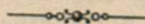


The 'tzin raised higher his princely head, and answered, smiling joyously, —

“Then, father, by whatever charm, or incantation, or virtue of prayer you possess, hasten the destiny, — hasten it, I conjure you. A tomb would be a palace with her, a palace would be a tomb without her.”

And with the smile still upon his face, and the resolution yet in his heart, he again, and for the last time, turned his back upon Mualox.



CHAPTER V.

THE CELLS OF QUETZAL' AGAIN.

“A victim! A victim!”

“Hi, hi!”

“Catch him!”

“Stone him!”

“Kill him!”

So cried a mob, at the time in furious motion up the beautiful street. Numbering hundreds already, it increased momentarily, and howled as only such a monster can. Scarce eighty yards in front ran its game, — Orteguilla, the page.

The boy was in desperate strait. His bonnet, secured by a braid, danced behind him; his short cloak, of purple velvet, a little faded, fluttered as if struggling to burst the throat-loop; his hands were clenched; his face pale with fear and labor. He ran with all his might, often looking back; and as his course was up the street, the old palace of Axaya' must have been the goal he sought, — a long, long way off for one unused to such exertion and so fiercely pressed. At every backward glance, he cried, in agony of

terror, “Help me, O Mother of Christ! By God's love, help me!” The enemy was gaining upon him.

The lad, as I think I have before remarked, had been detailed by Cortes to attend Montezuma, with whom, as he was handsome and witty, and had soon acquired the Aztecan tongue and uncommon skill at *totoloque*, he had become an accepted favorite; so that, while useful to the monarch as a servant, he was no less useful to the Christian as a detective. In the course of his service, he had been frequently intrusted with his royal master's signet, the very highest mark of confidence. Every day he executed errands in the *tian-guez*, and sometimes in even remoter quarters of the city. As a consequence he had come to be quite well known, and to this day nothing harmful or menacing had befallen him, although, as was not hard to discern, the people would have been better satisfied had Maxtla been charged with such duties.

On this occasion, — the day after the interview between the 'tzin and Mualox, — while executing some trifling commission in the market, he became conscious of a change in the demeanor of those whom he met; of courtesies, there were none; he was not once saluted; even the jewellers with whom he dealt viewed him coldly, and asked not a word about the king; yet, unaware of danger, he went to the portico of the Chalcan, and sat awhile, enjoying the shade and the fountain, and listening to the noisy commerce without.

Presently, he heard a din of conchs and attabals, the martial music of the Aztecs. Somewhat startled, and half hidden by the curtains, he looked out, and beheld, coming from the direction of the king's palace, a procession bearing ensigns and banners of all shapes, designs, and colors.

At the first sound of the music, the people, of whom, as

usual, there were great numbers in the *tianquez*, quitted their occupations, and ran to meet the spectacle, which, without halting, came swiftly down to the Chalcan's; so that there passed within a few feet of the adventurous page a procession rarely beautiful, — a procession of warriors marching in deep files, each one helmeted, and with a shield at his back, and a banner in his hand, — an army with banners.

At the head, apart from the others, strode a chief whom all eyes followed. Even Orteguilla was impressed with his appearance. He wore a tunic of very brilliant feather-work, the skirt of which fell almost to his knees; from the skirt to the ankles his lower limbs were bare; around the ankles, over the thongs of the sandals, were rings of furbished silver; on his left arm he carried a shield of shining metal, probably brass, its rim fringed with locks of flowing hair, and in the centre the device of an owl, snow-white, and wrought of the plumage of the bird; over his temples, fixed firmly in the golden head-band, there were wings of a parrot, green as emerald, and half spread. He exceeded his followers in stature, which appeared the greater by reason of the long Chinantlan spear in his right hand, used as a staff. To the whole was added an air severely grand; for, as he marched, he looked neither to the right nor left, — apparently too absorbed to notice the people, many of whom even knelt upon his approach. From the cries that saluted the chief, together with the descriptions he had often heard of him, Orteguilla recognized Guatamozin.

The procession wellnigh passed, and the young Spaniard was studying the devices on the ensigns, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder; turning quickly to the intruder, he saw the prince Io', whom he was in the habit of meeting daily in the audience-chamber of the king. The prince met his smile and pleasantry with a sombre face, and said, coldly, —

“You have been kind to the king, my father; he loves you; on your hand I see his signet; therefore I will serve you. Arise, and begone; stay not a moment. You were never nearer death than now.”

Orteguilla, scarce comprehending, would have questioned him, but the prince spoke on.

“The chiefs who inhabit here are in the procession. Had they found you, Huitzil' would have had a victim before sunset. Stay not; begone!”

While speaking, Io' moved to the curtained doorway from which he had just come. “Beware of the people in the square; trust not to the signet. My father is still the king; but the lords and pabas have given his power to another, — him whom you saw pass just now before the banners. In all Anahuac Guatamozin's word is the law, and that word is — War.” And with that he passed into the house.

The page was a soldier, not so much in strength as experience, and brave from habit; now, however, his heart stood still, and a deadly coldness came over him; his life was in peril. What was to be done?

The procession passed by, with the multitude in a fever of enthusiasm; then the lad ventured to leave the portico, and start for his quarters, to gain which he had first to traverse the side of the square he was on; that done, he would be in the beautiful street, going directly to the desired place. He strove to carry his ordinary air of confidence; but the quick step, pale face, and furtive glance would have been tell-tales to the shopkeepers and slaves whom he passed, if they had been the least observant. As it was, he had almost reached the street, and was felicitating himself, when he heard a yell behind him. He looked back, and beheld a party of warriors coming at full speed. Their cries and gestures left no room to doubt that he was their object. He started at once for life.

The noise drew everybody to the doors, and forthwith

everybody joined the chase. After passing several bridges, the leading pursuers were about seventy yards behind him, followed by a stream of supporters extending to the *tiangues* and beyond. So we have the scene with which the chapter opens.

The page's situation was indeed desperate. He had not yet reached the king's palace, on the other side of which, as he knew, lay a stretch of street frightful to think of in such a strait. The mob was coming rapidly. To add to his horror, in front appeared a body of men armed and marching toward him; at the sight, they halted; then they formed a line of interception. His steps flagged; fainter, but more agonizing, arose his prayer to Christ and the Mother. Into the recesses on either hand, and into the doors and windows, and up to the roofs, and down into the canals, he cast despairing glances; but chance there was not; capture was certain, and then the —SACRIFICE!

That moment he reached a temple of the ancient construction, — properly speaking, a *Cú*, — low, broad, massive, in architecture not unlike the Egyptian, and with steps along the whole front. He took no thought of its appearance, nor of what it might contain; he saw no place of refuge within; his terror had become a blind, unreasoning madness. To escape the sacrifice was his sole impulse; and I am not sure but that he would have regarded death in any form other than at the hands of the *pabas* as an escape. So he turned, and darted up the steps; before his foremost pursuer was at the bottom, he was at the top.

With a glance he swept the *azoteas*. Through the wide, doorless entrance of a turret, he saw an altar of stainless white marble, decorated profusely with flowers; imagining there might be *pabas* present, and possibly devotees, he ran around the holy place, and came to a flight of steps, down which he passed to a court-yard bounded on every side by a

colonnade. A narrow doorway at his right hand, full of darkness, offered him a hiding-place.

In calmer mood, I doubt if the young Spaniard could have been induced alone to try the interior of the *Cú*. He would at least have studied the building with reference to the cardinal points of direction; now, however, driven by the terrible fear, without thought or question, without precaution of any kind, taking no more note of distance than course, into the doorway, into the unknown, headlong he plunged. The darkness swallowed him instantly; yet he did not abate his speed, for behind him he heard — at least he fancied so — the swift feet of pursuers. Either the dear Mother of his prayers, or some ministering angel, had him in keeping during the blind flight; but at last he struck obliquely against a wall; in the effort to recover himself, he reeled against another; then he measured his length upon the floor, and remained exhausted and fainting.

CHAPTER VI.

LOST IN THE OLD CÚ.

THE page at last awoke from his stupor. With difficulty he recalled his wandering senses. He sat up, and was confronted everywhere by a darkness like that in sealed tombs. Could he be blind? He rubbed his eyes, and strained their vision; he saw nothing. Baffled in the appeal to that sense, he resorted to another; he felt of his head, arms, limbs, and was reassured: he not only lived, but, save a few bruises, was sound of body. Then he extended the examination; he felt of the floor, and, stretching his arms right and left, discovered a wall, which, like the

floor, was of masonry. The cold stone, responding to the touch, sent its chill along his sluggish veins; the close air made breathing hard; the silence, absolutely lifeless, — and in that respect so unlike what we call silence in the outer world, which, after all, is but the time chosen by small things, the entities of the dust and grass and winds, for their hymnal service, heard full-toned in heaven, if not by us, — the dead, stagnant, unresonant silence, such as haunts the depths of old mines and lingers in the sunken crypts of abandoned castles, awed and overwhelmed his soul.

Where was he? How came he there? With head drooping, and hands and arms resting limp upon the floor, weak in body and spirit, he sat a long time motionless, struggling to recall the past, which came slowly, enabling him to see the race again with all its incidents: the enemy in rear, the enemy in front; the temple stairs, with their offer of escape; the *azoteas*, the court, the dash into the doorway under the colonnade, — all came back slowly, I say, bringing a dread that he was lost, and that, in a frantic effort to avoid death in one form, he had run open-eyed to embrace it in another even more horrible.

The dread gave him strength. He arose to his feet, and stood awhile, straining his memory to recall the direction of the door which had admitted him to the passage. Could he find that door, he would wait a fitting time to slip from the temple; for which he would trust the Mother and watch. But now, what was done must needs be done quickly; for, though but an ill-timed fancy, he thought he felt a sensation of hunger, indicating that he had been a long time lying there; how long, of course, he knew not.

Memory served him illy, or rather not at all; so that nothing would do now but to feel his way out. O for a light, if only a spark from a gunner's match, or the moony gleam of a Cuban glow-worm!

As every faculty was now alert, he was conscious of the importance of the start; if that were in the wrong direction, every inch would be from the door, and, possibly, toward his grave. First, then, was he in a hall or a chamber? He hoped the former, for then there would be but two directions from which to choose; and if he took the wrong one, no matter; he had only to keep on until the fact was made clear by the trial, and then retrace his steps. "Thanks, O Holy Mother! In the darkness thou art with thy children no less than in the day!" And with the pious words, he crossed himself, forehead and breast, and set about the work.

To find if he were in a passage, — that was the first point. He laid his hand upon the wall again, and started in the course most likely, as he believed, to take him to the daylight, never before so beautiful to his mind.

The first step suggested a danger. There might be traps in the floor. He had heard the question often at the camp-fire, What is done with the bodies of the victims offered up in the heathen worship? Some said they were eaten; others, that there were vast receptacles for them in the ungodly temples, — miles and miles of catacombs, filled with myriads of bones of priests and victims. If he should step off into a pit devoted to such a use! His hair bristled at the thought. Carefully, slowly, therefore, his hands pressed against the rough wall, his steps short, one foot advanced to feel the way for the other, so he went, and such was the necessity.

Scarcely three steps on he found another dilemma. The wall suddenly fell away under his hand; he had come to the angle of a corner. He stopped to consider. Should he follow the wall in its new course? It occurred to him that the angle was made by a crossing of passages, that he was then in the square of their intersection; so the chances of finding the right outlet were three to one against him. He was more than ever confused. Hope went into low ebb.

Would he ever get out? Had he been missed in the old palace? If hostilities had broken out, as intimated by the prince Io', would his friends be permitted to look for him in the city? The king was his friend, but, alas! his power had been given to another. No, there was no help for him; he must stay there as in his tomb, and die of hunger and thirst, — die slowly, hour by hour, minute by minute. Already the fever of famine was in his blood, — next to the fact is the fancy. If his organism had begun to consume itself, how long could he last? Never were moments so precious to him. Each one carried off a fraction of the strength upon which his escape depended; each one must, therefore, be employed. No more loitering; action, action! In the darkness he looked to heaven, and prayed tearfully to the Mother.

The better to understand his situation, and what he did, it may be well enough to say here, that the steps by which he descended into the court-yard faced the west; and as, from the court, he took shelter in a door to his right, the passage must have run due north. When, upon recovery from the fainting-spell, he started to regain the door, he was still in the passage, but unhappily followed its continuation northward; every step, in that course, consequently, was so much into instead of out of the labyrinth. And now, to make the situation worse, he weakly clung to the wall, and at the corner turned to the right; after which his painful, toilsome progress was to the east, where the chances were sure to be complicated.

If the reader has ever tried to pass through a strange hall totally darkened, he can imagine the young Spaniard in motion. Each respiration, each movement, was doubly loud; the slide and shuffle of the feet, changing position, filled the rock-bound space with echoes, which, by a cooler head than his, might have been made tell the width and

height of the passage, and something of its depth. There were times when the sounds seemed startlingly like the noise of another person close by; then he would stop, lay hand on his dagger, the only weapon he had, and listen nervously, undetermined what to do.

In the course of the tedious movement, he came to narrow apertures at intervals in the wall, which he surmised to be doors of apartments. Before some of them he paused, thinking they might be occupied; but nothing came from them, or was heard within, but the hollow reverberations usual to empty chambers. The crackle of cement underfoot and the crevices in the wall filled with dust assured him that a long time had passed since a saving hand had been there; yet the evidences that the old pile had once been populous made its present desertion all the more impressive. Afterwhile he began to wish for the appearance of somebody, though an enemy. Yet farther on, when the awful silence and darkness fully kindled his imagination, and gave him for companionship the spirits of the pagans who had once — how far back, who could say? — made the cells animate with their prayers and orgies, the yearning for the company of anything living and susceptible of association became almost insupportable.

Several times, as he advanced, he came to cross passages. Of the distance made, he could form no idea. Once he descended a flight of steps, and at the bottom judged himself a story below the level of the court and street; reflecting, however, that he could not have clomb them on the way in without some knowledge of them, he again paused for consideration. The end of the passage was not reached: he could not say the door he sought was not there; he simply believed not; still he resolved to go back to the starting-point and begin anew.

He set out bravely, and proceeded with less caution than

in coming. Suddenly he stopped. He had neglected to count the doors and intersecting passages along the way; consequently he could not identify the starting-point when he reached it. Merciful God! *he was now indeed* LOST!

For a time he struggled against the conviction; but when the condition was actually realized, a paroxysm seized him. He raised his hands wildly, and shouted, *Ola! Ola!* The cry smote the walls near by until they rang again, and, flying down the passage, died lingeringly in the many chambers, leaving him so shaken by the discordance that he cowered nearly to the floor, as if, instead of human help, he had conjured a demon, and looked for its instant appearance. Summoning all his resolution, he again shouted the challenge, but with the same result; no reply except the mocking echoes, no help. He was in a tomb, buried alive! And at that moment, resulting doubtless from the fever of mind and body, he was conscious of the first decided sensation of thirst, accompanied by the thought of running water, cool, sweet, and limpid; as if to add to his torture, he saw then, not only that he was immured alive, but how and of what he was to die. Then also he saw why his enemies gave up the pursuit at the passage-door. Lost in the depths of the *Cû*, out of reach of help, groping here and there through the darkness, in hours condensing years of suffering, dead, finally, of hunger and thirst, — was he not as much a victim as if formally butchered by the *teotuctli*? And if, in the eyes of the heathen god, suffering made the sacrifice appreciable, when was there one more perfect?

"No, no," he cried, "I am a Christian, in care of the Christian's God. I am too young, too strong. I can walk; if need be, run; and there are hours and days before me. I will find the door. Courage, courage! And thou, dear, blessed Mother! if ever thou dost permit a

shrine in the chapel of this heathen house, all that which the Señor Hernan may apportion to me thou shalt have. Hear my vow, O sweet Mother, and help me!"

How many heroisms, attributed to duty, or courage, or some high passion, are in fact due to the utter hopelessness, the blindness past seeing, the fainting of the soul called despair! In that last motive what mighty energy! How it now nerved Orteguilla! Down the passage he went, and with alacrity. Not that he had a plan, or with the mind's eye even saw the way, — not at all. He went because in motion there was soothing to his very despair; in motion he could make himself believe there was still a hope; in motion he could expect each moment to hail the welcome door and the glory of the light.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE HOLY MOTHER HELPS HER CHILDREN.

I DOUBT not my reader is gentle, good, and tender-hearted, easily moved by tales of suffering, and nothing delighting in them; and that, with such benignant qualities of heart and such commendable virtues of taste, he will excuse me if I turn from following the young Spaniard, who has now come to be temporarily a hero of my story, and leave to the imagination the details of the long round of misery he endured in his wanderings through the interior of the old *Cû*.

Pathologists will admit they are never at fault or loss in the diagnosis of cases of hunger and thirst. Whether considered as disease or accident, their marks are unmistakable, and their symptoms before dissolution, like their

effects afterwards, invariable. Both may be simply described as consumption of the body by its own organs; precisely as if, to preserve life, one devoured his own flesh and drank his own blood. Not without reason, therefore, the suicide, what time he thinks of his crime, always, when possible, chooses some mode easier and more expeditious. The gradations to the end are, an intense desire for food and drink; a fever, accompanied by exquisite pain; then delirium; finally, death. It is in the second and third stages that the peculiarities show most strangely; then the mind cheats the body with visions of Tantalus. If the sufferer be thirst-stricken, he is permitted to see fountains and sparkling streams, and water in draughts and rivers; if he be starving, the same mocking fancy spreads Apician feasts before his eyes, and stimulates the intolerable misery by the sight and scent of all things delicious and appetizing. I have had personal experience of the anguish and delusions of which I speak. I know what they are. I pray the dear Mother, who has us all in holy care, to keep them far from my gentle friends.

* * * * *

A day and night in the temple, — another day and night, — morning of the third day, and we discover the page sitting upon the last of a flight of steps. No water, no food in all that time. He slept once; how long, he did not know. A stone floor does not conduce to rest even where there is sleep. All that time, too, the wearisome search for the door; groping along the wall, feeling the way ell by ell; always at fault and lost utterly. His condition can be understood almost without the aid of description. He sits on the step in a kind of stupor; his cries for help have become a dull, unmeaning moan; before him pass the fantasies of food and water; and could the light — the precious, beautiful light, so long sought, so earnestly prayed and struggled for — fall upon

him, we should have a sad picture of the gay youth who, in the market, sported his velvet cloak and feathered bonnet, and half disdainfully flashed the royal signet in the faces of the wondering merchants, — the picture of a despairing creature whom much misery was rapidly bringing down to death.

And of his thoughts, or, rather, the vagaries that had taken the place of thoughts, — ah, how well they can be divined! Awhile given to the far-off native land, and the loved ones there, — land and loved ones never again to be seen; then to the New World, full of all things strange; but mostly to his situation, lost so hopelessly, suffering so dreadfully. There were yet ideas of escape, reawakenings of the energy of despair, but less frequent every hour; indeed, he was becoming submissive to the fate. He prayed, also; but his prayers had more relation to the life to come than to this one. To die without Christian rite, to leave his bones in such unhallowed place! O, for one shrieking word from Father Bartolomé!

In the midst of his wretchedness, and of the sighs and sobs and tears which were its actual expression, suddenly the ceiling overhead and all the rugged sides of the passage above the line of the upper step of the stairway at the foot of which he was sitting were illumined by a faint red glow of light. He started to his feet. Could it be? Was it not a delusion? Were not his eyes deceiving him? In the darkness he had seen banquets, and the chambers thereof, and had heard the gurgle of pouring wine and water. Was not this a similar trick of the imagination? or had the Blessed Mother at last heard his supplications?

He looked steadily; the glow deepened. O wondrous charm of life! To be, after dying so nearly, brought back with such strength, so quickly, and by such a trifle!

While he looked, his doubts gave way to certainty. Light

there was, — essential, revealing, beautiful light. He clasped his hands, and the tears of despair became tears of joy; all the hopes of his being, which, in the dreary hours just passed, had gone out as stars go behind a spreading cloud, rose up whirring, like a flock of startled birds, and, filling all his heart, once more endued him with strength of mind and body. He passed his hands across his eyes: still the light remained. Surer than a fantasy, good as a miracle, there it was, growing brighter, and approaching, and that, too, by the very passage in which he was standing; whether borne by man or spirit, friend or foe, it would speedily reach the head of the steps, and then —

Out of the very certainty of aid at hand, a reaction of feeling came. A singular caution seized him. What if those bearing the light were enemies? Through the glow dimly lighting the part of the passage below the stairway, he looked eagerly for a place of concealment. Actually, though starving, the prospect of relief filled him with all the instincts of life renewed. A door caught his eye. He ran to the cell, and hid, but in position to see whomsoever might pass. He had no purpose: he would wait and see, — that was all.

The light approached slowly, — in his suspense, how slowly! Gradually the glow in the passage became a fair illumination. There were no sounds of feet, no forerunning echoes; the coming was noiseless as that of spirits. Out of the door, nevertheless, he thrust his head, in time to see the figure of a man on the upper step, bareheaded, barefooted, half wrapped in a cotton cloak, and carrying a broad wooden tray or waiter, covered with what seemed table-ware; the whole brought boldly into view by the glare of a lamp fastened, like a miner's, to his forehead.

The man was alone; with that observation, Orteguilla drew back, and waited, his hand upon his dagger. He

trembled with excitement. Here was an instrument of escape; what should he do? If he exposed himself suddenly, might not the stranger drop his burden, and run, and in the race extinguish the lamp? If he attacked, might he not have to kill? Yet the chance must not be lost. Life depended upon it, and it was, therefore, precious as life.

The man descended the steps carefully, and drew near the cell door. Orteguilla held his breath. The stepping of bare feet became distinct. A gleam of light, almost blinding, flashed through the doorway, and, narrow at first but rapidly widening, began to wheel across the floor. At length the cell filled with brightness; the stranger was passing the door, not a yard away.

The young Spaniard beheld an old man, half naked, and bearing a tray. That he was a servant was clear; that there was no danger to be apprehended from him was equally clear: he was too old. These were the observations of a glance. From the unshorn, unshaven head and face, the eyes of the lad dropped to the tray; at the same instant, the smell of meat, fresh from the coals, saluted him, mixed with the aroma of chocolate, still smoking, and sweeter to the starving fugitive than incense to a devotee. Another note: the servant was carrying a meal to somebody, his master or mistress. Still another note: the temple was inhabited, and the inhabitants were near by. The impulse to rush out and snatch the tray, and eat and drink, was almost irresistible. The urgency there is in a parched throat, and in a stomach three days empty, cannot be imagined. Yet he restrained himself.

The lamp, the food, the human being — the three things most desirable — had come, and were going, and the page still undetermined what to do. Instinct and hunger and thirst, and a dread of the darkness, and of the death so lately imminent, moved him to follow, and he obeyed. He had

cunning enough left to take off his boots. That done, he stepped into the passage, and, moving a few paces behind, put himself in the guidance of the servant, sustained by a hope that daylight and liberty were but a short way off.

For a hundred steps or more the man went his way, when he came to a great flat rock or flag cumbering the passage; there he stopped, and set down the tray; and taking the lamp from the fastening on his head, he knelt by the side of a trap, or doorway, in the floor. Orteguilla stopped at the same time, drawing, as a precaution, close to the left wall. Immediately he heard the tinkling of a bell, which he took to be a signal to some one in a chamber below. His eyes fixed hungrily upon the savory viands. He saw the slave fasten a rope to the tray, and begin to lower it through the trap; he heard the noise of the contact with the floor beneath: still he was unresolved. The man arose, lamp in hand, and without more ado, as if a familiar task were finished, started in return. And now the two must come within reach of each other; now the page must discover himself or be discovered. Should he remain? Was not retreat merely going back into the terrible labyrinth? He debated; and while he debated, chance came along and took control. The servant, relieved of his load, walked swiftly, trying, while in motion, to replace the lamp over his forehead; failing in that, he stopped; and as fortune ordered, stopped within two steps of the fugitive. A moment, — and the old man's eyes, dull as they were, became transfixed; then the lamp fell from his hand and rolled upon the floor, and with a scream, he darted forward in a flight which the object of his fear could not hope to outstrip. The lamp went out, and darkness dropped from the ceiling, and leaped from the walls, reclaiming everything.

Orteguilla stood overwhelmed by the misfortune. All the former horrors returned to plague him. He upbraided him-

self for irresolution. Why allow the man to escape? Why not seize, or, at least, speak to him? The chance had been sent, he could now see, by the Holy Mother; would she send another? If not, and he died there, who would be to blame but himself? He wrung his hands, and gave way to bitter tears.

Eventually the unintermitting craving of hunger aroused him by a lively suggestion. The smell of the meat and chocolate haunted him. What had become of them? Then he remembered the ringing of the bell, and their disappearance through the trap. There they were; and more, — somebody was there enjoying them! Why not have his share? Ay, though he fought for it! Should an infidel feed while a Christian starved? The thought lent him new strength. Such could not be God's will. Then, as often happens, indignation begat a certain shrewdness to discern points, and put them together. The temple was not vacant, as he at first feared. Indeed, its tenants were thereabouts. Neither was he alone; on the floor below, he had neighbors. "Ave Maria!" he cried, and crossed himself.

His neighbors, he thought, — advancing to another conclusion, — his neighbors, whoever they were, had communication with the world; otherwise, they would perish, as he was perishing. Moreover, the old servant was the medium of the communication, and would certainly come again. Courage, courage!

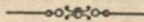
A sense of comfort, derived from the bare idea of neighborhood with something human, for the time at least, lulled him into forgetfulness of misery.

Upon his hands and knees, he went to the great stone, and to the edge of the trap.

"*Salvado! Soy salvado!* I am saved!" And with tears of joy he rapturously repeated the sweet salutation of the angels to the Virgin. *The space below was lighted!*

The light, as he discovered upon a second look, came through curtains stretched across a passage similar to the one he was in, and was faint, but enough to disclose two objects, the sight of which touched him with a fierce delight, — the tray on the floor, its contents untouched, and a rope ladder by which to descend.

He lost no time now. Placing his dagger between his teeth, he swung off, though with some trouble, and landed safely. At his feet, then, lay a repast to satisfy the daintiest appetite, — fish, white bread, chocolate, in silver cups and beaten into honeyed foam, and fruits from vine and tree. He clasped his hands and looked to Heaven, and, as became a pious Spaniard, restrained the maladies that afflicted him, while he said the old Paternoster, — dear, hallowed utterance taught him in childhood by the mother who, but for this godsend, would have lost him forever. Then he stooped to help himself, and while his hand was upon the bread the curtain parted, and he saw, amidst a flood of light pouring in over her head and shoulders, a girl, very young and very beautiful.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE PABA'S ANGEL.

IF I were writing a tale less true, or were at all accomplished in the charming art of the story-teller, which has come to be regarded as but little inferior to that of the poet, possibly I could have disguised the incidents of the preceding chapters so as to have checked anticipation. But many pages back the reader no doubt discovered that the *Cû* in which the page took shelter was that of *Quetzal'*; and now, while to believe I could, by any arrangement or conceit con-

sistent with truth, agreeably surprise a friend, I must admit that he is a dull witling who failed, at the parting of the curtain as above given, to recognize the child of the paba, — *Tecetl*, to whom, beyond peradventure, the memory of all who follow me to this point has often returned, in tender sympathy for the victim of an insanity so strange or — as the critic must decide — a philosophy so cruel.

Now, however, she glides again into the current of my story, one of those wingless waifs which we have all at one time or another seen, and which, if not from heaven, as their purity and beauty suggest, are, at least, ready to be wafted there.

I stop to say that, during the months past, as before, her life had gone sweetly, pleasantly, without ruffle or labor or care or sickness, or division, even, into hours and days and nights, — a flowing onward, like time, — an existence so serenely perfect as not to be a subject of consciousness. Her occupation was a round of gentle ministrations to the paba. Her experience was still limited to the chamber, its contents and expositions. If the philosophy of the venerable mystic — that ignorance of humanity is happiness — was correct, then was she happy as mortal can be, for as yet she had not seen a human being other than himself. Her pleasure was still to chatter and chirrup with the friendly birds; or to gather flowers and fashion them into wreaths and garlands to be offered at the altar of the god to whom she herself had been so relentlessly devoted; or to lie at rest upon the couch, and listen to the tinkling voices of the fountain, or join in their melody. And as I do not know why, in speaking of her life, I should be silent as to that part which is lost in slumber, particularly when the allusion will help me illustrate her matchless innocency of nature, I will say, further, that sleep came to her as to children, irregularly and in the midst of play, and waking was followed by no in-