

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 ;

his look constantly downward; the voice feeble and of uncertain tone; in short, his aspect was that of one come up from a battle in which shame and grief had striven with youth of body and soul, and, fierce as the struggle had been, the end was not yet. He was the counterpart of his former self.

"You have been sick," said the 'tzin, afterwhile.

"Very sick, in spirit," replied Hualpa, without raising his eyes.

The 'tzin went on. "After your desertion, I caused inquiry to be made for you everywhere,—at the Chalcan's, and at your palace. No one could give me any tidings. I sent a messenger to Tihuanco, and your father was no better informed. Your truancy has been grievous to your friends, no less than to yourself. I have a right to call you to account."

"So you have; only let us to the garden. The air outside is sweet, and there is a relief in freedom from walls."

From habit, I suppose, they proceeded to the arena set apart for military exercise. No one was there. The 'tzin seated himself on a bench, making room for Hualpa, who still declined the courtesy, saying,—

"I will give an account of myself to you, brave 'tzin, not only because I should, but because I stand in need of your counsel. Look for nothing strange; mine is a simple story of shame and failure. You know its origin already. You remember the last night I spent with you here. I do, at least. That day the king made me happier than I shall ever be again. When I met you at the landing, the kiss of my betrothed was sweet upon my lips, and I had but one sorrow in the world,—that you were an exile, and could not take part, as you so wished and deserved, in the battle which my hand was to precipitate next noon. I left you, and by dawn was at my post in the temple. The hours were long.

At last the time came. All was ready. The ten thousand warriors chosen for the assault were in their quarters. The lord Cuitlahua was in the tower of Huitzil, with the *teotuctli* and his pabas, at prayer. We awaited only the king's word. Finally, Io' appeared. I saw him coming. I raised the stick, my blood was warm, another instant and the signal would have been given —" Hualpa's voice trembled, and he stopped.

"Go on," said the 'tzin. "What restrained you?"

"I remembered the words of the king,—'Io' will come to you at noon with my commands,'—those were the words. I waited. 'Strike!' said Io'. 'The command,—quick!' I cried. 'As you love life, strike!' he shouted. Something unusual had taken place; I hesitated. 'Does the king so command?' I asked. 'Time never was as precious! Give me the stick!' he replied. But the duty was mine. 'With your own hand give the signal,'—such was the order. I resisted, and he gave over the effort, and, throwing himself at my feet, prayed me to strike. I refused the prayer, also. Suddenly he sprang up, and ran out to the verge of the temple overlooking the street. Lest he should cast himself off, I followed. He turned to me, as I approached, and cried, with upraised hands, 'Too late, too late! We are undone. Look where they carry him off!' 'Whom?' I asked. 'The king—my father—a prisoner!' Below, past the *coatapantli*, the royal palanquin was being borne, guarded by the strangers. The blood stood still in my heart. I turned to the prince; he was gone. A sense of calamity seized me. I ran to the tower, and called the lord Cuitlahua, who was in time to see the procession. I shall never forget the awful look he gave me, or his words." Hualpa again paused.

"What were they?" asked the 'tzin.

"My lord Hualpa,' he said, 'had you given the signal

when Io' came to you first, I could have interposed my companies, and saved him. It is now too late; he is lost. May the gods forgive you! A ruined country cannot."

"Said he so?" exclaimed the 'tzin, indignantly. "By all the gods, he was wrong!"

At these words, Hualpa for the first time dared look into the 'tzin's face, surprised, glad, yet doubtful.

"How?" he asked. "Did you say I was right?"

"Yes."

Tears glistened in the Tihuancan's eyes, and he seized and kissed his friend's hand with transport.

"I begin to understand you," the 'tzin said, still more kindly. "You thought it your fault that the king was a prisoner; you fled for shame."

"Yes, — for shame."

"My poor friend!"

"But consider," said Hualpa, — "consider how rapidly I had risen, and to what height. Admitting my self-accusations, when before did man fall so far and so low? What wonder that I fled?"

"Well, you have my judgment. Seat yourself, and hear me further."

Hualpa took the seat this time; after which the 'tzin continued. "The seizure was made in the palace. The king yielded to threats of death. He could not resist. While the strangers were bearing him past the *teocallis*, and you were looking at them, their weapons were at his throat. Had you yielded to Io's prayer, and given the signal, and had Cuitlahua obeyed, and with his bands attempted a rescue, your benefactor would have been slain. Do not think me dealing in conjectures. I went to him in the street, and prayed to be allowed to save him; he forbade me. Therefore, hold not yourself in scorn; be happy; you saved his life a second time."

Again Hualpa gave way to his gratitude.

"Nor is that all," the 'tzin continued. "In my opinion, the last rescue was nobler than the first. As to the lord Cuitlahua, be at rest. He was not himself when he chid you so cruelly; he now thinks as I do; he exonerates you; his messengers have frequently come, asking if you had returned. So, no more of shame. Give me now what else you did."

The sudden recall to the past appeared to throw Hualpa back; his head sunk upon his breast again, and for a time he was silent; at length he replied, "As I see now, good 'tzin, I have been very foolish. Before I go on, assure me that you will listen with charity."

"With charity and love."

"I have hardly the composure to tell what more I did; yet the story will come to you in some form. Judge me mercifully, and let the subject be never again recalled."

"You have spoken."

"Very well. I have told you the words of the lord Cuitlahua; they burnt me, like fire. Thinking myself forever disgraced, I descended from the *azoteas* to the street, and there saw the people's confusion, and heard their cries and curses. I could not endure myself. I fled the city, like a guilty wretch. Instinctively, I hurried to Tihuanco. There I avoided every habitation, even my father's. News of evil travels fast. The old merchant, I knew, must needs hear of the king's seizure and what I regarded as my crime. So I cared not to meet his eyes. I passed the days in the jungles hunting, but the charm of the old occupation was gone; somehow my arrows flew amiss, and my limbs refused a long pursuit. How I subsisted, I scarcely know. At last, however, my ideas began to take form, and I was able to interrogate myself. Through the king's bounty, I was a lord,

and owner of a palace; by his favor, I further reflected, Nenetzin was bound to me in solemn betrothal. What would she think of me? What right had I, so responsible for his great misfortune, to retain his gifts? I could release her from the odious engagement. At his feet I could lay down the title and property; and then, if you refused me as a soldier or slave, I could hide myself somewhere; for the grief-struck and unhappy, like me, earth has its caverns and ocean islands. And so once more I hurried to Tenochtitlan. Yesterday I crossed the lake. From the Chalcan I heard the story which alone was needed to make my humiliation complete, — how Nenetzin, false to me, betrayed the great purpose of her father, betook herself to the stranger's house, adopted his religion, and became his wife or — spare me the word, good 'tzin. After that, I lost no time, but went to the palace, made way through the pale-faced guards at the gate and doors, each of whom seemed placed there to attest the good king's condition and my infamy. Suitors and lords of all degrees crowded the audience-chamber when I entered, and upon every face was the same look of sorrow and dejection which I had noticed upon the faces of the people whom I passed in the street. All who turned eyes upon me appeared to become accusers, and say, 'Traitor, behold thy victim!' Imagine the pressure upon my spirit. I made haste to get away, — unseemly haste. What my salutation was I hardly know. I only remember that, in some form of speech, I publicly resigned all his honorable gifts. I remember, also, that when I took what I thought was my last look at him, — friend, patron, king, father, — may the gods, who have forbidden the relation, forgive the allusion! — I could not see him for tears. My heart is in my throat now; then it nearly choked me. And so ends my account. And once more, true friend, I come to you, Hualpa, the Tihuancan, without title, palace, or privilege; without dis-

tingtion, except as the hero and victim of a marvellous fortune."

The 'tzin was too deeply touched, too full of sympathy, to reply immediately. He arose, and paced the arena awhile. Resuming his seat again, he asked simply, "And what said the king?"

"To what?"

"Your resignation."

"He refused to take back his gifts. They could not revert, he said, except for crime."

"And he was right. You should have known him better. A king cannot revoke a gift in any form."

After a spell of silence, the 'tzin spoke again.

"One matter remains. You are not guilty, as you supposed; your friends have not lost their faith in you; such being the case, it were strange if your feelings are as when you came here; and as purposes too often follow feelings, I ask about the future. What do you intend? What wish?"

"I see you understand me well, good 'tzin. My folly has been so great that I feel myself unworthy to be my own master. I ought not to claim a purpose, much less a wish. I came to your door seeking to be taken back into service; that was all the purpose I had. I rely upon your exceeding kindness."

Hualpa moved as if to kneel; but the 'tzin caught him, and said, "Keep your seat." And rising, he continued, severely, "Lord Hualpa, — for such you still are, — all men, even the best, are criminals; but as for the most part their crimes are against themselves, we take no notice of them. In that sense you are guilty, and in such degree that you deserve forfeiture of all the king refused to take back. Put pass we that, — pass the folly, the misconduct. I will not take you into service; you have your old place of friend and comrade, more fitting your rank."

Hualpa's face brightened, and he answered, —

"Command me, O 'tzin! With you I can be brave warrior, good citizen, true friend; without you, I am nothing. Whatever the world thinks of me, this I know, — I can reinstate myself in its good opinion before I can in my own. Show me the way back to self-respect; restore me that, and I will be your slave, soldier, comrade, — what you will."

"It is well," said Guatamozin, smiling at his earnestness.

"It is well. I can show you the way. Listen. The war, about which we have so often talked, thanks to the gods! is finally at hand. The public opinion has done its work. The whole nation would throw itself upon the strangers to-morrow, but for the king, who has become their shield; and he must be rescued; otherwise, we must educate the people to see in him an enemy to be removed. We cannot spare the time for that, and consequently have tried rescue in many ways, so far in vain. To-morrow we try again. The plot is arranged and cannot fail, except by the king's own default. Reserving explanation, I congratulate you. You are in time; the good fortune clings to you. To-morrow I will set your feet in the way you seek."

Hualpa gazed at him doubtfully. "To-morrow!" he said.

"Will you trust me so soon, and in a matter so high?"

"Yes."

"Will my part take me from you?"

"No."

"Then I thank you for the opportunity. On the *teocallis*, that dreadful morning, I lost my assurance; whether it will ever return is doubtful; but with you, at your side, I dare walk in any way."

"I understand you," the 'tzin replied. "Go now, and get ready. Unless the king fail us, we will have combat requiring all our strength. To the bath first, then to breakfast,

then to find more seemly garments, then to rest. I give you to midnight. Go."

CHAPTER II.

WHOM THE GODS DESTROY THEY FIRST MAKE MAD.

THE morning after Hualpa's return Xoli, the Chalcan, as was his wont, passed through his many rooms, making what may be called a domestic reconnoissance.

"What!" he cried, perplexed. "How is this? The house is empty! Where are all the lords?"

The slaves to whom he spoke shook their heads.

"Have there been none for breakfast?"

Again they shook their heads.

"Nor for *pulque*?"

"Not one this morning," they replied.

"Not even for a draught of *pulque*! Wonderful!" cried the broker, bewildered and amazed. Then he hurried to his steward, soliloquizing as he went, "Not one for breakfast; not even a draught of *pulque*! Holy gods, to what is the generation coming?"

The perplexity of the good man was not without cause. The day the king removed to the palace of Axaya', the royal hospitality went with him, and had thenceforth been administered there; but though no less princely and profuse than before, under the new *régime* it was overshadowed by the presence of the strangers, and for that reason became distasteful to the titled personages accustomed to its enjoyment. Consequently, owners of palaces in the city betook themselves to their own boards; others, especially non-residents, quartered with the Chalcan; as a further result, his house

assumed the style of a *meson*, with accommodations equal to those of the palace; such, at least, was the disloyal whisper, and I am sorry to say Xoli did not repudiate the impeachment as became a lover of the king. And such eating, drinking, playing, such conspiring and plotting, such political discussion, such transactions in brokerage went on daily and nightly under his roof as were never before known. Now all this was broken off. The silence was not more frightful than unprofitable.

"Steward, steward!" said Xoli to that functionary, distinguished by the surpassing whiteness of his apron. "What has befallen? Where are the patrons this morning?"

"Good master, the most your slave knows is, that last night a paba from the great temple passed through the chambers, after which, very shortly, every guest departed."

"A paba, a paba!" And Xoli was more than ever perplexed. "Heard you what he said?"

"Not a word."

"About what time did he come?"

"After midnight."

"And that is all you know?"

The steward bowed, and Xoli passed distractedly to the front door, only to find the portico as deserted as the chambers. Sight of the people beginning to collect in the square, however, brought him some relief, and he hailed the first passing acquaintance.

"A pleasant morning to you, neighbor."

"The same to you."

"Have you any news?"

"None, except I hear of a crowd of pabas in the city, come, as rumor says, from Tezcuco, Cholula, Iztapalapan, and other lake towns."

"When did they come?"

"In the night."

"Oho! There's something afoot." And Xoli wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"So there is," the neighbor replied. "The king goes to the temple to worship to-day."

A light broke in upon the Chalcan. "True, true; I had forgotten."

"Such is the talk," the citizen continued. "Will you be there? Everybody is going."

"Certainly," answered Xoli, dryly. "If I do not go, everybody will not be there. Look for me. The gods keep you!"

And with that, he re-entered his house, satisfied, but not altogether quieted; wandering restlessly from chamber to chamber, he asked himself continually, "Why so many pabas? And why do they come in the night? And what can have taken the lords away so silently, and at such a time, — without breakfast, — without even a draught of *pulque*?"

Invariably these interrogatories were followed by appeals to the great ebony jar of snuff; after sneezing, he would answer himself, "Pabas for worship, lords and soldiers for fighting; but pabas and soldiers together! Something is afoot. I will stay at home, and patronize myself. And yet — and yet — they might have told me something about it!"

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About ten o'clock — to count the time as Christians do — the king issued from the old palace, going in state to the *teocallis*, attended by a procession of courtiers, warriors, and pabas. He was borne in an open palanquin, shaded by the detached canopy, the whole presenting a spectacle of imperial splendor.

The movement was slow and stately, through masses of people on the pavements, under the gaze of other thousands

on the housetops ; but neither the banners, nor the music, nor the pomp, nor the king himself, though fully exposed to view, amused or deceived the people ; for at the right and left of the carriage walked Lugo, Alvarado, Avila, and Leon ; next, Olmedo, distinguishable from the native clergy by his shaven crown, and the cross he carried aloft on the shaft of a lance ; after him, concluding the procession, one hundred and fifty Spaniards, ready for battle. Priesthood, — king, — the strangers ! Clearer, closer, more inevitable, in the eyes of the people, arose the curse of Quetzal'.

When the monarch alighted at the foot of the first stairway of the temple, the multitude far and near knelt, and so remained until the pabas, delegated for the purpose, took him in their arms to carry him to the *azoteas*. Four times in the passage of the terraces the cortege came in view from the side toward the palace, climbing, as it were, to the Sun ; — dimmer the holy symbols, fainter the solemn music ; and each time the people knelt. The unfortunate going to worship was still the great king !

A detachment of Christians, under De Morla, preceded the procession as an advance-guard. Greatly were they surprised at what they found on the *azoteas*. Behind Tlalac, at the head of the last stairway, were a score or more of naked boys, swinging smoking censers ; yet farther toward the tower or sanctuary of Huitzil' was an assemblage of dancing priestesses, veiled, rather than dressed, in gauzy robes and scarfs ; from the steps to the door of the sanctuary a passage-way had been left ; elsewhere the sacred area was occupied by pabas, drawn up in ranks close and scrupulously ordered. Like their pontiff, each of them wore a gown of black ; but while his head was bare, theirs were covered by hoods. Thus arranged, — silent, motionless, more like phantoms than men, — they both shocked and disquieted the Spaniards. Indeed, so sensible were the latter

of the danger of their position, alone and unsupported in the face of an array so dismal and solid, that many of them fell to counting their beads and muttering *Aves*.

A savage dissonance greeted the king when he was set down on the *azoteas*, and simultaneously the pabas burst into a hymn, and from the urn over the tower a denser column of smoke arose, slow mounting, but ere long visible throughout the valley. Half bending, he received the blessing of Tlalac ; then the censer-bearers swept around him ; then, too, jangling silver bells and beating calabashes, the priestesses began to dance ; in the midst of the salutation, the arch-priest, moving backward, conducted him slowly toward the entrance of the sanctuary. At his side strode the four cavaliers. The escort of Christians remained outside ; yet the pabas knew the meaning of their presence, and their hymn deepened into a wail ; the great king had gone before his god — a prisoner !

The interior of the sanctuary was in ordinary condition ; the floor and the walls black with the blood of victims ; the air foul and sickening, despite the smoking censers and perfuming pans. The previous visit had prepared the cavaliers for these horrors ; nevertheless, a cry broke from them upon their entrance. In a chafing-dish before the altar four human hearts were slowly burning to coals !

"*Jesu Christo !*" exclaimed Alvarado. "Did not the pagans promise there should be no sacrifice ? Shrieve me never, if I toss not the contents of yon dish into the god's face !"

"Stay !" cried Olmedo, seizing his arm. "Stir not ! The business is mine. As thou lovest God, — the true God, — get thee to thy place !"

The father spoke firmly, and the captain, grinding his teeth with rage, submitted.

The pedestal of the idol was of stone, square in form, and

placed in the centre of the sanctuary. Several broad steps, fronting the doorway, — door there was not, — assisted devotees up to a platform, upon which stood a table curiously carved, and resting, as it were, under the eyes of the god. The chamber, bare of furniture, was crowded with pabas, kneeling and hooded and ranked, like their brethren outside. The cavaliers took post by the entrance, with Olmedo between them and the altar. Two priests, standing on the lower step, seemed waiting to assist in the ceremonial, although, at the time, apparently absorbed in prayer.

Tlalac led the monarch by the hand up the steps.

"O king," he said, "the ears of the god are open. He will hear you. And as to these companions in devotion," he pointed to the assistants as he spoke, "avoid them not: they are here to pray for you; if need be, to die for you. If they speak, be not surprised, but heed them well; what they say will concern you, and all you best love."

Thereupon the arch-infidel let go the royal hand, and descended the steps, moving backward; upon the floor he continued his movement. Suddenly he stopped, turned, and was face to face with Olmedo; all the passions of his savage nature blazed in his countenance; in reply, the Christian priest calmly held up the cross, and smiled, and was content.

Meantime the monarch kissed the altar, and, folding his hands upon his breast, was beginning to be abstracted in prayer, when he heard himself addressed.

"Look not this way, O king, nor stir; but listen."

The words, audible throughout the chamber, proceeded from the nearest devotee, — a tall man, well muffled in gown and hood. The monarch controlled himself, and listened, while the speaker continued in a slow, monotonous manner, designed to leave the cavaliers, whom he knew to be observing him, in doubt whether he was praying or intoning some part of the service of the occasion, —

"It is in the streets and in the palaces, and has gone forth into the provinces, that Montezuma is the willing guest of the strangers, and that from great love of them and their society, he will not come away, although his Empire is dissolving, and the religion of his fathers menaced by a new one; but know, O king, that the chiefs and caciques refuse to credit the evil spoken of you, and, believing you a prisoner, are resolved to restore you to freedom. Know further, O king, that this is the time chosen for the rescue. The way back to the throne is clear; you have only to go hence. What says the king? The nation awaits his answer."

"The throne is inseparable from me, — is where I am, under my feet always," answered the monarch, coldly.

"And there may it remain forever!" said the devotee, with fervor. "I only meant to pray you to come from amongst the strangers, and set it once more where it belongs, — amongst the loving hearts that gave it to you. Misunderstand me not, O king. Short time have we for words. The enemy is present. I offer you rescue and liberty."

"To offer me liberty is to deny that I am free. Who is he that proposes to give me what is mine alone to give? I am with Huitzil'. Who comes thus between me and the god?"

From the pabas in the chamber there was a loud murmur; but as the king and devotee retained their composure, and, like praying men, looked steadily at the face of Huitzil', the cavaliers remained unsuspecting observers of what was to them merely a sinful ceremony.

"I am the humblest, though not the least loving, of all your subjects," the devotee answered.

"The name?" said the king. "You ask me to go hence; whither and with whom?"

"Know me without speaking my name, O king. I am your brother's son."

Montezuma was visibly affected. Afterwhile he said, —

"Speak further. Consider what you have said true, — that I am a prisoner, that the strangers present are my guards, — what are the means of rescue? Speak, that I may judge of them. Conspiracy is abroad, and I do not choose to be blindly led from what is called my prison to a tomb."

To the reasonable demand the 'tzin calmly replied, "That you were coming to worship to-day, and the conditions upon which you had permission to come, I learned from the *teotuctli*. I saw the opportunity, and proposed to attempt your rescue. In Tlalac the gods have a faithful servant, and you, O king, a true lover. When you were received upon the *azoteas*, you did not fail to notice the *pabas*. Never before in any one temple have there been so many assembled. They are the instruments of the rescue."

"The instruments!" exclaimed the king, unable to repress his scorn.

The 'tzin interposed hastily. "Beware! Though what we say is not understood by the strangers, their faculties are sharp, and very little may awaken their suspicion and alarm; and if our offer be rejected, better for you, O king, that they go hence ignorant of their danger and our design. Yes, if your conjecture were true, if we did indeed propose to face the *teules* with barehanded *pabas*, your scorn would be justified; but know that the concourse on the *azoteas* is, in fact, of chiefs and caciques, whose gowns do but conceal their preparation for battle."

A pang contracted the monarch's face, and his hands closed harder upon his breast; possibly he shuddered at the necessity so thrust upon him of deciding between Malinche whom he feared, and the people whom he so loved.

"Yes," continued the 'tzin, "here are the chosen of the realm, — the noblest and the best, — each with his life in his hand, an offering to you. What need of further words?"

You have not forgotten the habits of war; you divine the object of the concourse of priests; you understand they are formed in ranks, that, upon a signal, they may throw themselves as one man upon the strangers. Here in the sanctuary are fifty more with *maquahuittls*; behind them a door has been constructed to pass you quickly to the *azoteas*; they will help me keep the door, and stay pursuit, while you descend to the street. And now, O king, said I not rightly? What have you to do more than go hence? Dread not for us. In the presence of Huitzil', and in defence of his altar, we will fight. If we fall in such glorious combat, he will waft our souls straightway to the Sun."

"My son," the king answered, after a pause, "if I were a prisoner, I would say you and the lords have done well; but, being free and pursuing my own policy, I reject the rescue. Go your ways in peace; leave me to my prayers. In a few days the strangers will depart; then, if not sooner, I will come back as you wish, and bring the old time with me, and make all the land happy."

The monarch ceased. He imagined the question answered and passed; but a murmur, almost a groan, recalled him from the effort to abstract himself. And then the *teotuctli*, exercising his privilege, went to him, and, laying a hand upon his arm, and pointing up to the god, said, —

"Hearken, O king! The strangers have already asked you to allow them to set up an altar here in the house of Huitzil', that they may worship their god after their manner. The request was sacrilege; listening to it, a sin; to grant it would make you accursed forever. Save yourself and the god, by going hence as the lords have besought. Be wise in time."

"I have decided," said the poor king, in a trembling voice, — "I have decided."

Tlalac looked to the 'tzin despairingly. The appeal to the

monarch's veneration for the god of his fathers had failed; what else remained? And the 'tzin for the first time looked to the king, saying sorrowfully, —

"Anahuac is the common mother, as Huitzil' is the father. The foot of the stranger is heavy on her breast, and she cries aloud, 'Where is Montezuma? Where is the Lord of the Earth? Where is the Child of the Sun?'"

And silence hung heavy in the sanctuary, and the waiting was painful. Again the 'tzin's voice, —

"A bride sits in the house waiting. Love puts its songs in her mouth, and kindles her smiles with the dazzle of stars. But the bridegroom lingers, and the evening and the morning bring him not. Ah, what is she, though ever so beautiful and sweet-singing, when he comes not, and may never come? O king, you are the lingering lord, and Anahuac the waiting bride; as you love her, come."

The fated king covered his face with his hands, as if, by shutting out the light, to find relief from pangs too acute for endurance. Minutes passed, — minutes of torture to him, and of breathless expectancy to all present, except the cavaliers, who, unconscious of peril, watched the scene with indifference, or rather the scornful curiosity natural to men professing a purer and diviner faith. At last his hand dropped, and he said with dignity, —

"Let this end now, — so I command. My explanation must be accepted. I cannot understand why, if you love me as you say, you should receive my word with so little credit; and if you can devote yourselves so entirely to me, why can you not believe me capable of equal devotion to myself? Hear me once more. I do not love the strangers. I hope yet to see them sacrificed to Huitzil'. They promise in a few days to leave the country, and I stay with them to hasten their departure, and, in the mean time, shield you, the nation, the temples, and the gods, from their power, which

is past finding out. Therefore, let no blow be struck at them, here or elsewhere, without my order. I am yet the king. Let me have peace. Peace be with you! I have spoken."

The 'tzin looked once to heaven, as if uttering a last appeal, or calling it to witness a vow, then he fell upon his knees; he, too, had despaired. And as if the feeling were contagious, the *teotuctli* knelt, and in the sanctuary there was stillness consistent with worship, save when some overburdened breast relieved itself by a sigh, a murmur, or a groan.

And history tells how Montezuma remained a little while at the altar, and went peacefully back to his residence with the strangers.

CHAPTER III.

THE PUBLIC OPINION MAKES WAY.

IN the *tianguetz*, one market-day, there was an immense crowd, yet trade was dull; indeed, comparatively nothing in that way was being done, although the display of commodities was rich and tempting.

"Holy gods, what is to become of us?" cried a Cholulan merchant.

"You! You are rich. Dulness of the market cannot hurt you. But I, — I am going to ruin."

The second speaker was a slave-dealer. Only the day before, he had, at great cost, driven into the city a large train of his "stock" from the wilderness beyond the Great River.

"Tell me, my friend," said a third party, addressing the slave-dealer, though in hearing of the whole company, "heard you ever of a slave owning a slave?"

"Not I."