

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 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 Tezcuco,' 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 CŪ 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 Cŭs, 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 Cŭ 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 *azotecas* 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.* 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 *azotecas*, 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,

* Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva Esp.

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,* the owl on his skirt, and death in his hand. Return, O children, and Tenochtitlan may yet live!"

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 *tilmatti*, *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.

* The Mexican Hell. The owl was the symbol of the Devil, whose name signifies "the rational owl."

"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.*

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 *teomox-tli*,* in which is written how this Cū 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 Iztli'.

"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 Cū."

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

* The Divine Book, or Bible. Ixtli' Relaciones M. S.

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 Aztecan diamond.* 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!"

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."

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

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, hold-

ing 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** on Montezuma's head. In the third cartoon, he was with the army, going to battle. In the

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

fourth, he was seated, while a man clad in *nequen*,* but crowned, stood before him.

"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 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

* A garment of coarse white material, made from the fibre of the aloe, and by court etiquette required to be worn by courtiers and suitors in the king's presence. The rule appears to have been of universal application.

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 *tianquez*, or market-place; which, whether considered architecturally, or with reference to the business to which it was devoted, or as the device of an unassoilied 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 these 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."*

"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

* 'Tzin was a title equivalent to *lord* in English. *Guatamotzin*, as compounded, signifies *Lord Guatamo*.

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 Iztzil', the Tezcucan, had challenged the 'tzin to go into the arena with him to-morrow. Not a bad thing for the god Quetzal', 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 *maquahuiltl*. 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*.* 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.

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

* 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.

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," "Tlascalans." 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 Iztzil', 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 in-