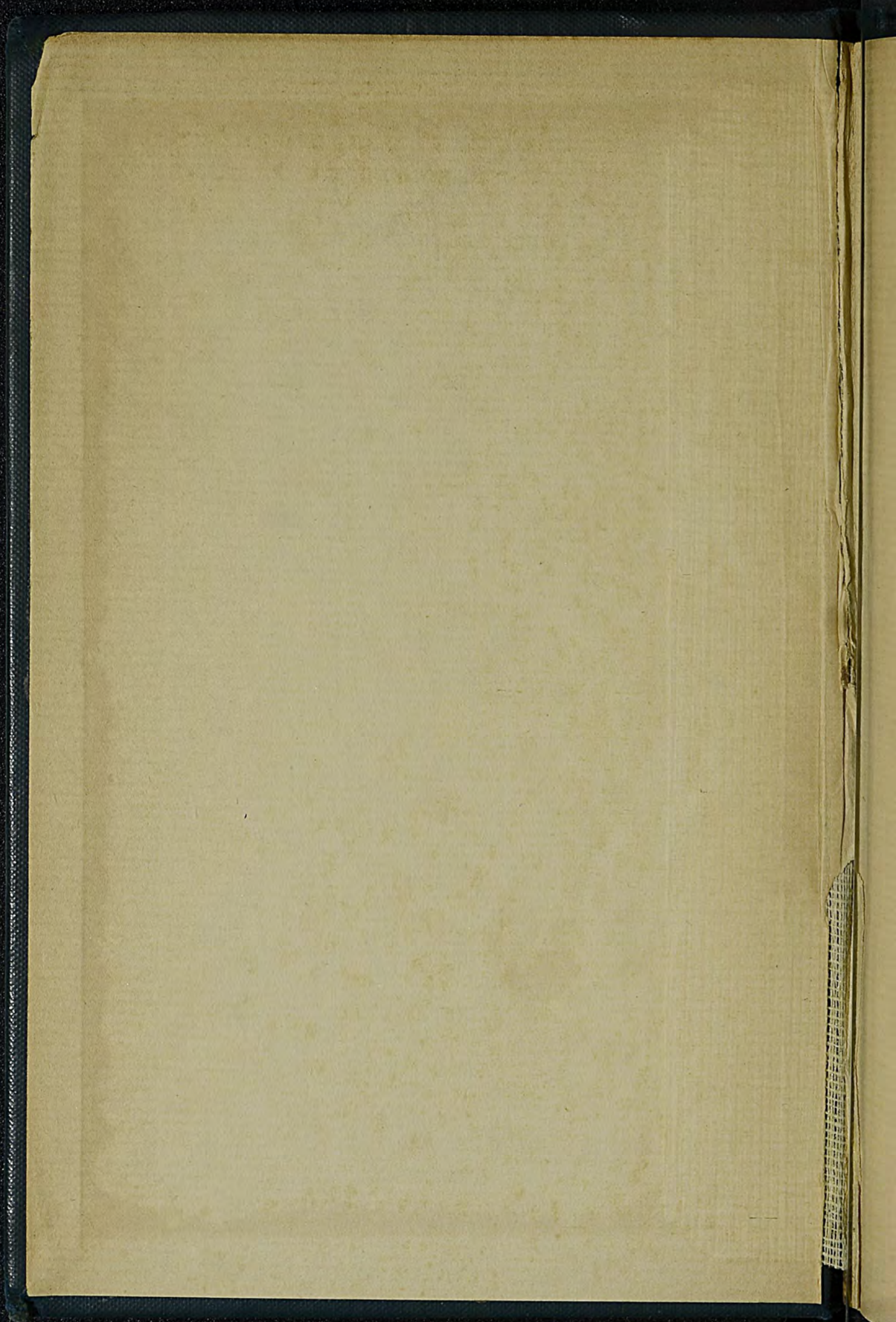


THE VIRGIN OF THE SUN

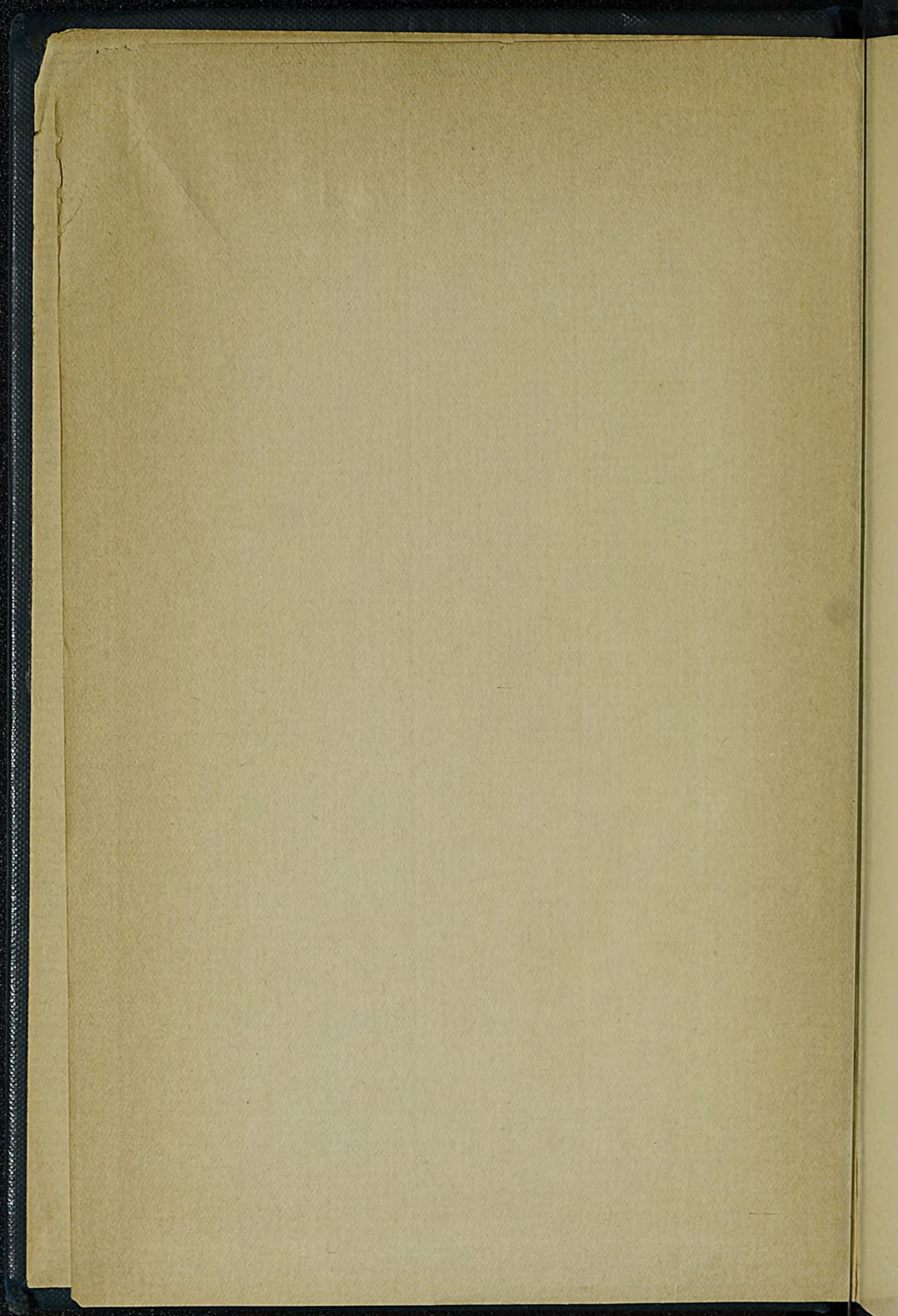


GEORGE GRIFFITH.



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—Prologue.

The Virgin of the Sun

A TALE OF THE CONQUEST
OF PERU

BY
GEORGE GRIFFITH

AUTHOR OF

The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born,"
"Men who have Made the Empire," &c., &c.



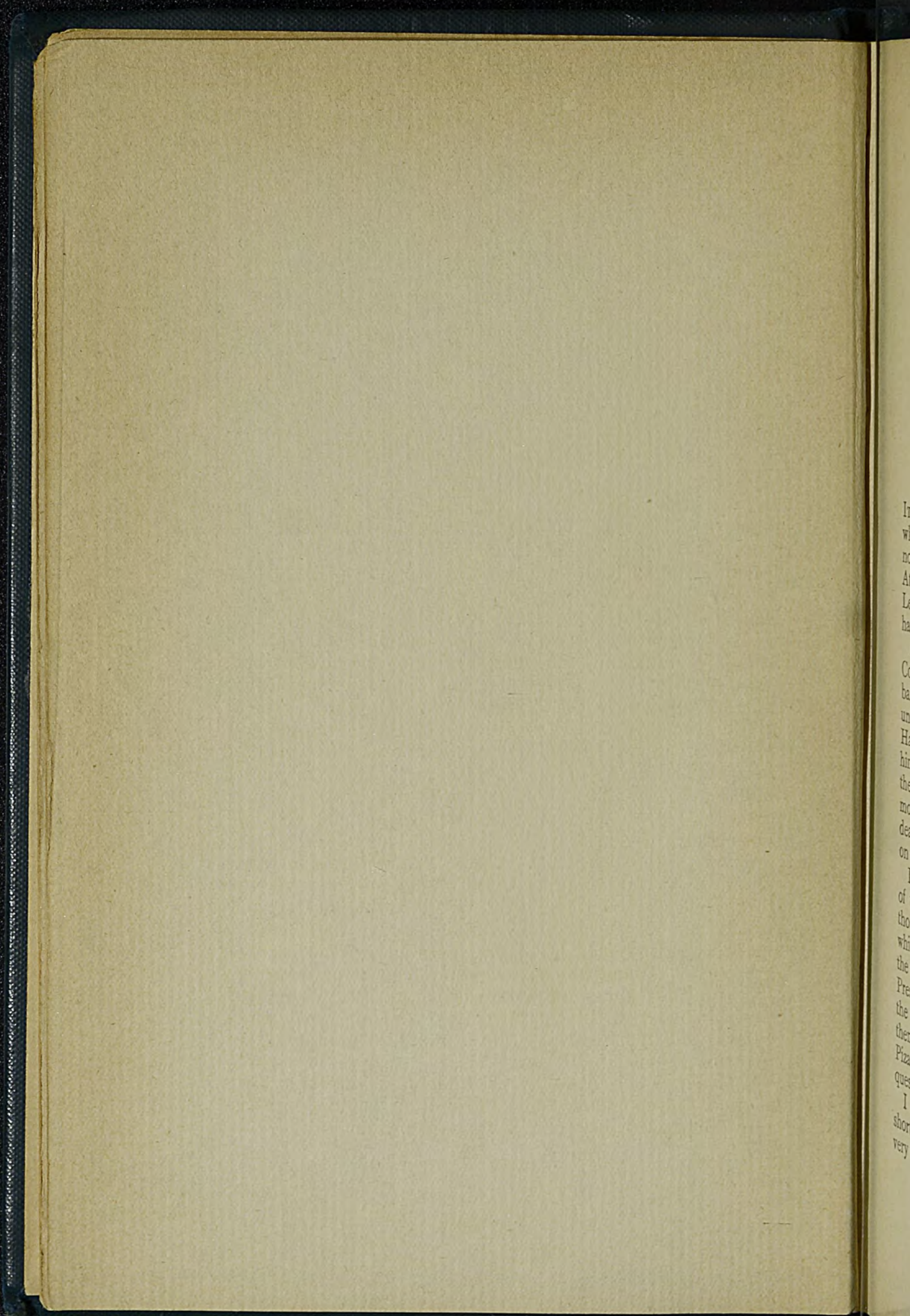
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1898

"Friends and comrades and cavaliers of Spain! On yonder side are toil and hunger, nakedness, the pitiless storm and the drenching rain, and it may be a grave in the unknown wilderness. On this side are ease, and pleasure, and safety; but yonder lies El-Dorado with its gold and silver and gems, the glory of conquest and the hope of dominion. Here is Panama, poverty and dishonour. Now choose each of you that which seems to you best becoming a brave Castilian. For my part I go south."
—Pizarro to his Companions.



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INTRODUCTION

It is a somewhat curious fact, especially in these days when books are many and subjects hard to seek, that none of our great historical novelists on either side of the Atlantic should have done for the Conquest of Peru what Lew Wallace in America and Rider Haggard in England have done for the Conquest of Mexico.

And yet surely Pizarro is as picturesque a character as Cortez, and certainly the achievements of the devoted little band of heroes who braved with him the terrors of the then unknown Sea of the South, who starved with him in Hunger Harbour and on the desolate shores of Gallo, who followed him across those colossal mountain-bulwarks which guarded the golden Empire of the Incas, who seized a conquering monarch in the midst of his victorious army and put him to death as a common criminal, bordered much more closely on miracle than did those of Cortez and his followers.

It was in this belief that I visited Peru with the intention of traversing the route of the Conquerors and obtaining those impressions, generically described as local colour, which can only be acquired on the spot. Marvellous as the story had seemed when read at home in the pages of Prescott, it became almost incredible after I had traversed the same wildernesses and scaled the same passes, many of them higher than the highest peak of the Alps, over which Pizarro had led his little army to the most wonderful conquest in the history of War.

I am only too painfully aware how far my story falls short of the splendour and wonder of its subject, but that very splendour and wonder must be my apology.

For the rest, so far as the demands of fiction have permitted, I have adhered to fact. All the characters are historical with the exception of Nahua, who lives in legend rather than in history, and the two Pallas, or wise women, who are inventions of my own. In the conversations I have reproduced as far as possible the exact words of the Conquerors, as recorded in the chronicles of their contemporaries, and if I have succeeded in making any of these wonder-workers live again, if only for an hour or two, in the reader's mind, I shall have achieved all the success that I can venture to hope for.

GEORGE GRIFFITH.

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PROLOGUE

THE LINE OF FATE

THE morning of the Twentieth of October, in the Year of Grace Fifteen Hundred and Twenty-seven, broke, as many another morning had done, slowly and most drearily over a little desolate island, a mere tract of sand-fringed rock, sparsely sprinkled with a few dwarf shrubs and scattered trees, lying some five leagues from the Pacific coast of Northern South America, which in those days was called Tierra Firma, and about two degrees to the northward of the Line.

As the light grew stronger under the low-brooding canopy of clouds which for many weeks had hung unbroken over the misty sea and the rain-lashed, wind-swept island, a man crawled out from under a wretched shelter of twisted boughs and ragged, sodden sail-cloth among the rocks on the western shore. He rose wearily to his feet and stretched himself with the slow, painful motion of one whose joints are stiff with wet and cold. Then he pushed the dank, black, matted hair back from his white, wrinkled brow, and his hands, thin and brown and knotted, trembled somewhat as he did so.

"Another day! Mother of God, how long is this to last? Ah, well, it is breakfast time, and one must eat even in a place like this. Come, comrades, rouse ye! it is daylight again. Perchance the ship will come to-day, if it pleases the merciful Saints to send her."

He turned his head back towards the rocks as he said these last words, and with an effort that would have been manifest to one who heard it, raised his voice, the harsh,

husky voice of a man well-nigh done to death by hunger and the sickness of body and soul that comes of bitter hardship and hope long deferred.

Then he made his way with slow, limping, dragging steps over the sloping strip of wet, much-trampled sand down to the water's edge, and there, just out of reach of the upwash of the waves, he fell on his knees and began to dig with a little piece of stick.

Presently other figures crept out of the rocks and shook and stretched themselves just as wearily as he had done, a few of them exchanging gruff, half-murmured, half-spoken greetings, and then went and fell to at the same task until some two score or more of as woe-begone looking wretches as the unkindly Fates ever mocked at in their misery were scattered along the shore, grubbing on their knees in the spongy sand amidst the spume of the out-going waves for the sand-worms and crabs and such other shellfish as relenting Fortune might deign to send to them for their morning meal.

There were high-born gentlemen of Spain among them, haughty gallants who had lorded it with the proudest in Seville and Cordova and Madrid, who would once have run a man through the body rather than yield him an inch of the footway, who had feasted and drunk and danced and dined and made love till only a remnant of their fair estates was left to them, and that they had staked on one last throw with Destiny—life, and honour, and every hope they had against a share of the fairy gold of El-Dorado, long dreamed of and never found.

There were rude sailors, too, and outlawed adventurers, cut-throats and cut-purses, criminals fleeing from justice, and debtors from their creditors; husbands who had wearied of their wives, and scapegrace sons who had been driven from the homes they had dishonoured—and here they all were, ragged and starving, racked with ague and smitten with scurvy, scraping shellfish and worms out of the sand where-withal to make the pangs of famine a little more endurable, for the hand of misery had fallen heavily upon them and crushed them all down level with the beasts that eat and take no thought for the morrow.

On a little plateau among the rocks, some twenty feet or so above the beach, a rude flagstaff had been fixed, propped up by a cairn of stone, and from the top of it flew a tattered

flag that had once borne the proud arms of Spain, Mistress of the West and heiress of all its unknown wealth and mysterious glories, and, pacing with slow steps up and down the little platform in front of the cairn, was a man whose worn and work-stained dress distinguished him but little from the wretches who were digging on the sands below him.

Though but a few years past middle age the storm and the stress of a long life of travail might well have passed over his stooping shoulders and down-bent head. His long black hair and ragged beard were streaked with grey, and his face was pinched with hunger and seamed and lined with the furrows of ever-present care; and yet his eyes, as he raised them every now and then to gaze out over the misty sea, as though striving to pierce the dense cloud-curtain in which sky and water were lost on every side, were still bright and proud and fearless as befitted the leader of the forlornest hope a soldier of fortune had ever led.

And yet his thoughts, as he paced that narrow strip of rock and muddy soil, were dark enough to have quenched the light in the eyes of most men, for they were thoughts of long and bitter toil which so far had brought no guerdon save failure and debt and dishonour.

He was thinking of that ill-starred Darien expedition, with its plague and famine and ruthless slaughterings, which had been the grave of so many golden hopes; of the gallant high-hearted Vasco Nuñez de Balboa whom he had watched toilsomely climbing the hills from whose summit he, first of all the men of the Old World, was to behold this Sea of the South over which he was now looking, hoping against despair for Almagro's ship to come and end the weary weeks of waiting; and then he thought of his own black treachery which had sent Vasco to his death in obedience to his own unspoken resolve to strike all men from his path who bade fair to get to the Golden South before him.

Then his thoughts shifted on to his first expedition southward from Panama, and he reviewed one by one with unsparing exactness the long succession of labours and disasters that had daunted well nigh every heart but his. He thought of his little, crazy, overloaded ships struggling against storms and contrary currents; of the pestilential

swamps and fever-haunted forests through which he had led his ever-dwindling little band of followers, and of the twenty-seven men who, one by one, had starved to death under his eyes in Hunger Bay—just as those companions of his down yonder must soon starve if help did not come.

Then at length his thoughts took a brighter hue as they turned back to the day on which that young naked savage lad, son of the cacique Commogre on the mountains above Darien, had laughed at the Spaniards for quarrelling about a few pounds' weight of gold and, pointing to the southward, had told them of the unknown sea and the lands that lay along its borders where gold was as common as the stones by the wayside and silver as the wood in the forests; and lastly he remembered how he himself had had that brief glimpse of El-Dorado at Tacamez which had lured him on to this, his second, journey which had ended here on the desert shores of Gallo and in the pitiless clutches of famine and despair.

Surely thoughts like these were enough to shake the heart and turn back the steps of many a man who might well yield to such ill-fortune and yet still be accounted brave; but it was not such a man who stood beside the flagstaff-cairn on Gallo and stared out in defiance of Fate itself over that dreary sea and into those all-circling glooms. If he had been he would never have written the name of Francisco Pizarro in letters of blood and flame across the Western World beside that of Hernando Cortes, and, though he knew it not, ere that day's gloom had deepened into the darker gloom of night, he was to show by a few brief words and one all-decisive act what manner of man he truly was.

The diggers on the beach had ended their task and were roasting the wretched fruits of their labours over a few smoky fires of mouldering sticks in the driest places among the rocks. But Pizarro, still seemingly lost in his thoughts, made no motion to join them at their meal, and presently a man whose short, sturdy, strong-built frame seemed to have defied so far both famine and sickness, came with short, active steps up on to the platform, carrying a drinking-can in one hand and a wooden platter in the other.

"Since you did not come to your breakfast, Señor Capitan, I have brought it to you," he said in a cheery

voice, as Pizarro saw him and came to meet him. "'Tis poor fare enough, but as good as this God-forgotten wilderness affords. This is almost the last of the wine, but the fish is passable, though the biscuit would be better if there were more bread and less mould."

Pizarro took the platter but put back the proffered can, saying with a smile that was strangely soft and kind for such a man as he—

"Nay, nay, good Ruiz. I thank you for your care of me, but I have no need of the wine, I who am still the strongest here, saving perchance yourself. Take it back and let the sick have it. Water is good enough for me. Nay, nay, man, I tell you I will not have it. Take it away and bring me a stoup of your best water instead."

"Ever the same, Señor," said the Pilot—for it was he, Bartolomeo Ruiz, first Pilot of the Southern Seas, who had brought the future Conqueror his breakfast in such homely fashion—"ever the same, caring more for the meanest wretch that has scurvy in his bones than for the life that is now everything to us. Still I do your bidding for its kindness' sake, praying, as I ever do, that Our Lady of Mercies may wait no longer to reward your goodness with the fortune it deserves. Ha! by the Saints, what was that?—the sound of a gun from the sea! Now, glory to God and Our Lady—there Almagro comes at last! Said I not ever that he would never leave us in our need?"

As Pizarro's longing ears caught the thrice-welcome sound that came booming out of the mist to seaward, a bright flush leapt into his thin, sallow cheeks, and he stretched out his hand and said in a voice that had a clear, strong ring of joy in it—

"Bring back the wine, Ruiz! The sick will have better than that ere long, so we'll pledge each other, you and I, old friend, to the end of our troubles and a fair wind to El-Dorado!"

Before the can was dry the men of the forlorn hope had forgotten their hunger and their weakness and had started at the sound of the gun to scramble up the rocks to get a better sight of the long-expected, oft-despaired-of argosy of their hopes which they now so fondly believed had come to their aid at last.

Men who had scarce been able to crawl down to the

water's edge an hour before now ran nimbly as schoolboys up from the beach to the plateau, and Pizarro's heart, ever as soft towards his companions-in-arms as it was hard towards his enemies, bled for them as he watched them, lean and ragged and crippled with disease, staring with hunger-hollowed eyes out into the mist which still hid the vessel from them. But the next moment the instinct of command returned to him, and he said in a loud, cheery tone—

"We must do something else than stare at the sea, comrades, if we don't want Almagro to sail past the island in the mist. Uncover the gun and bring up some powder and a length of match so that we may answer their signal."

They ran to obey him like men who had never known an hour of sickness. Beside the cairn was a heap of sail-cloths and well-tarred canvas which, when stripped off, revealed a mounted culverin, a Spanish piece capable of throwing a ball of two or three pounds in weight. It was scarcely uncovered before the powder arrived. The gunners loaded with a good charge, well rammed home. Then Pizarro took the match from Ruiz, who had kindled it, and fired it with his own hands. As the echoes of the report rattled away among the rocks every man on Gallo strained his ears to catch the answering sound from the sea. After a space of about a minute it came.

"She is yonder!" cried Ruiz, pointing out into the mist. "I saw the flash. There goes another gun, and there she comes like a ghost out of the clouds. Now, glory to the Lord of Hosts, who has heard the voice of our distress! On your knees, brothers, and give thanks, for the time of our misery is ended!"

Then down he went on his knees with hands uplifted, and, save Pizarro, every man followed suit, and there arose from that wild place as strange a sound of mingled praise and prayer as ever had risen from earth to Heaven. Men with shrill, cracked voices sought to raise the triumphant strains of the *Te Deum*, others, hoarse and husky, broke out into the *Magnificat*, and others again wept and laughed by turns, bringing forth nothing but a babble of words mingled with shrill cries and broken by sobs, until suddenly the quick, stern voice of Pizarro broke through the babel, bringing every man to his feet.

"Ruiz, Pedro de Candia, Alonso de Molina, come hither!"

The three men went to him where he stood apart from the rest by the flagstaff. They saw that the flush had died out of his cheeks, that his brows were frowning, and his eyes dark with an evil foreboding. He turned and faced them and said, in the hard, stern tones that they had so often heard from his lips in the moments when all others about him had despaired—

"We give thanks too soon, I fear me, comrades. That is not Almagro's ship. She is twice the size, and look yonder—behind her, there comes another out of the mist. Think you that fortune has so smiled upon Almagro that he went away with that poor little caravel of ours to return with two such ships as those? Nay, unless my heart is lying to me, not friends but enemies are yonder—enemies to our high enterprise, if not to our persons, for ere long you will learn that those ships come from Pedro de Arias, and not from Almagro and de Luque."

"The good Saints prove you wrong, Señor!" said the tall and, in spite of his rags, still graceful-looking cavalier who had answered to the name of Alonso de Molina. "Yet though they should have come to take us back to Panama by force, yet forget not that there are true hearts among us who have sworn to follow you, and will, though you lead us to the mouth of the Pit itself."

"Well spoken!" said he, also a knight of goodly stature and presence, who had come when Pedro de Candia was called. "Though there be but half a score of us that remain true, we will not forget what Almagro said when he left us, 'better to roam a free man through the wilderness than to lie in chains in the debtors' prison at Panama.' What say you, Señor Capitan? Shall we get the arms out?"

Pizarro thought for a moment, and then he raised his head and, with a glance at the ships which were now close in shore, he said—

"Yes, get them out. Let us receive them as soldiers and gentlemen of Spain, whatever errand they come on; but be that what it may, I swear by my good Saint, St. Francis, and all the host of Heaven, that if ten, ay, if but two good men stand by me, I will stop here and wait Almagro's coming, or such other means as God's mercy may send us

to prosecute this our enterprise to the end. Now, there comes the boat. Let us go and arm ourselves and receive them in what poor state we may."

"And three swords, if no more, shall be used this day to help you to keep that oath of yours, Señor, if need be," said Ruiz, as they went downward toward the beach, and the others said with one voice—

"Amen to that !"

On the beach Pizarro gave his orders with the quick, clear decision of a man to whom command is second nature, and arms and armour were taken out of their hiding-places, where they had been buried out of reach of the rain, and furbished up and donned on weak and famine-worn limbs with hands that trembled half with weakness and half with the excitement of new-born hope, for Pizarro had strictly enjoined his three companions to say nothing of his fears to the others.

Meanwhile a boat, with the flag of Spain trailing from her stern, was slowly making its way from the larger of the two ships to the shore. As her keel touched the sand a score of men, forgetting their discipline, as they well might do in such a moment, ran into the water and took hold of her gunwales, striving to draw her up, at the same time crying their welcomes to those they took for their deliverers ; but Pizarro, with the chief and better-born men of his company, stood aloof on the shore, only saluting the new-comers in a grave and soldierly fashion.

When the boat was well aground, a tall, lean man, whose bright arms and handsome dress looked splendid in contrast with the wretchedness of the Men of Gallo, came and stood up in the bows, and, unrolling a parchment that he held in his hand, bowed to those about him and, with no further greeting, straightway began to read—

"From his Excellency Señor Don Pedro de Arias, by the Grace of God and the favour of his most Puissant and Catholic Majesty Charles the Fifth of Spain and the Netherlands and Lord Paramount of the Indies, to Francisco Pizarro, Bartolomeo Ruiz, Pedro de Candia, Alonso de Molina, and all other faithful and obedient servants of His Majesty aforesaid, now on the Island of Gallo in the South Sea, Greeting !

"These are to inform you that the said Don Pedro de Arias, having received certain complaints from persons now serving in an expedition under the command of the said Francisco Pizarro, and being well aware how great loss and suffering hath been occasioned by the ill-conduct and disaster of the said expedition, and having well weighed these matters in his council at Panama, hath sent his lieutenant, Don Lorenzo Tafur, with two ships, to bid the said Francisco Pizarro, and those with him in the Island of Gallo, to return in the said ships with all speed to Panama, that an account of the lives and treasure lost in the said expedition may be faithfully rendered to him, and that the precious lives of his Catholic Majesty's faithful subjects may no more be endangered and wasted on the fantastic and chimerical schemes of the said Francisco Pizarro and his associates.

"Given under my hand and seal in the Government House at Panama, this the eighth day of October, in the Year of Salvation, one thousand five hundred and twenty-seven—

"For the King,
"PEDRO DE ARIAS."

When he had finished his reading the Lieutenant folded up his parchment and sprang to the land. As he did so some of the Men of Gallo raised a cheer, but others stood silent, looking at Pizarro as though wondering what he would say to this. He took a couple of steps forward to meet Tafur, and then saluting him with a courtesy which then as ever belied the baseness of his birth, drew himself up, and with his hand on his sword-hip looked him in the face and said—

"That is a cold and formal greeting, Señor, to bring to men who have spent all they have save their lives in the effort to win new lands and new nations for God and His Majesty; but such as it is, here is my answer to it. I, for one, having spent so much, am resolved to spend more, even to the life which is all that is left to me, before I will turn back. Having gone thus far, God and the Saints helping me, I will go to the end. The rest of my comrades can speak for themselves, but I go on."

"And I! and I! and I!" cried Ruiz and Candia and

Molina with one voice, drawing their swords and pointing them heavenwards in token of their oath.

Tafur drew himself up facing them, staring at them half in anger and half in wonder, for it seemed to him incredible that men who had manifestly suffered the utmost extremities of famine and misery could still have so bold a spirit left unbroken in their breasts. Then he said angrily, and yet not without a touch of pity in his voice—

“But, Señors, this is disobedience—nay, more, it is rebellion, since you are commanded to return in His Majesty’s name.”

“But not by His Majesty’s voice or under his hand and seal!” said Pizarro, cutting his speech short with an impatient gesture. “We be true and loyal subjects of the king, but Pedro de Arias shall have no obedience of mine in this matter. He is a partner with me in this venture, and has pledged his word to the carrying out of it. Moreover, it is not for our sakes that he bids us return, but because he wants good Spanish men and good Spanish swords to do his own work in Nicaragua. So, once for all, Señor, I will not go back, though I will seek to coerce none to stay with me.”

“Then, Señor Capitan,” replied Tafur, bowing as though unawares in respect to the greatness of this man’s heart, which could thus lift him above his miseries, “since I have neither the authority nor the will to use force against you, I will but say that all who will shall come with me, and that all, if any shall be so mad and blind to their own interest, who shall elect to stay with you may do so.”

“And if a sufficiency shall nevertheless elect to stay,” said Pizarro, looking round with a smile on his wretched followers, “will you not give me the smallest of your ships——”

“No, Señor, no!” replied the Lieutenant, stopping him as soon as he saw his drift. “Not a ship, not a boat even will I give to encourage you in your disobedience. I was not sent here to help you waste more lives and treasure in this mad enterprise of yours. If you elect to stay, you shall stay, but I will strain my authority no further. So now decide quickly and let me be gone, for there is food and drink on yonder ships, and clothes and shelter for those who will have them, and I will not keep starving and naked men longer without them than I can help.”

"Then that shall be soon decided!" said Pizarro, drawing his sword and going apart a little to where there was a smooth stretch of sand. Then with his sword-point he drew a long line from west to east, and, standing on the northern side of it, he pointed towards the south with his blade, and turning to the whole company, which had followed him to learn the meaning of what he did, he said in a clear, strong voice—

"Friends and comrades and cavaliers of Spain! On yonder side are toil and hunger, nakedness, the pitiless storm and the drenching rain, and it may be a grave in the unknown wilderness. On this side are ease, and pleasure, and safety; but yonder lies El-Dorado with its gold and silver and gems, the glory of conquest and the hope of dominion. Here is Panama, poverty and dishonour. Now choose each of you that which seems to you best becoming a brave Castilian. For my part I go south."

And with that he stepped across the line. There he faced them, one man daring Fate which had already almost done its worst upon him, still defying its further terrors. The others, both his own men and Tafur's, stared at him for a space, stricken dumb with wonder and reverence for him. Then Ruiz broke loose from the group amidst which he stood, and saying simply: "Señor Capitan, if none other follow you, I will!" walked across the line. Close following him came Pedro de Candia with his drawn sword across his shoulder, marching in silence like a soldier at parade. Then Alonso de Molina, who crossed himself and said—

"God must be with such a man as that. Come, comrades, yonder is the only road for a brave man!"

And after him there came one by one eleven others, of whom some crossed the line in silence without looking back, while some prayed and others laughed, and others went sideways, beckoning to those behind as though mocking their lack of courage; but when the fifteenth man, who was named Juan de la Torre, had gone over, the rest hung back and not a man of them moved, but each looked at the other and then at the little group beyond the line and then at the ships.

And so the Line of Fate was drawn, and so was the wheat divided from the chaff and the gold of true valour from the dross, and thus did Francisco Pizarro, the base-

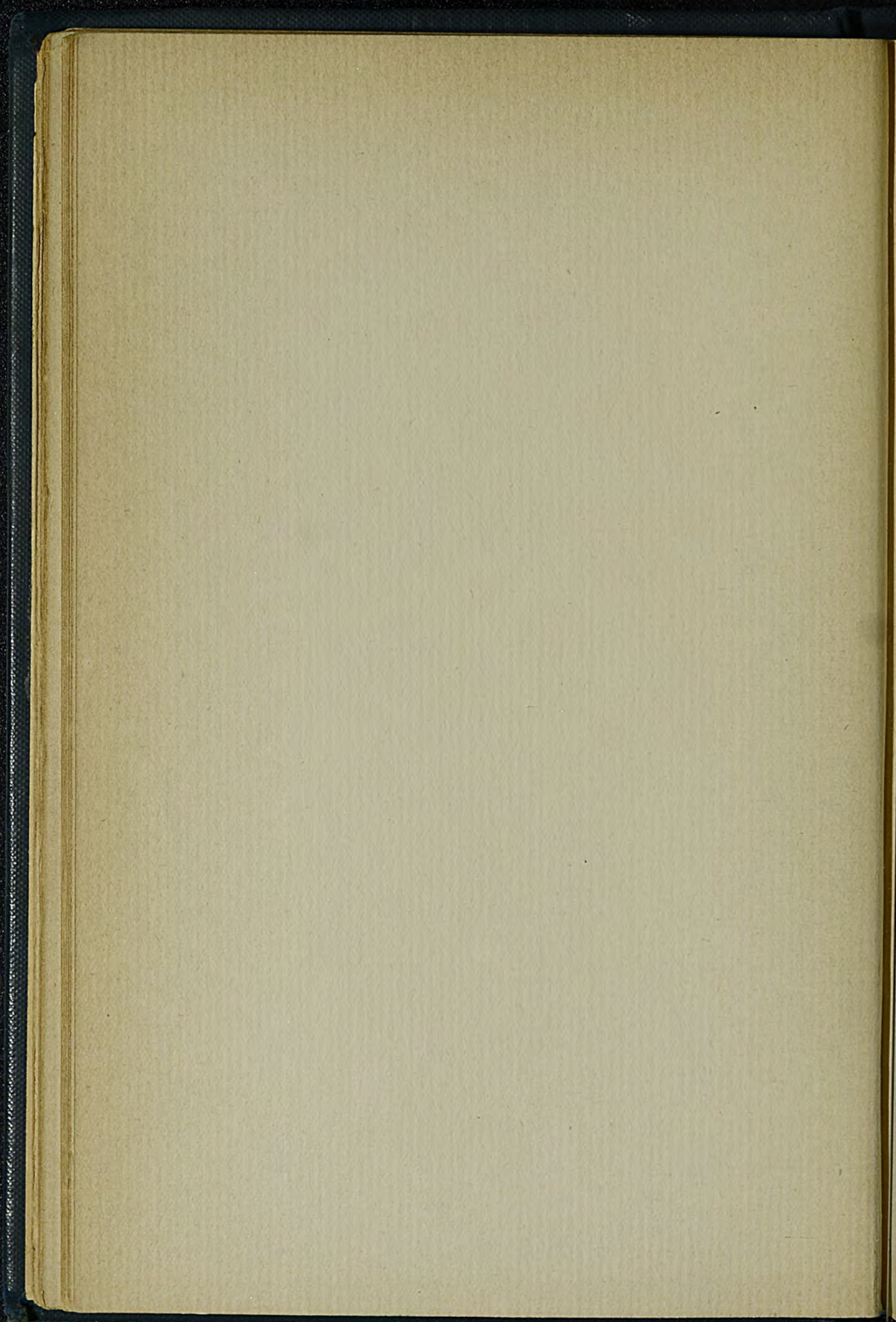
born captain of adventurers, draw his sword in the face of a frowning destiny, and with it trace on the shifting sands the line of a mighty nation's fate, and thus did he step over it, he and those who were faithful to him, out of the obscurity of his former life into the light of a fame that shall last while the world endures.

That afternoon Lorenzo Tafur sailed away with his ships and the faint-hearts who were not found worthy of great deeds; but after much argument and altercation he had been persuaded to leave a small portion of stores on the island, and he also took with him Bartolomeo Ruiz, the Pilot, charged with urgent messages to Almagro and De Luque, through whose hands came the funds that had been furnished by the Licentiate Espinosa for this and other expeditions, telling them of the resolution come to by Pizarro and his companions, and praying them to do all that in them lay to bring the succour they so sorely needed.

So the ships sailed away northwards and were lost in the mists and clouds, and the little band stood together on the rocks of Gallo watching them go until they had faded like ghosts into the gloom and the shadows drew closer round them and the night fell dark and drear over the desolate spot.

But, though the little band of heroes knew it not, far away to the southward, above the clouds which lay over them like a pall, the new-risen moon was shining in a clear and cloudless sky, gemmed with thousands of stars more brilliant than they had ever seen, over gleaming fields of spotless snow and soaring peaks of everlasting ice, through the midst of which they were one day to march to the long-dreamed-of El-Dorado and to the glory and the shame that was to be the reward of their valour and their sins.

BOOK I



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CHAPTER I

THE SUNSET OF AN EMPIRE

THE sun had set over Quito, "the City of the Great Ravine," but high above the night that had fallen upon the valley rounded tops and pinnacles of rock, gleaming domes of snow and shining minarets of ice were glowing with rosy fires changing every moment the wondrous hues which they borrowed from the light that seemed to stream across them from an unseen source. The unclouded sky was still a fathomless sea of radiance, and, high above all its attendant peaks, the mighty dome of Chimborazo towered up from the gloom into the light, crowned with a canopy of smoke whose rolling clouds seemed like a glorified chaos of light and darkness, of the sombre shadows and brilliant, many-coloured radiance, suspended between heaven and earth.

On a couch of the softest textures ever woven by human hands, draped over a framework of precious woods clamped and in a great part overlaid with gold, Huayna-Capac, the last of the long line of Incas descended from the Divine Manco and his sister-wife Mama-Occlu, son and daughter of the Sun, lay dying. The heir of the great Inca Yupanqui, during his long life of unsparing conquest and yet wise and most merciful rule, had extended the empire of the Children of the Sun until, from the burning regions of the North, beyond the central line of the earth, to the arid deserts of the far South, and from the trackless forests of the East to the shores of the Western sea, all the lands and peoples of Tavantinsuyu¹ owned, with gladness and without question,

¹ "The Land of the Four Regions" (North, South, East, and West). The name Peru was not known to the Incas. It was an invention of the Spaniards, and of obscure, indeed, unknown origin.

the glory of the Rainbow Banner and the just, yet rigid, sway of the Son of the Sun.

All that the valour of his soldiers, the wisdom of his councillors, and his own imperial genius could do had been done, and in all the world there was no other empire whose ruler was so completely all-powerful and whose subjects were so peaceful, prosperous, and contented as his were.

It was an empire at its zenith. It had reached that acme of military strength and social organisation beyond which, as the history of the world would seem to tell us, the Fates who govern human destiny do not permit a human society to develop.

Over an extent of a thousand leagues from north to south, and for four hundred leagues from east to west, in a land which rose from the deserts and torrid valleys of the Pacific coast through infinite gradations of climate to the eternal winter of mountain solitudes soaring far beyond the clouds into the realms of everlasting frost, and from the tropical valleys of the eastern and western slopes where Nature laughed in unrestrained luxuriance to the vast, treeless plains of grass which lay high above the limit of cultivation, walled in by the tremendous rock-ramparts which were crowned with the snowy diadems of the Andes, there was not a man who had need to take thought for the things of to-morrow, not one who did not know that if he fulfilled his duty to the State of which he was a unit, all that he could demand from it would be freely and ungrudgingly granted.

There had never been such a society upon earth before, it might be that there would never be such again, and now the work of twenty generations was finished, and the jealous Fates, as though unwilling that too much felicity should be the lot of man on earth, were looking down with angry eyes upon its perfection and conspiring even in the very centre of its power and glory to work its destruction. Nay, they were even gathered, pitiless and vindictive, around the death-bed of the dying warrior and statesman whose hand in the fulness of its strength had placed the coping-stone on the stately and symmetrical structure of the Empire of the Incas.

On the rich, many-coloured furs which carpeted the

cedar-boarded floor of the golden-walled, silver-ceiled room lit with silver lamps hanging by chains of gold, stood by the bedside in an attitude of attendant deference a very old man clad in the splendid robes which distinguished the priesthood of the Sun. His arms were crossed over his breast and his bared head was bowed, though every now and then the lids of his downcast eyes were raised and he looked anxiously at the face of his sleeping lord as though he were waiting for him to wake—perhaps even wondering whether he would ever wake again.

At last a deeper breath filled the breast of the sleeper and raised the embroidered coverings. A long sigh broke the silence of the death-chamber, and the eyes of the Inca opened. The priest took a soft step forward, and then he bent his head still lower and waited for his lord to speak.

"Are you still waiting for the end, Ullomaya? It is a long time coming, is it not? Yet it may be still longer, for my sleep seems to have given me new strength, and it may be that I shall even now see another day."

"May He who is above the Gods grant it, Son of the Sun and Lord of the Four Regions!" the priest answered, raising his hands palms outward and lifting his face to the ceiling, and making with his lips the mute sign which the Children of the Sun made when the name of the Unnameable was in their hearts. "For your Father, the Sun, has put it into the heart of his servant to say words to you that should not be left unsaid in such a solemn hour as this."

"Then say them, Ullomaya, and say them quickly, for neither you nor I know at what moment the summons may come to me to take my place with my fathers in the Mansions of the Sun. Speak freely, therefore, yea, even though you would speak on things forbidden."

"It was even of a thing forbidden that I would speak, Lord!" the priest replied, taking another step forward and stretching out his hands as though in entreaty. "It was even to seek that permission that I came."

The Inca's eyes closed for a moment, and then he opened them again and said with a smile, half of weariness and half of indulgence—

"Say on, then, old friend and good counsellor. For your sake the law of my lips shall be broken for the first and the last time. What is it? Not that which is already resolved?"

Do not tell me it is that, for the decree is already gone forth, and the last act of my life cannot be the revoking of words that an Inca's lips have spoken."

"Yet is it even that, Lord," said the priest more boldly; "for in this matter only in all the long years that I have served you you have listened to my counsel and taken that of others. Your footsteps are approaching the thresholds of the Mansions of the Sun, and mine are not very far off. Once past them we shall stand side by side in the presence of our Father, and each must give to the Divine Manco an account of that which he has wrought in the land that he gave to our fathers. And you, O Lord, would go into that sublime presence with the guilt of a disobedience lying heavy on your soul."

As the priest said these last words in a low and yet unfaltering tone a light seemed to kindle in the dying despot's eyes, a faint flush rose into his cheeks, and his hands caught nervously at the bed-coverings as he said with the ghost of the voice that had once rung high above the clamour of battle—

"Only one man in the land of Tavantinsuyu dare say that to me, Ullomaya, and even he scarce dare say it to me save on my death-bed."

"The Son of the Sun is still Lord of the land, and his word could still send me to the doom of those who disobey!"¹ said the priest, crossing his hands over his breast again and bending low before his master.

"Nevertheless, for the sake of the love I bear you, say on!" said the Inca.

Then the priest drew himself up again and said—

"It is not my will that speaks, Lord, but rather the spirit of my duty to the Children of the Sun and you, their Lord. By the might of your arms and the wisdom of your counsel you have enlarged the borders of the empire that your fathers gave you and brought many new peoples under its sway. Your throne has been higher, and your rule wider, than those of any that have gone before you. In this you have done well and fulfilled the commands that have been

¹ All disobedience to the direct commands of the reigning Inca was punished by death because he was considered to be the incarnation of Divinity; hence disobedience to him was sacrilege. There is, however, no instance on record of this crime having been committed.

obeyed by twenty generations of the Children of the Sun, yet the last act of your royal power will undo in its evil all the good that you have accomplished.

"When the Divine Manco left the world to return to the presence of his Father he left, as his last charge, the command to all who should come after him to keep the empire that he had given them one and indivisible for ever.

"Yet, by your last act, you have divided it. Nay, more, you would set on the throne of the North a prince whose blood is not of the pure and holy strain, and you have taken the sceptre of empire far away from the City of the Sun, and in so doing you have made those to lie who said that the Son of the Sun can do no wrong. Lord, it is not yet too late to undo this and save the empire of your fathers from the doom that will surely fall upon it when the laws of its Creator cease to be obeyed."

"And would you have me disinherit my son Atahualpa, the darling of my old age, the gallant lad who has followed me to battle and fought by my side, and who, under my own eyes, has grown to be a man and a warrior, while Huascar, to whom you would give the lands that are his by right of birth, has been dallying with his women and his courtiers amidst the delights of Cuzco and Yucay, never giving anything but an unwilling hand to the work that I have spent my own life in? Would it not be a greater wrong to do this—to rob my warrior-son of his right?"

"The laws of the Divine Ones are above all human rights, Lord!" the priest replied, looking steadily into the eyes of the man whose word could send him instantly to a death of torment. "Though I never speak other words on earth, though to-morrow's light may shine upon my ashes, yet I must speak what long and lonely vigils and many ponderings on this matter have taught me.

"The empire that the great Yupanqui gave you, and which you have made so mighty and so glorious, can only subsist as one. To divide it is to destroy it, for it is not in the hearts of princes to live at peace when their borders touch. Nay, more, Huascar, your son and your firstborn, is of the Divine descent, pure and undefiled, and the ancient laws will tell him that the realm is his from end to end and from the mountains to the sea, and think you not that our

Lady, his mother, and the nobles of the Blood will not urge him to claim his right when the hand of Death has taken the borla from your brow?

"Moreover, Atahualpa, the Prince of Quito, though the son of their conqueror, has yet also in his veins the blood of a conquered people, and many generations are needed to wipe the stain of defeat away. So when the grasp of your own strong hand is loosed, though there may be peace between them for a season, a time shall come when these two princes shall draw the sword upon each other and a war of brother against brother and of kindred against kindred shall desolate the land that your wisdom and strength have blest with prosperity and contentment.

"Yet a few more words, Lord, and I have done. On those who see the portals of the Mansions of the Sun open before them there shines a light which no eyes but theirs can see. May our Father, the Sun, grant even now that in the radiance of this light you may see into the future that was hidden from you before, and save while there is yet time your children and your people from the destruction which you would bring upon them!

"These are the words of truth, Lord, for while you have fought and striven I have watched and thought and prayed, and out of the silence of the night there have come voices from the stars that rule our fate, and this is the lesson that they have taught me."

The Inca heard him in silence to the end, now frowning and now smiling sadly, and when he had finished he lay in silence for a while with his eyes closed, and so still did he lie that the priest at last softly stole close up to the side of the bed and leant over him, wondering whether he was still alive. Then his eyes opened again, and he said in a soft, clear voice and with a smile on his pale lips—

"Nay, Ullomaya, I am not dead yet, my friend, and your words have sunk deep into my heart. I have seen the light that shines over the threshold which I must soon pass, and it has shown me the way of right and justice. The ancient laws shall not be broken. It shall be as you say. Huascar shall reign after me, supreme lord of all the land, and Atahualpa shall be Prince of Quito under him.

"Go now and summon the princes of the household and

the priests and curacas of the provinces that I may make my will known to them while yet I have strength to do it, for the hand of Death is already upon me, and the light of the lamps is growing dim in the brighter light that comes from beyond the stars. But first send Zaïma, my wife, and Atahualpa, my son, to me that I may tell them."

The priest bowed low before his lord again, and then, murmuring words of praise and thankfulness, went quickly from the room to do his thrice-welcome errand. For a few minutes the silence of the splendid death-chamber was unbroken save by the faint sound of the dying Inca's breathing. Then the thick woollen curtains which covered the door were drawn aside, and a woman, tall and of imperial carriage, and still fair to look upon, with the relics of a beauty that had once been peerless, came into the room followed by a stalwart, splendidly robed youth who could have been none other than her son.

As they entered the Inca opened his eyes, and with the hand that was lying outside the coverings of the couch he beckoned to them to come near. They went and stood by his bedside, and he told them in the brief words of a man who knows that he has not many words to waste that which he had summoned them to hear.

For a moment they stood silent and motionless, looking each at the other and then at the Inca who lay watching them and waiting for them to speak. Then suddenly a deep flush of anger burnt in the woman's cheeks and a fierce light leapt into her eyes, and with a swift movement she laid her hands over the dying Inca's mouth and nose and pressed his lips and nostrils tightly together.

His eyes opened widely into a stare of horror. There was a brief, convulsive movement under the covering, and then the glaze of death dimmed the staring eyes, and when the high priest came back, followed by the chief princes and nobles of Quito, Zaïma the Queen was lying wailing over the dead body of her husband and her Lord, and Atahualpa, Inca of the North, was cowering by the bedside with his face buried in his hands and his body trembling and shaking with sobs.

At the same moment, far away to the northward and westward, a man was drawing with his sword-point a line along the sandy beach of the desolate island of Gallo, and

in the years to come, though neither he nor the son of the murderess knew it, the steel of that same sword was destined to cleave its way to the heart of the great empire which Huayna-Capac would have made impregnable but for the hand of his queen which robbed him of the last half-hour of his life.

CHAPTER II

THE DOOM OF THE ANCIENT LAW

ULLOMAYA and those who followed him stopped suddenly on the threshold of what was now in truth the death-chamber of the Inca, and bent their heads and remained for a moment in respectful silence. Then the High Priest of the Sun went forward to the bedside and spoke to the prostrate woman, saying—

“Alas, I see we come too late, for our Lord is already standing in the bright courts of the Mansions of the Sun, and yet not too late, since before he departed he spoke the words of wisdom and comfort for his people. Is that not so, O Queen?”

The self-widowed queen rose to her feet as she heard him speak, and faced him with clenched hands, head erect and somewhat thrown back. There were no tears in the great deep dark eyes which burnt angrily under her straight, black brows, but the pale olive of her cheeks and brow looked a ghastly grey under the yellow fringe of the Llautu which denoted her rank, and her lips, of wont so red and fresh, though she had been a mother for twenty years, were pale and drawn and twitched somewhat at the corners as though betraying the workings of some fierce passion within her; and when she spoke, her voice, which had been the sweetest that had ever spoken the liquid speech of the Valley, rang harsh and angry on the silence of the chamber.

“Yes,” she said, “he is dead, my lord and master, the love of my youth and the honour of my age—he is dead! and as thou sayest, priest, he died with words of wisdom and comfort upon his lips. With his last breath he granted my prayer that he would not disinherit his son or take the

empire of Quito away from the House of my fathers and give its children to be subjects to the men of the South.

"This is not what you have come to hear, you who vexed the last hour of my Lord's life by seeking to turn his footsteps from the path of justice as they were approaching the threshold of the Mansions of the Sun, but it is said beyond recall, and thou, Ullomaya—High Priest of the Sun and man of the Divine Blood as thou art—art yet a traitor, for Atahuallpa is, from this hour forth Inca and Lord of Quito, and thou hast sought to rob him of his inheritance and make him the vassal of Huascar. Go forth, now, for thou art not fit to look upon the face of thy dead Lord!"

As she said this, Zaïma the Queen, with a swift movement of her arms, threw the bright-hued mantle that hung from her shoulders on to the couch so that it fell over the dead Inca's face, and then her right arm went out, pointing with extended forefinger to the door.

The high priest shrank back instinctively before the imperious gesture, and the little throng of priests and nobles gathered about the doorway, parted, leaving the way clear for him, for in their eyes he was already accursed, since he stood charged by the lips of the all-powerful queen-mother of a crime so great that no man of the Divine Blood had ever been guilty of it before him.

His deep knowledge of his people and their laws told him that any words of defence would be useless and worse than useless. So, throwing himself for the moment into the posture of supplication, he made a silent invocation to the Unnameable, whose name he would not utter even in a moment so solemn as this, and then turned and went slowly towards the door; but before he reached it a hand was laid heavily upon his shoulder and a grip like the clutch of a condor's talon held him motionless.

Atahuallpa had sprung erect from the place where he had been cowering by the bedside. The horror that had shaken his soul had passed. At the sight of his mother's imperial gestures, and the sound of her fierce and pregnant words, the warrior spirit and the fierce pride of the despot had awakened within him. He had accepted his destiny, and so sanctioned the crime which had given it to him.

Thousands of lives were to be sacrificed, rivers of blood

were to be poured out, and the empire of the Children of the Sun was to pass away for ever like a golden dream ending in an awakening of horror because of that swift and irrevocable resolution of his. But all this was in the future. In the present were the glories of empire and the delights of Divine honours and unquestioned rule, and other than these he saw nothing.

The priest looked up as he felt his grip and saw his eyes, bloodshot and fierce, looking into his.

"Thou who wouldst have changed the course of Destiny appointed by the Divine Ones, who wouldst have robbed me of my rights, and made my Lord and thine a liar with his last breath—is there any need for me to tell thee the doom of the traitor and the worker of sacrilege? Thou and thy wife and thy children and thy children's children shall share it, according to the justice of the Ancient Law. The fire shall consume thee and them, and the winds shall scatter thine ashes and theirs from the sight of men. The places where ye have dwelt, the works ye have done, and the fields ye have tilled shall be destroyed utterly and laid waste for ever, so that when men see the wilderness that was once thine home, they shall remember the law which says that the doer of evil and all that are his shall be taken away from among the Children of the Sun and no vestige of them suffered to remain."¹

The yet uncrowned Inca spoke these fearful words in a tone so coldly fierce that none who heard them doubted for an instant that he would use the power and the right that was his, and carry out the terrific penalty of the inexorable law to the last extremity, and none knew better how dire and all-embracing was the doom that impended over him and all that were his better than he who but an hour ago had held the highest and holiest dignity in the land, saving only that of the Inca-Royal himself.

Yet awful as it was, the old man gave no outward sign that it had any terrors for him. His eyes met the fierce gaze of Atahualpa's without flinching, and his voice, as he replied to his hideous words, was mild and yet unwavering—

"Son of him who was my Lord, there is no justice save

¹ Nothing less than this appalling penalty was the punishment decreed by the Inca laws to those who disobeyed the commands or deliberately thwarted the will of the crowned Son of the Sun.

that which the Divine Ones have given us, and there is no vengeance that is terrible save that which the sins of men call down from the hand of Him who may not be named. That which I sought to do was but to uphold the ancient laws and fulfil the parting spoken words of the Divine Manco, and the last words which my ears heard from the lips of my dead Lord and thine yonder told me that I had done rightly.

"Earth is small and life is short, but the Mansions of the Sun are vast and the life of those who reach them is without end. So I and mine are ready to depart. What thine eyes have seen here I know not, nor yet what it was that the eyes of him who is now among the Divine Ones last beheld, but ere long his lips will tell me——"

What else he might have said was never uttered, for Atahuallpa, with a cry like the snarl of a wounded mountain lion, shifted his grip from his shoulder to his throat and flung him stumbling backwards to the door, so that he fell prone across the threshold and lay stunned on the marble floor of the passage.

"Lift him up and take him away!" he said sharply to the frightened priests who were now huddled about the doorway. "He is no longer a Priest of the Sun or a man, but an outcast that may not be permitted to live. Let all of his blood be put in safe keeping instantly, and by the coming of our Father¹ to-morrow let all be made ready for them to meet their doom. Your Lord has spoken."

"Well and royally done, my son, and now my Lord!" said Zaïma the Queen, coming from where she stood by the head of the couch with both hands outstretched and making as though she would embrace him, but Atahuallpa started and shrank back ever so little. Yet he took her hands in his and bowed his head as if in deference before her, though it might have been that he feared to look into her eyes, and said humbly—

"The son of my father and my mother could have done no less. I did but what the Ancient Law has commanded. He has polluted the Blood with the poison of sin, and he must die. But go now, my mother, to your own house, for the embalmers must do their work before morning.

¹ The rising of the sun was thus alluded to.

Come, I will lead you to your door. Challcuchima, my uncle, come hither."

As he turned to lead his mother from the room he stopped and beckoned to an old man, grey and bronzed and scarred with the marks of battle, but glittering from head to knee with plates of gold and silver linked together by rings and fastened on to a long tunic of fine, soft leather, clasped round the waist with a broad belt of interlaced gold and silver links from which hung a heavy golden-hilted sword of tempered copper. This was Challcuchima, the brother of the dead Inca, chief general of his armies, and the most renowned warrior in the Land of the Four Regions.

He had a short, copper-headed spear in his hand, and as he approached his new Lord he laid this across his shoulders, stooping slightly as one who bears a burden, for this was the act of homage which the greatest princes and nobles of the empire, even those of the Inca's own blood, never dared to omit when they entered his presence, or were honoured by having speech with him, and as Atahuallpa saw it he smiled, and a sparkle came into his eyes, for it told him that the ally and the servant whose help was most precious of all to him had taken him for his lord and master.

"Let the room be cleared and guarded!" he said. "Remain here yourself with the guard and let none enter on any pretence till I return."

"I hear but to obey, Lord!" the old warrior answered, bending yet lower. "I will guard the chamber with my life, even as I will guard thy dominions against all that shall dare seek to take them from thee."

"Nor could they be better guarded than by him whose shield was ever the best bulwark of my father's realm!" Atahuallpa replied almost tenderly, as he laid his hand lightly on the old man's head. Then, leading his mother by the hand that had slain his father, he passed from the death-chamber through the little throng of princes and nobles, who bowed themselves almost to the floor as he went by and then arose and followed him at the bidding of Challcuchima, who at once blocked the passage with a guard of soldiers and remained alone in the room to await the coming of his master.

He drew the heavy curtains of brilliantly dyed wool, interthreaded with fine-drawn strings of gold, closely across the entrance and then he went to the bedside and reverently drew back the covering from the face of the dead Inca. He stooped and looked at it, and then suddenly started upright and clasped his hands over his forehead. Then he looked down again more closely than before, and, after gazing awhile, he closed with a gentle and reverent touch the glazed eyes that were staring up with their last look of horror scarce faded from them. Then he softly pushed the protruding tongue back into the mouth and bound up the fallen jaw with a strip of dyed cotton that lay beside the pillow.

"My Lord died hard, it would seem," he muttered to himself, "and yet all thought his end could not fail to be peaceful. Well, well—hard or easy, it was very near, and I had rather have Atahualpa the soldier-prince for my lord and leader than Huascar the lover of women and dreamer of dreams. What is done is past, and who knows but that some day we may have a wider realm than this and my Lord may reign with one foot planted on Quito and the other on Cuzco, master of all the Four Regions.

"There is no strife like the strife of brothers, and these two will not long reign side by side in peace. After that will come the day of brave men and stout warriors, and the victory shall be with us—with skill and order and strength and valour! It was a bold deed and a fearful one—I would have slain a score of men ere I had permitted it, yet now it is done and the Divine Ones themselves could not undo it."

CHAPTER III

THE WARNING OF THE LLAPA

WHILE Chalcuchima was soliloquising thus to himself over the dreadful secret that he had discovered, a youth, who could scarce have seen his fifteenth year, was walking with slow steps and down-bent head from the great gate of the palace towards a vast building which loomed darkly through the dusk of the starlit night some five hundred paces along the side of the slope on which it stood, like the palace, facing on to the great square of the city.

Though he was one of those favoured Children of the Sun who ripened to maturity so rapidly, he had yet hardly passed from boyhood to youth, but his stature was already tall and his limbs lithe and strongly shaped, and his thoughts, as he walked, were rather those of a man than of a boy. He was one of those who had been summoned by the high priest to hear the last words of his father the Inca ; for this was Manco-Capac, bearer of the Divine Name, and youngest and fairest son of Huayna-Capac and his sister-wife and Coya,¹ Mama-Oello, princess of Cuzco.

What he had seen and heard in the death-chamber had filled him, not only with the darkest forebodings for his people and his country, but also with feelings close akin to agony and terror which in this hour were sharper and bitterer than they. The great building towards which he was walking was the House of the Virgins of the Sun, in which dwelt the fairest and most nobly-born daughters of the Sacred Race, awaiting the time of their marriage or vowed to their perpetual maiden-wifehood in the service

¹ Queen, or wife-royal, as distinguished from those who formed the harem of the Sovereign. The Incas held exactly the same views on the subject of sister-marriage as the Pharaohs did.

of their Divine spouse, the Sun, and among them was one, the very gem and flower of them all, Nahua, the daughter of Amaro, son of Ullomaya the high priest, a little maiden who had seen but ten years of life, and whose beauty, like that of one of Nature's fairest flowers just opening to smile at the sun, had in one fatal instant set his heart aflame.

He had seen her day after day during his sojourn in Quito, tending with her sister-virgins the flower-crowned altar of the Sun in the Great Temple. Their eyes had met and flashed to each other greetings in the language that needs no words to tell its tender and yet momentous secrets. After this his high rank and the favour of the Inca and Ullomaya had gained him the rare and priceless privilege of speech with her in the golden Garden of the Sun within the temple precincts.

The Inca and the high priest had seen their childish love without displeasure, and it might well have been that some day he would have taken her to his palace in the South on a green hill-slope that overlooked the splendours of Cuzco, and to his pleasure-house in the lovely paradise of Yucay—but now, how was he to think of such delight as this?

Could it really be possible that Atahualpa, the son of his own father, had spoken those dreadful words, and that the light of to-morrow morning would show her to him being led out with her father and mother, her sisters and brothers, all that were near and dear to her, from the baby brother she was wont to fondle to the grandsire who was held to be the wisest man in the land, to be flung into the fierce flames that would consume them all till only their ashes were left, in obedience to the savage law which had been broken only in the vengeful imagination of the Inca—he had almost called him the Usurper!

As his eyes wandered over the long lines of mighty masonry which now formed, not her home but her prison, sorrow and anger seemed fighting for the possession of his soul, and dreams of rescue and vengeance, each one wilder than the other, crowded through his brain until he could bear the stress of them no longer. He felt that he must do something or go mad—and yet what could he do? He was powerless to alter ever so slightly the pitiless march of the inexorable law, even as he was to turn the vengeful Inca a hair's-breadth from his course.

Even to intercede for the doomed ones who were now accursed would be sacrilege, and a word from Atahualpa would send him to share their doom. As well might he seek to put forth his hand and take the brilliant Chasca¹ from her place in the sky above the vanished sun as to save his child-love from her fate.

Yet he must do something, something that at least might set flowing through his veins the blood that seemed stagnating in his brain. The huge dark walls of the temples and palaces and store-houses and fortresses which filled this quarter of the city seemed to be coming together upon him, and the air of the streets seemed hot and stifling, but outside the gates was the free, open country, and above it the cool, wind-swept hillsides.

So, wrapping his cloak more closely about him and throwing one corner of it over his left shoulder, he set out to walk rapidly out of the square and along the street which skirted the wall of the House of the Virgins, and by this he reached one of the city gates. The guard turned out as he approached, but at the sight of the yellow fringe on his brow² and the familiar features of the great Inca's youngest born they fell back in an orderly rank and saluted him as he passed out.

Once clear of the city, he left the paved highway that ran for many leagues over the mountains until it joined the coast-road of the west, and with the long, swift tireless stride of his race struck out along a narrow path which led out of the valley, winding upwards towards the heights of Yavirá, which hid the dark peaks of Pichincha from the view of the city.

He had been striding along for nearly an hour when he saw a dark, slowly-moving shape on the path ahead of him. He quickened his pace, and as he came up with it it stopped and a familiar woman's voice said to him—

"Have the tidings of evil to come reached the ears of the bearer of the Divine Name as well as those of the old woman? Art thou too, Prince, going to the altar of the Unknown round which the voices of To-morrow whisper?"

¹ The Incas' name for the planet Venus. They called her in their poems "the bright-haired handmaid of the Sun."

² The mark of social differences. Those not of the pure Inca race wore black, those of the blood-royal yellow, and the crowned Inca scarlet mingled with gold threads.

The voice and the strangely spoken words told him that she was Mama-Lupa, one of the oldest of the priestesses of the Sun and a *palla*, or wise woman, who was credited in the city with the gift of visions and prophecy. A swift thrill ran through his breast as he recognised her, for he knew that she could only have come from the House of the Virgins, where she dwelt, performing the work of her office and instructing the maidens in their daily duties and the simple lore which comprised their worldly education.

"My heart is hot and heavy, Mama-Lupa," he said, "and my soul is full of sorrow. The city was hateful to me, and so I came out to breathe the fresh air of the mountains. Yet I scarce knew which path I had taken, though I could have taken no better one in such a time as this. Thou knowest the reason of my sorrow and how bitter it must be. Tell me, does my little Nahua know yet of her doom?"

"Nay, not yet, Prince," the old woman answered, shaking her head; "neither she nor any other of the sacred maidens know anything of what has been done or said at the palace. So to-night she will sleep sweetly and dream of thee as ever."

"Alas, Mama, those are cruel words though kindly spoken!" cried the young Inca, clasping his hands across his eyes. "She will dream of me, and to-morrow——"

"How knowest thou, Prince, what to-morrow will bring forth?" she interrupted in a sharp, shrill voice. "Let to-morrow look to the things of itself. Maybe it will have enough to do, and all those who shall see the evening of it. But, since thou art going my way and youth is stronger of limb than age, lend me the support of thy strong young arm and we will go together into the presence of the Unknown, and perchance I may be permitted to show thee signs of the things that are to be."

So he gave her his arm to lean upon and together they went along the upward winding path, speaking but few words, for the old woman had but little breath to spare, and at last they stopped where the path ended before a great square altar of black stone which stood on the apex of the mountain.

Around them lay a scene which had not its equal even in the wonderland that was the cradle of their race—mountain piled on mountain and peak on peak, some dim and dark,

and others gleaming pale and ghostly white beneath the clear light of the brilliant stars which thronged the heavens above, where the constellations of two hemispheres mingled, and before them towered the black peaks of Pichincha, dominated by the snowy central cone, some two leagues away to the north-west.

At one corner of the altar a stairway hewn in the solid stone led to the top, and, beginning at the foot of this, Mama-Lupa walked thrice around the base with her hands clasped behind her and her face upturned to the stars, muttering swift words which had no meaning for Manco save that he knew them to be spells and incantations of some mystic import. Then she stopped at the foot of the stairway and called to him, saying—

“Come and lead me to the top, Prince of the race that is doomed, for my eyes are dim to the things of outer sense though they see clearly with the sight that pierces the shadows that lie between now and to-morrow.”

Without speaking, he mounted the steps in front of her backwards, leading her by both hands until they stood together on the broad, flat top of the stone. Then she drew herself upright and, throwing her long, thick white hair behind her, she turned slowly round, facing all sides of the horizon in turns, and at the moment that she faced Pichincha for the second time a dull red glow began to flicker in the sky above it.

She grasped his hand and, stretching out her long, lean arm, pointed to it and said—

“Look, Prince and bearer of the Divine Name! My eyes are dim yet I can see it. Pichincha is putting on her fire-crown, and woe to the People of the Valley when it shall encircle her brows in all its flaming splendour! This night a deed of sin and horror has been done and the Divine Ones have seen it from the windows of the Mansions of the Sun, and they are angry. To-morrow a new reign will be begun with the torment and death of the innocent, if they in their anger do not stretch out their hands and do justice on the guilty. Nay, do not speak, Prince; thou hast come here to watch and not to speak.”

She ceased, still pointing towards the red glow in the sky, which, while she was speaking, had deepened and broadened; and now Manco, watching with straining eyes and bated

breath, saw it broaden and deepen until he could see the jagged walls of the great crater standing out black and sharp against it, and above the ever-broadening glare perceived a long line of inky cloud like a pall of sable with a lining of flame.

Suddenly a dull roar of thunder seemed to roll up from the bowels of the earth and the cloud was rent in twain as though by a swift blast from the awakening monster's throat. At the same instant a red-blue globe of fire rushed up out of the westward, sped across the sky, leaving a track of flame behind it, and then, in the mid-most heaven right over the city, it burst with a crash that shook the air and vanished.¹

Manco, whose eyes, wide open and fixed with fear, had followed it in its awful course, covered his face with his hands and cowered shuddering at the old woman's feet when the crash had passed; but soon another roll of thunder growled across the valley and he looked up to see what new horror was coming. The clouds above Pichincha were now leaping and tossing in billows of mingled flame and ink, and from behind the black crater walls shone the fierce red glare of the eternal fires, once more unchained after the imprisonment of centuries.

Then, as he watched, a thin tongue of flame, red as new-shed blood, crept out through a gap in the crater wall and began licking its way down through the crimson, gleaming snow on the mountain-side. At the same instant the thunder rolled out again deeper and louder than before, and he felt the great stone on which he crouched heave and reel beneath him.

As he sprang terror-stricken to his feet he saw Mama-Lupa stagger backwards, and he caught her in his arms to save her from falling from the altar. Again the stone reeled beneath them and he fell on his knees, dragging her down with him. But she freed herself instantly and, rising to her feet, she stood tall and menacing above him, pointing downwards towards the city, and cried in a shrill voice that rose almost to a scream—

"Go back, Manco-Capac, son of the race that is doomed, go back and tell them yonder that the Divine Ones are

¹ This portent was actually seen over the city of Cuzco shortly before the Conquest.

wrath with their children, and that in their anger they have unchained the demon powers which dwell beneath the mountains. Tell it in street and square, in palace and temple, that all may be ready, from the Inca on his couch of gold to the slave shivering in his hovel. Nay, have no fear for me, Prince, the Llapa¹ will not strike me, for I have work to do to-morrow. I must stay here and watch and listen and learn the things thou canst not understand. Now go, go with thy best speed, that the warning may not come too late, for the Llapa travels fast and no man knows when it may strike."

Scarcely knowing what he did, Manco obeyed, and stumbled blindly down the steps. When he reached the ground he paused, breathing deeply, and strove to steady his whirling senses, his hands clasped tight over his wildly beating heart. Then, with a last look at the great altar-stone crowned by the tall figure of Mama-Lupa with her fluttering garments and outstreaming hair sharply outlined against the red glare in the sky beyond, he turned and sped down the mountain-side towards the city as fast as his fear-winged feet could carry him.

¹ A generic term used by the Incas to denote all or any of the manifestations of thunder-storms, earthquakes, meteors, and similar phenomena.

CHAPTER IV

THE CROWNING OF ATAHUALLPA

WHEN he reached the city the summits of the eastern mountains were already beginning to glow and glitter in the light of the still invisible dawn, but the angry glare which he had seen flaming so fiercely through the night had grown fainter and fainter until it had become so dim that the bulk of the Yavirá, rising up between it and the city, had completely hidden it from the view of those who had been in the streets and squares during the night.

As he entered the gate by which he had left he saw from the stolid calm of the guard who admitted him that no warning of the impending disaster had so far reached the men of Quito. The great city was just awakening from its slumber, for this morning every one would be abroad betimes. The news of the unheard-of crime of one whose holy office was believed to raise him above human frailty, and of the young Inca's terrible sentence had reached every ear in the city overnight, and so every one woke early on the morning of doom.

Many, indeed, had not slept at all, for a crime so fearful as the high priest's had been made out to be by the busy tongues of rumour was looked upon by the simple-minded folk as a presage of disaster, since, as they argued in their homely fashion, the Gods could not have permitted their chosen minister to sin if, for some cause or another, they were not grievously angry with their children.

More than this, too, vague, wild stories had ever and anon drifted up to the mountain-walled valley from the sea-borders of the West and North concerning the deeds of a strange new race of men, or demigods, as some called

them, who had come from unknown lands, or perchance from the skies themselves, wafted by the winds in marvellous winged vehicles from which they could pour out thunder and flame and death—nay, it was even said that they carried the Llapa itself in their hands, and could smite with instant death all who offended or withstood them, while they themselves, mounted on mighty and terrible beasts which snorted fire and smoke from their nostrils, would fly over the earth with incredible speed. Moreover, they were made invulnerable to all weapons by clothing of white, shining stuff that neither spear nor arrow would pierce.

Some said that they were the long-foretold messengers from the Sun, fair of skin and mighty of arm, who were coming to rule over the Land of the Four Regions, and advance its borders till they included the whole habitable world and all the men that lived upon the earth. Others, again, said that they were demons which the powers of evil had let loose upon the world, armed with weapons of infernal origin, to lay it waste ere they repeopled it with their own hideous kind.

There had been strange signs in the sky, too, for flaming shapes had leapt across it, as one had done this very night, or sailed slowly through its depths, bright and terrible or pale and ghastly, like warning heralds of universal doom—and now the great Inca was dead, the grasp of the mighty conqueror was loosed from his sceptre, and his sword had been sheathed, and the first act of the new Inca had been the uttering of a sentence which doomed the noblest and holiest family in the land save his own to utter extinction and a death of torment. It was little wonder, then, that sleep had fled from many eyes in Quito that night.

When Manco reached the terrace in front of the palace he saw men already dragging and carrying beams and planks and fagots towards the centre of the square, and his heart, beating hard with the exertion of his long and swift journey, stood still in an instant, as he remembered the awful purpose to which they were destined; for the labourers were about to build the funeral pyre on which his beloved Nahua and all her dear ones were to perish amidst the torment of the flames ere the new-born day was but a few hours older—unless, indeed, some mightier power than that of the despot

who had doomed them should be exerted to save them, and, if not to save them, perchance to avenge them.

Scarce knowing what he said or did, he went to the guards at the great door of the palace and sought to find admission, but all he gained was the reply, respectful and yet inexorable, that none, not even a prince of the Blood, could now enter the palace until the Inca came forth to salute the coming of his Father, the Sun. It was in vain that he commanded and besought by turns, and spoke of the anger of the Gods, and coming disaster to the city and its people. Only the formal words of blind obedience to orders answered him, and when at last he sought to force his way to the door crossed spear-shafts and lowered points showed him that he must die before he reached it.

Then at length he drew back, and in the tumult and bitter agony of his soul he paced up and down the broad terrace muttering disjointed and incoherent words, and watching with dry, aching eyes the stolid labourers silently doing their work in the square.

Beam by beam and plank by plank he saw the great scaffold rise, like the creation of some hideous magic, by the toil of many hands, and all the while the eastern peaks glowed brighter and brighter, heralding the coming of the fatal hour.

At last the guards fell back from the door of the palace and stood to their arms. A wierd, low sound of song seemed to rise from all parts of the city at once, every moment growing louder and stronger and more jubilant. Then, as though called into being by some spell or miracle, troop after troop of gaily-accoutred soldiery, glittering with gold and silver and burnished copper, and clad in bright-hued uniforms, streamed out of the streets into the square and formed up in silent, orderly ranks along its sides and on the great terrace which flanked it.

Then from the Temple of the Sun and the House of the Virgins came two long processions, one of priests and the other of the Brides of the Sun, chanting the Hymn of Greeting, for this was no ordinary day; it was the morning on which the new Inca was to hail the coming of his Father and his God for the first time, and, standing in the radiance of the first beams that fell into the valley, place the imperial borla upon his brow.

The priests and virgins, entering the square from opposite sides, took their places at either end of the great terrace on which the palace stood, leaving a triangular open space narrowing towards the great doorway and opening to the eastward. Manco went and stood among the guards by the door, eagerly and yet hopelessly scanning the shining ranks of the virgins in the vain search for the face that he would willingly have given his life to see among them, and so he waited till the master of human fate throughout the valley should come forth, and the solemn ceremony which it would be death to interrupt even by a word or a gesture should be over.

And as he waited and watched the silver deepening into gold and the gold blushing into crimson behind the far-off peaks, he thought of the fiery pall that he had seen flaming above Pichincha through the darkness of the night, and in his fancy he saw it rise and spread with the blackness of the cloud and the glare of the flame till it blotted out the dawn and hung like a pall of death and desolation over the whole of the lovely valley.

Then a louder burst of song roused him from his waking dream, and he turned to the door and saw Atahualpa, splendid in the pride of his imperial array, shining with gold and glittering with gems, come forth with a slow, stately step, his head bare and down-bent, like one going into the presence of his God, and carrying in his hands the scarlet Llautu fringed with the scarlet and gold borla, the insignia of his sovereignty and the symbol of his Divine descent.

He came out alone and walked into the midst of the vacant space. Then behind him came the High Priest of the Sun, newly appointed in Ullomaya's place, with the chief priests attending on him. Then came Zaïma the Queen-Mother with the princesses of her household, and then Chalcuchima with his brother chieftain, Quiz-Quiz, and a glittering array of the chief warriors of the realm and princes of the Sacred Blood.

As they halted each at their proper distance behind the Inca the melody of the singing suddenly stopped, a brilliant point of fire blazed for an instant beside the peak of Antisana, then the whole summit of the great mountain seemed to melt away into a sea of flame, and at the same instant

every knee, from that of the Inca to that of the meanest labourer in the city, was bent to the earth in adoration.

Then in the midst of the solemn silence of the breathless multitude, Atahualpa upturned his face towards the risen sun, and in a loud, clear, musical voice, whose words rang like the notes of a silver trumpet through the silent, crowded square, spoke for the first time the solemn Invocation to the visible shape of his Father and his God.

"O Thou whose sublime throne shines with immortal glory, with what incomparable majesty dost thou dominate the illimitable empire of the skies! When thou comest forth in thy splendour crowned with the flaming diadem of thy glory thou art the pride of heaven and the delight of the earth!

"Where now are those pale fires which flickered round the sombre brow of night? Have they sustained for an instant the attack of the shining shafts of thy heralds, or even the glance of thy glory? If thou didst not give them permission to shine on us for a little space they would remain for ever lost in the ocean of thy splendour, even as though they were not!

"Soul of the Universe, radiant and glorious, without thee the great ocean would be but a lifeless wilderness of ice, even as are the upper regions of the mountains. The earth would be but a barren desert of sand and rock, and the heavens but a gulf of darkness.

"Thou dost penetrate all elements with thy beams, and from their warmth springs life and beauty. By them the air is made sweet and fresh, the waters bright and flowing, and the land green and beautiful. Thy vital fires penetrate the womb of the earth, and she brings forth her fruits that thy children may enjoy them, for thou, O Sun, Soul of the Universe, art the giver of all the blessings of life!

"Yet if it may be that even thou, bright and glorious as thou art, art but the messenger and the minister of the Unnameable One, whose glory no mortal eyes may see, then hear the vows of our obedience and the praise of our adoration, and take them from us to Him, since we are not worthy to enter His presence.

"Thus, O Sun, I, chief of thy children, salute thee! May thy glory for ever shine unclouded upon us, and may

thy blessings never cease to fall upon the homes of thy children and thine adorers !”

When the Inca ceased there was silence for a space, and he and all about him remained motionless on their knees. Then he rose and stood alone erect amidst the vast kneeling throng, raising his two hands with the Llautu poised between them high above his head. Then he brought it down slowly until the scarlet fringe rested upon his brow, and then, spreading out his arms with the palms of his hands out-turned towards the sun, he said in a loud voice—

“Thus, O Lord and Father of thy chosen people, do I crown myself in accordance with the precept of the Divine Manco, and in obedience to the will of my father and thy servant, who now sees me from the abodes of the Divine Ones, Inca and ruler supreme of thy children and my people throughout this land.

“May the glory of my reign be a reflection of thine ! May thy strength be in my heart and thy light in my soul, and, even as thy blessings flow from thee to the earth and make it bright and beautiful and fruitful, so may the blessings of my just rule make the homes of my people glad and their lives full of peace and comfort !”

When he ceased there was silence again for a space, and those who were standing behind him parted to right and left, and then, from out of the great door of the palace, there came a procession of bearers in two rows, twenty on each side, carrying between them suspended on silver rods the golden throne from which Huayna-Capac had given laws and dispensed justice to his people of the North. Every one of the bearers was a prince of the royal house, for none other than princely hands might touch the throne sanctified by contact with the sacred person of the Inca.

They stopped just behind Atahualpa, who remained standing facing the sun as though unconscious of any mortal presence near him. Then three of the oldest and noblest of the bearers came on each side of him and put their hands under his armpits and loins and feet, and, with no seeming effort, the body of the Inca rose in the air and was borne backwards till it rested in a sitting posture on the throne.

At the same instant a great shout of joy and acclamation

rose up from hundreds of thousands of throats. It was thrice repeated, and then as it died away the priests and virgins raised the Song of Homage, chanting alternately in strophe and antistrophe the glories of the Inca's ancestors and his own valiant deeds achieved in the wars of his father.

This ended, the Inca sat for a little while, as though absorbed in thought, in the midst of a perfect silence, and then he rose to his feet, and, standing on a broad, massive plate of burnished silver which formed the first step of the throne-seat, he raised his voice and addressed the assembled thousands for the first time as their crowned lord and absolute master.

He told them of the conquest of their ancient kings by his father, and reminded them how, from being their conqueror, he became their king and father and protector. How he had taken their own princess to wife, and how, sprung from that union, he united in his own veins the purest blood of the South and the North. Then he spoke of the decree by which his father had given him, the son of a Quitan mother, the lordship of the land of the North, independent and absolute, and he took the new-risen Sun to witness that, with their help, he would preserve it as he had received it to the last day of his life.

After that, with a fiercer ring in his voice, he spoke of the crime of Ullomaya, and told how he was self-convicted of seeking to rob him, their lawful Inca, prince of their own blood, of his rightful inheritance, and to make him the vassal of his brother and them the slaves of the people of the South. Then, pointing to the scaffold now surrounded with great banks of fagots, he pronounced the formal sentence ordained by the ancient law.

And now he paused for a little, and when he began to speak again his voice, though still loud and clear, was mild and gracious, and he told them how, being unwilling that the first act of his new reign should be one of severity, however just, he would delay the execution until midday in order that the interval might be passed in hearing petitions according to the ancient custom, in righting the wrongs of those who had suffered injustice, and in rewarding those whose services to the State had given them a claim upon his bounty.

This was the moment for which Manco had been waiting in breathless anxiety. Yet, so deathless is hope in the heart of a youth, that when he had heard the Inca give the respite of even a few hours it rose again and his pulses throbbed with new life. Then a sense of awe, almost of fear, came over him as he remembered again what he had seen and heard and felt the night before—the fire-sign in the sky, the warning roll of the thunder that came, not from above, but from below, the terrible words of Mama-Lupa, and the shuddering of the solid earth beneath his feet as he stood with her on the altar on Yavirá. What if the anger of the Gods should smite judge and victims alike before the hand of human vengeance closed upon its prey!

CHAPTER V

THE CHOICE OF MANCO

By law and custom alike it was his right to claim the first audience, for, saving only the Inca himself, he stood highest in rank, even as he was noblest in descent, among all the princes and nobles of Quito. Nay, he was more even than this, though in the stress of his sorrow and the whirl of emotions which the experiences of the night had given birth to he had forgotten it: his blood was purer and his true rank higher even than that of the crowned despot who now sat on the golden throne of Quito, for, by the laws of the Divine ancestor from whom he took his name, he stood next in succession after his brother Huascar to the imperial borla and the rightful lordship of the Northern and Southern kingdoms.

Had he remembered this it might have saved him from a near and deadly peril, and yet, again, it might not, for so strong were his pity and his love and his sorrow that he would have pleaded, at least, for Nahua's life even with the threat of the flames sounding in his ears.

But he thought nothing of any peril save that of his darling and her dear ones, as he took a light spear from one of the guards, and, laying it across his shoulders in the fashion prescribed by the ancient custom, took his way to the front of the terrace and stood with his body slightly bent before Atahualpa's throne. The Inca's face flushed, and his black brows came closer together, but his voice was mild and smooth when he said—

"So my brother is the first to come and ask a boon or a gift of me, though he was not among those who brought their loyal greetings to the door of my chamber."

"It was from no lack of duty, Lord," replied Manco, still keeping his head bent down and his eyes on the foot of the throne. "I only returned to the city at daybreak, and then the guard refused me admittance to the palace. But for that I had not only saluted the majesty of my Lord but given him also a message of moment that I had brought."

"From whence?" said the Inca, sharply interrupting him. "If you were not in the city, where were you?"

"On the altar of the Unknown on Yavirá, Lord!" answered Manco, raising his head and looking him unflinchingly in the eyes. "And from thence I saw Pichincha put on her fire-crown, and heard the voices of the demons shouting in the halls of the under-world, and felt the earth beneath me tremble with the strength of their struggles as they sought to free themselves from their bondage. And then I saw the Llapa leap up out of the Westward, where they say the pale strangers are, and burst over the city, and Mama-Lupa the priestess was with me, and at her bidding I came to bid thee and all thy people make ready to appease the wrath of the Divine Ones who are angry with their children."

"And since when, my brother, hast thou been a sooth-sayer and the messenger of old women?" said Atahualpa, with a sneer on his lips. "How knowest thou or this doting priestess that the signs portend disaster? Has not Cotopaxi yonder flamed and slept by turns for many years of victory, and has not the Llapa ere now sped flaming through the skies before our armies as they marched to conquest? What has a lad like you to do with signs and omens? Leave them for the old and foolish, and if this is all you have to tell me think your errand done, and give place to those who have weightier matters to speak of. I will forgive your foolishness for the sake of your youth. Nay, I will even grant you a boon if you have one to ask of me."

"The Inca's word is passed!" cried Manco, suddenly drawing himself up straight and facing the despot with a smile on his lips, "and the Son of the Sun will perform what he has said."

"What now?" said Atahualpa, scowling darkly at him. "What need for such words from you to me?"

As he spoke Manco dropped suddenly on his knees

before him, and, letting the spear fall from his shoulders, spread his hands out towards him, and, with the tears that the grief and terror of the night had frozen falling from his eyes, he said in a low, pleading voice—

“Because I have a prayer to lay at the feet of my Lord, in granting which he will win more favour in the eyes of the Divine Ones, and more love and glory in the hearts of his people than by many victories. I pray for mercy, Lord, such as thy great father and mine has often shown, and which thou, his son, wilt honour him by showing—mercy for the innocent who have not sinned, and forgiveness for him who sinned only because his heart told him that he was doing the right!”

Then he looked up, and so terrible was the wrath depicted on the Inca's face, and so fierce was the fire that glared out of his eyes, that he shrank back appalled and covered his face with his hands.

“Ay! well mayst thou shrink and cover thy shameful face in the presence of the majesty which thine impious daring has outraged—thou who wouldst plead for a traitor and his accursed brood! Dost thou think that so poor a device will avail thee? Didst thou hope to entrap thy lord and master in his own words, and make him a liar and a destroyer of his own justice, a breaker of the laws that have never been broken? Thy sin is as great as his whom thou wouldst save, and the sacred blood in thy veins shall not save thee from the penalty.

“Yet I know the cause of thy madness, for thou art sick of love, and thinkest that thy Nahua is too dainty a morsel for the flames. Aye, thou lovest one of this accursed brood. I had forgotten that, though of itself it is a sin that stains the purity of thy blood and befouls the honour of thy race.

“Now, brother, I will give thee a boon, as I said I would—nothing less than the means of purging thyself of this pollution. Thou shalt choose between lighting the fagots with thine own hand or standing with thy Nahua in the midst of them. So shalt thou live, cleansed from thy dishonour, or the flames shall purge it for thee. Now go! I want no answer yet. When the guilty stand in the place of judgment it will be time enough for thee to speak. Then I will hear thy choice.”

With a wave of his hand Atahualpa dismissed him. All the sense that his despot brother's pitiless words had left him told him that remonstrance would be in vain, so he rose to his feet and, with a last look of silent appeal in the face of the Inca, now calm and passionless as that of a statue, he went back to where he had been standing, meeting on the way a look from the deep, dark eyes of the queen-mother as fierce and threatening as that which he had seen in those of the Inca's, and then being stopped by a hand laid upon his arm. He looked round and saw the kindly eyes and grim features of Quiz-Quiz, his great-uncle, a noble of the purest blood, and, next to Chalcuchima, or, as some said, equal with him, the greatest warrior in the North and South.

"Nephew," he said, "I have heard what has passed yonder before the throne of our Lord. Come with me into the palace, for you need counsel, and an old head may advise better than a young heart in such a strait as this."

"I have already chosen, my uncle!" Manco answered shortly but respectfully.

"Ay, that I could have guessed," said the old warrior. "Nevertheless, it may be that I can change your resolve without hurting either your love or your honour. So come and let me tell you my thoughts. They will not harm you even if they do not please you."

So saying, he took him by the arm and led him into one of the rooms which were set apart for his use in the palace, and there he talked long and earnestly with him, and when they came out together on to the terrace again Manco's resolve was changed, as Quiz-Quiz had said. There was also a flush on his cheeks and a brighter light in his eyes, and his carriage was that of one who has taken a high and solemn resolve.

Hour after hour passed for him in suspense, that was all the more agonising because it was also utterly inactive. He could do nothing but wait until the moment of his fate came—nothing but watch the long line of petitioners coming and going at the foot of the throne, but the end came at last.

The last of the petitioners had been dismissed, and the Inca clapped his hands thrice. Chalcuchima, laying his spear across his shoulders, strode forward to obey the

summons. The Inca spoke a few words to him in a low tone, and then Manco, his heart fluttering in the clutch of a deadly horror, saw the general make a signal to an officer at the head of a file of soldiers drawn up on the square facing the throne. Like machines they fell into a new formation and marched four abreast, with spears sloped over their shoulders, towards a long, low, heavily built building which formed nearly half of one side of the square.

Manco watched them with fixed, aching eyes till they disappeared through the low, wide, central portal, down the spear-lined lane that opened to receive them. For a few minutes there was utter silence in the great crowded square, for the multitude was waiting for the promised tragedy of the day to begin. Then there came out of the doorway a train of bearers carrying loads of clothing, furniture, and utensils of the household, which they carried across the square and up on to the scaffold, where they laid them down; for the tremendous penalty that Ullomaya had incurred extended even to the smallest possessions belonging either to himself or any member of his family.

When this had been done and the bearers had retired, the Inca clapped his hands again. The sharp sound was heard clearly all over the square and the crowded terraces. The treble files of guards which kept the open space about the scaffold brought their spear-butts to the ground with a simultaneous crash, and then, guarded on either hand by a file of spear-men, those who were doomed to die came forth to look their last on earth and sky and sun.

There were nearly threescore of them, all clothed alike in a single garment of coarse grey cotton, and the sight of them would have melted any heart not frozen to insensibility by the pitiless chill of superstition.

Yet not a murmur of pity or sorrow came from a single breast in all the vast, silent, throng, though there were old men and stalwart youths, grey-haired women stooping under the weight of years, young mothers with their last-born babies in their arms, bright-faced boys and girls who had never known an hour of real sorrow in their lives, and little toddling children who looked about them and laughed, wondering what all the splendid show was for.

But in all the piteous little throng Manco saw but one

slight figure and one sweet, pale, childish face in its framing of long brown shining hair, for this was his Nahua, walking wondering to her death with her hand clasped in her mother's.

The procession passed across the square, keeping pace with the slow, measured stride of the guards, till it stopped opposite an incline of planks which led to the floor of the scaffold. Then the doomed ones were driven up this like sheep being driven into a pen, and half the guard broke their ranks and followed them with thongs in their hands, and began silently and swiftly to bind the hands and feet of all save the very youngest. When this was done they piled a wall of fagots round the platform, and then came back down the incline, pulling the planks away and heaping fagots in their place.

Then the Inca clapped his hands once more and called Manco before him. When he had taken his place, standing in the same attitude of homage as before, he said to him in a quiet, almost kindly tone—

"Well, my brother, have you chosen? Will you carry the torch or stand amidst the fagots?"

"I will carry the torch, Lord," Manco replied in a low, steady voice.

Atahualpa started, and for an instant he looked at him as though he could have slain him with his own hand. Then his scowl changed swiftly to a smile and he said—

"That is well, my brother. It is better to live purged of dishonour than to die a death of shame. Let the torch be brought."

Then a soldier brought a blazing torch of aromatic, resinous wood with the upper half wrapped thickly about with strips of cotton soaked in oil. Manco took it from his hand and, saluting the Inca, walked backwards from the throne down the steps of the terrace without a word, and then turned and walked towards the scaffold through a gap made for him by the guards, with one hand gripping the shaft of the torch and the other in his breast closed upon the hilt of a long, keen knife of tempered copper.

Until now the little throng of victims on the scaffold had uttered no sound. Those who knew what the ghastly preparations meant had steeled themselves to meet their fate with the heroic stoicism of their race. Those who did not know were still wondering what it all meant, and some

of the little children were even playing with each other among the fagots, of whose terrible purpose they were still in happy ignorance.

But now, as the elders saw their executioner—to them the strangest of all who could have been found for the task—approaching they knew that the end was near, and for the first time they opened their lips, and the shrill, wailing cadencies of the Death-Song floated to the ears of the listening multitude, whose every eye was now turned on Manco.

With slow, steady steps he advanced to within ten paces of the scaffold. There he stopped, and, turning his face upward to the sun, he closed his eyes and with his lips made the silent Invocation to the Unnameable One. Then with a swift motion he dashed the torch to the ground, sprang forward at a run with the yellow shining dagger in his hand, and bounded with swift leaps up over the wall of fagots on to the scaffold and into the midst of the throng of victims crying—

“Nahua, where are you? I cannot save you, but I will die with you, and my dagger will be kinder than the flames!”

CHAPTER VI

THE VEILING OF THE SUN

HE found her standing bound beside her mother, leaning her head against her breast, and looking with fixed, dazed eyes blankly at the wall of fagots in front of her. In an instant he was at her side, in another he had severed the thongs which bound her wrists and ankles, and the next they were in each other's arms, and she was sobbing on his breast and imploring him piteously to save her, and not to let them burn her father and mother and little brother.

"Alas! Nahua, I have but come to die with you!" he answered, stroking her hair and kissing her upturned brow. "The Inca gave me the choice of being burned alive with you or lighting the fagots myself, and, as he thought, I chose to be your executioner. But I only did that so that I could reach you unbound and armed and save you the torture of the flames."

"But I do not want to die yet, Manco!" she pleaded with him, as though he himself held the power of life and death for her. "What have we done that our Lord should be so cruel?"

"There is no time to tell you that, dear," he answered, brushing the tears from his eyes with the back of the hand that held the knife. Nahua's eyes caught the yellow gleam of the blade, and she shuddered and clung more closely to him, murmuring—

"Then if I must die I would rather you should kill me than the fire should burn me, for you will not hurt me more than you must, will you, my Prince?"

"Quickly, Prince—quickly!" her mother cried out at this

moment, "for our Lord has had more torches brought, and they are coming to fire the fagots. But I pray you set free Amaro first, that I may die by his hand, and not see thee shed my Nahua's blood, even in mercy."

Manco looked towards the throne and saw the Inca pointing towards the scaffold, and four soldiers, each with a lighted torch, descending the terrace steps backwards. He cut Amaro's bonds and then those of Nahua's mother, so that they might embrace each other for the last time. Then he gave the knife into Amaro's hands, and taking Nahua in his arms again turned his head and hers away.

The four men with the torches were now inside the square of soldiers around the scaffold, and he knew that in a few minutes more the flames would be roaring about them. But the Fates had ordained that a greater tragedy even than the sacrifice of the threescore victims of Atahualpa's fury was to avenge the outraged shade of his murdered father.

The torchbearers stationed themselves one at each corner of the pyre and stood with their eyes on the Inca, waiting for the signal to fire it together. But the signal was never given, for, before Atahualpa could make it, a long, shrill, piercing scream rang out over the square, and every eye was instantly turned upon a weird unearthly figure standing on the top of the wall of the House of the Virgins where it fronted on the square overlooking the terrace on which the throne was set.

It was Mama-Lupa the Palla and prophetess. Her white clothing was rent and disordered, her grey hair was streaming wildly about her face and shoulders, and her arms were outstretched above her head, waving slowly to and fro. Again and yet again the scream rang out. The torchbearers dropped their torches and stood trembling beside them, and a thrill of terror shook every heart in the vast multitude saving only Atahualpa's.

Then Mama-Lupa's voice, high and shrill and clear, rose above the murmurs that were beginning to run from lip to lip, and her words reached every ear in the great throng as she half screamed and half chanted—

"There is woe coming to the great city and death to its people! Put out thy torches, Inca, for the Divine Ones have bidden the demons of the fire mountains light theirs

and there shall be no need for thine. Thy Father is wrath with thee and shall hide his face from thee, and ye, O People of the Valley! fly while there is yet time, for ere long there shall be darkness in heaven and fire and desolation on the earth.

"Fly lest the rocks open and swallow you and the mountains come together and crush you, for the City of the Sun is doomed and its streets shall be graves and its palaces and temples shall be sepulchres, and the Llapa shall smite the altars and rend them, and where there is life there shall be death, for the Son of the Sun has sinned, and his Father shall turn his face away from him!"

No words more awful could have been uttered in the ears of the multitude, for to every man and woman in the city the Inca was as the visible incarnation of a God, and to say that he had sinned was to say that the Gods themselves had done wrong since they had permitted him to sin. It would have been blasphemy from any lips, but from those of Mama-Lupa, revered by the whole people as the wisest and holiest of the Pallas, they were more, and they smote the hearts of her hearers like words uttered by the very voice of Doom.

Atahualpa heard them without moving a muscle or a feature till the last of them had died away in a long, wailing, scream. Not even he, immeasurably far removed as he was above the common herd of the people, could resist wholly the great wave of terror which was sweeping over the souls of the multitude.

He saw the sea of upturned faces turning as though moved by a single impulse from the figure of Mama-Lupa on the wall to himself on the throne. He saw his soldiers, perfectly disciplined as they were, relaxing the rigidity of their lines, and looking about them with frightened, shifting glances. In another moment fear might have blazed up into panic and all order have been lost in a riot of terror. He sprang to his feet, and, pointing to where Mama-Lupa stood, he shouted—

"Let the blasphemer's tongue be silenced! Pay no heed to her lying words, my children, go and fling her from the wall, and let her body be food for the vultures. Stop—no—such a death is too easy. Bring her here and I will judge her. Challcuchima, let the scaffold be guarded that none

may escape, but let not the fagots be kindled till this speaker of lies is ready for the flames."

"I will come to thee, Inca!" Mama-Lupa screamed. "I will come to thee without the bringing, and thou shalt judge me and I will judge thee."

Then she vanished from the top of the wall, and presently, when the soldiers had reached the door of the House of the Virgins, she came forth and, waving them aside, strode along the terrace, every one making way for her as she passed, and, without deigning to make the universal sign of homage, she stood erect before Atahualpa, looking him in the eyes, and said in a loud voice—

"The Son of the Sun has sinned, and would slay the innocent for his own sin! I tended my Lord that departed last night to the abode of the Divine Ones, and I saw his face when he was dead, and thou, Inca, didst see him die, thou and thy mother, the queen!"

Such words had never yet been spoken by mortal lips to a crowned Inca, and Atahualpa, struck dumb by their daring and the terrible meaning that lay hidden in them, heard her to the end perforce ere the command of speech came back to him. When it did all he said was—

"She is mad! Take her away and throw her into the midst of the others, then let the fagots be kindled. Away with her, and let my eyes be no longer polluted by the sight of her!"

Four of the guards advanced to seize her, but their hands trembled as they stretched them out, for the terror of her words had sunk deep into their hearts. She waved them back, and they stood trembling and looking from her to their master, and she raised her voice again and replied—

"Thou canst send me to the flames, Inca, but that will avail thee but little against the wrath of thy Father, who shall presently turn his face from thee, and in the days to come thou shalt follow me, for on thee the embalmers shall never do their work, and thou shalt have no place in the Chambers of the Dead. The golden mask shall never cover thy face,¹ and thy soul shall wander for ever in the darkness, seeking its body yet never finding it, for thou,

¹ The faces of the royal mummies were covered with a golden mask moulded to the features.

Inca, shalt never see the bright portals of the Mansions of the Sun!"

Again the horror of her words held Atahualpa silent, his face blanched to a dull grey; his lips were half parted and dry, and his eyes rolled in his head, striving vainly to meet her steady gaze, for the guilt that was in his soul opened the way to fear, and the crowned despot and lord of life and death to millions trembled before the victim he was about to send to the flames. But as soon as she had ceased his rage got the better of his terror. He snatched a spear from the hand of the guard who stood nearest to him and, with a stroke like lightning, drove it through the heart of one of the four soldiers he had bidden to seize Mama-Lupa.

"When thy Lord speaks to hear is to obey or die. Take her away and let me see her die, or may the face of my Father the Sun be darkened if I do not send you all to the flames with her!"

"Ay, it shall be darkened, Inca!" Mama-Lupa cried as they dragged her away. "It shall be darkened with a cloud of blood, and thou shalt see it fall from Heaven and consume thee and thine utterly with its flames!"

By this time, though terror was shaking every heart, the angry words of the Inca had stayed the impulse which had so nearly turned the fear into panic, and as Mama-Lupa was taken to the scaffold the multitude was silent and orderly once more. One of the soldiers climbed up the wall of fagots, dragging her after him by a rope that they had noosed round her waist, and then threw her down among the others, bound hand and foot.

All this while Ullomaya and Manco and the other victims had stood wondering and watching yet making no attempt to escape, knowing well that they could never pass the triple files of spearmen round the scaffold. But now the knowledge of their own near-approaching doom came back, and Amaro put his left arm about his wife and drew her to him. The next moment a shudder ran through her body, and with a little gasping cry her head dropped heavily on to his breast. Then he raised the red dripping knife high above him, and with a swift downward stroke drove it into his own heart.

As he fell with his arm still clasped about his dead wife, Manco snatched the knife out of his side and, throwing his

arm round Nahua, drew her to him just as the Inca made the signal to light the pyre. Another instant and he would have heard the crackling of the kindled fagots, and the knife, wet with the blood of her father and mother, would have been buried in Nahua's heart.

But before a torch touched the fagots a great screaming cry of almost more than mortal terror rang out from thousands of throats at once, and tens of thousands of hands went up, pointing to the sun. The torch-men looked up too and stood transfixed with terror, their torches dropping from their trembling hands, for Mama-Lupa's terrible words were coming true. A blood-red haze was stealing across the face of the sun sailing unclouded in the zenith. In the whole heavens there was neither cloud nor mist, but as the bloody haze deepened all the sky grew dim at once, and its azure turned to dusky grey. From Atahuallpa on his throne to the destined victims of his unrighteous vengeance on the scaffold utter terror held every heart still and frozen in its icy grip.

CHAPTER VII

THE KINDLING OF THE PYRE

WHEN the sound of the first myriad-voiced cry had died away the spell of a great silence fell upon the multitude. The torches smoked and smouldered out harmlessly on the ground, and they whose nerveless hands had dropped them stood like the rest, gazing upwards with fixed eyes, forgetful of all else but the awful portent in the sky.

Slowly the haze grew deeper and redder, and as it grew the sun seemed to shrink until they could see it shining dully as through a mist of blood, scarce larger than the moon. Then the spell of silence was broken again, and a long, low, shuddering wail went murmuring round the square. But soon above it rose the sharp shrieks and shrill screams of women and children.

Soldiers flung down their arms and broke their ranks unreprieved by their officers. Some grovelled on the ground, hiding their faces in their hands, and some ran about waving their arms and wailing like children or shrieking out incoherent words. Even the Inca had forgotten alike his majesty and his vengeance in the universal terror, and sat upon his golden throne, clutching with shaking hands at the arms and staring up with eyes that seemed about to burst from their sockets, and at his feet his queen-mother cowered, shuddering and moaning and covering her face with her cloak, not daring to look up.

A black shape, blacker than starless night, was beginning to creep across the sun's rim, growing slowly broader and broader, and then, though it was scarcely an hour past mid-day, a darkness as of sudden midnight began to fall upon the valley, and here and there stars began to flicker palely

in the sky as the black shape ate its way into the dimmed brightness of the fading sun.

And now there was not a sound in all the swarming, fear-stricken city as, right over the visible face of their God, the Children of the Sun watched that incarnate Blackness creep, until at last, in the very height and majesty of its noonday pride, it was blotted out from their sight. Then, from behind the blackness, there leapt out lurid flaming shapes of ghastly splendour, blue and red and yellow—the last flickerings, as they thought, of their dying God's expiring glory.

But this was only the beginning of the terrors of that awful noontide, for as they watched the hideous disc of flame-encircled darkness a roar as of a thousand thunder-peals in one shook the firmament and seemed to bring its ruins crushing down upon the shuddering earth. Then out of the north-west there leapt up a vast sheet of glaring ruddy light, and against it they saw the shape of Yavirá, crowned by the altar of the Unknown God, stand out huge and black and sharp.

A fiery wind like a blast from the very mouth of Hell itself swept roaring through the valley, and, as though swiftly drawn out by invisible hands, a black curtain spread over the heavens from north to south and east to west, and under it the ever-broadening glare blazed out, swiftly changing it from black to red. The earth reeled and swayed beneath their feet: the stone-paved streets cracked and gaped, and the mighty walls of palace and temple, built to endure for ever, shook and split, and great stones came crashing down, crushing scores out of all human shape beneath them.

And now the spell of fear was broken and the bonds of horror loosed, and madness came. Those who had moaned and wailed before now laughed and sang and shouted, and at the sound Manco woke from his stupor.

All this time he had stood with Nahua in his arms and the knife ready poised above her breast. Both seemed as though the fearful magic of the sights and sounds about them had changed them to statues of bronze, paralysed alike in mind and body.

When her father and mother fell dead beside her a shudder had run through Nahua's body and then it had

become fixed and rigid, and she had stood staring at the dead with blank, unmeaning eyes, heedless of the horror that was in Heaven and the terror that was on the earth.

Manco too, though half-prepared by his vigil on the altar and the words of Mama-Lupa for what had come to pass, had been smitten with a thought at once terrible and glad, the thought that in another moment Nahua would have died by his hand, and this had seemed to turn his heart and brain to stone and his blood to ice.

But now, in the midst of the delirium about him, the spell that had bound him was suddenly loosened, for the love which but a little while before had bidden him slay the being dearest to him on earth, leapt up into new life in his soul, triumphant even over the terrors of the convulsed heavens and earth, and love brought hope with it now where it had brought despair before.

All order was at an end. In the face of the awful majesty of nature's tragedy the Inca himself was nothing more than a trembling man, helpless as the meanest wretch who was running shrieking about the square. For the moment the whole fabric of his rule had crumbled to nothing, even as the monuments of his power seemed about to do. No one in that maddened multitude gave a thought to the bound and helpless ones on the scaffold. When Death, swift and terrible, was threatening all, what mattered the lives of three-score men and women?

And yet here was hope, if anywhere, and here too alone was calmness, for these had already set their faces to meet the bitterness of death. For nearly an hour now they had been standing bound on the brink of a fiery grave and death had lost well-nigh half its terrors for them. But if destruction were coming they should at least have the chance of flight with free feet, and their hands should be loosed so that, if it might be, they should save their little ones or die seeking to save them.

Waking Nahua from her stupor with a kiss, Manco bade her wait for him, and set to work cutting the bonds of the others, and they, as soon as they were free, took such garments as they could lay hands on and hastily clothed themselves and their children in some sort, and then, flinging the fagots aside, made themselves a way to freedom, leaving only the dead bodies of Amaro and his

wife behind them, and, led by Manco, began to make their way as best they could towards the street that led to the Southern Gate.

But Mama-Lupa broke away from them and gained the terrace where Atahualpa still sat, shivering on his golden throne, and, standing beside him over the prostrate Zaïma, she threw up her hands and screamed out shrilly above the tumult—

“The shade of the great Inca is angry! He stands alone in his house in the Mansions of the Sun. Where are those he honoured upon earth—wives of Huayna-Capac? Your Lord is lonely, get ye gone to him—sacrifice! sacrifice! The Divine Ones are wrath, and only sacrifice can appease them!”

A crowd of women that had been huddled about the palace door heard her and with one accord sprang towards her, tearing at their hair and their robes, and in shrill, screaming tones echoing her words—

“Sacrifice! sacrifice!”

They were the wives of the dead Inca, and they remembered how, in the olden times, when a king died, those who had loved him and whom he had loved had of their own accord gone with him to the Mansions of the Sun. It might be that the wrath of the Divine Ones would pass if they did this now, and one of them screaming out: “To the scaffold, to the scaffold! Let us go to our Lord on the wings of the flames!” began to fight her way down the terrace steps and towards the deserted pyre. Others caught up her cry and followed her. Then Mama-Lupa, pointing down at Zaïma’s prostrate form, screamed out again—

“Ay, to the flames and through them to your Lord, as becomes true wives according to the Ancient Law! But here lies she who was chief and dearest of you all in his eyes. Leave her not behind lest he shall send your souls back to seek her.”

Zaïma heard her and sprang to her feet, her fears banished by this nearer danger. But before she could turn to fly a score of eager, pitiless hands were clutching at her limbs and garments, and a score of screaming voices were crying—

“Come with us, Coya, come! We dare not go to our Lord without thee.”

She grasped one of the arms of the golden throne and

clung to it, crying to her son to save her. But the Inca sat still, staring straight before him and seeing nothing, like one in a waking dream, and not seeming even to hear her prayer. So they dragged her away, screaming and chanting salutations to their Lord, and with her in their midst they ran across the square, now almost bare of people, for with one consent nearly all the throng had made for the outlets and were swarming into the narrow streets, strangling and trampling each other down between the rocking and gaping walls.

Some of the women who had gone first to the scaffold had picked up the smouldering torches, and, waving them swiftly in the air, had made them burst into flame again. Then, with Zaïma still struggling and shrieking in their midst, the others mounted the platform over the fagots, and then those with the torches followed and danced round them, while all but Zaïma chanted the Death-Song. When it was done they flung their torches in among the fagots, and as the wall of flame and smoke rose up around them they flung their arms about each other, calling upon their Lord to witness their faith and fondness, and so they went to bear him company in the land where there is no death, leaving the fire-smitten and shuddering earth behind them.¹

But all the while the terrors of the earthquake were multiplying throughout the valley of the doomed city. Mighty masses of red-hot rock were flung high into the air from the throat of the volcano and fell back to earth, some on the mountain-sides and some on the squares and streets and buildings of the city, bursting in the midst of close-packed masses of men and women and children. Great gaps were opening in the ground and closing again, swallowing fragments of walls and buildings and burying hundreds alive in their depths. But the new-crowned Inca sat still and unharmed upon his throne, for at length his terror had passed, lost in a cold despair, and he had resolved to die, if die he must, crowned and throned as became a king and the son of kings, and so, in the midst of the ruins of his city and the death-agonies of his people, he

¹ It is said that more than 700 members of Huayna-Capac's Household sacrificed themselves in various places on his death, but some authorities hold that this savage custom had been abolished by the later and more enlightened Incas.

remained to the last, the one being unmoved, watching the blazing pyre and waiting for the hand of death to strike him.¹

In the cold, clear dawn of the morning after the Day of Terrors, Manco stood with Nahua in the doorway of a tambo, or rest-house, some five leagues to the south of Quito, on the great road that ran between the Sierras to Cuzco. They two alone of all the threescore victims who had stood together on the scaffold had escaped through the miracle or the mercy of the fate which had decreed for them the strange destiny of which the pages that follow will tell.

They were facing the eastern mountains, and their eager eyes were shining in the silver light of the fast brightening dawn. Soon long shafts of rosy light shot up from behind the clear-cut mountain-tops, and the morning star grew paler in the midst of their radiance. A broad band of ruddy golden light outspread across the sky behind the peaks and snowfields which gleamed and glittered in the glory it shed upon them, and then, in the eternal splendour of his unclouded majesty, the great sun rose up to smile once more upon the world.

Instantly Manco and Nahua bowed themselves in glad adoration before it. Then Manco took Nahua in his arms and said—

“Our Father’s wrath is past, my Nahua, and the wrath of the Divine Ones is appeased! See, his face shines as brightly as ever upon his children. He has given us his blessing again as he has done every morning that we have lived. Now let us go, and I will take you to my home, and you shall see the true City of the Sun.”

Then, hand in hand, they went on their way towards the South, leaving the darkened North where the doomed city still lay under its pall of mingled fire and darkness, behind them.

¹ It was said that nearly 40,000 inhabitants of the Valley of Quito perished in the earthquake which occurred about this time. It is, of course, a matter of history that Atahualpa escaped.

BOOK II

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CHAPTER I

ON THE ROAD TO EL-DORADO

IN the late afternoon of a day towards the end of October, in the year 1532, a little company of horse and foot, attended by some twoscore Indian bearers, was plodding slowly and wearily towards the green margin of a thirsty wilderness of red-brown sand and rock, over which it had been toiling almost without rest for sixteen hours past.

Nearly seventy of the company were either mounted or walking beside their parched and weary horses, and four of the strange animals, never before seen in the unknown regions into which the little army was penetrating, were harnessed to wheeled gun-carriages, on each of which was mounted a petrero, or small brass cannon, capable of throwing a ball of about three pounds weight. Besides the seventy horsemen, there were about a hundred men-at-arms, all passably equipped with helmet, breast-plate, and back-piece, sword and dagger and pike, and of these three carried arquebuses and resting-forks, and some twenty of them arbalests, or heavy cross-bows, which at fifty paces would send their short, steel-headed bolts through breast and back of a mailed warrior.

But some of the cavaliers are clad in mail from head to foot, saving only that they have permitted themselves the luxury of exchanging their plumed helmets, which hang at their saddle-bows, for wide-brimmed hats of plaited straw. To many men such a garb in such a place would be intolerable, for there is not a cloud in the sky, and the sun-rays beating down on the parched earth and heated rocks are cast up again as if from a reflector.

There is no breath of wind coming in from the sea twenty leagues away, and in all the wide plain there is not a scrap

of shadow save what is cast by the slowly-moving men and horses, and so every bit of steel and iron that the rays catch is hot, so hot that the bare hand can scarcely be laid upon it.

But these men are iron all through, hammered into hardness on the anvil of a fate that none but the sternest and strongest could have endured and yet lived. And good need, too, have they to be stern and strong, for this little army is marching into the heart of an unknown land, fenced in by mighty mountain bulwarks such as no white man has ever crossed before, to confront the master of millions in one of his strong places surrounded by his victorious hosts, and to pluck him from his throne as though he had been but the chief of a petty tribe.

Some of them you have seen before—down on their knees by the water's edge on the beach at Gallo, grubbing for sea-worms and shellfish to stay the torments of their famine. That was five years ago, and many and great things have happened since then. Yonder cavalier riding alone a little ahead of the troop, armed from head to foot in plate and mounted on a strong black charger, is he who drew that line with his sword-point on the sand and made that famous speech which will be remembered to his honour as long as the history of brave deeds continues to be written.

Then he was but a nameless, base-born adventurer, reckless even to madness in the pursuit of that phantom-land of El-Dorado, whose glittering shores ever receded as the barques of those who sought them struggled against wind and storm and current over the treacherous waters of the unknown sea.

But now El-Dorado is a fact, for the treasures of the golden city of Tumbez have been laid at the foot of his Catholic Majesty's throne, and Francisco Pizarro is a hidalgo of Spain, a military knight of the Empire who might hang from his shoulders the habit of Sant' Iago, whose arms are quartered with those of the Crown of Castile, and whose titles are Governor and Captain-General of New Castile, as El-Dorado has been already named though yet unconquered, and Adelantado and Alguacil Mayor, or chief magistrate, of the new land which his sword is to win for his imperial master.

Once more in the history of heroic things the dreamer has confounded the practical men of affairs who had derided and obstructed his schemes till the visions had become realities, and who were now hiding their envy under the mask of eager service.

A little way behind him strides the giant form of Pedro de Candia, leading his horse with his arm through the bridle, and by his side walks Alonso de Molina, also bridle on arm, and with them are six others, all that are left of the gallant band that crossed the line on Gallo, and now hidalgos to a man. But there are some others with them who were not on Gallo, but who are destined to write their names as deeply and redly in the history of El-Dorado as any of them. A fat, white-haired, fiery-faced man, long past the prime of life, who rolls about in the saddle like a full meal-sack, and yet a man of mighty strength and limitless endurance, for all his fat, who can sleep as well on a horse as in a bed, and march and fight and plunder and fight again till he has worn out every man but himself, and then laugh at his troop and curse them for carpet-soldiers and faint-hearts. For this is Francisco Carvahal, the bitterest jester and the bloodiest fighter that you may read of in all the wars of the Conquerors.

Him you will see and hear of again—as you will of Hernando de Soto, stateliest knight of them all, and of Juan and Gonzalo and Hernando, the brothers of the Captain-General—and near him, mounted on a mule and garbed in the black habit of a Dominican friar, rides another of whom the same may be said. From under the cowl that is drawn over his head to shield it from the sun-rays looks out a dark, ascetic face, thin-lipped and peaked-nosed, with small, black, deep-set eyes and high narrow forehead.

That is the face of Fray Vincente de Valverde, sometime to be bishop of Cuzco and Grand Inquisitor of New Castile, a man who, like some others of his cloth that are riding or walking with him, has come out to the new land and its millions of unknown dwellers with the words of the Gospel of Peace on his lips and the fires of fanaticism blazing hot and cruel in his heart.

Yet one more of the company must be signalled out by name, so that what follows may be made the plainer.

He is an Indian youth, slim and agile ; a son of the New

World clothed in the garb of the Old. Handsome and yet cunning of countenance, he has already learnt to look with something like contempt upon those who were once his people, for this is Filipillo, or little Philip, the lad who was taken away from Tumbez some three years ago and baptized and carried to Spain, being destined, as it appears, to an office which, however poorly performed, nevertheless has given his name a place in the story of the New World, for he is now interpreter to His Excellency Don Francisco, and before many days are passed it shall be his to stand, as it were, between the Old World and the New, and pass through his ears and lips the words which did all that words could do to seal the fate of an empire and the destiny of millions.

Only a bronze-skinned, straight-haired, black-eyed lad who has yet to see his twentieth summer, and yet one who is ere long, for the sake of a pretty face and a pair of eyes brighter and softer than his own, to compass the ruin of one into whose presence his father would scarcely have dared to crawl uninvited through the dust.

Of a sudden Pizarro's charger raised his head, and after drinking in with widened nostrils a long, deep breath, let out a shrill, whinnying neigh which was instantly taken up by all the other animals in the troop, and with one accord they quickened their pace as though they had drunk in some new principle of life through the air they were breathing.

"Ah," cried Carvahal, straightening his short, thick legs out from his charger's flanks, and throwing his arms wide apart, "Cuerpo de Jesu, the good beasts smell the green and the water at last! Carramba! Caballeros, some of us will be glad to get out of this, I fancy, for the good God seems to have made this accursed country in patches with pieces of Paradise and the Inferno, and then, for some wise purpose of His own, left it unfinished at that. It's a land where one must either get fat and soft and lazy with luxury in valleys that would be no shame to Paradise itself, or else starve and parch in deserts hardly fit for a heretic to die in!"

"It would be a dry desert and a hot one that would melt much of the fat off of that goodly carcase of thine, Carvahal," said Pedro de Candia, with a laugh, half turning in his saddle towards him; "though doubtless that poor nag of thine would willingly carry thee over a few leagues of

desert if thereby he could save himself a few pounds of thy weight to carry. More than once I have seen the poor beast look back at thee to see if thou wert not sweating thyself somewhat smaller."

"Ay, and I too," laughed Alonso de Molina; "and yet though this heathen wilderness hath to-day had more rain than it has ever had, and that, too, dripping from good Christian skins, methinks thou, Carvahal, hast done less than any of us to lay the accursed dust."

"Even so," growled Carvahal, "and for good reason too, for if there are many more rides like this before us some of ye will get to Atahualpa's camp, wherever the heathen may be lodged, with nothing more than your bones rattling inside your mail, and so a man or two with good flesh and blood inside his harness may be wanted when it comes to good honest blows, which the Lord in His mercy send as soon as may be, for this is cheerless work for Christian cavaliers."

"That is well put, Carvahal," said Candia, joining in the laugh that the old soldier's sally raised, and glancing with no little satisfaction from his own mighty frame to the slim, graceful form of Molina, "yet methinks thou wilt not be the only one that gets there unmelted. Ay, it is an accursed land, as thou sayest, and will need a plenteous blessing of heathen gold applied to good Christian profit to sanctify it, for it seems full of evil enchantments."

"Look at those hills yonder. All day we have been riding and walking and labouring alongside them and towards them, and they are no whit nearer than when we started. and as for that green yonder—who knows that we shall reach it to-day or to-morrow? It looks but a couple of leagues away, and yet it may be twenty, or not there at all in reality, but only put there to lure us on by some enchantment of the false gods that these heathens pray to."

"Thy horse knows better than that, Candia!" snorted Carvahal after a long sniff at the new element that was stealing into the air. "He can smell the grass and water if thou canst not; and so can I, cool and fresh and sweet. Ah, the smell of it is like a good draught of Jerez. I tell thee, to-night we shall camp amidst green fields by cool running waters. Carramba! we have had our bit of Hell to-day for our sins, and to-night we shall see a bit of Paradise for our labours."

"Labours!" laughed Molina, seeing a chance to turn the tables on the jester. "Call ye these labours, my knight of the ample waistband! Why, it is but a summer's day's ride. Hadst thou been with us on Gallo, or on Gorgona or at Puerto de Hambre thou wouldst have learnt more of labour in getting thy breakfast than thou hast done in all this pleasure trip of ours from San Miguel here. And yet, maybe it was well for thee that thou wast swashbuckling in Italy at the time. What say you, Candia? Would it not have been hard for us to refrain when none of us had tasted meat for a month had we had so juicy a morsel within reach?"

"Ay," said Candia, "that may well be. He would have kept the lot of us on Gallo for a month after the ships sailed away."

"Carrajo, hambrecito!" Carvahal roared through the laugh that followed, "you are wrong there. It was well for you that I was killing Frenchmen in Italy rather than starving with you on Gallo, for ere I had taken in an inch of my waistband I would have eaten the lot of you and made soup of your bones. But there—a truce to jesting, which is dry work anywhere without wine, and more than ever in a wilderness like this. What think you of the prospects, Candia? Were you ever pledged to a madder-seeming task than this?"

"Mad it may be," he answered more seriously, "yet those who would do great things must not fear going mad in the daring of them, and we have not done so badly so far. We have our fort at San Miguel and our ships on the coast, with Panama behind us, and El-Dorado in front of us, and more than that, is not all the news we have had good?"

"Have not these heathens been fighting amongst themselves for years, and are we not coming like strong men armed into a house that is divided against itself? This Atahuallpa, by all accounts, is a base-born usurper and ruthless tyrant. He has devastated the land with civil war, thrown his half-brother Huascar, the rightful heir, into durance, and made the streets of the Golden City red with the blood of his kindred? Hast thou not seen enough of war and politics to know how great advantage this may be to us?"

"True, true," said Carvahal, "it looks well enough on paper, as they say of treaties, and we have good swords to

turn it into practice. We will take the commission of His Most Catholic Majesty into a land that he would never have heard of but for the Captain yonder, and in his name judge a good judgment of cold steel and hot shot between usurper and rightful heir, for all the world as though we had God's own right to do it, and then see which can give the most golden reasons for the justice of his cause. Ay, 'tis a merry trade, this adventuring, whether plied by kings at home or simple gentlemen abroad, and the devils must laugh to see how well it goes."

"Peace, scoffer, peace!" laughed Molina. "Who art thou that thou shouldst deride our holy errand? And knowest thou not that these heathens believe us gods clad in impenetrable armour of light, invulnerable to all earthly weapons, and carrying the thunder and the lightning in our hands?"

"Knowest thou not that thou thyself, ugly as thou art, art in their eyes a heaven-descended son of the great god Vira—Vira—what is it, Candia? ah! I have it—the great god Viracocha. Ha, ha! how likes your godship the sound of that? I' faith, it will be worth all our labours heretofore to see them try and worship thee, good Carvahal."

"Me a god! ho, ho!" growled Carvahal. "That will be a new trade for an old soldier; yet methinks I shall like it well enough if they do but lay sufficient offerings on my shrine. I will even put off fighting for awhile to see them do it."

"And if the offerings be not big enough," said Candia, "I can well picture thee splitting their heathen skulls in punishment for their idolatry."

"That shows how little thou knowest of Carvahal yet," he growled again. "Great or small, I would take all the offerings that came and then crack their skulls to boot for following after strange gods, as the Scripture saith."

"Strange gods, i' faith!" laughed Molina again. "They would go far before they found a stranger than thou, Carvahal!"

No doubt the old man had a retort ready near his lips, but it was never spoken, and so for a wonder he failed to get the last word, for at that moment Pizarro, who had been looking eagerly ahead with shaded eyes, suddenly pulled up and reined his horse round, holding up his hand as a signal

to halt. Instantly the little troop came to a standstill, and Pizarro, riding back to the head of the column, said in a quiet but distinct tone—

“Caballeros, half an hour’s march will take us into the valley, and round the spur of the hill yonder I see a city of some size, and people are coming towards us over the fields; hence it behoves us to enter in due array. So mount and let the ranks be formed.”

CHAPTER II

HOW THE HORSES FED AT ZARAN

THE order had scarcely left the Captain's lips ere those in the vanguard had already set about obeying it, and it was passed down the line, each rank forming up as it went by, for every man in the little army, from the Captain-General himself to the meanest pike-bearer of them all, knew that on such an errand as theirs each one took his life in his own hands, and more than that, might by his own failure put all the rest in jeopardy.

Two days before all the faint-hearts whose courage had failed them in face of the difficulties and dangers of that unknown march had been given a chance to go back to San Miguel without loss of credit, and they had gone. There were only nine of them out of a hundred and eighty men, and all the rest were staunch and true, for their going had made the little army stronger and not weaker, and the Captain knew that on every man that was with him he could trust without fear for his own life and the honour of the great enterprise.

More than this, every man knew his orders almost before he got them, and so was worth three who might not have known them. So hardly had the word of command reached the other end of the column than every cavalier was in the saddle, helmed and plumed and in his place in the rank, and every footman was marching step for step with his fellow, and the whole army was moving forward over the desert, not limping or straggling now, but firm and close-ranked like a living wall of steel and iron.

The pace was now nearly doubled, for the column was moving with the uniform motion of a machine instead of that of a crowd of straggling units, and not many minutes

had gone by before the leading troop of horsemen saw a considerable body of natives emerge from the long low line of straggling thicket which formed, as it might be, the union between the wilderness of rock and dry earth and the green-carpeted, plentifully wooded valley which swept in waves of gentle, rolling wood-crowned hillspurs far away to the eastward where the giant shapes of the mountains beyond loomed dark and vague through the purple haze of the tropical evening.

They could see now, almost right ahead of them but a little to the left-hand side, a considerable town lying in a little side valley between two bold green bluffs, on each of which stood a guardian fortress which all must pass between who would gain the town from that side.

The sun, which was now sending its almost level beams across the desert plain and low hills which the Spaniards had crossed during the day, glinted brightly on polished mail and helm and trappings, so that to the wondering eyes of the natives who were coming to meet them they seemed as though already adorned with the glory of their deity and endowed with unmistakable marks of his favour. So when they came near to the glittering strangers mounted on those wondrous beasts, whose fame had already travelled far through the land, some of them stood back and waited as though awe-stricken, but others came on making gestures of welcome and deference.

When the two companies were within some fifty paces of each other the Captain made the signal for a halt, and called Filipillo to him. As the lad came to his stirrup he said shortly—

“Seek out some one of credible appearance among those yonder. Ask him the name of the valley and town, and how many soldiers there are in it. Then say that we come in peace on an embassy to the Inca, and ask for guides and safe conduct to the town.”

“I obey, Lord!” Filipillo replied, laying his hand lightly on Pizarro’s foot. Then he looked up, and with a half-boyish, half-cunning smile said, in a soft, almost girlish voice, “and may I not say too, Lord, that the sons of Viracocha are coming to do the bidding of their father?”

“Do thou my bidding, boy, and leave these unholy fancies to the heathen. Have we made thee so bad a

Christian that thou should still prate of thy false gods and seek to make us their servants? Go and speak only the words that I have put into thy mouth. What else is it for, save to do that and praise the Lord and His saints?"

The red blood showed bright through the clear bronze of the lad's cheeks as he bent his head again and turned away to do his master's bidding. But when he knew that none of the troop could see his face there came a smile on his lips which his back would have paid for could Pizarro have seen it.

It did not take many moments for his quick eyes to single out the most promising object for his inquiries. This was a man of middle age, somewhat better dressed than the rest, who was standing apart watching the column with grave face and eager eyes.

From the black turban of wool that he wore he saw that his veins did not boast of the blood of the Sacred Race, so he saluted him with more friendliness than deference and, straightway forgetting or ignoring his master's orders, told him that the men in shining clothing were the long-promised sons of Viracocha, who had come into the land by command of their Father to give it peace, and that as they only spoke the speech of the gods heard only in the Mansions of the Sun, he, Filipillo, had been endowed by the god with the power of this speech so that he might speak for the celestial messengers, and make plain their intentions to his children. All of which the Indian heard gravely enough, bowing his head every time the name of the god was mentioned, and when he had answered the questions which followed Filipillo went back to his master and made his report.

"The town and valley are called Zaran, Lord. It is a strong place and one that guards the approach from this wilderness and the coast beyond to the roads which lead over very great and high mountains to the heart of El-Dorado itself. But now there are but a few soldiers in the town, not more than a score or so, for the Inca Atahuallpa has drawn all the fighting-men from these regions to swell his armies, so that the way is open to my Lord, and if my Lord will follow, the man yonder whom I spoke to will go before with me and lead you to the causeway by which the river is crossed."

"That is well, go thou with him," said Pizarro; "we

follow. Keep thine eyes open and be ready to run back to me at need."

Then the column moved forward again, preceded at about twenty paces by Filipillo and the native, to whom he was talking constantly. They were guided along the edge of the scrub towards the valley, and then a straight, narrow path opened out. This led them through the thicket and a broad belt of trees and then between level fields, well watered by little channels lined with stone, and when they had passed through these the welcome sight of a broad, shallow river rippling smoothly between its green, shady banks cheered their eyes, so long dazzled by the stones and sand, and set their horses whinnying with delight.

From the end of the path a broad, straight causeway of stone, pierced by wide, square openings, ran from shore to shore, and at the end of this Pizarro halted his troop so that men and beasts might slake their thirst. But the Fray Valverde's mule, with the headstrong self-will of its kind, waited neither for halt nor order, and carried the cleric with unseemly haste through the breaking ranks and waded out till it was knee deep in the water, where, after striving vainly to drink, it looked round at its master and brayed angrily, saying as plain as speech of mule could say it: "I have thirsted all day for you, now take the bit out of my mouth that I may drink."

But this the Fray could not do without dismounting, nor could he dismount in two feet of running water without inconvenience. So there he sat, pulling this way and that at the bridle, and cursing the mule for a stiff-necked heathen beast, though she was of good Castilian birth, even as he himself was.

At this there was some unseemly tittering from the bank till one of the Friars tucked up his robe and waded in to do what was needful, but he, either not being quick enough to suit the creature's fancy, or being unskilful at the task, put her so far out of temper that she took him by the breast of his habit with her teeth and pulled him off his feet, so that he, having nothing better to hold on to, grabbed at her ears, and then down went her head and up went her heels, and the holy father on her back took a flying leap head-first and sorely against his will, and with a mighty splash soused his reverence and dignity over head and ears in a pool hard by.

The men of the troop were mostly pious and God-fearing fellows enough, but the Fray, with his strict insistence on fasts and his liberality with penances, had not won over much love from them, and a long hoarse laugh rolled down the river banks, and after it came a roar from Carvahal, who was standing by his horse holding his fat, shaking sides at the sight of the Friar and the mule struggling and kicking together in the water and his reverence rising like a dripping ghost out of his pool, coughing and spitting the water out of his mouth and rubbing it out of his eyes.

"O la diablata! ohe! ohe! Ah, carramba!—what a devil of a beast to carry so holy a man! Does she think the good father hasn't been baptized yet, or that this heathen river is the Jordan and she is John the Baptist? Ohe! ohe! the holy father has come out to baptize the heathen and got a dose of his own physic. Ah, well, it is a good thing to see a brace of clerics washed; you don't see it every day!" and then he roared out his deep laugh, and the rest joined him till a quick, sharp word of command from the Captain brought them back to their discipline.

Now this, though but a simple if laughable thing in itself, yet had somewhat considerable consequences, for it was seen by many of the natives, and from it they got the idea, as in their simplicity they might well have done, that the sad-robed clerics were not true sons of Viracocha at all, since they had no shining raiment or weapons, nor did they see how the god could permit any of his children to be overcome by a beast and put into such a ludicrous and contemptible position.

Another thing, too, they noticed which had a strange result, for after they had watched the horses drink they saw their riders put the bits back into their mouths, and from this they concluded that these wondrous animals fed upon the strange white metal, and afterwards when the troop had been hospitably and with high respect received into the town, which they reached in about another hour, they had spread this rumour abroad, with what consequence shall presently be told.

The men-at-arms and the horse-troopers were lodged in the barracks which the garrison had left, and Pizarro and his chief cavaliers were entertained with great honour in the houses of the Curaca and his officers; but first of all, like

the good soldiers that they were, they saw to the comfort of their beasts, which indeed were priceless to them, since not all the gold of El-Dorado could buy one now nearer than far-off Panama.

Now while they were doing this a very strange thing happened, and one that pleased the cavaliers better than the horses, for many of the townspeople, having heard that they ate the strange white metal in which the strangers were clad, came in their kindly, simple way with handfuls of little pieces of gold and silver and prayed Filipillo to get permission for these to be given to the animals, and to this, as the old chroniclers tell us, the cavaliers made no sort of objection, but rather encouraged them to lay the gold and silver among the green stuff that the beasts were eating, bidding Filipillo tell them that these wondrous creatures, sons of those which drew the chariot of the Sun, relished them greatly since they were softer and sweeter than iron, and that they would love them for their gifts. After which, the chroniclers go on to say, they went secretly at night and gathered up the spoil, and so the precious fodder went to fatten their pouches, which pleased them well and did no hurt to the beasts.

That night Don Francisco learnt from the Curaca that at Caxas, a more important town lying some ten leagues off among the mountains, there was a strong garrison under the command of a general of the Inca blood, and after consultation it was decided that Hernando de Soto should take twenty mounted troopers with him and go as an embassy with presents to this general to learn what manner of reception might be expected from him and also to discover the defences of the country, since they were now assured that they were actually within the dominions of the great Inca.

By sunrise the next day de Soto started, and for eight days Pizarro lay in Zaran awaiting his return more and more anxiously as each day went by, for he had ridden away with his little troop into an unknown country amidst those long-dreaded mountains, and it might be that the news had been but a pretence to lure him into some strong place or fearful gorge among the mountains whence neither man nor beast might ever return.

CHAPTER III

WHAT DE SOTO HAD TO TELL

BUT while the level beams of the sinking sun were still glancing redly across the low hills that bordered the wilderness to seaward runners came in on the eighth day bringing the welcome news that the sons of Viracocha were returning, and the sun had not long set before the paved causeway that led up to the principal gate of the town was ringing with the music of clanging hoofs, most welcome to the Captain's ears.

That night, in the principal chamber of the Curaca's house, by the light of burning cotton wicks floating on oil contained in curiously worked lamps of silver, another council of war was held, and de Soto, most highly bred and gentlest warrior of them all, made the report of his journey.

"Excellency and Caballeros," he said in the courtly tone which on occasion he could yet raise loud and high above the battle-tumult, "I must first offer you my regrets for the anxiety which, by the needs of my service, I may have caused you, but, this done, I may console myself and you with the information and news that I have brought back. Since there are no listeners here who can take anything away to do us harm, I may speak plainly and as a man among friends and comrades."

There was a little pause after this, and the assembled cavaliers bowed their heads in sanction and approval, and the Captain, nodding to him with one of his rare, grave smiles, said—

"That is well begun, Don Hernando, and bids fair for what may be to come. Now speak freely, and let your lips show us without fear or restraint all that your eyes have

seen and your ears have heard, be it good or evil. There is no need to make the dangers less or the promises of good fortune fairer than in good truth they are, for, as you know, there are none here who can hope more or fear less than good Christian gentlemen who take their lives and their honour hanging to their sword-belts may hope or fear for."

Again the knightly heads nodded, and Carvahal, bringing his fat fist as gently as might be down on the cedar table round which they sat, said with one of his wholesome, chuckling laughs—

"The Captain-General speaks our minds as ever. Go on, de Soto; thou hast good listeners. There is none here who would turn his back on El-Dorado though to go forward meant instant death, so tell thy story in words as plain as may be. If thou hast been to the mouth of Hell, say so, and we will go and warm ourselves at the blaze, and if thou hast seen the gates of Paradise, or whatever their like may be in El-Dorado, say so too, and we will go none the less speedily to take our share of such of its glories as may be carried away."

"I have to tell neither of the one nor of the other," answered de Soto after he had joined in the laugh that followed the old freelance's sally, "and yet I have that to tell which is worth the telling and the hearing too."

"First, then, we rode up the valley here till the causeway, which is well paved for leagues beyond the town, became a narrow track, winding up out of the valley round hillspurs and in and out of deep, dark gorges, slanting upwards so steeply that we were fain to dismount and lead our chargers by the bridle, taking as much heed to the beasts' footsteps as we did to our own, and often leading them by the very bit itself round jutting crags where the road went up and down in steps never meant for more than human feet."

"The road sloped so suddenly, and the rock-walls fell away so sheer on the one hand and rose so sharply on the other, that ever and anon our poor frightened beasts stopped and trembled, looking askance down into the abysses, as though knowing that one false step would send them to destruction; and for two days after the first we rode and walked thus, ever ending higher than we had begun, and ever in front of us as each ridge was scaled the mountains beyond rose higher and higher till they seemed like the

buttresses of a great wall that rose from earth to Heaven. Yet the valleys were ever green and lovely; and so we travelled on with good cheer till the sunset of the third day brought us to Caxas, which is a sightly town albeit that it is built with nothing better than baked clay.

"The garrison turned out in goodly number to meet us in full and warlike array and, as we thought, with hostile intent; but when we had explained so much of our purpose as we thought fit by the mouth of Filipillo they received us well and lodged us better, and from Caxas the next morning we went on to a most goodly town called Huamacucho, in good sooth as well and solidly built a town as Christian eyes need wish to look upon in such a heathen land as this; for the forts and houses, to say nothing of the temple and the dwelling-place of the Inca noble who rules it, are built, not of clay, but of stone all masoned with marvellous skill, for stone fits on stone and course on course with a precision so perfect that no mortar is needed to bind them together.

"Here we found a garrison stronger by far than at Caxas, and warriors well enough armed after the simple fashion of the land, fit to fight, maybe, with the street lads of Seville and Cordova, though but of poor account as I take it against cavaliers or men-at-arms in mail and plate. Yet their trappings were fine and costly enough, and there were many of them that would be worth a good hundred pesos whether taken alive or found dead on a field of battle."

Here Carvahal's eyes began to glitter, nor were they the only ones alight in the company as he growled out—

"Ah! there I see a glimpse of Paradise, or at least of El-Dorado. Go on, de Soto, thou hast good listeners now, I warrant thee."

But Don Francisco shook his head and said in his quiet, masterful voice—

"Nay, nay, Carvahal, it is early days to talk in that fashion yet. Remember that presently our errand is one of peace. We must not pluck the fruit while it would kill the tree. El-Dorado is not here; we shall find it beyond the mountains where its master is. Know you not the story that the Scripture tells of the strong man armed? We are not in his house yet. Go on with thy story, de Soto."

A low approving murmur ran round the table and de Soto began again—

"My thoughts were not unlike yours, Don Francisco, even as Carvahal's would have been had he heard the news that was told me in Huamacucho. The noble who commands the town is no less a personage than one Titu Atauchi, half-brother of the great Inca himself, and from him I learnt that Atahualpa is presently encamped in the valley of Cajamarca, a great city lying in a broad and verdant plain on the other side of a vast range of mountains compared with which all that we have so far seen are but little more than ant-hills, yet so fast does news fly, by some strange means or other, in this wondrous land, that already he has been informed of our coming, and has sent orders back to the Governor of Huamacucho to receive us with all friendliness and invite you, Excellency, to meet him and confer with him on the subject of your embassy in Cajamarca itself."

Here de Soto paused for a while, and Don Francisco, slowly nodding his head towards him, said—

"That all sounds well enough so far, de Soto, but heard you any tidings of the war that is being waged between the two Incas, and of what forces Atahualpa has with him?"

"It was even that that I was coming to, Excellency," replied de Soto. "All that we have heard so far is true. The armies of Cuzco have been defeated."

"Cuzco! Where and what is that?" asked Carvahal, again interrupting.

"Cuzco," said de Soto, "is by all accounts the very city after thine own heart, Carvahal. These heathens call it the Navel of the World, but for thee it may be enough to know that it is the very heart of El-Dorado, the city whose streets are paved with silver and whose palaces and temples are walled and roofed with gold. Art thou content?"

"Nay, not till I get there," said Carvahal. "Not until I turn my sword into a reaping-hook to garner the harvest that a good Christian should be able to gather there."

"After the labour the reward, Carvahal. Forget not that!" said Don Francisco, somewhat sharply, as though little pleased by the interruption. "Go on, de Soto, let us know what the labours are first."

"Well, then, Caballeros, as I was saying," he continued, "if the armies of Cuzco have been defeated by the armies of Quito. Huascar himself is held in close durance in a

strong place called Tumibamba, about half-way between the two capitals, and Atahualpa is camped in or about Cajamarca with an army—a victorious army, mind ye, of some eighty thousand men.”

“And we are some six score good Christian gentlemen and others!” interrupted Don Francisco with one of his quiet smiles. “Well, the odds are great, but God and Our Lady will defend the right. What more, de Soto?”

“But little more, Excellency,” he said, after he had joined in the laugh that went round the table. “From all I hear these heathens have every disposition to receive us kindly and trustfully. For instance, at Caxas and Huamacucho we drank chicha out of goblets of gold and silver, and ate delicious fruits from dishes of the same, and every man of us might have come back with a golden chain about his neck had I but consented to the taking of them.”

“Ah, de Soto! why was not I sent in thy stead?” growled Carvahal. “Thou art a man of wasted opportunities.”

“Nay,” said Pedro de Candia, “rather say a man of more wisdom than thou, Carvahal. Thou wouldst pluck the feathers from the wings of the bird whose flight would guide thee to El-Dorado just because they were tipped with gold. But de Soto would let it fly and follow it.”

“Ay, that I would!” said he. “All that we have seen is but the fringe of the cloth-of-gold, and if we snatched at it we might never see more of it. But,” he went on more seriously, “I should fail in my duty if I did not warn you, Señor Capitan, that all this kindness may be no better than a blind for our eyes and a snare for our footsteps, nor yet if I did not tell you that from what I have seen of it our road to Cajamarca is of such difficulty and danger that a score of men well placed and resolute might dispute it against a thousand. There are turns where an ambush would mean ruin, where the road might be blocked before and behind and no choice left save surrender or a leap to Heaven over a precipice. Once our feet are treading those mountain paths there is but one road, and that is forward. To come back save as conquerors were death as well as dishonour.”

There was a little pause after this, for the words were grave and serious ears were listening to them. Then Don

Francisco, after a quick glance at the sober faces round the table, said quietly, but with a ring in his voice that found an instant echo in every heart.

"The faint-hearts have gone back to San Miguel. Here there are only fearless gentlemen of Spain, and for them the only road is forward. Is not that so, Caballeros?"

"Ay, that is so! Go forward, Chosen of the Lord, go on and do His work! Shall the heathen prevail against you while ye are clad in the armour of righteousness and girded with the sword of faith? Remember Israel in Caanan and Joshua before Ai! If ye have faith ye may remove mountains—how much easier then shall ye cross them! There is not only shame and death behind you should ye turn back, there is damnation too, even that which befalls him who puts his hand to the plough and looks back. Are ye not the chosen messengers of God, soldiers of the Cross, and champions of our holy Church, and if gold and gems shall be the lawful reward of your labours here, shall not the eternal bliss and glory of Heaven be your reward hereafter?"

"It is not only El-Dorado that lies beyond the mountains. The harvest-fields of God and our holy Church are there, and for every heathen soul that is washed clean in the waters of baptism, each one who wields the sword in a good cause shall have reward in Heaven more precious than rubies—ay, more than if all the gold of El-Dorado were his.

"What matters it though the heathen be many in number and their hearts full of guile? How shall numbers prevail against the strength that God shall give you to do His work. How shall the wiles of heathenese overcome the wisdom of holiness? In your weakness shall be your strength, and in your simple valour your highest wisdom. Soldiers of God and the Church, go on, and God's blessing go before you!"

It was Vincente de Valverde who spoke; not now the thin, gaunt monk who had dragged his shivering limbs and dripping garments out of the river a few days before amidst the laughter of the whole troop, nor yet the cold-blooded persecutor who had stood not long before in the plaza at Santo Domingo in Hispaniola and with unmoved eyes watched half a score of lapsed heretics writhing and scream-

ing amidst the torture of the flames. For the moment he had risen above the man and the persecutor to be the single-hearted servant of his God and his Church, and his words rang out clear and true as words ever do ring from a heart that has a single purpose, and that a good one. The echo that they found in every heart was instant, and as the last words pealed from his lips every cavalier sprang to his feet, every sword leapt from its scabbard, and every lip was pressed with one consent to the cross-hilt.

"Even so—God speed our holy work, and may His holy Mother bless it with her prayers!" said the deep voice of Don Francisco, and then every other voice rang out in a shout of—

"Cajamarca—on to Cajamarca! There lies the road to glory and salvation!"

"And El-Dorado!" growled Carvahal, as the shout was dying away. "It were as well not to forget that in the meantime, Caballeros."

CHAPTER IV

ACROSS THE RAMPARTS OF EL-DORADO

THE next morning, while the dew yet lay on the grass and the higher slopes and peaks of the Eastern mountains were yet cut off from the lower by a shadowy sea of mist, every cavalier and man-at-arms had already breakfasted and was out in the square of Zaran, looking to his arms or making his charger ready for the momentous march that was to begin that day.

They had gathered up and hidden away the fragments of gold and silver which the simple-minded people had brought the night before as fodder for their strange beasts, and by this means every man of them left Zaran the richer by a good many pesos' worth of the coveted metals than he was when he came into it.

They had learnt much during their brief stay in the little frontier town that had whetted still further their already keen appetites for the wealth and the wonders of El-Dorado, and trusty guides had been given them, and when all was ready for the departure the Curaca with his chief officials came out to bid the sons of Viracocha good-speed, and these, after greetings and presents of meat and drink had been bestowed upon the parting guests, went before them down the smoothly-paved street which led to the gate of the town and out through this on to the little grassy plain which stretched for half a league or so from the walls along the river bank.

Here they saw a strange sight, yet one which they and their children and their children's children have had good cause to remember from that day to the day of their deaths, generation after generation, even until now. Once clear of

the town Pizarro, riding, as was his wont, at the head of the troop, raised his right hand, and every man stopped and every horse was reined in. Then the deep voice of the Captain rolled out—

“Halt, my brothers and companions in the Faith! Ere we go farther let us give thanks to Him who hath brought us thus far through so many and great dangers, and let us pray for that aid and countenance without which our human strength will in vain carry us farther.”

Then every man who was afoot dropped on his knees where he stood, and every cavalier swung himself from the saddle and knelt down likewise by the left fore-foot of his horse with the bridle on his arm, and crossed his hands upon his breast, the Captain kneeling by his charger in front of them all. Then there came out from the midst of the kneeling throng Vincente de Valverde followed by one Brother Joachim, a stalwart Friar of the Order of St. Francis, bearing a tall cross of black wood on which hung the white effigy of his Master, and as Valverde took his stand in front of Pizarro, he raised this in his great arms high above his head, and then the priest lifted his voice and prayed, and while his prayer, in the melodious monkish Latin, rose sweetly upon the still morning air the Curaca and the head-men of the town, with all the throng that had followed them from the gate, first looked about them in wonder, and then, as though drawn by some strange, unknown influence, all their eyes were turned upon the figure of the White Christ upon the cross, and whispers ran from lip to lip as they said wondering to each other—

“Is this, then, the god of the sons of Viracocha? Was it not said that he should come back, even as these have come to us, clad in armour of silver and armed with the lightnings? Why, then, does he hang bleeding and naked as he does yonder?”

Now when Ververde had finished his prayer he saw them looking askant at each other and gazing ever and anon at the crucifix and heard their murmurs, and, though he could not understand what they said, he read their looks of wonder truly enough and knew how to draw an omen of happy augury from them. With a swift motion he flung wide apart the hands that had been crossed upon his breast and cried in a loud voice—

"See, soldiers of the Cross, how gracious a sign hath been vouchsafed to us, even here at the gates of the land we have come to conquer for God and His holy Church! Was it not said of old: 'If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me'? Behold how the eyes of the heathen are already fixed upon the holy emblem of our Faith! Truly a day shall come when by your valour and devotion the darkness shall be taken away from this land, when its false gods shall be cast down and men's hearts shall know and their eyes shall see no other God than Him who liveth and reigneth world without end! *Laus Domine! Laus Domine!* Praise Him, ye children of His and soldiers of His Cross, for in this sign shall ye conquer!"

Then with one accord every man, from the Captain to ribald old Carvahal himself, sprang from his knees to his feet, every sword leapt from its scabbard, and every pike and partisan was waved aloft, and as the hoarse, deep-toned shout, "*Laus Domine! Laus Domine!*" rolled forth from every warrior's throat the first sun-burst of the morning streamed over the eastern mountains and flashed in a thousand rays on the gleaming blades and points of the weapons.

Then Pizarro, who of all men knew best how to turn a moment of enthusiasm to good account, sprang into the saddle, swung his blade above his head and, half turning towards his little army, cried—

"Ay, praise to the Lord, for in His strength we shall conquer, though of ourselves we be but few and weak. Mount and forward, gentlemen. Yonder dawns the morning of salvation for us which shall end the long night that we have passed through together. Forward, and God be with us!"

As he said this he turned his horse a little to the right and rode past where Valverde stood with the crucifix still raised above him by the strong arms of Brother Joachim. As he passed it he lowered the sword which ere long was to drink so deeply of innocent blood, and made the sign of the Cross with the hilt, and the priest blessed each man of the troop as he went by with bended head and crossing himself. When all had passed he and Brother Joachim mounted their mules and took their places in the rear, and so those whom they believed to be the sons of the god Viracocha

passed from the wondering gaze of the first of the Children of the Sun who had beheld them, and went on their way to El-Dorado.

There is no room to tell here of all that befell them day by day on that first march of theirs, for this is not the story of their journeyings—of which you may learn better from the pens of those who made them—but rather of the things that they did when the end of the march had at length brought them to the scene of their triumphs and their crimes.

They passed through Caxas and Huamacucho, finding them as de Soto had said, and being entertained with the simple and yet bounteous hospitality of the kindly-hearted people who were soon to whisper their names to each other as words of more than mortal terror.

They were surrounded by sights as strange as Christian eyes had ever seen, though not yet by things as terrible as those which the soldiers of Cortes had seen a few years before far away in Mexico on the other side of the central line of the earth. Everywhere they beheld the signs of perfect peace and order, though but a few days' marches to the eastward the earth had trembled not many weeks before beneath the tread of countless hosts rushing to the conflict out of which was to spring the doom of Atahualpa and the Children of the Sun, and which Ullomaya the priest had spoken by the bedside of the great Huayna-Capac in far-off Quito.

Everywhere, too, throughout the valleys and towns they saw the wealth of field and mine and the triumphs won by patient labour spread about them with lavish hand. The fields were green and golden with bounteous crops. In the groves of fruit-trees the branches bent beneath the weight of their luscious harvest. Gold and silver seemed to be in as common use as brass and iron were in Spain, and the people, clad in their bright-coloured stuffs of many hues and decked with jewels such as only princes wore in Europe, seemed to be living lives as calm and cloudless as the endless summer which smiled down from the changeless skies above them.

Many another hand than old Carvahal's closed ever and anon itchingly on sword-hilt or pike-handle at the sight of

all this; and often passions less holy than the ardour of conquest, to say nothing of the service of the Church, stirred in many a grim warrior's breast, for the daughters of this strange and childlike people were very fair and dainty to look upon with eyes which, like theirs, had starved so long for the sight of woman's beauty.

But the orders of the Captain were very strict, and, what was more, he obeyed them himself, for the greatest honour that can be accounted to Francisco Pizarro is accorded to him by those who truthfully say that he never asked a follower of his to dare or do that which he would not do himself, or forego delights which he himself would not go without.

Only once on that long march did any man seek to break the bonds of this iron discipline, and this was done by one Pedro Navarro, a man-at-arms who, on the morning that the army left Huamacucho, was accused by one of the headmen of the town of having offered violence and insult to his daughter.

Pizarro instantly put off the march until the accusation was made good in due form. Then in the presence of the army and the townspeople he called the offender before him and said—

“Pedro Navarro, hast thou come hither to serve God and His Saints or to pander to thine own evil lusts? What need hadst thou to leave Panama if thy desire was to bear thyself as a lecher and a doer of base violence rather than as a soldier of the Cross? Till thou hast repented, thou art not worthy to bear the arms or wear the garb of a soldier of Spain.”

Then, looking round among the cavaliers, his eyes lighted on Carvahal, and some thought that the shadow of a grim smile was visible under his beard as he beckoned to him and said—

“Come hither, Carvahal. I know of no hands fitter than thine to punish one who hath demeaned himself as this man hath. Let two of his fellows strip him of his arms and clothes, ay, even to his shoes, and do thou tie him to thy stirrup till thy mercy shall see fit to let him loose, and should he give signs of lagging on the march doubtless thou wilt find means at hand to bring him back to good marching order.”

To this Carvahal consented readily enough, for sinners punish sinners with as much gusto as thieves chase thieves, and all that day he dragged the naked, limping wretch by his side, stumbling over the steep stony road with swollen and bleeding feet, his bare back blistered by the scorching sun and his tongue, unslaked by a single drop of water, hanging out black and baked between his parted teeth, and when he was like to faint he roused him with his spurred heel to hear a homily on St. Anthony or a sermon that it would have done the Devil good to listen to.

It was a sore punishment enough, and Pedro Navarro was more dead than alive when the evening halt was called. And yet, not long after, this same man threw himself in the way of a spear that was aimed at his Captain's throat, so well did Francisco Pizarro know how to lead men like dogs and yet, like dogs, make them love him the better for his chastening of them.

Huamacucho was passed on the fourth day from Zaran, and on the night that the penance of Pedro Navarro was ended the sun set, as it seemed to these voyagers in a strange land, over the confines of two worlds. All day the narrow path, winding round hillspurs and threading mountain-sides midway between Heaven and the depth of unmeasured valleys and gorges, had led upward and ever upward.

At some of the turnings they had looked back and seen valley after valley, divided by their parting ridges, sloping and falling away down into illimitable distances until their eyes lost themselves in a dim, far-off haze beyond which, as they well knew, lay the desert coast and the blue Sea of the South. At others, looking upward, they saw ridge after ridge and range after range, each one barer and bleaker than the one below it, towering ever up and up like the steps of some titanic stairway which seemed to reach from earth to Heaven, and ever and anon from some 'vantage point of better view they saw far, beyond and above the highest of these, twinkling points of gleaming white, whiter than the cloud-sprays drifting in the mid-most heaven, so high and far away that it seemed as though they had as little kinship with the earth as the clouds themselves.

There was not a faint heart in all the company, for none such would have come thus far; but, as day after day they

mounted higher and higher, and as hour after hour the awful solitude of those lonely wildernesses encompassed them more and more closely about, there was not a heart among them that did not feel the weight of the Unknown pressing in upon him.

"By the faith of a soldier and a Christian," said Carvahal as he rounded one of the hillspurs on the forenoon of the seventh day, riding beside Alonso de Molina, "methinks much more of this would pass human endurance. Look at yonder line of snow and ice sharp-edged against the sky! Hast thou ever seen the purity of such whiteness as that on earth? Doth it not seem as though this ever upward mountain road would take us rather to the gates of Heaven than to those of El-Dorado? Santiago! it would need but little faith to see the gleam of the Gates of Pearl amidst yon peaks of snow and ice—may my good St. Francis pardon me for naming things earthly and heavenly in one breath!"

The young cavalier looked at him with a grave face, but with the twinkle of a smile in his eyes, and said—

"In good truth, Carvahal, this is a land of strange and mighty marvels that we are coming into, and the best proof of that is that I have never heard thee speak with such reverence of anything in any other land. Even now I feel as though I were hanging 'twixt Heaven and earth, and yet Filipillo had it from the guides this morning that, ere we descend into the valley in which Cajamarca lies, we must even pass between those same shining peaks and pyramids, and, from all they tell, nothing that we have yet seen or done will compare with the labour or the soreness of it."

"The holy Saints forfend!" said Carvahal, making a show of crossing himself, "for even El-Dorado might be too dearly won or even Heaven itself—may the Saints again forgive me—what blasphemy am I talking! Surely the strange air of this heathen land hath set my old wits a-wandering. Yet well might such a journey daunt the firmest mind."

He was right; for they, first of all Europeans, were beginning to experience that strange disorder of mind and body which is only known to those who have travelled long at great elevations, and as they went ever higher and higher

their sufferings increased even as their wonder and their fear did. Men who would have charged a host single-handed at the call of faith or duty reined up their trembling steeds on the brink of frightful precipices with hands that shook as though they had never held lance or sword, and their eyes gazed blankly down into the awful voids and their hearts fluttered in their labouring breasts like the hearts of little children left alone in the darkness.

Then, at length, they passed through the region of burning sun and piercing wind which lay above the soft summer of the valleys into the eternal winter that reigns unbroken through the centuries on its everlasting thrones of ice and snow.

There indeed they thought themselves wanderers beyond the limits that God had set to human life. Before and behind and around them towered the vast white shapes that seemed like the guardians of the portals of some other world into which no human foot had ever ventured. The icy blasts smote them with the keenness of sword-edges, and they and their labouring, shivering beasts gasped agonisingly for breath in the thin, frozen air.

At night cavalier and charger, man and brute, huddled together for warmth, for those awful wastes held neither tree nor shrub to furnish fuel for a fire. Their commonest duties seemed to them like the labour of slaves, and once a man-at-arms who sought to warm himself by running down a hill-slope fell prone ere he had gone fifty paces, with the blood gushing from his nose and mouth and ears, and his eyes starting out of his head. When they went to take him up he was already dead and the blood that had come from him frozen hard.

Still through all they pressed on, for their Captain, ever the last to rest and the first to move, had but one word on his lips, and that was "onward," and there was not a man among them who would have dared the shame of retreat or the bitterness of the reproach with which Pizarro would have bade him go back.

And so, as old Carvahal and the great Pedro de Candia had often used the little breath they had to spare in saying, since there is no staircase, however high, but must have a top step, they came at length to a curved ridge of grey-brown grass that sloped between two ice-crowned pinnacles

of rock, and here, standing, as it seemed, upon the very roof-tree of the world, they saw before and behind them only downward slopes.

Here Pizarro called a halt that was right welcome to every man and beast in the troop, and, calling Filipillo and the guides to him, he held a short conference with them. And when this was over he faced his pinched and starving, shivering followers, who had gathered in little huddled groups about him, and said in a voice that sounded strangely unlike his own in the thin, dry, cold air—

“Comrades, by the grace of God and with the help of His Holy Mother and the blessed Saints, we have won our way through the terrors of this wilderness to the threshold of the new land which shall be ours. The labours of the upward way are over. Henceforth our steps trend downwards from these fearsome solitudes, forsaken of man, if not of God since His arm has protected us even here, once more into the haunts of men and the home of warmth and sunshine. Did yonder snow-cloud break ye would see through it your first glimpse of the Land of Promise!”

As he said this he pointed with his right hand downward towards a tumbling sea of frozen mist which rolled in ghostly, silent billows along the mountain-side, and even as he spoke a storm-gust swept down from the upper ridges and rent asunder the heavy snow-laden clouds above them. Through this the sun, already beginning to sink towards the west, shone with a sudden stream of warmth and radiance. The mists at their feet parted, and through the changing rifts their longing eyes caught distant glimpses of tree-clad slopes and level, verdant plains cut by shining streams far, far away below them, and in the midst, for one brief instant, they saw a city so far away that it looked like a home of pigmies, yet with a gleam as of gold on its domes and roofs.

“Cajamarca! Cajamarca! Yonder is the Inca’s city!” piped Filipillo in his thin, shrill voice, starting forward and pointing down towards it.

“El-Dorado! El-Dorado!” shouted Carvahal in a hoarse, cracked voice, scrambling back into his saddle. “Santiago! we have won our way through this frozen hell. Now let us get down to Paradise, since in this heathen

country God's order is changed and Hell stands above Heaven."

"El-Dorado! El-Dorado!" ran like an echo from lip to lip—and, as the whole troop moved forward and downward, the rifts in the snow-mist closed again and shut out the vision from their eyes.

CHAPTER V

THE OPEN GATE

It was a good hour or more, so steep and difficult is that downward road, before the zone of frozen mist was passed through, and the vanguard of the little army halted, transfixed with wonder and admiration by the glorious scene which spread out—looking, in good truth, like a vision of Paradise after the hideous regions they had just passed through—some five thousand feet below them.

To the north-westward the slanting beams of the descending sun streamed under the edge of the cloud and mist and spread in a flood of glory over a broad valley walled in by terraced hills on every side. The whole of the level floor of the valley was covered with fields and plantations, separated by long green and red flowering hedges, groves of trees and shining streams, and straight paved roads, bordered by over-hanging trees.

At the very foot, as it seemed from that elevation, of the steep, sloping mountain-wall they had just crossed lay the city of Cajamarca, and scattered all over the valley were scores of villages gleaming white amidst the green of the fields and leafy groves about them.

On the lower slopes of the hills rose countless terraces, formed by the patient labour of many generations, the lowest of them golden with ripened maize, and step by step the gold passed shade by shade into the brilliant green of the unripened crops of the highest terraces. It was a vast oasis in the midst of a still vaster chaos of bleak and desert mountains, the home, as it seemed to these way-worn travellers, of industrious peace and bounteous plenty, and the gentler soul of Alonso de Molina whispered to him

as his gaze first fell upon its glories that it was a paradise into which he and his gold-hungering companions were about to bring the poison of treachery and the storms of ruthless violence.

And yet another moment's thought reminded him that not even this fair-seeming Eden was free from the curse that had blasted the first Paradise of earth, for he knew well that in the midst of it lay encamped a vast and conquering host, led by one who, beguiled by the fleeting dream of empire, had drawn his sword against his brother and brought down upon the ancient empire of the Incas that doom pronounced of old against the kingdom divided against itself—the doom which by the mailed hand of the invader was so soon to fall upon himself.

"A goodly land, comrade, and one that it were a pity to leave too long in the possession of the heathen and the enemies of Holy Church and His Most Catholic Majesty," said Pedro de Candia, who was guiding his stumbling beast alongside of him. "Malediction! what roads! This is the fortieth time at least in the last hour that nothing but the help of the Saints hath kept this poor beast off his knees, and it were an ill place this even for a dumb brute to kneel down in, to say nothing of pitching a good Christian on to his head."

"A goodly land as thou sayest, Pedro," replied Molina, somewhat sadly, "and well worth the stealing, as old Carvahal would say, and yet—well, if I were not a good Catholic I should think that those who could make such a paradise in the midst of such a wilderness, heathens though they be, were well deserving of a better embassy than we bring them, coming as we do with the Cross of God before us, lies on our lips, and the lust of plunder in our hearts."

"From which speech it would seem that the work before us is not much to your liking, Caballero," said the deep, stern voice of the Captain-General on the other side of him.

He turned quickly in his saddle and saw Pizarro's dark, grave eyes looking half inquiringly, half reproachfully at him, and before he could find any words to reply Pizarro went on in a kinder tone—

"Did I not know that there is no stouter heart or stronger arm under our banners than thine, Molina, I should say

that thou has brought too gentle a mind to such work as ours is and has to be. They who would hew out empires for their masters in the strange and new-found lands of the earth must do it with hands cased in gauntlets of steel. The silken glove is for the court and the palace. Ends, not means, must be the care of those who stake honour, fortune, and life itself on such hazards as ours.

"And look you," he went on, speaking quicker and louder, as though he wished those about him to hear as well, "let us make no mistake as to that which now lies before us. Yonder valley looks a paradise, but it is the armed camp of a conquering tyrant to boot. If the envoys have not lied to us, Atahualpa is yonder at the head of a host of eighty thousand men, full-flushed with the pride of victory, and we are a hundred and sixty soldiers and gentlemen of Spain, cut off from all succour and with but one road to take—and that road lies forward!"

"And thou shalt find none readier to follow thee along that road, Señor, than he who will strike none the less hard for God and king because he would win the land by other means if he could," replied Molina, bending his head in deference to his Captain's reproof.

"Spoken like as gentle a knight and as brave a cavalier as Spain herself can boast of!" said Pizarro, smiling one of his rare smiles. "I did not mean to reproach thee, only to show thee how great a difference there may be between that which a man would do and that which he must. Thou knowest well that I could think no evil of one of those who came with me across that line on the sands of Gallo."

Then, without waiting for any reply, he pulled his horse aside and joined his brother Hernando, who was riding a little way behind him.

"A strange man!" said Candia, in a low voice. "One of those instruments that God fashions sometimes out of vile material to hew out the rough shapes of His mysterious purposes—a base-born bastard, whose first work in life was tending swine, and now raised by the strength of the great heart that God gave him to be a hidalgo of Spain and, as I for one truly believe, ere long to be conqueror of realms wider than Spain itself. Fear not, Molina, put thy scruples in thy pouch, since thou presently hast but little else to put there. God makes great men only to great ends. Leave

the means to destiny, and believe thou art not marching under the banner of such a man as Francisco Pizarro for nothing."

"That I well believe," answered Molina. "We here are but instruments. Thou art right. It is not for the tool to question the intent of the hand that uses it. Thinkest thou we shall reach the city to-night?"

As though in answer to him the trumpet at that moment sounded a halt. While they were talking a turn in the downward road had brought them in sight of a ridge of rocks out-cropping from the grass-grown mountain-side to the right hand, and looking from a little distance like the fragments of some Titan-built fortress. To the left rose a steep, scarped hill, ringed with rocks. It was a position that a hundred men, resolute and well armed, could have held against ten thousand. Even a few score of naked savages could have poured such a rain of great stones down upon the little company passing between the two fastnesses as would have left neither man nor horse unmaimed, even if alive, and the Captain-General was not a man to lead his followers into such a place without due caution.

So the halt was called while they were yet above what might have been a death-trap for them all, and scouts were sent out on either hand to feel the way, and these, after a diligent search, came back and said that they could find not so much as a mouse among the rocks. So the trumpets sounded again, and the troop, with eyes and ears alert and weapons ready, marched through the defile which, if he had had the knowledge or the will to do so, the master of the hosts encamped below might have infallibly made the end of their journey.

"El-Dorado is ours!" laughed Carvahal to Hernando de Soto, as they came out of the pass and emerged on a green, sloping plain below. "Those who left such a place as that unguarded will make but small fight for the best they have. Carramba! with the men we have here I would hold that pass against all the armies of His Catholic Majesty while my powder and shot and the stones on the hillside held out. It is but child's play taking a castle whose defenders leave the portcullis up and forget to raise the drawbridge. Cuerpo de Cristo! who would have thought to find the gate of the Inca's treasure-house left open like that?"

De Soto laughed a trifle bitterly, and said—

“If thou wert anything better than a blaspheming eater of fire with never a thought beyond throat-cutting and gold-getting, Carvahal, thou wouldst have seen by this that we have been welcomed into this land as friends, as envoys of a king whom these poor people look on as a god. Nay, have they not hailed us as sons ourselves of one of their gods? Did not Titu Atauchi, brother of Atahualpa himself, greet the Captain-General down in Huamacucho yonder as Inca Viracocha, and place on his left arm the golden bracelet which none but those of Divine descent, as they think, may wear? Thou mayest believe me when I tell thee that if they had taken us for what we are we should never have come thus far alive through such a land as this, and it is thought——”

“Which makes thee ever and anon feel and speak more like a monk than a stout adventurer. Is that not so, de Soto?” growled Carvahal in reply. Santiago! though I am not so fine a gentleman or as soft-hearted a splitter of skulls as thou or Molina yonder, who hath conversed with me more than once in such a strain, yet, in good sooth, I believe I’m the better Christian, for, on my faith as a good Catholic, I believe that the Saints who watch over our enterprise have thus blinded the eyes of these heathens so that we can do our good work the easier. How else could we few prevail against so many? It is faith thou wantest, de Soto—faith. Thou art over-much given to reasoning, which was ever a bad thing for those whose business is rather with hard knocks than soft, smooth-sounding words.”

“Ha!” exclaimed de Soto, suddenly rising in his stirrups and looking on ahead. “What have we yonder? By my faith, a pair of forts, seemingly as well placed and as skilfully built as the best engineer could wish for. See how they command the way down to the valley from all sides! There, too, a handful of men could hold the road against a host. How much the easier, then, could the hosts of the Inca hold it against such a handful as we are! And look you—Santiago! what madness!—they are coming out from the chief one on the right hand yonder to meet us as though we were friends.”

De Soto laid a bitter emphasis on his last words, but Carvahal only slapped his thigh, and chuckled—

“Cuerpo de Cristo! Did good soldiers of the Cross ever have such luck as that! Verily the Lord hath delivered the heathen into the hands of His servants.”

The little army now moved down in good order on to a level space before the principal fort, and there, at the command of the Captain, halted drawn up in battle array. Pizarro and his brother Hernando went forward with the guides and interpreters, amongst whom was the lad Filipillo, who was soon to play so important a part in the great tragedy about to be enacted, and met the party that had come out from the fort. It was led by an Inca noble, the Curaca of Cajamarca, and he, after the first courtesies had been exchanged, told the Captain-General that his lord and master Atahualpa, in whose name he welcomed him, had bidden him offer the hospitality of the fort to him and his followers for that evening and night, as it was already too late to make the rest of the descent into the valley. The next morning he would himself conduct them into the city, and lodge them in the more suitable quarters that the Inca had already set apart for them.

He told them also that Atahualpa himself was encamped with his army at one of his palaces on the other side of the valley, where he was performing the observances of a fast which must be completed before he could give the strangers audience. But until then they would be lodged and well cared for as his guests in the city.

The Captain-General accepted the invitation with many courtesies and assurances of friendship, and that night the Spaniards slept softer and fared better than they had done for many a weary day and night, albeit the prudence of Pizarro found excuses for planting sentries and making sufficient provision against surprise, for he was a man who never of his own free will gave odds to Fate.

The next morning with the first glimmer of light the trumpet sounded, and, horse and foot, the little army marched out and mustered on the slope beyond the fort, watched with wondering and admiring eyes by their simple hosts. Then the Fray Valverde prayed before them, and pointed his prayer with a sermon which, as Carvahal said after, was both long and strong for the stomachs of break-

fastless men shivering in a keen wind on a bleak hillside. Then came breakfast, and after that the ranks were formed for the march to the city.

Before the trumpet sounded Pizarro spoke a few brief, weighty words to them, telling of the dangers that possibly awaited them, of the risk of treachery, and the enormous advantage of numbers that the Inca could use against them if once he took them for enemies. He gave them three watchwords—silence, watchfulness, and obedience, and then he rode to the head of the column and the downward march began.

With every mile the beauties of the valley opened out in ever-increasing splendour before them, but the weight and magnitude of the enterprise whose crucial hour was now so near seemed to press heavily upon their hearts and dim their eyes to the wonders that were multiplying about them. The valley that they were entering seemed a very paradise on earth, and yet, for all that they knew, it might for them be the end of their earthly journeying and the grave of all their hopes of El-Dorado.

As the column wound round the base of a green wooded hill whose summit was crowned with a building, half fort, half palace, constructed of the wonderful Inca masonry, they came in sight of the gate by which they were to enter the city. Then Pizarro waved his hand, the trumpets rang out brazen and jubilant, and, with banners waving and the bright morning sun gleaming on plate and mail and shining weapons and harness, this little handful of invaders of a mighty empire marched forward towards the gate.

They reached it and passed through it into a broad, paved street, but here there were no welcoming throngs to greet them as at Caxas and Huamacucho. As they rode through the town, and street after street opened up, they looked in vain for some sign of life. In all the city there seemed neither man, woman, nor child left. Not a sound answered the blare of their trumpets, the jingling of their accoutrements, or the clang of the iron hoofs on the stones of the silent streets. Cajamarca was, for the time being, a city of the dead, and if any of them had possessed the gift of prophecy he might well have looked upon it as an emblem of the desolation which they were bringing into the land of the Children of the Sun.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE CITY OF THE INCA

No reception could well have been more different from the anticipations of the adventurers than that which awaited them in the first of the cities of the Incas that they had so far seen, for the towns that they had passed through on their road up the western slopes of the mountains they had looked upon only as the outposts of an entrenched camp, a camp which to them was El-Dorado, and whose trenches and circumvallations were the gorges and heights of the mighty Andes themselves.

As has just been said, they entered the city in utter silence save for the blare of their own trumpets and the jingling of their own arms and accoutrements. They had already learnt from their guides that Cajamarca was the third city in importance in the whole Inca empire, standing as it did between Quito and Cuzco, and commanding the high-road running from north to south through the domains of Huayna-Capac.

It was in vain that they asked the Curaca or his subordinates for some explanation of their strange reception. There was not even an animal or a fowl left in the city. Only the wild birds flying to and fro amongst the trees which lined the squares of the city gave evidence of life within its borders. Not a house was tenanted, and every street and square was deserted, and yet this but a few hours before had been the home of many thousands of human beings. What had become of them? To all inquiries the Curaca and his officers answered in the same words—

“It is the will of our Lord, and in this land there is no other will but his. That which the Son of the Sun says is already done. The city is the home of his guests. It is

ours to do our Lord's will ; it is his only to know the reason. He is the brain ; we are the hands."

And so, amidst an utter silence that at length even swallowed up the voices of their own trumpets, Pizarro and his men entered Cajamarca and took possession of the spacious quarters allotted to them by this mysterious master of men whose officers obeyed him with the unquestioning servility of dogs.

The quarters assigned to the Spaniards were at the north-western end of the irregular square which occupied the centre of the city. They were formed of low, one-storeyed buildings, massively built and containing rooms large enough for the accommodation of a score of men each, and, as there were far too many of them for the little force to occupy, some of them were for the time being turned into stables for the lodging of the eighty-five horses and eight mules which had survived the hardships of the journey.

But though the strangers had been, as it were, welcomed into an empty house, there was no lack of entertainment, and that, too, of a sort which awoke more appetites than one, for there was an abundance of roasted meats, baked cakes of maize-meal, boiled roots and vegetables and varied fruits which, once strange to them, they had now become accustomed to, all of which were brought to them in dishes and vessels of silver, and to Pizarro and his captains there was brought also the golden-yellow chicha, the royal drink of the Inca himself, in great goblets of chased gold so massive and splendid that when they sat down to their first meal that midday Carvahal, after taking up a great golden bowl in both hands and quaffing a mighty draught of the pleasant liquor that it contained, set it down again on the table and brushed the clinging drops from his beard, and said with one of his big, chuckling laughs—

"Cuerpo de Cristo, Caballeros ! what does this remind you of ? Carramba ! without any disrespect to your worshipful persons I should be inclined to liken the present scene to a banquet of the beggars of Seville enjoying the best hospitality served in the most sumptuous fashion that the Chamberlains of His Most Catholic Majesty could achieve."

"A somewhat rude simile, Señor Carvahal," said Hernando Pizarro in his dry, official voice, "and one that

would scarce bear the test of logic. Surely thou art too stout a soldier of Spain to liken men who have the faith of God in their hearts, good plate of proof on their bodies, and good swords of Toledo steel by their sides, to beggars? Surely thou art confounding the worth of that which is to be won with the worth of that which is to win it?"

Carvahal had already opened his mouth to make some reply after his own fashion when the Captain-General, turning towards his brother, said—

"Thou hast there touched on a matter, Hernando, which should be discussed amongst us without loss of time. Carvahal, thou canst have thy jest hereafter shouldst thou find time to make it. Here and now there are other things to be talked of, for very grave matters claim our attention, and as true soldiers know no time so good as the present, it were better that we discussed them now. What say you, comrades?"

He paused and was answered by a silence in which every head was bowed in consent. Then, leaning his folded arms on the table, he went on to speak words which, as the event proved, decided the fate of an empire.

"We can speak here," he said in his slow, grave tone, "with such confidence as we could on the beach of the island of Gallo or in the cabin of one of our own ships, for truly we are as lonely here in the midst of this strange land as we could be there. The safety of all depends upon the faith of each. Therefore, apart from all questions of loyalty to our king, the interest of each is the welfare of all. Let us, then, as behoves true men and adventurers embarked upon an enterprise as desperate as it is glorious, look the conditions of our situation fairly and fearlessly in the face so that we may at once make the best and know the worst of them."

He paused again and looked about him and saw set faces and steadfast eyes such as he was accustomed to see when speaking on weighty matters. Then he went on again.

"We are here, a hundred and sixty strangers and adventurers, in the heart of an empire whose inhabitants, by all accounts, may be numbered by myriads. Between us and the sea over which we came and by which alone we could return whence we came is a barrier which we have crossed as guests and which we can never recross save as conquerors.

Within a league or so of us Atahualpa lies encamped, the leader of a conquering host that is numbered by thousands, while we are numbered by tens.

"So far we have been received as guests and friends, but the youngest of us here is too old a soldier to be deceived by such appearances as we have seen. In this wondrous land, where gold and silver and gems seem to have no value, our entertainment has cost so little that it is but a drop in the ocean of Atahualpa's wealth. Against that it behoves us as reasonable men to set the value of our destruction to him. You know through many rumours that these heathens have received us at the bidding of one of their ancient superstitions as beings somewhat more than human, as children of one of their gods, whose son they have by an unwelcome if somewhat useful flattery taken me to be."

Here he stopped and stroked his beard, and Pedro de Candia, looking round at the Fray Valverde, said in a low tone that had a laugh running through it—

"That, methinks, would be but a poor warrant in the eyes of the Church for the canonisation even of your Excellency, and yet a very good reason for the excommunication and anathema of his imperial high and mightiness should it ever come to the holy father yonder to pronounce the ban upon him."

Valverde smiled but said nothing, having said all he would say in his smile. Some of the others laughed aloud, guessing his meaning, and Pizarro went on—

"I see thou hast taken my meaning even before I spoke it, de Candia, and so thou hast left me but little more to say. We are few but strong against many whose only strength is in their numbers. It may be, as indeed seems most likely to me, that we have been decoyed by fair-seeming appearances into a trap, but if so this would not be the first time that the caged animal has turned and rent his captor. For us there is no escape save through the red road of battle and victory. These people, as I have said, are strong only in their numbers, and more than that, from what we have seen it is manifest that they are a huge body which moves and acts by the thought and will of a single head.

"To strike the body would be but to bury our weapons, as it were, in a mountain of flesh, which would be as vain

a work as striking an elephant with a dagger. Wherefore it will be as plain to you as it is to me that if we are to reduce this vast body to our will and purposes—nay, if we are to prevent it from eating us, alive or dead, at a mouthful, we must strike swift and straight and strong at its head.

"In a word," he went on, tapping with his forefinger on the table in front of him, "it is not upon this Inca empire with its innumerable legions that we must make war; it is upon Atahualpa himself, and in that warfare our first weapon must be that of the weak: we must use cunning first and steel afterwards. Atahualpa, himself a usurper who has divided the empire of his father in war with his brother, has, to my mind, led us here into a trap baited with a simulation of kindness and welcome and with the sight of gold and silver and gems such as we have here about us. It is for us, having no retreat, to take the fowler in his own snare."

He paused again and looked about him as though expecting an answer from some one. But no answer came. Bold as they were, the quiet daring of this tremendous proposition was more than they could grasp at the first view of it. For a hundred and sixty men, less than half a troop of cavalry, isolated in a strange land, cut off from all resources save such as they could make for themselves, in the midst of a land whose extent they only dimly dreamt of, and confronted and, it might be, surrounded with armies of unknown numbers, to take captive the lord and master of uncounted thousands looked at first sight an enterprise such as only demigods could dare, and yet another moment's thought showed them that the masterful genius of Pizarro had in those few weighty sentences pointed out the only possible way to victory and the only means of saving the little army of adventurers from destruction.

There was silence for a time, and Pizarro, folding his arms across his cuirass, closed his eyes and waited for his words to sink, as they did, deep into their minds. Then, as no one else seemed inclined to break a silence that was getting irksome to him, Carvahal took another deep drink of chicha from the golden bowl before him, and then, putting it down with a clash on the table, said—

"By the bones of St. Francis! it seems that, whether this heathen body has a head or not, at least this Christian

body of ours has. There never yet was a maze that had no way out of it if but a single one, and the Captain has found not only the way but the thread that leads to it. Doubtless he will give that thread into our hands in good time. Meanwhile there is another view to be taken of our position. We are not only a little band of wanderers lost in the vastness of a strange land. For my own part I would rather call ourselves a wedge of steel driven by the hand of God into the heart of a mighty oak. Oak is strong, but steel is stronger. Carramba! let but the wedge be driven far enough and the tree will be split? What say you, Caballeros?"

"Spoken like a stout soldier, Carvahal," laughed Pedro de Candia across the table, "and for once with as fine a point upon thy tongue as thou art wont to have upon thy sword."

"And like a good and faithful Christian to boot!" cried Valverde, rising to his feet. "It is not we who are delivered into the hands of the heathen. It is the heathen who in his blindness hath been delivered into ours. What shall the numbers of this unbelieving tyrant avail if we are but true to ourselves and our holy cause. We here in the flesh are but few, yet if our hearts do not fail us, shall not all the hosts of Heaven come to our aid in the hour of need? Who can prevail against the Lord and His anointed? Hath not the Vicar of Christ himself blessed our holy enterprise, and shall not it therefore come to a happy issue? Let the wisdom of the serpent unite with the courage of the lion, and all the hosts of heathendom shall not avail against us!"

"If we find the valour," growled Carvahal to Hernando de Soto, sitting next to him, "we may trust the holy father to find the cunning. Methinks that if we took this fair valley for Eden we should not have to look very far for the serpent. Holy Saints, what heresy am I talking!" and once more he buried his broad, red face in the golden bowl of chicha.

Then Pizarro opened his eyes again and said as quietly as before—

"Well, then, Caballeros, since none of you hath anything against my plan, we will take it as approved till a better one shall suggest itself, and, as there are few heads amongst us, it will be well to have the best thoughts of all. This

afternoon, therefore, let every one ponder what I have said, let every man, gentle and simple, think himself in the greatest peril that he hath yet ventured into, which in truth may well be the case. Let us consider these lodgings of ours our fortress, let every means be taken to guard against surprise, and yet forget not that everything must be done in such fashion that no suspicion shall be aroused. To-night our council of war shall meet, and to-morrow, if Atahualpa does not send an embassy to us, whether of peace or war, then we will send one to him. And now, Caballeros," he went on, rising from his seat, "we have used our tongues enough for the present. Let us use our eyes and ears and learn what we can of the truth of this strange situation into which we have come. We have but scant time for thought and plan-making, for we know not how soon the moment for action may come."

There was a little hum of conversation after this, each one talking with his neighbour and discussing the thoughts that were uppermost in his mind. Hernando de Soto, Pedro de Candia, and Alonso de Molina were seated together at a little distance from the Captain, his brother, and Valverde. Presently de Soto caught Pizarro's eye and made a motion as if he would speak. He nodded to him as though to say that he was listening, and de Soto said in a tone loud enough for all the others to hear—

"We have been talking, Señor, likening ourselves to the warriors of Judah on the borders of Canaan. They sent men to spy out the strength or weakness of the land. Why should not we do the same thing? It is yet but a little past noon, and Atahualpa is no more than a league or so away. There is no time to be lost, and that which we have to learn we cannot learn too quickly. I have been your envoy with some success twice already: once at Tumbez and once at Caxas and Huamacucho. Give me half a score of horse and let me ride across the valley and speak face to face with the Inca himself while you are making safe your position here. Before nightfall I shall be back with news that may be well worth the telling."

A hum of admiration and approval ran round the chamber as he uttered this daring proposal, and Pizarro answered, speaking slowly and gravely, and yet with a gleam of approbation in his eyes—

"That would be a bold venture, de Soto, and one well worthy of him who would undertake it, but, bethink thee—an embassy of ten to one who cannot know the laws of Christian warfare, surrounded by countless legions amidst which ye would be but as a handful of pebbles dropped into the ocean! We could ill afford to lose thee, de Soto, and I would rather lose my right hand than thee and ten others. What think you, Hernando?"

His brother thought for a moment, and then he looked up and said—

"De Soto is right, and I for one see no danger in the venture. Rather would it show the Inca that we come as friends, suspecting nothing of such designs as he may have against us. If Atahuallpa seeks our destruction, believing us safe in his power, he will not alarm the whole of his quarry by offering violence to our embassy. If his friendship be genuine, then, too, there can be no danger. Let de Soto take a score of our best-mounted horsemen and set out forthwith. The venture may well look a bold one in heathen eyes, and its boldness can do our enterprise little harm and may do it much good. Let them go, say I."

Pizarro looked down and stroked his beard in silence for a moment. Then he looked up and said—

"That is well and cunningly reasoned, brother. Thou wert ever a sound counsellor. Boldness is, after all, the best weapon of those who are at once stout of heart and few in number. De Soto, choose thy troop, to the number of not more than twenty. Take Filipillo to be thy mouth-piece, and God give thee a good return!"

CHAPTER VII

HOW DE SOTO PERFORMED HIS EMBASSY

THE matter of the embassy to Atahualpa having been thus decided, but little time was wasted in carrying it into execution. While Pizarro and his captains had been debating the venture in the banqueting-hall in the quarters which the Inca had assigned to them, a fierce and sudden storm of wind and hail had swept down the valley, and this, enduring only for a short time, as storms in those regions are wont to do, was followed by a swift change of temperature which melted the hail into a warm, soft rain. Then this with equal suddenness vanished, and the parting cloud-masses rolled in great shadowy billows up the mountainsides, and down between them the sun streamed warm and bright over the humid foliage of the valley, turning it by one of Nature's subtle strokes of magic into an enchanted realm paved with emeralds and diamonds—dazzling and yet fleeting forecasts of the fate of those whose daring had led them thus far into the unknown land which for most of them should prove at once a treasure-house and a grave.

"A good omen, comrades!" laughed de Soto as he wheeled his horse in between the chargers of Alonso de Molina and Sebastian ben-Alcazar, a tall, spare-built, dark-faced cavalier with more Moorish than Christian blood in his veins, and who was a Christian now only because his father had abjured his faith for love of a dark-eyed, fair-haired maiden of Castille. "A good omen, forsooth! Sunshine after storm. In good truth it seems to me that we have battled through storm and darkness enough from the sands of Gallo to this pleasant vale before us to earn somewhat of sunshine after our labours."

"*Sic itur ad astra!*" replied ben-Alcazar gravely. "I have heard of a proverb which says that the memory of toil which is past is the best heartening brave men can have to strengthen them for future labours."

"That is as true as thy scrap of Latin, ben-Alcazar," laughed de Molina more gaily than he had done; "yet surely we have climbed near enough to the stars in coming here. For my own part I wish to go no nearer till I go for good."

"We are ready—*Vamos!*" cried de Soto before he could get any further with his philosophical speech.

As he spoke he drew his sword and at the same moment the trumpet sounded, and at the head of their little troop of fifteen horse, the pick and flower of the whole army so far as mounting and accoutrements went, they moved across the square towards the opening of the street which led to the roadway running from the city walls to the pleasure-house round which the army of the Inca lay encamped.

This, when they came upon it, they found to be such a roadway as they had not so far met with in Peru, and forming a most pleasant contrast to the mountain paths over which they had so lately toiled. It was broad, straight, level, and well paved with evenly set stones, upon which the hoofs of their iron-shod horses rang merrily as they trotted along it. When they had covered about half of the way and had come within full view of the splendours of the Inca camp, with its thousands of brightly-coloured tents and hundreds of waving standards covering the plain beyond and sloping up the hillside on the other side of the valley, de Soto, turning in the saddle, said to the trumpeter of the troop—

"Diego, fill thy chest and give us a good honest blast so that we may give his heathen High-and-mightiness over yonder some warning of the honour that the servants of his Most Catholic Majesty are about to do him in this visit."

The trumpeter put the shining brazen tube to his lips and sent the shrill, piercing notes ringing down through the silence of the valley, and as the echoes of the mountain wall repeated them de Soto said again—

"Caballeros, it is long since our good beasts have stretched their limbs on such a road as this, and mine is already pulling at the bridle as though a gallop were well to

his taste. Give rein, then, and forward at speed. To come in good style before His Majesty will do us no harm in the eyes of the heathen."

With that he threw up his right hand and gave his charger the rein. The troop, riding three abreast, followed suit, and with a thunder of hoofs and a rattle and jingle of arms and harness, with the afternoon sun shining brightly on breast-plate and morion, tossing plumes and waving pennon, the Spanish cavalcade swept along the causeway, as the historian of the Conquest has well described it, "like some fearful apparition on the wings of the wind."

Thus they came into full sight of the Peruvian camp and saw long, serried lines of gaily-dressed warriors, splendid in armour of gold and casques of silver, drawn up motionless and expectant on the farther bank of a broad, shallow stream at which the causeway ended in a bridge of such light structure that it was manifestly made for nothing heavier than foot traffic.

De Soto, with an eye at once to good generalship and the value of first impressions, threw his hand up again and reined in his charger within fifty yards or so of the water.

"That bridge was never made to carry such as we are," he said to his two companions. "We should make as foolish a spectacle as we should an easy prey to those heathens did we trust to it and fall through. For my part I would rather trust the water. Follow me, Caballeros! God and Santiago for Spain!"

With that he set spurs to his horse, galloped to the river's edge and plunged into the water, followed with a great splashing and snorting of steeds by the rest of the troop. They crossed the river bed and gained the opposite bank with scarcely a break in their ranks. On the far side there was a broad stretch of level meadow-land, and across this they cantered in perfect order under the wondering gaze of the silent thousands drawn up on either side of the Inca's pleasure-house.

This was a vast, low structure, white-walled and built in the form of three sides of a square, with the open side towards the river. The interior space was filled with a brilliant array, composed of the Inca's chief warriors and the ministers of his court, and in the midst of a great semicircle, awaiting his already expected visitors, sat Atahualpa,

the most plainly-dressed man in all the glittering assembly, and yet distinguished from all by the golden throne-chair in which he sat while all the others stood about him or crouched at his feet, and by the crimson fringe of the borla which covered his forehead and half concealed his eyes. For all the sign that the Inca gave the display of the Spanish advance had been wasted, though wondering and perhaps admiring glances were not wanting among the courtiers and the bevy of bright-eyed, long-haired princesses that was gathered about the Inca's throne. But Atahualpa sat like an image carved in bronze, not even raising his head as the strange and terrible apparition approached him.

De Soto halted his troop some hundred paces from the Inca's throne, and then at a word from him Diego's trumpet rang out and it deployed into line. Then, with Molina on his right hand and ben-Alcazar on his left, he rode forward, and the three helmed and plumed heads bowed together within ten paces of the throne. Still Atahualpa gave no sign that he was even conscious of their presence. His body was there on the throne, but his spirit was far away in Quito, whither it had travelled back through five years to the Day of Disaster to watch the darkness stealing over the face of the sun, and to hear the words which had foretold the doom of which these fair-faced, shining strangers, mounted on their marvellous and terrible beasts, were assuredly the harbingers.

Somewhat chilled by so frigid a reception, de Soto called Filipillo to him and bade him deliver to the Inca the brief speech that he had already prepared for him, telling Atahualpa who they were and whence they came, whose servants they were and how their lord and master, His Most Catholic Majesty of Spain, had sent them to bear his greetings across many thousand leagues of ocean to his brother, the Emperor of the West.

This oration Filipillo delivered, putting more than enough bombast into his tone as though he knew that all this splendid state which surrounded the doomed monarch was but as a thin plate of burnished gold soon to be pierced and cut asunder by a dagger of steel. There had been a time when such as he would scarce have dared to enter the presence of the Inca grovelling on his face in the dust. Now he stood before him erect, almost as an

equal, and as he stood so and delivered his message his bold eyes wandered from the impassive countenance of the Inca to a slender, half-clad form seated beside the throne, and a fair face framed in long, shining hair—a face whose beauty, as it happened, was ere long to prove fatal to him at whose footstool Pillcu-Cica-Ñusta, princess of the blood-royal of Peru, lay as a slave might lie at the feet of her master.

When the speech was ended de Soto awaited some reply from the Inca, but none came. Atahualpa still sat motionless, not showing even by a movement of his eyes that he had understood or even heard what Filipillo had said. Then a tall and splendidly-dressed old warrior who stood at the right hand of the throne, and who was none other than Chalcuchima, General-in-Chief of the army of Quito, said curtly—

“It is well so far, but the ears of our Lord are not for such base voices as thine, thou slave of his servants! Let thy master speak, and it may be that our Lord will hear.” This speech Filipillo, with no very good grace, translated to de Soto, and he, having already acquired sufficient of the Peruvian tongue to achieve a few words in it, prayed the Inca to answer with his own lips. Hearing this Atahualpa looked up for the first time and said in a clear, passionless voice—

“Go back and tell him who sent you that I am keeping a fast which will be ended this midnight. To-morrow I will come and speak with him. Till then let him remain in the lodgings that have been given him and await my pleasure with patience.”

It was no very kindly greeting, and one that gave but little encouragement to those who received it. Whatever effect the strangeness of the embassy might have had on the minds of his soldiers and courtiers, it had none upon the frigid composure of the Inca himself. But the Spanish leader in the midst of his discouragement caught a gleam of interest in Atahualpa's eyes as he looked upon the splendidly caparisoned war-horse that stood nodding his plumed head and pawing the ground impatiently before him. Seizing the opportunity, de Soto, who was the finest horseman and best-mounted cavalier in the army, suddenly drove his spurs into his charger's flanks, and,

wheeling him sharply round, sent him careering away at full gallop over the level plain in front of the courtyard, and then, before the wondering eyes of the assembled thousands, he galloped and cantered, wheeled and caracoled and curveted in wide circles round the flanks and rear of his own motionless troop, and then, plunging in again at full gallop, he reined his charger up and pulled him back upon his haunches so close to Atahualpa's throne, that the foam flying from the bit was blown by the breath of his nostrils on to the skirts of his imperial robes.

Faint screams broke from the lips of the frightened women about the throne, and some of the nobles shrank back in something like terror from the strange sight—a weakness for which, as the chronicles say, they paid that night with their lives—but not a muscle of Atahualpa's form moved. He had cast his eyes to the ground again, and did not even raise them as de Soto finished his show of horsemanship. He who had sat unmoved amidst the falling ruins of Quito might well look without disturbance upon such a spectacle, strange and even terrible as it might seem in other eyes.

But when de Soto, feeling somewhat foolish after his arrogant display, had retired to his place in front of the troop, Atahualpa looked up and made a sign with his hand, and immediately refreshments of cakes and fruit and roasted meat were brought out in dishes of silver, but these de Soto, on behalf of his men, declined with the best grace he could, for his reception had not been such as to persuade him to risk the danger of dismounting in the midst of all those armed thousands about him. Still, as the historian truthfully says, they did not hesitate to quaff the sparkling chicha from golden vases of wondrous size which were presented to them by the dark-eyed beauties of the Inca's harem.

This they took as their dismissal, and so they made their salutations and departed with heavier hearts than they brought with them, and, having crossed the river more soberly than before, they took their way back to Cajamarca along the causeway, saying little among themselves, yet thinking much of the majesty and power that they had seen, and wondering how they, but a handful of strangers in a strange land, should overcome the innumerable

hosts which the next morning might see arrayed against them.

Night had fallen when they got back to their quarters, and from thence they looked across the valley and saw the countless camp-fires of Atahualpa's legions sprinkled over the fields and up the distant hillsides, "as thick as the very stars of heaven."

Later on that night Chalcuchima was standing with bowed head before his master's seat in his private apartment. Atahualpa, buried in thought, was sitting with hands clasped in his lap and chin resting on his breast. His old servant and General had been giving him such counsel as few save he would dare to give, and now he was making a last effort to save his Lord and the son of his brother from the consequences of the gloomy fatalism that had robbed the conquering ruler of his wisdom and the absolute master of many regions of his strength.

"Think once again, Lord, I beseech thee!" he said in solemn and yet impassioned tones. "This resolve of thine is a resolve of ruin and death. These strangers are no gods, or sons of gods. Do they not eat and drink like men? More, have we not heard how some of them have fallen and died amidst the snows of the upper mountains? Have not some of these strange beasts of theirs also fallen and died by the wayside? It is true that the weapons they bear are potent and terrible, yet have not tidings come to us from the North telling us how they have turned them against each other? Would the true sons of Viracocha have done that? Would they have ravaged and plundered our towns on the seaboard as these men have done who come to us with words of friendship on their lips and lies in their hearts?"

"I tell thee, Lord, as I have told thee oft before, they are but plunderers who have come to rob thee of this metal by which they set such store, and for which they will endure all toils and risk all dangers. By the memory of thy father and lord, who is even now looking down upon thee from the windows of the Mansion of the Sun, I conjure thee to speak the word that shall bid me lead thy legions to Cajamarca, and take these white-face plunderers in the trap that they will lay for thee to-morrow. Have not our spies told us of their intention? To-night all may

be saved. They are few and we are many, and the darkness will cover us from the aim of their lightning-bolts. Ten thousand to-night will gladly die to save thee and destroy those who would rob thee of the inheritance of thy fathers. But to-morrow, once thou hast set foot in the snare they have prepared for thee, not all thy legions could save thee, and if thou art lost, Lord, then all is lost, for thou art all we have."

Atahualpa heard him in silence, and when he had finished the silence continued. Minute after minute passed and the doomed Inca gave no sign that he had even heard the warning that might have saved him. Then at length Chalcuchima's broad breast heaved with a great sigh that ended in a choking sob, and then, knowing that all further argument must be in vain, he bowed himself in silent farewell, and walked with slow steps and down-bent head towards the curtained doorway. There for a moment he paused and looked back at the unmoved figure of his Lord, and then, making the silent sign of appeal to the Unnameable, he turned again and left the Last of the Incas to his thoughts and the near impending doom from which his whole army would joyfully have died to save him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMING OF ATAHUALLPA

It may well be believed that there was but little sleep for the Spanish army in Cajamarca that night, for the tidings which de Soto and his embassy had brought back, and which it is easy to see would lose nothing in the telling, were sufficiently heavy and full of grave import to convince the lightest-minded of the adventurers that the task of the morning would be no child's play even if it succeeded, and that if it failed, as it almost certainly must have done had the Inca taken the wise advice of Chalcuchima, it would infallibly involve the ruin of every man's hopes, and most likely the loss of his life to boot.

It were idle to say that no man thought of sleep, since old Carvahal said with truth that he never closed his eyes for a wink without opening them in fear of seeing the Peruvian legions swarming round the town. There were, indeed, some who talked almost openly of a retreat to the hills while there was yet time to escape from the city which to them seemed no better than a death-trap, and among these was Alonzo Riquelme, the king's treasurer himself, who, strangely enough, was that same "fat man" from whom, together with the one-eyed Almagro, who had not yet come upon the scene, Atahualpa was hereafter to pray to Pizarro for deliverance.

News of this possible defection was speedily carried to the Captain, and no sooner did he hear of it, having already made the arrangements which, according to his resolve, nothing less than a convulsion of Nature should alter, he sent for all the chief men of the little force, together with the officials of the Church and the empire, who were with

him to attend to other interests than those of the mere adventurer, and when these had gathered in the banqueting-hall he stood up in his place and said to them with that grave, simple eloquence which such men as he are accustomed to use at such moments when life or death, fortune or failure, honour or infamy, all hang trembling in the balance of a brief decision—

“Gentlemen and soldiers of Spain, champions of the holy Faith and comrades who have followed me thus far through storm and calm, hunger and plenty, cold and heat, I have called you here to speak to you with such plainness as the occasion demands. To my sorrow I have heard that there are some in the army who have talked of going back.”

As he said this he fixed his eyes on Riquelme, whose official assurance quailed visibly under his cold, steady gaze. Then, after a little pause, he went on—

“Let me deal with them first. They are, few as we all are, but a few among many. You all know with what difficulty we came here, even with the friendship and assistance of the servants of Atahualpa, false though that may have been. How much harder would it be for us all to go back even if we went united? But for a few it would be impossible, for they would not only have the hosts of the Inca to fight their way through over those long and weary leagues that we have traversed, but—in the name of God and Santiago, in the cause of his Most Catholic Majesty and our own high enterprise—I swear on the faith of a true man that one Christian sword at least, held by one Christian hand, will bar their way should they seek to tread the path of the recreant and the coward—so help me God and His holy Saints, I swear it!”

As he said this he brought his mailed glove down with a crash upon the table, and then in the silence that followed he looked from face to face awaiting an answer.

“And by all the host of Heaven thy sword shall not be the only one, Señor Capitan!” cried Carvahal. “My blade, however unworthy, shall go with thine on such a mission.”

“And mine! and mine! and mine!” went the cry down each side of the long tables as one by one the captains of the troops sprang to their feet, hand on hilt.

"As I expected, comrades," said Pizarro quietly. "That is enough. Now let us go to business. There are none of us here who are not aware of the bold stratagem with which the most admirable Captain Cortez made himself master of the person of Montezuma of Mexico, and, through him, of his whole empire ; but there is this difference between our situations. Cortez was lodged in a palace in Tenochtitlan, which was to Mexico as Cuzco is to Peru. He had with him some four hundred Spanish swords and some five thousand allies of Tlasclalan. We are here but a hundred and sixty fighting men all told. We have no allies, and this deserted city into which we have been invited savours to me far rather of the trap than the guest-chamber, wherefore it follows that we must act with the greater boldness and the more instant decision. My plans are already known to you all. I have no more to say save to bid every man who carries the fear of God and the honour of Spain in his heart to do the best that in him lies to carry this our holy enterprise to a good and happy end."

"And the blessing of God and the benediction of His holy Church—absolution in this world and beatitude in the next—be on all who worthily fulfil that most worthy behest!" rolled in solemn tones through the vast chamber as the lean, ascetic form of Vincente de Valverde raised itself erect at the other end of the table. His hand went up with three fingers pointing to the roof. Every head was bowed in silence as he spoke. "And the curse of God and the ban of holy Church on each and all whose heart shall faint or whose hand shall fail when the time comes to strike for the glory of God and the honour of Spain. Amen!"

"Amen! Amen!" came from every bowed head at once, and so the wound, which with other treatment might speedily have proved fatal, was healed, and Pizarro, seeing that the danger was past, stood up in his place again and said—

"That is well, comrades. We have had talk enough. Let us now to prayer and watchfulness that we may be the better ready for the work that lies before us."

With that he took up his sword, which he had laid on the table in front of him, and strode out of the hall, followed by the rest of the Council of War.

The next morning, which was the morning of the 16th of November, 1532, the sun rose up in a cloudless sky to look down upon the pleasant vale of Cajamarca, and to behold as base and bloody a deed as all the red-written history of Spain can tell of.

The houses which had been allotted to Pizarro and his troops consisted of a range of low buildings along the eastern side of the great square. Their interior was composed of spacious chambers opening by wide and lofty doorways on to the square, and within these all the troops, horse and foot, were disposed. The footmen, armed from head to foot, with sword and halbert ready to hand; the horsemen, standing by their ready-saddled steeds; and the arquebusiers with weapons loaded and matches alight. The two falconets which composed the artillery of the force, were loaded and trained, placed out of sight, one in the little fort above the town and the other in one of the houses, and yet so that their discharge would sweep the square in a diagonal direction.

Very early in the morning a man-at-arms and a trumpeter had scaled the walls of the little fort overlooking the town, and stationed themselves there to give timely warning of the Inca's approach. The last act of the night, or, as it might better be said, the first of the morning, was the solemn celebration of the Mass, and with his own hands the Fray Valverde carried the Host from troop to troop, giving absolution for all that might be done to each man as he partook of it, and when this was over he raised the solemn chant: "*Exsurge, Domine, et judica causam Tuam!*" in which all most fervently joined, as though, as the historian puts it, "they had been a company of martyrs about to lay down their lives in defence of their faith instead of a licentious band of adventurers meditating one of the most atrocious acts of perfidy on the record of history."

Yet, though all was ready soon after sunrise, it was nearly noon before the sentinel on the fort announced the approach of the Peruvian army along the causeway. As it advanced legion after legion deployed in orderly array over the fields on either side, covering them, as the Spanish chronicler says, as far as the eye could reach. Within the city all was anxiety and expectation, though, in obedience to the last injunctions of the Captain, no sound was made, nor did any

soldier show himself outside of the guard of honour that Pizarro had appointed to receive the Inca.

Then suddenly the sentinel gave the news that the army and the escort had halted a little distance outside the city walls, and presently there came runners from Atahuallpa to inform Pizarro that it was his intention to camp in the open that night and enter the city at daybreak the following morning.

Pizarro saw in an instant that such a delay meant ruin. He knew that his soldiers were already overstrung with suspense, and that another night must prove intolerable to them, knowing that they were closely surrounded by the innumerable hosts of the Inca, even if under cover of the night the armed legions did not close in upon them and overwhelm them with a resistless flood of numbers. In this moment's thought he had penetrated the true design of Atahuallpa. Challcuchima had renewed his entreaties in the morning, and had so far prevailed upon his master to cause the halt, which even at that last hour might have saved the Land of the Four Regions from the grasp of the invader.

Pizarro instantly called his brother Hernando to him, and sent him with de Soto and Molina to bid the Inca welcome in his name, and entreat him to come forthwith into the city, as he had prepared an entertainment for him, and had many weighty matters to discuss with him which would ill brook delay.

"Tell him that I hope to sup with him to-night," he said as Hernando mounted his horse.

And so, as will be seen, it came to pass.

It has been well said that whom the gods would undo they first make mad, and so it must have been with the Last of the Incas, for a writer of romance would be laughed at as an outrager of all the possibilities were he to relate what followed as his own story. Yet it is but sober fact that Atahuallpa, impelled by what impulse none may know, listened with open ears to the persuasions of the treacherous embassy, and not only left the protecting shelter of his army, but set out for the city attended by an unarmed escort.

Hernando and his companions rode swiftly back to tell of their good fortune.

"It is not the least of thy services to our master that

thou hast done to-day, Hernando," said Pizarro as his brother told him of the result of his embassy, "for now truly hath the Lord delivered the heathen into our hand."

It was nearly an hour later that their expectant eyes caught sight of the head of the Inca's cavalcade advancing up the broad street into the square. First came a body of some two or three hundred slaves carrying brooms of feathers, with which they removed every particle of dust and dirt from the path. These were followed by a band of gaily-dressed girls, crowned with garlands and carrying baskets of flowers, which they strewed in the way, chanting songs of strange and yet sweet harmony, which the pious chronicler tells us sounded "like songs of hell" in the ears of the faithful.

Then came the advance guard, brilliant in gorgeous liveries and plumed head-dresses, and after these rank upon rank of nobles with plumed casques of burnished silver on their heads and their bodies covered with armour of golden scales from shoulder to thigh. Then a body of priests, bare-headed and robed in flowing garments of snowy whiteness. Then followed a brilliant and orderly throng of nobles and warriors blazing with gold and silver and bright-hued uniforms shining with gems, and, borne aloft in the midst of these was the open litter, gorgeous with bright and many-tinted feather work, in which Atahualpa sat in his golden chair, blazing with gold and gems, and motionless as a statue hewn out of pale bronze.

Not a Spaniard was to be seen as the splendid pageant reached the entrance to the square. Those who came in front separated into two long lines, and between them the Inca's bearers advanced into the great open space. As they reached the middle of it the Spanish trumpets rang out, and the guard of honour sallied forth in all the bravery of polished steel and gay caparisons to meet it.

The first salutations were exchanged with a gravity befitting the occasion, and, these being over, Vincente de Valverde, Bible in hand, and attended by Brother Joachim bearing the great crucifix on his right hand, and the interpreter Filipillo, carrying the recollection of the fair face and bright eyes of the Princess Pillcu-Cica in his heart, on his left, advanced with slow steps towards the side of the Inca's litter.

Atahualpa now for the first time turned his head and stared in cold surprise at this strange apparition, and Valverde, giving him little time for wonder, plunged forthwith into an exhortation long enough to have wearied out anything more sensitive than the stony indifference of the Inca. In fervent heedlessness of the fact that every word had to pass through the mind and the lips of Filipillo before it could be understood, he expounded the whole Christian faith from the Fall of Man to the mystery of Pentecost, and from thence he deduced the descent of the Pope as the successor of the Apostles, and, passing from this to the Divine right of kings under the sanction of the Vicar of Christ, he proved to the satisfaction of any good Catholic that His Majesty of Spain was the true lord and rightful owner of all the lands of the West, including Atahualpa's empire, since he who sat in the chair of St. Peter had given them to him. Finally, seeing at length some signs of impatience on the frowning countenance of the Inca, he held up the Bible, proclaiming it as the Word of the Most High which he and those with him were commissioned to preach in every land under the sun.

When he had at length come to an end Atahualpa turned his eyes on to Filipillo and said—

"Speak, slave, and if thou understandest the speech of this strange creature tell me what he says that I may answer."

Filipillo bowed himself almost to the earth, and then, standing erect again, replied—

"Son of the Sun and Lord of the Four Regions—the man who has spoken is a priest of the Strangers and the servant of a strange God whose name hath never been honoured by coming to thine ears. This God is one and three, so far as my poor senses can understand, and that makes four. Further, this God has given the whole earth to a man who reigns in a place called Rome, and he, so the priest here says, has given them that part of the earth which is illuminated by thy presence and blest by thy rule. How this may be I know not, but he says that the black thing which he holds in his hand there is the Word of his God with which He speaks His will to men."

"Bid him give me the thing and let me hear it!" said Atahualpa curtly.

"The Inca would fain take the holy book into his hands, Father. Doubtless the touch of it will soften his heart and open his ears," said Filipillo in Spanish to Valverde.

The priest gladly held it out with both hands towards the litter. The Inca took it and held it to his ear for a moment or two. Then his black, heavy brows came together in an angry frown over his gleaming eyes. With a contemptuous gesture he flung the book to the ground and said to Filipillo—

"Tell the false priest that he is a liar. The thing is dumb. My land is mine, and none can give it away. If the strangers have come only to tell me such children's tales as that let them go back whence they came while my mercy leaves them alive. I want no god but the god of my fathers, and he is yonder!"

As he said this the Inca turned his face towards the sun, now, as though for a fatal omen, as the chroniclers put it, sinking on its downward path towards the western mountains, and bowed his head, moving his lips as though in unspoken prayer.

CHAPTER IX

"FOR GOD AND SPAIN!"

"ANATHEMA! Anathema! Shall the word of God be trodden under-foot of the heathen?" cried Valverde, his voice rising almost to a scream as he plunged forward with both hands outstretched to rescue the sacred volume from the feet of the Inca's bearers and escort, who, as though fearing that some violence was about to be done to their Lord, were beginning to crowd round the litter. He seized it in his right hand, and then, drawing himself up to the full height of his meagre stature, and spreading his arms out wide above his head, he turned his face up to the heavens and cried in a voice that rang loud and shrill through the silent square—

"Fall on! Fall on! Strike for God and for Spain! The Church absolves you. Strike, strike, and spare not, for the hour has come!"

Then, turning towards the Spaniard's quarters, he ran with his hands still above his head to Pizarro, who, at the head of the troop that had been called the guard of honour, was slowly advancing towards the Inca's litter and cried again—

"Son of the Church, fall on! Do you not see how the fields on both sides are filling with the host of the heathen? Strike now, straight and swift, ere it is too late."

Even at this supreme moment it seemed as though the soldier-soul of Pizarro made a last revolt against the treachery which he himself had planned. He knew that the splendidly arrayed guards of the Inca and the people who were now crowding fast into the square were unarmed, that they had not even taken the precaution of bringing those simple weapons which, however effective in their own warfare,

would be but as children's playthings if pitted against the shot and steel of his own troops. As Valverde reached his horse's head he drew rein, and threw up his right hand to stop those behind him, saying, in a low, husky voice—

"Is there no other way, Father? These poor people have no arms. There are many of them, but they would only be as a crowd of children before our charge——"

"There is but one way with the enemies of the Lord!" cried Valverde, raising his voice again to a shrill scream. "Fall on, I say, fall on! By my lips the Church absolves you! God Himself, whom this heathen hath insulted by casting His holy Word into the dust with contumely, will see whose hand is first raised to wipe the shame away, and ere long the king must know whether to-day an empire has been won or lost for him. Fall on! Fall on! for God and Santiago!"

The words, impassioned as they were, were skilfully spoken, and they left Pizarro with but one course open to him. A scarf of white silk, the colour of peace and truce between honourable enemies, was lying across his saddle-bow. With a hand that trembled as it had never done in battle, he took it up and waved it once aloft. Pedro de Candia, who had mounted one of his guns on the little fort above the square, was standing beside it with the lighted match in his hand, and as he saw the scarf wave he raised the smouldering match to his lips, blew on it and laid it on the priming.

The next instant the ears of the thronging thousands who had followed the Inca into the city were for the first time thunderstricken by the hoarse roar of cannon. For the first time their eyes saw leaping from the throat of a gun the flash which foretold the coming of the iron messenger of death.

Candia had trained his piece with all too deadly certainty. The little ball struck a golden-armoured, gaily plumed Peruvian who stood at the head of a column of guards within a few paces of the Inca's litter. He happened at the moment to be looking up towards the fortress. The shot struck him full in the face, burst his head asunder as though it had been a rotten orange, and ploughed its way through the files behind him, leaving a long row of bloody and mangled corpses to mark its path.

To the soldier of to-day such a thing would seem but a trifling and common-place incident of warfare, but to the Peruvians it was the revelation of a new power of destruction so strange and terrible, that its effect upon their minds was as great as would be that of a bolt falling from heaven upon a modern battlefield and annihilating a whole regiment.

But de Candia's cannon-shot was but the prelude to the dreadful tragedy that was to come. Almost at the same moment the other falconet, which had been mounted in the banqueting hall, belched forth its spurt of flame and cloud of smoke through one of the windows, and sent its ball into the midst of another dense mass of people that had rushed together at the sound of the first shot, impelled by that strange instinct which is common to both sheep and men when faced with some new and therefore more appalling danger.

Then, a moment later, from every window and doorway in the Spanish quarters jets of flame and waves of smoke gushed forth, and a storm of bullets from the arquebuses swept across the square and plunged into the crowded masses of the unarmed and helpless Peruvians. The thick and stifling smoke made by the crude and imperfect powder rolled across the square, blown by an easterly wind into the faces of the panic-stricken people, blinding and choking them. Then the roar of the cannon and the rattle of the musketry was followed by the hoarse, roaring battle-cry of the Spaniards.

"Santiago! Santiago! At them for God and Spain! Ohé! Ohé! At them! At them! Cristo y Santiago!"

Now rang out the clattering thunder of hoofs and the swift, orderly tramp of mailed feet on the stone pavement of the plaza, as the Spanish horse and foot rushed forth from their concealment, and flung themselves with murderous fury and resistless impetus upon the struggling, screaming swarms, which scattered before them in a vain attempt to escape from the crowded square. The cavaliers leapt their iron-shod horses into the shrinking masses of men and women, swords rose and fell every moment, gleaming ever redder and redder in the light of the afternoon sun. Pikes and halberds and axes thrust and hacked their way with pitiless swiftness through the unresisting crowds, and

high above the screams of terror and agony that came from the helpless victims still rose the hoarse and murderous cry—

“Dios y Santiago! Ohé! Ohé! Strike for Spain and El-Dorado!”

And still the horses reared and plunged, leaping hither and thither as the spurs of their riders drove them on, stamping the gaily-dressed throngs down and crushing them out of all human shape against the stones till they were more than fetlock deep in blood. And still the cruel steel did its murderous work, wielded by hands that knew no mercy, and ever and anon the cannon boomed out again, and the arquebusiers, reloading their cumbrous pieces, sent their bullets wherever they could aim them without hurting their comrades.

On the western side of the plaza there was a high wall of mud and stone stretching between two buildings some two hundred paces apart, and against this was pressed a vast throng of panting, struggling wretches, hemmed in on all sides by the Spanish horse and foot. The bullets tore their way through the dense mass, the stamping horse-hoofs struck them down by dozens, and the sweeping, thrusting steel mowed them down by scores. At length the vast throng surged outwards for a moment, and then, like a wave beaten back by the rocks, recoiled upon the wall. For one awful moment it remained motionless, pent in between the closing ring of steel and the wall. Then the wall swayed and tottered, and with a rumbling crash fell outwards, and over its ruins and through the cloud of dust that rose over them the wave of human agony and terror surged forward and scattered into broken and flying units over the open field beyond.

Some of the cavalry, foremost among whom was old Carvahal, his broad face purple-red with the lust of slaughter, rolling to and fro in his saddle, shouting hoarse battle-cries and invoking every saint in the calendar as he laid about him to right and left with his long sword, spurred forward over the ruins of the wall and spread out over the plain, careering hither and thither, and trampling and cutting their screaming victims down; but the greater part turned back to take their share in the still more bloody work that was going on round the gorgeous litter of the Inca.

This was now tossing to and fro above the human flood like a boat labouring in the sea, and in it Atahualpa sat clinging to his golden chair, staring with dazed eyes at the hideous scene about him, thinking, it may be, of that other scene in far-off Quito, and remembering those last words of Mama-Lupa as she stood above the prostrate body of Zaïma, his mother, on the terrace—

"Sacrifice ! Sacrifice ! The Divine Ones are wroth, and only sacrifice can appease them !"

And sacrifice it truly was, such sacrifice as human ruthlessness has seldom exacted or human loyalty and devotion paid. The nobles and princes of the doomed empire, their trappings of gold and silver and gems splashed and spattered with the noblest blood in the Land of the Four Regions, crowded round the litter of their Lord, opposing their bare hands to the steel of the Spaniards, and making a wall of their bodies to protect him from the plunging, trampling chargers. They clung with despairing heroism to manes and bridles, they strove to drag the riders from their saddles, and even flung their arms round the horses' legs, as though with their puny strength they would wrestle with these strange and terrible war-beasts and overthrow them. No sooner did one go down trampled to death or cloven to the chin than another sprang forward to take his place and meet his doom.

So the bloody, ruthless work went on, and ever the devoted throng round the Inca's litter grew less and less, and the Spaniards forced their way nearer and nearer towards the sacred and hitherto inviolate person of the Son of the Sun. At length one of the men-at-arms, Michael Asterre by name, a soldier of huge frame and giant strength, burst through the last ring, struck down one of the bearers with a blow of his iron mace and, standing on his body, reached up and grasped Atahualpa by the left arm. The litter rocked and swayed more violently than before, and just as Asterre was dragging him down a horse was driven close up, so close that the foam from its bit dripped upon the splendid feather work, and the deep voice of the Captain shouted—

"On thy life harm him not ! Let go, I tell thee, or, by our Lady, I will cut thee down myself !"

As Pizarro said this he stretched out his hand to save

the falling Inca. At this moment Atahualpa's stupor vanished, and the flame of the old warrior spirit seemed to blaze out again at such an insult as no Inca had ever before suffered—the touch of a hostile hand. He snatched a dagger of polished copper from his girdle and struck at Pizarro with it, but before his hand fell a sword blade, whose hilt was in de Soto's hand, leapt across the litter and struck the dagger from his hand. Yet the forceful stroke of the Inca's arm beat the sword-blade down and drove the point into Pizarro's wrist.

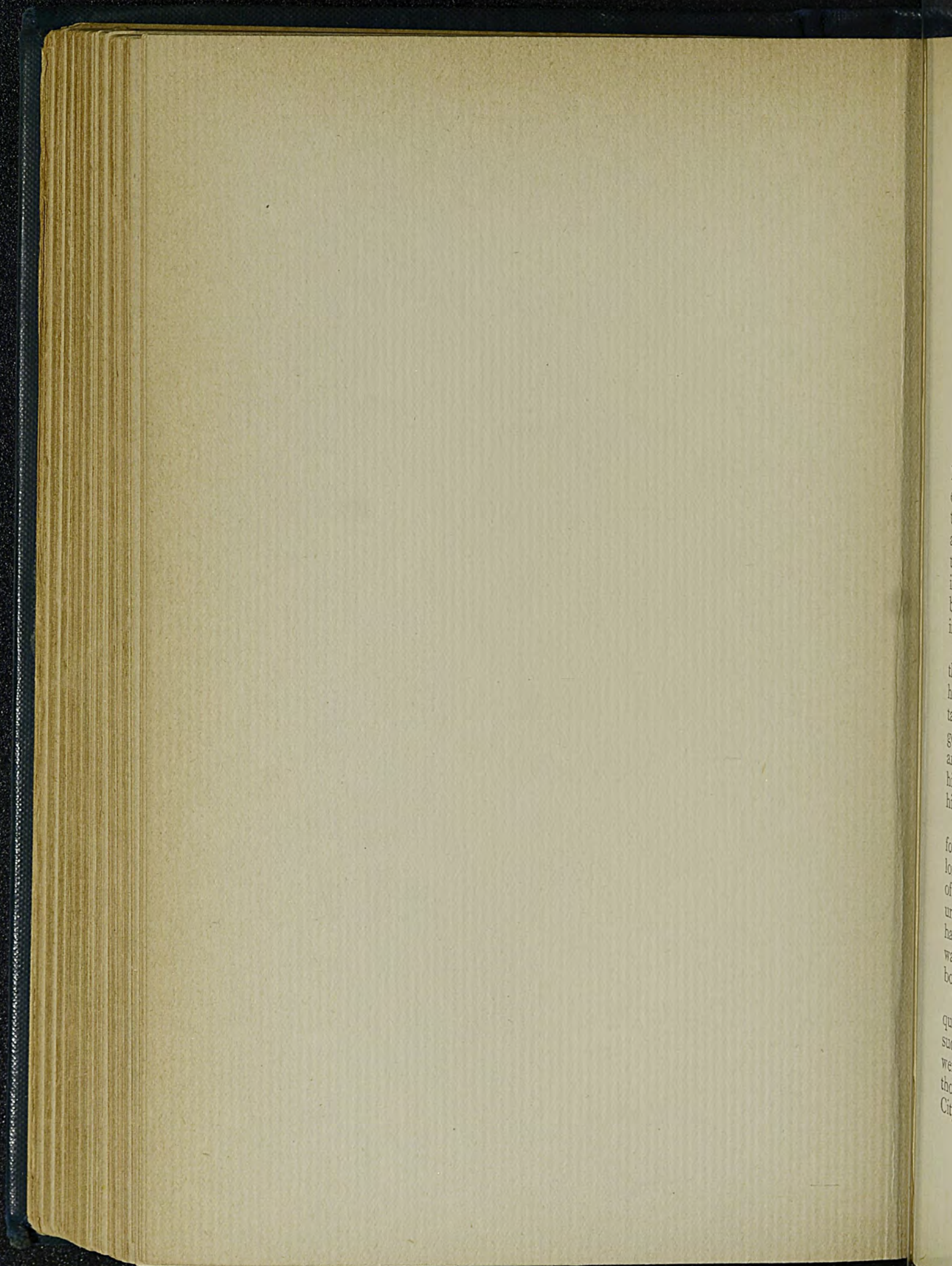
"Well meant, de Soto, and I thank thee!" laughed Pizarro, as he saw the blood flow. "Yet I never thought that blood of mine would be shed by Spanish steel."¹

Years afterwards he thought of this when the crime of that moment of his greatest triumph had been assessed at the bar of Eternal Justice, and the penalty of the ancient law, blood for blood, was about to be duly exacted.

At the same moment de Soto's horse, forced forward by the press behind it, stumbled against the litter and overturned it. Pizarro gripped the falling Inca and pulled him across his horse's neck and, as he fell, Michael Asterre put out his hand and snatched the imperial borla from his brow. And thus was the Last of the Inca's, the son of the great Huayna-Capac, and lord and master of many millions, discrowned by the hand of a common soldier who had embarked upon this wondrous enterprise for no better reason than to save himself from a debtors' cell at Panama.

¹ According to one who took some share in this hideous day's work, this was absolutely the only wound inflicted on a Spaniard.

BOOK III



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CHAPTER I

AN INCA'S RANSOM

NEARLY a week had passed since the massacre—for not even the Spanish chroniclers themselves have the hardihood to describe it as a battle—and Atahualpa, but a few days ago the leader of a conquering host and the master of all the broad domains of the Incas, was now a close prisoner in that very House of the Serpent which he had ordered to be prepared for his reception before he came to his doom in Cajamarca.

It was early evening, and in one of the apartments of the great building which the fallen Inca had selected as his hall of entertainment he was sitting at one end of a long table of carved stone, covered with goblets and dishes of gold and silver containing the remnants of the evening meal, and round it sat the chiefs of the Adventurers, the Captain himself at the other end facing the Inca, with Filipillo at his elbow.

During the meal Atahualpa had been strangely cheerful for one who within a few days had fallen from one of the loftiest pinnacles of human power and glory into the depths of a degradation which even he himself was not to fathom until he was about to take his last look upon the land that had so lately owned him as its Lord. But now that the feast was over he had sunk into silence and dejection, and the boisterous stream of conversation flowed by him unheeded.

The architecture of the room was similar to his own banqueting-hall in the palace at Quito, and its adornments, or such as the despoiling hands of his conquerors had left, were also somewhat similar. It may have been that, though his body was there, his spirit was far away in the City of the Great Ravine. His eyes were closed as though

in sleep, but with other eyes he might have been watching that convulsion of nature which followed so swiftly upon the unnatural crime that had left him the sole heir of Huayna-Capac, and which he might now look upon as the forerunner of another catastrophe more fatal to himself, his dynasty and people even than the earthquake which had rent his capital in twain. In the darkening of the sun, too, he may well have seen the harbinger of the swift eclipse of the glories of his imperial race.

But although the thoughts of such a man in such a position may well be unfathomable to eyes which look upon them across the gulf of three centuries, it is yet within the limits of reason to suppose that one at least of his sentiments was a bitter though unavailing regret that he had not taken the advice of his war-worn and battle-taught old General, worthy brother of his own conquering father, who, even in the midst of the disaster that had overwhelmed his master, had had the skill and address, not only to withdraw the pick and flower of his regiments from the open fields where they would have fallen an easy prey to the Spanish cavalry, but also to conduct them in swift and orderly retreat into the mountains on the other side of the valley, where the dreaded war-beasts of the strangers would be of but little avail.

Had he but listened to him and accepted the wise and loyal counsel he had given these so-called guests of his, instead of being his masters, might have been his prisoners. His nobles might have learnt the mastery of these strange brutes which had trampled them down in scores on the pavement of the plaza, and the use of those terrible flame-and-thunder weapons which had wrought such fearful havoc among them, and then, if that had only come to pass, who should have set bounds to the glory and dominion that might have been his? Yet here he was a helpless prisoner, with even his life at the mercy of a few strangers from some unknown land, whose numbers were to his legions as a few pebbles might be to the sands of the sea shore!

How had the miracle come to pass? Was there no explanation of it? What was the power that had drawn these men from lands which to him were only names, and across oceans whose magnitude he could not even dimly guess at? What did they come for? How could their

master, seated on some far-away throne, and, as they had told him, Lord Paramount of the world, covert so eagerly these distant dominions?

So far his train of thought had reached, and then his eyes opened, and his glance fell by chance on Carvahal, who at that moment, as it happened, half-drunk with wine and chicha, was holding up a great goblet of massive gold and crying in his thickly-laughing voice—

“Ah, comrades and soldiers of Spain! whether ye be servants of Heaven or Hell, as some of our enemies might call you, is not that a glorious thing to get in the grip of an honest man’s fist? Carrajo! It’s all very well to talk at home of the glories of conquest and the bringing of religion to the heathen, but there—*there* is the thing we adventure for and fight for. *This* is that for which we have crossed the world. It was the hope of this that kept us from dying of much despair and little food on the sands of Gallo. Look at the sweet yellow shine of it in the light of those fair silver lamps—that is the lustre of the day-star or night-star or will-of-the-wisp—call it what you please—that has brought us here. Gold, good gold, solid and shining and heavy—heavy—ay, Cristo y Santiago! mine is no woman’s arm, yet the weight of this pretty bauble is so precious great that it drags it down.”

“Ay! and see thou well to it that its weight is not great enough also to drag thy soul down to Hell, blasphemer of our holy enterprise!”

The voice, harsh and cold, was that of Valverde, who had risen from his seat on the opposite side and was pointing across the table with his lean forefinger at Carvahal’s drink-flushed face.

“Remember you, Carvahal, and every man here, gentle or simple, who thinks with thee that gold is the highest object of his adventuring and the best reward of his labours, remember how it was said of old: ‘No man can serve two masters!’ Gold is the lawful reward of those who venture life and limb and dare great things in a good cause, but woe to him who would set the lust of gold before his duty to God. It is God’s work that ye have come here to do; I pray you, for your souls’ sake, beware of that which befalls him who would seek to serve God and Mammon with the same heart and hands!”

The shrill, harshly vehement tones of the priest, his attitude as he stood pointing over the table at Carvahal, and the great contrast between the garb and figure of the lean, ascetic priest and those of the burly swashbuckler, roused the dreaming Inca in an instant out of his reverie. He did not understand the words, but the gestures were more eloquent than speech, and his keen mind quickly made its way to a new revelation. He caught Filipillo's eye and beckoned to him, and the interpreter, after a word of permission from Pizarro, went to him and stood by his chair waiting, with bowed head, for him to speak.

"If thou wouldst have thy heart's desire, whatever it is, answer me this question truly, keeping nothing back either in thy mind or on thy lips: What is it that these strangers who have made thee their slave desire above all other things on earth?"

And Filipillo, for once at least in his life, spoke honestly, telling the truth as he had found it, and said—

"It is gold, Lord. Saving the lean man yonder in the strange garb, who bade the thunders slay thy people, I know not one of them who does not live for gold, and would not stake his life on the chance of getting it. From their talk I have learnt that in the lands they come from the vilest of men can buy all things he desires if he has but gold enough to give for them. They say much about their God and the great king who sent them hither, yet they speak ever of gold as the first reward of their labours."

"So I have heard from others, and I believe that thou speakest truth. Now I am going to speak to all of them here, but more especially to their leader yonder, who hath falsely been called the son of Viracocha, and see thou that my words pass faithfully to their ears from thy lips."

As he said this the Inca rose from his seat and went to the wall on his right hand. A line of white, which was part of the decorations of the room, ran along it level from end to end of the great chamber, at a height about half as high again as a man's stature. He reached his hand up to this and laid his fingers on it and said—

"Tell them that if they have come here for gold and not to steal my life or the land of my fathers away from me they shall have gold. What is it to me? Have I not plenty? Is not the land full of it? Tell them that I will

fill this room with gold, from the floor to this line, if when it is full they will give me back my freedom and depart from my dominions in peace. The wrongs that they have done shall be forgiven them, and my own servants shall carry it for them across the mountains to the sea. Tell them that, neither more nor less. Now speak."

Filipillo bowed his head with his accustomed mock reverence; but before he could answer Pizarro beckoned to him and said somewhat sharply—

"What is it that he hath been saying to thee, boy? Out with it, and speak straightly if thou hast any love for thy back."

The interpreter was but an unarmed lad amongst armed men; but he knew his power too well to be frightened at the threat, so he smiled and answered in his best Spanish—

"The Inca has just asked me, most mighty Captain, if it could become agreeable to your pleasure to release him on payment of a ransom, and if that be so he pledges his royal word that he will fill this room which you now honour by your presence with gold up to the level of the line he has just touched. In this land gold is of no value, and he promises, further, that, if after he is restored to his throne, you will lend the aid of your valour and your strange and terrible weapons to his service in the conquest of the peoples of the South, he will give to every man as much more as he can carry away with him."

"Cuerpo de Cristo!" howled Carvahal before Pizarro could reply. "Mira! Mira! Caballeros! a room like this three-parts full of gold. A king's ransom! By the sword of Santiago it would be more than the price of an empire! Surely the heathen hound must be lying, for never was such a thing as that seen in the world before!"

"Hold thy peace, fool—hold thy peace!" said Pedro de Candia, who sat beside him, dragging him down by the belt. "Canst thou not see the Captain is about to speak?"

He spoke in a voice that had a touch of awe in it, and indeed something of the same spell seemed to have fallen upon all present. Even the steadfast soul of Pizarro himself seemed shaken by the tremendous tidings which had so suddenly come to them. For some moments they sat round the table in silence, staring at each other and at the man who had spoken of giving away a treasure vast beyond

even their wildest dreams as lightly as they would have spoken of throwing dice for a few pesos.

Then they stared round the great chamber and tried to picture it filled with gold up to the white line, and to attain to some calculation, however vague, of its value. All the treasury of Spain did not hold so much, and yet to them it would be but the price of a few hours' slaughter of victims who were as helpless as sheep or little children under their weapons.

Soon too came the thought: Could it be believed? Was such a glorious golden dream possible of fulfilment on earth? Well, at least the Inca had said it, and they knew that they held him fast enough to make him pay with his body should he fail to pay with his gold. Then the thread of their thoughts was broken by the voice of the Captain. His emotion had already passed, or at least been overcome, and he spoke with all his wonted calmness.

"Tell the Inca," he said to Filipillo, "that, greatly as his words have astonished us, we are well pleased to hear them. Let the ransom be paid, and we pledge our master's honour and our own faith as good Christians and soldiers of Spain that he shall be restored to full freedom and all his dignities as the brother and ally of our lord the Emperor. Moreover, for a fair price that shall be agreed upon between us, not only myself and those with me here but others of our fellow-soldiers, who are even now coming across the mountains, shall teach his armies our own way of warfare, and fight beside his regiments until all the land is his from north to south and sea to sea. Have I spoken well, Caballeros?"

"Ay, well, well as ever, Señor!" rolled in a murmur round the table, and again the drink in Carvahal cried out—

"Cuerpo de Cristo! Tell him that if this side of the world is not big enough for him we will make shift to carve him out a piece of the other. Carrajo! how much gold, I wonder, has the heathen got? If he could fill one room, why not two, or twenty, or even one for each of us?"

It was the very thought that had been rising in the minds of most of them, so quickly does the greed of man grow when fed on dreams of countless wealth, but none of them spoke, for Pizarro was already holding up his hand for

silence, and Filipillo, with grave deference outwardly, but laughing in his evil little heart, addressed the Inca and said—

“Son of the Sun, thy words are pleasing to the leader of the Christians and all his people. The truth is as I told thee, it is gold they come for, and for gold they will do anything and venture all things. The Captain bids me tell thee that when the room is filled to the mark thou shalt again sit on the throne of the Four Regions, provided always that it shall be found on inquiry to be made in the meanwhile that it is lawfully thine and not thy brother Huascar’s.”

The blood rushed into the Inca’s face, turning it to a ruddy bronze, and his eyes, always somewhat bloodshot, gleamed redly under his black, lowering brows. His broad chest heaved quickly with something like a sob, for now indeed was the dread and dismal truth fully brought home to him. These strangers were not only his captors and masters, they would make themselves his judges too, and if Huascar, whom his armies had already conquered and made captive, would but bid against him and throw the countless treasures of the City of the Sun into the balance, what hope had he of being able to buy even his life?

Thus did the thought so subtly put into his mind by a lad who was but little better than the slave of the strangers first stain the soul of Atahualpa with the dark purpose whose carrying out became the excuse for his own doom. Low indeed had the Son of the Sun fallen! Better a thousandfold that he should have died a warrior and a king, or even as a martyr in the midst of his murdered people!

It was some little time before he could speak or subdue the emotions that were choking him, but at length the old kingly habit of self-command came to his aid, and he said with a strange, forced calmness—

“Tell thy masters that in the matter of the ransom I will do as I have said, but that concerning my brother Huascar there can be no question between us. My armies have carried out the will of my Lord and father, and Huascar no longer reigns in Cuzco, nor ever can again. Tell the strangers this, and for thyself, slave, learn that if I ever know thee to have spoken falsely between us thou shalt be

flayed alive, and thy body shall be eaten by ants under the full noon-day sun."

Filipillo bowed low and laughed again in his heart. Then he translated the first part of the Inca's speech to Pizarro, and added instead of the latter part—

"My Lord the Inca trusts in the justice of his cause by right of birth and of arms, and fears no inquiry, but he would have your worships know that Huascar is already conquered and a captive, and by this time it may be dead, slain by hands which the Inca can no longer restrain."

"By Santiago that must not be if we can prevent it!" cried Pizarro, bringing his hand down heavily on the table. "With the first light of dawn a force must be dispatched to his place of captivity to bring him hither in safety. Tell the Inca that we must know where Huascar is, and that we must have his orders for his instant surrender to us. We cannot have one who may be so precious to us murdered like a rat in a hole. Tell him that his own life shall answer for Huascar's if need be."

CHAPTER II

THE INFAMY OF FILIPILLO

VERY soon after the capture of Atahualpa had been accomplished, and when Chalcuchima had withdrawn his regiments into the mountains, whither the Spaniards, by reason of the smallness of the force with which they had to guard so great a treasure as they had gained, could not follow them, Pizarro proclaimed peace in the name of the Inca, and Atahualpa, so soon as he found that his captors intended no violence or indignity towards him, had given this the sanction of his royal word, which, fallen and captive though he was, was yet the sole law of the Land of the Four Regions.

Now the proclamation of this peace had had two effects, both of which worked momentously on the future fortunes of captors and captive. Most sorely against his will, Chalcuchima believed that his master—still stricken by the same stupor of madness that had caused him to reject the plans which might have placed the invaders at his mercy—had abandoned his people at the very moment when the tide of victory was rolling at full flood towards the South. Clearly divining the true character and purpose of the invaders, he had given him up for lost, and was already considering in the privacy of his own soul how the deeds of the Day of Massacre might be best undone and how, should Atahualpa prove helpless or unworthy, the forces which he had so far led to victory might be best employed in upholding the throne of the Four Regions.

In the direct line of descent there were three princes of the Blood who possessed an almost equal right to wear the imperial borla. Of these the first was Huascar, whose title

was better even than that of Atahualpa himself, for Atahualpa was the son of Huayna-Capac and Zaïma, Princess of Quito, and this marriage was by the Ancient Law inferior to the union between Huayna-Capac and Amara-Coyllur, his own sister and Coya, who was the mother of Huascar.

But Huascar himself was already conquered and a prisoner, and at any moment Atahualpa might find means to send the order for his death to those who were guarding him. After him came his younger brother Manco, also of the pure blood-royal, and he, after the death of Huascar, would be the true heir to the throne. Lastly, there was the Prince Toparca, also a son of Huayna-Capac, but not born within the circle of the Sacred Blood, and he, following in the train of Atahualpa, had shared his fate and was already a prisoner in the hands of the Spaniards.

Upon Huascar the old General, well versed as he was in the ways of his master, looked as already lost. To rescue him would be to raise the standard of open revolt and once more to open the wound of dissension between Quito and Cuzco, and, moreover, Huascar, as he knew well, was but a dreamer of dreams and a lover of women, who lived such a life as no man could live who had great things to do; and even if he could have released him by force of arms he was but too well assured that he would lend a ready ear to the vain legend which had already deceived Atahualpa, and greet the Spaniards, not as invaders and hungry adventurers, but as the true sons of Viracocha who had come to raise the Empire of the Children of the Sun to a height of glory before undreamt of. Toparca was a mere lad, unformed alike in mind and body, already the Spaniards' captive, and, it might be, ready to become their puppet and their slave.

But Manco, bearer of the Divine Name, still remained. He was free, his blood was pure, and as for his manhood—the old General's thoughts went back to the Day of Terror in the City of the Great Ravine when he stood with his brother chieftains, Quiz-Quiz and Ruminavi, on the terrace of the palace and saw the gallant lad leap up over the fagots piled around the scaffold on which stood Nahua, his beloved, and all her kindred awaiting the fiery death.

He saw the sun, so soon to be darkened, flashing upon the blade of polished copper in his hand, and he saw that blade raised high above Nahua's breast ready, in defiance of the sentence of his Lord, to fall and rob her doom of its worst terror.

Manco had done this and lived. Out of the ruin and desolation that had overwhelmed the whole city he had brought Nahua, his beloved, fairest of the Virgins of the Sun, unharmed. Since then he had fought gallantly against himself in the armies of Cuzco, and even after the defeat and capture of Huascar had made Atahualpa master of the land, he had withdrawn his own regiments into the fastnesses of Yucay and Ollantay-Tambo and there had defied all the efforts of himself and his brother generals to reduce him to subjection. Upon whom, then, if not upon him should the hopes of the Children of the Sun rest?

So reasoned Challcuchima, brother of Huayna-Capac and General-in-Chief of the armies which the great Inca had so often led to victory. Yet, as he pondered over all these things, sitting by his camp fire high up in the mountains overlooking the plain of Cajamarca, the love of the Warrior-Prince who by some strange fatality was now lying captive in the city below him came back strong upon him, and he resolved even at the risk of his own liberty, and it might be his life, to make one more effort to break the spell that bound his master and to nerve him to the supreme effort which even now might save his life and his throne.

If this failed and he himself survived the failure, then he would lead his regiments to the South, leaving Atahualpa to the fate that he had chosen, and, in the name of the army and the people, place the borla on Manco's brow and hail him Inca and Lord of the Four Regions.

Of this resolve the upshot will be made plain in due course, but meanwhile other events were in progress in Cajamarca which, though small-seeming in themselves, were destined to produce results which would have made even the stout heart of Challcuchima quail could he have foreseen them.

The capture of the Inca and his instalment as a prisoner of state in the House of the Serpent had been followed after a few days by the gathering of a mock court, a poor semblance of the imperial state from which he had so swiftly

fallen. Mama-Oroya, his Queen-Wife or Coya, together with the rest of the princesses and ladies of his household, had been brought from the pleasure-house by the hot springs on the other side of the valley under an escort of Spanish horse, and installed with perfect freedom of movement in the house of his captivity.

At the same time there had come into the city hundreds of other nobles and ladies of the court with their households and retinues, and these the Conquerors, as they may well now be called, after it had been decided in solemn council neither to slay them nor, as had also been proposed, to cut off their right hands before driving them out of the city, had taken as their attendants, or, as some have said, their slaves, so that, in the words of the old chroniclers, the meanest soldier that followed the banner of Pizarro lived in better style than many a noble of Castile.

Those who had so far endured unheard-of hardships and toil found themselves in a moment exalted to a position of undreamt-of luxury and ease. The spoils of the Inca's camp had been so great that every man ate his rations and drank his liquor from dishes of silver and vessels of gold; and as iron became too precious, by reason of its rarity, such of the horses as wanted shoes were shod with silver instead of it.

Every cavalier in the army had taken to himself a mistress or two chosen from among the dark-eyed beauties of the Inca's court, saving only Alonso de Molina, who had left his heart behind him far away in old Castile, and still remained faithful to her who had it in her keeping, although, as the wayward Fates would have it, the day was not to be far distant when his eyes should behold one fairer even than she.

Even Pizarro himself, yielding to an example he would gladly have controlled had he been able, had succumbed for a while to the luxurious temptations which beset the Conquerors in the hour of their first victories, yet, with true policy and chivalrous generosity, he had insisted that the sanctity of the Inca's person and household should be respected. In the eyes of every Spaniard the House of the Serpent was sacred ground, and not even the Captain himself entered it save as the guest of his captive.

But there was one who laughed at these restrictions,

though outwardly he obeyed them with all humility. This was Filipillo the interpreter, and he, though born in such a condition as might have fitted him to be the slave of the humblest member of Atahualpa's court, now dared to aspire to nothing less than the possession of the Princess Pillcu-Cica, whose beauty had fired his lawless fancy when he had first seen her sitting by the Inca's throne at the Pleasure-House of the Hot Springs.

Moreover, Filipillo had cunningly made such use of his office as interpreter that he had got himself regarded in a measure as one of the Inca's household, and had used the privileges attaching to this office to gain admittance to the House of the Serpent and the presence of the Inca and his court at such times as suited his convenience. It was some three hours later on the night of the banquet after which Atahualpa had made his splendid offer of ransom, that he, unknown to the Spanish captains, succeeded, on pretence of important business, in having private speech of the Inca.

Atahualpa was alone in his sleeping-room, walking with slow, unequal strides to and fro on the fur-carpeted floor. Filipillo stopped in the doorway and waited till the Inca's eyes fell upon him. He paused in his walk, and, looking sternly at him, said shortly—

"Well, slave, what now? Has thy master and mine, as he doubtless thinks himself, sent thee with a message?"

"No, Lord," replied the interpreter with his ever-unruffled humility, yet taking encouragement and some inspiration from the Inca's words and tone. "I come without the Captain's knowledge, and in thy service rather than his, yet I have a message which, though it comes but from my poor self, may not be unworthy of the ears of the Son of the Sun."

The Inca turned his piercing glance on him as though he would read the inmost thoughts of his evil soul, as in truth it would have been well for him to do had he been able, but Filipillo's smooth and boyish face was all outward innocence and gave no sign of the plot, so far beyond his years in its complexity, which he had that evening begun to work out.

"A message?" at length said the Inca curtly. "And from thee? Well, I have heard strange things of late, and

it will scarcely harm me to hear that, so speak and let thy tongue be straight."

"I have come to tell thee, Lord, of what Pizarro the Captain said to-night after mention had been made of thy brother, the Lord Huascar, which I was not permitted to translate. Orders have been given for messengers to start for Andamarca with the first light of to-morrow, and their mission is to bring Huascar here and confront him with my Lord, so that, as the Spaniards say, their relative claims may be judged and assessed, but as my Lord's slave would rather think, guessing from what he has heard in the camp, to try them and prove which will give the greatest amount of gold for his liberty and the throne."

Few half-truths had ever been more skilfully told, and the words went straight to Atahuallpa's heart, and carried with them the conviction that their meaning, if they were true, could only be greater degradation and after that hopeless ruin for the land and its people, since none could believe that the invaders, having thus learnt its wealth, would go away contented till they had stripped it bare. He kept silence for some moments, for it was a weighty matter that had to be decided quickly. His decision was soon arrived at. Whether Filipillo's news was true or false, the more quickly Huascar was removed from Andamarca to some place of safe keeping unknown to the Spaniards the better. He turned to the youth, and said more gently and with a faint note of pleading in his voice—

"Boy, can I trust thee to get me a message swiftly and faithfully conveyed to Challcuchima in the hills yonder above the hot springs? If I can, then thou mayst ask me for any reward that I can give thee."

Filipillo's small dark eyes twinkled as the Inca said this, and he looked up and answered meekly—

"Yes, Lord. So slight a service for thee is its own reward. There are several of thy runners in the city. I have but to make some excuse to walk with one of them beyond the sentries, tell him the message, and within an hour or so he will be telling it in the ears of Challcuchima."

"This, then, is the message, and let it go quickly," said Atahuallpa. "Let the runner take my greeting to Challcuchima, and tell him that my will is that he shall instantly send an escort to Andamarca with such speed that it shall

arrive there before the Spaniards; that in my name he shall take over the charge of my brother Huascar from the Curaca, and convey him with all speed that he may to such a safe and secret retreat as his judgment shall select, and let his hiding-place on no account come to the knowledge of the invaders, and in token of my authority and command let him take this. Now, begone, and come for thy reward when Chalcuchima has done my bidding."

As he said this the Inca plucked a thread of crimson intertwined with gold from the borla that he still wore in his fallen state, and gave it to Filipillo. The interpreter received it with great show of reverence and with a thrill of delight in his heart, for he knew that the bearer of such a token was the very mouthpiece of the Son of the Sun, and could give orders as sacred as the command of his own lips. He pressed it to his forehead and bowed almost to the ground, saying—

"The word of my Lord is the law of his slave. Within a few moments the runner's feet shall be casting the leagues behind him."

He shuffled out of the imperial presence backwards, and managed to leave the House of the Serpent unseen. Less than half an hour later one of the royal post-couriers was speeding swiftly and silently through the star-lit darkness, not across the valley towards the camp of Chalcuchima, but straight along the great post-road due south to Andamarca, carrying the imperial token in his turban, and on his lips the mandate of Atahualpa to the Curaca in whose charge Huascar lay, bidding him, on pain of his own life, and the lives of all his kindred, to take such means as his judgment might find best to ensure that his captive should no longer be a living man when the Spaniards came to seek him.

CHAPTER III

“WILT THOU BE INCA OR SLAVE?”

WITH the first gleam of dawn Pizarro's envoys set out on their already bootless errand to Andamarca. He made no secret of their object during an interview which he had that day with the Inca, and Atahualpa, fully believing that he had forestalled them, contented himself with a feeble show of protest, saying that what he had not only inherited from his father but also won by the sword was surely his beyond all reach of foreign arbitrament; but very soon he took refuge in a dignified silence, as though he had made up his mind that the inquiry could result only to his own advantage—with which Pizarro, having his own plans, as he thought, already well matured, was well content.

Now Andamarca lay at such a distance from the Spanish camp that not even the imperial post-runners could convey a message there and bring an answer back in less than a week, and Pizarro had been given to understand that the roads were so unsuited for horse travelling that two weeks at the least would be necessary for his envoys to make the journey there on horseback and return with the captive Huascar, whose exalted station would render it imperative that he should be carried by bearers in one of the royal litters.

This, as Filipillo had foreseen, gave him ample time to push forward the plot which, with a cunning far beyond his birth and years, he had conceived with a daring as great as the ruthlessness with which he put it into execution. The day following the departure of the escort intended for Huascar he let fall certain vague hints about the camp and in the hearing of the Captain himself as to the stealthy

departure of runners from Cajamarca for unknown destinations, and spoke of rumours that had reached him of movements of the army under Chalcuchima which boded no good to the Spaniards, and promised but ill for the accumulation of the gold which was to pay Atahualpa's ransom.

It was but in reason that Pizarro, placed in circumstances still so difficult and dangerous, should be to some extent disquieted by this. He himself could neither read nor write his own language and knew not a word of the Quichua tongue, and none of his better-learned followers had deigned to make any acquaintance with it, saving only Hernando de Soto, and he knew but a few words and phrases which had served well enough on his embassies with Filipillo at his elbow, but were of no use in the lengthy conversations which they were obliged to hold with the Inca.

Thus the sole channel of communication between the Spaniards and their captive or any of his people was the youth, whose precociously keen intellect had been quick to perceive and make use of the advantages of his singular position, an advantage which, as has been shown, he was ready enough to use for his own purposes rather than in the service of those who, powerful as they might be in other respects, were yet utterly at his mercy in this one.

So far he had used all the opportunities that his position gave him to procure even a few minutes alone with the Princess Pillcu-Cica, whose girlish beauty had inspired him with a passion whose gratification was so far the sole object of his plotting. On the one side there were the stern commands of the Pizarro that the Inca's household should be held sacred and inviolate, even by the greatest of those among whom he was the least. On the other was the immeasurable gulf which lay between one such as he and a princess of the Blood upon whom the Son of the Sun had looked with favour. The slightest outward sign of his passion might mean, not only the final ruin of his daring hopes, but such punishment as his heart quailed at the thought of. Yet day by day, almost hour by hour, he saw her and looked ever more and more longingly upon her beauty, and at last, when the time for the return of the envoys was growing near, he determined upon a bold and, as he hoped, decisive stroke.

The Inca had been growing impatient for news from Chalcuchima, and on a suitable pretence had summoned him to his presence in his private apartment.

"Are there no tidings from the army yet?" he said as he entered the room.

"None, Lord," he answered, "nor is any news to be had of the General himself. The runner whom I sent with thy mandate should have returned the next day, or at latest the day after, but I can learn no tidings of him. It may be that some of these Unbelievers, who are ever prowling about the valley, have met him and slain him for their sport, for every hour I hear people talk of such doings outside the city. Truly it was an evil day that they came into the Land of the Four Regions, and bitterly do I now repent the service that they have forced me into! Yet, though appearances may have deceived my Lord, still am I his faithful servant and would most gladly see him freed from the base bondage they have put upon him.

"Thou, Lord," he went on, dropping on to his knee and spreading out his hands towards the Inca, "hast had but too good cause to know that, despite all their courtesy and present gentleness, these Unbelievers hold thee here a prisoner when thou shouldst be seated free and lord of all the land on thy father's golden throne in the City of the Sun."

The Inca's brows lowered angrily, and his blood-shot eyes gleamed darkly as he listened to these bold words from the lips of one who was little better than a slave, yet in his heart he knew, bitter as they were, that they were true. He kept a moody silence for a minute or two, and then he said with the manner of one who is musing aloud—

"Ay, true—too true! Would that I had taken faithful old Chalcuchima's counsel! What madness made me trust these strangers who have murdered my people, and, with fair speeches, broken their faith to me! But it is too late. My madness has earned my doom, for even if the captains of my hosts led them here to victory I should be dead before it could avail me anything. What is lost is lost!"

"Yet not all lost, Lord," said Filipillo, in his gentle boyish voice; "though what thou hast said is true, for I have heard the Spaniards talking of what they will do should thy Generals attack them. They will put thee and thy wives

and children in front of the battle; their war beasts will be behind thee, and thine own legions before thee, so that they can strike only through thy sacred person. Of this I am well assured, for it is the common talk of the Camp."

He paused for a moment or two to watch the effect of his words on the Inca, and seeing him shrink back and shudder with an irrepressible emotion of horror, he went on, speaking even more softly and insinuatingly than before—

"But there is another way, Lord, another path which the devotion of thy slave might open for thee to freedom and the regaining of thy lost empire."

"Another way?" said the Inca, starting from the seat into which he had thrown himself in an attitude of dejection that was almost like despair. "Another way—a way to freedom and the empire that was mine! Boy, if thou knowest such a way—if thou canst open these prison doors of mine—speak, and when I am once more on the throne of Huayna-Capac, nay, when I once more stand a free man at the head of my hosts, thou hast but to ask and have. I would even bind the yellow Llautu round thy brow and have thee hailed one of the noble Blood, however base thy birth may be, for such a deed would make thee worthy to rank with the noblest. Speak now and open thy mind freely to me."

"Know then, Son of the Sun," replied Filipillo, speaking almost in a whisper, "that Mama-Zula, the Palla, the Wise Woman, has journeyed hither from Pachacamac, the temple of the Supreme One. I have spoken with her in secret and she hath put into my mind the thought that I am about to speak to thee. She knew of the coming of these strangers long ago, since she dwells in the temple by the sea-shore and saw their ships go by many moons ago. She knew how their white shining clothing and thunder-smiting weapons made them irresistible to all assault of battle. She knows, as she told me but yesternight, that though thy hosts came against them a thousand to ten yet would they be conquered, even as unnumbered waves are beaten back from the face of one rock.

"But, though some have called them the sons of Viracocha, they are but mortal men like the meanest of thy servants, for some of them have died since they came into the land, and some of their war-beasts too. Therefore,

though the weapons of thy warriors are harmless against them, there are others that may prove of more avail."

He paused here and looked up at the Inca again as though mutely asking his permission to proceed.

"And those, if I mistake thee not, boy," said Atahualpa, with a thrill of honest anger in his voice, "are not the weapons of kings and warriors. I know the Palla's fearful power, but it was given her by the demons, not by the gods. If that is thy way say no more, for my ears are closed. Captive and fallen I may be, but I am still a warrior and a king."

"Ay, Son of the Sun, but king by no better deed than that which would now rid thee of thy tyrants!"

The voice came from the doorway. The Inca started back and looked up and saw the tall, lean figure of a woman who might almost have been Mama-Lupa herself come back from the fiery death to which he had consigned her years ago. She stretched her long, skinny arm out and pointed at him and said again—

"Shall those eyes of thine which looked upon thy great father's death shrink from beholding the death of thy masters and plunderers? Have they not slain thy helpless people in thousands with pitiless treachery? Have they not already sent to bring hither Huascar, who, if thy father's will had been made known before he died by thy mother's hand, would have been sharing the double throne of the Four Regions with thee now? Will they not set him up against thee when he comes? Will they not play the two Sons of the Sun off against each other like two counters in a game and perchance slay them both when the game is played out? Wherefore shrink then, O Son of the Sun, from using my arts to strike the only blow that thou now canst strike for liberty—ay, for life itself?"

As she said these terrible words the Palla had advanced with slow steps towards where the Inca was standing, staring with fixed eyes and dropped jaw at her.

"How—how knew you—from whence had you such lies?" he gasped, retreating before her as he might have done from a spectre.

She laughed a low, wild laugh at him as she answered—

"How do I know, Son of the Sun? Did not Zaïma the Queen shriek out her confession as the wives of Huayna-

Capac dragged her away to join their Lord? Did she not scream it out again louder than before as the flames touched her and she called upon his spirit to be merciful to her, and did not many hear her whose lips thou hast closed as thou didst those of Mama-Lupa, my sister—yet not before she had sent me trusty word of the truth?

"But that is past. It was not thy hand that did the deed. For thee the question is now: Wilt thou be Inca or slave? Wilt thou live or die? The price to pay is not great. In a few hours I can have potions ready, distilled from my roots and herbs, enough to slay every unbeliever in the city so swiftly that none of them shall know the manner of his death. The boy here who speaks for them can see that they are secretly mixed with their food and drink, and an hour after they have eaten and drunk thou art free, and Lord of thine own land again."

"And the price?" said the Inca in a hoarse whisper, once more dropping on to his seat and covering his eyes with his hands.

"For me," replied the Palla, "the office of Chief Priestess of the Sun and Mother of the Virgins in Cuzco—a gift that a word of the Inca's can give me. The boy can ask for himself."

"And thine?" said Atahualpa, raising his head and looking at Filipillo.

It was a moment when, strange as the saying may seem, the fate of an empire hung on the word of a boy. Had Filipillo had but a few years more of life's discipline to teach him wisdom and restraint, had he even known how enormous was the mistake he was about to make, he would have asked only what the Inca had already promised him—elevation to noble rank and the right to wear the insignia of the Sacred Blood—and trusted to the course of events to cool a passion which the Inca could no more gratify, even if he had the will, than he could have diverted it from the Princess Pillcu-Cica to a more attainable object. But instead of that his wayward love and longing flamed up hot in his untaught heart, and, seeing, as he thought, the prize within his grasp, he said, with somewhat less of meekness in his voice than he had used before—

"My Lord has already promised me the right to wear the yellow Llautu and to take my place among the nobles of

the land. That would have been more than his slave had dared to hope for had not the service demanded of him been so great and full of danger. Mine is the only hand that can put the poison into the Spaniards' meat and drink; but were I discovered—nay, even suspected—nothing less than a death of fiery torment would be mine. Therefore, Lord, to give me greater hope and a better heart in so deadly an enterprise, I pray thee add to thy promise the gratification of a love that has so far consumed my heart with hopeless longing."

He paused for a moment, and the agile intellect of Atahualpa instantly went back to the scene of de Soto's embassy at the hot springs, and he remembered the lad's bold and lawless glances at the princess, and the disquiet, as she had afterwards told him, they had caused her. His black brows met suddenly over his eyes, and fixing a steady, staring gaze upon him, he said in a cold hard tone—

"Say on and tell me which it is of my handmaids' handmaids that thou hast honoured with thy choice."

The note in the Inca's voice and the flash in his eyes told Filipillo plainly that the crisis had come. One older or wiser or less ignorantly daring would have taken the warning and deferred the request, or asked only that his Lord should have given him a mate befitting the new rank that was to be his. But he, puffed up by the arrogant sense of the power which he knew to be his, lifted his head and said boldly—

"I love none of thy slaves, Lord. If I did those other masters of mine would give me as many as I needed. If I am to stand by thy favour among the other Children of the Blood I would wed only one of its daughters. Such a one does my heart already long for. Give me thy royal word that the Princess Pillcu-Cica——"

Before he could say another word the skinny hand of the Palla was clasped tightly over his lips. The Inca had staggered back, his face purple-red with rage, stricken aghast by the bare mention of such a sacrilege as had never before even been thought of in the Land of the Four Regions.¹ He could find no words in his speechless wrath,

¹ The Spanish chroniclers have recorded that Atahualpa felt the, to him, unspeakable dishonour of this proposal even more keenly than his own captivity and all the indignities that it entailed.

but the voice of the Palla broke the silence with a low, fierce hissing sound as, with the sudden strength of passion, she flung him back against the wall—

"O thou, base-born and accursed, canst thou know what thou hast said! Wouldst thou make the price of thy Lord's salvation the dishonour of himself and his whole race? Dost thou not know that, by the Ancient Law that may not be broken, the very telling of thine impious love hath already doomed, not only thee, but also her whose fame thou hast sullied by the foul breath of thy passion, together with all her kindred, to the fiery death? Thou fool, why didst thou not ask for the borla itself? Thou couldst have had it as easily as this! Henceforth and for ever thy name and thy memory are accursed among the Children of the Sun! Slay him, Lord! Slay him—worthless as he is for thy sacred hands to touch—ere he hath time to add some deadly mischief to thy dishonour!"

Atahualpa started at the shrilly-spoken word, and, with a low cry like that of a sorely-wounded wild beast, he came across the room with outstretched hands.

A cry of fear burst from Filipillo's lips. He saw nothing else but swift death in the awful aspect of Atahualpa's countenance. With an effort whose vigour was far beyond his years he tore the Palla's clinging hands away from him, hurled her to the floor in front of the Inca, and fled swiftly and silently from the room and through the passages and chambers of the House of the Serpent till he reached the gate that was guarded by Spanish sentries. They stopped him with crossed halberds. But already his quick wit had found, even in the few short moments of his flight, a way to safety and revenge.

"Let me go!" he gasped breathlessly. "It is life or death for the Captain and all of you! Let me go, or one of you take me with you to the Captain. It is life or death, I tell you! Let me go!"

Then, with a swift, sudden motion he slipped under one of the halberds and sped away across the square towards Pizarro's quarters as fast as his fleet and fear-winged feet could carry him.

CHAPTER IV

HOW MAMA-ZULA DARED THE ORDEAL

THE two sentries, knowing the peculiar position in which Filipillo stood, as it were, between the Inca and his captors, contented themselves with laughing at his escape, and they were the more content because they had no mind to call out the guards and engage in a matter of explanations which might have kept them a good hour or so beyond the time of their stated duty.

It was a dark, cloudy night, and Filipillo's swiftly-moving form had traversed the plaza and he had reached the entrance to Pizarro's quarters before any of the soldiers lounging about the square had noticed him. The crossed halberds again barred his way. He stopped breathless and panting in front of the sentry-guarded door.

"How now, lad, how now? Whither in such haste?" growled one of them, who was the same Michael Asterre who had plucked the borla from Atahualpa's brow. "Is the Foul Fiend behind thee, or dost thou expect some fair Inca princess waiting for thee inside?"

"Let me to his Highness the Captain at once, I pray you," he gasped. "It is a matter of life or death!" he went on, using the same words that he had used to the sentries on the other side of the square only a few yards away, and yet measuring, as it proved, the interval between the fall of one empire and the establishment of another. "Let me in, or else go one of you and tell his Highness that I must speak with him at once. Quick, quick, if you are true servants of your master!"

Michael Asterre gripped him by the shoulder and turned

him round so that the light from a torch burning in a copper socket in the doorway fell upon his face. He stared at him for a moment or so and then said to his fellow-sentry—

"There is earnest in the lad's face, Andreaz, whether it be honest earnest or no, and so I will risk a breach of duty and take him to the Captain. Do thou call up one of those idlers about the square and let him mount guard with thee till I come back. Now come along, boy. The Captain has already gone to rest and for the sake of thy worthless skin I hope thy tidings will merit the trouble of awakening him. Come on!"

With that, still gripping Filipillo by the arm, he led him into the house and to the door of Pizarro's sleeping-chamber, which was also guarded by a sentry. A woollen curtain hung across the doorway, and through it could be seen the faint glow of a light burning in the room. The sentry brought his halberd to the charge and said—

"What would you? By strict orders no one passes here to-night."

"Orders or no orders," said Asterre, "I have made bold to bring this lad here. He came running across the plaza from the house where the Inca is lodged, out of breath and babbling about matters of life or death, and seeing that he is his Highness's own interpreter, I make bold to bring him to him."

Before the sentry at the door could reply they heard a quick, heavy tread on the floor of the room inside, the curtain was pulled away and Pizarro himself stood in the opening.

"What is this I hear about life and death?" he said shortly. "Thou, Asterre, hast left thy post, and thou, Filipillo—from the Inca's house! what does this mean? Come in, boy, and thou, Asterre, back to thy post. We shall see whether his tidings are grave enough to excuse thee from thy breach of duty."

Asterre, who had not forgotten the Captain's words when, a few days before, he had torn the borla from the Inca's brow, saluted and fell back somewhat abashed. Pizarro caught Filipillo by the arm and pulled him into the room, letting the curtain fall behind him. The interpreter looked in a half-dazed way about him, coming thus suddenly from the darkness into the light. He soon saw that the Captain,

instead of having retired to rest, was holding a council, for, standing and seated about the room, were the chiefs of the adventurers, Pedro de Candia, Riquelme, the king's Assessor, Alonso de Molina, Carvahal, now sober and sententious, Hernando Pizarro, Juan, the youngest scion of that famous family, Hernando de Soto, Pedro de Mendoza, and the priest Vincente de Valverde.

"Now, lad, what is this that thou wouldst tell us about at such an untimely hour of the night?" said Pizarro in a low tone, bringing Filipillo into the middle of the room.

The boy seized his hand and dropped on one knee before him, and said—

"It is treachery, master——"

"Hush!" whispered Pizarro, who, as has been said before, was a man who never knowingly gave away chances in the desperate game that he was playing against Destiny. He loosed himself from the boy's grasp and went to the door again.

"Ciezo," he said to the sentry, "go and join the guard at the outer door, and send round word for every man to awake and hold himself in readiness instantly, in case he's wanted."

The sentry saluted and tramped away, and Pizarro, coming back into the room, said—

"Señor de Candia, and you, de Molina, do me the kindness of crossing your swords over the doorway, and see to it that no one comes within earshot of the room. It may be that this is a serious matter. Now, boy, stand up and speak shortly and to the point, for we have no time to waste."

Filipillo rose from his knee, and facing the Captain with an air of unwonted assurance which no doubt he thought justified by the gravity of the tidings he brought, said—

"Master, I have sought to serve you well so far, and I know that you are strong to protect your servants as well as generous to reward them. I have just come from the House of the Serpent, from which I escaped at the peril of my life. A strange woman, an ancient witch, one of the heathen priestesses from the great temple of Pachacamac down by the sea-shore, has this night come to Cajamarca, and is even now in audience with the Inca. She is deeply skilled in poisons, and between them they have made a

plot to set Atahualpa free by poisoning the meat and drink of my Lord and all his brave followers.

"Knowing that, in a certain measure, I have gained the confidence of your Lordship, the Inca sought to win me over by promises of gold and rank—nay, he even promised to give me one of the princesses of the Blood for my wife if I would secretly put this poison which the Palla, Mama-Zula, would give me into the cooking-pots and drinking-vessels of my Lord and his followers, and when I refused Atahualpa would have strangled me with his own hands, but I escaped and fled hither with all speed to tell my Lord of his danger."

"Humph!" said Pizarro, stroking his beard and looking steadily into Filipillo's eyes. "That is a story which at another time and in another place I should much misdoubt, but here it will be none the worse for the proof. Caballeros," he went on, turning to the others, "this is a matter which, true or false, brooks but little delay. Buckle on your swords and come with me. We will sift this to the bottom at once. What say you, Hernando?"

"As you say," replied his brother. "Let us front the accuser with the accused."

"There is no faith to be found in the heathen," said Valverde the next moment. "It was but to be expected that, being conquered by arms, the Inca should seek to regain what he had lost by foul treachery and murder."

"Powers of light and darkness!" growled Carvahal. "Treachery and murder! That was well put. May I have such an advocate as the holy father when my own good and bad deeds come to be assessed! Cuerpo de Cristo! I thought I was somewhat of a liar myself, but until the holy father and that heathen lad shall have settled which of the two is the greater, I will henceforth call myself a speaker of the truth. Well, let us go."

"There are lies and lies, friend Carvahal," whispered Riquelme, who was standing close beside him and heard the soliloquy, "and surely thou hast heard by this time of the end that justifies the means."

"I know but one end and that is my sword-point, and as long as I can swing good steel I will see to it that it well justifies all the means that I may have to employ!"

replied Carvahal with a chuckle, as he followed the Captain and the rest out of the room.

They left the house, Filipillo walking between Pizarro and his brother Hernando, and marched across the square to the House of the Serpent. By this time Asterre had given his message, the drum had beat to quarters, and every Spaniard in the city, drunk or sober, was standing to his arms as best he could.

Scarcely fifteen minutes had passed from Filipillo's flight from the Inca's sleeping-chamber to his return with Pizarro and his captains. Without any ceremony, and not even being announced, the Spaniards marched with heavy steps straight into the Inca's presence. They found him seated in his chair, his face buried in his hands, and the Palla standing beside him speaking to him in vehement accents.

"There she is, Master, the priestess, the witch, the poisoner!" cried Filipillo as they entered. "She is even now telling the Inca to dissemble with you until her plot shall be executed."

Mama-Zula turned as he spoke and faced them, her old eyes blazing again with the angry fires of youth, and her hands suddenly thrown up above her head.

"Ah, slave and son of a slave!" she cried shrilly, "so thou hast returned with thy new masters to whom thou hast betrayed thy Lord. Truly his doom lies heavy upon him since his life is at the mercy of so base a thing as thou art!"

"What is that, she says?" said Pizarro.

"She says, Master," he replied, "that though I may have saved you from her poisons, and though you may slay her and the Inca too, yet none can save you from the tempest of spears that is about to burst upon you."

"Take her and search her, some of you," said Pizarro shortly. "Let us see if she has brought her poisons with her."

He looked round at his followers as he said this. They were men of a hard and cruel age, men with but little mercy or gentleness in their hearts, and all, saving Vincente, who had incited them to it, had wetted their steel with innocent blood but a few days before; yet it seemed that this was a business but little to their liking; still it had to

be done, and Pizarro, seeing their hesitation, smiled one of his grave almost sorrowful smiles, and said—

“Caballeros, I know it is mean work for soldiers’ hands to do, yet it must be done if we would know the truth. De Candia and de Molina, go you and guard the Inca yonder so that he does no harm to himself or any other. De Mendoza and Avila, take hold of the witch, if so she be, and Holy Father, since it may be yours to exorcise the evil spirit in her hereafter, your hands will be most fitting to make the search.”

So this was done, though by no means willingly, Atahualpa remaining seated all the while in the stoical silence of despair, and when the search was over Vincente had found some half-score of little bags of finely-dressed leather concealed about the Palla’s garments, and when these were opened they were found to contain fine powders of greyish-white and red-brown colours.

Mama-Zula, seeing that all was hopeless, had relapsed into silence and bore the degrading ordeal with the stoical resignation of her race, and when the search was over she stood between her two captors, looking at the little bags of powder in Valverde’s hands with an angry glow in her eyes and a smile of scornful defiance on her thin, withered lips.

“Such things, Caballeros, may be carried for good purposes or ill,” said Pizarro drily, when the angry murmurs that had greeted this discovery had died away. “These may be harmless and healing medicines, simples such as these Indians have ever been renowned for the use of. So, too, they may be poisons intended for the deadly use which Filipillo here has warned us of. We have the proof at hand. Fetch a goblet of water one of you.”

De Molina went out and presently returned with a silver cup three parts full of water.

“Now,” said Pizarro, taking the cup in his hand, “you, Filipillo, ask His Majesty which of these powders he will drink in this water.”

The interpreter did as he was bidden, and Atahualpa, taking his hands from his eyes, stared in stony silence first at him and then at Pizarro and his companions, but neither spoke nor moved a muscle of his countenance.

“Well?” said Pizarro again. “I have seen innocence look more innocent than that, yet if they be poisons it

would scarce become us to do His Majesty to death by force in such a manner. Take a little of all the powders, mix them in the water, and you, boy, tell the old woman to choose between drinking it and being burnt at the stake to-morrow morning at sunrise."

Valverde instantly took the office of mixing the powders, while Filipillo translated the order to the Palla with certain additions of his own which speedily proved to her that her case was hopeless.

"Give me the drink!" she said. "Since I have failed to save my Lord as I would have done, and since the day of doom has come for the Children of the Sun, let me no longer live in a land that is made vile by so foul a thing as thou art—yet shall thy death when it comes be worse than mine, for I die old and at my life's end, and thou shalt die while thou art yet young with every desire of thy heart unfulfilled."

Filipillo shrank back as though smitten by the force of her bitterly spoken words, and the next moment Valverde held the cup to her lips. Avila, who was holding her right hand, released it. She took the cup and with an unfaltering hand put it to her lips and drank a little. Then, with a swift motion, she dashed the rest of its contents full in Filipillo's face, crying out—

"There is thy baptism of death, accursed one! Now go and ask thy princess if she will look with favour on thee."

The next moment a swift and fearful change passed over her. Her limbs grew stiff and her face grey and rigid, her jaws came together with a sharp snap and her eyes, fixed in their sockets wide open and staring, glared at Pizarro for one never-to-be-forgotten moment, and then, like a figure of wood or stone, she leaned forward without the bend of a joint and fell at his feet face downwards on the floor.

At the same moment scream after scream of agony rang through the room, and Filipillo, with his hands clasped over his eyes and face, ran, bent double with torment, blindly about the chamber, butting his head against the bodies of the Spaniards and stumbling from them against the walls, till at last he fell down writhing and shrieking on the floor, and tearing at his eyes and mouth with his nails.

"Take him out and wash that vile stuff from his face, and see if you can give him some ease," said Pizarro in a voice that had but little pity in it. "Santiago, Caballeros! that was a narrow escape for us! We should soon have changed El-Dorado for a land where gold has but little value had any of that devil's mixture got into our meat or drink. De Candia, it is time we had done with courtesies so far as His Majesty is concerned. Henceforth he is not our guest but our prisoner. I charge thee strictly to see to it that he is placed forthwith in chains, and removed to the fort on the hill yonder. After this none of his people, not even his wives or women, must have speech with him save in the presence of two trusty guards at least. To-morrow we will inquire further into this matter and see what is to be done."

And the first news that the morrow brought came by the envoys who had been dispatched to Andamarca, and they brought the tidings that on the night before they arrived Huascar, the Inca of the South, had been put to death in accordance with the secret and urgent orders of Atahualpa.

CHAPTER V

TO THE CITY OF THE SUN

AT such a juncture as this it needed all the clear insight and instant decision of the true leader of men to decide upon the best course of action. The all too successful stratagem of Filipillo, although it had failed in its object as regards himself and his own desires, had so far entrapped Atahualpa in the snares of his own scheming as to give Pizarro sufficient reason for changing his honourable captivity into a more sternly-guarded durance.

On the other hand the death of Huascar, although it had closed one road to him, had opened another. True, he could now no longer arrogate to himself the office of mediator between Atahualpa and his brother, but he had now got the Inca of Quito under the shadow of a charge of murder, which, if it suited his plans, he might press even to the death. Then, too, there was the young prince, Toparca, whom he had captured with Atahualpa's retinue, and he, so far as he could learn, stood next in succession to the throne of the Incas of Quito.

But there was one other who, if the pure descent alone were counted, stood nearer still, and this was Manco-Capac, own brother to the murdered Huascar, who had an even closer title, now that Huascar was dead, than Atahualpa himself.

Now between the two possible claimants there was this difference in Pizarro's eyes. Toparca was a poor lad, weak-willed and indolent, a piece of already wetted clay that could be easily moulded into any shape that his masters might wish for, while Manco, by all accounts, was made of sterner stuff, since, as has already been said, he had with-

drawn his own regiments into the mountain fastnesses beyond Cuzco, and had seemingly prepared for a struggle to the death either with the invaders themselves or the Army of the North should the captive Inca ally himself with the Strangers.

For a day and a night the Captain took counsel, chiefly with himself, although he held more than one conversation with those for whose judgment he had some respect, and the result of this was that he did three things.

First he had the young Prince Toparca placed in a safe lodging, and took care that no one should pass between Atahualpa and himself without the intervention of one or more of his own men. Second, he dispatched his brother Hernando with twenty horse and a sufficient number of Indian followers to the great temple of Pachacamac, which was reputed to be one of the greatest of the treasure-houses of the Incas as well as the shrine of their chief deity. This he was to despoil, not only of its treasures, but also of the repute of sanctity with which it was encircled. Third, as he knew nothing beyond mere hearsay of Cuzco, the true City of the Sun, or the disposition of its inhabitants, he determined to send, under the sanction and with the authority of Atahualpa, an embassy which, like the envoys of Joshua of old, should spy out the weakness or strength of the land as the case might be.

For this embassy he chose Hernando de Soto, Pedro de Candia, Alonso de Molina, and Sebastian ben-Alcazar as being, after his own brothers, the most trusty of the cavaliers in his train, but he was forced to delay their departure for nearly a fortnight on account of the pitiable state into which the interpreter Filipillo had been cast by the potency of the poison which Mama-Zula, with the last gesture of her life, had flung into his face.

Not enough of it had gone into his mouth to poison him, but for five days he had lain in great agony and almost at the point of death, and, moreover, what had gone into his eyes had well-nigh destroyed them, and so far blinded them that he never afterwards saw anything clearly; which in itself was something of a just punishment for his double treachery and the presumption which had prompted him to look with unworthy longing upon the beauty of the Princess Pillcu-Cica.

It was necessary that he should accompany the embassy for two reasons, since he was the only one who knew enough of Spanish and Quichua to bring back an intelligible account, and, moreover, after what he had been guilty of, there was no telling what Atahualpa might cause to be done to him, even in the strict captivity in which he was now placed.

For reasons best known to himself Atahualpa, from whom Pizarro, with true state-craft, had carefully kept his own knowledge of Huascar's death, not only consented to the dispatch of the embassy, but sent one of his own secretaries with it with authority to procure for it the same conduct over the royal roads and the same entertainment at the resting-places on the way as he would himself have exacted. It may be that he saw in this a means of hastening the collection of his own ransom, or it may have been that he had deeper designs, but the truth is that, like many other incomprehensible things that he did, he here again played completely into the hands of his enemies.

So it came about that, some ten days after Hernando Pizarro had started to Pachacamac by way of the northern coast-road, de Soto and his three comrades departed with their retinue southward through the central valleys between the two great ranges of the Andes on their way to the City of the Sun.

They had been told that a great part of the way was almost impossible for horses, and further that the bridges over the many rivers they would have to cross were made only for foot-passengers, and would break down under the weight of such heavy beasts. More than this, the journey with horses would be very long and tedious, as well as not a little dangerous, so after due deliberation it was decided that they should leave their chargers behind them and make use of the litters and relays of bearers which the Inca had provided for them; and on the morning of the thirteenth day after the death of Mama-Zula—whose body had been burnt the next morning in the plaza to satisfy the scruples of the Fray Valverde—they took their places in their strange vehicles and started for the South.

For twelve leagues they were conveyed down the valley with what was to them incredible ease and swiftness. At every three leagues there was a rest-house, where the relays

of bearers were changed. They did not know then that they were being borne by the same bearers who carried the royal litter, men who had been trained from generation to generation to the same work, and who knew that the penalty of even a stumble was death, and so they marvelled as much at the ease of their progress as they did at the splendour of their entertainment, the richness of the country, and the absolute order which everywhere prevailed.

Of this last they had an example as they crossed the pass leading over a transverse range of mountains out of the valley of Cajamarca. At the narrowest and steepest part, where the hills rose up like walls on either side, and where ten resolute men might have held the road against a thousand, they found themselves suddenly surrounded, front and rear and all along the rocks on both sides, by a multitude of men armed with bows and arrows, slings and lances and swords and axes of polished, tempered copper.

Perforce a halt was called, and after the first parleyings were over an old warrior, glittering from head to foot with gold and jewels and gaily-coloured feather-work, came down the pass and spoke with the Inca's secretary. It was Chalcuchima himself, who all this time had been keeping watch and ward over the passes leading out of the valley, determined to let none of the hated strangers escape from it with their lives. Yet when the Inca's envoy had showed him the thread of interwisted scarlet and gold which was the token of his authority, and had explained to him the purpose of the embassy, so strong was the loyalty bred in his blood through many generations, that he pressed it to his forehead and gave it back, saying—

"Strange though it seems to me, yet it is well, since my Lord the Son of the Sun has said it. Not on me or my children be the evil if it comes! As for me I have heard and seen, and it is enough."

Then, without deigning to look at the Spaniards, who had alighted from their litters and got their weapons ready against any possible trouble, he turned and walked slowly up the pass, followed by his attendants. A few moments later the soft, singing notes of some reed instrument sounded on both sides of the road, and the soldiers who had barred the way vanished as rapidly and as silently as they had appeared.

"A strange country and a strange people!" said de Soto to Alonso de Molina as they were getting back into their litters. "Knowest thou any land in Europe where a captive king would be so well obeyed? It is well for us that they do not fight as well as they obey."

"It may be," he replied gravely, "that they have not fought well because they have obeyed too well. To tell thee the truth, de Soto, there is more strangeness about these people than I like to see. Such order and obedience could not be found anywhere else in the world. It is no common genius of rulership or kingly wisdom that hath founded such a state as this. Who are we that we should bring disorder in a land where such good order reigns?"

"That smacks somewhat of treason, de Molina," laughed de Candia, who was standing by. "I know not what that rascally Friar of ours would say if he heard thee, and yet there is much in thy words which a plain soldier can scarcely fathom."

"That may well be so," said de Soto shortly; "but come, Caballeros, we are not out of the wood yet. Who knows what this little parley may have meant, or what there is yet to befall us between here and Cuzco. Let the event prove itself, and let us get out of this ill-favoured spot with what speed we may."

"That is sound advice," said ben-Alcazar, "and yet to me there seems but little need for suspicion, whatever there may be for due caution, for never did I see or hear of so strange a people as this. Methinks even the holy father himself might take a few lessons worth the learning from them or some of their priests, whatever their creed may be, in the matter of Christian charity, and especially that doctrine which tells him who is smitten on one cheek to turn the other to his enemy, for surely never did a people give good for evil as these poor folk have done to us."

"There spoke the old infidel blood in thee, ben-Alcazar!" said de Soto, with a laugh that he would not have let into his voice had the Fray Valverde been within hearing. "But come, let us onward. I would rather rest to-night in another of those fair valleys than up here among these chilly mountains."

So they got back into their litters and the bearers lifted the long, pliant, silver-shod poles to their shoulders, and

once more they started off southward at the easy, swinging trot which, after their labours on horseback and afoot over the mountains from the sea, seemed in truth the very luxury of locomotion.

Thus they went on, making the most marvellous journey that men of their race had ever made in the world, for the space of eight days.

Down between the two vast ranges towering far into the sky on either hand they went, ever at the same swift, rhythmic pace. Some of the mountains were huge, bald rounded domes of brown rock, some tapered up into pointed pyramids, and others were broken into clusters of fantastic shape. Others, again, as they went southward, towered up above the nearer ranges, far-off pinnacles of ice and domes of snow ever rising higher and higher and coming nearer and nearer; but the lower slopes, walling in the valleys through which they travelled, were green with verdure or golden with rustling maize, and cut out into countless terraces, each one of which was as carefully tended as a garden.

On the bleaker uplands they could see vast flocks of llamas, the only beast of burden which this strange people possessed, and smaller herds of vicuñas, which yielded the wool that was spun into textures as fine and soft as silk. Each night they were lodged in the *tambos*, or rest-houses, welcomed with a silent, stately deference which showed them that their entertainers held no ordinary rank in the land of the Inca, and their fare was such as might have been offered to princes.

Indeed, such sumptuous treatment did they receive that, as Alonso de Molina said towards the end of the journey, there seemed to be something of shame in taking it all as they did from the hands of one who had suffered such treatment from them as Atahualpa had.

There were no signs to show that this lovely and wonderful land had but lately been swept by the tempest of civil war. Everything was in perfect order, and every man, woman, and child seemed contented with what Heaven and the Inca had bestowed. They passed strong fortresses fully garrisoned, and guarding narrow passages and gorges which looked impregnable if well defended, and they crossed broad, swift-flowing rivers by swinging bridges held

up by cables which, huge as they were, looked like threads when stretched across the vast abysses, and so at last they came to the greatest of all these bridges, which hung in mid-air from rock-wall to rock-wall, looking frail and slender as a spider's web as it hung more than a hundred feet above the dark, swift-flowing and hoarsely roaring torrent of the "Great Speaker."¹

As their litters were borne across it the whole fabric swung to and fro over the abyss with a pendulous motion like that of some huge hammock swayed by the wind which swept through the gorge; and though de Soto and his companions were men of well-proved courage there was a prayer for safety on the lips of each as they began the crossing and one of thankfulness when they got to the other side.

"I have seen nothing more like the Bridge of Jehennan, which, according to the faith of my fathers, stretches from this world to the next across the Gulf of Hell, than that!" said ben-Alcazar, when they stood on the little platform from which the bridge sprang on the Cuzco side, and where they had dismounted to take a better look at the wonderful structure.

"There would be little else than Hell for the unbeliever who fell unshriven from it," growled de Candia sententiously, yet with a grim smile at ben-Alcazar, whose near relationship to the arch-enemies of the Cross was a somewhat serious joke in the army, and one over which there had been a certain amount of blood-letting before he had got convinced that no reproach was meant by it.

"Ay, and I for my part would not give much for the unshriven soul even of a good Catholic who chanced to fall from the middle of it while his hands were yet red and his blade wet with innocent blood," he retorted, paying de Candia back in kind. "By the beard of the Prophet, as my fathers used to swear, I would give no more for his soul than I would for the chance of finding his body."

"Well hit, ben-Alcazar!" laughed de Molina as they got back into their litters. "Even de Candia's big carcass would be as sadly to seek there as charity for the heathen in Valverde's breast."

¹ The Apu-Rimac, one of the head-waters of the Amazon. It flows through this gorge with a constant dull roar.

From the bridge the narrow yet perfectly paved and smoothed road ran ever upward round huge mountain buttresses overhanging fearful abysses, out of which the voices of the torrents rose like the whispering of spirits guarding these gloomy and lifeless regions. They rose higher and higher into wildernesses ever bleaker and bleaker, till at length they reached the beginning of the topmost pass of the journey, running between two colossal mountains which rose, snow-capped, and glacier-clad, many thousands of feet on either hand, fitting sentinels to guard the enchanted realm into which they were about to enter.

On the eighth night they rested at a tambo about three leagues to the southward of the pass, and about a league farther on they could see that the road rose up again on to a broad broken plateau, but beyond this they could see no other hills or mountains.

They were roused very early the next morning, and found their first meal prepared for them, although it was barely yet dawn. But they had been so well treated, and the journey had been made with such marvellous expedition, that they thought it best to ask no questions, and getting into their litters, they were well on their way again before sunrise.

It was plain to them that their bearers and attendants were making unusual haste for some reason, for they swung up the long, steep, winding path at a marvellous speed. Then suddenly on the crest of the ridge they stopped and set the litters down.

"How now!" exclaimed de Soto, leaping to his feet and looking about him. "Ah! madre de Dios! was ever such a sight seen in the world before?"

"By Allah!—that is, I should say, all the Saints!" said ben-Alcazar, coming to his side. "It might be one of the valleys of Paradise itself. Are the wonders of this land never to cease for us? I, for one, am beginning to doubt whether I am still on earth."

"This, then," said de Molina, ranging his eyes over the vast and lovely prospect before them, and drawing in a deep breath of the keen, fresh morning air—"this can be nothing else than Cuzco itself, the City of the Sun!"

"Ay, that is so, comrade," said de Candia; "and look

you, yonder comes the Sun himself to show us his royal city in all its splendour."

As he spoke the swiftly rising sun blazed out suddenly over the peaks of the huge mountain wall that stretched along to the eastward of the valley, and in an instant earth and sky were blazing with light. All their retinue faced with one movement to the east, and, spreading their arms wide apart, gazed upward for a moment with raptured eyes and then bowed low in worship of the rising symbol of their Father and their God, and in the midst of them the four Christians stood erect, gazing in speechless wonder at the glory of the scene spread out below them, and looking, for the first time Christian eyes had ever looked, upon the visible and splendid reality of the long-sought, long-dreamed of El-Dorado, the Place of Gold.

CHAPTER VI

THE RETURN OF MANCO

At the moment when the Spanish cavaliers arrived on the brow of the hill overlooking Cuzco, Manco-Capac was walking with Nahua up and down a broad, paved path in a vast garden which formed part of the precincts of the great Temple of the Sun. It was one of the most wonderful gardens in the world, unequalled even by those lying round the Temple on the Island of Titicaca, or by the marvellous gardens attached to the pleasure palaces of the Incas in the valley of Yucay, "the Vale of Imperial Delights."

It was oblong in form and of considerable extent, containing some three acres by English measurement. The high walls of smooth, dressed stone were half pierced by deep niches or alcoves lined with plates of alternate gold and silver, and converted into shady bowers by veils of creeping plants suspended on trelliswork of silver.

The centre of the garden was laid out in exact imitation of the city, that is to say, each straight street was represented by walks which crossed each other, as the streets did, at right angles, and the squares and fountains were all reproduced exactly in miniature. The flower-beds were brilliant with many-tinted blossoms and odorous with a hundred perfumes. Every flowering plant that would come to maturity in the valley was represented, and those of the warmer valleys at lower elevations were cunningly counterfeited in gold and silver and copper coloured so as to exactly imitate stalks and leaves and blossoms.

They had just met, Manco coming from the garden entrance of the Temple, and Nahua from the gateway opening out of a long passage leading from the House of the

Virgins of the Sun. The five years that had passed since their escape from the City of the Great Ravine had changed them from a boy and girl to a youth and maiden on the threshold of manhood and womanhood. Nahua was now nearly sixteen and Manco within a few months of twenty.

During the last three years the young prince had borne arms almost constantly in the wars between Atahualpa and Huascar, always, of course, under the banner of his own elder brother, than whom there could in his eyes be no other rightful heir to the throne of the Land of the Four Regions. In the stern school of battle and misfortune his body and his spirit had alike grown and strengthened, and now, in this hour of near approaching disaster, young as he was, there was no better warrior in any of the armies of the Sun than he, no head cooler to plan or quicker to execute, no soul stauncher or more steadfastly determined to fight out the battle with Destiny to the bitter end.

In a word, Manco-Capac, now the sole remaining prince of the pure and sacred Blood, was now also the last hope of the sore-afflicted Children of the Sun.

As for Nahua, it may be enough for the present to say that the years had more than fulfilled the bright promise of her early girlhood, for of all the Daughters of the Sun she was the fairest and sweetest, even as Manco, now her Lord as well as her lover, was the strongest and most gallant of his sons. Between them they represented all that was noblest and best in the splendid traditions of their Divine race, and from their long-promised and hoped-for union could alone spring a posterity worthy to carry those traditions on to the days of unborn generations.

The day before Manco had heard of the coming of the Spanish envoys, and had instantly determined on a course of action as bold as it was politic. Rumours of the death of Huascar at the hands of Atahualpa's agents had already reached the city, and as soon as he had learnt these terrible tidings he had marched all the regiments that remained to him out of the mountain fastnesses to the north-east, and taken formal possession of the capital.

The inhabitants and chief officials of the city had received him with the respect and enthusiasm which his rank and tried valour deserved. The great fortress of the Sacsahua-

man, the wonderful gateway of Piquillacta, a colossal fortification extending from mountain to mountain across the south-western entrance to the valley, and all the other strong places commanding the few and difficult approaches to the city, had been joyfully entrusted to his keeping, and that morning he was to be proclaimed Regent and Protector of the realm, pending confirmation or disproof of the news of Huascar's murder.

He had already given orders that the Spanish envoys were to be hospitably received and entertained in one of his own palaces outside the city until the formal act of proclamation should have authorised him to confer with them in the name of his people.

It would not be the first time that he had met the Strangers, for he was in Tumbez when the Spaniards landed there over three years before when they first set foot on the mainland. It had so happened also that, during one of their battles with the natives on the island of Puna in the Gulf of Tumbez, two of the Spaniards had been badly wounded and taken prisoners. These men had afterwards escaped on rafts and reached the mainland, and, after many wanderings, had found their way southward to the valley of Chimay, in which the great Temple of Pachacamac stands, and there Manco had met them and brought them back with him to Cuzco.

Here, in gratitude for the kindness they had received at his hands, they not only took infinite pains to teach him their language, which he now spoke with admirable grace and fluency, but had told him all they could of the weapons and tactics of the Spaniards, and had given him many valuable hints as to their methods of attack, their formation of the line-of-battle and many other things which were eagerly seized upon by his keen intellect to be made good use of when he came to drill his own regiments.

Later on the two Spaniards had gone with the Army of the South to war against the Usurper, but, unhappily for the fortunes of both Huascar and Manco, one had been killed in the first great battle of the war, and the other had been captured with the Inca, after which nothing had been heard of him.

Nahua and Manco had not met for several weeks before his sudden entry into the city, and this was their first meet-

ing in private, for there was no one else in the great garden save a few slaves and attendants, none of whom would have dared on pain of his life to approach without being summoned within anything but the most respectful distance of the person of the prince, nor would have ventured even to so much as raise his eyes and look upon him without permission.

They had just saluted the rising sun, standing hand in hand in the central square of the garden, and as they turned to resume their walk Nahua, chancing to look up towards the north-eastern hills, suddenly uttered a soft little cry, half of wonder and half of alarm, and shrank closer to Manco's side.

"What is it, my Princess?" he asked tenderly, putting his arm round her shoulders. "Surely there can be nothing here to raise thy fears?"

"Look yonder, my Lord," she answered, raising her hand and pointing towards the ridge. "Look, there come the Strangers! Canst thou not see the glances of our Father sparkling on that strange white clothing of theirs such as was worn by the two who fought for our Lord?"

Manco looked up and saw dotted along the ridge bright gleams of white light which his instinct, no less true than Nahua's, told him could only be the sunlight reflected from the polished helmets and cuirasses of the mysterious strangers.

He was not as unfamiliar with these as the rest of his countrymen were, for he alone among the warriors of the Sun possessed a cuirass and morion and sword of good Milan plate and Toledo steel, which had been bequeathed to him by José Valdez, the Spanish knight who had fallen fighting by his side in the great fight at Jauja. He and some of his followers had borne him tenderly out of the battle, and Valdez, who had many a time before buckled the armour on to him and taught him how to use the sword and shield, had besought him almost with his dying breath never to go into battle without them, and to his obedience to this behest the young Inca had owed his liberty or life in many a hotly-contested battle and skirmish since then.

"Ay, thou art right, dearest. They can be no other," he said, half eagerly, half solemnly. "Truly thine eyes are as keen as they are soft and bright. I wonder what the vision

of those little points of light augurs for us and the Children of the Sun?"

"It augurs evil, my Lord!" she replied, turning and facing him, and laying her two hands on his shoulders. "Sore and deadly evil, if there be any truth in the voices of the spirits who come to us in our dreams; for last night, Lord, I dreamt that the fearful things which we have been told of these cruel strangers' doings in Cajamarca were being done by them again here in our dear and sacred City of the Sun. I saw roofs blazing red over palaces and temples, and the war-fires alight on all the hills and on the Sacsahuaman itself, and I heard a great wailing cry of misery and despair going up from thousands of our people, for these strangers, mounted on their fierce and wonderful war-beasts, which I have never yet seen, save in my dream, but which looked very terrible, were flying hither and thither among them, hewing them down by thousands and trampling them under foot. And I saw too, those strange things which the messengers from Cajamarca told us of—the pipes from which they pour out the llapa and smite men dead long before they can reach them—and then, my Lord, I saw one of them point his llapa-pipe at thee, who wert ever foremost in the battle—and then—my Lord—I screamed aloud and woke. An evil omen, was it not?"

The young prince looked down tenderly on to the sweet face and into the loving eyes that were turned up, and after a short space of silence said—

"The Wise Men have often told me, dearest, that there are omens which should be read backwards to reach the truth of them, and others that have no truth at all in them, but are only the idle freaks that the spirits of the night love to play with us. Of a truth I think more of thy loving care for me in thy vision than of the vision itself.

"Knowing that these strangers were coming it was but reasonable that thou shouldst go to sleep thinking of the tales that have come to us from Cajamarca, and I have often heard that the last thoughts of our waking time remain with us through sleep and come to life again in strangely altered shapes. For me, I see nothing fearful in it. We have not yet heard the full truth of what the Strangers did at Cajamarca. It may be that the Usurper invited them peacefully into the city so as to take them in an ambush,

and they did but lawfully punish him for his treachery. Thou knowest how cruel and unsparing he is, and how he trapped our Lord Huascar with his smooth words and false promises, only to take him prisoner and to murder him—if what we hear be true.

"It may be that these Spaniards, as they call themselves, are not such as report hath painted them. Those two who lived and fought with us were as true men and good comrades as princes and warriors could wish for. Why should not these be like them? No doubt this embassy that they are sending to us is one of all honour and friendship. At least we cannot forget that it is their hands that have avenged our wrong, and taken the Usurper prisoner in the midst of his triumphs."

Nahua heard him with downcast head, but when he had finished she looked up quickly, and said in an anxious, pleading voice—

"Nay, nay, my Lord and my beloved, do not think so, I pray thee by the glory and goodness of our Father. It would ill become me to pit my poor wisdom against thine, yet, as the Pallas have often told me, there are times when a woman's heart can find truth more quickly than a man's head, however wise he may be, and now my heart which loves thee so well tells me, doubtless because it loves thee, that thou art wrong. These strangers have no good-will for us or our people and they would treat thee as they have treated Atahualpa, wert thou in their power as he is. They care nothing for the rights or wrongs of our quarrel save to use it for their own ends. Hast thou forgotten what thy two friends told thee, how they had come hither for gold, and gold alone, and would use all means to get it.

"I was talking last night with the Villac-Umu in the House of the Virgins, and he told me that, by all the signs of the stars, sun, and moon, these men were coming hither to deceive thee with smooth words and fair promises, so that afterwards they may entrap thee as they have done the Usurper."

"And he told thee this," the young prince replied in a tone that was serious almost to sternness, "so that he might have that sweet voice of thine on his side. I know his mind, for I too have spoken with him on this matter. If he had his way he would have me treat these strangers as their

chief has treated Atahualpa. He would have me receive them as friends and then entrap them and slay them as enemies, as though a Son of the Sacred Race and the pure Blood could do so base a thing as that!

"No, dearest, thou mayst calm thy fears. I shall know how to guard our land and our people should it come to open warfare with them, but they are coming now as envoys on a mission of peace, and as such they must be received with all honour and kindness. What quarrel have we with them or they with us? It may be that they come to treat with me for Atahualpa's ransom. Well, if they want gold for that they shall have it, not to buy his freedom but his person. If they will deliver him in his chains into my hands they shall have all the gold that they and their strange beasts can carry away with them—ay, if I strip the very palaces and temples to give it to them—for then when they were gone I would do justice on him for the murder of my brother and my Lord, and I would reign over the whole land and there should be peace in it again."

Nahua looked up at him again and said, smiling sadly and gently shaking her head—

"Nay, my Lord and my beloved, there was truth in my dream, and my heart tells me there will never be peace in the Land of the Four Regions while one of these strangers remains alive within it. But that Anda-Huillac can tell thee better than I. I can only give thee what my heart has given me, and pray thee, for my love's sake, to listen to it."

"And so I will listen, dearest of my counsellors," he answered, stooping down, and kissing the lips that were held up to him with such tempting pleading; "but with these men I must treat as my great father would have done. Surely thou wouldst not have me dishonour his name and his blood with treachery or violence to those who come as envoys? Yet fear nothing for me, I shall take all means to guard myself and those who trust me. If they come with clean hearts and straight tongues they shall find me a friend and a prince who can give without stint, but if they come as enemies, whether open or hidden, they shall find that some share of the spirit of the great Huayna dwells in his son Manco."

"But see, our talk must come to an end for a time, for

yonder is Anda-Huillac himself with his priests come to summon me to the ceremony ; so farewell for awhile, dearest. When it is over I will take care that thou shalt be by my side when I receive the Strangers, and then thou shalt judge of their looks and their speech for thyself."

CHAPTER VII

DE SOTO'S AUDIENCE

THE ceremony of proclaiming the young prince Inca-Regent and Protector was brief and simple, though by no means without a due impressiveness. Escorted by a procession of the Priests of the Sun and the Curacas of Cuzco and the other towns in the valley, who had been summoned the evening before, he entered the great Sanctuary of the Temple, where, laying his hands upon the altar, and looking up at the great image of the Sun upon the wall above it, he swore to rule according to the Ancient Laws as long as he should hold his office, and to instantly relinquish it as soon as it should be shown that his brother Huascar was still alive and restored to freedom; that he would defend the throne and country against all enemies, whether from within or without, and that, should it be proved that the Usurper had in truth compassed the death of Huascar, he would neither rest nor spare toil or danger until he had meted out to him the punishment due to so awful a crime.

After this Anda-Huillac, the Villac-Umu, or Chief Priest of the Sun, took the yellow Llautu, or turban, which betokened his princely rank, from his brow, and replaced it with the red one which was only worn by the reigning Inca. But there was one of the insignia of royalty wanting, and this was the imperial borla, the fringe of intertwined scarlet and gold thread, which Manco had vowed never to assume, come what might, until the Usurper had paid the penalty of his crimes, and he was undisputed lord of all the land that had owned the sway of his father.

Thus semi-crowned he was escorted back to the palace of Viracocha, fronting the great central square of the city,

and there his attendants buckled on the polished steel cuirass which his friend Valdez had bequeathed to him, and girded him with the long, straight sword, for which his own artificers had made a golden sheath of very cunning and beautiful workmanship, and a sword-belt of flat links of gold and silver thickly studded, as the sword-hilt was, with gems.

From his turban sprang an aigrette of the white feathers of the coraquenque, which none but a reigning Inca might wear, fastened by a golden clasp, from which hung a great flat emerald, which in Europe would have been worth a prince's ransom. Under the cuirass a woollen tunic, as fine as silk and dyed a brilliant purple, descended to his knees, leaving the rest of his shapely, muscular legs bare. His feet were shod with the royal sandals of linked and flexible gold, bound on by jewelled cross-straps, and from his shoulders hung a cloak of pure white wool, embroidered with gold and scarlet thread, and bearing on the left breast an image of the sun in beaten gold, which was an exact miniature of the great effigy in the Sanctuary. The cloak was fastened loosely across his broad shoulders by a clasp formed of two great rubies of equal size and similar shape, set in curiously chased gold.

Such was the figure of Manco-Capac, the last of his royal line and Divine Blood, as he strode out of the great gateway of the palace on to the terrace in front of it, before which the Spanish envoys with their attendants were already drawn up awaiting his coming. A great open space had been kept in front of the terrace by close, orderly ranks of the Regent's own regiments, armed with sword and spear and shield; and on the terrace his own bodyguard of picked warriors, splendidly armed and uniformed, kept the space round the throne-seat, which had been placed for him at the top of the low, broad flight of steps which led from the terrace to the square.

A shrill blast of silver, sweet-toned trumpets, followed by a deep shout of welcome and homage, heralded his coming, and the amazed and dazzled Spaniards involuntarily bowed their respectful greetings to him as he walked with slow, stately strides to the silver throne-seat, looking, as ben-Alcazar murmured to de Soto, every inch a warrior and a king.

He did not at once take his seat, but stood beside the throne looking straight out across the square, as though he were not even aware of the presence of the Spaniards. There was another lower seat beside his, and presently from another door of the palace came Nahua, attired in flowing robes of pure white wool, bare-headed save for a broad band of polished silver which encircled her brows and confined the long, shining brown hair which fell in thick rippling masses over her shoulders and below her waist.

She was followed by an escort of the fairest and noblest of the Virgins of the Sun, twelve of whom, attired exactly like her, walked on either side of her. As she approached the front of the terrace, Manco turned and held his right hand out towards her. She took it with a gesture in which love and reverence were visibly blended, and bent over it for a moment, and then Manco, with a softly-spoken word of welcome, bade her take her place beside his throne.

Then he himself sat down, and, still without making the slightest sign of greeting or recognition, he stared straight at the Spaniards who were standing at the foot of the flight of steps, divided between admiration for the splendour of the scene and wonder at the cuirass and sword—which a single glance had told them must have crossed the ocean in one of their own ships—in the possession of the young Inca. It was in this moment, too, that Alonso de Molina's loyalty to the dark-eyed Señorita who was waiting for him in far-away Seville first wavered as he gazed in admiring wonder on the sweet and gentle beauty of Nahua.

At length the Inca made an almost imperceptible sign with his hand, and the Villac-Umu came and stood beside his chair and said to the leader of the Spaniards' escort—

"Who is the chief among the strangers? Let him ascend to the midway of the steps that his eyes may be blessed with the sight of the glory of our Lord, and his ears with the graciousness of his words."

All the members of the escort, even Atahualpa's own secretary, carried light wands across their shoulders in obedience to the rule which compelled all who came into the presence of the Inca to come bearing the semblance of a burden in token of their service to him, and the Curaca who was addressed immediately gave his to de Soto, and

bade Filipillo tell him what to do with it, he himself instantly taking another from an attendant and laying it across his shoulders. But de Soto, who knew perfectly the meaning of the act of homage, refused it somewhat indignantly, and said in a loud voice to the interpreter—

“Bid him tell his master that we are gentlemen of Spain and pay homage to none save our own king, from whom we come as honourable envoys, not as slaves.”

Then, to the amazement of all of them, and before Filipillo could translate what he had said, the Inca, looking straight at de Soto, beckoned to him and said in perfect Spanish, and with scarcely a trace of foreign accent—

“There is no dishonour in the act, Señor, yet I have no wish to force our customs unwillingly upon you. Approach, therefore, in your own fashion, and show me your credentials, and tell me the message you bring from your master.”

Then de Soto left his wondering companions and mounted the first of the double flight of steps, with his left hand resting on his sword-hilt and carrying in his right the thread of gold and scarlet which the chief of their escort had given to him. He stopped on the broader step which divided the flight, and, holding this out, said in a voice still full of wonder but instinct with respect and knightly courtesy—

“This is the sign that was given to us by his Majesty the Inca, who is presently our guest at Cajamarca, to be presented to the chief men of this city, where, to our great amazement, we find one who can himself be nothing less than a prince and chief of the royal house, and, to our still greater marvel, one who speaks the Castilian speech as purely as the most gently-bred hidalgo of Spain.”

As Manco's glance fell upon the symbol of Atahualpa's authority his brows came swiftly together in a frown, but his lips curved in a scornful smile as he said, with a contemptuous wave of his hand—

“Señor, if you have no better sanction for your embassy than that you may take it back whence you had it. There is no other majesty in this land than that of my Lord and brother Huascar, in whose place of rule I sit to-day, holding it for him till our Father the Sun shall restore him to us, or—as a grievous rumour has already told us—call him

back into his own presence. He from whom you had that is no Inca or lawful ruler. He is a traitor to our laws, a dishonourer of the memory of his great father and mine, and an oppressor and slayer of his people.

"Moreover," he went on, speaking even more sternly than before, "if report has told me truly, you, Señor, are not speaking to me with a straight tongue. The Usurper is not your guest but your prisoner, and in taking him captive you slew with great cruelty and with no just cause many of his people, who were also ours, and who had done you no harm—though at my hands they might have merited death, since they had followed the Usurper and forsaken their rightful Lord. What have you to say to that, Señor? But first tell me from whom you come. It cannot be that you are here as envoys from your captive."

De Soto, no less than his companions, was almost as much disturbed by the stern directness of the Inca's charge and reproof as he was astonished by the strength and majesty of his bearing and his wonderful, and to them inexplicable, command of their own language. His bronzed cheeks flushed with something very like shame, but his quick intelligence told him that, if his embassy was not to end there and then in abrupt failure, and it might be disaster, he must make a bold stroke to gain the goodwill of this superb young prince, whether his instructions warranted it or not. So he paused a little, meeting as well as he could the steady, frowning gaze of the Inca, and when he had somewhat collected his thoughts said with a note of respectful deprecation in his voice—

"Your Majesty, for such I now truly perceive you to be, and so lawful ruler of these realms, since the Prince your brother hath been dead now for many days, slain, as we have reason to believe, by order of him whom your royal justice rightly describes as a usurper, I will state my errand first. We are not here to explain or excuse what was done in Cajamarca. We are only simple knights and soldiers. What we did, we did under orders from our leader, who was put in authority over us by our sovereign lord, the King of Spain. Touching that matter he himself can best explain that which he found necessary to do."

"He shall do so," the Inca interrupted curtly. "Proceed, Señor. So you come from this leader of yours, and

not from the Usurper? It would have been better for you to have said that at first."

"And doubtless I should have done so," replied de Soto, who had now regained his self-possession, "had I not been overcome for the moment by the splendour of the scene about us and my wonder at your Majesty's strange command of the Castilian speech. He who sent me hither is Don Francisco Pizarro, a noble of Spain, and Generalissimo of his Catholic Majesty's army of exploration and discovery in these regions, hitherto strange and unknown to us. He hath come hither to offer friendship and alliance to the sovereign of these realms, and, seeing Atahualpa enjoying that state and title, and knowing nothing of the disputes which have lately rent this land, invited him to honourable conference. But he, as was believed, came with other and treacherous intent, having surrounded the city with armed men, who would have fallen upon us while we peacefully entertained him; so our Commander, to be beforehand with him, took him prisoner, and in the doing of it, to his sorrow and ours, blood was spilt. But of that, as I have said, your Majesty will doubtless hear the true explanation from his own lips.

"As for us," he went on again after a little pause, during which he sought in vain to read the effect of his words on Manco's stern and impassive face; "as for myself and my companions, we have been sent hither by our leader on a twofold errand, one part whereof was to set the matter of Atahualpa's ransom, which he himself hath fixed at a great and most marvellous quantity of gold, before the chief men of this city, to which end he sent the symbol of his authority by me, ordering them to do their part in collecting it with all possible speed. The other part was to perform a commission which the unexpected but most pleasing presence of your Majesty already in authority over this city has made at once easier and more speedy of performance."

"If it is to invite me to Cajamarca, as thy master hath already invited Atahualpa, you may spare yourself the trouble of speaking your message, Señor," again interrupted the Inca, with a somewhat disconcerting laugh running through his tone. "I need no invitation to my own city, and when I come it will be at the head of my armies. Now say on, but say no more of that."

De Soto saw the force of this home-thrust instantly, and, being well-nigh as skilled in tongue-fence as he was in sword-play, parried it as quickly as it was delivered.

"It is true, your Majesty," he said, returning the Inca's smile with frank deference, "that I am the bearer of an invitation from our Captain-General, but not such a one as that. Don Francisco, being cognisant of your royal birth and your just claims to the throne of these realms, and being, moreover, well informed of the valour and fortitude with which you have sustained the labours and misfortunes of the late unhappy war, bade me seek you out and offer to you, in his name and that of his august master and ours, his Most Catholic Majesty, friendship and alliance and the assistance of his arms in the regaining of your lawful inheritance.

"For his reward in doing this he will cast himself upon your Majesty's generosity, and, the matter being happily ended, he will depart peacefully to bear the news and tokens of your friendship and alliance to our master in Spain, leaving here only such an ambassador as your Majesty shall choose from among us to be the channel of communication between this court and that of Spain, as is the custom among monarchs in the lands from which we come; and, with your Majesty's permission, he will also leave certain holy men who shall instruct the people of these realms in the beauties and mysteries of the one true Faith."

"True faith! What is that?" the Inca broke in sharply, and once more frowning. "If by that you mean a new faith and the worship of strange gods, such as I have heard of from men of your race who have dwelt with us, say no more of it. The faith of my fathers is enough for my people; and, moreover, how should I, who bear the name of the Divine founder of our race, and who am of his blood, make way for another god in my own land? It seems that it is you, Señor, who need teaching something of true faith and courtesy as well."

De Soto saw instantly that he had made a false step, and at once hastened to repair the mistake.

"I crave your Majesty's forgiveness," he said, with greater deference than ever. "It was foolish of me to speak of matters that are beyond the comprehension of a

plain soldier. I pray you think no more of it. I doubt not that when you come to have speech with Don Francisco on the matter there will be no great disagreement found between you. And now, your Majesty, so much being said, this part of my mission is performed."

The Inca sat with his elbow on the arm of the chair and his chin in the palm of his hand staring at de Soto for some moments after he had done speaking. Then he said slowly—

"These are weighty matters, and not to be lightly disposed of. You, Señor, have done your part well, and I hope with honour and truthfulness. You and your companions shall be my guests during your stay in the city. I must talk with my wise men and trusted counsellors over these things, and you shall have my answer to take back to your leader as soon as may be. Till then my palace over yonder, which you have just come from, shall be your home. When I have more to say to you I will send for you, but when you come again do not bring that sore-eyed slave with you. I have heard of him. He is a Yunca, and a slave, and a maker of mischief, and you see that I can talk with you without his help. Tell him that if I see his face again I will have him killed, for the sight of him is not good for my eyes. Now adios, Señor, till we meet again."

De Soto received his courteous dismissal with a ceremonious bow, saying—

"I thank your Majesty for your gracious words and generous hospitality. So far as our duty to our master may permit, we are your servants so long as we shall remain in your realms. Adios!"

And so saying, in true courtier style he saluted the Inca, bowed low before Nahua, whom he naturally believed to be already his consort, and, without turning his back, descended the steps and rejoined his still wondering companions.

CHAPTER VIII

SENTENCE OF DEATH

IN Cajamarca the days grew rapidly into weeks, and events multiplied quickly, but the cavaliers did not return from Cuzco, nor was any more news heard of them than the meagre tidings of their arrival and reception which had been brought by Filipillo, who, in accordance with Manco's wish, had been sent back at once with the escort. This had, unhappily, given the interpreter still further means of mischief-making, for he had brought back to Pizarro a cunningly-concocted story of a plot, which he had himself hatched, between Manco and Atahualpa, and this had at length forced the Captain-General into a course which he had long been contemplating, and to which he was now strongly urged by his old comrade Almagro, who had arrived from the coast with some hundred and fifty men. This was to bring the Inca to trial for the murder of Huascar and for plotting the overthrow of the Spanish authority.

His brother Hernando, too, had returned from Pachacamac, followed by a train of thirty-five bearers, each carrying as much gold as he could stagger under. Meanwhile, too, streams of treasure from the other coast and inland towns had been flowing steadily into Cajamarca, and now the golden tide in the Banqueting Hall of the House of the Serpent was at length approaching the mark that the Inca had set for it.

But the higher it rose the more remote grew the chances of Atahualpa's freedom. The coming of Almagro and his men had put a new face on the whole situation. The sight of the treasure heaped up in the House of the Serpent and scattered so lavishly about the city had roused the gold-lust

fiercely within them. They began to clamour loudly for the division of the spoils that they had had no share in winning, and, as was but natural, Pizarro's own men, who had borne the burden and toil of which it was the reward, began to demand the payment of their shares into their own keeping. But again it was plain that the treasure could not be divided until the ransom had been completed and the Inca released—that is, if he was ever to be released at all.

Sitting after sitting of the court that had been constituted to try Atahualpa had been held, and at each one of them his guilt had been more and more openly urged, until even Pizarro himself had come to look upon his death as the shortest way out of all difficulties. There were three whose voices were raised with ever-increasing insistence to this end, and these were Almagro, Riquelme, and Vincente de Valverde, each of whom had his own reasons for such a course. At length Pizarro yielded to them, and this he did the more readily and with the better conscience as authentic reports of the gathering of great armies from all parts of the Empire were now coming in every day, each one of which added more and more colour of truth to the story which Filipillo had brought with him from Cuzco.

So it came about that at the last council it was resolved to melt the treasure down, to send the King's fifth to Spain under the care of Hernando Pizarro, and to impeach Atahualpa on the various counts that had already been formulated against him. How immense the treasure already was may be seen from the fact that the King's fifth alone amounted to a million, three hundred and twenty-six thousand, five hundred and thirty-nine pesos of pure gold, which in modern English money is over three hundred and thirty thousand pounds sterling.

With this huge sum Hernando Pizarro, with an escort of twenty horse and a long train of Indian bearers, started out for the coast. The most of the simple folk believed that the others would soon follow and that their Inca would be immediately set free. But Atahualpa had no such delusion, for when the Captain's brother went into his prison-room to bid him farewell he shook his head mournfully and said, with the air of a man who believes himself already doomed—

I am deeply grieved to see you go, for you are a good man and would be my friend and see justice done to me ; but I know that when you are gone that fat man and that one-eyed man and that other one who is always seeking to make me worship his strange gods will most certainly kill me."

Then Hernando Pizarro shook his head too and sought to reassure him, saying that he was going to the great king who was lord and master of all the Spaniards, and that he would see justice done to him. And then he took leave of him as quickly as he could, for he knew that his fate was already sealed, and was eager to get away out of so black a business.

No sooner had he gone than Atahualpa, feeling now that if he remained in the power of the Spaniards his fate was sealed, and knowing that he could be no worse off whatever happened, suddenly resolved to do that which Chalcuchima had so earnestly prayed him to do the night before he was taken prisoner, and in taking this resolve he gave his worst enemies among the Spaniards the one pretext that was now wanting to them. It may have been that at this last hour, when face to face with his fate, the old warrior spirit burnt up afresh within him, and he resolved that if he must die he would do so in the midst of battle and massacre rather than be slain like a felon after a mock judgment, and that at least he would not leave the world without the knowledge that some of his enemies had paid for the indignities they had put upon him with their lives.

The fifth day after the departure of Hernando Pizarro he managed, after four days of watching and waiting for an opportunity, to dispatch a knot of the fringe of the borla—which he still wore even with his chains in mournful mockery of his former imperial state—to Quiz-Quiz and Ruminavi, with orders to march instantly with every regiment at their command upon the city, first laying waste the whole country about it, and after that to fall upon it with fire and sword and avenge his insulted honour, even if rescue of his person was impossible.

Now the Curaca of Cajamarca, which was one of the cities that had owed allegiance to Huascar and had about a year before been seized by Atahualpa, had never borne

him any goodwill, and through the agency of Filipillo he had become a firm ally of the Spaniards, deceived, as many others of his simple race were, by their promises of kindness and protection. He had made it his business to organise a small army of spies, who had kept close watch on the movements of every one who had access to the Inca and afterwards left the city.

Thus it happened that Atahuallpa's messenger, without knowing it, was stealthily followed until he reached an outpost of the army and delivered his message. Then, as he was coming back to the city to tell the Inca that his command had been obeyed, he was seized and brought before the Curaca, who at once took him to Pizarro, and he sternly questioned him through Filipillo, who, following his usual policy, so translated his answers that Pizarro, at length losing patience, ordered him to be tortured until he gave such answers as were required.

At the same time he ordered that every kinsman and friend of Atahuallpa's in the city should be placed under close arrest. Then these also one by one were either stretched on the rack or forced to submit to the torment of the slow-match, all of which they bore with the fortitude of their race, until the extremity of the agony overcame their reason; and then from their frantic cries and incoherent babblings Filipillo, whose evil soul had delighted in the hideous work for the sake of the revenge that it gave him, made up a tale of accusations against Atahuallpa which left his fate no longer in doubt.

As it happened, there was a Doctor of Laws among those who had followed the fortunes of Almagro, no doubt being attracted, if not by the prospect of gold-getting for himself, at least by that of making spoil, after the manner of his kind, out of the disputes of rude and ignorant men placed suddenly in possession of such wealth as people of the same stamp in the Old World had never dreamt of. So by the help of this man, Martin de Zarate by name, the mock court which was to try a prisoner already condemned and to deliver a judgment already determined upon was constituted in due legal form, and so far was the solemn farce of justice pushed that an advocate was given to Atahuallpa to plead the cause of one already lost.

But there stood against the Inca an advocate more potent

than all the doctors of Spain, and this was Filipillo, the only one of the interpreters in the camp who had sufficient skill and knowledge of both tongues to conduct the business of the court as regarded the accusations and pleadings of the accused, whom he, by his falsehood and treachery, had done so much to entrap in the fatal mesh from which he now saw there was no escape.

But Atahualpa, as though divining that his last days had come and that it behoved him to bear himself as the son of his great father should do, suddenly threw off the stupor which up to now had seemed so strangely to paralyse his mind, and bore himself in a fashion worthy his ancient race and his own fame as a warrior and a prince. When he was first arraigned before his judges, and Filipillo, blinking maliciously at him out of his still swollen and half-blinded eyes, translated the deed of indictment and asked him, as the mouthpiece of the court, what answer he had to make, he drew himself up and crossed his manacled hands upon his breast and replied, with more dignity than he had ever spoken with from his golden throne—

“Tell thy masters, slave, that I know that my doom is already decided, though I have done nothing that one betrayed, oppressed, and ill-used as I have been might not have done and yet go blameless. They have taken my gold and given me their faith. They have broken it without ruth or shame to me and mine, and now, that they may the better steal my country and make my people slaves, they are going to kill me. Since my armies have failed me and all my friends and servants have deserted me, there is nothing left for me but to die in accordance with the decree of the Unnameable. To His judgment I bow, but not to theirs. The will is His and theirs is but the hand, for the sins that I die for they have never seen. There can be no tribunal in this land high enough to judge one who is himself the law, and even were their justice pure it would be polluted in passing through so foul a channel as those lying lips of thine. Tell thy masters what I have said. Tell them also that, since they have assured themselves beforehand of my guilt, there is nothing left for them but to tell me the manner of my death. Now I have spoken, and not even their torments shall bring more useless words from me.”

So saying he turned his head away and looked out of an open window near him over the green valley and the terraced mountains beyond, with their rugged, broken heights piercing the blue and cloudless sky, and from that moment to the end of his trial he never spoke again or seemed to take any interest in the proceedings on which his life depended. It was in vain that Pizarro ordered Filipillo to put question after question to him, threatening and promising by turns. The fallen Inca had wrapped himself in unbending dignity and unbreakable silence, and neither word nor sign of interest in what was going on could be drawn from him. At length Valverde, who had long lost all patience, said angrily—

“Señores, how much longer shall we suffer this heathen to trifle with us? We have made others speak, why not he as well?”

“Ay,” added Almagro, with an evil twinkle in his one eye, “the reverend father is right. I warrant that a very brief trial of the match or the thumbscrew, or maybe a few minutes on the rack, would speedily open his Majesty’s lips and loosen his royal tongue.”

“No, Caballeros, while I have a voice in the matter, no,” said the Captain-General, shaking his head and looking as some thought almost sorrowfully at the prisoner. “It seems to me that the Inca hath already suffered enough at our hands, unless of course the finding of this honourable court be that he is guilty of the crime imputed to him, in which case let the just penalty fall upon him, but let us not forget, Señores, that, whatever his fault may be, he is a crowned monarch, and that it would ill-please the tender mercy and high chivalry of his Most Catholic Majesty to learn that soldiers of his had put the indignity of torture upon a brother sovereign.”

“And moreover,” chimed in Riquelme, in his soft, official voice, “methinks there is but little need, even if such a thing might be permitted, to which I, as the servant of his Majesty, could never consent. Have we not proof enough already—nay, have not the Inca’s own words convicted him of contumacy? Has he not defied us and laughed our careful justice to scorn? Have not all the witnesses spoken against him, and since none have spoken for him, not even himself, is it not best that we should deliberate forthwith on

our judgment, and when arrived at consider the best means of putting it into effect?"

Pizarro, who all this time had been looking at the unmoved, averted face of the Inca, now glanced round the table at which they were sitting, and, reading approval in the faces of all present, he said in a tone which plainly showed how weary he was of the whole base business and how glad he would be to see it ended—

"Very well, Señores, since that seems to be the wish of all of you, so be it. Let the Inca be conducted back to his apartment."

The captain of Atahualpa's guard saluted, and then touched him on the shoulder. The touch seemed to waken him out of a dream, for all this time he had never taken his eyes off the distant hills beyond which, as he knew, thousands of his faithful subjects were encamped, or it might be even now on their way to attempt his rescue. A little shudder seemed to run through his frame at the touch. He turned and saluted his judges with a gesture full of royal dignity, and without a word followed his guards from the room.

As might be expected, the court did not take long in finding its verdict, and within an hour Atahualpa was found guilty of crimes enough to have sent half-a-dozen men to their death if judged by such a tribunal. He was guilty of fratricide in procuring the death of Huascar; of treason and conspiracy against the Spaniards and their sovereign as rightful lord of the country; of wasting, embezzling, and misapplying its revenues after the Spaniards had entered into possession of it. Further, he was guilty of idolatry and concubinage; and lastly, as though to fitly cap the solemn farce, he was convicted of prosecuting unjust wars to the injury and oppression of his country and its people!

"And now, Señores," said Pizarro, when these formidable counts had at length been agreed to, "since the finding of the court is 'guilty' it remains but to pass sentence. Señor Zarate, what says the law in such matters?"

"The court," replied the Doctor, rising and speaking in a pompous, inflated tone, "hath by the laws of Leon and Castille discretion to pass on one found guilty of so many grave offences two sentences at least. Should its judgment

incline rather to mercy than justice it may pass sentence of a fine proportionate to the means of the culprit and banishment to some place of safe keeping. Should it, on the other hand, see in these heinous crimes no room for the exercise of mercy that would be compatible with the safety and good order of these realms, then the only sentence that it can pass will be death by such means as may be considered best merited by the crimes of the condemned."

"But is there not a third course?" said Pizarro, as though even as this last moment he shrank from soiling his hands with the blood of his captive. "Is not this a somewhat hasty proceeding, Señores? I confess that of late my mind has somewhat misgiven me as to our competence to do this thing. Hath not, after all, the Inca a right to be tried, as every other man hath, by his peers? and if so, would not a more proper course be to pronounce the lighter sentence and send our prisoner, with a due statement of this process that we have held, to the government at Panama, so that either final judgment may be pronounced by the Viceroy or the Inca may be sent to Spain to receive his sentence from the august lips of our master the Emperor?"

In this wise and temperate proposition lay the Inca's last hope of justice or even of life, but when, after a heated discussion, it was put to the vote only five out of the fifteen members of the court voted in favour of it. Valverde, Almagro, Riquelme, and Zarate all spoke vehemently in favour of death, and in the end their arguments and the veiled threats which they did not scruple to use so far prevailed with the Captain-General that when the vote had been given he, although with manifest reluctance, ordered his secretary to affix his signature to the death-warrant. The five dissentients, to their everlasting credit, not only refused to sign, but afterwards drew up a formal protest against the haste and injustice of the act which was about to be done, and this document has to-day an honourable resting-place among the archives of Spain.

As soon as the fatal parchment had been signed Pizarro took Filipillo with him and went himself to the Inca to acquaint him with his doom and make him ready to die on the morrow. Atahualpa heard it with the dignity and composure which proved how fully he had already resigned himself to the inevitable, but this did not prevent him from

reproaching Pizarro, albeit with mildness and dignity, for this shameful breach of all his promises and his treachery in first taking the ransom and then consenting to his murder. These reproaches, well merited as they were, did not reach Pizarro's ears as the doomed Inca spoke them, for the malice of Filipillo, still unsatisfied even by the knowledge that by the light of the next sun he would see Atahualpa done to death, translated them so that they became the vilest opprobrium, which, being uttered, as Pizarro saw it was, without passion or violence, appeared to him doubly insulting on account of the scorn and contempt which the Inca's manner seemed to display.

So in the end he fell into a violent passion and, swearing that Atahualpa should have no further aid or protection from him, strode from the room after ordering the guards on pain of their lives to let no one come near the Inca with the exception of Valverde, who had piously undertaken to prepare him for his end, and not to lose sight of him until the moment that he should be led out to execution. Filipillo took his opportunity to stay behind for a moment, and going up to the Inca, who had thrown himself on to his couch and buried his face in his hands, he whispered in his ear—

"Would it not have been better, Lord, to have accepted my service and given me the Princess in payment of it? To-morrow I shall ask the chief of the Strangers for her, and he will not refuse me."

Atahualpa sprang from his couch to his feet, his face flushed purple-red and his blood-shot eyes aflame with sudden fury, and before Filipillo had time to slip out of his reach he had grasped him round the body with his chained hands and with a single effort of his great strength lifted him to arm's length above his head and hurled him like a stone from a catapult through the doorway, where he fell between the two guards and lay stunned and bleeding as one dead on the stone pavement.

CHAPTER IX

"SACRIFICE ! SACRIFICE !"

THAT night the utmost precautions were taken to prevent surprise and rescue. The guards at all points of entrance to the city were doubled, and the difficult roads that led down the mountains towards the fortress where Atahualpa was spending his last night on earth were strictly guarded. But the most potent safeguard of all for the Spaniards was the full moon which rose high in the cloudless heavens, filling the valley with a flood of light and making the mountain-paths stand out white and clear, so that no human shape could pass along them without being instantly seen.

But to make assurance doubly sure Pizarro had caused the Curaca to send out about half a score of his spies to go to the different divisions of the army as though they came from Atahualpa, and these told the General and the captains of the advanced posts that the Inca had come to an agreement with the Spaniards by which they entered his service and would, for a certain payment in gold every month, help him to crush the insurrection of Manco in the South and restore his rule over the whole land.

Now since this was exactly what Quiz-Quiz and Ruminavi had said in their argument with Challcuchima that he would do, and as they believed that the Spaniards had been overawed and brought to reason by the threat of cutting off all provisions and the water from the city and afterwards assailing it with overwhelming numbers, they took the cunning story as truth and contented themselves with sending messengers into the city assuring the Inca of their undying loyalty and their willingness even to fight by the

side of the Strangers against the people of Cuzco, since it was his will that they should do so. These messengers, who arrived very early in the morning, were no sooner safely within the Spanish lines than they were instantly taken prisoners and kept in close confinement till the tragedy had been completed.

By sunrise the whole Spanish force, now amounting to nearly four hundred men with sixty arquebuses and five pieces of cannon, were under arms and in all respects ready for battle in case at the last minute the Peruvian General should discover the fraud that had been practised upon them and attack the city.

In the centre of the square a great stake had been planted, and near this were piled heaps of fagots and dried grass, for in spite of the desire of the Captain-General that his royal prisoner should die, as became his rank, by the headsman's axe, the rest of those who had made up the majority of the court, instigated by Valverde, had overridden his scruples, and it had been decreed that if the Inca persisted in his idolatry to the last he should die by fire. But they granted that if at the last moment he recanted his errors and received the Sacrament of Baptism at the hands of the holy father he should suffer by the milder death of the garrote and his body, instead of being scattered in ashes to the winds, should receive Christian burial and all honour due to his rank.

The whole of the next day was passed by the soldiery in anxious watching and by Valverde and his attendant monks in prayer for the turning of Atahualpa's soul—as they faithfully believed—from the path of inevitable damnation, and in exhorting him to abjure the error of his ways and escape the torment of the fire here and hereafter by embracing the Cross while yet there was time. But Filipillo, whose head was still singing and whose bones were still aching from his last night's rough treatment, had determined that, so far as he could bring it about, the Inca should die by fire and not by the garrote, and therefore, with pitiless malice, he took care to turn all their pious words into the most ribald nonsense.

It was nearly two hours after sunset when Pizarro, at the head of a file of soldiers, at length went up to the fortress to tell the Inca that the fatal moment had come. As he

entered the room Valverde and his monks stopped and Atahualpa looked up. An expression of scornful reproach more eloquent than many words lit up his noble features, now made more noble than ever by the dignity of near-approaching death. His lips moved as though he would say something, but the same instant he bethought him that he could say nothing save through the interpreter, so he closed them again and turned his face away from Pizarro as though he could no longer bear to look upon the man who had taken his gold as ransom and then betrayed him to death.

"How goes it with his Highness, holy father?" said Pizarro affecting not to notice the Inca's silent reproach. "Have thy sacred ministrations yet been crowned with success?"

"For his soul's sake and to my own sorrow I say that though I have striven with him all day, he still hardens his heart against the blessed unction of our holy Faith and still clings to his false gods, not even confessing that he hath sinned, but remaining like one of his own dumb idols and refusing the grace that is offered to him. Greatly would I have loved to be the means of saving so great a sinner, and for many hours I have wrestled in spirit to this end; but the ways of Heaven are inscrutable, and it would seem that it is not to be. There is but one hope now, and that is that the fear of the fire may even at the last moment melt him into repentance."

"It hath been found ere now a more potent reasoning than even such eloquence as thine, holy father," replied Pizarro grimly, "and for my part, and not only for his soul's sake, should I rejoice to see it, for truly he hath had hurt enough at our hands without dying by a death of torment."

Valverde frowned at this and said sternly—

"Señor, he who could find mercy for the heathen or the idolater in his heart hath commonly little room left for the love of God. The Inca hath already passed beyond the civil power into the keeping of the Church, which now by my hands gives him back into thine for the execution of his body as an obstinate heretic and idolater as mercifully as maybe and without shedding of blood. Do thou, as a true son of the Church, see to this, and, shouldst thou need

any excuse to thy conscience, find it in this charge of mine."

Pizarro bowed and crossed himself, feeling now much lighter at heart, for to such a man in such an age this was full and sufficient warranty for the doing of any cruelty or injustice.

"Since it is the Church that bids me, by thy lips, holy father," he said gravely, "my responsibility in the matter is discharged. I have come to tell thee and the prisoner of the Church that all things are ready for the carrying out of the sentence."

"Then let us go," said Valverde, solemnly clasping his hands and casting his eyes up to the roof; "and may God and the Saints in their infinite mercy change his heart even at the last minute of the eleventh hour !"

The Inca's chains were then struck off and he was led out from the room into the forecourt of the fortress, and there the procession of death was formed between two rows of torchbearers. First went Brother Joachim bearing the great white crucifix aloft, then came Valverde in his full canonicals chanting the Mass for the Dying with the four monks who came behind him walking two and two on either side of the Inca, who, with his hands clasped behind him, gazed upwards to the sky gemmed with the innumerable stars of two hemispheres and flooded by the white radiance of the moon, the sister-wife of his Father and Lord the Sun.

Beneath him lay the broad moonlit valley spread out in ghostly and almost unearthly beauty, and to his mourning eyes it seemed as though it had never looked so beautiful before. Over against him the dim horizon was closed in by range after range of terraced hills, capped by their domes and pinnacles of bare rock, and behind him towered the tremendous snow and ice-crowned bulwarks which he, in the mad confidence of his strength and ignorance, had left unguarded, and which had so failed to keep out these pitiless and arrogant strangers who were now taking him helpless to his doom.

In the plaza the guards were drawn up in a hollow square round the stake, on either side of which stood a company of torchbearers. The procession moved slowly round to the side of the square which had been left open, and there,

halting in front of the stake, the Notary stood out with a parchment in his hand, and in a loud voice read the indictment on which the Inca had been found guilty and the sentence that the court had passed upon him. All round the sides of the plaza stood dense throngs of the people, silent, cowed, and helpless, yet even now scarcely believing that their deity would permit his crowned and sceptred son to die without launching some fearful vengeance upon the heads of the impious strangers.

But there was no thought now of revolt or rescue, for the moment of the massacre with all its horrors was still fresh in their minds, and in every direction they saw the terrible war-beasts ready to ride them down, and the still more dreaded fire-tubes, or llapa-pipes as they called them, ready to rain fire and death and thunder upon them as they had done before.

Pizarro had expressly ordered that they should be permitted to be present, for now that he had finally decided that the Inca's death was inevitable he was determined that his end should be made as awful and impressive as possible, so that the news of it might be carried throughout the length and breadth of the land and convince those who had not beheld it how vain all opposition to his will must ever be.

When the Notary had finished his reading Valverde went to the Inca's side with a small crucifix in his hand and, pointing to the crucifix and then to the stake with the fagots piled about it, he gave him to understand by signs and the few words of Quichua that he had acquired that the moment of his final choice had now come. If he would take the symbol of the faith in his hand and speak the one word, "Credo," then a swift and painless death should be his, and after that salvation. If he refused—there were the fagots and the torches, a death of lingering agony, and after that damnation and eternal torment.

In such an awful moment it could not but be that the doomed Inca's thoughts should go back to that hour in Quito when he had himself doomed three generations of men, women, and children, and among them his own brother, to the same death of fiery torment which awaited him now.

He looked mutely from the crucifix to the priest, and

from the crucifix to the stake and the executioner standing beside it with the torch that was to light his death-pyre. Then his thoughts flew back again into the past, and he saw his guilty mother dragged away to the fagot-piled scaffold. He saw the torches waving in the frenzied hands of the great Huayna's wives, then he saw them hurled into the fagots, and as the flames sprang up he heard the shrieks and screams of agony mingling with the shrill strains of the Death Chant.

That which neither threats nor exhortations had done the memory of that dreadful hour and the result of his own pitiless sentence did. Once more the terrible words of Mama-Lupa rang shrilly in his ears—

"Sacrifice ! Sacrifice ! The gods are wroth and nought but sacrifice can appease them !"

Now the moment of sacrifice had come indeed, and *he* was to be the living sacrifice offered up to assuage the anger of the Powers whom his own crimes had provoked against his people. The spirit of his murdered father seemed to come back and tell him of the unjust doom of those who had died by his command, and suddenly his heart melted within him. He put out his hand and took the crucifix from Valverde and pressed it to his breast, and with bowed head murmured the saving syllables.

"Laus tibi Domine ! Gloria, Gloria !" cried Valverde, spreading his hands out towards the heavens. "Shall there not be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth ? Brother Francis, the font quickly, ere the moment of grace shall pass !"

The monk immediately came forward with a silver vessel containing the holy water. Valverde signed to the penitent to kneel down, and as he did so he dipped his finger in the water and, making the sign of the Cross on the Inca's brow, he cried in a loud, triumphant voice—

"In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, I baptize thee, Juan de Atahualpa.¹ By the prayers of our Blessed Mother and the intercessions of the Holy Saints thou hast been brought out of the darkness of heathendom into the light of the true Faith. By the authority given me by our

¹ It was the evening of the Feast of St. John. Hence the new "convert's" name.

Holy Father the Pope, God's vicegerent upon earth, lawful heir and successor of him to whom it was said : That whosoever he should bind on earth should be bound in heaven, and whosoever he should loose on earth should be loosed in heaven, I now absolve thee from the sins and errors of thy past life, seeing that they were committed while thy soul was yet in darkness. That which was as scarlet hath been washed whiter than snow. Go now, son of the Church, and enter into the glory of thy new inheritance !”

They were strange words with which to send one who but a few months before had been lord of wide lands and master of many millions to the ignominious death of a common malefactor, and yet not even old Carvahal was able to look upon the face of Valverde as he uttered them and doubt his perfect faith. For him the miracle of the Church's Sacrament had been accomplished by his hands, and no man believed anything more truly than he did that the heathen soul of the Inca was at that moment as white and pure as the soul of a little child.

He saw none of the mockery, none of the cruelty, none of the murderous injustice of which they were the sanction. If Atahualpa could have understood them he might have taken them for the words of pardon and release, but a few moments would have bitterly undeceived him. In their inner meaning they were nothing less than a command to his executioners, the surrender of the body of the doomed man from the keeping of the Church to the secular arm in accordance with the hideous formula which has sent thousands of men, women, and children to the agonizing death of the flames.

But the Inca's tardy recantation had saved him at least from the physical torments of such an end. The fagots were cleared away from the stake, and the fatal torch was extinguished. Two men-at-arms put their hands under his shoulders and raised him to his feet. He walked between them to the stake passively and in seeming unconsciousness of what was being done. Behind it Michael Asterre had taken his place with a noosed rope in one hand and a short thick staff of wood in the other. Then the Inca was placed against the stake and bound to it with cords. Before his right hand was bound he raised it and, looking towards Pizarro, beckoned to him. The Captain-General approached

with Filipillo at his side, but Atahualpa, with almost the last action of his life, turned his head aside and angrily waved him away. So another interpreter was brought, and by him he said to Pizarro.

"That other who speaks for you is a liar and a traitor both to you and me, and I would have my last words to come truthfully to your ears.

"You have entrapped me and betrayed me. You have plundered me and my people, as no doubt you came to do and as you will still do when you have murdered me as you are going to do. Since you have done me so much injury give me at least one pledge in return. When I am dead let my body be taken to my own city of Quito and there dealt with according to the customs of my race and the honour of my name. Protect those whom I leave desolate behind me, and let them suffer neither insult nor injury at the hands of your soldiers. Now I am ready, let me die!"

Even the iron soul of the Conqueror was shaken by these simply and solemnly spoken words, uttered as they were on the threshold of another world. The accusation struck him for the moment to the heart, and he bowed his head as though abashed by the force of it. Then he looked up and said shortly and in a husky voice—

"You have my pledge, Inca, and all that can be done shall be."

Then he stepped back quickly and made a sign with his hand to Asterre. The next instant the rope was thrown round the Inca's throat, noosed and knotted. As he felt the touch of it Atahualpa started in his bonds and opened his eyes which a moment before he had closed. The next instant Asterre had passed the staff through the noose and given it a quick, wrenching turn. A short gasping cry broke from the Inca's lips only to be instantly silenced as his executioner gave the staff another and yet stronger turn.

Those who stood round saw by the light of the flaring torches a hideous change pass over the face of the doomed man. Yet another turn and his jaw fell and his tongue shot out as though forced from his crushed throat. For a few moments there was an awful silence broken only by the spluttering of the torches and the dull murmuring of prayers for the safety of the departing soul, and then

Asterre released the staff. It spun round and dropped to the earth, and as it did so Atahualpa's head fell forward on his breast, and so died the son of Huayna-Capac and Zaïma, his queen and murderess.

As soon as the Inca was proved to be dead the trumpet sounded and the square was cleared. In the midst stood the stake with the body still bound to it, left to a grim and solemn solitude, but after about an hour the Inca's wives and sisters came in a sorrowful procession to Pizarro, praying that he would allow them to go and mourn by the body of their Lord, and this he, no doubt feeling some softness of soul, if not remorse, for the thing that he had helped to do, not only granted, but ordered that all the guards should draw back to the walls of the houses and the entrances to the square, leaving them unmolested for as long as they pleased.

Then presently upon the still night air there rose the soft, wailing sounds of the Death Chant, and hour after hour this went on, ever growing fainter and fainter, till at last it ended in the long, shrill, piercing cry of a woman's voice, and then all was still.

The Spaniards thought that one by one they had worn themselves out with wailing and so fallen asleep; but when with the first light of dawn they went to take the Inca's body away to lay it in the newly-built church of San Francisco, they learnt the true cause of the silence, for there in a circle round the stake at which their Lord had died they lay, maid and matron, each with her eyes upturned to his downbent head, and each with a slender dagger of gold taken from her dark unloosed tresses and plunged deep into her faithful heart.

And so too died the wives and sisters and daughters of Atahualpa, and among them lay the Princess Pillcu-Cica, fairest form of all, saved thus from dishonour by the parting of the gentle soul which had gone in the fulness of its simple faith to rejoin its murdered Lord in the Mansions of the Sun.

BOOK IV

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CHAPTER I

A PAGE OF HISTORY

MANY months had passed, and many grievous misfortunes had fallen upon the Children of the Sun since Atahualpa had been done to death in the square of Cajamarca. De Soto and his companions had returned after performing their mission only too well, since they had by fair words and splendid promises convinced the youth and inexperience of Manco that the sole object of the Spaniards and the only wish of their lord and master in Spain was the conquest and punishment of the Usurper and an honourable alliance with the true descendant and lawful heir of the ancient line of Huayna-Capac.

No sooner had this end been attained by the wily conquerors than it produced just that result which they expected. The nobles of Quito, enraged at the death of their prince and the collapse of their dream of universal empire, at once asserted their independence of Cuzco, and even persuaded the old chieftain Quiz-Quiz to forget his promises to Manco and undertake single-handed the tremendous task of driving the victorious invaders back over the mountains and into the sea whence they came.

Such falsehood and treachery on the part of a warrior so well proved is but one of many incomprehensible incidents in this most wonderful of all conquests. At every step the student of this last dark period of the history of the Incas is confronted and bewildered by events which, according to European ideas, ought never to have happened. At one time he sees the Inca princes and nobles acting like warriors and statesmen, at others like children and cowards. No doubt it would be possible to find many plausible

reasons for their extraordinary conduct, but to seek and find such is the business of the philosophical historian. The romancer has nothing to do with them.

The first result of the secession of the army of Quito was the arrest of Challcuchima by the Spaniards after they had invited him as a guest to Cajamarca to be present at the obsequies of his murdered master. They then compelled him to accompany them on their triumphal march to Cuzco, whither they set out some five hundred strong, inflamed to intoxication by the splendid accounts of the incredible wealth of the city which had been brought back by de Soto and his companions.

On the road Quiz-Quiz with his own forces and those that had been Challcuchima's beset the advancing conquerors at all the most difficult points on the way, and more than once came near to overwhelming them, but again and again the courage and discipline of the Spaniards, aided by their irresistible weapons, triumphed over all difficulties and dangers, though not without considerable cost both in men and horses, till at last in a great battle on the plain of Jauja the army of Quito was cut to pieces and scattered in fragments over the mountains. These fragments gradually came together again, and Quiz-Quiz led them back to Quito, and there at length his treachery was rewarded by a miserable death under the knives and spears of his own mutinous soldiers.

The Spaniards lost no time in turning this victory to the best advantage, and to the speedy clearing of their own road to universal dominion. Immediately after the battle Pizarro sent an embassy to Cuzco informing Manco of the defeat and dispersal of the rebels, and greeting him as Inca and lord of the whole land. At the same time he accused Challcuchima of treasonable correspondence with Quiz-Quiz during the march, and of attempting to lead the Spanish forces into an ambush. Like his master, he was convicted before he was judged, and the Captain-General, to the anger of de Soto and all the better minded of the cavaliers, condemned him to die by fire at the stake. The old warrior met his fate as became a prince and a soldier. Up to the last moment before the torch was applied to the fagots which his own countrymen piled round him, Valverde sought to do with him as he had done with

Atahualpa; but the brother of Huayna-Capac was made of sterner stuff than his son. His last words were—

“I do not understand the religion of the white men. They come with words of peace and kindness on their lips, and with their hands they do deeds of violence and cruelty and treachery. My place is waiting for me in the Mansions of the Sun. Let me go quickly back into the presence of my Father.”

And so he died, unmoved by the torment of the flames, and with the name of his ancient deity upon his lips. Only one of the great chieftains of the nation was now left, old Ruminavi, or Stony-face, of whom more hereafter.

The embassy to Manco bore speedy fruit, for while the Spanish army was resting in the verdant plain of Jauja the young Inca returned with it in brilliant state to thank Pizarro for his destruction of the Usurper and his rebel force, and to enter into a formal alliance with him. The wily Spaniard received him with open arms and all honour. The troops who were really his conquerors were drawn up to receive him as though he had really been a sovereign and independent prince, and the guns which had wrought such havoc in the ranks of his countrymen woke the echoes of the guardian hills of Jauja with salutes in his honour.

The united forces then returned to Cuzco, and here Manco-Capac, in the capital of his ancestors, was proclaimed and crowned Inca with all the stately ceremonial that had been practised of yore. The Spaniards formed his guard of honour, and did homage with his own nobles, but there was one difference. Instead of taking the imperial borla from the hands of Anda-Huillac, the Villac-Umu, High Priest of the Sun, he received it from the hands of him who was in fact Viceroy of the Spanish Emperor and now doubly his own conqueror.

After this had been done, and the sovereignty of Charles V. had been proclaimed at sound of trumpet in the Metropolis of the Inca's, Pizarro's brother Hernando returned from his mission to Spain, bringing with him the King's patent appointing the Conqueror Governor of the country covered by his conquests, and raising him to the rank of Marquis, thus making the base-born adventurer a grandee of Spain.

But Hernando also brought less welcome tidings of other

armies of adventurers steering for the golden shores of El-Dorado. Alvarado, one of the bravest of the captains of Cortez, had already landed, others were coming, and it behoved him to see to his position. Worse than all, when Hernando arrived in Peru from Panama, it was found that the Emperor had given Almagro permission to conquer the country to the south of Pizarro's territory for a distance of two hundred leagues, and rule over it independently. The fatal upshot of this was that Almagro and his men at once took their revenge for what they had considered the unfair distribution of the spoils at Cajamarca by taking advantage of the imperfect measurements of the country and claiming that Cuzco fell outside the jurisdiction of Pizarro, and therefore within that of Almagro.

Thus, by the strange decrees of Fate, it came about that the City of the Sun, the chief and richest prize of their incredible labours and astonishing triumphs, first became the object of the bitter dispute between the two factions of the Conquerors, which speedily grew from personal quarrel into civil war, during which the former friends and allies turned their weapons upon each other, and in the end overwhelmed in mutual disaster for themselves the great enterprise which they had begun so brilliantly.

For the time being, however, the dispute was healed, and the two ancient comrades, who so many years before in far-away Panama had dreamed the golden dream of El-Dorado, took a solemn oath on the Sacrament in the very capital of El-Dorado itself that all quarrels should be forgotten, and that both should work henceforth loyally together for the glory of the crown of Spain and the spread of the true Faith. This being done, Pizarro set out for the coast to found that City of Kings, which is now called Lima, and which was for more than two centuries the most splendid city on the southern continent of America, while Almagro made ready to start southward to the conquest of his new dominions: and it is at this juncture in the fortunes of the conquerors and the conquered that the curtain rises upon the last act of the tragedy which began in the City of the Great Ravine.

CHAPTER II

NAHUA'S OATH

It was after sunset one day early in the year 1535, and the young Inca Manco, the titular ruler of the Land of the Four Regions, was sitting moody and disconsolate in a chair, whose framework was carved out of massive silver, in a small apartment of the palace of the Inca-Rocca, which stood on an ample terrace about half-way up the slope leading to the great fortress of the Sacsahuaman, and which had been assigned to him as a residence by those whom he had now learnt to recognise were not his allies but his masters. A thousand trifles, and one fact that was anything but a trifle, had at last brought the bitter truth home to him. All the fair promises of the Spaniards had been lies. If they had overthrown the Usurper it had been only to help themselves, not him. He was no more sovereign here in the city of his fathers than Atahualpa had been in captivity at Cajamarca.

After the fair seeming ceremony of his establishment there had been feasting and dancing and revelry, for the lighthearted, childlike people had believed as honestly as he had done in the sincerity and friendliness of the Strangers. But then had come the rude awakening. The Spaniards had appointed their own officers over the city; their priests had carried a new worship into the temples sacred to the Sun; the soldiers, in spite of their General's own strict command, had plundered both palaces and temples of their treasures, and, worse than all, they had broken open the great House of the Virgins and the other convents about the city and had inflicted the foulest indignities upon their innocent dwellers. He had himself once

sought to escape from the hideous thralldom of this royal mockery with Nahua, his one beloved, and of so little account did the Spaniards hold him that he was allowed to go unnoticed, and they would have escaped to the friendly shelter of the mountains had it not been that Talambo, the chieftain of the Cañaris, a northern tribe which had revolted from the rule of Atahualpa and joined the invaders, went to Almagro and persuaded him that he had gone to join Ruminavi and bring all the remaining hosts of Peru in an irresistible swarm down upon the devoted city, and this had led to his being pursued and brought back to be thrown into prison like a common malefactor.

The coming of Hernando Pizarro to take command of the city in place of Almagro had led to his release and his restoration to the pretence of royalty. But now the iron had entered into his soul and he knew himself for what he was, a captive and a slave, a puppet dressed in the robes of sovereignty whose business it was to dance at his master's orders for the delusion of his own people.

Nearly half an hour had passed in his sombre reverie when suddenly the vision of Atahualpa, bound to the stake and surrounded by these pitiless Strangers, seemed to rise before his view as it had been told to him by many of those who had stood round the square of Cajamarca on that fatal night. Then he saw the morning light breaking over the circle of devoted women lying dead, slain by their own hands, round the stake, and among them the Princess Pillcu-Cica, his own half-sister. He remembered her in the old days at Quito as the friend and playmate of Nahua, and then suddenly again the picture before his half-dreaming eyes changed and he saw himself bound to such a stake with Nahua lying lifeless at his feet.

It needed no more to stir the latent heroism in his soul to revolt. He sprang from his seat, nerved by a sudden impulse of almost despairing anger, and snatching the fringed diadem from his brow he dashed it to the ground, and at the very moment that he did so the heavy curtains that covered the doorway were drawn apart and his uncle Anda-Huillac entered with bowed head and slow steps, followed by Mama-Oello, his mother, the sister-wife and Coya of Huayna-Capac, and Nahua.

When the high priest had given him the customary

greetings, his eyes fell upon the borla lying on the floor, then he raised them and looked at the young Inca, and said—

"It is the first time, Lord, that the crown of the Four Regions has lain where it might be trampled underfoot, yet I call our Father the Sun to witness that I would rather see it there—ay, I would rather see it spurned by the foot of the merest slave in Cuzco—than on thy brow."

"Because that brow is not worthy to wear it? Is that so, brother of my father?" exclaimed Manco, turning half angrily and half reproachfully upon him.

"Not so, Lord," replied the old priest, "since I for one believe that if the true spirit of the great Huayna yet burns in the breast of any of the Children of the Sun it burns in thine. It is the crown that is not worthy of the brow since it was placed on it by the hand of the Stranger and the Unbeliever."

"And the conqueror. Forget not that Anda-Huillac," the young Inca added, clasping his hands behind his back and looking down upon the discarded crown.

"Conqueror until now only, my son and my Lord," said Mama-Oello, coming forward and laying her hand lightly upon his arm, "and conquerors only because the Usurper had split the power of the land in twain and set one half of it against the other. Had there been but one Lord over the Four Regions, and had all our armies been united under such a rule as his whose love was my joy and my honour, then these few Strangers, despite their strange weapons and terrible war-beasts, would have been but as feeble reeds in a rushing torrent, to have stood perchance for a while and then fall overwhelmed. My son, is there no hand in all the Four Regions that can draw together what the hands of Atahuallpa parted? Is there no heart whose valour can fire the thousands who yet remain faithful to us with the high resolve to win back what is lost, and to overwhelm these cruel Strangers in the midst of the ruin that they have brought upon us? If there is such a hand and such a heart left in all the Four Regions, surely they shall be thine, my son."

"Why have you come to tell me this now?" said Manco, turning almost roughly upon her. "Have you waited till I am something worse than a slave, powerless and a captive,

degraded before the eyes of my people and accursed in my own? See, there lies the borla which I may never wear again. I am sick of pretence. Henceforth I will be and seem what I am. Oh, Nahua, Nahua, wisest and dearest of my counsellors, what evil spirit stopped my ears to the wisdom of your counsels and opened them to the smooth-spoken lies of these accursed strangers? But why do you three come to me now, now when it is too late?"

"Because it is not yet too late, Lord," replied Anda-Huillac, motioning to Nahua to be silent till he had spoken, "and because while thou hast been brooding here in thy captivity, since it is nothing else, over the misfortunes of thy people two of the vilest outrages that could have befallen them and thee have this day come to pass."

"What are they?" said Manco, looking gloomily at him. "What worse can befall the Children of the Sun or him who should be their lawful Lord?"

"My Lord knows," replied Anda-Huillac solemnly, "that these impious Strangers have already despoiled the House of the Sun of its most sacred treasures. At noon to-day they robbed it even of its holiness, and dedicated it to the worship of their own gods. To-day, too, the common soldiers of the Strangers forced their way for the third time into the House of the Virgins, penetrating this time into its most secret and holiest place, and by order of the same four who came to thee many moons ago as friendly envoys, rifled it of its last priceless treasure, and at this moment the Princess Lalla-Cica and her sisters, fairest save one of the Virgins of the Sun, are the slaves and playthings of these false-tongued and black-hearted Strangers whom we have welcomed as friends only to know them as enemies and oppressors."

No other tidings could have carried such shame and horror to the heart of a true Son of the Sun as these, and as he heard them Manco staggered back, and the red blood faded out of his cheeks leaving them a dull greyish brown. The Temple of the Sun was the last spot left undefiled in all the land, and the maidens who had been torn from the most sacred recesses of the House of the Virgins were, saving only Nahua herself, the pick and flower of the royal race that had been destined, according to the custom of

the land, for the Inca's own harem. How black was the insult and how deep was the injury may be guessed from the fact that the Temple of the Sun was looked upon as the actual first dwelling-place of the Divine founders of the Inca race, and that not even the vestal virgins of Rome were held in higher honour or guarded more jealously than were the Virgins of the Sun.

There was a little silence in the room before Manco spoke again. Nothing, not even his own captivity, could have shown him how far he and his race had fallen from almost unearthly splendour, or how utterly the imperial fabric which his ancestors had reared, had crumbled into fragments at the touch of these strange and terrible invaders. Then his eyes fell on the fair face and graceful form of Nahua and a new ray of hope seemed to shine through the gathering gloom of his despair. Brushing past his mother and Anda-Huillac he took two quick strides towards her holding out both his hands, and said in a voice that shook with the strength of his mingled sorrow and passion—

"All is lost, and yet not all whilst thou art left to me, my Nahua. If the Children of the Sun are false to their gods and themselves, if they give the land into the hands of the Strangers by fighting for it among themselves, is there not many a remote and unknown valley hidden away among our eternal mountains to which thou mayst fly with me and with a remnant of our people who may remain faithful? The land from the sea stretches away for ever so they tell me. Can we not escape out of this prison-house and in some far distant land, where these accursed Strangers can never follow us, found another empire and a new line of royal Incas?"

To his amazement Nahua drew herself up and shrank back for the first time from his proffered embrace, and as he stopped short and stared wide-eyed at her she said with distant and yet gentle dignity—

"My Lord has offered me the greatest honour that can befall a Daughter of the Sun. He has asked me to be not only his wife but his Coya and queen. He has the power to make me his slave, even as these brutal Strangers have made Lalla-Cica and her sisters their slaves. But by the Ancient Law he cannot make me his queen without my full and free consent, and his queen I will never be until he has taken that which is his own again. Not from the hands

of the Strangers as he took this dishonoured diadem, but that which he shall have won in battle by the strength of his own right hand, and by the right hands of those who shall still bow faithful to him and the memory of his fathers. It is not that I love you less, my Lord," she went on in a gentler tone, "for that would be impossible. It is that I love your honour and that of our ancient race more than life itself. Your slave I may be at your will, but—by the glory of our Father the Sun, by the unspeakable might and majesty of the Unnameable, I swear it—your wife and queen I will never be till I can take my lawful place beside you to rule over a people that is free!"

"And free it shall be!" cried Manco, roused by her words to all his old enthusiasm. "That holy oath which thou hast taken I take too. As thou hast sworn, so will I swear never to claim thee for my queen till I can set a worthy diadem upon thy brow. I will find a means of escape and this time I will not be caught. Ruminavi is still free and I will find him, and with him I will either win back what is lost, or thou shalt find me waiting for thee in the Mansions of the Sun. Surely there must be some way of escape even now."

"There is, Lord, for we have found one for thee," she said, her eyes suddenly filling with tears, and her voice broken by a sob which she tried in vain to repress. "But of that Anda-Huillac can tell thee better than I. Farewell, my Lord and my love—farewell!"

So saying she clasped her hands to her eyes, and before the Inca could make a motion to stop her or even say a word to call her back, she had fled swiftly and silently from the room.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUR OF TRIAL

"WHY has she gone? Why has she spoken to me in such a manner? It is the first time that her lips have ever spoken any but loving words to me. What is this new trouble that is about to fall upon me? Tell me quickly," said Manco, turning almost angrily to the high priest.

"Lord," replied the old man, bending his head humbly before him and yet speaking in strong and steady tone, "the meaning of it is this. The Princess Nahua, frail and tender though she may be in body, has a soul as strong and steadfast as any of the heroines of our ancient race. Nay, I will say that if the men of her race, the princes and warriors of the Sacred Blood, had had such wisdom and such steadfastness as hers the armed foot of the Stranger would not now be on our necks, nor would our most sacred things be the sport of his greed and his lust."

While he was speaking Manco had looked at him first in angry surprise and then with something very like shame. The blood began to glow red in his bronzed cheeks, and he even hung his head somewhat as he said—

"It is an evil time for reproaches, Anda-Huillac. I have erred in judgment and I have been deceived, but neither the Usurper nor the Stranger has yet seen my back in battle, and the dearest wish of my soul is to be once more with Ruminavi at the head of our warriors, so that, if I could not win back what is lost, I might at least die as becomes my Blood in the strife for it. I have no care for this thing, dishonoured as it is by the touch of the Stranger!" he went on, kicking the borla into a corner of the room.

"My only longing is now to fight and die as a simple Inca warrior. I long for battle with an even greater passion than I long for Nahua herself. Her words were bitter but true. What right has a king to claim his queen when he is crownless and throneless?"

"It is of that that she spoke, Lord——"

"Call me not Lord again," the young Inca interrupted passionately. "It is not I who am Lord here. It is the Stranger. Call me Manco-Capac, since my name and its holy memories are all that our conquerors and plunderers have left me. Now say on."

"The name of the Divine One is a better and prouder one now than any name of rank," replied Anda-Huillac, bowing his head at the mention of it, "and therefore I will call thee Manco-Capac and tell thee that thy worthy wish may yet be gratified though the sacrifice may be great. Briefly, then, the matter stands thus: When our Father first looked upon his sorrowing children this morning the Princess Nahua came to me with the queen, thy mother. They had been taking counsel together, and the Princess Nahua, well knowing that the last hopes of the Children of the Sun rest now upon thee, swore upon the sacred emblems of the Sun an oath that may not be recalled, that since the land demands a sacrifice, that sacrifice shall be herself if needs be."

"What? Nahua?" cried the young Inca, springing from the chair into which he had thrown himself after he had bidden the priest call him Lord no longer. "What? The purest and the holiest thing that is left in the land. It is impossible! The gods could not accept it, and, as for me, I would die first—ay, even as Atahualpa did."

"There is but that choice and another before thee, O my son and Son of him who was my Lord," said the queen, suddenly drawing herself up to her full height and stretching her arms out towards him. "For thee it is escape and then either victory or a death worthy of thy father's son. That is one choice. The other is captivity, dishonour to thee and all thy House, and such a death of shame as would make thy name unworthy to be spoken hereafter even by the lips of slaves. We know thy love and Nahua's. She has chosen the chance of death for herself rather than the certainty of shame for thee, and she has consecrated her

choice by an oath that may not be broken. Wilt thou do less, bearer of the Divine name and last hope of the Children of the Sun?"

"No, I will not. The choice is bitter, yet I thank thee, mother and queen, that thou hast shown me the only path that my feet can tread with honour. Now, Anda-Huillac, say on and tell me the plan. I will listen patiently and will say no more till I tell thee that, however desperate it may be and however bitter the cost, I will dare the venture. By the glory of our Father the Sun and the holiness of that which may not be named, I, Manco-Capac, swear it."

As he ceased speaking he made with his lips the silent sign indicating the name of the Unnameable. Then, taking his mother by the hand, he led her to the seat he had just risen from, and, turning to Anda-Huillac, waited in silence for him to begin.

"My son," he began, speaking now with an air of authority befitting not the subject of a fallen prince but as the chief priest of a pure and ancient faith and the lawful pontiff of the land, "that oath of thine has already been heard in the Mansions of the Sun and carried joy to the hearts of all the kings and heroes who have gone before thee. Now what is to be done is this.

"Thou knowest that these Spaniards have but two passions in life—greed and lust, and that their greed is greater than their lust. So great is it, indeed, that not all the treasures they have torn from our temples and our homes have satisfied it. Nay, they have rather increased it. Thou knowest also that for many days past thou hast been seeking with us and the remnant of the House of Nobles to persuade this Hernando Pizarro, who is now our master and thy gaoler, to let thee go to Yucay and there ransom thyself with great treasures whose hiding-place is now known only to thee, the last of the royal line. This he has so far refused, but now his soldiers have been clamouring for more treasures, and more especially those who have lost all they had by gaming to their companions. We have taken care that stories of this great treasure at Yucay should be well spread among them, and they have demanded that it shall be found and shared as the other was, and to this Hernando Pizarro, driven by his own greed and the fear of a revolt among the soldiers of the chief they

call Almagro, has at last consented, but he has made hard terms, and these must of necessity be agreed to."

The Inca raised his eyes quickly and made as though he would speak, but he remembered his promise and closed his lips again.

"The terms are these," the high priest continued in a low, sad tone that told Manco only too clearly what was coming. "In the first place a guard of his own men mounted on their war-beasts are to go with thee, and if the treasure is not found they are to slay thee. But so great are their fears of being surrounded in the city and cut off by our armies, and so much greater are their fears and jealousies of each other, that only a very few will be spared, and these Ruminavi will be ready to deal with at the proper time and place. But the second condition is harder than this. It is that thy mother the queen and the Princess Nahua shall give themselves up into his hands to be dealt with as he may see fit shouldst thou not return. Thou wilt not return, son of Huayna-Capac, for thou hast already sworn the oath that may not be broken. They too have sworn it, and so, whatever may befall, thy feet have but one path to tread, and that path lies hence to Yucay. Now, Manco-Capac, I have spoken, and it is for thee to remember thy name and blood and rank."

While Anda-Huillac had been saying these last words the blood had left Manco's cheeks and the pale bronze of his skin had turned to a sickly yellow grey. His eyes, opened to their widest extent, showed the white all round the black, gleaming eyeballs. His white, strong teeth were clenched, and his lips, drawn back from them, gave them almost the appearance of a wild animal's fangs. The countenance which was wont to look so kingly and noble now looked horrible. It was like the face of a corpse with living eyes glaring out of it.

Mama-Oello uttered a cry of terror and, rising from her seat, flung herself weeping on his breast and moaning that he was already dying. The touch of her hand and the sound of her voice recalled its wonted strength to the manhood which had staggered under the stroke of these terrible tidings. The life came back to his features and motion to his limbs as he returned her embrace. For a few brief moments of weakness he mingled his tears with

hers, and then, drawing himself up, he put her gently but firmly away from him. As he did so he saw her reel. In an instant he had her in his arms and had laid her on a couch which stood against one of the walls. Then, drawing himself up again, he faced Anda-Huillac and said in a hard, dry, unnatural voice which the high priest hardly recognised as his—

“If the frail daughters of our Father can dare so greatly, is there anything that his sons should not dare? Come, Anda-Huillac, I have looked my last on those I love. To look upon them again might make a craven of me even now. Henceforth I am no longer a man. I will tear out of my heart every human passion save hate and revenge, and the oath that I have sworn I repeat once more, that it may bind me never, so long as my arm can strike a blow, to spare a Spanish man, woman, or child whose life it is given me to take, and as He who sees all things knows the righteousness of my vengeance, so may He help me to take it! Now let us go to this Spanish butcher and tell him lies like his own, and then may the gods grant that I may never look upon his face again until the hour in which I shall ask his innocent victims’ blood at his hands! Come, let us go, for the sooner this thing is done the better.”

And so saying, and without even one backward look at the prostrate form on the couch, he gripped the high priest by the arm and almost dragged him out of the chamber.

CHAPTER IV

A GENTLEMAN OF SPAIN

THAT night, soon after sunset, a body of five cavaliers, preceded and followed by a score of native auxiliaries of the Cañaris tribe, left the city by the causeway leading to the north-west across the Sierras in the direction of the lovely valley of Yucay—once the scene of the gorgeous revels of a long line of absolute monarchs, and now the mustering-ground of the last of their armies.

Four of the cavaliers were old acquaintances, Hernando de Soto, Pedro de Candia, Sebastian ben-Alcazar, and Alonso de Molina. The moment that they had heard of the terms that Hernando Pizarro had made with the Inca they had gone to him and not only volunteered themselves for the service, but had practically demanded that it should be entrusted to them and to no others. They had asserted that, after the Pizarros themselves, they stood highest in rank and honour in the old army of the Conquerors, that Almagro's men were not to be trusted since they had shown themselves traitors already to the Governor by supporting their leader in his claim to a part of his territory, and that if they once set eyes on the treasure they would be quite capable of murdering the Inca and claiming that they had themselves discovered the gold, in which case their comrades in Cuzco would be certain to insist on the lion's share of it, if not indeed the whole, saving only the royal fifth.

Hernando Pizarro, who, according to the chroniclers of the Conquest, always seemed to have been more kindly disposed towards the conquered people than any other of the Spanish leaders—which, after all, is not saying very much—

had seen the force of this logic and consented, and he had also consented, after some further persuasion, to permit Alonso de Molina to lend the Inca one of his chargers, so that he might be spared the indignity of going on foot among the native guards.

Thus it had come about that the fifth cavalier was Manco himself, and he sat his horse as firmly and easily as any of the Spaniards; for, like the rest of the royal youth of Peru, he had been trained to hardy exercises almost from the time that he could walk, and ever since he had made what he had believed to be his alliance with Pizarro on the plain of Jauja, the four envoys who had come first into the City of the Sun had taken a delight in teaching him horsemanship and the better use of the Spanish arms in return for the kindness that he had shown to their lost and destitute countrymen, José Valdez and his comrade Alonzo de Avila.

When they were well out of the City and beyond the farthest outposts which had been placed on the slopes of the hills to guard against surprise, Manco, who was riding in the midst of the four cavaliers, saw a movement among them which at first sight seemed to betoken treachery. They pulled aside a little, allowing him to ride on alone between them and the advance guard of Indians, and then he heard them whispering in the still night together.

Perhaps to disarm his suspicions, but more probably on the representations of his guards, he had been allowed to wear his own arms and armour. José Valdez' sword hung at his side, a good steel battle-axe was hooked on to his saddle-bow, and a long, keen dagger rested in its sheath at his right hand. His armour, too, was as perfect as that of any of the Spanish cavaliers, and so he was well prepared, if not to guard his life from attack, at least to sell it dearly. Presently he heard de Soto say aloud—

"Go to, Molina. Thou art the man to say and do it. Who better? Who else in the army hath a smoother tongue and a readier wit than thine? Thou art the lover too and the hero of thine own plot. Go on, man, and have no fear for us. We will keep well out of earshot. All the blame and all the glory shall be thine, though if there be danger afterwards thou shalt not find us lacking."

Then the Inca heard the canter of hoofs behind him.

His right hand instantly closed on the haft of his battle-axe; as he turned half round in the saddle he saw Alonso de Molina coming up on his left-hand side.

Instead of the sword-thrust or axe-stroke that he half expected there came a light, good-humoured laugh, and as the young cavalier reined his horse up alongside his he threw up his unarmed right hand and said—

“Nay, nay, your Majesty, it is well for a good soldier to be ever on his guard, more especially against those who come from behind, but thou art not now with Almagro’s men, but with true knights of Spain, who do not tempt a friend out into the open that they may fall on him four to one, so hook on thine axe again and listen to me, for I have something of moment to tell thee for myself and my comrades yonder.”

Manco, whose heart was too sore and whose soul was too utterly steeped in gloom and filled with hatred of all things Spanish to recognise the ring of truth and honesty that there was in Molina’s voice, laughed bitterly as he put his battle-axe back and said—

“Majesty and friend! Those words have a strange sound in my ears from one of those who are my conquerors and enemies. As I am now I would rather have a straight thrust than a crooked word. So far I have had nothing but fair promises and foul lies from your people, even as the Usurper himself had. What better am I to expect from you, Don Molina?”

“All that one brave man may expect from another, Señor Manco,” replied de Molina a little more gravely; “and more than some in thy position might have reason to hope for, even from honest enemies.”

“How can one such as I believe that those who came to me as friends can now be honest or honourable enemies? I and my people are not accustomed to believe those whose lips say one thing and whose hands do another. That is an art which the Children of the Sun have not yet learnt.”

“The rebuke is a just one!” replied de Molina, slightly bowing his head, and as the Inca turned sharply round he fancied he saw, even by the starlight, a deeper flush on the young cavalier’s sunburnt cheeks. “Yes,” he went on, “it is true that there is much to be laid to our charge in that respect, but your Highness must remember that guile was

ever the weapon of the weak. What else were we when we first came here, a few score among multitudes?"

"Can a full-armed man be weak among a multitude of children who have no arms to hurt him? Would a god armed with the Llapa and guarded by impenetrable armour be weak among a host of men? If that is so, then you were weak among the hosts of the Children of the Sun."

"That is true again in a measure, Inca," replied de Molina, "and, more than that, I grant that we have not used the strength that our better knowledge has given us fairly or honourably against you, but that is a matter for our leaders, not for us. And yet," he went on, lowering his voice and bringing his horse a little nearer to Manco's, "not all the guile has been or is on our part. What of this treasure at Yucay? What of the thousands of men who are swarming in the passes and above the mountain roads we shall have to traverse? What of the rocks that are even now being poised ready to hurl down without warning upon us? What of the captured Spanish arms and armour already in Ruminavi's possession ——"

"You have said enough, Don Molina," interrupted Manco in cold, steady tones. "I see that I have been betrayed, and the great price that has been paid for this, my last hope of freedom, has, like Atahualpa's ransom, been paid in vain. Well, you yourselves are four to one, and these barbarians are your slaves, but I at least can die as the last of my race should do."

He never raised his voice, nor was there a trace of passion in his tone, but as he said these last words he drove the spurs into his horse's flanks and swung him sharply round to the left, striking de Molina's heavily on the fore-quarter and throwing it back on to its haunches, then he leapt him forward and wheeled again, and confronted the troop with battle-axe swung aloft. He knew that escape was hopeless for the hillside along the road sloped sharply upwards, and the Cañaris were already spreading before and behind to cut off his retreat. He believed that the plot had been discovered and that all was lost, and his only hope was to die fighting, and not as a captive. He had gained a little 'vantage ground up the hillside, and in another moment he would have charged the four Spanish cavaliers, and then to his utter amazement they all

burst into a hearty laugh, and de Molina, who had been almost unseated by the violence of the shock, rode towards him with his right hand outstretched, and saying between his laughs—

“Santiago, Señor Inca! it seems that thou art made of different stuff to him whom we strangled down in Cajamarca yonder. A gallant foe may make a good friend. You and I may be foes hereafter, but for the present we will be friends. Come, come, I meant no harm by my words, however evil they may have sounded. If I had done it would have fared ill with thee by now, in spite of all thy valour. Come, let us ride on as friends, at least to our journey’s end. We love thee none the less for choosing as thou hast done the death of a brave man, and it has made us the more determined to serve thee as we set out to do. Come back, ere these heathen dogs do thee some damage.”

Manco was himself too honest and brave a man not to feel instinctively that de Molina’s words were sincere, and he was too good a warrior not to know that if the four Spaniards had been so minded they could by this time have flung him from the saddle and trampled the life out of him under their silver-shod horses’ hoofs. Yet their laugh and Alonso de Molina’s words not a little bewildered him, and as he put back his battle-axe he answered in some confusion—

“What does this mean, Señores? Is it possible that you are friends and not enemies? Are you not Spaniards?”

It was a bitter rebuke though spoken almost by chance, and it went home. Already the name of Spaniard had come to have the same meaning as a curse in that new world in which their memory is to-day one of ruthless greed and pitiless cruelty. The generous soul of de Molina felt it even more keenly than his companions did, and as he grasped the Inca’s hand half against his will he said half in sorrow and half in shame—

“Yes, Inca, that is true, we are Spaniards, but all Spaniards are not brute beasts such as thou, to our shame, hast seen amongst us. Even in this army of ours, adventurers and plunderers though in truth we may be, there are yet as thou shalt find some who know how an honest enemy should be treated by gentlemen of Spain. Come back,

then, and let us ride along, for I have something to say to thee of those thou hast left behind."

The last words instantly disarmed the Inca's suspicion. He bowed his head in consent and returned de Molina's hand-clasp, and when the cavalcade had been re-formed and the march resumed, he said gravely and yet with a thrill of expectation in his voice—

"Señor, I ask your pardon and that of your comrades for my suspicions. Now what of the lost ones I have left behind me?"

"They are not lost while they and thou have friends in Cuzco, even though those friends be Spaniards," replied de Molina gravely.

Manco's heart leaped with newborn hope at his words, though another moment's thought seemed to show him that they were too fair-spoken to be truthful, and so he simply looked up and said again, somewhat coldly—

"Friends—Spanish friends to them in Cuzco? How can that be, de Molina? You know all, therefore you know that Mama-Oello the queen and the Princess Nahua, who one day I had hoped to make my queen, have delivered themselves up knowingly to a fate of shame and torment to buy one more chance of freedom for me. Who is there among you who could wish or could dare to save them?"

"From what we have done so far, Inca," replied de Molina in a somewhat altered voice, "thou mayest have seen that there is little that gentlemen of Spain cannot dare. As to the wish, that is another matter, and springing from that there is a tale which concerns myself not a little, and for that reason my comrades yonder have chosen me to tell it. It hath also some interest for thee, if thou art willing to hear it; it may at least beguile a portion of our march."

"I hear a friend speaking through your lips, my Lord," replied the Inca quietly, although it took all his native stoicism to keep the eagerness of his expectations from showing itself in his voice. "Say on; I am listening not with patience but with the deepest interest."

Then there was a little silence as though de Molina hardly knew how to begin his tale, and when he did begin his words were at first slow and halting.

"Inca," he said, "I have told thee, and I trust I and my

comrades have already given thee reason to believe, that we Spaniards, whatever else we may be, are not all thieves and ravishers like that one-eyed scoundrel Almagro and his fellow-villains. Nevertheless thou hast heard much against us of which I will now speak first of one charge. The high priest of thy faith told thee this morning that we who are here with certain of our men-at-arms broke into the most sacred recesses of the retreat that you call the House of the Virgins and took thence by force four of the noblest-born maidens, of whom the Princess Lalla-Cica, destined as they say to adorn thine own court, was one. That is true, but that is not all the truth. We took them with mock violence to save them from the real violence of Almagro's men, who have to-night leagued themselves to commit just such a crime as ours would have been. The maidens are now safe under the charge of the holy father Valverde, who has received them into the sacred asylum of the Church, which no man among us may violate save at the peril of his own soul."

"May the blessing of the Unnameable, even though He be not the same god as yours, rest upon you for that good deed for ever!" exclaimed Manco, holding out his right hand.

"It may be that after all He is the same," replied de Molina, grasping it, "and therefore I take the blessing and thank thee for it. Now for the rest of my story.

"Years ago in old Castile, before these dreams of El-Dorado had fired my soul with visions of adventure and sudden riches, I loved a maiden of my own blood and country, as fair and sweet a maid as the sun of Heaven ever shone on, the fairest of all I thought till I came hither to El-Dorado itself. Thou wilt remember, Inca, how on that first day that we came to thee as an embassy from his Highness the Governor we were led into the great square to the foot of thy throne, and how ere thou didst take thine own place thou didst lead to the seat beside thee her who hath now given herself as hostage for thee. In that moment I saw that earth held a maiden fairer far than her who till then had been my soul's mistress, and that moment I became a traitor to my own love and a slave of thine. Since then, sleeping or waking, the vision of her beauty has never left mine eyes. Again and again without thy know-

ledge I have sought by every art I knew to gain her favour, and once, but a few days since, to my eternal shame I say it, I hired force to do what my arts of love had failed to do. She was taken and brought to my house. I could not speak to her as I would in her own language, although, as thou knowest, I know some little of it, and so for want of a better way I sought to bring her to my mind through the lips of the interpreter Filipillo. If I had trusted to what he said I should have taken her as willing to betray thine honour and her own, but happily, when, misled by his lies, I sought to do so, she pleaded so sweetly for herself and thee, and I, more happily still, understood so much of her pleading, that the falsehood was made plain to me. Within the hour she was back unharmed in her home, and it may do thy heart good to know that within the same hour the vile slave who had deceived me, and would have betrayed her, shrieked out his last breath under the lash."

"It was a fate justly decreed, my friend, for now I may well call you that," said Manco in a voice that was broken by a faint sob. "Henceforth, whether I live or die, thy name shall be one of honour among our people. What more?"

"The rest may be told in a few words. When we heard this morning of the noble sacrifice that the Princess Nahua had vowed herself to make for the sake of thee and her people, I called my comrades here together and told them all the story, and when they had heard it we plighted our honour as good Christian knights and gentlemen of Spain that in so far as in us lay, even to the shedding of our own blood, we would prevent so foul a shame from falling upon our faith and nation.

"Hernando Pizarro is our leader and captain, but only under our sovereign lord the king, than whom there is no more knightly soul in Christendom, and it would go hard with the greatest among us did he know he had consented to do so vile a thing. Moreover, we know well that it is only these ruffians of Almagro's who have driven him to it in the hope of getting more treasure, so, though it be called treachery or what it may, we have sworn to save thee this night and thy mother and thy princess so soon as God shall put it in our way to do it. That horse which thou bestridest so well is thine. Take it as a free gift from one

who is to-night thy friend and whose duty may to-morrow make him thine enemy. I speak for every Christian and good knight here. Now see, here we have come at last to a fair level plain. None know the way to Yucay better than thou dost. Those slaves ahead are but the knaves who serve him who betrayed thee the other day—nay, waste no time in words or thanks, for time is priceless. Charge through their midst and begone. We shall pursue thee for show's sake, but thou needst not fear we shall overtake thee. Farewell, friend Manco, and begone with all speed and take thy freedom for thy sweet princess's sake."

As the last words left his lips de Molina whipped out his long sword and gave Manco's charger a slash across the haunches with the flat of it. The animal bounded forward and the next moment Manco found himself in the midst of the front guard of Cañaris. His battle-axe was already unhooked and swung high in air. It came down straight and true on the skull of a warrior who was making a stab at his horse with his spear and clove him to the shoulders. The next moment he had burst through the scattering troop and the next he was free. His battle-cry rose by instinct to his lips and rang out loud and clear as he swung his bloody axe above his head in the fierce exultation of freedom. Behind him he heard the hoarse shouts of the Spaniards mingled, as he thought, with laughter as well as with the stamping of their horses' hoofs. He looked back and saw them cantering heavily after him with the Indians labouring behind them. He put his own horse to a harder gallop. The Indians vanished in the darkness, then the shouts of the Spaniards and the echo of hoofs grew fainter and fainter and at last they too faded into the star-lit dusk, and Manco sped on alone, exulting in his new-found freedom and with the new-born hope which had driven despair out of his soul.

CHAPTER V

AT THE FORTRESS GATE OF YUCAY

ALTHOUGH the four cavaliers found no difficulty in reconciling their complicity in the Inca's escape to their consciences, their generosity did not therefore extend to the rest of his people. They knew from what had already happened that the little force in Cuzco would soon be called upon to fight desperately for its very existence. They knew too from their Indian spies that all the approaches to the beautiful valley were fast filling with detachments of Peruvian warriors, and finally there had come rumours that Ruminavi, the last of Atahualpa's great chieftains, had returned from Quito and had rallied all that remained of the four great armies of the empire and had united all the factions, Quitans and Cuscans, tribes of the Sierras and tribes of the plains, under the banner of the Last of the Incas, and devoted them to one supreme effort to crush the conquerors in the midst of their conquests.

As they were now well on the road to Yucay they held a brief council of war when they halted, and determined to spend the rest of the night and the following day in reconnoitring the approaches to the valley and discovering, as far as they could, the positions held by the Peruvian army.

The first thing they did was to collect the Cañaris and rate them soundly for permitting the Inca to escape, emphasising their reproaches, lest they should be not fully understood, with their rein-straps and the flats of their swords, promising them further that if they went back to Cuzco without the information that was needed they should every one be put to death as traitors. They then took up the march again and rode on slowly and cautiously for the best

part of the night, but without discovering a sign of the enemy.

A couple of hours before dawn they halted for food and rest and then with the earliest light rode on again. The bleak uplands over which they had passed now began to slope downwards and become more fertile, and as the light increased they saw that they were approaching the entrance to a great valley walled in on all sides by huge and precipitous mountains, and by the time the sun rose they had reached a rocky ledge from which they beheld a scene whose strange and wonderful loveliness told them at a glance that this could be nothing else than the far-famed valley of Yucay.

The lower slopes of the seemingly impassable mountains were terraced into gardens which glowed with a hundred shades of green and gold, azure and scarlet. The broad plain which lay along the centre was sprinkled with villas and temples and palaces bright with colours and glittering with gold and silver, and through the midst of them rolled a broad, winding river, glittering like a wide band of molten silver in the rays of the sun, now streaming into the valley from the eastward. All along the two sides rose ridge after ridge of bare, brown mountains, apparently without a break for miles and miles, and high above these towered into the sky, one to right and one to left, two mighty snow-crowned peaks like twin Titans guarding this enchanted realm.

But the keen eyes of the Spaniards soon discovered that the valley had other guardians than these. At every bend of the river a dark fortress rose tier above tier jutting out from the hillside and completely commanding it. All along the heights there were watch-towers on which, as the light grew stronger, they could see the sun glinting on polished arms and waving plumes, and soon shrill, wailing cries rose to right and left of them and ran along the ridges until they died away in the distance, telling that the sun shining on their own armour had already betrayed their presence and that the whole valley was alert.

"A glorious spot, by the Saints!" said de Soto, as his eye ranged delighted over the lovely prospect. "A very Garden of Eden, if such might be in a heathen land, but well guarded. Methinks it would fare badly with us even if we attacked it with all our forces. Still it is our present

business to find a way into it, if such there be, and that can only be where the river flows out of it. Come, let us try the sloping ground down here to the right."

"Ay," replied de Candia, "it were well to keep moving lest we find ourselves surrounded, but for all that I doubt not that the Inca will find a way of showing his gratitude for what we did for him last night. He must have reached the army by this time."

"That is certain," said de Molina, "and I for one would so far trust him that I would ride unarmed through his whole host. Ah, look yonder," he went on, pointing ahead past a spur of rock which they had just cleared. "Yonder is the gate of Eden."

"And the mouth of the River of Paradise!" said ben-Alcazar. "But methinks for all that the mouth of Hell for the enemy that should seek to get into it. Were those forts guarded by well-served artillery not all the Spaniards in Peru could force the entrance."

"I, for one," added de Candia grimly, "would pledge my life on holding it with a dozen culverins against a thousand men."

They had now come within full view of the entrance to the valley. It was some five or six hundred yards wide. On either side rose a steeply-sloping hill and on each of these a huge fortress of black stone built in angles like the Sacsahuaman and crowned with lofty towers dominated the little level, sandy plain through which the river flowed. The stream itself was some thirty yards wide and apparently deep and swift flowing. The moment that they came in sight the loud, shrill blast of a horn rang out, and instantly thousands of warriors, armed and plumed, sprang into view. They lined the tiers of the fortresses in perfect order, and far up the terraces of the hills were swarming in a moment with their glittering ranks. The notes of the horn had hardly died away before they were taken up and echoed far along the valley, and as they went fort after fort in endless succession was manned in full view by the glittering ranks of its garrisons.

Instinctively the whole troop pulled up, horse and foot. It was the first time that the Spaniards had ever seen a Peruvian army so splendid in appearance and so impregnable in position, and it was a sight that might have

inspired the boldest heart with both admiration and awe. While they were standing thus gazing at the splendid spectacle, half inclined to wheel about and make the best of their way back to Cuzco, if indeed the way were still open, de Molina threw up his right hand and cried—

“Ah, did I not tell you, Caballeros? There is the Inca himself if I mistake not. By the Saints, does he not look as goodly a figure as any Christian knight amongst us, and how well he sits that good steed of mine! See, he is waving a white scarf and beckoning to us. Come, let us forward, comrades. That means a truce at least.”

The apparition that had called forth this exclamation was that of the Inca himself. He was clad from head to foot in shining steel. Round his helmet was bound the scarlet llautu but without the imperial borla, and from it rose two lofty nodding feathers of the Coraquenque, which only the chief of the royal House might wear. In his right hand he carried a broad white scarf or kerchief, and with his left he guided his charger with perfect ease down the narrow, winding causeway which led from the rear of the fortress on to the plain. As he crossed this towards the brink of the river the Spaniards rode up to the other bank, each of them waving his scarf in reply to his signal. Then across the river there came, in the clear, high-pitched tone in which the Peruvians send their signal-cries from mountain to mountain, the words—

“Why have you followed me so far, my friends? Every moment your lives have been in danger. Do you not know that the City of the Sun is already beleaguered, and that you stand between two of my armies?”

“Cuerpo de Cristo! That is bad news!” growled de Candia. “It will be no light matter getting back to our quarters if that is so.”

“And if it be so it were well to learn the worst at once,” said de Molina. “I will go and speak with his Majesty.”

And before any of them could stay him the gallant young cavalier had leapt his horse into the stream and was swimming across. A half-suppressed cry of wonder broke from the Peruvian soldiers, and two or three companies of them, armed with bows and slings and spears, marched swiftly down out of the fortress which guarded the bank on which the Spaniards were, as though to cut off their retreat,

while others marched out from the other fortress as though to close round the sacred person of the Inca. But he instantly waved them back and rode alone to a point on the bank which de Molina was rapidly nearing. As he reached it the dripping horse scrambled out of the water, and de Molina, holding out his hand, said with a laugh—

“A good morrow to your Majesty! This is a strong place and a gallant array that you have here.”

Manco took his hand and replied gravely—

“You and your comrades have done unwisely, my friend. If you had not forced me to leave you so suddenly last night I would have warned you that by sunrise this morning every pathway to it would have been filled by our warriors. Moreover, if I had not been in this part of the valley Ruminavi would certainly have taken you for spies, and my people are now so incensed against yours that you would have been slain if it had cost a thousand lives, and then,” he went on more gently, “how would you have kept your promise, and who would have saved Nahua from her doom? But now you have not a moment to lose. The higher the sun rises the greater will be the peril of your return. There is indeed only one means by which you can reach the city alive. Take this feather,” he said, pulling one of the sacred plumes from his turban. “There is not one of the Children of the Sun who would dare to touch the wearer of that. Put it in your helmet and go. With it I give you and your comrades your lives in payment for mine. Should we come to battle, still wear it and you will be harmless, however thick the fight. Tell your leader what you have seen here, and save Nahua and the queen as quickly as maybe, for soon there will be bitter and relentless war between us to the end. Now farewell. Go quickly if you would go safely.”

“Fear not for the queen and princess, friend Manco!” replied de Molina as he gripped his hand again. “If we could not bring them out of Cuzco in safety we should not ourselves return, since we four have pledged ourselves each to the other by our Christian faith and knightly honour to be hostages for them. If they are not here on this river bank before another sun has set then thou wilt see us here or know that thou hast four Spanish knights the less to fight against. And now farewell, and till we meet again in battle God speed thee!”

Then with a last clasp of the hand he pulled his horse round and plunged into the river again. As he regained the opposite bank all four turned and saluted the Inca, still resting motionless on his horse. He returned the salute, and as he did so ten thousand warriors rent the still morning air with a great cry, and thousands of burnished weapons flashed in the now ardent sunbeams.

"Was that a farewell?" said de Soto, as they turned their horses and rode away up the hill. "To my ears it sounded more like a bidding to battle, and such battle as we have not had yet. Methinks that, despite all our easy-won triumph, the real work of conquest is only just beginning."

"For one thing," said de Candia, "this friend Manco of ours would seem to be the only man they have so far had to lead them. He will give us trouble. Old Carvahal said to me not long since that the Governor, if he had been wise, would have treated him as he did Atahualpa when he had the chance."

"Carvahal is a Christian savage," laughed ben-Alcazar. "I have ever had a presentiment that that man will die neither on a field of battle nor in his bed, good soldier and huge drinker as he is."

The lightly-spoken words were prophetic, although their fulfilment does not come within the limits of this narrative, for there came a day seven years afterwards when the fierce old swashbuckler was dragged in a basket to the scaffold in company with the last of the Pizarros without a fear in his heart and with a homely jest on his lips.

So, talking of the chances of the war which, with de Soto, they all believed to be only now about to commence in earnest, they made their way back with all possible speed to Cuzco. The sacred feather in de Molina's helmet was saluted again and again on the road by armed detachments of Peruvian warriors, hundreds of whom they saw, not a little to their disquiet, posted with perfect skill and knowledge of the country, so as to command all the most difficult parts of the road. They rightly guessed that where they saw hundreds there were really thousands, but although, as they well knew, part of the great debt of vengeance that they had piled up might well have been paid off on them, not a hand was raised or a spear lowered

to bar their path. The instant that the sacred plume was seen the leaders of the detachments bowed their heads and ordered their men back, leaving the road clear, and so with hard riding they came shortly after sundown within sight of Cuzco. When they had nearly reached the bottom of the steep causeway that winds round the western shoulder of the great fortress, de Molina turned in his saddle and said—

“And now, Caballeros, as the Inca has kept faith with us, so, I take it, must we now keep faith with him. There is little time to be lost if all these hosts are closing about us. Are you agreed, then, that we shall go at once and perform what remains of our oath to be fulfilled?”

“Yes,” the other three replied almost in a breath.

And then de Soto dismissed the Indian escort, and the four cavaliers, entering the city, turned their horses' heads in the direction of the palace which Hernando Pizarro had taken for his headquarters.

CHAPTER VI

"WE HAVE SWORN!"

THE news that they had returned without the Inca had apparently preceded them by some means, for they met Carvahal at the door of the palace, and in answer to their greeting he looked up and said with one of his deep, growling laughs—

"So you have seen his Majesty safely home, Señores! By my faith, a right worthy Christian escort for a heathen king who was yesterday a captive! Did I not say that it would have been better to try the tight collar on him as we did on Atahualpa? If I mistake not the lad is worth a score of Atahualpas. I fear me it will go hard now with the lad's mother and sweetheart. Don Hernando is in a towering rage, and I believe the punishment is to be a flogging first, and then shooting to death with arrows. It would have been greater mercy to have strangled the lad himself."

While the old ruffian was running on in this way de Soto and his companions had flung themselves from their horses and mounted the steps.

"Is Don Hernando within?" said de Soto roughly, and seeming to take no heed of what he had said.

"He is, Señores," replied Carvahal, bowing with a clumsy attempt at mock politeness, "and he is awaiting you in a humour that seems to have more of brimstone in it than of the milk of human kindness. You will find him in the banqueting-hall—and methinks you will find the feast already spread for you."

Without noticing the sally the four cavaliers strode past him hands on sword-hilts, and looking more like men going to battle than soldiers about to account for a grave failure

to their commander. De Soto went first, and as he entered the room Hernando Pizarro, who was sitting at a table with three or four of his officers, looked round and then started to his feet. He was a big, heavily-built man with a low, narrow brow, large and fleshy nose and mouth, and a pallid skin which the most ardent sun had been unable to tinge with bronze. His black eyes were small but very bright, and as he looked at de Soto they flashed with unmistakable anger. His voice, always unpleasing, seemed to grate roughly over his yellow uneven teeth as he said with the air of a judge addressing culprits brought up for judgment—

"How now, Señores? Where is he who was entrusted to your keeping? A tale brought by an Indian reached me to-day telling me that you had permitted his escape. I trust you come to tell me that that is false. If not, it will be my duty to show you how we deal with traitors."

"Don Hernando," said de Soto very quietly, as he always spoke when he had weighty words to say, "good soldiers do not draw their swords upon each other in the face of the enemy, and we have come to tell you that every moment brings the enemy closer, else there are four swords here ready for thine and those of any three friends at your choice. At proper time and place mine will be at your service. Meanwhile let me remind you with all respect that you are speaking to your peers and not to your men-at-arms. If you think otherwise we can find another use for our swords and the right arms of our friends and followers. You forget that we already have the Governor's permission to join ourselves to his forces at Los Reyes."

Angry as he was, Don Hernando was too shrewd not to see that this was really a serious threat. De Soto and his companions were not only very popular among the men, but they were, with the exception of the Pizarros themselves, the principal leaders of what were already called the Old Conquerors. As it was the balance of power between what were afterwards known as the Pizarro and Almagro factions was held too evenly in Cuzco just then for his liking. He knew that such a defection as this would place his party in a hopeless minority, and he knew too that the Almagrists, if they could do it with safety, would think no more of flinging him into prison, as indeed they afterwards did, and proclaiming their leader Governor of the city, than they

would think of sending an arrow through a flying Indian's body, for it must be remembered that the conquerors were not a regular army under the rigid discipline of a European camp. They were simply a body of adventurers held together by nothing but common interests and common perils, isolated in a hostile land and far removed from any centre of real authority. Their leaders were chosen by themselves, and, as the civil wars in which the two factions afterwards rent each other to pieces clearly proved, their tenure of office was by no means a secure one. No one knew this better than the titular Governor of Cuzco, and he knew, too, that if these four men chose to raise the standard of revolt and throw in their lot with the Almagrists his dead body might within an hour be lying in the streets pierced with a dozen sword-thrusts.

Such considerations as these, flashing as they did through his active mind during the pause which followed de Soto's bold words, instantly brought back his habitual self-command and that tactful control of his feelings and manner which made him the best diplomatist and perhaps the only statesman among the Conquerors. He smiled as pleasantly as such lips as his could smile, and said with a not ungraceful wave of his hand—

"Señores, I spoke hastily and I ask your pardon. The loss of the Inca's person is a very serious one to us. From the reports that have reached us it might even mean our ruin. It was natural, then, that the tidings should affect me deeply, but no doubt you have a report to make. If so, we are all attention. Will you be seated?"

"Señor," replied de Soto, still in the same cold, quiet voice, "I have a somewhat strange tale to tell you for myself and these caballeros here, and after the greeting you have been pleased to give us, we would prefer not to sit in your presence lest perchance we might be taken for your guests."

Don Hernando frowned at the coolly-spoken insult, but he was too politic not to see the danger of exasperating de Soto and his companions any further, so he simply nodded his head and waved his hand again and said—

"Very well, Señores. As you will. And now for the report."

"What happened first," said de Soto without any further

preamble, "was this. In the darkness of the night and just as we had reached the edge of a level plain beyond the mountains, the Inca, who sits a horse as well as any Christian cavalier, suddenly spurred forward into the midst of the fore-guard of Indians. He clove the skull of one with his battle-axe, rode half-a-dozen others down, and went for his life across the plain with us hard after him. The horse he rode belonged, as you know, to the Señor de Molina here, and as you know also, five thousand pesos would not buy such a horse south of Panama. He had the better animal, and he knew the country to a yard. To be brief, he outrode us and escaped. We rode on, hoping to gain some knowledge of the position of the Indian army, which by all accounts is about to attack us. Soon after sunrise we found ourselves in the entrance to that valley of Yucay on which we had doubtless stumbled by accident in the chase, and there we found the Inca."

"Ha!" exclaimed Hernando with just the suspicion of a sneer. "You found him and you did not bring him back—you, four Spanish cavaliers, to one puny Peruvian!"

"Señor," replied de Soto as calmly as ever, "he who hears a tale but half told knows little of the truth of it. We were not four to one. We were more like four to forty thousand, for no sooner did the Inca show himself than the whole valley was alive with armed men. Moreover, there was a fortress on each side of us, a river in front of us, and behind us leagues of country swarming with the enemy. We had already given ourselves up for lost when the Inca waved a white scarf and made a sign that he wished to speak with us. Señor de Molina leapt his horse into the stream and swam to him. What happened, let him tell himself."

He stepped aside, and the young cavalier strode forward, pale, angry, and defiant. But before he could speak Don Hernando waved his hand again and said—

"A moment, Señor. Your friend the Inca would seem to have forgotten that he left certain hostages with me in pledge for his return. I did not tell him what would befall them if he broke faith with me, but I will send one or two meaner prisoners that I have in my hands to him at once, to tell him that unless he is back here, alone and unarmed, by sunset to-morrow they shall be taken out at sunrise into

the great square, and there, in the presence of the army, they shall be stripped and flogged and then shot to death with arrows. That is their doom, and I will abate no jot of it."

"Then, Señor," said de Molina, his ruddy face white to the lips, and his whole frame trembling with passion at the atrocious words, "if that is your irrevocable decision you have no need to release any of your prisoners to take the tidings of it to the Inca, for we ourselves will take it, as we have already pledged our Christian faith and knightly honour to do."

"How? What mean you? You will take it?" exclaimed Don Hernando, staring at him in blank astonishment. "Surely, Señores, this is neither time nor place for jesting."

"It is a jest that we are ready to put a point to with our swords, Señor," replied de Molina, clapping his hand on his sword-hilt. "If it will please you to hear my story I will make few words of it, and my meaning shall be plain enough."

"When I met the Inca on the other side of the river he pointed out what was plain enough to see, that our lives were at his mercy. Then he told me of the pledge that he had left behind him in your hands, and he offered us our lives and liberties in exchange for those of his mother and and his betrothed, and we, seeing no better way out of the business, accepted the offer."

"How now, Señor?" cried Don Hernando angrily. "Whose authority had you to make such terms?"

"The authority of necessity, Señor," replied de Molina, bowing slightly, "and if you know of a better you may tell us."

"Whether I know of a better or not, I tell you that I will not recognise it!" cried Don Hernando, bringing his fist down on the table. "The lives of the women are forfeit, and they shall die unless Manco returns. I have sworn it."

"And we have sworn, Señor," exclaimed de Soto, stepping forward again, "that these ladies shall be sent scathless to Yucay, or that we will ourselves return according to our oath. Is that not so, Caballeros?"

The others bowed, and de Candia, placing himself between de Soto and de Molina, said in his deep, powerful voice—

"It seems to me, Don Hernando, that unless you think we are standing here lying to you, you are setting the gratification of a needless and cruel revenge against the honour and safety of four Christian knights and gentlemen of Spain. It is yet to be seen whether the Council of the Army will endure that, and if they do, whether the soldiers will. It maybe that they will think there is shame enough on our army already."

"Is this your earnest, Caballeros?" asked Don Hernando somewhat anxiously, for he saw that the matter was now getting serious. "Have you in sober truth sworn to do so mad a thing? Is it possible you would go back and give yourselves up to this heathen?"

"Ay, by God and Santiago we will!" replied de Candia solemnly. "Our honour is pledged and our oaths are passed, and though we had to cut our way through the whole army we would do it to redeem them. Now what say you, Don Hernando? Which think you will have the more worth in the eyes of our sovereign lord when the news gets home to Spain—the honour and the lives of four cavaliers who have fought and bled for him, or the torment and death of two helpless and innocent women?"

It was an awkward situation plainly and skilfully described, and Don Hernando looked up with something very like admiration at the four cavaliers; for, making allowance for the age he lived in, and the profession he followed, he was a kindly-hearted man save when his passions were aroused, and, moreover, he was well enough skilled in the ways of the Spanish court to know how terribly black an accusation might be made against him out of such a circumstance. Still, having spoken so positively, he did not see his way to yield to such a peremptory summons, and he was looking round the table somewhat anxiously when his eye caught that of his half-brother Juan, the noblest youth and most gallant knight of all the Pizarro family. His ready wit grasped the situation instantly—the more quickly since he was entirely on the side of the four cavaliers. He rose to his feet and said, speaking to them all through de Candia—

"Caballeros, good as your motives are, and merciful as your errand is, it is yet a hard thing for one placed as my brother is in authority to turn aside from his path because he is threatened with certain pains and penalties. Never-

theless, speaking for myself, I will say as a private cavalier and not as Don Hernando's brother, that he did not do this thing of his own will and judgment. He will not deny that the evil thought was put into his mind by that lying knave, Cepeda, who is himself a living proof of the wisdom of that decree of our august master which forbade lawyers to set foot in this land, and which has since, to my sorrow, been repealed. He, as you know, is heart and soul with the Almagrist faction, and he has no more a human heart in his breast than the mummies of the Incas which we found in the Temples of the Sun. The plan was his, and its object was not only the getting of more gold, but also the possession of the person of the Princess Nahua by himself——"

"Cuerpo de Cristo!" cried de Molina taking a couple of strides up the room and half drawing his sword from its scabbard. "What! Has that lean and scoundrelly anatomy of law and lying dared even to dream of that? Then, by the glory of God, am I the more fixed in my oath. Now, Don Hernando," he went on, turning to the Governor, "we want you, not to yield, but to do justice. It cannot be that you knew of this thing. It cannot be that you, Governor of the city and brother of his Highness, could have entered into a league with this vile quill-driver to dishonour the promised bride of a prince who, be it remembered, received us as friends and honoured envoys."

"It is true," said Juan, "for I know it of my own knowledge, and so does Gonzalo here, and had you never returned we had determined that if Cepeda persisted in his intention he should not live to accomplish his infamy."

"That is true," added Gonzalo, with a nod; "for I was captain of the guard over the palace where the queen and princess are lodged, and the sentry told me how Cepeda went to them but to-day with an interpreter to tell them at what price he would save them from the punishment decreed against them did the Inca not return. When I heard of it I ordered him to be thrown out of the palace if he would not go for less persuasion, but he had already gone, looking as black as the gates of his future abode."

"Then if that is so, Caballeros," said Don Hernando, who meanwhile had been industriously reviewing all the aspects of the case, "since we do not make war on women

or trade with their honour, I will willingly take back what I have said. The anger that I showed on your first entry you will doubtless take as natural in one who has lost an almost priceless prize. But now, in cooler blood, I am willing to confess that, situated as you were, you could have done only what you did, since the loss of four such gallant cavaliers to our little army would have been even graver than the loss of the Inca's person. As you have sworn so shall you do, granted always that you will faithfully uphold me against these Almagrists."

"Ay, that we will, Don Hernando!" exclaimed de Soto, well pleased that the seemingly difficult matter had been after all so easily settled; "and we shall do so with none the less heart and strength for that we were firmly resolved to keep our oath to Manco. That being kept we are more than ever devoted to your person and our holy cause."

"Then, Señores," replied Don Hernando, rising from his seat, and bowing gravely towards them, "you are at liberty, so far as your loyal duty to his Majesty permits, to provide for the present safety of the queen and the princess and their restoration to the Inca as may seem best in your eyes. But I pray you let there be no trouble with Cepeda if possible. I will answer to him for what is done, but we can afford no divisions in the camp now."

"He is not worth an honest man's steel," replied de Soto as they all returned the bow, "so you may rest assured of that. In the name of my companions I thank you for permitting us to redeem our oath in peace and good fellowship. Señores, adios!"

"Adios, Señores!" replied Don Hernando and his brothers, and the four cavaliers swung round and marched with jaunty strides and cocked swords out of the palace, to the great astonishment of Carvahal, who had waited all this time for the joke of seeing them brought out under arrest.

CHAPTER VII

FRIENDS THOUGH FOES

DE SOTO's first care naturally was to seek out the Villac-Umu, and through him to convey to the queen-mother and the princess, who were already preparing themselves to meet with becoming dignity and fortitude the shameful fate from which they believed nothing could save them, the welcome news of their unexpected and indeed incomprehensible salvation. At the same time runners were dispatched to Yucay, or, to be more correct, to Chinchero, the great fortress at the entrance to the valley where the Inca had posted himself with the advance guard of his army. Their mission was to tell him that the four cavaliers had redeemed their promise, and that as soon as might be convenient for them the two royal ladies would set out from Cuzco under a suitable escort.

This they did betimes in two of the royal litters magnificently adorned with gold and jewels and feather work, and on either side of each rode one of those to whose chivalry and generosity they owed even more than life and liberty.

When the cavalcade had proceeded some two leagues or so beyond the city, and had reached the rugged plain on which Manco had made his mock escape, they saw several long, glittering files of men rapidly approaching them, and Gonzalo Pizarro, to whom the command of the escort had been given, looked round suspiciously at de Soto and said—

"Señor, your friend the Inca must have a good many men at his disposal to be able to send an army as an escort for his bride. To my eyes it has more the look of an ambush."

"There is no need for fear, Señor," replied de Soto,

laughing, "for de Molina here carries in his morion a talisman that would take an unarmed foe scathless through all the Inca's hosts. If it please you to bid him ride forward you shall soon see that this is so."

"Very well," said Gonzalo, "I shall be glad to know it. Let him go."

So the young cavalier, who so far had been riding in moody silence on the right hand of Nahua's litter, scarcely trusting his eyes to rest upon her, although she had drawn the curtains partly aside, touched his horse with the spurs and cantered off to meet the approaching host. As he rode on they saw file after file come into view from behind until the whole of that part of the plain seemed covered with the splendidly dressed soldiery. But the moment that the sacred feather in de Molina's helmet became visible every file stopped motionless, then a rippling sea of fire seemed to run across the plain as the sunlight gleamed upon thousands of weapons of polished copper waved in greeting to him, and a mighty shout from thousands of throats came rolling over the plateau. Then, as though by magic, the shining files separated and swung back, and in a few moments the paved causeway was lined on either hand as far as the eye could reach with an endless array of warriors silent and rigid as bronze statues.

Between these the two litters with their escort passed at a rapid foot-pace for nearly four hours. As the cavalcade proceeded the two files behind fell into marching order on the roads, and so it went on, with an ever-increasing rear-guard, until at length the huge black walls of the fortress loomed up in the distance.

"Yonder is our journey's end, Señor!" said de Soto to Gonzalo Pizarro. "That is one of the fortresses guarding the river of which we told you. I doubt not that the Inca will meet us there and relieve us of our charge. There too you will see something of the strength of the position that we shall shortly have to force, unless indeed his Majesty takes the bolder step of besieging us in Cuzco."

They were now on the sloping, zigzag pathway which led down towards the river, and Gonzalo's soldierly eye had already noted that the lower they descended the worse the ground became for horses and the stronger the defences of the ravine appeared.

"I would rather his Majesty came to Cuzco, even though he came at the head of a hundred thousand men, than we should meet him here with only ten thousand at his back," he replied. "I doubt if the world holds another so lovely a spot so ably defended."

"So would I," said de Soto. "It is well for us that these people have neither steel nor gunpowder. If they had they could hold this valley for years, in spite of all the soldiers Spain could send against them."

"I believe you, Señor," said Gonzalo, "but, mira! is not that a brave show. Look, the garrison are turning out to receive us, and yonder is our late guest, the Inca, armed cap-à-pie, and, Santiago! yonder is another clad in good steel and mounted on a piece of good Spanish horse-flesh. Por Dios, these people learn quickly! Methinks if we do not bring the war swiftly to a close we shall be conquered with our own weapons."

"The other will no doubt be old Ruminavi—him they call Stony-Face," replied de Soto. "Next to Huayna-Capac himself he is said to have been the greatest general in the land. The Inca warned me that we should find fighting him a graver matter than taking Atahualpa prisoner."

The cavalcade had now reached the last of the slopes in the roadway, and presently it turned from it on to the plain in front of the fortress. As it did so the shrill notes of trumpets and horns rang out along the mountain-sides, and instantly not only was every terrace and rampart lined with men but a vast array seemed to spring out from the ground behind the two mailed figures on the other side of the river. The stream was now bridged by a quadruple row of balsas or rafts of reeds lashed tightly together and covered with neatly-dressed planks of a size which showed that they must have come from the vast forests which clothe the eastern slopes of the Andes.

The Inca and his companion drew up at about forty paces from the river bank and remained motionless until the whole cavalcade had crossed it. The Peruvian escort, as before, separated and fell back into two files, between which the Spanish cavaliers rode, Gonzalo Pizarro at the head and the others on either side of the litters. When all had crossed Manco threw up his vizor and cantered forward

alone. He pulled his horse up with admirable grace within a couple of paces of Gonzalo, and when he had saluted he held out his hand to him saying—

“Señor, you are welcome since you have come to bring me the greatest of all the treasures that our land contains. And welcome to you too, Señores,” he went on with a wave of his hand and a stately bow to either side of the litters, “since your coming proves that your tongues are as straight as your right arms are strong. For this day at least we are friends. I have been your guest,” he went on with a laugh, “now you must be mine if you will accept such hospitality as my poor palace can afford.”

“Since, as you say, there is truce between us, Señor Inca,” replied Gonzalo, “there is no reason against our accepting the honour with all due gratitude, and I trust we shall sup together none the less heartily that ere long we may be exchanging honest blows.”

The Inca bowed gravely, wheeling his charger without, as far as the Spaniards could see, so much as having glanced at the litters, the curtains of which were now closely drawn, and led the way towards the palace which formed the northern half of the fortress. The great array of warriors separated into two solid, shining masses as they approached, and old Ruminavi, sitting his horse like a statue of steel, threw up his vizor and saluted with his sword as they passed.

At the foot of a broad flight of steps leading up to a wide terrace running the whole length of the palace Manco dismounted and asked the Spanish cavaliers to do the same. Then he led the way on to the terrace. He now made a sign to the litter-bearers, who at once set their burdens down, and then for the first time he approached them. He went first to the one in which Mama-Oello was lying, and with gracious deference helped her to rise. Then he went to the other, and as Nahua rose and stood beside him a mighty shout burst from tens of thousands of throats and went echoing across the river and along the rock-walls of the valley, and at the same instant every warrior within sight of the terrace dropped on his knees and spread out his arms towards it, and Nahua's name, uttered at the same instant by tens of thousands of lips, went up to heaven in one great cry of joy and thankfulness.

"You see, Señores," said Manco, turning to the Spaniards, "that mine would not have been the only heart that you would have filled with darkness and sorrow had you not been as brothers rather than as enemies to one who hereafter, even if he should fall by your hands, will take none but loving memories of you with him to the Mansions of the Sun."

Toil-worn and battle-hardened as they were the Spaniards were still men, and for the most part gentlemen, and more than one of them looked at this touching spectacle of thankful devotion through a mist which was certainly not in the clear sky or the translucent air of the Sierras, and this mist was not far from becoming veritable tears when Nahua, at a word in Quichua from Manco, left his side and went to them one after the other, beginning with de Soto, and took their rough right hands in hers and bowed her lovely head over them till her lips touched them.

It was her act of public thanks for the great service they had done her and her people, and although the army knew that ere many days were past they must meet these same men in bitter and unsparing battle every man of all the thousands within sight sprang to his feet again, waving his weapon and making the rocks and the fortress' walls ring with his cheers. It was a moment in which a lasting peace might have been made and the greatest empire and the most perfect civilisation of the New World saved from utter and irretrievable ruin. If the majority of the Spaniards had been such men as those who were now standing with the Inca on the terrace of his palace they might have been to Peru what two centuries and a half later the English became to India. But this was not to be. They had brought with them into the land the twin curses of insatiable greed and invincible religious intolerance, and these were ere long to prove the utter undoing of both conquerors and conquered.

For the rest of that day and far into the night the Spaniards were treated with a royal and splendid hospitality worthy of the great race from which Manco sprang. They were feasted in gorgeous chambers, seated on chairs of silver, and eating and drinking from dishes and vessels of gold. They were carried in litters up to the rocky ledge beyond Chinchero, where the tableland ends and whence they

could see all the glories of the lovely valley spread out laughing in the brilliant sunshine four thousand feet below them. Then, descending into the valley, they were taken without reserve from palace to palace and fortress to fortress, and at night they were amused with dances and martial displays. Then, after feasting splendidly again, they went to rest on couches of cedar and silver covered with the finest and softest furs and inclosed by bright-hued curtains of the silken vicuña wool.

The next morning they found their chargers ready groomed and caparisoned for them and their native escort drawn up to receive them in front of the terrace. As soon as the morning meal was over the trumpets and horns sounded and the garrison turned out in silent and perfect order to do honour to the departing guests, and the Inca, accompanied by Nahua and the queen, and attended by old Ruminavi, still clad in steel, and a brilliant array of his nobles, came out to bid them farewell in sight of the assembled host.

Behind the Inca came an attendant bearing a great plate of gold, on which was a heap of gems which flashed gloriously in the sunlight, and from this Manco took five long strings of emeralds and rubies, each of which in another land would have been of almost priceless value, and one of these he hung round each of the astonished Spaniards' necks, and immediately afterwards Nahua left the side of the queen, with whom she had been standing, and went shyly up to de Molina and stood before him blushing rosy red through the pale olive of her skin.

On her upturned palms there lay a magnificent ruby cut in the shape of a heart and attached to a golden chain of exquisite workmanship. As soon as he saw it the young cavalier flushed red to the brows and, with the true instinct of a Spaniard and a cavalier, he instantly doffed his morion and dropped on one knee before her, and she took the two ends of the chain and with trembling fingers fastened them around his neck.

"That is the gift of my betrothed wife and promised queen," said Manco, who had come to her side, "and she asks your acceptance of it as a token of the great love that we both bear you, since without you we should not have been together to-day and both of our lives would have been

darkened with a great darkness until we met hereafter in the Mansions of the Sun, and therefore we both pray that our Father may keep you to wear it in honour and happiness until we shall meet you as well, no longer enemies, in the land where men do not make war upon each other."

While he was speaking de Molina had caught Nahua's two little hands in his and pressed them in turn gently and respectfully to his lips, as he might have done had he been kissing the hands of his own sovereign's consort. Then he rose to his feet with his morion under his left arm and said in a voice that he had hard work to keep steady—

"Señor, I would that I could thank her Highness in her own musical speech, but since I cannot you must do it for me, and doubtless her ears will receive the words more gladly from your lips than mine. Tell her that as long as Alonso de Molina lives her gift shall be the most priceless of his possessions, even as the memory of her beauty and graciousness shall be the sweetest, if also the saddest, that life holds for him. Whether I die in battle, as is my hope, or in bed, as may be my fate, those who find me dead shall find this next to my heart."

As he said this he took the splendid gem and pressed it to his lips, and then throwing back his scarf, he dropped it out of sight under his breastplate.

"And now, Señor," he went on, taking the sacred plume from his morion, "there remains, alas, but this to do. To-day we are your friends and guests. To-morrow we may meet as enemies, each bound by his duty to slay the other if he can. When you gave me this you bade me wear it, and you promised me that it should bear me scathless through every battle. That, Señor, is what no soldier of Spain could accept. I may rely on no protection save the mercy of God and my own right arm. Therefore I pray you take it back, not because I would part with it, but because I must."

"That is spoken like a true warrior and an honest man," said the Inca as he took the feather from him. "I take back my gift since you have shown me that you cannot wear it with honour, yet should it be our fate to join battle a hundred times for each time our hands have met in friendship, before each onset I will pray to our Father that he may keep your lance and mine far apart. And now

farewell, Señor, y amigo mio. The way is long and the sun is getting high. When you come to the City of the Sun give my greeting to Anda-Huillac and the rest of my people that are there, and tell them, and your people too, that it will not be long ere I shall visit them."

So the last farewells were said and the Spaniards and their auxiliaries, escorted by a splendid array of the Inca's own body-guard, crossed the little plain and the bridge of boats and ascended the winding causeway, ever turning to look back with regretful eyes at the brilliant throng on the terrace which stood watching them and waving their farewells until the spur of the mountain had shut them from sight. After a hard ride over the bare, bleak puna they reached Cuzco shortly after sundown and at once made their report to Don Hernando.

They found him presiding over a Council of War, and when they had delivered their report, and de Soto and Gonzalo Pizarro were beginning to urge, in the interests of both humanity and policy, that an honourable peace, or at the least a lengthy truce, should be if possible concluded with the Inca until the whole situation of affairs could be laid before the King of Spain, with a view to preventing further bloodshed and destruction, Don Hernando cut them short by saying curtly, and with no great good-humour—

"Señores, though you doubtless come with the best of intentions you yet come too late, since it hath already been decided by a great majority in full council of war to attack this revolted prince forthwith in his stronghold, and before he hath time to further increase the hosts which he means to bring against us. I regret that you were not here to take part in the deliberation, though your voices would not have been numerous enough to have changed the decision. But since you have now been twice the guests of the Inca none can know the approaches to his fastnesses so well as you, and therefore none can be better fitted to direct the expedition. It leaves at sunrise to-morrow, and I do not doubt that in furthering the work in hand you will prove yourselves at least as good friends to Spain and our holy cause as your laudable chivalry has lately led you to show yourselves such good friends to her enemies."

Later on that night Michael Asterre became the richer

by two bars of gold of the value of 500 pesos each, and Alonso de Molina became the poorer by these and by the exchange of one of the best suits of armour in the city for the iron cuirass and greaves and battered plumeless morion which had so far been the property of the stalwart man-at-arms.

CHAPTER VIII

THE OATH OF THE BLOOD

THAT same night, when the last of the escort had returned, the bridge was taken up out of the river and all the dispositions for the defence of the valley against an attacking force were made as complete as possible. The Inca and his General personally inspected the vast stores of arrows, javelins, and spears that were accumulated in the fortresses. Between twenty and thirty sets and half-sets of armour, with as many swords, pikes, and battle-axes which had been taken from the Spaniards in the skirmishes of the last six months, were distributed among the bravest and most stalwart of Manco's body-guard, and great stones and fragments of rock were laboriously carried up from the river bed and collected from the mountains and plateaus surrounding the valley, to be piled up on all the points of vantage ready to be hurled down on the heads of the attacking force.

Then towards midnight, when all the preparations had at length been completed, Manco and Ruminavi assembled their princes and chieftains on a high plateau of bare rock overlooking the valley.

Three hundred torchbearers formed a wide circle round them, and in the midst were two huge golden vases full of chicha. About these the nobles and chief warriors were grouped, and between them stood Manco clad in his Spanish armour, saving only for the helmet, in place of which he wore the scarlet Llautu surmounted by a plume of coraquenque feathers.

He looked round the ring of torchbearers and then upon the two groups of princes and warriors which had silently ranged themselves round either of the vases. But for the

space of several minutes not a word was spoken. At length the broad yellow disc of the full moon began to show itself above the eastern ridge of the mountains. Instantly all eyes were turned towards it; then every head was bowed as the brilliant orb rose into full view.

As soon as its lower edge was clear of the mountain-tops Manco drew his sword and held it aloft so that the moonlight fell upon the long, polished blade, making it look like a slim shaft of burnished silver, and then he began to speak in tones very different from those in which he had that morning bidden his Spanish guests farewell. Then they had been gentle and courteous; now they were deep and full, instinct with majesty, and thrilling with indignant emotion.

"Brothers of the Sacred Blood and warriors of the Four Regions," he said, addressing each of the groups in turn, "the ancient glories of our race and nation lie behind us, and between us and them there is the shame of division and the sorrow of defeat. But if the division had not gone before the defeat would not have followed after. Had not the Usurper—whose name shall be for ever accursed in the ears of the Children of the Sun—divided the armies of my conquering father into hostile factions, these calamities could never have fallen upon us. Is it to be believed that if the great Huayna-Capac had still commanded the united armies of the Sun these strangers, falsely called the sons of Viracocha, would have crossed those mountains which our Father in his wisdom raised up as bulwarks to guard the homes of his children? Would not they have been overwhelmed in the narrow passes? Would not they and their war-beasts have been starved on the bare and wind-swept punas; and would not those who might have been left have perished amidst the ice and snows through which the servants of the Usurper guided them in safety?"

"But all that is past now," he went on, with an added note of passion in his voice. "The conquering Strangers are here in our midst. They have plundered our treasure-houses, they have defiled our temples, and dishonoured the holy vestals of the Sun. They have proved themselves, not the descendants of gods, but of demons, and yonder, in the heart of the empire of our fathers, in the sacred City of the Sun itself, they are even now perpetrating their vilest

abominations and wreaking their cruel will and sating their foulest lusts like masters and conquerors in a land of slaves!"

The Inca paused for a moment, and as he looked about him he saw by the light of the torches frowning brows, dark, gleaming eyes, and white, clenched teeth shining through parted lips, and he heard a low, growling, hissing sound that would have boded but ill in the Spaniards' ears. Then he went on again—

"But as the Ancient Wisdom says, out of evil there may often come good, and out of the grave evils that have befallen us and our people there has come this good—that, though defeated and broken, we have become united, and so are still unconquerable. Now, for the first time since the death of the great Huayna, the heart of every warrior within the Four Regions is beating high and true for his lawful Lord and his beloved country. It has fallen to me, the unworthy bearer of the Divine Name, to lead you, my brothers of the Blood, in the last struggle with the invader of our country and the dishonourer of our holy things. Before two more suns have risen and set that struggle will have begun, and we have come here unto this holy place, where the Divine Manco held his first war-council, to take the most solemn oath that the lips of the Children of the Sun can utter that, when that struggle has once begun, it shall not end while an invader is left alive in the land or one of us has power to do him harm.

"Henceforth there is war without rest or mercy between us. Where any of this accursed race are found within the confines of the Four Regions, be they man, woman, or child, death, swift and pitiless, must overtake them. As they have dealt with us, so shall we deal with them. We will give blow for blow, death for death, and dishonour for dishonour, until the last of us shall have fallen in the holy strife or the last of them shall have paid the last penalty of their countless crimes—and that I, Manco-Capac, Inca and lawful Lord of the Four Regions, swear by the glory of our Father the Sun and his sister-wife the Moon, who now beholds my oath, and by the might and Majesty of That which may not be named, and in token of my oath I give my blood that it may bear witness for me or against me as I keep my oath or break it in that hour, be it soon or late,

when my foot crosses the threshold of the Mansions of the Sun !”

As he said this the Inca lowered his sword and sheathed it. Then he drew his dagger, and baring his left arm he made a slight cut in it and held it over one of the bowls of chicha until a few drops of his blood had fallen into it. Then he gave the dagger to Ruminavi, who did the same and passed it on to the prince next in rank to himself, and so the dagger went round until a few drops from the veins of each one of the Blood had fallen into the vase. Then the dagger was passed to the other group, for it was not lawful that the pure blood should be mingled with any other, however slightly tainted, and the same ceremony was performed over the second bowl.

Then Manco raised the great goblet to his lips and drank and gave it to Ruminavi, and so the two goblets were passed round the two groups till they were drained to the last drop. And so the taking of the Oath of the Blood was completed.

There was not much rest that night for prince or warrior in the valley of Yucaj and its guardian fortresses, for every hour runners came in from all parts of the country, some bringing news of new regiments marching up to the scene of action, some telling of isolated settlements of the Strangers cut off and given over to fire and sword, of detachments of the enemy making their way to the mountains overwhelmed in narrow gorges and on the brink of precipices, or caught on bridges and flung headlong into the torrents, and others again of the safe removal of stores and flocks of animals into parts of the mountains inaccessible to the heavy-footed Strangers and their war-beasts.

The next day the defences of the valley were once more inspected, outposts were thrown out, and ambushes laid, and so another day and another night passed, and at length, in the twilight of the second morning, there came runners in from the way of Cuzco bringing the news that a body of nearly a hundred horse were within two leagues of the fortress of Chinchero.

There was no need to give any further orders, for every man already knew what was to be done. All the way from Cuzco the Spaniards had not seen a single living thing. The whole country was silent and seemingly deserted. The

great guardian fortress was as still and lifeless as a house of the dead.

They halted before it, and Juan Pizarro, who was in command of the troop, ordered half a score of his men to dismount and summon it to surrender. There was no answer to the summons, and when at length they entered it they found the vast halls of the palace stripped bare and deserted. Then they cautiously entered the fortress, only to find it in the same state. They had no men to spare for a garrison, for they knew not what work lay before them, and so, not a little mystified and not without some misgivings, Juan Pizarro ordered his men to re-mount, and then the difficult descent of the zigzag road began.

"I would sooner have seen that fortress swarming with men and have fought our first battle under its walls," said de Soto, who was riding beside Pizarro, "than leave it empty like that in our rear. Methinks we shall find it full enough when we come back."

"Ay, that is like enough," said Juan, "but we could spare no men to keep it. We should have had a half-score of archers and as many arquebusiers to hold it for us, but they could ill be spared from Cuzco now, so we must take our chances of the retreat, if retreat we must."

They accomplished the descent amidst an unbroken and ominous silence, and even by the time they reached the river they had not seen a single warrior. Fortress, palace, and terrace seemed alike deserted, and as they halted about thirty yards from the river-bank, Juan Pizarro said to de Soto—

"I like this but little. Yonder valley looks to me more of a trap than a battlefield. What if the Inca has left us to entangle ourselves here among these unknown mountains while he has gone to Cuzco? He knows full well that the city can ill spare as many swords as we have here from its defence."

"That may be so," replied de Soto, "yet the daylight is precious to us, and it were not wise to lose too much of it making vain guesses here. Would it not be well to send a party across the river to reconnoitre?"

"The river looks deep and flows fast," said Pizarro, shaking his head. "It would make a bad way of retreat were this bank well held by the enemy."

"I have swum it twice, Señor, and will answer for taking a troop across and back safely."

It was Alonso de Molina who spoke, though few would have recognised the gallant young cavalier who was wont to take such fastidious pride in his armour and accoutrements in the meanly-armed trooper who now reigned his horse up alongside Pizarro's.

The reason for this strange freak may be told in a few words. After the council Hernando Pizarro had jested with him somewhat rudely on the promise that the Inca had made to spare him when he gave him the sacred plume, and de Molina, who had been strangely silent and cast down ever since he had left the palace of Chinchero, had there and then sworn that he would go into the first battle that should be fought so disguised that not even his own companions should know him. Among themselves his three companions had said more than this—that he had resolved to make this disguise of his a short way to death, for it was plain to all of them that he was sorely stricken with hopeless love for the Princess Nahua, who was now, through his own act, lost to him for ever.

Juan Pizarro gladly accepted his offer, and he called for twelve volunteers, on which a score immediately rode out of the ranks, and among them Michael Asterre, looking very gay and gallant in his captain's armour. He chose his twelve men, Asterre among them, and at once rode to the brink of the river and plunged in at the same spot where he had entered it before.

They reached the other side without catching a sight of an enemy or hearing a hostile sound, and when they had got on to firm ground again de Molina said to Asterre—

"Now, Michael, thou art leader for the time being. Keep thine eyes and ears open, and do not believe that there are no enemies here because thou canst hear and see none."

They rode past the guardian fortress, scanning it closely and listening intently without seeing the glint of a weapon or hearing anything but the wash of the river behind them. As they rounded the angle the ground became rougher, and presently they came to a very narrow place where there was nothing but a steep, rugged footway leading close under

an ancient and seemingly tottering fortress wall, and fenced in on the other side by the fast-flowing river. Beyond this they came to another bend in the river, and here the valley widened out again, leaving a broad and fairly level plain of some considerable size on either side of the stream. This plain was completely walled in on all sides, save the one on which they had entered it, with tiered fortresses built into the rocky mountain-sides, and as they came in sight of it Asterre pointed ahead with his sword and said to de Molina—

“Ha! yonder they are at last, Señor! And this is the death-trap in which they would fain give us battle.”

De Molina looked ahead as he rounded the point and saw the whole of the upper end of the valley covered with glittering ranks of silent warriors, conspicuous in the midst of whom were the figures of Manco and Ruminavi mounted on their Spanish war-horses and clad in their shining Spanish mail.

“A goodly array and well posted, friend Manco!” he exclaimed, “yet if you do but bring it out to fight us on the plain the end will not be long in doubt.”

“It is not the fight, Señor,” said Asterre, “but rather the getting back after it that looks the worst to my eyes. If they give us battle here it will be but as a feint. They will entangle us here with their multitudes. Yonder fortresses are unscaleable for us who have no ladders. The horses cannot work among those rock-strewn slopes that line the hills, and some time, whether victors or vanquished, we must get back.”

“Then let us get back now, good Michael,” said de Molina abruptly. “Those are matters for the commander to decide, not for us.”

And with that he turned his horse's head and led the way back through the narrow path under the fortress wall. Their retreat was watched without a sound or a sign from the hosts of the Inca, which remained under their entrenchments silent, terrible, and portentous.

When they reached the main body again de Molina told the commander exactly what they had seen without proffering any advice.

“Well, friend Alonso, that is not very good hearing,” said Juan Pizarro when he had finished his description of the

valley and the preparations that the Inca had made for their reception in it. "It would seem to me that, unless some miracle like that of Cajamarca happens, we shall discover that our erstwhile guest in Cuzco has invited us to a feast where we shall find the viands somewhat hard of digestion. Hast thou any advice to offer—or let me say rather, what wouldst thou do wert thou in my place?"

"To put it quite plainly, Señor," said de Molina bluntly, "and to speak as one who has already devoted himself to such death as may be honourably found in battle, were I myself commanding this troop I would send my men back to Cuzco under a trusty lieutenant, then I would swim the river and fight the champions of the Inca, beginning with himself, on the condition that if I overcome three of them in succession this whole land should henceforth be held as tributary to our Sovereign Lord. But if I were Juan Pizarro, and yet knew as much as I do of the Inca and the dispositions he has most evidently made to receive us, I should without further ado turn my horses' heads back to Cuzco and fight my way thither with as little loss and delay as might be."

The young captain looked at him long and seriously before he replied, then he said, almost solemnly for him—

"De Molina, that sounds but little like counsel of thine—thou whose blade was ever wont to show red earliest in the battle. Moreover, it is such counsel as I, entrusted now with my first command, could not accept without dishonour. I have been sent here to bring this proud young Inca back a captive, and I must do it. To return without striking a blow would be to make my name—and that is his Highness's name, mind you—a by-word in the camp. No, whatever be the odds or the hazards, we must fight."

"Very well, Señor," replied de Molina, with a somewhat ceremonious bow, "you asked for my candid counsel and I have given it. The rest is nothing to me. Did you go back I would cross the river alone and fulfil my oath. If you fight, I may still hope to do so. But in this case, since you have more than half the day left, I would most earnestly counsel you to lose no time. Cross the river at once. It may be that the Inca's troops, flushed with conquest, may give us battle in the plain. If so we may inflict so crushing a defeat on them that Yucay will be

another Jauja, though you will never take the Inca alive. If we camp here till morning we shall find the fortresses behind us occupied, and, when we are in the thick of the battle, another host behind us waiting till we are wearied with fighting to cut us off from all retreat. Nevertheless," he went on, speaking still more earnestly, "my best counsel to you is to go back to Cuzco, for by the time you reached it you would find it already beleaguered. That is my reading of the Inca's last words to us."

"Nay, friend Alonso," replied Juan Pizarro, reaching out his hand and laying it on de Molina's shoulder, "that cannot be. We were sent here to fight, and fight we must, whatever the odds and whatever the upshot."

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE OF THE VALLEY

WITHIN ten minutes of this decisive pronouncement Alonso de Molina had once more led his little troop of scouts across the river, followed closely by the whole company. But scarcely had they made good their footing on the opposite bank and begun their cautious march towards the narrow path at the river bend than a file of spearmen came round the corner at a quick run and drew a treble line of spear-points across the entrance to the narrow passage. There were neither archers nor arquebusiers among the Spaniards, for none could be spared from the defence of the city, and so Juan Pizarro could do nothing more than dismount a portion of his troop and send them forward as pikemen to clear the way with pike and sword, since horses would have been worse than useless. The Peruvians disputed the passage obstinately and several severe wounds were given and taken and a few lives lost on either side before they at last broke and ran.

The footmen pressed them back at a run and Juan Pizarro cried exultingly—

“Mira! Mira! So—they fly already! When could the infidel withstand good Christian steel! After them, gentlemen and soldiers of Spain! For God and Santiago—forward!”

“For God and Santiago, *back*, Señor!” shouted de Molina, who, still full of suspicion, had been watching, not the little skirmish, but the rocks and fortress walls about him, and had seen that these were now swarming with hidden men.

But the warning came too late to be heeded. The pikemen were already round the bend and chasing the

Peruvian spearmen over the plain. Juan Pizarro had galloped round, waving his sword above his head, and the whole troop, some of them leading the horses of the dismounted men, were streaming along under the fortress wall. He himself held back till the last man had passed, and then he drove his spurs into his horse's flanks and went after them at a gallop.

Just as he cleared the bend and swung out into the open plain he heard a dull rumbling crash behind him. He reined his horse up sharp and looked round. The whole of the front wall of the old fortress had fallen outward, completely blocking the path between the hillside and the river, and over the ruins hundreds of men were streaming down into the plain, swinging their weapons aloft and screaming out their shrill and savage war-cries.

"There closes the death-trap!" he laughed. "Well, now it is just a question of who lives longest. There is nothing much to be done with these fellows. There is better work than that to do in front. Adios, Señores!" and with that he put spurs to his horse again and, waving his sword as though in invitation to the shouting throng behind him, he galloped away over the plain and joined the troop.

Juan Pizarro had by this time got his men into battle array—that is to say, he had divided them into three divisions in the invariable Spanish style, a main body or "battle" in the centre and two wings a little in advance of it. But the gleaming wall of soldiery in front made no move as they rode up to it, and when they came within some thirty paces they found a rising ridge of ground running from the mountain-side to the river across the plain strewn and piled so thickly with stones that no cavalry could charge across it without being broken, and as they halted before this showers of arrows and stones from slings were rained upon them, and then bands of javelin-men ran out almost up the ridge of stones and hurled their heavy weapons pointed with tempered copper at the horses' heads and flanks until the maddened animals, already galled by the arrows and bruised by the stones, began to rear and plunge and swerve aside in somewhat ominous fashion, and Juan Pizarro, seeing that not much good could come of this, drew his troop back and ordered a score of men to dismount and cross the barrier on foot.

Nearly twice the number obeyed, and then, sword and dagger in hand, the grim, iron-clad Spanish soldiery leapt through the stones and sprang at their assailants. It was steel against copper, iron cuirass against quilted cotton mail, European discipline and training against mere savage valour, and what followed was butchery until the Inca himself led a troop of his own body-guard down into the plain and drove the Spaniards back nearly to the barrier.

But meanwhile the right wing had scrambled through the stones, and, as they were forming to charge, old Ruminavi led a column of spearmen across their path while another moved out to cut them off by the rear. The spearmen took the charge kneeling with their spear-butts planted firmly in the ground. They were ridden over and slain almost to a man, but when the charge was past four of the dreaded war-beasts were writhing and kicking on the ground, screaming with pain and gashed with fearful wounds inflicted by the barbed copper lance-heads, and this was a greater loss to the Spaniards than a hundred men to the Peruvians.

Old Ruminavi himself rode at the first man who broke the line, caught his sword-thrust on his own Spanish buckler, and then dealt him so shrewd a blow with a huge, copper-headed mace that he hammered in the iron of his cap as though it had been parchment and broke his skull like an egg-shell beneath it. Almost at the same time the Inca, seeing three troopers playing sad havoc with their long swords among his own guards, put his Spanish lance down and charged one of them so strongly and so truly that he drove him from the saddle and flung him down among the struggling footmen, there to be speedily stabbed to death. And then, letting go his lance and unhooking his battle-axe, he clove another through helm and skull to the chin. Then he wrenched his axe out just in time to take a sword-cut from the other on his shield and drove the blade under his still up-lifted arm and hurled him too, crippled and bleeding, to the ground.

"Santiago! that was well hit, Señor Inca!" shouted Michael Asterre through the bars of his vizor.

He had just forced his way through the press towards the mounted and mailed figure, longing to find some worthy foe to prove his new armour and weapons, and when he saw the third man go down under the Inca's fierce attack he made

sure he had found one; but to his amazement and disgust the Inca only turned in his saddle towards him and then leapt his horse over the dead and dying and flung himself into another part of the battle.

All through the long burning afternoon the fight raged fast and furious, and until sundown Michael Asterre sought to close with the mailed figure that carried the sacred plumes in its helmet, but ever without success. Once only they came to blows, and then the Inca contented himself with taking the savage sword-cut on his buckler, and once more avoided the single combat without returning it.

There was another of the Spaniards, a man clad and armed like one of the meanest troopers, who also seemed to the Inca to meet him at every turn in the battle and three times he wounded him without taking a scratch back. Indeed so light and half-hearted were his blows that Manco took him at last for some soldier enfeebled by disease, and so avoided him too as not worthy of his own royal steel.

So the Battle of the Valley raged on until the sun drooped towards the western ridges and the long shadows of the mountains began to fall across the river and the now bloody plain. Yard by yard the Spaniards had driven the Peruvians back under their fortress walls. Superiority of discipline and weapons had now, as ever, proved better than superiority of numbers; and although neither the Inca nor Ruminavi had been captured or even wounded, so far as was known, yet when the Peruvians at length retreated into their impregnable fastnesses and Juan Pizarro took the remains of his troop back across the stony barrier to form his camp in the middle of the plain, where he would be secure from a night attack, he was fain to confess that, if all the battles to come were to be like this one, even victory would leave the Spanish forces so weak that it would be worthless to them.

Hundreds of the enemy had been slain, but more than half a score of his own men were dead, a score more were badly wounded, and no less than eleven horses would never carry a rider to battle again. Still, they had fought the enemy on his own ground and driven him back, as usual with heavy loss, and the young commander hoped all through the anxious, miserable night that followed that the lesson would prove stern enough, and that he would at

least be able to go back to Cuzco with the news of a victory.

But when morning dawned grey and calm over the mighty hills that seemed to shut them in from all the rest of the world, he saw what had happened the day before was only the beginning of the tragedy. The whole of the valley as far as they could see was filled with innumerable hosts which surrounded them on every side, and one despairing look about him sufficed to show him that his expedition was now nothing more than a forlorn hope.

His battle-worn and wounded men had laid down in their armour beside their horses, and with the first glimmer of light all who could mount were in the saddle. There were only two ways out of the fatal valley. One was over the narrow pathway, blocked and cumbered by the stones of the fallen wall which had been pushed by the sheer weight of the men behind it out from its foundation. The other was across the river, and already the plain on the other side was filling up with regiment after regiment of the Inca's soldiery.

"I would to God I had taken thy advice yesterday, Alonso!" said Juan Pizarro, as he swung himself up into his saddle. "Those of us who get alive out of here will have but a sad tale to tell in Cuzco."

"There are no eggs in last year's nests, Señor!" replied de Molina, as he too, stiff and sore with his wounds and weak with loss of blood and lack of food and sleep, dragged himself up to the saddle. "The only question for us now is how many of us may get back. If my advice is still worth having, you will take all the men and horses that are now fit for hard service and fight your way back with all haste that you may, for you will be sorely wanted ere long in Cuzco. As for us who are not of much further account, we will do what we can to keep the enemy at bay while you make good your retreat."

"And what of you after that?" said Pizarro. "Do you think, friend Alonso, that we are going to desert wounded comrades in arms in that fashion?"

"Señor," said de Molina, with a brave attempt at a laugh, "we are wounded, and our horses are well-nigh crippled, and without sound beasts escape is hopeless. When it is over what is left of us will not be worth the taking home."

It is a hard thing to say and a harder thing to do, but it is the need of battle and our duty. There are fourteen or fifteen of us here who are still men enough to keep the enemy back while you lead your horses over the stones yonder. Ride over them you cannot. Once on the other side and remounted, your way is open to the river, though doubtless you will need your swords to keep it open.

"You cannot pass the river here. It is too deep and the banks are too steep. There is but one way and that is over the fallen wall. For God's sake and Spain's, Señor, take it quickly or it will be too late. Do you not see those clouds of men up yonder gathering on the mountain-side? If you are not past that corner before they come above us they will rain down such an avalanche of stones and rocks as will not leave a man or horse unmaimed among us. Go, Señor, go, for God's sake, while you can!"

Juan Pizarro looked up at the towering slopes above him and saw that, bitter as de Molina's counsel was, in it lay the only hope of saving the troop. The other bank of the deep, swift stream was swarming with men, and already arrows and darts and stones were flying across in ever thickening showers. Their hands met for a moment in a last clasp, and then the troop moved forward towards the pass. In front went the thirty-five men who were still unwounded or only slightly hurt, taking all the sound horses with them, and in the rear went Alonso de Molina with his forlorn hope of wounded men and horses.

While they were on the plain the Inca held his men back by the strictest orders, for he knew full what would happen if the retreating enemy turned and caught them on the open plain. He was well content with what had been done so far, and he knew what was still in store for the Spaniards before they got back to Cuzco. But the moment that the troop had reached the narrow pathway and the men began to dismount he gave the order to advance, and his regiments went forward at the run, not over the plain, but round along the mountain slopes, while he rode with Ruminavi along the open directing their movements with word and gesture.

But when he reached the pass he saw that all the Spaniards were not crossing it, for a line of them were drawn up across the approach, half on horseback and half on foot. He could see that they were wounded and weary,

and that their beasts were gashed and spattered with dried blood. One of their mounted men a little in advance of the others was the sorry-looking trooper who had again and again the day before seemed to seek death at his own hands.

Before half Pizarro's troop was over the stone-encumbered pathway the first of the Inca's regiments had gained the high ground above it, and instantly the hillside was covered with leaping stones and masses of rock which crashed and thundered into their midst, sending horses and men down with maimed and broken limbs. Hoarse shouts of triumph thundered along the valley, showers of arrows and darts and sling-stones rained rattling upon the harness of the Spaniards, who could strike no blow in return till they had got the trembling, frightened animals, on whom they were depending for their escape, over the stones.

At the same time the Inca ordered another regiment to come down and charge the rear-guard, and on they went, rank after rank, yelling their war-cries and hurling themselves with spear and axe and mace on the thin, ragged line of wounded men.

But, few and wounded though they were, they were made of stern stuff. With the first onset wounds and weariness were forgotten, and the long, keen Spanish swords struck out hard and true, and the heavy Spanish axes swung fast and bit deep, and every warrior who came within their reach went down. But more and more came on, and then one by one the Spaniards, overwhelmed by weight of numbers, began to go down, till at last only the mounted men were left.

But now the last of the troop had passed the stones, and they could hear the shouts of their comrades telling them that all was well and bidding them come and join them. De Molina shouted to his remaining companions to give up the unequal fight and make the best of their way back, and this they did, nothing loth to end it, though only two of them reached the other side alive.

Then de Molina, facing the whole host alone, drove his spurs into the flanks of his jaded, wounded beast, and made for the river brink. But old Ruminavi was too quick for him, and charged him when he was within two yards of it. De Molina, better skilled in horsemanship, swerved aside,

and Ruminavi very nearly charged into the river instead, but the next moment the Inca was on him, with axe uplifted.

"Yield, Señor!" he cried, in Spanish. "Whether you be gentle or simple, you are too gallant a man to throw your life away thus. We are two to one, and there are thousands behind us."

"I have already got my death-blow, so your axe will but make the end a little quicker. Therefore strike, friend Manco, for I could wish to die by no nobler hand than thine."

As de Molina said this he threw up his vizor, and the Inca saw his face already ghastly with the grey hue of death and his once bright blue eyes already dim and glazing.

"They are safe, are they not?" he said faintly, looking over the pass he had so gallantly held. "Then the work is done. Well, since you will not strike, friend Manco, I yield."

But even as he said this he reeled in the saddle, and the Inca, calling to Ruminavi, sprang from his horse just in time to catch him in his arms as he fell. As he laid him down on the sand he saw that there was scarcely a part of his body in which he had not received a wound, and that blood was flowing from him in nearly a score of places. He at once took his morion off and bade one of his men go to the river for water. A draught of it revived him for the moment, and he put his hand to his neck and pulled out the gem that Nahua had given him.

"You can tell your princess, friend Manco, that I spoke truly when I said that this should only leave me with my life. I have not many more moments left. When they are over take it back to her and tell her that I died happier holding this dear token of her friendship than I could have lived without her love. As a loyal Spaniard I cannot wish you victory, but for her sake I can wish you safety and happiness when this evil war is over. Farewell, friend Manco! May your last fight be as hard a one as mine has been, and may you come better out of it. Mother of God, pray for one who is a sinner!—Dios y Santiago, they are coming!—Stand fast, gentlemen, for God and Spain! They are on us! Now strike! Ah, that was my death-wound,

yet we must hold them a few minutes longer. It will not be long—not long——”

As the delirium of death had come on him he had struggled up into a sitting posture and waved his right hand above his head as though it still held a sword. Manco threw himself on his knees beside him, but just as he clasped him in his arms his head fell back heavily against his shoulder, and there, on the breast of his best-loved enemy, Alonso de Molina breathed out his gallant soul with a sigh so soft that even Manco's strained ears could scarcely catch it.

He laid him down with gentle reverence on the sands, and when he had taken Nahua's jewel from his neck he ordered one of the royal litters to be instantly brought that he might be taken back to the fortress, and while it was being brought he stood over him with bent head and wet eyes, mourning for him as man seldom mourns for his enemy, and, for the time, heedless in his sorrow of the battle which was still roaring away up the valley.

CHAPTER X

BELEAGUERED

NEARLY five months had passed since Juan Pizarro and Hernando de Soto had ridden at the head of twenty-eight wounded and wearied men, the sole survivors of the terrible Battle of the Valley, into the northern gates of Cuzco. Their homeward march had been one long fight of two nights and two days, during which not a man left his saddle save when he dropped from it overcome by wounds and weariness, and lay waiting for the axe or spear or mace which ended his fighting days for ever.

Those who reached the city had found it closely invested on all sides by seemingly innumerable hosts, which had come flocking from all quarters of the land in answer to the call of its last champion. The beleaguering hosts had opened to let them through, and the Peruvian warriors had laughed at them as their wounded and jaded steeds crawled feebly into what seemed the death-trap in which they were about to die, but those who had fallen behind had been butchered without pity.

The young Inca had fulfilled with terrible exactness the oath which he had sworn to Anda-Huillac on the fateful night when Nahua and Mama-Oello had devoted themselves to a death of shame and torment to buy him his last chance of liberty. The news of the Battle of the Valley had sped with the swiftness of lightning throughout the length and breadth of the land, and the Inca's call to arms had been answered north and south and east and west by hosts of fierce and pitiless warriors, who had seemed to spring full-armed from the earth like the fabled fruit of the dragon's teeth of old.

Wherever the Spaniards had settled in isolated families and small communities, they had been fallen upon and butchered, men, women, and children, without warning and without pity, for the day of reckoning had come, and the penalty of outrage and massacre, of plunder and treachery, had now to be paid.

Messenger after messenger had been dispatched from Cuzco to the coast, and when at length one of them had reached Pizarro in his newly-founded City of the Kings, he had sent an army of four hundred horse and foot to the relief of the sorely beleaguered city. Then the host which had been besieging Lima had drawn back into the mountains, hovering on the Spaniards' flanks and rear until they had caught them entangled among the narrow, winding mountain-paths and the fearful gorges of the mountains. Then they had cut the bridges and broken down the roads before and behind them. Avalanches of rocks and stones had fallen upon them from inaccessible precipices, clouds of warriors had descended on their nightly camps, and though these had fallen by hundreds under the well-wielded Spanish weapons, in the end the inevitable happened, and of the army which was more than twice as strong as that which had conquered Atahualpa in Cajamarca, only a few sorely-wounded stragglers had struggled back across the mountains to Lima to tell their tale of disaster and defeat.

In the City of the Sun the long weary months had been filled with days and nights of horror. The splendid capital of El-Dorado on which de Soto and his companions had gazed in awe-mingled wonder on that first memorable morning was now a wilderness of blackened and fire-wasted ruins. Day after day the legions of the Inca had flung themselves into its approaches, only to be beaten back with fearful slaughter by the little band of desperate heroes, now less than two hundred strong, who held their camp in the midst of the great square surrounded by the blackened ruins of the palaces and temples which they had first seen glowing with gay colours and shining with gold and silver.

Every night the countless watchfires had blazed up in undiminished numbers on the hills about the city and on the towers of the great fortress which loomed dark, threatening, and unscaleable above it. Every hour arrows and darts headed with blazing fire-balls had soared through the air

and fallen on the thatched roofs of the buildings and into the fast-emptying magazines of grain, which, saving the horses killed in battle, were all that now stood between the besieged and starvation.

Scarcely a day had passed but one or more severed Spanish heads were flung from the battlements of the fortress into the city to tell Hernando Pizarro and his men in what terrible fashion the Inca was keeping his oath, and at last Don Hernando, forgetting all knightly honour and humanity in his desperation, sent out an envoy to say that if he received such another message he would slay every prisoner in his hands.

As it happened, the Inca was absent at the time on one of those raiding expeditions which afterwards made his name a terror to every Spaniard in the land, and Ruminavi sent back his messenger's head as an answer. Within an hour the Princess Lalla-Cica and her companions, whom de Soto had so far, even in the midst of all these horrors, contrived to defend from injury, were brought out into the square, and there, in full sight of the garrison of the fortress, they died the death that had been decreed to Nahua and the Queen-mother.

Scarcely had their shame and torment ended than a general assault was made on all sides of the city, and the Peruvian warriors poured in, column after column, through the streets blocked with charred timbers and strewn with the rotting corpses which throughout the siege had been filling the air with poison and plague. Through these they fought their way with little check, for the narrow streets were too choked and cumbered for the horses to work with any good effect. But no sooner did they reach the entrances to the square than the cannon and musketry roared out, and the silver balls and bullets—for iron was now too precious to use for such purposes—tore their way through their crowded ranks, mowing them down by scores, and then came the thundering charges of the war-beasts, the onslaught of the swift-striking, deep-biting steel, and the end was the same as it had ever been—hundreds slain at the cost of a few wounded men and horses and one or two dead of the iron-clad soldiery of Spain.

It was a victory for Don Hernando and his companions, as every fight had been when the Peruvians had once come

within range of the artillery and musketry and made themselves a fair mark for the irresistible charges of the cavalry. But the same thing had happened day after day, week after week, and month after month, as the great tragedy of the Conquest drew to its climax, and every day fresh hosts had replaced the slain without, and every night death and wounds and sickness had made the muster-roll of the defenders shorter and shorter.

"We must make an end of this somehow, comrades," said Don Hernando, when they were holding a council the night after the grand assault, "or by the Saints it will surely make an end of us! Here we are, cut off from all succour, with scarce a hundred and fifty fighting-men, and not fourscore horses that are fit for work. Every day we grow fewer and weaker, and every day these heathens seem to grow more and stronger. Those we slay lie in the streets and poison us with plague, so that we do but bring sickness on ourselves by slaying them, while at every onset there come back ten for every one we kill. The loss of one man and a horse is to us greater than a thousand men to them. They have the whole country to draw their supplies from; we have only what is here in the city, and that, as you know, cannot last many days longer. When that is gone we must fight our way out or starve. It is manifest that no help can come to us from outside. Almagro is far away in Chili, my brother, the Governor, is no doubt beleaguered in Los Reyes. If he could have sent us succour he would have done. If he has sent it the troops have doubtless been cut off and perished among the mountains. That is our condition, comrades. Now what is your counsel upon it?"

The assembled cavaliers, who were sitting and standing round a smoky fire in the middle of the wretched camp, looked at one another for a few moments in gloomy silence. They had eaten their last scanty meal from vessels of gold, and the whole camp was littered with gold and silver flagons and dishes, ornaments and chains and bars into which others had been melted down, and yet, battle-worn and sore stricken with plague and famine, they themselves looked scarcely less wretched than that other company which some seven years before had grubbed for worms and sea-snails on the desolate shores of Gallo. At length Pedro de Leon,

one of the Almagrist faction, spoke, and said in a sullen, angry voice—

"So far as I can see, Señor, and as many others think with me, this much-boasted city of El-Dorado hath been little better than a gold-baited death-trap to us. True we eat and drink from vessels of gold, yet we are dying of famine by inches. Therefore my counsel is that, while we have yet a little life left in us, and before all our powder is burnt or our horses die of wounds and starvation, we should leave this accursed place and make shift to fight our way to the coast."

"It would be as easy to fight thy way to Heaven, friend!" growled Carvahal, whose huge form seemed to thrive as well on famine as on plenty. "Depend upon it, if men well fed and well found have not been able to fight their way from Los Reyes here, we shall never fight ours to Los Reyes, and, since one place is as good as another to die in, why take the trouble to go elsewhere to do it?"

"I have not often heard thee speak wiser words than those, Carvahal," said de Soto. "But still to my mind there is something more to be said. It seems to me, Señores," he went on, addressing the council generally, "that we are here to hold this place for his Highness and our Sovereign Lord. We have won it with our arms, and with our arms we should keep it. Nevertheless, I am fain to confess that I see no way of holding it so long as the fortress is held by the enemy. It commands the whole country to the north, and blocks the only road by which succour can reach us. Moreover, if report speaks truly, there are great stores of meal and grain in it which would be very useful to us just now. If it were ours I should see no cause for despair."

"Then let us take it!" said Juan Pizarro, sitting up on a rug of skins on which he had been lying.

He had been wounded in the jaw in that day's fight by a shrewdly-slung stone, which had crushed the iron of his chin-piece in upon his flesh, and the wound was so painful that he could not now bear anything more than a felt cap upon his head.

"It was by my counsel that we did not occupy it at first. Therefore if it be the wish of the council, I will seek to make good my error by leading the attack upon it to-morrow. Let us make scaling-ladders and shields to guard

us from the stones, and take it by escalade. Let us to-morrow divide our force into three companies of fifty each. I will lead one against the fortress, let Gonzalo take the other out by the northern road and take it in flank at the same time, and do you, Hernando, hold the camp with the other fifty. With the cannon and the musketry you will be well able to keep it against as many as will attack it. If God gives us the victory we can hold out for months to come; if not, we shall at least have fought a good fight and be none the worse than we are now. What say you to that, Señores?"

"It is good counsel, Juan," said Hernando, after a little pause, during which they all looked at one another in anxious silence. "It is good counsel and we will do it. In such straits as ours what is boldest is best; so now, comrades, the council is ended. Get what rest and refreshment you can to-night, for to-morrow we shall have a hard day's work. I will see to the making of the ladders and shields. The holy father Valverde will hold Mass at sunrise, and those who have sins to confess had better seek their confessors betimes, for this time to-morrow night may be too late. And now, comrades, again good-night, and God be with us, for in Him is now our only hope of help!"

CHAPTER XI

ST. JAGO'S DAY

WHILE the Spaniards were holding their council in the camp in the great square, Manco and Ruminavi were holding another no less momentous in one of the chambers of the central tower which crowned the fortress of the Sacsahuaman. Nor was their debate less anxious than that of Hernando Pizarro and his companions. The truth was that the feeding of the vast host which had now for months been encompassing Cuzco was fast becoming impossible. More than that, the time for sowing had come, and this among the Incas and their people had for ever been the season of universal religious observance. It was to them what Holy Week was to the Catholics, or the feast of Bairam to the Moslems.

Moreover, in such a country as the elevated regions of the Sierras, it was absolutely imperative that the grain should be sown simultaneously, and at this one season. If not, the next year the Children of the Sun would have to fight a foe even more pitiless than the Spaniards, for there would be famine throughout the length and breadth of the land. There were thus two reasons—one religious and one economical—which made it imperative to partially raise the siege of Cuzco, at least for a time.

Now that the great Temple of the Sun had been defiled and desecrated, the most holy place in the Land of the Four Regions was the temple on the sacred Island of Titicaca, some six days' journey to the south, and thither it was necessary that the Inca, in his sacred character as Brother of the Sun, should go and open the first furrow with his golden hoe and plant the first seeds of the next

year's harvest. To have neglected this duty would have been an incredible impiety, and a breach of a custom hallowed by ages of solemn observance.

On the other hand, too, the multitudes which had been gathered about Cuzco, feeling the pinch of famine, and wearying of the length and rigours of the siege, were getting more and more difficult to keep together in any semblance of an army. Their thoughts were turning to their homes and families, and to the starvation and misery that would be their fate if the crops were not sown.

The last grand attack on the Spanish camp had failed, as all the others had done, and the disheartened hosts of the Inca were falling back to their old belief that, after all, these strange invaders must be something more than human, and therefore unconquerable, and Manco and his old General well knew that, while the people were in this temper, to neglect or even to postpone the Feast of Sowing would be to provoke almost universal mutiny and revolt, and utterly ruin all hope of future resistance.

So, after long and earnest debate between the young Inca and his General, the priests of the Sun and the chief nobles of the Blood, a compromise was decided upon. Manco was to start at dawn with his priestly retinue, and proceed with all possible dispatch to Titicaca. The bulk of the people were to be sent to their homes to prepare the fields for sowing, and Ruminavi was to remain with the picked regiments of the army to continue the blockade of the city.

It was thus that there came about the last of the long series of fatalities which had seemed to foredoom the empire of the Incas to destruction. If this decision had been made even a day later, or even if the Spaniards had carried out their original plan of attacking the fortress the next morning, Cuzco might have fallen, and the Spaniards might have been forced to begin the whole conquest over again in the face of a victorious and triumphant people.

But it so happened that the next day was St. James', and when Hernando Pizarro told the Fray Valverde, who was now duly consecrated Bishop of Cuzco and the Southern Indies, of the projected attack, he protested with all the vigour of his eloquence against the desecration of the holy day by avoidable bloodshed, and ended by

refusing point blank to celebrate Mass or to give absolution to any who took part in the impious enterprise.

"No, Señor," he said sternly, in reply to Don Hernando's military arguments as to the necessity of striking quickly. "No, the day on which the holy St. Jago died is no day for battle and slaughter if good Christians can avoid them. If you are attacked again, then strike back like true men, and prayers shall not be wanting for the souls of those who fall. But if the heathen leave you in peace, as after to-day's defeat they may well do, then should the solemn hours of to-morrow be devoted to a better and more urgent service. They must be hours of fasting, humiliation, and prayer.

"Do you wonder, Señor, at the misfortunes that have overtaken you when you and your captains have permitted your men to imperil their own souls and pollute their holy cause by all manner of greed and lust and violence? Think you that God and the Holy Saints can look down with favour on work done by hands so foul and wicked as theirs are? It is not a battle with the heathen that they must fight to-morrow. It is a battle with their own evil lusts, which destroy the soul as well as the body. Do your will according to your own advice, Señor, but remember that to-morrow I proclaim a solemn fast and day of humiliation and intercession, and those who go out to battle between the rising and setting of the sun, save to repel an assault of the enemy, will go followed, not by the Church's blessing, but by her solemn anathema!"

Don Hernando was too good a soldier as well as too good a Catholic not to see that in the face of such an interdict the order to march would be answered by the superstitious soldiery with nothing less than flat refusal and mutiny. So Bishop Valverde had his way, and, all unknowingly, did more than any other man at such a juncture could have done to ensure the triumph of the enterprise. All through the day a silence hung over the Spanish camp, broken only by the tolling of bells and the murmur of prayer and chanting and exhortation. The Peruvians, most mistakingly believing that they were preparing to leave the city and run the fatal hazard of the mountain passes, left them unmolested and went on with their own dispositions. The Inca departed southward at

dawn, his heart full of heavy forebodings, and yet firmly persuaded that duty as well as necessity compelled the observance of the sacred duty he was going to perform; while Ruminavi and his captains busied themselves in organising the people according to their divisions, or nations, preparatory to dismissing them to their homes.

And so it came about that, when that ever memorable Saturday came, the amazed and delighted Spaniards looked out upon the surrounding hills and saw that the innumerable hosts which for months had blackened the hillsides and covered the plain had melted away and vanished like the creatures of an evil dream.

"Behold how quickly the Lord has answered the prayer of His servants!" cried Valverde, when the news was brought to him, and he came out on the terrace before the palace of Viracocha, which he had consecrated as the Cathedral of San Francisco. "Behold the Lord of Hosts hath spoken and His enemies are scattered, even as were the multitudes of Sennacherib before Salem! Now, soldiers of the Cross, go forth and conquer, for the voice of your contrition has risen up to Heaven and the hour of your deliverance is at hand. Go now and take the triumph that awaits you and the blessing of God and His holy Church go with you!"

The soldiers who had assembled before the terrace at the sound of his voice knelt by one impulse and received his benediction. Then they ate as good a meal as their scanty resources afforded them and set about their preparations.

Juan Pizarro's first plan of attack had been greatly altered in after debate. In the first place the assault was to be made under cover of darkness, as the Peruvians, like all Indian nations, never fought at night unless forced to do so. Secondly, Don Hernando was to take command of the troop which was to carry out the flanking operations, while Gonzalo Pizarro, with Pedro de Candia as Captain of the Artillery, was to hold the square and what was left of the city.

The morning was busily employed in constructing scaling-ladders and mantlets, to protect the assailants from the stones that would be showered upon them, and shortly after the midday meal Juan Pizarro, at the head of forty horse, rode out of the city to the southward. This move

was a feint to persuade the Peruvian leaders that he had gone on a foraging raid to replenish the exhausted store-houses of Cuzco.

But as soon as the sudden darkness had fallen over the valley he turned aside and threaded his way up through the side valleys on to the open plain which was commanded by the curved northern and eastern face of the great fortress. Meanwhile another party on foot had left the city carrying the ladders and mantlets, and made their way up under cover of the darkness to the gorge of the Rodadero past the south-eastern flank of the fortress and met him on the plain. By this time, too, Don Hernando had taken his troop round by the north up the steep, paved roads towards the head of the pass from which de Soto and his companions had first seen the City of the Sun.

The Sacsahuaman, the guardian fortress of the metropolis of the Land of the Four Regions, was at this time by far the most splendid and stately monument of architectural skill in the Western Hemisphere, and would have lost little by comparison with some of the strongest places of the Old World. It was, indeed, rather a fortified hill than a fortress—a Gibraltar of the land.

On the side facing the city it towered up an almost sheer ascent of more than seven hundred feet, faced with massive masonry, and approachable only by narrow zigzag paths and flights of steps hewn in the living rock, and absolutely unapproachable by a hostile force so long as the summit or fortress proper was held even by a scanty garrison. The approaches to the hill at either end were ravines dominated by high walls built of stones so huge and solidly set together that they stand to-day as firm as the primæval rock on which they are founded. To the northward the true fighting face, commanding the little, level plain of the Rodadero, consists of three angled walls of cyclopean stonework, extending in the shape of a bent bow and rising in terraces one above the other to a height of some seventy feet, and the lower of these walls forms a curve of some eighteen hundred feet in length.

At the time of the Conquest this colossal structure was crowned by three towers, the central and greatest of which was the true citadel, half palace, half fortress, built close to the perpendicular wall overlooking the city, and rising some

sixty feet above its summit. These three towers have vanished, and much of the outworks are damaged now, torn down by the Conquerors to yield dressed stones for the building of the modern city, but, even after the ravages of three centuries, the Sacsahuaman remains to-day the greatest as well as the most marvellous structure of the New World.

Such, then, was the strong place which the remnant of the Spanish army in Cuzco, something less than a hundred men in all, set out to storm on that memorable night. If it had been held by disciplined troops, furnished with even the most primitive artillery of the times, it would have been impregnable, but its present defenders possessed only the arms of savage warfare—bows and arrows, darts and stones, and for closer quarters axes, maces and swords of copper, while its assailants, few as they were, were equipped with the most efficient arms that the art of war had so far produced.

Had it not been for the fatal decision of the night before the whole country would still have been occupied by the countless throngs, through which it would have been impossible for the attacking forces to have passed without discovery, as they now did, until they had reached the points at which the assault was to be delivered. Instead of this they must have been entangled and overwhelmed in the difficult defiles which, by an oversight of which no European commander could have been guilty, they now found unguarded.

The point which Juan Pizarro had selected for his attack was a great gateway opening on to the narrow valley through which the little stream now known as the Rodadero flows down to the ravine. This was called the Tiapunco, or Gate of Sand, possibly from the sandy nature of the little plain. It was an opening in the lower and outer wall of the fortifications, and led on to the first terrace of level ground between the outer and middle wall.

When they reached it they found it blocked by masses of stone which made almost as solid a barrier as the wall itself, and guarded by vigilant sentries, who instantly gave the alarm by kindling a huge pile of grass and brushwood saturated with oil and fat which had been built up in an

angle beside the gate. The moment that the flames leapt up they were answered by others all along the triple walls and on the battlements of the central towers.

A score of archers and half as many arquebusiers had come up with the ladders and mantlets, and these Juan Pizarro posted on a little eminence on the other side of the stream about forty paces away, with orders to keep the terrace and wall clear while a company of sappers attacked the pile of stones in the gateway with their picks and crowbars.

The pain of his wounded jaw had been so great that he had been forced to discard his helmet and trust entirely to his buckler, yet, in spite of this, he led the first party up to the assault as coolly as though he had been encased from head to foot in mail of proof.

Before they had reached the gate the alarm had spread over the whole vast fortress, and the three terraces were already alive with armed men. A storm of missiles, arrows, javelins, and stones was rained down upon the sappers as they advanced to the attack, but the next moment the roar of the arquebuses rolled out, and the heavy balls, directed by the light of the fires, plunged into the crowded masses of men. Then came the hissing flight of the long, steel-headed arrows and the short, heavy, crossbow bolts, which did almost as much execution as the bullets. Under cover of this fire the mantlets were pushed forward, and under them pick and lever and crowbar went to work on the stones.

A little higher up one of the scaling-ladders had been planted against the outer wall, and up this began to crawl a dark stream of mail-clad men, headed by Sebastian ben-Alcazar with his buckler close down over his head, and a long, broad-bladed dagger between his teeth.

Four times was the ladder planted against the wall, and four times did the gallant Spanish Moor climb to the top of it through a storm of missiles, only to be flung down again when he had almost reached the top. The fifth time a well-directed volley from the archers swept the wall clear for a moment and in that moment he made good his footing. He struck down two warriors with his dagger, and then, drawing his heavy broadsword, he set his back against the inside of the wall and valiantly held the place he had won

until a dozen more had scrambled up the ladder and planted themselves beside him.

Then, shoulder to shoulder and with bucklers interlaced, they went like a moving wall of iron along the terrace towards the gate, hewing down all who opposed them with the swift, swinging strokes of their good Toledo blades. Meanwhile the sappers had been doing their work well, and the Peruvian warriors, gallant as they were, were recoiling before the well-directed arrow-flights and the volleys of the ever-dreaded fire-arms. Presently a great stone was prised out from below and sent rolling down into the valley followed by an avalanche of others, and at last the gate was clear.

"Dios y Santiago! Make way there for God and Spain, ye heathens!" roared old Carvahal, flinging his huge bulk first into the breach. "To me, comrades, to me! Carrai! there goes another heathen soul to Hell!" he shouted again as he struck out with his heavy blade at the first of a stream of warriors that had poured down into the gateway, and the splendidly attired Peruvian rolled over with severed shield arm and head split to the jaws.

Close behind Carvahal came Hernando de Soto and Juan Pizarro followed by a score of men shouting the familiar war-cry. For some minutes they were checked by the solid mass of warriors which had poured down from the second terrace to oppose them, and so close was the press that they could scarcely find room to use their weapons. They were even driven back a few feet by the sheer weight of the crowd descending upon them; but meanwhile ben-Alcazar and his comrades had been hacking and hewing away at the Peruvian flank, more ladders had been planted against the outer wall; the archers and arquebusiers had left their position as soon as there was danger of their volleys injuring friends as well as foes, and they too had joined in the desperate escalade.

Again and again the ladders were hurled away from the wall by the ever-increasing throngs of warriors who came pouring down from the upper terraces, and again and again they were up-reared, until, one by one, the climbing columns of men gained the summit of the first rampart and made good their footing. Some drew their weapons and turned fiercely on the swarming defenders while others dragged the ladders up in readiness for the assault on the

second line. Before long ben-Alcazar had nearly forty men behind him, and, forming these into a solid wedge of steel and iron, he drove them deep into the flank of the column that was still holding the assailants of the gate in check.

For a few moments it stuck fast as though locked in and overwhelmed by the swarm of men into which it had driven itself. Then the wedge began to move slowly forward again, and then the column burst asunder, half of it scattered flying up the slope and the other half fast shut in between the wedge and the gate.

Now the wedge dissolved and spread out into a double line, and between this and the head of the Spanish column coming through the gate the Peruvian warriors were entrapped. They had no more chance against the steel-clad Spanish soldiery than a mob of children would have had against themselves, but they went down to the last man fighting and dying like heroes, and when the bloody, pitiless work was over the Gate of Sand was won, and the hitherto inviolate fortress was impregnable no longer.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIGHT FOR THE FORTRESS

JUAN PIZARRO now divided his men into three companies commanded by himself, de Soto, and ben-Alcazar, and planted the archers and arquebusiers in positions from which they could rake the second terrace with their volleys, but the storming of this was harder work than the forcing of the gate had been, for the wall was high and smooth and the few and narrow openings in it had been built up almost as solidly as the wall itself. It presented an unbroken series of angles, and above these huge heaps of stones had been piled, and hence the moment a ladder was planted those who attempted to mount it were exposed to attack not only from the top but from both sides as well.

Time after time the ladders were planted, and time after time the heroic assailants were driven back bruised and maimed by the avalanches of stones that were rained upon them. Only their stout, well-trying mail and bucklers saved them from certain death, and only the knowledge that this was their last fight and that they must either conquer in it or lose all that they had fought so hard and suffered so bitterly for, sent them back and back again to the seemingly hopeless assault.

At last Juan Pizarro, seeing that isolated attacks could only end in failure, ordered all the ladders to be planted in a single angle where the ammunition of the defenders was becoming exhausted. At the same time he drew up his archers and arquebusiers on the opposite side of the lower terrace, and, while the assailants were swarming for the fiftieth time up the ladder, these sent volley after volley over their heads into the dense ranks of the defenders above.

Still, in spite of this, two of the ladders were pushed aside and sent crashing down with their load of men on to the terrace below. Carvahal had just reached the top of a fourth, panting and swearing and foaming with fury, when suddenly the ranks of the defenders divided and a tall figure clad in Spanish mail and helm, with a Spanish buckler on his left arm and a huge copper-headed mace in his right hand, strode forward and, swinging up the mace, brought it down with a frightful crash on Carvahal's steel cap.

The grip that he had just taken of the top of the wall relaxed and, with a hoarse cry like the bellow of a wounded bull, he reeled backwards and rolled down the ladder, sweeping every man behind him off it. They tumbled in a heap to the ground with Carvahal on top of them. One was killed outright and two were maimed for life, but the old swashbuckler sat up the next minute in the midst of them, pulled off his cap to see if his head was broken, and then, finding it wasn't, shouted—

"Cuerpo de Cristo! that was a shrewd knock for a heathen to give a good Christian. By the Saints, I thought all the fortress had fallen on me! Devil take him, I shall have a headache for a week! Come on, lads, up again! It shall never be said that Carvahal took a blow without giving it back! I'll crack that son of Satan's pate for him yet if God gives me strength and a fair chance at him."

With that he scrambled to his feet again and, with the help of those who were not too badly hurt by the fall, reared up the ladder again and once more mounted first upon it. But while this was happening a footing had already been gained on top of the wall from three of the other ladders, and Juan Pizarro, de Soto, and ben-Alcazar, with stout Michael Asterre, were laying about them with their long swords and fast clearing a space on the second terrace. Foot by foot they drove the defenders back, and now the infuriated soldiery came pouring unresisted up the ladders.

"Where is he? Where is he?" howled Carvahal as he rolled over the parapet.

"Whom seekest thou, fire-eater?" laughed de Soto, leaning on his sword during a brief pause in the fight.

"That heathen knave in Christian clothing! That iron

clad son of Belial who gave me that crack over the pate and made me see more stars than the good God ever created!" he growled, looking about him in the dim light for his foe. "If I mistake not he is none other than Ruminavi the General, old Stony-face as they rightly call him. Carrajo! I will see whether his head too be made of stone when I get near enough to whet my blade upon it."

"It will not be stone but good Spanish steel that thou wilt whet thy blade on," said Juan Pizarro, "for that, as thou hast said, was old Ruminavi, and thou mayest thank the Saints that it was not the Inca himself, for, judging what he did in the Battle of the Valley, thick and all as thy skull may be, he would have smashed it like an egg-shell. But come, Señores," he went on, addressing the others, "minutes are worth much now, and we have yet another wall to scale and after that the citadel to storm, and, see, the heathens are gathering to the fight again! So far we have done well, yet I would give something to hear Hernando's guns from the gap of the road yonder."

"And I would give more to see your head covered by a good steel morion, Señor Juan," said de Soto. "There are two or three down yonder who have done with theirs for ever. Why not take one of them? It might mean the difference between life and death for you to-night, and the worst part of the battle has to come yet, for these gallant heathens, if I mistake not, will fight while one of them can strike a blow."

"I have a good buckler, de Soto, and that must suffice," he replied, speaking with some little difficulty, "for with this wounded jaw of mine I could not bear the chin-piece, and if I have to die I may as well do it comfortably as any other way."

"And yet this is not a matter in which one may take too many chances," growled Carvahal, rubbing his head. "Carramba! if it had not been for this steel cap of mine methinks I should by this time have been looking for the coolest spot in Purgatory. Cuerpo de Cristo! where is the scoundrel who gave me this headache?"

"By Allah and all the Saints!" shouted ben-Alcazar, "thou wilt not have long to wait, Carvahal. See, here he comes and at the head of a goodly array too! On guard, Señores, on guard!"

He had scarcely spoken when they turned and saw coming along the terrace a solid phalanx of men with long spears levelled at the charge, swinging on at a steady, measured run, led by Ruminavi whirling his huge mace and shouting the old battle-cry of the Incas.

Carvahal, who was standing a little in advance of the others, put his buckler up and his head down, and with his sword shortened in his right hand ran like a charging bull at Ruminavi. But the old warrior had fought too many fights in that style to be taken unawares. As Carvahal rushed blindly on he stepped aside with the lightness of a youth, and as he passed brought his mace down between his shoulders, and with a cry that was half a gasp and half a groan Carvahal stumbled and fell, and the next moment the first rank of the spearmen had leapt over his body and flung themselves on the Spaniards.

Even now, if it had only been man to man and weapon to weapon, the assault would have been repelled, for, in spite of their tough armour and long swords, the rush of the well-drilled spearmen drove the Spaniards back and huddled them into a heap. But just at the critical moment, as they were being crushed up against a terrace wall by the sheer weight of the column that had hurled itself against them, there rang out far to the rear a hoarse roaring shout—

“Dios y Santiago! lay on for God and Spain—lay on!” and then came the ever-dreaded thunder of horses’ hoofs, mingled with yells of terror and screams of pain and the fierce clink—clink—clink of smiting steel.

The charging spearmen stopped in the very moment of victory, as though paralysed by the dreaded sound. In vain Ruminavi, who had already smitten ben-Alcazar lifeless to the ground and broke Michael Asterre’s sword-arm with a blow of his mace, alternately cursed and cheered them on. Three or four arquebusiers scaled the wall and levelled their pieces. The “thunder-pipes” belched out their flame and smoke, and the balls, fired at less than five paces, tore through rank after rank of the close-packed spearmen and completed the panic. They broke their formation and ran, some leaping over into the terrace below, others swarming like cats up the third wall, but most of them going down pierced and slashed by the Spanish steel.

Meanwhile a troop of Don Hernando's horse had come tearing along the terrace, riding down and trampling over a crowd of fugitives before them, and in the fast-closing gap between the Spanish horse and foot stood Ruminavi, still unwounded yet seemingly devoted to certain death.

For one brief instant he stood and looked from one to the other, and then, just as de Soto ran forward, as he thought, to save his life by making him prisoner, the wary old warrior darted under the cover of the upper wall and then, as the first horse came up to him, he put his buckler over his helmet, took a well-meant sword-stroke harmlessly upon it, and at the same moment brought his mace round with such a savage swing on the horse's forelegs that the bones snapped under it like twigs, and horse and man rolled over in a helpless heap with the next rider and horse on top of them. Two more swift strokes of the terrible mace drove the steel of their caps into the skulls of the two fallen riders, and then the gallant old warrior, grasping one of a dozen hands held out to him over the upper wall, swung himself up as lightly as a lad of sixteen and disappeared into the darkness.

"Santiago! that was well met, Señor," said Juan Pizarro to Cieza de Leon, who was leading the troop of horse. "Another minute and we should have been over the wall. It is well for us that these heathens have only two good men to lead them, and that only one of them seems to be here. That old Stony-face as they call him fights as if all the devils of Gadara were in him."

"Ay, and by the Saints he nearly sent me down a steeper place than I could ever climb up again. Carrajo! has no one killed the heathen yet? First he tries to hammer what brains I have down my throat, and then he knocks the breath out of me like the wind out of a burst bladder."

"Why, Carvahal," laughed de Soto, as the old swash-buckler hobbled out from the midst of the fallen horses and men with one hand behind his back and the other rubbing his huge paunch, "art thou not dead yet? I should be loth to believe that thou wert born to be hanged——"

"Go hang thyself, babbler!" said Carvahal between a snarl and a gasp. "Is this time to crack jokes on a comrade's misfortunes? Carrajo, Caballeros, what are we stand-

ing here for? Is this a battle or a dancing party, and where has that infernal heathen vanished to again? Ah! that was poor ben-Alcazar, was it? Well, well, it is the fortune of war and the good God will be able to see now whether he was better Christian or Moslem. For myself as a good Christian I have always had my doubts of him."

"Buenos noches, Señores! How goes the battle your way?" said the deep voice of Don Hernando, who now rode up at the head of a second troop of horse. "For our part we have cleared the two lower terraces and driven the heathen, or such as we have left alive, either on the plain, where I have posted a troop to look after them, or up yonder to their citadels—— How now, Juan? What art thou doing here without thy helmet? Art mad, lad, to come into a fight like this bareheaded?"

"I have but a scratch and a bruise or two so far, brother," said Juan, with a good attempt at a laugh, "and this jaw of mine is so sore and stiff that I could not bear a chin-piece on it, and what is the use of a leader who cannot cheer his men on? But enough of me for the moment. What we have done is as thou seest. We have forced the gate and cleared the two terraces, though, it grieves me to say it, not without loss. Still, here we are and there is the citadel yet to be taken. What say you? Shall we attack forthwith ere the heathen have time to recover themselves?"

"Ay, that were best," replied Don Hernando, "when you start a savage running keep him going, and we may as well scale the wall while it is yet unguarded."

While this conversation had been going on between the two leaders the archers and crossbow-men of the two parties had been busy collecting the arrows and bolts which they had shot, pulling and cutting them out of the flesh of those they had slain with them, and so Don Hernando, now taking the chief command, ordered them to scale the third undefended wall and spread themselves out in skirmishing order on the little plain above it. After them went the musketeers, of whom there were now five-and-twenty, and then Don Hernando, leaving half a score of mounted men to watch the horses and keep the terrace clear, dismounted and led the rest of his men, to the number of over sixty, to the final assault on the citadel.

While they were clearing the wall and dragging the ladders after them the archers, crossbow-men, and musketeers had been advancing slowly across the little plain towards the citadel, driving the now disheartened Peruvians before them. For generations the great fortress had been rightly believed to be impregnable. Horde after horde of the savage tribes of the east had dashed themselves to fragments against its triple walls and until now no enemy had ever yet set foot even upon its first terrace, and yet here a mere handful of these unconquerable strangers stood triumphant on its topmost tier. To them it was the work of demons rather than of men, and, following as it did upon unnumbered defeats and only a single victory, it was little wonder that in such a moment the hearts of the bravest failed them.

The three Spanish ranks advanced almost without resistance to the walls of the central citadel. The other two towers had been deserted, but round the base of the central one the remnants of the garrison were drawn up ten or twelve deep in a solid human wall of desperate, though it might be despairing valour, and its three terraces and broad, flat roof were filled with men who had there taken their last stand ready to die to a man for the country and the homes which they could no longer save.

But however desperate their valour and resolution they were of little avail against the well-proved science of Don Hernando and his lieutenants. Though there were others amongst the Conquerors who could have led a charge more brilliantly or fought a pitched battle in the open against overwhelming odds with better chance of success than he, yet when it came to such an attack as this, where skill and caution were equally needed, he was without a rival.

The moon had risen now and in the clear air of that elevated region the light was quite bright enough for accurate aim either with bow or arquebus, so he planted his force in three lines arranged in a semicircle about the citadel, which, as has been said before, stood close to the perpendicular face of the fortress overlooking the city. In front were the musketeers lying down with their pieces levelled at the close ranks beneath the walls. Behind them was the line of cavaliers and troopers armed with their long swords, battle-axes, and pikes, and behind them again were

the archers and crossbow-men ; and the plan of the battle was this :—

First the musketeers sent a murderous volley into the ranks round the base. Then, while they reloaded, the second line charged past them to increase with axe and pike and sword the havoc which the musket-balls had wrought, and while they were doing this the third rank sent their volleys of arrows and bolts into the crowded masses on the terraces. Then when the musketeers had reloaded Don Hernando gave the signal for the second rank to disengage itself and retire behind them, and as the defenders rushed forward they were met by yet another volley of balls, and hard after these came the charging steel again.

Thus, volley after volley and charge after charge were made and ever the close and well-directed flights of bolts and arrows rained with deadly effect upon the impotent defenders of the citadel whose feeble weapons were useless at a range at which the Spanish long-bows and arbalasts were almost as deadly as modern rifles.

To such a fight there could be but one end, and so the time came when the last volley of musketry and the last charge of the sword and pike rent asunder the ranks of the defenders at the base and scattered their remnants weaponless and terror-stricken over the plain. Then Don Hernando bade his musketeers stand up and use their resting-forks so that they could play on the terraces of the citadel and he kept them and the archers and crossbow-men at this work until every bullet and arrow and bolt had been shot away. Then he ordered up the ladders and the last assault began.

All this time Ruminavi had been striding up and down the roof of the citadel exhorting his warriors to stand fast and die as he had sworn to do, in battle rather than in that slavery to the Strangers which was now the only alternative. Though ever erect himself and passing by some miracle scathless through the storm of missiles, he had kept his men crouching behind the parapets so that as many of them as possible might remain for the last struggle, and this struggle when it came was a bitter one, for now the fight was hand to hand, weapon to weapon, and man to man.

Again and again the ladders were planted and again and again they were hurled back to fall with their human load on the thronging assailants beneath, and a good half-score

of Spaniards had fought their last fight by the time the last rampart was gained, and more than twice as many more had been disabled by wounds or broken limbs. But still, rung by rung, they went up the ladders and terrace by terrace the last stronghold of the Incas was stormed until at length one of the ladders was firmly hooked on the parapet of the roof itself.

Juan Pizarro, pushing Cieza de Leon aside and swearing that a Pizarro should be first on the roof, sprang on to the ladder with his dagger between his teeth. As he did so Don Hernando fought his way, to the foot, shouting in a voice hoarse with anxiety and the passion of battle—

"Down, Juan, down! Come back! Come back! Come down, I pray thee—nay, I command thee, come down! Ah! Mother of God, there is that accursed heathen again!"

And so saying he sprang up the ladder after Juan, who, unheeding his brother's prayers and command, was already more than half-way to the parapet. After him went de Soto and then Carvahal. Juan reached the top first and as he put his hand on the parapet to clamber over, the gigantic form of Ruminavi towered high above it and the great mace went up. Instantly Juan's buckler covered his head, and, lying flat on the ladder, he crawled up another step. He let go the parapet, snatched the dagger from his mouth and made a swift thrust at Ruminavi's side. But in the uncertain light he missed the joint and the Spanish blade shivered to splinters on the Spanish mail. The next instant the mace came down, and with a dull, rending crash Juan's buckler burst asunder under the irresistible shock of the blow. The bones of the arm that held it were crushed to pulp and Juan's body, doubled up like a half-empty sack, pitched on to his brother's shoulders and fell with a dead, heavy thud on the terrace below.

"God curse thee, thou hast killed the gentlest knight in Christendom!" roared Don Hernando as he rushed up the ladder and sprang over the parapet at Ruminavi before he could bring his mace up again. "Take that to Hell with thee!" he shouted again as he swung his long blade round and dealt a sweeping sword-stroke at the old warrior.

But Ruminavi saw it coming and sprang back so that the point only grazed his armour. The next instant Don Hernando was striding across the roof with de Soto and

Carvahal hard after him. Meanwhile, too, another ladder had been hooked on and another stream of eager assailants were pouring on to the roof. Don Hernando, de Soto and Carvahal rushed together at Ruminavi while the new-comers were striking down the few defenders left, but not one of them could pass the circle which the terrible sweeps of the great mace made about him. Don Hernando's sword was knocked flying from his grasp, another stroke took de Soto on the right shoulder and sent him reeling back among his followers. Then Carvahal ran in and took the head of the mace full on his jaw.

"Carrajo!" he howled, reeling back and spitting out a mouthful of blood and broken teeth. "The curse of God upon thee and thy stolen steel!" And then he ran in again with a savage, sweeping stroke of his broad blade at Ruminavi's thigh.

But again the Spanish steel was met by the Spanish mail and the edge turned harmless off it and again Carvahal took a blow of the mace on his left shoulder which paralysed his buckler-arm and made even his mighty bulk tremble and reel backwards.

By this time every other defender of the roof had been cut down or pierced through and through with sword and pike-thrusts, and now old Ruminavi was the only defender left. Don Hernando had picked up an axe in place of his lost sword, de Soto had shifted his sword to his left hand, and de Leon and a dozen more Spaniards were making ready for a last rush at the gallant old warrior.

And now Ruminavi saw that the end had come. One swift glance over the corpse-strewn roof showed him that he alone was left, another at his closing enemies showed him that the trust he had so desperately defended was lost at last. He ran back to the parapet overlooking the city and leapt upon it and for the last time turned and looked round on his foes.

"Save him! Save him! He is too gallant a man to die!" shouted Don Hernando springing forward towards him.

The great mace swung round again and then like a stone from a catapult it whistled through the air, and taking Don Hernando full on the breast it sent him reeling backwards and hurled him prone on the roof. The next moment old Ruminavi drew himself up erect and, still without turning

his back on his foes, sprang into the air. The next he was lying smashed out of all human shape on the stones five hundred feet below.

The Spaniards rushed forward and leant over the battlements peering down into the fearful abyss. Then de Soto stood up and made the sign of the Cross and said in a choked, husky voice—

“Heathen or not, comrades, a stark warrior and a good patriot! May God receive his gallant soul in peace. Amen!”

EPILOGUE

It is one of the misfortunes of the romancer who devotes himself to the re-telling of a story which has already been recorded by the pen of History that he cannot deal with his characters as he would with those who are purely the creation of his own fancy. Here or there a date or an incident may be altered, and to a certain extent he may put such words as he pleases into the mouths of those whom he has recalled from the grave to play their parts upon the stage which he has reconstructed for them. But with this the license which he may legitimately use is exhausted. To push his privileges beyond this point would be to utterly destroy the verisimilitude of his narrative by bringing it into flat contradiction with the known facts of history.

Thus I am well aware that in the present instance the unities of Romance would demand that not Ruminavi, but Manco-Capac, should have died that gallant death on the citadel of the Sacsahuaman, or, better still, have brought back a great host with him from the South and overwhelmed his conquerors in the hour of their victory. But the circumstances narrated by the chroniclers of the Conquest, some of whom were actually present, are substantially as they have been given here. The gallant Manco was far away when the last assault was made, although even had he been present the final result, although it might have been deferred, could hardly have been different in the end. And yet as it happens it is this very fact which makes it possible for the romancer to bring the tale of the Conquest of Peru

to a close with at least a plausible assumption that in the end poetic justice was done.

With the fall of the Sacsahuaman the Siege of Cuzco virtually ended. It is true that after the seed-time Manco came back and once more encompassed the city with innumerable legions, but meanwhile the Spaniards had stripped the surrounding country bare, not only of the remaining stores of grain, but also of the remnants of the Peruvian flocks and herds. Almagro's men, too, were marching back from Chile, and reinforcements at length were pushing their way through the mountain defiles from the cities of the coast, and ship-load after ship-load of adventurers from Panama and Nicaragua were landing on the doomed shores of Peru. So in the end the gallant Manco, seeing his legions starving by thousands around him, was forced to yield to famine if not to the Spaniards, and finally raised the siege.

From Cuzco he retired into the fastnesses of Yucay and the impregnable fortress of Ollantay-Tambo. Here expedition after expedition was sent against him, only to be cut off to a man or hurled back in defeat and disaster. Then the well-earned vengeance of Eternal Justice fell hard and heavy on those iron Conquerors who for lust of riches had outraged every canon of human and Divine law. The gold that they came to seek proved their ruin when they had found it. Faction turned against faction, and comrade against comrade, and fiercer fights by far were fought between Spaniard and Spaniard than had ever been fought between Spaniard and Peruvian, and to-day there is not a rood of ground on all the South American continent over which the golden banner of Spain flies.

Of those of the Conquerors who have figured in these pages only one reaped any earthly reward for his labours, and this was the gallant and gentle knight Hernando de Soto, who, after the Civil Wars married a noble Inca princess, whom he took with him as his bride to Spain and presented at the Court of the Great Emperor. Of the rest, Alonso de Molina, as we have seen, died with his head on the breast of his well-beloved enemy and rival in love. Juan Pizarro died a soldier's death on the citadel of the Sacsahuaman. His brother Gonzalo, taken in revolt against his lawful sovereign, lost his head on the block.

Carvahal, after winning himself the title of "the Demon of the Andes," was dragged to the scaffold in a basket and there hung, drawn, and quartered under the sentence of the victorious Viceroy. Pedro de Candia was murdered on the bloody field of Chupas by Almagro his own commander, and Almagro himself, taken prisoner in Cuzco by Don Hernando, was garroted in prison after abjectly begging his life from his conqueror. And Don Hernando himself went home to Spain only to be flung into a dungeon, in which he languished for twenty weary years—the last of his ever-famous family—to be released in the evening of his days, and to watch from the sad eminence of a hundred years of life the ruin of the great enterprise in which he had borne so conspicuous and, on the whole, so honourable a part.

Of the fate of Manco there are two stories told. One by the Spaniards, which says, that after years of successful guerrilla warfare, during which he made his name a terror to the conquerors of his country, he fell slain, surrounded by the bodies of his enemies, in an obscure combat. The other, be it legend or truth as you will, is found in the traditions of the fallen people, who still revere his name as that of the last champion of their lost liberties.

In an unknown and almost inaccessible valley hidden away somewhere in the vast ranges of the Vilcañota, surrounded by ice-crowned peaks and vast snowfields towering far up into the cloudless sky, he at length, with a remnant of the Children of the Blood, found a refuge, and there to this day the ancient Inca Empire survives, awaiting the day of vengeance, and ruled over by a lineal descendant of the last bearer of the Divine Name, and of her who was once the fairest and noblest of the Virgins of the Sun.

In this happy uncertainty we may take farewell of Manco and Nahua, and turn our eyes for a moment to the City of the Kings. There, in a room in his own palace, lies an old battle and travel-worn man of nearly three-score years and ten, pierced by the swords of those to whom he had opened the long-locked gates of El-Dorado. His life-blood is dripping from a wound in his throat on to the floor. He turns over on his side and with his finger traces a cross in his own blood. Then he kisses it, and, as his trembling lips shape the one word "Jesu," another sword pierces him,

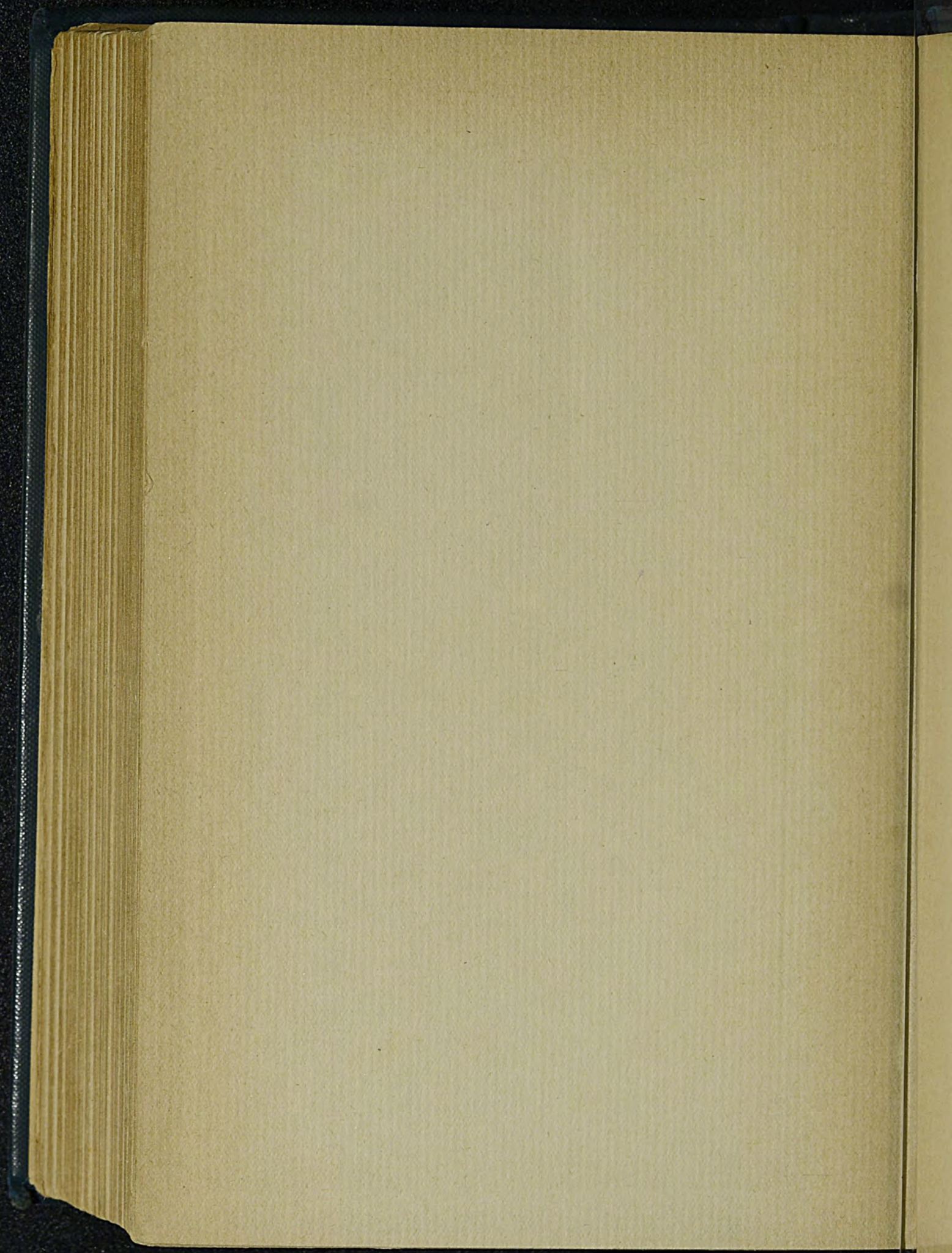
this time to the heart, and his head drops down and he dies. And this is the end of that iron-souled Conqueror who had fought so many a bitter battle with Destiny and who, with the sword that was to win an empire for others, had traced that Line of Fate on the desolate sands of Gallo.

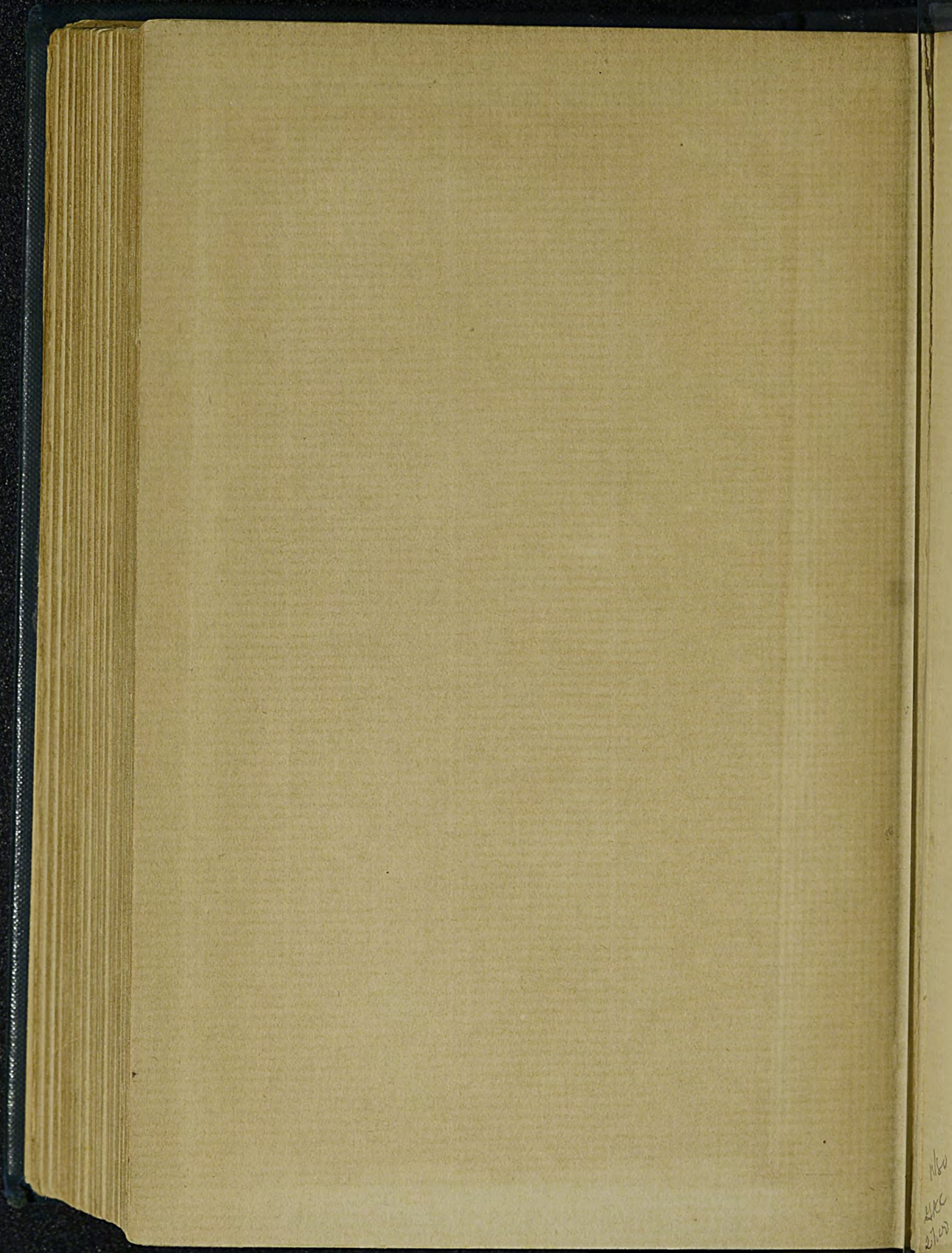
THE END

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