

seen it. If it is not a Teocalli there is not one in all Mexico. The fact is, no other Aztec mound in Mexico is worthy of the name, — not even Cholula."

Suddenly a low point, until now hidden by an intervening headland, pushed itself into the lake. Moon reached for his spy-glass and adjusted the sliding tube.

"Do you see those two white specks over that flat shore?"

"Perfectly."

"And the clump of dark trees surrounding it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is Tzintzúntzan. The big speck is what is left of the old Franciscan convent, the clump of trees is the olive orchard, the ancient burial-place of the Aztecs. The little speck is the top of the dome of the convent chapel, beneath which hangs your daub of a Titian."



CHAPTER XII.

TZINTZÚNTZAN AND THE TITIAN.

THE catamaran rounded the point, floated slowly up to the beach, and anchored on a shoal within a boat's-length of the shore. Strung along the water's edge, with wonder-stricken faces, were gathered half of the entire population of Tzintzúntzan. The other half were coming at full speed over the crest of the hill, which partly hid the village itself.

There being but two feet of water, and those wet ones, Moon shot an order in an unknown tongue into the group in front,



starting two of them forward, swung himself gracefully over the shoulders of the first, — I clinging to the second, — and we landed dry shod in the midst of as curious a crowd of natives as ever greeted the great Christopher himself.

The splendor which made Tzintzúntzan famous in the days of the good Bishop Quiroga, when its population numbered forty thousand souls, has long since departed. The streets run at right angles, and are divided into squares of apparently equal length, marking a city of some importance in its day. High walls surround each garden and cast grateful shadows. Many of these are broken by great fissures through which can be seen the ruins of abandoned tenements overgrown with weeds and tangled vines. Along the tops of these walls fat melons ripen in the dazzling sun, their leaves and tendrils white with dust, and from the many seams

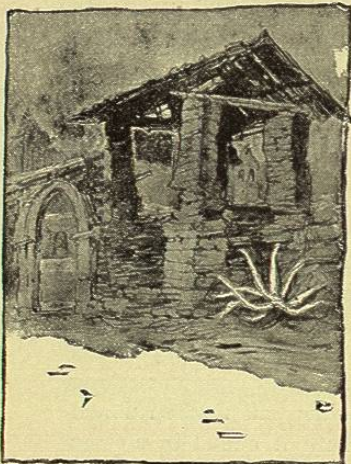
and cracks the cacti flaunt their deep-red blossoms in your face.

We took the path starting from the beach, which widened into a broad road as it crossed the hill, over which could be seen the white spire of the church. This was beaten down by many feet, and marked the daily life of the natives — from the church to pray, to the shore to fish. With the exception of shaping some crude pottery, they literally do nothing else.

As we advanced along this highway, — Moon carrying his spy-glass as an Irishman would his hod over his shoulder, I my umbrella, and the Indians my sketch trap and a basket containing something for the padre, — the wall thickened and grew in height until it ended in a cross wall, behind which stood the ruins of a belfry, the broken bell still clinging to the rotting roof timber. Adjoining this was a crumbling archway without door or hinge.

This forlorn entrance opened into the grounds of the once powerful establishment of San Francisco, closed and in ruins since 1740. Beyond this archway stood another, protected by a heavy double

iron grating, which once swung wide to let pass the splendid pageants of the time,



now rust-in-crust, and half buried in the ground.

Once inside, the transition was delightful. There was a great garden or orchard planted with olive trees of enormous size, their tops still alive, and their trunks seamed and gnarled

with the storms of three and a half centuries, beneath which lie buried not only the great dignitaries of the Church, but many of the allies and chiefs of Cortez in the times of the Tarascan chieftancy.

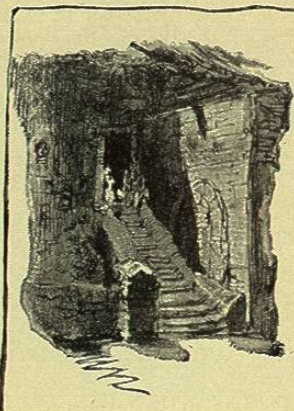
On one side of this orchard is the chapel of the Tercer Order and the Hospital and the convent church, now the

parróquia. We crossed between the trees and waited outside the convent building at the foot of a flight of stone steps, built along an angle of a projection and leading to the second floor of the building. These steps were crowded with Indians, as was also the passageway within, waiting for an audience with the parish priest, whose apartments were above.

Nothing can adequately describe the dilapidation of this entrance and its surroundings. The steps themselves had been smeared over with mortar to hold them together, the door jambs were leaning and ready to fall, the passageway itself ended in a window which might once have held exquisite panels of stained glass, but which was now open to the elements save where it was choked up with adobe bricks laid loosely in courses. The rooms opening into it were tenantless, and infested with lizards and bats, and the whole place inside and out was fast succumbing to a decay which seemed to have reached its limit, and which must soon end in hopeless ruin.

We found the padre seated at a rude

table in the darkest corner of a low-ceiled room on the left of the corridor, surrounded



by half a dozen Indian women. He was at dinner, and the women were serving him from coarse earthen dishes. When he turned at our intrusion, we saw a short, thickset man, wearing a greasy black frock, a beard a week old, and a smile so treacherous that I involun-

tarily tapped my inside pocket to make sure of its contents. He arose lazily, gathered upon his coat cuff the few stray crumbs clinging to his lips, and with a searching, cunning air, asked our business.

Moon shifted his spy-glass until the large end was well balanced in his hand, and replied obsequiously, "To see the famous picture, holy father. This, my

companion, is a distinguished painter from the far East. He has heard of the glory of this great work of the master, of which you are the sacred custodian, and has come these many thousand miles to see it. I hope your reverence will not turn us away."

I saw instantly from his face that he had anticipated this, and that his temper was not improved by Moon's request. I learned afterwards that a canoe had left Pátzcuaro ahead of the catamaran, and that the object of our visit had already been known in Tzintzuntzan some hours before we arrived.

"It is a holy day," replied the padre curtly, "and the sacristy is closed. The picture will not be uncovered."

With this he turned his back upon us and resumed his seat.

I looked at Moon. He was sliding his hand nervously up and down the glass, and clutching its end very much as a man would an Indian club.

"Leave him to me," he whispered from behind his hand, noticing my disappointment; "I'll get into that sacristy, if

I have to bat him through the door with this."

In the hamper which Moon had instructed Griddles the *chef* to pack for my comfort the day before at Morelia, was a small glass vessel, flat in shape, its contents repressed by a cork covered with tinfoil. When Moon landed from the catamaran this vessel was concealed among some boxes of dulces and fruits from the southern slope, inclosed in a wicker basket, and intrusted to an Indian who now stood within three feet of the table.

"You are right, holy father," said Moon, bowing low. "We must respect these holy days. I have brought your reverence some delicacies, and when the fast is over, you can enjoy them."

Then he piled up in the midst of the rude earthen platters and clay cups and bowls, — greasy with the remnants of the meal, — some bunches of grapes, squares of dulces, and a small bag of coffee. The flat vessel came last; this Moon handled lovingly, and with the greatest care, resting it finally against a pulque pot which the padre had just emptied.

The priest leaned forward, held the flat vessel between his nose and the window, ran his eyes along the flow line, and glancing at the women turned a dish over its bottom side up.

"When do you return?" he asked.

"To-day, your reverence."

There was a pause, during which the padre buried his face in his hands and Moon played pantomime war dance over the shaved spot on his skull.

"How much will the painter give to the poor of the parish?" said the padre, lifting his head.

After an exposition of the dismal poverty into which the painter was plunged by reason of his calling, it was agreed that upon the payment to the padre of *cinco pesos* in silver — about one pound sterling — the painter might see the picture, when mass was over, the padre adding, —

"There is presently a service. In an hour it will be over, then the sacristan can open the door."

Moon counted out the money on the table, piece by piece. The padre weighed each coin on his palm, bit one of them,

and with a satisfied air swept the whole into his pocket.

The tolling of a bell hurried the women from the room. The padre followed slowly, bowing his head upon his breast. Moon and I brought up the rear, passing down the crumbling corridor over the uneven flooring and upturned and broken tiles and through a low archway until we reached a gallery overlooking a patio. Here was a sight one must come to Mexico to see. Flat on the stone pavements, seated upon mats woven of green rushes, knelt a score or more of Indian women, their cheeks hollow from fasting, and their eyes glistening with that strange glassy look peculiar to half-starved people. Over their shoulders were twisted black rebozos, and around each head was bound a veritable crown of thorns. In their hands they held a scourge of platted nettles. They had sat here day and night without leaving these mats for nearly a week.

This terrible ceremony occurs but once a year, during passion week. The penance lasts eight days. Each penitent pays a sum of money for the privilege, and her

name and number is then inscribed upon a sort of tally-board which is hung on the cloister wall. Upon this is also kept a record of the punishment. The penitents provide their zarapes and pillows and the rush mats upon which to rest their weary bones; the priest furnishes everything else, — a little greasy gruel and the stone pavement.

The padre threaded his way through the kneeling groups without turning his head to the right or left. When his footsteps were heard they repeated their prayers the louder, and one young girl, weak from long fasting, raised her eyes to the priest's pleadingly. His stolid face gave no sign. With downcast eyes she leaned forward, bent low, and kissed the hem of his frock. As she stooped Moon pointed to the marks of the cruel thorns on her temples.

"Shall I maul him a little?" he whispered, twisting the glass uneasily.

"Wait until we see the Titian," I pleaded.

The cloister led into the chapel. It was bare of even the semblance of a house of worship. But for the altar in

one end, and the few lighted candles, it might have passed for the old refectory of the convent. We edged our way between the kneeling groups and passed out of a side door into an open court. Moon touched my arm.

"See! that about measures the poverty of the place, he said. One coffin for the whole village."

On a rude bier lay a wooden box, narrowed at one end. It was made of white wood, decorated on the outside with a rough design in blue and yellow. The bottom was covered with dried leaves, and the imprint of the head and shoulders of the poor fellow who had occupied it a few hours before was still distinct.

"Two underneath, one inside, a mumbled prayer, then he helps to fill the hole and they save the box for the next. A little too narrow for the padre, I am afraid," soliloquized Moon, measuring the width with his eye.

Another tap of the bell, and the Indians straggled out of the church and dispersed, some going to the village, others halting under the great tree trunks, watching us

curiously. Indeed, I had before this become aware of an especial espionage over us, which was never relaxed for a single instant. A native would start out from a doorway as soon as we touched the threshold, another would be concealed behind a tree or projecting wall until we passed. Then he would walk away aimlessly, looking back and signalling to another hidden somewhere else. This is not unusual with these natives. They have always resented every overture to part with their picture, and are particularly suspicious of strangers who come from a distance to see it, they worshipping it with a blind idolatry easily understood in their race.

This fear of invasion also extends to their village and church. It has been known for several years that an underground passageway led from a point near the church to the old convent, and in 1855 a party of *savants*, under the direction of Father Aguirre, began to uncover its entrance. No open resistance was made by the natives, but in the silence of the night each stone and shovelful of earth was noiselessly replaced.

A few years later the Bishop of Mexico offered for this picture the sum of twenty thousand pesetas, a sum of money fabulous in their eyes, and which if honestly divided would have made each native richer than an Aztec prince. I do not know whether their religious prejudices influenced them, or whether, remembering the quality of the penance gruel, they dare not trust the padre to divide it, but all the same it was refused. Moon assured me that if the painting ever left its resting place it must go without warning, and be protected by an armed force. It would be certain death to any one to attempt its removal otherwise, and he firmly believed that sooner than see it leave their village the Indians would destroy it.

"Señor, the padre says come to him."

The messenger was a sun-dried, shrivelled Mexican half-breed, with a wicked eye and a beak-like nose. About his head was twisted a red handkerchief, over which was flattened a heavy felt sombrero. He was barefooted, and his trousers were held up by a leather strap.

"Who are you?" said Moon.

"I am the sacristan."

"I thought so. Lead on. A lovely pair of cherubs, are they not?"

The padre met us at the door. He had sad news for us; his mortification was extreme. The man who cleaned the sacristy had locked the door that morning and started for Quiroga on a donkey. No one else had a key.

I suggested an immediate chartering of another, and somewhat livelier donkey, with instructions to overtake and bring back the man with the key, dead or alive. The padre shrugged his shoulders, and said there was but one donkey in the village,—he was underneath the man with the key. Moon closed one eye and turned the other incredulously on the priest.

"When will the man return?"

"In three days."

"Your reverence," said the commodore slowly, "do not send for him. It might annoy him to be hurried. We will break in the door and pay for a new lock."

Then followed a series of protests, beginning with the sacrilege of mutilating so