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THE MOTHER OF EMERALDS.

CHAPTER I.

"TUMBLEDOWN TOWERS."

"It's just throwin' away your dividends, that's what it is, Molly, bringin' me here for the cure, as these medical liars call it. Cure indeed! Is it bein' pickled like a side of bacon that's goin' to cure me, I should like to know?—it's liars they are, me dear, iviry one of them."

"Still the pains have left you, uncle, and your right hand is better," observed the girl on whose arm he leaned.

"And small thanks that is to thim; me nerves are strained and pinched like harp-strings, no less; and the divil's own fingers it is that have been playin' upon thim. He's twiddlin' at my heart-strings this very moment, bad luck to him!"

"Hush, Uncle Tom; you shouldn't speak like that. Remember you are a priest."

"I am not. 'Tis your mother's own rheumatic brother I am, livin' on your charity. A priest!—it's a saint, me dear, I should be called for not swearin' hourly, God forgive me! Ah well; I'm not dead yet, Molly, though it's in Purgatory I am for me sins."

"Let us walk down the street, uncle."

"Street indeed!—say a ram's horn rather, by the twist of it. If the inhabitants' conduct is no straighter than their houses, it's mighty hard work the good saints must have to keep the fire of Heaven from scorchin' the whole place. Well, well; maybe it's out of good taste for the crooked creatures who come here for the picklin', that they warp their cabins so:" from which it will be seen that Father O'Dwyer, like the majority of his race, could be whimsical when he chose. His niece suppressed a smile and proceeded to assist him over the uneven pavement.

Never was there so deformed a town. Its name need not be set down here; no one who has been there will fail to identify it. Father O'Dwyer called it "Tumbledown Towers"; than which it would be difficult to provide a better name. Far and wide the place is renowned for its brine baths; and to the copious excavations of salt made in connection therewith is due its present distorted appearance. The main street, and indeed most of the other streets, seem fixed as by enchantment in a series of undulations. Houses perch on hillock, or sink in hollow; now leaning cheek by jowl, now shunning one another. Obtusely they withdraw from the pavement, or acutely overhang it, avoiding with astounding unanimity all approach to the vertical. Scarce a window or a door will close as it was originally designed, and the roofs point skywards at every conceivable angle. Even the tower of the parish church lurches forward in drunken fashion, incongruous, bordering well-nigh on the disreputable. The whole place has the appearance of having suffered from a seismic seizure of undoubted severity.

"They must have faith in the saints, hereabouts," said Father Tom,

pointing to a house through the open door of which could be seen the hall lamp swinging at an angle of some forty-five degrees. "Mary be good to us; whoever saw the like of that now?"

"On the contrary, uncle, I don't think the people here are of the true faith!"

"Bad luck to them then for heretics, Molly. Maybe, if they held fast by Peter, he wouldn't be after lettin' them dwell in this valley of dry bones. 'Tis only a miracle could straighten their houses anyhow!"

The amber lights of the sunset were fading on the horizon into one uniform grey mist; and overhead a star or two twinkled sharply in the unclouded blue. Already a chill breeze swept down from the neighbouring hills, and the priest shivered as he felt the nip in the air. That rheumatic frame of his responded instantly to the smallest change of temperature. Molly noticed this; so, carefully adjusting his grey duffel cloak she walked him back to the hotel as fast as he was able to go.

Neither summer heats nor the thickest of clothing served to keep the cold from that sensitive frame. She led the old man along. It was as Spring leading Winter to the grave.

No more comely figure ever walked that crooked town than Molly Prynne. There were all the graces of young womanhood—bronze hair, shot with glorious ruddy lights; a spotlessly fair complexion; the kindest of grey eyes; and a figure which amid those distorted surroundings seemed the sole symmetrical creation. Yet there was something of sadness in the face—something of that sadness which of itself makes for beauty. Her expression was a thought too pensive to betoken all absence from care. But the tread was firm and elastic; and would alone have sufficed to show that the girl was no weakling either in mind or body. The little chin too, rounded off cunningly as it was, plainly indicated strength of character.

Father Tom adored his niece, and she on her part loved him dearly. They were the only two of their blood left—so far as they knew. It is true that Molly's father—but there, this story greatly concerns Molly's father and his fate, so it will be best to take that as it comes.

Despite his rheumatic pains—perhaps the more to distract his attention from them—the priest talked volubly on the way home; for in truth Father O'Dwyer had a long tongue though withal a kind one. "It seems he's coming here," he said; which abrupt and apparently irrelevant remark seemed wholly intelligible to Molly, for the blood mounted to her cheeks, and her eyes beamed with a brighter light for it. Yet with true feminine fence, she asked for explanation. Now, thirty or more years of the confessional had not been without their teaching for Father Tom. In that time he had obtained what he would doubtless have allowed to be an imperfect, yet, so far as it went, a comparatively clear insight into the devious ways of feminine nature. He chuckled now at the transparency of his niece's suppression of the truth. "I'm talkin' of Prester John and the Great Cham, me dear," he said in his sly way; "of whom else, when one of 'em writes askin' the manager of the hotel for a room, and that untidy creature leaves the letter on his desk for me to read when I'm payin' the weekly bill?"

"Did you see the name then?"

"As plain as the nose on your pretty face, dear—Prester John sprawled all over the one side of it."

"Why is he coming here, uncle?"

"Maybe his rheumatism——"

"Oh, the idea; as if Mr. Hazel suffered from rheumatism!"

"Ah, thin, 'tis not Prester John we're talkin' of, is it?"

Molly laughed. She frowned too, and sighed. "I wish Mr. Hazel was not coming here," she said pensively, "it isn't fair——"

"Fair—to whom?—to you? Begad that's just where it is fair, me dear."

"I was going to say, uncle, that it is not fair to *him*."

Now it was Father O'Dwyer who frowned. "It's that blackguard you're thinkin' of, is it?" he questioned sharply.

"Dick is not a blackguard—he is unfortunate!"

"And Judas Iscariot was the best of the Twelve, maybe. Oh, Molly, Molly, are you nivr goin' to learn sense? The man's a drunken prodigal, I tell you. If you marry him it's sorrow alone will be your portion. And 'tis not love that gives you conceit of the rascal; I know that well."

"I may not love him, uncle; but at least I pity him."

"Pity is it?—and a mighty sound foundation that is to build your marriage happiness upon. Mary Prynne, 'tis me sister's own child you are, rest her soul, and she fed you with her heart's blood like the pelican of the wilderness. When she died, Mary, 'twas you she thought of at the last. 'Be a father to her, Tom,' she said, 'be a father to the orphan, for that's what she is seein' her own father's a wanderin' Cain in the naked lands at the back of beyond.' Those were her words, Molly me dear; and standin' in her place, I had rather see you cold and cofined than married to Dick Amherst, black reptile that he is!"

"It is too late to talk about that now, Uncle Tom. Dick's salvation depends upon my marrying him. He implored me to be his good angel; I alone, he said, could save him from himself. Could I—could any woman withstand such an appeal as that? I promised him I would. I gave him my word I would be his wife, and I must abide by it. Besides," added the girl, as if in rebuke, "Mrs. Amherst has been a mother to me ever since I was five years old, and Dick was brought up with me!"

"And a mighty fine bringing-up it was," muttered Father O'Dwyer, "—a foolish mother, and a bad son. Talk about bringin' up a child in the way it should go—did she bring up that boy as she should have done, I ask you?—faith, you know better! No, she spared the rod and spoilt the child; and now he's a strayin' vagabond upon the earth keepin' the company of divils like himself. Marry him!—Save him?—I wonder you don't see the folly of it, child, whin the inimy of mankind has him fast by the ear. Your tinder heart it is, and the sophistry of that mother of his fightin' for her cub, that's brought you to this way of thinkin'."

"But, uncle, poor Mrs. Amherst would break her heart if I were to give Dick up now: oh no, it would not be right."

"An' he'll break yours if you don't. It's no ripintance you'll ever see from Dick Amherst—grapes from a thorn more like. You've set him rollin' round the world again, Molly, and you had best let him roll now till he drops into the black pit that's yawnin' for him. God forgive me that I should speak so of the creature; but true it is."

"That's just it, uncle, it was I who sent him away—to search for my father, and so far, if no further, I am responsible. You would not have me shirk the responsibility of my own act. He is working for me; and I must keep my promise to him."

"Well, ye may, me dear, if he keeps his. He has been in Peru these two years now, and not a sign is there of his bein' alive. If he's not dead, I'll go bail he's drinkin' himself into Purgatory. Believe me, Molly, it's with the saints in glory your father is, this long time. Give up this folly, me child, and marry the man you love."

"How do you know I love Mr. Hazel, uncle?"

The priest chuckled. "How do I know it?—why, much the same way as I know his heart is set on yourself. Haven't I seen you together cooin' like turtle doves more than once? You have no vocation for bein' a nun, me dear, so give the boy a good word. He has followed the longings of his heart here; be careful thin, Molly, I say, and don't spoil your life like a foolish virgin."

"I must do my duty, uncle."

"Is it your duty you call it; and what is that anyhow?"

"If Mr. Hazel asks me to marry him, I must tell him of my compact with Dick. That is right, and that is my duty, uncle."

"Ah well, you must boil your kittle in your own way, Mary Prynne, and God forgive me for the sore heart I have. Maybe I won't be here long, and I can put in a good word with St. Peter for you. Sure you'll need it as Mrs. Amherst!"

Molly made no reply, but leaving her uncle seated in the hall—they had now arrived at the hotel—walked off to her own room. And Father O'Dwyer sighed. He knew that the girl was quite capable of marring her life for what she considered her duty. He was a fine enough young man, this Amherst, so far as looks went. But, unfortunately, an hereditary tendency for strong drink had chosen him for its development, and so rendered him an unpromising husband for Molly or any other woman. He had used—and not without effect—a most sure and deadly plea; for he had sworn to the girl that all he needed to save him from himself was the influence of some good woman. And that had gone straight home with Molly: few women are proof against it. She had pitied the man so sorely; and she had half promised to become his wife. Then O'Dwyer had intervened. He knew that Amherst's craving was too strong for any amount of good intention; he knew that he could not but make the girl wretched—more than that, that she would have to sink with him to the depths of misery and degradation. And so the priest had cunningly suggested that the marriage should take place only when his wandering brother-in-law should be found and brought home to be present at the wedding. And through love for her father Molly had supported his suggestion, and Dick had betaken himself off to Peru where Mr. Prynne had last been heard of.

For two years this man dropped out of Molly's life. Beyond a letter or two received shortly after his departure, she heard nothing from or of him. So it was that Father O'Dwyer really believed both Dick and Prynne to be dead, and urged the girl to grasp the happiness that offered itself to her, in the person of Gerald Hazel. But there, as we have seen, Molly's sense of duty stood in the way. Till Dick returned, or till proofs of his death and that of her father were forthcoming, she most resolutely refused to listen to any lover. It seemed probable now that Hazel was coming to her with a proposal of marriage. But Father Tom foresaw little chance of his success.

CHAPTER II.

" BETWEEN TWO FIRES."

As Father O'Dwyer sat in the hall of the hotel, he groaned inwardly at what he would have termed his niece's "obstinate rectitude." And when Father O'Dwyer sorrowed, he did it thoroughly. He had got hold of a very tangible grievance, or at least he thought so, and he was not going to dismiss it lightly. And it is doubtful whether of itself the arrival of the hotel omnibus which just then came up, would have been sufficient to distract him from his lugubrious yet (to him) pleasurable employment. Despite the clanging of bells and scuttering of waiters, and the general riot which ensued upon the arrival of this very unimportant looking vehicle, Father O'Dwyer would no doubt have continued in the deepest of sorrow for himself, had not the fates been against him. As it was, he was obliged to give it up, for from out the little crowd there came to him with outstretched hand a handsome young man, whom he did not fail instantly to recognise, and having recognised, to welcome. Again let it be said that with this genial priest there were no half measures. His welcome was no mere phrase. It was hearty and spontaneous, and tinged with the very definite charm of manner of his race.

"Ah, it's you, Mr. Hazel," said he kindly, "indeed it's glad I am to see you at last!"

"At last? Why how, pray, did you know I was coming at all?"

"How do I know the sun will rise to-morrow in the East?—how do I know these old bones of mine will ache as long as they are inside me,—how do I——?"

"And Miss Prynne, she is well I hope?" murmured this very conscious lover, colouring vividly. For the life of him he could not repress the interruption.

"And why should she not be? Indeed, the girl is bloomin' like the first rose of summer, though 'twas the last one Tom Moore wrote about, I know well. And you are no sick man by the look of you—it's no pain has brought you to Tumbledown Towers, I'll go bail!"

"Tumbledown Towers?"

"Oh, 'tis just a name I give the place, by reason of its crookedness. It's all crooked together as ye may see, though there's mighty little to choose between the place and its people for dilapidation."

"Miss Prynne is with you, of course? where is she now?"

"Improvin' the looks God has given her; that's where she is. Dressin' for dinner is the plain English of it. And why not—seen' the creature's as vain as a peacock?"

"Oh, come, Father, that's not quite fair. On the contrary, Miss Prynne is as artless and simple as a child."

"Maybe it's yourself is that last. Hazel, now I think of it, I wonder how you came to escape Herod's massacre at all, at all."

The young man laughed. "You credit me in a somewhat wrong direction, I fear, Father. But come, there goes what I take to be a summons to eat, and I am both dirty and hungry. See you at dinner, of

course?" Hazel slipped into the office for the key of his room and bounded upstairs.

"See me at dinner, will you, deceiver that you are!" muttered the priest. "It's little seein' you'll have for any soul but Mary Prynne, I'm thinkin'; and a bitter cup it is she's brewin' for your thirst, if ye only knew it, me boy! Ah well, it's mighty hard to understand the divilments of the sex."

Hazel made a hasty, though scrupulous toilet—hasty because not one moment of his well-beloved's company would he lose—scrupulous because, for one reason, he was a man who inclined to belief that in most things in this life the best was bad enough. He was fair, and he suddenly became aware that the sombre tones of an evening coat set off his well-knit frame. He was guilty of a white waistcoat, too, and a trifle captious, too, over the set of his cambric bow. Then he became distinctly conscious that his present state of mind was extraordinary, not to say fastidious. There had been a time when he would have laughed at himself for a peacock. But he donned his feathers now—magpie feathers even though they were—with a pride and a care which he felt to be not only legitimate but called for. The enervating influence of sentiment was well at work upon Gerald Hazel, hard-headed, much-travelled, and journalist though he was.

To be precise, his especial business was that of roving correspondent. He possessed a small income, which since leaving Oxford, he had been in the habit of supplementing by newspaper work of a desultory order. His gifts happened to be of that variety which thrives under compression. As a lurid and graphic depicter of warfare, as a diligent student and clear exponent of strategy he was hard to beat. His copy had the real smell of the powder; consequently, let there be strife worth the chronicling in any quarter of the globe, and Gerald Hazel was very quickly on the scene. Then there invariably followed in the columns of one or the other journal to which he was addicted, a procession of papers, picturesque, though for that none the less critical, upon the men and manners of the country which at the moment he happened to be exploiting. From Persia to Patagonia, from Iceland to the Cape, there was little his pen had not "let go" upon. His work was eagerly sought and therefore highly paid, so that he was really well-to-do for a bachelor. He was a Bohemian and free to live the life he loved—the only life in which he could hope wholly to thrive. He had no patience with the "chocolate-cream" soldier. He hated the fringes of society with the gusto of a born pioneer, for he belonged by instinct to that band of restless Englishmen who for their individual pleasure directly—though for their country's good indirectly—expand the limits of the Empire. Then for the moment he would grow weary and come and shave his beard, and spruce his dress and, apparently without inconvenience, submit generally to the de-civilizations of civilized society. And his friends wondered—at least the female portion of them did—why so peculiarly adaptable a man did not fulfil his very obvious destiny, and marry! They asked themselves, and they asked each other. But somehow, no one ever asked the man himself. Yet he could have explained his feelings on that as on most other things, with ease. He would probably have told them that he could in nowise *ranger* himself, as the French say; and that hitherto his duties had not permitted him the relaxation of seeking a wife. Thus it was at thirty Gerald Hazel found himself quite heart-whole and un-

reclaimed—a veritable wild man of the woods, wholly averse to what he was pleased to term the “smug” existence of matrimony. He would never marry, he said, thereby invoking the interference of the gods, who forthwith went to work to make him eat his words.

On his last visit to London he had formed a notion of exploring his own country, about which he knew just as much, or rather, just as little, as most men of his kind. His notion led him to Harrogate, and there he saw Molly Prynne ministering as usual upon her good uncle, and helping him to bear those pains which, had he only known it, not all the combined waters of Europe would ever disperse. The girl's beauty attracted him in the first instance, and her personality did the rest. He recognised that he was doomed, and surrendered himself to his fate *con amore*. And the very obvious fact that his admiration for Molly was somewhat extensively shared did nothing to lessen it. But in her allegiance to the absent Amherst the girl had never wavered, though in truth it must be confessed that not one of those who up to this time had followed in her train, had put it to any severe test. She was merely indifferent to them. And so she was to Hazel in the beginning. But she came to feel differently. Indeed, she did not fail to recognise that from being merely one among others, he was fast becoming to her the *one*. She was of too truthful a nature—too strong, to blind herself. She understood quite well how it was with her, and she began to rate herself roundly for having exposed Dick's interests to such danger. Doubtful of her own fortitude, she was strong enough to take to flight, although instinctively she knew it would be of small avail. Her insight into Gerald Hazel's character told her that he was not a man to be put off easily. And now she found that it had all come about just as she had thought, and her good actions were all for nothing, for he was here, clearly with a purpose, of the nature of which she could not for one moment pretend to be in doubt. She felt that her loyalty to Dick would require all that she could muster in support of it, so she began the battle with herself there and then. She did not dine at the *table d'hôte* that night, but *ête-à-ête* with her uncle in their sitting-room; whereat the holy father pondered, and the disconsolate young man nearly lost his appetite. As for Molly herself she rested comparatively content, oblivious utterly to the fact that her first manœuvre was a very patent avowal of her assailant's strength and of her own weakness.

Of itself the dinner was not such as to recompense Mr. Hazel for his disappointment. He was decidedly unquiet in spirit. He could not understand Molly's absence at all. Nor was the company amid which he found himself calculated in the least degree to cheer. It was a universally afflicted community; egotistical, dyspeptic, neurotic and combative. Its conversational area was limited to its afflictions, and its ideas and experiences were distinctly circumscribed. In short, the young man felt instinctively that this was a table at which there might easily be trouble.

It was difficult to find one man who had not suffered more than his neighbour. Hazel felt himself to be aggressively healthy; indeed, he was not at all sure that his presence might not be taken as directly insulting. But he hoped for the best, ate his dinner, and whiled away the very substantial interims between courses in taking stock of the surrounding wreckage. It was not until he was nearly through the meal that he caught sight of a handsome florid woman, imposing, and if one

might judge by her present expression—more than high-spirited. This lady he instantly recognised as Mrs. Amherst, the companion and champion of Molly, and a lady who bore no very good-will towards himself.

Indeed Mrs. Amherst detested Hazel with all the energy of her singularly undisciplined nature ; and during the course of a short but stormy acquaintance, she did not fail effectually to remove any uncertainty he might have felt on the point. Ignorant as he was of Molly's engagement to her son, Hazel could not in the least understand how he came to be so perpetual a mark for the woman's spleen. Mrs. Amherst, of course, could easily have informed him, and would indeed have done so long since in manner worthy of her, had she not feared to bring the two men into open rivalry. But there was something about this young gentleman, with the steady grey eyes, which impressed Mrs. Amherst. She had a notion that he was a rock against which her fury would expend itself in vain. So for her son's sake, she avoided open warfare, lest in the conflict his interests might be jeopardised. She contented herself with being just politely disagreeable and contentious. Usually Hazel avoided her, but he waylaid her now in the hope of news concerning his well-beloved. Mrs. Amherst rustled out of the dining-room in her most formidable fashion. Her manner towards the intruder was glacial. "I am as well as can be expected," she replied in answer to his conventional enquiry after her health.

"Miss Prynne was not at dinner," said Hazel. He knew that the remark was obvious, and he was not at all given to that kind of thing, but for the life of him he could think of nothing else to say.

"No, Mr. Hazel—a slight headache. She dined in her room. I do not think" (this with great emphasis) "she will be down this evening."

"Really! I'm very sorry to hear that. Perhaps the place——"

"The place is dull, Mr. Hazel ; very dull indeed : not at all the place for a gay young man like you ; I really should advise you to go away."

"Now, that's very good of you, Mrs. Amherst ; really very good of you. Believe me, I appreciate it. I'll take your advice and get out of it—in a day or two."

Mrs. Amherst did not reply. She didn't quite know what she had expected him to say, but she was distinctly conscious that what he had said was not what she had expected. She took herself upstairs.

Hazel, deprived of the company he wished for, consoled himself with a cigar on the lawn. He needed consolation, for somehow he felt the prospect was by no means rosy. The presence of such a counsellor as Mrs. Amherst ever at Molly's elbow, was not likely to conduce to his success. As for that lady's attitude towards him, though he felt strongly that it called for frustration on his part, he did not in the least know how to set about frustrating it. Her enmity was very obvious, and in the future might take any form. He presumed it had a cause, and he could only hope that sooner or later the good lady herself would make some false move by which he would be able to arrive at it. For the present he could only wait patiently until chance should afford him the opportunity of free converse with Molly. He believed that "Kismet" was the final word in most human affairs.

Mrs. Amherst was not in an amiable mood when she went upstairs. And she was prepared to vent her feelings upon either O'Dwyer or Molly. Ill-regulated as was her mind, her temper was not regulated at all. She was a very bad companion for a girl like Molly. And therefore it is per-

haps right to say that her presence was not due to selection, either in that or in any other capacity. Circumstances alone had brought about her installation, and once installed she had remained, a cross thrust upon the shoulders of this good priest and his niece "just to keep one mindful of what poor creatures we are," as he put it, "and to give us a taste of Purgatory maybe."

Mrs. Amherst had been a school companion of the late Mrs. Prynne, who had always been wont to look upon her as a friend, and a widow with a most unruly boy to manage. And when Mrs. Prynne died, the lady did not fail to come forward as the rightful person to take charge of the orphan girl. She installed herself as cuckoo in the nest, the inhabitants of which speedily realised the utter futility of any attempt at removing her. Then followed, in the most natural way, an arrangement by which Mrs. Amherst was to draw a "nominal" salary in recompense for her performance of the various responsibilities and duties incumbent upon her in the capacity of Molly's official mother. Indeed, there were moments when the good father expressed it as his view that so far as Mrs. Amherst was concerned, her motherhood was official merely through force of circumstances. Prynne was continually abroad on what were termed his "travels," and of his absence Mrs. Amherst's presence might have been either the cause or the effect. And Father O'Dwyer had been known to suggest it was the cause. He appeared to be quite certain that Mrs. Amherst would require no great pressure to induce her to take her late friend's name in addition to her other responsibilities. And if only Mr. Prynne had proved as anxious to be a father to Dick as she had to be a mother to Molly, things might have been different. But for the present that did not appear to be so. Indeed, for long past, Mr. Prynne had shown no sign of life at all.

Thus Mrs. Amherst continued in possession of her salary, and exercised her maternal supervision over Molly to the extreme unhappiness of the girl and everyone around her. She had neither home, nor money nor friends, and it was quite impossible to oust her. She took her stand as a despot and maintained it.

With all the force of a fine healthy Irish spirit did Father O'Dwyer hate this woman. And now that Hazel had come upon the scene again, he had a very shrewd idea of what he might expect from her. The sparkle of the lady's eyes as she entered the sitting-room confirmed his worst fears. So, without further ado he betook himself to bed, arguing that as some part of him must suffer, it might as well be his digestive apparatus.

At the window Molly stared out into the darkling twilight, and wondered how best she could evade Hazel's impending proposal. Mrs. Amherst sat down, and in another moment opened fire. In the adjacent room Father O'Dwyer thanked the saints that he was sheltered from the storm.

"I have been insulted," began Mrs. Amherst, without preamble. "Yes, you may well look, Mary; I have been insulted, I say, and on your account."

The statement appeared to be so unanswerable that Molly attempted none. Moreover, she thought that silence on her part might perhaps serve to avert the coming trouble. But in that she proved to be mistaken; for upon her very passiveness Mrs. Amherst did not fail at once to pounce.

"Oh, I know I am of no account—self-sacrificing people never are in

the eyes of those for whom they immolate themselves. But if I am to be sneered at by the girl I have brought up as my own child, I had better leave the room : there is no more to be said."

"What is the matter? Has——"

"Yes; Mary, he has; and on your account—such insolence! I wonder you can look me in the face; that you are not black ashamed!"

"Of what, of what? I have done nothing, Mrs. Amherst."

"Nothing!—you have asked that impertinent Hazel fellow to come here, to insult me. Oh, I know—I know, you are tired of my poor boy—you want to marry this man. But I am a mother; I will not stand by and see such injustice done."

"I did not ask Mr. Hazel to come here, and I certainly said nothing about wishing to marry him; as for Dick, you know that he has my promise, and I intend to keep it."

"That's right; that's right; accuse me of falsehood. Do! Oh, I have long foreseen this. If I remain here, I shall lose my temper. You ungrateful girl! This Hazel——"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, leave Mr. Hazel's name out of the question!" cried Molly, furious in her turn. "I am engaged to your son; there's an end of it. You needn't fear I shall break my word."

"Then tell this fellow to go."

"Oh no. I really can't do that. The hotel isn't my property. I have no right to dictate to Mr. Hazel what he shall do."

"All this is mere subterfuge, Mary; you know well enough what I mean."

"Of course I know what you mean, and I've given you your answer. I tell you I shall not marry Mr. Hazel if it should break my heart to refuse him."

"Break your heart! What has your heart got to do with him, I should like to know? Are you not engaged to a noble, handsome gentleman, my——"

"I am engaged to a weak creature, in the hope of making a man of him. Do you think I love Dick? I don't; it is out of sheer pity I marry him. You have failed utterly to influence him for good; and it seems to be my lot to take up the burden."

"How dare you speak to me like that, Mary? Have I not been the most indulgent mother to my son?"

"Yes, far, far too indulgent. In a great measure you have made him what he is."

"Oh, this is too much. Did I make him a drunkard?"

"No, I am bound to say that he seems to have inherited that. But you have never trained him as you should have done. You have never corrected him. He grew up to know no will but his own—to defy you absolutely."

Mrs. Amherst was fast reaching the secondary stage of her malady. She was on the verge of tears.

"Oh, that I should be spoken to like this!" she wailed. "And after all my trouble! That ungrateful boy ran away from school, and wandered about the Colonies and America for years. He came back a ruffian, only to disgrace me; and now, Mary, it is you who have sent him away; yes, sent him to his death!"

"That is not true. Dick went to Peru of his own free will. I certainly made it a condition of my marrying him that he should find my

father, and he gladly accepted it. You couldn't expect everything to be on my side, Mrs. Amherst ! ”

“ Ah, it is a good thing your mother is not alive to hear you insult her best friend.”

“ If my mother was alive, she would most certainly not allow me to marry your son. Indeed, I am beginning to think I did a very rash thing when I consented to.”

“ No, no, Mary. Don't say that ” (she had reached yet another stage now, and was prepared to be coaxing), “ Dick loves you truly, and once you are his wife you will be able to twist him round your finger. Don't break my heart by throwing him over for that detestable Hazel.”

“ Mr. Hazel is not detestable ; but you need not go on like this, Mrs. Amherst. I tell you if Dick is alive and returns with my father, I will marry him ; but it is just possible, since I have not heard from him for so long, that he may not be.”

“ Oh cruel, cruel, to speak so callously of my poor boy ! He is not dead. He can't be. I have always written to him, and my letters were addressed to the post office at Lima. If he had not had them they would have been returned to me.”

“ I doubt it very much. The Peruvians are the laziest of people. Your letters may be lying there unopened at this moment. We know Dick was going into the interior, and it is not the safest country in the world. A hundred and one things may have happened to him.”

“ Then you should remain true to the memory of a martyr.”

Molly laughed a trifle hysterically. “ With the greatest stretch of imagination I cannot picture Dick a martyr. But good-night, Mrs. Amherst. I am tired of this fruitless discussion.”

“ Tell me again you don't intend to accept Mr. Hazel.”

“ If Mr. Hazel proposes to me, I shall refuse him.”

“ Bless you, bless you for that ; if a mother's love——”

“ Good-night, Mrs. Amherst,” repeated Molly, cutting short this harangue. Then she left the room.

CHAPTER III.

“ MOLLY'S CONFESSION.”

“ AH, Hazel, it's yourself, is it ? An hour of sleep after sunrise is worth a dozen before, despite the busybodies and their distractin' proverbs.”

Father O'Dwyer had just returned from his brine bath, and met the young man as he was coming down the stairs. It was somewhere about eleven o'clock, and neither of them had breakfasted. Hazel accepted readily the priest's invitation to join him. And so they had their cloth spread in the shade of a mighty sycamore on the lawn. Your celibate is invariably an adept in the gentle art of eating. Certainly Father O'Dwyer was no exception to prove the rule. He had the tenderest regard for his internal economy, and he treated it with the very greatest respect, not to say consideration. A stodgy meal he abhorred, and in his opinion the usual English breakfast was stodgy. Hence Hazel saw appear in goodly array cold viands, sardines, and luscious fruits ; and the matutinal coffee, or infusion of tea-leaves and indigo, which as often as not serves in its stead, was replaced by a mellifluous Hock, and the best product of La Bourgogne.

"Yes, I suppose I am a bit behind time, Father; but you, I don't think, are one to condemn me on that score. You're not going to talk about Solomon, the sluggard, and the ant, eh?"

"Augh! a most over-rated insect, believe me; and the man Solomon but a trifle better, as his scandalous old age shows plainly enough. Early risin' is mighty well for an old man like me, but for you, why, you show your sense in takin' your fill of your pillow. I commind ye for it, me boy!"

"Ah, that's good. Nine out of ten men wouldn't, you know. On the contrary, they'd dub me the sluggard, if nothing worse."

"More shame to thim. They nivir do any good in this world for all their leavin' a warm bed at dawn. They wear themselves out with over-eatin' and under-sleepin', to the worry of their nerves, and ruin of their digestions. Thin they marry and populate the jails and workhouses with children of little stamina. Original sin, I tell ye, is the outcome of over-work and an immoderate appetite."

"But you know what Dr. Watts says, 'Birds in their little nests, etc.'"

"And isn't he a fool, sir? Is that Natural History, I ask you?—it's not even common sense. 'Satan finds some mischief for idle hands to do,' that's another silly sayin' for ye, as if the old inimy didn't invariably employ the busiest people to make all the trouble. An' the bee—the same Dr. Watts on the bee—faith, 'tis the bee on Dr. Watts I'd rather be seen', and that in good goin' order. But I'm not lookin' after ye, me boy. Is it a good meal you're makin'?—if not, sing out for more."

"A superlative meal, Father, fit for a king!"

"Ah, poor souls, 'tis not the kind they take, pamperin' their bodies at the expinse of their lives, and bringin' whole nations into conflict, through sheer biliousness. What ruined Napoleon, I ask ye—wasn't it eatin' the wrong food too fast, and thinkin' more of his battles than his stomach, when that same had to do a lot of the work? If you'll believe me, Hazel, the ruck of humanity needs lookin' after like infants, no less. Holy Church knew that same whin she declared Friday a meagre day. And Moses, the wise man! Why, it's keepin' to his bill of fare that gives the Jews their clear heads, and makes them grow rich, bad luck to 'em! Ah, well, but it's not in the pulpit I am for sure!"

"No; one hears worse sermons there, Father."

"You may well say that, Hazel; for it's of people's souls they're always talkin', forgittin' as they do, that their souls are largely dependant on their bodies. You'll nivir get a man with his liver wrong to put his morals right. Augh! but it's dry I am with talkin'. Pass the 'Liebfrau,' hilp yourself to a cigar, and praise the saints I have not stuffed you with ham and eggs, and tea to make lither of them."

Hazel laughed. The old man amused him vastly; and he did feel singularly content within himself. But Molly was not to be banished from his thoughts, even by the gastronomic attentions of Father O'Dwyer, subtle as they undoubtedly were. While he did not fail to appreciate the aroma of a good cigar—and this was a very good one—he was nevertheless conscious that with his divinity away, complete happiness was not for him. He was shy of introducing her as a subject of conversation, but for the life of him he could not suppress an allusion to her.

"And do Miss Prynne and Mrs. Amherst share your very excellent dietary principles, sir?"

"There now! Well, I'm surprised at ye; did ye ever hear of a woman

sinsible enough to take thought of her eatin' ? Isn't it buns and milk and pastry, and unwholesome sugary things they live on ? Have you any shares in the aerated bread shops ? If ye have, you'll know the sinful way they eat, since you'll be pocketin' handsome dividends. 'Tis positively sinful, I tell you. You may see them in herds any day of the week, eatin' and talkin' with their loins girded up Passover fashion. More than half the trouble they give us, and that's no little, as maybe you're aware, comes from the poison they're always consumin', and mis-callin' it eatin'."

"But come, Father, your niece is more sensible than that ; it does not do to generalise you know ; there are exceptions——"

"Not a bit of it—a woman's a woman, no less, and she's like the rest of them. With all me warnin's she breakfasts always at the wrong time, on the wrong food. She's away now on a long walk, and I'll go bail her meal before startin' was no more than a cup of tea with a morsel of toast to soak it up. Ah, the folly of it ! I've no patience with the girl. It's a husband she needs to show her sinse."

The opportunity came so pat, that almost before he was aware of it, Hazel had grasped it.

"H'm, like myself, for instance—tell me what would you think of me in that capacity ?"

O'Dwyer had long ago foreseen some such conversation as this. He was not in the least surprised. He was even ready with his answer.

"What I think does not matter," he said, "so much as what Molly thinks. Ask her, me boy, and tell me what she has to say on the subject. She's of age this long time, and her tongue's not tied that I know of."

"I can't say you're inspiring."

"Maybe I've me reasons for that," rejoined O'Dwyer, dryly.

"I don't quite follow you."

"It's the girl herself you should follow, don't I tell you ; she's over yonder, where the church sits on the hill."

"Alone ?"

"Not so much as a fly with her that I'm aware of."

"All right ; I will—at least, sir, tell me that I may count on your support."

"And what good'll that do you, Hazel ? If the girl says 'no,' her uncle's 'yes' won't mend matters, eh ? Fight with your own hand, me son, and ask the good saints to aid you, for vain is the help of mortal man when a woman's in the case."

"Yes ; I'll risk it," said Hazel, abruptly, as the result of his cogitations, it seemed, rather than of O'Dwyer's excellently well-meant counsel.

But he noticed as he walked off, a look on the genial Father's face which, if he mistook not, signified approval.

Hazel made straight for the church on the hill, that is, as straight as the devlous by-ways would permit. It was a good mile from the hotel. But a quarter of an hour's sharp walk brought him close under the tower. He had not far to seek for Molly. There, on one of the flat heavy tomb-stones, describing with the tip of her parasol the most wonderful diagrams, she sat. She saw him, and his eye caught hers. She quickly realised there was no chance of escape—that her fateful moment had come. Already he was doffing his straw hat in greeting.

"Ah, Miss Prynne," he said. "I must count myself lucky in finding you at last."

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Hazel?—I heard of your arrival."

"Is that the reason you did not breakfast with your uncle this morning?"

Molly raised her brows. "Now you must know that you are risking the most severe of snubs by asking me a question like that. But I will refrain on this occasion. Come, won't you sit down? You are keeping the sun from me."

"Miss Diogenes speaks; Alexander obeys."

She continued to stare directly in front of her. Yet of itself the prospect was wholly unattractive—nothing but a railway cutting through the red sandstone, and a jumble of waste building plots, iron foundries, and tumbledown houses. Her instinct was to beat a retreat without loss of time, but somehow she did not act upon it.

He, too, seemed a trifle ill at ease. He could think of nothing to say that seemed worth saying. It was she who broke the silence.

"You have travelled a great deal, have you not, Mr. Hazel?"

"Yes, Miss Prynne, I have—more than most people, perhaps. The Seven Seas and their shores know me fairly well, I think."

"Can you tell me anything about South America?"

"Well, yes, I can tell you a good deal one way and another, though not from personal observation. Curiously enough, you name the one Continent I have not explored."

"Oh, what a pity! I was hoping you could tell me something about Peru."

Hazel seemed a little curious. "May I ask what it is that interests you so particularly in Peru?"

"My father is there."

"Really; I didn't know your father was alive. I thought you were an orphan."

"So I may be for all I know. It is fifteen years since my father went on an exploring expedition into the wilds of that country. From that time we have heard no word of him. I don't know if he is dead or alive—probably I never shall, unless Mr. Amherst should find him."

"Amherst!—is that any relation of our amiable friend Mrs. Amherst?"

"Her son—in fact her only child. It was at my request he set out in search of my father. Poor fellow, I'm afraid I sent him on a sorry errand!"

This produced precisely the effect she had intended. It implanted a nice little root of suspicion in his mind.

"Then he is a friend of yours, this—this Mr. Amherst?"

"Oh, yes, Dick and I are old playfellows. We were brought up together, you know. He was just like a brother to me—though a bad brother, I must admit. He is a dreadful scamp. He ran away from school, and nearly broke his mother's heart."

"Dear me, is that so? I should have thought the cardiac region was particularly robust in that quarter. But tell me," he noticed her colour was rising, "Mr. Amherst's absence is not causing you any anxiety?"

"Well, I am somewhat anxious about him, of course."

"Why?" His tone was hard and cold. He was experiencing a sensation utterly new to him. It was not a pleasant one. As she did not answer, he repeated his question. "Why, may I ask, Miss Prynne?"

"Well, because I—I am engaged to be married to him."

Then she waited for the storm. But it did not come. All he did was to get up and walk to the far end of the churchyard. He was pretty hard hit, and he felt he must have it out with himself for a few moments, at least. He was not a man wont to shirk the inevitable, but he craved the time to "strip" mentally. She would probably think him rude, eccentric even, and he knew well he was neither. He succeeded so well, that he was able to return with something approaching a smile on his face.

"What you have just told me has taken me somewhat by surprise, Miss Prynne," he said; "I confess too, it is a blow to me. I had thought you understood that— Well, suppose we return to the hotel, eh?"

"No, not yet. I want you to let me explain to you—let me explain."

"One moment, please, Miss Prynne. You must not misunderstand me. Believe me, I ask you for no explanation. You are in no way to blame; I was mistaken, that's all."

"You need not be so certain of that," said Molly, softly.

"Please don't make it worse for me; there's a good deal of the human about me, you know. I don't want to say things I ought not to say. You are engaged to Mr. Amherst; that seems to me quite final."

"I know I should have told you that I was engaged. I see that now—when it is too late. But you will do me the justice to say that I never encouraged you in any way."

"I say you are in no way to blame. I said so before. Why continue the subject?"

"Because I can't bear you to think badly of me. With no disloyalty to Dick I can say that I feel this—this mistake as much as you do. You understand me, don't you? You don't think it is a matter of indifference to me? You wouldn't—you wouldn't, if you knew why I engaged myself to Dick."

"The basis of your engagement was, I presume, the usual one."

"It was not, it is not. I accepted Dick because I—well, just because I was sorry for him. There is a great deal that is good in him, he was my old playfellow, and he was going to the dogs rapidly. He was becoming hopelessly irretrievable. He is weak-willed, dissipated, foolish—it was a case in which only my influence could save. I would not let him fall beyond reach without exerting that influence. In sheer pity, in despair for him, I promised to be his wife. I feel I must tell you this. I owe it to you because—I have perhaps shown a deeper interest in you than I ought to have done. But I have never meant to mislead you. I have tried hard to do what is right, to keep to the path I have chosen. I would not be disloyal to Dick—not for the world would I hurt you. What I did was of my own free will. I can blame no one but myself. If I had met you before it happened—but there, I have said enough. You know the truth now; you must think of me as you will."

"I think you are a noble woman; with the courage of your nobility. There are few who would do as you are doing—who would speak out as you have done to me. It is not for me to criticise the action you have decided upon; but simply to keep in mind that it is decided upon. Of course you must keep your promise."

"Dick is searching for my father on that understanding."

"I think I am beginning to see it all, now; would you mind being a little more explicit?"

The worst was over, so she did not mind. "Perhaps I had better tell you all about myself from the beginning: I was born and brought

up in a small village—the village of Hagbourne, to be precise, in Berkshire. My mother died when I was but five years old, and Mrs. Amherst came to look after me. She brought Dick with her, and we grew up together until he was sent to school. My father had a good income; but he was never satisfied with it. He chanced to come across the history of a Jacobean ancestor. It had to do with some hidden treasure in Peru. From that time he was possessed with one idea—to go in search of it. He arranged for Mrs. Amherst to remain with me, and appointed Father O'Dwyer my guardian. Then he set out in quest of this thing, and from that day to this, not a word have we heard of him. When his health became bad—he suffers chronically from rheumatism, as you know—Uncle Tom came to live with us. The next thing that happened was that Dick ran away from school, and for a long time was wandering about in Australia and America."

"A rolling stone by nature, evidently."

"Yes. I don't defend Dick. But he is more unfortunate than designedly wicked. Well, he returned home, some four years ago, and nothing would do but I must marry him. He implored me to save him from himself—he said I was the only one in the world who could save him. I had not the heart to refuse him; and his mother, too, had been good to me in her own way—I felt my duty was plainly before me, and I determined I would not shirk it."

"Ah, I understand Mrs. Amherst's feelings for myself now!"

"Oh, of course she is afraid I may break my promise. But she need have no fear. Well—two years ago, Dick went off in search of my father; and it was agreed that when he returned with him we should be married. Now he seems to have disappeared altogether. His mother has had no word from him, neither have I, for over a year. I think he must be dead. Of course if that were so—but there, as things stand at present, they must remain."

"How old is Mr. Amherst?"

"Thirty-three."

"Then I fear he is past your help. If a man cannot pull himself together by that age, I am afraid not the influence of you or any woman is of much avail. But don't think I seek to discourage you. After all you have told me, I agree most emphatically that you must stick to him."

"It is very difficult," sighed Molly, "sometimes I——"

"There now, come, I am going to help you."

"You?"

"Why not? You didn't think I would do the other thing, did you? You have just got to think of me—to remember that I am always your very good friend, eh? Now that's settled."

"There's one o'clock ringing," was all she said. She did not know what to think of him. She was conscious of his goodness, his great unselfishness; of his consideration for her, above all things. But she could not keep away from her a sensation of definite disappointment. Her hero, her immaculate ideal, would surely have taken her in his arms, and forced her to give up all for him, would have carried her away in spite of protest, in the face of everything—they two against the world.

Yet he was here by her side, cool and collected; prepared to help her, yes, even to help her to marry another man.

"We shall be late for luncheon," he said.

She could have cried with vexation.

CHAPTER IV.

"O'DWYER'S STORY."

NEITHER of these young people ate any luncheon. Hazel had perhaps something more than the remembrance of his *recherche* little repast under the sycamore tree to serve him ; and the girl's emotions were too keenly aroused to permit of her doing more than pick at the not too appetising fare which awaited her. They parted at the door of the hotel. He felt that nothing but sheer muscular exertion could satisfy him for the next hour at least. His ideas, too, always flowed more freely when walking. He was oblivious utterly to time or distance, the leafy beauty of the lanes failed in ever so small a degree to arrest his attention. It was a strong characteristic of the man that, when confronted with difficulty in any guise, he must be up and at it there and then. He could not procrastinate. Yet he was not impulsive to a fault. It was never necessary to him to put his plans into execution merely because he had formulated them. But it was always necessary for him to formulate them. He was conscious that the present juncture was a highly critical one, and that as he acted towards it, so would the future in large measure shape itself : and the future was of all import to him, for he always vowed that if he left nothing else behind him, he would leave a clean trail. The situation was quite clear to him. He reduced it to its elements. He quickly saw that the question of Amherst's success or failure was of minor importance. What was not, was to know if he still lived, and to a man of his active temperament there seemed but one way of arriving at a reliable answer to that. It appeared inevitable that if the man were alive Molly must marry him. On the other hand, if he were not, well, then he argued, he had every excuse for thinking she had rather be Mrs. Gerald Hazel than anybody else. He returned to the hotel with more than half an eye on Peru. Even the hundred and one details of the journey had flashed in confused array through his mind—the best line of boats, their probable dates of departure, the time of year, the possibilities of the country, and all that had happened to him on his last visit to that part of the world, for although South America, as a continent, was practically strange land to him, he had skirted its shores, and probed the local life of the more important of its coast towns. He possessed some knowledge of the language, having learned Spanish during the course of a somewhat protracted Peninsular tour, so that a comparatively short residence in Mexico had done the rest. The prospect undoubtedly allured him. He was never more happy than when his life depended on straight shooting. There had been many times when he had been strongly drawn towards this land of the Incas, but somehow up till now, though the attraction had in no sense waned, feasible opportunity had not presented itself. Now came Destiny knocking at his door in a manner that was not to be denied. The trail ran westward to some spot unknown, where, it would seem, were to be decided the fates of himself and the girl who was most to him in the world.

He took a tepid bath, an hour's sleep, and felt better. By the time he had dressed and come down for dinner, his mind was made up. Usually a pure water drinker, he ordered half a pint of his favourite wine. There,

a little way down the room, he could see Molly—a very pale-faced Molly—dining with the good priest, and the amiable Mrs. Amherst. He had decided to avoid the girl until he had put things before Father O'Dwyer. So after dinner, he tramped the lawn with a cigar for company. It is safe to say that the lady of his love resented his apparent indifference, and while in one breath dubbing him the most heartless of men, confessed to herself in the next that she loved him beyond telling.

He made sure she had gone upstairs, and then he ventured in.

In a corner of the smoking-room sat the Reverend Father, his senses for the time being given over to the severally counteracting, yet jointly soothing, influences of coffee and tobacco. He had heard nothing from Molly of what had passed between her and Hazel, and the young man's absence during the entire afternoon, and his pointed avoidance of the girl at dinner, together aroused his curiosity. But he felt confident Hazel would not keep him much longer in ignorance, and his presence at this moment in the smoking-room was in some measure due to his expectancy. He had ordered two glasses with his liqueur, and they had not been there much more than five minutes, when Hazel came in. The evening was fine and dry, which perhaps accounted for the room being comparatively deserted.

"Ah, Father, you expected me, I see," said Hazel, noticing the empty liqueur glass.

"To be sure I did. And now you're here, I hope it's good news you bring with you."

"You shall judge of that for yourself. I am going to Peru."

"Faith, and I guessed that would be it. She has a real gift that girl for originatin' a wild-goose chase. And whin do you start?"

"Oh, in a week or so. But why wild-goose chase?"

"Well, that perhaps depends if it's the father or the rascal you're goin' after."

"Well, both, as a matter of fact. But you're wrong in assuming Miss Prynne sent me. On the contrary, she doesn't even know I'm going."

"Miss Prynne is it? Have you got no further than that?"

"For the present, no. Have you spoken with her?"

"God forbid; 'twould be indilicate of me to get pokin' about in a young girl's mind. And but that my real wish is for her happiness not one word would I be sayin' to you on the subject. Maybe I should keep a silent tongue in any case, but it's me love for the dear girl must be me excuse. She told you her story, I suppose."

"Yes; briefly, though sufficiently. I understand that if Amherst succeeds in finding her father, she has promised to marry him. She seems convinced that the redemption of the man is her mission in life."

"Her mission is it, she calls it?—the black curse on that mission, God forgive me for swearin'. But what good can come, I ask you, of a girl tyin' herself up for life to a drunken scoundrel who hasn't the pluck to fight his own battles? It's more your mission to save the girl, Hazel, than hers to save that thirsty blackguard."

"He seems a bad lot."

"One of the worst—a swearin', drinkin', quarrelsome rascallion, with love for nought but his own dirty carcase. I could do nothing with him, and all the mighty ragin' of his mother only served to send him to the bottle, though it's but right to say it might have done the same to many a better man than him. Save her from this, Amherst, if ye can, me boy,

You've hit upon the right course, I can see. Get you to Peru, as you say. It's in Lima you'll probably find the fellow, drinkin' himself blind in some den, I'll go bail, unless he's tucked away in six foot of soil with his soul in Purgatory. Anyhow, it's the father he was sint after, and if he hasn't found him, he won't get Molly. About the old lady you needn't trouble your head. I'll manage her. It's my own conviction neither you nor he nor any one else will iver find Prynne. He's been gone now well-nigh twenty years, and divil a sign of him. Mark me, me boy, he'll niver come back."

"No?—well, you know, in matters of this kind, a few years are neither here nor there. I understand he went in search of some unique treasure, and that's not the sort of thing that's to be found just for the looking."

"That's true enough. Still, take me word for it, the poor chap's not above ground. Didn't Molly tell you 'twas the Mother of Emeralds he went after—a stone of huge price that those idolatrous rascals worship? It's a long story, and maybe it'll interest you not a little, more especially just now. I've got an old manuscript here of Bevil Prynne's, which I brought down for you. You'll find it queer sort of readin', but whin you've gone through it, I'll be mighty astonished if it isn't with me you are about Prynne. He'll niver come back. He's probably been only too successful in his search, and thim Indian divils have got him fast in their hidden city."

O'Dwyer handed him the manuscript. It seemed a somewhat lengthy document. Hazel turned over the sheets casually, and his eye caught such words as "Tavantisuyu," "Cuzco," "Manco," "Capac," "Yupanqui." The style of the narrative was more or less modern.

"This is not a verbatim copy of the original?" he asked.

"No, it's not. It's a *précis* adapted from it, on the *multum in parvo* principle. The other was a fearfully long-winded affair. You'll notice some of the old style there, but it's plain readin' enough for a careful man like you. If you can understand Defoe—and I make no doubt you can, and like him—you'll not fail to understand that. It might have been written by him. You'll probably find it fascinatin', and not a little help to ye. Dick Amherst had a copy of it, and it may have led him to his destruction. You'll have to look out it doesn't lead you the same way, me boy."

"Oh, I'll manage to look after my own skin. I've had a fair amount of practice you know, Father. Upon my word, the whole thing takes my fancy hugely, apart from Molly—I should say, Miss Prynne. An ancient civilization—a hidden city—a treasure of jewels—it sounds attractive, eh?"

"So John Prynne thought, poor soul. Maybe he thinks it less attractive now. Anyhow, you read the story and tell me what you think of it."

"Yes, I will. I'll talk to you about it in the morning. Now just tell me, Father, what sort of man is Mr. Prynne—we'll say 'is' because it's always well to look at the bright side of things while we can."

"Me brother-in-law?—well, 'tis a scientific creature he is mostly."

"Fond of money as well as of science?"

"Only as far as one is good for the other. At the time he wint out after that treasure he was mad on raisin' the capital for some flyin' machine of his. He was always a dreamer, and an inventor—and it's mighty costly things they are both whin you come to realisin' them. Faith, it would

have needed all the mines of Golconda to carry out his whims. But he'd always plenty to live on ; two thousand a year, no less, though he could not touch the principal. It's Molly and meself have the money now. He made that safe before he wint. It's probable the poor soul had mis-givin's about his return, and he seems to have been a mighty true prophet."

"Well, that has yet to be proved."

"The Lord hilp you with the task thin—you're bint upon it, I can see."

"Yes, I think I'll go to Peru. As a matter of fact, I mapped out the route this afternoon."

"And how is it ?"

"Leave Southampton Thursday by Royal Mail Liner for Colon, thence rail to Panama. There I pick up one of the Pacific Company's boats for Lima—that's not complicated, is it, and it's enough for the present."

"It's a clear head you have, me boy. I couldn't wish me dear girl a better husband ; and ye've money, or I'm mistaken."

"Five hundred a year with power of pen to double it."

"Good. Molly has two thousand a year secured to her by her father, and though, as I told you, I share it with her now, it's not long I am for this world. 'Tis P.P. of Ballyderry, County Clare, I was till these cursed rheumatics warped me into a pauper. But Molly, the heavens be her bed, loves her old uncle, and does not grudge him his bed and board, though he's a trifle saucy about the board."

"Nor will her husband, if I'm ever the lucky man."

"I believe you, Gerald Hazel. Bring home John Prynne by the ear if needs be ; but bring him home, and take the girl with an old man's blessing. 'Tis you she loves right enough, me boy ; 'tis you can set her feet dancin' to the music of her heart ; and if I die before you chance on the Mother of Emeralds, maybe you'll have a mass or two said for Father O'Dwyer. But it's nonsinse I'm talkin' with this salt picklin' makin' a new man of me. Tin o'clock, past !—Holy Mary, and me a-chatterin' here nineteen to the dozen ! Good-night, me son. God bless you, and the saints have you in mind."

Then Hazel went to bed too, intent on the story of Bevil Prynne.

CHAPTER V.

"THE MANUSCRIPT."

THIS I write in the hidden City of the Idolators, beneath the great Hills they call the Andes, or Copper Mountains, to the which I did come through many terrible great Perils ; and it is my Hope that by God His Blessing this Account of my Hardships and Captivity may come to the Hands of my Son Philip, if it be that he is yet alive.

It is now three Years and more, that to mend my Fortunes, impaired by the late horrid Rebellion against the King's Majesty, I did seek the Mother of Emeralds : yet, although I have succeeded beyond my Hopes, I shall not bring the great Jewel to my House at Hagbourne, nor see the pleasant Lands of my Inheritance, since it has fallen out otherwise. Much Greed hath brought me into Tribulation, and I am Captive to savage Wretches in the Hollows of the great Cordilleras, whence I cannot escape but by a Miracle and Christ His Help. The huge Emerald I have indeed seen with these Eyes, where its green Glory fills the Idol Temple before

the Moonface of wrought Silver ; but the Treasure is not for me who write, or indeed for anyone, seeing how much Store is set upon it by those blinded Heathen, who worship it as their Lord God, and guard it with everlasting Watchfulness, as the Palladium of their brutish Worship. This will testify that I still live, although in much Affliction, being cut off from my own Kind, and condemned to melancholy Life. But this being the Station of Life which God His Providence hath determined for me, it is my Part to submit to His Divine Wisdom, as I am His Creature, and He hath judicial Right to afflict me for the Degeneracy of my Nature. That which led me into this Strait was the Loss of my Inheritance, on the Roundhead Rogues, and more particularly the Rebel Cromwell (whom God confound), slaying his most sacred Majesty to the Horror of all loyal Cavaliers. When that iniquitous Crime made Havoc in the Realm, many who held by the Divine Right of the Prince of Wales, did become Marks for Malignity and Robbery, and the Name of Bevil Prynne, who had fought for his Sovereign, was treated with Contumely and with Scorn. Mine own House of Hagbourne, with the rich Lands thereof, was wrested from me by one Puritan Knave—Balm-in-Gilead Napper, who did sit in my Seat and rob me of my Rents with horrid Wickedness, leaving me with scarce a Mouthful of Bread. My dear Wife Dorinda, and her pretty Chicks, he bade tramp with me, whereby we were afflicted with Want and many Sorrows of the Flesh. But God His Mercy prevailed, and my worthy Neighbour, Sir Byng Caston, did give us Food and Raiment and Shelter for many Years : Praise be to him for his Charity to the Poor.

Then it was that it came about for me to converse with one Hidalgo of Spain, Don Miguel de Torrez Vasquez, who had followed his most sacred Majesty from Madrid, what Time he journeyed there with my Lord Duke Buckingham, for the Spanish Match in the Reign of the late King.

Don Miguel, knowing the Indies in his Youth, did tell me many signal Histories of golden Peru, where those lost in Darkness, possess much Treasure, the which they use for the Worship of their Idol Gods : and in particular he made Mention of a prodigious Jewel, said by Report to lie at a City in Earth's Bowels to which no man might come by Reason of fierce Savages, who have laid up their Treasure in this safe Place. None of our Nation can gain this Jewel, said Don Miguel, although many Indians know well the City, for they fear us exceedingly, seeing that Don Francisco Pizarro made Havoc of their Idols at Cuzco, the Seat of the Inca, or King. And said he, if a daring Cavalier could but come upon this secret Place, he would therefrom gain immeasurable Wealth, such as his sacred Majesty King Solomon had not in his Coffers. Furthermore, the Ancient did say that the Savages aware of this City were sworn to Secrecy, and carried on the bare Skin of their Breasts the Symbol of a Rainbow ; such to the Shame of Mankind being adored of them. And, said he, if one could force to Speech a Savage adorned with such a Symbol, the City of the Jewel might be found speedily by one daring of Heart ; the which Relation told daily did set me dreaming of great Wealth, and the Regaining of my Lands from the filthy Puritan who sat wrongly in my House at Hagbourne, by the Rape of this mighty Jewel. The End of which was this, that I resolved to attempt the Adventure with God His Grace. I took ship for the Kingdom of Spain, with the Commendation of Don Miguel to the Count of Salvatierra, who did then rule Peru as Viceroy for his most Catholic Majesty. At the Port of Cadiz I boarded a Ship

outward for the Indies ; but when our Craft was gotten into the Great Seas the Winds did blow and the Waves did rise to whelm us, much to our Dismay ; but by God His Blessing the Ship did win with Safety and delivered from our Perils we did cast Anchor in the Port of Callao.

Upon gaining the Capital Town of Lima, where the Viceroy held his State, I made Haste to assure him of my Honesty and Worth by delivering the Letters ; and he, finding me a Person of Repute, and one well commended by his Friend, did embrace me most heartily, and did give me an Assurance of his Aid in my Search for the City of the Jewel. But, said he, should the Discovery be to you, fail not to give me the King's Portion of what Treasure you may chance upon, seeing that I am bounden by my Duty to demand so much. And this I vowed to do with all Willingness, so that the Count of Salvatierra was well pleased that I should gain him Wealth without bestowing upon him the Burden of seeking for same amidst frightful Savages, ill-disposed towards the Spaniards by Reason of their manifold Cruelties to the defenceless Indians, whom God will most surely avenge. Being thus regarded by the Viceroy, I gathered for my Adventures twenty Souls, many being Indians of the Town ; but also seven Spaniards much set upon discovering this Eldorado, as they called the City of Jewels. These I armed with Muskets and Swords and a great Quantity of Ammunition, with Powder Horns and Pistols, and, so accompanied, I set forward to the City of Cuzco, where the ancient Incas of Tavantisuyu (as they call their Land) held their State. Our little Party, taking Farewell of the Count of Salvatierra, pushed forward over the great Mountains, where we underwent many perilous Dangers from Cold and rugged Paths and bitter Winds ; but in Parts we followed the great Road of the Inca Huayna Capac, and thereby we had less Difficulty in overcoming the Hostility of Nature. In Time we gained the golden City of Cuzco, which is set like a rich Jewel in the Heart of Peru, near to the great River of Apurimac, of which more hereafter. And it was in this Place that I met with the Englishman, Harry Ingraham, who shared my Perils with much Bravery. This Gentleman had been for long in Peru striving to mend his Fortunes, but had met with repeated and unmerited Reversals, whereby he had fallen as low as Lazarus, the Beggar at the Gate of Dives. But, finding him to be of good Repute and much Honesty, I joined myself to him, seeing that he was acquainted with the Country. When he did learn my Hopes, Ingraham did then relate that he also had heard of the hidden City and its Great Jewel, and, indeed, had questioned a Savage marked with the Rainbow Symbol about the same, yet had learned no Good, by Reason of the sacred Oath of these obstinate Idolators. It was commonly reported that such City lay in the Recesses of the Vilcamba Cordilleras, to which the last *Inca Manco* had withdrawn when maddened by the Cruelties of the Spaniards. For, said he, I mark that those Savages stamped with their God, the Rainbow, come always down the Rio Apurimac ; and it may be that they come hither from the City of Jewels, so if our Company venture up the River and enter the Interior of the Land beyond the civilised Part of it, may be we shall come upon it.

Yet did I fear to take this Counsel, lest we might mistake the Path, seeing we had no Guide, and the Land over by the Rivers is wild beyond telling, with many great Hills shagg'd over with great Woods ; so I did abide in *Cuzco*, and did cast among the poorer Indians for information of their buried Town. Now, it so happens that by God His Will I am skilled

beyond common Men in Simples as well as in the cure of Sickness of the Body, and, finding many sick among the Savages of *Cuzco*, by Reason of the hard Labour their inhuman Masters put them to, I did Exercise my Knowledge to make well their Diseases, whereby my Fame as a Lord over Death was spread abroad with much Noise, and the eager Savages came for Healing at my Hands. With them it did chance there came a great Noble of the fallen Empire, and he did question me much concerning the Circumstances of my Knowledge of Sickness and of Disease, to all of which Questions I did reply with open Heart. Then did this Noble say, if you will but trust yourself to my Care, I will take you into the Wilderness where there is much Sickness amongst those of my Race who yet hold themselves free of the *Spaniards*, and it may be, should you restore them to good Health, and thus snatch them from the Grave, I will bestow on you great Quantities of Gold such as you white Men love, for I have heard, said he, of your Quest, and for your own Sake, I would bid you believe my Word; and with that he showed to *Ingraham* and myself the Symbol of the Rainbow on the bare Skin of his Breast, whereby we cried out for Joy, believing that he knew of the City of the Jewel, and would guide us thereto, did I but cure his People of their Sickness, as was his Wish. And the End of it was that we did pledge ourselves to follow *Nayamlap* (for thus was named the Noble) into the Wilderness, and do good to his Race in Sickness, if it was his Will to guide us to the City of the great Emerald, and give us of the Treasure; and this he swore by his God the Sun to do, keeping us from all Harm at the Hands of his People. For, said he, I know you are of the *English*, who are not cruel and barbarous like the *Spaniards*, who oppress us so horribly. Then as the Noble was honest of Complexion, and spoke us fair, and had also taken Oath on his God, we did follow him according to his Desire, and in *Periaques* (as the Indians call their Boats) we did row up the Rio Apurimac for many Weeks, until we did come to a Land wherein, said *Nayamlap*, did dwell fierce *Indian* Savages, called by the Name of *Amahuaca*; and it was in this Country that we left the main Stream and did turn up a Tributary, which did flow swiftly from some great Hills, whose Heads touched the Clouds, and were white with the Snows of many Winters, but of this new River we could not gain the *Indian* name from *Nayamlap*, whereby we judged that we had arrived in the Neighbourhood of the hidden City of the Jewel, and this was truly so, as I shall presently tell. It did then happen that we did chance upon a Village or Town of savage Creatures, and there did leave the *Periaques*, when the inhabitants did salute us with a thousand antick Postures and Gestures, even although *Nayamlap* did speak with Anger to them and bid them to cease. And here it was that the deadly Sickness spoken of by *Nayamlap* did rage, the which I found to be a foul *European* Disease, carried hither by the *Spaniards*, being, indeed, none other than the spotted Sickness or Small-pox, and of this many of these poor Creatures did die, by Reason of their foolish Way of pouring cold Water on the Body to cool the raging Fever. But God His Mercy did bring me hither to assuage this Plague, and I did cure many who else would have died, whereby *Nayamlap* did praise me greatly, saying that I was one of the greatest of *Amautas*, by the which Name those of his Race did call their wise Men. For a Month or more did we abide in the Village of the *Amahuacas* Savages, and I did spy out the Land, for it was borne in upon me that the City of the Jewel was not far distant. Now it did so happen that this Village sat at the Foot of

a high Hill, the Top whereof was covered with Snow and Clouds, and nigh to it there did run a mighty rapid Stream, out of the Mountain's Bowels, and the ignorant Savages did think the great Hill bewitched by Reason of the Stream bursting from its Womb, and also seeing that at Sunrise the Rocks of it did breed Musick, the which I did hear with mine own Ears, and the Sound thereof was as the Tones of the Organ in the Parish Church of Hagbourne ; but none but God the All-knowing can say whence this Musick doth come, though it may be that the heathen Idols, the which are Devils, produce these sweet strains for the beguiling of their sorry Worshipers. But Ingraham did think with me, that the Musick did come from within the Mountain, wherein the City lay concealed, and this we did believe firmly, for that one Day the Body of a fine Man, with a fierce Countenance and many Ornaments of Gold, was borne out of the Entrails of the Hill by the River Current ; and this dead Man did bear on his Breast a pictured Rainbow for all to see, whereas no Savage in the village did wear the same. Therefore, said Ingraham, it is certain that the *Indian* was offered upon the bloody Altar of their barbarous Gods in the Hollow of the Hill, wherein the City is placed, and that the Stream in its flowing hath discovered the horrid Crime ; and it may come about that should we gain the City, we can fly from Captivity by throwing ourselves into the Waters which will bear us out of the Mountain.

But, alas, the City and its manifold Wealth was not for him, as that same Night God did smite him with the spotted Sickness, and he came near to Death. And it did so happen that I could not use my Skill on him, for at Dawn I was seized and bound by the treacherous Orders of *Nayamlap*, and borne up the Mountain, in which Strait I did give myself up for lost, and prayed loudly for my *Dorinda* and her Chicks, the which did comfort me greatly in my Distress. For many Hours I was so carried, not knowing what would be the End of my Trouble or whither I was going, for the *Indians* did carry me up the rugged Mountain and I could discover no Road leading to the City of Jewels.

Then they did cast me down on the Verge of a vast Fissure in the Earth (such as the Spaniards call *Quebradas*), and it did gape for my Destruction, and truly I did think my last Hour was at Hand ; but, binding a stout Rope round my Body they did lower me into the Abyss, and some did climb down by Ladders of Notches dug from the live Rock, so that when I again was placed on my Feet I stood in the Bed of a deep Gulch, with these by my Side, and they bore me a long Distance, to the Face of a great Waterfall. Here, thought I, is the sad End of Bevil Prynne, but it was not so, for *Nayamlap* and his Servants did bear me through the Water, and we did pass into a mighty Cavern, with many Lights of Torches set round, whereby I knew that at last (to my Sorrow) I was in the City of Jewels, as the Noble declared, for, said he, this is the Place of Treasure, where you will behold the Mother of Emeralds, and can gain Treasure to your Heart's Desire, although it may not be that you shall pass out, lest you should reveal our Refuge to the Spanish Dogs, for so the *Inca Tupac* hath determined in his Wisdom.

And they did bear me to a vast Cave, wherein were many Buildings of Stone and much Light from Lamps and Torches, so that the Palace shone as the Sun at Noonday. And it so happened that their Chief (*Inca* as they do call him, being of the Seed Royal) bade my Limbs be unbound, and did give me Food, bidding me be of good Cheer, for that my Life was safe. And, said he, I did hear of your Skill in the City of

Cuzco, and did send my Noble thither, that he might bring you to this Place, for it is my Will that all those who can teach us the Powers of the white Men should be brought here, that our Hands may be strengthen'd against the barbarous *Spaniards*. Therefore, said he, take Heed and give your Skill and Knowledge to my People, who dwell here with me, and so you shall fare well and possess great Treasure, howbeit that you may not pass from our Refuge any more, which Speech did throw me into terrible Agonies of Mind, seeing that I was to be held Captive thus in the Womb of the great Hills. And so it came about, as the *Inca Tupac* did inform me, and for two Years I have abode in this Hell, as I may well call it, since its Place is in the Heart of the Earth, nor have I beheld the Sun or Sky for that Time. Yet my Son Philip may take Comfort in the Knowledge that I am treated with Kindness, and that the Savages have bestow'd upon me Freedom to roam through many Caves, and mingle with the People who dwell therein, working with Mind and Hand to acquire Knowledge that may drive out the *Spaniards* and re-possess their Land.

They hoard up much Gold and many Jewels, the biggest whereof is the one they call the Mother of Emeralds, which did bring me to my Undoing, and these Treasures they design for the Use of conquering their Enemies. All such as have Knowledge of War or Medicine or Art to strengthen a Nation, do they lure to their hidden City, that the People may be instructed. And the Time one Day will come when the Savages will rise and drive the Spaniards and their Bastards out of Peru, and this they have sworn by their Gods, and by the Head of *Tupac Inca Yupanqui*, one of their most renowned Conquerors.

All through Peru this Thing is known to the Savages who bear the Rainbow Symbol on their Breasts; yet so strong is their Hatred of their cruel Masters, that none will reveal the Knowledge of the great Treasure. For, indeed, the *Inca Tupac* is richer than was his most sacred Majesty King Solomon, and all the Wealth of Europe would not form a Tithe of that which is hidden up in those Caves, though none of it is for me to redeem my Fortunes, seeing that I shall never behold my Native Land again, but must go down to the Grave without Sight of the Sun. How it fared with *Mr. Ingraham*, I know not, nor would *Nayamlap* tell me; but if he be recovered from his fell Disease, I know he will watch the River in the Hope of my Escape. For which Reason I have writ this Account of my Sorrows, and have the Intention to wrap it in many Folds of Cloth, so that it may take the Water: the which when done, I shall commit it to the River's Breast (for the same floweth beneath the Temple of the Moon Idol), and trust that *Ingraham*, my Friend, may chance upon it, and deliver the same to my Son *Philip*.

And I charge my said Son that he be not lured hither by Reports of the Wealth of these horrid Idolators, lest he, too, should be held Captive among them; but that he have wise and sober Thoughts, and watch for the Regaining of our Lands of Hagbourne, should his sacred Majesty be called to the Throne of the Realm by a repentant People.

And should this duly fall into the Hands of *Ingraham* my Friend, I bid him depart, for never shall he find this City, seeing that I cannot tell him the Way, and it is hidden beyond the Power of Man to discover. And to all Christian Souls I say, pray for poor Bevil Prynne who hath fallen into the Pit, whence he may not come again, but by Christ His Help; and here I send all Love to my dear Dorinda, who never more will behold her Husband, and to my loving Children bereft of a Father; with

the which I sign my Name to this most true Account, and commit the same to the Breast of the River which floweth from the Mountain of Musick. In God is my Trust, and although I dwell in darkness, yet shall I behold the eternal Light of Heaven.

Signed in my Dungeon,

BEVIL PRYNNE.

Some Time of Hagbourne, in the County of Berkshire, England.

CHAPTER VI.

“ WESTWARD HO ! ”

It was dawn ere Hazel laid down the romance of Bevil Prynne ; for romance it certainly was to him. In all his travels he had heard of nothing, certainly seen nothing, quite like it. Surely it was sheer fiction—this hidden community with its incalculable treasure ! Yet, withal, he was conscious of a ring of truth about the narrative, an element of sincerity, due, no doubt, to a conspicuous absence of digression, and abstinence from aught of ornament or elaboration in the setting forth of it. It might be after all but the quaint recital of actual fact. But he could not make up his mind whether of itself it was sufficient to warrant the very considerable outlay and risk of life and limb—though these last had become by habit of little more than insignificant account for him—which the expedition would entail. He turned it all over again and again in his mind. He felt strongly urged towards it ; but then he did not blind himself to the real reason of that. Although civilization as found in England had little attraction for him, he was of too practical a nature to run on any fool’s errand. He knew he was lacking in imagination, and that was why he supposed he could not bring himself wholly to believe in the existence of Bevil Prynne’s El Dorado. It was evident that Molly’s father had been powerfully influenced by the document in question, though the fact that he had never returned from the city of his ancestor’s dreams—if dreams they were—proved nothing. And as O’Dwyer had said, the younger man was, if not already dead, probably making for extinction as speedily as his opportunities would permit. In that case it was more than likely he had never got beyond the boundaries of Lima, or wanted to.

He wondered how they had come by this manuscript, and wished he had asked Father O’Dwyer. A good deal would depend upon that. The city itself might or might not be pure fable, but he doubted not that the dangers in reaching its supposed locality would prove substantial enough. If he should come through all right, it seemed—providing the other men didn’t turn up in the meantime, and providing he succeeded in procuring proof of Amherst’s death—that Molly would marry him. There had been nothing definite said to that effect, but he felt sure of it. He did not deny to himself that that was his greatest incentive, though it was true he was getting a trifle weary of inactivity, and this would be mostly new ground to him.

Still dubious, he threw himself on the bed without troubling to undress and slept till ten o’clock. Then there came to him the vision of Father O’Dwyer—and with him this morning, perchance, Molly—under the sycamore on the lawn. He decided that he could not do better than join them.

He took his bath, dressed, and got downstairs within half an hour. In the hall he met Mrs. Amherst, who claimed his attention for a while. She had all the appearance of being in wait for him. As a matter of fact she was. She had made up that complex organism which she termed her mind, that she herself would enlighten him on the subject of Molly's engagement to her dearly-beloved son. And this trenchant manœuvre she could command. The woman really had the instincts of a despot.

"Good morning, Mr. Hazel, I am glad to meet you. I think, with your permission, I must have a few words with you."

"With all the pleasure in the world, my dear madam. I am wholly at your disposal; though perhaps it is only right to say that I have had no breakfast. But I daresay you won't mind that. Might I suggest that we—er—retire to some less public place?—the drawing-room, for instance."

Mrs. Amherst did not reply, but she made a move in that direction. The room was empty. She chose the most commodious easy chair—(its back happened to be to the light), and enthroned herself therein with great impressiveness.

Hazel took up his position on the hearth-rug, placed his hands behind his back, and submitted, with the humility of an entomological specimen, to the lady's lorgnette. Such an instrument was calculated, he could easily understand, to make havoc of most men's nerves, especially at such short range as this; and although it disturbed him precious little now, he felt there were mornings when he might have been restive under it.

"Mr. Hazel, I feel called upon to give you a little advice. I am older than you; I have had much more experience, and I feel that what I am about to say to you, unpalatable as it may be, is necessary, and for your good."

No answer. Nothing but silence, and the most indulgent of expressions. Mrs. Amherst felt just a little off her balance. She could on occasions—very rare occasions it is true—consume her own smoke; but it was rather too much to be asked to provide her own fuel. She continued:

"It is with pain, Mr. Hazel, that I see—indeed no one could help seeing—that you are most strongly attracted to Miss——"

"Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Amherst, but there is surely no need to mention names!"

She erected her crest. This was better.

"I think otherwise. There is very great need. As the very old friend of Miss Prynne, whom I have brought up from a child, I consider it nothing short of my duty—more especially since I am to be her mother-in-law—to inform you that she is engaged to be married to my son."

"Really!"

"Yes, and on my son's behalf, I must request you in future to cease your, I may say, your unwelcome attentions to Miss Prynne."

"Ah; please continue."

"I have nothing more to say, except to express my regret that I should be called upon to perform this very painful task."

"Thank you. I accept your regret with pleasure."

"Really, Mr. Hazel, have you nothing to add to that?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Amherst—absolutely nothing—unless it be what is obvious. You see, I can't deny that you are older than myself. I hold that in any circumstances a lady is always the best judge of her own age, or any other lady's, for that matter. And for all I know, you may have

had many more experiences of every kind than I have had ; and if Miss Prynne (as it seems we must mention names) is to marry your son, I can't deny that you will be her mother-in-law ; so that I think, with your permission, I'll go and see what there is to eat."

"Well, I——" She got up from her chair somewhat less impressively than she had sat down. "Of all the—upon my—absolutely, words fail me !"

"Allow me," he opened the door for her. She was in a white heat, and rushed upstairs to find Molly. She felt that if she stayed another moment she would hit the man.

But Molly was under the sycamore tree with her uncle, who, goodly soul, was doing his best to coax her vestige of an appetite. She looked worn and pale. Hazel was startled at her appearance. She knew that he noticed what her glass had already told her, and she resented not so much that, as the fact that he himself should appear so spick and span. She supposed he was like all men, utterly callous and heartless. They were horrid creatures. She had thought he was different.

"Come along, me boy, it's just in time you are for the dear little dicky-birds" (holding up a quail). "They're beautiful, they are, cooked to a turn, and after my own recipe. Now, what's to be your wine this morning ?"

"Can't do better than the best, and that we had yesterday, Father. The same for me, if you please."

"You're right, me boy. Here it is. Now make a start and continue to a finish. There's plenty more where that came from."

Molly was utterly disgusted. If he only knew the night she had passed ! Really, this boisterous hospitality of Uncle Tom's was positively revolting.

"And how is Miss Prynne this morning ?" said Hazel, as soon as the old man gave him an opportunity to speak.

"Oh, I'm quite well, thank you. It seems superfluous to ask how you are, Mr. Hazel."

"Oh, the perfidy of the sex ! Listen to that now. And she's drooping as a spirea for want of water. Why, I tell ye, man, it's nothing but a morsel of toast and a cup of rank poison she calls tea, that she's taken."

"But, uncle, you know I never eat when I don't sleep, and I had not a good night last night."

"Tut, tut, it's t'other way round. If you ate, you'd sleep right enough. Do ye iver do more than pick at your food, and thin it's the wrong sort."

"Well, I didn't sleep at all," said Hazel.

Molly relented somewhat. He was not quite so callous as she had thought.

"I was reading that fairy tale of Bevil Prynne's into the small hours, and thinking about it after that."

"Fairy tale, indeed. You may well say that. It's a regular Baron Munchausen the fellow was with his gold and jewels of size."

"Tell me, Father, candidly ; what do you think of the story yourself ?"

"I've niver given it a thought at all. There's mighty queer things in thim heathen parts to be sure, and it's possible there may be a morsel of truth in what he says, but I've a feelin' that its Arabian Nights rubbish over again mostly."

"And I'm sure that every word of it is true," said Molly vehemently. "My father was not the man to be deceived, and he believed in it, or he

would never have gone to Peru at all. I have not the least doubt he found the city."

"An' if he did, the findin's done him mighty little good, me dear. What d'ye say, Hazel?"

"Well, I'd rather reserve my opinion on that point until I've seen the city. But I quite sympathise with Miss Prynne's confidence in her father's judgment."

"Until you've seen the city?—what on earth do you mean, Mr. Hazel? You're not going to Peru!"

"I hope so, Miss Prynne, next week, by one of the Royal Mail boats. It seems to me this question as to the whereabouts of your father and Mr. Amherst would be the better for clearing up, and if I may say so, I think I'm about as capable of doing it as any man."

"But you must not. I cannot allow you to take my trouble on your shoulders like that! I should feel I was sending you to your death. Really, Mr. Hazel, I cannot allow you to do this. I should never forgive myself. I couldn't hear of your doing any such thing on my account."

"In that case we'll say it's on my own, as you prefer it. Put it down as a mere whim, if you will, but pray give yourselves not the least anxiety on my account, either of you. You may be quite sure I'll turn up all right. I always do. Besides, I've been lazy too long. It's my business, you know, as well as my pleasure, to get to out-of-the-way places. I confess, fiction or not, that story of your Cavalier ancestor has taken my fancy. I may as well go there as anywhere else, better in fact, because I may chance upon one, if not both, of these gentlemen, in which case I should be in the happy position of being able to restore them to—well, let's say to civilization."

Molly looked at him hard. She didn't half like this phase of him. She felt it was a trifle beyond her.

"But does it not strike you, that as they neither of them have returned, you may not do so either?"

"Certainly it does. But one would never cross the Channel if one thought of that. I must take my chance as they did. It's quite possible, you know, that I may succeed where they failed."

"Molly, dear, it's arrant nonsense you're talkin'. As if he wouldn't be as near the good saints in Peru, as in this tumbledown place, or any other, for the matter o' that."

"The saints seem to have taken but little care of my father and Dick, uncle! If I had dreamt for one moment that Mr. Hazel would have done this, I should never have told him a word about it. It's nothing short of madness for him to risk his life on such a fruitless errand, for I feel convinced they must be dead. If Mr. Hazel goes, he will offend me seriously. I will not be a party to this—to this suicide; I——"

She could trust herself no further. Another moment and she felt she must give way. It was all she could do to hold back the tears. She beat a hasty retreat to the far end of the grounds.

"Foolish, soft-hearted child," muttered O'Dwyer; "no sinse, all sintiment."

Hazel made no comment. Nor did he attempt to follow her. It would be useless, he argued, in her present frame of mind. And it was as well too, he thought, to carry a point like this in the beginning. She would come to look at it in his way later on. He went on with his breakfast. He was surprised when Father O'Dwyer turned on him:

" Ah, it's a cold-blooded Saxon y'are, Hazel. How you can sit there like a block of wood, whin ye see the dear girl is breakin' her heart for ye, passes me entirely. She'll be cryin' her eyes out over yonder, whin it's comfortin' her ye should be."

" My dear Father, such a position, whatever may be in the future, is hardly feasible at present. You would scarcely have me act as *locum tenens* for Mr. Richard Amherst ! "

" Well, it's no flesh and blood ye are anyhow."

" Perhaps not—perhaps not ; that is, my flesh and blood are, as you say, Anglo-Saxon, and I suppose that's a poor variety of the species. But, come now, this is not what I want to talk to you about. I want you to tell me how this manuscript of Prynne's came to England."

The priest shrugged his shoulders.

" You're like no man I iver met with, Hazel. But I suppose it's just yourself you are, and your own way you must go. But you're no warm-hearted Irish boy, or you'd——"

" Oh, yes, I know ; I'd throw this and every other project to the four winds of Heaven, so long as Miss Prynne was comforted, and we'd be married next week, and live happily ever afterwards: But you see I'm not warm-hearted, and I'm not Irish, nor can you call me exactly a boy—forgive my being so literal, Father ; as you say, I'm just myself, and I'm afraid that's what I shall continue to be. But what I want most to talk about now is not my pachydermatous self, but this manuscript of Bevil Prynne's. Tell me, how did it get here ? "

" Well, that's simple enough, anyhow. 'Twas the man Ingraham gave it to the wife, Dorinda."

" And Ingraham, how did he come by it ? "

" Ain't I tellin' you ? It was Mistress Prynne wrote out all that this Ingraham man told her, in a sort of appendix to the story. It seems that, by the blessing of Mary, he was cured of the small-pox, and the Indians, havin' had about enough of him, no doubt, sent him away from their musical mountain (the liars !). Thin whin he got to the place they call Cuzco, if he wasn't after askin' the Viceroy for another expedition to find the unfortunate Bevil. But the Count Salvatierra put the stop on that. He told 'em it was no good. But he was a persistent divil of a man, this Ingraham, and will ye believe it, for two years, no less, he hung about thim parts until his luck brought him in tow with a greedy Spaniard, who was wild after the filthy lucre he thought to be there. So takin' their wretched lives in their hands the two of thim wint back and poked around again after their blessed city. But the man Ingraham had a trifle of sinse left it seems, for he kept his eye, and told the others to do the same, on the stream of water that came from the mountain. An' sure enough one day there came floatin' along a bundle o' stuff which took the fancy o' one of those Indian fellows, who picked it up ; and a mighty sell it was for him no doubt whin it turned out to be nothin' but a lot of papers done up as cliverly as you like. That, me boy, was the manuscript. Of course whin the mad fools read it they were more mad than iver to get at the beastly place, but before they could say Jack Robinson almost, the Indians set upon them and killed ivery blessed one of thim, except the man Ingraham, who, as I told you, was a persistent divil. An' would you believe it, as if he hadn't had enough of that part of the world, no sooner did he get back to this country than he set about workin' upon the avaricious minds of another set of lunatics to start

out on a third expedition to the unholy place. But the saints decreed it otherwise, an' he'd just about time to give the manuscript to Dorinda, and die in his bed like a Christian."

"And this Philip Prynne, didn't he go to Peru?"

"He did not. The man had more sinse. Whin the King came to his own again, Philip turned out that heretic blackguard of Hagbourne and got back his lands. And the manuscript was just tossed aside as rubbish until John Prynne (may he be forgiven for an obstinate fool) found it and his undoin' at the same time, and must needs go on a wild-goose chase after the Mother of Emeralds."

"Is the whole story here?"

"It is not, Hazel. There are pages and pages about the life of thim creatures in the city, and tales of treasure that'd make your mouth water, if you're fond of those things, as I make no doubt you are. But John Prynne took the original with him, leavin' only the boiled-down affair behind; and Dick Amherst has a copy of that same."

"I think I should like to take this to town with me and have it copied, if you don't mind."

"Mind! Why should I mind, me boy? But it's that same you can take if you like. It's mighty little good to an old man like me. Whin is it you're goin' to London?"

"By the mid-day train. I must get my kit in order, you see, and it doesn't do to cut things too fine. The boat that leaves on Thursday is one of the new ones, and I don't want to miss her."

"Well, it's God and the saints be with you, Hazel!"

The young man took out his watch. "I think I'll go now and say good-bye to Miss Prynne. I haven't too much time."

He walked off in the direction Molly had gone. He found her pacing up and down an isolated path. His reception was not cordial. She spoke first.

"Why do you follow me, Mr. Hazel?"

"I have come to say good-bye to you—you're not really angry with me, Miss Prynne?"

"Oh no, not in the least. It is not calculated to make one angry to have one's express wishes totally disregarded. Besides, angry or not, it cannot possibly affect you."

"I don't think you really mean that. Can you not look upon this journey of mine as if it were any other?"

"That is quite a different thing. I should not—well, I should not, of course, feel responsible for you in Madagascar, you see, there is no one belonging to me in Madagascar; besides, I should have no right to object to your going there, should I, and—oh, of what use is it talking like this? You know why you are going to Peru, and I know, and I tell you it is to certain death you go, and I—I shall feel—it will be all my fault. Once for all I tell you, you shall *not* go, you—I—oh, how can I persuade you?"

"And if I stay, what happens? You and I are as far apart—we must be—as if I were in Peru. I may bring back Mr. Amherst, or——"

"I never asked you to bring him back!"

"No, I know that. But, on the other hand, it is just possible I may not be able to bring him back, because he may be dead; and in that case it would be well surely to—to have proof of his death."

"But think, think of the terrible risks, the horrible dangers you run."

"That is what neither you nor I need think about—at least you need

not, and if I think about them at all it will only be to avoid them. I must take my chance of all that; it is a perfectly fair one—I may say usually a good one. I am one of those people, you know, provided by nature with a self-preserving instinct, almost feline; as I told your uncle just now, I am pachydermatous—that's an ugly long word, but it explains what I mean. I have come through some pretty tight places in the last few years, and then, you know, it wasn't necessary that I should come through them at all."

He waited for her to speak, but she did not. He felt at the moment that he dared not look at her, for his own safety. It was proving a good deal more trying to him than he could have imagined possible. He began to think he could not be pure Anglo-Saxon after all. But he pulled himself together.

"Good-bye," he said. "It is time for me to go now. There's the 'bus. Believe me, I am going for—my—own sake. Look at me, Miss Prynne. Say good-bye to me."

Still she was silent. The tears were falling fast now, she had given up trying to hide them. He felt that he must not stay. Once again he turned to her. She let her eyes meet his, and then her hand.

"Good-bye," she said.

Then he turned on his heel, and walked over to the door of the hotel. He thought he had an idea of what it had cost her to say the word; and now that she had said it he began to wonder whether he had better go, after all. But his indecision was only momentary.

As soon as he was out of sight Molly went to her room. She could get in by a side entrance. On the threshold she met Mrs. Amherst, prepared, it seemed by the look of her, for battle then and there.

"Mr. Hazel is——" She stopped and eyed the girl searchingly.

"Oh yes, I know, he is going—he is going to Peru, and it's all my own wretched doing," burst out Molly, unable to control herself longer.

"Going to Peru—Mr. Hazel going to Peru? And why, may I ask?"

"No, you mayn't—that is—you'd better ask him if you want to ask anybody. I shall never see him again."

"Really, child, to say that you astonish me little expresses my feelings. You don't seem to be aware that you are a perfect spectacle. I cannot imagine that anything Mr. Hazel intends to do is any excuse for your making such a disgusting exhibition of yourself!"

"Oh, leave me alone, can't you—let me go to my room. Don't you see how wretched I am? Go away, go away." Then in sterner tone, "Let me pass, please, Mrs. Amherst."

She did not wait, but pushed by the bulky figure into her room, locked the door, and threw herself into a chair by the window and sobbed hysterically. She caught a sight of herself in the glass on the opposite wall, and it arrested her thoughts. Mrs. Amherst was right—she did look awful. She felt glad she had not given way utterly before him. Now she could hear plainly the voices in the porch below; his amongst them. They were getting up the luggage. And her uncle, too—he must know how miserable she was, yet she could discern his voice high above the rest as hearty and as jovial as ever. Oh, how could they leave her like this! The world was horrid; she wished from the bottom of her heart she was out of it. Then the 'bus drove off to the station. She followed it with her eyes out of the gate. She could just see him sitting in a corner with a cigar in his mouth. Oh, how could he smoke! Then it seemed as though

all the light had gone out of her life, and she threw herself on the bed and sobbed bitterly.

Meanwhile Mrs. Amherst had gone downstairs with two things uppermost in her mind—to have it out with Father O'Dwyer, and to write to Dick. "For," she muttered to herself, "there's something queer—something very queer, about this journey to Peru. At all events Dick shall know of it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRODIGAL.

"CAIN, Cain, you black cuss, hurry up there with the grub."

"Yah, yah, massa ; don't git mad 'count ob Cain. Dis chile gib you suthin' to eat mighty slick."

"Oh, hold your jaw ; m' head's splitting and m' tongue's sandy, and there's—here, damn you, where's the chica ?"

The negro pointed to a large jar on the floor, near the bed. He shook his head, and bent again over his cooking.

"Dat der arguandiente's jes killin' you, Massa Dick."

"'Bout time too, old man. Guess I'm only fit for manure now."

He took a long pull at the cool maize beer.

It was Dick Amherst's way never to spare himself. He was under no delusion about his own shortcomings. He would even set them forth for you with a frankness positively alluring, suggestive almost of repentance. And there were people who saw, or thought they saw, in these loud-mouthed avowals, evidence of a desire to improve.

But they were chiefly those whose knowledge of him was both short and short-sighted. In the course of a more protracted acquaintance with Mr. Richard Amherst, you came to learn many things, amongst them, that when he said he was a "bad lot" it was best to believe him, or at least to act as though you did. It was a trifle disconcerting to be rankly swindled, and then to be told it was your own fault, because you had heeded not your warning. And Dick Amherst had a little way of "rounding" on his friends like this, that became, in time, quite characteristic of him. So that even the most sanguine and long-suffering of that select little community had perforce to abandon all attempt at reforming him as utterly hopeless.

Thus, in time, what happened to him was that he came to be taken at his own valuation by those who knew him, which, after all, is no more than happens to most of us. And when this was borne in forcibly upon him, all he said was, "Well, at last they've tumbled to the sort of animal I am," and that without the least rancour or resentment in the world.

He had arrived about two years before, with an excellently well selected stock of intentions, and the promise of ample reward should he carry them out. But he seemed to think it was a stock to be got rid of as expeditiously as possible, and, indeed, to that end, everything seemed to favour him. As for the reward—which was, of course, the hand of Molly Prynne—he had ceased long since to think of it. It was the old story of the serpent and the bamboo.

His sensations upon arriving at Lima had been novel, for, in addition to a clean sheet, he had found himself—thanks to Molly—with a supply of money more than ample for his immediate needs, which were the only needs he ever thought of. The attainment of the end he was supposed to

have in view soon ceased to trouble him altogether. It is true he went so far as to question the very questionable companions with whom, instinctively, he seemed to come in contact, somewhat closely, if disconnectedly, upon the subject of the subterranean city and its treasures. But the Limenos scouted the very idea of such an anomaly existing in their own country, though they admitted a considerable tract of it was yet unexplored. But as all native civilization had passed away with the Incas, the survival of any city such as Amherst described, seemed in the highest degree improbable. They exaggerated largely the dangers of the Cordilleras, and urged that they alone provided an insuperable barrier to any expedition of the kind, however wisely conducted and completely equipped.

In fact he could find no one to sympathise with the project, nor any who, if they felt curiosity as to the wonderful story of Bevil Prynne, were inclined to gratify it. It became obvious that he would have to go alone if he was to go at all, and that was not in the least to his liking. And what was not to his liking, Dick Amherst never did. Hence his continued presence in Lima.

Not for one moment did the question of Molly's feelings weigh with him. Had he been asked such a thing directly, he would have unhesitatingly declared that he loved her. But his ideas of love were singular, not to say quaint. He was quite aware that she was pretty and young and innocent, and that she would be well-off some day. Then she had been his playfellow from a child, and that was the kind of thing which as often as not culminated in marriage. His mother, too, had been constantly at his elbow urging him on to that end. So that although he was keen enough to foresee that the girl was not likely to marry him for his own sake, he saw clearly that a marriage with her would be advantageous to himself, in that it would extricate him from a lot of bother. And she was a "devilish pretty girl."

For some time he took counsel with himself how best to go about it. And he decided that his greatest chance of success lay in a more or less direct appeal to Molly's womanly nature. So he drew a very pitiful and pathetic caricature of himself, which the girl took for a portrait, and the result was such as to gratify him exceedingly. He patted himself on the back for his "cuteness," for she had agreed to be his "good angel," exacting only as a condition that he should bring back her father from the outlandish place he appeared to have got to. And that was a job after Mr. Dick's own heart. She could not have offered him anything he liked better. It would be a taste of the old—the dear old unregenerate days. He could not—nor did he seek to—disguise from himself that his spasmodic attempts at what he took to be respectability were a dismal failure, at all events, unaided. Perhaps once he was "hitched-up" it would be easy. He was conscious of a slight sense of regret at parting with this beautiful young lady, just as he had some right to look upon her as his own prospective property. But he supposed that was the kind of feeling usual under the circumstances, and would pass off with his sea-sickness.

He had not been long in Lima before he found young women every whit as much to his taste as the girl he had left behind him. And he rejoiced exceedingly because he had in hand sufficient money to provide him with what he termed a "high old time," more especially as he felt the breadth of the moral atmosphere to be highly conducive to that end, and greater by far than that in which he had been forced hitherto to support life.

His letters home became fewer by degrees and beautifully less, and that

ecstatic morrow, when, at his dear Molly's side, he was to settle down, a wholly reformed and regenerate being, was never by any chance referred to even in his most maudlin phases of alcoholism.

His existence became abandoned and Bacchanalian, so long as his money lasted.

But even at his worst Dick Amherst was a man of considerable physical attractions, and no little fascination of manner. And when the time came that he had to change his last "*real*," these were what stood him in good stead. Of a truth, the devil is ever mindful of his own. A young Peruvian, who had known him in his more halcyon days, came across him now, and installed him major-domo of his hacienda, near Chiclayo. And for a while Dick managed the coolies under his charge with no small measure of success, until his drinking played the mischief with him, and once more led to his undoing. Still, he managed to find a job here and there, descending with every change a rung of the ladder. Now he had come to the very lowest, and there was nothing left for him but manual labour, or living on poor old Cain. And so he lived on the negro, whom, in days gone by, he had rescued from the brutality of an overseer in a nitrate factory. On that occasion he had saved the nigger a thrashing, and had ducked the overseer in the river. Henceforth Cain had been devoted to his preserver. He was a puny old creature, hailing originally from the States; but, somehow, he had drifted South to plantations where the law was of small account, and had suffered accordingly. From the day of his rescue by Dick Amherst he had never left him. And now he was working for him, getting a living for them both here in the Indian quarter of the city, by peddling fresh water. He catered, and cooked, and scrubbed, and washed, and adored the vagabond for whom he did it all. And so it came about that for once in his life Dick Amherst found himself looked up to, instead of the other thing, which, perhaps, accounted for his preservation of one last particle of what had once been self-respect.

A bare white-washed room, with a bed and a few stools, formed their head-quarters for the time being. The negro occupied a mat in a corner of the room. The climate of the Peruvian littoral does not make for a quantity of luxurious upholstery. At all events, the absence of it troubled Dick but little. He was in his pyjamas now, his feet bare, and his hair innocent of the touch of either brush or comb. It was quite remarkable how, through all his drinking, the man kept his appetite. Cain always knew when his master wanted feeding. And the creature put his very soul into all that he did for him.

"It am jes done, massa—golly! don't 'im smell nice!"

"Deal of sameness about your cooking, Cain," replied the white man, ungraciously, "rice and beans, goat's flesh and Chili peppcr—that's about the racket I seem doomed to."

They both squatted on the floor.

"There's a heap o' trouble gettin' things to eat, Massa Dick. Dem black trash don't gib Cain much fo' de watta."

"Who is it you're calling 'black trash' you damned peacock, you? What are you, any way?"

"I's a cull'd gen'lman fro' ole Kentucky, dat's what I is, Massa Dick. 'Fore de manciperation by dat Yankee President, dis nigger fetch a heap o' dollas."

"Rats!—you; who'd part for a one-horse article like you? Why, you wouldn't fetch a red cent for work!"

"I kep de flies off de massa when he sleep, same as I does to you, sah. Dem 'skeeters ain't easy fo' to kep 'way."

"Lazy hog, you! Here, feed on."

"Lil rice an' watta, Massa Dick. Ole Cain don't want nutin' else to eat."

"Now don't lie, but put yourself outside this, or I guess I'll make you skip some."

There were moments when what was left of the man's better nature oozed out, and this was one of them.

"You damned old cow you, if I didn't look after you, you'd fill a vacancy for an angel in no time. Here, drink some maize beer, and eat the blooming lot, I tell you."

"No, Massa, dis food am cook for you. A lil rice an' watta for ole Cain."

"Drink—the—maize—beer, I tell you, and eat; d'you hear?"

With many protests Cain obeyed.

"De Lawd bless yo', Massa Dick, you's dat good as nebber was."

"And stow that Methody lingo. You kept me awake the whole night with your canting hymns and rot."

"Law, dis chile neber sing nohow, massa. You wuz dat drunk, sah, dat I pray de Lawd fo' to sabe yo'."

"Chuck it, don't I tell you! You don't think He's got the time to listen to a second-rate old nig like you, do you? 'Sides, save your breath, you want it, and I ain't worth it."

"Massa Dick, dat not so. You's a good man."

"Good Lord, Cain; if I didn't know you, I'd say you were drunk."

"You is good, Massa Dick, an' ef ole Cain no find yo' in de Golden City, ole Cain no stay dere."

"Guess you won't be there long then."

At the sound of the words, his thoughts ran back to Bevil Prynne's manuscript and the Mother of Emeralds, and John Prynne and Molly. And then he fell to wondering whether, after all, he hadn't been "an awful damned fool." He came to the conclusion that he had. He wondered if it was possible even now to pull himself together, and have a shot at it. Then his eye caught the jug of maize beer.

"There's no straightenin' out that crook, anyway," he muttered. "Say, Cain; how about the girl I told you to keep your eye on?"

"De young cull'd lady?" He reached out for the tobacco. "Why, massa, I see'd dat chile las' night at one ob dem fandango rings."

"Oh, you did, did you! Well, she's an Indian herself, and a bit chummy with the peons, I suppose."

"Dat so, sah, but dis one mighty rich, I guess. Dey's all mos' 'specful to de cull'd young lady. When she get out, ole Cain hobble a'ter her, an' she wuz gwine inter dat dere Huascar Hotel."

"Oh, come now, you old black beetle, you, I'm a bit of a liar myself, but that's going it too strong. Why, the 'Huascar's' the most slap-up grog-shop in Lima. You don't tell me she hangs out there, unless—but no, she can't be a slavey; she's not the cut."

"Ole Cain see dat young cull'd lady gwine inter dat 'Huascar Hotel.'"

"Did he?—well, did you find out her handle then?"

"Oh, yis, Massa Dick, dey call her Mama Ocllo."

"The devil! that's rum. Why, that was the name of the wife of the Manco Capac chap who started the Inca biz. Seems I've struck a big bug amongst the niggers—she's mighty good to look at, anyhow."

" Yes, Massa Dick, an' dis chile he get inter de room while dey dance de panuela, an' dat lil cull'd gal she hab round her one big colla ob big green stones wid gold. Sakes ! "

" H'm, emeralds. Who the devil is she, I wonder. Where was this fandango business, Cain ? "

" In de ole cabin of Tockto, who sell de limonade. "

" Great Scott ! He's a swell among the Indians, too. There's something groggy about this. Guess I'd better loaf round a bit, and have a look at the show. Here, Cain, can you light out for the biz ? "

" Dar's your clean shirt ober dere, Massa Dick. "

" Right you are. Git. "

The nigger hobbled off. But Dick seemed in no hurry to dress. He selected a maize leaf for a fresh cigarette, and finished the chica. Then he threw himself on the bed again. His thoughts were with the girl Mama Oclo. She was a surprisingly handsome creature, and had taken his fancy hugely. For a week or more, he had noticed her in and out of the houses of the neighbouring Indians. In no way backward with women, he had forced himself upon her attention. And he had been smartly snubbed for his pains. Since then, although he had seen her frequently, he had not again addressed her. He did not half like the scowls of the peons. They could be unpleasant when they liked, and Mr. Dick was still much addicted to this life.

He grew tired of conjecturing who she might be, and drew out from under his pillow a letter. It was from his mother. It set forth in detail the perfidy of Molly, and it told of Gerald Hazel's expedition to Peru. She hoped that her son would receive the letter, although, sometimes, she really thought he must be dead, seeing that for so many months he had not written her a line. She trusted he would thwart Hazel in every way, though she hoped that on his part Mr. Hazel would succeed in finding him, and would bring him home to her, and then she hoped that her dear boy would at once marry Molly and settle down as a country gentleman should ; and a hundred other things never in the least likely to be fulfilled.

Dick chuckled. She was evidently just the same old " two and three-pence," as he put it. And he thanked his stars (though, if he had ever had any, he was pretty certain he had long since extinguished them) there were a good few leagues of water between them. " Five sheets, no less," he muttered to himself. " Jingo, how the old lady can sling ink ! she'd talk the hind leg off a mule. Thank the Lord, one can shut her up on paper. "

Then he fell to thinking of Molly. He had no great opinion of his own attractions. This Hazel was evidently a good-looking chap. He didn't wonder a bit that she had gone over to him. Yet it raised the devil in him against the other man. It did not take much to work him into a passion, and in ten minutes he was, what he would have called, pretty well primed. If only he could meet the beast, he'd show him jolly smartly who was the better of the two. It seemed likely he would.

" Comin' in search of Prynne and the hidden city, is he ?—and of me, too, Damn him, I'll show him the way. Guess I'm not the man to be played the angora with by a bally tender-foot. He'll have his work cut out to find me, too. When a chap ' goes under ' in this damned hole, he takes some finding. "

Then he dressed, and went down to the shipping-office to find out when his enemy was likely to arrive.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE LAND OF THE INCAS.

IN the patio of the Fonda de los Ingas sat Gerald Hazel, smoking his after-dinner cigar. He looked thoughtful. He was too deeply absorbed even to pay attention to his environment, beautiful as it was.

The marble court, roofed by the starry sky, bloomed like a garden with the fecund vegetation of the tropics. Blossoms glowed in profusion amid their leaves of glossy green, and from the placid surface of a quadrangular pool shot up two jets of water, like rods of silver. The palms dropped their supine heads, the orange trees were heavy with their burden of gold, and the spiky blades of the cactus sprouted menacingly in the corners. And under the multitudinous lamps the people lounged, smoking and sipping their coffee, now in animated converse, now striving to catch the strains of a distant band.

It was the sort of scene which, under other circumstances, would not have failed to attract Hazel, and to leave its impress upon him. But now he was ill at ease, and restless, and, susceptible as he was to beauty in any form, it passed him altogether. He fidgetted in his chair, and his cigar burned unevenly—always a bad sign with him. Half a dozen times in five minutes he took out his watch and looked at it.

Things were not turning out as he had expected. It seemed that the prodigal of whom he was in search had vanished completely, so far as the city of Lima was concerned. There seemed not a few who had known Dick Amherst in his palmy days, and, through the letters of introduction he had been careful to bring, he had been enabled to come in touch with them. But while they one and all were able to unfold a formidable tale of rascality, more or less embellished according to their individual proclivities, they confessed themselves utterly ignorant of his present whereabouts. Some there were, who, not averse to indulgence in conjecture, suggested that he might be found on one of the many inland haciendas; or, failing that, then in the maritime dens of Callao, if, indeed, he had not migrated to Chili. Others insisted that he was dead. But so far as search in the proper quarters could prove it, Hazel had already made certain that no one of his name had died within the boundaries of the city. This accounted for his present mood. He had grown accustomed to his own picture of Mr. Amherst in Lima. It seemed, henceforth, he would have to banish it. He had a very good mind to start for Cuzco straight away. It was from Cuzco that both the Prynnes had set out for the interior.

At last his look of perplexity somewhat relaxed, and gave way to one of recognition. The man he was waiting for was coming towards him. He rose to greet him.

"At last. I had quite given you up," he said.

"No jolly fear, old boy. Trust me to keep my appointments."

He spoke English fluently. Yet he was evidently not English. He was Don Miguel de Ercilla, a creole, and native of Peru. He admired the English above all other nations. He had graduated in London society; had learned its chatter, and its manners, not to speak of its

mannerisms, and its affectations of dress and other things. He had learned these things well, so that it is not to be supposed its vices had passed him altogether, although he was not a man to whom that sort of thing appealed in any strong degree. But, on the whole, he was as thoroughly whited a sepulchre as any devotee of Mayfair could desire. You seldom caught Don Miguel tripping. He was aggressively English—a deal more English than was Hazel himself. And sport, though he affected it largely, was no mere affectation with him. He was a right down good shot, and he had driven tandem from Piccadilly to Barnes in June, and come back "on both wheels," as he himself would have put it. He was invariably sent in first wicket down by his captain, and had covered himself with glory as a "quarter back" at "rigger." And, if he had not acquired just the real "swing" of 'varsity rowing, there was no one in "Leander" who would have denied that Don Miguel pulled his weight and more, on either side of the boat.

If only he had attended to his hacienda one half as thoroughly as he did any of these things, it would have been well for him. But the business of life did not attract Don Miguel. Sartorially speaking, he might have stepped from anywhere round St. James's Street this moment. The cut of his evening coat was altogether irreproachable, if somewhat "out of the picture" amid his present surroundings. Hazel had met him at the Club Nacional, and had been instantly appreciative of his exuberant vitality, and single-mindedness. He liked Don Miguel, and during the short time he had been in Lima, he had made it his business to see a good deal of him. Besides, he seemed of all those he had met, the most likely to be of assistance towards the thing he had in hand. He had confided in Don Miguel quite as much as was necessary to interest that young man, who, on his part, had entered into the spirit of it for Hazel's sake, because he liked him. They were on a fair way to becoming good friends. At the moment Hazel was anxious for news. He ordered another coffee and cigar, and waited for Don Miguel's report. That young gentleman did not keep him waiting.

"Well, Hazel, I wrote to a friend of mine at Cuzco, about Amherst," he said, "and it seems he was last heard of there, but my friend tells me he got into some gambling row about nine months ago, and the place became too hot for him. So he cleared up the Apurimac. So the chances are he's dead by now. Anyhow, here's my friend's letter, and you can read it for yourself."

Then he relapsed into Spanish, as he would do at times.

Hazel read the letter, and learned that it was from a friendly peon that the writer had come by his facts. It looked as though Amherst had really gone in search of Prynne, seeing that the Apurimac was the trail indicated in the manuscript.

"I concluded as much, Ercilla," he said, "when no trace was to be found of him here. It's pretty certain he has gone into the interior. I must follow, sharp."

"Mother of God, Hazel, is the fellow worth it?"

"For himself, perhaps not; but you see, there are other reasons—substantial reasons—I may say personal reasons, which make it worth any amount of trouble."

"Oh, of course if that's so, I have no more to say; but seems to me he's no good. Of course I never met the man, because for the last three years I've been in England. But from what I've been told of his goings

on here during that time, I'm afraid he really is a bad lot. He seems to have left his mark, and that pretty indelibly."

"I suppose you haven't heard anything he might have let drop about this expedition of his?"

"No, I can't say I have. He seems to have gassed a good deal about some subterranean city, where he expected to find emeralds as big as your head, and all the treasures of the Incas—but that's rather vague, isn't it. One's heard of that sort of thing before in this country. Of course, it's true enough, there's a lot of gold stored away up there, because when Pizarro killed Atahualpa—he was the last of the reigning Incas, you know—the Indians buried all the gold they were bringing for his release. But it's ten thousand to one it will never be found, and as to subterranean cities and the rest of it, you may take my word for it that's pure rubbish."

"But there must be some among the Indians now, who know where that gold was hidden."

"Oh, no doubt there are. But you may bet they'll keep their knowledge to themselves at any cost. Besides, the natives of the country up the Apurimac are savages. There is no sort of civilization known up there. Now, if there were any of these highly civilized hidden cities about, their influence would be bound to make itself felt one way or another."

"Well, yes, that's a fair enough deduction. But tell me, Ercilla, have you ever heard of these peons being tattooed with a rainbow across the chest?"

"No, never. And I have had to do, you know, with a good many of them in my time. 'Sides, I had an old Quichua nurse once, and she used to tell me all manner of stories about the Incas. But I never heard of anything of the kind, nor did she even hint at any existent civilization among the Indians. Believe me, my dear Hazel, there's no such thing—it's all a yarn."

"H'm. Well, at all events, it seems a case of 'gone away,' and I must follow. I promised his relatives, if he was above-ground, I'd bring him back; and I've no doubt of itself an exploration of the interior will prove diverting; what do you say, Ercilla?"

"I should say it would be jolly hard work."

"Of course it will. But I like hard work of that sort."

Then for a while the two men smoked on in silence. A grey-headed old negro came up to them with a tray of curios slung before him.

"Massa, buy some lil things for de house?"

"No," replied Ercilla, in Castilian, "go, black devil; out, I say. This is neither the time nor place for your traffic."

"All de time good for ole Cain, sah. Cain a po' sort o' chile. Dere's mighty fine tings in his c'llecshun. Dis cup wid dollas," and the old man held up a cup of red earthenware, graceful in shape, and adorned with quaint figures; "heah dis figger ob de llama, an' nudder ob puma. Dat de sun wid spiky rays, an' cull'd rainbow."

"A rainbow, eh!" said Hazel, reaching for the vase. "Here, let's have a look at it; where did you get it from?"

"Ole Cain get it fro' Tockto, dat sell de limonade, him get dem fro' dos Huacas ob de ole cull'd pussons. Dere is de skeletons berry fine, massa, an' de skull ob turquoise."

Hazel turned the vase slowly round and examined it minutely. He was struck with the marvellous execution and fidelity to nature of the

designs. The llama and puma were really wonderfully done. He felt sure it was a genuine relic of the Incas. And it brought to his mind again the symbol mentioned by Bevil Prynne.

"What about this?" he asked, pointing to the rainbow.

"Dat, massa, is de rainbow what de Lawd set in de firmament ob Noa. Dese po' cull'd folk dey lub it as der god."

"Speaker of lies," rebuked Ercilla, angrily. "You know well enough the peons are of the true faith."

"Tockto him no follower ob de Lawd," replied Cain, obstinately, "he lub dis rainbow berry much. Him hab it on him breast."

"And who is Tockto?" asked Hazel, striving to suppress anything more than ordinary curiosity.

"Law sakes, massa! why, Tockto what sell de limonade."

"Oh; and where are he and his lemonade to be found?"

"He means the peons' quarter, across the Rimac," explained Don Miguel. "I know it well; I was there the other day, Hazel; saw a jolly pretty little girl there, too, by Jove! and now I come to think of it, she was with a man selling lemonade and cake stuff."

"Dat's Tockto, and Mama Oclo."

"Mama Oclo—who the deuce is Mama Oclo?"

"She dat lil gal, señor. If you lub dat lil gal, ole Cain take you dere. She at Tockto's ole cabin dis night for de fandango ring."

"Mama Oclo," repeated Ercilla, thoughtfully, "Oclo—Oclo—why, that's an Inca name, unless I'm mistaken. Who is the girl?"

"Frien' ob Tockto, Señor. Him berry 'specful to dat gal."

"Respectful, is he; well, so he ought to be, no doubt." Then turning to Don Miguel. "Suppose we take a turn round there and make the acquaintance of these good people, eh, Ercilla? I ought to see something of your native customs."

"All right. I don't mind. I'd like to see the girl again myself. She was a jolly little creature. Her name's a first rate one among her people. She may be of great use to *you*, Hazel."

"Now, really, that's very good of you, Ercilla—I don't know that I ought to allow you to be so self-sacrificing."

"I mean it, Hazel. We'll get this good nigger to take us to the dance he talks about."

"Tockto no like that, señor."

"Then, understand, Tockto's got to like it," retorted Ercilla, in the imperious fashion of an over-lord. "You can tell him if you like, that we may buy some of his rubbish."

"Dis no rubbidge, señor—dis——"

"Hold your tongue, you black devil, you! We go, that's enough."

Cain muttered something under his breath. Then the two men followed him out of the patio.

"Any need to be prepared?" asked Hazel.

"Not in the least, my friend. Every bit as safe here as in London. All he wants," pointing to the nigger, "is to sell his own stuff, and not give the other chap a chance."

After crossing the Rimac, they left the more frequented thoroughfares, and turned into a series of dark narrow lanes. There was not a human being to be seen. The windows to right and left were protected by their iron rejas, and not a glimmer of light escaped into the street.

Gradually the buildings diminished in size and importance. They

found themselves in the low quarter, where walls of cane, plastered with mud, supported roofs of straw. Pausing at the door of one of these dwellings, Cain held up his hand. They could hear the sound of music from inside.

"Dis am Tockto's," he said in a cautious whisper. "Dere am berry fine dancin' in dere. Go in, señor, ole Cain come berry soon." Before either of them could stop him, the nigger had vanished round the corner.

"Seems we must announce ourselves," said Don Miguel, with a shrug. "Come on, Hazel."

They entered. Hardly had they done so, when two dark forms stole out from the shadows. They were Dick Amherst and Cain. Hurriedly the negro was detailing the success which had attended upon his efforts to decoy Hazel and his friend.

"Good," said Dick. He patted the negro's woolly head. "You've come home on the winner this time, sonny. You didn't spin too straight a yarn about that rainbow?"

"No, no, massa; ole Cain jes tell ob Tockto's mark on him breast."

"Well, that's gospel truth, anyhow. I don't want this chap to know that I know what he knows."

"Golly, massa, dat am mighty hard big talk."

"He mustn't know who I am, don't you understand, you stupid owl? If I hear you call me by my name I'll knock your silly old head off!"

"Dat so, Massa Dick."

"There you go, you fool; don't I tell you not to do it? Thought the rainbow tip would fetch him. Now if he pulls out for the buried city, I'm off there too, you bet. You can come an' cook, if you like."

"Ole Cain must go wid you, massa!"

"Right. Now keep your eyes open, and your tongue quiet. Follow me!"

He opened the door of Tockto's den, and walked in. Thus the Rubicon was crossed.

CHAPTER IX.

"A NIGHT ADVENTURE."

Tockro's cabin was little more than a cage of cane, plastered with mud and painted inside and out in imitation of stone. Its extreme lightness of structure was necessary on account of the frequency and severity of the earthquakes in the country. Its single room was surprisingly large for so unpretentious a dwelling, and boasted no furniture save benches set flat against the wall, and a rude wooden dais at the further end elevating the one distinguished guest above the beaten mud of the floor. From the white-washed ceiling swung a petroleum lamp shedding its crude light now upon a crowd of natives. Four or five deep they stood around watching the dancers of both sexes who gyrated and rocked to the most melancholy of music—music as tuneless as it was plaintive.

Expecting to see the usual medley of cholos, mestizos, and chinos which constitutes the lower strata of Peruvian social life, Hazel was surprised, and indeed Don Miguel no less so, at the prevalence of a higher racial type. The tall and well-formed men and women there gathered together were of a coppery complexion, well-nigh Caucasian in its fairness. Their eyes

were small and black, their noses aquiline, and their hair of a deep brown hue, oiled and elaborately plaited under chaplets of flowers. Over the usual peon dress loose cloaks of black stuff were worn, fringed with borders of the brightest hues. An unusual dress; an unusual type; and even Ercilla was startled out of his habitual nonchalance.

"Mourning for the Incas," he muttered. "Santa Rosa, this is more of a conspiracy than a fandango ring."

"Is there much conspiracy amongst these peons, Ercilla?"

"Dios, I should think so! They're always hankering after their early civilization. Their great desire is to be ruled by people of their own blood. At Guanta and Andahuyalas they obey their own Alcades rather than the Government; no doubt their object is to bring about a similar state of things in Lima. Hush, man, here comes our host!"

The advancing native was undoubtedly the master of the house, and although, according to Cain, he was but a lemonade seller, his whole mien gave one the idea rather of the chief of a free tribe than of the peddling peon of a conquered race. He raised his hand to stop the music, and enquired with grave displeasure why the visitors had thrust themselves thus uninvited upon the company. Don Miguel taking umbrage at his tone answered haughtily with the brusque superiority of a master. The atmosphere became a trifle charged, and the looks of the speakers defiant.

Leaving his friend, as native born, to settle matters, Hazel turned his attention upon the guest on the daïs—a handsome woman, who sat inert and listless under the arc of a rainbow rudely painted on the wall. In her attitude and immobility she was as some tomb idol of Thebes or Memphis. Her feet were drawn close together, her hands placed palm upwards on her knees, her eyes were unblinking and expressionless. Straight before her she stared in fixed gaze, appearing to be quite unconscious of what was taking place around her. Her face, of the pure Quichua type, was singularly beautiful, but disdainful withal. Haughty, still to a point suggestive of catalepsy, inanimate wholly—an imperious Queen Semiramis, changed into stone by enchantment.

Her dress was very strange. The sable of her cloak—for she likewise affected Incarial mourning—formed a background for the display of her many jewels. She was literally encrusted with gems. A broad band of dull gold, studded with superb emeralds, encircled her neck. Opals, pearls, sapphires, and fragments of lapis lazuli, threaded on silver wires, trailed from a belt of the same metal to the hem of her skirt. Bracelets of golden fretwork were on her wrists, and the fingers of both her hands glittered with the finest brilliants of Brazil. Her black locks, braided with many-coloured ribbons and sprinkled with gold dust, streamed from under a plumed headdress of white feathers artificially streaked with the seven hues of the rainbow. From this, on either side, nets of gold, sparkling with tiny gems, fell to her shoulders. The jewels scintillated and shot forth their sparks of fire at every heave of her breast. She blazed in the lamp-light like a King-opal, and a splendour seemed to radiate from her to the four corners of the room. Hazel stared spell-bound at this enchantress, so gorgeous yet so relentlessly immobile.

Of a sudden she called out sharply in a strange tongue, and Tockto, breaking off his wrangle with Don Miguel, hastened to abase himself before her. It was at this moment Dick swaggered into the room.

"Hullo!" said he, feigning surprise at the sight of the white men; "English or Yankee—which?"

"I am English," replied Hazel, taking him in at a glance. "But my friend here is a Spanish gentleman. And you?"

"Oh, I hail from the U.S.A. Wyoming, Wis., if you must be precise, sir. Dodgin' round to see the sights, I guess. Rum lot o' greasers here, ain't they?—don't look over pleased either."

"And why not?" enquired Ercilla sharply.

"Lordy, I dunno. Running a private circus, maybe, and don't want no white trash hanging round. Mighty stand-off-the-grass air they have, haven't they? Won't do any harm if I loosen my shooter." He smiled blandly at the scowling natives, and slipped one hand round to his hip pocket.

"Simply a rowdy American," Hazel had thought at first; "probably the human refuse of some digging township, such as are found down south by the dozen." But he altered his opinion on hearing the man talk, for with all Dick's ostentatious slang he spoke with a purity of intonation, and occasionally with a choice of phrase sufficiently nice to elevate him to a sphere far above any to which he made pretension. That accent moreover was palpably acquired—too obtrusively nasal to be convincing. The fellow was English he made not a doubt.

"Never have taken you for a Yankee," said Hazel, "in fact I should have sworn you'd been schooled on our side, at all events."

He could see the man flush under his bronze as he replied: "Well, as a matter o' fact that's so. I was at—at Bedford; but I've been so long in th' States now that I always count m'self a Yank. M'name's Dick——"

Hazel started in spite of himself. "Not Dick Amherst—you're not Dick Amherst?"

"Guess not; Gibbs, Dick Gibbs, I ticket m'self. Queer though you should talk of Amherst; he was a chum of mine till he got sent up; rare good sort too old Dicky, never could see the harm in him m'self."

From which it will be seen that Mr. Dick was at least skilful in his mendacity. The transposition of his school from one river to another—from Thames to Ouse to be precise—was all sufficient for his purpose while preserving the ever-important fact that it was on a river. And in the same way the retention of his own first name was likely to save him no little inconvenience—chance betrayal by Cain for instance—and at the same time was calculated to dispel any suspicions which might gather in Hazel's mind. And so Dick Amherst was accepted without hesitation as Mr. Richard Gibbs, and Hazel rejoiced exceedingly, in that chance—as he conceived it—should have thrown across his path thus early one so likely to enlighten him as to the probable whereabouts of the prodigal he sought. Indeed he had it in his mind to put a few leading questions to Mr. Gibbs then and there. But Tockto, coming up to them with manifestly pacific intentions—his expression of countenance was all gracious—made that impossible for the moment.

"Señores," said he, bowing gravely, "although it is not customary for the white man to behold our ceremonies, since you are here it is permitted"—this with a glance at the figure on the daïs—"that you remain!"

"And you will sell my friend here some pottery from the *huacas*, eh?" said Don Miguel. Again Tockto bowed. "To-night," he replied, "I neither buy nor sell. We celebrate a festival of our forefathers—the

feast of Hurachillo—and it is not lawful for us to trade. May it please you to be seated here, Señores, and to partake of our hospitality ! ”

Both Don Miguel and the Englishman would have preferred to be seated in closer proximity to the beautiful statue on the dais, and permitted themselves to say as much. But Tockto, with unabated politeness, gave them clearly to understand that such familiarity could not be ; so they were reluctantly compelled to sit on the benches. Near them several Indian women were sewing vigorously, and these a little later on were joined by the female dancers, so that only the men were left to maintain the movement of the dance to the sharp notes of the syrinx and the beating of the shallow drums. “ Why,” enquired Hazel, “ do pleasure and work go thus hand in hand ? ” Tockto sighed.

Said he : “ They sew the clothes in which their sons are to be dressed for the feast of the *huarachicu*. It used to be that the young men at this festival had their ears bored by the divine Inca and received knighthood ; but now alas ”—and he made a gesture of despair—“ we are a fallen race. Still do we keep up this ceremony although the children of Manco Capac are gone to the Sun.”

“ You are no Catholic then ? ”

“ I am—what the Señor pleases,” replied the crafty Indian. “ Will it comfort the white man to partake of wine ? ”

One white man at least was comforted, and that Dick, who drained a goodly bowl of Pica with great gusto. Indeed to maintain his courage to the point of recklessness he felt he needed it, for it was not without dismay that he had recognised Mama Ocllo in the silent woman on the dais. And the recollection of his last meeting with her did nothing to allay his feeling of uneasiness.

“ There’ll be a holy row if that tiger-cat spots me,” he muttered to himself, keeping well in the background the while. “ That sort of thing won’t do now I’m chummy with the tender-foot.”

As he sipped the dark sweet wine Hazel watched intently the extraordinary evolutions of the male dancers. It was a shuffling performance at best, two only at a time took the floor, each waving a kerchief rhythmically with the music. As they drew further apart their movements seemed to become more slow and accentuated, increasing again in pace and agility as they came together, while those around still clapped their hands to mark the beat of the movement. All this executed without the ghost of a smile gave one the most mournful impression. It was evident that the peons took their pleasures a trifle sadly. Hazel remarked it to Don Miguel.

“ Oh, all the so-called amusements of this order are dismal,” he explained. “ This dance—the *panuela* they call it—is a very fair example of what they term festivity. Ay de mi, but it is melancholy ! ”

“ Guess they’ve had all the monkey crushed out of them by you Spanish devils,” observed Dick, with his customary tact.

“ Señor Americano, I would remind you that my blood is Castilian.”

“ Guess I said as much ; but I’d lie low about it if I were you, Don. Oh, you needn’t get riz at me ; I am no Peon to be scared by big looks or swagger words ! ”

The man’s insolence was so pronounced, so uncalled for, that it was difficult for Hazel to refrain from pulling him up pretty sharply. But for two reasons he kept himself in hand ; in the first place he had no desire for a scuffle with an armed reprobate like Dick in a shady quarter

such as they were in, and in the second he was very anxious to make use of him to his own ends. But he could see that it was as much as ever Don Miguel could do to restrain himself. His fiery temperament was not easily kept under. So in the hope of averting trouble Hazel chipped in with an enquiry as to the name and title of the queenly personage on the dais. He met with a curt denial from Tockto.

"I would remind the Señor that he is here on sufferance," said the Indian, with a glance towards the lady in question, who still remained motionless and staring; "the name of such a one can have no interest for him."

"Talking of Mama Oello?" demanded Dick, in dialect strange to Hazel. Tockto turned upon him with so tigerish a gesture that the scamp gripped his revolver. Seeing that the white man was prepared for any emergency the Indian changed his tone. "You know our tongue, and you speak that name! Say," he said, "who are you?"

"One who knows more of Tavantinsuyu than of Peru!"

"Strange! You are not of our blood!"

"You can't be sure of that. Manco Capac was white!" The Indian appeared to be much agitated. He looked dubiously at Dick, then abruptly hurried across the room and prostrated himself before the dais. Dick, knowing that he was still in danger, kept his hand upon his revolver, and a very watchful eye on Tockto.

Hazel turned to him. "What language was that you were talking?" he asked.

"Quichua," replied Dick, his eye still upon the Indian. "They use it up in the Sierras, you know; it's the Inca talk."

"Oh, so you've been up there?"

"You bet; the Cordilleras are print to me. Look out, boys, there's going to be a shine in Kedar's tents!"

The warning came none too soon. A few words from Tockto had fastened upon him the angry gaze of Mama Oello. To her he was no learned stranger, but the man who had insulted her. With all the fury of primitive nature she sprang to her feet to pour upon him the most voluble of menaces in the Quichua tongue. There was nothing immobile about her now. "She-devil," sang out Dick, his revolver in hand.

With a yell of rage Mama Oello dashed forward with the spring of a wounded puma. With one accord the Indians followed at her heels. Miguel and Hazel sprang up and set their backs to the wall, staring at the crowd held at bay by Dick's revolver. As they drew their knives Hazel gripped his walking stick, determining to make some show of fight if necessary. Lithely as unexpectedly, Tockto slid under the arm of Mama Oello and flung himself forward. Hazel knocked him down, and at the same moment Dick levelled his revolver—not at the Indians who were leaping and howling around the enraged woman, but at the great petroleum lamp. There was a crash, then utter darkness, and for a moment—silence!

"The door—make for the door!" cried Dick, gripping Hazel's arm; "hold on to the other chap!"

Arm in arm the three men forged their way through the throng. The Indians bit and kicked and grasped at random. At intervals, through the hubbub, Mama Oello would be heard spitting and spluttering for all the world like a wild cat. Then a bluish flame leapt up. Tockto had put a light to a mass of cotton wool steeped in spirit. The door was but a

few yards off, now they could see, but a cluster of natives stopped the way. Hazel gripped a couple of them and hurled them to the right and left. On the nine-pin principle they did a good deal of damage to their fellows—upsetting their equilibrium sufficiently to allow Dick and Don Miguel to reach the door. Against their force it yielded as though it were of cork, and through it and over all they scrambled into the open air, the Indians tumbling over one another in hot pursuit.

The warm mellow night had given way to a dense mist. In an instant they were in the thick of it.

"Stick to me," cried Dick, breathlessly, "I know the beastly place blindfolded."

And he proved that he did. Whither he was leading them neither Ercilla nor Hazel—who had now come up with them—had a notion. With a firm hold of the wrist of each, Dick rushed on through the darkness. Up one street and down another, across the squares, round—it seemed—a hundred corners with unerring instinct and never faltering step he led them, until they found themselves across the Rimac, in the more familiar quarter of the city, where the gas lamps glimmered at intervals through the atmosphere—discs of woolly light. Of a sudden—Hazel never knew quite how—they came upon the doorway of the *Fonda de los Ingas*. Then, with a long gasp as truly expressive of achievement as of a desire for oxygen, Dick sat down on the step and mopped his face.

"Ha, ha!" he said, "I guess that she-boss has got left this trip!"

CHAPTER X:

"DICK OBTAINS EMPLOYMENT."

IF Dick had got them into their trouble, most assuredly it was he who had got them out of it. And, as that in Hazel's mind rather more than balanced matters, he felt that he could do no less than ask him into the hotel. A long drink and a good cigar were both things after Dick's own heart, and for their sake alone he would have been ready enough to close with the invitation. As it was, he particularly desired a few words with Hazel, that he might impress upon that gentleman the advantages to be gained from the assistance he was willing to lend towards the expedition into the interior. For Mr. Dick was very tired of Lima, more tired even of Cain's cooking, and desperately weary of being hard up. He felt that he, of all people, should have the right to participate in the hunt after himself. When he grew weary of the thing, and had secured to himself a nice little sum of money, it would be the easiest thing in the world to make a clean breast of it and reveal himself. It was a salve to his feelings too to feel that yonder beyond all bounds of civilization he would have the chance of settling up with Hazel about Molly, as man to man. There would be none of those awkward little restrictions such as he was bound for his own personal comfort to take notice of, in a community like that in which they now were. What the exact terms of settlement were to be he could not quite make up his mind at this juncture. But he had a kind of hazy notion that they would resolve themselves into so much cash. In the meantime, it amused him to play with his man, and to dwell upon the fact that he was master of the situation.

Things came about very much as he wished for, since Don Miguel, his

Castilian dignity considerably ruffled, took himself off home without delay. Nocturnal adventures such as that which he had just come through were in no wise to his liking.

On his part, Hazel was glad of the opportunity for a few words with Dick alone, and, as soon as the mist had shut down on Ercilla, he led him into the patio of the Fonda. A certain air of swagger, which was noticeable about Amherst, was to be attributed to the fact that at so late an hour he felt he ran no risk of coming into collision with some kind friend who might betray him. There was no false modesty about Dick.

It was after midnight, and most of the lights were out, so they sat there in the half light under a drooping palm. Here again, Fate was playing into Mr. Amherst's hands, for he had a very formidable string of lies on the tip of his tongue—formidable even to him—and, although he would no doubt have been able to deliver them nicely under any circumstances, he felt more easily able to do full justice to them, now that Hazel's keen eyes had no chance of scanning his face. His host roused a sleepy waiter, who was curled up like a dormouse in a corner, and, in course of time, a bottle of Pica and a box of cigars made their appearance. These monopolised their attention for a while. Dick had evidently made up his mind that this was an instance where silence was golden—or might prove to be so. As a strategist, he deemed it wise to let his friend have the first shot. Hazel took it.

"To-night," he observed, in the deliberate manner habitual to him, "to-night you mentioned that you were a friend of Amherst's. Now, I think it right to tell you at once that, by the request of his friends at home, I am here to look for him. Do you happen to know where he is?"

"That's a large order," replied Dick, "because I haven't set eyes on him for six months at least. He made Lima a jolly sight too hot to hold him, I know that, and I believe he went up the Apurimac into the naked lands."

"That, with slight variation, is the information which I have received by letter through a friend of Ercilla's, only he said it was Cuzco that Amherst had to clear out of, and put down the time of his clearing out at about nine months ago. But, as you saw him six months ago, you are evidently the one who saw him last!"

"Well, I'll tell you how it was. I was up at the back o' beyond, myself, and met Amherst making for the Amahuaca country."

"Ah!" said Gerald, recalling to mind the manuscript, "that's somewhere about where the subterranean city is supposed to be, isn't it?"

"Oh, that's all tommy rot; I don't believe there's any subterranean city. Old Sir Bevil was a liar——"

"Oh, you know the story, then?"

"You bet I do; and a dandy Arabian Nights yarn it is. Will you believe it, he wanted me to go back with him, and burrow under the blooming Cordilleras for that No-man's land. But I wasn't such a fool—not I, sir."

"Then you feel certain in your own mind that there's no such place?"

Mr. Amherst indulged in another drink before replying. "Well, I'm not prepared to say right away that it mightn't," he said. "I don't freeze on to the civilization business and all that poppy-cock; but as to treasure, there's no harm in that, and what's more, there's a deuce of a lot of it, and the folk up there are just crazy to get at it. There's a cache

in the Chima pyramid you may have heard of, The greasers call it the *peje grande*, and swear it's stuffed with gold and silver and barrow loads of gems, but I guess nobody's dropped on the right spot yet. Oh, there's treasure enough thereabouts, you bet, and ruined cities by the dozen; but as for this Mother of Emeralds subterranean business in full swing, no, sir, I don't cotton to it."

"Well," said Hazel, coolly, "I'm going to have a look for it, any way, and for John Prynne too—I suppose Amherst told you about John Prynne?"

"Oh, yes; he spun me the whole yarn. So you're going to look for him, are you? Now, don't you make any mistake, John Prynne's in the golden city upstairs this long time."

"How do you know that?"

"Amherst let loose a few facts he picked up in Cuzco. Seems it was from there the old man lighted out for the Amahuaca, some twenty years back. He got up the Apurimac right enough, but got left on the Cordilleras—dropped down a quebrada of sorts, I guess."

"What the deuce is a quebrada?"

"Oh, a crevasse, or rather a gulch. There's lots of 'em splitting the mountain flanks—make your hair curl to look down into some of them."

"How did Amherst get hold of all this?"

"Dick? Oh, he dropped across an Indian cuss in Cuzco, who, it seems, served John Prynne as guide—a Campa nigger from the Ucayali River. The expedition, he said, was attacked on the mountains by the Amahuacas, and they made precious short work of old John Prynne, by slinging him into a quebrada. Titu—that's the greaser's name—slid down a snow slope and, somehow, got back to the Rio Apurimac with a whole skin."

"Is the chap reliable?"

"*Quien sabe?*" retorted Dick, with a shrug. "I'm a bit of a liar myself; but Titu had no reason to invent, that I know of. Anyhow, Amherst cottoned to his yarn, and gave up the job of finding John Prynne. Still, he went on looking for Yayacarui all the same."

"Yayacarui?"

"Yes, that's the name of the subterranean city, according to the yarn of the Indian. It's a Quichua word—means 'rainbow.'"

"There's a tradition, I suppose, among the Indians about this city?"

"I guess there is something of the kind. They've all sorts of yarns about a mysterious civilization—expect some descendant of the Incas to turn up and boss Peru again, or, as they call it, Tavantinsuyu—bit of a jaw-breaker, isn't it? It means the four quarters of the world, in their lingo. But I don't believe the blooming city exists at all. I said it before, and I say it again. John Prynne never managed to get there, anyway, and Amherst's not likely to drop on it either. For all I know, he may be in his little wooden overcoat by this time. As for the city, it's a sort of Nephelococcygia."

"Ah, you haven't forgotten all your Greek, I see," said Hazel, a trifle dryly. "All the same, I don't quite agree with you about the city. An old nigger told me that Tockto had the symbol of a rainbow tattooed across his chest."

"Well, that's a frozen fact, anyhow—seen it m'self. But what does it prove?"

"Clearly some connection between Tockto and Yaya—what is it?"

"Yayacarui? Not a bit of it. Besides, if Tockto did know anything, he wouldn't split. They're as close as wax, these Indians."

"Then, again, did you notice," continued Hazel, reflectively, "over the head of that girl there was a rainbow painted on the wall? Her name, Mama Oclo, is pure Inca—and her jewels! 'pon my soul, I never saw such stones. Then their dances, and the keeping up of the old ceremonies, the mourning for their forefathers—all that doesn't look like fable. I can't help thinking the place exists, and what's more, those beggars we were with to-night know a good deal about it, I swear!"

"For all we know, Mama Oclo may have come from there," said Dick, tilting the bottle, to show that he had done his share; "must be an Eldorado, if she looted those precious stones along with her. Well, I guess there's no chance of my getting into Yayacarui, anyhow. She's got her knife into me—damned mountain cat that she is! Any more liquor about?"

Once again Hazel stirred up the slumbering waiter, and Dick was supplied with another bottle and more cigars. "See here," he said, leaning over the table, "John Prynne may be dead, or he may not, but it's my opinion that Dick Amherst is alive, and I mean to find him, and the city too, if that's a possibility. Will you join my expedition?"

"Well, there's no saying," Dick lit another cigar; "but I must tell you first that I'm a damned bad lot!"

"Oh, I'll take the risk of that!"

"Guess you'll have to keep your weather eye pceled then, sonny. I drink till all's blue, now and again."

"I dare say; that's not so difficult to believe!"

In no wise offended, Dick poured himself another glass, and proceeded with the catalogue of his iniquities. "It's a tidy while since decency and I ran in double harness, I can tell you. Give me a slant to rob you, and I'll do it safe. When you get me, Mr. Hazel, you get as bad a lot as you'll find about these parts, and that's saying a good deal."

For the life of him, Hazel could not help pitying the fellow. His avowal was shameless—perfectly abandoned; but, like his American accent, he had an idea that it was a trifle overdone. There was good in the man, he felt that instinctively. "Well, you have a couple of virtues, at least," he said, after a pause, "to place against these terrible vices of yours. One is courage—I had a very fair sample of that to-night in Tockto's cabin—and the other is candour, of which you have just afforded me a somewhat striking illustration. Well, even in the face of this none too alluring description of your little ways, I only need to feel sure that you have one other virtue, to renew my offer to you to join my expedition."

"Guess that puts me out of the running then, straight away—what is it?"

"Fidelity! I must feel that you are faithful to me, whatever you are—that I can rely upon that absolutely and always, that's all!"

Dick dropped his head. How could he promise—even though his promises were made only to be broken, as a rule—how could he promise this thing to this man, above all men? Here was his hated rival actually fallen into his trap, offering to engage him to accompany him upon a perilous journey into the interior, thereby placing himself at his mercy entirely—at the mercy of him—Dick Amherst, notorious for neither knowing nor caring for law, honour or morality? Why, with his know-

ledge of the country and the Indians, it would be the easiest thing in the world to rid himself for ever of this Hazel ! Still, he hesitated ! Fidelity, and to Molly's lover ! He squirmed a bit in his seat, and evaded a direct reply.

"If you realised what a thorough bad lot I am, you'd know that you were demanding the impossible from me, Mr. Hazel."

"I have your own confession that you are the worst of bad lots, my friend—but I don't always believe all I am told, even when it comes to taking a man at his own valuation, though I'm aware that is the valuation most readily accepted by the generality of people."

"By —— ! " Dick selected the most powerful expletive in his selection.

"By ——, you must believe it ! "

"Very well, then, I believe you by your own showing to be hopelessly, irretrievably bad. I am at liberty, I presume, to place my own valuation upon the 'showing' ? Supposing then, that I choose to believe that all these vices of yours : drink, theft—since you will have it that you are a thief, when opportunity offers—blasphemy, immorality ; the whole gamut of them spring from one cause only—suppose I hold that you are simply the outcome of a nature abnormally, pitifully weak, not bad ? "

"Weak ?—why, man, I'm as strong as a horse ! "

"Yes, yes ; no doubt, physically. But many a man with Herculean biceps is the puny plaything of his will and pleasure ; and that, unless I'm vastly mistaken, is your case, though of course I know nothing about you ; nothing whatever—how should I ? But I'm willing to back my own opinion generally for what I'm worth, and so I say, give me your word, your promise as man to man, that you'll be faithful to me, and I'll risk all the rest—yes, and make a new man of you too."

"It's too late, too late," muttered the remorseful Dick. "I might promise you a heap and go back on the lot, every word of it."

"No, I don't think so ; not while I'm at hand to nudge you. 'Come now, I'm not asking so much, and I'm ready to do a good deal ! "

Dick could not help being suspicious. "And why the devil should you bother yourself over me, that's what I want to know. You don't know me from a crow, and you're not one of the sky-pilot lot anyway."

"Well, you leave all that to me. Put me down as a crank if you like. I ask you to join my little picnic, and you tell me in plain language that you're a blackguard and I'd better look after myself. All right, I think none the less of you for the warning. But I'm entitled to ask something from you with such a job in front of us. You tell me plainly I mustn't rely on your honour or honesty, or any of the virtues most men lay pretence to, at all events—very well, knowing that, I ask you for what I'm most likely, to get, for what you're most able to promise and perform—fidelity, good faith ; you know what I mean ! I don't even ask you for that to-night. I shall be content to have you swear to it when we get to Cuzco."

"And how the deuce do you think I'm going to get to Cuzco ? why, man, I haven't a red cent ! "

"You will come with me ; it's from Cuzco we shall start."

"And suppose I don't join ? "

"Then we'll drop you in Cuzco, that's all, and you must go your own way. I think you may leave it to me that you'll be none the poorer when we part—if we must part ! "

"You're a rattling good sort," said Dick, getting on his feet. There

was a quiver in his voice. "See here, suppose I close with you, and promise now!"

"No; I think you'd better not, now."

"Why not?"

Hazel laid his hand on the man's shoulder. "Because I don't think you are *quite* sure of yourself," he said, steadily.

Even in the uncertain twilight Dick felt the gaze of those cold grey eyes. Impulsively he grasped Hazel's hand. "Good night," he said—his voice was quite husky now—"see you to-morrow. If you knew——"

He felt he dare not trust himself further. Without another word he beat a retreat from the patio. And he felt glad of the mist and the darkness—for his eyes were filled with tears.

CHAPTER XI.

"MAMA OCLLO."

FOR all that could be seen of Lima next morning it might indeed have been that "cloud-cuckoo-town" of Aristophanes to which Dick had alluded when speaking of the subterranean city on the previous night. And although Hazel had been in no wise led astray by the popular idea of a winter in the capital of Peru, which imagines a climate more or less subtropical, he had hardly been prepared for the soaking and all-pervading fog and drizzle, which, under the vernacular of "garua," was in no degree distinguishable from an ordinary Caledonian mist. Inside the house and out everything was reeking with damp. And to be told that on the heights of Morro Solar, but a half dozen miles or so away, the sun was blazing uninterruptedly, was but sorry comfort, despite any amount of interesting meteorological phenomena which might go to account for the fact. A glance at the thermometer too showed that there was little to choose in point of frigidity between Lima in August, and London in November. He could well understand how it was that when the last of the Incas heard where Pizarro had resolved to found his Spanish city, he rejoiced exceedingly, predicting that none of them would ever live there; for this part of the Rimac valley had for generations past served its purpose as a penal locality with the Incas.

It was a day calculated to dispel all visions of a "golden Peru"—at least in the month of August—if not to shake the faith of the most ardent believer in the splendours described by De la Vega and Cieza de Leon. As Hazel put it, it was "a beast of a day!"

Being one of those men who do not fail to profit by experience, he invariably carried a supply of warm clothing, irrespective altogether of what might be deemed necessary for the latitudes he might contemplate. Hence he was able to start off now on a stroll round the city in much the same apparel as he would have chosen for a Scottish moor. For no weather, however detestable and forbidding, was sufficiently so to interfere with Hazel's activity of habit. Yet, notwithstanding such bodily satisfaction as resulted from a good meal, and a heavy coat, he felt sufficiently dismal as he trudged over the slippery cobble-stones towards the bridge over the Rimac—the flowing summer torrent reduced now to a dozen or so of mere rivulets. On the old bridge he halted, and kneeling in one of the recesses, leaned over and gazed into the river bed below. The willows of the Paseo de Acho could just be discerned, but the prominent buildings

of the city and the glorious background of the mountains were all obscured in mist. For some time Hazel remained thus, occupied only with his own ruminations. Then the fog showed signs of lifting, enabling him to catch now and then a glimpse of the snowy crests of the distant Cordilleras. Not a little bored he made his way as far as the Plaza Mayor, and thence along the arcade for a saunter through the shops—if so they can be called, since they are little more than mere stalls. But he found nothing to cheer him here, and, disgusted with the weather, himself, and his surroundings generally, he made up his mind to return to the hotel until such time as there should be sunshine at least. He turned down a sidewalk—across and through half a dozen others, until in ten minutes he was hopelessly out of his bearings and obliged to confess to himself that he had lost his way. The fog which on the bridge had shown signs of lifting seemed thicker than ever here. He came to a halt and deliberated. Not a soul was to be seen. He decided it was no use waiting, and continued to grope his way slowly along, by keeping touch of the wall and railings. Suddenly he heard a shriek and a scuffle, and the voice of a woman wailing loudly three times in succession, "Yayacarui, Yayacarui, Yayacarui !"

As swiftly as he could he moved in the direction whence he thought the sound came. Then he saw two figures loom out of the fog—those of a man and a woman struggling together. Without consideration of any kind he made straight for the man, tore his hands from the woman's throat, and closed with him. The man was a zambo—the worst type of mixed negro and Indian. He was half drunk with aguardiente, and swore horribly. As Hazel wrestled with him in the roadway the woman stood by the wall clapping her hands in great glee. At last, losing patience with the brute, he treated him to an old trick he had learned in Cornwall, the immediate result of which was that the nigger found himself for the space of a moment in mid air ; the next he came with a crash to the ground. But he picked himself up, and with his head down, and the roar of an infuriated bull, made straight for Hazel, who was by the woman, close to the wall. Gerald, stepping to one side just at the right moment, let the nigger miss him and come full force against the stones. But the proverbial thickness of the negro skull was proof even against this, and though half stunned, the wretched zambo still managed to recover his balance. Then, before Hazel could interpose, the woman whipped out a small knife and slipped it deftly under her assailant's arm. A spurt of blood, as she withdrew it, and with an inhuman screech, the zambo fell like a log. His murderess seized the Englishman's hand and drew him swiftly away, and the mist shut down on the scene of the tragedy.

"Come, Viracocha : Come," she murmured, as they fled on through the thickness. Hazel, almost too bewildered to resist, submitted passively to her guidance. She appeared to be well acquainted with the city, for she led him on without hesitation, and with the greatest dexterity avoided any collision with the passers by. For some distance they continued thus, until a tall gateway appearing suddenly to their left, she drew him into the patio of a luxurious modern hotel.

There was no mistaking the woman now—it was undoubtedly Mama Oclo. The picture of her as he had seen her the night before receiving the obeisance and adoration of the peons in Tockto's cabin, was still fresh in Hazel's mind. How immobile she had been then, how silent, how disdainful ! And now here she was all activity and chatter, and talking to him in perfectly fluent English. From head to foot she was enveloped in

a black capote of lustreless material. Only her face was visible. It was very beautiful, Hazel thought—yet wicked withal. But, for him, her preserver, her looks were full of tenderness. He did not speak, for in truth he was too astounded. His silence seemed distasteful to the haughty spirit of the woman. She plucked a leaf from an orange shrub at hand and twisted it irritably between her fingers. At last she lost all patience, and with a withering glance of disdain she addressed him. "Say, my silent Englishman, does the sticking of that pig make you afraid?"

"Señora, the man will die!"

"Indeed I hope he may. I struck sure enough and deep! Would you have me spare a thief?" With a flourish of one arm she drew her cloak aside and displayed her gorgeous emerald collar. "This," she exclaimed, pointing to it, "he would have stolen this, but for you, who like an Englishman struck bravely with your fists, and I, like—with my knife! Between us," and she smiled, oh, so cruelly, "there is one pig the less in Lima!"

Hazel could not repress a sensation of disgust at the cold-blooded savagery of the woman. With a bow he turned to go. But she was not minded to let him leave her thus. She caught his arm and beckoned to a waiter.

"The elevator," she said, imperiously. "Come, Mr. Hazel, you must drink a glass of wine. We will go to my room."

"How comes it that you know my name, Señora?"

"I know many things—all things!"

She was pleased to be playful, thought Hazel, as perchance a jaguar might be playful. He determined to humour her. There was no telling but that he might obtain from her—as from no one else—the information he so eagerly sought. He followed her to the sitting-room—a comfortable, not to say luxurious, apartment. Then she vanished into a further room, and shortly the waiter appeared with champagne and biscuits. The position amused and interested him. It was difficult to realise that he was there on terms of easy intimacy with this queenly creature of the night before. He had certainly little to complain of from lack of adventures. They had begun, and seemed likely to continue, promising, moreover, to be both dramatic and romantic—perhaps even, so far as they might be concerned with this beautiful lady, a trifle dangerous to boot.

As she re-entered the room he was almost betrayed into an expression of surprise. She no longer wore the black cloak and gorgeous emerald collar, but a costume which in truth might have been made by Redfern for Goodwood. He wondered if she knew how exquisitely it set off the graceful lines of her figure. He thought it safe to conclude she did. She was modest too, in fact almost retiring in her manner. The chieftainess, the Mœnad of the gutter, had vanished completely; this was a demure young lady of surpassing attractiveness it was true, but such as he would not have been surprised to meet in any drawing-room of Mayfair. He felt there was something well-nigh uncanny about it all.

"I suppose I should give you tea, should I not, Mr. Hazel? You English are so devoted to tea; you drink it at all times, is it not so? But I fear the tea of the 'Huascar Hotel' would not be quite to your liking; so instead you must try this wine and a few of these biscuits—do, please."

He poured out a glass of the wine, and passed it to her, and then another for himself. Then he looked at her very hard.

"Who are you, madame, may I ask?"

The look she gave him was of pure coquetry. "I am not a French woman at all events, Mr. Hazel. Neither am I married. The style of 'Madame' is therefore not quite *à propos*, eh?"

"Perhaps you will be so good as to enlighten me then?"

"Certainly. You will be safe in addressing me as Señorita Pepa de Herrera."

"You are Spanish?"

"The name is certainly Spanish."

"Peruvian then?"

"Assuredly Peruvian. I was born in one of the villages near Lake Titicaca."

"And christened there without doubt," added Gerald, with some point.

"By the way, did not Manco Capac and his sister wife, Mama Ocllo, come from those parts?"

She produced a golden cigarette case from the pocket of her dress and held it open to him. "This is Egyptian tobacco," she said; "you will find it good, I think. I am no patriot—I fear, so far as tobacco is concerned."

"Thank you." He selected and lighted a cigarette, holding the match for her that she might do the same. He waited for her to continue the conversation. She did not keep him long.

"Manco Capac came from Paccari-tampu, in the valley of the Vilcamayu," she said, without removing the cigarette from her lips. "He advanced northward to Cuzco, and there founded the Inca civilization. Perhaps you are not strong in archæology, Mr. Hazel?"

"Well, Señorita, you see I am yet a stranger in Peru. I have only quite lately arrived, so you must excuse me if I appear but ill-informed. There are many things I would know—amongst them where Yayacarui is to be found!"

"Yayacarui? That is an extraordinary name even to me. What does it mean?"

"Your knowledge of the Quichua language should surely tell you that, Mama—I beg your pardon, Señorita Pepa."

She was clever, cool-headed, and withal strong-willed; but—she was very much a woman, and he exasperated her beyond the limit of control. Accordingly she committed herself so far at least as to relapse into speech unequivocal. "Why do you address me as Mama Ocllo?" she asked. The tone of her voice was raised, and Hazel did not fail to notice it.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "it did not occur to me that Señorita Pepa de Herrera, of the Huascar Hotel, might not like to recall her Indian name."

"And how, pray, do you come to know my Indian name?"

Hazel shrugged his shoulders. "I have ears, Señorita, and I was in Tockto's cabin last night."

There was a look of savagery in her eyes as she turned to him. "You go too far, Mr. Hazel," she said. "I should have thought you would have learned by this time not to meddle with what does not concern you. Are you aware that I have but to lift my finger to end you and your curiosity once and for all?"

"I must take my chance of that. If I am to die I may as well die in Lima as in Yayacarui. By the way, now that you mention it, that is a very strange name. I quite agree with you. I wonder what would happen if I were to call it out three times in the Plaza Mayor?"

"Why, what could happen?"

"What, indeed! Perhaps—mind I say perhaps—a band of Indians might spring as it were out of the earth to help me out of any trouble I might be in. Eh, what do you think?"

She looked at him now with something akin to admiration in her eyes. She seemed to realise that he was master of the situation—at least he knew more about her than she was disposed to like. His methods perchance were new to her. She evidently was at a loss how best to answer him. "Are you married?" she said, abruptly.

"No, I am not." His thoughts flew back to England and apparently she was quick enough to divine them.

"What is her name?" she asked.

"Now, that is clever of you, Señorita. But the lady's name can scarcely be of interest to you."

"*Quien sabe?*" she drawled, with a glance all significance.

Hazel recollected once having read a story of Balzac's which told of the love of a tigress for a soldier. He imagined he was feeling now as that soldier must have felt. If this lady was connected with the buried city of Yayacarui—and he made no doubt in his own mind that she was—he might safely look for trouble of no ordinary kind. Still there was no need to meet it half way.

"Tell me, Señorita," he went on, "why did you call me Viracocha? You see, I can't repress my curiosity on these little points, try as I may!"

"It seems you cannot. I called you Viracocha because you are so fair—so like, in fact, the brother of Manco Capac."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and you come from the sea.—Viracocha, you know, means 'foam of the sea.' Does that satisfy you? Now let me give vent to a little curiosity on my part. Why are you come to Peru?"

"I will tell you. I am here to search for a man, a hidden city, and the Mother of Emeralds."

"The Mother of Emeralds?" There was something of a tremor in her voice as she repeated the phrase. "I am afraid I cannot help you there. I know nothing of the Mother of Emeralds."

"No? Nor nothing of the city of Yayacarui, notwithstanding it was the name that sprang to your lips so readily when the zambo attacked you?"

"Did it? Well, perhaps it did. I am so familiar with the traditions of the Indians that it is quite possible. But for that reason you must not be led astray, Mr. Hazel—you must not credit me with knowledge at first hand when all I can boast of is but hearsay. Do you know, I verily believe that because last night I indulged in a frolic you have got it into your head that I am a daughter of some Inca! Surely you must see what utter nonsense that is? Why, all the Incas are dead and gone years ago; their civilization is at an end for all time. Now, do you really wish to know who I am?"

"Very much so," replied Hazel, preparing himself for a veritable masterpiece of mendacity.

"Then you shall know. I am a very prosaic person. Not at all the romantic child of the Sun you take me to be. I am a Spanish gentlewoman. My parents died some years ago, leaving me mistress of a sugar-cane plantation in the Carabayllo Valley. Ask there for the De Herrera hacienda and it will be shown to you. I am devoted to the Indians, and like yourself much interested in their glories of the past. Nothing gives

me more pleasure than to fraternise with them here in Lima, and occasionally to preside over their festivals. My jewels amazed you? I know they did. Well, it is natural they should, for they are some of the old Inca jewels which were buried with the dead in those funeral mounds which the peons call huacas. I purchased them at various times, and it pleases the natives that I should wear them. There, that is the whole story in a nutshell—does it satisfy you? Ask me anything you will."

"I confess I should like to have explained the meaning of that rainbow device which was painted on the wall in Tockto's cabin, and perhaps you can tell me, too, why a facsimile of it is tattooed upon his breast?"

"First tell me how you came to know that."

"I had it from the Americano who enraged you so last night."

"The Americano!" Señorita de Herrera was so far surprised out of her European reserve as to spit upon the floor—and that with vigour. "He is a brute beast, that Americano. He insulted me grossly. He shall die. I will have him killed!"

"Oh no, Señorita," said Hazel, calmly. "He is my very good friend."

"What is that to me?"

"Just this—that as I saved you from the zambo so you must pardon him!"

She raised her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders.

"As you please. I pardon your friend. We are quits now so far as obligation goes. Are you making a long stay in Lima?"

"No; within the week I leave for Cuzco."

"En route for Yayacarui?"

"Perhaps. Since you refuse me your assistance I must rely upon myself."

"I cannot help you to what I do not know. Besides you seem sufficiently well informed, if I may say so. You have evidently perused the manuscript of Sir Bevil Prynne to some purpose."

For the life of him Hazel could not conceal his astonishment at this. "What do you know of that manuscript?" he asked.

"I know many things. The peons are *my* very good friends, and the Americano—well, he takes the eleven a trifle too often to be able to keep a secret!"

"Takes the eleven?"

"Oh, that is a phrase we Peruvians have for drinking the aguardiente; it has arisen from there being eleven letters in the word. Well, perhaps we have talked long enough for the present." She rose, further to intimate that the interview was at an end.

"So you won't satisfy my curiosity about the rainbow symbol?"

"I cannot; you know more about it than I do."

"Nor about Yayacarui?"

"I tell you I am absolutely ignorant that such a place exists. You say it does; but I warn you not to believe all you hear, or you will find yourself in for many a wild goose chase. Good-bye."

Hazel shook her hand. "Shall we meet again?" he said.

"*Quien sabe?*"

"And next time you will tell me all about Mama Ocllo, eh?"

"You speak in riddles, Mr. Hazel!"

"Not such, surely, as you are unable to solve?"

"*Quien sabe?*" was all she said. And as he left her, there was the most enigmatic of smiles upon her beautiful face.

CHAPTER. XII.

"Cuzco."²²"HURRAH, you black cuss !"²²"Watta ole Cain say dat for, Massa Dick ?"²²

"Great Scott, what an ungrateful nig you are, Cain ! Here we are in Cuzco at the top of the tree : dandy clothes, slap-up grub and billets for the next twelve months. Say 'Hurrah ? damn you !"²²

"Hurrah, if Massa pleases,"²² said Cain, showing what remained of his teeth. "De Lawd am berry good fo' sure. He hab made dis cull'd gentleman cook to Massa Hazel, and gibs you plenty dollas. Praise de Lawd, Massa' Dick."²²

"Cain, you Methodist fool, don't I tell you the Lord takes no stock of me ? I have set the gilded roof on my sins long since."²²

"No fea', Massa Dick. Yo' is a good man."²²

"Look here, if you say that much oftener, you'll come to believe it. Well, what are you squinting at, Tarbaby ?"²²

"Dat aguardiente, Massa Dick."²²

"Oh, you make me tired. I haven't had my back teeth sluiced with it for the last week."²²

"But when yo' begins, yo' go berry fa', Massa !"²²

"I ain't going to begin. Curse your stupidity ! I'm a reformed character ; am I the sort to go back on Hazel ?"²²

Cain shook his woolly head. "Yo' talks berry fine, Massa Dick, but dat aguardiente ! Lor-gol-a-marcy, ole Cain skeered ob dat aguardiente."²²

"Shucks ! we light out in a week for the land at the back of beyond. I can't get out of hand in that time, and once on the Apurimac, I'll be as straight as a die. I'm a damned bad lot, Cain, but you can plank your dollas on my keeping square this trip."²²

"Hab you tole Massa Hazel dat, sah ?"²²

"I've told him nothing—I've promised him nothing. Hang you, I'm m' own master, ain't I ? Shut your head, Cain, and let me engineer this job."²² Whereat the old negro said no more, but shook his head doubtfully. He knew Dick too well to have much faith in his engineering capacities, so far at least as they might be directed towards moral rectitude.

Dick of Cuzco was a finer animal than Dick of Lima had been—but he was still an animal. Sober, well-clothed, with a prospect of congenial employment ahead, he had pulled himself together for the time being. He felt that Hazel's great kindness merited at least some show of repentance, and there was no one who could repent so thoroughly and ostentatiously as Mr. Dick Amherst. But his talents in this direction did not deceive Hazel. He was too clear-headed—too sceptical of human nature in general, and of Dick's character in particular, to accept so rapid a transformation—not to say reformation—save for what it was worth. Nevertheless, he recognised that the man was making a certain effort, and tacitly he felt he was encouraging him to persevere, by taking him away from Lima. As yet he had not insisted upon the promise of fidelity. The time had not yet arrived when, if made, it would be of any value. For the present it was sufficient that Dick was to accompany the ex-

pedition : and that Cain—who refused to be separated from his “bad child”—was engaged as cook. Nevertheless, before leaving Cuzco for the wilds, Hazel was determined he would have a clear understanding with this prodigal. On no other terms but an oath of fidelity—an oath which he believed he would keep—would he add the man to his party. In the meantime, he kept him interested in buying stores and necessities for the journey : and awaited the moment which he should judge favourable for the enactment of his bond. Such was the position of affairs at Cuzco.

Lima they had left sooner than anticipated. A second visit to the “Huascar Hotel” had discovered that Mama Ocllo had taken her departure. Whither she had gone, nobody seemed to know ; but it was significant that Tockto had disappeared about the same time. That there was some collusion between the *soi-disant* Spanish lady and the peon, Hazel was convinced, and he felt tolerably certain that in some way it had to do with the subterranean city. Still, on the face of it, her departure was not wholly to be deplored. She had clearly demonstrated that, under pressure, there was little she would stop at. Her assassination of the negro had been no less expert than her powers of mendacity, so that, Hazel argued, there would have been little to be gained from her had she remained. On the contrary, she might, he thought, be depended upon to make trouble of one kind or another, from the mere fact of her presence. He was not a vain man, but he could not help seeing that he had in some way caught her fancy—to which, he conjectured, her hatred were almost preferable. All things considered, he was glad to find her gone, though he scarcely dared to hope that he had seen the last of her.

He was not going to allow anything to turn him aside from the main object he had in view—the search for John Prynne. So long as there had been the remotest chance of learning from this woman directly or indirectly, anything likely to be of advantage, he would have remained in Lima. But now she had gone, the sooner he got on, the better. It was uncertain up to the last moment whether Don Miguel would accompany him ; but, in the end, the charms of a Limenos widow had prevailed, and with many a caution, and the heartiest expression of good will, Ercilla saw them off on board the steamer at Callao. On his part, Hazel would gladly have had the Spaniard for company, for he was a cheery comrade, and had all the makings of an excellent pioneer. But he had known from the first that such attractions as he had to offer stood no chance against those of the Limenos lady, and Ercilla’s decision was no more than he had anticipated. Thus he was forced to rest content with the companionship of the reprobate Dick, and the eccentricities, culinary and otherwise, of Cain.

Lima being as yet unconnected with the ancient imperial capital, by rail, the journey had to be made in part by coach, and in part by water. Embarking at Callao, on a P. S. N. steamer, they dropped south to Mollendo—the great wool-port of the country—then took rail via Arequipa and Juliaca to Sicunani, whence they continued to Cuzco by coach.

For the more easy manipulation of Mr. Dick, Hazel had engaged rooms at a lodging house, in preference to the hotel. The place was equally as central, being at the corner of the Calla Vela, which is near the Field of the Sun, and calculated moreover not to offer the same invitation to drink, which, from Dick’s point of view, was synonymous with, and so essential a feature of, hotel life. It served, too, as an excellent starting-point from which to explore the city.

Hazel was glad to find that in spite of the close proximity of the snow-clad mountains by which it is surrounded, and which constitute it, as its name implies, the "navel" of Peru, the temperature was in Cuzco but little lower than it had been at Lima. For the rest, the place was full of interest for him. The narrow streets, and blind walls, and occasional glimpses of flower-filled patios, shut in by ornamental gates of wrought iron, whose design was often of the most curious description, reminded him strongly of Florence, even though its architecture was for the most part purely Moorish.

He studied his "Prescott," with the diligence of a Cook's tourist, neglecting nothing, from the Cathedral and the House of the Virgins, to the Palace of Huayna Capac, and the marvellous fortress of Sacrahuaman. It was different altogether from Lima. There was an entire absence of that air of busy-ness which characterises the younger city. In its place was an all-permeating spirit of the past—of a truly glorious past, teeming with the most venerable Spanish and Incarial tradition. For several days he continued absorbed in his surroundings, varying his sight-seeing by further preparations and purchases necessary for the proper equipment of the expedition. In Dick he found as able a guide as he could wish, for the lodging-house scheme had proved remarkably successful, so far as that young gentleman's sobriety was concerned.

"Dick," he said, as they were returning one afternoon from the exploration of some Incarial remains, "have you noticed that some of these Indians are following us continually?"

"You bet, chief! I've seen the beggars sneakin' and dodgin' round corners ever since we struck root here. Guess they fancy we're treasure-hunting and want to loot their swag."

"H'm. I've an idea Mama Ocllo knows something about their game. What do you think?"

"Shucks! She's got her knife into me right enough. But you—why, I guess you're 'right bower there,' anyhow I can't see why she should want to tickle *your* ribs with cold steel. 'Sides, we don't know she's here at all!"

"No: on the other hand we don't know she isn't. I've got my suspicions. You remember what I told you about my confab with her?—I bet you she puts a spoke in our wheel if she can."

"Well, she knows what we're after, of course. Like a bally idiot I blabbed a good deal about that manuscript when I was 'under way' once or twice, and Tockto had his ears open right enough, I guess he thieved the papers from Amherst's digs, when he was kicking round Lima last year. Wish to God Amherst had kept his confounded secrets to himself!"

"You might have gone one better and kept them to *yourself*. However, it's no use talking about that now. I've no doubt you're right, and Tockto did collar the manuscript, as you say, probably under instructions from his chieftainess. Anyhow, as you say, she knows what we're after—I told her as much myself. This is her doing, right enough."

"Well, it don't matter a red cent so long as the beggars keep their distance. I've got my shooter handy, I reckon, and if they start meddling, they'd better look out."

"So have I for that matter. We'll let them rip for the present. By the way, how about the Indian guide you were to hunt out; did you find him?"

"Titu? No. 'Pears he's gone under—in a bone-yard hereabouts. But I've struck a Montana nigger calling himself Mayta—Quichua, for 'sure'—who says he can get us a dozen peons this trip."

"All square?"

"Oh, I guess so—as greasers go. This chap's done a lot with globe-trotters round this district, and seems to have brought 'em all back safe and sound. To go by his papers, he ought to be in Heaven—I told him to yank 'em along for your reading. You can bet he's all right."

Mayta proved to be a most desirable person. He was a fair-complexioned aborigine, belonging to the Jeveros tribe, who are to be found on the Maranon watershed. His credentials were nothing if not enthusiastic. Personally, Hazel took a fancy to the man, and did not hesitate to engage him. So Mayta set about collecting his men, and the final preparations for departure were pushed on with all speed.

It was now only three days from the date which Hazel had fixed for the start, and he was still without the necessary promise from Dick. He had made up his mind to settle that question one way or the other during the next twenty-four hours. As fate would have it, Mr. Dick chose the same twenty-four hours in which to kick over the traces. It was from Cain that Hazel heard about it. It seemed, that fatigued with rather a heavy day than usual, his scapegrace master had, on returning home, indulged in "just one" glass of aguardiente. After that the deluge! Finally, in spite of all entreaties, he had insisted on taking himself off, as Cain put it, "to de cancha—dat is to de cock-pit, at San Andres."

"I thought they'd put down all your cock-fights here," said Hazel.

"Dat so, Massa; but dere is plenty done widout talk! Massa Dick him play de debble at San Andres. Oh, Massa Hazel, do come and take de po' chile to bed—him mighty bad, for shua."

"All right, Cain, don't alarm yourself, I'll come; lead the way to this cock-pit, if you know where it is."

Cain hobbled off with all the alacrity he was capable of. Through a maze of back streets and side-walks he led the way, until he pulled up at a mean-looking adobe house, round the door of which some Indians and a few Spaniards were loafing. Hazel did not like the looks of them, and they eyed him not a trifle suspiciously. Cain represented himself as the guide of the rich Englishman, and a sufficient inducement did the rest to open the door. As they passed through, Hazel noticed a dwarfish peon slip in close behind them—evidently a spy, he thought, and dangerous, to boot. But he continued his way, intent on finding Dick at all hazards, the dwarf following closely.

The cancha was nothing more nor less than a thick ring of mud in the centre of a bare barn, lit by flaring petroleum lamps. The spectators did not attempt to seat themselves, but stood around four and five deep, ready to make good their escape at any moment at a given signal. The two feathered combatants had their spurs armed with thin steel blades, sharp as razors. With outstretched necks and ruffled plumes they faced each other for the fray. The atmosphere reeked with the smoke of countless cigarettes, and vendors of chicha and aguardiente moved through the excited throng, crying their wares. Some of the spectators were betting freely, nearly all were the worse for drink. At last, from out the midst of a little group, Hazel spied Dick, frenzied with alcohol, and gesticulating loudly. With difficulty he made his way towards him.

"Hullo! damned if it's not old Hazel himself! What larks! Say,

old man, look at those warriors—ain't they goin' it fine? I've won a pot on the viscacha, that's the little 'un. He's from Quito, as fine a little beggar as ever came out of a nest. Hi, hi!—go it, you devils!"

He was in a highly dangerous state to meddle with—quarrelsome and vicious. Hazel was puzzled how best to deal with him. He inclined to think his only chance of success lay in persuasion.

"Come on, old chap," he said, "you've had enough of this."

"Get out of it: I'm having a bully time. Leave me alone, can't you—I guess I'm a free white man, ain't I? Golly, that stroke ripped him up!"

It was a sickening sight, for the birds had pecked and lacerated each other, and were now streaming with blood. On either side of the ring their owners still kneeled, urging them to further fury. The noise was intolerable, and Hazel could see the crowd were getting more and more out of hand. If it came to a fight, he didn't stand much of a chance, situated as he was, with the ungovernable Dick on his hands. The dwarfish peon still followed close at his heels, and Cain never left his side. He deliberated how he could possibly induce Dick to come outside. Then Cain whispered to him, "Gib him aguardiente—more aguardiente, Massa Hazel. Den he tumble right down, and dis nig carry him 'way on his back."

Not a bad idea, thought Hazel. He decided to try it. "Well, Dick, if you won't come, perhaps you'll give me a drink, and I'll get along."

"You bet I will. You're a white man, Hazel. Hi, aguardiente, here!"

The man came in answer to his call, and poured out two large cups of the fiery drink. Hazel managed with no little artfulness to empty the contents of his upon the ground. Dick drank to the very dregs and howled for more.

The crowd was hustling up against them now, and Hazel's hand went to his revolver pocket.

"I've got left in this hell of a place," whimpered Dick. He was fast reaching the mandlin stage. "'Tisn't kind of you, old man. I am all alone—I'm——" He drained another cup of the spirit, muttered a few incoherent words, and slipped down at Hazel's feet. As the Englishman stooped to pick him up, the Indians and the Spaniards with one accord made a rush. Cain commenced to yell furiously. There was complete chaos, and the ring was trampled literally to dust by the riotous crowd. Fortunately, there was plenty of light. Hazel hit out right and left, knocking over half a dozen of them. He watched for his opportunity to drag Dick up to the wall and set his back to it. Then he whipped out his revolver. At the sight of it, some of those who had drawn their knives, stepped back. He let fly a shot at the roof, and the confusion became more than ever reckless and wild. He saw the little Indian tossed like a ball above the mass of heads. Cain crouching beside him, was making no end of a fuss. "Shut up, you fool!" he said. "Drag him to the door."

Before they could either of them move, the body of the dwarf seemed to come flying through the air, and fell with a thud at Hazel's feet. Apparently the little creature was unhurt. He clutched at Hazel's knees and, in bastard Spanish, implored his protection. A stalwart Peruvian, with one evil eye, made a grab at him, but a blow from Hazel finished all that, and he was trampled and swallowed up in the crowd. Then the dwarf managed to raise himself to his feet, and, with all the power he could summon, yelled out the name "Yayacarui," three times.

As by magic the Indians came together to a common centre, and, in one forceful body, swept over Hazel like a tidal wave. His revolver was snatched from his hand by the dwarf, and he went down under the torrent of savage humanity, conscious only of the fierce faces around him, and the menacing flash of knives. The next moment he was lifted high and borne swiftly out of the barn.

"This is the end of all things," he thought. He was dizzy, breathless, and utterly helpless.

It was quite dark outside, for there were no lamps in the narrow streets. Hurriedly he was rushed along, he knew not whither. He closed his eyes, thinking his last moment had come. When he opened them again, the Indians had disappeared. He was on the door-step, with Dick lying senseless on one side of him, and Cain, still terrified, on the other.

"Where are we, Cain?" he gasped.

The negro staggered to his feet, looked round him and examined the door against which Hazel was propped up. "Lawd be praised, we am sabed, we am in de Calla Vela, at home!"

"Impossible!"

"Golly, massa; dat de truph!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE DWARF-INDIAN."

A GOOD eight hours' sleep and a cold bath, and Hazel was himself again. The adventure at San Andres puzzled him not a little, and that chiefly because he felt that Mama Oclo had been the moving spirit of it all. He didn't know quite what to make of it—least of all what to make of her. Her conduct baffled him. He felt that he would be the better for an hour or two alone to run things over in his mind. Dick was still sleeping off the effects of his debauch, which was the best thing he could do under the circumstances. At least it postponed any discussion of his delinquencies. He sent Cain round for one of the horses which he had secured for the use of Dick and himself while in Cuzco, and by the time he had finished his breakfast and rolled his morning cigarette, the animal was at the door. Cain had taken on an air of vicarious repentance for his master's misdeeds.

"You is bery angry wid Massa Dick," he said, as he held the stirrup for Hazel.

Gerald laughed as he swung into the saddle. "Angry!—not a bit of it, Cain. We know what we've got to expect from Master Dick, don't we? If we don't we ought to. Angry?—no, I'm not angry. Puzzled at other things, that's all—much puzzled! Perhaps I'll be less so when I get back."

"An' what about Massa Dick, sah?"

"Oh, let him sleep it out. Then feed him, and put him on to looking after the boys. There's a deuce of a lot to be done to-day. Expect me in four or five hours from now."

"You'se a good man, Massa Hazel!"

"Think so, Cain? Well, you go and watch over the bad child and comfort him when he wakes with the news that I'm not the least bit angry with him."

He clattered over the cobble stones with a sense of pleasure born only

of the saddle and the keen morning air. But not a hundred yards had he gone when he saw three Indians slip round the corner. They brought to his mind more forcibly than ever the previous evening's adventure. They had probably been watching the house all night, he thought. Again Mama Oclo? "What the devil can she be driving at?" he mused. "Last night, protection clearly—but to-day? Perhaps she's changed her mind to-day. The mere fact of that little beggar having sung out 'Yayacarui' as he did seems to prove that he's in tow with her." He could only suppose that it was the watchword of some band—but it was the name of the hidden city too. He wondered what would happen if he were to yell it out three times! He had half a mind to try the experiment. He was riding now down the El Trionfo, close by the Rododero. The place was absolutely solitary. All the houses were closed up. His curiosity gained upon him, and almost before he was aware of it, he had called out three times loudly: "Yayacarui, Yayacarui, Yayacarui."

He waited, holding his breath. Still there was silence; but not for long. Softly there came the pad-pad of many feet, then the murmur of subdued voices, and half a dozen peons in gaudy ponchos raced down the lonely street. Then, as they caught sight of the solitary horseman, they halted and communed together. As Hazel turned in his saddle to look at them, the foremost, a lean stalwart creature, in a red cloak, bent a bow which he drew from under it. He had just time to give his horse the spur and an arrow whizzed past his ear with a buzz like an angry bee. Even now he was regretting his experiment. On past the Rododero Gorge he galloped for all he was worth, and did not draw rein until he was safe on the lower terrace of the Colcompata. It seemed the peons had made no attempt to follow. He halted and loosened his revolver. "Phew! things don't seem to be quite so rosy as I thought. But why, after letting me off last night, should they try to stick me this morning? The signal is evidently one of warning, but not for the white man's use, that seems pretty certain. I wish to heaven I could think that in leaving Cuzco we were leaving Mama Oclo and her gang. But I can't. On the contrary, I expect she'll give us a good deal more trouble yet than she has done. Ah, well, I came out here in search of adventure, and I've got it with a vengeance—let's hope the vengeance won't come off." Then he thought of Dick, and with the thought he laughed.

The path now became steep and dangerous. High on the left he could see the Eastern terraces of the Sacsahuaman fortress, and to the right of him the depths of the Gulch. He rode on until he reached the plateau and then through the Tuipuncu gateway, until he came on to a small pampa scored over with the remains of a once massive fortress. For the best part of an hour he rambled about exploring this most wonderful Incarial work. It was difficult to conceive how those colossal stones had ever been got into position. He continued his way on to the Calvario which overlooks the city. There he tethered his horse and lit his pipe and sat down on the parapet which commands perhaps the finest of all views of Cuzco and the Cordillera peaks. He let his thoughts wander amid the romance and history which were associated with that spot where he now was. And what romance, what history it was! There the golden wedge of Manco Capac had sunk into the ground, from there had been exercised the paternal government of the Incas, thence ran the four great highways to the furthestmost parts of the Empire. He tried to conjure up before his mind the sacred city of Huyana Capac as it must have been before the

coming of the Spaniards—to rebuild in his imagination the palace of Inca Rocca, the mammoth walls of which remain as if to put to very shame all efforts of the present or intervening ages; the convent of the Sun Virgins consecrated now to the nuns of Romish faith; the most gorgeous Temple of the Sun, which tradition tells surpassed even the splendours of Solomon's fane. All these he tried to picture now as they had been. And he called to mind what Charles the Fifth had said of the Spanish Alhambra, "Unhappy the man who lost all this!" Why, he wondered, should Spain so have played the rôle of destroyer? "A torch she had had to burn, but no hammer to build." And now retribution had her, and she was paying the penalty for her depredatory past—a past of wanton misrule and devilry what time three glorious civilizations—Moorish, Mexican, and Peruvian—had been demolished! She was at bay now in her own fastness. No longer did the great yellow banner of Castile—once so famous, since so infamous—flaunt itself in the perfumed breezes of the New World. Her Empire was passed away, her chivalry itself non-existent. She had had a mission from heaven direct, and in it she had failed, utterly, hopelessly, miserably! And for why? Ask it in Rome!

Hazel was absorbed in these ruminations. He did not hear the soft footsteps behind him. But a stone slipped and rattled down, and noticing it, he turned, and saw the diminutive figure of a native approaching. It was the Indian dwarf—such a dwarf as must have led Rip up the haunted Catskills. The legend flashed through his mind at the moment. Without a word the little creature rushed forward and embraced his riding boots. For a moment he did so in silence, then he let fly a perfect volley of what was evidently meant to be expressive of gratitude and eulogy. That much Hazel divined, though the mixture of English and bastard Spanish which the little man employed made it all but unintelligible.

"Santo Sol; you save me; you cover me. May Con sit in your house para eternidad, oh most generous Señor de los Ingles."

"Then I saved one speaking my own tongue—is it not so?" said Hazel. "For the present, sit you here and let us talk," though in what vernacular that was going to be accomplished it was difficult to say. The sample of Spanish and English—either equally bastard—did not make for fluency.

"Good, Viracocha; let us talk. But first, los huacas!" With every show of gravity the little man advanced towards a heap of stones, and throwing thereon a ball of coca, exclaimed reverentially. "Apachietamuchani," which being interpreted means, "I worship at this heap"; so Hazel ascertained from the pocket dictionary of the Quichua which he made a point now of always having with him. It was evidently an offering to the local gods, and argued that the little red Indian was no good Catholic. He slipped another coca pellet into his mouth, and sat down close by Hazel, whom he stared at most gravely.

His dress was that of the Sierra Indian—a green coat, black breeches, and a black cap adorned with many coloured ribbons. His breast and legs were bare, and on his feet were llama leather sandals. His shock of coarse black hair gave to his cranium a disproportionately large appearance. His mouth was wide and his eyes of extraordinary size. A grotesque little personage truly, yet of countenance not unpleasing, and expression touchingly human, and typical of the Indian chiefly by reason of his beak-like nose. Mis-shapen and dwarfed of stature as he was, he in no wise repelled you.

"And your name, good friend?" asked Hazel.

"Graciosa, Señor, my name is Puca, for this"—he laid a lean finger on his cheek—"so am I known. But the huaca of my ayllu is Cuy, and so the Villac Umu call me. Cusi-Cuy is Puca's name, Viracocha."

This was a teaser, and necessitated copious reference to the dictionary, which the little man seemed not at all to resent, waiting most patiently. Hazel made out that he was called Puca evidently from his complexion, since puca means red. That the huaca (diety) of his ayllu (tribe) was a Cuy (guinea-pig) and that Villac Umu (high priest; literally the head which gives counsel) had christened him Cusi-Cuy (the happy guinea-pig).

"And where do you come from, Puca?"

The Indian swung his arms to intimate the four points of the compass. "Everywhere—from everywhere," said he; and he produced a kind of shallow drum, which he proceeded to beat with a stump of wood. "I wander, and I make song, Señor."

"Ah, a Nanki-Pooh of sorts," mused Hazel. "So you're a strolling musician, eh?" he said.

Puca nodded, and rapped his tambourine, and began to chant in a musical voice. The song he sang dated probably as far back as the time of Pachacutec Inca, which was about 1350. Here it is translated afterwards by Dick from Hazel's transcript.

Dear humming-bird, you bring for bread
The yellow maize, the purple maize:
The sun will burn thro' many days,
His arrows shoot the Snow-One dead:
You tell us so, and you we praise,
Ah Ccenti, rainbow-feathered Ccenti!

Swift humming-bird, you bring the girl
With bosom white as cotton boll,
Her eyes 'neath rainbow arches roll,
Her forehead shines, a moon of pearl
Inwoven, black and gold, her curl,
Ah Ccenti, emerald-tinted Ccenti!

Bright humming-bird, bring back the sway
Of Manco Capac, father mild:
Restore his altars undefiled,
To golden skies transform the gray,
And let us greet the Sun's own child,
Ah Ccenti, ever-darting Ccenti!

"Ah! as pretty sounding a yaravi (song) as one wants to hear," said Hazel, as he finished.

The Indian looked up quickly. "Quichua! Lord, you talk Quichua, Señor?"

"Just a word or two, Puca—no more. I cannot follow all your song, but the Ccenti is the humming-bird, isn't it?"

"Yes, Señor—Ccenti is the humming-bird." He stopped abruptly and stared at Hazel. His eyes were full of curiosity.

"Why come you here, oh, Viracocha?" he burst out, "there is sickness in the air for you."

"Sickness!—trouble! for me, Puca? Then it is through Mama Ocllo that it comes—tell me!"

"The coya of mighty Manco! Ay di mi, señor, she dwells now in the bright, bright mansion of the sun!"

"I speak of Mama Ocllo who lives, Puca!"

"Truly, Señor, I know not such one!"

"Think again, Puca, and you will know. Was it not she who taught you when in trouble to cry 'Yayacarui'?"

The Happy Guinea-pig appeared to be genuinely astounded.

"Soy hambrecillo, Señor, and I know nothing. One friend, muy bueno, teach me to cry "Yayacarui" in trouble, and help come. Mama Oclo? I know not Mama Oclo. No I not. Por Santa Rosa la Patrona de todas das Americas, I know not that one, Señor!"

Could it be that he spoke truth—that from a friend he had heard this name, and parrot-like called it out in time of trouble. He swore that so it was; but, be it noted, he swore by a Catholic saint, an oath less binding upon him than one drawn from his own pagan faith.

"Open your coat, Puca," said Hazel, "and show me what sort of chest you have." He beat his own breast to indicate his meaning. The Indian obeyed without a word, and laid bare the red skin. Then only was Hazel convinced that he had spoken truth, for there was no rainbow scored thereon, and without the symbol he would not be one with Mama Oclo and her band.

"Tell me, Puca, why did you help me last night?"

"Viracocha, you save me from el cuchillo of the Spanish devil—viejo demonio Espanol. Puca save you—he call Yayacarui, and Indians come!"

"Then perhaps you can tell me why an Indian in a red poncho shot an arrow at me as I rode by this morning?"

The Happy Guinea-pig shrugged his shoulders. "Quien sabe, Señor?" was all he said.

"H'm, you seem to be pretty much in the dark yourself. But come now, Puca, you can tell me about Yayacarui—the hidden city, the——"

"Señor!" The little creature's face took on an expression of abject terror. "Señor," he said, "speak of it not. There is a sick air for you. Dios! No word!"

"Oh! You evidently know a good deal about it!"

Puca glanced uneasily to right and left. Then he nodded. "Puca hear Yayacarui near music-hill," he whispered, "Si, Señor, devils in the earth. Infernellos de los Ingas!"

"Jove, that's the place," exclaimed Hazel, excitedly.

"No, no!" Puca shook his head violently. "Music-hill no more. I go all over Peru. I hear speak Yayacarui—I see rainbow here, here!" he touched his breast, "but no. Yo sabo poco—muy poco."

Hazel considered. The man knew apparently that the city was in the neighbourhood of the musical mountain, as it was said to be in the manuscript of Bevil Prynne, but he was afraid that was about all he did know.

"See here, Puca," he went on, "take me to that mountain and I'll give you more money than you have even seen in your life."

He was hardly prepared for what followed. With a shriek Puca jumped up, and made off as fast as his tiny legs could carry him. By the time Hazel had realised the fact, he was out of sight.

Without further ado he mounted his horse and rode back to the city. As he clattered up the Calle Vela, Cain, who was looking out for him, ran down the street in a state of wild excitement.

"Massa, massa," he cried, "one of dem Indians hab been killed—killed wid a knife, massa Hazel. Gol-a-mighty, dey kill dat por ting right dere near de house." Gerald drew rein sharply. "An Indian killed! Near which house?—ours?"

" Yes, massa, Cain saw him dead wif dese berry two eyes."

" Wearing a red poncho ? "

The negro scratched his woolly pate and stared. " Golly, massa, how you know dat ? Yes, fo' su' ; him hab red poncho ! "

CHAPTER XIV.

" TWO PROMISES."

As soon as Cain, having relieved himself of his great piece of news, had taken himself off, Hazel crossed the street to where the blood of the Indian bespattered the pavement. He had no doubt that the murdered man was he who had shot at him in the morning. Was this Mama Oclo again ? He had a very shrewd suspicion it was ; certainly the punishment of this peon had been both speedy and drastic. And that was altogether characteristic of this great lady. She had evidently a mind to constitute herself his guardian angel for the time being. And if her methods were a trifle uncomfortable, not to say mystic, it did not become him, as the recipient, to enquire too nicely into them.

Musing thus he crossed over to the house again, and went in. His ride had given him an appetite worthy of attention. As he entered the eating-room a certain dishevelled-looking gentleman, of a decidedly woe-begone expression, was leaning up against the wall with his hands in his pockets. His general mien was one of intense pity for himself. He greeted Hazel with a scowl, having in it something of defiance. It was met with the most genial of smiles.

" Ah, Dick, how are you—all right ? Come on, my boy, and feed—or have you fed ? I see one of Cain's culinary creations in the shape of a ' puchero ' inviting mastication if not digestion—that ought to tempt you ! "

The expression of defiance had merged now into one of unfeigned surprise. This was the " coals of fire " racket, and he didn't appreciate it in the least. It was a mean way to treat a fellow who not only expected to be rated soundly for his misdeeds, but was prepared and ready to " face the music." He was not going to be done like that ; so he brought the subject on the carpet without more ado. " Now then, Hazel," he said, " I'm waiting ; come on, out with it ! "

" Out with what ? I don't know what the deuce you're talking about ; but it's ' in with it ' with me, just for the moment." He drew his chair to the table.

" What, aren't you goin' to bully-rag me ? "

" Bully-rag you, what for ?—don't I tell you, man, I'm starving ! "

" Oh, damn it all, I thought you liked me a bit better than that ! "

" Of course I like you, Dick—here, you want a drink, that's what's the matter. There's the chica ; see what that'll do for you."

Dick proceeded. " Then if you like me, why the devil don't you show it by pitchin' into me ? I'm ready ! "

" My good Richard, you should know by this time that I'm not the man to weave ropes of sand."

" But it's the last time, Hazel—by Gad, I swear it's the last time."

" Of course it is, Dick—so was the time before."

" You don't believe me ! "

" No, if you are referring to the state you were in last night, frankly

I don't. Why should I? Besides, you know it's no affair of mine if you choose to go and get 'paralytic' this morning!"

"But—Hazel, I say—you're chaffin', aren't you? It is somethin' to you—I want it to be something to you, Hazel. I thought it was. I swear I'm not the beast you think I am."

"Now, did I say you were a beast?"

"Lord! D'you think I can't see it in your face?" Dick dropped into a chair. "Well, perhaps you're right. I *am* a beast—a brute of a beast, and worse, I dare say, than that. I know I went on the ran-tam last night and made a holy show of myself; but I'm a kind of 'Crazy Jane,' Hazel, when I get liquor aboard. I told you I was a bad lot——"

"And as I told you when you told me—you're not. Only a fool, Dick—a complete fool!"

"Confound you, Hazel, I'm not a fool. I guess I can show you or any other white man round. The chap's not built that'll take a rise out of *me*."

Hazel was really enjoying his "puchero." The appetite set up by his ride was sauce, and Dick's little harangue was good enough as garniture thereto.

"You put me in mind, Dick, of a man I know at home—a bilious, lethargic, querulous beast, who exists under the firm conviction that he is an invalid—to be precise, a victim to 'neurosis'—that's how he likes to hear it called. Occasionally, when they want to humour him especially, his friends call it 'neuritis'—both terms are equally idiotic as applied to his particular trouble. As a matter of fact, to continue in correct therapeutic style, the chap's got a cirrhotic liver—that's a liver badly out of order, Dick. In short it's bile, man—pure bile. But, tell him that, and he's your enemy for life. You remind me, I say, of that chap. You don't mind my telling you you're a damned bad lot, but let me mention the word 'fool' and you're up on stilts in no time. But you are a fool, Dick—an awful fool, nevertheless. Now, what have you to say?"

"Say?" Dick thumped the table and glared. "Why if any man but you had said as much I'd have dropped him in his tracks. You don't know the kind of poison I am, Hazel."

"Oh yes, I do. I've just told you so. Now, Dick, be sensible. You know this sort of thing won't go down with me, though it might with some people. This self-condemnatory business of yours amounts to a vice. It's a species of vanity. You like to proclaim what you are pleased to call your iniquities from the house-tops. Why, man, they're not iniquities at all, but little piffing lapses into this, that, or the other. Do you know you haven't got the strength of will to accomplish any real iniquity? Upon my soul, I'd think more of you if you had!"

"Well, I'm damned!"

"No, my boy, you're not, nor will you ever be. Your fate will be no worse than relegation to the intermediate limbo which we are told—though I admit, the people who tell us know precious little about it—forms the buffer state between Paradise and Sheol. That's your destination, Dick. And what I say is that there's no dignity in it—it's where all the silly asses go to."

A long draught of maize beer was absolutely necessary to Dick on top of this. Not that he had any retort to make even then. "What do you want me to do?" he asked, in all humility.

"Come with me in search of El Dorado."

"Well, I am coming, ain't I—else, what the deuce am I roosting in Cuzco for?"

"Maybe for your own gratification. We have not yet concluded our little agreement, have we? I must have a man I can trust to work under me. Now the question is, can I trust you?"

"Yes, by thunder, you can!"—he rose excitedly. "You asked me to swear it at Lima. Well, I swear it now."

"No—hold hard a moment; fidelity as I understand it implies absolute confidence, man to man." He paused and looked very searchingly at Dick. "Now, I don't fancy I have your confidence—you have, unless I am mistaken, something to tell me—something, shall I say, to confess?"

"Confess! Why, what more can I confess? I've told you everything, Hazel. I know I'm a drunkard, a gambler, a——"

"Quite so—you've told me no little about *what* you are; but who you are; that's what I mean, Dick. *Who you are!*"

"Why, who the devil should I be? I'm—I'm Dick Gibbs, of course—Dick Gibbs; I told you!"

"Dick, you may be; Gibbs, you're not, any more than I am."

"Oh, hell! P'raps you can figure it out for yourself then?"

Hazel laughed. "That's just what I *have* done, my good Amherst—and that long since."

Hazel smoked on, and the detected one stared at him as though he were some wild and wonderful animal. By what process of deduction his undoing had been accomplished he could not conceive.

"What awful rot you talk," he blustered, "I'm not Amherst—how the devil can I be when he's my pal?"

"There again, you're wrong; he isn't; he's your worst enemy, because he is yourself. Now, you'd very much better drop this game and own up. I've no stomach for any more lies."

In a cold fury Dick jumped up and laid a hand on his revolver. "Damn you, Mr. Gerald Hazel. What d'you mean by talking to me like this? I tell you I'm sick of your infernal superior airs. I'm as good a man as you any day of the week, as I can prove right away. Get your shooter ready, and we'll see."

"When will you have it, Amherst—now?"

He was irritating the other man intensely by his immobility, and he knew it; and because he liked him—reprobate as he was—so sincerely, he could have had it in his heart to take him by the hand and end the trouble then and there. He hated to be obliged to play the prig. But Mr. Dick required these methods. He must see the thing through now.

"Confound you, my name's Gibbs!" yelled Dick.

"Oh, all right—just as you please. We'll have it Gibbs, if you like. It really makes no difference. Sit down and finish your beer—you'll feel better then."

"By thunder, I'll kill you!"

"Kill away—if you dare!"

Their eyes met. Hazel knew that the supreme moment had come. And he looked the man through to his very soul, until he flung the weapon on the table and turned away. Then the situation adjusted itself. The over-wrought nerves of the unhappy Dick gave way, and he burst into tears.

Hazel pitied him from the bottom of his heart. Yet he dared not show

it. On the contrary, he walked round the table and shook him sharply by the shoulder.

"Now stop your damned nonsense, Amherst, and be a man," he said. "I tell you this sort of tommy-rot doesn't appeal to me. If you are keen on keeping up the rôle of repentant sinner, there's a church round the corner, where it'll go off better than here."

"Damned little sympathy from you," moaned Dick.

"Damned little," assented Hazel. "I gave you all I had in stock of it at Lima. I knew then, of course, quite well who you were. But I thought it better to let you have your little joke. But that's all over now, Dicky, my boy. Richard Amherst you are henceforward, if you please—that is if you come with me."

The salubrious effect of this treatment was beginning to make itself apparent. The arrows were all gone from Dick's quiver. He had run the gamut of his invective—blasphemy, rage, tears, argument—all had been without power to move the inexorable Hazel.

Dick straightened his back and finished his chicha. His demeanour was touchingly naïve now. "I should like to hear, Hazel, how you found it out," he said.

"Oh, it wasn't difficult. In the first place, Miss Prynne gave me a fairly accurate specification of you—so accurate that I had no bother about making it tally when I saw you in the flesh—then there was the fact of Sir Bevil's manuscript, and your—forgive me, Dick, I must say it—inept and clumsy floundering around that subject; and I think your little peculiarities, your tendencies to this, that, and the other, finished you in my mind. You were Father O'Dwyer's 'Dick Amherst' to a T. There was not much deduction about it—mere observation—I wouldn't even call it intelligence. There couldn't be two Dicks in Peru so much alike, you know—you'd never have got me to believe that!"

"All the same, it was damned smart of you, Hazel. It's true enough, I am Dick Amherst. And now that you know it, p'raps you'll tell me what the devil you mean by taking my girl from me?"

"Ah! your mother has been putting her lady-like spoke into my wheel, I see. She is so fond of me I—couldn't even leave me out of her correspondence with you. Well, it's only fair to her to say that she is a lady who never strives in any way to disguise her feelings, either for me or anyone else. But the other matter will keep, Dickie. I'm not engaged to marry Miss Molly Prynne, and you are. I think we'll let it stand at that for the present."

"I know Molly promised to be my wife——"

"On the condition that you brought back her father; wasn't that it? Well, here I am organising an expedition which is more than likely to find him, and asking you to join me. I'd like to know what more you could want than that? Once for all now, are you coming?"

"You'll have me, honour bright, now that you know who I am?"

"Certainly—don't I tell you I've known all along who you are? All I say is, let us drop Molly and your engagement, and all that sort of thing—in fact, your past life altogether. I want a white man—in every sense of the word—to come with me; a friend and a comrade. You know well enough what I want. Will you come?"

"Yes," replied Dick, unhesitatingly, "I will."

"And you swear to be faithful to me, to stick to me through thick and thin, without reserve—to trust me as I trust you?"

"You do trust me, then?" Dick looked ever so surprised.

"Absolutely." Their hands and eyes met, and the bond was sealed.

"Hazel, I'll stick to you to Hell and back again—by thunder, that's the almighty truth, and I mean it. After we've seen this business through I don't say; but till then, I'm your man."

And Dick felt happier at that moment than he had done for years. It seemed to come upon him that this was the sort of chance he had needed for so long—another man in the boat to set the stroke, and pull with him. He registered a vow to pull *his* weight and more. There was no mere maudlin determination to "turn over a new leaf," no self recrimination in his zeal. He felt inspired to effort—to the best that he was capable of for its own sake, and for the sake of the good fellow who had been his salvation. He was saner, healthier, than he had ever known himself to be. Stranger still, he was able to see it. And Hazel trusted him! That was a "knock-me-down stagerer" if you like!

"Now then, Dick," said Hazel, with a breath of relief, "come on and let's get to work. There's a deuce of a lot to be done yet."

As he moved towards the door it opened, to admit the diminutive person of Puca! The Indian threw himself at Hazel's feet.

"Viracocha, I will, I will! The music-hill, si, si!"

"Who the devil is this monkey?" asked Dick.

"Take my word for it, he is no monkey. He got us away from that den last night, and what's more, he promises to take us to the city of cities; isn't that so, Puca?"

"Si, si, gracia Señor, I will do. You save Cuy-cusi. I help you, oh lord of the sea!"

"Ha, Quichua, eh?" said Dick.

Puca sprang up with no very pleasant expression. "Quichua, speak?"

Dick replied, "Arri; Yma sutinqui," which means, "What is your name?"

"Cuy-cusi."

"The joyful guinea-pig! Great Scott, what a name!"

"Go on, Dick; talk to him; find out what he knows about the musical mountain and Yayacarui. We must manage to get him to guide us there somehow."

So Dick launched into Quichua for all he was worth. It appeared that Puca did know something about the city, and that it was situated near what he called "the music-hill." And because the English *señor* had saved his life, he said he was willing to guide the expedition so far. But he warned them that the risks were great, that the whole country was filled with hostile Indians, whose methods with the white man were summary and drastic. They would in all probability drown them in the sacred river which flows from the mountain of music. Even so, and although he was willing to guide them thus far, he would not swear that the city existed.

"We'll take the risk of all that," said Hazel. So it came about that through the intermediary of Dick, little Puca was formally engaged as guide. Then, with many "adios" and "paccaricamas," he departed.

Dick looked at Hazel. "Can you trust him?" he asked.

Hazel shook his head. "Wouldn't be fair to try," he said. "There is only one man of the party, Dick, whom I trust, and that's yourself!"

"True bill, old man, you may," replied the reprobate slowly. "Shake!"

CHAPTER XV.

"IN THE THICK OF IT."

A FEW weeks later the adventurers reached Todos Santos, a small town on the upper waters of the Ucayali. The voyage had been accomplished expeditiously, and with less difficulty than might have been anticipated, judging from the nature of the navigation. Three or four skirmishes with forest Indians, the loss of a boat while descending a rapid, one or two cases of fever, and the death of two men from arrow wounds; such were the events which stood out most clearly in Hazel's memory of the journey. What other recollections he had were mostly of the scenery, which was much contrasted, varying from the terrifying spectacle of the river, pent up and raging in the Ayacucha gulch—where a spider's-web bridge swings two hundred feet overhead—to the gorgeous colouring and fecund life of the Montano region, overspread with unexplored forests, through which the broadened stream meandered more placidly.

All this had been exploited with quiet British courage, under burning suns, and the downpour of tropical rains, with intervals of muggy heats and chill night-mists rising from the marshy lands. Through these perils of Nature and Nature's children they had made their way safely, and had brought up at Todos Santos for breathing-time and mature consideration of the route thence. For there still remained forests to be pierced, and pampas to be crossed, and the Cordilleras to be ascended; all promising difficulties and dangers, and—it might be—death.

At Todos Santos they lost touch with all traces of civilisation. This collection of houses, lost in an immense region, shagged with forests, facing a lonely stretch of water, unploughed by civilised keels, was inhabited by creatures little above the level of brutes. An adobe church, controlled by a Jesuit missionary, dominated the village. Its congregation confessed to Christianity, but it was Christianity so merged in Paganism that it was difficult to distinguish. The race—mixed bastard and true-born red-men—preserved the characteristic melancholy impressed by centuries of tyranny; but there were occasions when this veneer of sullen patience was overcome. Then Todos Santos would drink deep of potent native liquors, and give itself up to orgies of the worst description. Hazel was disgusted with these festivals; but Dick enjoyed them, even to participating in their unrestrained mirth. He drank deeply and more deeply, until Hazel, weary of attempting to keep him in the paths of virtue, hastened the departure of the expedition. Deprivation was the sole remedy for Dick's dissipation.

"I am tired of seeing you deliberately making a hog of yourself, Dick."

"Don't wonder at it, old man; but I told you what to expect!"

"I know. But there is no need for you to go quite so far. I shall never reform you. Talking is useless."

"Waste of time," assented Dick, cheerfully, "best cut off supplies, chief. Let's haul out for the wilds; it's m' only chance."

And so the next morning the little force re-commenced its march through the dense woodlands on the further side of the Ucayali. Puca as guide, Gerald in command, walked ahead. After them strung a single

file of Indians with the baggage ; and Dick between Cain and Mayta closed the column. For the most part—shut out from the sky by the thick foliage—they pushed on through a green twilight, steaming and choking. At intervals they emerged into wild glades, where the sun was visible. On all sides the monstrous stems and lofty greenery of the trees dwarfed them to the size of ants ; and they crawled along such narrow paths as could be discovered by Puca. Indeed, the dwarf knew the way too well for Hazel's peace of mind, and more than once he expressed his doubts of him.

" Seems as if the little devil is luring us into a trap of sorts."

" Huh ! I guess he's makin' a bee-line for the ranche we're after. We're a personally conducted party of Cook's tourists ; and Mama Oclo's engineering the job, with Puca in the signal-box."

" Shouldn't be anxious if I were sure of that," mused Hazel. " Certainly, if Mama Oclo had wished to get quit of us, she would have arranged that at Lima or Cuzco."

" Oh, she'll play the ace when it suits her," said Dick, savagely. He had no great love for the lady. " She'll yank us safely to Yayacarui, you bet ; then—well then——" Dick waved his hand to indicate that the deluge might follow.

Both white men had a vague feeling that some unseen power controlled their expedition ; but they could not exactly formulate it. The few Indians they met were suspiciously friendly, or ostentatiously timid, and molested them in no way, regarding them, apparently, with awe. Any effort to extract the meaning of these things from Puca resulted in failure. He professed complete ignorance of everything and everyone ; stated not once, but many times, that he was a guide only, and ascribed his all extensive knowledge of the country to previous wanderings as an itinerant musician. Plainly, there was nothing for it but to accept Puca, and the situation. Whatever might be the facts of the case, it was evident that they would accomplish the passage of the forest with less risk than the previous dangers had led them to expect. The white men gave up all attempt to discover what was at the back of this unlooked-for immunity from danger. They took the goods the gods sent them, and pushed on with all speed.

For days, for weeks, they marched through the forest. It seemed illimitable, endless. As they marched Gerald found reason to modify considerably any ideas regarding Mama Oclo as a protecting angel ; for the perpetual peace which had hitherto reigned gave way now to frequent and wholly unlooked-for attacks. Without warning of any kind, arrows would be shot out of the underwood, and straggling bands of painted creatures would throw themselves on the column, flourishing axes and spears, to the accompaniment of ear-splitting yells. Gerald did not attempt to account for this sudden change of tactics—there was no time for that. He ranged his men and fought. For the most part they did more damage to the enemy than the enemy did to them ; and, although three or four men were killed, Hazel brought his small force through the hostile zone very successfully.

At last they approached the verge of the forest, for the trees were beginning to thin out, and the grass to dwindle to short cropped levels. All fighting stopped as suddenly as it had begun. They could not understand it, and referred to Puca for explanation. But Puca's answer was the usual profession of ignorance.

"Lemme cowhide the little beast," said Dick, who was furious, "he's at the bottom of all this, for sure."

"No, no." Gerald restrained Dick's ardour. "Thrashing would only turn him against us, and he would simply lie like a hatter. Leave him alone. We shall know all about it in time."

"It's Mama Oclo," grumbled Dick between his teeth, "that she-boss is playin' low down, chuckin' greasers at us. What's her game?"

"Dios sabe!" said Hazel, quite in the style of Puca, "but if she is mixed up in this, she holds the winning hand. All our cards are on the table, but we can't see hers."

"The King of Hearts!" suggested Amherst, slyly glancing at his chief.

"Rot!" said that young man, reddening, "you ought to know better than that."

"Perhaps I ought," replied Dick, gloomily.

Then one night, under a splendid moon of silver, they came to a belt of trees which girdled a ruined city of old—how old, none of them had sufficient archæological knowledge to say. In a vast space lay what must once have been a populous town, now given over to bats and owls and the beasts of the fields, who there made their lairs. On all sides rose temples, and mansions, and mighty palaces, of Cyclopean architecture and size. Terraces overgrown with weeds; ranges of carven pillars, wide flights of shallow steps, and many statues with solemn faces looking from niches at the desolation of the place over which they had once ruled as gods. The altars were fallen, the temples deserted, but the gods still remained, looking, as it were, from the past into the far future, and ignoring the present. The streets, which of yore had echoed to the tread of myriad feet, were silent and deserted; grass grew from the cracks of the worn pavement, and creepers climbed the pillars of merchants' houses. And in the centre of the desolation the explorers found a still pool of water, rimmed with marble, and glittering now in the moonlight.

By this they encamped for the night. Dazed by the glare of their fire, the owls and bats fluttered in and out of the roofless halls, and snakes trailed over the marble pavements.

Gerald strolled away towards the terraces. Puca followed, and Hazel, while he silently accepted him for companion, did not omit to loosen the revolver at his waist. He was ever suspicious of Puca.

"Would the Señor see what lies before him?" asked the dwarf, when they were out of sight of the camp fire. "Let us then ascend the tower of the stars and behold the desert. Ay de mi! The sorrow of earth is there."

"What do you know about it, Puca?"

"Señor, I know many things of which it is not well to speak!"

Hazel said no more. Already they had arrived at the foot of the tall shaft of stone, before a squat door, and slipping into this, the dwarf, chanting a weird melody, vanished. Hazel followed. As in a dream he stumbled up a narrow staircase, which wound round and round, broken and dilapidated, and black as the pit. For hours, as it seemed, he climbed upward, always hearing high above him, the chanting of Puca. At last he emerged on to a small platform of stone, and beheld the Indian kneeling, with his hands crossed on his breast, and a face uplifted to the stars. He finished his devotions, and springing up, led Hazel to the edge of the platform, which was protected by a low wall.

"See, Señor," said he, "yonder is the desert, and the hills which lie above the city; so they say."

Gerald folded his arms and silently surveyed the scene. Immediately below the tower lay a belt of scrub, which melted into sands, grey now in the moonlight. Like undulating billows they stretched towards the far distant horizon, where glittered the white peaks of lofty hills. The desolation and the silence of the place were terrible.

"The belt of death," said Puca, solemnly. "Say, Viracocha, do you still wish to find this city of dream, beyond these grey sands?"

"I have not come so far to draw back now," said Gerald. "It is your wish to lead us to the city Puca, although you would have me believe you know nothing of it."

"Truly, Señor, what is said of this city, I believe not. I lead you to the music-mountain; and there I leave you. Señor," said Puca, suddenly, and more earnestly than was his wont, "you saved my life, and I would not be ungrateful. Harken then to me, and go back while there is yet time. Beyond that belt there may be death."

"What is, is," retorted Hazel, "I am going on. I have sworn to find that city, and find it I will. We cross that desert to-morrow, Puca."

Before Gerald was aware of it, the dwarf had fitted forward and laid a light finger on the young man's heart. It beat regularly, and as Hazel stepped suddenly back—for he feared treachery—a look of admiration overspread Puca's face.

"Surely she will be pleased this time," he muttered.

Hazel seized him. "What do you mean by all this chatter?" he said, angrily. "Speak out. Are you a messenger from that woman?"

"What is, is," cried Puca, mocking Gerald with his own words; and, ducking under the arm which held him, he fled down the stairs. Hazel followed quickly, but he did not see the dwarf again that night.

He returned to the camp, speculating freely, but imparted his thoughts to no one, not even to Dick. More than ever he was convinced that he was the object of some intrigue on the part of the strange woman he had met with in Lima, and, moreover, that the intrigue was being carried on by the mysterious dwarf.

With the dawn came Puca, cheerful and grotesque as ever. Gerald did not question him. He knew it was useless. But he kept a close watch on him and told Dick to do the same. Puca was quite cognisant of this espionage, but he took no heed of it.

At sunrise the column was once more in motion, with Puca guiding them into the trackless waste. A vast plain of loose sand, hemmed in on all sides by a cloudless sky, wherein the sun flamed with merciless splendour, lay before them. The heat was terrific. It danced over the burning surface till the distant peaks quivered like aspen leaves. Their feet dragged in the loose sand; their tongues dried up, for water was scarce, and had to be doled out in thimblefuls.

"Guess Hell must be somethin' of this sort," said Dick. "Gosh, what wouldn't I give you for a suck of chicha?"

"We ought to be glad we have a sufficiency of tepid water, Dick."

"Huh! I reckon that won't last long. The skins are nearly empty."

"We must push on more rapidly, then; there's no going back now."

"Why not travel by night, chief? Guess it'd be cooler."

Hazel decided to try it. And they certainly did get over more ground in the moonlight, although there was not much appreciable difference in

the heat. Then the worst of accidents befel them. One of the boys went mad, and ripped up their last skin of water. Starvation seemed inevitable, and Hazel was almost in despair; though by this time they were rapidly lifting the mountains. There was just a chance that, by making a supreme effort, they might reach water.

"Sides, there's Puca," argued Dick. "He's been in these parts before; and you bet he's not game to send in his checks yet. He'll engineer us through this job somehow. Oh, he's got an ace up his sleeve for sure."

Dick proved to be a true prophet. One night they became acquainted with Puca's ace. The little force was encamped some few miles from the mountains, which Hazel—if they could hold out—hoped to reach next day. But the men were demoralised, and inclined to be mutinous. Their privations had caused them to suffer terribly. Dick and his chief, with their Winchesters on their knees, sat looking at the distant peaks, so pallid in the moonlight. Puca, with something under his arm, stole past them, and out of the camp some short distance.

"Gosh! What's the little devil up to now?"

"Don't know; but he can't do much harm hereabout anyhow. We're all in the same box." Hazel was much too fagged out and weary to heed any of Puca's little tricks, just then. He had reached that state of exhaustion when the pluck begins to die out of the strongest man.

Suddenly a magnificent rocket cleaved the air. It shot up to a great height, scattering its red and green fire. It was followed by another. With a simultaneous shout the white men raced for Puca. The dwarf was found in possession of a store of ships' rockets, which he was proceeding to fire in the most methodical manner. Clearly it was not his first acquaintance with such things. He grinned as the party came up with him.

"A sign for my people, Señores," he said.

"Oh, so you're in touch with Yayacarui, after all, are you?"

"Nay, Viracocha. My people dwell by the sacred river, at the foot of yonder hills. They will bring both food and water."

"Told you the little devil was a tool of Mama Oclo's," muttered Dick, as they returned to camp, "he wouldn't be able to work those rockets if he wasn't up to a trick or two. Oh, you bet he knows what he's about, though we don't."

For a long time Puca continued to fire his rockets. Then, apparently satisfied that his signals had been observed by his mysterious friends, he lay down to sleep with a grunt of satisfaction.

Towards dawn, when the eastern hills were gilded with fine gold, the noise of galloping horses was heard, and a small band of men could be seen coming over the undulating hollows. Gerald and Dick, ready for emergencies, went out to meet them. Shortly afterwards a troop of light-coloured Indians, well clothed, comparatively civilised, and mounted on mules, swept into the camp. Puca fraternised with them, and presented to them Dick and Gerald, to whom the leader made obeisance. Water and food were produced, and in a very short time the expedition was on the march again.

"What price Puca now, chief?"

"Yes, he's a creature of that woman's; there is no doubt on that point. We'll come up with that city after all, Dicky."

"Huh!" said Dick, relapsing into gloom. "I guess we'll see a sight

more than that, chief! We're in the claws of the tigress this trip for sure!"

And Hazel thought so too.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE ADOBE PUEBLO."

"WELL, Dick, I think we've broken the back of it now!"

"Dunno about that, chief; but we're alive and I reckon that's something. I don't say we haven't struck pie in this shanty; and we've put forest and puma at the back of us, but I guess it'll be no easy job to negotiate those mole hills over yonder."

"Dick, you're not the philosopher I thought you were. Take the good things the gods give you, and be grateful—we're safe, man, so far, anyhow!"

"That's an almighty fact, Hazel, I know. It was precious nearly a case of 'Jerusalem's m' happy home' for us. But there's not much the matter with this; and I'll be solid enough when the trouble begins. Cain, you swine, isn't the grub ready?"

"Berry nea', Massa Dick. Dis mos' lubly chupe. Ole Cain jes role de tortillas an' den you eat, sah."

It was a fair-sized room they occupied, in the house of the Curaca, furnished barely, after the fashion of native houses. The whole party looked in excellent condition considering their recent experiences. Into the Indian town, in the shadow of the great mountains, they had been received with every show of hospitality, well supplied with food, and tended with all possible care. For Puca these gentle people seemed to have the greatest reverence. They treated him as one of an altogether superior race, and their estimation of him seemed to Hazel to be in no wise warranted by his capacities, notwithstanding his rocket-signalling and other accomplishments. He could only conclude that it was because of his connection in some way with Mama Ocllo. A decoy of hers, no doubt, he was, since he had been upon this particular trail before, and was apparently well-known to the dwellers in this adobe town: Yet if such were actually the case, it puzzled Hazel to account for the little man having given himself so much unnecessary trouble in directing them.

"He knew we were after the city," he said to Dick, "so did Mama Ocllo. Why then did not he or she frankly lead us there?"

Dick spooned out a liberal supply of stew on to the red earthenware plate.

"Oh, there's no getting down to the bed-rock of these greasers," he replied, with his mouth full. "Perhaps they're chucking borack at us, or maybe Mama Ocllo's working out a poker trick on her own account, though it's fair to say she hasn't played low down on us yet, nor has that little red devil. I guess we've got the bulge on 'em so far!"

"More likely they've got the bulge on us," retorted Hazel. "Here we are in this naked place, with our lives in our hands and dependent on Puca for guidance absolutely. You're going in the other direction now, Dick—you're tempting the gods. For all you know we may be walking clean into their trap."

"Mama Ocllo's trap then it is—she's engineering the entire job."

"She must have travelled ahead of us then, and I'm willing to bet you what you like she couldn't stand much of the kind of thing we've been

doing lately. If she's on ahead there must be an easier way than the way we've taken. Then I say, why the devil didn't Puca take us by it?"

"Ah, that wasn't his game, you bet. He was cute enough to know that if we got wind of the easy track we mightn't keep it to ourselves. His dodge was to make things as rocky as possible for us—river choke full of alligators, forest jammed with Indians, a forty mile desert tract without a blessed drop of liquid; I guess you can't beat that in the way of defences for Yayacarui. Take my tip, chief, that guinea-pig can count ten. Now, what's the next move?"

"The mountains. In a couple of days we start the climb at Puca's tail."

"Well, let the beggar look out then," drawled Dick, rolling a cigarette, "for, by Jimmy, I'll put a charge of buck-shot in his stern if he leads us into any of his beastly ambushes—to the Golden city he comes along o' me for company if I've to make tracks that way!"

"Oh, Puca's all right, Dicky. He's got his orders straight from head quarters, though the little devil 'll never admit it. He says he'll take us as far as the 'music-hill' but not further."

"Lawd ob mercy, what am dat, massa Hazel? De lil hills can skip, as de good book say; but Cain nebber hea' ob dem singin'."

"Cain's going to hear and see a lot he's never heard or seen before—take my word for it, old man."

"Yes, nig; that's a true bill; shouldn't be surprised if that black hide o' yours got blanched a bit before we get back," continued Dick. "Confess I'm fogged myself over all this talk about music-hill and that rot!"

"Oh, it's right enough," explained Hazel. "Humboldt refers to it in his book. He says there's a granite rock on the Orinoco which emits sounds at sunrise just like the tones of an organ. He attributes it to the action of the sun's rays on the rarefied air in the crevices. You get the same kind of thing in Arabia. And you've heard, I suppose, about the statue of Memnon, in Egypt?"

"Yes, believe I have, long time ago—speaks at sunrise, don't it?"

"Yes; well, that's the same sort of thing. Deep fissure, rarefied air, and sudden raising of temperature."

"That's the miracle, no doubt; but I guess it ain't Puca's way of lookin' at it. He sizes it out as the voice of some big bug in the way of gods."

"Don't you make any mistake about that. Puca knows a thing or two more than you give him credit for. He's no savage. They're a knowing lot, these Indians. Look how Mama Oclo speaks English, for instance. Why, man, it's wonderful. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if when we do strike this city of cities it turns out to be a slap-up place, right up to date."

"If ever we *do*, chief!" yawned Dick. "Anyway, let's go round the town now for a stretch—Cain can keep an eye on the fire-irons."

Hazel nodded assent, and they strolled off, their revolvers in their pockets, despite the gentle demeanour of the Indians.

The town was built after the fashion of the Zuni pueblos in Arizona—half dwelling-place, half fortress. It rose in regular terraces, each one being narrower than that immediately below it, and sloping back like the seats of an amphitheatre. Ladders communicated with each storey in such a manner that they could be removed at will. In front of each line of cabins ran a narrow walk, and from the lowest of these a mud wall encircling the whole dropped twenty feet to the ground. Thus, when the ladders were removed, this human hive was completely isolated from a ny

raiding Indians, and as impregnable, well-nigh, as any mediæval castle. Two of these fortresses stood one on each side of a narrow but rapid stream, which, bursting from its source in the mountains, rushed on between these fertile banks, until it disappeared, a silvery snake, in the desert sands. The two pueblos were constructed entirely of mud, plastered over with some hard and shiny white material, which, when the sun's rays were upon it, glittered like silver. Such structures seen under such conditions might easily have given rise to the marvellous legends of Manoa and El Dorado in the times of the Conquest. At the back of the town rose an arid precipice, pierced by the low arch of the tunnel through which ran the river. Higher up, verdure and shrubs and trees; then naked rock of reddish limestone, and high above all the serrated peaks of eternal snow. The great range of hills ran North to South, walling in the desert and the pampas. Round about the pueblos fields of maize and potatoes were fenced in by walls of stone, and the great plains stretching away to the horizon, shimmered in the burning rays of the sun. The pueblo was a veritable oasis of green, fertilised by the river, and isolated utterly by mountain and desert from the world.

The natives here were pure-blooded Ynca Indians. At the time of the Conquest they had retreated into this fastness for the preservation of their independence. And here they lived, as their forefathers had lived before them, in the same style of semi-civilisation as had existed in the days of Ynca Atahualpa. Their worship was pagan, and was done in their Sun temple according to the rites of Manco Capac. Here was, in fact, the civilisation of the red man as it had flourished in pre-Columbian days.

When Hazel and Dick descended their ladder to terra firma, they were joined by the Curaca, a stately grey-haired ancient, wrapped in a poncho of vicuña wool. His name was Naiu. He was civil and attentive, but nevertheless showed clearly that he bore no love to the white man. He could speak no other tongue but Indian, and even so was usually reserved in his communications.

He conducted them up the riverside now, towards the mountains. They saw both men and women working in the fields. Some of the younger women were of graceful figure, and carried jars of water from the stream. Dick's endeavours to attract their attention toward himself passed unheeded. They were sparsely clad, and wore ornaments rudely carved, of gold, but what little clothing they had was tastefully arranged, and woven in many hues. They seemed to be sad and silent, and they eyed the strangers mistrustfully. Their conduct was new and strange to Dick, and by no means what he looked for. He turned to Naiu for explanation.

"We see few white men here," replied the Curaca, "nor do we wish to see more, for the dogs who came from over-sea plundered and slew and enslaved our people in their lust for gold. We dread your race. If they came hither, even we, the exiles from Cuzco the sacred, would be doomed. For you are the children of Supay, not of Pachacutec, and if we did our will we would slay you and all white men who come hither."

The man spoke with vehemence, and in a spirit of cold-blooded cruelty.

"Then why don't you make a start on us?" replied Dick, recklessly.

Naiu cast his eyes towards the towering hills. "It is not commanded!" he said, solemnly.

"I thought not," muttered Dick, translating the man's words to Hazel.

"She is watching over us," said Hazel, fearful of pronouncing the name of Mama Ocllo lest it should rouse the Curaca's suspicions. "Ask him,

Dick, if any white men have been here before us in his time. He may know something of Prynne."

"Many white men have come over this desert," replied Nainu in answer to Dick's question. "They go over the mountains."

"Where to?"

"They go over the mountains."

"To Yayacarui?"

The Indian cast a look full of hatred at the speaker. "They go over the mountains," he said for the third time.

"Do you remember some twenty years ago a white man who came here, tall, with grey hair and grey beard?" asked Dick.

"Many white men have come. They go over the mountain." That was all the information that was to be extracted from Nainu.

"I guess it's under the mountains then for a change that we'll go," said Dick, in English. "Recollect, in Bevil Prynne's yarn, chief, how these devils in the mountain city decoyed the white man? They're at the same game still, you bet."

"No doubt; that accounts for the white man going over the mountain, as our friend here says, but he omits to add that they never return. You mark me, Dick, we shall find a thoroughly go-ahead *fin-de-siècle* city over yonder. I am beginning to understand now how Mama Ocllo came by her fluent English. She makes good use of her prisoners."

"Mama Ocllo!" exclaimed Nainu, fiercely, as he caught the name. "And what does Viracocha know of Mama Ocllo?"

"Oh, she's a friend of ours," replied Dick, carelessly. "No doubt if it didn't happen that she forbade you, you'd make mighty short work of us in that temple of yours over there!"

"We offer no human sacrifices to our lord the Sun," replied Nainu, haughtily. But he said no more.

"Strikes me, Dick, this must be the river down which Bevil Prynne's packet floated. I expect it communicates with the city."

They stared at the stream spouting from under a low arch of rock. It seemed to be forced sheer out of the mountain. No doubt it had its source in the very bowels of the earth, and rolled through miles of darkness ere it reached the light of day. The water was darkish of hue and bitterly cold—colder, it seemed to Hazel, than the snow itself. It put him instantly in mind of Coleridge's lines. He quoted them to Dick:—

"And from this chasm with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced."

"Who was the Johnny wrote that, chief—Byron? By Gad, he must ha' seen this very squirt o' water."

"No, Dick, it was a contemporary of his though—Coleridge."

"Jove, I remember a line or two of his scrip. Doesn't it go:

'Where Alph the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea!'

That's his, isn't it?"

"Yes, those lines are from 'Kubla Khan' too—same poem; they're better known than the others. 'Pon my soul, this might be the very river described by Coleridge—its resemblance is wonderful, even to its being sacred! What's the name of it?"

Dick put the question to Niau. "Callparicu," he answered.

"That means 'one who gives strength,'" said Dick. "They usually apply the word to a wizard chief. I read all about it in a book of the Hakluyt Society when I was getting up facts about this country at home. I can't see how it applies though."

"I do," said Hazel, promptly. "The stream comes from the buried city, and brings with it strength—it's some religious allusion of course—to the Indians. Callparicu!—"

"Hullo!" interrupted Dick, excitedly. "what the devil's that?"

Niau and Hazel followed the direction of his outstretched finger. As he looked Niau became greatly excited too. For the river had flung forth a scarlet ball, the size of a man's head. It was bobbing and swaying on the water like a thing of life. "Gosh," yelled Dick, trying to hook it out with a stick. "A message from Yayacarui, I'll go nap!"

Suddenly he felt himself gripped from behind. Niau had laid hold of him unawares, and now stood over him machete in hand, as he lay sprawling on the ground. For a moment Hazel was startled; then he sprang forward and closed with the Curaca. Dick found his legs and drew his revolver, but he dared not fire whilst the two men wrestled together. Then Hazel managed to throw Niau, but the next moment the Indian was up and running for the pueblo, shouting lustily as he ran. With an oath Dick sighted him with his revolver. As he fired Hazel struck the weapon so that the shot flew high. Dick swore furiously.

"Are you mad, man?" shouted Hazel; "what can we do against them if it comes to a fight? Come on, let's make for the pueblo and find Puca. This may turn out pretty badly for us."

They raced together along the bank, and as they ran the scarlet ball followed them slowly by the stream.

Niau's shouts brought the Indians out like bees from a hive, and he continued to cry out loudly to them, pointing the while to the red ball bobbing down the stream.

Then a great and universal cry arose, and the Indians swarmed forward to meet the white men.

"Shoot, man, shoot," cried Dick; his revolver ever ready.

"No, no; don't you see they are unarmed!"

But Dick was not to be stayed. As soon as they were within range he fired into the brown mass. There was a shriek, and one of them fell. Still the Indians came forward, and were upon them like a swarm of bees. Dick was trodden underfoot, and Hazel rushed forward, revolver in hand, to help him. The next moment he too was borne down, helpless and insensible.

CHAPTER XVII.

"ESCAPE."

WHEN Hazel regained consciousness, he found himself bound hand and foot, and lying in complete darkness. It was some time before he could comprehend the situation. Then little by little it came back to him, and he knew that the pain he was suffering was due to the knocking about he had had at the hands, or rather at the feet of the Indians. He recalled Dick's rash attempt to obtain possession of the scarlet ball, his own struggle with Niau, and the overwhelming rush of the Indians, that

had nearly trodden the life out of them both. Now he was in prison, bound and helpless. It did not take him long to realise that; and he cursed Dick roundly for his folly and ruthless impetuosity. Rescue seemed impossible, unless through Puca, perchance. But as yet the little man had made no sign. Perhaps he had turned traitor; there was no saying! Then there came upon his ears the sound of certain oaths in a voice too well-known to be mistaken. Dick was still very much alive, and apparently in no-wise chastened in spirit.

"You there, Dick?"

"You bet I am—tied up like a damned spiritualist about to do a conjuring trick. Gosh, if I could only get loose, how I'd twist the brown necks of those brutes. Curse and——"

"That's all right, old chap. I'll take it as said. You won't get us out of this pickle that way, though, and I think you've done enough damage for the present. I've only just pulled myself together. How are you?"

"Oh, I've had m' wits about me long since. Takes a deuce of a lot to knock me out of time. They've chucked us into prison, Hazel, on top of the pueblo: what's more, they've collared our guns and knives, the devils—once let me get at 'em, that's all!"

"Has Puca made any sign?"

"No: guess he's a rotter, and gone off and left us in this hole. Saw Cain though, a while ago—the poor old nig's blubbering like a kid."

"What do you think their game is, Dick?"

"Oh, God knows: offer us up to the sun, I suppose."

"Don't fancy they'll do that after what Naiu said. But we're in a deuce of a fix, there's no getting out of that!"

"Awfully sorry, Hazel: it's just like my cursed luck. But how was I to know that Naiu would get on his hind legs over that blessed red ball? Wish I'd chucked him in along with it now!"

"That ball came down from Yayacarui, Dick, consequently Naiu regarded it as a very sacred object—much too sacred for you to touch."

"I'd touch him some," muttered Dick; "but, I say, chief, can't you wriggle out of these knots?"

"Haven't tried yet: too jolly sore!"

"H'm; well as I got you into this mess, guess I'll get you out of it—'Struth, what infernal luck!"

"How can you, man? we're unarmed and powerless."

"Shucks, we'll see about that. Puca will give us a hand, so'll Mayta."

"Doubt if you can: what we've done is to rouse the religious prejudices of these beggars, Dick, and that's about the worst thing we could rouse."

"I'd rouse 'em a sight more if I'd only got m' shooter. Anyhow, I'm goin' to get quit of these cords."

As Dick proceeded to struggle with his bonds, the door was opened and a ray of sunlight shone into the cell. Three silent Indians entered, bearing food and drink. They unbound the prisoners, and set the food before them. Then they lit a primitive lamp—a mere cotton wick floating in a saucer of oil, and departed as silently as they had entered. Dick swore at them in English, questioned them in Quichua, and Hazel threw in a few words of Spanish. But the red men gave no sign.

"I guess they don't mean us to fertilise their beastly boneyard, even now," said Dick. "Here's grub and chica anyhow, so let's be joyful, oh my soul! What are you groaning at, chief?"

"Lord! Dickie, what wouldn't I give for a wash? I'm hot and dirty and sore."

"Same here, my boy, and a black eye into the bargain. Guess I shan't fret about no water while there's grub about. Come on, old man, feed away."

"You really are a cool hand, Dick!"

"Oh, bless you, I'm used to it. I'm always in trouble: everlastingly in the mud. Providence has got a pick at me. I suppose I'll have to go under some day, but that I guess'll be the look-out of the Almighty, and he won't be too hard on poor Dickie. I'm not a religious cuss, Hazel, as you know, but I hang by that peg, anyhow!"

From which it will be seen that Dick's theology, if somewhat rudimentary, was none the less of comfort to him on that account. At least he was both able to eat and drink with gusto, as Hazel could see by the glimmer of the oil-lamp.

But Hazel felt differently. He could not eat. After a very few mouthfuls he took refuge in his pipe, and from this he got more solace. But he could not take his thoughts away from the present situation. It was undoubtedly serious, and not all Dick's optimism—the immediate result of his replenished interior—could make him view it otherwise.

"Oh, keep your pecker up, old man," said Dick, seeing he was inclined to be downcast. "Mama Ocloo 'ull put this all right soon as she hears 'bout it. Shouldn't wonder she knows the whole story by now. She's dead nuts on you, you know!"

"Explain yourself, Amherst!"

"Oh, no offence, chief—she's real sweet on you, that's all. If she wasn't, she wouldn't have taken all the bother she has."

Gerald smiled. "I know, Dick—there *is* something in what you say. I can admit it to you—you won't misunderstand me. I mean to say, you know I'm not a prig—that I find precious little comfort in the knowledge of her 'dead nuts,' as you put it—on the contrary, it bothers me a lot!"

"Why? I can't see how. She's all the more certain to get us out of this on that account."

"That may be. But it'll only be to get us—or, at least, me—into another, and, if possible, worse trouble. If ever there was a tiger-cat, that woman's one. She's got the cheek of a dozen she-devils. She's quite game to do any amount of—well, I don't know quite how to put it; but you know what I mean!"

"Well, and if she does?"

"I'm not inclined to respond, that's all; and quite enough too, I imagine."

"I daresay she'll get a bit restive under that. It's Molly blocks the way with you, Hazel, I suppose?"

"Leave her name out of it, Dick."

"Well, 'pon my soul—I should ha' thought if anyone had the right to mention the name of Molly Prynne, it was me, seeing she's engaged to marry me. I only meant to show you that you were perfectly free to go it hammer-and-tongs with Mama O."

"We agreed to leave the question of your engagement and my feelings—in fact, that subject was tabooed, Dick, by mutual consent. Let it lie!"

"All right, chief—as you like. I'm going to turn in. Good-night."

He put out the light. But, in the ensuing darkness, neither of them

slept. Unwilling as he was to confess it, Hazel resented the situation intensely. Dick's proprietorship of the girl—even though *he knew her feelings* on the subject, irritated him. He seldom, if ever, allowed himself to think about it. And yet, without thinking of her, she was ever in his mind. Was it not for her that he was here—in trouble, in prison, in hourly danger of his life? And Dick, on his part, had no great desire to have her for his own. He knew that. It was merely since he had learned that she was coveted, desired, by another man, that there had grown up within him the inclination to assert his rights of proprietorship. A dog in the manger he was, and he knew it. Every day he felt himself drawn closer to Hazel in the bonds of real friendship. His feeling for him was, even now, the strongest feeling he had ever known—stronger by far than anything he had ever felt for Molly. And yet he could not bring himself to part with her—to surrender his property in her. His life he was ready to lay down for his friend at any moment. But a woman!—a man would surely be a cur who gave up a woman to another man without showing fight for her! That was how he looked at it. At least, that was the thesis upon which he leant, and with which he comforted himself—in such transient flashes as he felt the need of comfort. And yet, if it came to a point, he was pretty sure that he would allow neither Molly nor half a hundred Mollies to come between him and Hazel. These things were in his mind as he turned over from side to side for the sleep that would not come.

"Hazel!"

"Hullo! what is it?"

"I promised you what you wanted, didn't I?"

"Yes, Dick, and so far you've kept your promise; why?"

"Oh, not much. Only I wanted to tell you I'm straight all through. Whatever turns up you've got a square man in Dick Amherst. I want you to hang on to that, Hazel!"

"All right, Dickie; but what the deuce is all this about?"

"Tell you when we're out of this mess. You trust me, chief—whole hog?"

"Yes, Dick—as myself."

"Shake! Now I guess I know the way I've got to travel." He wrapped the rug well round him and tried again for sleep. In half an hour they were both off.

At dawn the door opened to show the sky all rose and gold over there beyond the desert. Three Indians came to lead them from the cell. They then saw that they were on the highest terrace of the pueblo, and that it was crowded with natives, sullen-faced and silent. Through their midst the prisoners were conducted to the Sun temple, an edifice built after the Egyptian style, at the end of the terrace. On entering, they found themselves in a large room, low of ceiling and with bare white-washed walls. At the far end was a small altar of stone, upon which burned a handful of fire. Behind this a plain yellow curtain was draped. The temple was crowded. By the altar stood Naiu, throwing incense from a curiously formed golden dish. He, in common with all the others, was dressed in black. On either side of the shrine two Indians sat, wholly naked, save for some fish nets thrown over them. The fish-nets were the symbol of death. They played the most lugubrious music, these two, on a wind instrument called the choimia. When the two Englishmen entered the sounds ceased. There was dead silence. Naiu did not even

glance at them. He gazed intently on a square aperture directly over the door, against the altar. The sun had not yet come up over the mountains, though the yellow rays of his unseen glory seemed to boil over the summits of the peaks.

"Gosh," whispered Dick, uneasily. "I believe they're going to sacrifice us!"

Hazel shook his head, and cast an anxious look around. "If only Puca were here!" he said.

The naked Indians began their melancholy music again. Naiu joined in now, chanting strange words accompanied with stranger gestures. Then the worshippers prostrated themselves, chanting also. The incense curled up white and thick from the altar, and soon the temple was filled with its smoke. And stronger and stronger grew the radiance from behind the giant hills, until, as with a leap, the orb of fire appeared. And through the aperture, penetrating the dense rolling smoke, a radiant shaft of golden light smote the yellow curtain. It was drawn aside, and there glittered a great golden plate, in the centre of which was fashioned a human countenance, awful and of horrid solemnity, studded around with turquoise stones. The chant grew louder and more shrill, and Naiu threw himself on the ground, covering his head with his dark mantle. Then there came a grating sound, and the sun-face was slid to one side, and through the square aperture one could see the desert stretching away below. Four natives rushed forward and seized the white men.

"They mean to chuck us through there," roared Dick, wrestling to free himself, and striking out right and left. "There's a drop of a clean hundred feet! Fight, chief, for your life—we must get out of this hole!"

Hazel saw that there was nothing for it now, and vowed to sell his life dearly. Very quickly half a dozen Indians were on the floor. The rest had drawn their knives and were prepared to use them. The two Englishmen managed to set their backs against the wall. Hazel caught up an Indian who advanced to strike, and hurled him with all his force back amongst his fellows, three of whom he knocked over as he fell. But, now, Naiu was on his feet, shouting forth alternate orders and imprecations. With a reckless dash, Dick made for the old man as he stood there by the altar, and, catching him bodily, sent him with a wild "hurrah" flying through the hole in the wall. The Indians drew back for a moment, as they saw the body of the Curaca go hurtling through the air. And that moment was enough. Before they had time to realise it, Hazel and Dick, fighting like demons, were through the doorway.

"Chuck yourself over, chief," yelled Dick, jumping the heels of the kneeling crowd outside. The next instant he was dropping from ledge to ledge of the terraces, Hazel following close. The Indians poured after them—a veritable torrent of humanity.

"Puca!" shouted Hazel. "See, Dick, Puca!"

There was Puca on the terrace half-way down, calling to them to come on. No sooner had they touched ground on his ledge, than he ran up and thrust their revolvers into their hands. Hazel gripped the butt ever so gratefully. He fired into the very thick of the crowd, and one by one they dropped as he fired. Both white men continued their descent, terrace after terrace, Puca following closely. They were at the lowest now, and there was a sheer drop of at least fifty feet to a sandy bottom. There, below, was Cain with four mules saddled. Puca screeched at the top of his voice.

"Cordel, Señor, cordel." There sure enough was a rope dangling against the wall.

"Come on, Dick; you go down first; I've three shots left!"

After settling an Indian who was close upon him, Dick swung himself over, Puca following. The weight of the dwarf put but little more strain on the rope. Then Hazel turned and faced the crowd as they came. The air was rent and shaken with their cry of rage. Spears and arrows came down thick, and three Indians sprang upon Hazel with their machetes. He levelled, and killed one, disabled the other, but missed the third, who sprang forward at him with uplifted knife. Hazel closed with him, collaring "low," but the steel went through his khaki, nevertheless, and gashed his arm. He felt no pain. He managed to hold the man's wrist and, inch by inch, he forced him to the parapet. Then he saw two others close upon him, and with a terrific effort he lifted his man and threw him. Then he sprang for the rope. As he swung over he could see Dick had reached bottom and was sighting the Indians with his Winchester. Another instant, and he was in mid air with the rope running furiously through his hands.

When he was half-way down there came a shout from Dick, who had now reached a spot where Cain was holding four mules. Hazel looked up. One of the Indians was hacking away at the rope with a knife. Almost as he realised what this meant, there came the crack of the rifle, and the man's body passed him in descent more rapid even than his own. Another stepped forward to finish the work of his brother, only to be picked off again by Dick. Still undaunted came another in his place. But even as he came Hazel was within reach of the ground. Then—the last strand severed—the rope fell beside him. He staggered forward.

"Up, chief!—mount for your life!"

"Lawd 'a mercy!" whimpered Cain, clinging strenuously to the neck of his animal.

Already the ladders were out and black with the Indians climbing down them. Following Puca's lead the fugitives galloped away between the river and the pueblo, followed by a shower of missiles. Cain was struck by a spear, and Hazel got an arrow in his shoulder. Still they rode on, urging their beasts mercilessly. They rounded the corner and the desert lay before them. But Puca, shrieking like a demon, headed for the mountains. As they swept along Hazel caught sight of Naiu writhing on the ground below the temple. He was literally impaled on spearheads, which had been planted in the sands like an upturned harrow, and seemed to be in the last agonies of death. They tore past the great walls of the pueblo, the Indians ever following. But the yielding sands were proving too much for the natives, giving them but poor foothold, so that they could not keep pace with the mules. Faint as he was with loss of blood, Hazel managed to hang on until they were well away. Then, after they had been ascending the hill for about a quarter of an hour, Puca called a halt. They were on a great ledge of rock up to which one narrow path ascended. The precipice yawned below them, and dotted away over the plain they could even now see the Indians in groups. Then all became indistinct to Hazel, and his senses left him. The last thing he heard as he fell from the mule, was a cry of dismay from Dick.

This was the second time he had become unconscious within the last twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER XVIII:

"THE MUSIC MOUNTAIN."

Two days later the little party encamped for the night at an altitude of seven thousand feet. Above the camp fire the blind wall of a granite precipice rose sheer a thousand feet. At the snow line it split into jagged peaks, flecked here and there with white. At the base, a grassy shelf, half encircled by rocks, extended for some little distance, suddenly giving place to vast beds of scoriaceous lava, and sloping half a mile to the lips of a huge quebrada. Zig-zag across a bleak plateau, herbless, dry and rugged with fallen rocks, this earthquake fissure stretched, all overlaid with a fine volcanic dust. On its further side, three miles or more away, the ground rose sharply in jags of blackest rock, which lost themselves only in the banks of cloud stretching across the horizon. Above all shot the great peaks of the Andes, pallid with eternal snows. Over one volcano glowed the red glare from the lava seething in its cup. A sky wonderful with stars, and filled with cold moonlight, arched above this grim magnificence.

"It is like the frozen circle of hell," said Gerald, as he surveyed the bleak grandeur of the landscape, "where Dante made stepping-stones on the heads of sinners chained in ice."

He was standing near the tethered mules on the verge of the platform. The thermometer registered something about fifteen degrees Fahrenheit. He looked out on to the lonely circle of hills. At his feet the plateau with its jagged gulch was hidden in gloom and mist. In silver bands the clouds extended across the bosom of the mountains, and the moon, wheeling along the ragged rims of the lofty peaks, rained down whiteness on the solitary world. He felt they were like emmets at the bottom of a colossal bowl, shut out from all humanity by the frozen rocks. The wonderful gloom, the red glow of the volcano, the chill splendour of moon and stars appealed to his most solemn feelings. And the awful loneliness!—that was most terrible of all.

He had a vivid perception of the majesty and of the cruelty of Nature. Here was Nature's workshop, and here the raw material, the naked ribs of earth, from out which she would manufacture a more kindly world.

"Say, chief," shouted Dick, "ain't you keen on getting your teeth into some llama flesh? Cain's roasted it to a turn. Huh! Lucky I shot the beast or we'd have had nothing but charqui. I never did see much eatin' in charqui myself. By the way, how's the arm, old man?"

"Oh, it's healing fast enough now—and your shoulder?"

"Pooh! a mere flea bite; those beggars can't shoot for sour apples!"

"Dey hurt Cain 'nough, Massa Dick," said that gentleman, serving out the llama steak. "Wif dat mule an' dem arrows, old Cain hab had a mos' 'citin' time. Lawd bery good to dis nig."

"He's good to all of us, Cain." Hazel stretched himself by the fire and reached out for his portion. "What do you say, Cusi-cuy?"

Puca, seated like a little clay image, showed his teeth pleasantly at this formal address from his chief:

"Con-illa-ticci-vira-cocha—good to white man and red man, Viracocha."

"Great Scott, what a jargon. Say, Puca, you never told us why those damned niggers were after bashing us about?"

"Señor! You wished—Rojorojo." Here Puca's mixture of Spanish and Anglo-Saxon gave out. He took refuge in Quichua. "You would have taken the red ball which floated on the sacred stream."

"Well, what of that?"

"I do not know. These men have their customs; the river is sacred."

"Did the red ball come from Yayacarui?"

"I do not know, Uchu," replied the little Indian, using a name which he had given to Dick as significant of his fiery temper, the word in his own language meaning "pepper." "I know nothing. Viracocha saved my life, and I promised, as he wished, to bring him to the Music Mountain." He pointed to the precipice looming overhead. "Behold, Uchu, the Music Mountain! My promise is fulfilled."

"But we want to find the city, Puca!"

The dwarf looked gravely round at the desolation. "I have no knowledge of the city, Uchu. To-morrow, when the great god looks over yonder hill, this rock will sing to him. When you hear that, all is done." Then he relapsed into silence.

Dick translated all this to Hazel. "The beggar knows where the city is, sure enough," he said. "Guess he's bluffing us. Anyhow, we can't take root in this God-forsaken place listening to any rocks squealing. What's the order, chief?"

"Indeed I don't know, Dick." Hazel lit his pipe and considered gravely. "We've got rid of the Indians it's true; but here we are on the hills with only those mules and our guns. Naiu and his lot have got everything else."

"I guess Naiu hasn't," broke in Dick, grimly. "He's cooking in Sheol by this time, confound him. I'm glad I chucked him on to that crop of spear-heads. I wonder how he liked his own physic?"

"Even so, the fact remains they've annexed our stuff," persisted Hazel. "We've got a precious small stock of provisions, and it doesn't look as though there were much to kill hereabouts. Even if we wanted to turn back, we couldn't in our present plight. We'd be no match for those beggars down below. As it was we had a precious near squeak."

"Ah ha," chuckled Cain. "Puca tell dis nigger dere was danger, sah, and say dat you an' Massa Dick be killed. Den he bring dem mules an' tell ole Cain to wait wid dem below. Lawd-gol-a-mercy, Massa Hazel; it was bery funny when I see you an' Massa Dick tumble down dem steps."

"Shut your potato-trap, you silly fool. There was darned little fun about the whole circus. If we hadn't engineered the job ourselves, Puca couldn't have got us out of the trouble."

"Him was climbing up to help you, sah," protested Cain.

"Shucks! He hadn't the boss-word I thought he had." Dick fastened a vindictive gaze on Puca, who was smoking placidly. "He's a blamed liar, and a——"

"Well, well, Dick," interrupted Hazel, impatiently. "As we can't go back we must go on."

"Right you are; but where to, chief?"

"To the city—we'll hope." He paused, and resumed gravely: "Tell

you what, Dick, I still believe Mama Ocllo's got her eye on us. Puca is playing 'possum according to orders. I've a notion we'll drop on the city somehow."

"Gosh! hanged if I see how!"

"Trust to the chapter of accidents. We've got so far, you bet we'll get further."

"Bit vague, isn't it?"

"Perhaps; but so far as that goes the whole thing's very vague. On the slightest of evidence you and I, Dick, have launched out on this queer business. We're looking for a man who is dead according to Titu's story—in search of a buried city supposed to be filled with immense treasure—an Arabian Nights emerald, which ten to one doesn't exist at all. The whole thing is vague, Dick, very vague; the kind of thing one reads about in adventure stories of the Mayne Reid order, or Jules Verne. However, circumstances which we will not allude to particularly"—Hazel thought of Molly, and Dick's face showed that he was not very far away from the same subject—"have sent us thus far into the wilderness. Puca has fulfilled his promise, and here we are at the Music Mountain. What is next to be done I cannot say offhand; what will happen neither you nor I, Dick, can prophesy. Therefore," said Hazel, wrapping himself in his poncho, "we must trust, as I said, and as I still say, to the chapter of accidents. Good-night now, you'd better get off to sleep."

Cain and Puca were already asleep, and after a glance at their recumbent forms Dick remarked to himself that it was a queer start, and prepared to follow their example. In ten minutes they were all sleeping soundly by the dying fire, in the midst of that tremendous desolation. In that desert, arid and solitary, there was no need for sentry—the sense of security was absolute.

As the night drew on the moon dropped behind the western peaks, and the scene was swallowed up in darkness. The silence deepened, and—as it seemed—even the mules ceased to stamp and snort. After a feeble flicker or so the fire died into a pile of feathery white ash. There was no breath of wind, and the black night lay over all.

A fresh cold wind blew down the cañon as the morning dawned; the mules stretched themselves and began to feed; Puca woke and shivered. It was bitterly cold; he threw some wood on the smouldering embers and they broke into flame. Not one of the worn-out trio was yet awake, and Puca, much to his satisfaction, had the field all to himself. For a time he watched the position of the stars; then, perching on the extreme verge of the rocky shelf, he fixed a steady eye on some conjectural spot in the gloom below. There was some plan in his mind.

In an hour or thereabouts a spurt of rainbow-hued fire could be seen to shoot up in the gloom. It was the trail of a rocket. It rose and broke into jewelled flame. Puca knew that it was launched from the depths of the quebrada. Hardly had the sparks died out in the darkness when he slipped noiselessly over the edge of the platform and disappeared in the night. He did not return.

After the long hours had slowly dragged themselves to dawn a thrill ran through the gloom. It began to disperse, to lift; and over the rugged hilltops a wan light spread luminous and pale. It broadened north and south, crept up to the zenith, and made faint the stars, growing stronger and more searching, until the rocky world was revealed, grey,

colourless, and clear. Delicate as the faintest blush, a pale pink hue tinged the west. It deepened to a fiery crimson, and fan-like shafts of gold radiated from behind the hills. Then the gold became fire, intolerable, blinding; and flaming in unclouded majesty, the sun leapt over the world's edge. The hollow was filled with light, liquid and golden, the shadows of rock and peak grew black. Across the great amphitheatre shot rays of yellow effulgence, and smote on the granite face of the precipice — on the astonished countenances of three newly-awakened men. In awed surprise they sat up and listened. A dull moaning sound, low and faint, welled from the mountain's heart. It grew thinner, higher in pitch, more musical. Below it all the sustained drone as of an organ pedal. In a few minutes, having attained its greatest volume, the strain faltered, broke into confused tones, and these dwindled with a dying fall until their melody escaped the sharpest ear. A moment more and the granite harp was mute; and the planet, having saluted her god, basked silently in the presence of his glory. The hymn of Nature was ended.

"By George, it's wonderful," cried Gerald, placing his hand on the great slab of stone which now was slightly warm. "It's the first time I ever heard Apollo play his lyre. Ah, how wise these old Greeks were in their interpretation of nature."

Dick rose and shook the frost rime off his poncho, and yawned. Rubbing his eyes he looked round. Hitherto they had been fixed on the rock. Now with the swift change of a wind-swept lake his expression altered.

"Puca!" He gathered together his sleepy wits. "Hi, Puca, you little devil, you, where are you sulking?"

"Puca!" Gerald wheeled round suddenly, looked at the camp fire, at the iron landscape, at Dick himself. With a clatter Cain let fall the tin coffee-pot he was holding.

"Golly, massa, why dat Puca gone?" He stared skyward as though expecting to see the dwarf drop therefrom.

Dick and Hazel, fully alive to the danger of the loss, set off in different directions, explored the platform, peered round the corners, looked into the gulch, and shouted the name of their missing follower until the whole place rang with their strident cries. But there was no answer, save a derisive shriek of a slow sailing condor. Puca was gone.

"Hell!" said Dick, looking blankly at his chief. "Here's a go!"

"He must come back!" Gerald spoke much more confidently than he felt. "Where the devil has he got to, I wonder, in this howling wilderness? The mules are all here; he's taken nothing!" He looked round at the landscape, now beginning to glow like a furnace in the sunlight. "He must come back."

"Hope so," said Dick, gloomily. "Let's have a feed anyhow." And they went to breakfast in no very cheerful frame of mind.

But Puca never came back, although they waited hours for him;

And so they found themselves in a treeless, arid desert; left stranded by the only man who knew the geography of that desolate waste.

CHAPTER XIX.

" IN THE DEPTHS."

" COUNCIL of war, Dick ! "

Mr. Amherst, who had recovered his spirits, nodded approbation. " Guess that'll about fill the bill, chief. Cain, you blamed fool, hunker down."

The negro showed what remained of his teeth, and took his place. They still clung to the ledge in the faint hope that Puca might return. Now at his highest, the sun poured floods of glowing light on the shadowless earth, and puffs of heated air rose from the arid valley, where the temperature was almost that of a blast furnace. Not a cloud tempered the pitiless glare ; not a shadow was cast by the jumble of black slag ; and arched by a brazen firmament, the earth lay baked, parched, almost molten. With the water giving out ; the provisions failing ; the grass cropped by the mules to its very quick, there was no time to be lost ; they must descend to a level where they might hope to find both food and water. And so they took counsel among themselves, Cain—the mere echo of Dick—participating therein as a matter of course.

" Well, Dicky, what's to be done ? "

" First and foremost we must get to water, chief."

" That means we will have to drop down the mountain again. Naiu's gang, or no Naiu's gang, there's nothing else for it, so far as I can see. We'll have to chance it. If only the devils had left us a few more cartridges, I wouldn't mind so much."

" Dat Puca nebber gib ole Cain time to git dem tings on de mules, Massa Hazel."

" No, he knew a thing worth two of that," said Dick, gloomily ; " we've got enough to see us through about twenty shots ; after that, whew ! There's just the chance we may pick up some friendlies though, Hazel ! "

" Can't trust 'em." Hazel knit his brows. " Seems to me the pueblo tamash was a put-up job by Puca, Dick."

" Quite believe it. I'll wring his blamed neck when I get him ; he needs man-handling. But what's to be done, chief ? "

" Well, we'd better get back the way we came. If we hide in the gorge above the pueblo until it is dark there may be a chance of stealing down and collaring a couple of the canoes on the sacred river. We shall probably find that the stream joins the Ucayali or some affluent, and that we can reach Todos Santos that way."

" Huh ! You reckon to shunt the city, then ? "

" No, by Heaven ! " cried Hazel, vigorously. " We'll replenish both gun and other fodder down below and get back as sharp as we can."

" H'm ! Guess there ain't much gun-food at Todos ! "

" Then at Iquitos. It only means a run up the Ucayali ; and that town's a boss-centre, where you can get a good deal for money." Gerald touched his belt. " We'll manage it somehow, Dick."

" It'll be the deuce's own business slipping past that blamed pueblo."

" Not by night ; and once on the river we'll take our chance. Well ? "

"I'm with you, chief. Cain?"

"Lawd, Massa Dick, yo' knows dis niggah do jes' what yo' do."

"Even to grilling on a rock," grinned Dick, who was recovering his spirits. "'Twon't be easy to get the mules along the quebrada edge."

"Stuff! Mules were invented for that sort of thing. I'd ride one along a rainbow. But look here, we must have a snack before starting."

"Amen to that—I'm with you. Hurry up with the grub, Cain."

In an hour they began the descent, the trifling luggage strapped on one mule, Dick, Cain and Gerald mounted on the other three. Amherst led, and picking out the faint trail which had been indicated by Puca, let his mule go free. The sure-footed animal, followed by its companions, descended in a zigzag; and despite the abrupt slope of the ground, and the rolling of the loose stones, Dick felt as safe there as riding along a level road. It was between two and three o'clock when they turned on the old trail.

"Hot as Sheol!" grumbled Gerald, whose skin was creased with the fine, slate-coloured dust raised by the feet of the mules, and whose eyes ached with the hard light, hot and shadowless.

"Hot? I reckon it is," replied Dick, simply. After that there was no word spoken, save by Cain, whose terror each time his mule stumbled, led him to gasp out a pious prayer. So they dropped down slowly to the lower levels; not without danger—since a false step might send the whole of them rolling into the quebrada—but with a dogged courage born of necessity.

And the abyss was at hand. Two hours of crawling along the lava slopes brought them to the wall of mountains which hemmed in the amphitheatre. Here the earthquake had split the cliffs not only from top to bottom, but down—almost into the womb of the world, and the terrific chasm stretched its gaping mouth through the gorge for many miles. On either side ran a narrow ledge, along which the mules paced, scraping their riders' legs against the rock. It was indeed a perilous way. Above, the frowning cliffs—below, the fathomless crack in the planet's crust; and between, like the bridge of dread, a path scarcely nine feet wide. The journey along this ledge required the nicest handling—a nerve of steel; but as it was the sole outlet to the lower slopes of the mountain, the attempt had to be made somehow. At least they were out of the glare of the sun, for here was a slight shade, cool and pleasing to the eye, and a breeze which tempered the heat radiating from the cliffs. Hazel glanced at his watch.

"We'll get through by sundown," he said. "Cain, let the animals have their heads," to which remark the negro made no reply, being terrified at finding himself hanging between heaven and earth on a nine foot shelf.

The sun wheeled west, the gloom intensified in the gorge, and still they held on at a slow pace, with straining eyes and aching nerves. As the glimpse of sky overhead changed to a dazzling yellow, they were able to see the pleasant green of the lower hills above the desert. On turning a corner the path grew a trifle wider, and Dick gave a great shout as they emerged from the jaws of the pass. Fatal expression of joy! for they were yet on the ledge and in peril. Hardly had the echo of his cry died away, when the gorge reverberated with the sharp ping, ping, ping, of three rifles. The mule led by Cain plunged, snorted, and with a loud bray disappeared over the precipice. The old nigger, holding fast

to the lariat, lost his balance, and in a flash was jerked from his mule into the depths. The incident happened so suddenly that Gerald for the moment lost his head, the next thing he realised was that he was galloping down the broad descent of the valley road, with Cain's mule plunging by his side, and Dick tearing ahead brandishing his revolver and cursing freely. They hurled themselves blindly into an ambush of Indians, who scattered right and left at the onset, and then wheeled round with rifles levelled. It flashed across Hazel that the end of all things was at hand, and he set his teeth to die game.

Dick, furious at the loss of Cain, was shooting wildly. Hazel saw an Indian fling up his hands and fall, then as fire spouted from two rifles Amherst's mule rolled under him. The next moment Dick was up, striking and kicking ; but a mass of men flung themselves forward and bore him down. Gerald leaped from his mule and swinging his revolver, dashed forward to his aid. If death must come let them die together.

"Hold on, Dick, I'm with you," and crack, crack, two men bit the dust.*

"Shoot ; shoot the devils !"

But the contest was too unequal. Overwhelmed and outnumbered, the white men were struck to the earth and rendered powerless by the sheer weight of their enemies. In another five minutes, bound and blindfolded, they were being borne in some unknown direction to some unknown doom. A quarter of an hour had sufficed to change the whole aspect of affairs.

Gerald was the coolest of men. The more imminent the danger, the more composed he became ; and in spite of the suddenness of this attack, of the frightful death of the negro, of his own helpless condition, and that of Dick, his wits were always with him. An occasional oath from Amherst no great distance away assured him that his friend was at least alive, which was something to be thankful for in the circumstances.

The Indians said no word, but carried Gerald swiftly yet not roughly along. In the turmoil he had lost all knowledge of the cardinal points ; and knew not whether he was being taken back to the gorge or forward to the lower slopes. But he felt the irregularities of the ground ; first an ascent, then a level path ; then a flight of steps, which his bearers descended, and finally a halt. Shortly after, a rope was knotted under his arms, and he was swung into space. A solution of the attack flashed across his mind.

"Mama Oclo ! The Quebrada ! The buried city !"

Reeling and dizzy, he dropped down like a bale of goods. He thought he would never reach the bottom of the abyss, and wondered vaguely how long the rope could be. Strong winds sucked up from the earth's entrails rushed and roared, dashing his body to and fro. He swung like a spider at the end of its self-spun strand. Unexpectedly there came a pause. He was dropped gently as thistledown on to a craggy shelf—midway, he guessed it must be, since the wind still streamed upward. Another rope, and he was again lowered into those tremendous depths. Three times he rested on as many ledges ; three times a fresh rope was bound round him. Down ! down ! down ! He began to think he would drop to the central fires ; and like the ghosts in the Inferno, he was blown like a withering leaf along the wind.

At the fourth rest, the second stage of this blind and nightmare journey was reached. There was no more lowering, but, lifted by strong arms,

he was borne at a running pace through a warm thick atmosphere. As in a dream he heard the splash of water, the clashing of subterranean winds, the echo of falling rocks, as though he were in the workshop of Nature—in the very bowels of the earth. Still there could be felt a faint breeze, and a damp coolness, which constrained him to believe he was even yet in the open. Then borne up a steep ascent, the thunder of a waterfall struck his ear, and on his cheek he felt the sting of bitterly cold spray. Then the roaring ceased; so suddenly and completely that the ensuing silence became terrible by contrast. Again came the running on level ground; then again a pause. Released from his bonds he was rolled on the earth. The bandage was whipped from his eyes, and the soft pad, pad, of bare feet died away. The darkness around him was as the darkness of Egypt.

Physically and mentally incapacitated for the moment, he lay there motionless. Gradually, as the blood circulated, his brain began to work again, and he became more alive to his position. Someone was sobbing by his side.

“Dick, is that you?”

“Y—e—s,” after a long interval.

Gerald groped with his hands, and finally touched what seemed to be a bundle of wet clothes; a bundle which shook and trembled as with ague. He caught the bundle in his numbed arms.

“Dick! Be a man—pull yourself together.”

But Amherst, with his head on Gerald’s breast, still sobbed and shivered. “Cain, Cain! Poor old Cain!” he wailed. “Ah, God! God!”

Gerald could give him no consolation on this point. Cain was no doubt lying shattered and dead in some terrific abyss; never again to be seen by the eye of man. “M’only friend,” wept Dick. “A better man than ever I was. Curse them! Damn them! Oh! Oh! Oh!”

Far in the distance a silvery star twinkled unexpectedly in the gloom. It waxed and brightened, and radiated light until it became a moon for size and lustre—and like the moon seemed to float in the void. Hazel suddenly jerked Dick to his feet. “Look here—we can’t stay here for ever, and howling won’t do any good!” he said, almost brutally. “For God’s sake let’s get out of this!”

“Where?” asked Dick, listlessly.

“Towards that light. Then we may see our surroundings. We must be in the buried city, Amherst.”

“We are in Cain’s grave. I’ll come!”

Hand in hand the two advanced, timorous as children, moving cautiously through the dark lest they should be precipitated into some abyss. Dick’s heart was too full to feel much; but Gerald’s throbbed rapidly, fluttered fearfully as they crept along the unknown. The bravest man may be excused terror at a danger he cannot foresee or guard against; and their nightmare position shook Gerald to the centre of his being.

The gallery—as it undoubtedly was—trended upward, and with every step they took, the silvery light rose steadily. When they were directly underneath, it hung like a splendid planet high above their heads—so high that its pallid radiance served only to hollow out a small gulf of light in the thick gloom. Then another miracle happened.

Directly in front of them, an arm’s length away, appeared a seven-hued rainbow of considerable size, which glowed like some splendid jewel. At the same moment the star overhead vanished. Filled with curiosity,

Hazel stretched out his hand. It touched the rainbow, and there was a ripple of delicate sound from silver bells. The tintinnabulation still trembled in the air when a softly sliding door was pushed aside. A blaze of light ; a glitter of silver and crystal and jewels dissolved in a mist of white fire. The two men reeled back, struck blind well-nigh with the dazzle, after those many hours of darkness. From the—to them—blinding light a voice proceeded.

“ Enter into Yayacarui ! ”

It was the voice of Mama Oclo ; and the adventurers leaped forward. At the sound of the well-known voice they were filled with hatred and wrath. As they sprang the sliding sound was again heard. The door closed behind them. They were alone before a throne of resplendent silver, upon which sat Mama Oclo, smiling mockingly.

CHAPTER XX.

“ THE END OF THE JOURNEY.”

As Abou Hassan may have felt on waking a caliph in the caliph's palace, so did Hazel feel, surrounded by this unaccustomed and barbaric splendour. He and Dick found themselves in a fair-sized room—if room it could be called—having an arched roof, and at the further side a circular recess wherein was placed the throne occupied by Mama Oclo.

Both men, unkempt and dishevelled, stared silently at her, for she was once again the bejewelled idol of that never-to-be-forgotten night in Lima. But the shrine was more resplendent now than it had been in Tockto's cabin. Plates of polished silver covered roof and walls and throne, a mosaic pavement of wondrous design and colouring stretched nakedly around, wholly bare of furniture : curtains of purple silk, gold-broidered with grotesque patterns, draped the door, and cushions of the same material and colour enriched the throne. In the dome sparkled a myriad of electric lamps in saffron-hued globes : and over the recess arched a seven-coloured rainbow, formed of gems, which scintillated sparks of fire. The silver walls flashed back the light, the lamps were reflected and reduplicated as in mirrors, and the throne shone with the radiance of white flame. In the centre of this glow and glory and intolerable brilliancy sat Mama Oclo, concentrating in herself all the wondrous splendour of that wondrous place. The whole coruscated and streamed with rainbow fires like the Northern Lights. Here, if anywhere, was earth's treasure-house, in earth's womb, and Mama Oclo sat on its throne as the goddess of Fortune, to be worshipped or cursed. Dick, on recovering from the shock of his first surprise, was quick to enrol himself on the side of those who cursed.

“ You infernal witch ! ” shouted he, feeling for his revolver and finding none. “ If I'd m' shooter, I'd kill you as you killed Cain.” He rushed up the steps of the throne before Hazel could stop him, and shook his clenched hand in the face of the motionless figure. “ By God, it's well you're a woman, or I'd wipe the floor with you. As it is——” choking with rage, he raised his fist.

“ Here, I say, Dick, go easy. Pull yourself together. Remember you're a white man.”

Mama Oclo never moved, never flinched. With Dick's fist a few inches away from her face, she still continued to smile, and mocked him with

her smile. By that gaze he was hypnotized, disarmed, put to utter rout, so that he let himself be dragged back by Hazel.

"Jezebel! You murdered my only friend," and tears of which he was not ashamed streamed down his dirty cheeks. "I'll wring your neck, damn you! See if I don't!"

Mama Ocllo still sat mute, still smiled.

It was reserved for Hazel to sting her into speech and action. With a shrug, he gazed at the splendours around him, secretly amazed, outwardly calm, even contemptuous. When he looked again on the woman there was a sneer on his face and an irony in his voice. Dick, sullen and downcast, held his tongue.

"This is all very pretty and theatrical," said Hazel deliberately. "Your *mise-en-scène* is imposing and correct: just what one expects from Peru, after reading Prescott's 'Arabian Nights.' But you will forgive my observing that the preparations for our entrance were a trifle melodramatic, and—so far as we are concerned—quite ineffective. I don't care for Rosicrucian mysteries myself, and should have preferred more of a welcome and less of a pantomime. Perhaps the *Señorita de Herrera* will explain why she has taken so much trouble to impress two common-place Englishmen?"

The lazy scorn in his voice was so evident, that Mama Ocllo winced—perhaps for the first time in her life. She evaded his question. "Call me no Spanish dog names," she said, rising with regal pride. "In me you behold the descendant of Manco Capac—the representative of the Incas."

"Quite so. I was aware in Lima that you exercised your feminine prerogative of—shall we say, equivocation. You are Mama Ocllo, an Inca princess, and, for purposes best known to yourself, you preside over this jeweller's shop. I knew much of this before. But what I do not know, and what I would have you tell me, is why you have seized us; and how you have dared to kill our servant."

"Dare!" Mama Ocllo's black brows drew together. "No one uses that word to me. Here my word is the word of life and death. I am supreme."

"So I should think—you give every evidence of an undisciplined nature."

"If you speak to me like that, you shall not live."

Hazel shrugged his shoulders. "As you please. We are in your power."

"Are you not afraid?"

"Afraid!" echoed Dick, taking the word out of Gerald's mouth. "Neither I nor my friend's afraid of any slut sewn up in jewels. Why you——"

"Shut up, Dick," whispered Hazel, vehemently. "Let me manage her."

"Be damned to her!" shouted Dick, "She killed Cain."

"And you also shall be killed if you are not silent instantly," panted the woman, her eyes flashing, her voice shaking with passion. "Yes, and be days in dying."

"It's torture you mean, you she-devil!"

"Yes, torture. Drunken hound, but for your friend there, I would have had you killed long since. You insulted me at Lima: the death of your negro clears that score. But insult me here in my own city, and by Him whose breath is my soul, I will teach you how long death can be in coming. Now you have my warning!"

Dick snapped his fingers. "Huh! I should smile. I'd like to see m'self knuckle down to you in this rabbit-burrow. If——"

With a frown Gerald seized Dick's arm. "Hold your tongue, I tell you. You promised to obey me. Let me speak."

"Fire ahead!" said Dick, sullenly. "I guess that cat-a-mountain 'ull make it hot for us anyhow!"

By this time Mama Oclo had recovered herself somewhat. Taking no notice of Dick's insolence, she addressed herself to Hazel. "You are no doubt tired and upset," she observed coolly, "and perhaps you are not well able to measure your words. As I am not naturally a patient woman, it may be best—it will be best if we postpone further conversation till to-morrow. I have given all instructions for your comfort."

"First tell me why you killed our servant."

"I had no use for him," replied Mama Oclo, brutally. "I have still less for your friend, but as I promised you in Lima, I ordered that he should be spared. It is you I want, Mr. Hazel: and," with a slow smile, "it is you I have. Now go!"

"But if you will ex——"

"Be wise and go."

She clapped her hands, and the door rolled back again, showing a rugged gallery now lighted with many electric lamps. Several Indians in cotton dresses waited without, and thinking discretion was the better part of valour, Gerald took Dick's arm and led him out of the silver chamber. As they left it, the door closed again, and shut off its splendours from their view. Following the Indians, Gerald kept fast grip of Dick, and reproached him for his rashness.

"We tread on egg-shells here, Dicky," he said impressively, "and your game of bluff won't do—to use your own vernacular, it doesn't pay a red cent."

"She needn't have killed Cain," grumbled Dick, savagely.

"I know, and I am sorry. Poor old Cain—he was a decent sort."

Amherst stopped and struck his heel passionately on the ground. "He was a white man, Hazel. God never made a better. I'm a dandy sinner, I am—and there's no vacancy for an angel which would suit me. But Cain, a good old saint! He'll be roosting in Abraham's bosom, I guess, while I'm being barracked in the sulphur factory. If there was——"

Dick's queer mixture of lamentation and slang, of sorrow and blasphemy, was interrupted by Hazel, who saw their guide—a tall Indian in blue cotton trousers and blouse—looking curiously at the speaker. "Do you understand English?" asked Hazel, sharply.

"Yes, sir," was the ready response, just as a waiter in a London hotel might answer.

"Great Scott!" gasped Dick, "where did you pick it up?"

"Here, sir. We all speak two languages—English and Quichua."

"But why English?"

The man touched his breast, his mouth, his forehead, rapidly. "The Coya knows—the Coya Mama Oclo knows all things."

"Huh! Coya means a she-boss. Is Mama Oclo queen of this dug-out?"

Again the man repeated his strange gesture. "Inca Sutic-toco reigns!"

"Guess he doesn't with the Virgin about," growled Dick, resuming his walk. "Go on—what's your name?"

"Apu, lord. I am the chief of the Coya's servants," he saluted again. "The name signifies 'chief.'"

"Well, Apu," said Hazel, rather confused to find an Indian speaking the English tongue with such fluency, "we are tired and hungry: lead us to our rooms," and as Apu went forward he whispered in Amherst's ear, "For Heaven's sake, Dick, be careful. All you say will be repeated to that woman, and she's a vindictive devil if ever there was one. Weigh your words, man, or you'll ruin us both."

"You didn't weigh yours over much, Hazel."

"Indeed I did. My insolence was studied. I fancy I understand how to deal with Mama Ocllo. She understands me."

"She loves you!"

"All the better. That will give me sufficient influence over her to keep us out of danger anyway. But there's no need for you to go out of your way to get us into it, Dick."

"All right. I'm square. But I'll get even with her for killing Cain—you bet I will!"

Still in the lighted gallery, they arrived at a small niche in which was set a dull-looking door of some metal unknown to Hazel—though, to speak truly, his knowledge of metallurgy was not of an extensive order. At a touch from Apu this slipped silently to one side, and they entered an arched corridor, the walls of which were plastered with a silvery cement like that used in the pueblo. At intervals lamps were placed which shed a brilliant light. Another door admitted them to a large room with a domed ceiling studded with electric stars. The walls of this were of a polished blue, the pavement of white slabs, and in it were chairs, tables, sofas, and all the comforts of civilization, even to a clock. Hazel rubbed his eyes. It seemed incredible that such a homely room could exist in this romantic city. In the dome several electric fans kept the air sweet and cool: but there was no fireplace. The natural heat of the caverns did away with the necessity for artificial warmth.

"This is where you eat, lords," said Apu, and pointed to a table amply served. "Here and here," pointing to right and to left, "the sleeping rooms and baths."

"Baths!" Hazel raised his eyebrows. "Yayacarui is indeed civilised. Hot and cold water I presume!"

Dick, who had not been long finding out something to drink, finished a glass of chicha, and looked gravely at Apu. "Is there an elevator?" he demanded. "We really can't engage the rooms without an elevator."

"A lift, he means," explained Gerald, seeing that Apu was puzzled.

"Oh yes; we have lifts, but not here; it is not needed." The Indian turned towards the door. "You have all you wish here, lords. I go."

"One moment, Apu. Are we prisoners?"

"No; Viracocha, you are free to come and go. Still," Apu looked serious, "it would be better not to leave these rooms, as you do not know our caverns, and there may be danger."

"Oh, there are caverns then?"

"Many caverns, Viracocha—many and big, under the Andes. But it is late," he pointed to the clock, which was on the stroke of midnight; "Eat, drink and sleep, lords. Should you wish to go out, see—" and he showed them how to manipulate the door spring.

"Ain't you afraid we'll clear—make tracks? Light out! Oh hang it!"

exclaimed Dick, seeing that Apu did not understand him. "Escape I mean."

For the first time the Indian smiled. "No one can escape from Yayarui," he said. "He who comes stays for ever." He again made the sign and stepped outside. Another moment and the door slipped into its place, and Dick and Hazel were alone.

"Huh! What do you think, chief?" said the former thoughtfully.

"I think we'd better examine our rooms, and make ourselves comfortable."

"I mean about our chances of getting out of this."

Hazel shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I'm in no hurry. We wanted to get into Yayarui, and we've got there. Now it remains to take the benefit of our success. Come and feed, Dicky."

"Let's see the ranche first, chief."

The bedrooms were smaller apartments, one on each side of the central hall. One had walls of smooth green cement, the other red. To each was attached a tiny bath-room of smooth white stone with ample baths sunk in the floor.

"And silver taps and fittings, by gosh," cried Dick. "Well, they are a dandy lot of bankrupts hereabouts anyway."

"Silver's as common as tin here, Dick. All the riches of Peru seem to be concentrated in this place. Mammon's church, Dick. Cuzco's sun temple was a fool to this for wealth. I expect revelations to-morrow."

"Do you think we're safe?"

"Quite; so long as you keep your tongue civil. Mama Ocllo would not have brought us all this way to make meat of us."

"What about that little devil Puca?"

"Oh, I daresay he'll turn up and explain himself. By Jove, I'm so fagged out I can scarcely stand. Come on, Dick, food first and rest afterwards."

They returned to the first apartment and made a good meal. At its conclusion Dick filled a glass of wine and rose.

"To the dear old nig's memory," he said.

"Amen," replied Hazel. And they drank the toast in silence.

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE BEGINNINGS OF KNOWLEDGE."

IN these subterranean depths there could be seen no dial of the sky, whereby to gauge the passage of the hours. In time the adventurers came to know more concerning the electric illuminations of the cavern, and to learn how an eight-hour night had been created for recuperative purposes. Indeed, the eight-hour system obtained here throughout; and the twenty-four were apportioned off to slumber, work, and recreation; and the resultant health and happiness of the troglodytes justified the wisdom of those in authority.

This underground state was governed on lines wholly ancient in their foundation, and modernised only so far as experience and the exigencies of the peculiar situation seemed to demand. And assuredly no better model than the Inca constitution could have been taken; for of all constitutions known to man it proved itself most conducive to his well-being.

Formed on a socialistic basis, administered by discreet rulers, it took equal care of the individual and of the multitude; and at the time of the Conquest it was far in advance of any European system. By sheer brute force, the Spaniards, narrow-minded and fanatical, destroyed this ideal state. The dreams of Plato and of Sir Thomas More, which it realised, they replaced by civil and military and religious despotism. The glory of conquest was blotted out by the shame of tyranny.

Hazel was the first to wake next morning. Worn out by fatigue and the emotion he had felt at poor old Cain's violent end, Dick still slept heavily. As Gerald looked at him he could see the traces of tears on his haggard face. He let him sleep on, and stole back on tip-toe to the central room. Here he found Apu waiting with salutations and a bundle of clothes. The man addressed Hazel with an amiable gravity.

"Hail, Viracocha! You have slept late, and indeed I do not wonder at that after your journey down the quebrada. Coya Mama Ocllo sends these garments to you and Uchu. But if you would still dress as a white man, your baggage from the pueblo is in your sleeping room."

In rather a supercilious way, Gerald examined the tunics and breeches of dyed vicuña wool, which, he concluded, went to form the official dress of the Yayacarui citizens. "With all thanks to Mama Ocllo I prefer my own clothes, Apu; and I doubt not Uchu will be of the same mind. I suppose Puca told you that name. By the way," Hazel looked up with marked curiosity, "who is this little man we know as Puca?"

"Cusi-cuy is the jester of Inca Sutic-toco!"

"H'm. He struck me as being something in that line, although his merry-making is a trifle dismal. The red rascal! He is a traitor as well as jester!"

"No, lord," remonstrated Apu. "Cusi-cuy did but obey your will. You desired to see our city, and you are in it. What the man promised, the man performed."

"There is some truth in that, Apu. But why were we blindfolded?"

"In truth you ask me a hard question, Viracocha. Perhaps it was that you might not mark the way to our refuge; but as you will never leave it again, I know not why your sight should have been taken."

"Are you then so certain that we shall never leave this place, Apu?"

The Indian smiled grimly. "Many have come; none have departed, and I do not think you will be the first to find your way out. But these things have to do with the Coya!" He produced a paper from his girdle. "She sends you this, Viracocha. Bathe and dress, lord. I go for food." He disappeared, leaving Gerald to digest the letter of Mama Ocllo. It was a lengthy document, containing sundry explanations; and as exhibiting the attitude of the Coya, may be here set forth with advantage.

"No doubt you wonder, Viracocha, that you find yourself so unexpectedly in our City of the Rainbow. I write to explain, and save myself many questions, which I have not sufficient patience to answer. To make your position clear at the outset, know that it is I who had you brought to this place; otherwise in seeking our refuge, you would have lost your life. Why did I protect it and admit you into the secret city? Indeed, Viracocha, I hardly know, and that is a sufficient answer for a woman to make. Perhaps I wish to repay you for having saved me from insult at Lima; or it may be that I have another and a stronger reason which you may learn later, if it pleases me. Enough! You are here, and that is the main thing. From the hour you arrived at Cuzco you were

under my care ; and your future was of my contrivance. It was I who sent you Cusi-cuy for guide. Had he not gained your friendship at the cock-fight he would have done so in another way, seeing that it was my command you should be led to the mountains, ignorant always that you were so led. Uchu, by his evil doings, threw you across Cusi-cuy's path, and—you know how it all came about. Your life was guarded by me ; and the fool who shot an arrow at you was slain by my order. There is no limit to my power ; otherwise your bones would long since have been bleaching on the hills.

“ Cusi-cuy guided you up the Apurimac, through the forest, across the desert, into the mountains. The journey was difficult, was it not ? Ah, there is a nearer and easier way to Yayacarui, by which I preceded you ; but that way was not for you. I had you plunged into dangers and difficulties to prove the stuff you were made of—why, you shall learn later. The attacks of Indians in the forest and at the pueblo were arranged by my order. The loss of water in the desert was designed. Naini died because of Uchu's uncontrolled temper and headstrong courage. He is a brave man as you are. Had either of you flinched—had either of you gone back with your task unfulfilled, both would have died. I love no cowards ! Cusi-cuy left you to shift for yourselves at the base of the music-mountain in a waterless land. You were never less alone, than when alone—as you thought—on that platform. Many eyes watched what you would do ; many ears overheard your words. How, it does not matter ; my people know the secrets of the hills ; and you were surrounded on all sides by invisible watchers. Thus was your design of the retreat to Todos Santos known ; thus were you seized when you had achieved the dangerous passage of the quebrada. To the very utmost I tested your courage, knowing your heart was brave. I was right, as I always am right ; and so I permitted you to gain your goal. In descending into the depths of the chasm you did not tremble ; borne through the gate of the waterfall you did not flinch ; and you bore yourself with courage when alone with your friend in the very depths of the world. Therefore you sought and found me in my silver chamber ; therefore you gained the end you aimed at. In truth, Viracocha, you are a brave man ; and I love you for your bravery. Well, your reward shall be great—you know not how great.

“ To-day I send you one to display our wonders. Go through our city ; spy out our secrets ; acquaint yourself with our defences ; all is open to you—nothing is withheld. For this also I have my reason. When you know all, ponder in your heart ; then come to me for the reason of these things. Think not of Yayacarui as romantic ; deem it not a city of enchantment. It is hidden under the crust of our prosaic planet ; no fairy-land, no fabled realm of the ‘ Arabian Nights,’ no Manoa of legend ; but the refuge of a fallen and despoiled people, who work in secret to recover their share of God's world overhead. We who worship Con, the supreme, the All-glorious, through his servant the Sun, are shut out from the glory of that Sun, though his children we know ourselves to be. Cut off from the kindly influence of the sky ; deprived of Moon, and Sun, of fertile rain, and health-giving winds, we grope like beasts in the clefts of earth ; but unlike beasts strive for the higher and freer life. It will come ; it will come, when the wheel of Time comes full circle. The night of sorrow is passing away ; the dawn of joy is at hand. Glory be to Con who ruleth all.

"Many things in our city will amaze you; many startle you; many puzzle you; but I can explain all; and the explanation will be commonplace and painful. You are brave, Viracocha! Are you also noble-hearted and generous? When you have seen and reflected, come to Mama Ocllo and answer that question. I wait!—I have long waited for Manco Capac! Why? He was the father of the red race; the spouse of an earlier Mama Ocllo, when they led those wandering in darkness to the light, raised men above the condition of brutes, and taught them that souls endure though bodies go to dust. Of those who now sit in darkness, I am the new mother. But Manco Capac! the redeeming one! the Regenerator! the Deliverer! Where is he? I, gifted by Con with knowledge, can answer that question when the time is ripe for telling. The hour demands its hero! Mine be the task to find him; to arm him; to point out his path. And you? What of you, blinded to what the future hath in store? But the eyes shall see; the heart shall know! Viracocha! Consider these things, and guess my riddle if you can—if you dare. As for me, I wait!"

To this extraordinary letter Mama Ocllo had put no signature. Bewildered by its dark sayings, which were almost on a level with Apocalyptic prophecies, Hazel read it twice and thrice and again in the endcavout to unravel its mysteries. Much that was meant he could guess; but much again was beyond his comprehension. Perplexed, he sought Dick's counsel; and demanded his opinion of the new Sphinx. The prodigal was awake and melancholy; staring at the ceiling with his hands behind his head, and the head itself full of Cain and Cain's sad end. He grumbled somewhat at his grief being thus intruded upon; but recognising the call of duty sat up to peruse the document. Its contents embarrassed his understanding very speedily.

"Well, I'm damned!" was his sage comment on the riddle.

"You see I was right in suspecting Mama Ocllo. We have been under her eye all the time—insects in a microscope; our designs forestalled; our very thoughts read. The journey, real enough to us, was a farce to her. We protected ourselves against shadowy dangers, safe-guarded on all sides."

"None the less courage to face them, chief!"

"True. We danced without knowing that she pulled the wires. Faugh! It is humiliating to have figured as such puppets."

"Gosh! to think that the slut should ha' been givin' us borack all the time!" raged Dick. "She chucked those troubles our way out of sheer devilment. Anyhow, I got even with her over Naiu; there was no pantomime over that!"

"As little as there was about the death of poor Cain. She's thrown in a spice of tragedy with her comedy, I must say!"

"Curse her! I'll level up to that some day. What's all this play-actin' for, Hazel?"

"That much she puts plainly in the letter—to prove our manhood!"

"Huh! She don't take much stock in this child. No, sir. You are the white-haired innocent, I guess." Dick glanced again at the document and mused. "Seems to me she wants you to freeze on to the name of Manco Capac, an' hitch up 'longside her. It's clear as mud."

"I fancy even she would stop short of that."

"Oh, you bet I'm jamming in the square reason," said Amherst, gravely; "she's running you for a god of sorts in her high-falutin' style."

I've heard the queerest yarns about that red-skinned Adam. The niggers down the coast way let on he was an English boss to pull 'em straight. Ingasman Cocapac, they call him; an' that means 'bloomin' Englishman' in their lingo. Seems as the virgin wants to repeat history. You're bloomin' enough for her, anyhow!" and despite his sorrow, Dick grinned.

"Oh, that tradition's of modern manufacture, Dickie. If by any chance one of our race had been cast in the past on South American shores—which I don't for one moment believe—he couldn't have called himself an Englishman. Consider an instant. Manco Capac appeared at Cuzco about 1021, long before the battle of Hastings. We were not a nation then, and the term 'English' was not invented."

"Humph! May be. Still, it's rum these niggers should spout our lingo!"

"No doubt; but that is one of the explanations Mama Ocllo is prepared to furnish in her own good time. We must see the city first; then her."

Dick lay down with a sulky face. "Damned if I'm goin' to run round any city," said he, savagely. "Cain's on my mind; and I've got to howl him out of it."

Hazel was too well assured of Dick's genuine grief to enter a protest. He patted his shoulder, and, ever mindful of the prodigal's capacity for getting into trouble, spoke a word in season. "You'll not leave these rooms while I'm away, Dickie?"

"No. I only want to be by myself for a shake. The trouble of that old nig's death's enough to make a dog sick." So Gerald went away and left Dick to mourn in his own savage fashion.

A bath in deliciously cold water, diamond clear, made him feel more like himself. He found all the accessories of his toilet, and selected for wear a fresh suit of khaki, after some rummaging amongst his kit. It seemed rather ridiculous to don riding breeches and high boots underground; but there was choice only between that and native dress, in which he could in no way fancy himself. That Mama Ocllo should even thus outwardly decivilise him was not to be thought of. So his English kit went on; and he felt smart, clean, and comfortable—all aids to outfacing a difficult situation. But he regretted his revolvers; which had been carefully removed.

Apu's catering resulted in a well-cooked meal of the plainest food; but the coffee was fragrant, and Gerald hungry, so he made no objection to hermit fare. Not so Dick, who came to table attracted by the rattle of dishes; finding that even grief had an appetite, and must be fed up. He grumbled so much that Hazel rebuked him.

"You ought to be jolly glad to get a meal at all," he said, "and considering we'll need all our wits about us in this place, the less we eat, the clearer they will be. You are like all the English, Dick, you eat far too much."

Dick sighed remorsefully. "I'm a beast to eat at all," he said, and no doubt would have gone on to mourn for Cain in his usual unmeasured fashion; but that a third person appeared; a tall, burly man, with blue eyes, red-headed, long-bearded; with a generally active air, rather discountenanced by a slouching gait. He wore cotton garments, cut Indian fashion, of a dark blue; sandals of llama hide, and a broad-brimmed straw hat—though why he should require a hat in these sunless regions was matter for conjecture.

"Morning, gentlemen," said he, in a slow and deliberate voice. "I shall have to introduce myself. James Parry, gentlemen, engineer of Yayacarui."

"English, I think?"

"True blue. Bedford Town—born in Bunyan's village."

"Shake!" cried Dick, jumping up. "I'm a public-school man myself. Good old Bedford! Was under Jerry in the school. Hnh! He couldn't make a Bunyan out o', the likes o' me. Sit down and grub, Parry."

"I'd rather smoke, if you don't mind." He spread his large form over the sofa, and proceeded: "I'm the Baedeker of these parts," said Parry, "an' the local Cook personally to conduct inquiring tourists."

Hazel laughed at the familiar words. "Do you know it well?"

"If I didn't after fifteen years I would be a——"

"Fifteen years!" this was Dick's interruption. "Great Scott! Have you taken root here?"

Parry smiled, knowing what he knew, and raked his beard with outstretched fingers. "Looks like it, doesn't it! Case of must, gentlemen. There's a wife an' family waiting for me in London—Highgate way. Think I'm bridge-building in Peru. But although they don't know where I am, they get my salary regularly. Oh, I will say that for Mama Oclo; she mails the coin all right. There's no playin' low down in the cash department."

"But, Mr. Parry, are you—that is—do you call yourself a prisoner?"

"Within limits I do, Mr. Hazel. You see I know your name, sir; yes, and Mr. Amherst's too. Prisoner! That's so. You might put in a day askin' how the lot of us stand bein' jammed in this hole. I don't say," drawled Parry, "as I'd undertake to answer you. Not much!"

"The lot of you? Gosh! Are there other whites cavortin' round here?"

"Twenty, Mr. Amherst. Samples of every nationality under the sun. Time of this sort of penal servitude amongst 'em ranges from thirty years to a few months. The last arrival—he was a Yankee inventor from N'York City—dropped in here ten months back. What's your line, gentlemen?"

"Ain't got any. Got round just for fun."

"That's unlucky," said Parry, with good-humoured sarcasm. "For you'll get round no more, Mr. Amherst."

"H'm," Hazel chipped in. "There are two opinions about that. However, we can leave it for the present. The show's the thing now. What do all you whites do with yourselves here, Mr. Parry?"

"Act accordin' to our lights and trainin', sir. I'm electric myself, an' run the illumination biz. Another of us—an Oxford B.A. he is—teaches the natives to get their tongues round 'Varsity English. Some one else—but here!" Parry rose with the heave of a spouting whale, "come out an' see for yourselves. Good's a play sight-seein', hereabouts."

"Can't go myself, Mr. Parry. M' chief 'll follow on."

"Come then." Parry turned to Gerald. "We'll see the city first; and later take the train to the workshops."

"The—the—train?"

"Electric railway, sir," explained the engineer to the astonished questioner.

"Jove, you are up to date here and no mistake!"

Parry let out a short laugh of quiet amusement. "Up to date, sir!"

Why, Yayacarui's ahead of any city in the overhead world. There isn't an invention worth salt that doesn't figure round about here some way."

"Well!" Hazel laughed also, and put on his cap. "I'm prepared to be awe-struck. Dick, 'member to lie up!"

"Honest Injin! See you again, Parry."

"To-night, if you will. We have a White Man's club here. The boys 'll be glad to see you both this evenin'. Come down, and we'll put you through the whole business."

"Right oh. So-long, chief! Don't get spilt!" after which enigmatic advice Dick ushered the two out of doors, and returned to his mourning. He was nothing if not thorough, was Dick.

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE CITY OF THE RAINBOW."

SURPRISE followed surprise rapidly. Each hour disclosed some new wonder, and at the end of the day Hazel sat down with something approaching a sensation of bewilderment, to consider seriously the topography of this underground world. The immensity and number of the caverns which went to make it up, amazed him. It was weeks before he got what Dick termed "the hang of the place."

Under the guidance of Parry, he commenced exploration with the main gallery. This ran from the quebrada straightway into a cluster of caverns, and through them into a king-cavern, the Hall of Eblis, the most gigantic of all. He began at the far end. There, a waterfall, skilfully guided over the entrance, fell in glassy sheets, shutting out completely, with its liquid barrier, the external world. With hammer-like blows it descended on a ledge of rock—as it might be, the threshold of the gateway—and rebounded, foaming and roaring into the fathomless depths. It could be cut off—Parry informed Gerald—at any moment, so that those whom the Inca delighted to honour could enter. But while its Niagara-like flood masked the door, passage was impossible. As a defence it was as absolute as it was ingenious.

Thence Gerald and his guide proceeded into the heart of the mountain, and into the Silver Chamber. Passing on through the numerous galleries which diverged from it, like spokes from the hub of a wheel, they emerged on to a terrace of dressed stone running round the craggy shelf of the main cavern. Below, gaped a mighty hollow, circular in shape, and having all the appearance of a crater of some extinct volcano. This was belted by gigantic cliffs of grey and black lava. Along the top of them ran the terraces, protected by balustrades of green stone, grotesquely carved. In their rear rose the cavern walls, pierced here and there by tunnels leading into the interior hollows; and over it all arched the immense concave roof, starred with electric lamps, brilliant as a South Sea night. Gerald gasped. He felt a very pismire in the appalling vastness of this temple of Nature.

The city itself filled the crater as water fills a cup, touching it on all sides. Divided into four quarters by broad roads, these converged to a central square; and at their far ends terminated in vast staircases of red stone, leading up to the terraces. Each quarter was packed with adobe houses—or rather single-roomed cabins—intersected by narrow

lanes. The paltry architecture of these was in marked contrast with the rest of the work, but even here a unique effect was obtained, through the huts being plastered with a kind of white cement, which made them appear as made of silver. A few of the houses in the main streets might be called mansions ; but on the whole Hazel was surprised at the relatively small proportions of the dwellings. He remarked upon it to his companion.

"Oh, the crowd don't need any better," replied Parry, carelessly. "The cabins are good enough for those not exposed to sun and rain. But the public buildings are finer. Yonder is the palace of the Inca ; opposite the house of Mama Ocllo ; and straight ahead the temple of the Sun."

These great buildings were very much alike ; being constructed of black basalt in the Egyptian style of architecture. Each stood some hundred feet back from its staircase. The walls blazed with colour. Painted in vivid reds, blues, yellows, green with figures of gods and men ; with lines of hieroglyphics, grotesque symbols and mystic signs, they glowed like tulips over the silvery lake of the city. On temple and palace walls were strange devices, descriptive of scenes in the history of Yayacarui for many hundreds of years. The priests alone could interpret the sacred writings. The hues and designs were both crude and rudimentary. Yet the effect was rather pleasing than otherwise. It imparted a sense of mysticism to the place.

In the central square spread a wide pool of water, rimmed with stone ; and thence sprang to the height of a hundred feet a jet the thickness of a man's body. In the radiance of the lamps it resembled a silver rod.

Most of all the lighting of the place held Gerald spellbound. Lines of white-globed lamps ran down the city ways, and clustered in the square ; sparkled on the terraces, and hung overhead. One colossal orb swung low down from the centre, a disc of cold white flame—the moon of that nether world.

The vast spaces glowed lustrous as a June noon, resplendent but cold—the mysterious splendence of the moon, not the warm and glowing brilliance of the sun. The silver city glimmered with soft lustre like a mirage, as cloudlike, as unsubstantial. Faint mists drew their lawny veils across the hard outline of rock and stone. There from where he stood, the whole place seemed to Hazel to quiver and recede, like a city of hallucination, built of cloud forms and moon reflections. Cloud-cuckoo town, Fata Morgana's palaces, the necromantic castles of mediæval fancy—it might have been any one of these.

Of vegetation nothing was to be seen, and of colouring there was little save for the vermilion staircases, and the tulip-hued temple and palaces. Black and white predominated—colours that are not colours. The kindly influences of nature seemed wholly withheld. No sun shone here, no moon made splendour of the night, Rain fell not, and the green of the fields was wanting. Neither arched the infinite blue of the sky, nor did the winds of heaven blow across the stony waste. The very people who thronged the streets moved low-voiced or silent about their business. No song of bird, no cry of animal, no laughter of children, no murmur of women ! All was dead, silent, buried. A city of demons it seemed : one cursed by God—terrible in its repose. The city of tears ; the city of refuge ! yet—with a hope for the future—the city of the Rainbow !

"Four roads, you see!" explained the prosaic engineer, "corresponding to the cardinal points. So was planned the Cuzco of Manco Capac. This is the largest of the caverns. There are many others; I do not know how many. We shall visit some and you shall see what the Inca race is preparing for the world above. Let us cross to the Temple of the Sun."

Hazel roused himself from his reverie and followed the engineer. "It is all very wonderful," he said, "it reminds me of that novel—what is it?—'The Coming Race'!"

"I know," said Parry, "Mama Ocllo has it in her library. Yes, you are right, it might fairly be taken as the Baedeker of Yayacarui. Bulwer Lytton wrote more truly than he knew. You, no doubt, thought to find here nothing but barbarism, Mr. Hazel. You will now find no difficulty in believing me when I tell you that the Incas—as I may call them—are every bit as civilised and as clever as the Caucasians. They have learned through suffering, you see. For centuries they have studied the white man's methods, his thoughts, utilized his inventions, improved on them even; and you may take my word for it the day is coming when they will avenge the cruelties of Pizarro. Here are we, twenty white men, cultured in modern thought and science, with trained brains and active intellects. Yet we are detained here against our wills to impart our knowledge to our masters; for these niggers, as some fools would call them, are our masters. We cannot escape! The Incas are too wary to afford us the chance. Remember, too, Mr. Hazel, that you have to do with a race more cultured in many respects than the nations who dwell overhead. Why you have been brought here, seeing you and your friend are in no way specialists, I do not know. But this I do know—that you will never leave this place again. Never! Never! The Incas have us; they have you—and they hold us with a grip of iron."

"Well!" said Gerald, impressed in spite of himself by this speech, "that remains to be proved. I, for one, do not intend to stay for ever in this melancholy world."

Parry smiled sadly. "Many have said the same thing, Mr. Hazel. They died saying it," he added in sombre tones.

"H'm! that so? Are you kindly treated?"

"In every way. But there are limitations. We have no freedom beyond these caverns; and we are not permitted to take wives. I have a wife of my own at home," here Parry sighed. "But it is lonely to live for fifteen years without a helpmate. The Incas, in their pride of race, will not sanction mixed marriages. And we are all in the same plight—all bachelors—all prisoners. There's a good deal of hard swearing goes on at times."

"Excusable enough, Parry. By the way, did you ever meet a man here called Prynne—John Prynne?"

"I should think so—knew him well. He died in my arms."

"Died!" Hazel stopped short, and fixed a bright eye on the speaker. Here, indeed, ended his quest; and at the door of the tomb. "When did he die?"

"A few years ago—say five. He was trying to invent a flying machine; but died before it came to anything. Did you know him—in the world?"

"I never met him. But for his daughter's sake, I came here to seek him."

"His daughter!" Parry sighed again. "I know. He often talked of her. I have a daughter of my own; she must be a grown-up lass by this

time." The engineer mused a space and raised his eyes thoughtfully to the artificial firmament he had created. Not yet prepared to make a confidant of Parry, the young man said nothing; and they continued their way silently, moved to thought of things far away from those by which they were surrounded. Then they came into contact with some of the inhabitants of the buried city.

The citizens of Yayacarui were tall, well-formed, and dignified. Yet an inward melancholy showed itself in their looks and bearing. Indeed, they were about as dejected a throng of people as can well be imagined. Occasionally Parry greeted an acquaintance. But, on the whole, little notice was taken of the white men. Amongst themselves these Indians were sparing of speech—utterly devoid of gaiety. Hazel could have imagined himself in the City of Dis, in the Hall of Eblis, where the damned were devoured by inward fire. That the name of this splenetic place should symbolise hope seemed to him ironical. If these people looked forward to a brighter future, they gave no sign of the cheerful courage such expectation should create. Silent, dreary, depressed; they resembled a company of undertakers professionally engaged.

"No chance of getting into the temple," said Parry, after a short conversation with a guard. "This chap tells me that the Coya intends to show you round herself. Going to do you honour, sir!"

"An honour I could very well dispense with," retorted Gerald, frowning at the closed bronze doors.

He said no more at the time; not deeming it politic to be too free spoken even to one of his own countrymen. In his own mind Gerald was afraid of Mama Oclo—afraid of the length to which she might carry the passion which evidently possessed her.

When a man captures the fancy of a woman, and when he is in that woman's power, he has but little chance of success in his efforts to resist her. Hazel had a very shrewd idea that this daughter of the Incas was a Catherine of Russia in her own way; but, thinking of Molly, and still as ever devoted to Molly, he determined he would be no slave of her fancy. But, as he learned later, he did the Coya wrong. Her aims were patriotic; and all her passions were subordinated to the supreme desire for the regeneration of her race. In fact, she was Elizabeth, not Catherine.

"Shall we return to the city?" asked Parry.

"I'd rather see the workshops, I think. Yayacarui can wait."

The engineer nodded, and skirting the Temple, led the way to a niche in the cliff, wherein they found a lift, as prosaic as could be. Smoothly and swiftly it raised them. On this higher level Hazel was conducted to a small series of caves, superimposed on those beneath. Then began a devil's dance, a nightmare journey through the bowels of earth. Electric cars shot through the interminable galleries; lifts dropped or soared in the chasms; bridges arched over quebradas; cranes swung over those places where even the engineer of Yayacarui hesitated to construct a lift. By such means was Gerald borne along, lowered to the depths, raised to the heights, while ever at his elbow Parry discoursed volubly of achieved or projected works. Everywhere the vast place was brilliant with electric light.

"Mine, all mine," said Parry, with pride. "Fifteen years it has taken me to bring this installation to its present state. It is perfect, sir, perfect so far as it goes, that is. But it'll go a deal further before I've done with it."

"What's your power ; steam ?"

"No ; water. We've got a powerful stream here down below."

"And all your fittings—do you make those ?"

"Most of 'em. We have factories of every kind, from glass to Whitworth steel. There's precious little we can't do here. You see the hills yonder give us plenty of raw material ; what they don't give us we get. This place is the root of a vast secret society above ground. Its ramifications extend throughout Peru, and are controlled from this centre. The Inca, or rather Mama Oclo, is the true ruler of this country. She counts her subjects by tens of thousands."

"Hasn't the Government at Lima a word to say to that ?"

"My dear sir, it knows nothing about it: It could do nothing if it did, save, perhaps, precipitate a native rising. The Indians recognise one another by signs, and no white man, even though he be half Indian, is trusted. Here, we've got all the Incarial treasures that were buried at the time of the Conquest. In these caves lie buried millions of money. Gold and silver and jewels, crowns, sceptres, thrones—all the paraphernalia of Empire, to be used in due season. When the Incas regain their lost heritage they will be the wealthiest nation in the world. And——" added Parry, slowly, "I believe they will make the best use of their wealth."

"When do they begin business ?"

"I don't know. Mama Oclo alone knows that. It is she and she alone who will have her hand on the starting gear—the engine is being put together now. Come and see."

Forthwith Gerald was conducted to a vast iron foundry covering many caves, where a German was at the head of affairs. Here big guns were being cast, barrels rifled, swords welded, and all kinds of small arms in course of construction. In an adjacent workshop the component parts were being put together by skilled artisans. The furnaces roared and flamed at white heat. Hordes of almost naked men toiled in the sulphur-laden atmosphere. The clang and ring of metal was deafening. Here was copper tempered to the hardness of steel by a process known only to the Indians—a secret which all the cruelties of the Spaniards had been unable to extract from them. The weapons welded out of this superb metal resembled the Damascus sabre in their razor-like edge.

In other caves stood the completed work. Rows of cannon, guns of heavy and light calibre, Maxims, Mausers, Lee-Metfords, automatic repeating pistols, Mannlichers—all the latest murder toys of war.

Then they came to the jewellers' cave, where were cast ingots of gold, wedges of silver ; where they polished and cut precious stones, and wrought all manner of rich material into ornament for personal wear, and for the adornment of high places. Hazel was shown ears of barley and corn exquisitely wrought in gold ; a life-size statue of Mama Oclo in her royal robes, was moulded in silver ; and there were coffer of gems both cut and in the matrix. A jewelled breast-plate for the Inca glittered with the hues of the rainbow · a throne of rose-wood was plated with gold and inlaid with precious stones so that it out-shone Solomon's seat of pride.

Gerald was staggered and bewildered by the immense riches here collected. It was the temple of Mammon, the cave of Aladdin, the treasure-house of golden Peru. If the Incas failed to conquer the world, they could at least buy it, he thought—buy it twice over.

"But tell me, Parry," said Gerald, as they descended again to the lower levels, "where do they keep the Mother of Emeralds?"

"Oh, that's in the Temple—a most marvellous jewel. The palladium of Yayacarui, and the lure which has decoyed so many to this place."

In the depths were factories for carpets, silks, and cloth and woollens, the looms for which were all worked by water power. There were yards for the cutting of stone and marble, and workshops of every kind, wherein all the arts and sciences were drawn upon for the working of the raw material into the finished article; and in one monster hollow was the whirring clanking machinery which generated in the mighty dynamos the electric current for the illumination of the underground world.

Yet another descent and Parry conducted Gerald along a narrow rift, to show him the racing river, ink-black and tumultuous. It ripped along at tearing speed, between riven rocks, turning on its way the great wheels continuously. Round and round they spun, and the electric light danced madly on the waters, glinted from the steel and burnished brass of the machinery; and Parry talked and talked and talked, till Gerald, already bewildered by what he was called upon to contemplate, felt his head whirl almost as the great wheels before him.

"For Heaven's sake stop, Parry," he cried. "I shall go silly. Let's get back to the city; I've seen enough and more than enough for one day."

Parry laughed, quite understanding. He had felt that way himself when introduced to Yayacarui; and he had seen others so affected after him. Taking Gerald by the arm he led him to a lift, and in a few minutes they were seated on the steps of the Sun Temple, watching the silent people moving about the streets. But still Parry continued to volunteer small doses of information.

"They call the river sacred," he said, "why, I don't know, unless it is because it runs under the temple here. In fact the temple itself is built over a great rift which extends down to the waters. From the floor is a clean drop into the stream."

"H'm, sounds unsafe—reminds me a trifle of the Delphic oracle, when the priestess was placed over a chasm to sniff the gases as they rushed up, until she was worked into a frenzy, and discoursed more or less truthfully concerning the future. But a temple over a rift!—no, I confess I am not altogether attracted by it."

"Oh, the temple itself's safe enough, there's nothing wrong with that. Wish I could say as much for the rest of the place."

"Why, is there danger?"

"Well," said Parry, "there's a fair chance of the whole show going to Kingdom Come in chunks, and us with it. The seismic forces which made these caves can precious quick unmake them if they feel like it. As a matter of fact they have thrown out one or two hints in that direction lately. We get earthquakes of a sort hereabouts, and she quakes pretty loud down here when she starts, I can tell you. We are a bit too close to the fires for my fancy. By the way, I heard you camped at the music mountain; s'pose you noticed a volcano in the range opposite?"

"We did: there was a faint indication of smoke; but no immediate signs of an eruption."

"Worse luck. So long as that chimney's in full blast we're all right here; but when it shuts up you can bet there's trouble ahead—so Mac-jean says, and he's the official geologist of these parts."

“Do the Indians know of these dangers?”

“Known ’em all their little lives: that’s why they don’t care a cent for ’em. They and theirs have lived over this bombshell for a couple of hundred years, so I guess they think the caves ’ll last till Mama Oclo annexes Cuzco, anyway.”

This was not altogether comforting, or rather, it was not convincing to anyone who thought more of a whole skin than anything else. But Hazel was not one of that sort. Had he been so he would not now have found himself in Yayacarui. To get there had been his one great desire, and now that it was gratified, he was more than content to chance any such hasty, if uncomfortable, exit as that at which Parry hinted. It seemed at least there was something over which Mama Oclo had no control.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“THE WHITE MAN’S CLUB.”

ONE large bare room filled with men, tobacco smoke, and a babel of voices, represented the White Man’s Club, to which Parry had so proudly alluded. The entire Caucasian population foregathered in the engineer’s house, and squatted round as best they could on stools and forms. Chica in unlimited quantities was provided by the host. But there hospitality stopped short, for it was ordered that each man should bring his own tobacco and matches. To this assemblage Dick and Gerald were formally introduced, Parry acting as master of the ceremonies. The official business over, there ensued smoking, drinking, and the discussion of divers subjects in divers tongues. No Indians were present, not even in the rôle of spies. Apparently Mama Oclo was too sure of her methods to fear any plotting. Whether it went on or not, she could afford to ignore it since it had never taken tangible form. It was not likely to do so in the future. Her plans were too well laid for that.

“A dandy lot of boys!” was Dick’s comment on the gathering as with Hazel he took stock of the company.

The racial types were strongly contrasted, and their conversation not unlike what might be expected from a European congress after a war. One and all they appeared to be able and clever men, if not the pick of their various countries. Even in the uniform dress, blue cotton blouse and breeches, with straw hats and sandals of hide, the eye could easily differentiate the nationalities. Here, a Nihilist from Archangel, who knew more about bombs surely than was for his nation’s good, and so had drifted to Yayacarui to create a new epoch of freedom tempered by dynamite; there an Italian chemist, suave and treacherous, who discoursed on experiments yet unsuccessful for the prolonging of life by arresting the waste of tissue. In one corner a German discussed a new projectile which was to be a hundred times more far-reaching as a dealer of death than any at present in use; and an Oxford scholar, while expatiating upon the beauties of the Quichua tongue, told them how Mama Oclo intended that once the Empire was established, it should be spoken from Panama to Patagonia. The Yankee was confident of wonders from his flying machine—still in embryo (perhaps because it *was* still in embryo), and a Hindoo jeweller displayed a rare and newly-cut gem, and a fairy filigree necklace for the

neck of the Coya. Parry boasted of the powers of a gigantic dynamo which he had in process of construction, and so on in turn, though by no means waiting for their turn, these twenty good men extolled their individual achievements. It was evident to Hazel that Mama Oclo had a positive genius for the collection of "cranks"—here were twenty of them at all events, each an enthusiast of the most abandoned order. Although they each fell naturally into use of their respective languages, they were all equally fluent in either Quichua or English. The law, under which they all worked, demanded this. Being a company of hobby-riders they endured their imprisonment with less discontent than they would otherwise have done.

"An international industrial congress," remarked Hazel, as he listened to the rapid French speech of an excited little man. "But where is Don Spaniard?"

"Recall the events of three hundred years ago, and you'll pardon the omission," retorted Parry. "The Incas hate the Dons like poison, and small blame to them."

"That so? H'm. When Mama Oclo regains Peru she will have to set about arranging a massacre then!"

"Or a general emigration. It will be a cold day for the Señors when that she-devil gets the upper hand."

"You don't admire her, Parry?"

"I do as a force—not as a woman. She has a heart of stone; a will of iron; and as much wickedness as would fit out a moderately intelligent Sunday School. Original sin? Huh! She's chock full of it!"

"I never undervalued her capabilities in that direction," said Gerald, dryly. "By the way, how old is she?"

"Thirty-five years as time goes; but in craft and wickedness she has rounded her century long since."

"Dear me! And is that how you speak of your queen?—for she's queen of Yayacarui, I presume?"

"Well, she is, and she isn't. You see, while the Inca lives, he is supposed by some political fiction to reign. But he is old and muddle-headed, and must soon die—the last of the male line. He had only two children, Mama Oclo and her younger brother, Paehacutic; but the young man died shortly after he married his sister. There were no children."

Gerald's amazement showed itself in his face. "Do you mean to tell me that so civilised a woman as Mama Oclo kept up that horrible custom and married her brother?"

"She did. Their morality is a lot different from ours, you must remember. 'Sides, she had no choice by their law. Oh, she married him sure enough; but, as I say, there were no children, and as Pachacutic died two years ago, things are a bit complicated about the succession. Of the true royal race only two remain, Mama Oclo and Inca Sutic-toco. The old man's dying, and the Coya will be queen. All right so far; but how the deuce she intends to carry on the dynasty I don't know. Don't suppose she does herself."

"Oh, she is fertile in expedients," said Hazel, grimly. "She'll scrape through somehow. Tell me, is there any English equivalent for the name Sutic-toco? It's queer enough as these names go."

"Well, Sutic may be translated 'name' and toco 'window.' It really means the window at Peccari-tampo out of which Manco Capac climbed to civilise Peru. The present Inca bore it in the hope that he would do

a bit of civilising on his own ; as he's eighty-five and weak in the head, there is not much chance of his setting the Apurimac on fire now."

Hazel looked thoughtful. "'Seems I've arrived at a crisis," he said.

"Well, sir," Parry took a long look at him, "it wouldn't surprise me to learn that you were timed to arrive. In my opinion you will have more to do with the re-adjustment of state affairs than you know of," he paused and smiled significantly, with his eyes still fixed on Gerald. "There's a rumour hereabouts that a re-incarnated Manco Capac is about to show."

Gerald smiled. "I understand what you mean, Parry," he said, quietly, "but believe me, I am not disposed to play that game."

"Guess you'll have to, or—by George, sir, you don't know what she is, this lady, when she takes a thing into her head. There are no half measures about her."

"No. I once saw her slip a knife into a nigger at Lima. I gathered from her general aspect then that she had no liking for compromise."

"Ah!" there was a volume of meaning in Parry's ejaculation. "Then you know the kind of animal you have to deal with."

"Perfectly! Shall we say a pantheress for choice? The heather will be on fire when we come to close quarters. Happy little time I'm in for, I expect."

Meanwhile Dick was very much at home amidst this rough and ready company, which was of the quality most congenial to his not too-exacting mind. After his own fashion he had mourned honestly for Cain, but having done so—and that thoroughly—he was prepared now to relegate that sorrow to its niche in his somewhat involved and heavy-laden past. For the moment he was in high spirits and in the full tide of enjoyment. The situation fitted him to a nicety. Midnight hours, good rowdy company, and an ample supply of the best procurable liquor, attained very closely to Mr. Dick's idea of a terrestrial heaven. But because he was in heaven, or in something approaching very closely to it, was no reason, by Dick's logic, that he should behave like an angel. He had reached a state highly contentious, not to say quarrelsome.

"By Gosh!" thus spoke the chica. "D'y mean t'say twenty white men can't tackle these damned niggers, an' lick the heads off 'em?"

"My good sir," replied the Oxford man, with precision, "these niggers, as you term them, are by no means the ordinary type of the coloured race. They are more akin to the Arab than the African. Intellectual, subtle, far-seeing, they are more than a match for us; in their hands we are so many children. It is a contest of Ulysses with Polyphemus!"

"Eh, my faith, it is just!" put in the French doctor, a sallow creature called Brossard. "Conceive to yourself, Monsieur, our chances of attaining the fine day above-ground. These Incas are armed—well armed; they know the caves better than we; and twenty to one!" he shrugged his shoulders. "Eh, what would you? It is impossible that thing, is it not?"

"Impossible be damned!" thundered Dick, now well-nigh alight within. "Can't you loot a gun or two, and get home on the winner that way?"

The chemist, with much Florentine gesticulation, took him up. "Signor, you speak not to the point; but ignorantly. The little red man, Cusi-cuy, holds the key of the magazine; he and Mama Oclo. We have our guns and rifles, and even Maxim machines; but bullets and powder, shell and shot? Dio mio! These are beyond our reach."

"That's a fact, I guess," said America, gravely; "and how to negotiate

that darned quebrada — that's another. No, sir; can't be done, nohow."

"Ah, that's where your flying machine should come in," remarked the Oxonian, drily.

"Shoo! She can't skim yet. When she does, I don't say but what she might negotiate that bit of atmosphere anyway."

The lean geologist, who came from Aberdeen, and attended to the earthquake department, shook his head with formidable solemnity.

"Ye blethering fules!" he began, delicately, "there'll be nae fleein' fra this pit o' Tophet, it's ma opeenion." He looked round the assembly to see how they took it now. "We'll hae an awful blowing up o' this volcano; an' waes me for the hail o' ye then!"

"So there's a chance of the apple-cart being upset that way is there? Three cheers for old Macgregor!" roared Dick.

"Maclean's ma name, I'd hae ye obsarve. Chance, mon! I tell ye we're dwelling on the skin o' a bombshell joost filled wi' combustible mateerial that may crack like a stuffed haggis ony minute!"

Everyone looked uneasily at the floor. "Ay, ye may look, ye silly gowks. We hold oor lives in oor honds. They puir misbegotten Incas wha ca' themsels oor maisters think they wull rule the airth wi their siller an' instruments o' battle; deil's buckies as they are. But the Lawd wull stretch oot His richt hond an' make dust o' them."

"Pshutt!" Brossard shrugged his meagre shoulders. "Monsieur Le Bon Dieu has held his hand this long time. Bah! I mock myself of this trouble!"

This was quite enough for the argumentative Scotsman. With many illustrations and much weird and forcible language he strove to drive home into the skull of the fiery Frenchman the inevitableness of the doom he foretold. Technical terms rattled like hail around, and in a very few minutes the discussion became general, not to say unparliamentary. Some believed, others doubted, a few scoffed, many laughed; but all knew that Maclean was solid in his facts, since he had not the imagination to invent them. In the end the "ayes" seemed to have it. There would, agreed the majority, come a "blow up" (to speak quite colloquially) sooner or later. In these circumstances the best subject for discussion—indeed for the present the only subject—was their chance of escape, and how they could best achieve it.

As a new-comer, Hazel maintained a judicious silence, until his thoughtful aspect attracting the attention of the less noisy, he was invited to deliver his views.

"All this is so new to me that I really don't feel confident to offer an opinion," said Gerald, thus appealed to. "But in listening to your very animated discussion, I have been struck with the idea that there are too many cooks here!"

There ensued an astonished silence. "Monsieur will have the goodness to explain," said Brossard, stiffly. It was incumbent upon him, as a Frenchman, to be the first to take offence.

"Well; put it another way if you like," continued Gerald, coolly. "You need a leader; an arbitrator who can sort out from among these many schemes and ideas, those most practicable and likely to be successful. When everyone leads no one leads. Better have a despot. I would suggest Mr. Parry—a man who thinks twice and looks before he leaps."

"That is a mere pleonasm, my dear sir," murmured the Oxford man. Such a chance was too good to let slip. But nobody paid any attention to him. The eyes of all were fixed on Parry.

"Not me," said the engineer, modestly; "I can follow and execute. I'm no good at leading. But what you say is true enough, Mr. Hazel. A leader is necessary—very necessary, considering the gravity of the situation."

"Assuredly, without doubt," spluttered Brossard, offering himself with racial vain glory; "I, even I, Achille Brossard, will lead. Where is danger, there is France!"

"Rot! get away, out of it, froggy!" shouted Dick, contemptuously. "We want a man, not a thing! Think my chief's goin' to work under you? No, damn you, not much!"

"Monsieur forgets himself. I am the child of the great nation. France does not serve; she leads." He folded his arms with Napoleonic dignity, and looked round the company. "Messieurs, in the name of the Republic I take the post of danger!"

Dick—as Hazel saw with some anxiety—had found the cross drop in his liquor, and was, as the Irish say, spoiling for a row. Galled by such lightsome reference to his nation and himself, Brossard gesticulated wildly, swore volubly, exhausting, it seemed, the whole gamut of Parisian anathema. But Dick the wanderer was versed in many tongues, and replied with a variety which completely staggered the Frenchman. The atmosphere was fast becoming charged, and Hazel, seeing what must inevitably follow, took Dick by the arm, and quietly led him aside.

"Don't be a fool, Dick," he said; "leave me to deal with this lot."

"Well, what does that black piece of Paris dirt mean by——"

"Pooh, French calmness, that's all. You should be English enough to overlook the snarling of a poodle. Apologise, and——"

"I'll be damned if I do."

"You'll be damned if you don't. How are we to get along here or get out of here if we quarrel amongst ourselves? United we stand; divided we fall; you know the sort of thing, Dick—unity is strength, if you like that better; anything so long as you keep quiet and go slow. It won't do to row here, you know."

But the disturber of the peace in a mulish state of mind was not to be cajoled or reasoned into an apology. He conceded so far as to hold his tongue, and confined his attention to a fresh can of beer. Indicating Dick's state with a shrug, Gerald glanced significantly at the doctor, mutely asking him to suspend judgment. With the traditional politeness of his nation the Frenchman bowed and resumed his seat. Harmony being thus restored, Hazel continued.

"At present we can choose no leader," he said, "for, so far as I am concerned, it is impossible to consent to any plan until I know my ground. Although from Mr. Maclean's report an eruption seems certain, there is, I understand, nothing to indicate that it will happen immediately—let us hope not before we have formulated our plans and put them into execution. The corner stone of this civilization appears to be Mama Ocllo. On her depends our retention or release. She has invited me to go to her—to discuss certain proposals she intends to lay before me. How they will affect you all I can hardly say. At present I have but the faintest notion of what they may relate to. So, in the meantime, gentlemen, I must ask you to allow me the opportunity of learning more about this place and

its government. As the latest comer I can speak with some authority as to our chances of regaining civilization when once outside ; but the rest, for the present at all events, I must leave to you who have lived here so long."

"There is another entrance," interrupted Parry, suddenly, "one that leads into the hills. But where it is none of us know. The native population have the secret ; but we have never been able to find it out."

"Then we must learn the whereabouts of that entrance at all costs," said Gerald, "since it appears to be an absolute impossibility to escape by the quebrada. But we can discuss this and other things when I have learned more of Yayacarui and its ways. Whomsoever you may choose for a leader I promise to obey faithfully. In a week or two we can begin to shape our schemes. In the meantime, if you are willing, I should like to hear from some of you how you came to this place."

There was some applause, much shouting, and a general desire all to speak at once. It was very plain to Gerald how all plans of escape had hitherto failed. Not one of those present appeared to possess the necessary organizing capability ; and though all were highly-trained and intellectual men, there was no leader among them, or he would have been forthcoming long ago. Each man was, as he had said before, a "crank" polarised by his particular hobby or gift. Assuredly they were not of the stuff of which leaders were made. Hazel was not a vain man ; but he thought himself competent to fill the post ; and indeed he silently stepped into the vacant place by reducing the many voices to one.

"I should like to hear what Mr. Parry has to say, gentlemen."

The engineer raked his beard reflectively. "My story's as bald as a police report," said he, in his heavy way. "I was doing badly in the old country, when I saw an 'ad.' in the *Times*, saying that an engineer was wanted at Cuzco. I sent in my testimonials and got the billet from an agent, who didn't know what was at the back of it—so he said ; but I fancy he was a liar, that agent. 'Said there was a good deal of bridge-building to be done, and all that sort o' thing. Well, gentlemen, I fetched Cuzco in a few weeks ; and Mama Ocllo showed up under the name of Señorita de Herrera. Asked me to come inland and light her haciendo house. I went straight, not thinking anything was wrong. One night I was seized and brought here. Then the lady was so good as to make clear my position. She promised to send my wages to my family ; and it's true she has done so ; and as far as that goes she's been square enough. So here I've camped these fifteen years, an' making the best of a bad job, I've attended to my work. I've no complaint to make so far, but I'd like to get home and see the boys and girls."

"Huh !" cried Dick, who had now passed from the contentious to the more jovial stage of inebriation. "Guess I won't hang up m' hat long in this shanty. Not much ! I'm on for lootin' the Mother of Emeralds, an' lightin' out for Europe. What ho ! she bumps ! Wouldn't I paint the place scarlet ? By Gum !"

The mention of the gem led several to explain that they had been inveigled hither by its lure. Their stories, though beginning with no little variety, wound up in the same monotonous catastrophe. Whether attracted by the emerald ; invited to a false address to exercise their various professions ; or drawn into the interior by reports of hidden treasure ; one and all in due time had been blindfolded and carried to Yayacarui.

It would appear indeed that Mama Ocllo had agents all over the world, picking up unconsidered talent for her own purposes. Once in Yayacarui there was no exit, save by the door of the tomb. Since the founding of the city in the days of Pizarro many had come ; but none had returned to reveal the secret of this buried civilization.

"The cleverest," said Parry, "are embalmed as mummies and placed in the temple, thus being honoured for having advanced the civilization of the place. The rank and file are buried in caves, with the common herd. John Prynne is amongst the mummies. An ancestor of his is there, too !"

"Sir Bevil !" said Hazel. "Yes, I know he was an early visitor here. It was his manuscript which led me into this trap. Well, gentlemen," Gerald rose, "we're all in the same box, now the thing is how to get out of it !"

"I think we shall do that now," said Parry, looking at Hazel. A remark which seemed to show that at last the White Man's Club had found a leader, and recognised it.

CHAPTER XXIV

"INCA SUTIC-TOCO."

FROM that time the new-comers attended the confabulations of the club with scrupulous regularity : Dick, because he found its company congenial, Gerald on grounds connected more particularly with the future well-being of its twenty members. For it had come to be tacitly admitted among them that Gerald Hazel was a man with a head on his shoulders ; one to be followed and obeyed by reason of his craft and courage. He assumed this position of leader without any kind of formal initiation : and when Brossard contested his right to direct affairs, and generally to sit in judgment, the Frenchman's nineteen comrades gave him clearly to understand that he was in the minority, and therefore wrong. Hazel, they declared, was the man for their money ; so they swore *by* him, and *at* the envious Frenchman whose envy and uncharitableness fell harmlessly.

For the most part, when his fellow white men were at their work, Hazel walked around, absorbing details and information generally. He talked with many strange people and heard many strange things. And he attained to no small proficiency in the Quichua tongue. On some occasions there were explorations with Dick to be made, but more often than not that young gentleman prowled round on his own account, asking questions and making discoveries in localities where his right to be was very questionable. Laden with knowledge as to highways and byways, Dick would return from his wanderings and report to his chief. A comparison of notes led to the projection of maps, to be understood assuredly by none save themselves. But the secret entrance still remained secret. It defied them utterly. Nevertheless, in their search for it they had become possessed of a vast deal of data which would without a doubt prove invaluable to them at a later period.

All this time Gerald never caught so much as a glimpse of Mama Ocllo. He was especially anxious to see her, but she kept out of sight, as became one of the most high gods : and, like them, she supervised his wander-

ings unseen. Puca reappeared, this time in the double rôle of jester and of spy. Hazel constantly ran up against him in odd corners and at odd times. Such constant supervision worried him no little; but since it could not be contested openly, he said nothing about it, even to his friend. For it is safe to say that had he done so, Dick would soon have made short work of Puca's thick neck; and so would have led to his own undoing, if not to that of others. The only possible course was to tolerate Puca, and to thwart him when it came to close quarters.

After a fortnight of this sort of thing, a message was brought to Hazel from the Inca at the hands of Puca. It included an order that Gerald was to tabulate his impressions for the information of the sovereign. This he obeyed very willingly, being only too anxious to see the royal puppet whose strings Mama Ocllo pulled so dexterously. He wondered if the Coya would be present, and sought to know from Puca.

"Indeed, Viracocha, I know not," replied the dwarf. "The wind blows, the wind goes, but who sees the wind?"

"Yes, and you seem to have contracted something of the same order; since you speak and no one can understand what you say," replied Gerald. "You needn't trouble to juggle for me." He knew it was useless to expect anything in the shape of a straightforward reply from Puca. But he could not understand the undisguised show of hostility which the little man now evinced. Formerly, although cunning and untrustworthy, he had been agreeable, at least, but since Gerald's arrival in the hidden city, he had been at no pains to hide his enmity. And it seemed that against Hazel, rather than Dick, was it chiefly directed. And later on, when Hazel learned why this was so, what he learned puzzled him every whit as much.

The front of the Inca's palace was a mere mask to a cave. Within, the vast hollow was walled round, divided into courts and rooms, intersected by corridors; adorned with imposing staircases. On stepping through the square of the doorway, Hazel found himself in a large hall, where squat pillars in the Egyptian style girdled a circular space of vermilion pavement. Between the pillars the smooth walls were painted in crude and glaring colours with scenes of festival and battle. An arched roof glittered with electric stars, and a fountain spouted and foamed in a central pool. Round this stood a number of guards, clothed in a green uniform braided with gold, and wearing helmets of the same metal. They bore long spears tipped with silver; and—strange juxtaposition—carried revolvers in their belts. Like statues of bronze they stood amid a solemn low-voiced crowd of great nobles, dressed in flowing robes of vicuña wool, dyed and woven with ornamental devices. In the lobes of their ears were inserted discs of gold—the same fashion which led the Spaniards of Pizarro to call their ancestors Orejones (great ears). On his back each man bore a slight bundle in token of submission, without which he could not enter into the presence of the supreme lord. Although he could not but wonder that a nation pretending to so advanced a civilization could tolerate these ancient follies, it was apparent to Hazel that these Indians aped the dress and ceremonial of old Inca days.

Much in the way of anachronism, Mama Ocllo might have explained: but at that moment she was not to be seen, either without, or within the interior hall, whither Puca hurried the Englishman. This hall was of a much smaller size, though of similar architecture. Its prevailing hue was a pale green, with lamps so shaded as to reflect the same tint. Hazel

felt as though he were walking under seas in a translucent emerald twilight, brooding and soothing. Several aged men sat round on gilded stools; immovable, venerable, haughty. Such like must have been the senators of Ancient Rome upon whom Brennus and his Gauls broke in. These were the notables of the nation—the great lords of illegitimate royal blood, whose duties brought them into immediate contact with the true-born child of the Sun. They gazed solemnly at Gerald, but made no attempt to rise or to greet him. Ushered by Puca he passed on to a silver staircase, at the top of which appeared a narrow postern of the same material, encrusted with rough turquoise stones. This the dwarf pushed open and signified to him to enter; while he himself remained on the outside.

"I am to face the old man alone," thought Gerald, when the door snapped behind him. "H'm. Is this etiquette, sheer cunning, or a trap?"

Immediately before him rose a gilded screen, beyond which soared white clouds of smoke, thick and stupefying, and scented with many spices. There was the sound of music faint and far away: and Hazel stepped round the screen feeling sure that here was another of Mama Oclo's theatrical surprises. If so, it proved remarkably effective, and moved even the phlegmatic Briton to an ejaculation of astonishment. The splendour of the scene which met his eye was as the splendour of the New Jerusalem described by St. John the Divine. It dazzled, stunned, bewildered him. Never, save perhaps in the Sun Temple at Cuzco itself, had the eye of man rested on such an accumulation of treasure.

The chamber was of no great size, nor was it lofty; but walls and ceiling were plated with fine gold, and the flooring glittered a smooth expanse of polished silver, reflecting like still water. The sole articles of furniture in this sumptuous apartment were a throne such as Solomon might have sat upon, and three or four gilded stools. A dais with three shallow steps, gold-plated; a voluminous cloth of gold canopy, woven with many precious gems; a massive chair moulded in gold, wrought with figures and sacred symbols; and overhead, shedding seven hues on the yellow metal, a glittering arc, radiant with jewels. The many lights in the apartment were focussed on to this royal seat: and the whole glowed and sparkled with the splendour of the sun at noon-day—a fit throne truly for the potentate who called himself the child of the mighty orb. He sat there amid the glory and brilliance with knees close together, the palms of his hands turned upward, and his eyes fixed directly over Hazel's head—a bleary-eyed, wrinkled, failing creature, whose frail appearance made a mockery of the seat of pride; a little wizened brown monkey-man, reminding Gerald forcibly of those terribly ancient creatures who should, but would not, die, imagined by Swift in his tale of Laputa. The shrivelled body was draped in a loose robe of yellow, interwoven with silver half-moons and, embroidered on the breast, sparkled a rainbow of coloured gems. Plumes of green feathers adorned his head, and beneath, the crimson fringe "llautu" dropped over his lined forehead. The splendour, the colour, the light, the shining of fine gold, and the flashing of jewels served only to demonstrate the more, how poor a creature is man when seared by the finger of Time. The incense smoked in the golden vases, rolling fragrant clouds: but to Hazel, gazing on the lord of these treasures, there seemed to be a chill breath from the tomb sweeping through the room. To him the atmosphere was heavy with corruption. Death

sat on that splendid throne, mocking the earthly god. He shivered, and closed his eyes. What a tragedy this picture, what infinite irony in the setting!

"The supreme Inca!" breathed a voice in his ear. "The child of the Sun; the ruler of Tlahua-ntin-Suyu!"

It was a relief to turn to the glowing beauty of Mama Ocllo. Unexpectedly she appeared at his elbow, arrayed in a pied robe of feathers, red and white: coruscating with jewels. She exhibited vigour and vitality as vigorously as the Inca exhibited decay. Here was the true ruler of Yayacarui: the enemy to be conquered: the diplomatist to be thwarted. Sutic-toco sat on his throne, a puppet, a figure-head, a tradition—useless as an idol. Mama Ocllo, with her firm and wondrously expressive countenance, her masculine sense of understanding, was, in truth, the incarnate figure-head of the nation in embryo—the nation from whose clutches he would have to deliver himself and the twenty who trusted in him. He glanced from her splendid vitality to the motionless figure on the throne: but he said no word. Then the Coya spoke.

"Are you satisfied, Viracocha?" she demanded mockingly. "Are these, the riches of golden Peru, such as you expected to see? Is there enough treasure here to satisfy your avarice—the insatiable avarice of the white race?"

"I have no liking for baubles," said Hazel, with a shrug; it was not his policy to appear impressed. "These things may tickle the fancy of children. I am no child."

"Yet you came hither for these very toys; you braved death and danger and many disasters for—what you see!"

"I came here for John Prynne, alive or dead. Do you think that, like the Spaniards, I have a disease to be cured only by gold? When I leave here, believe me, madam, there will not go with me one little jewel of all your wealth."

"Ah!" mocked she, "*when* you leave here!"

The Inca, evidently tired of playing the rôle of jewelled dummy, relaxed his rigid attitude, dropped his head between his shoulders, and became what he was—a very flabby old gentleman. But he was sufficiently wide awake to take an intelligent interest in Gerald, whose free and easy behaviour attracted him as being something out of the common. In that gem-encrusted room the trim unadorned dress of the Englishman stood out in its severity; and his behaviour was in keeping with it. Heedless of the Byzantium-like ceremonial of the Inca court, he drew a gilded stool towards him and sat down, at which Mama Ocllo frowned; but the Inca only laughed, being very human, and sick to death of etiquette. In the end Mama Ocllo fell so far as to take a seat herself. She admired this man and his utter fearlessness and disregard for all convention. And, after all, there was no one but themselves to be shocked. Since her father did not mind, it was unnecessary for her to waste time in reproof. So she and Gerald sat facing the throne, where Sutic-toco, leaning wearily back amid his golden cushions, asked certain questions, and gave vent to certain remarks in the most excellent English. For reasons best known to herself Mama Ocllo let him do most of the talking.

"I welcome you to our city, Viracocha!" said the Inca in a quavering voice. "We have waited for you long—ah, very long!"

"Indeed! I do not quite see how you could have expected me very long, seeing I only made up my mind quite recently to come here at all."

But now that I am here perhaps you will tell me what it is you want of me ? ”

The Coya was ill-pleased at his attitude, but the Inca laughed again and stared at the speaker. “ You are a bold man, Viracocha ! Never has a man spoken to me thus before. What I want, you shall know in due season. You have seen our city ? ”

“ I have. And I cannot deny that it is well worth a visit. ”

“ A visit ! ” Mama Ocllo laughed. “ Yes, a very long visit. ”

“ Perhaps, ” retorted Hazel. “ But one with a conclusion, for all that. ”

He looked at her, and she at him. Then the Inca spoke again. “ You have no doubt seen much that has amazed you, ” said Sutic-toco. “ And it may be that you wish to question me concerning our wonders. ”

“ Well, no, ” drawled Hazel. “ I have eyes to see and a brain to think, so I am not really in need of much in the way of explanation. But, ” he hesitated, “ there are just a few questions—about yourself—for instance, that I should like to put to you. Are you the real Inca article ; one of the genuine old stock ? ”

A faint smile curved the thin lips of Sutic-toco, but he did not appear in the least degree ruffled. “ Why should you doubt it, Viracocha ? ”

“ Well, I doubt most things, sire ; until I have proved them. ” He glanced significantly at Mama Ocllo. “ But if you would know I always understood that the Inca race died out with Tupac Amaru in 1781 ! ”

“ He died and 80,000 of his people with him ; but the Inca race did not perish then ; nor was he the true Inca. Under these mountains even at that time, reigned the legal descendant of the royal house. I am descended from that Inca Manco who defended himself in the valley of the Vilcamayu against the dog Pizarro. When Con permitted the barbarous white men to slay the patriot and enslave our race, his son came hither with many nobles and common people, putting the barriers of nature between himself and the devils from overseas. In these caves he founded a refuge, and hither brought the Incarial treasures which had been collected for the ransom of the traitor Atahualpa. The building of Yaya-carui and the existence of the true Inca were made known throughout Peru ; and on pain of death it was forbidden to all to reveal the secret. The royal house has sat in darkness these many years ; but the sceptre has come down from father to son without a break until it fell into my unworthy hands. Now, ” the Inca sighed and looked at his daughter, “ the line ends with me. A woman’s hand must take up the fallen sceptre. ”

“ And the woman will sway it nobly, ” said Hazel. “ Do not mourn that you have no son, Inca, for Mama Ocllo has the heart and will of a man. ”

She flushed a rosy red at his praise ; and her eyes sparkled bright as the diamonds in her dress. “ You are right, Viracocha, ” she said with energy, “ and I thank you for the good omen of your words. I am a woman, it is true, but I have the mind of a man. It is no sceptre my hand shall grasp ; rather the sword ; and I swear by Con ! ” she continued with intense feeling, “ that it shall not be sheathed until the land is free, and the empire of Manco Capac is restored from Panama to the waves that beat round the Horn. ”

“ But Peru *is* free ! ” said Hazel. “ The Spaniards have been expelled. ”

“ Dog has replaced dog ! ” said Sutic-toco, catching somewhat of his

daughter's fire. "Peru! I know nothing of Peru! Tlahua-ntin-Suyu, the land of the four provinces, is not free. Spanish hounds in a new guise still sit on our throne, still kennel in our palaces. The white man rules: the white man breeds in the land. But we will sweep these bastards into the sea whence their fathers came; and reign, red men over red, as in the days when Cuzco was the seat of empire!"

"You would put back the clock of time!"

"Nay, Viracocha. I would restore the rule of our house, of our race. Why should we be put out of our heritage? Hath not Con given the earth to all men? Must we hide like conies in the rocks, and lose our right to gaze upon our father the sun? No, by the host of heaven, no! I will bring back the golden age and give the land to those who received it from Con."

"By means of war, I suppose. You would slay thousands for your own ends?"

"Strong diseases require strong remedies, Viracocha; and the harvests will grow the richer for the rain of blood. The sowing, the growing, has been long; but the time of reaping is at hand."

The princess made a gesture of dissent, but held her peace. Apparently she did not agree with the latter part of her father's speech; yet deemed it politic not to contradict. Sutin-toco, roused out of his lethargy, continued to speak with a vigour surprising in one of his age.

"Here we have those who know the science of the white race. They have taught and we have learned, until now the pupils are able to surpass their masters. In a short time we shall go forth to war, and those of our race above ground, who pine in slavery, shall strike a blow for freedom, and the empire of their fathers. Then!" the Inca rose with a royal air, "shall we return to Cuzco—to the holy city—the navel of the world, and again rule the land, giving to all men justice and peace. What say you, Viracocha?"

"It is a splendid—dream!"

"Dream!" Mama Ocllo's temper flashed out, and she sprang to her feet with a superstitious gesture to avert the evil omen of his words. She would have given vent to the rage within her had not her father at that moment collapsed in his golden seat, weeping senile tears. The optimism of an unnatural and unwonted energy died out in him, and the pessimism of old age re-asserted itself.

"I fear it may be so!" he wailed, beating his breast. "The holy Sun shines not upon us here, and how can we be blessed without our father's smile? In these depths Supay rules our fate; and it may be that his avenging fires will break forth to overwhelm our mighty works. We may prepare the weapons of war, but who will instruct a fallen people in their use? Who will put hope into those hearts broken with despair, or make strong the hands which chains have bound? The time was; the time is; the time is past." He slipped down from his golden seat, and grovelled on the ground. "Here let me rest, the father of sadness, the ruler of a ruined race. The doom of centuries may not be changed. The people of the sun are no longer a people; the walls of their strong cities are broken down; and the jaguar crouches on the cold hearth-stones in ruined palaces. Con speaks, and who can gainsay his words? We are dust in the dust. You speak my thought, Viracocha; the thought which has shadowed my life and made desolate my old days. It is a dream! Aye, truly it is a dream, and we but dreamers in the watches of a night which

will never pass. Go! For I am sick at heart. Sorrow lies heavy upon me, and my old eyes weep tears of blood. Go! Go! What has youth to do with age? Failure! Failure! sorrow, and again failure! I have spoken!"

In a paroxysm of grief he cast his mantle over his grey head, and crouched weeping, moaning, and crying out against the unjust gods. Hazel, with folded arms, looked sadly at this last representative of a royal race. Mama Oclo looked also; but her eyes were hard with scorn; her hands were clenched with scarcely restrained rage. Such abasement and despair were beyond the understanding of her pride. She neither wept nor knelt. She defied the gods dry-eyed. For a minute she stood thus immovable; then she lifted some silken hangings and revealed a passage. In response to an imperious gesture, Gerald followed her. The hangings dropped, and he found himself in a warm darkness. Mama Oclo grasped his hand, and drew him along swiftly; whither he knew not.

In the dust, alone with his melancholy thoughts, wailed Sutic-toco—the faint-hearted, would-be regenerator of his race. The spirit of prophecy had come upon him, and with unwilling lips he had spoken the doom of the Sun-children. Yayacarui! the acquired wisdom of the white man; the arms and jewels and treasures of old time; weapons of war and eager armies; these were as nothing against the fiat of Con. The nation was, the nation was not, the nation would not be. And who can read the riddle of the Most High?

CHAPTER XXV.

"THE MOTHER OF EMERALDS."

ON through the darkness, never pausing, never speaking, Mama Oclo led her captive. Through a labyrinth of passages to right, to left, on and on—miles it seemed to Hazel. Without the least show of resistance he left himself in her hands completely. Then the air became cooler and a trifle less dense, and he knew they were approaching the open. At the top of a flight of shallow steps, she halted. Still she spoke no word. Guiding his hand on to some round concave object she held it there and pressed it down hard. Then her voice, imperious and decisive, rang out with amazing volume. There was a reverberation—an echo. They must be in some vast building. It flashed across Hazel that they were in the Temple.

"Swear!" cried the woman, harshly. "Swear to tell no one of Sutic-toco's weakness of which you have been witness!"

"I swear," answered Gerald with difficulty able to conceal his mirth. It seemed to him all very ludicrous and much ado about nothing.

"Swear to reveal neither his words nor his abasement!"

"I swear!"

"Not even to Uchu!"

"Since you wish it, not even to Uchu!"

"So be it. Remove your hand, and look upon that you have sworn by."

Gerald, having an idea of what was coming, did as she bade him. Suddenly a green ray sparkling as deep sea water in sunlight, shot through the darkness. Another and another followed until the gloom scintillated with threads of greenish fire. There was no need to enquire into this

phenomenon. That fiery object, large as an ostrich egg, tender-hued as the grass in spring-time, could be none other than the palladium of Yayacarui, the most famous and sacred of all gems. It glowed with the lustre and vitality of a wild's cat's eye seen from the camp-fire.

"You have sworn by the Mother of Emeralds to keep silence!"

For the moment Gerald was inclined to laugh outright. This big jewel, its native splendour enhanced by a cunningly-concealed electric spark, was nothing to him, an oath taken upon it was no whit more binding than an oath upon anything else. But he did not say so. Whatever he might feel, she was in deadly earnest, and he was content to humour her in her present mood, and await developments.

These came in rapid succession. The darkness rolled up like a curtain, and in a moment the whole place was illuminated. Then he saw, what he had half expected to see, the Temple of the Sun. The blaze of light was blinding and he placed both hands over his dazzled eyes.

"Yes, Viracocha," said the voice of the woman. "This is indeed the shrine of our great Father, the Sun: and you have sworn silence by the sacred emerald which sits ever on the altar. Look you now, how we honour the servant of the Invisible!"

Gerald, standing beside the high altar of rose-hued granite, beheld an immense circular space with a domed roof, supported by innumerable columns of precious marbles. The pavement of malachite was diapered with mosaic flowers of rainbow hues; and across its green expanse meandered a brook wrought in beaten silver. Seen from above, it appeared as one blossoming mead watered by the winding stream—a marvel of invention and artistic workmanship. In the concave ceiling of dark blue enamel glittered electric stars arranged in groups as the constellations of the southern heavens. Between the many pillars hung yellow silk draperies, woven with threads of silver and gold, so that every breath of air shook out sparkles of light. At the back of the high altar the icon of the Sun was veiled by a curtain of pale blue, starry with diamonds. Opposite to this, at the far end of the temple, and behind an altar of black basalt, spread a vast silver plate on which was graven the face of a beautiful woman, surrounded by rays of pearls. It was the shrine of Quilla, the moon goddess, the sister of the Sun Ynti. Around the walls stood altars to Coyllur, the host of heaven; to Chasac, the planet Venus; to Yllapa, the thunder and lightning, and to Ceuicha, the rainbow. Massive doors, plated with gold, formed the entrance to this splendid pagan church; but these were closed. In censers of silver smoked gums and spices which perfumed the air, and veiled the jewelled shrines with clouds of odorous smoke.

But amidst this gorgeous splendour were also horrors of no common order. The flowery pavement lay in a kind of hollow, encircled by three tiers, upon which were ranged the companies of the dead. More mummies than Gerald could count sat in gilded chairs, decked in gorgeous robes, stiff with gold and gems. The skins preserved almost their natural tints. For eyes, were moonstones, pale and cloudy-white. And before these royal dead stood golden vases, holding sacrificial first-fruits. Incense burned around. With rigid figures and arms crossed on the breast, these poor remnants of humanity sat grimly waiting the sounding of Gabriel's trumpet. Yet there was something humorous about them, too; and Gerald could hardly repress an outburst of laughter as it struck him. They called to his mind nothing so much as Mrs. Jarley's wax-works.

"These are the treasures collected by those!" said Mama Ocllo, pointing to the grinning company of the dead. "The wealth of the Incas, which the Spanish dogs could not gain. Kings and queens and princes keep watch over the riches we saved from the invaders. Do you not think, Viracocha," she waved her hand, "that with this treasure we can conquer the earth?"

Hazel looked at her with a cynical smile. "Since there is little on this planet which cannot be bought and sold, Mama Ocllo, you should be able to acquire much—even the nations of the earth. But you will never conquer them, never! These buried millions will be more potent to buy back Peru than your arms will be in regaining it by force."

The woman's face grew stormy. "What talk is this? Have you not seen our wonderful city?"

"I have. I have also heard its wonderful talk. Even Parry seems to be magnetised by the place. And perhaps that is not so strange, for the city is marvellous in its way. As a vast treasure-house it is powerful; but as a base from which to send forth conquering armies——" Hazel shook his head.

"But we have all the most formidable weapons of modern warfare!"

"That is just the point. You have the most modern weapons, and—other nations have them too; nations trained in arms, with thousands of professional soldiers. To be victorious over them, you should possess the weapons of the future; otherwise——" he shrugged, paused, and continued. "The present Government of Peru is not very strong, I grant; and with determined men using your war stores, you might—yes, you might bring about the re-construction of the empire. But the Government, however weak, have one card to play which is not in your pack!"

"What is that?" asked Mama Ocllo, drawing near.

"A fleet! A small one, certainly; but a fleet nevertheless!"

"Bah! What of it?"

"There should be no necessity for you to ask such a question. Look at the length of the Peruvian sea-board, and consider the impossibility of defending it without a well-equipped navy. You may regain and hold Cuzco because the Andes form a barrier between Cuzco and the sea. But once your enemies—driven from the land, take to the water and harass your coasts, what then? You will be in a state of constant warfare, Mama Ocllo, and without the chance of reprisal!"

"First the land and then the sea!" she replied coolly. "When we have regained Cuzco and the lands which lie between the Cordilleras, is time enough to think of the rest. Then we, too, can build ships—or better still, buy them from the Clyde dockyards. Money would not be lacking. Then again, Mr. Hazel, the exiled Government would have no base of operation!"

"Oh, I think so. If their ships command the sea-board, your enemies can hold Lima, and the other coast towns."

"Not if we harass them from the mountains. Besides, holding the interior, we would hold the corn supplies. We could starve them out."

"Oh dear no: they could obtain their supplies by ship. And your hands might not be free. You don't think the other Spanish Republics are going to stand quietly by and see their sister crushed, knowing that their turn will come next? Chili, for instance—Chili is a very powerful

state, and the neighbour of Peru. She can march her armies in amongst you very quickly. Would Chili be content to see the rising of a new Indian empire? I think not; to say nothing of Ecuador, Bolivia, or Brazil. Believe me, madam, you would be attacked on all sides, and would be much put to, to hold your own, let alone take the aggressive."

"You forget we should be much better armed."

"H'm. Would you be better armed? These Republics with their little wars are very much up-to-date. And—have you the men to fight?"

"Thousands of men. The whole native population overhead is sworn to free the land."

Hazel shook his head. "The natives are not trained soldiers."

"They are patriots who will fight to the death!"

"No doubt. But a disorderly crowd can do little against drilled men. The thicker the wheat, the quicker it is mown. That proverb fits your untrained masses."

For some moments Mama Ocllo was silent, considering the matter from Gerald's point of view. When she did speak, what she said was apparently irrelevant. "Do you know why my people learn the English tongue?" she asked.

"No. And I am curious about that, I confess."

Mama Ocllo sat down on the steps, and, resting her chin on her hand, looked at him steadily. "I want England to be the friend of my newly formed Empire. Of all nations yours is the most liberal minded, the most willing to aid the cause of fallen races. When we regain Cuzco, a task which you yourself at least admit to be possible of accomplishment, I shall send an embassy to ask England to right our wrongs. It shall be an embassy from Queen to Queen. If my aim were to revive a barbaric state, I could not expect help. But it is admitted, even by the most critical, that the government of my forefathers was enlightened, mild and just—the constitution most adapted to the well-being of the red race. In the days of the Incas there was little crime; the laws were humane and there was no poverty; on the contrary, a wonderful industry and organisation. It is my desire to revive that state of things. And I feel certain that England, the wise, the just, the free, will aid me in the good work. Peru for the Peruvians—that is my aim. But for the Indian Peruvians; not for those Spanish bastards who now misgovern at Lima, and oppress the true owners of the country. And if England consents, Viracocha, her fleet will destroy that of Peru, which you seem to think is so much to be feared. Ourselves we can repel the invasion of the surrounding states, and in a few years we shall have peace, in which to build up and consolidate our Empire."

"You forget there is such a thing as the Monroe doctrine," said Hazel, smiling. "If England interfered in the New World, even with the best intentions, she would have to reckon with the United States. As her desire is to bind them to her, and thus preserve the peace of the world, she could not be expected to jeopardise that by becoming your ally."

"Very good; then I should ask the aid of the States; and my order for the teaching amongst my people of the Anglo-Saxon' tongue would still have been wise. The eldest daughter of Britannia is as free and liberal as is her mother, and she would help me, I am sure."

"Well, there is something in what you say," replied Gerald, as she rose and descended the steps. "To revive so noble a civilisation as that of the Incas would meet with the approval of most nations; for, after

all, you would be only regaining the heritage of the red man, wrongfully taken from him. At all events, I wish you every success, Mama Ocllo."

She turned towards him with an impulsive movement of pleasure, and was about to speak. But on second thoughts she checked herself, and walked on in silence. They left the Temple by a side door, and came out on to the terrace by the grand stair-case. Pensively Mama Ocllo looked down on the swarming city, where the tide of people ebbed and flowed in the streets. The nether world was cheerful to-day, and the hum of many voices rose to where they stood. Musing on the wonders of the place, Hazel forgot for a time his companion, and her dreams. He was recalled by the princess throwing out her arm.

"For all these people I have to think," she said. "They are the limbs, the body. I am the brain. You have mentioned many obstacles to the success of my schemes, Viracocha; but the greatest obstacle you have not mentioned."

"Not in so many words," answered Gerald; "but I am aware of it, nevertheless. Is it not that you lack a leader amongst your race?"

"Yes, indeed, Viracocha," said she bitterly. "You have divined our weakness. My people are faithful and patriotic; they even possess that supreme courage which is born of despair. But political genius they have not. I alone possess it. Centuries of oppression have crushed the capabilities for leading out of them. They are so accustomed to their tyrants thinking for them that, like children, they cannot think for themselves."

"Mere disuse of the faculty, perhaps! When they are a nation once again it may revive amongst them."

"It may, as you say, when they are a nation. But they need it in order to become one. It is now we need a leader. I can find none. Believe me, Viracocha, in this vast place there is not one soul bold enough to measure itself against me—against a woman! I could pardon even rebellion if it brought forth a man."

"They say the hour produces the man," said Hazel, sententiously.

"There are exceptions to that as to every rule," she answered. "At the present moment in the dying Latin nations, in France, Italy, Spain, the man is wanted, but none can be found. The French with their wars and revolutions and petty jealousies have destroyed utterly the organising administrative genius of their nation. In Spain, the bigotry of Rome, and the Inquisition have done the same. And in Italy, where city hates city, and the whole house is divided against itself, the necessary genius has been frittered away. Germany, England, America—they produce the thinkers of the age, because they have given full scope to thought, and have drawn their leaders from all classes, irrespective of rank. Amongst my own people it is the ages of cruelty and slavery that have obliterated the genius I require. So was the genius of Greece crushed by Turkey; so is Russia now stifling the genius of the Slav. I want a man—a man!" cried Mama Ocllo, clenching her fists. "But not here shall I find one such as I need." She stopped and looked steadily at him. "It is for that reason that I had *you* brought to this place, Viracocha!"

"I am no genius," stammered Gerald, a trifle taken aback by the directness of her avowal.

"You are ignorant of your own power—you have genius—political genius: the genius necessary for a leader of men. You have but to use it. In your private station you have had no opportunities; hence your

disbelief in yourself. Well——” she stared at him fixedly, “I will give you opportunities in plenty. With me you shall assist at the birth of an Empire !”

“But I am not of the red race. I am not of royal Inca blood. The people would not accept me even if I were capable of doing what you say, which I very much doubt.”

Mama Oclo smiled now. “I can arrange all that,” she said, “these obstacles you speak of are already overcome, or will be when I put my plans into execution. You will be the successor of Sutic-toco. You will be the sovereign, and my husband ; and the people above ground and below will accept you with joy. No !” She raised her hand. “Do not speak ; but think over what I have said. This is no trivial matter to be decided in a breath. My future, your life, hang on your acceptance or refusal. Refusal !” she drew a long deep breath. “No, I do not think you will refuse. Consider, consider. This is the supreme hour of your life !”

Gathering up her robes she moved away in the direction of the Palace, and looked back over her shoulder with a smile upon her face—a smile softer and more womanly than he had ever seen there before. “The Queen commands your aid,” she said in low tones, “but the woman asks for it.”

Confused, agitated, moved in no small degree by her smile and the seductiveness of her whole attitude, Gerald hardly knew how best to answer her. Then he found there was no need to ; for before he was aware of it she had ascended the steps and was looking back at him and waving her hand. She disappeared within the door.

He remained where he was, and in a very few moments was himself again. His thoughts had flown over-seas—to the girl in far-distant England, who had sent him hither. He murmured her name softly to himself. It was as a talisman against the enchantress and her wiles—proof against the proffer of a dozen Empires !

CHAPTER XXVI.

“JOHN PRYNNE, DECEASED.”

THIS was but one of many conversations between Gerald and Mama Oclo. The ice once broken—and it must be confessed that on her part it had been very thoroughly broken—they met daily, she showing herself ever ready for the discussion of matters more or less closely connected with Yayacarui and its glories, both present and future. They exchanged opinions, expounded dreams of reform, suggested improvements, municipal and governmental, and tacitly agreed, for the time being, at least, to leave in abeyance matters more purely personal. To her very definite proposal the princess did not again refer, and Hazel, for obvious reasons, was not inclined to allude to it. Yet it was the crux of the whole situation ; and as such, ever present in the minds of both ; and it seemed that failing such union all their projects were more than likely to prove futile. On his part Gerald's mind was fully made up. He was determined not to become this woman's puppet. He might allow her to think that he would, for the moment, but in the end a definite refusal would have to come. His

energies now were directed to warding off the dénouement until such time as he could do so with safety. Meanwhile he became interested in her schemes, and rendered her really valuable assistance, all of which she took for a favourable sign, and rejoiced accordingly. So did he outwit her for the moment, in spite of her shrewdness and ever suspicious nature.

Dick was by no means pleased at the turn things had taken. His admiration for Gerald had by this time assumed proportions akin to hero-worship. He chose to consider him his personal property, and resented Mama Ocllo's demands on his company and time. In vain did Hazel argue against this childish pique; but Dick was not to be brought round by any amount of persuasion. He raged and sulked; took to wandering about alone, and—what was worse—to drinking again. He drank, not for the love of drinking, but because heredity, it seemed, had decreed that he should always leave a bottle empty. After each debauch he made good resolutions; which he proceeded to break as quickly as they had been made. All that Gerald could do was totally unavailing. Dick glibly confessed his shame, and returned to revel in it with a sense of compunction, which wore off after the third glass.

By this time he had recognised the impossibility of keeping Molly to the promise extracted from her. Indeed, in his own mind, he had already made her over to the care of Hazel. But he did not tell him so. Such a renunciation, it seemed to Dick, should be made on a proper occasion, and with becoming dramatic effect. There was, of course, absolutely no reason for secrecy in the matter, unless it were to be found in that spirit of obstinacy which he had inherited from his mother, and was so characteristic of him. Gerald was good to him, and the surrender of Molly was to be Gerald's reward. But it must be given at a fitting moment. So Dick, hugging his secret, continued to drink, and Hazel fruitlessly to exhort, and Mama Ocllo studiously to ignore the scapegrace Dick as much as she affected the company of Gerald. A word from her would have put a very conclusive check on Master Dick's bibulations, since she had only to cut off supplies; but she refused to speak that word, and scoffed at Gerald for desiring it to be spoken.

"Let the brute drink himself to death," she said. "He is of no use to you or me that I can see."

"Use?—perhaps not. But he is Dick, and a good fellow if he could only be true to himself."

"He *is* true to himself!" she insisted. "He is a born drunkard, and is fulfilling his destiny."

"My dear lady, does not the civilization of the Inca count the loss of the human soul?"

"Every soul must work out its own redemption. If that man's life were your life it would be different, but one human being cannot act Providence to another."

"Yet you would act Providence to me," smiled Hazel. "You would lead me into a path of your own tracing."

"I point out the path. It remains for you to walk in it."

"At the risk of your taking your revenge on me if I do not, eh? Oh, I am beginning to know you very well, Princess!"

Mama Ocllo laughed. "A man can't go very far wrong if he allows a woman to guide him. As to your friend, I say again, let him die. I have no use for him."

"Even so, he shall not die if I can help it!"

"Pshaw! If you take up other people's burdens you will soon have more than enough on your shoulders."

"Perhaps. The South American portion of it will be considerable, I am aware. However, don't let us argue, Princess."

"You are pleased to be sentimental."

"Because I want to save a poor devil from going under?—call it so if you will. No one is likely ever to accuse you of such an amiable weakness, Princess. You are a female Napoleon in your way, as reckless, as hard, and as cruel!"

"Politically reckless, hard, and cruel perhaps," corrected she, "but I can be soft to those who do not stand in my way—you do not know how soft!"

"No, I don't. My imagination has its limitations. Softness from you is, I confess, outside of them. If I may say so, those who do not stand in your way, do not exist for you—at most you ignore them."

"Perhaps." With that the conversation dropped, and Hazel was left to his own devices.

The heartlessness of Mama Ocllo disgusted him. She would have strewn her path with dead to gain a single one of her many aims, and granting that this was the fault of her genius, it was none the less repulsive—in a woman. Still there was some show of excuse for her. Artistic genius can afford to be soft, since such a weakness does not materially affect its creations; but political genius must be as hard and brilliant as a diamond, else its goal may never be won. Cæsar and Napoleon were both cruel, not by nature so much as by reason of the force which impelled them, and controlled their every action. They could not be judged as ordinary men. So he supposed it was with Mama Ocllo. She was not an ordinary woman. She had in her a portion of that evil fire which burns up and destroys the softer affections. Conscience she had none—no capability of remorse; but like Nature, went on destroying and creating, irrespective wholly of suffering or delight. Parry, he thought, had put it very neatly when he had called Mama Ocllo a "force." She was a force—a blind force—not a woman.

As the weeks went on, Gerald divided his attention pretty equally between Mama Ocllo and searching for the secret entrance. But this latter was hard to come at—so hard that he almost gave up the task in despair. But in his own way he was every whit as obstinate as Dick; and he poked and peered into every cranny, hoping against hope, and determined, though it took him years, to find the exit. He was a good deal at the White Man's Club, making plans and testing the temper of every single individual who hoped to take part in the escape. The emerging from this burrow was not the hardest part of the affair; for there remained the journey to Todos, as the nearest place in touch with the civilized world. Down the Andes, across the waterless desert, through the dense jungles of the forest—the whole way was packed with wild Indians and wilder beasts, against which means of defence must be adequate. Rifles they could procure, revolvers too; haversacks, clothes, tents, bedding, all the paraphernalia of travel were forthcoming in plenty. But it was the lack of powder and shot, of cartridge and dynamite, which bothered Gerald. These also were stored in Yayacarui, but were kept rigorously under lock and key in a distant cavern, behind doors, iron-bound. Mama Ocllo had one key at her girdle; the other was in the keeping of Puca. The magazine was never opened save in the presence of the Coya and a large

force of armed men—too large a force for the whites to tackle with any hope of success. This was the nut that Hazel and his followers had to crack, and a pretty hard one they found it. Since force was useless there remained only strategy. But every scheme seemed futile. Gerald failed to devise any means of looting the ammunition without it coming to the knowledge of Mama Oclo. Pending accident therefore, which might perchance deliver it into his hands, he gave up the problem for the time being, as insoluble.

And so time went on without their coming any nearer to the fulfilment of their hopes.

"We can only keep our eyes open and play a waiting game," said Gerald. "Sooner or later, we shall gain our ends," and endorsing this decision the white men went about their various tasks with such equanimity and patience as they possessed. But with success so near and yet so far, Hazel found it hard work sometimes to curb the impatience of a few of them.

Mama Oclo took Gerald into many strange places—places utterly unknown to the general populace. She showed him the reservoir, whence flowed the stream which masked the quebrada gate-way, and cut off exit in that direction. She introduced him into a vast cave filled with skeletons of the plebs. By some horrible process the bones of these were dyed bright crimson and resembled nothing in nature. Row upon row of these ghastly objects filled the cavern; and the sight of their red skulls in the electric glare was a little too much even for Hazel's nerves. The scene reminded him of the Danse Macabre as depicted by some of the mediæval masters. It was long ere he lost the uncanny feeling of it.

"Ugh!" he said, unable to repress a shiver, "what an abominable desecration of the dead! What ghastly scheme is this?"

"I can hardly tell you," she replied. "The custom was one of our forefathers' and we abide by it. Perhaps, like the Mussulman's lock of hair, it has some symbolical connection with the afterdeath."

"You believe then there is an afterdeath?"

"The priests say so," she replied, with a shrug. "But who knows? This is the tomb of the common people," she continued. "There is another cave filled with the noble dead. In the Temple, as you know, we place the mummies of royalty, and those of the strangers who have forwarded our aims. So do we honour the brave, the learned, and the kingly."

"John Prynne is in the Temple?"

"His mummy is. I will show you all that remains of John Prynne. But what do you know of him?"

"I know that he was the descendant of Sir Bevil Prynne, who came——"

"Quite so. I read all about him in the manuscript that was taken from your drunken friend. Bevil Prynne also is in the Temple. He cured our people of many diseases."

"And John Prynne? Was he a benefactor too?"

"Yes; John Prynne was an inventor—a very clever man. He was trying to perfect an air-ship when he died. Ah!" she drew a long breath, "if that secret could only be discovered! The owner of it will rule the world. I would rule the world if it were mine. Some day it will be discovered. We have an inventor here now——"

"The Yankee chap?"

"Yes; but he does not seem to make much progress. I am afraid the

discovery will not be made by him. I send everywhere for those who imagine they can invent an air-ship. Many have come here; but not one has been successful. See, here is the Temple!"

She broke off abruptly as they entered the glorious fane, and glanced round at the grim company of dead. Gerald was immediately attracted by the great emerald sparkling on the altar, and the veil behind it—the veil that concealed the great Deity of the Incas. That the icon should be so concealed puzzled him. He turned to her for explanation. In answer she pointed overhead.

"These rocks shut out the true sun from our gaze," said she, but whether in earnest or not Gerald could not tell. "Our father is angered with his children, and has sent them to dwell in darkness, far from his smile. Therefore we veil his image, and shall do so until such time as the plate of gold with its graven face is set up in the holy temple of Cuzco. Alas," she sighed, "we must build a new Yntippampa in the sacred city, for the Spanish dogs destroyed the house of the god. Yes, Viracocha, we hide the sun's image. Yet on high festivals the veil is withdrawn so that the people may not forget their father."

Gerald looked at her curiously. "Tell me, Mama Oclo, how much of all this do you believe? In your eyes is the sun a god?"

She shook her head. "The sun is God's servant," she said. "Even the common people know that. Our race was never an idolatrous race. I believe in what my fathers believed, Viracocha. They worshipped Con-illa-ticci-uiracocha, the spirit of eternal life, who rules by light through his servants the sun and moon. I adore no idols. These shrines and the images behind them are symbolic merely of invisible forces with which God controls and sustains the world. The sun and moon, thunder and lightning, the host of Heaven, as we call the stars—we venerate these as the manifestations of the Godhead. Con himself has our undivided worship. But the common people may worship these truly as idols. I do not know."

She paused and looked round the vast space glowing with gold and silver and jewels. "After all, who knows the unknown?" she continued gravely. "Do you; do I? No! Nor shall we ever know. These symbols are necessary to the common herd who must have their religion brought home to them by outward and visible signs. But you and I, Viracocha; are we wiser than they? I think not. A child is as learned about God as the wisest man, nay, more learned, since the child comes latest from God. God exists! We are sure of that, but we cannot prove it. All the religious systems in the world have been built up by man out of man's thoughts. Each man has fashioned a god to his lusts—has invented a hereafter according to his liking. I believe in none of them. God! When you utter that name you say all."

"Those are agnostic principles, surely? You believe in nothing?"

She turned to him with a subtle smile. "Even then I must believe that I do not believe. No! I am no agnostic. I believe in a Supreme Being, call him Jehovah, Foh, God, Jove, Allah—what you will; but I cannot explain my belief, nor can you, nor can anyone; as little," she added, with a bitter smile, "as I can explain why the Supreme permitted a happy nation, bloodless and industrious, to be so swept away by a horde of cruel fiends. The Aztecs! Yes, they sinned; they offered human sacrifices in their blindness; the worst of civilizations was better than their best. But our race?—we reaped a whirlwind which was none of our sowing."

Nor I nor you can understand why such a thing was permitted. There is a God," she spread out her arms, "the rest is—silence!"

"A somewhat hopeless creed!"

"The only creed for those who would search out the unsearchable. Tell me a better one! The ever-wise Greeks set up an altar to the unknown god; and so anticipated our century. Ah, well; God reigns somewhere. We are in His hands—little children in His hands; and the hereafter—" with an abrupt pause she looked at the glittering circle, "they are wiser than we are, Viracocha. We also shall be wise when the wisdom shall be powerless to affect this life. But enough of theology, which at the best is only weaving ropes of sand. You would see the mummies of those whose works I carry on? Here they are, the Incas and their sister wives. This one led his people to these caves; that one lighted them first with oil; and his neighbour illuminated the darkness with gas. He who introduced the electric light yet lives."

"Your father, Sutic-toco?"

She bowed her head. "It is the glory of his reign. The glory of mine and yours will be that we shall give the people sunlight. But that is yet on the knees of the gods. Here is Sir Bevil Prynne, who was lured to Yayacarui centuries ago by the fame of the great emerald."

The mummy was that of a man in the prime of life, strong-limbed, and beyond the common stature. Gerald gazed long at the grave, black-bearded face, with its broad brow and firm chin. This was the man who had fought for ill-fated Charles at Edgehill and Naseby; who had escaped Puritan swords to die amidst Pagans in the heart of the earth. A strange fate for one of Rupert's cavaliers.

"And this is John Prynne," said Mama Ocllo, "the man you seek—or rather what remains of him."

In vain Hazel tried to find some resemblance to Molly in the desiccated face of this white-bearded ancient. So this was John Prynne, this morsel of dried humanity! The man he had come to seek, whom he would never be able to take back! Dead indeed—but not with his bleached bones lying on Andean hills, as Titu, the liar, had said. With those of kings and princes his body was preserved, sepulchred in that magnificent tomb wherein were gathered the millions he had craved, the jewel he had coveted. And as in irony the face with its moon-stone eyes was turned towards the altar whereon the emerald shot its threads of green fire. There then was what remained of John Prynne—here the end of Hazel's quest!

"This is the man you came to seek," repeated Mama Ocllo.

"This is the man," assented Gerald, still looking at the mummy. "And now that I know he is really dead, the object of my journey is achieved."

"Very good. And what follows?"

"I crave your leave to return, Mama Ocllo."

"And so lose me the labour of my life, Viracocha!"

"Mama Ocllo!" For a moment he hesitated, turning over what was in his mind. Then he proceeded. "I will be plain with you. In many ways I admire and applaud your schemes; but they are so outside my life, so beyond my aspirations and capabilities, that I do not see how I can assist you to carry them out. I have ties in my own country which hold me. You are of a different race to me—your life is planned on different lines. There is a gulf between us which nothing can bridge over. If I were free, things might be different; but I am not free. No man can

evade racial responsibilities, or with any success take up the burden of the alien. I came here for a specific purpose. That purpose is now fulfilled, and I would return to my own people. It is true that I have learned your secret; but it is safe with me for ever. Let me go, Mama Ocllo. You will find a helpmate wiser far than me. I am not worthy to be your husband or the king of your people. Your attempt to make me both can end only in disaster. I respect you! I admire you! But I cannot love you. Your life and mine may not mingle. We have met, but we must part. Wish me good-bye, and God speed!"

She did not reply. She looked at him with a smile of utter derision on her face. Neither colour nor expression betrayed the tumult which raged in her breast. She was trying to think what the woman at the bottom of it all was like. Was she more beautiful than herself—younger, more accomplished, stronger? No—not stronger; that she vowed. She continued to smile.

"We can speak of these things in my house, Viracocha," she said at length. "Come!"

Hazel mistrusted that calm reply. To his thinking it precluded a storm. But he need not have been afraid. Mama Ocllo had not sufficient womanly weakness to permit of her sacrificing her aims for the sake of indulging her temper. Before she left the Temple she had formulated a plan, whereby to force Gerald to do her bidding in spite of himself.

He followed her to the Palace, and into a small room. There she left him alone on what was obviously an invented plea. He wondered what she was after; he would require all his wits about him to be even with her, he knew that. He sat down contentedly to wait. By that simple action he delivered himself into her hands.

The room was strange in appearance, even for that strange place. Every inch of it, walls, ceiling, flooring, was covered with scales of mother-of-pearl; and the whole glistened faintly in the subdued light of shaded lamps. A pile of grey silk cushions on the floor, a few grey-painted stools were all the furniture it contained. Windows there were none, and when Mama Ocllo closed the door, it fitted in so neatly as to be indiscernible. After the glare and gilding and splendour of the other apartments Hazel had seen, this cloudy, grey, vaporous-looking room was at least restful to the eye. He felt as though he were enveloped in mist on some high Scotch moor; and threw himself on the cushions with a sigh of weariness. But the air was not so cool as it would have been on a moor. He hardly noticed that at first. But after a while a warm and odorous breath was wafted past his nostrils. He became aware of a distinct scent—a scent that made his head dizzy; but the sensation was not altogether unpleasant. There were several minute holes in the flooring through which the subtle vapour seemed to be breathed. It grew warmer and more fragrant, with the perfume of tuberoses, sickly, heavy, sensuous. Suddenly its gentle caress changed to violence, and it caught Hazel by the throat. With a strangled, choking feeling he got on his feet. He began to suspect that something was wrong. He staggered towards the door. He had almost reached it when a whiff more powerful than before took away his senses. He sank on his knees, fighting desperately against the faintness which he now recognised as due to some devilry of Mama Ocllo. Thicker and thicker grew the scented atmosphere, and gasping for breath, he reeled over, and fell full length and quite unconscious on the floor. He lay as dead, white and still as marble, in that grey twilight room.

"You would crave my leave to go," murmured Mama Oclo, twenty minutes later, as she knelt beside his unconscious form. "Ah, no, my love! No, no; my sweet! That leave shall never be yours, for you would take my heart with you over-seas!" There was the tenderest light in her eyes now as she bent to kiss the unresponsive lips:

CHAPTER XXVII.

"DICK PAYS A VISIT."

As a direct result of Mama Oclo's action, there was trouble in the White Man's Club that evening. With the choicest oaths in his vocabulary, Dick imparted to the members the intelligence of his chief's disappearance: and there ensued much wonderment as to its cause. Not a few of the natives were somewhat roughly button-holed by the irate white men, and were, of course, altogether discredited when they protested—in all good faith—that they knew nothing of Viracocha's whereabouts. Dick assembled a search-party, and Parry kept the lights ablaze long after the termination of the official day, that every cavern and passage might be explored. But all this came to nothing. At ten o'clock the twenty of them re-assembled in Parry's room with the knowledge that their chief was still missing. For all that came to light, Gerald might have dropped into one of the innumerable fissures, or have been swallowed up by the sacred river. And those who held by him as their sole hope of success were in despair; and the single one who did not, rejoiced silently. Needless to say, Brossard was the happy man on this occasion.

Finally suspense was ended by Mama Oclo, who got wind of the situation, and sent down Puca to readjust it. The little red man informed his breathless audience that Viracocha was in good health and spirits: but for political reasons would be invisible during the next fourteen days. Then Puca took himself off, not liking the looks of those around him; and an astonished pause was broken by Dick thumping the table to attract attention.

"It's that damned slut!" declared Amherst, who had about as much aboard as he could carry. "She's got the chief stowed away in a corner of sorts. Puca's been cavortin' round here and takin' in more than is good for him."

"About our plans?" queried Parry.

"You bet! He's foxed the information, and handed it on to Mama Oclo. She knows the lot of us ain't worth a cent without our chief; so she just ups and yanks him off, to stop our canoodlings. Huh! Puca thinks I can't see through him! That's just where the little beast slips up. 'Guess I'll wring his neck afore long; and, by thunder, I'll annex the magazine key same time."

There was a silence of dismay while the company digested this announcement.

Then said the Oxford man. "Mama Oclo may keep Hazel apart from us if she has learned anything of our schemes. But I do not think she will hurt him in any way."

"Oh, I guess not. She's a sight too fond of him: but she'll hurt us. Chain him up till she's got her plans in working order; an' we'll be left out in the cold!" he groaned. "Who's to lead now?"

"Messieurs, I assume the position—I, a son of France!"

There was a chorus of dissent, and Brossard sat down furious at the snub which galled his vain nature to the quick. He did not forget it, as will be seen hereafter. While he sulked, the others talked of electing another chief. But the babel of voices was reduced to one, when Parry gave his opinion.

"We must get Hazel back," he said decisively. "He is the only man who can do what we want!"

"Right oh!" sang out Dick, setting down an empty beer jug with a bang. "And this child don't serve under no other boss. No, sirs!" He jumped up. "I'm off to find out that she-devil's game. Whatever it is, I'll give her fifty in a hundred and lick her head off."

"Where are you making for, Dick?" cried Parry, as the rascal started for the door.

"Mama Oclo, 'course. 'Goin' to have it out with her; and bring back m' chief in double quick time."

"You fool, she'll only lock you up! You're as drunk as an owl."

"Not me. I've just hoisted in enough to make me tackle that she-boss. So-long boys! I'm on the war-path." And, in spite of many hands outstretched to hold him, Dick swung clear and out of the room. The other men remained behind in a state bordering upon panic. They did not know into what straits Dick's rashness might lead them: and, like Macbeth's feast, the meeting broke up in the most "admired disorder."

But Dick was more level-headed than they guessed. He was just sufficiently primed to deal boldly with Mama Oclo: that is, to defy her and tell her a few home truths, choicely embellished, no doubt, but likely to hit the mark none the less on that account. Towards women Dick could be brutal, especially when in liquor. Sober, he would have hesitated to beard the lioness in her den; but half seas over, he thought himself a match for her, and competent to get at the truth.

The Providence which watches over drunken men stood on guard at this moment, else he would not have got off so cheaply as he did. As it was, his audacity carried him safely through a very difficult situation.

"She's not goin' to snaffle m' chief this trip!" said Dick to himself, as he swung on towards the palace. "If he's jailed, I'm to be jailed too; but I guess I'm goin' to stick to him like wax—closer than a brother, damn me!"

Strange to say, Mama Oclo received this imperative visitor. She detested him with her whole heart; and but for Hazel's influence would speedily have got rid of him without any fuss at all. As a rule she took no more notice of him than if he had been a fly. The sole redeeming feature about him in her eyes was his fidelity to Hazel; and she had some idea, therefore, of what she might expect from him now. She was in nowise astonished at his visit; indeed, she was rather pleased than otherwise, having, as a matter of fact, use for him at that moment.

Her instinct led her to suspect that Gerald was in love with some girl in the home-country. Otherwise, she argued, he would not be so anxious to get away. A few questions to Puca elicited the information that Dick and Gerald sometimes talked of a certain Molly Prynne; and Mama Oclo, connecting this name with that of the man Hazel had avowedly come to seek, began to see daylight. Puca could tell her no more; but it was probable Dick might. Therefore, she rejoiced when she heard

that he danced on her door-step, and rejoiced still more at the intelligence that he was in liquor. The scamp was garrulous in his cups; and his garrulity, guided by skilful questioning on her part, should serve her well now. He was a sponge to be squeezed dry; and the Princess prepared herself to squeeze it.

Into that cloudy mother-of-pearl chamber Dick was conducted. He found Mama Oclo reclining, Eastern fashion, on a pile of cushions. She wore a loose white robe; but no jewels, as became the sober twilight atmosphere. A weary soul—such as Mama Oclo's often was—could well be soothed in that misty colourless room, so silent and restful—the very shrine of the sleep-god.

When Dick swaggered in with the courage oozing out of his fingertips, she laid aside a book she had been reading, and looked him calmly up and down: but spoke no word until the door was closed.

"Well, Mr. Amherst!" she said at length, "and what can I do for you? Nothing wrong with the chica, I hope?"

"Hang the chica!" growled Dick, ill-pleased with this raillery.

"As you please. I understand that you are well up in the subject of beer. It does not interest me in the least. Have you to complain about the quality or the supply? In either case I fear I must refer you to Apu."

"I've come about m' chief."

"You mean Mr. Hazel? Well, I can give you ten minutes. Please sit down on yonder stool. No! Don't bring it closer. I can see you very well."

A faint smile curved her lips as she saw the cooling effect of her reception. Dick would have faced a battery in his present state of daredevilry: but, somehow, he felt abashed before this mild-spoken woman. Had she raged, he would have been equal to the occasion; since he could hold his own with anybody in the matter of strong language. But Mama Oclo talked so engagingly that all he could do was to sit on his stool like a naughty child, the drink and the courage dying out of him.

"Where's m' chief?" he demanded.

"In the palace of Sutic-toco." This was a lie, though Dick did not know it. "He will remain there for a fortnight—in perfect safety, Mr. Amherst, I assure you."

"What the—I mean, why is he to stick there all that time?"

"Ah! Now you want to know too much."

"Perhaps I do," said Dick, doggedly. "But I don't leave this place until I *do* know."

"Won't you? Really, such fidelity should have its reward. Well, I will tell you: Mr. Hazel is engaged in political business with which you have nothing to do—and which you would not understand. In a fortnight or so, you will see him again safe and sound. Does that please you, Mr. Amherst?"

"No, it doesn't. I want to see m' chief now—this very instant!"

"Really! Now, I am afraid you are asking too much."

The sneering answer gave Dick back his courage with a rush. He jumped up, dashed his cap on the ground, and let his temper fly. "Now, look you here, you—you—woman!" he suppressed a stronger term. "I know you're up to some infernal trick: an' I'm not goin' to have it played on m' chief. Just you let me see him, or—or——"

"Or what, Mr. Amherst?"

"I'll—I'll raise Cain; see if I don't!"

"Isn't that rather vague? There are so many ways of raising Cain, as you call it. Be more explicit."

"As 'splicit' as you like. I'll wring your neck!" and Dick made a step forward.

Mama Oclo changed neither expression nor position. But Dick found himself looking down the barrel of a neat pistol. "I am considered a clean shot, Mr. Amherst," said she.

"Shoot away. Don't care a damn!"

"I see you don't." She laughed and tossed aside the weapon. "But you care considerably about the gentleman you call your chief. I have really no use for that pistol. If you laid a finger on me—well—" with a shrug, "you can risk the experiment, if you care to face my people."

Dick, looking foolish, balanced himself like a stork on one leg. He guessed at what she hinted; and, although indifferent about his own safety, was in deadly fear lest Hazel should come to harm. Furthermore as his hostess held the whip, and knew how to use it, he recognised the futility of bluffing. "'Guess you've gone one better than me," he remarked quietly, and resumed his stool with a lamb-like air.

"I see you are open to persuasion," said Mama Oclo coolly. "Now that you are more sober, perhaps you will talk more sensibly. My reason for secluding Mr. —"

"Oh, I'm on to your blamed reason right enough," interrupted Dick, sniffing. "You know we want to light out of this rancho, and so you annex the only man who can run the circus."

"That speech does credit to your imagination. Your plots for escape do not trouble me in the least. Here you are, and here you will stay—every one of you, in spite of your ingenious schemes. I really don't see why you want to leave. The beer here is quite as good as you will get anywhere; and you haven't got to pay for it!"

"Oh, go on—go on! That's just like a woman—won't let a man enjoy himself without rubbing it into him. Huh! Women and their chin-music! As to my lighting out, don't care a cent whether I do or do not. But m' chief wants to go, and where he goes, I follow."

"Why does Mr. Hazel want to go?"

"That's his business, I guess. He's goin' for sure, an' you won't keep him, Mama Oclo. Oh, you ain't the only female in the world!"

The calmness of this fiery woman under these insults might have warned Dick of his danger: but he was in a reckless mood, and took an ell for every inch she gave him. Beyond the sudden clenching of one hand, and a quick indrawn breath, there was no sign of disturbance on her part. Quite ignorant of the restraint she was putting on herself, Dick pursued his browbeating, by irrelevantly introducing Puca's name into the discussion.

"There's that little cuss of yours. He's got his knife into Hazel, an' is watching his chance to scratch. What's that for, anyhow?"

"Puca is jealous of Mr. Hazel's attentions to me."

Dick sniggered offensively. "'Guess he needn't be; they don't mean anything—not by a long chalk."

"How gracefully you put things, Mr. Amherst! And why not?"

"Better ask Hazel."

Years of training enabled Mama Oclo to control her temper. She saw that Dick was insolently drunk; but not drunk enough to make him in-

discreet. He hinted at what she wished to know, but without further inspiration would not explain. Humiliated in her own mind by the necessity of using this degraded creature, Mama Oclo clapped her hands. Dick, thinking he was about to be ordered to instant execution, jumped up to make a fight for it. But when a pretty girl entered to receive instructions about Pica wine he sat down again with an agreeable smile.

"Guess you're adoing the thing in style. Oh, I never did see much harm in you, Mama Oclo."

"Thank you. Your opinion is worth having."

"Huh! Don't chuck borak at me!"

"If you would only speak English," said Mama Oclo impatiently, "we could understand one another better. So you want to leave us?"

"You bet! It don't suit this child to be holed like a darned badger, though 'pon m' soul I don't know if it's worth diggin' m' way out. Above ground or under it poor Dick Amherst's done for!" Here the scamp became gloomy and extremely sorry for himself. "I'm a bad lot; that's what I am, an' don't you forget it. Always in the mud—always. Hazel straightens me out at times and picks me up; but I only drop back again. A dung-hill beast—that's me—a dung-hill beast!"

"Oh come, come, Mr. Amherst; you're a little depressed. Here, take this glass of wine, and you'll soon feel better."

He lifted the wine to his lips, and looked at her. Then he tossed the liquor down and re-filled the glass. Suddenly he seemed to become suspicious.

"Guess you're standin' drinks to get somethin' out of me," he said, "but I can carry m' liquor and hold m' tongue as well as any, I can!"

"How clear your conscience must be, Mr. Amherst, when a simple act of hospitality makes you so suspicious. What can you possibly know that would be of value to me? Indeed, you are so little use that I am thinking of getting rid of you."

"Oh, if it comes to that——"

"I never go to extreme measures unless they are necessary. You needn't fear for your life," replied the Princess, coldly, "my idea is to send you away from Yayacarui, lest you should demoralise it. There is a tribe beyond the Andes with which I can place you. These Indians will hold you captive, but treat you well, so long as you behave yourself. Yes, I really think that will be best," she finished placidly.

"You don't get me to budge without m' chief," said Dick in a sulky tone.

"That we shall see. Besides, Mr. Hazel does not want to go!"

"That's a lie!" retorted Dick, politely. "He wants to get back to Molly."

"Molly? Molly? And who, pray, is Molly?—I know no Molly." There was a tremor in the voice of Mama Oclo, which she could not altogether suppress.

"Dare say you don't," growled Dick, helping himself to more wine—Mama Oclo had pushed over the bottle to him. "Molly's worth a dozen of your sort. She don't get round shootin' niggers. I'll get even with you for sendin' Cain to Kingdom Come; see if I don't."

"So Molly is the name of a woman," said Mama Oclo, taking no notice of the insolent threat. "And Mr. Hazel is—is—engaged to marry her!"

"Huh! That's just where you slip up. Molly's engaged to me!" and Dick turned a rapidly glazing eye on the Coya.

She clasped and unclasped her hands, hardly able to restrain her agitation. This was better news than she had hoped to hear. "In that case she will marry you!" she panted eagerly.

"Marry me! Look at me! I'm a decent beast to marry a girl, ain't I? Oh yes; m' wife would have a holy time along o' me. No!" Dick wagged his head solemnly, "I did think of sittin' up square, an' runnin' in double harness with Molly Prynne; but I can't leave the bottle. I'm a drunken hound—yes, I am—only fit for manure!"

"Is Molly Prynne any relation to the John Prynne who was here?" "A daughter of sorts. That's why Hazel came to look the old man up. If he brings back the corpse Molly becomes Mrs. Hazel."

Mama Ocllo rose with a flushed face. "She will never become Mrs. Hazel—never! The body of John Prynne will remain where it is. Hazel—ah, why do I call him so?—Viracocha will remain also. He will become one of us."

"And marry you!" said Dick, with a drunken laugh. "Huh! 'Guess I see him doing it! Well, I should smile."

"Would you smile to see him marry the girl you are engaged to?" cried Mama Ocllo, furiously.

"Why, bless you, I'm to be best man at the weddin'. Hazel's a good sort; an' I'm a pig. I'll hand Molly over to him!"

"Are you a man?"

"No, I'm a beast, I tell you!" Dick finished another glass, "a dog; but I'm faithful as one." He rose threateningly. "Don't you try harm m' chief or this dog will bite. Hazel's good sort—marry Moll—ho! ho! You'll get lef—what larks!—get lef—"

"Beast that you are; hold your tongue, or I'll have it torn out!" White with rage she furiously clapped her hands, while Dick half fell down and laughed derisively. Then he heard Mama Ocllo's voice raised in anger, and suddenly several men seemed to make a rush at him; and—he could not explain how—he found himself on the terrace outside the palace.

Annoyed by the inexplicable transference, and deprived of his wine, Dick began to remonstrate loudly. Finding no one took any notice of him, he relapsed into tears. After a time his weeping gave way to snoring, and on the hard stones he spent the long night, oblivious utterly of all things. It was not the first time that he had occupied such a couch.

Meanwhile Mama Ocllo raged up and down the room, trying to turn to account what she had gathered from Dick. She did not know very well how to manage with so drunken an instrument. But she was resolved that Dick should never surrender Molly to Hazel—that he should be free for her to win. And win him she would; though, for the moment, she knew not how. But in the end she would succeed in this as she had already succeeded in so much. She passed on mentally to another detail of her plot for the subjugation of Gerald—a detail more easy of manipulation.

"It must be done," she murmured, "and speedily!" after which mysterious soliloquy she went to visit her prisoner.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"THE FESTIVAL."

HENCEFORTH Dick sat tight and made no attempt to interfere with the administration. He explained the position to the White Man's Club, and the Club accepted the situation as one beyond their power to amend. No one believed in the official version of Hazel's disappearance; but any excuse was good enough for them, who were not bound to receive one at all. As a despot Mama Ocllo conceived that she had the right to do as she pleased, and, white subjects or red, none had the power to withstand her. Dick, who was in the secret of the Coya's passion, judged that its object would surely be treated well, and probably released before long. But he was not inclined to appear over and above optimistic to his comrades. Still, he was in some degree reassuring.

"We'll string out patience for a fortnight," he said, when pressed, "and then that virgin's bound to play her ace. She can't keep the chief in quod for ever. Huh! Wonder what her game is!"

And this he learned just when Mama Ocllo chose he should learn it; not before. She was too clear-headed a young woman to vacillate. Nor was she given to procrastination. She knew just what she wanted to do and she did it. And Dick was forced to admit to himself that for a young woman, she was remarkable; even talented. But, nevertheless, he had a secret conviction that when it came to a trial of individual capacity, Hazel would prove himself the better of the two and beat her at her own game. For even Dick was sufficiently astute to see that she was hopelessly in love with his chief, and to know that a woman in love is handicapped. He felt sure that Hazel, in the end, would get the uppermost in some way—he did not know how—and that he would return in triumph to release the score of white slaves from their intolerable imprisonment. Pending this, he drowned his grief in drink; and lived in a state of semi-stupor for the whole fourteen days. On the fifteenth came about a ceremonial at the Temple of the Sun, and he pulled himself together so far that he might take a hand in it. It was then that Mama Ocllo developed her policy.

For weeks there had been much excitement about this festival. Rumours connected with the legends of the past and the expectations of the future had run like wild-fire through the place. The city hummed like a swarm of bees; and the Indians abandoned their routine to gather in chattering knots. What the root of the matter was, none of the white men could learn; for the reticence of the natives baffled the most persistent enquiries. That the excitement had to do with some miracle which would be worked at this festival, was all the information on the subject that Dick could obtain. Meanwhile the population throughout the caves congregated at Yayacarui; and the city was crowded with red men wrought up to fever heat. Strange to say, they were all of them pleased to be particularly civil to the whites.

"Gosh! They've got their bloomin' night-gowns on," said Dick, thus profanely designating the white robes of the worshippers. "Seems there's a big pow-wow of sorts comin' off. Huh! What a row!"

He made this observation, posted on the terrace over against the Temple looking down on the square and the streets, which were packed with humanity. Gongs roared, drums thundered and trumpets shrieked. There was the babble of a myriad voices. From the Inca's palace Dick saw a litter emerge, It was carried down the steps, through the throng, who fell on their knees as the sovereign passed onward to the Temple.

Thinking he might as well see as much as he could of the "show," he ran along the terrace to the far side, where the high priest in green and white robes awaited Sutic-toco. Rich carpets were unrolled and the Inca descended, leaning on the arm of Mama Ocllo. Her air was triumphant, as though she had brought a piece of strategy to a successful conclusion; and she looked more beautiful than ever. She caught sight of Dick and shot a glance of contempt in his direction—it made him wince, thick-skinned though he was. To all appearances she had gained her ends; and curious to know what these might be, he elbowed his way through the crowd and into the Temple.

Here were the rulers of Yayacarni enthroned on a gorgeous daïs erected opposite the high altar. The notables of the Government surrounded them, and the whole assembly, clothed in white, glittered with jewels. In the bright light the place looked like a bed of tulips tossed by the wind, and the Inca and his daughter blazed sunlike on their thrones. Temple and terraces, streets and square, were crowded with worshippers. But in front of the altar whereon lay the emerald, there was a clear space. Here stood the high priest, a white-bearded ancient, in flowing robes, and with him a retinue of attendants, with musical instruments, censers, banners, and golden vases of fruit. When all were seated, the ceremony began. It was strange enough to impress even the unimaginative mind of Dick.

The priest waved his hand, and the noise within and without died rapidly away. In all that vast multitude not a sound could be heard, save the heavy breathing of humanity stricken with religious awe. On a second signal the electric lights faded out; and everywhere darkness was supreme. With the dying of the light there was a quick gasp, the shuffling of many feet, then again the silence of the grave. Dick shuddered, for in that heavy gloom he seemed to feel the whole weight of the mountains pressing on him alone. Without doubt every individual there felt the same sensation. The impression produced was one of absolute terror.

"Oh, Sun! Oh, servant of Con!" intoned the high priest through the gloom. "We are those who sit in darkness, bereft of light and joy. As it is now so it was in the beginning, before thou didst spread thy light over the abyss. Supay is darkness and evil to thy children. Yntip is light and bringeth blessing to all who adore. Shine, oh Sun, servant of the Unknown One, and let us not die for want of thy beams."

A shrill-voiced choir began to chant a slow majestic hymn. The harmonies rolled mysteriously through the darkness. There was something magnetic in the song—a wail of sorrow in its minor cadences. A tremor shook the multitude, for the emerald woke on the altar, and its sparks of green fire shot out in radiant clusters. Then the great gem commenced to glow with brilliancy well-nigh intolerable, and lambent flashes seemed to flicker on the pale faces of the priests. The chant ceased; the high priest cried out and threw himself prone.

"The emerald wakes in the darkness; its colour is that of the fields in

springtime. It is thy promise, oh Sun, servant of Con, that thou wilt pour out thy life-giving rays."

Dick distinctly heard a sliding sound at the back of the altar; and as by preconcerted signal, a pencil of electric light—the substitute in these Cimmerian regions for sunbeams—stole through an opening over the central door, and smote on the curtain above the altar. As in a flash it disappeared, and a human countenance moulded in gold, surrounded with rays, leaped into light. Benign and beautiful the sun-god looked down on his worshippers; and in the radiance which grew stronger and stronger the metal glittered with wondrous splendour. A burst of jubilant music hailed the unveiling of the god's image. The extinguished lamps flashed out once again in all their glory; and the hymn to the rising of the sun, taken up by the multitude, rolled an immense volume of sound through the cavernous spaces. The emerald was removed from the altar; a fire was lighted and incense cast thereon, so that a white smoke hid the face of the idol. Fruits and flowers, rare gums, and tropical spices were offered by the high priest, and the Inca advancing to the golden shrine poured a libation of chica before his god. The crowd, within and without, roared joyously. The Temple was thick with the fumes of the white smoke of the sacrifice; and the choir, to the beating of drums, and the strident clamour of trumpets, proclaimed the offering. Dick's head reeled with the noise, and the scents, and the glittering of the jewels. He would have pushed his way out; but something more strange even than anything he had yet seen, stopped him.

At a given signal the clamour ceased, and Inca Sntic-toco advanced to the altar. Mama Oclo still sat on the throne, but her face was absolutely devoid of expression. It was difficult to believe that a woman of her intelligence could have faith in such mummerly.

"Oh, Con-illa-ticci-nira-cocha, spirit of the abyss," prayed the Inca, "creator of eternal light. Of old thou didst send the child of thy servant the Sun, to make us worthy to be thy worshippers. He came and we were glad in the splendour of his countenance; but he departed to the mansions of his father the Sun, thy servant, oh Con! But it was said of old that when thy children were sick and down-trodden, he would return to lift from our necks the yoke of evil. Those who came overseas in the days of Huascar wrought us ill, oh Con, and we are but a remnant who survive to proclaim thy god-head. Under the earth, banished from the light of our father the Sun, thy servant, we work in darkness to regain our inheritance. Fulfil the promise of old, Invisible One. Send again Manco Capac, the blessed one; for thou canst enshrine his spirit in the flesh of man to work our deliverance. Thou hast accepted our sacrifice; bring forth the redeeming one to lead us again to the holy city. Let the sign be manifest, oh Con, that we may know him!"

Again silence, and the Inca flung himself on his face with outstretched arms. Beside him stood the high priest, silent, and with closed eyes, his hand, palms uppermost, out-held in an attitude of worship. All eyes were fixed upon him with religious awe, expectant of some revelation of the god's will. Suddenly the man became violently agitated. Then he turned stiff and motionless. He spoke in a kind of hoarse whisper, and every word was accepted as from the unseen deity

"Incarnate! the English stranger! en clothed in that flesh." His voice leapt an octave and came forth in a shriek. "Manco Capac; the old in the new. He comes, he comes!" The priest fell senseless.

A tremor of awe passed through the crowd, and at that moment two men appeared from behind the shrine, leading Gerald Hazel. Dick uttered an oath, which did not fail to reach the ears of Mama Ocllo. She cast an angry glance at him.

Clothed in a long white gown, embroidered with figures of the sun worked in golden thread, his face perfectly expressionless, and his eyes open, Hazel moved like a man in a dream. The Indians beholding in him an incarnate god, grovelled terror-stricken on the floor. Dick alone remained erect. Even Mama Ocllo had fallen on her knees.

"Con! Oh, Invisible One! The Sign, the Sign!"

A murmur came from the prostrate multitude. "Con! Oh, Invisible One! The Sign, the Sign!"

One of his supporters bared Hazel's chest, and there all beheld the rayed sun, tattooed in deep blue. From the crowd went up a cry of wonderment; and the choir broke forth into their jubilant hymn. Dick was astounded. He could not speak. He was shaking with excitement. Then Hazel spoke.

The music stopped, and the crowd, hiding their faces after that glimpse of deity, listened with positive terror. Gerald's voice rang out, and the words he uttered were so strange that Dick could hardly believe his ears.

"I am Manco Capac. I am the child of the Sun. My father, Yntip, has sent me once more to earth, to accomplish his will. In the guise of a fair-haired stranger I come as I came of old. Rejoice, rejoice! The night of your desolation has passed away, and now breaks the sun of joy—of victory. Rise, my children, I am here!"

The crowd rose as one man, and the place shook with their jubilant cries. Inca Sutic-toco kissed the feet of the new god. Mama Ocllo stood up. There was a wild light in her eye, and a flush on her cheek. Dick saw that her gaze was intently fastened upon Gerald. It appeared to draw him, for with unwilling feet, as it seemed, he made a few steps forward. Those in his path threw themselves flat, and he trod over their bodies, through a lane of awe-struck faces. Advancing to Mama Ocllo, he held out his hand and spoke slowly.

"From of old thou wast mine. I am thy brother and thy husband. In the dim past we wrought with evil things and conquered. To-day we must again go forth to conquer and to rule. Come, my sister, my queen!"

Mama Ocllo gave her hand, with a well-assumed expression of religious fear, and the two returned towards the altar. She lifted the crimson fringe of royalty from the brow of the kneeling Inca, and placed it on Hazel's head. He turned for a moment, and faced the people with a royal mien. Then once again darkness rushed down on the Temple.

When after an interval the lights again shone forth, Mama Ocllo and the so-called Manco Capac had disappeared. It was a most effective piece of work, and did credit to the inventive and administrative powers of the princess and the priests, who were the only persons undeceived by it.

As for Dick, he was no wiser than the rest. He left the Temple with the crowd, and seating himself on the terrace, watched them descend with joyous shouts into the city. Calling on the new Manco Capac they gave themselves up to feasting and revelry and celebration of all kinds. Tables were spread in the great square, and the people sat down to eat and drink. Some danced, others played on musical instruments of strange shape,

and a few—the more religiously inclined—knelt with adoring eyes fastened on the Temple, wherein so great an event had occurred.

The god had manifested himself. He had come to rule again over them, to make them a nation, to give them once more the peace and perfect happiness of the Incarial times. That was the burden of their song and prayer. Ended was the age of Iron; the Golden Age had commenced. The bitter tears of many centuries gave place to smiles.

Their great forefather had descended to lead them, as he had done of yore, to the holy city of Cuzco. The gods were with them.

“Oh Con, Oh Qnilla, Oh Yntip!” such was the refrain of their cries. The name of Manco flew from lip to lip with eulogy and ejaculations of heartfelt delight. The whole city gave itself up to frenzied enjoyment, and centuries of misery were blotted out from the minds of the rejoicing people. It was the rebirth of the Children of the Sun—of the nation of Tlahua-ntin-Suyu.

Dick sat and marvelled. The whole thing was beyond him. He could not conceive by what miracle Mama Ocllo had compelled his chief to play so unworthy a part.

“Well, I’m damned!” he said; and he meant it rather more than usual.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“DICK’S RENUNCIATION.”

DESPITE his not inconsiderable amount of practical experience of the sex, Dick’s understanding of the feminine temperament was incomplete. More than that, it was founded on a basis of itself wholly misleading. To him woman was the female of man—than which surely no definition was ever more fallacious. And Mama Ocllo was now proving to him its fallacy. Her proceedings up to this present—and more particularly at this present—baffled him utterly. He could not, for the life of him, understand her. How had she managed to coerce so strong-willed a man as Gerald? It was inexplicable. But when he entered the civilised cave he called home, and found Hazel lying on the sofa, clothed in his usual dress, and apparently in his right mind, the thing became positively uncanny. In a state of misery at Gerald’s unworthy performance, he had lingered in the square for some hours, eating and drinking, hoping thereby to drown his sorrow; but, strange to say, without the usual result. This he could account for only by the supposition that his nerves were “all wrong.” At any rate, the Amherst who discovered Gerald was as sober as an owl and quite as melancholy. Surely this was the doppelgänger of his friend!

He remained at the door, not quite sure if he beheld flesh and blood. His unusual sobriety, coupled with what he was beginning to think must be an apparition, struck terror into Dick’s sinful soul. He stared and stared, and finally relapsing into his invariable phrase which was indicative of all things.

“Well, I’m damned!” he said. He sat down to recover his wits, which had gone wool-gathering with the uncommon strain put upon them.

Gerald, who had not noticed him, turned his head languidly. “Hullo, Dick, is that you! I’m glad to see you again after the last twenty-four hours.”

"Twenty-four hours!" Dick gasped again. "Why, Great Scott, I haven't seen you for a fortnight!"

"Dick! You've been drinking again." Gerald sat up and looked angrily at his friend. "I left you yesterday to go to the Temple with Mama Ocllo. She drugged me, and kept me for a night, and——"

Dick interrupted him by striding across the room, and seizing his arm.

"Oh!" He sat down on the edge of the sofa. "You are flesh and blood then?"

"What the devil else did you expect me to be? Dick! Dick!——"

"Upon my soul, it's not drink," burst out Dick. "I'm as sober as a judge; but—I'm not very sure if you are!"

"Not sure if I am? Why, man——"

"Well, I'm damned," said Dick, and ran his hand distractedly through his unkempt locks. "It's the drug."

"It's nothing of the kind! What the deuce are you driving at?"

In a state of bewilderment they stared at one another. Dick was the first to speak. "Hazel, old man," he said in a caressing voice, "tell me what you have been doing since you've been away."

"Doing?—you confounded idiot! Why, didn't I tell you that I went to Mama Ocllo's palace, and that she drugged me?—laid me out flat with some beastly smelling stuff. When I came to a bit, my head was splitting. Then she managed to bring me under her influence in some hypnotic way—made passes and all that sort of thing; and I went off into a dead sleep."

"Why the devil did you let her?"

"I couldn't help it. My head was splitting, I tell you, and I was not myself; I had no power against her. The drugging was too much for me, I suppose. Anyway, I was like a child in her hands. I must have been unconscious for some hours—at least she told me so; but I woke up in this room an hour ago, and wondered where you had got to. What the dickens are you talking about?—a fortnight? Why, it was only last night I saw you. Drunk again, my good Dicky, drunk again."

For answer Dick went off into something not far removed from hysterics. His anxiety about Hazel for the past two weeks had worn him out, and the drink, and the sudden discovery that his friend was in total ignorance of the part he had played at the Temple, had been rather too much for his nerves. Hazel jumped up in a hurry and got out his brandy flask. By its aid Dick managed to pull himself together.

"Fact is, old man, I *have* been drinkin'," he said, with admirably acted penitence. "I think if you don't mind I'll turn in and sleep it off. You see I was anxious when you didn't return for twenty-four hours, and so went off on a bender."

"Oh, well," said Gerald, languidly, "as it was on my account, I suppose I must forgive you. But I really wish, Dicky, that you would keep your anxiety for me within bounds—you know what I mean, eh?"

Dick did not reply. Apparently shame-faced he took himself off, to look up Parry, and see if he had any light to throw upon these latest devilries of Mama Ocllo. But the engineer was every whit as astounded as was Dick himself: and not any more inclined to spare Mama Ocllo. Indeed, for a quarter of an hour or more, these two let loose a flow of expletive and comminatory metaphor devoid of anything approaching redundancy, and forming a very respectable display of what two determined men could do in the way of anathema.

"Yet, whatever we may say against her, she is a wonderful woman,"

admitted Parry at last, "of all men though, I should least have expected Hazel to be taken in so easily."

"He wasn't taken in easily," cried Dick, ever jealous for his friend.

"Anyway, he allowed himself to be hypnotised."

"Well, an' I guess if you were half crazy with drugging you'd 'low the same racket. The cunning devil! First she muddled the chief's head and then began this hypnotic foolin'. If Hazel had had his wits about him d'ye think he'd have 'lowed it?"

"Oh, well," Parry raked his beard, "we're all infants in the hands of that woman. But you don't mean to tell me Mr. Hazel doesn't realise that he's been unconscious for fourteen days?"

"Not a bit of it. I'm goin' to post him up in the whole show though, to-morrow. It's a rum start," added Dick, in a meditative fashion. "How the devil did she manage to keep him under all that time?"

"Well, I suppose that once in her power, she could keep him so for any length of time for that matter. Anyway, she did it—and did it neatly, too, as she does most things. I don't suppose he's feeling particularly well after it, either, is he?"

"Muddled him a bit: that's all. I hope a good night's rest will pull him straight. Good-night."

Then Dick hurried off to Hazel's bedside, where he spent the rest of the night watching him, very much in the same possessive and protective spirit as a mother watches a child. And as he sat there, he made up his mind to his great act of renunciation. Molly should be Hazel's. He would give up all claim to her in favour of his friend and chief. He would tell him, too, of his resolve. Now that he had nearly lost his friend, he knew how dear he was to him. He would break down the last barrier—Molly should no longer stand between them. "Shoo!" he said to himself, "if it comes to that, he's worth half a hundred Molly-girls."

After a natural sleep—the first he had enjoyed for long past—Hazel woke late in full possession of his wits. The first sight that met his eye, was the faithful Dick stretched out on the floor beside him, sleeping heavily. He seemed perfectly worn out. How he came to be there, Gerald knew not. But of his great fidelity he did know, and he was touched by it. Hazel did not disturb him. He laid a rug gently over him and went off to dress. He had not been gone long when Dick, who had awoke in a fright, came hurrying after him.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" he said, with a look of relief. "What an almighty fright you gave me. I dreamt you'd got loose again."

"Oh, I'm here right enough, though upon my soul I'm beginning to wonder whether it *is* me. Look here, Dick, how did I come by this? Who's been playing the fool with me?"

He bared his chest and showed him the blue tattoo.

"Oh, so you've dropped on it, have you?" said Amherst.

"Yes; it's not the sort of thing that's very easy to miss when a chap's in his tub. But how do you come to know about it? You do know about it, I swear. Now then, Dick, out with it. I'm in no mood for fooling."

"Know of it? By gum, the whole of Yayacarui knows of it! Perhaps you don't know that you're a god of sorts?"

Hazel stared. "A god? What the deuce are you talking about?"

"Well, I guess the whole community can enlighten you there again," said Dick, leisurely proceeding with his breakfast. "Mama Ocllo's been playing low down on you, old man."

Hazel looked uneasy. "Not publicly?"

"Publicly, you bet. She exhibited you as a manufactured god to the whole crew. Couldn't make out how she engineered the job. 'Spose the hypnotic biz did it. Gosh, you were 'fresh' to let her have you that way."

For a moment or so Hazel looked helplessly at his friend. Then he began to put two and two together. It was evident that she had contrived to use him very much for her own ends, whatever they might be. She had hypnotised him, and he had been a mere puppet in her hands, the abject slave of her will.

"How long have I been away, Dick?" he asked.

"A fortnight, no less."

"A fortnight? Great heavens, man, you don't mean to say that I have been away a fortnight? I couldn't have been unconscious all that time!"

"Well, that of course I can't say; but you can ask the boys, and I guess they'll tell you the same."

"What did the woman make me do, Dick—you say it was in public?"

"You were rigged up as a god, an' what's more, you said you were one; the incarnation of Manco Capac, or some such Johnny. There was a rippin' shindy on at the Temple yesterday, and you were right in the thick of it. You let 'em know, too, that you were goin' to marry Mama Ocllo."

"Dick! You're—here, give me a drink, I feel dizzy."

"Hold up, chief."

Hazel had turned deathly white. Dick applied the brandy strenuously. There was not much that brandy could not do, to his thinking. The colour returned to Hazel's face and he pulled himself together.

"Dicky," he said, quickly. "We've got to get out of this, and that slippy. That damned woman's one too many for either you or me. She——"

"Not she," interrupted Dick. "Give her rope enough an' she'll hang herself for sure one of these days. She's been playing low down on you just lately—but you'll come out on top in the long run, take my word for it. That sly sort generally ends up by slittin' its own pipe."

"Maybe—as a matter of fact I think you're right. I was a fool though—by Gad, what a complete fool—to run into her noose like that. She laid me out properly in that loathsome mother-o'-pearl room of hers. Great Scott, when I think of her having wiped out my wits for me as she might wipe the writing from a slate, and of her having projected into me her own diabolical personality, it makes me just long to be even with her! We will be even with her, Dick. Yes, and what's more, we'll use her own weapons against her. Now listen to me. She spoke through my lips all the rhodomontade of which you have told me. Very well; she made me a god to these people. I am, you say, the incarnation of Manco Capac. Then Manco Capac I must remain, for ever, in their minds. As Manco Capac I am infallible—almighty, unassailable. Don't you see, man, the power that gives me? I am omnipotent."

"With the ruck, yes: but you must remember that Mama Ocllo and the priests, and the Inca and all that crowd know jolly well what a swindle the whole show is; and if it comes to fightin' they'll not be above showing up their own swindle to save their skins."

"Can't, my dear boy—not with any chance of success. Once you set a force like that in motion, I defy you to control it. It amounts to fanati-

cism. The people are with me henceforth, come what may. My plan will be to lead them out on a career of wholesale conquest, and thus to fulfil the prophecy."

"That's right enough; but, anyway, don't show your hand yet awhile, chief. Let's get together what we want in the way of powder and shot first."

"Certainly; we'll do nothing hastily." Hazel passed his hand across his brow. "As a matter of fact," he went on, "we'll do nothing at all, yet awhile. I don't feel a bit myself. I've been shaken up more than a trifle. We'll think out a careful plan of action, Dick. Meanwhile, you get along and see Parry and a few of the others, and come along here to-night and we'll talk it over. But do it we will, Dick, you can take my word for that."

"You bet, chief; and then for England, home, and beauty." Dick cleared his throat. His voice was husky. "Say, Hazel," he began, "we've kept pretty quiet on one subject all through, you and I. I want you to let me say a word about her now. By this time you know the sort o' chap I am, I reckon. You'll agree, anyway, that I never painted m'self any colour but a damned dirty black."

"Now, what the deuce are you driving at, Dick?" He knew he might expect something out of the ordinary when Dick commenced thus in self-abasement. He had not done it at all lately.

"I want to tell you straight, Hazel, old chap, what I mean. You know the yarn 'bout David and Jonathan and that lot, I don't know who's which, but I know it's that way I feel for you. I'd do anything for you, Hazel. If I'd had a brother, I couldn't have done for him what I could for you. So far I've not had the chance o' doin' much except stickin' to you, which I reckon I've done pretty close. But there's one thing I want you to let me do, and we'll talk of it now, if you've no objection. I want you to take Molly, Hazel."

The other man looked at him; but he did not speak. Dick continued:

"It was my mother insisted that I should marry her. I knew jolly well I was not good enough for her. But I was beast enough to trick her into promising to marry me. It was the money, not Molly, I was after."

"That I don't believe, Dick."

"Gospel truth, I swear," he replied, with a quaver in his voice. "I might have had an idea she'd reform me. I had. But I played jolly low down on her. It was a caddish thing to do. And then when I got to Lima, I loafed round and chucked away her coin, when I should have been hunting out her governor as I'd promised. My character at Lima's a bit blacker than it is anywhere else. I never carried out my part of the bargain; and I don't see why she should carry out hers. Now you have carried through yours, and that damned well, and you deserve to have her, Hazel. I want you to understand that I'm out of it altogether. Let's get out of this hole now, as you say, and light out for the old country, and you marry Molly with my blessing, old chap, and I'll be best man. That'll be the most dignified billet I've ever had, I reckon. Come now, chief, that's settled; give us your hand on it."

Hazel took his hand and grasped it warmly. He did not know quite what to say. Dick's words had gone right home, and had touched his deepest feelings. He had not been mistaken in him.

"Dick," he said, "you and I can never be but the closest friends. You have more than kept your word to me. But I don't know that you have

the right to do what you are doing. I won't deny that Molly Prynne is more to me than any woman in the world ; and I think you will believe me when I tell you that I never said one word to her after I knew she was engaged to you."

" You needn't tell me that, chief. But don't bank me of my wish now ; you've given your hand on it. Say it's settled."

" All right, my dear fellow ; unless you change your mind, it's settled."

" Good. Now I feel better."

Dick threw himself on the sofa, filled his pipe, and lit it. " Gosh, what a stew the old lady'll be in ! " he said.

" Your mother ? Are you very fond of her, Dick ? "

" Fond of her ? Well, I reckon you know what she is, and you know what I am. I'll leave you to fog out the answer to that question ! "

CHAPTER XXX.

" BY THE SACRED RIVER."

" WELL, Puca, what is it ? "

The dwarf bowed with deep respect—respect which had developed only since the apotheosis of Gerald, now some three or more days old. But there was in his cunning eyes a glint of mockery of which the deity could not entirely approve. Towards one acknowledged the re-incarnated father of a race there should be no room for anything save awe in the minds of underlings. And even if Puca knew that the official ceremony of deification had been performed for political reasons, he had no right to give any inkling of his knowledge. Hazel had never had any sort of liking for the red imp. He liked him less than ever now as he made his genuflexions before him. And as if quick to discern his master's feelings, Puca hastened to expunge all that was qualifying of his obeisance, lest Manco Capac should beat him ; a ceremony at which half the population would gladly assist, did they think their hero was being treated with disrespect ever so slight.

" Lord ! " said Puca, cringing, " the Coya awaits you by the sacred river."

" Oh ! " Gerald did not accept the invitation at once. He had not seen Mama Ocllo since the rites of his incarnation, and he was not sorry. He was in nowise anxious to meet her again.

The sacred river was far below, in the least civilized part of Yaya-carui—a part much too lonely to have any attraction for him after what had passed. For aught he knew Mama Ocllo might be desirous of trying now how he would respond to aqueous methods, in which case it might be that he would have to quit this sphere with his duty unfulfilled. On reflection, however, he came to the conclusion that his death would be in no way to the Coya's advantage ; so he motioned to Puca to lead him to the appointed spot. He would at least have the opportunity of putting his views before her. He wished without delay to make it very clear to her that he had no intention of becoming her husband and every intention of leaving the city at the next opportunity. As it was to be war to the knife it was only fair she should know. Considering the position in which he stood, this, although chivalrous, was obviously unwise ;

but his antagonist was a woman, and Hazel was never able to forget that fact.

Yet for all his high-flown notions Gerald was very nearly falling away from them when he found himself alone with Puca in a lift. For Puca had upon his little person the key of the powder magazine. As Hazel caught sight of the gold chain which held it he was sorely tempted to effect a change of ownership then and there. But a conviction that this would but lead to a speedy changing of the lock by Mama Oclo kept him from so far forgetting himself. He resolved to leave that part of the affair to Dick.

Wholly unaware of the dire fate that threatened him, Puca preserved an impenetrable silence as the lift dropped to the lower level. As soon as it touched bottom he stepped out into a low narrow gallery, and led the way to the river, the murmur of which could be distinctly heard from where they were. In a few minutes they emerged on to a craggy platform which projected over the torrent. Many feet below, the black-looking water swept along, swift and treacherous. The lamps which starred the high roofs showed on all sides the tie-ribs of earth, rugged, gigantic, sombre; and glinted on the sweeping waters. As Hazel stared at this river of hell—it might have been that very Styx by which the gods swore—he felt a light touch on his shoulder. He turned to find Mama Oclo by his side. Puca had discreetly disappeared, and they were alone. The Coya was wrapped from head to foot in some white fleecy material. She looked ghostlike in the weird light. "Two souls," thought Hazel, "waiting for Charon to ferry them across the stream of the dead."

Mama Oclo laughed. "Don't be afraid, Manco Capac," she said, mockingly, "it is beyond my power to kill a god!"

"That might be in ordinary circumstances. But you see, I am one of your own manufacture, and liable therefore to destruction should my behaviour as such not chance to please you."

The woman was silent for a moment. "You speak more truly than you know," she said, drily. "Your life does indeed depend upon your playing the part of Manco Capac as I design it to be played."

"Should you not instruct me then?" said Hazel, with a shrug.

"Your own heart should instruct you," retorted Mama Oclo, bitterly. "It is no easy task and certainly no pleasure to deal with one who won't see—none so blind, as your saying is. But come now and sit down." She led the way to a slab of rock, and Hazel took his place by her side. "We have much to talk about," with a little laugh she looked into his face. "I presume at least you have some questions to ask me?"

"No," he said, indifferently, "I cannot say I am devoured by curiosity. I know a good deal. It seems proved conclusively that having taken me at a disadvantage you made a very thorough puppet of me. I may say no one has ever done so much before."

"No? Well, at all events you seem to grasp the salient features of the situation. Yes, it is true; you were my puppet, as you are pleased to put it, on that occasion. And as Manco Capac—for such, of course, you are now to my people—you are little less my puppet for that matter."

"Indeed! And if I don't quite fall in with your little plans?"

"You have no choice. I hold you here." She stretched out a very pretty hand, opening and shutting it significantly. "I have brought you here that I may fully explain to you my plans."

"That is very charming of you, Princess. You are ever charming. But could we not have had our little talk in your own apartments?"

"No. The river yonder will be of service to me on this occasion."

"My dear lady," said Gerald, ostensibly bored, "I am going to be so ungallant as to point out to you your one very great defect; you are too fond of the theatrical. You are really addicted to it. Now how can the river yonder possibly serve you as regards *me*?"

"That you shall see in good time, Mr. Hazel. I have said it and so it will be. Meanwhile if you think to anger me with your cynicism, you are mistaken. It might have its effect with some women; not with me. They might lose their temper with you. I have too much at stake to do any such thing."

As she spoke her cheek flushed and her eyes sparkled. It was as much as ever she could do to restrain herself. She knew quite well that his attitude was studiously insolent; but she was unaccustomed wholly to insolence studied or otherwise; and she was not a little restive under it.

"Not your life alone, but the lives of others are at stake," she resumed, seeing that Hazel preserved a judicious silence, "so listen, please, to what I have to say. I have told you my aims of re-establishing the Inca dynasty. Unfortunately on the very verge of fulfilment it so happens that I am the sole representative of the royal race. Unhappily for me, my brother, who was my husband, died—you need not be shocked at the bond, it is quite moral to one trained as I have been in the observances of our royal house. I am not sorry he died. He was a fool. I am the man and woman of our family in one. But I wish to re-establish a dynasty; and to do so it is necessary that I should have a husband. I have chosen you!"

"Thank you," said Hazel, ironically. "I am indeed flattered. As you say, choice I have none!"

"No, you have none; this is a state affair. I am no love-sick girl, but a queen. Had I loved you—as you are puppy enough to think possible——"

"Pardon me, but could one think about love in connection with you, Princess? Believe me, I think nothing about it."

Mama Oclo bit her lip, but there was no trembling of her voice as she continued. "That is just as well. We shall understand one another all the better. I need hardly say that a woman does not expose the man she loves to the perils of the forest and the desert, to say nothing of savage tribes such as you encountered. I did all that to try you. In Lima I saw that you were clever enough to occupy the position of my husband, or shall I say my partner; but I was not sure of your courage, therefore I resolved to test it in the way you know of. You came through the ordeal successfully, so I pursued my design. As I was well aware that you would never consent to masquerade as a god to please me, I contrived my plans so that you should do so against your will—or at all events, unconsciously. For that reason it was necessary to destroy your will, which I did by means of the fumes of a certain drug which was set burning when I left you alone in that hermetically sealed chamber."

"I noticed there were no windows or ventilators," said Hazel, to himself.

"You awoke confused and helpless as a child. Then I hypnotised you. With your will against mine I might have failed, for your will is strong; but on you, reduced almost to the condition of an automaton,

I focussed my will and so got you under my control. The tattooing, the impressing on your brain of the part I wished you to play—you know all about that. Well," she rose and flung out her hands, "my plans have succeeded. You are Manco Capac, re-incarnate, and the people accept you as such. I can now marry you without fear, as they believe you are the father of the Inca race. In a few weeks the ceremony will take place; you will become my husband, and a king. I offer you a brilliant destiny! You will raise a fallen nation, you will occupy a throne; and you will have me to reign by your side," she paused and flushed, "and I will be to you a true wife," she said, faintly, "that is if you——" breaking off she turned away pettishly. "Oh, have I to do with a fool, Mr. Hazel?"

In spite of all her ambition her feelings became too much for her. His indifferent look and irresponsive eyes exasperated her into betraying what she had vowed did not exist. Gerald's sensation was one of profound sorrow for her. She was really very beautiful. Many a man would have been a slave to her beauty. He must seem a horrible prig to her, he thought. And her nature was fine, too. He hated his position; for her passion for him was so evident that it was impossible to blind himself to it. What could he do? He could not speak of Molly to her. If only she had managed to maintain an attitude of antagonism! There she was by his side, waiting for some word of response. He must make some kind of answer to her.

"I am sorry it is not possible for me to fall in with your plans, señora," he said, quietly. "For one thing I cannot remain in Yayacarui. I wish to leave it."

"You shall leave it," she cried, eagerly, "as a king! as the new Inca!"

Hazel shook his head. "The position overwhelms me, señora; if I were not a prisoner——"

"Prisoner? You are no prisoner!" She came near him, and her breath was on his cheek. "Unless——" With an abrupt gesture she turned away. "Oh, cannot I make you understand?"

"I understand very well. But private feelings unfortunately are not private soldiers, to be commanded at will. If you trusted me——"

"I would trust you with all, if you would only say what I wish you to say," she burst out. "I will show you the other entrance to the city, the one which leads to the hills; I will give you the key of the magazine, it you like—the magazine upon which the safety of my city depends. See," with a rapid movement she snatched the key from her neck, and thrust it into his hands. "There is a sign of my trust."

For a moment a great temptation came over Hazel. It required all his power of will to struggle against it. He held in his hand the key of the magazine. If he feigned a passion for this woman, she would leave it in his possession, and he would be able to arm his men, to fight his way out of the city, and thus beat her with her own weapons. But he thrust the thought from him. Freedom must be gained by some other way than that. His voice was hoarse and his brow moist, as he returned the key to her.

"No; no! I—I—cannot promise. Don't tempt me!" He walked to the other end of the shelf striving to control himself. Mama Ocllo remained where she was. She had a faint idea of the struggle which was raging within him. She became possessed of a cold fury.

"What do you mean?" she asked, in a harsh voice

"I mean that I must be plain with you." Gerald returned to face her. "I intend to leave this accursed city, and that in spite of all your efforts to prevent me. If I chose, I could keep that key, and arm my fellow countrymen. But that is not how we Englishmen are taught to fight. I will be honest in every way. But if you will not let me go peaceably, then fight I must."

"Fight! Fight me?" A derisive smile curled her lips. "You might as well try to fight against the high heaven. I hold you and I shall keep you. Ah!" She clasped his arm and spoke in a voice of rare tenderness. "Can you not see that I am a woman, as well as a queen? Why should you wish to leave me—me who love you as no other woman will ever love you? Yes, I confess it; I glory in it, though I am false to myself in saying it—false to my aims, to my plans, to my whole life. They can all go for you, Gerald." She flung her arms around him. "Nothing is anything without you. Gerald, say one word to me. Speak to me. Can you not love me?" Her voice had dropped to a whisper. She was shaking in the throes of her passion.

"I—I—I am not free to—to——"

"Ah, it is that English girl. I know, I know; don't think of her; she is not here. I am here; we are here, alone—we two in our own world. Am I less beautiful, less fond? Oh, Gerald, my heart; do not turn from me."

"I am not worthy of your love—I——" Gerald was losing his head. Involuntarily he responded to her clasp.

"You are; you are. I love you. I could not love a man unworthy of me. I see you a great king. I give you a throne; I give you my heart. I give myself to you, Gerald. I am yours, yours, yours—yours for always."

She drew back and threw open her arms. "Come. Am I not beautiful? Am I not a queen—your queen, Gerald? Inca! Come!"

In the light she seemed to glow with vitality and beauty. Her eyes were like stars; her mouth a rose; her cheeks a royal red.

Gerald fought desperately with a sense of helplessness which assailed him. Almost inaudibly one name sprang to his lips. "Molly——"

Then the light died out of Mama Oclo's eyes, for she had heard it. Dead they became—dead as those of a snake. The sound of that name petrified her. The colour faded from her face. She became white to the lips. She was Medusa; as terrible, as deadly. Hazel faced her in silence. Suddenly she threw up her arms and cried out. Three priests in white robes came from behind the rocks, and with them Puca.

"Throw him in," said Mama Oclo, pointing to the river.

Waking quickly to a sense of peril, Gerald sprang back, as the two men flung themselves forward. With all his strength he strove to resist, as they tried to drag him to the verge of the shelf. Mama Oclo, with a terrible smile on her face, stood quietly by; and Puca, with the hiss of a snake, clutched his leg. His strength was failing, and he began to give himself up for lost. But his fate was in the hands of a power higher than that of Mama Oclo. As he was dragged slowly but surely to the abyss, a kind of muffled roar, a giant sound echoed through the cavern. The earth heaved like a wave. The woman shrieked; and his opponents let him go. But Puca like a venomous reptile still clung to his leg. Gerald, though near the edge or the shelf, let him cling. His eyes were fixed with horror on a point up the tunnel. Mama Oclo too was looking

there ; and as she looked, again she shrieked. For there came rushing down a great wave, foamless and black ; shining like ebony in the light. Smoothly, swiftly, with deadly forceful speed, it came on, towering to the roof. Yelling loudly, the priests fled, followed by the woman. They disappeared into the narrow arch of the passage. Puca, now alive to his danger, turned and ran. Hazel followed ; but the great wave was upon them. They were whirled aloft as by giant hands. And the earth heaved and bellowed like a sick beast.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“ STRATEGY AGAINST FORCE.”

WHIRLING like a top, Hazel grasped wildly for the proverbial straw. The water lifted itself silently and dashed him against a projecting crag that stood out mid-stream. Half stunned he gripped this, and the earthquake wave—for it was one single gigantic wave—passed onward and past him. He found himself shaken and sore, but in full possession of his senses. Across his feet lay something heavy ; a body, as it proved to the feel, and when he had wiped the water from his eyes, he ascertained that it was Puca.

Luckily the earthquake had not interfered with the electric circuit, and the lamps showed him all that was to be seen. The vast volume of water borne onward had drained the immediate channel of the river dry ; but Hazel knew that where water had been, water would in all probability be again, and he hastened to get out of the tunnel before a second wave should come upon the heels of the first. He caught up the dwarf—who was senseless from a wound on the skull—and rushed into the higher gallery. He had no love for Puca ; but a master-thought had germinated in his brain.

As he gained the arch, a second flood filled the tunnel to the roof, and expended its superfluous waters through the arch. It was strong enough to lift Hazel bodily into the gallery. Then the water drained off, and he was left gasping by Puca's body.

Mama Ocllo and the priests had disappeared at the first alarm, and were no doubt by this time in safety.

A hasty examination proved that the dwarf was only stunned. His thick head had saved him from a worse fate. Gerald secured the magazine key which Puca carried for safety at the end of a heavy gold chain twisted round his neck, and turned away, leaving him to recover as he best could. The longer he remained insensible and ignorant of his loss, the easier it would be for a dozen or so of men to loot the magazine of the much-needed ammunition. Mama Ocllo's last action assured him that he had now to deal with the implacable hatred of a woman scorned ; and he doubted if even the necessity of completing her schemes would avail him now. It therefore behoved him to secure his own safety, and that of the men who trusted in him, as speedily as possible. With this sole aim in view and with the key in his possession, he started for the lift.

Hardly had he reached the gallery it occupied, when he heard a well-known voice cursing volubly. A few moments later he was face to face with Dick and Parry. With a shout Dick hailed him.

"Thank God, old man! I thought you were dead; oh, thank God." He hugged Hazel like a bear, while Parry, scarcely less moved, shook hands.

"I've had a narrow squeak, Dicky. Tell me quick, does Mama Oclo think I am dead?"

"She does," said Parry. "Dick and I heard you were down below, and so we came on to look for you. We met Mama Oclo, and she told us you had been swept away down stream. There's been no end of a heave up all round."

"Damn her!" cried Dick fiercely.

"Well, she'll learn I haven't," said Hazel cheerily. "See here, man!" he held out the key. "I've managed to nab that from Puca."

"Gosh! Has the little devil passed in his checks?"

"No such luck. I left him down the gallery stunned. Let him lie there till we complete our plans. Parry, when are the lights out?"

"In an hour," replied the engineer, looking at his watch. "But I can shut 'em off now, and say it's the earthquake. Dane is in charge."

"Get 'em out at once. I want you to smuggle me to my rooms. It's just as well that Mama Oclo should think I've gone under. I'm going to best that lady."

"What's her game?"

"Homicide! Because I won't fall in with her views. The earthquake nearly carried out her amiable intentions for her. Don't curse, Dicky: it's loss of time. Let's take the lift now and get to our diggings, Parry!"

"I'll put the lights down now, and you can get home under cover of darkness. There's a telephone down here. Go on. I'll follow."

Parry vanished with a chuckle, and the other two made for the lift, in which they were soon soaring to the city level. Midway the lamp faded, a signal that the entire city and surroundings had reverted to primeval gloom.

"Huh! Parry's a smart man!"

"So! We'll need all our smartness, Dick. Mama Oclo's declared war!"

Amherst grunted in the darkness, and they stepped out into the open. A rapid walk brought them to the terraces; where they felt their way in the gloom by running their hands along the balustrades. Many Indians, kneeling, lying, huddled in groups, were spread in a disorderly multitude. Down in the city itself the groans and shrieks were loud. The extinguishing of the lights, ascribed to the earthquake, had demoralised the population. To make matters worse, there came a slight tremor of the ground, sufficiently noticeable to set the people running, though flight was ever so impossible.

In the confusion the two men passed unnoticed, and gained their rooms without recognition. Having achieved this much, Hazel congratulated himself on scoring the first move in the game between himself and Mama Oclo. He had hardly got his wind when Parry arrived.

"The natives are in a sinful state of excitement," said the engineer, lighting some candles he had brought with him, for the room was in complete darkness. "This earthquake has put the fear of God into them. I am not very happy myself."

His uneasiness was reflected in the faces of the others.

"No," assented Gerald, "it is decidedly unpleasant living over a mine

which may be exploded at any moment. We must get out of this place as soon as possible. There is much to be done to-night."

"As how, chief?"

"We must loot the magazine and arrange things so that when Puca goes to look—for when he finds the key is gone he will look—he will not be able to see what we have done. Can you rouse up ten men, Parry?"

"The whole twenty are waiting developments in my shanty."

"Good. We'll stir them up in half an hour. 'Say, Parry, do you know of any cave with a steep approach and an exit in case of retreat?"

"There's one above the workshops about a quarter of a mile from here—unlighted, and so far as I know, unexplored."

"Huh! Good business," said Dick. "Their shooters won't be able to pick us off in the dark. But retreat?—where the nation are we goin' to retreat to, chief?"

"H'm. That must be considered. There's a secret way of sorts through which they carry down grub from the hills. 'Fancy I'll have to make use of my godship to locate it. 'Mightn't be a bad plan to slip off that way and save fighting after all."

Dick's face fell. He had the Irish love for a row and things looked promising. "Don't think it 'ud be fair to slip off that way," he argued, "what's the use of annexing gun-food if we don't make use of it?"

"Oh, you'll get all the fighting you need, my son," said Parry grimly. "We won't be out of the wood when we're in the open by a long chalk. There's likely to be a scrimmage when Mama Oclo finds we've cleared. The whole country will be in arms."

"Then I guess we'll have our back to the wall," observed Dick, reflectively. "She'll harden her heart like Pharaoh and send out her armies. My aunt, all the wigs will be on the green then! But this plan of yours, chief?"

"No need to explain just now, Dicky. First thing to do is to stock that cave Parry speaks of." Gerald rose and shook himself. "Where is it?"

"Back of the Temple, several hundred feet higher. We can nip along the upper galleries. Magazine's handy!"

"Well, we've got the pull over Mama Oclo this time; so let's take advantage of it. 'Must show myself to-morrow and play the god."

Dick wanted explanations, but received none. Indeed, there was no time, for the official night of Yayacarui had commenced long since, and those of the population who could sleep were trying to get what they could snatch of it. As the engineer of the city, Parry was in a position to manipulate the whole electric plant—lifts, engines, and such like, without question. At this time the upper levels in which the magazine and the cave of refuge were located would be entirely deserted, and with seven hours before them they would have time to carry out their plans.

"Is the magazine guarded?" asked Hazel, as Parry started to rouse his subordinates.

"No, Mama Oclo thinks there's no danger as long as she and Puca hold the keys."

Dick chuckled, and looked lovingly at the key which Hazel dangled in his hand. After making an appointment, Parry slipped out, and Dick followed his chief to the rendezvous. They got away from the terraces into the immediate galleries, and skirted the town, so as to come out at the back of the Temple. Here there was a lift, as Dick knew well. In-

structed as he had been by Parry, he had the topography of the caves at his finger ends. He had often thought how useful it might prove in emergency. As he and Gerald ascended now, they found to their surprise that the magazine gallery was lit up. As it afterwards transpired, Parry had telephoned Dane to disconnect the main currents and spend his dynamos on the suburban.

Then the engineer himself arrived with the whole twenty conspirators, who in dumb show expressed their joy at the sight of Hazel. Gerald then opened the magazine and, as they filed in, he left them to collect the needful under Dick's supervision, while he clambered up with Parry to the cave of refuge. Here a hand lamp enabled them to explore; and Parry, who carried it, spent the light lavishly in every corner.

"Good enough," said Gerald, approvingly. "We can shove a Maxim into the entrance, and keep the invaders back. How about the guns, Parry?"

"Oh, that's all right. They're not locked up, you know. To-morrow night I'll enlist the boys to run 'em up here. One machine, and a score of Mausers, with revolver each. That'll about fill the bill. Then food!"

"Yes, we must provision against a siege. It'll be harder getting grub and drink than fire-irons."

"We'll have to shift 'em up in small quantities. Dare say we can give ourselves a week to provision the garrison."

"We jolly well can't," said the chief. "Mama Oclo's sure to find out that I'm still in the flesh, and then there will be trouble. No! You must collect sufficient in a couple of days."

"But, see here," urged the engineer, "we can't hold out for ever in the cave. There's the exit to be sure; but that only leads into other caves. We'll get lost for a certainty if we are driven back into them."

"I don't propose to do anything of the sort," said Hazel drily. "I'm going to find that second entrance."

"How?"

"You leave that to me, Parry. All you and the rest have to do is to provision and fortify the cave. You're under sealed orders, remember."

Parry nodded and did not waste further words. He had every confidence in Gerald; and the way in which the escape was being planned commanded his respect. Besides, Parry, as the second engineer of an Orient liner, had been well accustomed to discipline. Indeed, all the white men, with one exception, recognised that in such a case as the present it was essential. The French doctor alone was refractory. He embodied in himself the eternal hatred which France bears towards England; and he would have nullified Gerald's plans, if only to bring him into contempt, even at the risk of losing his own chance of escape. But the other white men knew him and watched him closely. And the little doctor realised that he ran a very fair chance of being murdered should the attempt fail through his agency; and therefore he was circumspect both in speech and in action. But he was troublesome nevertheless.

"You're savin' up for a lickin'," Dick told him in his uncompromising way, "and I'll choke the life out of you if you don't obey m' chief!"

"Monsieur, I have also brains."

"Then use 'em, an' shut your jaw, damn you!" Whereat the Frenchman, deploring the coarseness of this son of Albion, but respecting his superior strength, confined himself to shrugging and vowing dire vengeance.

All that night they worked without ceasing. Dick, in command, strung them out single file from magazine door to cave mouth, and the packages of ammunition passed from hand to hand. The hollow they proposed to occupy for the siege was above the magazine, but not immediately over it. Shaped like a bottle with a narrow neck, it was the first of a series of caverns which stretched into a perfect labyrinth of hollows with connecting passages. An approach of rugged ground slanted some twenty feet to a lower tunnel; and this, trending some distance, gave by steps on to the gallery of the magazine. For six hours the men, stripped to the waist, worked like navvies; and Dick in the magazine itself so manipulated affairs by re-arranging the stores, that only a close examination could have detected the removal of a portion of them.

By five o'clock they had a goodly quantity of ammunition stowed away in their fort. Then Hazel thought it was time to knock off. He ordered the men to separate and descend singly to their homes, intimating that he would remain above. Only by thus secluding himself could he keep the secret of his resurrection from Mama Oclo; and, until he learned the whereabouts of the second entrance, it was absolutely necessary that it should be so kept, unless their attempt was to fail.

"Lemme stay too," urged Dick, unwilling to leave his chief.

"No, Dicky, I want to make use of you below. Find out what Mama Oclo is doing; and get news of Puca. You can report in six hours. I'll turn in for that time. I'm dead tired."

"Here's some brandy," Dick offered a well-filled flask. "I brought it with me in case. Next time I'll yank along some grub."

"Right! And don't get fresh, Dicky. My life may depend upon it."

They shook hands warmly. If anything could keep Dick sober, it would be the trust imposed upon him. Hazel was satisfied that his orders would be obeyed. Finally he told Parry to keep an eye on the doctor, of whom he was suspicious; and then he despatched them.

In a few minutes the lights were out, and Hazel, in complete darkness, went contentedly to sleep on the bare floor of the cavern. As the looting had not been interrupted, it would appear that so far their scheme was safe from discovery.

But Gerald slept with one eye open. He knew Mama Oclo too well to do otherwise.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"DICK IMPROVES THE OCCASION."

NEXT morning there was consternation in Yayacarui. The pool and fountain in the great square had vanished, and in their place now gaped a fathomless hole, emitting columns of steam. And from this the inhabitants did not fail to realise what might be the fate of their troglodytic city. They were in a frenzy of terror, and clamoured round the palace of their rulers.

Inca Satic-toco was all unable to deal with the situation, and the burden fell on the shoulders of his daughter. And her frame of mind was far from enviable. The loss of Hazel and of Puca; the physical dangers which threatened; the lamentations of her people crying to be led to the light

of day, and the confusion of all her schemes were proving too much even for Mama Ocllo.

When day began with the re-lighting of the lamps, she sat in council with her advisers and endeavoured to cope with the position. But they were of little use to her, and she was thrown back upon her own resources. Then it was that she rose to the occasion and exhibited the promptitude, the courage, the foresight of a born ruler. She saw that time must be gained at any cost.

"The wrath of the gods is upon us!" she cried, making an appeal to that superstition from which even the most educated of the Indians were not free, "and we must propitiate them with sacrifice and prayer lest they destroy us wholly. Manco Capac has departed in anger; we must implore him to return. Then will all be well. After mid-day let us invoke the Sun and humble ourselves; so that Supay may withhold his devouring fires. The High Priest will announce this to the people; and he will announce also that Manco Capac will return to lead them to the light of day."

This device for the pacification of the multitude seemed good to those in authority; and the High Priest in his robes of office duly made proclamation that sacrifice would be offered in the Sun-temple, whereby Manco Capac would be induced to return and save the children of the Sun.

The announcement, confidently made with all the imposing ritual of the Inca worship, did much to still the clamour of the terror-stricken crowd. Re-assured for the moment, they sought their homes that they might make ready for the ceremony.

Having thus succeeded in preventing a riot, Mama Ocllo sent for Maclean, and questioned him concerning a possible eruption of the extinct volcano, supposed to lie below the city. The Scotsman looked grave and admitted that the seismic disturbance was ominous, particularly when taken in conjunction with the fact that the lava of the burning mountain in the Andes had ceased to flow. However, with characteristic caution, he declined to commit himself to an opinion until he had examined the chasm in the square and the river tunnel; so Mama Ocllo sent him away to search the city foundations and report at once. Commands were likewise conveyed to the outside pueblo instructing for search to be made for the bodies of Gerald and Puca. Mama Ocllo herself prepared to descend to the tunnel.

As she rose, Puca appeared. The little man was haggard, and blood-stained. He could hardly stand from weakness and fatigue. Mama Ocllo hailed his resurrection as that of a god. It flashed across her mind that, as he had escaped, Gerald also might have done so.

"Cusi-cuy," she cried, "tell me, is he dead?"

"I know not, Coya; but I think he lives."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because, Coya, the key of the magazine is no longer with me. Coya!" the dwarf's face became convulsed with rage, "I believe Viracocha has taken it!"

"You probably lost it in the water."

"No, Coya, no! The chain could not have become untwisted from my neck. I was struck here," he laid his hand on the bandage round his head. "I lay stunned for many hours, and I woke in the gallery beside the river tunnel. The flood must have swept both Viracocha and myself in there. He left me to die."

These were glad tidings to the ears of Mama Ocllo, to know that Hazel lived. But her suspicions were all alert when she heard of the loss of the key.

"Did you examine the magazine?" she demanded, hastily.

"I went there, Coya, as soon as I could drag myself along. It was day when I arrived, and the door was fast locked. Come you and open it to see if anything has been taken. If Viracocha lives and has the key——" Puca's silence was more than eloquent.

"I will go at once, Puca! Stay you here and eat; you will need all your strength soon."

So eager was the dwarf for revenge that he would have dragged himself up to the magazine or have had himself carried there; but he had lost a quantity of blood and he fainted now at the Coya's feet. She gave orders for his comfort; and with a small guard hastened up to the magazine. To her surprise and anger, the gallery was in darkness. She sent at once for Parry; and met him full of suspicion. The engineer took his reprimand with all due respect, and replied with a carefully prepared excuse.

"Our machinery's built to stand a good deal, ma'am; but I guess no engine that was ever put together would keep its bearings square in a shake-up like we've just had." He had unshipped and tangled up a dynamo very cleverly. "I couldn't keep the gallery alight, but I hope to have everything right in a couple of days."

By the light of the acetylene lamps which Parry had brought along, Mama Ocllo looked at him suspiciously. Outside his own particular business, she had but a poor opinion of his intellect. Consequently she credited him with no power of invention. And as Parry was sufficiently astute further to disarm her by an invitation to visit the engine-room, she accepted his story in good faith. Then she sent for more lamps, and did her best to examine the ground. Parry looked on stolidly. He knew that all traces of the looting had been carefully obliterated, and that they ran no risk of discovery in that direction. Had the lamps been all going, it was just possible that a trail to the upper cave might have been discovered, but then they were not alight, nor would be until such time as Gerald should choose to give the order.

And so Mama Ocllo departed, fully convinced that so far no one had forced the magazine, the more so since an examination of the ammunition revealed nothing to arouse suspicion.

Gerald, overhead, smiled to himself in the darkness when he heard all about the Coya's wrath and Parry's excuses. So far all was well. Nevertheless it did not fail to strike him that had Puca been present, the search might have been of somewhat wider scope, and have included an examination of the surrounding caves. Clearly Providence was working in their favour. Then Parry came to report progress in the engine cave, and to make arrangements for further work that night.

The Coya did not return immediately to the palace. A report arrived from the pueblo that no bodies had been found; on receiving which she went down to the river tunnel to see if Gerald were in truth alive. On her heels followed Dick in hot haste, ready to play his part with gusto, since it included the production of the missing key. He caught up with Mama Ocllo in the river tunnel.

"Where's m' chief?" he demanded, with feigned anger. "You've nabbed him again. Don't say you haven't!"

Mama Oclo, in no very good temper, wheeled round. "See here, my friend," she said, in a low voice, "I do not happen to be quite so amiable as I was the other night; don't you run any risks or you may not get off so easily."

"Shoo! I want Hazel."

"I want him myself. Is he not in your lodgings?"

"No, he isn't; you know that well enough. Some of your gang have been cavortin' round this mornin'. Where is he; that's what I want to know. You told me and Parry some yarn last night about his being swept down stream." Dick stared at the smooth deadly current. "I don't see!"

"Look about then. Mr. Hazel and myself were caught here by an earthquake wave last night. I am safe, so is Puca; but Mr.—"

"Oh, Puca's safe, is he? And what was Puca doin' down these parts?"

The princess threw such a deadly look on the speaker that he deemed it judicious to pull in a bit. With well-feigned zeal he began to hunt for Hazel in the most unlikely places; and shouted until the cavern rang. Mama Oclo relented at this exhibition of good intention.

"Hullo!" cried Amherst, who was standing by the crag against which Hazel and Puca had been dashed. "Here's a chain."

The Coya hurried forward to receive it. Dick had wrenched the links apart very artistically, and it had all the appearance of having been torn from Puca's neck. "I see how it is," said Mama Oclo, looking up stream and down, "the wave dashed him here, and the chain caught on the rock and was torn off when he dropped."

"I s'pose so," said Dick, innocently. "That old chain's got a key too!"

"Yes, a key you would no doubt like to possess, Mr. Amherst—the key of the magazine!"

Dick scowled like a transpontine villain, and cursed under his breath, so that the princess could hear and rejoice. She did both; little guessing than an elaborate comedy had been prepared to account for the loss of the key. However, she was too ill at ease about Hazel to say very much, and Dick having gained his end, subsided into discreet silence.

As they had been ordered to do, the Indians set to work to explore the tunnel in search of Hazel. But all their efforts were unfruitful, and they were obliged to return empty handed. Observing that Mama Oclo's hopes were growing fainter, Dick piled on the agony with an admixture of oaths and tears which should have done justice to any occasion. But he soon found his supply of tears lamentably deficient, so that he was obliged to fall back upon his other commodity of commiseration which had never yet been known to fail him. In her own less obtrusive way Mama Oclo was mourning sincerely for her lost "god"; and it was with sorrowful countenance and joyless spirit that she made her way back to her palace and Puca.

"Here are your key and chain, Cusi-cuy," she said to the little red man. "He must be dead. There is no trace of him. And it was I who sent him to his death!"

She turned aside to conceal her emotion. Puca meanwhile examined the chain, and found it rudely broken. He was obliged to conclude that it had been torn from his neck, through having caught on the rock. Taken in conjunction with his mistress's report, that all was satisfactory at the magazine, he began to think he had been mistaken in his suspicions.

It only remained to rejoice that the Englishman was no more, and to make solemn vow that his friend and fellow should share his fate as speedily as might be. But towards the consummation of this desire Fate did not assist the wily Puca. On the contrary it decreed that he should be struck down with fever arising from the wound he had received, and so put out of action altogether for the time being.

Meanwhile Mama Ocllo, the Inca, and the terrified populace were gathered together in the Temple, where the most desperate sacrifices and heart-rending supplications were being offered to the great Sun god. For the evils that threatened Yayacarui were such as could not be overcome by the hand of man. Mighty Mother Nature was against them and they were sore afraid. So the llama bled on the altar and the priests threw dust and ashes on their heads, and the people wailed and beat their breasts. And with secret inward scorn Mama Ocllo watched it all. She was above the superstitions of her race, and her thoughts were far away with the Scotsman whom she had sent on an errand of survey. She was wondering too what she should do were the caves to become uninhabitable. The treasures stored therein—the great treasures of the great Inca race—must be preserved at all costs. But given a new and suitable place of refuge for them, it would be a Herculean task to transport them thither. For it was borne in upon Mama Ocllo that the time was short, and she was therefore all the more impatient with the present ceremonies. Yet she must bear with them for they were a very part of the being of her people. Through them alone could they be prevailed upon. Her expression was clearly indicative of her state of mind. She stood beside her father, who looked more than ever frail and aged.

At length the ceremonies were ended and she led him tenderly towards the door of the Temple. The people were consoled and comforted. They had offered their sacrifice to the great Unknown and he would not turn a deaf ear to them in their tribulation. The priests went forth and the great door of the building closed.

Then from behind one of the royal mummies ever so softly stole Dick. For Dick had had an idea when Mama Ocllo had left him, and hither he had come at its dictate.

It was lonesome now in the huge edifice ; and very dark. The place reeked with incense and perfume. Producing a small acetylene lamp with which he had provided himself, Dick lit it and brought its rays to bear on the circle of mummies. They looked more than horrible in its ghostly light. He glanced round at each of the doors to satisfy himself that they were securely closed, and proceeded to climb the high altar. For the purposes of the sacrifice the Mother of Emeralds had been removed to a niche under the icon of the Sun. He placed his lamp on the altar, and reached down the gem. Its pellucidity was marvellous. Like a piece of solidified sea water it glistened in his hands. It was worth a king's ransom, he knew.

"Gum ! I'd like to snaffle it," he said, eyeing it covetously, "but I guess it 'ud be 'Kingdom Come' pretty slick if these niggers found it about. Then we'll see what we can do with it. I must hide it safely. That'll send the whole go-bang lot of 'em crazy."

From which it will be seen that Dick was here on no vulgar robbery intent. His sole wish for the moment was to scare the natives still further into the belief that the gods had deserted them ; once get them thoroughly demoralised, and everything would be simple. He proceeded to hunt

round for a secure hiding-place. The mummies! With a chuckle he walked round the circle of kings and queens and princes, and stopped short before the mummy of Molly's father.

"You came for the emerald," murmured Dick, laying bare the chest, "and I'm blest if you're not goin' to get it, even though it is a bit late. Don't like the job, but it's got to be done." He whipped out his knife and cut a gash in the parchment-like skin. A resinous odour filled the air. Dick cut deeper, apologising for himself the while. At last he had made a cavity sufficiently large to take the gem. Carefully he tucked it in, and smoothed the skin over it. He had but continued the one incision, so that when he pulled the edges of this together, it showed little sign of what had been done. Then he re-arranged the dress and the plate of gold which dangled from a chain round the neck. Finally, having completed his gruesome task, he stepped back to behold his handiwork. It appeared to him perfectly satisfactory. Certainly no casual glance would detect that the thing had been tampered with.

"They'll never think of looking inside that old buffer, I'll swear," he said to himself, approvingly. "Now, I guess there'll be trouble in the land, oh my soul! I'd best light out, I reckon!"

Like a born strategist he had not omitted to make good provision for his retreat. There was a door at the back of the altar, used by the priests to introduce animals for the sacrifice. Through this he made his exit. He met with no one, for the priests were all sleeping after the arduous duties of the day. Moreover the Temple was held to be so safe from robbery, by superstition alone, that no watch was considered needful. Emerging into a dark and narrow passage, Dick closed the postern door behind him, and extinguishing his lamp, groped his way along. He came to an open space. It was pitch dark, but he knew the locality perfectly. A bee line through this brought him into a lighted gallery. Thence he had no difficulty in gaining a main one; and so he worked round to the populated parts of the city. He felt he could with justice congratulate himself on having achieved a very pretty piece of work, the result of which he awaited with a lively interest and supreme content.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND."¹

THAT night Dick smoked his pipe with Gerald as if he had earned it. There was a smug smile of self-satisfaction on his face as he related to his chief what he had done. Hazel was both delighted and astonished.

"We shall have precious little trouble with them now," he said. "They don't know about it yet?"

"No; I guess not. The Temple's been shut up ever since, and 'twon't be opened till to-morrow. Then the fun'll begin. They'll hunt the place through, I reckon, but they'll never think of looking in John Prynne's mummy for their beastly bauble."

"No; so far as that goes, I admit your plan's excellent, brilliant in fact, old man. But I confess I wish you could have chosen a somewhat less uncanny spot for your hiding-place. After all, you know, according to our notions, it's straining things a bit far to rip up the dead that way."²

"Shucks! An Englishman's always ready to help his fellows in a mess, dead or alive. Doesn't do to be squeamish, chief: things are a bit too desperate for that. Any way, I reckon it'll settle the business."

"Yes, I think it will, Dick; that's to say, if things aren't settled for us more unpleasantly. Maclean's just been up to see me and report. So far as he can tell by the light of his knowledge and experience, there's going to be trouble with this spirited volcano."

"Holy Moses! Don't say the darned place is going to blow up!"

"It's by no means unlikely. Maclean's been in the deeps, under the city; and what he saw there, was not re-assuring. The ground is cracking in all directions, and the earth is blowing off steam for all she's worth. The whole show may be skied any day. I'll be glad when we're out of this, Dicky!"

"Same here, chief. I've no wish to participate. What's to be done?"

"Nothing more can be done than we're doing. We'll store the guns to-night and sit tight till I find that exit. By the way, Dick, I want you to lend a hand in another little comedy I'm going to play."

"It is an order," said Dick, gravely. "Well?"

"To-morrow you must bring me a white robe similar to that I wore at the Temple service. Also as many balls of string—red for choice—as you can lay hands on. In the afternoon, when Mama Oclo's out of the way, chase as many Indians as you can collect into the gallery out there."

"That's as easy as pie. But what's it all about?"

"Capac has cleared out. I intend to appear and instruct them to lead me to the secret entrance that I may worship my father, the Sun; and——"

"And I'll follow trailing the string behind as a clue," finished Dick. "My aunt, that's a good idea! Mama Oclo will be mad."

"H'm, I'm afraid she'll be anything but mad to learn I'm alive, more's the pity. But I'm turning her own weapons against her. She made me a god; well! a god I'll be and, what's more, I'll get any good that is to be got out of my godship. My plan may not come off, but there's always a pretty good chance when one appeals to the superstitious of these Indians. Here come the boys. You needn't say anything to them just yet, Dick."

One by one, so as not to attract attention, the conspirators arrived at the rendezvous. In half an hour the whole twenty were collected. Assured that the city was asleep, and that nothing was suspected, Gerald took command, and apportioned out the work for the night. Parry marched a gang to the armoury—they went barefooted, stealthily as cats in the dark—and the remainder of the men, under Dick, commenced fortifying the cave, by piling up rocks at the entrance. A goodly store of provisions had by this time been collected. Of ammunition they were already in possession of a fair quantity, and would, if necessary, have ample wherewith to make a fight for it. The engineer and his men returned with the sections of a machine-gun, and pieced it together in a commanding position on the rise where it could sweep the approach. Then the rifles were carried to the cave; and each man, for his own special defence, was supplied with a brace of revolvers. A second journey resulted in the production of haversacks, bayonets, ammunition belts, swords, khaki uniforms, and a supply of boots. In short, when night drew to day, Hazel found himself the leader of a force, well armed, well provisioned, and bent on fighting to the bitter end. An old army ser-

geant who had been kidnapped to train the natives, drilled the force, which was fully equipped and in complete marching order.

Most of the men were good shots; and through constant work, as tough as was needful for the campaign.

"Men!" said Hazel, addressing them, "we are now in a position to fight our way hence to civilization. To-morrow I hope to discover the secret entrance to this city. It may be that we shall be able to get away by night—that is if our plans are not discovered. Once in the open we must be prepared to fight our way through a hostile country: for we may be sure that Mama Ocllo will raise the tribes around. If all goes well, I hope to escape without fighting. Therefore, I ask you to be both silent and circumspect in your behaviour to-morrow, and to meet here singly to-morrow night. Should any knowledge of our intentions come to the ears of the authorities, collect in this cave at once, and we will fight. Better death than slavery. You can go now; but disperse to your homes one by one, so that suspicion may not be aroused." And so the night's work ended.

Shortly after dawn Yayacarui was in commotion. For rumour had spread swiftly from mouth to mouth that the Mother of Emeralds had vanished even as Manco Capac had done. The city was bereft of tutelary god and palladium; and there remained no protection against the power of Supay, into whose hands the children of the Sun had been delivered utterly. Amazed, hopeless, deserted by the Supreme, the people sat in frozen silence, expectant of the worst. They neither wailed nor made protest against the injustice of the gods. The end of all things was at hand for them. The nation would be blotted out. Dumb with misery they sat in the city ways bemoaning their plight. And ever and anon, the mutterings of the earthquake ran growling underground. Destiny was upon them, and they could not hope to escape.

Incautiously informed by an excited priest of this fresh trouble, the Inca had passed away in an excess of grief. His emotion had wrought upon him so that the breaking of a blood vessel abruptly ended his life. As Mama Ocllo looked upon his dead form she was filled with terror at so many omens of ill. She was instructed in all modern knowledge; she had a fine brain and liberal views: yet there was in her that latent feeling of superstition common to her race. And now it manifested itself. The hand-writing was on the wall; the days of her kingdom were numbered; and try as she might to gibe at the hints of downfall, her whole being lay under a spell of terror. Like that righteous Mycerinus, to whom the gods gave evil for good, she asked of the Supreme why this thing had come upon her and her people. In the past a nation industrious, pious, bloodless, had been swept away by the brutality of a so-called more advanced civilization; and now the doom was upon those who sought to restore it. Mama Ocllo believed in a Supreme Being. But why, oh why, should He destroy the just? To that question there came to her no answer. The god of Things-as-they-are triumphed over the people who toiled for a state of Things-as-they-ought-to-be. Beyond that it was not given to her to know.

But the thing, however terrible, had to be faced. Hazel and the Inca were dead; the emerald had disappeared; her plans were brought to naught, and fire threatened to overwhelm the refuge of her people. Yet she shook off the lethargy induced by these woes; and grappled the situation with judgment swift and true. Giving orders that the death of

the Inca should not be made known, she appeared on the terrace in her regal robes, surrounded by her pale-faced elders, and harangued the multitude.

"Why sit ye there awaiting the anger of the gods?" she cried, and her voice was hard with scorn, "truly they have no love for cowards. The command of Con, the counsel of his servant the Sun, comes not to the common people, but to the rulers of the state. In the silence of the night I lay down, and a dream from the Invisible came unto me. In shining light appeared our father the Sun, and his brow was dark. He bade me announce that the wrath of Con is heavy upon us, inasmuch as we have delayed in restoring his worship at the Holy City of Cuzco. Therefore that the time may swiftly approach, he drives us out of the refuge by the fires of Supay. It shall no more be a resting-place for our race; but we will go up to Cuzco and drive thence the Spanish dogs. Know ye that Manco Capac, even he who shall lead you to conquest, came in the night and took with him the Sacred Emerald. He will appear again, and shall go before you with the gem to light your way to the city of the Sun. It is a sign! So, ye people, sit no more weeping, but gird up your loins, and go forth to conquest—to the light of day. Gather your goods for departure; arm yourselves with weapons, and make ready for Manco Capac to lead you to the upper world. He will bear the Emerald to the Holy Place, and set it on the altar of the Sun in Cuzco. No sorrow this, but joy. Rise; be strong, for the time of victory is at hand!"

This put a new complexion on the face of things. Once persuaded that Manco Capac possessed the Mother of Emeralds, the people's feelings quickly changed from sorrow to great joy, from despair to hope. As one man they rose; and the caverns rang with their joyousness. Each hurried to his dwelling to make ready for the advent of the new Moses.

Having thus inspired them with renewed confidence, Mama Ocllo retreated to her palace to consider how best she could make a show of fulfilling her promises. She realised that it would be no easy matter.

That same afternoon Hazel prepared for his masquerade. A white robe was smuggled up by Dick, and Gerald stripping himself, put it on, leaving bare his breast that he might display the symbol of the Sun. Below, rumours were rife that Manco Capac was about to appear, and Dick carefully reported them to his chief.

"Good business, Dick," said Hazel, delighted that events had shaped themselves so. "They will be the less astonished to see me and the more controllable on that account. Got the string all right?"

"Miles of it, more or less," replied Dick with a grin, "I'll slouch after you, and mark the trail."

"Whatever you do don't let them see you, or you'll do for the whole thing."

"I'm awake, old man. Guess there won't be much trouble about that. Gosh! you look just like a ghost—a first rate church-yarder."

Hazel laughed. "I feel a bit of an ass, to tell you the truth. But come on; send up the rabble, Dick."

Dick vanished. In the engine cave he interviewed Parry, who had contrived to find work for a dozen or so of the natives in the magazine gallery where the wires required re-stretching. Then Dick ascertained that Mama Ocllo was closeted with her council, busy with the discussion of measures to meet the situation. At ease on this point he regained the cave by devious ways.

Thus it was that a score of Indians at work, suddenly beheld the vision of a tall man clothed in a white robe. That it was Manco Capac they could see by the light of their lamps. Promptly they fell on their knees, never doubting but that they were in the presence of their re-incarnated hero. The lamps dropped with a clatter, and the vision spoke to them in the darkness. While they were thus held in conversation, Dick knotted his twine to a spike of rock.

"Children of the Sun," said Manco Capac mildly, "I have heard of your woes and of the doings of Supay. Therefore I am come to help you and to lead you to the Holy City of Cuzco, which I founded afore-time. But I seek a sign from the Sun, my father, and it is not meet that I should do so alone. Go then, and precede me to the upper world, where I can speak face to face with the Shining One. Go; I follow!"

He spoke in English, which did not seem strange to the people; for tradition held that the original Manco Capac had been an Englishman. He waited its result with some amount of anxiety, for it was always on the cards that mistrust might exist in the breasts of some, and might beget refusal. But, already prepared by the speech of Mama Ocllo, they did not hesitate a moment in fulfilling the will of him whom they believed to be their deity. In awestruck silence they rose, and marched silently forward. They knew the entrance well, for it was a secret only to the white men.

Rejoicing in his good fortune, Gerald followed them through the gloom and out into the lighted gallery leading toward the engine cave. Dick, close at his heels, unrolled the twine close to the rocky sides of the tunnel. In the glare of the lamps some of them looked back and shuddered as they saw the symbol on the breast of the god. There was no room for doubt in the face of that direct manifestation of deity. They hurried along at top speed. The other natives, working or wandering in the passages, recognised their divinity and joined in.

The way to the entrance was devious beyond description, and Hazel, for all his careful observation, lost his bearings. He was glad to know that Dick, with the clue of Ariadne, was tailing behind him. Otherwise all his trouble must have gone for naught.

He reckoned that it was a quarter of a mile or thereabouts from the cave of refuge to the far side of the city. There was just the chance that Mama Ocllo might cut in between the fugitives and liberty when she found out his plan. That she would be informed of it within the hour, Hazel knew well. He deliberated in his mind as to whether it would be possible to collect his men and rush the entrance before the Coya could arrange to intercept them. The steps which they had now reached were wide, and worn away by the feet of generations. The Indians ascended them into an upper passage ending in massive gates, covered in sheet iron. These gates were opened by the sentry guard, every man of which quaked with fear when the eyes of the god fell upon him. But even on passing through they were not yet in the open. An irregular cave stretched for some distance, and through this Hazel followed his guides, Dick having exhausted his string at the foot of the stairs, and, unwilling to be seen by the guardians of the gate, remained behind in concealment. His heart hammered at his ribs as he heard whispers all around him, and the padding of the naked feet. Discovery there meant death. He loosened a revolver—one of those looted from the magazine—and waited.

Meanwhile Gerald, at the heels of the Indians, emerged from the cave.

He stepped on to a broad platform which ended in a tremendous cliff, whence a narrow path led upward to the hills. At the back rose the precipitous sides of the mountain, and far away below lay the beautiful undulating lands, surrounded by the snowy peaks. The cave's mouth looked westward, and the sun was already hovering on the tops of the distant mountains. The glory of sky and sun, and the freshness of the air, the wide-spreading landscape bathed in the purple twilight, came with a suddenness all bewildering to Hazel. A lump rose in his throat, and he flung out his arms unconsciously, as if in adoration of the great orb. At once the Indians dropped on their faces. They understood their god to be worshipping his celestial father.

Informed now of all he wished to know, Gerald's great anxiety was to get back before Mama Oclo could learn of his resurrection. Casting a majestic glance on the prostrate throng, he raised his voice: "Sing ye the song of the Shining One!" he commanded.

With one accord the people scrambled to their knees and with hands crossed on their breasts, broke out into the noble chant. Gerald, his arms still outstretched towards the sun, remained thus for some moments. Then he moved slowly back to the cave. At the entrance he turned.

"Wait ye here until I come again."

Once within the gates, he walked swiftly down the steps. Here, attracted by the rumour of his appearance, he found more Indians collected. But they only grovelled at the sight of him. At that instant the light was extinguished, and Hazel felt the friendly grip of Dick.

"Follow me close," he whispered, "I've got the string all right."

On swiftly through the darkness Dick led the way, the twine slipping swiftly through his hands. The gloom still continued. They could hear the voices of many men, who seemed to know that their god was passing by. Gradually they died away, as they approached what Dick guessed was the magazine gallery. When the cord came to an end, Dick shook Gerald by the hand.

"By Jove," he said, "that was a close shave. Lucky I found that switch at the foot of the stairs and turned out the light."

Hazel cut him short. "See Parry, Dick, and tell him to bring the men up to the cave at once."

"Gosh, you do mean to fight, then?"

"We must. The rumours of my appearance and of my having found the secret entrance will soon reach Mama Oclo, if, indeed, they haven't already done so. Think it well out, Dick, while I go and change. Now then, cut along."

Mounting to the cave, Gerald rapidly reassumed his khaki suit.

"The die has been cast," he muttered, "it's a case of fighting now for our lives!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"THE TUG OF WAR."

"It is true, Mademoiselle. I swear it is true! Monsieur Hazel is alive. He has stolen arms and ammunition from the magazine, and it is arranged that we are all to fight. He sits now in the cave yonder waiting what shall come. Holy Blue, it is true, I tell you!"

So spoke the little French Doctor to Mama Ocllo. A furious jealousy of Gerald, coupled with racial hatred, and an overweening vanity, had proved too much for his equilibrium. To turn traitor now was to avenge a heap of insults to himself and to his nation.

So at the moment when Hazel, in his capacity of deliverer, was prosecuting his plans, Brossard sat in the mother-o'-pearl apartment of Mama Ocllo detailing them to her. For apart altogether from the gratification of his revengeful feelings friend Brossard was not without his ambitions, and the dual positions of supreme Inca and husband to a very charming young lady came within the scope of them.

"He lives?" Mama Ocllo covered her face with her hands. She could not repress her emotion. Nor could Puca, though his feelings were of a vastly different order. His enormous fund of vitality had served him in good stead, and had enabled him to make a quick recovery from his wounds. His hatred of Gerald had increased with his enforced physical inactivity. It was with a howl of rage that he heard the Doctor's statement.

"We must kill him—kill him and his men. Accursed be Viracocha. Accursed be the white men!"

"Eh, Monsieur, but there are exceptions; is it not so?" put in Brossard, a trifle uneasily. "That I may aid you and Mademoiselle I have left this brutal Englishman."

"You shall have your reward," said Mama Ocllo, with a wan smile, which might mean anything. Deliberate treachery such as this man had shown himself capable of was to her a loathsome thing. The fact that it tended to her advantage did not weigh with her.

Puca saw her smile, and felt uneasy. He drew her to one side.

"Coya," he whispered, "there is no time to be lost. Leave me to deal with the Englishman. Go you and take possession of the magazine, and——"

He was interrupted. The door opened, and the High Priest entered. As he did so a great shouting could be heard.

"What is the matter now?" asked Mama Ocllo, prepared to hear of some fresh blow.

"The god has appeared again," replied the High Priest, "Yes, Coya, even Manco Capac. In the magazine gallery he came upon the workers, and they led him to the light of day, that he might worship his father the Sun!"

"The entrance!" cried Puca. "He has found it. Quick, Coya. Take men, armed, and guard the gates, or the white men will escape us!"

"The people believe him to be the god," urged the priest. "They will not take up arms against him."

"But thou knowest well he is of our making," retorted Mama Oclo. "Go you hence and proclaim it around, that this is not Manco Capac, but some devil of Supay's breed who has assumed his shape. I will lead the men forth to prevent their flight. Go, go. If the white men escape Yaya-carui is lost!"

Without a word the priest departed. Mama Oclo passed into another room to give her orders.

Left alone with the Doctor, Puca bade him repeat his story. Brossard complied very willingly, dilating upon the cleverness of Gerald in having stolen the key and looted the magazine, because he knew well that thus would he inflame still further the animosity of the dwarf. They recognised, both of them, that they were vipers from a common egg; and they were willing to work in unison for the downfall of the man they hated.

But Puca went even further. He not only intended to make use of the Doctor, but to wipe him out when he had done with him. He counted on Brossard's inordinate vanity to aid him.

"And what do you expect for this?" asked Puca, when the Frenchman had related the whole story.

Brossard smirked, thinking he was to be given a free hand in choosing his reward. "It is this, Monsieur," said he. "I know well enough that you manufactured a god and an Inca out of this English pig. Good, very good; but for that he has betrayed you. He is your enemy, now and for ever. But I, even I, Achille Brossard, will become Manco Capac and Inca. I will marry the charming Mademoiselle, and lead you to victory." He rose and flung out his arms. "See you, Monsieur Puca, you behold in me a true son of France—of France the great and glorious. Make me all you would have made this English cabbage, and I rule the world for you. None shall stand against me. Is it not so?"

Puca contemplated the excited little face grimly, and made answer—"So be it. But there is much to be done first."

"I will do all—all. Command me, Monsieur," replied Brossard eagerly, thinking he was within an ace of realising his ambition.

"First, then, you must slay Viracocha," said the dwarf slowly, fixing his eye on the man. The Doctor's jaw fell. In the exercise of his profession slaughter was no new thing to him; but that was authorised by science. But to attack physically a strong and wary man such as this Hazel: "Ah, Monsieur," he said, "that is most difficult."

"Difficult it may be," replied the Indian; "but to gain much you must risk much. Go thou with the Coya, who leaves us to confront these daring ones. Take this revolver, and when she holds him in conversation——"

"Good, good. I will do it. Achille Brossard is a brave man. And when he is dead?"

"Then, all shall be as you wish. Come." Puca moved toward the door. There was a grim smile on his face, for he thought he saw his way clearly now. First Viracocha, then Ucha, finally the Frenchman—that would be the order of demise. And then, although he was not of the royal Inca blood, he felt that many things might be possible.

Meanwhile Parry had collected the white men together in the cave. They were now changing their native dress for khaki uniforms, and preparing themselves generally for action. Gerald had neglected nothing in the way of preparation for the journey back to civilization. He called:

over the roll, and found that all were present with the exception of Brossard and Dick. But at that moment Dick rushed in.

"Been scouting," he cried; "all the fat's in the fire. Mama Ocllo's tumbled to the whole business. Saw that scallywag of a Frenchman beside her on the terrace. He's rounded on us!"

A growl which boded no good for Brossard should he be caught, ran through the ranks. Gerald and Parry cursed the Doctor freely, and Dick continued his report. "The High Priest's been tellin' the mob that the Manco Capac whom they led to the entrance is a son of Supay—false god!"

"Jove! That puts an end to my godship. We'll have to fight. We must start at once, boys!"

"Hadn't we better wait a bit?" asked Parry, uneasily.

"What for?—to be starved out? No. I've changed the plan of campaign. We must make for the entrance while the way is clear."

"Guess it isn't," cried Dick, as a roar broke on their ears. "Huh! They're in the galleries already. I've filled the keyhole of the magazine lock with gravel, and they'll have to bust the door off its hinges."

"Bring the machine gun along, Parry. Dick! Form up, men. Sharp!"

As his orders were being executed, the roaring of the mob became more distinct, and the white men unanimously swore at Brossard, whose tell-tale tongue had brought up the natives to cut them off from the entrance. With Gerald and Dick leading, they formed fours, marching at the quick step; and Parry, with a couple of men, drew the Maxim at the rear. It was Gerald's policy to get into a lighted gallery forthwith, that his men might not be at a disadvantage in firing. Indeed he hoped to get almost to the entrance before being intercepted. But Mama Ocllo had been warned in time; and with the traitor by her side appeared at the head of a large body of men as the fugitives wheeled into the main gallery. Gerald had the Maxim drawn to the front, establishing a line facing rearwards, lest there should be an attack from that quarter; and waited the approach of the enemy. They came forward more deliberately than might have been expected. On seeing the white men they halted and sent up a yell of rage. That their white slaves should thus turn on them drove the red men to desperation. Nor was their wrath assuaged by the sight of Gerald—the false Manco Capac—the son of Supay. There was a space of barely twenty paces between the forces. Gerald and Dick advanced, knowing that with Mama Ocllo in front no shooting could take place. On her side the Coya came forward, and Brossard, white and shaking, sneaked by her side.

"You hound!" sung out Dick. "Wait till I have the handling of you!" and a roar of rage sounded from both parties.

Mama Ocllo in a semi-military dress, with a brace of pistols in her belt, halted a few paces away, and spoke in a would-be conciliatory tone. Her nerve was shaken at the sight of him whom she had looked upon as dead, and it took all her strength of will to keep the woman subservient to the queen.

"What would you do, Viracocha?" she demanded haughtily.

"I would go forth, I and my people," replied Gerald coolly. "You have held us in bondage and we would be free."

"Since when have my servants become thy people?"

"Since the time I found them here as slaves. I told you I would free

them and myself, and I will keep my word. Stand aside and let us pass ! ”

“ You shall never pass,” cried the Coya fiercely. “ Stand you back, Viracocha, or your blood be on your head.”

“ Guess we’re ready for that,” cried Dick, swinging a revolver. “ Ho ! Ho ! if it comes to fightin’——”

“ Be silent, dog ! Viracocha, lay down your arms, and I promise to overlook this folly.”

“ No, Madam. These men trust me. They shall not be deceived by me.”

“ You deceived *me*,” she said bitterly.

“ That is not true, I always told you my intentions. The time has come, and——”

The sound of a shot cut short her sentence, but it did not fetch its mark. Dick had seen Brossard raise his revolver ; and had just time to fling himself before Gerald. The bullet struck him in the chest, and with a gasp he fell into the arms of the man he had saved. In another second Brossard was lying dead at the feet of Mama Oclo, and she was returning a still-smoking pistol to her belt. She had seen Gerald’s danger, Dick’s sacrifice ; and she had acted promptly, but not sufficiently so as to prevent trouble. On seeing Dick fall the white men rushed forward, and were met by a volley from the natives. Gerald dropped on Dick and lay over him to shield his body. Mama Oclo stood for a moment in the midst of the *mêlée*. Then she was swallowed up by the surging mass of her own people. That was the last seen of her. Then the fight became general.

The foremost line of whites flung themselves forward, firing low, and the Indians fell back, though they returned shot for shot. Gerald, left in the rear, bore Dick’s body to a niche in the gallery, and drawing his sword, dashed forward to put himself at the head of his men. He did not know if Dick was dead or alive ; and he had no time to make sure. The close atmosphere of the tunnel was white with smoke ; rent with the cries of the combatants, and the cracking of rifles. Inch by inch the whites drove back the natives by their superior shooting. The tide of battle rolled on to an open space, where the little body were at a disadvantage against the overwhelming force of the reds. These rushed in from all the galleries converging into the central cavern. Gerald kept back such men as would have thrown themselves forward ; and yelled to Parry for the Maxim. Maclean and the engineer wheeled it forward to the mouth of the gallery ; and in a few moments it was spitting death and destruction against the close-packed ranks of the enemy. The reds fell fast as the continuous rattle of the gun cut lanes through their midst ; but these seemed to fill up as quickly as they were made. The ground was like shambles, heaped with corpses. But it was going badly with the red men, and they retreated slowly, demoralised by the steady fire.

“ Give ’em the bayonet, boys ! ” Gerald sprang ahead waving his sword ; and with a cheer the men followed to close quarters. The Oxford don dropped by Hazel’s side ; and Maclean was tangled with a dozen wiry fellows striving to drag him to the ground. A shrill yell sounded from the gallery they had left, and immediately it vomited a new host to take the little force in the rear. On all sides the whites were surrounded and outnumbered. Back to back they fought desperately, trampling the dead and dying under foot ; hewing, thrusting, slashing. But the odds were too great in spite of the most desperate bravery. From every passage

more men poured in and pitched themselves into the fray with fanatical courage. The lamps glared down on a struggling pandemonium of howling, shrieking humanity. On the bodies of the dead and dying the whites stood as on a mound, keeping back the tide of foes which threatened to overwhelm. Man after man dropped, until four only were left, among them Parry and Hazel.

"It's Kingdom Come, sir," shouted the engineer.

"We've made a fight for it, anyhow," gasped Gerald, cutting and thrusting to right and left.

For the last time the four, back to back, beat down the foe. Like a wave receding to gather itself anew their assailants recoiled a few paces. Then they came on with a rush which was impossible to withstand. Parry was down, struggling desperately. A gigantic native gripped Gerald round the waist and sought to throw him. The two rolled in the slippery blood wrestling furiously. The Indians had triumphed and they raised a shrill cry of joy. But it was answered by the voice of Supay.

With a heave and a roar the earth spoke. The walls of the cavern rocked and split asunder. At that terrific sound the puny noise of the battle ceased, and the conquerors fled in all directions. Some were crushed to pieces by the falling rocks; those that escaped made for the gallery leading to the entrance. The volcano bellowed anew, and spurts of steam and jets of scalding water burst from the surrounding cracks. The floor of the cavern gaped, swallowing up dead and living. The clamour and rumbling, the voice of the deeps made hell of the place. Then all was complete darkness.

"Parry! Maclean! Cochrane!" Gerald disengaged himself from a pile of dead, and shouted aloud. Only one voice answered him. It was that of Parry. He crawled towards his chief by light of the fitful illumination which played round the walls.

"You are alive?"

"Yes; and you—are you hurt?"

"Nothing to speak of. Let us make for the entrance."

"Can't find poor Dick's clue."

"We can follow the Indians; they're rushing for it; hear the yells! This is the end of Yayacarui for sure, and of us too if we don't get out jolly quick."

"You go, Parry; I'm going back for Dick. He's alive."

"Man, you can't get through that?"

"I must. He was moaning when I left him. He saved me; I must save him."

"Madness; he's dead by this time. God of mercy, look!"

The side of the gallery giving on to the central cavern gaped, and a portion fell outward on the city. Flames came roaring up. "It's a lake of fire down there," gasped Parry, blanching with fear. "Come, Hazel!"

But Gerald was already clambering over the dead towards the silent machine-gun.

"Dick! Dick!"

"I'll come, too, by God!" swore Parry, following. "You fool! Wait, Hazel. I have a lamp."

In that inferno of smoke and flame he lighted the acetylene lamp he carried at his belt. Gerald snatched it from him.

"Go back, Parry, go back. Escape—the entrance!"

"No, by God, I'll stay with you."

They were in the gallery, and the lamp, shooting a long beam ahead, showed that the ground was yet whole there. Gerald in front, Parry a short way behind, they made what speed they could through the sulphurous atmosphere. Again the earth bellowed like a sentient thing. Tons of rock crashed around the two men, blocking the gallery and dividing them for ever.

"Parry!" called Hazel. But there was no reply save the crumbling of earth. Then there came a cry which made his heart leap. Faint it was amid the clamour of destruction, but trumpet-toned to the eager ears of friendship.

"Old man, old man; I knew you wouldn't leave me to die alone."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"THE END OF YAYACARUI."

AMID the chaos Gerald knelt holding the hand of his dying friend. The earth still continued to shake, and there was complete darkness. The livid lamplight revealed Dick's features, haggard, drawn, ghastly with the imprint of death: Leaning his weary head on Gerald's knee, he looked up with the fond gaze of a faithful dog. Falling rock, roaring, spurting flame, the distant wailing of blinded, burnt humanity, the continuous grinding as of steel on steel—it all was as naught to Dick now. Nor indeed did Hazel heed it, any more than he heeded the certain knowledge that his retreat was cut off. His whole mind was bent upon soothing the last moments of the man who had saved his life. "Greater love hath no man——" The text came to his mind, as he knelt.

"Dick, my poor old chap. How can I thank——"

"Shoo," said Dick, feebly. "That's all right; you're worth a dozen of a wrong 'un like me. Say good-bye, Hazel, and cut."

"Damned if I do. Dick, are you badly hurt?"

"Shot through the wind-bags, I guess, from the feeling I've got there." He gasped, and a trickle of blood dyed his khaki. "It's all U. P., chief."

"Let me have a shot at getting you out of this."

"No; go—die here—hold m' hand, old chap."

"I swear I won't leave you, Dick. Besides the gallery's blocked."

"Never mind, you'll get clear. Know you will. Don't forget me, Hazel. 'Now I lay me down'—Gosh! haven't said that—since—little chap—Gerald!"

"What is it, dear old man?"

"Inside m' tunic—letter—Molly——" He groaned.

Hazel slipped in his hand and took from his inside pocket an envelope directed to Molly. It was stained with blood. A lump bulged in his throat at the sight of it.

"Give—Molly——"

"Yes, Dicky, I will—if I get clear."

Hazel listened to the crashing smashing noises of the earth gods, and thought how little chance there was of that.

"You'll get away all right, I know—Gerald—'member me."

"Always, old chap."

"Never mind—glad I helped—Molly and you—happy. My mother—poor soul—damned bad son—must pay—pay for all——"

His head fell back. Gerald thinking the end had come bent his ear to the pale lips. "Dick, can you understand?"

"Understand——" The words came faint and low, but he opened his eyes. There was over them the glaze of death.

"I swear, Dick, I will never forget you, and the way you gave your life for mine. If I escape and marry Molly—if God blesses us with children, one shall bear your name. Dick, Dick, my dear fellow——"

Gerald clasped the limp body to his breast. The dying man sighed contentedly.

"Hold tight, Gera—poor old Cain—meet Cain—pray—pray."

Hazel whispered a prayer. His eyes were dry; he was long past tears.

As the "amen" dropped from his lips, Dick began to babble. "Father—art—Heaven—kind to poor Dick—closer than a brother—dulce domum—old school——" His voice faltered and died away. "Molly—couldn't help it—the mater—forgive—kiss—the mater——" and his eyes closed.

Gerald touched his forehead lightly for his mother's sake. There was a sigh, a tremor of the limbs, and Hazel's arms held lifeless clay. He raised his eyes to the blackness, now threaded with many-coloured fires.

"Poor old chap—he's gone."

There was a tremendous concussion in the gallery, and the earth gaped almost at Gerald's feet. He struggled up with his friend's body in his arms, and ran back towards the magazine. The ground was riving and cracking in all directions. Laying the body reverently in a niche, he closed the eyes, crossed the hands on the still breast, and again kissed the forehead. "Good-bye, Dick, dear old fellow."

With a whistling sound steam was jetting from a thousand crevices. It drove Gerald back from his dead. A crack zig-zagged to the door of the magazine; and dreading the explosion which he knew must ensue, he fled blindly along the ways, with the instinct of an animal unconsciously running from danger. As he ran, whither he knew not, tons of falling rock suddenly closed up the path behind him only to be as suddenly rent asunder with a terrific report.

"The magazine!" gasped Gerald, and lunged forward.

His good genius brought him up short, near the lift, which descended to the back of the Sun Temple. The rope still stretched taut to the chamber at the bottom of the shaft, and down this he slid, the wire running like fire through his hands, skinning them raw. At the bottom he shot off the roof of the lift into the lower gallery. It was thick with sulphurous smoke, whirling and curling. Into this he plunged, and half blinded wheeled out on to the terrace before the temple. Facing him was a lake of seething fire. The city of Yayacarui was swallowed up in an ocean of boiling lava. The flames soared to the roof of the cavern, and therefrom fell blocks of granite, splash into the molten sea.

The palace of the Inca, the home of Mama Ocllo, both were in ruins, and red, yellow, and blue flames, tongues of orange and scarlet fire flickered snake-like through the massive stones. Torrents of boiling water spouted down, hissing savagely as they came into contact with the incandescent sea. The dead lay disorderly on the terraces; the living knelt, and stood, and grovelled, silent with fear, motionless even as the dead. Some offered vain prayers to Heaven—to a heaven they could not see; and a few, mad with fear, flung themselves into the glowing hell.

The earth swayed like a cradle, heaved like a disturbed sea. Exulting thunders crashed full-voiced under the vault; waves of molten matter leaped and spattered the terraces with wild-fire spume. Gerald advanced. A spurt of molten metal drove him back. He retreated; and an abyss yawned at his feet. On all sides danger; on every side death. He leaped sideways to avoid a wave of fire, and finally sprang across a chasm and took a temporary refuge in the Temple. Here the fire was not; but the great doors were down, and the interior was like day from the lurid glow of the lava sea.

On all sides, the dying and the dead—at the altars, before the shrines, grasping the image of the Sun, clutching the silver crescent of the moon. Around in grim contrast sat the mummies in their gilded seats—indifferent, ghastly. In the centre was a bier, upon which lay the form of Inca Sutic-toco, dressed regally, and crowned and covered with jewels. Across it lay a woman in a white dress, with outstretched arms and clasped hands.

“Mama Oclo!”

She sprang to her feet, wild-eyed, colourless, her beauty distorted with terror. For one moment she stood, rigid as a corpse; the next she stumbled towards him, clutching spasmodically at the air.

“Viracocha, ah, dear God!”

Those around raised a shrill wail, shaking their fists at the false deity who had brought this doom upon them. But none strove to harm him. They resumed their aimless prayers, their mutterings, their blasphemies. No longer a queen, but very much a woman, Mama Oclo clung to Gerald’s breast and sobbed bitterly. But under all her dread and anguish there ran an undercurrent of joy.

“You do love me—not that girl? You came back for me? Ah, dear one!”

His face was wet with her tears. Out of sheer pity he had not the heart to undeceive her. He was lost; she was lost. He felt that, could she have known, Molly would have pardoned and condoned what he did. Mama Oclo was almost happy.

“You are mine—all mine,” she whispered, her breath on his cheek. “Death has brought me to you, you to me; lovely death; only he can part us now. My arms shall hold you for ever—yes, for ever. Con has taken from me my Empire; he has destroyed my people; gold, silver and jewels, all have returned to the depths whence they came. But I have you, my heart, and all else may go—so long as I have you. Kiss me before we die.”

He kissed her. “Come; there may be a chance for us even yet,” he said.

“No; no; there is no chance. And I would not have you save me. You would go back to her. Let this be our bridal chamber. Here I hold you for ever.”

“Puca—where is he?”

“Gone, gone. He fled among the first. I could not leave my people. Whither should I go? I who am their queen! I have lost the world for love, my soul. Kiss me, kiss me again——” She broke off with a shriek and hid her face in his breast.

A meteor of fire shot through the doorway. Like a thunderbolt it struck the image of the Sun, and wrenching the sheet of gold from its setting hurled it crumpled and twisted into the depths. As the wor-

shippers wailed and scattered the great building oscillated. Part of the roof fell with a crash, crushing many. Gerald carried the woman out of the way of the falling débris, and took shelter behind a mummy. Then fell a rain of cinders on the figures covering round the altar. Maimed and seared, they yelled piteously. Then the façade toward the terrace rocked and fell outward, and a whirl of dust and smoke and flickering fire came up. Some of the mummies toppled over and lay stiffly amongst the writhing figures on the floor. Then they beheld a vision of Hell through the smoke, rent asunder by mighty winds. Mama Ocllo shrank back with a cry.

"Not that death; oh, God! Gerald! Gerald!"

He wrapped one arm around her shuddering form, and clung to the mummy, as though seeking aid from the dead. It happened to be the mummy of John Prynne.

"Be brave, be brave; God is over all," he cried.

"Hark; hark! See! the floor! the ground!"

The pavement yawned—parted in the centre. A mighty crack ran zig-zag from right to left; and the fumes of Tophet rose from the fathomless depths. Then it forced itself upon Gerald with awful persistency, that the Temple was built over the sacred river. Still clinging to the mummy of John Prynne he dragged back both it and the woman. But the earth rose behind them like a tidal wave, and they were hurled into the abyss.

In close embrace the three turned over and over, clashing and striking against each other—the living and the dead. In an instant they plunged into the sacred river. The waters were still cold, and for that Gerald rejoiced for one half second ere they closed over his head. He was dizzy, blinded, battered and bruised; but he still had his senses about him. He rose to the surface, and kept himself and the woman afloat by clinging to the mummy. The racing current bore them away down stream at express speed. Mama Ocllo was unconscious; but it was possible, if he could only retain his hold of her, that having escaped so much they might even now escape all. He prayed God they might reach the vent by the pueblo.

After what seemed to him many hours, they were driven by a side current into a kind of backwater, where they struck against a rock. The rock rose ruggedly out of the water, but on the surface it was comparatively flat. Weak though he was, he managed to drag Mama Ocllo on to it. Against the crag the mummy rocked and bobbed like a canoe. Shivering with cold Gerald sat, ever hugging the body of the woman. She still lived. She had been stunned in falling through the Temple floor, but her heart beat feebly and her breath came faintly. In the gloom, profound and almost tangible, he could not see her face. He had a flask of brandy in his pocket—prepared against flight—(how long ago did that all seem now!) and with this he moistened her lips. He wetted her nostrils too with the powerful spirit, and at last she moaned and stirred. A draught poured down her throat restored her scattered senses and she awoke to the horrors of their situation with a long sigh.

"Viracocha! Gerald!"

"I am here. Do you not feel my arms around you?"

"Dear arms!" Her voice died away with exhaustion; but a second draught of the spirit brought her round again. "Gerald, where are we?"

"In the sacred river. You remember, we fell through the floor of

the Temple. I managed to drag you on to this rock. We are safe so far."

"Safe!" She laughed mirthlessly; then she moaned again. "Oh, my head! my head!"

"Are you hurt?" He passed his hand through her streaming hair. There was a deep cut on the side of the head. He had nothing wherewith to bandage it—save his handkerchief. He was afraid she must soon sink from sheer exhaustion. There was but little brandy left in his flask; but although his throat seemed as if it would close up with dryness he would not touch it. With the utmost tenderness he bound up her head with his handkerchief. She sighed again, and kissed his hand.

"Gerald, my Gerald; how good you are. This is the end—the end."

"I hope against hope!"

"We die together. God is good. You are all mine—all!"

In the distance they could still hear the sullen murmur of the eruption; but they were now out of immediate danger from it. On that barren rock, in the cold darkness, with the river racing past, they sat clasped in each other's arms. For the woman, love was enough; but the man's heart ached within him. Burnt, wounded, battered, starving, and weak—all these things were as nothing to the mental pain he suffered.

Half delirious, yet wholly happy, Mama Oclo babbled all the while in his arms. He was hers for ever; his arms would hold her to the last; she would die in his embrace. All her woes were more than compensated for by that. It was as if God had relented, to give her one last hour of supreme joy.

Gerald could keep no count of the flight of time. It seemed to him days since they had reached the rock. And although she never complained, he knew the woman in his arms must suffer terribly. The pangs of thirst and hunger would not much longer be denied. For himself, already he was conscious of a horrible gnawing sensation at his stomach, and he tightened his belt. All his brandy he gave to the woman. Her endurance amazed him. Weak as she was from loss of blood and want of food, she clung to him and to life with every show of cheerfulness. He was for launching themselves once more on the stream and trusting to its carrying them to daylight. But she was not willing.

"Let us die here in peace," she said. "You are not afraid?"

"No; I am not afraid. But it would perhaps be easier to drown than to starve."

"Anything, everything is easy with you beside me. But if we are saved she would get you again; you would go back to her! No; no; let us die together, here alone."

So hour by hour, day by day, the inevitable death drew nearer. They sat bearing their privations as they best could, with the mummy ever at their feet. Gerald did not know that it was the mummy of John Prynne he had so clung to as a life preserver, and that therefore the Mother of Emeralds was within reach of his hand. What was the Mother of Emeralds to him now, if he had known?

The woman persistently refused to leave the rock. There they both should die. Death together, would she have, a thousand times rather than life apart. In death he was hers—in life another's. He could feel her body growing colder and heavier in his arms. She became light-headed and wandering. She inveighed against the Supreme for having destroyed her work, and that of her forefathers. Then she would weep and laugh

hysterically, thanking her God that Gerald was by her side. Then it seemed to strike her that he would fain leave her.

"You hate me, Viracocha, because I keep you here to die. You want to go back to *her*. Go, go; you do not love me. She is your life. I am nothing to you—less than nothing."

She turned on him once and tried to stab him lest some chance should save his life and so restore him to the other woman. He took the dagger gently from her feeble hands and flung it mid-stream. As she heard the sullen splash of it, she kissed his hand, imploring pardon. "But indeed it is born of my great love for you. You are not angry? I worship you; you are my god, my cruel, cruel god. Gerald! Gerald—I go. Follow, Gerald."

She died peacefully. By that time he was so weak that he could hardly hold her in his arms. As in a dream, her voice came to him—sounded in his ears faint and low as though ever so far distant. She tried to clasp his neck, but could not.

"I die, I cannot live. Darling, I must leave you. Say for the last time you love me."

"I love you," said Gerald, weakly.

"Now, I go happy; you will join me soon. Oh, the darkness, the terrible darkness! And I, a daughter of the Sun! My people, my kingdom; gone, gone! Holy One, Con, God of the Abyss, take me to your home. Gerald! Not that woman! You are mine, mine. Ah, my beloved, my——"

Her voice died away in drowsy murmurs, and she scarce gave a sign of life. With the last dregs of brandy he moistened her lips; but it did not revive her. She was just able to press his hand faintly. Then a long drawn sigh, and it was over with her. The beautiful, imperious, loving woman was dead.

Her lifeless body still in his arms, he fell into a stupor. He knew not how long he remained so, but when he came to himself he was so feeble he could scarcely move. In stretching out his hand to get some water he over-balanced, and rolled on to the mummy. Together once again the living and the dead fell into the river. Half unconsciously he clung on to it. A swirl of the current wafted it gently along until the full stream caught it fiercely. Down they went swiftly and more swiftly as the current gained power. Gerald heard a dull roaring; lights flashed before his eyes. Then he became wholly unconscious. And in the gloom, on the hard bare rock under the ribs of the earth, the last daughter of the Incas lay dead, and royally sepulchred in the heart of the everlasting hills. Her fate was fixed; but Hazel swept away on the unknown tide! What would be his doom? And these things the gods wrought in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"THE JUSTICE OF THE GODS."

THREE months later the Huascar Hotel at Lima was the richer by two guests from over-seas. One a genial Irish priest; the other, as pretty an English girl as you could wish to meet. Molly, and Molly alone had done it; and that for her own peace of mind. Without news of Gerald for many months, and knowing from his last Cuzco letter that he was

starting inland, she had fretted herself into a state of physical illness over the probable dangers that he might have encountered.

All Father Tom's explanations, and arguments, and comfortings went for nothing. Molly wanted to know what her lover was doing, and insisted upon travelling to Lima—and beyond it if necessary—to find out. Thus it came about that they sojourned at the City of Kings.

Mrs. Amherst was not of the party. She characterised the whole proceeding as "mad," and not even her solicitude for Dick availed to drag her from the comforts of her own country. And so Mrs. Amherst was established at Bath, be it said, on a most handsome allowance, and Molly and her uncle enjoyed their trip only the more, as they well knew, for her absence. Great as was her anxiety for the man who had come into her life so closely only to drop completely out of it, Molly kept wonderfully cheerful. The novelties of the journey were manifold, and furthermore Providence had arranged that the travellers should meet with a surprise almost as soon as they set foot in Peru.

Father Tom, with racial haste, lost no time in commencing search for Hazel. He saw the British consul; he wrote to Cuzco; and caused enquiries to be made amongst the Indians in both capitals. But nothing could be heard of Gerald or of Dick save that they had gone up the Apurimac and had not returned—some added were not expected to return. Then Fate sent along a tall, bearded, and bronzed man in a shabby khaki suit, very much the worse for wear, who introduced himself as one Parry. He had heard of their enquiries, he said, through the consul. Hazel, he told them, was lying ill in a small native fonda on the outskirts of Lima. Whereat Molly cried and laughed in the same breath; and demanded to be led instantly to the small native fonda.

"You'll find him changed, miss," Parry said cautiously, as Molly hurriedly put on hat and cloak; "it's been a case of touch and go."

The girl's trembling fingers ceased to busy themselves, and she turned white. She could not speak. Father Tom made the enquiry.

"He's not dyin', you'll be after sayin', Mr. Parry?"

"Well, he's not exactly dying," replied the engineer, raking his beard. "But he won't be himself for many a long day. You see, we've been through a tidy lot. It was only by Almighty Providence that we escaped!"

"Ill—my Gerald—oh, take me at once!"

"An' Dick?" cried O'Dwyer anxiously, "what of the boy? Amherst's his name, an' a mighty trouble he has been to the mother who bore him."

Parry removed the hat he had assumed. "He made a good end, sir."

"Oh, poor Dick!" wept Molly. "Dead?"

Parry's face answered them.

"Holy Mary, have him in charge! Blessed Peter, plead for the poor sinner!" said the priest. He looked up to heaven, crossed himself, and muttered a prayer. "Ah, the lonely mother—"

"She had a noble son." Parry glanced at Molly. "It was for another he laid down his life."

"Gerald!" cried the girl, "for Gerald. Dear Dick—kind Dick! To die for Ger—Ger—Gerald! Oh, uncle, uncle!"

"Whist now!" said the priest, to hide his emotion. "Can ye give me the poor boy's story, Mr. Parry?"

"Gerald is waiting, uncle."

"Molly, darlin', let us know all before we see him; else you'll be askin' him too much. A sick man has no strength to talk, poor soul."

"Oh, as to that," said Parry, sitting down again, "Mr. Hazel has got over his fever, and is perfectly himself, though, of course, he's not over strong yet. But in a short while, no doubt, he'll be able to tell you the whole story from the time of his arrival in the buried city."

"Look at that, now! Do ye mane the place exists?"

"It *did* exist," replied the engineer, "but a volcano settled it some months ago. I was held captive there for fifteen years. 'The Arabian Nights' is a fool to the story I can tell you."

And Parry, in his slow, unromantic way, related his own history, Gerald's history, and the history of poor Dick Amherst. Careful not to wound the susceptibilities of Molly, he suppressed all mention of Mama Ocllo's love for Hazel; but in every other respect his account of the life and catastrophe at Yayacarui was accurate and detailed. He told them how he himself had escaped, and how Gerald came to be in Lima.

"When the falling rocks parted me from Mr. Hazel," he said, "I thought he was done for, and made off to save myself. I followed a crowd of Indians through the smoke and fire. They were seeking the secret entrance; and although many of the galleries were blocked with débris, managed to fetch it. I was at their heels and got into the open air with them. Then another and a greater earthquake shook down tons of rock at the gates; and shut up for ever those who had not escaped. I was the only white man left alive; but the Indians were too dazed and terror-struck to take notice of me. With them I found my way down the mountains to the pueblo at the mouth of the sacred river; and stayed there for a few days, considering how I could best get back to civilization: I never expected to see Mr. Hazel again, but one morning the Indians told me that a white man's body had been shot out of the river vent. I hastened to the spot, and found Mr. Hazel clutching on to a mummy, which had, no doubt, floated him down the current. How he got into the sacred river, I learned later. As it was, I had him carried ashore, mummy and all. Some of the Indians wanted to kill him as a false god; but others were afraid that more misfortunes might happen to them if he were slain. In the end they put us in a canoe, gave us food, and sent us down the river. I forgot to say that I revived Mr. Hazel, but he fell ill of fever and several times nearly died. We brought the mummy along with us, and for many days drifted down to the Ucayali. At Santos Todos I lay up for a time, as Mr. Hazel was—as I thought—dying; but with the aid of a Jesuit missionary I managed to pull him round. The priest sent us by river and land to Lima, in charge of a convoy of natives, who looked after us well. Mr. Hazel was carried in a litter, and gradually regained strength in the pure mountain air. On arriving here we had very little money, as much had been lost; so we put up at this native ranche, and intended to stay there until Mr. Hazel was well enough to go to England. But, of course, now that you have arrived, it will be all right."

"Oh, thank God—thank God he is alive!"

"Do you know what kept him alive, Miss Prynne? Well, it was the thought of you, and the task you had set him. He went out to seek your father; and he found him!"

"Alive do you mane?" cried Father Tom, with a roar.

"No. Mr. Prynne died some years ago," said Parry sadly. "I was with him when he died. We brought back his body."

"The mummy!" cried Molly, aghast.

"Yes, his mummy—wonderfully preserved. Looks like life. It's at our digs, Miss Prynne. And now you know the whole story."

"Poor Dick," murmured Molly, who had wept freely when Parry told of that heroic end. "His death indeed redeemed his follies."

"God be good to him. Molly, he was a brave man. Ah, m' dear, the blessed saints will have a care of his golden soul. It's masses by the dozen I'll have said for that same. Blessed Mary, it's one myself I'll celebrate."

A general move was made to the door; for Molly was too anxious to see Gerald to be further restrained. Her father's death seemed to affect her but little. She could hardly be expected to cherish any very clear memory of one who had left home when she was a little child, and was scarcely more than a lay figure in her imagination. That he should be dead, that his body should have been returned to civilization, were matters rather of wonderment than for poignant regret. She was concerned more with the thought of poor Dick's noble sacrifice. Again and again on the way to Hazel's sick-bed she made Parry repeat the story, and each time she wept afresh. The prodigal's heroic death atoned for all that had gone before, and henceforward Molly treasured his memory tenderly in her heart. Nor was Father O'Dwyer less affected. He bade Molly take note that none should judge a man, even the worst, until his life was rounded off by death. Thus were Dick's short-comings interred with his bones; and those who knew him best, who had condemned him most, had no thoughts of him but were kindly and reverent.

"The boy knew what friendship should be, God bless him!" said Father Tom, "an' he did for Hazel what Hazel would have done for him. *Alter ipse amicus!*" That was Dick's threnody and epitaph. He would have desired no better."

It was a new and strange lover whom Molly found stretched on a narrow bed in the bare cool room of the fonda. His face was yellow, lean, haggard beyond telling, and a rough beard masked his chin. With sunken eyes and listless hands he lay shorn of his vigorous manhood, and of the graces of his youth. Foolish Molly could not restrain her impatience to see that dear face once more, and when she entered the room he was wholly unprepared. One amazed look and he fainted. When he was brought round he could not speak. He wept and held her hand in his, and thanked God that he had lived to look again into those sweet eyes. She kissed him with many tears and many prayers, and Father Tom blew his nose frequently to disguise his emotion. He sat on one side of the bed; Molly on the other. It was too much altogether for the bluff engineer, who withdrew.

"But it's no time for talk at all, at all," said the good father. "We'll jist look at ye, an' consider the mercies of the Blessed Mary, whose care you have been. Ah, now, don't be openin' your mouth, my dear. The good man has told us of your troubles and the poor boy's death."

"God bless him!" murmured Gerald, the tears still in his eyes.

"He will—oh, He will, Gerald. By saving you, my darling, he saved himself."

The visitors stayed only half an hour, for Parry came to turn them out. His patient, he said, was not in a condition to stand excitement.

But Molly went away with Dick's letter in her hand ; and cried bitterly over the hurried scrawl. It contained an earnest farewell, an earnest desire that she should marry Gerald, and that " poor Dick " should not be forgotten. Molly showed that tear-stained, blood-stained letter to no one. She kept it as her most sacred possession. Mrs. Amherst never saw it. It was a thing apart ; a holy relic ; the testament of a noble soul. Dick had lived a scamp, and died a martyr—and greater than a martyr, since he had given up his life not for his own weal, but for the love of his brother man. Ever from that day was the hero remembered in Molly's prayers.

The weeks went by and Gerald grew stronger. The sight of Molly was the best of medicine, and restored him to health as nothing else could have done. His cheeks rounded and flushed with colour, as his heart-beat waxed in strength ; the old brightness returned to his eyes ; and his frame regained its former symmetry and vigour. With characteristic independence he would not allow himself to be removed from his lowly inn until he was ready to depart for England. But Molly and Father Tom paid daily visits, bringing all that was necessary in the way of comfort and cure. Parry was, in truth, a trifle jealous of the invasion ; but tolerated it for Molly's sake. Her tender nursing and the genial presence of O'Dwyer did much towards assisting recovery. As he grew in strength he told them a story so stirring that Molly shuddered and wept at the trials her lover had undergone. But her eye brightened as she heard of his indomitable pluck and perseverance detailed by the engineer to spare the hero's blushes.

About the disposal of John Prynne's remains there was much argument. Father Tom wished them brought to Hagbourne and laid in the family vault ; but Molly, horrified at the travesty of life presented by the stuffed and painted mummy, was anxious that it should be put underground with all despatch. In the end O'Dwyer came round also to this opinion ; so one morning the poor fragment of Molly's father was buried with all Christian solemnities. O'Dwyer recited the prayers of the elder Church over the grave, and had masses said for the soul of the dead. Nor did the good priest forget Dick. He was the celebrant on more than one occasion ; and interceded with the saints for that noble if erring man. It mattered little to the kind-hearted father that both Prynne and Amherst died in the Protestant faith. He gave no hint of that to his brother priests, but said his prayers for the dead and trusted that Peter would overlook their not being of his peculiar flock.

Then it was that Gerald displayed the Mother of Emeralds to Molly, and related how Dick had hidden it in the bosom of the dead, wherein it had travelled safely to Lima. She had all a woman's innate love for jewels, and cried out for pleasure at the sight of the magnificent gem, worth a king's ransom, and worthy of any woman's beauty. But although Gerald gave her the stone, he deemed it ill-omened, and hated to see it in her hand.

One day when they were alone, he told her the truth about the princess ; and how she had died in the belief that she had his love. Molly flushed and paled as she listened. She did not altogether like it and was honest enough to say so. But Gerald pleaded the situation ; and the loneliness of the woman he had deceived into dying happily.

" She lost all, darling ! " he said, " father, empire, people, home, life itself. Ah, Molly, dearest, you do not grudge the poor woman that one

hour of happiness? If she sinned greatly, she suffered greatly; and I could not do less than help her to die in peace."

"So long as you did not really and truly——"

"My own, there is none—has never been any one in the world for me, but you. What I did I did in sheer humanity—that she might pass away peacefully and content. You are not angry?"

"No—o," replied Molly, doubtfully, "poor woman, I should not grudge her a crumb out of my plenty. Was she very beautiful?"

Hazel smiled. "Not in my eyes," said he promptly, "but common opinion held her to be beautiful. Her misfortunes were equal to her beauty. She lies dead and unburied in the heart of the mountains. I don't know if she could have a more royal tomb."

"You kissed her?"

"I kissed her as she died. When she was in the bloom of health and in the plenitude of her power, I refused her love; but in those last moments—Molly, what would your generous heart have had me do?"

Molly pouted and refused to meet his eyes. It was hard that this savage princess should have had any part in her Gerald. But in the end the girl's kind heart triumphed, and with tears she threw herself into her lover's arms.

"You were right, darling; you were right. I—I—I would not have had it otherwise."

"Ah, now I recognise the Molly who loves me! Don't cry, dearest."

"I am a horrid selfish girl," sobbed Molly. "But I'll never be mean enough to be jealous of that poor creature. Oh Gerald, Gerald!"

"There—there! All that is ended, Molly, my heart. We are together for the rest of our lives, and you can afford to forgive the dead."

Then Parry came in with the news that he had seen Puca lurking about the Indian quarter of Lima. Gerald was doubtful.

"I know Mama Oclo said that he escaped," he said, "but in the weak state he was, I don't see how he could have got so far as this place. Are you sure you were not mistaken, Parry?"

"Quite," insisted the engineer. "It was Puca I saw. It is not easy to mistake Puca. He ran away as soon as he cast eyes on me. I know he got away from Yayacarui, for the Indians said so. No doubt he has come here to do you some mischief."

"How's that? We are not in Yayacarui now."

"Don't know, chief. Puca's a spiteful little devil; and always hated you; he wouldn't mind slipping a knife into you."

"Oh, I'll be on the high seas soon, and he won't have the chance."

But Parry still shook his head, knowing the malignity of the dwarf too well. He had not lived fifteen years in Yayacarui for nothing; and Puca, cunning, spiteful, angered at Gerald's safety, was not to be despised. In future Parry kept a close watch on his patient. At times he saw the dwarf, who always evaded him. Fearing danger, Parry urged Father Tom to push on the preparations for departure. Not until Gerald was out of Lima would his mind be at rest.

And what happened proved that the engineer had not under-rated the malevolence of the creature. One afternoon Gerald was taking a siesta. Parry snoozed in an arm-chair on the far side of the bed. Molly had just left, and the Mother of Emeralds, with which she had been playing, lay on the table at Hazel's elbow. In the hot noon-day the window was open, protected only by a mosquito curtain. The heat was

stiffing, and Parry could not sleep soundly. His light slumber was broken by the sound of a cautious footstep. Opening his eyes lazily, he saw Puca slip in through the window, carrying a bare knife. He alighted softly on the floor with naked feet, and moved with the sinuous grace of a cat towards the bed. Parry held his breath, knowing that the dwarf could not see him in the shadow. As the creature was about to fling himself forward, he saw him halt with manifest surprise. The green gleam of the emerald sparkling in the pencil of a sunbeam caught his eye. Amazed at sight of the palladium of Yayacarui in so unexpected a place, he was held motionless for an instant. That momentary paralysis afforded Parry the opportunity he wanted. In a second he had vaulted across the bed and seized Puca by the throat. The dwarf screeched and spat like a wild cat. Gerald woke in alarm, trembling in every nerve; and saw Parry rolling over with something which snapped and snarled. Too weak to assist he could only look on helplessly. But at once he recognised Parry's adversary.

"You devil!" cried the engineer, breathlessly, "commit murder, would you? I'll kill you! Ah, you can sting, you wasp!"

Puca stabbed him in the arm. The momentary pain relaxed the engineer's grip; and Puca slipped like an eel from under him. Then with a bound the dwarf was on Gerald, who evaded the down stroke of the knife by rolling to the far side of the bed. Up again in a second, Parry plucked back Puca and flung him across the room. Shrieking out Spanish maledictions, Puca rebounded from the wall like an india rubber ball, and knocked over the table on which lay the gem. It fell, and he seized the glittering stone with a cry of delight.

"You live, but you lose the Mother of Emeralds, cursed one!"

He pitched the knife skilfully at Gerald, but Parry intercepted it.

"May Supay burn you, and sit on your heart. Devil, brute——"

His voice became inarticulate with rage, and he dodged Parry like a Jack-in-the-box. Lowering his head he rushed at the engineer, struck him like a battering-ram, and threw him on the floor. Then with a triumphant yell he sprang through the window. When Parry recovered his breath, Puca was gone.

Furious with rage the engineer pursued him; but the creature had vanished, nevermore to be seen by those who had sojourned with him in the buried city. Gone too was the Mother of Emeralds, and with it its ill fortune.

After a futile scamper Parry returned to Gerald, and found him unconscious on the floor. Much alarmed he sent a boy for Molly, Father Tom, and the Doctor. They arrived just as Gerald was reviving; and Parry, with much wealth of detail, related what had happened.

Molly at once insisted that Gerald was not safe in the fonda, and within the hour he was bestowed in the Huascar Hotel under her immediate care.

Parry hunted everywhere for Puca and the gem, but without success. Pressed with questions the faces of the Indians became blank as a sheet of paper; and they declared their ignorance of the little man's whereabouts. Puca was gone—far from the ken of the white man; and with him the sacred jewel. What he did with it, whither he bore it, neither Parry nor Hazel could learn. Indeed they had not much time in which to make enquiries, for within the week the whole party were on board a P. N. C. liner steaming for Panama.

The land of miracle, of marvel, of adventure, was a memory of the past.

In a deck chair reclined Gerald, comfortably wrapt up against the keen sea wind ; beside him sat Molly and the ever-genial Father Tom. The white peaks of the Andes glowed with many colours in the sunset, and the eyes of all were fixed on the great hills.

"Ah, well," said O'Dwyer, "it's good-bye to Peru, and all your glory. Ye go barer than when ye came, Hazel."

Molly sighed. She could not help regretting the loss of the gem.

"No, Father, I go richer than I came. If I have lost the Mother of Emeralds, I have gained a wife whose worth is above rubies."

"And whose eyes are like diamonds," suggested Parry, taking to compliments in his old age.

"I shall blush as red as the sunset if you talk so," cried Molly, suiting the action to the word. "Oh, Gerald, to think I sent you into such dangers ! I can never make enough of you."

The night shut down on the sea ; and the great vessel ploughed her way through the black ocean, carrying them to home and happiness. The coasts of Golden Peru faded—melted in sea-mist, grey and chill. Far away a mighty peak rose against the clear shining of the stars, and caught the radiance of the rising moon. It was Chimborazo.

"The tomb of Mama Ocllo !" said Gerald.

"And of poor Dick," whispered Molly.

THE END.

