

This particular evening the ceremony of the parade received less than usual attention. Two ships had entered the harbor the day before, bearing news and plunder from Francisco Pizarro's expedition to the coast of South America. The inn at the side of the plaza was full of men. Its wineshop was overflowing, but the rattle of dice, the oaths, and controversy were wanting. In front lounged a crowd, thickening at the door, where swayed lazily a banner displaying a device new to heraldry, — the arms of Pizarro. At the portal stood a halberdier in corselet and morion fresh-burnished, recounting with vaunt and gasconade an alluring tale of rapine, which was heard with varying degrees of interest, credulity, or scepticism. There was no enthusiasm. Some sauntered doubtfully away. A few heeded, and finally entered the door. Within, there was more animation.

Behind a table near the rear, leaning comfortably against the wall, his legs sprawled under the board and his hands thrust into his belt, sat a sturdy cavalier. He was listening with some amusement to the excited comments of the men about him as they passed a golden bracelet of barbaric design which he had tendered for their inspection. He was between thirty-five and forty years old — perhaps nearer the latter. His sunbrowned countenance gave the impression of being stern, almost fierce. A close-shorn beard, nearly black, covered a firm, well-formed jaw, and with the trim cut of his hair, suggested a care of person conspicuous among the rough-looking campaigners in the room. The upward twist of his mustachios and strongly aquiline nose gave his face a pronounced military character, borne out presently, when he straightened up from his lounging attitude, by the erect bearing and squareness of shoulder that belong to the soldierly calling.