

"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.

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-

tiful garden, he clomb the stairs of the *teocallis*. Before the day was fairly dawned, he was at his post, waiting, dreaming of Nenetzin, and hearkening to the spirit-songs of ambition, always so charming to unpractised souls.

And the lord Cuitlahua perfected his measures. On all the dikes, and at the entrance of all the canals, guards were stationed. The bridges nearest the palace occupied by the strangers were held by chosen detachments. Except those thus detailed, the entire military in the city were pent in the temples. And to all, including the lord steward, the proper orders were confided. All awaited the signal.

And the king, early in the night, ignorant of the flight of Nenetzin, had come from Chapultepec to his palace in the capital. He retired as he was wont, and slept the sleep as restful to a mind long distracted by irresolution as to a body exhausted by labor; such slumber as comes to him who, in time of doubt, involving all dearest interests, at last discovers what his duty is, and, fully determined, simply awaits the hour of performance, trustful of the action taken, and of the good-will of the god or gods of his faith.

On the side of the Christians, the preparation, more simple, was also complete. From mass the little host went to breakfast, then to arms. The companies formed; even the Tlascalans behaved as if impressed with a sense that their fate had been challenged.

To the captains, again convoked in the audience-chamber, Cortes detailed his plan of operation. His salutation of each was grave and calm. Though very watchful, they heard him without question; and when they went out, they might have said, The hour of trial is come, and now will be seen which holds the conquering destiny, — the God of the Christian or that of the Aztec.

From the council, Alvarado went first to Marina; finding that Nenetzin slept, he joined his companions in the great

court, where, gay and careless, he carolled a song, and twirled his sword, and, in thought of smiling fortune and a princely Indian love, walked complacently to and fro. And so wait, ready for action, the Christian lover and the heathen, — one in the palace, the other in the temple, — both, in fancy, lord of the same sweet mistress.

At the stated hour, as had been the custom, the three lords came, in splendid costume, and with stately ceremonial, bringing the king's compliments, and asking Cortes will for the day. And they returned with compliments equally courteous and deceptive, taking with them Orteguilla, the page, instructed to inform the monarch that directly, if such were the royal pleasure, Malinche would be happy to visit him in his palace.

A little later there went out parties of soldiers, apparently to view the city; yet the point was noticeable that, besides being fully armed, each was in charge of a chosen subordinate. Later, the army was drawn up, massed in the garden; the matches of the gunners were lighted; the horsemen stood at their bridles; the Tlascalans were stationed to defend the outer walls. De Oli, Morla, Marin, and Monjarez passed through the lines in careful inspection.

"Heard'st thou when the drum was to be sounded?" asked De Oli, looking to the sun.

"At noon," answered Marin.

"Three hours yet, as I judge. Short time, by Our Lady!"

The party was impatient. To their relief, Cortes at last came out, with his five chosen cavaliers, Sandoval, Alvarado, Leon, Avila, and Lugo. As he proceeded to the gate, all eyes turned to him, all hearts became confident, — so much of power over the weak is there in the look of one master spirit.

At the gate he waited for the Doña Marina.

"Are ye ready, gentlemen?"

"All ready," they replied.

"With thee, De Oli, I leave the command. At sight or sound of attack or combat, come quickly. Charge straight to the palace, lances in the lead. Bring our horses. Farewell. Christ and the Mother for us!" And with that, Cortes stepped into the street.

For a time the party proceeded silently.

"Is not this what the pagans call the beautiful street?" Sandoval asked.

"Why the question?"

"I have gone through graveyards not more deserted."

"Thou'rt right," said Lugo. "By Our Lady! when last we went this way, I remember the pavements, doors, porticos, and roofs were crowded. Now, not a woman or a child."

"In faith, Señor, we are a show suddenly become stale."

"Be it so," replied Leon, sneeringly. "We will give the public a new trick."

"*Mirad, Señores!*" said Cortes. "Last night, all through this district, particularly along this street, there went patrols, removing the inhabitants, and making ready for what the drum is advertised to let loose upon us. Don Pedro, thy princess hath told the truth." And looking back to the towers of the *teocallis*, he added, after a fit of laughter, "The fools, the swine! They have undone themselves; or, rather," — his face became grave on the instant, — "the Holy Mother hath undone them for us. Give thanks, gentlemen, our emprise is already won! Yonder the infidel general hath his army in waiting for the word of the king. Keep we that unspoken or undelivered, — only that, — and the way of our return, prisoner in hand, will be as clear of armed men as the going is."

The customary guard of nobles kept the portal of the palace; the antechamber, however, was crowded to its full capacity with unarmed courtiers, through whom the Chris-

tians passed with grave assurance. To acquaintances Cortes bowed courteously. Close by the door of the audience-chamber, he found Orteguilla conversing with Maxtla, who, at sight of him, knelt, and, touching the floor with his palm, offered to conduct the party to the royal presence; such were his orders. Cortes stopped an instant.

"Hath the king company?" he asked Orteguilla.

"None of account, — a boy and three or four old men."

"He is ours. Let us on, gentlemen!"

And forthwith they passed under the curtains held aside for them by Maxtla.

On a dais covered with a carpet of *plumaje*, the monarch sat. Three venerable men stood behind him. At his feet, a little to the right, was the prince Io', in uniform. A flood of light poured through a window on the northern side of the chamber, and fell full on the group, bringing out with intense clearness the rich habiliments of the monarch, and every feature of his face. The Christians numbered the attendance, and, trained to measure dangers and discover advantages by a glance, smiled at the confidence of the treacherous heathen. Upon the stillness, broken only by their ringing tread, sped the voice of Cortes.

"Alvarado, Lugo, all of ye, watch well whom we have here. On your lives, see that the boy escape not."

Montezuma kept his seat.

"The gods keep you this pleasant morning," he said. "I am glad to see you."

They bowed to him, and Cortes replied, —

"We thank thee, good king. May the Holy Virgin, of our Christian faith, have thee in care. Thus pray we, than whom thou hast no truer servants."

"If you prefer to sit, I will have seats brought."

"We thank thee again. In the presence of our master, it is the custom to stand, and he would hold us discourteous if

we did otherwise before a sovereign friend as dear to him as thou art, great king."

The monarch waved his hand.

"Your master is no doubt a rare and excellent sovereign," he said, then changed the subject. "The lords, whom I sent to you this morning, reported that all goes well with you in the palace. I hope so. If anything is wanted, you have only to speak. My provinces are at your service."

"The lords reported truly."

"I am very glad. Thinking of you, Malinche, and studying to make your contentment perfect, I have wondered if you have any amusements or games with which to pass the time."

As there were not in all the New World, however it might be in the Old, more desperate gamblers than the cavaliers, they looked at each other when the translation was concluded, and smiled at the simplicity of the speaker. Nevertheless, Cortes replied with becoming gravity, —

"We have our pastimes, good king, as all must have; for without them, nature hath ordered that the body shall grow old and the mind incapable. Our pastimes, however, relate almost entirely to war."

"That is labor, Malinche."

"So is hunting," said Cortes, smiling.

"My practice is not," answered the monarch, taking the remark as an allusion to his own love of the sport, and laughing. "The lords drive the game to me, and my pleasure is in exercising the skill required to take it. Some day you must go with me to my preserves over the lake, and I will show you my modes; but I did not mean that kind of amusement. I will explain my meaning. Io," he said to the prince, who had arisen, "bid Maxtla bring hither the silver balls. I will teach Malinche to play *toto loque*."

"Have a care, gentlemen!" said Cortes, divining the speech from the action of the speaker. "The lad must stay. And thou, Marina, tell him so."

The comely, gentle-hearted Indian woman hastened tremulously to say, "Most mighty king, Malinche bids me tell thee that he has heard of the beautiful game, and will be glad to learn it, but not now. He wishes the prince to remain."

One step Io' had in the mean time taken, — but one; in front of him Leon stepped, hand on sword, and menace on his brow. The blood fled the monarch's face.

"Go not," he at length said to the boy; and to Cortes, "I do not understand you, Malinche."

The time of demand was come. Cortes moved nearer the dais, and replied, his eyes fixed coldly and steadily on those of the victim, —

"I have business with thee, king; and until it is concluded, thou, the prince, and thy councillors must stay. Outcry, or attempt at escape, will be at peril of life."

The monarch sat upright, pale and rigid; the ancients dropped upon their knees. Io' alone was brave; he stepped upon the platform, as if to defend the royal person. Then in the same cold, inflexible manner, Cortes proceeded, —

"I have been thy guest, false king, long enough to learn thee well. The power which, on all occasions, thou hast been so careful to impress upon me, hath but made thy hypocrisy the more astonishing. Listen, while I expose thee to thyself. We started hither at thy invitation. In Cholula, nevertheless, we were set upon by the army. No thanks to thee that we are alive to-day. And, in the same connection, when thou wert upbraided for inviting us, the lords and princes were told that such was the instruction of one of thy bloody gods, who had promised here in the capital to deliver us prisoners for sacrifice."

Montezuma offered to speak.

"Deny it not, deny it not!" said Cortes, with the slightest show of passion. "In god or man, such perfidy cannot be excused. But that is not all. Say nothing about the command sent the troops near Tuzpan to attack my people; nor about the demand upon townships under protection of my royal master for women and children to feed to thy hungry idols; now —"

Here the king broke in upon the interpreter, —

"I do not understand what Malinche says about my troops attacking his people at Tuzpan."

"Thy governor killed one of my captains."

"Not by my order."

"Then make good the denial, by sending for the officer who did the murder, that he may be punished according to the wickedness of his crime."

The king took a signet from his wrist, and said to one of his councillors, "Let this be shown to the governor of that province. I require him to come here immediately, with all who were concerned with him at the time spoken of by Malinche."

The smile with which the monarch then turned to the Spaniard was lost upon him, for he continued, pitilessly as before, —

"The punishment of the governor is not enough. I accuse thee further. Thou treacherous king! Go with me to the temple, and now, — this instant, — I will show thee thy brother, with an army at call, waiting thy signal to attack us in the palace where so lately we received thy royal welcome."

The listener started from his seat. Upon his bewildered faculties flashed the remembrance of how carefully and with what solemn injunction he had locked his plans of war in the breasts of the members of his family, gathered about him

on the *azoteas* at Chapultepec. His faith in them forbade suspicion. Whence then the exposure? And to the dealer in mysteries Mystery answered, "The gods!" If his former faith in the divinity of the stranger came not back, now, at least, he knew him sustained by powers with which contention were folly. He sunk down again; his head dropped upon his struggling breast; — HE WAS CONQUERED!

And the stern Spaniard, as if moved by the sight, said, in a softened voice, —

"I know not of thy religion; but there is a law of ours, — a mercy of the dear Christ who hath us in his almighty keeping, — by which every sin may be atoned by sacrifices, not of innocent victims, but of the sinner's self. In the world I come from, so much is the law esteemed, that kings greater than thou have laid down their crowns, the better to avail themselves of its salvation. Thou art an unbeliever, and I may do wrong, — if so, I pray pardon of the Holy Ghost that heareth me, — I may do wrong, I say, but, infidel as thou art, if thou wilt obey the precept, thou shalt have the benefit of the privilege. I do not want war which would end in thy destruction and the ruin of thy city and people; therefore I make thee a proposal. Hear me!"

The unhappy king raised his head, and listened eagerly.

"Arise, and go with us to our quarters, and take up thy abode there. King shalt thou continue. Thy court can go with thee, and thou canst govern from one palace as well as another. To make an end of speech," — and Cortes raised his hand tightly clenched, — "to make an end of speech, finally and plainly, choose now: go with us or die! I have not brought these officers without a purpose."

All eyes centred on the pale face of the monarch, and the stillness of the waiting was painful and breathless. At last, from the depths of his tortured soul, up rose a sparkle of resentment.

"Who ever heard of a great prince, like myself, voluntarily leaving his own palace to become a prisoner in the hands of a stranger?"

"Prisoner! Not so. Hear me again. Court, household, and power, with full freedom for its exercise, and the treatment due a crowned prince, — all these shalt thou have. So, in my master's name, I pledge thee."

"No, Malinche, press me not so hardly. Were I to consent to such a degradation, my people would not. Take one of my sons rather. This one," — and he laid his hand on Io's shoulder, — "whom I love best, and have thought to make my successor. Take him as hostage; but spare me this infamy."

The debate continued; an hour passed.

"Gentlemen, why waste words on this wretched barbarian?" exclaimed Leon, at last, half drawing his sword, while his face darkened with dreadful purpose. "We cannot recede now. In Christ's name, let us seize him, or plunge our swords in his body!"

The captains advanced, baring their swords; Cortes retired a step, as if to make way for them. Brief time remained for decision. Trembling and confused, the monarch turned to Marina, and asked, "What did the *teule* say?"

As became a gentle woman, fearful lest death be done before her, she replied, —

"O king, I pray you make no further objection. If you yield, they will treat you kindly; if you refuse, they will kill you. Go with them, I pray you."

Upon the advance of the captains, Io' stepped in front of the king; as they hesitated, either waiting Cortes' order or the answer to Marina's prayer, he knelt, and clasped his father's knees, and cried tearfully, —

"Do not go, O king! Rather than endure such shame, let us die!"

Stupefied, almost distraught, the monarch seemed not to hear the heroic entreaty. His gaze was on the face of Cortes, now as impenetrable and iron-like as the armor on his breast. "The gods have abandoned me!" he cried, despairingly. "I am lost! Malinche, I will go with you!" His head drooped, and his hands fell nerveless on the chair.

The boy arose, and turned to the conquerors, every feature convulsed with hate.

"Thanks, good king, thanks!" said Cortes, smiling. "Thou hast saved my soul a sin. I will be thy friend till death!"

Thereupon, he stepped forward, and kissed the royal hand, which fell from his lips as if palsied — I will not say profaned — by the touch. And, one after another, Leon, Lugo, Avila, Alvarado, and Sandoval approached, and knelt on the dais, and in like manner saluted the fallen prince.

"Are you done, Malinche?" the victim asked, when somewhat revived.

"What I wish now, above all things," was the reply, spoken with rare pretence of feeling, "is to be assured, good king, that we are forgiven the pain we have caused thee, since, though of our doing, it was not of our will as much as of the ambition of some of thy own lords and chiefs. What I desire next is, that thy goodness may not be without immediate results. I and my officers, thy son and these councillors, are witnesses that thou didst consent to my proposal out of great love of peace and thy people. To secure the object, — noble beyond praise, — the lords here in the palace, and those of influence throughout the provinces, must be convinced that thou dost go with me of thine own free will; not as prisoner, but as trusted guest returning the favor of guest. How to do that best is in thy knowledge more than mine. Only, what thy judgment approveth, set about quickly. We wait thy orders."

"Io, uncles," said Montezuma, his eyes dim with tears, "as you love me, be silent as to what has here taken place. I charge you that you tell it to no man, while I live. Bid Maxtla come."

Summoning all his strength to meet the shrewd eyes of the chief, the monarch sat up with a show of cheerfulness.

"Bring my palanquin," he said, after Maxtla's salutation, "and direct some of the elder lords to be ready to accompany me without arms or ceremony. As advised by Huitzil, and these good uncles, I have resolved to go, and for a time abide with Malinche in the old palace. Send an officer, with the workmen, to prepare quarters for my use and that of the court. Publish my intention. Go quickly."

Afterwhile from the palace issued a procession which no man, uninformed, might look upon and say was not a funeral: in the palanquin, the dead; on its right and left, the guard of honor; behind, the friends, a long train, speechless and sorrowing. The movement was quiet and solemn; three squares and as many bridges were passed, when, from down the street, a man came running with all speed. He gained the rear of the cortege, and spoke a few hurried words there; a murmur arose, and spread, and grew into a furious outcry,—a moment more, and the cortege was dissolved in tumult. At the last corner on the way, the cavaliers had been joined by some of the armed parties, who, for the purpose, had preceded them into the city in the early morning; these closed firmly around, a welcome support.

"*Mirad!*" cried Cortes, loudly. "The varlets are without arms. Let no one strike until I say so."

The demonstration increased. Closer drew the mob, some adjuring the monarch, some threatening the Christians. That an understanding of the situation was abroad was no longer doubtful; still Cortes held his men in check, for he knew, if blood were shed now, the common-sense of the people

would refuse the story he so relied upon,—that the king's coming was voluntary.

"Can our guest," he asked of Sandoval, "be sleeping the while?"

"Treachery, Señor."

"By God's love, captain, if it so turn out, drive thy sword first of all things through him!"

While yet he spoke, the curtains of the carriage were drawn aside; the carriers halted instantly; and of the concourse, all the natives fell upon their knees, and became still, so that the voice of the monarch was distinctly heard.

"The noise disturbs me," he said, in ordinary tone. "Let the street be cleared."

The lords whom he addressed kept their faces to the ground.

"What is the cause of the clamor?"

No one answered. A frown was gathering upon his face, when an Aztec sprang up, and drew near him. He was dressed as a citizen of the lower class. At the side of the carriage he stopped, and touched the pavement with his palm.

"Guatamozi!" said the king, more in astonishment than anger.

"Even so. O king,—father,—to bear a soldier's part to-day, I have dared your judgment." Lifting his eyes to the monarch's, he endured his gaze steadily, but, at the same time, with such an expression of sympathy that reproof was impossible. "I am prepared for any sentence; but first, let me know, let these lords and all the people know, is this going in truth of your own free will?"

Montezuma regarded him fixedly, but not in wrath.

"I conjure you, uncle, father, king,—I conjure you, by our royal blood, by our country, by all the gods,—are these strangers guests or guards? Speak,—I pray you, speak but one word."

The poor, stricken monarch heard, and was penetrated by the tone of anguish ; yet he replied, —

“ My brother’s son insults me by his question. I am still the king, — free to go and come, to reward and punish.”

He would have spoken further, and kindly, but for the interruption of Cortes, who cried impatiently, —

“ Ho, there ! Why this delay ? Forward ! ”

And thereupon Avila stepped rudely and insolently between the king and ’tzin. The latter’s broad breast swelled, and his eyes blazed ; he seemed like a tiger about to leap.

“ Beware ! ” said the king, and the warning was in time. “ Beware ! Not here, not now ! ”

The ’tzin turned to him with a quick, anxious look of inquiry ; a revulsion of feeling ensued ; he arose, and said, with bowed head, “ I understand. O king, if we help not ourselves, we are lost. ‘ Not here, not now. ’ I catch the permission.” Pointing to Avila, he added, “ This man’s life is in my hands, but I pass it by ; thine, O uncle, is the most precious. We will punish these insolents, but *not here* ; we will give you rescue, but *not now*. Be of cheer.”

He stepped aside, and the melancholy cortege passed on, leaving the lords and people and the empire, as represented by them, in the dust. Before the *teocallis*, under the eyes of Cuitlahua, within hailing distance of the ten thousand warriors, the doughty cavaliers bore their prize unchallenged.

And through the gates of the old palace, through the files of Spaniards in order of battle waiting, they also carried what they thought was the empire, won without a blow, to be parcelled at pleasure, — its lands, its treasure, its cities, and its people.

BOOK SIX.

CHAPTER I.

THE LORD HUALPA FLEES HIS FORTUNE.

THE ’tzin Guatamo sat at breakfast alone in his palace near Iztapalapan. The fare was simple, — a pheasant, bread of maize, oranges and bananas, and water from the spring ; and the repast would have been soon despatched but for the announcement, by a slave in waiting, of the lord Hualpa. At mention of the name the ’tzin’s countenance assumed a glad expression.

“ The lord Hualpa ! The gods be praised ! Bid him come.”

Directly the visitor appeared at the door, and paused there, his eyes fixed upon the floor, his body bent, like one half risen from a salutation. The ’tzin went to him, and taking his hand said, —

“ Welcome, comrade. Come and account for yourself. I know not yet how to punish you ; but for the present, sit there, and eat. If you come from Tenochtitlan this morning, you must bring with you the appetite which is one of the blessings of the lake. Sit, and I will order your breakfast.”

“ No, good ’tzin, not for me, I pray you. I am from the lake, but do not bring any blessing.”

The ’tzin resumed his seat, looking searchingly and curiously at his guest, and pained by his manner and appearance. His face was careworn ; his frame bent and emaciated ;