

LEW WALLACE

THE FAIR GOD;
OR, THE LAST
OF THE 'TZINS

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The Fair God; or, The Last of the 'Tzins: A Tale of the Conquest of Mexico:

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NOTE BY THE AUTHOR

A personal experience, though ever so plainly told, is, generally speaking, more attractive to listeners and readers than fiction. A circumstance from the tongue or pen of one to whom it actually happened, or who was its hero or victim, or even its spectator, is always more interesting than if given second-hand. If the makers of history, contradistinguished from its writers, could teach it to us directly, one telling would suffice to secure our lasting remembrance. The reason is, that the narrative so proceeding derives a personality and reality not otherwise attainable, which assist in making way to our imagination and the sources of our sympathy.

With this theory or bit of philosophy in mind, when the annexed book was resolved upon, I judged best to assume the character of a translator, which would enable me to write in the style and spirit of one who not merely lived at the time

of the occurrences woven in the text, but was acquainted with many of the historical personages who figure therein, and was a native of the beautiful valley in which the story is located. Thinking to make the descriptions yet more real, and therefore more impressive, I took the liberty of attributing the composition to a literator who, whatever may be thought of his works, was not himself a fiction. Without meaning to insinuate that *The Fair God* would have been the worse for creation by Don Fernando de Alva, the Tezcucan, I wish merely to say that it is not a translation. Having been so written, however, now that publication is at hand, change is impossible; hence, nothing is omitted,—title-page, introductory, and conclusion are given to the reader exactly as they were brought to the publisher by the author.

L. W.

Boston Mass. August 8, 1873.

INTRODUCTORY

Fernando De Alva,¹ a noble Tezcucan, flourished, we are told, in the beginning of the sixteenth century. He was a man of great learning, familiar with the Mexican and Spanish languages, and the hieroglyphics of Anahuac. Ambitious to rescue his race from oblivion, and inspired by love of learning, he collected a library, availed himself of his knowledge of picture-writing, became master of the songs and traditions, and, in the Castilian language, composed books of merit.

It was scarcely possible that his labors should escape the researches of Mr. Prescott, who, with such incomparable genius, has given the world a history of the Conquest of Mexico. From him we have a criticism upon the labors of the learned Fernando, from which the following paragraph is extracted.

“Iztlilzochitl’s writings have many of the defects belonging to his age. He often crowds the page with incidents of a trivial and sometimes improbable character. The improbability increases with the distance of the period; for distance, which diminishes objects to the natural eye, exaggerates them to the mental. His chronology, as I have more than once noticed, is inextricably entangled. He has often lent a too willing ear to traditions and reports which would startle the more sceptical

¹ Fernando De Alva Iztlilzochitl.

criticism of the present time. Yet there is an appearance of good faith and simplicity in his writings, which may convince the reader that, when he errs, it is from no worse cause than the national partiality. And surely such partiality is excusable in the descendant of a proud line, shorn of its ancient splendors, which it was soothing to his own feelings to revive again—though with something more than their legitimate lustre—on the canvas of history. It should also be considered that, if his narrative is sometimes startling, his researches penetrate into the mysterious depths of antiquity, where light and darkness meet and melt into each other; and where everything is still further liable to distortion, as seen through the misty medium of hieroglyphics.”

Besides his *Relaciones* and *Historia Chichemeca*, De Alva composed works of a lighter nature, though equally based upon history. Some were lost; others fell into the hands of persons ignorant of their value; a few only were rescued and given to the press. For a considerable period he served as interpreter to the Spanish Viceroy. His duties as such were trifling; he had ample time for literary pursuits; his enthusiasm as a scholar permitted him no relaxation or idleness. Thus favored, it is believed he composed the books now for the first time given to the world.

The MSS. were found among a heap of old despatches from the Viceroy Mendoza to the Emperor. It is quite probable that they became mixed with the State papers through accident; if, however, they were purposely addressed to His Majesty, it must have been to give him a completer idea of the Aztecan people

and their civilization, or to lighten the burthens of royalty by an amusement to which, it is known, Charles V. was not averse. Besides, Mendoza, in his difficulty with the Marquess of the Valley (Cortes), failed not to avail himself of every means likely to propitiate his cause with the court, and especially with the Royal Council of the Indies. It is not altogether improbable, therefore, that the MSS. were forwarded for the entertainment of the members of the Council and the lordly personages of the Court, who not only devoured with avidity, but, as the wily Mendoza well knew, were vastly obliged for, everything relative to the New World, and particularly the dazzling conquest of Mexico.

In the translation, certain liberties have been taken, for which, if wrong has been done, pardon is besought both from the public and the shade of the author. Thus, The Books in the original are unbroken narratives; but, with infinite care and trouble, they have all been brought out of the confusion, and arranged into chapters. So, there were names, some of which have been altogether changed; while others, for the sake of euphony, have been abbreviated, though without sacrificing the identity of the heroes who wore them so proudly.

And thus beginneth the First Book.

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I.

OUR MOTHER HAS A FORTUNE WAITING US YONDER

The Spanish Calendar is simpler than the Aztecan. In fact, Christian methods, of whatever nature, are better than heathen.

So, then, by the Spanish Calendar, March, 1519, had about half spent itself in the valley of Anahuac, which was as yet untrodden by gold-seeker, with cross-hilted sword at his side, and on his lips a Catholic oath. Near noon of one of its fairest days a traveller came descending the western slope of the Sierra de Aqualco. Since the dawn his path had been amongst hills and crags; at times traversing bald rocks that towered to where the winds blew chill, then dipping into warm valleys, where were grass, flowers, and streamlets, and sometimes forests of cedar and fir,—labyrinths in which there reigned a perpetual twilight.

Toilsome as was the way, the traveller, young and strong, marched lightly. His dress, of the kind prevalent in his country, was provincial, and with few signs of rank. He had sandals of buffalo-hide, fitted for climbing rocks and threading pathless woods; a sort of white tunic, covering his body from the neck

to the knees, leaving bare the arms from the shoulder; *maxtlatl* and *tilmatli*—sash and mantle—of cotton, blue tinted, and void of ornament; on the wrist of his left arm he wore a substantial golden bracelet, and in both ears jewelled pendants; while an ebony band, encircling his head, kept his straight black locks in place, and permitted a snow-white bird's-wing for decoration. There was a shield on his left arm, framed of wood, and covered with padded cloth, and in the left hand a javelin barbed with 'itzli; at his back swung a *maquahuitl*, and a quiver filled with arrows; an unstrung bow in his right hand completed his equipments, and served him in lieu of staff. An ocelot, trudging stealthily behind him, was his sole companion.

In the course of his journey he came to a crag that sank bluffly down several hundred feet, commanding a fine prospect. Though the air was cold, he halted. Away to the northwest stretched the beautiful valley of Anahuac, dotted with hamlets and farm-houses, and marked with the silver tracery of streams. Far across the plain, he caught a view of the fresh waters of Lake Chalco, and beyond that, blue in the distance and faintly relieved against the sky, the royal hill of Chapultepec, with its palaces and cypress forests. In all the New World there was no scene comparable with that he looked upon,—none its rival for beauty, none where the heavens seemed so perfectly melted into earth. There were the most renowned cities of the Empire; from that plain went the armies whose marches were all triumphs; in that air hovered the gods awaiting sacrifices; into that sky rose the smoke of

the inextinguishable fires; there shone the brightest suns, and lingered the longest summers; and yonder dwelt that king—in youth a priest, then a warrior, now the terror of all nations—whose signet on the hand of a slave could fill the land with rustling of banners.

No traveller, I ween, could look unmoved on the picture; ours sat down, and gazed with brimful eyes and a beating heart. For the first time he was beholding the matchless vale so overhung with loveliness and full of the monuments of a strange civilization. So rapt was he that he did not observe the ocelot come and lay its head in his lap, like a dog seeking caresses. “Come, boy!” he said, at last rousing himself; “let us on. Our Mother² has a fortune waiting us yonder.”

And they resumed the journey. Half an hour’s brisk walk brought them to the foot of the mountain. Suddenly they came upon company.

It was on the bank of a considerable stream, which, pouring in noisy torrent over a rocky bed, appeared to rush with a song forward into the valley. A clump of giant oaks shaded a level sward. Under them a crowd of *tamanes*,³ tawny, half-clad, broad-shouldered men, devoured loaves of cold maize bread. Near the roots of the trees their masters reclined comfortably on *petates*, or mats, without which an Aztec trader’s outfit was incomplete. Our

² The goddess Cioacoatl, called “Our Lady and Mother.” Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva Esp.

³ Carrier slaves, or porters.

traveller understood at a glance the character of the strangers; so that, as his road led directly to them, he went on without hesitation. As he came near, some of them sat up to observe him.

“A warrior going to the city,” said one.

“Or rather a king’s courier,” suggested another.

“Is not that an ocelot at his heels?” asked a third.

“That it is. Bring me my javelin!”

“And mine! And mine!” cried several of them at once, all springing to their feet.

By the time the young man came up, the whole party stood ready to give him an armed welcome.

I am very sorry to have disturbed you,” he said, quietly finding himself obliged to stop.

“You seem friendly enough,” answered one of the older men; “but your comrade there,—what of him?”

The traveller smiled. “See, he is muzzled.”

The party laughed at their own fears. The old merchant, however, stepped forward to the young stranger.

“I confess you have greatly relieved me. I feared the brute might set on and wound somebody. Come up, and sit down with us.”

The traveller was nowise disinclined, being tempted by the prospect of cheer from the provision-baskets lying around.

“Bring a mat for the warrior,” said the friendly trader. “Now give him bread and meat.”

From an abundance of bread, fowl, and fruit the wayfarer

helped himself. A running conversation was meantime maintained.

“My ocelot? The story is simple; for your sakes, good friends, I wish it were better. I killed his mother, and took him when a whelp. Now he does me good service hunting. You should see him in pursuit of an antelope!”

“Then you are not a warrior?”

“To be a warrior,” replied the hunter, modestly, “is to have been in many battles, and taken many captives. I have practised arms, and, at times, boasted of skill,—foolishly, perhaps; yet, I confess, I never marched a day under the banner of the great king.”

“Ah!” said the old man, quizzically, “I understand you. You have served some free-trading company like our own.”

“You are shrewd. My father is a merchant. At times he has travelled with strong trains, and even attacked cities that have refused him admission to their market.”

“Indeed! He must be of renown. In what province does he live, my son?”

“In Tihuanco.”

“Tepaja! old Tepaja, of Tihuanco! Are you son of his?” The good man grasped the young one’s hand enthusiastically. “I knew him well; many years ago we were as brothers together; we travelled and traded through many provinces. That was the day of the elder Montezuma, when the Empire was not as large as now; when, in fact, most gates were closed against us, because

our king was an Aztec, and we had to storm a town, then turn its square into a market for the sale of our wares. Sometimes we marched an army, each of us carrying a thousand slaves; and yet our tasks were not always easy. I remember once, down on the bank of the Great River, we were beaten back from a walled town, and succeeded only after a four days' fight. Ah, but we made it win! We led three thousand slaves back to Tenochtitlan, besides five hundred captives,—a present for the gods."

So the merchant talked until the hunger of his new acquaintance was appeased; then he offered a pipe, which was declined.

"I am fond of a pipe after a good meal; and this one has been worthy a king. But now I have no leisure for the luxury; the city to which I am bound is too far ahead of me."

"If it is your first visit, you are right. Fail not to be there before the market closes. Such a sight never gladdened your dreams!"

"So I have heard my father say."

"O, it never was as it will be to-night! The roads for days have been thronged with visitors going up in processions."

"What is the occasion?"

"Why, to-morrow is the celebration of Quetzal! Certainly, my son, you have heard the prophecies concerning that god."

"In rumors only. I believe he was to return to Anahuac."

"Well, the story is long, and you are in a hurry. We also are going to the city, but will halt our slaves at Iztapalapan for the night, and cross the causeway before the sun to-morrow. If you

care to keep us company, we will start at once; on the way I will tell you a few things that may not be unacceptable.”

“I see,” said the hunter, pleasantly, “I have reason to be proud of my father’s good report. Certainly, I will go a distance with you at least, and thank you for information. To speak frankly, I am seeking my fortune.”

The merchant spoke to his companions, and raising a huge conch-shell to his mouth, blew a blast that started every slave to his feet. For a few minutes all was commotion. The mats were rolled up, and, with the provision-baskets, slung upon broad shoulders; each *tamane* resumed his load of wares, and took his place; those armed put themselves, with their masters, at the head; and at another peal from the shell all set forward. The column, if such it may be called, was long, and not without a certain picturesqueness as it crossed the stream, and entered a tract covered with tall trees, amongst which the palm was strangely intermingled with the oak and the cypress. The whole valley, from the lake to the mountains, was irrigated, and under cultivation. Full of wonder, the hunter marched beside the merchant.

CHAPTER II.

QUETZAL', THE FAIR GOD

“I was speaking about Quetzal', I believe,” said the old man, when all were fairly on the way. “His real name was Quetzalcoatl.⁴ He was a wonderfully kind god, who, many ages ago, came into the valley here, and dwelt awhile. The people were then rude and savage; but he taught them agriculture, and other arts, of which you will see signs as we get on. He changed the manners and customs; while he stayed, famine was unknown; the harvests were abundant, and happiness universal. Above all, he taught the princes wisdom in their government. If to-day the Aztec Empire is the strongest in the world, it is owing to Quetzal'. Where he came from, or how long he stayed, is not known. The people and their governors after a time proved ungrateful, and banished him; they also overthrew his religion, and set up idols again, and sacrificed men, both of which he had prohibited. Driven away, he went to Cholula; thence to the sea-coast, where, it is said, he built him a canoe of serpent-skins, and departed for Tlapallan, a heaven lying somewhere toward the rising sun. But before he went, he promised to return some day, and wrest away the Empire and restore his own religion. In appearance he was not like our race; his skin was white, his hair long and wavy and

⁴ In Aztec mythology, God of the Air.

black. He is said to have been wise as a god, and more beautiful than men. Such is his history; and, as the prophecy has it, the time of his return is at hand. The king and Tlalac, the *teotuctli*,⁵ are looking for him; they expect him every hour, and, they say, live in continued dread of him. Wishing to propitiate him, they have called the people together, and celebrate to-morrow, with sacrifices and combats and more pomp than was ever seen before, not excepting the time of the king's coronation."

The hunter listened closely, and at the conclusion said, "Thank you, uncle. Tell me now of the combats."

"Yes. In the days of the first kings it was the custom to go into the temples, choose the bravest warriors there set apart for sacrifice, bring them into the *tianguetz*, and make them do battle in the presence of the people. If they conquered, they were set free and sent home with presents."⁶

"With whom did they combat?"

"True enough, my son. The fight was deemed a point of honor amongst the Aztecs, and the best of them volunteered. Indeed, those were royal times! Of late, I am sorry to say, the custom of which I was speaking has been neglected, but to-morrow it is to be revived. The scene will be very grand. The king and all the nobles will be there."

The description excited the listener's fancy, and he said, with flushed cheeks, "I would not lose the chance for the world. Can

⁵ Equivalent to Pontiff or Pope.

⁶ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva Esp.

you tell me who of the Aztecs will combat?"

"In the city we could easily find out; but you must recollect I am going home after a long absence. The shields of the combatants are always exhibited in the *tianguetz* the evening before the day of the fight. In that way the public are notified beforehand of those who take the field. As the city is full of caciques, you may be assured our champions will be noble."

"Thank you again, uncle. And now, as one looking for service, like myself, is anxious to know with whom to engage, tell me of the caciques and chiefs."

"Then you intend entering the army?"

"Well, yes. I am tired of hunting; and though trading is honorable, I have no taste for it."

The merchant, as if deliberating, took out a box of snuff and helped himself; and then he replied,—

"The caciques are very numerous; in no former reign, probably, were there so many of ability and renown. With some of them I have personal acquaintance; others I know only by sight or reputation. You had better mention those of whom you have been thinking."

"Well," said the hunter, "there is Iztlil', the Tezcucan."⁷

"Do not think of him, I pray you!" And the good man spoke earnestly. "He is brave as any, and perhaps as skilful, but proud, haughty, soured, and treacherous. Everybody fears him. I suppose you have heard of his father."

⁷ Ixtlilxochitl, son of Nezahualpilli, king of Tezcucan.

“You mean the wise ’Hualpilli?”

“Yes. Upon his death, not long since, Iztli’ denied his brother’s right to the Tezcucan throne. There was a quarrel which would have ended in blood, had not Montezuma interfered, and given the city to Cacama, and all the northern part of the province to Iztli’. Since that, the latter has been discontented with the great king. So, I say again, do not think of him, unless you are careless about honor.”

“Then what of Cacama?⁸ Tezcucoco is a goodly city.”

“He has courage, but is too effeminate to be a great warrior. A garden and a soft couch delight him more than camps, and dancing women better than fighting men. You might grow rich with him, but not renowned. Look elsewhere.”

“Then there is the lord Cuitlahua.”⁹

“The king’s brother, and governor of Iztapalapan!” said the merchant, promptly. “Some have thought him better qualified for Chapultepec than Montezuma, but it is not wise to say so. His people are prosperous, and he has the most beautiful gardens in the world; unlike Cacama, he cares nothing for them, when there is a field to be fought. Considering his influence at court and his love of war, you would do well to bear shield for him; but, on the other hand, he is old. Were I in your place, my son, I would attach myself to some young man.”

“That brings me to Maxtla, the Tesoyucan.”

⁸ King of Tezcucoco.

⁹ See Prescott’s Conq. of Mexico.

“I know him only by repute. With scarcely a beard, he is chief of the king’s guard. There was never anything like his fortune. Listen now, I will tell you a secret which may be of value to you some time. The king is not as young as he used to be by quite forty summers.”

The hunter smiled at the caution with which the old man spoke of the monarch.

“You see,” the speaker continued, “time and palace life have changed him: he no longer leads the armies; his days are passed in the temples with the priests, or in the gardens with his women, of whom there are several hundreds; his most active amusement now is to cross the lake to his forests, and kill birds and rabbits by blowing little arrows at them through a reed. Thus changed, you can very well understand how he can be amused by songs and wit, and make favorites of those who best lighten his hours of satiety and indolence. In that way Maxtla rose,—a marvellous courtier, but a very common soldier.”

The description amused the young man, but he said gravely, “You have spoken wisely, uncle, and I am satisfied you know the men well. Really, I had no intention of entering the suite of either of them: they are not of my ideal; but there is a cacique, if reports are to be credited, beyond all exception,—learned and brave, honored alike by high and low.”

“Ah! you need not name him to me. I know him, as who does not?” And now the merchant spoke warmly. “A nobler than

Guatamozin,¹⁰—or, as he is more commonly called, the 'tzin Guatamo—never dwelt in Anahuac. He is the people's friend, and the Empire's hope. His valor and wisdom,—ah, you should see him, my son! Such a face! His manner is so full of sweet dignity! But I will give you other evidence.”

He clapped his hands three times, and a soldier sprang forward at the signal.

“Do you know the 'tzin Guatamo?” asked the merchant.

“I am an humble soldier, my master, and the 'tzin is the great king's nephew; but I know him. When he was only a boy, I served under him in Tlascala. He is the best chief in Anahuac.”

“That will do.”

The man retired.

“So I might call up my *tamanes*,” the merchant resumed, “and not one but would speak of him in the same way.”

“Strange!” said the Tihuanacan, in a low tone.

“No; if you allude to his popularity, it is not strange: if you mean the man himself, you are right. The gods seldom give the qualities that belong to him. He is more learned than Tlalac or the king; he is generous as becomes a prince; in action he is a hero.

¹⁰ Guatamozin, nephew to Montezuma. Of him Bernal Diaz says: “This monarch was between twenty-three and twenty-four years of age, and could in all truth be called a handsome man, both as regards his countenance and figure. His face was rather of an elongated form, with a cheerful look; his eye had great expression, both when he assumed a majestic expression, or when he looked pleasantly around; the color of his face inclined to white more than to the copper-brown tint of the Indians in general.”—Diaz, *Conquest of Mexico*, Lockhart's Trans., Vol. IV., p. 110.

You have probably heard of the Tlascalan wall in the eastern valley;¹¹ few warriors ever passed it and lived; yet he did so when almost a boy. I myself have seen him send an arrow to the heart of an eagle in its flight. He has a palace and garden in Iztapalapan; in one of the halls stand the figures of three kings, two of Michuaca, and one of the Ottomies. He took them prisoners in battle, and now they hold torches at his feasts.”

“Enough, enough!” cried the hunter. “I have been dreaming of him while among the hills. I want no better leader.”

The merchant cast an admiring glance at his beaming countenance, and said, “You are right; enter his service.”

In such manner the conversation was continued, until the sun fast declined towards the western mountains. Meantime, they had passed through several hamlets and considerable towns. In nearly the whole progress, the way on either hand had been lined with plantations. Besides the presence of a busy, thriving population, they everywhere saw evidences of a cultivation and science, constituting the real superiority of the Aztecs over their neighbors. The country was thus preparing the stranger for the city, unrivalled in splendor and beauty. Casting a look toward the sun, he at length said, “Uncle, I have much to thank you for,—you and your friends. But it is growing late, and I must hurry on, if I would see the *tianguetz* before the market closes.”

“Very well,” returned the old trader. “We will be in the city to-morrow. The gods go with you!”

¹¹ Prescott's Conq. of Mexico, Vol. I., p. 417.

Whistling to his ocelot, the adventurer quickened his pace, and was soon far in the advance.

CHAPTER III.

A CHALLENGE

In the valley of Anahuac, at the time I write, are four lakes,—Xaltocan, Chalco, Xochichalco, and Tezcucu. The latter, besides being the largest, washed the walls of Tenochtitlan, and was the especial pride of the Aztecs, who, familiar with its ways as with the city, traversed them all the days of the year, and even the nights.

“Ho, there!” shouted a *voyageur*, in a voice that might have been heard a long distance over the calm expanse of the lake. “Ho, the canoe!”

The hail was answered.

“Is it Guatamozin?” asked the first speaker.

“Yes.”

“And going to Tenochtitlan?”

“The gods willing,—yes.”

The canoes of the *voyageurs*—I use that term because it more nearly expresses the meaning of the word the Aztecs themselves were wont to apply to persons thus abroad—were, at the time, about the middle of the little sea. After the ’tzin’s reply, they were soon alongside, when lashings were applied, and together they swept on rapidly, for the slaves at the paddles vied in skill and discipline.

“Iztlil, of Tezcucu!” said the ’tzin, lightly. “He is welcome;

but had a messenger asked me where at this hour he would most likely be found, I should have bade him search the *chinampas*, especially those most notable for their perfume and music.”

The speech was courteous, yet the moment of reply was allowed to pass. The 'tzin waited until the delay excited his wonder.

“There is a rumor of a great battle with the Tlascalans,” he said again, this time with a direct question. “Has my friend heard of it?”

“The winds that carry rumors seldom come to me,” answered Iztlil’.

“Couriers from Tlascala pass directly through your capital—”

The Tezcucan laid his hand on the speaker’s shoulder.

“My capital!” he said. “Do you speak of the city of Tezcucoc?”

The 'tzin dashed the hand away, and arose, saying, “Your meaning is dark in this dimness of stars.”

“Be seated,” said the other.

“If I sit, is it as friend or foe?”

“Hear me; then be yourself the judge.”

The Aztec folded his cloak about him and resumed his seat, very watchful.

“Montezuma, the king—”

“Beware! The great king is my kinsman, and I am his faithful subject.”

The Tezcucan continued. “In the valley the king is next to the gods; yet to his nephew I say I hate him, and will teach

him that my hate is no idleness, like a passing love. 'Tzin, a hundred years ago our races were distinct and independent. The birds of the woods, the winds of the prairie, were not more free than the people of Tezcucu. We had our capital, our temples, our worship, and our gods; we celebrated our own festivals, our kings commanded their own armies, our priesthood prescribed their own sacrifices. But where now are king, country, and gods? Alas! you have seen the children of 'Hualpilli, of the blood of the Acolhuan, suppliants of Montezuma, the Aztec." And, as if overcome by the recollection, he burst into apostrophe. "I mourn thee, O Tezcucu, garden of my childhood, palace of my fathers, inheritance of my right! Against me are thy gates closed. The stars may come, and as of old garland thy towers with their rays; but in thy echoing halls and princely courts never, never shall I be known again!"

The silence that ensued, the 'tzin was the first to break.

"You would have me understand," he said, "that the king has done you wrong. Be it so. But, for such cause, why quarrel with me?"

"Ah, yes!" answered the Tezcucan, in an altered voice. "Come closer, that the slaves may not hear."

The Aztec kept his attitude of dignity. Yet lower Iztzil' dropped his voice.

"The king has a daughter whom he calls Tula, and loves as the light of his palace."

The 'tzin started, but held his peace.

“You know her?” continued the Tezcucan.

“Name her not!” said Guatamozin, passionately.

“Why not? I love her, and but for you, O ’tzin, she would have loved me. You, too, have done me wrong.”

With thoughts dark as the waters he rode, the Aztec looked long at the light of fire painted on the sky above the distant city.

“Is Guatamozin turned woman?” asked Iztzil’, tauntingly.

“Tula is my cousin. We have lived the lives of brother and sister. In hall, in garden, on the lake, always together, I could not help loving her.”

“You mistake me,” said the other. “I seek her for wife, but you seek her for ambition; in her eyes you see only her father’s throne.”

Then the Aztec’s manner changed, and he assumed the mastery.

“Enough, Tezcucan! I listened calmly while you reviled the king, and now I have somewhat to say. In your youth the wise men prophesied evil from you; they said you were ingrate and blasphemer then: your whole life has but verified their judgment. Well for your royal father and his beautiful city had he cut you off as they counselled him to do. Treason to the king,—defiance to me! By the holy Sun, for each offence you should answer me shield to shield! But I recollect that I am neither priest to slay a victim nor officer to execute the law. I mourn a feud, still more the blood of countrymen shed by my hand; yet the wrongs shall not go unavenged or without challenge. To-morrow is the

sacrifice to Quetzal'. There will be combat with the best captives in the temples; the arena will be in the *tianguetz*; Tenochtitlan, and all the valley, and all the nobility of the Empire, will look on. Dare you prove your kingly blood? I challenge the son of 'Hualpilli to share the danger with me."

The cacique was silent, and the 'tzin did not disturb him. At his order, however, the slaves bent their dusky forms, and the vessels sped on, like wingless birds.

CHAPTER IV.

TENOCHTITLAN AT NIGHT

The site of the city of Tenochtitlan was chosen by the gods. In the southwestern border of Lake Tezcuco, one morning in 1300, a wandering tribe of Aztecs saw an eagle perched, with outspread wings, upon a cactus, and holding a serpent in its talons. At a word from their priests, they took possession of the marsh, and there stayed their migration and founded the city: such is the tradition. As men love to trace their descent back to some storied greatness, nations delight to associate the gods with their origin.

Originally the Aztecs were barbarous. In their southern march, they brought with them only their arms and a spirit of sovereignty. The valley of Anahuac, when they reached it, was already peopled; in fact, had been so for ages. The cultivation and progress they found and conquered there reacted upon them. They grew apace; and as they carried their shields into neighboring territory, as by intercourse and commerce they crept from out their shell of barbarism, as they strengthened in opulence and dominion, they repudiated the reeds and rushes of which their primal houses were built, and erected enduring temples and residences of Oriental splendor.

Under the smiles of the gods, whom countless victims kept propitiated, the city threw abroad its arms, and, before the passage of a century, became the emporium of the valley. Its

people climbed the mountains around, and, in pursuit of captives to grace their festivals, made the conquest of "Mexico." Then the kings began to centralize. They made Tenochtitlan their capital; under their encouragement, the arts grew and flourished; its market became famous; the nobles and privileged orders made it their dwelling-place; wealth abounded; as a consequence, a vast population speedily filled its walls and extended them as required. At the coming of the "conquistadores," it contained sixty thousand houses and three hundred thousand souls. Its plan testifies to a high degree of order and regularity, with all the streets running north and south, and intersected by canals, so as to leave quadrilateral blocks. An ancient map, exhibiting the city proper, presents the face of a checker-board, each square, except those of some of the temples and palaces, being meted with mathematical certainty.

Such was the city the 'tzin and the cacique were approaching. Left of them, half a league distant, lay the towers and embattled gate of Xoloc. On the horizon behind paled the fires of Iztapalapan, while those of Tenochtitlan at each moment threw brighter hues into the sky, and more richly empurpled the face of the lake. In mid air, high over all others, like a great torch, blazed the pyre of Huitzil.¹² Out on the sea, the course of the *voyageurs* was occasionally obstructed by *chinampas* at anchor, or afloat before the light wind; nearer the walls, the floating gardens multiplied until the passage was as if through an archipelago

¹² The God of War,—aptly called the "Mexican Mars."

in miniature. From many of them poured the light of torches; others gave to the grateful sense the melody of flutes and blended voices; while over them the radiance from the temples fell softly, revealing white pavilions, orange-trees, flowering shrubs, and nameless varieties of the unrivalled tropical vegetation. A breeze, strong enough to gently ripple the lake, hovered around the undulating retreats, scattering a largesse of perfume, and so ministering to the voluptuous floramour of the locality.

As the *voyageurs* proceeded, the city, rising to view, underwent a number of transformations. At first, amidst the light of its own fires,¹³ it looked like a black sea-shore; directly its towers and turrets became visible, some looming vaguely and dark, others glowing and purpled, the whole magnified by the dim duplication below; then it seemed like a cloud, one half kindled by the sun, the other obscured by the night. As they swept yet nearer, it changed to the likeness of a long, ill-defined wall, over which crept a hum wing-like and strange,—the hum of myriad life.

In silence still they hurried forward. Vessels like their own, but with lanterns of stained *aguave* at the prows, seeking some favorite *chinampa*, sped by with benisons from the crews. At length they reached the wall, and, passing through an interval that formed the outlet of a canal, entered the city. Instantly

¹³ There was a fire for each altar in the temples which was inextinguishable; and so numerous were the altars, and so brilliant their fires, that they kept the city illuminated throughout the darkest nights. Prescott, Conq. of Mexico, Vol. I., p 72.

the water became waveless; houses encompassed them; lights gleamed across their way; the hum that hovered over them while out on the lake realized itself in the voices of men and the notes of labor.

Yet farther into the city, the light from the temples increased. From towers, turreted like a Moresco castle, they heard the night-watchers proclaiming the hour. Canoes, in flocks, darted by them, decked with garlands, and laden with the wealth of a merchant, or the trade of a market-man, or full of revellers singing choruses to the stars or to the fair denizens of the palaces. Here and there the canal was bordered with sidewalks of masonry, and sometimes with steps leading from the water up to a portal, about which were companies whose flaunting, parti-colored costumes, brilliant in the mellowed light, had all the appearance of Venetian masqueraders.

At last the canoes gained the great street that continued from the causeway at the south through the whole city; then the Tezcucan touched the 'tzin, and said,—

“The son of 'Hualpilli accepts the challenge, Aztec. In the *tianguetz* to-morrow.”

Without further speech, the foemen leaped on the landing, and separated.

CHAPTER V

THE CHILD OF THE TEMPLE

There were two royal palaces in the city; one built by Axaya', the other by Montezuma, the reigning king, who naturally preferred his own structure, and so resided there. It was a low, irregular pile, embracing not only the king's abode proper, but also quarters for his guard, and edifices for an armory, an aviary, and a menagerie. Attached to it was a garden, adorned with the choicest shrubbery and plants, with fruit and forest trees, with walks strewn with shells, and fountains of pure water conducted from the reservoir of Chapultepec.

At night, except when the moon shone, the garden was lighted with lamps; and, whether in day or night, it was a favorite lounging-place. During fair evenings, particularly, its walks, of the whiteness of snow, were thronged by nobles and courtiers.

Shortly after the arrival of Iztzil' and Guatamozin, a party, mostly of the sons of provincial governors kept at the palace as hostages, were gathered in the garden, under a canopy used to shield a fountain from the noonday sun. The place was fairly lighted, the air fresh with the breath of flowers, and delightful with the sound of falling water.

Maxtla, chief of the guard, was there, his juvenility well hidden under an ostentatious display. That he was "a very common soldier" in the opinion of the people was of small

moment: he had the king's ear; and that, without wit and courtierly tact, would have made him what he was,—the oracle of the party around him.

In the midst of his gossip, Iztzil', the Tezcucan, came suddenly to the fountain. He coldly surveyed the assembly. Maxtla alone saluted him.

“Will the prince of Tezcuco be seated?” said the chief.

“The place is pleasant, and the company looks inviting,” returned Iztzil', grimly.

Since his affair with Guatamozin, he had donned the uniform of an Aztec chieftain. Over his shoulders was carelessly flung a crimson *tilmatli*,—a short, square cloak, fantastically embroidered with gold, and so sprinkled with jewels as to flash at every movement; his body was wrapped closely in an *escaupil*, or tunic, of cotton lightly quilted, over which, and around his waist, was a *maxtlatl*, or sash, inseparable from the warrior. A casque of silver, thin, burnished, and topped with plumes, surmounted his head. His features were gracefully moulded, and he would have been handsome but that his complexion was deepened by black, frowning eyebrows. He was excessively arrogant; though sometimes, when deeply stirred by passion, his manner rose into the royal. His character I leave to history.

“I have just come from Iztapalapan,” he said, as he sat upon the proffered stool. “The lake is calm, the way was very pleasant, I had the 'tzin Guatamo' for comrade.”

“You were fortunate. The 'tzin is good company,” said Maxtla.

Iztlil' frowned, and became silent.

"To-morrow," continued the courtier, upon whom the discontent, slight as it was, had not been lost, "is the sacrifice to Quetzal'. I am reminded, gracious prince, that, at a recent celebration, you put up a thousand cocoa,¹⁴ to be forfeited if you failed to see the daughter of Mualox, the paba. If not improper, how runs the wager, and what of the result?"

The cacique shrugged his broad shoulders.

"The man trembles!" whispered one of the party.

"Well he may! Old Mualox is more than a man."

Maxtla bowed and laughed. "Mualox is a magician; the stars deal with him. And my brother will not speak, lest he may cover the sky of his fortune with clouds."

"No," said the Tezcucan, proudly; "the wager was not a sacrilege to the paba or his god; if it was, the god, not the man, should be a warrior's fear."

"Does Maxtla believe Mualox a prophet?" asked Tlahua, a noble Otompan.

"The gods have power in the sun; why not on earth?"

"You do not like the paba," observed Iztlil', gloomily.

"Who has seen him, O prince, and thought of love? And the walls and towers of his dusty temple,—are they not hung with dread, as the sky on a dark day with clouds?"

¹⁴ The Aztec currency consisted of bits of tin, in shape like a capital T, of quills of gold-dust, and of bags of cocoa, containing a stated number of grains. Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva Esp.

The party, however they might dislike the cacique, could not listen coldly to this conversation. They were mostly of that mystic race of Azatlan, who, ages before, had descended into the valley, like an inundation, from the north; the race whose religion was founded upon credulity; the race full of chivalry, but horribly governed by a crafty priesthood. None of them disbelieved in star-dealing. So every eye fixed on the Tezcucan, every ear drank the musical syllables of Maxtla. They were startled when the former said abruptly,—

“Comrades, the wrath of the old paba is not to be lightly provoked; he has gifts not of men. But, as there is nothing I do not dare, I will tell the story.”

The company now gathered close around the speaker.

“Probably you have all heard,” he began, “that Mualox keeps in his temple somewhere a child or woman too beautiful to be mortal. The story may be true; yet it is only a belief; no eye has seen footprint or shadow of her. A certain lord in the palace, who goes thrice a week to the shrine of Quetzal’, has faith in the gossip and the paba. He says the mystery is Quetzal’ himself, already returned, and waiting, concealed in the temple, the ripening of the time when he is to burst in vengeance on Tenochtitlan. I heard him talking about it one day, and wagered him a thousand cocoa that, if there was such a being I would see her before the next sacrifice to Quetzal’.”

The Tezcucan hesitated.

“Is the believer to boast himself wealthier by the wager?” said

Maxtla, profoundly interested. "A thousand cocoa would buy a jewel or a slave: surely, O prince, surely they were worth the winning!"

Iztlil' frowned again, and said bitterly, "A thousand cocoa I cannot well spare; they do not grow on my hard northern hills like flowers in Xochimilco. I did my best to save the wager. Old habit lures me to the great *teocallis*;¹⁵ for I am of those who believe that a warrior's worship is meet for no god but Huitzil'. But, as the girl was supposed to be down in the cells of the old temple, and none but Mualox could satisfy me, I began going there, thinking to bargain humilities for favor. I played my part studiously, if not well; but no offering of tongue or gold ever won me word of friendship or smile of confidence. Hopeless and weary, I at last gave up, and went back to the *teocallis*. But now hear my parting with the paba. A short time ago a mystery was enacted in the temple. At the end, I turned to go away, determined that it should be my last visit. At the eastern steps, as I was about descending, I felt a hand laid on my arm. It was Mualox; and not more terrible looks Tlalac when he has sacrificed a thousand victims. There was no blood on his hands; his beard and surplice were white and stainless; the terror was in his eyes, that seemed to burn and shoot lightning. You know, good chief, that I could have crushed him with a blow; yet I trembled. Looking back now, I cannot explain the awe that seized me. I remember how my will

¹⁵ Temple. The term appears to have applied particularly to the temples of the god Huitzil'.—Tr.

deserted me,—how another's came in its stead. With a glance he bound me hand and foot. While I looked at him, he dilated, until I was covered by his shadow. He magnified himself into the stature of a god. 'Prince of Tezcucó,' he said, 'son of the wise 'Hualpilli, from the sun Quetzal' looks down on the earth. Alike over land and sea he looks. Before him space melts into a span, and darkness puts on the glow of day. Did you think to deceive my god, O prince?' I could not answer; my tongue was like stone. 'Go hence, go hence!' he cried, waving his hand. 'Your presence darkens his mood. His wrath is on your soul; he has cursed you. Hence, abandoned of the gods!' So saying, he went back to the tower again, and my will returned, and I fled. And now," said the cacique, turning suddenly and sternly upon his hearers, "who will deny the magic of Mualox? How may I be assured that his curse that day spoken was not indeed a curse from Quetzal'?"

There was neither word nor laugh,—not even a smile. The gay Maxtla appeared infected with a sombreness of spirit; and it was not long until the party broke up, and went each his way.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CÛ OF QUETZAL', AND MUALOX, THE PABA

Over the city from temple to temple passed the wail of the watchers, and a quarter of the night was gone. Few heard the cry without pleasure; for to-morrow was Quetzal's day, which would bring feasting, music, combat, crowd, and flowers.

Among others the proclamation of the passing time was made from a temple in the neighborhood of the Tlateloco *tianguetz*, or market-place, which had been built by one of the first kings of Tenochtitlan, and, like all edifices of that date properly called Cûs, was of but one story, and had but one tower. At the south its base was washed by a canal; on all the other sides it was enclosed by stone walls high, probably, as a man's head. The three sides so walled were bounded by streets, and faced by houses, some of which were higher than the Cû itself, and adorned with beautiful porticos. The canal on the south ran parallel with the Tlacopan causeway, and intersected the Iztapalapan street at a point nearly half a mile above the great pyramid.

The antique pile thus formed a square of vast extent. According to the belief that there were blessings in the orient rays of the sun, the front was to the east, where a flight of steps, wide as the whole building, led from the ground to the *azoteas*, a paved

area constituting the roof, crowned in the centre by a round tower of wood most quaintly carved with religious symbols. Entering the door of the tower, the devotee might at once kneel before the sacred image of Quetzal'.

A circuitous stairway outside the tower conducted to its summit, where blazed the fire. Another flight of steps about midway the tower and the western verge of the *azoteas* descended into a court-yard, around which, in the shade of a colonnade, were doors and windows of habitable apartments and passages leading far into the interior. And there, shrouded in a perpetual twilight and darkness, once slept, ate, prayed, and studied or dreamed the members of a fraternity powerful as the Templars and gloomy as the *Fratres Minores*.

The interior was cut into rooms, and long, winding halls, and countless cellular dens.

Such was the Cû of Quetzal',—stern, sombre, and massive as in its first days; unchanged in all save the prosperity of its priesthood and the popularity of its shrine. Time was when every cell contained its votaries, and kings, returning from battle, bowed before the altar. But Montezuma had built a new edifice, and set up there a new idol; and as if a king could better make a god than custom, the people abandoned the old ones to desuetude. Up in the ancient cupola, however, sat the image said to have been carved by Quetzal's own hand. Still the fair face looked out benignly on its realm of air; carelessly the winds waved "the plumes of fire" that decked its awful head; and one

stony hand yet grasped a golden sceptre, while the other held aloft the painted shield,—symbols of its dominion.¹⁶ But the servitors and surpliced mystics were gone; the cells were very solitudes; the last paba lingered to protect the image and its mansion, all unwitting how, in his faithfulness of love, he himself had assumed the highest prerogative of a god.

The fire from the urn on the tower flashed a red glow down over the *azoteas*, near a corner of which Mualox stood, his beard white and flowing as his surplice. Thought of days palmier for himself and more glorious for his temple and god struggled to his lips.

“Children of Azatlan, ye have strayed from his shrine, and dust is on his shield. The temple is of his handiwork, but its chambers are voiceless; the morning comes and falls asleep on its steps, and no foot disturbs it, no one seeks its blessings. Where is the hymn of the choir? Where the prayer? Where the holiness that rested, like a spell, around the altar? Is the valley fruitless, and are the gardens without flowers, that he should be without offering or sacrifice?... Ah! well ye know that the day is not distant when he will glister again in the valley; when he will come, not as of old he departed, the full harvest quick ripening in his footsteps, but with the power of Mictlan,¹⁷ the owl on his skirt, and death in his hand. Return, O children, and Tenochtitlan may yet live!”

¹⁶ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva Esp.

¹⁷ The Mexican Hell. The owl was the symbol of the Devil, whose name signifies “the rational owl.”

In the midst of his pleadings there was a clang of sandalled feet on the pavement, and two men came near him, and stopped. One of them wore the hood and long black gown of a priest; the other the full military garb,—burnished casque crested with plumes, a fur-trimmed *tilmatli*, *escaupil*, and *maxtlatl*, and sandals the thongs of which were embossed with silver. He also carried a javelin, and a shield with an owl painted on its face. Indeed, one will travel far before finding, among Christians or unbelievers, his peer. He was then not more than twenty-five years old, tall and nobly proportioned, and with a bearing truly royal. In Spain I have seen eyes as large and lustrous, but none of such power and variety of expression. His complexion was merely the brown of the sun. Though very masculine, his features, especially when the spirit was in repose, were softened by an expression unusually gentle and attractive. Such was the 'tzin Guatamo', or, as he is more commonly known in history, Guatamozin,—the highest, noblest type of his race, blending in one its genius and heroism, with but few of its debasements.

“Mualox,” said the priestly stranger.

The paba turned, and knelt, and kissed the pavement.

“O king, pardon your slave! He was dreaming of his country.”

“No slave of mine, but Quetzal's. Up, Mualox!” said Montezuma, throwing back the hood that covered his head.

“Holy should be the dust that mingles in your beard!”

And the light from the tower shone full on the face of him,—the priest of lore profound, and monarch wise of thought, for

whom Heaven was preparing a destiny most memorable among the melancholy episodes of history.

A slight mustache shaded his upper lip, and thin, dark beard covered his chin and throat; his nose was straight; his brows curved archly; his forehead was broad and full, while he seemed possessed of height and strength. His neck was round, muscular, and encircled by a collar of golden wires. His manner was winsome, and he spoke to the kneeling man in a voice clear, distinct, and sufficiently emphatic for the king he was.¹⁸

Mualox arose, and stood with downcast eyes, and hands crossed over his breast.

“Many a coming of stars it has been,” he said, “since the old shrine has known the favor of gift from Montezuma. Gloom of clouds in a vale of firs is not darker than the mood of Quetzal’; but to the poor paba, your voice, O king, is welcome as the song of the river in the ear of the thirsty.”

The king looked up at the fire on the tower.

“Why should the mood of Quetzal’ be dark? A new *teocallis* holds his image. His priests are proud; and they say he is happy, and that when he comes from the golden land his canoe will be full of blessings.”

Mualox sighed, and when he ventured to raise his eyes to the king’s, they were wet with tears.

“O king, have you forgotten that chapter of the *teoamoxtli*,¹⁹ in

¹⁸ Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista.

¹⁹ The Divine Book, or Bible. Ixtlil’s Relaciones M.S.

which is written how this Cû was built, and its first fires lighted, by Quetzal' himself? The new pyramid may be grand; its towers may be numberless, and its fires far reaching as the sun itself; but hope not that will satisfy the god, while his own house is desolate. In the name of Quetzal', I, his true servant, tell you, never again look for smile from Tlapallan."

The paba's speech was bold, and the king frowned; but in the eyes of the venerable man there was the unaccountable fascination mentioned by Iztlil'.

"I remember the Mualox of my father's day; surely he was not as you are!" Then, laying his hand on the 'tzin's arm, the monarch added, "Did you not say the holy man had something to tell me?"

Mualox answered, "Even so, O king! Few are the friends left the paba, now that his religion and god are mocked; but the 'tzin is faithful. At my bidding he went to the palace. Will Montezuma go with his servant?"

"Where?"

"Only into the Cû."

The monarch faltered.

"Dread be from you!" said Mualox. "Think you it is as hard to be faithful to a king as to a god whom even he has abandoned?"

Montezuma was touched. "Let us go," he said to the 'tzin.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROPHECY ON THE WALL

Mualox led them into the tower. The light of purpled lamps filled the sacred place, and played softly around the idol, before which they bowed. Then he took a light from the altar, and conducted them to the *azoteas*, and down into the court-yard, from whence they entered a hall leading on into the Cû.

The way was labyrinthine, and both the king and the 'tzin became bewildered; they only knew that they descended several stairways, and walked a considerable distance; nevertheless, they submitted themselves entirely to their guide, who went forward without hesitancy. At last he stopped; and, by the light which he held up for the purpose, they saw in a wall an aperture roughly excavated, and large enough to admit them singly.

“You have read the Holy Book, wise king,” said Mualox. “Can you not recall its saying that, before the founding of Tenochtitlan, a Cû was begun, with chambers to lie under the bed of the lake? Especially, do you not remember the declaration that, in some of those chambers, besides a store of wealth so vast as to be beyond the calculation of men, there were prophecies to be read, written on the walls by a god?”

“I remember it,” said the king.

“Give me faith, then, and I will show you all you there read.” Thereupon the paba stepped into the aperture, saying,—

“Mark! I am now standing under the eastern wall of the old Cû.”

He passed through, and they followed him, and were amazed.

“Look around, O king! You are in one of the chambers mentioned in the Holy Book.”

The light penetrated but a short distance, so that Montezuma could form no idea of the extent of the apartment. He would have thought it a great natural cavern but for the floor smoothly paved with alternate red and gray flags, and some massive stone blocks rudely piled up in places to support the roof.

As they proceeded, Mualox said, “On every side of us there are rooms through which we might go till, in stormy weather, the waves of the lake can be heard breaking overhead.”

In a short time they again stopped.

“We are nearly there. Son of a king, is your heart strong?” said Mualox, solemnly.

Montezuma made no answer.

“Many a time,” continued the paba, “your glance has rested on the tower of the old Cû, then flashed to where, in prouder state, your pyramids rise. You never thought the gray pile you smiled at was the humblest of all Quetzal’s works. Can a man, though a king, outdo a god?”

“I never thought so, I never thought so!”

But the mystic did not notice the deprecation.

“See,” he said, speaking louder, “the pride of man says, I will build upward that the sun may show my power; but the gods

are too great for pride; so the sun shines not on their especial glories, which as frequently lie in the earth and sea as in the air and heavens. O mighty king! You crush the worm under your sandal, never thinking that its humble life is more wonderful than all your temples and state. It was the same folly that laughed at the simple tower of Quetzal', which has mysteries—"

"Mysteries!" said the king.

"I will show you wealth enough to restock the mines and visited valleys with all their plundered gold and jewels."

"You are dreaming, paba."

"Come, then; let us see!"

They moved past some columns, and came before a great, arched doorway, through which streamed a brilliance like day.

"Now, let your souls be strong!"

They entered the door, and for a while were blinded by the glare, and could see only the floor covered with grains of gold large as wheat. Moving on, they came to a great stone table, and stopped.

"You wonder; and so did I, until I was reminded that a god had been here. Look up, O king! look up, and see the handiwork of Quetzal'!"

The chamber was broad and square. The obstruction of many pillars, forming the stay of the roof, was compensated by their lightness and wonderful carving. Lamps, lit by Mualox in anticipation of the royal coming, blazed in all quarters. The ceiling was covered with lattice-work of shining white and

yellow metals, the preciousness of which was palpable to eyes accustomed like the monarch's. Where the bars crossed each other, there were fanciful representations of flowers, wrought in gold, some of them large as shields, and garnished with jewels that burned with star-like fires. Between the columns, up and down ran rows of brazen tables, bearing urns and vases of the royal metals, higher than tall men, and carved all over with gods in *bas-relief*, not as hideous caricatures, but beautiful as love and Grecian skill could make them. Between the vases and urns there were heaps of rubies and pearls and brilliants, amongst which looked out softly the familiar, pale-green lustre of the *chalchuites*, or priceless Aztec diamond.²⁰ And here and there, like guardians of the buried beauty and treasure, statues looked down from tall pedestals, crowned and armed, as became the kings and demi-gods of a great and martial people. The monarch was speechless. Again and again he surveyed the golden chamber. As if seeking an explanation, but too overwhelmed for words, he turned to Mualox.

“And now does Montezuma believe his servant dreaming?” said the paba. “Quetzal’ directed the discovery of the chamber. I knew of it, O king, before you were born. And here is the wealth of which I spoke. If it so confounds you, how much more will the other mystery! I have dug up a prophecy; from darkness plucked a treasure richer than all these. O king, I will give you to read a message from the gods!”

²⁰ A kind of emerald, used altogether by the nobility. Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva Esp.

The monarch's face became bloodless, and it had now not a trace of scepticism.

"I will show you from Quetzal' himself that the end of your Empire is at hand, and that every wind of the earth is full sown with woe to you and yours. The writing is on the walls. Come!"

And he led the king, followed by Guatamozin, to the northern corner of the eastern wall, on which, in square marble panels, *bas-relief* style, were hieroglyphs and sculptured pictures of men, executed apparently by the same hand that chiselled the statues in the room. The ground of the carvings was coated with coarse gray coral, which had the effect to bring out the white figures with marvellous perfection.

"This, O king, is the writing," said Mualox, "which begins here, and continues around the walls. I will read, if you please to hear."

Montezuma waved his hand, and the paba proceeded.

"This figure is that of the first king of Tenochtitlan; the others are his followers. The letters record the time of the march from the north. Observe that the first of the writing—its commencement—is here in the north."

After a little while, they moved on to the second panel.

"Here," said Mualox, "is represented the march of the king. It was accompanied with battles. See, he stands with lifted javelin, his foot on the breast of a prostrate foe. His followers dance and sound shells; the priests sacrifice a victim. The king has won a great victory."

They stopped before the third panel.

“And here the monarch is still on the march. He is in the midst of his warriors; no doubt the crown he is receiving is that of the ruler of a conquered city.”

This cartoon Montezuma examined closely. The chief, or king, was distinguished by a crown in all respects like that then in the palace; the priests, by their long gowns; and the warriors, by their arms, which, as they were counterparts of those still in use, sufficiently identified the wanderers. Greatly was the royal inspector troubled. And as the paba slowly conducted him from panel to panel, he forgot the treasure with which the chamber was stored. What he read was the story of his race, the record of their glory. The whole eastern wall, he found, when he had passed before it, given to illustrations of the crusade from Azatlan, the fatherland, northward so far that corn was gathered in the snow, and flowers were the wonder of the six weeks' summer.

In front of the first panel on the southern wall Mualox said,—

“All we have passed is the first era in the history; this is the beginning of the second; and the first writing on the western wall will commence a third. Here the king stands on a rock; a priest points him to an eagle on a cactus, holding a serpent. At last they have reached the place where Tenochtitlan is to be founded.”

The paba passed on.

“Here,” he said, “are temples and palaces. The king reclines on a couch; the city has been founded.”

And before another panel,—“Look well to this, O king. A

new character is introduced; here it is before an altar, offering a sacrifice of fruits and flowers. It is Quetzal'! In his worship, you recollect, there is no slaughter of victims. My hands are pure of blood."

The Quetzal', with its pleasant face, flowing curls, and simple costume, seemed to have a charm for Montezuma, for he mused over it a long time. Some distance on, the figure again appeared, stepping into a canoe, while the people, temples, and palaces of the city were behind it. Mualox explained, "See, O king! The fair god is departing from Tenochtitlan; he has been banished. Saddest of all the days was that!"

And so, the holy man interpreting, they moved along the southern wall. Not a scene but was illustrative of some incident memorable in the Aztecan history. And the reviewers were struck with the faithfulness of the record not less than with the beauty of the work.

On the western wall, the first cartoon represented a young man sweeping the steps of a temple. Montezuma paused before it amazed, and Guatamozin for the first time cried out, "It is the king! It is the king!" The likeness was perfect.

After that came a coronation scene. The *teotuctli* was placing a *panache*²¹ on Montezuma's head. In the third cartoon, he was with the army, going to battle. In the fourth, he was seated, while a man clad in *nequen*,²² but crowned, stood before him.

²¹ Or *capilli*,—the king's crown. A *panache* was the head-dress of a warrior.

²² A garment of coarse white material, made from the fibre of the aloe, and by court

“You have grown familiar with triumphs, and it is many summers since, O king,” said Mualox; “but you have not yet forgotten the gladness of your first conquest. Here is its record. As we go on, recall the kings who were thus made to stand before you.”

And counting as they proceeded, Montezuma found that in every cartoon there was an additional figure crowned and in *nequen*. When they came to the one next the last on the western wall, he said,—

“Show me the meaning of all this: here are thirty kings.”

“Will the king tell his slave the number of cities he has conquered?”

He thought awhile, and replied, “Thirty.”

“Then the record is faithful. It started with the first king of Tenochtitlan; it came down to your coronation; now, it has numbered your conquests. See you not, O king? Behind us, all the writing is of the past; this is Montezuma and Tenochtitlan as they are: the present is before us! Could the hand that set this chamber and carved these walls have been a man’s? Who but a god six cycles ago could have foreseen that a son of the son of Axaya’ would carry the rulers of thirty conquered cities in his train?”

The royal visitor listened breathlessly. He began to comprehend the writing, and thrill with fast-coming

etiquette required to be worn by courtiers and suitors in the king’s presence. The rule appears to have been of universal application.

presentiments. Yet he struggled with his fears.

“Prophecy has to do with the future,” he said; “and you have shown me nothing that the sculptors and jewellers in my palace cannot do. Would you have me believe all this from Quetzal’, show me something that is to come.”

Mualox led him to the next scene which represented the king sitting in state; above him a canopy; his nobles and the women of his household around him; at his feet the people; and all were looking at a combat going on between warriors.

“You have asked for prophecy,—behold!” said Mualox.

“I see nothing,” replied the king.

“Nothing! Is not this the celebration to-morrow? Since it was ordered, could your sculptors have executed what you see?”

Back to the monarch’s face stole the pallor.

“Look again, O king! You only saw yourself, your people and warriors. But what is this?”

Walking up, he laid his finger on the representation of a man landing from a canoe.

“The last we beheld of Quetzal’,” he continued, “was on the southern wall; his back was to Tenochtitlan, which he was leaving with a curse. All you have heard about his promise to return is true. He himself has written the very day, and here it is. Look! While the king, his warriors and people, are gathered to the combat, Quetzal’ steps from the canoe to the sea-shore.”

The figure in the carving was scarcely two hands high, but exquisitely wrought. With terror poorly concealed, Montezuma

recognized it.

“And now my promise is redeemed. I said I would give you to read a message from the sun.”

“Read, Mualox: I cannot.”

The holy man turned to the writing, and said, with a swelling voice, “Thus writes Quetzal’ to Montezuma, the king! In the last day he will seek to stay my vengeance; he will call together his people; there will be combat in Tenochtitlan; but in the midst of the rejoicing I will land on the sea-shore, and end the days of Azatlan forever.”

“Forever!” said the unhappy monarch. “No, no! Read the next writing.”

“There is no other; this is the last.”

The eastern, southern, and western walls had been successively passed, and interpreted. Now the king turned to the northern wall: *it was blank!* His eyes flashed, and he almost shouted,—

“Liar! Quetzal’ may come to-morrow, but it will be as friend. There is no curse!”

The paba humbled himself before the speaker, and said, slowly and tearfully, “The wise king is blinded by his hope. When Quetzal’ finished this chapter, his task was done; he had recorded the last day of perfect glory, and ceased to write because, Azatlan being now to perish, there was nothing more to record. O unhappy king! that is the curse, and it needed no writing!”

Montezuma shook with passion.

“Lead me hence, lead me hence!” he cried. “I will watch; and if Quetzal’ comes not on the morrow,—comes not during the celebration,—I swear to level this temple, and let the lake into its chambers! And you, paba though you be, I will drown you like a slave! Lead on!”

Mualox obeyed without a word. Lamp in hand, he led his visitors from the splendid chamber up to the *azoteas* of the ancient house. As they descended the eastern steps, he knelt, and kissed the pavement.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BUSINESS MAN IN TENOCHTITLAN

Xoli, the Chalcan, was supposed to be the richest citizen, exclusive of the nobles, in Tenochtitlan. Amongst other properties, he owned a house on the eastern side of the Tlateloco *tianguetz*, or market-place; which, whether considered architecturally, or with reference to the business to which it was devoted, or as the device of an unassoilzied heathen, was certainly very remarkable. Its portico had six great columns of white marble alternating six others of green porphyry, with a roof guarded by a parapet intricately and tastefully carved; while cushioned lounges, heavy curtains festooned and flashing with cochineal, and a fountain of water pure enough for the draught of a king, all within the columns, perfected it as a retreat from the sultry summer sun.

The house thus elegantly garnished was not a *meson*, or a café, or a theatre, or a broker's office; but rather a combination of them all, and therefore divided into many apartments; of which one was for the sale of beverages favorite among the wealthy and noble Aztecs,—Bacchic inventions, with *pulque* for chief staple, since it had the sanction of antiquity and was mildly intoxicating; another was a restaurant, where the *cuisine* was

only excelled at the royal table; indeed, there was a story abroad that the king had several times borrowed the services of the Chalcan's *artistes*; but, whether derived from the master or his slaves, the shrewd reader will conclude from it, that the science of advertising was known and practised as well in Tenochtitlan as in Madrid. Nor were those all. Under the same roof were rooms for the amusement of patrons,—for reading, smoking, and games; one in especial for a play of hazard called *totoloque*, then very popular, because a passion of Montezuma's. Finally, as entertainments not prohibited by the *teotuctli*, a signal would, at any time, summon a minstrel, a juggler, or a dancing-girl. Hardly need I say that the establishment was successful. Always ringing with music, and of nights always resplendent with lamps, it was always overflowing with custom.

“So old Tepaja wanted you to be a merchant,” said the Chalcan, in his full, round voice, as, comfortably seated under the curtains of his portico, he smoked his pipe, and talked with our young friend, the Tihuancan.

“Yes. Now that he is old, he thinks war dangerous.”

“You mistake him, boy. He merely thinks with me, that there is something more real in wealth and many slaves. As he has grown older, he has grown wiser.”

“As you will. I could not be a merchant.”

“Whom did you think of serving?”

“The 'tzin Guatamo.”²³

²³ *Tzin* was a title equivalent to *lord* in English. *Guatamotzin*, as compounded,

“I know him. He comes to my portico sometimes, but not to borrow money. You see, I frequently act as broker, and take deposits from the merchants and securities from the spendthrift nobles; he, however, has no vices. When not with the army, he passes the time in study; though they do say he goes a great deal to the palace to make love to the princess. And now that I reflect, I doubt if you can get place with him.”

“Why so?”

“Well, he keeps no idle train, and the time is very quiet. If he were going to the frontier it would be different.”

“Indeed!”

“You see, boy, he is the bravest man and best fighter in the army; and the sensible fellows of moderate skill and ambition have no fancy for the hot place in a fight, which is generally where he is.”

“The discredit is not to him, by Our Mother!” said Hualpa, laughing.

The broker stopped to cherish the fire in his pipe,—an act which the inexperienced consider wholly incompatible with the profound reflection he certainly indulged. When next he spoke, it was with smoke wreathing his round face, as white clouds sometimes wreath the full moon.

“About an hour ago a fellow came here, and said he had heard that Iztliil’, the Tezcucan, had challenged the ’tzin to go into the arena with him to-morrow. Not a bad thing for the god Quetzal’,

signifies *Lord Guatamo*.

if all I hear be true!”

Again the pipe, and then the continuation.

“You see, when the combat was determined on, there happened to be in the temples two Othmies and two Tlascalans, warriors of very great report. As soon as it became known that, by the king’s choice, they were the challengers, the young fellows about the palace shunned the sport, and there was danger that the god would find himself without a champion. To avoid such a disgrace, the ’tzin was coming here to-night to hang his shield in the portico. If he and the Tezcucan both take up the fight, it will be a great day indeed.”

The silence that ensued was broken by the hunter, whom the gossip had plunged into revery.

“I pray your pardon, Xoli; but you said, I think, that the lords hang back from the danger. Can any one volunteer?”

“Certainly; any one who is a warrior, and is in time. Are you of that mind?”

The Chalcan took down the pipe, and looked at him earnestly.

“If I had the arms—”

“But you know nothing about it,—not even how such combats are conducted!”

The broker was now astonished.

“Listen to me,” he said. “These combats are always in honor of some one or more of the Aztecan gods,—generally of Huitzil’, god of war. They used to be very simple affairs. A small platform of stone, of the height of a man, was put up in the midst of

the *tianguetz*, so as to be seen by the people standing around; and upon it, in pairs, the champions fought their duels. This, however, was too plain to suit the tastes of the last Montezuma; and he changed the ceremony into a spectacle really honorable and great. Now, the arena is first prepared,—a central space in a great many rows of seats erected so as to rise one above the other. At the proper time, the people, the priests, and the soldiers go in and take possession of their allotted places. Some time previous, the quarters of the prisoners taken in battle are examined and two or more of the best of the warriors found there are chosen by the king, and put in training for the occasion. They are treated fairly, and are told that, if they fight and win, they shall be crowned as heroes, and returned to their tribes. No need, I think, to tell you how brave men fight when stimulated by hope of glory and hope of life. When chosen, their names are published, and their shields hung up in a portico on the other side of the square yonder; after which they are understood to be the challengers of any equal number of warriors who dare become champions of the god or gods in whose honor the celebration is had. Think of the approved skill and valor of the foe; think of the thousands who will be present; think of your own inexperience in war, and of your youth, your stature hardly gained, your muscles hardly matured; think of everything tending to weaken your chances of success,—and then speak to me.”

Hualpa met the sharp gaze of the Chalcan steadily, and answered, “I am thought to have some skill with the bow and

maquahuitl. Get me the opportunity, and I will fight.”

And Xoli, who was a sincere friend, reflected awhile. “There is peril in the undertaking, to be sure; but then he is resolved to be a warrior, and if he survives, it is glory at once gained, fortune at once made.” Then he arose, and, smiling, said aloud, “Let us go to the portico. If the list be not full, you shall have the arms,—yes, by the Sun! as the lordly Aztecs swear,—the very best in Tenochtitlan.”

And they lifted the curtains, and stepped into the *tianguetz*.²⁴ The light of the fires on the temples was hardly more in strength than the shine of the moon; so that torches had to be set up at intervals over the celebrated square. On an ordinary occasion, with a visitation of forty thousand busy buyers and sellers, it was a show of merchants and merchantable staples worthy the chief mart of an empire so notable; but now, drawn by the double attraction of market and celebration, the multitude that thronged it was trebly greater; yet the order was perfect.

An officer, at the head of a patrol, passed them with a prisoner.

“Ho, Chalcan! If you would see justice done, follow me.”

“Thanks, thanks, good friend; I have been before the judges too often already.”

So the preservation of the peace was no mystery.

²⁴ The great market-place or square of Tlateloco. The Spaniards called it *tianguetz*. For description, see Prescott, *Conq. of Mexico*, Vol. II., Book IV. Bernal Diaz's Work, *Hist. de la Conq.*

The friends made way slowly, giving the Tihuacan time to gratify his curiosity. He found the place like a great national fair, in which few branches of industry were unrepresented. There were smiths who worked in the coarser metals, and jewellers skilful as those of Europe; there were makers and dealers in furniture, and sandals, and *plumaje*; at one place men were disposing of fruits, flowers, and vegetables; not far away fishermen boasted their stock caught that day in the fresh waters of Chalco; tables of pastry and maize bread were set next the quarters of the hunters of Xilotepec; the armorers, clothiers, and dealers in cotton were each of them a separate host. In no land where a science has been taught or a book written have the fine arts been dishonored; and so in the great market of Tenochtitlan there were no galleries so rich as those of the painters, nor was any craft allowed such space for their exhibitions as the sculptors.

They halted an instant before a porch full of slaves. A rapid glance at the miserable wretches, and Xoli said, pitilessly, "Bah! Mictlan has many such. Let us go."

Farther on they came to a platform on which a band of mountebanks was performing. Hualpa would have stayed to witness their tableaux, but Xoli was impatient.

"You see yon barber's shop," he said; "next to it is the portico we seek. Come on!"

At last they arrived there, and mixed with the crowd curious like themselves.

"Ah, boy, you are too late! The list is full."

The Chalcan spoke regretfully.

Hualpa looked for himself. On a clear white wall, that fairly glistened with the flood of light pouring upon it, he counted eight shields, or gages of battle. Over the four to the left were picture-written, "Othmies," "Tascalans." They belonged to the challengers, and were battered and stained, proving that their gathering had been in no field of peace. The four to the right were of the Aztecs, and all bore devices except one. A sentinel stood silently beneath them.

"Welcome, Chalcan!" said a citizen, saluting the broker. "You are in good time to tell us the owners of the shields here."

"Of the Aztecs?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Xoli, slowly and gravely. "The shields I do not know are few and of little note. At one time or another I have seen them all pass my portico going to battle."

A bystander, listening, whispered to his friends,—

"The braggart! He says nothing of the times the owners passed his door to get a pinch of his snuff."

"Or to get drunk on his abominable *pulque*," said another.

"Or to get a loan, leaving their palaces in pawn," said a third party.

But Xoli went on impressively,—

"Those two to the left belong to a surly Otompan and a girl-faced Cholulan. They had a quarrel in the king's garden, and this is the upshot. That other,—surely, O citizens, you know the

shield of Iztlil', the Tezcucan!"

"Yes; but its neighbor?"

"The plain shield! Its owner has a name to win. I can find you enough such here in the market to equip an army. Say, soldier, whose gage is that?"

The sentinel shook his head. "A page came not long ago, and asked me to hang it up by the side of the Tezcucan's. He said not whom he served."

"Well, maybe you know the challengers."

"Two of the shields belong to a father and son of the tribe of Othmies. In the last battle the son alone slew eight Cempoallan warriors for us. Tlascalans, whose names I do not know, own the others."

"Do you think they will escape?" asked a citizen.

The sentinel smiled grimly, and said, "Not if it be true that yon plain shield belongs to Guatamo, the 'tzin."

Directly a patrol, rudely thrusting the citizens aside, came to relieve the guard. In the confusion, the Chalcan whispered to his friend, "Let us go back. There is no chance for you in the arena to-morrow; and this new fellow is sullen; his tongue would not wag though I promised him drink from the king's vase."

Soon after they reached the Chalcan's portico and disappeared in the building, the cry of the night-watchers arose from the temples, and the market was closed. The great crowd vanished; in stall and portico the lights were extinguished; but at once another scene equally tumultuous usurped the *tianguetz*. Thousands of

half-naked *tamanes* rushed into the deserted place, and all night long it resounded, like a Babel, with clamor of tongues, and notes of mighty preparation.

CHAPTER IX.

THE QUESTIONER OF THE MORNING

When Montezuma departed from the old Cû for his palace, it was not to sleep or rest. The revelation that so disturbed him, that held him wordless on the street, and made him shrink from his people, wild with the promise of pomp and combat, would not be shut out by gates and guards; it clung to his memory, and with him stood by the fountain, walked in the garden, and laid down on his couch. Royalty had no medicine for the trouble; he was restless as a fevered slave, and at times muttered prayers, pronouncing no name but Quetzal's. When the morning approached, he called Maxtla, and bade him get ready his canoe: from Chapultepec, the palace and tomb of his fathers, he would see the sun rise.

From one of the westerly canals they put out. The lake was still rocking the night on its bosom, and no light other than of the stars shone in the east. The gurgling sound of waters parted by the rushing vessel, and the regular dip of the paddles, were all that disturbed the brooding of majesty abroad thus early on Tezcuco.

The canoe struck the white pebbles that strewed the landing at the princely property just as dawn was dappling the sky. On the

highest point of the hill there was a tower from which the kings were accustomed to observe the stars. Thither Montezuma went. Maxtla, who alone dared follow, spread a mat for him on the tiles; kneeling upon it, and folding his hands worshipfully upon his breast, he looked to the east.

And the king was learned; indeed, one more so was not in all his realm. In his student days, and in his priesthood, before he was taken from sweeping the temple to be arch-ruler, he had gained astrological craft, and yet practised it from habit. The heavens, with their blazonry, were to him as pictured parchments. He loved the stars for their sublime mystery, and had faith in them as oracles. He consulted them always; his armies marched at their bidding; and they and the gods controlled every movement of his civil polity. But as he had never before been moved by so great a trouble, and as the knowledge he now sought directly concerned his throne and nations, he came to consult and question the Morning, that intelligence higher and purer than the stars. If Quetzal' was angered, and would that day land for vengeance, he naturally supposed the Sun, his dwelling-place, would give some warning. So he came seeking the mood of the god from the Sun.

And while he knelt, gradually the gray dawn melted into purple and gold. The stars went softly out. Long rays, like radiant spears, shot up and athwart the sky. As the indications multiplied, his hopes arose. Farther back he threw the hood from his brow; the sun seemed coming clear and cloudless above the mountains,

kindling his heart no less than the air and earth.

A wide territory, wrapped in the dim light, extended beneath his feet. There slept Tenochtitlan, with her shining temples and blazing towers, her streets and resistless nationality; there were the four lakes, with their blue waters, their shores set with cities, villages and gardens; beyond them lay eastern Anahuac, the princeliest jewel of the Empire. What with its harvests, its orchards, and its homesteads, its forests of oak, sycamore, and cedar, its population busy, happy, and faithful, contented as tillers of the soil, and brave as lions in time of need, it was all of Aden he had ever known or dreamed.

In the southeast, above a long range of mountains, rose the volcanic peaks poetized by the Aztecs into "The White Woman"²⁵ and "The Smoking Hill."²⁶ Mythology had covered them with sanctifying faith, as, in a different age and more classic clime, it clothed the serene mountain of Thessaly.

But the king saw little of all this beauty; he observed nothing but the sun, which was rising a few degrees north of "The Smoking Hill." In all the heavens round there was not a fleck; and already his heart throbbed with delight, when suddenly a cloud of smoke rushed upward from the mountain, and commenced gathering darkly about its white summit. Quick to behold it, he scarcely hushed a cry of fear, and instinctively waved his hand, as if, by a kingly gesture, to stay the eruption. Slowly the vapor

²⁵ Iztacoihuatl.

²⁶ Popocatepetl.

crept over the roseate sky, and, breathless and motionless, the seeker of the god's mood and questioner of the Morning watched its progress. Across the pathway of the sun it stretched, so that when the disk wheeled fairly above the mountain-range, it looked like a ball of blood.

The king was a reader of picture-writing, and skilful in deducing the meaning of men from cipher and hieroglyph. Straightway he interpreted the phenomenon as a direful portent; and because he came looking for omens, the idea that this was a message sent him expressly from the gods was but a right royal vanity. He drew the hood over his face again, and drooped his head disconsolately upon his breast. His mind filled with a host of gloomy thoughts. The revelation of Mualox was prophecy here confirmed,—Quetzal' was coming! Throne, power, people,—all the glories of his country and Empire,—he saw snatched from his nerveless grasp, and floating away, like the dust of the valley.

After a while he arose to depart. One more look he gave the sun before descending from the roof, and shuddered at the sight of city, lake, valley, the cloud itself, and the sky above it, all colored with an ominous crimson.

“Behold!” he said, tremulously, to Maxtla, “to-day we will sacrifice to Quetzal': how long until Quetzal' sacrifices to himself?”

The chief cast down his eyes; for he knew how dangerous it was to look on royalty humbled by fear. Then Montezuma shaded his face again, and left the proud old hill, with a sigh for its

palaces and the beauty of its great cypress-groves.

CHAPTER X.

GOING TO THE COMBAT

As the morning advanced, the city grew fully animate. A festal spirit was abroad, seeking display in masks, mimes, and processions. Jugglers performed on the street-corners; dancing-girls, with tambours, and long elf-locks dressed in flowers, possessed themselves of the smooth sidewalks. Very plainly, the evil omen of the morning affected the king more than his people.

The day advanced clear and beautiful. In the eastern sky the smoke of the volcano still lingered; but the sun rose above it, and smiled on the valley, like a loving god.

At length the tambour in the great temple sounded the signal of assemblage. Its deep tones, penetrating every recess of the town and rushing across the lake, were heard in the villages on the distant shores. Then, in steady currents, the multitudes set forward for the *tianguetz*. The *chinampas* were deserted, hovels and palaces gave up their tenantry; canoes, gay with garlands, were abandoned in the waveless canals. The women and children came down from the roofs; from all the temples—all but the old one with the solitary gray tower and echoless court—poured the priesthood in processions, headed by chanting choirs, and interspersed with countless sacred symbols. Many were the pomps, but that of the warriors surpassed all others. Marching in columns of thousands, they filled the streets with flashing arms

and gorgeous regalia, roar of *atabals* and peals of minstrelsy.

About the same time the royal palanquin stood at the palace portal, engoldened, jewelled, and surmounted with a *panache* of green plumes. Cuitlahua, Cacama, Maxtla, and the lords of Tlacopan, Tepejaca, and Cholula, with other nobles from the provinces far and near, were collected about it in waiting, sporting on their persons the wealth of principalities. When the monarch came out, they knelt, and every one of them placed his palm on the ground before him. On the last stone at the portal he stopped, and raised his eyes to the sky. A piece of *aguave*, fluttering like a leaf, fell so near him that he reached out his hand and caught it.

“Read it, my lords,” he said, after a moment’s study.

The paper contained only the picture of an eagle attacked by an owl, and passed from hand to hand. Intent on deciphering the writing, none thought of inquiring whether its coming was of design or accident.

“What does it mean, my lord Cacama?” asked the monarch, gravely.

Cacama’s eyes dropped as he replied,—

“When we write of you, O king, we paint an eagle; When we write of the ’tzin Guatamo, we paint an owl.”

“What!” said the lord Cuitlahua, “would the ’tzin attack his king?”

And the monarch looked from one to the other strangely, saying only, “The owl is the device on his shield.”

Then he entered the palanquin; whereupon some of the nobles lifted it on their shoulders, and the company, in procession, set out for the *tianguetz*. On the way they were joined by Iztzil', the Tezcucan; and it was remarkable that, of them all, he was the only one silent about the paper.

The Iztapalapan street, of great width, and on both sides lined with gardens, palaces, and temples, was not only the boast of Tenochtitlan; its beauty was told in song and story throughout the Empire. The signal of assemblage for the day's great pastime found Xoli and his provincial friend lounging along the broad pave of the beautiful thoroughfare. They at once started for the *tianguetz*. The broker was fat, and it was troublesome for him to keep pace with the hunter; nevertheless, they overtook a party of *tamanes* going in the same direction, and bearing a palanquin richly caparisoned. The slaves, very sumptuously clad, proceeded slowly and with downcast eyes, and so steadily that the carriage had the onward, gliding motion of a boat.

"Lower,—down, boy! See you not the green *panache*?" whispered Xoli, half frightened.

Too late. The Chalcan, even as he whispered, touched the pavement, but Hualpa remained erect: not only that; he looked boldly into the eyes of the occupants of the palanquin,—two women, whose beauty shone upon him like a sudden light. Then he bent his head, and his heart closed upon the recollection of what he saw so that it never escaped. The picture was of a girl, almost a woman, laughing; opposite her, and rather in

the shade of the fringed curtain, one older, though young, and grave and stately; her hair black, her face oval, her eyes large and lustrous. To her he made his involuntary obeisance. Afterwards she reminded many a Spaniard of the dark-eyed *hermosura* with whom he had left love-tokens in his native land.

“They are the king’s daughters, the princesses Tula and Nenetzin,” said Xoli, when fairly past the carriage. “And as you have just come up from the country, listen. Green is the royal color, and belongs to the king’s family; and wherever met, in the city or on the lake, the people salute it. Though what they meet be but a green feather in a slave’s hand, they salute. Remember the lesson. By the way, the gossips say that Guatamozin will marry Tula, the eldest one.”

“She is very beautiful,” said the hunter, as to himself, and slackening his steps.

“Are you mad?” cried the broker, seizing his arm. “Would you bring the patrol upon us? They are not for such as you. Come on. It may be we can get seats to see the king and his whole household.”

At the entrance to the arena there was a press which the police could hardly control. In the midst of it, Xoli pulled his companion to one side, saying, “The king comes! Let us under the staging here until he passes.”

They found themselves, then, close by the spears, which, planted in the ground, upheld the shields of the combatants; and when the Tihuacan heard the people, as they streamed in, cheer

the champions of the god, he grieved sorely that he was not one of them.

The heralds then came up, clearing the way; and all thereabout knelt, and so received the monarch. He stopped to inspect the shields; for in all his realm there was not one better versed in its heraldry. A diadem, not unlike the papal tiara, crowned his head; his tunic and cloak were of the skins of green humming-birds brilliantly iridescent; a rope of pearls large as grapes hung, many times doubled, from his neck down over his breast; his sandals and sandal-thongs were embossed with gold, and besides anklets of massive gold, *cuishes* of the same metal guarded his legs from knee to anklet. Save the transparent, lustrous gray of the pearls, his dress was of the two colors, green and yellow, and the effect was indescribably royal; yet all the bravery of his trappings could not hide from Hualpa, beholding him for the first time, that, like any common soul, he was suffering from some trouble of mind.

“So, Cacama,” he said, pleasantly, after a look at the gages, “your brother has a mind to make peace with the gods. It is well!”

And thereupon Iztzil’ himself stepped out and knelt before him in battle array, the javelin in his hand, and bow, quiver, and *maquahuitl* at his back; and in his homage the floating feathers of his helm brushed the dust from the royal feet.

“It is well!” repeated the king, smiling. “But, son of my friend, where are your comrades?”

Tlahua, the Otompan, and the young Cholulan, equipped like Iztzil’, rendered their homage also. Over their heads he extended

his hands, and said, softly, "They who love the gods, the gods love. Put your trust in them, O my children. And upon you be their blessing!"

And already he had passed the spears: one gage was forgotten, one combatant unblest. Suddenly he looked back.

"Whose shield is that, my lords?"

All eyes rested upon the plain gage, but no one replied.

"Who is he that thus mocks the holy cause of Quetzal'? Go, Maxtla, and bring him to me!"

Then outspoke Iztli'.

"The shield is Guatamozi's. Last night he challenged me to this combat, and he is not here. O king, the owl may be looking for the eagle."

A moment the sadly serene countenance of the monarch knit and flushed as from a passing pain; a moment he regarded the Tezcucan. Then he turned to the shields of the Othmies and Tlascalans.

"They are a sturdy foe, and I warrant will fight hard," he said, quietly. "But such victims are the delight of the gods. Fail me not, O children!"

When the Tihuanacan and his chaperone climbed half-way to the upper row of seats, in the quarter assigned to the people, the former was amazed. He looked down on a circular arena, strewn with white sand from the lake, and large enough for manœuvring half a thousand men. It was bounded by a rope, outside of which was a broad margin crowded with rank on

rank of common soldiery, whose shields were arranged before them like a wall impervious to a glancing arrow. Back from the arena extended the staging, rising gradually seat above seat, platform above platform, until the whole area of the *tianguetz* was occupied.

“Is the king a magician, that he can do this thing in a single night?” asked Hualpa.

Xoli laughed. “He has done many things much greater. The timbers you see were wrought long ago, and have been lying in the temples; the *tamanes* had only to bring them out and put them together.”

In the east there was a platform, carpeted, furnished with lounges, and protected from the sun by a red canopy; broad passages of entrance separated it from the ruder structure erected for the commonalty; it was also the highest of the platforms, so that its occupants could overlook the whole amphitheatre. This lordlier preparation belonged to the king, his household and nobles. So, besides his wives and daughters, under the red canopy sat the three hundred women of his harem,—soft testimony that Orientalism dwelt not alone in the sky and palm-trees of the valley.

As remarked, the margin around the arena belonged to the soldiery; the citizens had seats in the north and south; while the priesthood, superior to either of them in sanctity of character, sat aloof in the west, also screened by a canopy. And, as the celebration was regarded in the light of a religious exercise, not

only did women crowd the place, but mothers brought their children, that, from the examples of the arena, they might learn to be warriors.

Upon the appearance of the monarch there was a perfect calm. Standing awhile by his couch, he looked over the scene; and not often has royal vision been better filled with all that constitutes royalty. Opposite him he saw the servitors of his religion; at his feet were his warriors and people almost innumerable. When, at last, the minstrels of the soldiery poured their wild music over the theatre, he thrilled with the ecstasy of power.

The champions for the god then came in; and as they strode across to the western side of the arena the air was filled with plaudits and flying garlands; but hardly was the welcome ended before there was a great hum and stir, as the spectators asked each other why the fourth combatant came not with the others.

“The one with the bright *panache*, asked you? That is Iztzil’, the Tezcucan,” said Xoli.

“Is he not too fine?”

“No. Only think of the friends the glitter has made him among the women and children.”

The Chalcan laughed heartily at the cynicism.

“And the broad-shouldered fellow now fixing the thong of his shield?”

“The Otompan,—a good warrior. They say he goes to battle with the will a girl goes to a feast. The other is the Cholulan; he has his renown to win, and is too young.”

“But he may have other qualities,” suggested Hualpa. “I have heard it said that, in a battle of arrows, a quick eye is better than a strong arm.”

The broker yawned. “Well, I like not those Cholulans. They are proud; they scorn the other nations, even the Aztecs. Probably it is well they are better priests than soldiers. Under the red canopy yonder I see his father.”

“Listen, good Xoli. I hear the people talking about the ’tzin? Where can he be?”

Just then within the wall of shields there came a warrior, who strode swiftly toward the solitary gage. His array was less splendid than his comrades’; his helm was of plain leather without ornament; his *escaupil* was secured by a simple loop: yet the people knew him, and shouted; and when he took down the plain shield and fixed it to his arm, the approbation of the common soldiery arose like a storm. As they bore such shields to battle, he became, as it were, their peculiar representative. It was Guatamozin.

And under the royal canopy there was rapid exchange of whispers and looks; every mind reverted to the paper dropped so mysteriously into the king’s hand at the palace door; and some there were, acuter than the rest, who saw corroboration of the meaning given the writing in the fact that the shield the ’tzin now chose was without the owl, his usual device. Whether the monarch himself was one of them might not be said; his face was as impassive as bronze.

Next, the Othmies and Tlascalans, dignified into common challengers of the proudest chiefs of Tenochtitlan, were conducted into the arena.

The Tlascalans were strong men used to battle; and though, like their companions in danger, at first bewildered by the sudden introduction to so vast a multitude, they became quickly inured to the situation. Of the Othmies, a more promising pair of gladiators never exhibited before a Roman audience. The father was past the prime of life, but erect, broad-shouldered, and of unusual dignity; the son was slighter, and not so tall, but his limbs were round and beautiful, and he looked as if he might outleap an antelope. The people were delighted, and cheered the challengers with scarcely less heartiness than their own champions. Still, the younger Othmi appeared hesitant, and, when the clamor somewhat abated, the sire touched him, and said,—

“Does my boy dream? What voice is in his ear that his heart is so melted? Awake! the shield is on the arm of the foe.”

The young man aroused. “I saw the sun on the green hills of Othmi. But see!” he said, proudly, and with flashing eyes, “there is no weakness in the dreamer’s arm.” And with the words, he seized a bow at his feet, fitted an arrow upon the cord, and, drawing full to the head, sent it cleaving the sunshine far above them. Every eye followed its flight but his own. “The arm, O chief, is not stronger than the heart,” he added, carelessly dropping the bow.

The old warrior gazed at him tenderly; but as that was no time

for the indulgence of affection, he turned to the Tlascalans, and said, "We must be ready: let us arm."

Each donned a leathern helm, and wrapped himself in a quilted *escaupil*; each buckled the shield on his arm, and tightened the thongs of his sandals. Their arms lay at hand.

Such were the preparations for the combat, such the combatants. And as the foemen faced each other, awaiting the signal for the mortal strife, I fancy no Christian has seen anything more beautiful than the theatre. Among the faces the gaze swam as in a sea; the gleaming of arms and ornaments was bewildering; while the diversity of colors in the costumes of the vast audience was without comparison. With the exception of the arena, the royal platform was the cynosure. Behind the king, with a shield faced with silver, stood Maxtla, vigilant against treachery or despair. The array of nobles about the couch was imperial; and what with them, and the dark-eyed beauties of his household, and the canopy tingeing the air and softly undulating above him, and the mighty congregation of subjects at his feet, it was with Montezuma like a revival of the glory of the Hystaspes. Yet the presence of his power but increased his gloom; in a short time he heard no music and saw no splendor; everything reminded him of the last picture on the western wall of the golden chamber.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COMBAT

The champions for the god drew themselves up in the west, while their challengers occupied the east of the arena. This position of parties was the subject of much speculation with the spectators, who saw it might prove a point of great importance if the engagement assumed the form of single combats.

Considering age and appearance, the Tlascalans were adjudged most dangerous of the challengers,—a palm readily awarded to the Tezcucan and the 'tzin on their side. The common opinion held also, that the Cholulan, the youngest and least experienced of the Aztecs, should have been the antagonist of the elder Othmi, whose vigor was presumed to be affected by his age; as it was, that combat belonged to Tlahua, the Otompan, while the younger Othmi confronted the Cholulan.

And now the theatre grew profoundly still with expectancy.

“The day grows old. Let the signal be given.” And so saying, the king waved his hand, and sunk indolently back upon his couch.

A moment after there was a burst of martial symphony, and the combat began.

It was opened with arrows; and to determine, if possible, the comparative skill of the combatants, the spectators watched the commencement with closest attention. The younger Othmi

sent his missile straight into the shield of the Cholulan, who, from precipitation probably, was not so successful. The elder Othmi and his antagonist each planted his arrow fairly, as did Iztli' and the Tlascalans. But a great outcry of applause attended Guatamozin, when his bolt, flying across the space, buried its barb in the crest of his adversary. A score of feathers, shorn away, floated slowly to the sand.

"It was well done; by Our Mother, it was well done!" murmured Hualpa.

"Wait!" said the Chalcan patronizingly. "Wait till they come to the *maquahuitl*!"

Quite a number of arrows were thus interchanged by the parties without effect, as they were always dexterously intercepted. The passage was but the preluding skirmish, participated in by all but the 'tzin, who, after his first shot, stood a little apart from his comrades, and, resting his long bow on the ground, watched the trial with apparent indifference. Like the Chalcan, he seemed to regard it as play; and the populace after a while fell into the same opinion: there was not enough danger to fully interest them. So there began to arise murmurs and cries, which the Cholulan was the first to observe and interpret. Under an impulse which had relation, probably, to his first failure, he resolved to avail himself of the growing feeling. Throwing down his bow, he seized the *maquahuitl* at his back, and, without a word to his friends, started impetuously across the arena. The peril was great, for every foeman at once turned his arrow against

him.

Then the 'tzin stirred himself. "The boy is mad, and will die if we do not go with him," he said; and already his foot was advanced to follow, when the young Othmi sprang forward from the other side to meet the Cholulan.

The eagerness lest an incident should be lost became intense; even the king sat up to see the duel. The theatre rang with cries of encouragement,—none, however, so cheery as that of the elder Othmi, whose feelings of paternity were, for the moment, lost in his passion of warrior.

"On, boy! Remember the green hills, and the hammock by the stream. Strike hard, strike hard!"

The combatants were apparently well matched, being about equal in height and age; both brandished the *maquahuitl*, the deadliest weapon known to their wars. Wielded by both hands and swung high above the head, its blades of glass generally clove their way to the life. About midway the arena the foemen met. At the instant of contact the Cholulan brought a downward blow, well aimed, at the head of his antagonist; but the lithe Othmi, though at full speed, swerved like a bird on the wing. A great shout attested the appreciation of the audience. The Cholulan wheeled, with his weapon uplifted for another blow; the action called his left arm into play, and drew his shield from its guard. The Othmi saw the advantage. One step he took nearer, and then, with a sweep of his arm and an upward stroke, he drove every blade deep into the side of his enemy. The lifted weapon dropped

in its half-finished circle, the shield flew wildly up, and, with a groan, the victim fell heavily to the sand, struggled once to rise, fell back again, and his battles were ended forever. A cry of anguish went out from under the royal canopy.

“Hark!” cried Xoli. “Did you hear the old Cholulan? See! They are leading him from the platform!”

Except that cry, however, not a voice was heard; from rising apprehension as to the result of the combat, or touched by a passing sympathy for the early death, the multitude was perfectly hushed.

“That was a brave blow, Xoli; but let him beware now!” said Hualpa, excitedly.

And in expectation of instant vengeance, all eyes watched the Othmi. Around the arena he glanced, then back to his friends. Retreat would forfeit the honor gained: death was preferable. So he knelt upon the breast of his enemy, and, setting his shield before him, waited sternly and in silence the result. And Iztli’ and Tlahua launched their arrows at him in quick succession, but Guatamozin was as indifferent as ever.

“What ails the ’tzin?” said Maxtla to the king. “The Othmi is at his mercy.”

The monarch deigned no reply.

The spirit of the old Othmi rose. On the sand behind him, prepared for service, was a dart with three points of copper, and a long cord by which to recover it when once thrown. Catching the weapon up, and shouting, “I am coming, I am coming!”

he ran to avert or share the danger. The space to be crossed was inconsiderable, yet such his animation that, as he ran, he poised the dart, and exposed his hand above the shield. The 'tzin raised his bow, and let the arrow fly. It struck right amongst the supple joints of the veteran's wrist. The unhappy man stopped bewildered; over the theatre he looked, then at the wound; in despair he tore the shaft out with his teeth, and rushed on till he reached the boy.

The outburst of acclamation shook the theatre.

“To have seen such archery, Xoli, were worth all the years of a hunter's life!” said Hualpa.

The Chalcan smiled like a connoisseur, and replied, “It is nothing. Wait!”

And now the combat again presented a show of equality. The advantage, if there was any, was thought to be with the Aztecs, since the loss of the Cholulan was not to be weighed against the disability of the Othmi. Thus the populace were released from apprehension, without any abatement of interest; indeed, the excitement increased, for there was a promise of change in the character of the contest; from quiet archery was growing bloody action.

The Tlascalans, alive to the necessity of supporting their friends, advanced to where the Cholulan lay, but more cautiously. When they were come up, the Othmies both arose, and calmly perfected the front. The astonishment at this was very great.

“Brave fellow! He is worth ten live Cholulans!” said Xoli.

“But now look, boy! The challengers have advanced half-way; the Aztecs must meet them.”

The conjecture was speedily verified. Iztli’ had, in fact, ill brooked the superior skill, or better fortune, of the ’tzin; the applause of the populace had been worse than wounds to his jealous heart. Till this time, however, he had restrained his passion; now the foe were ranged as if challenging attack: he threw away his useless bow, and laid his hand on his *maquahuatl*.

“It is not for an Aztec god that we are fighting, O comrade!” he cried to Tlahua. “It is for ourselves. Come, let us show you king a better war!”

And without waiting, he set on. The Otompan followed, leaving the ’tzin alone. The call had not been to him, and as he was fighting for the god, and the Tezcucan for himself, he merely placed another arrow on his bow, and observed the attack.

Leaving the Otompan to engage the Othmies, the fierce Tezcucan assaulted the Tlascalans, an encounter in which there was no equality; but the eyes of Tenochtitlan were upon him, and at his back was a hated rival. His antagonists each sent an arrow to meet him; but, as he skilfully caught them on his shield, they, too, betook themselves to the *maquahuatl*. Right on he kept, until his shield struck theirs; it was gallantly done, and won a furious outburst from the people. Again Montezuma sat up, momentarily animated.

“Ah, my lord Cacama!” he said, “if your brother’s love were but equal to his courage, I would give him an army.”

“All the gods forfend!” replied the jealous prince. “The viper would recover his fangs.”

The speed with which he went was all that saved Iztzil’ from the blades of the Tlascalans. Striking no blow himself, he strove to make way between them, and get behind, so that, facing about to repel his returning onset, their backs would be to the ’tzin. But they were wary, and did not yield. As they pushed against him, one, dropping his more cumbrous weapon, struck him in the breast with a copper knife. The blow was distinctly seen by the spectators.

Hualpa started from his seat. “He has it; they will finish him now! No, he recovers. Our Mother, what a blow!”

The Tezcucan disengaged himself, and, maddened by the blood that began to flow down his quilted armor, assaulted furiously. He was strong, quick of eye, and skilful; the blades of his weapon gleamed in circles around his head, and resounded against the shields. At length a desperate blow beat down the guard of one of the Tlascalans; ere it could be recovered, or Iztzil’ avail himself of the advantage, there came a sharp whirring through the air, and an arrow from the ’tzin pierced to the warrior’s heart. Up he leaped, dead before he touched the sand. Again Iztzil’ heard the acclamation of his rival. Without a pause, he rushed upon the surviving Tlascalan, as if to bear him down by stormy dint.

Meantime, the combat of Tlahua, the Otompan, was not without its difficulties, since it was not singly with the young

Othmi.

“Mictlan take the old man!” cried the lord Cuitlahua, bending from his seat. “I thought him done for; but, see! he defends, the other fights.”

And so it was. The Otompan struck hard, but was distracted by the tactics of his foemen: if he aimed at the younger, both their shields warded the blow; if he assaulted the elder, he was in turn attacked by the younger; and so, without advantage to either, their strife continued until the fall of the Tlascalan. Then, inspired by despairing valor, the boy threw down his *maquahuatl*, and endeavored to push aside the Otompan’s shield. Once within its guard, the knife would finish the contest. Tlahua retreated; but the foe clung to him,—one wrenching at his shield, the other intercepting his blows, and both carefully avoiding the deadly archery of the ’tzin, who, seeing the extremity of the danger, started to the rescue. All the people shouted, “The ’tzin, the ’tzin!” Xoli burst into ecstasy, and clapped his hands. “There he goes! Now look for something!”

The rescuer went as a swift wind; but the clamor had been as a warning to the young Othmi. By a great effort he tore away the Otompan’s shield. In vain the latter struggled. There was a flash, sharp, vivid, like the sparkle of the sun upon restless waters. Then his head drooped forward, and he staggered blindly. Once only the death-stroke was repeated; and so still was the multitude that the dull sound of the knife driving home was heard. The ’tzin was too late.

The prospect for the Aztecs was now gloomy. The Cholulan and Otompan were dead; the Tezcucan, wounded and bleeding, was engaged in a doubtful struggle with the Tlascalan; the 'tzin was the last hope of his party. Upon him devolved the fight with the Othmies. In the interest thus excited Iztlil's battle was forgotten.

Twice had the younger Othmi been victor, and still he was scathless. Instead of the *maquahuilt*, he was now armed with the javelin, which, while effective as a dart, was excellent to repel assault.

From the crowded seats of the theatre not a sound was heard. At no time had the excitement risen to such a pitch. Breathless and motionless, the spectators awaited the advance of the 'tzin. He was, as I have said, a general favorite, beloved by priest and citizen, and with the wild soldiery an object of rude idolatry. And if, under the royal canopy there were eyes that looked not lovingly upon him, there were lips there murmuring soft words of prayer for his success.

When within a few steps of the waiting Othmies, he halted. They glared at him an instant in silence; then the old chief said tauntingly, and loud enough to be heard above the noise of the conflict at his side,—

“A woman may wield a bow, and from a distance slay a warrior; but the *maquahuilt* is heavy in the hand of the coward, looking in the face of his foeman.”

The Aztec made no answer; he was familiar with the wile.

Looking at the speaker as if against him he intended his first attack, with right hand back he swung the heavy weapon above his shoulder till it sung in quickening circles; when its force was fully collected, he suddenly hurled it from him. The old Othmi crouched low behind his shield: but his was not the form in the 'tzin's eyes; for right in the centre of the young victor's guard the flying danger struck. Nor arm nor shield might bar its way. The boy was lifted sheer above the body of the Otompan, and driven backward as if shot from a catapult.

Guatamozin advanced no further. A thrust of his javelin would have disposed of the old Othmi, now unarmed and helpless. The acclamation of the audience, in which was blent the shrill voices of women, failed to arouse his passion.

The sturdy chief arose from his crouching; he looked for the boy to whom he had so lately spoken of home; he saw him lying outstretched, his face in the sand, and his shield, so often bound with wreaths and garlands, twain-broken beneath him; and his will, that in the fight had been tougher than the gold of his bracelets, gave way; forgetful of all else, he ran, and, with a great cry, threw himself upon the body.

The Chalcan was as exultant as if the achievement had been his own. Even the prouder souls under the red canopy yielded their tardy praise; only the king was silent.

As none now remained of the challengers but the Tlascalan occupied with Iztliil',—none whom he might in honor engage,—Guatamozin moved away from the Othmies; and as he went, once

he allowed his glance to wander to the royal platform, but with thought of love, not wrong.

The attention of the people was again directed to the combat of the Tezcucan. The death of his comrades nowise daunted the Tlascalan; he rather struck the harder for revenge; his shield was racked, the feathers in his crest torn away, while the blades were red with his blood. Still it fared but ill with Iztzil' fighting for himself. His wound in the breast bled freely, and his equipments were in no better plight than his antagonist's. The struggle was that of the hewing and hacking which, whether giving or taking, soon exhausts the strongest frame. At last, faint with loss of blood, he went down. The Tlascalan attempted to strike a final blow, but darkness rushed upon him; he staggered, the blades sunk into the sand, and he rolled beside his enemy.

With that the combat was done. The challengers might not behold their "land of bread" again; nevermore for them was hammock by the stream or echo of tambour amongst the hills.

And all the multitude arose and gave way to their rejoicing; they embraced each other, and shouted and sang; the pabas waved their ensigns, and the soldiers saluted with voice and pealing shells; and up to the sun ascended the name of Quetzal' with form and circumstance to soften the mood of the most demanding god; but all the time the audience saw only the fortunate hero, standing so calmly before them, the dead at his feet, and the golden light about him.

And the king was happy as the rest, and talked gayly, caring

little for the living or the dead. The combat was over, and Quetzal' not come. Mualox was a madman, not a prophet; the Aztecs had won, and the god was propitiated: so the questioner of the Morning flattered himself!

“If the Othmi cannot fight, he can serve for sacrifice. Let him be removed. And the dead—But hold!” he cried, and his cheeks blanched with mortal pallor. “Who comes yonder? Look to the arena,—nay, to the people! By my father’s ashes, the paba shall perish! White hairs and prophet’s gifts shall not save him.”

While the king was speaking, Mualox, the keeper of the temple, rushed within the wall of shields. His dress was disordered, and he was bareheaded and unsandalled. Over his shoulders and down his breast flowed his hair and beard, tangled and unkempt, wavy as a billow and white as the foam. Excitement flashed from every feature; and far as his vision ranged,—in every quarter, on every platform,—in the blood of others he kindled his own unwonted passion.

CHAPTER XII.

MUALOX AND HIS WORLD

Mualox, after the departure of the king and 'tzin, ascended the tower of the old Cû, and remained there all night, stooped beside the sacred fire, sorrowing and dreaming, hearkening to the voices of the city, or watching the mild-eyed stars. So the morning found him. He, too, beheld the coming of the sun, and trembled when the Smoking Hill sent up its cloud. Then he heaped fresh fagots on the dying fire, and went down to the court-yard. It was the hour when in all the other temples worshippers came to pray.

He took a lighted lamp from a table in his cell, and followed a passage on deeper into the building. The way, like that to the golden chamber, was intricate and bewildering. Before a door at the foot of a flight of steps he stopped. A number of earthen jars and ovens stood near; while from the room to which the door gave entrance there came a strong, savory perfume, very grateful to the sense of a hungry man. Here was the kitchen of the ancient house. The paba went in.

This was on a level with the water of the canal at the south base; and when the good man came out, and descended another stairway, he was in a hall, which, though below the canal, was dusty and perfectly dry. Down the hall further he came to a doorway in the floor, or rather an aperture, which had at one time been covered and hidden by a ponderous flag-stone yet lying

close by. A rope ladder was coiled up on the stone. Flinging the ladder through the door, he heard it rattle on the floor beneath; then he stooped, and called,—

“Tecetl, Tecetl!”

No one replied. He repeated the call.

“Poor child! She is asleep,” he said, in a low voice. “I will go down without her.”

Leaving the lamp above, he committed himself to the unsteady rope, like one accustomed to it. Below all was darkness; but, pushing boldly on, he suddenly flung aside a curtain which had small silver bells in the fringing; and, ushered by the tiny ringing, he stepped into a chamber lighted and full of beauty,—a grotto carven with infinite labor from the bed-rock of the lake.

And here, in the day mourned by the paba, when the temple was honored, and its god had worshippers, and the name of Quetzal’ was second to no other, not even Huitzil’s, must have been held the secret conclaves of the priesthood,—so great were the dimensions of the chamber, and so far was it below the roll of waters. But now it might be a place for dwelling, or for thought and dreaming, or for pleasure, or in which the eaters of the African lotus might spend their hours and days of semi-consciousness sounding of a life earthly yet purely spiritual. There were long aisles for walking, and couches for rest; there were pictures, flowers, and a fountain; the walls and ceiling glowed with frescoing; and wherever the eye turned it rested upon some cunning device intended to instruct, gladden, comfort, and

content. Lamplight streamed into every corner, ill supplying the perfect sunshine, yet serving its grand purpose. The effect was more than beautiful. The world above was counterfeited, so that one ignorant of the original and dwelling in the counterfeit could have been happy all his life long. Scarcely is it too much to say of the master who designed and finished the grotto, that, could he have borrowed the materials of nature, he had the taste and genius to set a star with the variety and harmony that mark the setting of the earth's surface, and of themselves prove its Creator divine.

In the enchantment of the place there was a peculiarity indicative of a purpose higher than mere enjoyment, and that was the total absence of humanity in the host of things visible. Painted on the ceiling and walls were animals of almost every kind common to the clime; birds of wondrous plumage darted hither and thither, twittering and singing; there, also, were flowers the fairest and most fragrant, and orange and laurel shrubs, and pines and cedars and oaks, and other trees of the forest, dwarfed, and arranged for convenient carriage to the *azoteas*; in the pictures, moreover, were the objects most remarkable in the face of nature,—rivers, woods, plains, mountains, oceans, the heavens in storm and calm; but nowhere was the picture of man, woman, or child. In the frescoing were houses and temples, grouped as in hamlets and cities, or standing alone on a river's bank, or in the shadow of great trees; but of their habitants and builders there was not a trace. In fine, the

knowledge there taught was that of a singular book. A mind receiving impressions, like a child's, would be carried by it far enough in the progressive education of life to form vivid ideas of the world, and yet be left in a dream of unintelligence to people it with fairies, angels, or gods. Almost everything had there a representation but humanity, the brightest fallen nature.

Mualox entered as one habituated to the chamber. The air was soft, balmy, and pleasant, and the illumination mellowed, as if the morning were shut out by curtains of gossamer tinted with roses and gold. Near the centre of the room he came to a fountain of water crystal clear and in full play, the jet shooting from a sculptured stone up almost to the ceiling. Around it were tables, ottomans, couches, and things of *vertu*, such as would have adorned the palace; there, also, were vases of flowers, culled and growing, and of such color and perfume as would have been estimable in Cholula, and musical instrument, and pencils and paints.

It was hardly possible that this conception, so like the Restful World of Brahma, should be without its angel; for the atmosphere and all were for a spirit of earth or heaven softer than man's. And by the fountain it was,—a soul fresh and pure as the laughing water.

The girl of whom I speak was asleep. Her head lay upon a cushion; over the face, clear and almost white, shone a lambent transparency, which might have been the reflection of the sparkling water. The garments gathered close about her did not

conceal the delicacy and childlike grace of her form. One foot was exposed, and it was bare, small, and nearly lost in the tufted mattress of her couch. Under a profusion of dark hair, covering the cushion like the floss of silk, lay an arm; a hand, dimpled and soft, rested lightly on her breast. The slumber was very deep, giving the face the expression of dreamless repose, with the promise of health and happiness upon waking.

The paba approached her tenderly, and knelt down. His face was full of holy affection. He bent his cheek close to her parted lips, listening to her breathing. He brought the straying locks back, and laid them across her neck. Now and then a bird came and lighted on the table, and he waved his mantle to scare it away. And when the voice of the fountain seemed, under an increased pulsation of the water, to grow louder, he looked around, frowning lest it might disturb her. She slept on, his love about her like a silent prayer that has found its consummation in perfect peace.

And as he knelt, he became sad and thoughtful. The events that were to come, and his faith in their coming, were as actual sorrows. His reflections were like a plea addressed to his conscience.

“God pardon me, if, after all, I should be mistaken! The wrong would be so very great as to bar me from the Sun. Is any vanity like that which makes sorrows for our fellows? And such is not only the vanity of the warrior, and that of the ruler of tribes; sometimes it is of the priests who go into the temples thinking of

things that do not pertain to the gods. What if mine were such?

“The holy Quetzal’ knows that I intended to be kind to the child. I thought my knowledge greater than that of ordinary mortals; I thought it moved in fields where only the gods walk, sowing wisdom. The same vanity, taking words, told me, ‘Look up! There is no abyss between you and the gods; they cannot make themselves of the dust, but you can reach their summit almost a god.’ And I labored, seeking the principles that would accomplish my dream, if such it were. Heaven forgive me, but I once thought I had found them! Other men looking out on creation could see nothing but Wisdom—Wisdom everywhere; but I looked with a stronger vision, and wherever there was a trace of infinite Wisdom, there was also for me an infinite Will.

“Here were the principles, but they were not enough. Something said to me, ‘What were the Wisdom and Will of the gods without subjects?’ It was a great idea: I thought I stood almost upon the summit!

“And I set about building me a world, I took the treasure of Quetzal’, and collected these marvels, and bought me the labor of art. Weavers, florists, painters, masons,—all toiled for me. Gold, labor, and time are here,—there is little beauty without them. Here is my world,” he said aloud, glancing around the great hall.

“I had my world; next I wanted a subject for my will. But where to go? Not among men,—alas, they are their own slaves! One day I stood in the *tianguetz* where a woman was being sold. A baby in her arms smiled, it might have been at the sunshine, it might

have been at me. The mother said, 'Buy.' A light flashed upon me—I bought you, my poor child. Men say of the bud, It will be a rose, and of the plant, It will be a tree; you were so young then that I said, 'It will be a mind.' And into my world I brought you, thinking, as I had made it, so I would make a subject. This, I told you, was your birthplace; and here passed your infancy and childhood; here you have dwelt. Your cheeks are pale, my little one, but full and fresh; your breath is sweet as the air above a garden; and you have grown in beauty, knowing nothing living but the birds and me. My will has a subject, O Tecetl, and my heart a child. And judge me, holy Quetzal', if I have not tried to make her happy! I have given her knowledge of everything but humanity, and ignorance of that is happiness. My world has thus far been a heaven to her; her dreams have been of it; I am its god!"

And yet unwilling to disturb her slumber, Mualox arose, and walked away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEARCH FOR QUETZAL'

By and by he returned, and standing by the couch, passed his hand several times above her face. Silent as the movements were, she awoke, and threw her arms around his neck.

“You have been gone a long while,” she said, in a childish voice. “I waited for you; but the lamps burned down low, and the shadows, from their hiding among the bushes, came creeping in upon the fountain, and I slept.”

“I saw you,” he answered, playing with her hair. “I saw you; I always see you.”

“I tried to paint the fountain,” she went on; “but when I watched the water to catch its colors, I thought its singing changed to voices, and, listening to them, they stole my thoughts away. Then I tried to blend my voice with them, and sing as they sung; but whenever mine sank low enough, it seemed sad, while they went on gayer and more ringing than ever. I can paint the flowers, but not the water; I can sing with the birds, but not with the fountain. But you promised to call me,—that you would always call me.”

“I knew you were asleep.”

“But you had only to think to waken me.”

He smiled at this acknowledgment of the power of his will. Just then a bell sounded faintly through the chamber; hastening

away, he shortly returned with breakfast on a great shell waiter; there were maize bread and honey, quails and chocolate, figs and oranges. Placing them on a table, he rolled up an ottoman for the girl; and, though she talked much and lightly, the meal was soon over. Then he composed himself upon the couch, and in the quiet, unbroken save by Tecetl, forgot the night and its incidents.

His rest was calm; when he awoke, she was sitting by the basin of the fountain talking to her birds gleefully as a child. She had given them names, words more of sound pleasant to the ear than of signification; so she understood the birds, whose varied cries were to her a language. And they were fearless and tame, perching on her hand, and courting her caresses; while she was as artless, with a knowledge as innocent, and a nature as happy. If Quetzal' was the paba's idol in religion, she was his idol in affection.

He watched her awhile, then suddenly sat up; though he said not a word, she flung her birds off, and came to him smiling.

“You called me, father.”

He laid his hand upon her shoulder, all overflowed with the dark hair, and said in a low voice, “The time approaches when Quetzal' is to come from the home of the gods; it may be he is near. I will send you over the sea and the land to find him; you shall have wings to carry you into the air; and you shall fly swifter than the birds you have been talking to.”

Her smile deepened.

“Have you not told me that Quetzal' is good, and that his voice

is like the fountain's, and that when he speaks it is like singing? I am ready."

He kissed her, and nearer the basin rolled the couch, upon which she sat reclined against a heap of cushions, her hands clasped over her breast.

"Do not let me be long gone!" she said. "The lamps will burn low again, and I do not like to have the shadows come and fold up my flowers."

The paba took a pearl from the folds of his gown, and laid it before her; then he sat down, and fixed his eyes upon her face; she looked at the jewel, and composed herself as for sleep. Her hands settled upon her bosom, her features grew impassive, the lips slowly parted; gradually her eyelids drooped, and the life running in the veins of her cheeks and forehead went back into her heart. Out of the pearl seemed to issue a spell that stole upon her spirits gently as an atomy settles through the still air. Finally, there was a sigh, a sob, and over the soul of the maiden the will of Mualox became absolute. He took her hand in his.

"Wings swifter than the winds are yours, Tecetl. Go," he said, "search for the god; search the land."

She moved not, and scarcely breathed.

"Speak," he continued; "let me know that I am obeyed."

The will was absolute; she spoke, and though at first the words came slowly, yet he listened like a prophet waiting for revelation. She spoke of the land, of its rivers, forests, and mountains; she spoke of the cities, of their streets and buildings, and of

their people, for whom she knew no name. She spoke of events transpiring in distant provinces, as well as in Tenochtitlan. She went into the temples, markets, and palaces. Wherever men travelled, thither her spirit flew. When the flight was done, and her broken description ceased, the holy man sighed.

“Not yet, Tecetl; he is not found. The god is not on the land. Search the air.”

And still the will was absolute, though the theme of the seer changed; it was not of the land now, but of the higher realm; she spoke of the sunshine and the cloud, of the wind rushing and chill, of the earth far down, and grown so small that the mountains levelled with the plains.

“Not yet, not yet,” he cried; “the god is not in the air. Go search the sea!”

In the hollow of his hand he lifted water, and sprinkled her face; and when he resumed his seat she spoke, not slowly as before, but fast and free.

“The land is passed; behind me are the cities and lakes, and the great houses and blue waters, such as I have seen in my pictures. I am hovering now, father, where there is nothing before me but waves and distance. White birds go skimming about careless of the foam; the winds pour upon me steadily; and in my ear is a sound as of a great voice. I listen, and it is the sea; or, father, it may be the voice of the god whom you seek.”

She was silent, as if waiting for an answer.

“The water, is it? Well, well,—whither shall I go now?”

“Follow the shore; it may lead where only gods have been.”

“Still the waves and the distance, and the land, where it goes down into the sea sprinkled with shells. Still the deep voice in my ear, and the wind about me. I hurry on, but it is all alike,—all water and sound. No! Out of the waves rises a new land, the sea, a girdle of billows, encircling it everywhere; yet there are blue clouds ascending from the fields, and I see palm-trees and temples. May not thy god dwell here?”

“No. You see but an island. On!”

“Well, well. Behind me fades the island; before me is nothing but sheen and waves and distance again; far around runs the line separating the sea and sky. Waste, all waste; the sea all green, the sky all blue; no life; no god. But stay!”

“Something moves on the waste: speak, child!”

But for a time she was still.

“Speak!” he said, earnestly. “Speak, Tecet!”

“They are far off,—far off,” she replied, slowly and in a doubting way. “They move and live, but I cannot tell whether they come or go, or what they are. Their course is unsteady, and, like the flight of birds, now upon the sea, then in air, a moment seeming of the waves, then of the sky. They look like white clouds.”

“You are fleeter than birds or clouds,—nearer!” he said, sternly, the fire in his eyes all alight.

“I go,—I approach them,—I now see them coming. O father, father! I know not what your god is like, nor what shape he takes,

nor in what manner he travels; but surely these are his! There are many of them, and as they sweep along they are a sight to be looked at with trembling.”

“What are they, Tecetl?”

“How can I answer? They are not of the things I have seen in my pictures, nor heard in my songs. The face of the sea is whitened by them; the largest leads the way, looking like a shell,—of them I have heard you speak as coming from the sea,—a great shell streaked with light and shade, and hollow, so that the sides rise above the reach of the waves,—wings—.”

“Nay, what would a god of the air with wings to journey upon the sea!”

“Above it are clouds,—clouds white as the foam, and such as a god might choose to waft him on his way. I can see them sway and toss, but as the shell rushes into the hollow places, they lift it up, and drive it on.”

A brighter light flashed from his eyes. “It is the canoe, the canoe!” he exclaimed. “The canoe from Tlapallan!”

“The canoe, father! The waves rush joyously around it; they lift themselves in its path, and roll on to meet it; then, as if they knew it to be a god’s, in peace make way for its coming. Upon the temples in my pictures I have seen signs floating in the air—”

“You mean banners,—banners, child,” he said, tremulously.

“I remember now. Above the foremost canoe, above its clouds, there is a banner, and it is black—”

“’Tis Quetzal’s! ’Tis Quetzal’s!” he muttered.

"It is black, with golden embroidery, and something picture-written on it, but what I cannot tell."

"Look in the canoe."

"I see—O, I know not what to call them."

"Of what shape are they, child?"

"Yours, father."

"Go on: they are gods!" he said, and still the naming of men was unheard in the great chamber.

"There are many of them," she continued; "their garments flash and gleam; around one like themselves they are met; to me he seems the superior god; he is speaking, they are listening. He is taller than you, father, and has a fair face, and hair and beard like the hue of his banner. His garments are the brightest of all."

"You have described a god; it is Quetzal', the holy, beautiful Quetzal'!" he said, with rising voice. "Look if his course be toward the land."

"Every canoe moves toward the shore."

"Enough!" he cried. "The writing on the wall is the god's!" And, rising, he awoke the girl.

As Tecetl awake had no recollection of her journey, or of what she had seen in its course, she wondered at his trouble and excitement, and spoke to him, without answer.

"Father, what has Tecetl done that you should be so troubled?"

He put aside her arms, and in silence turned slowly from the pleasant place, and retraced his steps back through the halls of the Cû to the court-yard and *azoteas*.

The weight of the secret did not oppress him; it rested upon him lightly as the surplice upon his shoulders; for the humble servant of his god was lifted above his poverty and trembling, and, vivified by the consciousness of inspiration, felt more than a warrior's strength. But what should he do? Where proclaim the revelation? Upon the temple?

"The streets are deserted; the people are in the theatre; the king is there with all Anahuac," he muttered. "The coming of Quetzal' concerns the Empire, and it shall hear the announcement: not on the temple, but to the *tianguetz*. The god speaks to me! To the *tianguetz*!"

In the chapel he exchanged his white surplice for the regalia of sacrifice. Never before, to his fancy, wore the idol such seeming of life. Satisfaction played grimly about its mouth; upon its brow, like a coronet, sat the infinite Will. From the chapel he descended to the street that led to the great square. Insensibly, as he hurried on, his steps quickened; and bareheaded and unsandalled, his white beard and hair loose and flowing, and his face beaming with excitement, he looked the very embodiment of direful prophecy. On the streets he met only slaves. At the theatre the entrance was blocked by people; soldiery guarded the arena: but guard and people shrunk at his approach; and thus, without word or cry, he rushed within the wall of shields, where were none but the combatants, living and dead.

Midway the arena he halted, his face to the king. Around ran his wondrous glance, and, regardless of the royalty present, the

people shouted, "The paba, the paba!" and their many voices shook the theatre. Flinging the white locks back on his shoulders, he tossed his arms aloft; and the tumult rose into the welkin, and a calm settled over the multitude. Montezuma, with the malediction warm on his lips, bent from his couch to hear his words.

"Woe is Tenochtitlan, the beautiful!" he cried, in the unmeasured accents of grief. "Woe to homes, and people, and armies, and king! Why this gathering of dwellers on the hills and in the valleys! Why the combat of warriors? Quetzal' is at hand. He comes for vengeance. Woe is Tenochtitlan, the beautiful! * * * * This, O king, is the day of the fulfilment of prophecy. From out the sea, wafted by clouds, even now the canoes of the god are coming. His power whitens the waves, and the garments of his warriors gleam with the light of the sky. Woe is Tenochtitlan! This day is the last of her perfect glory; to-morrow Quetzal' will glisten on the sea-shore, and her Empire vanish forever. * * * * People, say farewell to peace! Keepers of the temples, holy men, go feed the fires, and say the prayer, and sacrifice the victim! And thou, O king! summon thy strong men, leaders in battle, and be thy banners counted, and thy nations marshalled. In vain! Woe is Tenochtitlan! Sitting in the lake, she shines lustrously as a star; and though in a valley of gardens, she is like a great tree shadowing in a desert. But the ravager comes, and the tree shall be felled, and the star go out darkling forever. The fires shall fade, the bones of the dead kings be scattered, altars and gods

overthrown, and every temple levelled with the streets. Woe is Tenochtitlan! Ended,—ended forever is the march of Azatlan, the mighty!”

His arms fell down, and, without further word, his head bowed upon his breast, the prophet departed. The spell he left behind him remained unbroken. As they recovered from the effects of his bodement, the people left the theatre, their minds full of indefinite dread. If perchance they spoke of the scene as they went, it was in whispers, and rather to sound the depths of each other's alarm. And for the rest of the day they remained in their houses, brooding alone, or collected in groups, talking in low voices, wondering about the prescience of the paba, and looking each moment for the development of something more terrible.

The king watched the holy man until he disappeared in the crowded passage; then a deadly paleness overspread his face, and he sunk almost to the platform. The nobles rushed around, and bore him to his palanquin, their brave souls astonished that the warrior and priest and mighty monarch could be so overcome. They carried him to his palace, and left him to a solitude full of unkingly superstitions.

Guatamozin, serene amid the confusion, called the *tamanes*, and ordered the old Othmi and the dead removed. The Tezcucan still breathed.

“The reviler of the gods shall be cared for,” he said to himself. “If he lives, their justice will convict him.”

Before the setting of the sun, the structure in the *tianguetz* was

taken down and restored to the temples, never again to be used. Yet the market-place remained deserted and vacant; the whole city seemed plague-smitten.

And the common terror was not without cause, any more than Mualox was without inspiration. That night the ships of Cortes, eleven in number, and freighted with the materials of conquest, from the east of Yucatan, came sweeping down the bay of Campeachy. Next morning they sailed up the Rio de Tabasco, beautiful with its pure water and its banks fringed with mangroves. Tecetl had described the fleet, the sails of which from afar looked like clouds, while they did, indeed, whiten the sea.

Next evening a courier sped hotly over the causeway and up the street, stopping at the gate of the royal palace. He was taken before the king; and, shortly after, it went flying over the city how Quetzal' had arrived, in canoes larger than temples, wafted by clouds, and full of thunder and lightning. Then sank the monarch's heart; and, though the Spaniard knew it not, his marvellous conquest was half completed before his iron shoe smote the shore at San Juan de Ulloa.²⁷

²⁷ Cortes' squadron reached the mouth of the river Tabasco on the 12th of March, 1519.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I. WHO ARE THE STRANGERS?

March passed, and April came, and still the strangers, in their great canoes, lingered on the coast. Montezuma observed them with becoming prudence; through his lookouts, he was informed of their progress from the time they left the Rio de Tabasco.

The constant anxiety to which he was subjected affected his temper; and, though roused from the torpor into which he had been plunged by the visit to the golden chamber, and the subsequent prophecy of Mualox, his melancholy was a thing of common observation. He renounced his ordinary amusements, even *totoloque*, and went no more to the hunting-grounds on the shore of the lake; in preference, he took long walks in the gardens, and reclined in the audience-chamber of his palace; yet more remarkable, conversation with his councillors and nobles delighted him more than the dances of his women or the songs of his minstrels. In truth, the monarch was himself a victim of the delusions he had perfected for his people. Polytheism had come to him with the Empire; but he had enlarged upon it, and covered it with dogmas; and so earnestly, through a long and glorious

reign, had he preached them, that, at last, he had become his own most zealous convert. In all his dominions, there was not one whom faith more inclined to absolute fear of Quetzal' than himself.

One evening he passed from his bath to the dining-hall for the last meal of the day. Invigorated, and, as was his custom, attired for the fourth time since morning in fresh garments, he walked briskly, and even droned a song.

No monarch in Europe fared more sumptuously than Montezuma. The room devoted to the purpose was spacious, and, on this occasion, brilliantly lighted. The floor was spread with figured matting, and the walls hung with beautiful tapestry; and in the centre of the apartment a luxurious couch had been rolled for him, it being his habit to eat reclining; while, to hide him from the curious, a screen had been contrived, and set up between the couch and principal door. The viands set down by his steward as the substantials of the first course were arranged upon the floor before the couch, and kept warm and smoking by chafing-dishes. The table, if such it may be called, was supplied by contributions from the provinces, and furnished, in fact, no contemptible proof of his authority, and the perfection with which it was exercised. The ware was of the finest Cholulan manufacture, and, like his clothes, never used by him but the once, a royal custom requiring him to present it to his friends.²⁸

When he entered the room, the evening I have mentioned,

²⁸ Prescott, Conq. of Mexico.

there were present only his steward, four or five aged councillors, whom he was accustomed to address as “uncles,” and a couple of women, who occupied themselves in preparing certain wafers and confections which he particularly affected. He stretched himself comfortably upon the couch, much, I presume, after the style of the Romans, and at once began the meal. The ancients moved back several steps, and a score of boys, noble, yet clad in the inevitable *nequen*, responding to a bell, came in and posted themselves to answer his requests.

Sometimes, by invitation, the councillors were permitted to share the feast; oftener, however, the only object of their presence was to afford him the gratification of remark. The conversation was usually irregular, and hushed and renewed as he prompted, and not unfrequently extended to the gravest political and religious subjects. On the evening in question he spoke to them kindly.

“I feel better this evening, uncles. My good star is rising above the mists that have clouded it. We ought not to complain of what we cannot help; still, I have thought that when the gods retained the power to afflict us with sorrows, they should have given us some power to correct them.”

One of the old men answered reverentially, “A king should be too great for sorrows; he should wear his crown against them as we wear our mantles against the cold winds.”

“A good idea,” said the monarch, smiling; “but you forget that the crown, instead of protecting, is itself the trouble. Come

nearer, uncles; there is a matter more serious about which I would hear your minds.”

They obeyed him, and he went on.

“The last courier brought me word that the strangers were yet on the coast, hovering about the islands. Tell me, who say you they are, and whence do they come?”

“How may we know more than our wise master?” said one of them.

“And our thoughts,—do we not borrow them from you, O king?” added another.

“What! Call you those answers? Nay, uncles, my fools can better serve me; if they cannot instruct, they can at least amuse.”

The king spoke bitterly, and looking at one, probably the oldest of them all, said,—

“Uncle, you are the poorest courtier, but you are discreet and honest. I want opinions that have in them more wisdom than flattery. Speak to me truly: who are these strangers?”

“For your sake, O my good king, I wish I were wise; for the trouble they have given my poor understanding is indeed very great. I believe them to be gods, landed from the Sun.” And the old man went on to fortify his belief with arguments. In the excited state of his fancy, it was easy for him to convert the cannon of the Spaniards into engines of thunder and lightning, and transform their horses into creatures of Mictlan mightier than men. Right summarily he also concluded, that none but gods

could traverse the dominions of Haloc,²⁹ subjecting the variant winds to their will. Finally, to prove the strangers irresistible, he referred to the battle of Tabasco, then lately fought between Cortes and the Indians.

Montezuma heard him in silence, and replied, "Not badly given, uncle; your friends may profit by your example; but you have not talked as a warrior. You have forgotten that we, too, have beaten the lazy Tabascans. That reference proves as much for my caciques as for your gods."

He waved his hand, and the first course was removed. The second consisted for the most part of delicacies in the preparation of which his *artistes* delighted; at this time appeared the *choclatl*, a rich, frothy beverage served in *xicaras*, or small golden goblets. Girls, selected for their rank and beauty, succeeded the boys. Flocking around him with light and echoless feet, very graceful, very happy, theirs was indeed the service that awaits the faithful in Mahomet's Paradise. To each of his ancients he passed a goblet of *choclatl*, then continued his eating and talking.

"Yes. Be they gods or men, I would give a province to know their intention; that, uncles, would enable me to determine my policy,—whether to give them war or peace. As yet, they have asked nothing but the privilege of trading with us; and, judging them by our nations, I want not better warrant of friendship. As you know, strangers have twice before been upon our coast in

²⁹ God of the sea.

such canoes, and with such arms;³⁰ and in both instances they sought gold, and getting it they departed. Will these go like them?"

"Has my master forgotten the words of Mualox?"

"To Mictlan with the paba!" said the king, violently. "He has filled my cities and people with trouble."

"Yet he is a prophet," retorted the old councillor, boldly. "How knew he of the coming of the strangers before it was known in the palace?"

The flush of the king's face faded.

"It is a mystery, uncle,—a mystery too deep for me. All the day and night before he was in his Cû; he went not into the city even."

"If the wise master will listen to the words of his slave, he will not again curse the paba, but make him a friend."

The monarch's lip curled derisively.

"My palace is now a house of prayer and sober life; he would turn it into a place of revelry."

All the ancients but the one laughed at the irony; that one repeated his words.

"A friend; but how?" asked Montezuma.

"Call him from the Cû to the palace; let him stand here with us; in the councils give him a voice. He can read the future; make of him an oracle. O king, who like him can stand between you

³⁰ The allusion was doubtless to the expeditions of Hernandez de Cordova, in 1517, and Juan de Grijalva, in 1518.

and Quetzal'?"

For a while Montezuma toyed idly with the *xicara*. He also believed in the prophetic gifts of Mualox, and it was not the first time he had pondered the question of how the holy man had learned the coming of the strangers; to satisfy himself as to his means of information, he had even instituted inquiries outside the palace. And yet it was but one of several mysteries; behind it, if not superior, were the golden chamber, its wealth, and the writing on the walls. They were not to be attributed to the paba: works so wondrous could not have been done in one lifetime. They were the handiwork of a god, who had chosen Mualox for his servant and prophet; such was the judgment of the king.

Nor was that all. The monarch had come to believe that the strangers on the coast were Quetzal' and his followers, whom it were vain to resist, if their object was vengeance. But the human heart is seldom without its suggestion of hope; and he thought, though resistance was impossible, might he not propitiate? This policy had occupied his thoughts, and most likely without result, for the words of the councillor seemed welcome. Indeed, he could scarcely fail to recognize the bold idea they conveyed,—nothing less, in fact, than meeting the god with his own prophet.

"Very well," he said, in his heart. "I will use the paba. He shall come and stand between me and the woe."

Then he arose, took a string of pearls from his neck, and with his own hand placed it around that of the ancient.

"Your place is with me, uncle. I will have a chamber fitted

for you here in the palace. Go no more away. Ho, steward! The supper is done; let the pipes be brought, and give me music and dance. Bid the minstrels come. A song of the olden time may make me strong again.”

CHAPTER II.

A TEZCUCAN LOVER

Traces of the supper speedily disappeared. The screen was rolled away, and pipes placed in the monarch's hand for distribution amongst his familiars. Blue vapor began to ascend to the carved rafters, when the tapestry on both sides of the room was flung aside, and the sound of cornets and flutes poured in from an adjoining apartment; and, as if answering the summons of the music, a company of dancing-girls entered, and filled the space in front of the monarch; half nude were they, and flashing with ornaments, and aerial with gauze and flying ribbons; silver bells tinkled with each step, and on their heads were wreaths, and in their hands garlands of flowers. Voluptuous children were they of the voluptuous valley.

Saluting the monarch, they glided away, and commenced a dance. With dreamy, half-shut eyes, through the scented cloud momentarily deepening around him, he watched them; and in the sensuous, animated scene was disclosed one of the enchantments that had weaned him from the martial love of his youth.

Every movement of the figure had been carefully studied, and a kind of æsthetic philosophy was blent with its perfect time and elegance of motion. Slow and stately at first, it gradually quickened; then, as if to excite the blood and fancy, it became more mazy and voluptuous; and finally, as that is the sweetest

song that ends with a long cadence, it was so concluded as to soothe the transports itself had awakened. Sweeping along, it reached a point, a very climax of abandon and beauty, in which the dancers appeared to forget the music and the method of the figure; then the eyes of the king shone brightly, and the pipe lingered on his lips forgotten; and then the musicians began, one by one, to withdraw from the harmony, and the dancers to vanish singly from the room, until, at last, there was but one flute to be heard, while but one girl remained. Finally, she also disappeared, and all grew still again.

And the king sat silent and listless, surrendered to the enjoyment which was the object of the diversion; yet he heard the music; yet he saw the lithe and palpitating forms of the dancers in posture and motion; yet he felt the sweet influence of their youth and grace and beauty, not as a passion, but rather a spell full of the suggestions of passion, when a number of men came noiselessly in, and, kneeling, saluted him. Their costume was that of priests, and each of them carried an instrument of music fashioned somewhat like a Hebrew lyre.

“Ah, my minstrels, my minstrels!” he said, his face flushing with pleasure. “Welcome in the streets, welcome in the camp, welcome in the palace, also! What have you to-night?”

“When last we were admitted to your presence, O king, you bade us compose hymns to the god Quetzal’—”

“Yes; I remember.”

“We pray you not to think ill of your slaves if we say that the

verses which come unbidden are the best; no song of the bird's so beautiful as the one it sings when its heart is full."

The monarch sat up.

"Nay, I did not command. I know something of the spirit of poetry. It is not a thing to be driven by the will, like a canoe by a strong arm; neither is it a slave, to come or go at a signal. I bid my warriors march; I order the sacrifice; but the lays of my minstrels have ever been of their free will. Leave me now. To you are my gardens and palaces. I warrant the verses you have are good; but go ask your hearts for better."

They retired with their faces toward him until hidden behind the tapestry.

"I love a song, uncles," continued the king; "I love a hymn to the gods, and a story of battle chanted in a deep voice. In the halls of the Sun every soul is a minstrel, and every tale a song. But let them go; it is well enough. I promised Iztzil', the Tezcucan, to give him audience to-night. He comes to the palace but seldom, and he has not asked a favor since I settled his quarrel with the lord Cacama. Send one to see if he is now at the door."

Thereupon he fell to reflecting and smoking; and when next he spoke, it was from the midst of an aromatic cloud.

"I loved the wise 'Hualpilli; for his sake, I would have his children happy. He was a lover of peace, and gave more to policy than to war. It were grievous to let his city be disturbed by feuds and fighting men; therefore I gave it to the eldest son. His claim was best; and, besides, he has the friendly heart to serve me. Still

—still, I wish there had been two Tezcucos.”

“There was but one voice about the judgment in Tezcuco, O king; the citizens all said it was just.”

“And they would have said the same if I had given them Iztzil’. I know the knaves, uncle. It was not their applause I cared for, but, you see, in gaining a servant, I lost one. Iztzil’ is a warrior. Had he the will, he could serve me in the field as well as his brother in the council. I must attach him to me. A strong arm is pleasant to lean on; it is better than a staff.”

Addressing himself to the pipe again, he sat smoking, and moodily observing the vapor vanish above him. There was silence until Iztzil’ was ushered in.

The cacique was still suffering from his wounds. His step was feeble, so that his obeisance was stopped by the monarch himself.

“Let the salutation go, my lord Iztzil’. Your courage has cost you much. I remember you are the son of my old friend, and bid you welcome.”

“The Tlascalans are good warriors,” said the Tezcucan, coldly.

“And for that reason better victims,” added the king, quickly. “By the Sun, I know not what we would do without them. Their hills supply our temples.”

“And I, good king—I am but a warrior. My heart is not softened by things pertaining to religion. Enough for me to worship the gods.”

“Then you are not a student?”

“I never studied in the academies.”

“I understand,” said the king, with a low laugh. “You cannot name as many stars as enemies whom you have slain. No matter. I have places for such scholars. Have you commanded an army?”

“It pleased you to give me that confidence. I led my companies within the Tlascalan wall, and came back with captives.”

“I recollect now. But as most good warriors are modest, my son, I will not tell you what the chiefs said of your conduct; you would blush—”

Iztlil’ started.

“Content you, content you; your blush would not be for shame.”

There was a pause, which the king gave to his pipe. Suddenly he said, “There have been tongues busy with your fame, my son. I have heard you were greatly dissatisfied because I gave your father’s city to your elder brother. But I consider that men are never without detractors, and I cannot forget that you have perilled your life for the gods. Actions I accept as the proofs of will. If the favor that brought you here be reasonable, it is yours for the asking. I have the wish to serve you.”

“I am not surprised that I have enemies,” said Iztlil’, calmly. “I will abuse no one on that account; for I am an enemy, and can forgive in others what I deem virtue in myself. But it moves me greatly, O king, that my enemies should steal into your palace, and, in my absence, wrong me in your opinion. But pardon me; I did not come to defend myself—”

“You have taken my words in an evil sense,” interposed the

king, with an impatient gesture.

“Or to conceal the truth,” the Tezcucan continued. “There is kingly blood in me, and I dare speak as my father’s son. So if they said merely that I was dissatisfied with your judgment, they said truly.”

Montezuma frowned.

“I intend my words to be respectful, most mighty king. A common wisdom teaches us to respect the brave man and dread the coward. And there is not in your garden a flower as beautiful, nor in your power a privilege as precious, as free speech; and it would sound ill of one so great and secure as my father’s friend if he permitted in the streets and in the farmer’s hut what he forbade in his palace. I spoke of dissatisfaction; but think not it was because you gave Tezcuco to my brother, and to me the bare hills that have scarcely herbage enough for a wolf-covert. I am less a prince than a warrior; all places are alike to me; the earth affords me royal slumber, while no jewelled canopy is equal to the starred heavens; and as there is a weakness in pleasant memories, I have none. To such as I am, O king, what matters a barren hill or a proud palace? I murmured, nay, I did more, because, in judging my quarrel, you overthrew the independence of my country. When my father visited you from across the lake, he was not accustomed to stand before you, or hide his kingly robes beneath a slave’s garb.”

Montezuma half started from his seat. “Holy gods! Is rebellion so bold?”

“I meant no disrespect, great king. I only sought to justify myself, and in your royal presence say what I have thought while fighting under your banner. But, without more abuse of your patience, I will to my purpose, especially as I came for peace and friendship.”

“The son of my friend forgets that I have ways to make peace without treating for it,” said the king.

The Tezcucan smothered an angry reply.

“By service done, I have shown a disposition to serve you, O king. Very soon every warrior will be needed. A throne may be laid amid hymns and priestly prayers, yet have no strength; to endure, it must rest upon the allegiance of love. Though I have spoken unpleasant words, I came to ask that, by a simple boon, you give me cause to love. I have reflected that I, too, am of royal blood, and, as the son of a king, may lead your armies, and look for alliance in your house. By marriage, O king, I desire, come good or evil, to link my fortune to yours.”

Montezuma's countenance was stolid; no eye could have detected upon it so much as surprise. He quietly asked, “Which of my daughters has found favor in your eyes?”

“They are all beautiful, but only one of them is fitted for a warrior's wife.”

“Tula?”

Iztlil' bowed.

“She is dear to me,” said the king, softly, “dearer than a city; she is holy as a temple, and lovelier than the morning; her voice

is sweet as the summer wind, and her presence as the summer itself. Have you spoken to her of this thing?"

"I love her, so that her love is nothing to me. Her feelings are her own, but she is yours; and you are more powerful to give than she to withhold."

"Well, well," said the monarch, after a little thought; "in my realm there are none of better quality than the children of 'Hualpilli,—none from whom such demand is as proper. Yet it is worthy deliberation. It is true, I have the power to bestow, but there are others who have the right to be consulted. I study the happiness of my people, and it were unnatural if I cared less for that of my children. So leave me now, but take with you, brave prince, the assurance that I am friendly to your suit. The gods go with you!"

And Iztzil', after a low obeisance, withdrew; and then the overture was fully discussed. Montezuma spoke freely, welcoming the opportunity of securing the bold, free-spoken cacique, and seeing in the demand only a question of policy. As might be expected, the ancients made no opposition; they could see no danger in the alliance, and had no care for the parties. It was policy.

CHAPTER III

THE BANISHMENT OF GUATAMOZIN

The palace of Montezuma was regarded as of very great sanctity, so that his household, its economy, and the exact relation its members bore to each other were mysteries to the public. From the best information, however, it would seem that he had two lawful and acknowledged wives, the queens Tecalco and Acatlan,³¹ who, with their families, occupied spacious apartments secure from intrusion. They were good-looking, middle-aged women, whom the monarch honored with the highest respect and confidence. By the first one, he had a son and daughter; by the second, two daughters.

“Help me, Acatlan! I appeal to your friendship, to the love you bear your children,—help me in my trouble.” So the queen Tecalco prayed the queen Acatlan in the palace the morning after the audience given the Tezcucan by the king.

The two were sitting in a room furnished with some taste. Through the great windows, shaded by purple curtains, streamed the fresh breath of the early day. There were female slaves around them in waiting; while a boy nearly grown, at the eastern end of

³¹ These are the proper names of the queens. MSS of Muñoz. Also, note to Prescott, *Conq. of Mexico*, Vol. II., p. 351.

the apartment, was pitching the golden balls in *totoloque*. This was prince Io', the brother of Tula, and son of Tecalco.

"What is the trouble? What can I do?" asked Acatlan.

"Listen to me," said Tecalco. "The king has just gone. He came in better mood than usual, and talked pleasantly. Something had happened; some point of policy had been gained. Nowadays, you know, he talks and thinks of nothing but policy; formerly it was all of war. We cannot deny, Acatlan, that he is much changed. Well, he played a game with Io', then sat down, saying he had news which he thought would please me. You will hardly believe it, but he said that Iztlil', the proud Tezcucan, asked Tula in marriage last night. Think of it! Tula, my blossom, my soul! and to that vile cacique!"

"Well, he is brave, and the son of 'Hualpilli," said Acatlan.

"What! You!" said Tecalco, despairingly. "Do you, too, turn against me? I do not like him, and would not if he were the son of a god. Tula hates him!"

"I will not turn against you, Tecalco. Be calmer, and tell me what more the king said."

"I told him I was surprised, but not glad to hear the news. He frowned, and paced the floor, now here, now there. I was frightened, but could bear his anger better than the idea of my Tula, so good, so beautiful, the wife of the base Tezcucan. He said the marriage must go on; it was required by policy, and would help quiet the Empire, which was never so threatened. You will hardly believe I ventured to tell him that it should not be,

as Tula was already contracted to Guatamozin. I supposed that announcement would quiet the matter, but it only enraged him; he spoke bitterly of the 'tzin. I could scarcely believe my ears. He used to love him. What has happened to change his feeling?"

Acatlan thrummed her pretty mouth with her fingers, and thought awhile.

"Yes, I have heard some stories about the 'tzin—"

"Indeed!" said Tecalco, opening her eyes.

"He too has changed, as you may have observed," continued Acatlan. "He used to be gay and talkative, fond of company, and dance; latterly, he stays at home, and when abroad, mopes, and is silent; while we all know that no great private or public misfortune has happened him. The king appears to have noticed it. And, my dear sister,"—the queen lowered her voice to a confidential whisper,—“they say the 'tzin aspires to the throne.”

"What! Do you believe it? Does the king?" cried Tecalco, more in anger than surprise.

"I believe nothing yet, though there are some grounds for his accusers to go upon. They say he entertains at his palace near Iztapalapan none but men of the army, and that while in Tenochtitlan, he studies the favor of the people, and uses his wealth to win popularity with all classes. Indeed, Tecalco, somehow the king learned that, on the day of the celebration of Quetzal', the 'tzin was engaged in a direct conspiracy against him."

"It is false, Acatlan, it is false! The king has not a more faithful

subject. I know the 'tzin. He is worth a thousand of the Tezcucan, who is himself the traitor." And the vexed queen beat the floor with her sandalled foot.

"As to that, Tecalco, I know nothing. But what more from the king?"

"He told me that Tula should never marry the 'tzin; he would use all his power against it; he would banish him from the city first. And his rage increased until, finally, he swore by the gods he would order a banquet, and, in presence of all the lords of the Empire, publicly betroth Tula and the Tezcucan. He said he would do anything the safety of the throne and the gods required of him. He never was so angry. And that, O Acatlan, my sister, that is my trouble. How can I save my child from such a horrid betrothal?"

Acatlan shook her head gloomily. "The king brooks defeat better than opposition. We would not be safe to do anything openly. I acknowledge myself afraid, and unable to advise you."

Tecalco burst into tears, and wrung her hands, overcome by fear and rage. Io' then left his game, and came to her. He was not handsome, being too large for his years, and ungraceful; this tendency to homeliness was increased by the smallness of his face and head; the features were actually childish.

"Say no more, mother," he said, tears standing in his eyes, as if to prove his sympathy and kindness. "You know it would be better to play with the tigers than stir the king to anger."

"Ah, Io', what shall I do? I always heard you speak well of the

'tzin. You loved him once."

"And I love him yet."

Tecalco was less pacified than ever.

"What would I not give to know who set the king so against him! Upon the traitor be the harm there is in a mother's curse! If my child must be sacrificed, let it be by a priest, and as a victim to the gods."

"Do not speak so. Be wise, Tecalco. Recollect such sorrows belong to our rank."

"Our rank, Acatlan! I can forget it sooner than that I am a mother! O, you do not know how long I have nursed the idea of wedding Tula to the 'tzin! Since their childhood I have prayed, plotted, and hoped for it. With what pride I have seen them grow up,—he so brave, generous, and princely, she so staid and beautiful! I have never allowed her to think of other destiny: the gods made them for each other."

"Mother," said Io', thoughtfully, "I have heard you say that Guatamozin was wise. Why not send him word of what has happened, and put our trust in him?"

The poor queen caught at the suggestion eagerly; for with a promise of aid, at the same time it relieved her of responsibility, of all burthens the most dreadful to a woman. And Acatlan, really desirous of helping her friend, but at a loss for a plan, and terrified by the idea of the monarch's wrath incurred, wondered they had not thought of the proposal sooner, and urged the 'tzin's right to be informed of the occurrence.

“There must be secrecy, Tecalco. The king must never know us as traitors: that would be our ruin.”

“There shall be no danger; I can go myself,” said Io’. “It is long since I was at Iztapalapan, and they say the ’tzin has such beautiful gardens. I want to see the three kings who hold torches in his hall; I want to try a bow with him.” After some entreaty, Tecalco assented. She required him, however, to put on a costume less likely to attract attention, and take some other than a royal canoe across the lake. Half an hour later, he passed out of a garden gate, and, by a circuitous route, hurried to the canal in which lay the vessels of the Iztapalapan watermen. He found one, and was bargaining with its owner, when a young man walked briskly up, and stepped into a canoe close by. Something in the gay dress of the stranger made Io’ look at him a second time, and he was hardly less pleased than surprised at being addressed,—

“Ho, friend! I am going to your city. Save your cocoa, and go with me.”

Io’ was confused.

“Come on!” the stranger persisted, with a pleasant smile. “Come on! I want company. You were never so welcome.”

The smile decided the boy. He set one foot in the vessel, but instantly retreated—an ocelot, crouched in the bottom, raised its round head, and stared fixedly at him. The stranger laughed, and reassured him, after which he walked boldly forward. Then the canoe swung from its mooring, and in a few minutes, under the impulsion of three strong slaves, went flying down the canal.

Under bridges, through incoming flotillas, and past the great houses on either hand they darted, until the city was left behind, and the lake, colored with the borrowed blue of the sky, spread out rich and billowy before them. The eyes of the stranger brightened at the prospect.

“I like this. By Our Mother, I like it!” he said, earnestly. “We have lakes in Tihuanco on which I have spent days riding waves and spearing fish; but they were dull to this. See the stretch of the water! Look yonder at the villages, and here at the city and Chapultepec! Ah, that you were born in Tenochtitlan be proud. There is no grander birthplace this side of the Sun!”

“I am an Aztec,” said Io’, moved by the words.

The other smiled, and added, “Why not go further, and say, ‘and son of the king?’”

Io’ was startled.

“Surprised! Good prince, I am a hunter. From habit, I observe everything; a track, a tree, a place, once seen is never forgotten; and since I came to the city, the night before the combat of Quetzal’, the habit has not left me. That day you were seated under the red canopy, with the princesses Tula and Nenetzin. So I came to know the king’s son.”

“Then you saw the combat?”

“And how brave it was! There never was its match,—never such archery as the ’tzin’s. Then the blow with which he killed the Othmi! I only regretted that the Tezcucan escaped. I do not like him; he is envious and spiteful; it would have been better had

he fallen instead of the Otompan. You know Iztzil'?"

"Not to love him," said Io'.

"Is he like the 'tzin?"

"Not at all."

"So I have heard," said the hunter, shrugging his shoulders. "But— Down, fellow!" he cried to the ocelot, whose approaches discomposed the prince. "I was going to say," he resumed, with a look which, as an invitation to confidence, was irresistible, "that there is no reason why you and I should not be friends. We are both going to see the 'tzin—"

Io' was again much confused.

"I only heard you say so to the waterman on the landing. If your visit, good prince, was intended as a secret, you are a careless messenger. But have no fear. I intend entering the 'tzin's service; that is, if he will take me."

"Is the 'tzin enlisting men?" asked Io'.

"No. I am merely weary of hunting. My father is a good merchant whose trading life is too tame for me. I love excitement. Even hunting deer and chasing wolves are too tame. I will now try war, and there is but one whom I care to follow. Together we will see and talk to him."

"You speak as if you were used to arms."

"My skill may be counted nothing. I seek the service more from what I imagine it to be. The march, the camp, the battle, the taking captives, the perilling life, when it is but a secondary object, as it must be with every warrior of true ambition, all

have charms for my fancy. Besides, I am discontented with my condition. I want honor, rank, and command,—wealth I have. Hence, for me, the army is the surest road. Beset with trials, and needing a good heart and arm, yet it travels upward, upward, and that is all I seek to know.”

The *naïveté* and enthusiasm of the hunter were new and charming to the prince, who was impelled to study him once more. He noticed how exactly the arms were rounded; that the neck was long, muscular, and widened at the base, like the trunk of an oak; that the features, excited by the passing feeling, were noble and good; that the very carriage of the head was significant of aptitude for brave things, if not command. Could the better gods have thrown Io' in such company for self-comparison? Was that the time they had chosen to wake within him the longings of mind natural to coming manhood? He felt the inspiration of an idea new to him. All his life had been passed in the splendid monotony of his father's palace; he had been permitted merely to hear of war, and that from a distance; of the noble passion for arms he knew nothing. Accustomed to childish wants, with authority to gratify them, ambition for power had not yet disturbed him. But, as he listened, it was given him to see the emptiness of his past life, and understand the advantages he already possessed; he said to himself, “Am I not master of grade and opportunities, so coveted by this unknown hunter, and so far above his reach?” In that moment the contentment which had canopied his existence, like a calm sky, full of stars

and silence and peace, was taken up, and whirled away; his spirit strengthened with a rising ambition and a courage royally descended.

“You are going to study with the ’tzin. I would like to be your comrade,” he said.

“I accept you, I give you my heart!” replied the hunter, with beaming face. “We will march, and sleep, and fight, and practise together. I will be true to you as shield to the warrior. Hereafter, O prince, when you would speak of me, call me Hualpa; and if you would make me happy, say of me, ‘He is my comrade!’”

The sun stood high in the heavens when they reached the landing. Mounting a few steps that led from the water’s edge, they found themselves in a garden rich with flowers, beautiful trees, running streams, and trellised summer-houses,—the garden of a prince,—of Guatamozin, the true hero of his country.

CHAPTER IV

GUATAMOZIN AT HOME

Guatamozin inherited a great fortune, ducal rank, and an estate near Iztapalapan. Outside the city, midst a garden that extended for miles around, stood his palace, built in the prevalent style, one story high, but broad and wide enough to comfortably accommodate several thousand men. His retainers, a legion in themselves, inhabited it for the most part; and whether soldier, artisan, or farmer, each had his quarters, his exclusive possession as against every one but the 'tzin.

The garden was almost entirely devoted to the cultivation of fruits and flowers. Hundreds of slaves, toiling there constantly under tasteful supervision, made and kept it beautiful past description. Rivulets of pure water, spanned by bridges and bordered with flowers, ran through every part over beds of sand yellow as gold. The paths frequently led to artificial lagoons, delightful for the coolness that lingered about them, when the sun looked with his burning eye down upon the valley; for they were fringed with willow and sycamore trees, all clad with vines as with garments; and some were further garnished with little islands, plumed with palms, and made attractive by kiosks. Nor were these all. Fountains and cascades filled the air with sleepy songs; orange-groves rose up, testifying to the clime they adorned; and in every path small *teules*, on pedestals of stone,

so mingled religion with the loveliness that there could be no admiration without worship.

Io' and Hualpa, marvelling at the beauty they beheld, pursued a path, strewn with white sand, and leading across the garden, to the palace. A few armed men loitered about the portal, but allowed them to approach without question. From the antechamber they sent their names to the 'tzin, and directly the slave returned with word to Io' to follow him.

The study into which the prince was presently shown was furnished with severe plainness. An arm-chair, if such it may be called, some rude tables and uncushioned benches, offered small encouragement to idleness.

Sand, glittering like crushed crystal, covered the floor, and, instead of tapestry, the walls were hung with maps of the Empire, and provinces the most distant. Several piles of MSS.,—the books of the Aztecs,—with parchment and writing-materials, lay on a table; and half concealed amongst them was a harp, such as we have seen in the hands of the royal minstrels.

“Welcome, Io', welcome!” said the 'tzin, in his full voice. “You have come at length, after so many promises,—come last of all my friends. When you were here before, you were a child, and I a boy like you now. Let us go and talk it over.” And leading him to a bench by a window, they sat down.

“I remember the visit,” said Io'. “It was many years ago. You were studying then, and I find you studying yet.”

A serious thought rose to the 'tzin's mind, and his smile was

clouded.

“You do not understand me, Io’. Shut up in your father’s palace, your life is passing too dreamily. The days with you are like waves of the lake: one rolls up, and, scarcely murmuring, breaks on the shore; another succeeds,—that is all. Hear, and believe me. He who would be wise must study. There are many who live for themselves, a few who live for their race. Of the first class, no thought is required; they eat, sleep, are merry, and die, and have no hall in heaven: but the second must think, toil, and be patient; they must know, and, if possible, know everything. God and ourselves are the only sources of knowledge. I would not have you despise humanity, but all that is from ourselves is soon learned. There is but one inexhaustible fountain of intelligence, and that is Nature, the God Supreme. See those volumes; they are of men, full of wisdom, but nothing original; they are borrowed from the book of deity,—the always-opened book, of which the sky is one chapter, and earth the other. Very deep are the lessons of life and heaven there taught. I confess to you, Io’, that I aspire to be of those whose lives are void of selfishness, who live for others, for their country. Your father’s servant, I would serve him understandingly; to do so, I must be wise; and I cannot be wise without patient study.”

Io’s unpractised mind but half understood the philosophy to which he listened; but when the ’tzin called himself his father’s servant, Acatlan’s words recurred to the boy.

“O ’tzin,” he said, “they are not all like you, so good, so true.

There have been some telling strange stories about you to the king.”

“About me?”

“They say you want to be king,”—the listener’s face was passive,—“and that on Quetzal’s day you were looking for opportunity to attack my father.” Still there was no sign of emotion. “Your staying at home, they say, is but a pretence to cover your designs.”

“And what more, Io?”

“They say you are taking soldiers into your pay; that you give money, and practise all manner of arts, to become popular in Tenochtitlan; and that your delay in entering the arena on the day of the combat had something to do with your conspiracy.”

For a moment the noble countenance of the ’tzin was disturbed.

“A lying catalogue! But is that all?”

“No,”—and Io’s voice trembled,—“I am a secret messenger from the queen Tecalco, my mother. She bade me say to you, that last night Iztzil’, the Tezcucan, had audience with the king, and asked Tula for his wife.”

Guatamozin sprang from his seat more pallid than ever in battle.

“And what said Montezuma?”

“This morning he came to the queen, my mother, and told her about it; on your account she objected; but he became angry, spoke harshly of you, and swore Tula should not wed with you;

he would banish you first.”

Through the silent cell the ’tzin strode gloomily; the blow weakened him. Mualox was wrong; men cannot make themselves almost gods; by having many ills, and bearing them bravely, they can only become heroes. After a long struggle he resumed his calmness and seat.

“What more from the queen?”

“Only, that as she was helpless, she left everything to you. She dares not oppose the king.”

“I understand!” exclaimed the ’tzin, starting from the bench again. “The Tezcucan is my enemy. Crossing the lake, night before the combat, he told me he loved Tula, and charged me with designs against the Empire, and cursed the king and his crown. Next day he fought under my challenge. The malice of a mean soul cannot be allayed by kindness. But for me the *tamanes* would have buried him with the Tlascalans. I sent him to my house; my slaves tended him; yet his hate was only sharpened.”

He paced the floor to and fro, speaking vehemently.

“The ingrate charges me with aspiring to the throne. Judge me, holy gods! Judge how willingly I would lay down my life to keep the crown where it is! He says my palace has been open to men of the army. It was always so,—I am a warrior. I have consulted them about the Empire, but always as a subject, never for its ill. Such charges I laugh at; but that I sought to slay the king is too horrible for endurance. On the day of the combat, about the time of the assemblage, I went to the Cû of Quetzal’ for blessing. I saw

no smoke or other sign of fire upon the tower. Mualox was gone, and I trembled lest the fire should be dead. I climbed up, and found only a few living embers. There were no fagots on the roof, nor in the court-yard; the shrine was abandoned, Mualox old. The desolation appealed to me. The god seemed to claim my service. I broke my spear and shield, and flung the fragments into the urn, then hastened to the palace, loaded some *tamanes* with wood, and went back to the Cû. I was not too late there; but, hurrying to the *tianguetz*, I found myself almost dishonored. So was I kept from the arena; that service to the god is now helping my enemy as proof that I was waiting on a housetop to murder my king and kinsman! Alas! I have only slaves to bear witness to the holy work that kept me on the temple. Much I fear the gods are making the king blind for his ruin and the ruin of us all. He believes the strangers on the coast are from the Sun, when they are but men. Instead of war against them, he is thinking of embassies and presents. Now, more than ever, he needs the support of friends; but he divides his family against itself, and confers favors on enemies. I see the danger. Unfriendly gods are moving against us, not in the strangers, but in our own divisions. Remember the prophecy of Mualox, "The race of Azatlan is ended forever."

The speaker stopped his walking, and his voice became low and tremulous.

"Yet I love him; he has been kind; he gave me command; through his graciousness I have dwelt unmolested in this palace of my father. I am bound to him by love and law. As he has been

my friend, I will be his; when his peril is greatest, I will be truest. Nothing but ill from him to Anahuac can make me his enemy. So, so,—let it pass. I trust the future to the gods.”

Then, as if seeking to rid himself of the bitter subject, he turned to Io'. "Did not some one come with you?"

The boy told what he knew of Hualpa.

"I take him to be no common fellow; he has some proud ideas. I think you would like him."

"I will try your hunter, Io'. And if he is what you say of him, I will accept his service."

And they went immediately to the antechamber, where Hualpa saluted the 'tzin. The latter surveyed his fine person approvingly, and said, "I am told you wish to enter my service. Were you ever in battle?"

The hunter told his story with his wonted modesty.

"Well, the chase is a good school for warriors. It trains the thews, teaches patience and endurance, and sharpens the spirit's edge. Let us to the garden. A hand to retain skill must continue its practice; like a good memory, it is the better for exercise. Come, and I will show you how I keep prepared for every emergency of combat." And so saying, the 'tzin led the visitors out.

They went to the garden, followed by the retainers lounging at the door. A short walk brought them to a space surrounded by a copse of orange-trees, strewn with sand, and broad enough for a mock battle; a few benches about the margin afforded accommodation to spectators; a stone house at the northern end

served for armory, and was full of arms and armor. A glance assured the visitors that the place had been prepared expressly for training. Some score or more of warriors, in the military livery of the 'tzin, already occupied a portion of the field. Upon his appearance they quitted their games, and closed around him with respectful salutations.

“How now, my good Chinantlan!” he said, pleasantly. “Did I not award you a prize yesterday? There are few in the valley who can excel you in launching the spear.”

“The plume is mine no longer,” replied the warrior. “I was beaten last night. The winner, however, is a countryman.”

“A countryman! You Chinantlans seem born to the spear. Where is the man?”

The victor stepped forward, and drew up before the master, who regarded his brawny limbs, sinewy neck, and bold eyes with undisguised admiration; so an artist would regard a picture or a statue. Above the fellow's helm floated a plume of scarlet feathers, the trophy of his superior skill.

“Get your spear,” said the 'tzin. “I bring you a competitor.”

The spear was brought, an ugly weapon in any hand. The head was of copper, and the shaft sixteen feet long. The rough Chinantlan handled it with a loving grip.

“Have you such in Tihuanco?” asked Guatamozin.

Hualpa balanced the weapon and laughed.

“We have only javelins,—mere reeds to this. Unless to hold an enemy at bay, I hardly know its use. Certainly, it is not for

casting.”

“Set the mark, men. We will give the stranger a lesson. Set it to the farthest throw.”

A pine picket was then set up a hundred feet away, presenting a target of the height and breadth of a man, to which a shield was bolted breast-high from the sand.

“Now give the Chinantlan room!”

The wearer of the plume took his place; advancing one foot, he lifted the spear above his head with the right hand, poised it a moment, then hurled it from him, and struck the picket a palm’s breadth below the shield.

“Out, out!” cried the ’tzin. “Bring me the spear; I have a mind to wear the plume myself.”

When it was brought him, he cast it lightly as a child would toss a weed; yet the point drove clanging through the brazen base of the shield, and into the picket behind. Amid the applause of the sturdy warriors he said to Hualpa,—

“Get ready; the hunter must do something for the honor of his native hills.”

“I cannot use a spear in competition with Guatamozin,” said Hualpa, with brightening eyes; “but if he will have brought a javelin, a good comely weapon, I will show him my practice.”

A slender-shafted missile, about half the length of the spear, was produced from the armory, and examined carefully.

“See, good ’tzin, it is not true. Let me have another.”

The next one was to his satisfaction.

“Now,” he said, “set the target thrice a hundred feet away. If the dainty living of Xoli have not weakened my arm, I will at least strike yon shield.”

The bystanders looked at each other wonderingly, and the ’tzin was pleased. He had not lost a word or a motion of Hualpa’s. The feat undertaken was difficult and but seldom achieved successfully; but the aspirant was confident, and he manifested the will to which all achievable things are possible.

The target was reset, and the Tihuacan took the stand. Resting the shaft on the palm of his left hand, he placed the fingers of his right against the butt, and drew the graceful weapon arm-length backward. It described an arc in the air, and to the astonishment of all fell in the shield a little left of the centre.

“Tell me, Hualpa,” said Guatamozin, “are there more hunters in Tihuanco who can do such a deed? I will have you bring them to me.”

The Tihuacan lowered his eyes. “I grieve to say, good ’tzin, that I know of none. I excelled them all. But I can promise that in my native province there are hundreds braver than I, ready to serve you to the death.”

“Well, it is enough. I intended to try you further, and with other weapons, but not now. He who can so wield a javelin must know to bend a bow and strike with a *maquahuitl*. I accept your service. Let us to the palace.”

Hualpa thrilled with delight. Already he felt himself in the warrior’s path, with a glory won. All his dreams were about to

be realized. In respectful silence he followed Guatamozin, and as they reached the portal steps, Io' touched his arm:

“Remember our compact on the lake,” he whispered.

The hunter put his arm lovingly about the prince, and so they entered the house. And that day Fate wove a brotherhood of three hearts which was broken only by death.

CHAPTER V

NIGHT AT THE CHALCAN'S

The same day, in the evening, Xoli lay on a lounge by the fountain under his portico. His position gave him the range of the rooms, which glowed like day, and resounded with life. He could even distinguish the occupations of some of his guests. In fair view a group was listening to a minstrel; beyond them he occasionally caught sight of girls dancing; and every moment peals of laughter floated out from the chambers of play. A number of persons, whose arms and attire published them of the nobler class, sat around the Chalcan in the screen of the curtains, conversing, or listlessly gazing out on the square.

Gradually Xoli's reverie became more dreamy; sleep stole upon his senses, and shut out the lullaby of the fountain, and drowned the influence of his *cuisine*. His patrons after a while disappeared, and the watchers on the temples told the passing time without awakening him. Very happy was the Chalcan.

The slumber was yet strong upon him, when an old man and a girl came to the portico. The former, decrepit and ragged, seated himself on the step. Scanty hair hung in white locks over his face; and grasping a staff, he rested his head wearily upon his hands, and talked to himself.

The girl approached the Chalcan with the muffled tread of fear. She was clad in the usual dress of her class,—a white

chemise, with several skirts short and embroidered, over which, after being crossed at the throat, a red scarf dropped its tasseled ends nearly to her heels. The neatness of the garments more than offset their cheapness. Above her forehead, in the fillet that held the mass of black hair off her face, leaving it fully exposed, there was the gleam of a common jewel; otherwise she was without ornament. In all beauty there is—nay, must be—an idea; so that a countenance to be handsome even, must in some way at sight quicken a sentiment or stir a memory in the beholder. It was so here. To look at the old man's guardian was to know that she had a sorrow to tell, and to pity her before it was told; to be sure that under her tremulous anxiety there was a darksome story and an extraordinary purpose, the signs of which, too fine for the materialism of words, but plain to the sympathetic inner consciousness, lurked in the corners of her mouth, looked from her great black eyes, and blent with every action.

Gliding over the marble, she stopped behind the sleeper, and spoke, without awakening him; her voice was too like the murmur of the fountain. Frightened at the words, low as they were, she hesitated; but a look at the old man reassured her, and she called again. Xoli started.

“How now, mistress!” he said, angrily, reaching for her hand.

“I want to see Xoli, the Chalcan,” she replied, escaping his touch.

“What have you to do with him?”

He sat up, and looked at her in wonder.

“What have you to do with him?” he repeated, in a kindlier tone.

Her face kindled with a sudden intelligence. “Xoli! The gods be praised! And their blessing on you, if you will do a kind deed for a countryman!”

“Well! But what beggar is that? Came he with you?”

“It is of him I would speak. Hear me!” she asked drawing near him again. “He is poor, but a Chalcan. If you have memory of the city of your birth, be merciful to his child.”

“His child! Who? Nay, it is a beggar’s tale! Ho, fellow! How many times have I driven you away already! How dare you return!”

Slowly the old man raised his head from his staff, and turned his face to the speaker; there was no light there: he was blind!

“By the holy fires, no trick this! Say on, girl. He is a Chalcan, you said.”

“A countryman of yours,”—and her tears fell fast. “A hut is standing where the causeway leads from Chalco to Iztapalapan; it is my father’s. He was happy under its roof; for, though blind and poor, he could hear my mother’s voice, which was the kindest thing on earth to him. But Our Mother called her on the coming of a bright morning, and since then he has asked for bread, when I had not a *tuna*³² to give him. O Xoli! did you but know what it is to ask for bread, when there is none! I am his child, and can think of but one way to quiet his cry.” And she paused, looking

³² A species of fig.

in his face for encouragement.

“Tell me your name, girl; tell me your name, then go on,” he said, with a trembling lip, for his soul was clever.

At that instant the old man moaned querulously, “Yeteve, Yeteve!”

She went, and clasped his neck, and spoke to him soothingly. Xoli’s eyes became humid; down in the depths of his heart an emotion grew strangely warm.

“Yeteve, Yeteve!” he repeated, musingly, thinking the syllables soft and pretty. “Come; stand here again, Yeteve,” said he, aloud, when the dotard was pacified. “He wants bread, you say: how would you supply him?”

“You are rich. You want many slaves; and the law permits the poor to sell themselves.³³ I would be your slave,—asking no price, except that you give the beggar bread.”

“A slave! Sell yourself!” he cried, in dismay. “A slave! Why, you are beautiful, Yeteve, and have not bethought yourself that some day the gods may want you for a victim.”

She was silent.

“What can you do? Dance? Sing? Can you weave soft veils and embroider golden flowers, like ladies in the palaces? If you can, no slave in Anahuac will be so peerless; the lords will bid more cocoa than you can carry; you will be rich.”

“If so, then can I do all you have said.”

And she ran, and embraced the old man, saying, “Patience,

³³ Prescott, *Conq. of Mexico*.

patience! In a little while we will have bread, and be rich. Yes," she continued, returning to the Chalcan, "they taught me in the *teocallis*, where they would have had me as priestess."

"It is good to be a priestess, Yeteve; you should have stayed there."

"But I did so love the little hut by the causeway. And I loved the beggar, and they let me go."

"And now you wish to sell yourself? I want slaves, but not such as you, Yeteve. I want those who can work,—slaves whom the lash will hurt, but not kill. Besides, you are worth more cocoa than I can spare. Keep back your tears. I will do better than buy you myself. I will sell you, and to-night. Here in my house you shall dance for the bidders. I know them all. He shall be brave and rich and clever who buys,—clever and brave, and the owner of a palace, full of bread for the beggar, and love for Yeteve."

Clapping his hands, a slave appeared at the door.

"Take yon beggar, and give him to eat. Lead him,—he is blind. Come, child, follow me."

He summoned his servants, and bade them publish the sale in every apartment; then he led the girl to the hall used for the exhibition of his own dancing-girls. It was roomy and finely lighted; the floor was of polished marble; a blue drop-curtain extended across the northern end, in front of which were rows of stools, handsomely cushioned, for spectators. Music, measured for the dance, greeted the poor priestess, and had a magical effect upon her; her eyes brightened, a smile played about her mouth.

Never was the chamber of the rich Chalcan graced by a creature fairer or more devoted.

“A priestess of the dance needs no teaching from me,” said Xoli, patting her flushed cheek. “Get ready; they are coming. Beware of the marble; and when I clap my hands, begin.”

She looked around the hall once; not a point escaped her. Springing to the great curtain, and throwing her robe away, she stood before it in her simple attire; and no studied effect of art could have been more beautiful; motionless and lovely, against the relief of the blue background, she seemed actually *spirituelle*.

Upon the announcement of the auction, the patrons of the house hurried to the scene. Voluntary renunciation of freedom was common enough among the poorer classes in Tenochtitlan, but a transaction of the kind under the auspices of the rich broker was a novelty; so that curiosity and expectation ran high. The nobles, as they arrived, occupied the space in front of the curtain, or seated themselves, marvelling at the expression of her countenance.

The music had not ceased; and the bidders being gathered, Xoli, smiling with satisfaction, stepped forward to give the signal, when an uproar of merriment announced the arrival of a party of the younger dignitaries of the court,—amongst them Iztzil', the Tezcucan, and Maxtla, chief of the guard, the former showing signs of quick recovery from his wounds, the latter superbly attired.

“Hold! What have we here?” cried the Tezcucan, surveying

the girl. "Has this son of Chalco been robbing the palace?"

"The temples, my lord Iztzil! He has robbed the temples! By all the gods, it is the priestess Yeteve!" answered Maxtla, amazed. "Say, Chalcan, what does priestess of the Blessed Lady in such unhallowed den?"

The broker explained.

"Good, good!" shouted the new-comers.

"Begin, Xoli! A thousand cocoa for the priestess,—millions of bread for the beggar!" This from Maxtla.

"Only a thousand?" said Iztzil', scornfully. "Only a thousand? Five thousand to begin with, more after she dances."

Xoli gave the signal, and the soul of the Chalcan girl broke forth in motion. Dancing had been her *rôle* in the religious rites of the temple; many a time the pabas around the altar, allured by her matchless grace, had turned from the bleeding heart indifferent to its auguration. And she had always danced moved by no warmer impulse than duty; so that the prompting of the spirit in the presence of a strange auditory free to express itself, like that she now faced, came to her for the first time. The dance chosen was one of the wild, quick, pulsating figures wont to be given in thanksgiving for favorable tokens from the deity. The steps were irregular and difficult; a great variety of posturing was required; the head, arms, and feet had each their parts, all to be rendered in harmony. At the commencement she was frightened by the ecstasy that possessed her; suddenly the crowd vanished, and she saw only the beggar, and him wanting bread. Then her

form became divinely gifted; she bounded as if winged; advanced and retreated, a moment swaying like a reed, the next whirling like a leaf in a circling wind. The expression of her countenance throughout was so full of soul, so intense, rapt, and beautiful, that the lords were spell-bound. When the figure was ended, there was an outburst of voices, some bidding, others applauding; though most of the spectators were silent from pity and admiration.

Of the competitors the loudest was Iztzil'. In his excitement, he would have sacrificed his province to become the owner of the girl. Maxtla opposed him.

"Five thousand cocoa! Hear, Chalcan!" shouted the Tezcucan.

"A thousand better!" answered Maxtla, laughing at the cacique's rage.

"By all the gods, I will have her! Put me down a thousand quills of gold!"

"A thousand quills above him! Not bread, but riches for the beggar!" replied Maxtla, half in derision.

"Two thousand,—only two thousand quills! More, noble lords! She is worth a palace!" sung Xoli, trembling with excitement; for in such large bids he saw an extraordinary loan. Just then, under the parted curtain of the principal doorway, he beheld one dear to every lover of Tenochtitlan; he stopped. All eyes turned in that direction, and a general exclamation followed,—"The 'tzin, the 'tzin!"

Guatamozin was in full military garb, and armed. As he lingered by the door to comprehend the scene, what with his

height, brassy helm, and embossed shield, he looked like a Greek returned from Troy.

“Yeteve, the priestess!” he said. “Impossible!”

He strode to the front.

“How?” he said, placing his hand on her head. “Has Yeteve flown the temple to become a slave?”

Up to this time, it would seem that, in the fixedness of her purpose, she had been blind to all but the beggar, and deaf to everything but the music. Now she knelt at the feet of the noble Aztec, sobbing broken-heartedly. The spectators were moved with sympathy,—all save one.

“Who stays the sale? By all the gods, Chalcan, you shall proceed!”

Scarcely had the words been spoken, or the duller faculties understood them, before Guatamozin confronted the speaker, his javelin drawn, and his shield in readiness. Naturally his countenance was womanly gentle; but the transition of feeling was mighty, and those looking upon him then shrank with dread; it was as if their calm blue lake had in an instant darkened with storm. Face to face he stood with the Tezcucan, the latter unprepared for combat, but in nowise daunted. In their angry attitude a seer might have read the destiny of Anahuac.

One thrust of the javelin would have sent the traitor to Mictlan; the Empire, as well as the wrongs of the lover, called for it; but before the veterans, recovering from their panic, could rush between the foemen, all the 'tzin's calmness returned.

“Xoli,” he said, “a priestess belongs to the temple, and cannot be sold; such is the law. The sale would have sent your heart, and that of her purchaser, to the Blessed Lady. Remove the girl. I will see that she is taken to a place of safety. Here is gold; give the beggar what he wants, and keep him until to-morrow.— And, my lords and brethren,” he added, turning to the company, “I did not think to behave so unseemly. It is only against the enemies of our country that we should turn our arms. Blood is sacred, and accursed is his hand who sheds that of a countryman in petty quarrel. I pray you, forget all that has passed.” And with a low obeisance to them, he walked away, taking with him the possibility of further rencounter.

He had just arrived from his palace at Iztapalapan.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHINAMPA

Between Tula, the child of Tecalco, and Nenezin, daughter and child of Acatlan, there existed a sisterly affection. The same sports had engaged them, and they had been, and yet were, inseparable. Their mothers, themselves friends, encouraged the intimacy; and so their past lives had vanished, like two summer clouds borne away by a soft south wind.

The evening after Iztzil's overture of marriage was deepening over lake Tezcuco; the breeze became murmurous and like a breath, and all the heavens filled with starlight. Cloudless must be the morrow to such a night!

So thought the princess Tula. Won by the beauty of the evening, she had flown from the city to her *chinampa*, which was lying anchored in a quarter of the lake east of the causeway to Tepejaca, beyond the noise of the town, and where no sound less agreeable than the plash of light waves could disturb her dreams.

A retreat more delightful would be a task for fancy. The artisan who knitted the timbers of the *chinampa* had doubtless been a lover of the luxuriant, and built as only a lover can build. The waves of the lake had not been overlooked in his plan; he had measured their height, and the depth and width of their troughs, when the weather was calm and the water gentle. So he knew both what rocking they would make, and what rocking would be

pleasantest to a delicate soul; for, as there were such souls, there were also such artisans in Tenochtitlan.

Viewed from a distance, the *chinampa* looked like an island of flowers. Except where the canopy of a white pavilion rose from the midst of the green beauty, it was covered to the water's edge with blooming shrubbery, which, this evening, was luminous with the light of lamps. The radiance, glinting through the foliage, tinted the atmosphere above it with mellow rays, and seemed the visible presence of enchantment.

The humid night breeze blew softly under the raised walls of the pavilion, within which, in a hammock that swung to and fro regularly as the *chinampa* obeyed the waves, lay Tula and Nenetzin.

They were both beautiful, but different in their beauty. Tula's face was round and of a transparent olive complexion, without being fair; her eyes were hazel, large, clear, and full of melancholy earnestness; masses of black hair, evenly parted, fell over her temples, and were gathered behind in a simple knot; with a tall, full form, her presence and manner were grave and very queenly. Whereas, Nenetzin's eyes, though dark, were bright with the light of laughter; her voice was low and sweet, and her manner that of a hoyden. One was the noble woman, the other a jocund child.

"It is late, Tula; our father may want us. Let us return."

"Be patient a little longer. The 'tzin will come for us; he promised to, and you know he never forgets."

“Patience, sister! Ah! you may say it, you who *know*; but how am I to practise it,—I, who have only a *hope*?”

“What do you mean, Nenetzin?”

The girl leaned back, and struck a suspended hoop, in which was perched a large parrot. The touch, though light, interrupted the pendulous motion of the bird, and it pecked at her hand, uttering a gruff scream of rage.

“You spoke of something I know, and you hope. What do you mean, child?”

Nenetzin withdrew her hand from the perch, looked in the questioner’s face, then crept up to win her embrace.

“O Tula, I know you are learned and thoughtful. Often after the banquet, when the hall was cleared, and the music begun, have I seen you stand apart, silent, while all others danced or laughed. See, your eyes are on me now, but more in thought than love. O, indeed, you are wise! Tell me, did you ever think of me as a woman?”

The smile deepened on the lips, and burned in the eyes of the queenly auditor.

“No, never as a woman,” continued Nenetzin. “Listen to me, Tula. The other night I was asleep in your arms,—I felt them in love around me,—and I dreamed so strangely.”

“Of what?” asked Tula, seeing she hesitated.

“I dreamed there entered at the palace door a being with a countenance white like snow, while its hair and beard were yellow, like the silk of the maize; its eyes were blue, like the deep

water of the lake, but bright, so bright that they terrified while they charmed me. Thinking of it now, O Tula, it was a man, though it looked like a god. He entered at the palace door, and came into the great chamber where our father sat with his chiefs; but he came not barefooted and in *nequen*; he spoke as he were master, and our father a slave. Looking and listening, a feeling thrilled me,—thrilled warm and deep, and was a sense of joy, like a blessing of Tlalac. Since then, though I have acted as a girl, I have felt as a woman.”

“Very strange, indeed, Nenetzin!” said Tula, playfully. “But you forget: I asked you what I know, and you only hope?”

“I will explain directly; but as you are wise, first tell me what that feeling was.”

“Nay, I can tell you whence the water flows, but I cannot tell you what it is.”

“Well, since then I have had a hope—”

“Well?”

“A hope of seeing the white face and blue eyes.”

“I begin to understand you, Nenetzin. But go on: what is it I know?”

“What I dreamed,—a great warrior, who loves you. You will see him to-night, and then, O Tula,—then you may tell of the feeling that thrilled me so in my dream.”

And with a blush and a laugh, she laid her face in Tula’s bosom.

Both were silent awhile, Nenetzin with her face hidden, and

Tula looking wistfully up at the parrot swinging lazily in the perch. The dream was singular, and made an impression on the mind of the one as it had on the heart of the other.

“Look up, O Nenetzin!” said Tula, after a while. “Look up, and I will tell you something that has seemed as strange to me as the dream to you.”

The girl raised her head.

“Did you ever see Mualox, the old paba of Quetzal? No? Well, he is said to be a prophet; a look of his will make a warrior tremble. He is the friend of Guatamozin, who always goes to his shrine to worship the god. I went there once to make an offering. I climbed the steps, went in where the image is, laid my gift on the altar, and turned to depart, when a man came and stood by the door, wearing a surplice, and with long, flowing white beard. He looked at me, then bowed, and kissed the pavement at my feet. I shrank away. ‘Fear not, O Tula!’ he said. ‘I bow to you, not for what you are, but for what you shall be. *You shall be queen in your father’s palace!*’ With that he arose, and left me to descend.”

“Said he so? How did he know you were Tula, the king’s daughter?”

“That is part of the mystery. I never saw him before; nor, until I told the story to the ’tzin, did I know the paba. Now, O sister, can the believer of a dream refuse to believe a priest and prophet?”

“A queen! You a queen! I will kiss you now, and pray for you then.” And they threw their arms lovingly around each other.

Then the bird above them awoke, and, with a fluttering of

its scarlet wings, cried, "Guatamo! Guatamo!"—taught it by the patient love of Tula.

"O, what a time that will be!" Nenetzin went on, with sparkling eyes. "What a garden we will make of Anahuac! How happy we shall be! None but the brave and beautiful shall come around us; for you will be queen, my Tula."

"Yes; and Nenetzin shall have a lord, he whom she loves best, for she will be as peerless as I am powerful," answered Tula, humoring the mood. "Whom will she take? Let us decide now,—there are so many to choose from. What says she to Cacama, lord of Tezcuco?"

The girl made no answer.

"There is the lord of Chinantla, once a king, who has already asked our father for a wife."

Still Nenetzin was silent.

"Neither of them! Then there are left but the lord of Tlacopan, and Iztzil', the Tezcucan."

At the mention of the last name, a strong expression of disgust burst from Nenetzin.

"A tiger from the museum first! It could be taught to love me. No, none of them for me; none, Tula, if you let me have my way, but the white face and blue eyes I saw in my dream."

"You are mad, Nenetzin. That was a god, not a man."

"All the better, Tula! The god will forgive me for loving him."

Before Tula spoke again, Guatamozin stepped within the pavilion. Nenetzin was noisy in expressing her gladness, while

the elder sister betrayed no feeling by words; only her smile and the glow of her eyes intensified.

The 'tzin sat down by the hammock, and with his strong hand staying its oscillation, talked lightly. As yet Tula knew nothing of the proposal of the Tezcucan, or of the favor the king had given it; but the ken of love is as acute as an angel's; sorrow of the cherished heart cannot be hidden from it; so in his very jests she detected a trouble; but, thinking it had relation to the condition of the Empire, she asked nothing, while he, loath to disturb her happiness, counselled darkly of his own soul.

After a while, as Nenetzin prayed to return to the city, they left the pavilion; and, following a little path through the teeming shrubbery, and under the boughs of orange-trees, overarched like an arbor, they came to the 'tzin's canoe. The keeper of the *chinampa* was there with great bundles of flowers. Tula and Nenetzin entered the vessel; then was the time for the slave; so he threw in the bundles until they were nearly buried under them,—his gifts of love and allegiance. When the rowers pushed off, he knelt with his face to the earth.

Gliding homeward through the dusk, Guatamozin told the story of Yeteve; and Tula, moved by the girl's devotion, consented to take her into service,—at least, until the temple claimed its own.

CHAPTER VII

COURT GOSSIP

“A pinch of your snuff, Xoli! To be out thus early dulls a nice brain, which nothing clarifies like snuff. By the way, it is very strange that when one wants a good article of any kind, he can only get it at the palace or of you. So, a pinch, my fat fellow!”

“I can commend my snuff,” said the Chalcan, bowing very low, “only a little less than the good taste of the most noble Maxtla.”

While speaking,—the scene being in his *pulque* room,—he uncovered a gilded jar sitting upon the counter.

“Help yourself; it is good to sneeze.”

Maxtla snuffed the scented drug freely, then rushed to the door, and through eyes misty with tears of pleasure looked at the sun rising over the mountains. A fit of sneezing seized him, at the end of which, a slave stood by his elbow with a ewer of water and a napkin. He bathed his face. Altogether, it was apparent that sneezing had been reduced to an Aztec science.

“Elegant! By the Sun, I feel inspired!”

“No doubt,” responded the Chalcan. “Such ought to be the effect of tobacco and rose-leaves, moistened with dew. But tell me; that *tilmatli* you are wearing is quite royal,—is it from the king?”

The young chief raised the folds of the mantle of *plumaje*,

which he was sporting for the first time. "From the king? No; my tailor has just finished it."

"Certainly, my lord. How dull I was! You are preparing for the banquet at the palace to-morrow night."

"You recollect the two thousand quills of gold I bid for your priestess the other evening," said Maxtla, paying no attention to the remark. "I concluded to change the investment; they are all in that collar and loop."

Xoli examined the loop.

"A *chalchuite*! What jeweller in the city could sell you one so rich?"

"Not one. I bought it of Cacama. It is a crown jewel of Tezcucu."

"You were lucky, my lord. But, if you will allow me, what became of the priestess? Saw you ever such dancing?"

"You are late inquiring, Chalcan. The beggar was fast by starvation that night; but you were nearer death. The story was told the king,—ah! you turn pale. Well you may,—and he swore, by the fires of the temple, if the girl had been sold he would have flayed alive both buyer and seller. Hereafter we had both better look more closely to the law."

"But she moved my pity as it was never moved before; moreover, she told me they had discharged her from the temple."

"No matter; the peril is over, and our hearts are our own. Yesterday I saw her in the train of the princess Tula. The 'tzin cared for her. But speaking of the princess,—the banquet to-

morrow night will be spicy.”

The Chalcan dropped the precious loop. Gossip that concerned the court was one of his special weaknesses.

“You know,” continued Maxtla, “that the ’tzin has always been a favorite of the king’s—”

“As he always deserved to be.”

“Not so fast, Chalcan! Keep your praise. You ought to know that nothing is so fickle as fortune; that what was most popular yesterday may be most unpopular to-day. Hear me out. You also know that Iztzil’, the Tezcucan, was down in the royal estimation quite as much as the ’tzin was up; on which account, more than anything else, he lost his father’s city.”

Xoli rested his elbow on the counter, and listened eagerly.

“It has been agreed on all sides for years,” continued Maxtla, in his modulated voice, “that the ’tzin and Tula were to be married upon her coming of age. No one else has presumed to pay her court, lest it might be an interference. Now, the whole thing is at an end. Iztzil’, not the ’tzin, is the fortunate man.”

“Iztzil’! And to-morrow night!”

“The palace was alive last evening as with a swarming of bees. Some were indignant,—all astonished. In fact, Xoli, I believe the ’tzin had as many friends as the king. Several courtiers openly defended him, notwithstanding his fall,—something that, to my knowledge, never happened before. The upshot was, that a herald went in state to Iztapalapan with a decree prohibiting the ’tzin from visiting Tenochtitlan, under any pretence, until the further

pleasure of the king is made known to him.”

“Banished, banished! But that the noble Maxtla told me, I could not believe what I hear.”

“Certainly. The affair is mysterious, as were the means by which the result was brought about. Look you, Chalcan: the ’tzin loved the princess, and was contracted to her, and now comes this banishment just the day before the valley is called to witness her betrothal to the Tezcucan. Certainly, it would ill become the ’tzin to be a guest at such a banquet.”

“I understand,” said Xoli, with a cunning smile. “It was to save his pride that he was banished.”

“If to be a Chalcan is to be so stupid, I thank the gods for making me what I am!” cried Maxtla, impatiently. “What cares the great king for the pride of the enemy he would humble! The banishment is a penalty,—it is ruin.”

There was a pause, during which the Chalcan hung his head.

“Ah, Xoli! The king has changed; he used to be a warrior, loving warriors as the eagle loves its young. Now—alas! I dare not speak. Time was when no envious-hearted knave could have made him believe that Guatamozin was hatching treason in his garden at Iztapalapan. Now, surrounded by mewling priests, he sits in the depths of his palace, and trembles, and, like a credulous child, believes everything. ‘Woe is Tenochtitlan!’ said Mualox; and the days strengthen the prophecy. But enough,—more than enough! Hist, Chalcan! What I have said and you listened to—yea, the mere listening—would suffice, if told in the right ears,

to send us both straightway to the tigers. I have paid you for your snuff, and the divine sneeze. In retailing, recollect, I am not the manufacturer. Farewell.”

“Stay a moment, most noble chief,—but a moment,” said the Chalcan. “I have invented a drink which I desire you to inaugurate. If I may be counted a judge, it is fit for a god.”

“A judge! You? Where is the man who would deny you that excellence? Your days have been spent in the practice; nay, your whole life has been one long, long drink. Make haste. I will wager *pulque* is chief in the compound.”

The broker went out, and directly returned, bearing on a waiter a Cholulan goblet full of cool liquor, exquisitely colored with the rich blood of the cactus apple. Maxtla sipped, drank, then swore the drink was without a rival.

“Look you, Chalcan. They say we are indebted to our heroes, our minstrels, and our priests, and I believe so; but hereafter I shall go farther in the faith. This drink is worth a victory, is pleasant as a song, and has all the virtues of a prayer. Do not laugh. I am in earnest. You shall be canonized with the best of them. To show that I am no vain boaster, you shall come to the banquet to-morrow, and the king shall thank you. Put on your best *tilmatli*, and above all else, beware that the vase holding this liquor is not empty when I call for it. Farewell!”

CHAPTER VIII

GUATAMOZIN AND MUALOX

Up the steps of the old Cû of Quetzal', early in the evening of the banquet, went Guatamozin unattended. As the royal interdiction rested upon his coming to the capital, he was muffled in a priestly garb, which hid his face and person, but could not all disguise the stately bearing that so distinguished him. Climbing the steps slowly, and without halting at the top to note the signs of the city, all astir with life, he crossed the *azoteas*, entered the chamber most sanctified by the presence of the god, and before the image bowed awhile in prayer. Soon Mualox came in.

“Ask anything that is not evil, O best beloved of Quetzal', and it shall be granted,” said the paba, solemnly, laying a hand upon the visitor's shoulder. “I knew you were coming; I saw you on the lake. Arise, my son.”

Guatamozin stood up, and flung back his hood.

“The house is holy, Mualox, and I have come to speak of the things of life that have little to do with religion.”

“That is not possible. Everything has to do with life, which has all to do with heaven. Speak out. This presence will keep you wise; if your thoughts be of wrong, it is not likely you will give them speech in the very ear of Quetzal'.”

Slowly the 'tzin then said,—

“Thanks, father. In what I have to say, I will be brief, and

endeavor not to forget the presence. You love me, and I am come for counsel. You know how often those most discreet in the affairs of others are foolish in what concerns themselves. Long time ago you taught me the importance of knowledge; how it was the divine secret of happiness, and stronger than a spear to win victories, and better in danger than a shield seven times quilted. Now I have come to say that my habits of study have brought evil upon me; out of the solitude in which I was toiling to lay up a great knowledge, a misfortune has arisen, father to my ruin. My stay at home has been misconstrued. Enemies have said I loved books less than power; they charge that in the quiet of my gardens I have been taking council of my ambition, which nothing satisfies but the throne; and so they have estranged from me the love of the king. Here against his order, forbidden the city,”—and as he spoke he raised his head proudly,—“forbidden the city, behold me, paba, a banished man!”

Mualox smiled, and grim satisfaction was in the smile.

“If you seek sympathy,” he said, “the errand is fruitless. I have no sorrow for what you call your misfortune.”

“Let me understand you, father.”

“I repeat, I have no sorrow for you. Why should I? I see you as you should see yourself. You confirm the lessons of which you complain. Not vainly that you wrought in solitude for knowledge, which, while I knew it would make you a mark for even kingly envy, I also intended should make you superior to misfortunes and kings. Understand you now? What matters that you are

maligned? What is banishment? They only liken you the more to Quetzal', whose coming triumph,—heed me well, O 'tzin,—whose coming triumph shall be your triumph.”

The look and voice of the holy man were those of one with authority.

“For this time,” he continued, “and others like it, yet to come, I thought to arm your soul with a strong intelligence. Your life is to be a battle against evil; fail not yourself in the beginning. Success will be equal to your wisdom and courage. But your story was not all told.”

The 'tzin's face flushed, and he replied, with some faltering,—
“You have known and encouraged the love I bear the princess Tula, and counted on it as the means of some great fortune in store for me. Yet, in part at least, I am banished on that account. O Mualox, the banquet which the king holds to-night is to make public the betrothal of Tula to Iztzil', the Tezcucan!”

“Well, what do you intend?”

“Nothing. Had the trouble been a friend's, I might have advised him; but being my own, I have no confidence in myself. I repose on your discretion and friendship.”

Mualox softened his manner, and said, pleasantly at first, “O 'tzin, is humanity all frailty? Must chief and philosopher bow to the passion, like a slave or a dealer in wares?” Suddenly he became serious; his eyes shone full of the magnetism he used so often and so well. “Can Guatamozin find nothing higher to occupy his mind than a trouble born of a silly love? Unmanned

by such a trifle? Arouse! Ponder the mightier interests in peril! What is a woman, with all a lover's gild about her, to the nation?"

"The nation?" repeated the 'tzin, slowly.

The paba looked reverently up to the idol. "I have withdrawn from the world, I live but for Quetzal' and Anahuac. O, generously has the god repaid me! He has given me to look out upon the future; all that is to come affecting my country he has shown me." Turning to the 'tzin again, he said with emphasis, "I could tell marvels,—let this content you: words cannot paint the danger impending over our country, over Anahuac, the beautiful and beloved; her existence, and the glory and power that make her so worthy love like ours, are linked to your action. Your fate, O 'tzin, and hers, and that of the many nations, are one and the same. Accept the words as a prophecy; wear them in memory; and when, as now, you are moved by a trifling fear or anger, they should and will keep you from shame and folly."

Both then became silent. The paba might have been observing the events of the future, as, one by one, they rose and passed before his abstracted vision. Certain it was, with the thoughts of the warrior there mixed an ambition no longer selfish, but all his country's.

Mualox finally concluded. "The future belongs to the gods; only the present is ours. Of that let us think. Admit your troubles worthy vengeance: dare you tell me what you thought of doing? My son, why are you here?"

"Does my father seek to mortify me?"

“Would the ’tzin have me encourage folly, if not worse? And that in the presence of my god and his?”

“Speak plainly, Mualox.”

“So I will. Obey the king. Go not to the palace to-night. If the thought of giving the woman to another is so hard, could you endure the sight? Think: if present, what could you do to prevent the betrothal?”

A savage anger flashed from the ’tzin’s face, and he answered, “What could I? Slay the Tezcucan on the step of the throne, though I died!”

“It would come to that. And Anahuac! What then of her?” said Mualox, in a voice of exceeding sorrow.

The love the warrior bore his country at that moment surpassed all others, and his rage passed away.

“True, most true! If it should be as you say, that my destiny—”

“If! O ’tzin, if you live! If Anahuac lives! If there are gods!—”

“Enough, Mualox! I know what you would say. Content you; I give you all faith. The wrong that tortures me is not altogether that the woman is to be given to another; her memory I could pluck from my heart as a feather from my helm. If that were all, I could curse the fate, and submit; but there is more: for the sake of a cowardly policy I have been put to shame; treachery and treason have been crowned, loyalty and blood disgraced. Hear me, father! After the decree of interdiction was served upon me, I ventured to send a messenger to the king, and he was spurned from the palace. Next went the lord Cuitlahua, uncle of mine,

and true lover of Anahuac; he was forbidden the mention of my name. I am not withdrawn from the world; my pride will not down at a word; so wronged, I cannot reason; therefore I am here.”

“And the coming is a breach of duty; the risk is great. Return to Iztapalapan before the midnight is out. And I,—but you do not know, my son, what a fortune has befallen me.” The paba smiled faintly. “I have been promoted to the palace; I am a councillor at the royal table.”

“A councillor! You, father?”

The good man’s face grew serious again. “I accepted the appointment, thinking good might result. But, alas! the hope was vain. Montezuma, once so wise, is past counsel. He will take no guidance. And what a vanity! O ’tzin, the asking me to the palace was itself a crime, since it was to make me a weapon in his hand with which to resist the holy Quetzal’. As though I could not see the design!”

He laughed scornfully, and then said, “But be not detained, my son. What I can, I will do for you; at the council-table, and elsewhere, as opportunity may offer, I will exert my influence for your restoration to the city and palace. Go now. Farewell; peace be with you. To-morrow I will send you tidings.”

Thereupon he went out of the tower, and down into the temple.

CHAPTER IX

A KING'S BANQUET

At last the evening of the royal banquet arrived,—theme of incessant talk and object of preparation for two days and a night, out of the capital no less than in it; for all the nobler classes within a convenient radius of the lake had been bidden, and, with them, people of distinction, such as successful artists, artisans, and merchants.

It is not to be supposed that a king of Montezuma's subtlety in matters governmental could overlook the importance of the social element, or neglect it. Education imports a society; more yet, academies, such as were in Tenochtitlan for the culture of women, always import a refined and cultivated society. And such there was in the beautiful valley.

My picture of the entertainment will be feeble, I know, and I give it rather as a suggestion of the reality, which was gorgeous enough to be interesting to any nursling even of the court of His Most Catholic Majesty; for, though heathen in religion, Montezuma was not altogether barbarian in taste; and, sooth to say, no monarch in Christendom better understood the influence of kingliness splendidly maintained. About it, moreover, was all that makes chivalry adorable,—the dance, the feast, the wassail; brave men, fair women, and the majesty of royalty in state amidst its most absolute proofs of power.

On such occasions it was the custom of the great king to throw open the palace, with all its accompaniments, for the delight of his guests, admitting them freely to aviary, menagerie, and garden, the latter itself spacious enough for the recreation of thirty thousand persons.

The house, it must be remembered, formed a vast square, with *patios* or court-yards in the interior, around which the rooms were ranged. The part devoted to domestic uses was magnificently furnished. Another very considerable portion was necessary to the state and high duties of the monarch; such were offices for his functionaries, quarters for his guards, and chambers for the safe deposit of the archives of the Empire, consisting of maps, laws, decrees and proclamations, accounts and reports financial and military, and the accumulated trophies of campaigns and conquests innumerable. When we consider the regard in which the king was held by his people, amounting almost to worship, and their curiosity to see all that pertained to his establishment, an idea may be formed of what the palace and its appurtenances were as accessaries to one of his entertainments.

Passing from the endless succession of rooms, the visitor might go into the garden, where the walks were freshly strewn with shells, the shrubbery studded with colored lamps, the fountains all at play, and the air loaded with the perfume of flowers, which were an Aztec passion, and seemed everywhere a part of everything.

And all this convenience and splendor was not wasted upon an inappreciative horde,—ferocious Caribs or simple children of Hispaniola. At such times the order requiring the wearing of *nequen* was suspended; so that in the matter of costume there were no limits upon the guest, except such as were prescribed by his taste or condition. In the animated current that swept from room to room and from house to garden might be seen citizens in plain attire, and warriors arrayed in regalia which permitted all dazzling colors, and pabas hooded, surpliced, and gowned, brooding darkly even there, and stoled minstrels, with their harps, and pages, gay as butterflies, while over all was the beauty of the presence of lovely women.

Yet, withal, the presence of Montezuma was more attractive than the calm night in the garden; neither stars, nor perfumed summer airs, nor singing fountains, nor walks strewn with shells, nor chant of minstrels could keep the guests from the great hall where he sat in state; so that it was alike the centre of all coming and all going. There the aged and sedate whiled away the hours in conversation; the young danced, laughed, and were happy; and in the common joyousness none exceeded the beauties of the harem, transiently released from the jealous thralldom that made the palace their prison.

From the house-tops, or from the dykes, or out on the water, the common people of the capital, in vast multitudes, witnessed the coming of the guests across the lake. The rivalry of the great lords and families was at all times extravagant in the matter of

pomp and show; a king's banquet, however, seemed its special opportunity, and the lake its particular field of display. The king Cacama, for example, left his city in a canoe of exquisite workmanship, pranked with pennons, ribbons, and garlands; behind him, or at his right and left, constantly plying and deploying, attended a flotilla of hundreds of canoes only a little less rich in decoration than his own, and timed in every movement, even that of the paddles, by the music of conch-shells and tambours; yet princely as the turn-out was, it did not exceed that of the lord Cuitlahua, governor of Iztapalapan. And if others were inferior to them in extravagance, nevertheless they helped clothe the beloved sea with a beauty and interest scarcely to be imagined by people who never witnessed or read of the grand Venetian pageants.

Arrived at the capital, the younger warriors proceeded to the palace afoot; while the matrons and maids, and the older and more dignified lords, were borne thither in palanquins. By evening the whole were assembled.

About the second quarter of the night two men came up the great street to the palace, and made their way through the palanquins stationed there in waiting. They were guests; so their garbs bespoke them. One wore the gown and carried the harp of a minstrel; very white locks escaped from his hood, and a staff was required to assist his enfeebled steps. The other was younger, and with consistent vanity sported a military costume. To say the truth, his extremely warlike demeanor lost nothing by the flash

of a dauntless eye and a step that made the pave ring again.

An official received them at the door, and, by request, conducted them to the garden.

“This is indeed royal!” the warrior said to the minstrel. “It bewilders me. Be yours the lead.”

“I know the walks as a deer his paths, or a bird the brake that shelters its mate. Come,” and the voice was strangely firm for one so aged,—“come, let us see the company.”

Now and then they passed ladies, escorted by gallants, and frequently there were pauses to send second looks after the handsome soldier, and words of pity for his feeble companion. By and by, coming to an intersection of the walk they were pursuing, they were hailed,—“Stay, minstrel, and give us a song.”

By the door of a summer-house they saw, upon stopping, a girl whose beauty was worthy the tribute she sought. The elder sat down upon a bench and replied,—

“A song is gentle medicine for sorrows. Have you such? You are very young.”

Her look of sympathy gave place to one of surprise.

“I would I were assured that minstrelsy is your proper calling.”

“You doubt it! Here is my harp: a soldier is known by his shield.”

“But I have heard your voice before,” she persisted.

“The children of Tenochtitlan, and many who are old now, have heard me sing.”

“But I am a Chalcan.”

“I have sung in Chalco.”

“May I ask your name?”

“There are many streets in the city, and on each they call me differently.”

The girl was still perplexed.

“Minstrels have patrons,” she said, directly, “who—”

“Nay, child, this soldier here is all the friend I have.”

Some one then threw aside the vine that draped the door. While the minstrel looked to see who the intruder was, his inquisitor gazed at the soldier, who, on his part, saw neither of them; he was making an obeisance so very low that his face and hand both touched the ground.

“Does the minstrel intend to sing, Yeteve?” asked Nenetzin, stepping into the light that flooded the walk.

The old man bent forward on his seat.

“Heaven’s best blessing on the child of the king! It should be a nobler hand than mine that strikes a string to one so beautiful.”

The comely princess replied, her face beaming with pleasure, “Verily, minstrel, much familiarity with song has given you courtly speech.”

“I have courtly friends, and only borrow their words. This place is fair, but to my dull fancy it seems that a maiden would prefer the great hall, unless she has a grief to indulge.”

“O, I have a great grief,” she returned; “though I do borrow it as you your words.”

“Then you love some one who is unhappy. I understand. Is this

child in your service?" he asked, looking at Yeteve.

"Call it mine. She loves me well enough to serve me."

The minstrel struck the strings of his harp softly, as if commencing a mournful story.

"I have a friend," he said, "a prince and warrior, whose presence here is banned. He sits in his palace to-night, and is visited by thoughts such as make men old in their youth. He has seen much of life, and won fame, but is fast finding that glory does not sweeten misfortune, and that of all things, ingratitude is the most bitter. His heart is set upon a noble woman; and now, when his love is strongest, he is separated from her, and may not say farewell. O, it is not in the ear of a true woman that lover so unhappy could breathe his story in vain. What would the princess Nenezin do, if she knew a service of hers might soothe his great grief?"

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