

Literature.org:
[Authors](#)
[Contact](#)

[The Plumed Serpent](#)

[D. H. Lawrence](#)

This Book:
[Contents](#)
[Previous Chapter](#)
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 18 - Auto Da Fe

Ramón saw Carlota and his boys in the city, but it was a rather fruitless meeting. The elder boy was just uncomfortable in the presence of his father, but the younger Cyprian, who was delicate and very intelligent, had a rather lofty air of displeasure with his parent.

'Do you know what they sing, papa?' he said.

'Not all the things they sing,' said Ramón.

'They sing - ' the boy hesitated. Then, in his clear young voice, he piped up, to the tune of La Cucaracha:

'Don Ramón don't drink, don't smoke.
Doña Carlota wished he would.
He's going to wear the sky-blue cloak
That he's stolen from the Mother of God.'

'No, I'm not,' said Ramón, smiling. 'Mine's got a snake and a bird in the middle, and black zigzags and a red fringe. You'd better come and see it.'

'No, papa! I don't want to.'

'Why not?'

'I don't want to be mixed up in this affair. It makes us all look ridiculous.'

'But how do you think you look, anyhow, in your striped little sailor suit and your little saintly look? We'd better dress you as the Infant Jesus.'

'No, papa! You are in bad taste. One doesn't say those things.'

'Now you'll have to confess to a fib. You say one doesn't say those things, when I, who am your father, said them only a moment ago, and you heard me.'

'I mean good people don't. Decent people.'

'Now you'll have to confess again, for calling your father indecent. - Terrible child!'

The child flushed, and tears rose to his eyes. There was silence for a while.

'So you don't want to come to Jamiltepec?' said Ramón, to his boys.

'Yes!' said the elder boy, slowly. 'I want to come and bathe in the lake, and have a boat. But - they say it is impossible.'

'Why?'

'They say you make yourself a peon, in your clothes.' - The boy was shy.

'They're very nice clothes, you know. Nicer than those little breeches of yours.'

'They say, also, that you pretend to be the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl.'

'Not at all. I only pretend that the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl is coming back to the Mexicans.'

'But, papa, it is not true.'

'How do you know?'

'Because it is impossible.'

'Why?'

'There never was any Quetzalcoatl, except idols.'

'Is there any Jesus, except images?'

'Yes, papa.'

'Where?'

'In heaven.'

'Then in heaven there is also Quetzalcoatl. And what is in heaven is capable of coming back to earth. Don't you believe me?'

'I can't.'

'Then go on unbelieving,' said the father, laughing at them and rising to leave them.

'It is very bad that they sing songs about you, and put mama in; like about Pancho Villa,' said the younger boy. 'It hurts me very much.'

'Rub it with Vapour-rub, my pet,' said Ramón. 'Rub it with Vapour-rub, where it hurts you.'

'What a real bad man you are, papa!'

'What a real good child are you, my son! Isn't that so?'

'I don't know, papa. I only know you are bad.'

'Oh! Oh! Is that all they teach thee at thy American school?'

'Next term,' said Ciprianito, 'I want to change my name. I don't want to be called Carrasco any more. When thou art in the newspapers, they will laugh at us.'

'Oh! Oh! I am laughing at thee NOW, little frog! What name wilt thou choose, then? Espina, perhaps. Thou knowest Carrasco is a wild bush, on the moors in Spain, where we come from. Wilt thou be the little thorn on the bush? Call thyself Espina, thou art a sprig of the old tree. Entonces, adiós! Señor Espina Espinita!'

'Adiós!' said the boy abruptly, flushing with rage.

Ramón took a motor-car to Sayula, for there was a made road. But already the rains were washing it away. The car lurched and bumped in the great gaps. In one place a camión lay on its back, where it had overturned.

On the flat desert there were already small smears of water, and the pink cosmos flowers, and the yellow, were just sprouting their tufts of buds. The hills in the distance were going opaque, as leaves came out on the invisible trees and bushes. The earth was coming to life.

Ramón called in Sayula at Kate's house. She was out, but the wild Concha came scouring across the beach, to fetch her. - 'There is Don Ramón! There is Don Ramón!'

Kate hurried home, with sand in her shoes.

She thought Ramón looked tired, and, in his black suit, sinister.

'I didn't expect you,' she said.

'I am on my way back from town.'

He sat very still, with that angry look on his creamy dark face, and he kept pushing back his black moustache from his closed, angry lips.

'Did you see anybody in town?' she asked.

'I saw Don Cipriano - and Doña Carlota, and my boys!'

'Oh, how nice for you! Are they quite well?'

'In excellent health, I believe.'

She laughed suddenly.

'You are still cross,' she said. 'Is it about the monkeys still?'

'Señora,' he said, leaning forward, so that his black hair dropped a little on his brow, 'in monkeydom I don't know who is prince. But in the kingdom of fools, I believe it is I.'

'Why?' she said.

And as he did not answer, she added:

'It must be a comfort to be a prince, even of fools.'

He looked daggers at her, then burst into a laugh.

'Oh, Señora mía! What ails us men, when we are always wanting to be good?'

'Are you repenting of it?' she laughed.

'Yes!' he said. 'I am a prince of fools! Why have I started this Quetzalcoatl business? Why? Pray tell me why.'

'I suppose you wanted to.'

He pondered for a time, pushing up his moustache.

'Perhaps it is better to be a monkey than a fool. I object to being called a monkey, nevertheless. Carlota is a monkey, no more; and my two boys are prize young monkeys in

sailor suits. And I am a fool. Yet what is the difference between a fool and a monkey?

'Quién sabe?' said Kate.

'One wants to be good, and the other is sure he IS good. So I make a fool of myself. They are sure they are always good, so that makes monkeys of them. Oh, if only the world would blow up like a bomb!'

'It won't!' said Kate.

'True enough. - Ah, well!'

He drew himself erect, pulling himself together.

'Do you think, Señora Caterina, you might marry our mutual General?' Ramón had put himself aside again.

'I - I don't know!' stammered Kate. 'I hardly think so.'

'He is not sympathetic to you at all?'

'Yes, he is. He is alive, and there is even a certain fascination about him. - But one shouldn't try marrying a man of another race, do you think, even if he were more sympathetic?'

'Ah!' sighed Ramón. 'It's no good generalizing. It's no good marrying anybody, unless there will be a real fusion somewhere.'

'And I feel there wouldn't,' said Kate. 'I feel he just wants something of me; and perhaps I just want something of him. But he would never meet me. He would never come forward himself, to meet me. He would come to take something from me and I should have to let him. And I don't want merely that. I want a man who will come half-way, just half-way, to meet me.'

Don Ramón pondered, and shook his head.

'You are right,' he said. 'Yet, in these matters, one never knows what is half-way, nor where it is. A woman who just wants to be taken, and then to cling on, is a parasite. And a man who wants just to take, without giving, is a creature of prey.'

'And I'm afraid Don Cipriano might be that,' said Kate.

'Possibly,' said Ramón. 'He is not so with me. But perhaps he would be, if we did not meet - perhaps it is our half-way - in some physical belief that is at the very middle of us, and which we recognize in one another. Don't you think there might be that between you and him?'

'I doubt if he'd feel it necessary, with a woman. A woman wouldn't be important enough.'

Ramón was silent.

'Perhaps!' he said. 'With a woman, a man always wants to let himself go. And it is precisely with a woman that he should never let himself go. It is precisely with a woman that he should never let himself go, but stick to his innermost belief, and meet her just there. Because when the innermost belief coincides in them both, if it's physical, there, and then, and nowhere else, they can meet. And it's no good unless there is a meeting. It's no good a man ravishing a woman, and it's absolutely no good a woman ravishing a man. It's a sin, that is. There is such a thing as sin, and that's the centre of it. Men and women keep on ravishing one another. Absurd as it may sound, it is not I who would ravish Carlota. It is she who would ravish me. Strange and absurd and a little shameful, it is true. - Letting oneself go, is either ravishing or being ravished. Oh, if we could only abide by our own souls, and meet in the abiding place. - Señora, I have not a very great respect for myself. Woman and I have failed with one another, and it is a bad failure to have in the middle of oneself.'

Kate looked at him in wonder, with a little fear. Why was he confessing to her? Was he going to love her? She almost suspended her breathing. He looked at her with a sort of sorrow on his brow, and in his dark eyes, anger, vexation, wisdom, and a dull pain.

'I am sorry,' he went on, 'that Carlota and I are as we are with one another. Who am I, even to talk about Quetzalcoatl, when my heart is hollow with anger against the woman I have married and the children she bore me? - We never met in our souls, she and I. At first I loved her, and she wanted me to ravish her. Then after a while a man becomes uneasy. He can't keep on wanting to ravish a woman, the same woman. He has revulsions. Then she loved me, and she wanted to ravish me. And I liked it for a time. But she had revulsions too. The eldest boy is really my boy, when I ravished her. And the youngest is her boy, when she ravished me. See how miserable it is! And now we can never meet; she turns to her crucified Jesus, and I to my uncrucified and uncrucifiable Quetzalcoatl, who at least cannot be ravished.'

'And I'm sure you won't make him a ravisher,' she said.

'Who knows? If I err, it will be on that side. But you know, Señora, Quetzalcoatl is to me only the symbol of the best a man may be, in the next days. The universe is a nest of dragons, with a perfectly unfathomable life-mystery at the centre of it. If I call the mystery the Morning Star, surely it doesn't matter! A man's blood can't beat in the abstract. And man is a creature who wins his own creation inch by inch from the nest of the cosmic dragons. Or else he loses it little by little, and goes to pieces. Now we are all losing it, in the ravishing and ravished disintegration. We must pull ourselves together, hard, both men and women, or we are all lost. - We must pull ourselves together, hard.'

'But are you a man who needs a woman in his life?' she said.

'I am a man who yearns for the sensual fulfilment of my soul, Señora,' he said. 'I am a man who has no belief in abnegation of the blood desires. I am a man who is always on the verge of taking wives and concubines to live with me, so deep is my desire for that fulfilment. Except that now I know that is useless - not momentarily useless, but in the long run - my ravishing a woman with hot desire. No matter how much she is in love with me and desires me to ravish her. It is no good, and the very inside of me knows it is no good. Wine, woman, and song - all that - all that game is up. Our insides won't really have it any more. Yet it is hard to pull ourselves together.'

'So that you really want a woman to be with you?' said Kate.

'Ah, Señora! If I could trust myself; and trust her! I am no longer a young man, who can afford to make mistakes. I am forty- two years old, and I am making my last - and perhaps in truth, my first great effort as a man. I hope I may perish before I make a big mistake.'

'Why should you make a mistake? You needn't?'

'!? It is very easy for me to make a mistake. Very easy, on the one hand, for me to become arrogant and a ravisher. And very easy, on the other hand, for me to deny myself, and make a sort of sacrifice of my life. Which is being ravished. Easy to let myself, in a certain sense, be ravished. I did it to a small degree even yesterday, with the Bishop of Guadalajara. And it is bad. If I had to end my life in a mistake, Señora, I had rather end it in being a ravisher, than in being ravished. As a hot ravisher, I can still slash and cut at the disease of the other thing, the horrible pandering and the desire men have to be ravished, the hateful, ignoble desire they have.'

'But why don't you do as you say, stick by the innermost soul that is in you, and meet a woman there, meet her, as you say, where your two souls coincide in their deepest desire? Not always that horrible unbalance that you call ravishing.'

'Why don't I? But which woman can I meet in the body, without that slow degradation of ravishing, or being ravished, setting in? If I marry a Spanish woman or a dark Mexican, she will give herself up to me to be ravished. If I marry a woman of the Anglo-Saxon or any blonde northern stock, she will want to ravish me, with the will of all the ancient white demons. Those that want to be ravished are parasites on the soul, and one has revulsions. Those that want to ravish a man are vampires. And between the two, there is nothing.'

'Surely there are SOME really good women?'

'Well, show me them. They are all potential Carlotas or - or - yes, Caterinas. I am sure you ravished your Joachim till he died. No doubt he wanted it; even more than you wanted it. It is not just sex. It lies in the will. Victims and victimizers. The upper classes, craving to be victims to the lower classes; or else craving to make victims of the lower classes. The politicians, craving to make one people victims to another. The Church, with its evil will for turning the people into humble, writhing things that shall crave to be victimized, to be ravished - I tell you, the earth is a place of shame.'

'But if YOU want to be different,' said Kate, 'surely a few other people do - really.'

'It may be,' he said, becoming calm. 'It may be. I wish I kept myself together better. I must keep myself together, keep myself within the middle place, where I am still. My Morning Star. Now I am ashamed of having talked like this to you, Señora Caterina.'

'Why?' she cried. And for the first time, the flush of hurt and humiliation came into her face.

He saw it at once, and put his hand on hers for a moment.

'No,' he said. 'I am not ashamed. I am relieved.'

She flushed deeply at his touch, and was silent. He rose hastily, to leave, craving to be alone again with his own soul.

'On Sunday,' he said, 'will you come into the plaza, in the morning, when the drum sounds? Will you come?'

'What for?' she said.

'Well! Come, and you will see.'

He was gone in a flash.

There were many soldiers in the village. When she went to the post-office, she saw the men in their cotton uniforms lying about in the entrance to the military station. There must have been fifty or more, little men, not the tall soldiers in slouched hats. These were little, quick, compact men, like Cipriano, and they talked in a strange Indian language, very subdued. They were very rarely seen in the streets. They kept out of sight.

But at night everyone was requested to be indoors by ten o'clock, and through the darkness Kate heard the patrols of horse-soldiers riding round.

There was an air of excitement and mystery in the place. The parish priest, a rather overbearing, fat man of fifty or so, had preached a famous Saturday evening sermon against Ramón and Quetzalcoatl, forbidding the heathen name to be mentioned, threatening with all the penalties any parishioner who read the Hymns, or even listened.

So, of course, he was attacked when he left the church, and had to be rescued by soldiers who were in the doorway. They marched him safely home. But his criada, the old woman who served him, was told by more women than one that the next time the padre opened his mouth against Quetzalcoatl, he would have a few inches of machete in his fat guts.

So his reverence stayed at home, and a curate officiated.

Practically all the people who came over the lake in boats on Saturdays went to mass in Sayula church. The great doors stood open all the day. Men as they passed to and fro to the lake, took off their big hats, with a curious cringing gesture, as they went by the gateway of the church. All day long, scattered people were kneeling in the aisles or among the benches, the men kneeling erect, their big hats down by their knees, their curious tall-shaped Indian heads with the thick black hair also erect; only the kneeling legs, close together, humble. The women hooded themselves in their dark rebozos and spread their elbows as they kneeled at a bench, in a slack sort of voluptuousness.

On Saturday night, a great ruddy flickering of many candle-points, away down the dark cavern of the church; and a clustering of dark men's heads, a shuffling of women, a come and go of men arriving from the lake, of men departing to the market. A hush, not exactly of worship, but of a certain voluptuous admiration of the loftiness and glitter, a sensual, almost victimized self-abandon to the god of death, the Crucified streaked with blood, or to the pretty white woman in a blue mantle, with her little doll's face under her crown, Mary, the doll of dolls, Niña of Niñas.

It was not worship. It was a sort of numbness and letting the soul sink uncontrolled. And it was a luxury, after all the week of unwashed dullness in their squalid villages of straw huts. But it irritated Kate.

The men got up and tiptoed away in their sandals, crossing themselves front and back, on the navel and on the back of the head, with holy water. And their black eyes shone with a loose, sensuous look. Instead of having gathered themselves together and become graver, stronger, more collected and deep in their own integrity, they emerged only the more loose and sloppy and uncontrolled.

Oh, if there is one thing men need to learn, but the Mexican Indians especially, it is to collect each man his own soul together deep inside him, and to abide by it. The Church, instead of helping men to this, pushes them more and more into a soft, emotional helplessness, with the unpleasant sensuous gratification of feeling themselves

victims, victimized, but at the same time with the lurking sardonic consciousness that in the end a victim is stronger than the victimizer. In the end, the victims pull down their victimizer, like a pack of hyenas on an unwary lion. They know it. Cursed are the falsely meek, for they are inheriting the earth.

On Sunday morning there was early mass at sunrise, another mass at seven o'clock, another at nine, another at eleven. Then there was a little band of violins and 'cellos, playing old-fashioned dance music; there was, especially early in the morning, a solid mass of peons and women, kneeling on the floor; and a flapping of dusky candles, a smell of the exhaust air of candles, a heavy, rolling fume of incense, and the heavy choir of men's voices, solid, powerful, impressive, from the gallery.

And the people went away in sensuous looseness, which soon turned, in the market, to hate, the old, unfathomable hate which lies at the bottom of the Indian heart, and which always rises black and turbid when they have swayed awhile in sensuous gratification.

The church inside was a dead interior, like all Mexican churches, even the gorgeous Puebla cathedral. The interior of almost any Mexican church gives the impression of cynical barrenness, cynical meaninglessness, an empty, cynical, mocking shell. The Italian churches are built much in the same style, and yet in them lingers a shadow and stillness of old, mysterious holiness. The hush.

But not in Mexico. The churches outside are impressive. Inside, and it is curious to define it, they are blatant; void of sound and yet with no hush, simple, and yet completely vulgar, barren, sterile. More barren than a bank or a schoolroom or an empty concert-hall, less mysterious than any of these. You get a sense of plaster, of mortar, of whitewash, of smeared blue-wash or grey-wash; and of gilt laid on and ready to peel off. Even in the most gorgeous churches, the gilt is hatefully gilt, never golden. Nothing is soft nor mellow.

So the interior of Sayula church; and Kate had often been in. The white exterior was charming, and so valuable in the landscape, with the twin white pagoda-towers peering out of the green willow-trees. But inside, it seemed nothing but whitewash, stencilled over with grey scroll-work decorations. The windows were high, and many, letting in the light as into a schoolroom. Jesus, streaked with blood, was in one of the transepts, and the Virgin, a doll in faded satin, stood startled inside a glass case. There were rag flowers and paper flowers, coarse lace and silver that looked like tin.

Nevertheless, it was quite clean, and very much frequented.

The Month of Mary had gone by, the blue and white paper ribbons were all taken down, the palm-trees in pots were all removed from the aisle, the little girls in white dresses and little crowns of flowers no longer came with posies in their hand, at evening. Curious, the old gentle ceremonials of Europe, how trashy they seem in Mexico, just a cheap sort of charade.

The day of Corpus Christi came, with high mass and the church full to the doors with kneeling peons, from dawn till noon. Then a feeble little procession of children within the church, because the law forbids religious processions outside. But all, somehow, for nothing. Just so that the people could call it a fiesta, and so have an excuse to be more slack, more sloshy and uncontrolled than ever. The one Mexican desire: to let themselves go in sloppy inertia.

And this was the all-in-all of the religion. Instead of doing as it should, collecting the soul into its own strength and integrity, the religious day left it all the more decomposed and degenerate.

However, the weeks passed, the crowd in the church seemed the same as ever. But the crowd in the church one hour was the crowd of Quetzalcoatl the next hour. Just a sensation.

Till the more socialistic Readers mingled a little anti-clerical bitterness in their reading. And all the peons began to say: was El Señor a gringo, and the Santísima, was she nothing but a gringuita?

This provoked retaliation on the part of the priests, first mere admonitions, then at last the loud denunciations and threat of that sermon. Which meant war.

Everybody waited for Saturday. Saturday came, and the church remained shut. Saturday night, the church was dark and closed. Sunday, the church was silent and the doors blank fastened.

Something like consternation spread through the market host. They had nowhere to go! - But among the consternation was a piqued curiosity. Perhaps something exciting was going to happen.

Things had happened before. In the revolutions, many of the churches in Mexico have been used for stables and for barracks. And churches are turned into schools, and concert halls, and cinematograph theatres. The convents and the monasteries are most of them barracks for the rag-tag-and-bobtail soldiers. The world changes, is bound to change.

The second Saturday of the closed church was, as it happened, a big market. Much fruit and stuff had come up the lake, from the south from far distances, even from Colima. There were men with lacquer wooden bowls, and women with glazed pottery. And as usual, men crouching in guard over twenty centavos worth of nauseous tropical plums, or chiles, or mangoes, in tiny pyramids along the roadway.

A crowded market, with the much and the little of the Indians. And the church doors shut and locked, the church bells silent, even the clock stopped. True, the clock was always stopping. But not with such a final arrest.

No mass, no confession, no little orgy of incense and slack emotion! The low rumble of murmuring tones, the quick, apprehensive glances around. Vendors by the causeway squatted tight, as if to make themselves dense and small, squatting down on their haunches with their knees up to their shoulders, like the Aztec idols. And soldiers in twos and threes sprinkled everywhere. And Señoritas and Señoras, in their black gauze scarves or mantillas, tripping to the church for mass and shrilling round the gateway of the church, all a bubble and a froth of chatter; though they had known quite well the church was shut.

But it was Sunday morning, and something was due to happen.

At about half-past ten, a boat appeared, and men in snow-white clothes got out, one carrying a drum. They marched quickly through the people, under the old trees on the sand, across to the church. They passed through the broken iron gates into the stone courtyard in front of the church.

At the church doors, which were still shut, they took off their blouses, and stood in a ring, with dark naked shoulders and the blue-and-black sashes of Quetzalcoatl round their waists.

The drum began to beat, with a powerful, pounding note, as the men stood bare-headed and bare-breasted in a circle outside the church doors; a strange ring of lustrous, bluey-black heads and dark shoulders, above the snowy-white pantaloons. Monotonously the drum beat, on and on. Then the little clay flute with the husky sound wheezed a clear melody.

The whole market pressed densely towards the gateways of the church. But there, soldiers stood guard. And on the inside of the stone yard in front of the church, soldiers quietly guarded the low walls, letting nobody mount. So that outside, under the old willow- and pepper-trees, in the hot morning sun, the dense crowd stood gazing at the church doors. They were mostly men in big hats; but some townsmen were there, and some women, and Kate with a parasol lined with dark blue. A close, silent, tense throng under the spangled shade, pressing round the trunks of the palm-trees, climbing on the roots of the pepper-trees. And behind were the camiones and the motorcars drawn up.

The drum shuddered and went still, and the earthen flute was silent. The lake could be heard lapping, and a clink of glasses and a sound of chauffeurs' voices at the little cantina-booth. For the rest, the silent breathing of the crowd. - Soldiers were quickly distributing a few leaflets among the crowd. A strong, far- carrying male voice began to sing to the softened thud of the drum.

JESUS' FAREWELL

Farewell, Farewell, Despedida!
The last of my days is gone.
To-morrow Jesus and Holy Mary
Will be gone.

It is a long, long way
From Mexico to the Pool of Heaven.
Look back the last time, Mary Mother,
Let us call the eleven.

James, and John, and Mark,
Felipe and San Cristobal,
All my saints, and Anna, Teresa,
Guadalupe whose face is oval.

Come then, now, it is finished for all of us.
Let us all be gone.
Follow me now up the ladders of sparks.
Every one.

Joaquin, Francis, and Anthony
And many-named Maria,
Purísima, Refugio, and Soledad
Follow here.

Ho! all my saints and my Virgins
Troop out of your shrines,
After your master, the Crucified;
Bring all your signs.

Run up the flames, and with feet on the sparks
Troop into the sky.
Once more following the Master,
Back again now, on high.

Farewell, let all be forgotten
In Mexico.
To the pool of peace and forgetting in heaven
We go.

While this was singing, another boat had arrived, and soldiers made way through the crowd for Ramón, in his white serape with the blue edges and scarlet fringe, and a young priest of the church in a black cassock, and six men in dark serapes with the blue borders of Quetzalcoatl. This strange procession marched through the crowd and through the gateways of the yard.

As they approached, the ring of men round the drum opened, and spread into a crescent. Ramón stood tall behind the drum, the six men in dark serapes divided and went to the wings of the crescent, the young, slim priest in a black cassock stood alone, in front of the crescent, facing the crowd.

He lifted his hand; Ramón took off his hat; all the men in the crowd took off their hats.

The priest turned, met Ramón at the centre of the crescent, and, across the drum, handed him the key of the church. Then the priest waited.

Ramón unlocked the church doors and flung them open. The men in front of the crowd kneeled down suddenly, seeing the church dark like a cavern, but a trembling blaze of many candles, away, seemingly far down the mysterious darkness, shuddering with dark, rippling flame, like the Presence of the burning bush.

The crowd swayed and rustled, and subsided, kneeling. Only here and there a labourer, a chauffeur or a railway man stood erect.

The priest raised his hand a little higher, re-turning towards the people.

'My children,' he said; and as he spoke the lake seemed to rustle; 'God the Almighty has called home His Son, and the Holy Mother of the Son. Their days are over in Mexico. They go back to the Father.

Jesus, the Son of God, bids you farewell.
Mary, the Mother of God, bids you farewell.
For the last time they bless you, as they leave you.
Answer Adios!
Say Adios! my children.'

The men in the circle said a deep Adios! And from the soldiers, and from the kneeling crowd, a ragged, muttered, strange repeating of Adios! again and again, like a sort of storm.

Suddenly, in a blast, down the darkness of the church into which the kneeling people were staring, the burning bush of candles was gone, there was only darkness. Across the sunshine, lit here and there by a frail light of a taper, was a cave of darkness.

Men in the crowd exclaimed and groaned.

Then the drum softly touched, and two men in the crescent began to sing, in magnificent, terrible voices, the Farewell Hymn again. They were men whom Ramón, or his followers, had found in low drinking-dens in Mexico City, men with trained and amazing voices, the powerful Mexican tenor that seemed to tear the earth open. Men whom the 'times' have reduced to singing in low city dives. And now they sang with all the terrible desperation that was in them, the hopeless, demonish recklessness.

When they finished, the priest again lifted his hand, and gave the benediction; adding in a quiet voice:

'And now, with all the saints, let Me go, saith Jesus. For I go back to my Father which is in heaven, and I lead my Mother in my right hand, home to peace.'

He turned and went into the church. Ramón followed. Then slowly, all the men of the crescent. Overhead the church bell rang a little while, on the deathly silence. It ceased.

And in a moment, from the depths of the church sounded a drum, with a remote, fearsome thud, and a slow monotony.

The priest, in his white vestments with rich lace, appeared in the doorway of the church, bearing a tall crucifix. He hesitated, then came into the sun. The kneeling people clasped their hands.

Candles in the dark church were clustering towards the door, lonely flames. Don Ramón came out of the dark, naked to the waist, his serape over one shoulder, bearing the front pole of the great bier whereon lies, within a glass case, the lifelike, terrible dead Christ of Holy Week. A tall, dark man, naked to the waist, held the other end of the pole on his shoulder. The crowd moaned and crossed themselves. The lifelike Dead Christ seemed really dead, as he passed the gate. As He entered the crowd, kneeling men and women lifted sightless faces and flung their arms wide apart, and so remained, arms rigid and outflung, in an unspeakable ecstasy of fear, supplication, acknowledgement of death.

After the bier of the Dead Christ, a slow procession of men naked to the waist, carrying litter after litter. First the terrible scourged Christ, with naked body striped like a tiger with blood. Then the image of the Saviour of the Sacred Heart, the well-known figure from the side altar, with long hair and outstretched hands. Then the image of Jesus of Nazareth, with a crown of thorns.

Then the Virgin with the blue mantle and lace, and the golden crown. The women began to moan as she emerged rather trashily into the blazing sunlight. Behind her, in the church, the candles were one by one going out.

Then came brown Saint Anthony of Padua, with a child in his arms. Then Saint Francis, looking strangely at a cross in his hand. Then Saint Anna. And last, Saint Joaquin. And as he emerged, the last candles in the dark church went out, there were only open doors upon a darkness.

The images on the shoulders of the brown-skinned men rode rather childishly out through the blazing sun, into the shadow of trees. The drum followed last, slowly thudding. On the glass case of the big Dead Christ the sun flashed with startling flashes, as the powerful men carrying it turned towards the water. The crowd murmured and swayed on its knees. Women cried: Purísima! Purísima! Don't leave us! and some men ejaculated in strangled anguish, over and over again: Señor! Señor! Señor!

But the strange procession made its way slowly under the trees, to the coarse sands, and descended again into the great light towards the lake. There was a little breeze under a blaze of sun. Folded serapes on naked, soft shoulders swung unevenly, the images rocked and tottered a little. But onwards to the edge of the water went the tall crucifix, then the flashing glass box. And after, came Jesus in a red silk robe, fluttering, then a wooden Jesus all paint and streaks, then Jesus in white with a purple mantle that blew like a kerchief, Mary in lace that fluttered upon stiff white and blue satin. But the Saints were only painted; painted wood.

The slim, lace-smocked priest staggered down the sand under the heavy crucifix, which had a white Christ Crucified stretched aloft, facing the lake. By the little wall was a large black canoa, sailing boat, with a broad plank gangway up to her stern. Two bare-legged, white-clad men walked by the slim priest, whose white sleeves blew like flags as he slowly climbed the gangway to the ship. Men helped him on board, and he walked away to the prow, where at length he stood the big crucifix, with the Christ still facing outwards.

The ship was open, without deck or hatches, but with fixed tables for the images. Slowly Ramón ascended and descended into the boat, the great glass case was laid down on its rest, the two men could wipe their wet brows and their hot, black hair. Ramón put on his blanket and his hat, against the sun. The boat heaved very slightly. The wind was from the west. The lake was pale and unreal, sun-blinded.

One after another the images rose over the stern of the boat, against the sky, then descended into the vessel, to be set down on their rests, where they rose above the black sides of the canoa, in view of the throng on the shore.

It was a strange and tawdry collection of images. And yet, each image had a certain pathos of its own, and a certain touch of horror, as they were grouped together for their last ride, upon the trestle-supports, within the vessels. By each image stood the bearers, in hats and serapes, keeping a steady hand on the poles.

There was a little line of soldiers on the shore, and three motor-boats with soldiers waited by the big canoa. The shore was covered with a mass of people. Many row-boats came rowing inquisitively round, like fishes. But none came too near.

Bare-legged sailors began to pole the ship from the shore. They leaned heavily on the poles, and walked along the rims of the vessel. Slowly she began to move upon the waters, in the shallows. Slowly she was leaving the shore, and the throng.

Two other sailors swiftly began to hoist the huge, square white sail. Quickly, yet heavily it rose in the air, and took the wind. It had the great sign of Quetzalcoatl, the circling blue snake and the blue eagle upon a yellow field, at the centre, like a great eye.

The wind came from the west, but the boat was steering south-east, for the little Island of the Scorpions, which rose like a small dim hummock from the haze of the lake. So the sail reached out, and the great eye seemed to be glancing back, at the village with the green willows and the empty white church, the throng on the shore.

Motor-boats circled the huge, slow canoe, small boats like insects followed and ranged round at a distance, never coming too close. The running water clucked and spoke, the men by the images steadied the poles with one hand, their hats with the other, the great eye on the sail ever looked back at the land, the sweep of the white canvas sweeping low above the glass case of death, the Christ caked with gore, the images in their fluttering mantles.

On the shore, the people wandered away, or sat on the sands waiting and watching in a sort of dumb patience that was half indifference. The canoe grew smaller, more inconspicuous, lapsing into the light, the little boats circled around it like mere dots. The lake tired the eyes with its light.

Away under the trees, in a half silence, a half vacancy, a woman bought a dark water-melon, smashed it open on a stone, and gave the big pinky fragments to her children. In silence, men sprinkled salt on the thick slice of cucumber sold by the woman under the tree. In silence they wandered into the church, past the soldiers on guard at the door.

The church was absolutely dark, save for the light that entered the doorway, and absolutely bare; walls, floor, altar, transepts, all stark bare and empty. The people wandered away again, in silence.

It was noon, and a hot day. The canoa slowly ranged to the small hummock of the island amid the waters, where lived one family of Indians - fishers, with a few goats and one dry little place where they grew a few beans and heads of maize. For the rest, the island was all dry rock and thorny bushes, and scorpions.

The vessel was poled round to the one rocky bay. Slowly she drew near the island. The motor-boats and the little boats hurried ahead. Already brown, naked men were bathing among the rocks.

The great sail sank, the canoa edged up to the rocky shore, men sprang from her into the water, the images were lowered and slowly carried on to the rocks. There they waited for the bearers.

Slowly the procession went again up the bank of the dishevelled island, past the couple of huts, where a red cock was crowing among the litter, and over to rocks, beyond the bushes, on the far side.

The side facing Sayula was all rock, naked and painful to tread on. In a rocky hollow at the water's edge, tall stones had been put up on end, with iron bars across the top, like a grill. Underneath, a pile of faggots ready; and at the side, a pile of faggots.

The images, the glass box of the great Dead Christ, were laid on the iron bars of the grill, in a pathetic cluster all together. The crucifix was leaned against them. It was noon, the heat and the light were fierce and erect. But already down the lake clouds were pushing up fantastically.

Beyond the water, beyond the glare, the village looked like a mirage, with its trees and villages and white church towers.

Men who had come in boats crowded on the rocks of the little amphitheatre. In silence, Ramón kindled shreds of cane and ocote, with a burning-glass. Little hasty flames like young snakes arose in the solid sunlight, with vapour of smoke. He set fire to the carefully-arranged pyramid of faggots beneath the grill-table of the images.

There was a crackling, and a puffing of whitish smoke, the sweet scent of ocote, and orange-red tongues of half-substantial flame were leaping up in the hot white air. Hot breaths blew suddenly, sudden flames gushed up, and the ocote, full of sweet resin, began to roar. The glass of the great box emitted strange, painful yelps as it splintered and fell tinkling. Between the iron bars, brownish flames pushed up among the images, which at once went black. The little vestments of silk and satin withered in a moment to blackness, the caked wounds of paint bubbled black.

The young priest took off his linen vestment, his stole, and his chasuble, and with flushed face flung them in the flame. Then he stripped off his black cassock, and emerged in the white cotton of the men of Quetzalcoatl, his white drawers rolled up to the knee. He threw his cassock in the fire. Someone handed him a big hat, and a white serape with blue ends.

There was a smell of burning paint, and wool, and ocote. The fire rushed in a dusky mass upon the blackened, flickering images, till nothing was to be seen but a confused bush of smoke and brown-red flames, puthering, reeking, roaring. The flaming crucifix slipped aside, and fell. A man seized it and pushed it into the fire, under the images. Men in a sort of ecstasy threw on more of the heavy, resinous wood, that almost exploded into flame. Rocks cracked and exploded like guns. Everybody drew back from that roaring tree of flame, which rose ever higher and higher, its dark smoke and its sparks unfolding into heaven.

One of the supporting stones burst with a bang, bars of iron and blazing stumps of images tumbled in a confused roar. The glass case had disappeared, but ribbons of iron waved, then curled over red, into the torrent of the sudden fire. Strange rods of iron appeared out of nowhere, protruding from solid red coals.

And soon, all that was left was a fierce glow of red coals of wood, with a medley of half-fused iron.

Ramón stood aside and watched in silence, his dark brow quite expressionless.

Then, when only the last bluish flames flickered out of a tumble of red fire, from the eminence above rockets began to shoot into the air with a swish, exploding high in the sightless hot blue, with a glimmer of bluish showers, and of gold.

The people from the shore had seen the tree of smoke with its trunk of flame. Now they heard the heavy firing of the rockets, they looked again, exclaiming, half in dismay, half in the joyful lust of destruction:

'Señor! Señor! La Purísima! La Santísima!'

The flame and the smoke and the rockets melted as if by miracle, into nothingness, leaving the hot air unblemished. The coals of fire were shovelled and dropped down a steep hole.

As the canoa sailed back, the side of the lake, through filmy air, looked brownish and changeless. A cloud was rising in the south-west, from behind the dry, silent mountains, like a vast white tail, like the vast white fleecy tail of some squirrel, that had just dived out of sight behind the mountains. This wild white tail fleeced up and up, to the zenith, straight at the sun. And as the canoa spread her sail to tack back, already a delicate film of shadow was over the chalk-white lake.

Only on the low end of the isle of Scorpions, hot air still quivered.

Ramón returned in one of the motor-boats. Slowly the sky was clouding for the thunder and the rain. The canoa, unable to make her way across, was sailing for Tullapan. The little boats hurried in silence.

They landed before the wind rose. Ramón went and locked the doors of the church.

The crowd scattered in the wind, rebozos waving wildly, leaves torn, dust racing. Sayula was empty of God, and, at heart, they were glad.