

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 *tianguex* 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 sub-

ject, 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.

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### 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 veer 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, Tecetl !"

"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 fleetier 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 —"

"'T is Quetzal's ! 'T is 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 : so 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 *tianques* 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.\*

\* 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.