

A CAST FOR FORTUNE.

(Continued from last page.)

"It is best to let the future take care of itself," replied Geoffrey, rising. This was the last subject he would discuss.

"There was a tender farewell, for the mother and son were truly devoted to each other, and then, with a great sense of relief, Derwent found himself speeding as fast as steam could carry him toward the distant, mysterious land of New Spain.

He met Morell in the city of Mexico; and up to that point he had been in the Alameda all seemed going well with the negotiations for the mine. Then suddenly an obstacle arose, a man who stood in the way, a real obstacle, or merely a trick or trade, Derwent felt himself unable to determine: but his firmness seemed to have an effect, for a day or two afterwards Morell announced that they were ready for investigation.

"You will go to Guadalajara," he said, where Fernandez is ready to make all arrangements for showing you the mine. You will have to make a trip of sixty or seventy miles on mule-back into a very rough country; but I suppose you don't mind that?"

"Not in the least," said Derwent, quietly. "I don't think I will have you up—you look like a man who could stand hardship pretty well—and you will be rewarded by the sight of such a mine as ours does not see in the States. Don't try to talk to the owner. It will do no good. Let Fernandez manage them. All you have to do is to verify our statements about the width of the veins and value of the ore. If the property mine, we will keep you from getting possession of it. I will give you a letter to Fernandez and telegraph besides that you are on the way, so that he will be ready for you. I hope all will go well."

"At last I am concerned," there is no reason why all should not go well," said Derwent, who was mentally set down by the other as the coolest person he had ever seen engaged for the first time in such a business. His mind had undergone a rapid and complete change with regard to the young man during the few days of their personal intercourse. Anticipating complete ignorance and an unlimited capacity for imposition, of which, however, he had virtuously determined not to take advantage, he found an opinion to Senor Fernandez in characteristic terms.

"There is no good in attempting any tricks with him," he wrote. "He is wide awake and shrewd to the last degree. We must do a square business with him, if we are to do any at all, and be satisfied with a moderate profit. I am sorry that we did not put a higher price on the mine, but there is no hope of advancing it now. He will pay what we expect, or nothing at all, and we must be sure of that. Keep Barren quiet if you can. As for the mine, it can stand on its own legs. I have no fear of that."

"Proposed by actions like these," Derwent finally took leave of the city of Mexico and set his face toward the beautiful city, with the Spanish name, which lies in the lovely valley of the Lerma.

CHAPTER III. Seen first in the light of a sunset which filled the whole earth and sky with rosy tints, Guadalajara, with its slender towers and shining domes rising out of the verdant plain, seemed to Derwent like a city of a dream, so fair and white and graceful as if built of marble and ivory instead of common bricks and mortar.

The Perla del Occidente, a friendly Mexican fellow-traveller told him, was called; and the postman named told the appearance well, as if they stepped in from the north, the air of its cathedral rang against the pellucid sky. His Byzantine domes glowing with iridescent colors, shrouded against leading to the gates from all directions, and exquisite masses of square heights, the beautiful expanse of the great valley which encompassed it.

"What a picture!" said Derwent to himself as he crossed his hat and looked out of the railway-car to take it in more fully. "And what a country!" he added, as his glance swept from the pebbly towers to the wide, business horizon, over miles of level plain covered with fields green and set with gleaming villages. "As beautiful as Arcadia, as picturesque as I remember the East. I really hadn't the faintest idea of what I should find here!" he ended, as the train starting the city walls and made its slow way to the station.

"You were speaking for Comopolita," said the conductor, as it finally stopped. Here is the place. And he pointed to a tall, slender Mexican, wearing a short, headed jacket, and the name of the hotel in large letters around his shoulders.

This dignified person took Derwent's value, invited him by a gesture to follow, and threaded his way quietly through the crowd toward the place of exit. Descending a carriage, with the exquisite evening air, made walking a delight. Derwent followed his guide along, a street which led past a beautiful old church with an elaborately sculptured front of brownstones, through a lovely plain green with trees, and fragrant with roses and violets, where a military band was playing and numbers of people were sitting and walking, up a crowded thoroughfare lined with handsome buildings, and finally into the courtyard of a large Spanish house, where at the head of the broad stone steps he was met by an English-speaking landlord, who showed him of all further necessity to think for himself.

An hour later he was seated at one of the small tables placed invitingly around the gallery which overlooked the large inner court, with Senor Fernandez opposite him. The scene was altogether charming to eyes fresh from a northern latitude. The polished tiles that formed the floor of the wide gallery stretched to a stone balustrade where broad-leaved tropical plants were set in large pots, while through the great arches that sprang from pillar to pillar the dark violet sky, sown with golden stars, looked down. Around the gallery various other parties were dining at the tables set here and there, waiters, waitresses, or oriental slaves, skinned lightly back and forth over the smooth pavement, the air was soft as a curve, and most important point—the cuisine was excellent.

In the intervals of doing justice to it, Derwent studied the appearance of the man to whom Morell had consigned him. Senor Fernandez was probably of middle age, but he bore his years lightly. A slender, dark man, well bred, well dressed, with all the courteous suavity of his country it was impossible not to find him agreeable; yet Derwent was conscious of a sentiment of the trust which he could only account for by believing that it sprang from a warning given him before he entered Mexico by a man who knew the country well.

"The men," he said, "whom I advise you to look most sharply after in business dealings are Mexicans who have learned their business methods in the States. It is a sad fact that in the matter of honesty they are very likely to be demoralized. Does not I never regretted sending a native Mexican, but when you find one who is thoroughly Americanized it is generally safe to watch him."

This warning from a shrewd practical man had struck Derwent as rather an amusing commentary on the higher civilization which at another moment the speaker would have been ready to arrogate to himself and his people. But he remembered it when Morell said to him, "You'll find Fernandez speaks English perfectly—he lived sixteen years in California—and is thoroughly conversant with American habits. He's a capital character. He'll manage the Mexican case and get the mine, while I introduce you to the notice of intriguing investors like yourself. You'll like him, I know."

Derwent was doubtful on this point, and he still remained doubtful when he met Senor Fernandez. Yet there could be no question of that gentleman's agreeable qualities. As they dined together he proved a very pleasant conversationalist, and the familiarity of business, talked of the attractions of Guadalajara, lightly sketched its history, and deftly changed his tone when he found that Derwent had scant sympathy for the agitations and tyrannies of the so-called "liberal" government. Senor Fernandez, however, was one of those gentlemen who always find it convenient to uphold the existing order of things. He spoke familiarly of ministers and governors, shrugged his shoulders when Derwent denounced the wholesale robbery and persecution of the Church, was evidently highly civilized to possess either religion or patriotism, and thought that the golden day of promise would dawn for Mexico when, giving up her antiquated customs, she would be recreated according to the admirable pattern of her neighbors across the Rio Grande. It was somewhat astonishing by Derwent's reply to this.

"When that day comes, if it ever does," said the young man, "your country will cease to be worth caring for. She will lose her individuality and become a feeble copy of a civilization altogether alien to that which has made her what she is. All that remains for her is to be absorbed into those who have any natural appreciation will disappear, the foreign charm of her beautiful old cities, the exquisite manners of her people, the decorum of her women, the respectful obedience of her children, the grace of her picturesque, unburied life; but, more than that, the things that she will copy will be the worst things in the civilization she does not imitate. There can be no doubt that 'sharp' American practices will be among the first improvements that American admirers will import into Mexico."

Senor Fernandez smiled, but it was in a somewhat disconcerted manner, as he bowed over his glass of claret. "I am delighted to find that you have so high an opinion of Mexico. Most Americans think that we have much to learn, and that we cannot do better than copy their more fortunate country."

"Most Americans—like their English kinsmen—are too narrow-minded to understand that rational Anglo-Saxon methods of civilization don't suit every people," said Derwent. "God knows, they had better reform themselves before setting out to reform the world. But you take nothing for granted, do you? I offer you a cigar?"

It was accepted and lighted, the table cleared, and then the two men looked at each other with a glance of mutual interrogation. "Let us get to business now," Derwent said. "You have heard from Morell, of course. You know that I am here to examine the mine that you and he are offering for sale. When can we go to see it?"

"We can start to-morrow if you like," the other answered. "We will take the diligence to Etzamal, and from there it is twenty leagues on horseback to the Buena Esperanza."

"The Good Hope," said Derwent, unconsciously translating. "Is that the name of the mine? It may be a good one."

"The man who first found the lode and gave it that name thought so, and it proved so good a hope to him, that he realized a fortune from it. Several fortunes, in fact, have been realized from the Buena Esperanza; but now the water is troublesome, the ores have grown rebellious, the present owners are too poor to handle the property, and so they will sell. It is a wonderful mine to go for such a price. Mr. Derwent, if you wish to see the mine, I will take you to see it when you see it."

"If so, the price will be promptly paid," said Derwent. "But what is that Morell was telling me about a difference of opinion among the owners with regard to the sale?"

"Oh, there is one of them who is dissatisfied,—thinks the mine ought to bring more, doesn't want to sell at all, in fact, and regrets having joined in the bond. But the mine has signs so you need not fear about this."

This was explicit enough, and sufficiently plausible that Derwent inclined to distrust the man who had been conscious of at first made Derwent wary to himself that there was something in the transaction which might not perhaps reflect credit upon Senor Fernandez if known. It plainly did not concern him, however, to take up the vaguely-suspected grievance of an unknown Chatham. That must be settled between the parties concerned. All that he had to do was to look at the mine, and if assured of its value, pay the price asked, in case a good title could be given him. It was settled that they would start the next morning, and, since nothing could be determined until this journey was made, Derwent, who heard redolent strains of music near by, proposed that they should finish their cigars in the open air.

[To be continued.]

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I have made the foregoing change in the business of the ADVANCE for two reasons. The first is because many patrons who have been given credit, have abused the privilege to such an extent as to make the business of publishing the paper a non-paying one, and it is necessary in my own interest and that of those who do pay, that I should no longer continue to furnish the ADVANCE to those non-paying subscribers.

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