

A closer view dispelled the first notion of fierceness, for from the ruggedly marked brows looked a pair of dark eyes, clear, frank, well lined about with crow's-feet, and enlivened by good humor.

While he conversed with those nearest, the bracelet circulated from hand to hand, was scrutinized, bitten, rung upon the tables to test its metal, and was finally handed back by a seedy-looking soldier, who observed: "By my faith, Señor Cristoval, that bauble hath the proper color. There is more of yellow in its complexion than I've seen for many a day. Thou mayst set me down. I go to Peru. *Hola! camaradas*, d'ye hear? I go to Peru. Who will follow?"

His example and the lure of the gold had their sure effect. In a moment the officer was busy with his pen, while an eager group leaned over the table to watch as he wrote their names and answers to his brisk questions. Their enthusiasm spread among the loungers outside, and before it subsided a dozen or more enlisted for the expedition. Most of the recruits were half-starved fellows who had idled about the colony for months, unable to secure employment for their swords since the rebellion in Nicaragua had been suppressed, and disdainful of work less honorable. A few were fully equipped, but many had sold, pawned, or gambled away their arms and armor, and had only their rapiers, which they retained as a necessity. During this first day of recruiting, a score had been sent to the temporary quarters, with instructions first to gather up or locate whatever of equipment they could find.

Candles had been brought, the room had not been emptied, and the officer was arranging his papers, when he heard the sound of hoofs and the voice of the halberdier, evidently addressing a rider.

"*Hola*, Pedro! Blessed Faith! Is it thou?"