and Don Hypolito Xuarez offers, if you make him President of Cholacaca, to return to his allegiance."

"Never!" cried Maraquando, springing to his feet, amid a deafening cheering. "What! elect Xuarez for our President – place the supreme power in his hands? Give to ourselves a Dictator who will rob us of our liberties! Never! Never! Never!"

"No, Francia! No Iturbide! No, Santa Anna!" yelled the excited members. Gomez called the assemblage to order.

"Are these the only terms on which Xuarez will return to his allegiance?" he asked the priest.

"The only terms. If they are accepted, fire one gun, and *The Pizarro* will steam to Acauhtzin to tell Xuarez that the war will not take place. Two guns, and then, oh, my children, the vessel will go northward to bring desolation upon us. There will be war – red war; brother will be arrayed against brother; our towns will be laid in ashes; our peaceful community will struggle in deadly strife. I urge you, implore you, to accept this offer and avert disaster!"

"There will be war!" sang out some man in the crowd. "The opal is red!"

"The opal is red! the opal is red!"

"Are you Catholics?" cried Padre Ignatius, his voice ringing forth like a trumpet. "Are you sons of the Church or children of the devil? That stone is the work of Satan! Obey it, and you will bring ruin on yourselves, on your families, on your country.

In the name of this sacred symbol," he thundered, holding up the cross, "I command you to put this evil from your hearts. The devil stone speaks war the holy cross commands peace. Obey it at the peril of your souls – of your salvation. I say Peace! Peace! Peace! In the name of the Church – Peace! At your peril – War!"

The whole man was transfigured as he stood intrepidly facing the furious assemblage with the uplifted cross. There was no fear in his eyes, there was no trembling of the hand which upheld the symbol of Christianity. He was no longer Padre Ignatius, the gentle priest whom they knew. It was a priest, the representative of the awful power of Rome, with the thunders of the Vatican at his back, with salvation in this world, and in the next at his will, holding their souls in the hollow of his hand.

"Richelieu," murmured Philip, softly.

For a moment the assemblage was awed. Many were atheists who believed in nothing; some idolaters, who trusted in the devil stone, all were superstitious, and they quailed before that frail old man who faced them so dauntlessly. Suddenly, as it were, the influence passed away, the devil-stone conquered the cross.

"War! War!" yelled the deputies, springing to their feet. "No priests! no Jesuits! To the vote! to the vote!"

Gomez arose to his feet.

"Señores," he cried, loudly, "I respect the Padre for his effort to avert the war. His mission is to bring peace, and he has striven to do so. But it cannot be. The Cholocacan Republic cannot yield to the insolent demands of X Suarez. We choose our rulers

freely, without coercion. In six months I surrender my office and will you permit Don Hypolito Xuarez, traitor and scoundrel, to profane this chair? No, Señores; a thousand times no! We know the nature of this man who aspires to play the part of a tyrant. Place him in this seat of power, and he will break every law of our glorious constitution. Will that liberty which was won by the blood of our fathers, by the heroism of Zuloaga, be trodden under foot at the bidding of this man? He comes, not to implore you to elect him supreme magistrate of the Republic. He comes with an army at his back, and commands you – I say commands you – to make him Dictator!"

"War! War! Down with Xuarez!"

"Who is this traitor, to dare our power? He has the fleet, it is true – traitors that they are! – but we have the army. We have money. We can buy a new fleet. Our soldiers shall break up his power. Let us hurl back in his face this insolent defiance, and sweep away Xuarez and his partisans in torrents of blood!"

"War! War! The opal burns red."

"Yes, the opal burns red. And our hearts burn with indignation at the insolence of this man. I swear," cried the President, drawing his sword. "I swear, by my sword, by the Chalchuih Tlatonac, that I shall not sheath this weapon till it has exterminated these traitors, and purified the Republic. Hear me, God!"

"Hear us, God!" And a myriad swords flashed in the air.

"Will I put the offer of the traitor Xuarez to the vote?"

"No, no! War! war!"

Ignatius tried to speak, but he saw that the Junta was unanimous in proclaiming war. His cross fell from his nerveless hands; his head sunk on his breast.

"Holy Mary, have mercy on these misguided men."

He passed out of the hall in dejected silence, and after him swept a whirlwind of men, headed by the President. Outside the Palacio Nacional, a crowd of people were waiting to hear the decision of the Junta. Standing on the marble steps of the palace, Don Francisco caused the standard of the Republic to be unfurled, and waved his bare sword in the air.

"In the name of the Junta! In the name of the free people of the great Republic of Cholocaca, I proclaim war against the traitor Xuarez!"

"War! war! war!" yelled the mob, frantically. "The opal burns red! War! war!"

Then, with one accord, the rabble dashed down to the sea-gate of the city.

"What are they going there for, Tim?" asked Philip, as they were borne along by the living torrent.

"To hear the cannon answer Xuarez, if I mistake not. Holy Virgin! what devils these are when their blood is up!"

From the Plaza de los Hombres Ilustres the crowd rolled down the steep of the Calle Otumba, passed into the Calle Mayor, and in a few minutes the city was vomiting hundreds of infuriated men out of her gates on to the beach and wharf.

Far away on the azure sea lay the vast bulk of *The Pizarro*, with the flag of the Republic floating at her main-mast, in conjunction with the white pennant of peace. The crowd held their breath, and throughout the vast assemblage there was not a sound. The waves lapping on the beach could alone be heard, and each man in that mighty congregation held his breath.

"One gun for 'yes!' Two guns for 'no!'" muttered Jack, in Tim's ear.

At that instant a puff of smoke broke from an embrasure of the rear fort, and a gun thundered out its defiance to Xuarez. In another minute, before the echo of the first died away, a second gun from the other fort roared out in the still air, and there was an answering roar from the crowd below.

The flag of peace! the flag of the opal were suddenly lowered from the mast of *The Pizarro*, and up went a fierce red banner, foretelling war and disaster. The mob yelled with rage, the guns of *The Pizarro* sent forth an insolent defiance, and in a few minutes, with the smoke pouring black and thick from her funnels, the great vessel stood out to sea.

The War of Cholacaca had commenced.

CHAPTER XI

THE DRAMA OF LITTLE THINGS

Many things happen!

They are the daily events of our lives, we note them with idle indifference.

The lover kisses his dear one, she sighs on his throbbing bosom,

He springs on his waiting horse, and waving his hand at parting,

Thinks that the morrow for certain, will bring her again to his kisses,

Alas! he knows not that Fate is capricious!

That never again will the dear one respond to his welcome caresses!

"Good-bye for an hour!" ah, sorrow. That good-bye means "farewell for ever."

And yet they know not this future, and so, parting happy, Go east and west gladly, to anguish apart till they perish.

"Quiere a fumar, Juan," said Dolores, holding out a small case to Jack, with a coquettish smile.

"Campeacheanos!" replied her lover, selecting one carefully, "these are for men only. I hope you don't smoke these, mi cara."

"No! I but use cigarros de papel. This case belongs to my

cousin, Don Rafael. Now it is yours."

"What will Don Rafael say?"

"Say! Why, nothing, of course. He made me a present of the campeacheanos."

"Oh, did he?" exclaimed Jack, suspiciously. "You seem to be fond of your cousin, Dolores!"

"Naturally! It is my duty," replied Dolores, demurely, and dropped her eyes.

"Oh!" said Duval, briefly, and busied himself in lighting a cigarette.

It was late in the afternoon, and they were on the azotea of Maraquando's house alone, save for the presence of Doña Serafina; but she was asleep, and, therefore, did not trouble them. As before stated, the Casa Maraquando was on the summit of the hill, and from the roof they could look down into the valley below. Ring after ring of houses encompassed the rise, and on the flat, trending towards the sea, street, and house, and plaza, and wall, were laid out as in a map. To the left, the vast space of the parade-ground; to the right, the crowded quarter of the peons, a mass of huddled huts, red-roofed, white-walled, and between the two the broad street leading from the foot of the hill down to the sea-gate.

On the parade-ground companies of soldiers were manœuvring. Here and there the bright colours of uniforms could be seen in the streets. Sometimes a distant trumpet rang out shrilly, or the muffled thunder of drums came faintly to their

ears. Within the walls of the city all was bustle and military pomp, the place was one vast camp. Beyond, the white line of the walls and the infinite stretch of azure sea glittering in the sunshine.

Peter, in company with Cocom, had gone outside the inland walls for a final butterfly hunt before the outbreak of war, when, in view of the suburbs being deserted, he would have to abandon his favourite pursuit. Down in the Plaza de San Jago, Sir Philip Cassim was assisting Don Rafael to drill his men, and Tim was, as usual, haunting the telegraph-office and the Palacio Nacional. He spent all his time between these two places, collecting news, and despatching messages. Only Jack was idle; Jack, who, decked out in the gaudy uniform of the Regimient de los Caballeros, set on the azotea flirting with Dolores and smoking innumerable cigarettes. With masculine vanity, he had come there especially to show himself to the lady of his heart, in his new uniform, and, finding Doña Serafina asleep, had waited to speak to Dolores for a few minutes before joining Philip in the plaza below. The few minutes had, by this time, lengthened into half-an-hour.

Without doubt Jack looked remarkably handsome in his uniform, and Dolores acknowledged this to herself as she glanced at him from behind the safe shelter of her fan. He was as fine as a humming-bird, and tinted like a rainbow. The Mexican dress became him admirably, and in that brilliant climate the bright colours did not look too pronounced.

The uniform consisted of calzoneros of dark green velvet split

from the thigh downward, slashed with braid, set with rows of silver buttons, and filled with the calzoncillos of white muslin. A short, tight-fitting jacket of yellow cloth embroidered with gold, over a full white shirt, puffing out at the hips, open sleeves, a scarlet-silk sash round the waist sustaining a brace of pistols and a Spanish knife. Finally, boots of tanned leather with heavy spurs hanging with little bells. Over all his finery, Jack wore a picturesque zarape of dark blue, and a sombrero of the same colour encircled with a broad band of gold. In this picturesque costume, his fine figure was seen to its best advantage; but Jack was already regretting his plain English riding-suit of unadorned grey.

At present, however, he was not thinking of his fine feathers, or of the two men waiting for him in the Plaza de San Jago, but of the last remark of Dolores.

Jack had no reason to be jealous of Don Rafael, as he, to all appearances, cared more for war than for women; yet, because Dolores admitted that she liked her cousin, this foolish young man began to sulk. The girl watched him with great amusement for a few minutes, and then made a malicious remark in reference to his uniform.

"Pajaro precoso!"

"Oh, I am a precious bird, am I?" said Jack, ungraciously; "but not precious to you, Dolores. Don Rafael –"

"Is my cousin – nothing more."

"I don't like cousins," muttered Duval, obstinately, keeping his

eyes away from her face, whereat Dolores rapped him smartly on the fingers with her closed fan.

"I will eat all the cousins of your killing, Juan. Turn your face to me, child that you are. Santissima! What a cross face! Señor Caballero, you are jealous!"

"Yes," admitted Jack, reluctantly.

Dolores glanced at her aunt, to make sure that she was asleep, then bending towards this foolish lover, kissed him on the cheek.

"Are you jealous now, querido?"

"No," answered Jack, returning the kiss with interest; "I am a fool not to trust you thoroughly."

"You are! Hush! Enough! My aunt may awake."

"Not she! So you love me only, Dolores? And Don Rafael –"

"Is betrothed to a lady of Acauhtzin."

"Oh, Dolores!" sighed Jack, much relieved, and kissed her again. In fact, he would have saluted her several times, had not Dolores spread her fan between their two faces as a shield.

"No, no! Doña Serafina may awaken, and then – 'Dios de mi alma,' what would my uncle say?"

"He must know sooner or later."

"Wait till the war is over, querido. Till Don Hypolito is slain, and you return covered with glory. Then my uncle can refuse you nothing."

"Bueno! I will wait. And, after all, Dolores, I am not quite a foreigner. I have dwelt so long in Mexico that I know all your manners and customs. Now I have even assumed the dress of

Cholacaca, so I am quite one of your own people."

"And a heretic!"

"Ah! Padre Ignatius has been talking to you?"

"No, querido; my aunt – "

"Oh, never mind your aunt. If I mistake not, she admires a heretic herself."

"El hombrecillo!"

"If by the little man you mean Don Pedro, yes. But oh, my soul, do not let such things as this separate us. You love me, Dolores? You will be true to me?"

"I swear it!" cried the girl, throwing herself on his breast; "I swear it – by the opal!"

"No, no! not that. You surely don't believe in the devil stone?"

"Am I a child to believe?" laughed Dolores, scornfully. "No; I am a true daughter of the Church; but I believe this opal to be mine, and if I can get it I will do so."

"We will both try and obtain it, though I am afraid there is but little chance of doing so. We know not where is the temple."

"Cocom knows."

"Yes; but Cocom will not tell. But enough of the opal. We will talk of it again. Meanwhile, tell me to whom is Rafael engaged? He has told me nothing about it."

"No; he has told no one save me, lest it should reach the ears of my uncle, and thus anger him. The lady my cousin loves is Doña Carmencita de Tejada – "

"What!" ejaculated Jack, in surprise. "The daughter of

Xuarez's right-hand man?"

"Yes, the daughter of Don José de Tejada, the rebel. So, you see, he does not let his father know of his love, for Don Miguel would never consent to his son becoming the husband of a traitor's child."

"True, true. Poor Rafael! The course of his love does not seem likely to run smooth. Still, when the war is over, he may be more fortunate."

"Ah! the war," said Doña Dolores, sadly. "This terrible war. How I tremble to think of what is before us. Should Don Hypolito conquer – " She covered her face with her hands, shuddering violently.

"Don Hypolito will not conquer," replied Jack, soothingly taking her to his breast. "We will humble him to the dust before three months are ended. Besides, if the worst comes, we can fly to Europe."

"Ay, de mi. May it not come to that."

"Amen!" said Duval, solemnly; and they remained clasped in each others arms, with hearts too full for speech.

Suddenly they heard the sound of a prolonged yawn, and had just time to separate before Doña Serafina caught them in that close embrace. Fortunately, they had been hidden by an angle of the azotea wall, so the good lady, who had just awakened, and was still bemused with sleep, saw nothing. When she was thoroughly awake, however, she espied Jack in all the bravery of his uniform, and came forward with a light step and an

exclamation of delight.

"El Regimiento de los Caballeros!" she exclaimed, admiringly. "Santissima! how the uniform does become you, Don Juan. I do so admire handsome Americanos," added the lady, languidly. Dolores laughed at this naïve confession, but Jack, modest Jack, blushed through the tan of his skin.

"Really, Doña Serafina, I am much obliged, I kiss your hands," he answered, confusedly. "I have just arrived" – he had been there half an hour – "just arrived, Señora, and I had not the heart to disturb you."

"Has the child spoken?" said Doña Serafina, waving her fan towards Dolores, who stood with downcast eyes, inwardly convulsed, outwardly demure.

"Oh yes; a little. She has not the brilliant tongue of her aunt," replied Jack, artfully.

"Pobrecita! She is young; she is a kitten. She will yet improve. I was the same at her age."

"The deuce you were," thought Jack, with secret apprehension, surveying her portly form. "I hope Dolores won't be the same at your age."

"And Don Pedro?" asked the duenna, languidly.

"Will lay his heart at your feet this evening, Señora."

"It is his Don Juan," responded the lady, graciously. It was a mere figure of speech; but Jack was secretly amused to think how alarmed Peter would be hearing of such an offer.

"Oh, this war, Señor Americano; this terrible war! How I fear

it."

"Do not be afraid, Señora. We will protect you."

"Oh yes; I am sure of that. But my nephew, Señor? Don Rafael! He is much angered."

"At the war?"

"Santissima, no! At his ship, which still sails up and down in front of Tlatonac. What does it mean, Señor?"

Jack turned in the direction indicated by her fan, and saw a large ship far out on the wrinkled sea.

"Is that *The Pizarro*? I did not know," he said in some perplexity. "I understood she had departed to Acauhtzin."

"My cousin says it is *The Pizarro*," interposed Dolores at this moment; "and we know not why she stays."

"I notice she keeps well out of the range of the fort guns," muttered Jack, anxiously. "Hum! it is curious. Perhaps she is sent by Don Hypolito to carry off Doña Dolores."

The old lady made a gesture to avert the evil eye.

"Say not such things, Señor. That terrible man! He might carry me off even here."

"So he might, Señora," replied Jack, trying to be serious. "I would advise yourself and the young ladies to keep within doors."

"If Don Hypolito can carry us off from the middle of Tlatonac, he is cleverer than I think," said Dolores, contemptuously; "but what can be the reason of *The Pizarro* thus guarding the town?"

"I have it!" cried Jack, suddenly enlightened. "She is watching

for the arrival of the torpedo-boats. Yes, that is her game. She wishes to meet them before they know of the revolt, and thus seduce them to the cause of Xuarez!"

"Impossible, Señor!" exclaimed both ladies at once.

"It is true! I am sure of it," responded Jack, hurriedly. "I must speak to Don Rafael about this. 'Adios, señoritas! Con Dios vayan ustedes.'"

The young engineer kissed the hands of both ladies, and clattered down the steps on his way to the patio. Just as he was passing through the zaguan, he heard a light foot hasten after him, and before he reached the door, Dolores was in his arms.

"I left my aunt on the azotea," she said, breathlessly. "One kiss, querido, before you go! There; – and there! Oh, my soul! Be careful of yourself. I go, at vespers, to pray for you at the shrine of our Lady."

"Angel! Such prayers will be my safeguard in all dangers!"

"Padre Ignatius has promised me a sacred relic which preserves the wearer from harm. He gives it to me this evening. I will bring it to you. To-night you will be here?"

"Yes, at the eighth hour. Adios, angelito!"

They embraced hurriedly, and Dolores returned to the azotea to explain her sudden absence to Doña Serafina as best she could; while Jack, filled with joy at these proofs of her love, gaily danced down the street on his way to the Plaza de San Jago, where Philip waited him.

Everywhere soldiers, everywhere the beating of drums, the

shrilling of trumpets, the waving of flags, and oftentimes the martial strains of the "Opal Fandango." The city of Tlatonac had awakened from its sleep of years, and in every street, in every house, activity prevailed. It was not a city; it was a camp. The inhabitants, almost to a man, had become soldiers, and flattered by the women, dressed in gaudy uniforms, excited by frequent draughts of aguardiente, they fancied themselves invincible. Every evening fireworks were let off in the principal squares, bands of soldiers marched nightly through the streets, singing the national song of the opal; and at times the enthusiasm arose to such a pitch that the whole city was convulsed with a delirium of joy. In the opinion of Tlatonac, the rebel X Suarez was already conquered.

"I hope this enthusiasm is not born of Dutch courage," said Jack to himself, as he elbowed his way through an excited throng; "but it seems too violent to last. These howling wretches see X Suarez in chains, pleading for his life; but they don't see the events which are bound to occur before such a thing takes place."

"Abajo los Oposidores! Viva el Republica! Mueran a X Suarez!"

"Shout away, mis amigos," muttered Duval, grimly; "we'll see if you'll shout as loudly when the bombs are cracking over the city. If *The Pizarro* sent one now, I guess you'd not be so lively."

In the Plaza de San Jago, soldiers were being drilled. A fine body of men was El Regimient de los Caballeros, and a gallant show they made as they wheeled their horses into line. Philip,

arrayed in the same style as Jack, was reining his steed beside Colonel Garibay, the commander of the troop, and on the other side of him rode Don Rafael, late a captain in the navy, now a captain on land. Don Rafael, a handsome, dark-eyed young man, full of fiery earnestness, and not unlike his sister in appearance, though lacking her softer feminine grace, had taken a great fancy to Philip, with whom he had become very intimate. Jack Duval he knew of old, and liked immensely; but Cassim's character was more in accordance with his own, therefore they were comrades by the rule of like drawing to like.

Colonel Garibay was greatly gratified that these two young Americanos had joined his troop as volunteers, and made things as pleasant for them as he possibly could. He commanded one of the crack regiments of the Cholocacan army, and was determined that it should not belie its reputation in the coming war. Hitherto it had but reaped laurels in frontier wars against the Indians; but now it was for the first time to combat with a civilised foe, and would have a good opportunity of showing to the world of what stuff its men were made.

The regiment deployed into thin lines, massed into compact columns, charged at the gallop, retired in good order, and proved themselves in all the complicated evolutions of a cavalry corps to be thoroughly disciplined soldiers. In the burning sun, with the grey dust whirling up in clouds from the restless feet of the horses, the columns expanded and contracted like the glittering lengths of a snake, and at every sound of the bugle the lines

changed their position with the utmost military precision. For three hours Garibay kept his troop hard at work. At length even his insatiable soul was satisfied at their state of efficiency, and to the stirring strains of the "Zuloaga March" the men filed off the ground.

In other parts of the plaza infantry regiments were drilling and, after a time, these also dispersed, so that by the hour of sundown the great square was almost deserted, save for scattered groups of soldiers discussing the coming war. Jack, in company with Philip and the Colonel, went off to the quarters of the latter in the sea-fort, and there they proceeded to make themselves comfortable.

"I am pleased with my children, Señores," said Garibay, thoughtfully; "but I would I commanded foot instead of horse."

"Wherefore so, Don Rodrigo?"

"For this reason, Señor Felipe. Our country is so mountainous that, save on the plains, there is but little use for cavalry. The seat of the war will be at Acauhtzin, and there the land is all mountains. Consequently the infantry will be of most service up yonder. If, however, the enemy come south to Tlatonac and Janjalla, our cavalry can meet them in the open plains surrounding these towns."

"Don Hypolito will certainly come south," said Jack, sagely. "He will not wait for the Republic to send troops up to Acauhtzin, but embark his troops on the war-ships, and try his fortunes down in this direction. Besides, X Suarez knows that the Republic has no

transports for the troops."

"No war-ships, Señor," replied the Colonel, gravely, "that is true. But by order of his Excellency, all merchant-vessels of a certain tonnage have been seized in the port of Tlatonac, and requisitioned for the service of transporting troops to Acauhtzin."

"The deuce! And what say the owners to such high-handed proceedings?"

"The owners have been paid. So, you see, we can embark our men on these ships, and sail north to – "

"To be knocked to pieces by the war-ships," finished Philip, coolly.

"Señor, you forget the torpederas will be here soon."

"That is if *The Pizarro* will let them pass her," said Duval, meaningly. "I see she is cruising constantly up and down."

"Do you think, Don Juan, she is waiting for the arrival of the torpederas?" asked the Colonel, anxiously.

"I am sure of it, Colonel. Don Miguel informed me that the torpedo-boats had started from England. Xuarez, who has his spies in England, also knows this, and sent *The Pizarro* south with a twofold object: to dictate terms to the Republic, and intercept the torpederas."

"He failed in the first, however," observed Philip, hopefully.

"True! but he may not fail in the second."

"One moment, Señores," said the Colonel, earnestly, "*The Pizarro* dare not stop the torpedo-boats – they could sink her in no time. She has no defence against them – no nets, for those

were left at Tlatonac when the fleet went north."

"All the more reason that Xuarez should capture the torpedo-boats," retorted Jack, hotly. "*The Pizarro* will not try force, mi Colonel! No; the torpederas left England before war was proclaimed; therefore, those in charge know nothing of the disaffection of the fleet, of the rebellion of Xuarez. If they meet *The Pizarro*, they will stop when she signals; their commanders will go on board in blissful ignorance, and be either seduced to the cause of Xuarez, or retained as prisoners of war. In either case, the torpederas, taken by surprise, will be captured, and accompany *The Pizarro* to the north."

"True! What you say is true, Señor! Santissima! What ill-fortune!"

"The torpederas must be warned!" exclaimed Philip, quickly. "I will speak to His Excellency, and offer the services of my yacht to the Republic. If my offer is accepted, I will get steam up on *The Bohemian*, and stand out to sea at once. Cruise up and down till I see the torpederas, and then warn them of their danger."

"Yes, and be chased all the time by *The Pizarro*."

"She can't catch *The Bohemian*. I'd back my boat against the combined speed of the whole rebel navy. It is the only chance of saving the torpedo-boats from the clutches of Xuarez."

"What a pity my railway is not finished," said Jack, regretfully; "then we could have ran up the whole army to Acauhtzin without trouble. As it is, the only passage is by sea, and I am afraid the war-ships render that impossible."

"How far have you got with the line, Jack?"

"Only fifty miles. It stops in the centre of a dense forest, so it is worse than useless – to Xuarez as to ourselves."

At this moment Don Rafael entered, in a state of great excitement.

"Ola, Señores," he said, gaily; "I have just come from the presence of His Excellency and my father; it is the intention of the Junta to send an embassy to Acauhtzin."

"To treat with Xuarez?"

"Carajo! no!" retorted the young man fiercely; "to promise freedom to the rebels, if they lay down their arms and deliver up Xuarez for punishment."

Colonel Garibay shook his head.

"They won't do that, mi amigo! if I know anything of Don Hypolito."

"It is true that he has great influence over them," said Rafael, thoughtfully; "but the power of the Oposidores is as nothing before that of the Junta; if they are wise, they will lay down their arms."

"They are not wise, however," said Jack, dryly; "and they won't lay down their arms. And how does the embassy propose to get to Acauhtzin?"

"It is said that Señor Felipe has offered his ship to the Junta," said Rafael, bowing courteously to the baronet; "and the Junta have decided to accept that grand offer with a thousand thanks."

"Bueno!" cried Philip, heartily. "I am glad *The Bohemian* will

be of some service. Yes, Don Rafael, my yacht is at the disposal of the Government. But tell me, Señor, who goes north with the embassy?"

"Yourself, Señor Felipe, if you will come; my father and myself, with a company of soldiers."

"Why yourself, Don Rafael?"

The young hidalgo blushed, and rolled a cigarette with pretended indifference.

"I! Oh, I wish to hurl defiance in the teeth of Xuarez."

Philip had received a hint of Don Rafael's passion and as Jack was busily talking with Garibay, approached the captain with a smile.

"Is that all?" he whispered, smiling.

Don Rafael looked at him steadily, and then caught his hand with a sudden passion of friendship.

"No, mi amigo. I wish to see Doña Carmencita, and, if possible, carry her south."

"Will she come, Rafael?"

"Yes, she loves me; her father is cruel to her; she will come, if you will permit it."

"Señor, my ship and all I have is at your disposal."

"A thousand thanks, Don Felipe," said Rafael, cordially pressing his friend's hand; "I will take advantage of your kindness. Not a word to my father, Señor. He knows nothing as yet; I will tell him all at Acauhtzin."

"I will be silent."

"Gracias mi amigo. I will give you my help in the like case."

"It will certainly be needed some day," replied Philip, significantly.

"But not as yet. Ah, Señor, you do not then know what it is to love."

"Don't I?" thought Philip, and saw before him, as in a dream, the fair face of Doña Eulalia.

It was now late, so, after they had dined with Garibay, the two Englishmen, at the invitation of Don Rafael, went to the Casa Maraquando.

When they arrived, to their surprise, all was in confusion. The servants were running aimlessly about, Doña Serafina and Eulalia were in tears, and Don Miguel was cursing loud and deep.

"What is the matter?" asked the young men in alarm.

"Dolores is lost!"

CHAPTER XII

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

Shepherds kind! my love hath left me,
Therefore am I filled with woe;
Of my heart hath she bereft me;
Thievish nymph! why didst thou so?
Ah, well-a-day! True love is a jewel!
Why hence away? Oh, my Chloe cruel.

Tell the damsel, should ye meet her,
That, alas! no heart have I,
For her love I would entreat her;
Fickle maid, why didst thou fly?
Ah, well-a-day! True love is a jewel!
Why hence away? Oh, my Chloe cruel.

Prythee shepherds, her discover,
I her face again would see;
Still am I her longing lover;
Sweet coquette, return to me!
Ah, well-a-day! True love is a jewel!
Why hence away? Oh, my Chloe cruel.

Dolores lost! Jack's thoughts immediately became busy with

Don Hypolito, and the Forest Indians. Could it be that she had been carried off by one of these, and if so, by which of the two? It was now nine o'clock, and Jack had left her on the roof of the azotea at four. It seemed impossible that in so short a period the girl could have utterly disappeared. At the same time, by the strict social observances of Tlatonac, Dolores should have returned from her visit to the cathedral before dark, and as she had not done so, there seemed to be reasonable ground for apprehension.

Such excitement reigned in the house that it was some time before either Jack or Philip could extract the reasons for such belief from the alarmed inmates. As poor Duval was terribly upset at the thought that Dolores was lost, Philip took affairs into his own hands with great promptitude, and proceeded to cross-examine the maid who had last seen her. This damsel, by name Marina, was of pure Indian extraction, and cunning past all knowing. At the present time, however, owing to the reproaches of Doña Serafina, and the scoldings of Don Miguel, she was reduced to a kind of moral pulp, not having even sufficient energy to lie according to custom.

Philip spoke to Don Miguel as to the advisability of extracting information from this girl; and at once Marina was brought before him. She was terribly afraid of the Señor Americano, who looked so stern and evidently thought Philip was about to order her immediate execution.

"Marina!" asked Philip, slowly, in Spanish, "where did you last see the Señorita?"

"Santissima! Señor Americano!" replied the frightened poblana, clasping her hands, "it was in the great church. The Señorita was kneeling at the shrine of Our Lady, and – and –"

"Go on," said Philip, seeing she hesitated.

"Por Dios, Señor, I thought no harm; but I saw Pepe at the door of the church, and he beckoned to me."

"Who is Pepe?"

"Hechicera!" broke in Doña Serafina, wildly, "that good-for-nothing Pepe is your lover. And you went to him, ladroncilla? Eh, yes! You left the Señorita. Oh, wicked one! Oh, child of Satan!"

"But for a moment, I swear! Por todos santos! it was not long. When I returned to the shrine, Doña Dolores was gone. I thought she had departed to see Padre Ignatius, and I waited. A long time I waited, Señor Americano, but she came not. Then I believed she had returned to the casa, and I was afraid of being punished, so I did not come back here till late! She is not here! ay de mi! and I know not where is the poor angel! Madre de Dios! what misfortune!"

There was nothing more to be got out of the terrified girl, as she but repeated this story over and over again. She had gone with Dolores to the cathedral, had spoken to Pepe, and then lost sight of her mistress. Inquiries were made for Pepe, who was a zambo, that is, the offspring of an Indian and an African. To all accounts, he inherited the worst vices of both races, and was an idle, drunken vagabond, who had been frequently punished by Don Miguel for thieving. It was possible that, out of revenge,

the zambo might have decoyed Dolores beyond the walls, and there surrendered her to the Indians. Maraquando thought that this might be the case.

"No!" said Jack, when this explanation was suggested, "Dolores was afraid of the Indians, and would not believe any message brought by such a man. But she told me to-day that she wished to see Padre Ignatius. Perhaps he was not in the cathedral, and she went to his chapel beyond the walls. Once there, and all things are possible."

"It might be so," cried Don Miguel, sadly. "I have sent out men to ride everywhere beyond the walls, and try to discover traces. They will certainly go to the chapel, and ask the Padre if my poor child has been there!"

"Ay di mi! what sorrow," cried Eulalia, whose pretty face was disfigured by tears; "if Dolores is with the Indians, they will sacrifice her to the Chalchuih Tlatonac."

"Not so, hermanita!" cried Rafael, hastily, "she is the guardian of the opal! They would not dare to do this! If she is with the Indians, her life is safe. But Don Hypolito!"

"Carrai!" exclaimed his father, fiercely, "what of that false one?"

"He swore to carry off Dolores, and make her his wife. This demonio of a Pepe was once in the household of Xuarez. He may be in his pay now, and have decoyed my cousin down to the sea-beach, beyond the gate."

"But how could he take her from thence?" asked Philip, in

perplexity.

"Carrambo, Señor! do you forget that *The Pizarro* has been cruising before Tlatonac for days past. It was not to watch the torpederas coming, as we thought. By San Jago, it was to capture and carry off Dolores."

"That cannot be!" said Jack, in despair. "*The Pizarro* would not dare to come under the guns of the fort!"

"She could do so in the darkness."

"But the search lights."

"They are at present useless," cried Don Miguel striking his breast with his hand; "the electric apparatus is out of repair, and the engineers are now attending to it. What misfortune! Dios! It may be as Rafael says. Pepe decoyed Dolores to the beach, and from thence she could be taken to the war-ship."

Jack was horrified at this possibility. It was not very probable that such a thing had happened; still, it might have taken place. If it were so, Dolores would be now on board *The Pizarro*, steaming north to Acauhtzin – to X Suarez, whom she hated and feared. He was about to speak his mind on the subject when Tim, in a great flurry, arrived with Peter.

"What is all this about?" cried Tim, rushing up to Jack. "Is Doña Dolores missing?"

Philip drew him away from Jack, who was too overwhelmed to answer questions, and hurriedly explained all that had occurred. The Irishman scratched his head, but could suggest nothing save that they should search the country. A sudden idea struck Philip.

"Peter!" he said quickly, turning towards the doctor, "what time did you return from your beetle hunting?"

"About sunset."

"And Cocom?"

"Left me as soon as we entered the town, in order to pray at the cathedral. He has done the same thing regularly every time we have returned to Tlatonac."

"Cocom!" cried Jack, jumping to his feet at the mention of the name, "why, Philip, do you think he decoyed Dolores away?"

"Who knows! She is either with the Indians or with Xuarez. Cocom or Pepe, as emissaries of Don Hypolito, may have carried her off."

The foregoing had been spoken in English, and, ignorant of the language, Rafael could only understand the names. He glanced eagerly from one to the other, and spoke quickly.

"Cocom! Pepe! What is this, Señor Felipe?"

Whereat Philip began to explain, but was interrupted by the entrance of Padre Ignatius. The good priest looked much disturbed, and raised his hand to bless those in the room. Doña Serafina and Eulalia flung themselves at his feet, and were so overwhelmed with grief that they had to be taken away. When they had gone, Padre Ignatius turned to the men.

"My sons, I hear evil news. Is it true that Doña Dolores is missing?"

"Yes; do you know where she is?" asked Jack, imploringly, laying his hand on the rusty sleeve of the priest.

"Alas! no," replied the Padre, shaking his head; "all the afternoon did I wait for her in the cathedral, but she came not!"

"She did not go to your own church, my father?" questioned Rafael, eagerly.

"No, my son. I thought she might have done so, and repaired thither. But the sacristan tells me no one has been to the shrine this day. The messengers you sent out to seek for the poor lady came to the chapel to ask me if I had seen her, and it was then that I first heard of your great loss."

"Think you the Indians have her?" asked Philip, anxiously.

"Alas! who knows, Señor? The idolaters have been worshipping the devil stone greatly of late, and it may be that they have carried off Doña Dolores to assist in the ceremonies."

"Not to sacrifice her?"

"Santissima Virgen! no, Señor," rejoined the Padre, hastily. "The idolaters look on her as the guardian of the stone, as one under the protection of the god himself. If they have carried her off," added the priest, emphatically, "her life is safe, and her honour. But my son, Don Hypolito?"

"Do you think – ?"

"I know nothing, my son. But there is one Pepe."

"The zambo? Yes, Padre."

"He hired a boat this afternoon from one of the fishers, saying he was about to go up the coast to see his mother. I heard of that by chance, my children. When it was told to me that Pepe had been seen hanging about the doors of the cathedral, I went from

my chapel to the sea-port at once, and there I find that the boat and Pepe are both gone."

"Carajo!" swore Rafael, giving voice to the general opinion, "he has carried Dolores off to *The Pizarro*. Ladron!"

"It may not be so," said Philip, thoughtfully; "Cocom is also missing. Doña Dolores may have gone with him."

"I don't believe it," said Peter, angrily. "Cocom is a good fellow, and devoted to Doña Dolores. He would not harm a hair of her head."

"It's a queer business," cried Tim, in perplexity; "'tis either Cocom or Pepe. I am certain it is the last of them. *The Pizarro* wasn't cruising up and down for nothing."

"The torpedo-boats – "

"To the devil with them! Hasn't Xuarez his spies in England as well as the Junta? He knows the torpedo-boats are not due here for at least a fortnight, so why should he waste time in searching for them now? By all the saints," shouted Tim, raising his enormous fist, and crashing it down on the table, "'tis Don Hypolito who has the poor girl."

There was nothing more to be said in the matter as the opinions of everyone were divided. Don Rafael, Philip, and Peter believed that Dolores had been carried off by Don Hypolito, as also did Padre Ignatius; while Don Miguel, Tim, and Jack were equally confident that she was in the power of the forest Indians. The Englishmen went back to their house, and, as nothing could be done till morning, Philip spent most of the night trying to

comfort Jack, who refused to go to bed, and walked up and down the sitting-room till close on dawn. At last the baronet persuaded him to lie down and have some rest, but he only slept fitfully. At dawn he was on his feet again, and away to the house of Maraquando, to hear if any news had arrived concerning Dolores.

"My poor Jack, you will kill yourself," said Philip anxiously looking at the young man's haggard face.

"No I won't," retorted Jack, grimly, "I'll hold out until I find Dolores. And find her I will, whether she is in that d – d temple, or with the cursed Don Hypolito."

"If she is with Don Hypolito," said Philip, as he hurried along beside his friend, "we can go up to Acauhtzin in my yacht, and demand her to be given up; but if the Indians have her, I am afraid we shall never see her. No one knows where the temple is."

"I don't care if it is in the moon," cried Duval, doggedly. "I'll hunt those infernal Indians out and make them pay for this. Of two evils I choose the least, and I trust and believe she is with those opal-stone fanatics rather than at Acauhtzin."

"Don Hypolito – "

"He is a devil!" rejoined Jack, fiercely. "If she is with him, God help her! And God help him!" added the young man, in a low voice of concentrated hatred, "if I get my fingers on his throat."

Philip heartily endorsed this opinion; but, afraid of adding to Jack's worry, kept his thoughts to himself. They speedily arrived

at Casa Maraquando, and found Rafael on the azotea, looking seaward with a marine telescope. He turned round sharply as he heard their footsteps, and pointed due east.

"She is gone," he said, with a gesture of despair.

"Dolores?" said Jack, whose brain only held one idea.

"Yes; and *The Pizarro!*"

"In that case, I am afraid Doña Dolores has been carried off by Don Hypolito," observed Philip, taking the glass from Rafael. "No doubt that cursed zambo induced her to go down to the sea-gate on some pretext, and then took her off to the war-ship, which stood in to land under cover of darkness."

"Have you heard anything?" asked Jack, paying no attention to this speech, but turning to Don Rafael.

"Of Dolores, nothing. All the messengers sent out have returned without tidings. It is stated that the Chalchuih Tlatonac is burning red, and thus proclaiming war. To propitiate the god, some great feast is to take place; but whether Dolores has been seized by the Indians and carried to their temple to assist at the ceremony I do not know. Not a single trace of her can be found."

"And Cocom?"

"Cocom has disappeared – so has Pepe and Marina?"

"Marina?" cried Jack, starting.

"Yes; but that is not the worst. My father, as a member of the Junta, had plans of the fortifications to Tlatonac. These have been stolen – "

"Stolen?" interrupted Philip, who had been vainly sweeping

the horizon in search of *The Pizarro*; "and by Marina."

"So my father thinks. My belief of last night is true, Señores. That ladron Pepe is a spy in the service of Hypolito. He seduced Marina into stealing the plans from my father's room, and now they have gone off together in that boat to *The Pizarro*."

"Impossible, Rafael," replied Cassim, decisively. "Doña Dolores was missing while Marina was in this house. She was still here when Padre Ignatius came with the news that Pepe and the boat were gone. Doubtless she has stolen the plans; but she could not have escaped as you say."

"That is a mere detail," said Jack, hastily. "Marina is an Indian, and knows the whole country round for miles. After stealing the plans, she doubtless slipped out of the country gate and travelled up the coast. There a boat from *The Pizarro* could pick her up."

"Where is Don Miguel?"

"My father was summoned before dawn to a special meeting of the Junta. I believe the assemblage has been sitting all night to deliberate on what is to be done."

"Oh, my poor Dolores," groaned Jack, covering his face with his hands; "where are you now?"

"She is on board *The Pizarro*, I doubt not, Don Juan," said Rafael, approaching the young English-man, "I feel sure this is the case. But courage, mi amigo, we will save your dear one yet."

"My dear one!" stammered Duval, in some perplexity.

Don Rafael slipped his arm within that of Jack's, and smiled kindly. "Oh, I know all, Juan. Dolores told me of your love when

I returned from Acauhtzin."

"And you are not angry?"

"Eh! mi amigo! Why should I be angry? It is true you are an Americano – a heretic! but do I not know what love is myself? This makes me kind to you, and when the war is over, I will do all in my power to aid you with my father."

"Gracias Rafael!" rejoined Duval, wringing his friend's hand with intense gratitude; "but first we must rescue Dolores from the Indians."

"I tell you she is not with the Indians, Jack," said Philip, who had been at the other end of the terrace and just returned within earshot; "she is on board *The Pizarro*."

"I think so also, Juan. If so, we will chase the war-ship in the vessel of Don Felipe."

"But I have given her to the Junta, for political, purposes."

"Bueno! that is so. But when my father returns from the Palacio Nacional, I am certain he will request you, in the name of the Republic, to start for Acauhtzin before noon."

"In order to demand the surrender of Xuarez," said Jack, clenching his fist; "those rebels will not do that; but if Dolores is there, I will save them the trouble of answering, by man-handling Don Hypolito till he'll be fit for nothing but his bed."

"Dos pajaros al un golpe," replied Rafael, significantly. "Dolores and Xuarez being the birds, you, mi amigo, the stone. Ah!" he added, as the bell in the cathedral tower chimed the hour, "there is eight o'clock. I think it will be as well, Señores, to have

something to eat."

"I couldn't eat a thing," said Jack, abruptly, as they descended the staircase to the patio.

"That is wrong, Juan. You will need all your strength to regain Dolores."

"Where are the ladies?" asked Philip, anxious to see Doña Eulalia.

"They are not yet up, Don Felipe! Nor do I wish to disturb them, for they are worn out with sorrow."

On hearing this, Philip agreed that it would be better to let them rest, and accepting Rafael's invitation, they sat down to a hastily spread meal. In the middle of it, Don Miguel, followed closely by the ubiquitous Tim, entered the patio.

"Buenos Dias, Señores," said Maraquando, as the young men arose from their meal. "I have news."

"Of Doña Dolores, Señor?"

"Yes, Don Felipe. Sad news! Alas! there is no doubt of it. She is on board *The Pizarro*."

"How is this, my father?" asked Rafael, as Jack resumed his seat with a visage of despair.

"A fishing-boat came into the port late last night, and the men reported that they had passed a skiff containing a man and a veiled woman, making for *The Pizarro*."

"Dolores!" sighed Jack, sadly; "but then, Señor Maraquando," he added, with reviving hope, "it might have been Marina."

"No, Señor. Marina was here when Padre Ignatius told us the

boat was taken. I fear it is true. My poor niece has been decoyed away by that accursed zambo, and carried to the war-ship. Now she is on her way to Acauhtzin – to the rebel Xuarez."

"Cheer up, old fellow!" cried Tim, thumping Jack on the shoulder, with a heavy but kindly fist. "We'll have the colleen back soon. We're all going to fight the rebels this day."

"What's that, Tim? *The Bohemian*—"

"Hold on, Jack! Don Miguel is speaking; he'll tell you all!"

"Señor Felipe," said Maraquando, removing his sombrero with suave courtesy; "in the name of the Republic of Cholacaca, I have to thank you for the offer of your ship, and to inform you that the Junta gladly accepts your aid with a thousand thousand thanks."

"The pleasure is mine, Señor," said Philip, courteously.

"The Junta, Don Felipe," resumed Don Miguel gravely, "desire to know if you can leave Tlatonac by noon."

"Certainly, Señor. By noon *The Bohemian* will steam northward. Are you to be of the party, Señor?"

"I regret to say I am not, Señor. His Excellency is pleased to consider that I will be more useful by his side. The message to Xuarez will be delivered by Don Alonzo Cebrian, the Intendente of the province of Xicotencatl. He will be accompanied by Colonel Garibay, my son Don Rafael, Captain Velez and about twenty soldiers. Can your vessel hold such a company, Señor."

"Oh yes. If they don't mind a little discomfort, Don Miguel. *The Bohemian* is rather small for such a number."

"Fortunately, the voyage will not take long," added Jack, thankfully. "With myself and you, Philip, the number tots up to twenty-six passengers."

"Twenty-seven, Jack," interposed Tim, quickly "I'm not going to miss the fun."

"But your business, Tim," remonstrated Philip, in alarm, afraid lest Fletcher's fighting propensities should cause trouble at Acauhtzin.

"Well, isn't this my business, sir? Interview with the rebel leader! It's a fine article I'll get out of that same, Philip."

"Right you are, Tim. I'll be glad of your company. But Peter?"

"We'll leave him behind, to look after the ladies."

"Don Miguel," said Jack, who had been thinking deeply, "is the boat of Señor Felipe to sail under the English or the Cholacacan flag?"

"Under the flag of the opal, Señor."

"In that case, Señor, a few shots will send her to the bottom, as she approaches Tlatonac. Don Hypolito will suspect treachery and fire on the ship."

"He dare not fire on the opal banner, Señor."

"I wouldn't trust him. He's a scoundrel," retorted Jack, savagely. "Besides, war is proclaimed, and Xuarez won't want any messages of peace."

"Señor Maraquando," said Philip, gravely, "I think it will be best to approach Acauhtzin under the English flag. When Don Alonzo delivers the message of the Junta, we can hoist the opal

banner."

"I will speak to his Excellency on the subject, Don Felipe," replied Maraquando, a trifle haughtily, feeling rather nettled at the implied hint of the opal banner being treated with disrespect. "Meanwhile, you will be ready to start at noon."

"Yes, Señor; at noon precisely."

"Bueno! His Excellency and the Junta will be at the sea-gate to see you depart."

After this, the three Englishmen bowed, and departed to get themselves ready for the journey to Acauhtzin.

"I say, Philip! You rather put the old gentleman's back up!"

"Oh, confound it. I don't want *The Bohemian* split up into matchwood. Xuarez will fire on the opal flag; but he'll think twice before he insults the Union Jack."

"Let him try," said Tim, grimly; "and if I'm not kicking my heels at the bottom of the sea, I'll wire to London about the insult, and bring the British navy like hornets about his ears. Come, John, my boy! Wake up! We're going to bring back your darling."

"That is if we can get her from Xuarez," said Jack gloomily; "but I'm terribly afraid. If any harm has happened to her, I'll kill him. By gad, I'll choke the life out of him."

"I'll help you, Jack," said Philip, earnestly, for his blood boiled at the thought of Dolores in the grasp of Xuarez; "but I think you'll find Dolores can look after herself. Besides, Xuarez will be too much afraid of his allies, the Indians, to harm her."

"You must change those fine feathers, boys," said Tim,

suddenly.

"And why?"

"Because it will never do to let Don Hypolito know you're in this shindy. Afterwards it doesn't matter; but, with the Union Jack flying, you can't dress as Cholacacan soldiers."

"Tim is right," said Jack, after a pause; "we will change our clothes."

"But not our intentions, Jack," said Philip, anxious to keep up his friends' spirits. "Dolores or war!"

"No," cried Duval, with intense earnestness; "with me it is 'Dolores or death!'"

END OF VOL. I