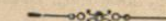


"Xoli," he said, "a priestess belongs to the temple, and cannot be sold; such is the law. The sale would have sere your heart, and that of her purchaser, to the Blessed Lady. Remove the girl. I will see that she is taken to a place of safety. Here is gold; give the beggar what he wants, and keep him 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 Nenetzin, 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 Itzli'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 splash 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 Tezcucoc?"

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.

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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 Tezcucoc."

"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 Iztlil', 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. Iztlil', not the 'tzin, is the fortunate man."

"Iztlil'! 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 *tilmatlí*, 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 fruit-

less. 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 Iztilil', the Tezucan!"

"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 philoso-

pher 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 Tenoch-

titlan 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 ex-

travagant 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 Nenetzin do, if she knew a service of hers might soothe his great grief?"

Nenetzin's eyes were dewy with tears.

"Good minstrel, I know the story; it is the 'tzin's. Are you a friend of his?"

"His true friend. I bring his farewell to Tula."

"I will serve him." And, stepping to the old man, she laid her hand on his. "Tell me what to do, and what you would have."

"Only a moment's speech with her."

"With Tula?"

"A moment to say the farewell he cannot. Go to the palace, and tell her what I seek. I will follow directly. Tell her she may know me in the throng by these locks, whose whiteness will prove my sincerity and devotion. And further, I will twine my harp with a branch of this vine; its leaves will mark me, and at the same time tell her that his love is green as in the day a king's smile sunned it into ripeness. Be quick. The moment comes when she cannot in honor listen to the message I am to speak."

He bent over his harp again, and Nenetzin and Yeteve hurried away.

CHAPTER X.

THE 'TZIN'S LOVE.

THE minstrel stayed a while to dress his harp with the vine.

"A woman would have done it better; they have a special cunning for such things; yet it will serve the purpose. Now let us on!" he said, when the task was finished.

To the palace they then turned their steps. As they approached it, the walk became more crowded with guests. Several times the minstrel was petitioned to stay and sing, but he excused himself. He proceeded, looking steadily at