

She waited expectantly, but no answer came, — none ever came.

And when, directly, she joined the group about Nenetzin and Hualpa, and leaned confidingly upon Io', she little thought that his was the shadow darkening her love; that the dreamy monarch, looking forward to the succession, saw, in the far future, a struggle for the crown between the prince and the 'tzin; that for the former hope there was not, except in what might now be done; and that yet there was not hope, if the opportunities of war were as open to the one as to the other. So the exile continued.

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### CHAPTER VIII.

#### THE IRON CROSS COMES BACK TO ITS GIVER.

ADMITTING that the intent with which the Spaniards came to Tenochtitlan took from them the sanctity accorded by Christians to guests, and at the same time justified any measure in prevention, — a subject belonging to the casuist rather than the teller of a story, — their situation has now become so perilous, and possibly so interesting to my sympathetic reader, that he may be anxious to enter the old palace, and see what they are doing.

The dull report of the evening gun had long since spent itself over the lake, and along the gardened shores. So, too, mass had been said in the chapel, newly improvised, and very limited for such high ceremony; yet, as Father Bartolomé observed, roomy enough for prayer and penitence. Nor had the usual precautions against surprise been omitted; on the contrary, extra devices in that way had been resorted to; the guards had been doubled; the horses stood capari-

soned; by the guns at the gates low fires were burning, to light, in an instant, the matches of the gunners; and at intervals, under cover of the walls, lay or lounged detachments of both Christians and Tlascalans, apparently told off for battle. A yell without or a shot within, and the palace would bristle with defenders. A careful captain was Cortes.

In his room, once the audience-chamber of the kings, paced the stout *conquistador*. He was alone, and, as usual, in armor, except of the head and hands. On a table were his helm, iron gloves, and battle-axe, fair to view, as was the chamber, in the cheerful, ruddy light of a brazen lamp. As he walked, he used his sword for staff; and its clang, joined to the sharp concussion of the sollerets smiting the tessellated floor at each step, gave notice in the adjoining chamber, and out in the *patio*, that the general — or, as he was more familiarly called, the Señor Hernan — was awake and uncommonly restless. After a while the curtains of the doorway parted, and Father Bartolomé entered without challenge. The good man was clad in a cassock of black serge, much frayed, and girt to the waist by a leathern belt, to which hung an ivory cross, and a string of amber beads. At sight of him, Cortes halted, and, leaning on his sword, said, "Bring thy bones here, father; or, if such womanly habit suit thee better, rest them on the settle yonder. Anyhow, thou'rt welcome. I assure thee of the fact in advance of thy report."

"Thank thee, Señor," he replied. "The cross, as thou mayst have heard, is proverbially heavy; but its weight is to the spirit, not the body, like the iron with which thou keep'st thyself so constantly clothed. I will come and stand by thee, especially as my words must be few, and to our own ears."

He went near, and continued in a low voice, and rapidly, "A deputation, appointed to confer with thee, is now com-

ing. I sounded the men. I told them our condition; how we are enclosed in the city, dependent upon an inconstant king for bread, without hope of succor, without a road of retreat. Following thy direction, I drew the picture darkly. Very soon they began asking, 'What think'st thou ought to be done?' As agreed between us, I suggested the seizure of Montezuma. They adopted the idea instantly; and, that no consideration like personal affection for the king may influence thee to reject the proposal, the deputation cometh, with Diaz del Castillo at the head."

A gleam of humor twinkled in Cortes's eyes.

"Art sure they do not suspect me as the author of the scheme?"

"They will urge it earnestly as their own, and support it with arguments which" — the father paused a moment — "I am sure thou wilt find irresistible."

Cortes raised himself from the sword, and indulged a laugh while he crossed the room and returned.

"I thank thee, father," he said, resuming his habitual gravity. "So men are managed; nothing more simple, if we do but know how. The project hath been in my mind since we left Tlascala; but, as thou know'st, I feared it might be made of account against me with our imperial master. Now, it cometh back as business of urgency to the army, to which men think I cannot say nay. Let them come; I am ready."

He began walking again, thumping the floor with his sword, while Olmedo took possession of a bench by the table. Presently, there was heard at the door the sound of many feet, which you may be sure were not those of slippered damsels; for, at the bidding of Cortes, twelve soldiers came in, followed by several officers, and after them yet other soldiers. The general went to the table and seated himself. They ranged themselves about him, standing.

And for a time the chamber went back to its primitive use; but what were the audiences of Axaya' compared with this? Here was no painted cotton, or feather-work gaudy with the spoils of humming-birds and parrots: in their stead, the gleam and lustre blent with the brown of iron. One such Christian warrior was worth a hundred heathen chiefs. So thought Cortes, as he glanced at the faces before him, bearded, mustachioed, and shaded down to the eyes by well-worn morions.

"Good evening, gentlemen and soldiers," he said, kindly, but without a bow. "This hath the appearance of business."

Diaz advanced a step, and replied, —

"Señor, we are a deputation from the army, appointed to beg attention to a matter which to us looketh serious; enough so, at least, to justify this appearance. We have been, and are, thy faithful soldiers, in whom thou mayst trust to the death, as our conduct all the way from the coast doth certify. Nor do we come to complain; on that score be at rest. But we are men of experience; a long campaign hath given us eyes to see and ability to consider a situation; while we submit willingly to all thy orders, trusting in thy superior sense, we yet think thou wilt not take it badly, nor judge us wanting in discipline and respect, if we venture the opinion that, despite the courtesies and fair seeming of the unbelieving king, Montezuma, we are, in fact, cooped up in this strong city as in a cage."

"I see the business already," said Cortes; "and, by my conscience! ye are welcome to help me consider it. Speak out, Bernal Diaz."

"Thank thee, Señor. The question in our minds is, What shall be done next? We know that but few things bearing anywise upon our expedition escape thy eyes, and that of what is observed by thee nothing is forgotten; therefore, what I wish, first, is to refer some points to thy memory. When

we left Cuba, we put ourselves in the keeping of the Holy Virgin, without any certain purpose. We believed there was in this direction somewhere a land peopled and full of gold for the finding. Of that we were assured when we set out from the coast to come here. And now that we are come, safe from so many dangers, and hardships, and battles, we think it no shame to admit that we were not prepared for what we find, so far doth the fact exceed all our imaginings; neither can we be charged justly with weakness or fear, if we all desire to know whether the expedition is at an end, and whether the time hath arrived to collect our gains, and divide them, and set our faces homeward. There are in the army some who think that time come; but I, and my associates here, are not of that opinion. We believe with Father Olmedo, that God and the Holy Mother brought us to this land, and that we are their instruments; and that, in reward for our toils, and for setting up the cross in all these abominable temples, and bringing about the conversion of these heathen hordes, the country, and all that is in it, are ours."

"They are ours!" cried Cortes, dashing his sword against the floor until the chamber rang. "They are ours, all ours; subject only to the will of our master, the Emperor."

The latter words he said slowly, meaning that they should be remembered.

"We are glad, Señor, to hear thy approval so heartily given," Diaz resumed. "If we are not mistaken in the opinion, and, following it up, decide to reduce the country to possession and the true belief, — something, I confess, not difficult to determine, since we have no ships in which to sail away, — then we think a plan of action should be adopted immediately. If the reduction can be best effected from the city, let us abide here, by all means; if not, the sooner we are beyond the dikes and bridges, and out of the valley,

the better. Whether we shall remain, Señor, is for thee to say. The army hath simply chosen us to make a suggestion, which we hope thou wilt accept as its sense; and that is, to seize the person of Montezuma, and bring him to these quarters, after which there will be no difficulty in providing for our wants and safety, and controlling, as may be best, the people, the city, the provinces, and all things else yet undiscovered.

"*Jesu Christo!*" exclaimed Cortes, like one surprised. "Whence got ye this idea? Much I fear the Devil is abroad again." And he began to walk the floor, using long strides, and muttering to himself; retaking his seat, he said, —

"The proposition hath a bold look, soldiers and comrades, and for our lives' sake requireth careful thought. That we can govern the Empire through Montezuma, I have always held, and with that idea I marched you here, as the cavaliers now present can testify; but the taking and holding him prisoner, — by my conscience! ye out-travel me, and I must have time to think about the business. But, gentlemen," — turning to the Captains Leon, Ordas, Sandoval, and Alvarado, who, as part of the delegation, had stationed themselves behind him, — "ye have reflected upon the business, and are of made-up minds. Upon two points I would have your judgments: first, can we justify the seizure to his Majesty, the Emperor? secondly, how is the arrest to be accomplished? Speak thou, Sandoval."

"As thou know'st, Señor Hernan, what I say must be said bluntly, and with little regard for qualifications," Sandoval replied, lipping. "To me the seizure is a necessity, and as such justifiable to our royal master, himself so good a soldier. I have come to regard the heathen king as faithless, and therefore unworthy, except as an instrument in our hands. I cannot forget how we were cautioned against him in all the lower towns, and how, from all quar-

ters, we were assured he meant to follow the pretended instructions of his god, allow us to enter the capital quietly, then fall upon us without notice and at disadvantage. And now that we are enclosed, he hath only to cut off our supplies of bread and water, and break down the bridges. So, Señor, I vouch that, in my opinion, there is but one question for consideration, — Shall we move against him, or wait until he is ready to move against us? I would rather surprise my enemy than be surprised by him."

"And what sayest thou, Leon?"

"The good Captain Sandoval hath spoken for me, Señor. I would add, that some of us have to-day noticed that the king's steward, besides being insolent, hath failed to supply our tables as formerly. And from Aguilar, the interpreter, who hath his news from the Tlascalans, I learn that the Mexicans certainly have some evil plot in progress."

"And yet further, captain, say for me," cried Alvarado, impetuously, "that the prince now with us, his name — The fiend take his name!"

"Thou would'st say, the Prince of Tezcucó; never mind his name," Cortes said, gravely.

"Ay, never mind his name," Olmedo repeated, with a scarce perceptible gleam of humor. "At the baptism to-morrow I will give him something more Christian."

"As ye will, as ye will!" Alvarado rejoined, impatiently. "I was about to say, that the Tezcucan averreth most roundly that the yells we heard this afternoon from the temple over the way signified a grand utterance from the god of war; and of opinion that we will now be soon attacked, he refuseth to go into the city again."

"And thou, Ordas."

"Señor," that captain replied, "I am in favor of the seizure. If, as all believe, Montezuma is bent to make war upon us, the best way to meet the danger is to arrest him in time.

The question, simply stated, is, his liberty or our lives. Moreover, I want an end to the uncertainty that so vexeth us night and day; worse, by far, than any battle the heathen can offer."

Cortes played with the knot of his sword, and reflected.

"Such, then, is the judgment of the army," he finally said. "And such, gentlemen, is mine, also. But is that enough? What we do as matter of policy may be approved of man, even our imperial master, of whom I am always regardful; but, as matter of conscience, the approval of Heaven must be looked for. Stand out, Father Bartolomé! Upon thy brow is the finger of St. Peter, at thy girdle the cross of Christ. What saith the Church?"

The good man arose, and held out the cross, saying, —

"My children, upon the Church, by Christ himself, this solemn hest hath been placed, good for all places, to be parted from never: 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.' The way hither hath been through strange seas and deadly climates. Hear me, that ye may know yourselves. Ye are the swords of the Church. In Cempoalla she preached; so in Tlascalá; so in Cholula; and in all, she cast out false gods, and converted whole tribes. Only in this city hath the gospel not been proclaimed. And why? Because of a king who to-day, almost in our view, sacrificed men to his idols. Swords of the Church, which go before to make smooth her path, Christ and the Holy Mother must be taught in yon temple of sin. So saith the Church!"

There was much crossing of forehead and breast, and "Amen," and the sweet name "Ave Maria" sounded through the chamber, not in the murmur of a cathedral response, but outspokenly as became the swords of Christ. The sensation was hardly done, when some one at the door called loudly for Alvarado.

"Who is he that so calleth?" the captain asked, angrily.  
 "Let him choose another time."

The name was repeated more loudly.

"Tell the moulder to seek me to-morrow."

A third time the captain was called.

"May the Devil fly away with the fellow! I will not go."

"Bid the man enter," said Cortes. "The disturbance is strange."

A soldier appeared, whom Alvarado, still angry, addressed, "How now? Dost thou take me for a kitchen girl, apprenticed to answer thee at all times? What hast thou? Be brief. This goodly company waiteth."

"I crave thy pardon, captain. I crave pardon of the company," the soldier answered, saluting Cortes. "I am on duty at the main gate. A little while ago, a woman —"

"*Picaro!*" cried Alvarado, contemptuously. "Only a woman!"

"Peace, captain! Let the man proceed," said Cortes, whose habit it was to hear his common soldiers gravely.

"As I was about saying, Señor, a woman came running to the gate. She was challenged. I could not understand her, and she was much scared, for behind her on the street was a party that seemed to have been in pursuit. She cried, and pressed for admittance. My order is strict, — Admit no one after the evening gun. While I was trying to make her understand me, some arrows were shot by the party outside, and one passed through her arm. She then flung herself on the pavement, and gave me this cross, and said 'Tonatiah, Tonatiah!' As that is what the people call thee, Señor Alvarado, I judged she wanted it given to thee for some purpose. The shooting at her made me think that possibly the business might be of importance. If I am mistaken, I again pray pardon. Here is the cross. Shall I admit the woman?"

Alvarado took the cross, and looked at it once.

"By the saints! my mother's gift to me, and mine to the princess Nenetzin." Of the soldier he asked, in a suppressed voice, "Is the woman old or young?"

"A girl, little more than a child."

"'T is she! Mother of Christ, 't is Nenetzin!"

And through the company, without apology, he rushed. The soldier saluted, and followed him.

"To the gate, Sandoval! See the rest of this affair, and report," said Cortes, quietly. "We will stay the business until you return."

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## CHAPTER IX.

TRULY WONDERFUL. — A FORTUNATE MAN HATH A MEMORY.

TWO canoes, tied to the strand, attested that the royal party, and Io' and Hualpa, were yet at Chapultepec, which was no doubt as pleasant at night, seen of all the stars, as in the day, kissed by the softest of tropical suns.

That the lord Hualpa should linger there was most natural. Raised, almost as one is transported in dreams, from hunting to warriorship; from that again to riches and nobility; so lately contented, though at peril of life, to look from afar at the house in which the princess Nenetzin slept; now her betrothed, and so pronounced by the great king himself, — what wonder that he loitered at the palace? Yet it was not late, — in fact, on the horizon still shone the tint, the last and faintest of the day, — when he and Io' came out, and, arm in arm, took their way down the hill to the landing. What betides the lover? Is the mistress coy? Or runs he away at call of some grim duty?

Out of the high gate, down the terraced descent, past the

avenue of ghostly cypresses, until their sandals struck the white shells of the landing, they silently went.

"Is it not well with you, my brother?" asked the prince, stopping where the boats, in keeping of their crews, were lying.

"Thank you for that word," Hualpa replied. "It is better even than comrade. Well with me? I look my fortune in the face, and am dumb. If I should belie expectation, if I should fall from such a height! O Mother of the World, save me from that! I would rather die!"

"But you will not fail," said Io', sympathetically.

"The gods keep the future; they only know. The thought came to me as I sat at the feet of Tula and Nenetzin, — came to me like a taste of bitter in a cup of sweets. Close after followed another even stronger, — how could I be so happy, and our comrade over the lake so miserable? We know how he has hoped and worked and lived for what the morrow is to bring: shall he not be notified even of its nearness? You have heard the sound of the war-drum: what is it like?"

"Like the roll of thunder."

"Well, when the thunder crosses the lake, and strikes his ear, saying, 'Up, the war is here!' he will come to the door, and down to the water's edge; there he must stop; and as he looks wistfully to the city, and strains his ear to catch the notes of the combat, will he not ask for us, and, accuse us of forgetfulness? Rather than that, O my brother, let my fortune all go back to its giver."

"I understand you now," said the prince, softly.

"Yes," Hualpa continued, "I am to be at the temple by the break of day; but the night is mine, and I will go to the 'tzin, my first friend, of Anahuac the soul, as Nenetzin is the flower."

"And I will go with you."

"No, you cannot. You have not permission. So farewell."

"Until to-morrow," said Io'.

"In the temple," answered Hualpa.

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## CHAPTER X.

### HOW THE IRON CROSS CAME BACK.

IO' stayed at the landing awhile, nursing the thought left him by his comrade. And he was still there, the plash of the rowers of the receding canoe in his ear, when the great gate of the palace gave exit to another person, this time a girl. The guards on duty paid her no attention. She was clad simply and poorly, and carried a basket. Around the hill were scores of gardeners' daughters like her.

From the avenue she turned into a path which, through one of the fields below, led her to an inlet of the lake, where the market-people were accustomed to moor their canoes. The stars gave light, but too feebly to reclaim anything from the darkness. Groping amongst the vessels, she at length entered one, and, seating herself, pushed clear of the land, and out in the lake toward the glow in the sky beneath which reposed the city.

Like the night, the lake was calm; therefore, no fear for the adventuress. The boat, under her hand, had not the speed of the king's when driven by his twelve practised rowers; yet she was its mistress, and it obeyed her kindly. But why the journey? Why alone on the water at such a time?

Half an hour of steady work. The city was, of course, much nearer. At the same time, the labor began to tell; the reach of her paddle was not so great as at the beginning, nor was the dip so deep; her breathing was less free, and sometimes she stopped to draw a dripping hand across her forehead. Surely, this is not a gardener's daughter.

*Voyageurs* now became frequent. Most of them passed by with the salutation usual on the lake, — "The blessings of the gods upon you!" Once she was in danger. A canoe full of singers, and the singers full of *pulque*, came down at speed upon her vessel. Happily, the blow was given obliquely; the crash suspended the song; the wassailers sprang to their feet; seeing only a girl, and no harm done, they drew off, laughing. "Out with your lamp next time!" shouted one of them. A law of the lake required some such signal at night.

In the flurry of the collision, a *tamane*, leaning over the bow of the strange canoe, swung a light almost in the girl's face. With a cry, she shrank away; as she did so, from her bosom fell a shining cross. To the dull slave the symbol told no tale; but, good reader, we know that there is but one maiden in all Anahuac who wears such a jewel, and we know for whom she wears that one. By the light of that cross, we also know the weary passenger is, not a gardener's daughter, but Nenetzin, the princess.

And the wonder grows. What does the 'tzin Nene — so they called her in the days they swung her to sleep in the swinging cradle — out so far alone on the lake? And where goes she in such guise, this night of all others, and now when the kiss of her betrothed is scarcely cold on her lips? Where are the slaves? Where the signs of royalty? As prayed by the gentle *voyageurs*, the blessings of the gods may be upon her, but much I doubt if she has her mother's, almost as holy.

Slowly now she wins her way. The paddle grows heavier in her unaccustomed hands. On her brow gathers a dew which is neither of the night nor the lake. She is not within the radius of the temple lights, yet stops to rest, and bathe her palms in the cooling waves. Later, when the wall of the city, close by, stretches away on either side, far reaching, a margin of darkness under the illuminated sky, the canoe seems at last to conquer; it floats at will idly as a log; and in that time the princess sits motionless as the boat, lapsed in revery. Her purpose, if she has one, may have chilled in the solitude or weakened under the labor. Alas, if the purpose be good! If evil, help her, O sweet Mary, Mother!

The sound of paddles behind her broke the spell. With a hurried glance over her shoulder, she bent again to the task, and there was no more hesitation. She gained the wall, and passed in, taking the first canal. By the houses, and through the press of canoes, and under the bridges, to the heart of the city, she went. On the steps bordering a basin close to the street which had been Cortes' line of march the day of the entry, she landed, and, ascending to the thoroughfare, set out briskly, basket in hand, her face to the south. With never a look to the right or left, never a response to the idlers on the pavement, she hurried down the street. The watchers on the towers sung the hour; she scarcely heard them. At last she reached the great temple. A glance at the *coatapantli*, one at the shadowy sanctuaries, to be sure of the locality; then her eyes fell upon the palace of Axaya', and she stopped. The street to this point had been thronged with people; here there were none; the strangers were by themselves. The main gate of the ancient house stood half open, and she saw the wheels of gun-carriages, and now and then a Christian soldier pacing his round, slowly and grimly; of the little host, he

alone gave signs of life. Over the walls she heard the stamp of horses' feet, and once a neigh, shrill and loud. The awe of the Indian in presence of the white man seized her, and she looked and listened, half frightened, half worshipful, with but one clear sense, and that was of the nearness of the *Tonatih*.

A sound of approaching feet disturbed her, and she ran across to the gate; at once the purpose which had held her silent on the *azoteas*, which prompted her ready acquiescence in the betrothal to Hualpa, which had sustained her in the passage of the lake, was revealed. She was seeking her lover to save him.

She would have passed through the gateway, but for a number of lances dropped with their points almost against her breast. What with fear of those behind and of those before her, she almost died. On the pavement, outside the entrance, she was lying when Alvarado came to the rescue. The guard made way for him quickly; for in his manner was the warning which nothing takes from words, not even threats; verily, it had been as well to attempt to hinder a leaping panther. He threw the lances up, and knelt by her, saying tenderly, "Nenetzin, Nenetzin, poor child! It is I, — come to save you!"

She half arose, and, smiling through her tears, clasped her hands, and cried, "*Tonatih! Tonatih!*"

There are times when a look, a gesture, a tone of the voice, do all a herald's part. What need of speech to tell the Spaniard why the truant was there? The poor disguise, the basket, told of flight; her presence at that hour said, "I have come to thee"; the cross returned, the tears, the joy at sight of him, certified her love; and so, when she put her arm around his neck, and the arrow, not yet taken away, rattled against his corselet, to his heart there shot a pain so sharp and quick it seemed as if the very soul of him was going out.

He raised her gently, and carried her through the entrance. The rough men looking on saw upon his cheek what, if the cheek had been a woman's, they would have sworn was a tear.

"Ho, Marina!" he cried to the wondering interpreter. "I bring thee a bird dropped too soon from the nest. The hunter hath chased the poor thing, and here is a bolt in its wing. Give place in thy cot, while I go for a doctor, and room with thee, that malice hurt not a good name."

And at the sight the Indian woman was touched; she ran to the cot, smoothed the pillow of feathers, and said, "Here, rest her here, and run quickly. I will care for her."

He laid her down tenderly, but she clung to his hand, and said to Marina, "He must not go. Let him first hear what I have to say."

"But you are hurt."

"It is nothing, nothing. He must stay."

So earnestly did she speak, that the captain changed his mind. "Very well. What is spoken in pain should be spoken quickly. I will stay."

Nenetzin caught the assent, and went on rapidly. "Let him know that to-morrow at noon the drum in the great temple will be beaten, and the bridges taken up, and then there will be war."

"By the saints! she bringeth doughty news," said Alvarado, in his voice of soldier. "Ask her where she got it; ask her, as you love us, Marina."

"From my father, — from the king himself."

"And this is child of Montezuma!" cried Marina.

"The princess Nenetzin," said the cavalier. "But stay not so. Ask her when and where she heard the news."

"To-day, at Chapultepec."

"What of the particulars? How is the war to be made? What are the preparations?"

"The lord Cuitlahua is to take up the bridges. Maize and



meat will be furnished to-morrow only. About the great temple now there are ten thousand warriors for an attack, and elsewhere in the city there are seventy thousand more."

"Enough," said Alvarado, kissing the little hand. "Look now to the hurt, Marina. Bring the light; mayhap we can take the bolt away ourselves."

Marina knelt, and examined the wounded arm, and shortly held up the arrow.

"Good!" the cavalier said. "Thou art a doctor, indeed, Marina. In the schools at home they give students big-lettered parchments. I will do better by thee; I will cover the arm that did this surgery with bracelets of gold. Run now, and bring cloth and water. The blood thou seest trickling here is from her heart, which loveth me too dearly to suffer such waste. Haste thee! haste thee!"

They bathed the wound, and applied the bandages, though all too roughly to suit the cavalier, who, thereupon, turned to go, saying, "Sit thou there, Marina, and leave her not, except to do her will. Tell her I will return, and to be at rest, for she is safe as in her father's house. If any do but look at her wrongfully, they shall account to me. So, by my mother's cross, I swear!"

And he hurried back to the audience-chamber, where the council was yet in session. While he related what had been told by Nenezin, a deep silence pervaded the assemblage, and the brave men, from looking at each other, turned, with singular unanimity, to Cortes; who, thus appealed to, threw off his affectation, and standing up, spoke, so as to be heard by all, —

"Comrades, soldiers, gentlemen, let there be no words more. The step you have urged upon me, in the name of the army, I hesitated to take. I grant you, I hesitated; but not from love of the soft-tongued, lying, pagan king. Bethink ye. We left Cuba hastily, as ye all remember,

because of a design to arrest us there as malefactors and traitors. Now, when our enemies in that island hear from our expedition, and have told them all its results, — the wealth we have won, and the country, cities, peoples, and empire discovered, — envy and jealousy will pursue us, and false tongues go back to Spain, and fill the ears of our royal master with reports intended to rob us of our glory and despoil us of our hire. How could I know but the seizure in question might be magnified into impolicy and cruelty, and furnish cause for disgrace, imprisonment, and forfeiture? For that I hesitated. This news, however, endeth doubt and debate. The over-cunning king hath put himself outside of mercy or compassion; we are compelled to undo him. So far, well. Let me remind ye now, that the news of which I speak hath in it a warning which it were sinful not to heed. Yesterday the great infidel was at our mercy; not more difficult his capture than a visit to his palace; but now, in all the histories of bold performances, nothing bolder, — nothing of the Cid's, nothing of King Arthur's. In the heart of his capital we are to make prisoner him, the head of millions, the political ruler and religious chief, not merely secure in the love and fear of his subjects, but in the height of his careful preparation for war, in the centre of his camp, within call, nay, under the eyes, of his legions, numbering thousands where we number tens. Take ye each, my brave brethren, the full measure of the design, and then tell me, in simple words, how it may be best done. And among ye, let him speak who can truly say, I dare do what my tongue delivereth. I wait your answer."

And in the chamber there again fell a hush so deep that those present might well have been taken for ghosts. The idea as first seen by them was commonplace; under his description, it became heroic; and struggling, as he suggested, to measure it each for himself, all were dumb.

"Good gentlemen," said Cortes, smiling, "why so laggard now? Speak, Diaz del Castillo. Offer what thou canst."

The good soldier, and afterward good chronicler, of the conquest and its trials, this one among the rest, replied, "I confess, Señor, the enterprise is difficult beyond my first thought. I confess, also, to more reflection about its necessity than its achievement. To answer truthfully, at this time I see but one way to the end; and that is, to invite the monarch here under some sufficient pretence, and then lay hands on him."

"Are ye all of the same minds, gentlemen?"

There was a murmur of assent, whereupon Cortes arose from leaning upon his sword, and said, sharply, —

"To hear ye, gentlemen, one would think the summer all before us in which to interchange courtesies with the royal barbarian. What is the fact? At noon to-morrow our hours of grace expire. A beat of drum, and then assault, and after that,"—he paused, looking grimly round the circle,—"and after that, sacrifices to the gods, I suppose."

There was a general movement and outcry. Some griped their arms, others crossed themselves. Cortes saw and pressed his advantage.

"I shall not take your advice, Bernal Diaz; not I, by my conscience! Heaven helping me, I expect to see old Spain again; and more, I expect to take these comrades back with me, rich in glory and gold." Then, to the officers behind him, he said, in his ordinary tone of command, "Ordas, do thou bid the carpenters prepare quarters in this palace for Montezuma and his court; and let them begin their work to-night, for he will be our guest before noon to-morrow. And thou, León, thou, Lugo, thou, Avila, and thou, Sandoval, get ye ready to go with me to the —"

"And I?" asked Alvarado.

"Thou shalt go also."

"And the army, Señor?" Diaz suggested.

"The army shall remain in quarters."

Never man's manner more calm, never man more absolutely assured. The listeners warmed with admiration. As unconscious of the effect he was working, he went on, —

"I have shown the difficulties of the enterprise; now I say further, the crisis of the expedition is upon us: if I succeed, all is won; if I fail, all is lost. In such strait, what should we do between this and then? Let us not trust in our cunning and strength: we are Christians; as such, put we our faith in Christ and the Holy Mother. Olmedo, father, go thou to the chapel, and get ready the altar. The night to confession and prayer; and let the morning find us on our knees shrieved and blessed. We are done, comrades. Let the chamber be cleared. To the chapel all."

And they did the bidding cheerfully. All night the good father was engaged in holy work, confessing, shrieving, praying. So the morning found them.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CHRISTIAN TAKES CARE OF HIS OWN.

HUALPA returned to the city about the time the stars, which in that clime and season herald the morning, take their places in the sky. He had lightened his heart, and received the sympathy of a lover in return; he had told the great things done and promised by the king, and sorrowed that his friend could take no part in the events which, he imagined, were to make the day heroic forever; and now, his enthusiasm of youth sobered by the complaints to which he had listened while traversing the dusky walks of the beau-