

FOR JACINTA

CHAPTER I

JACINTA BROWN

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when sobrecargo Austin boarded the little mail-boat *Estremadura* as she lay rolling at anchor on the long, moon-lit heave that worked into the roadstead of Santa Cruz, Palma. Sobrecargo means much the same thing as purser, and Austin was an Englishman, though the *Estremadura* was to all intents and purposes a Spanish steamer. She traded round the islands of the Canary archipelago with mules and camels, tomatoes, bananas, onions, and seasick English tourists, as fortune favoured her. Now, as the heavily sealed document Austin carried in his pocket declared, she was to sail for Las Palmas, Grand Canary, with the Cuban mail, by the gracious permission of the young King of Spain.

He had trouble on getting on board of her, for there were a good many bullocks swimming about her side waiting until the red-capped crew should heave them on board beneath the derrick-boom by means of a rope twisted round their horns. It probably hurt the bullocks, and now and then one succumbed to a broken neck during the operation; but the Castilian, who can face his losses placidly, is not, as a rule, particularly merciful to his beast. There were also stray sheep, goats, and donkeys, as well as olive-