

Nenetzin went to a pile of manuscripts lying on the floor. The elder sister was startled by the first picture exposed; for she recognized the handiwork, long since familiar to her, of the 'tzin. Nor was she less surprised by the subject, which was a horse, apparently a nobler instrument for a god's revenge than man himself.

Next she saw pictured a horse, its rider mounted, and in Christian armor, and bearing shield, lance, and sword. Then came a cannon, the gunner by the carriage, his match lighted, while a volume of flame and smoke was bursting from the throat of the piece. A portrait followed; she lifted it up, and trembled to see the hero of Nenetzin's dream!

"Did I not tell you so, O Tula?" said the girl, in a whisper.

"The face is pleasant and noble," the other answered, thoughtfully; "but I am afraid. There is evil in the smile, evil in the blue eyes."

The rest of the manuscripts they left untouched. The one absorbed them; but with what different feelings! Nenetzin was a-flutter with pleasure, restrained by awe. Impressed by the singularity of the vision, as thus realized, a passionate wish to see the man or god, whichever he was, and hear his voice, may be called her nearest semblance to reflection. Like a lover in the presence of the beloved, she was glad and contented, and asked nothing of the future. But with Tula, older and wiser, it was different. She was conscious of the novelty of the incident; at the same time a presentiment, a gloomy foreboding, filled her soul. In slumber we sometimes see spectres, and they sit by us and smile; yet we shrink, and cannot keep down anticipations of ill. So Tula was affected by what she beheld.

She laid the portrait softly down, and turned to Nenetzin, who had now no need to deprecate her laugh.

"The ways of the gods are most strange. Something tells me this is their work. I am afraid; let us go."

And they retired, and the rest of the day, swinging in the hammock, they talked of the dream and the portrait, and wondered what would come of them.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE TRIAL.

HUALPA'S adventure in the garden made a great stir in the palace and the city. Profound was the astonishment, therefore, when it became known that the savior of the king and the murderer of the Tezcucan were one and the same person, and that, in the latter character, he was to be taken into court and tried for his life, Montezuma himself acting as accuser. Though universally discredited, the story had the effect of drawing an immense attendance at the trial.

"Ho, Chalcan! Fly not your friends in that way!"

So the broker was saluted by some men nobly dressed, whom he was about passing on the great street. He stopped, and bowed very low.

"A pleasant day, my lords! Your invitation honors me; the will of his patrons should always be law to the poor keeper of a portico. I am hurrying to the trial."

"Then stay with us. We also have a curiosity to see the assassin."

"My good lord speaks harshly. The boy, whom I love as a son, cannot be what you call him."

The noble laughed. "Take it not ill, Chalcan. So much do I honor the hand that slew the base Tezcucan that I care

not whether it was in fair fight or by vantage taken. But what do you know about the king being accuser to-day?"

"So he told the boy."

"Incredible!"

"I will not quarrel with my lord on that account," rejoined the broker. "A more generous master than Montezuma never lived. Are not the people always complaining of his liberality? At the last banquet, for inventing a simple drink, did he not give me, his humblest slave, a goblet fit for another king?"

"And what is your drink, though ever so excellent, to the saving his life? Is not that your argument, Chalcan?"

"Yes, my lord, and at such peril! Ah, you should have seen the ocelot when taken from the tank! The keepers told me it was the largest and fiercest in the museum."

Then Xoli proceeded to edify his noble audience with all the gossip pertaining to the adventure; and as his object was to take into court some friends for the luckless hunter more influential than himself, he succeeded admirably. Every few steps there were such expressions as, "It would be pitiful if so brave a fellow should die!" "If I were king, by the Sun, I would enrich him from the possessions of the Tezucan!" And as they showed no disposition to interrupt him, his pleading lasted to the house of justice, where the company arrived not any too soon to procure comfortable seats.

The court-house stood at the left of the street, a little retired from the regular line of buildings. The visitors had first to pass through a spacious hall, which brought them to a court-yard cemented under foot, and on all sides bounded with beautiful houses. Then, on the right, they saw the entrance to the chamber of justice, grotesquely called the Tribunal of God,* in which, for ages, had been administered a code, vindictive, but not without equity. The great door

* Prescott, Conq. of Mexico, Vol. I. p. 33.

was richly carved; the windows high and broad, and lined with fluted marble; while a projecting cornice, tastefully finished, gave airiness and beauty to the venerable structure.

The party entered the room with profoundest reverence. On a dais sat the judge; in front of him was the stool bearing the skull with the emerald crown and gay plumes. Turning from the plain tapestry along the walls, the spectators failed not to admire the jewels that blazed with almost starry splendor from the centre of the canopy above him.

The broker, not being of the class of privileged nobles, found a seat with difficulty. To his comfort, however, he was placed by the side of an acquaintance.

"You should have come earlier, Chalcan; the judge has twice used the arrow this morning."

"Indeed!"

"Once against a boy too much given to *pulque*,—a drunkard. With the other doubtless you were acquainted."

"Was he noble?"

"He had good blood, at least, being the son of a Tetzmellocan, who died immensely rich. The witnesses said the fellow squandered his father's estate almost as soon as it came to him."

"Better had he been born a thief,"* said Xoli, coolly.

Suddenly, four heralds, with silver maces, entered the court-room, announcing the monarch. The people fell upon their knees, and so remained until he was seated before the dais. Then they arose, and, with staring eyes, devoured the beauty of his costume, and the mysterious sanction of manner, office, power, and custom, which the lovers of royalty throughout the world have delighted to sum up in the one word,—majesty. The hum of voices filled the chamber. Then, by another door, in charge of officers, Hualpa ap-

* A thief might be punished with slavery: death was the penalty for prodigalism and drunkenness.

peared, and was led to the dais opposite the king. Before an Aztecan court there was no ceremony. The highest and the lowliest stood upon a level: such, at least, was the beautiful theory.

So intense was the curiosity to see the prisoner that the spectators pressed upon each other, for the moment mindless of the monarch's presence.

"A handsome fellow!" said an old cacique, approvingly.

"Only a boy, my lord!" suggested the critic.

"And not fierce-looking, either."

"Yes —"

"No —"

"He might kill, but in fair fight: so I judge him."

And that became the opinion amongst the nobles.

"Your friend seems confident, Xoli. I like him," remarked the Chalcan's acquaintance.

"Hush! The king accuses."

"The king, said you!" And the good man, representing the commonalty, was frozen into silence.

In another quarter, one asked, "Does he not wear the 'tzin's livery?"

The person interrogated covered his mouth with both hands, then drew to the other's ear, and whispered, —

"Yes, he's a 'tzin's man, and that, they say, is his crime."

The sharp voice of the executive officer of the court rang out, and there was stillness almost breathless. Up rose the clerk, a learned man, keeper of the records, and read the indictment; that done, he laid the portrait of the accused on the table before the judge; then the trial began.

The judge, playing carelessly with the fatal arrow, said, — "Hualpa, son of Tepaja, the Tihuacan, stand up, and answer."

And the prisoner arose, and saluted court and king, and

answered, "It is true, that on the night of the banquet, I fought the Tezcucan; by favor of the gods, I defeated, without slaying him. He is here in person to acquit me."

"Bring the witness," said the judge.

Some of the officers retired; during their absence a solemn hush prevailed; directly they returned, carrying a palanquin. Right before the dais they set it down, and drew aside the curtains. Then slowly the Tezcucan came forth, — weak, but unconquered. At the judge he looked, and at the king, and all the fire of his haughty soul burned in the glance. Borrowing strength from his pride, he raised his head high, and said, scornfully, —

"The power of my father's friend is exceeding great; he speaks, and all things obey him. I am sick and suffering; but he bade me come, and I am here. What new shame awaits me?"

Montezuma answered, never more a king than then: "Hualpilli was wise; his son is foolish; for the memory of the one I spare the other. The keeper of this sacred place will answer why you are brought here. Look that he pardons you lightly as I have."

Then the judge said, "Prince of Tezcuco, you are here by my order. There stands one charged with your murder. Would you have had him suffer the penalty? You have dared be insolent. See, O prince, that before to-morrow you pay the treasurer ten thousand quills of gold. See to it." And, returning the portrait to the clerk, he added, "Let the accused go acquit."

"Ah! said I not so, said I not so?" muttered the Chalcan, rubbing his hands joyfully, and disturbing the attentive people about him.

"Hist, hist!" they said, impatiently. "What more! hearken!"

Hualpa was kneeling before the monarch.

"Most mighty king," he said, "if what I have done be worthy reward, grant me the discharge of this fine."

"How!" said Montezuma, amazed. "The Tezcucan is your enemy!"

"Yet he fought me fairly, and is a warrior."

The eyes of the king sought those of Iztli'l.

"What says the son of 'Hualpilli?"

The latter raised his head with a flash of the old pride.

"He is a slave of Guatamozin's: I scorn the intercession. I am yet a prince of Tezcuco."

Then the monarch went forward, and sat by the judge. Not a sound was heard, till he spoke.

"Arise, and come near," he said to Hualpa. "I will do what becomes me."

His voice was low and tremulous with feeling, and over his face came the peculiar suffusion of sadness afterwards its habitual expression. The hunter kissed the floor at his feet, and remained kneeling. Then he continued, —

"Son of the Tihuacan, I acknowledge I owe my life to you, and I call all to hear the acknowledgment. If the people have thought this prosecution part of my gratitude, — if they have marvelled at my appearing as your accuser, much have they wronged me. I thought of reward higher than they could have asked for you; but I also thought to try you. A slave is not fit to be a chief, nor is every chief fit to be a king. I thought to try you: I am satisfied. When your fame goes abroad, as it will; when the minstrels sing your valor; when Tenochtitlan talks of the merchant's son, who, in the garden, slew the tiger, and saved the life of Montezuma, — let them also tell how Montezuma rewarded him; let them say I made him noble."

Thereupon he arose, and transferred the *panache* from his head to Hualpa's. Those close by looked at the gift, and saw, for the first time, that it was not the crown,

but the crest of a chief or cacique. Then they knew that the trial was merely to make more public the honors designed.

"Let them say further," he continued, "that with my own hand I made him a warrior of the highest grade." And, bending over the adventurer, he clasped around his neck the collar of the supreme military order of the realm.* "Nor is that all. Rank, without competence, is a vexation and shame. At the foot of Chapultepec, on the shore of the lake, lie an estate and a palace of which I have been proud. Let it be said, finally, that I gave them to enrich him and his forever." He paused, and turned coldly to the Tezcucan. "But as to the son of 'Hualpilli, his fine must stand; such pride must be punished. He shall pay the gold, or forfeit his province." Then, outstretching toward the audience both his arms, he said, so as to be heard throughout the chamber, "Now, O my children, justice has been done!"

The words were simple; but the manner, royal as a king's and patriarchal as a pontiff's, brought every listener to his knees.

"Stand up, my lord Hualpa! Take your place in my train. I will return to the palace."

With that he passed out.

And soon there was but one person remaining, — Iztli'l, the Tezcucan. Brought from Tlacopan by officers of the court, too weak to walk, without slaves to help him, at sight of the deserted hall his countenance became haggard, the light in his hollow eyes came and went, and his broad breast heaved passionately; in that long, slow look he measured the depth of his fall.

* The authorities touching the military orders of the Aztecs are full and complete. Prescott, *Conq. of Mexico*, Vol. I. p. 45; Acosta, *Book VI.* ch. 26; Mendoza's *Collec. Antiq. of Mexico*, Vol. I, pl. 65.

"O Tezcuco, Tezcuco, city of my fathers!" he cried aloud. "This is the last wrong to the last of thy race of kings."

A little after he was upon a bench exhausted, his head covered by his mantle. Then a hand was laid upon his shoulder; he looked up and saw Hualpa.

"How now! Has the base-born come to enjoy his triumph? I cannot strike. Laugh and revile me; but remember, mine is the blood of kings. The gods loved my father, and will not abandon his son. In their names I curse you!"

"Tezucan, you are proud to foolishness," said the hunter, calmly. "I came to serve you. Within an hour I have become master of slaves—"

"And were yourself a slave!"

"Well, I won my freedom; I slew a beast and conquered a— But, prince, my slaves are at the door. Command them to Tacopan."

"Play courtier to those who have influence; lean your ambition upon one who can advance it. I am undone."

"I am not a courtier. The service I offer you springs from a warrior's motive. I propose it, not to a man of power, but to a prince whose courage is superior to his fortune."

For a moment the Tezucan studied the glowing face; then his brows relaxed, and, sighing like a woman, and like a woman overcome by the unexpected gentleness, he bowed his head, and covered his face with his hands, that he might not be accused of tears.

"Let me call the slaves, O prince," said Hualpa.

Thrice he clapped his hands, whereat four tattooed *tamanes* stalked into the chamber with a palanquin. *Iztliil'* took seat in the carriage, and was being borne away, when he called the hunter.

"A word," he said, in a voice from which all passion was

gone. "Though my enemy, you have been generous, and remembered my misfortunes when all others forsook me. Take with you this mark. I do not ask you to wear it, for the time is nearly come when the son of 'Hualpilli will be proscribed throughout the valley; but keep it in witness that I, the son of a king, acknowledged your right and fitness to be a noble. Farewell."

Hualpa could not refuse a present so delicately given; extending his hand, he received a bracelet of gold, set with an Aztec diamond of immense value. He clasped it upon his arm, and followed the carriage into the street.