

Orteguilla set the girl upon her feet, took the shield, and proceeded to buckle it upon his arm, while Alvarado rode into the fight again. A moment more, and he would have protected her with the good steel wall. Before he could complete the preparation, he heard a cry, quick, shrill, and sharp, that seemed to pierce his ear like a knife, — the cry by which one in battle announces himself death-struck, — the cry once heard, never forgotten. He raised the shield, — too late; she reeled and fell, dragging him half down.

"What ails thee now?" he cried, in Spanish, forgetting himself. "What ails thee? Hast thou looked at the sun again?"

He lifted her head upon his knee.

"Mother of Christ, she is slain!" he cried, in horror.

An arrow descending had gone through her neck to the heart. The blood gushed from her mouth. He took her in his arms, and carried her to the steps of the temple. As he laid her down, she tried to speak, but failed; then she opened her eyes wide: the light poured into them as into the windows of an empty house; the soul was gone; she was dead.

In so short a space habitant of three worlds, — when was there the like?

From the peace of the old chamber to the din of battle, from the din of battle to the calm of paradise, — brief time, short way!

From the sinless life to the sinful she had come; from the sinful life sinless she had gone; and in the going what fulness of the mercy of God!

I cannot say the Spaniard loved her; most likely his feeling was the simple affection we all have for things gentle and helpless, — a bird, a lamb, a child; now, however, he knelt over her with tears; and as he did so, he saw the rosary, and that all the beads but one were wet with her blood. He

took the string from the slender neck and laid her head upon the stone, and thought the unstained bead was for a prayer uncounted, — a prayer begun on earth and finished in heaven.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PUBLIC OPINION PROCLAIMS ITSELF. — BATTLE.

"HOW now, thou here yet? In God's name, what madness hast thou? Up, idiot! up, and fly, or in mercy I will slay thee here!"

As he spoke, Alvarado touched Orteguilla with the handle of his axe. The latter sprang up, alarmed.

"*Mira, Señor!* She is just dead. I could not leave her dying. I had a vow."

The cavalier looked at the dead girl; his heart softened.

"I give thee honor, lad, I give thee honor. Hadst thou left her living, shame would have been to thee forever. But waste not time in maudlin. Hell's spawn is loose." With raised visor, he stood in his stirrups. "See, far as eye can reach, the street is full! And hark to their yells! Here, mount behind me; we must go at speed."

The infidels, faced about, were coming back. The page gave them one glance, then caught the hand reached out to him, and placing his foot on the captain's swung himself behind. At a word, up the street, over the bridges, by the palaces and temples, the horsemen galloped. The detachment, at the head of which they had sallied from the palace, — gunners, arquebusiers, and cross-bowmen, — had been started in return some time before; upon overtaking them, Alvarado rode to a broad-shouldered fellow,

whose grizzly beard overflowed the chin-piece of his morion:—

"Ho, Mesa! the hounds we followed so merrily were only feigning; they have turned upon us. Do thou take the rear, with thy guns. We will to the front, and cut a path to the gate. Follow closely."

"Doubt not, captain. I know the trick. I caught it in Italy."

"*Cierto!* What thou knowest not about a gun is not worth the knowing," Alvarado said; then to the page, "Dismount, lad, and take place with these. What we have ahead may require free man and free horse. *Picaro!* If anybody is killed, thou hast permission to use his arms. What say ye, *compañeros míos!*" he cried, facing the detachment. "What say ye? Here I bring one whom we thought roasted and eaten by the cannibals in the temples. Either he hath escaped by miracle, or they are not judges of bones good to mess upon. He is without arms. Will ye take care of him? I leave him my shield. Will ye take care of that also?"

And Najerra, the hunchback, replied, "The shield we will take, Señor; but—"

"But what?"

"Señor, may a Christian lawfully take what the infidels have refused?"

And they looked at Ortegulla, and laughed roundly,—the bold, confident adventurers; in the midst of the jollity, however, down the street came a sound deeper than that of the guns,—a sound of abysmal depth, like thunder, but without its continuity,—a divided, throbbing sound, such as has been heard in the throat of a volcano. Alvarado threw up his visor.

"What now?" asked Serrano, first to speak.

"One, two, three,—I have it!" the captain replied.

"Count ye the strokes,—one, two, three. By the bones of the saints, the drum in the great temple! Forward, comrades! Our friends are in peril! If they are lost, so are we. Forward, in Christ's name!"

Afterwards they became familiar with the sound; but now, heard the first time in battle, every man of them was affected. They moved off rapidly, and there was no jesting,—none of the grim wit with which old soldiers sometimes cover the nervousness preceding the primary plunge into a doubtful fight.

"Close the files. Be ready!" shouted Serrano.

And ready they were,—matches lighted, steel-cords full drawn. Every drum-beat welded them a firmer unit.

The roar of the combat in progress around the palace had been all the time audible to the returning party; now they beheld the *teocallis* covered with infidels, and the street blockaded with them, while a cloud of smoke, slowly rising and slowly fading, bespoke the toils and braveries of the defence enacting under its dun shade. Suddenly, Alvarado stood in his stirrups,—

"*Ola!* what have we here?"

A body of Aztecs, in excellent order, armed with spears of unusual length, and with a front that swept the street from wall to wall, was marching swiftly to meet him.

"There is wood enough in those spears to build a ship," said a horseman.

A few steps on another spoke,—

"If I may be allowed, Señor, I suggest that Mesa be called up to play upon them awhile."

But Alvarado's spirit rose.

"No; there is an enemy fast coming behind us; turn thy ear in that direction, and thou mayest hear them already. We cannot wait. Battle-axe and horse first; if they fail, then the guns. Look to girth and buckle!"

Rode they then without halt or speech until the space between them and the coming line was not more than forty yards.

"Are ye ready?" asked Alvarado, closing his visor.

"Ready, Señor."

"Axes, then! Follow me. Forward! *Christo y Santiago!*"

At the last word, the riders loosed reins, and standing in their stirrups bent forward over the saddle-bow, as well to guard the horse as to discover points of attack; each poised his shield to protect his breast and left side, — the axe and right arm would take care of the right side; each took up the cry, *Christo y Santiago*; then, like pillars of iron on steeds of iron, they charged. From the infidels one answering yell, and down they sank, each upon his knee; and thereupon, the spears, planted on the ground, presented a front so bristling that leader less reckless than Alvarado would have stopped in mid-career. Forward, foremost in the charge, he drove, right upon the brazen points, a score or more of which rattled against his mail or that of his steed, and glanced harmlessly, or were dashed aside by the axe whirled from right to left with wonderful strength and skill. Something similar happened to each of his followers. A moment of confusion, — man and beast in furious action, clang of blows, splintering of wood, and battle-cries, — then two results: the Christians were repulsed, and that before the second infidel rank had been reached; and while they were in amongst the long spears, fencing and striking, clear above the medley of the *mêlée* they heard a shout, *Ala lala! Ala lala!* Alvarado looked that way; looked through the yellow shafts and brazen points. Brief time had he; yet he beheld and recognized the opposing leader. Behind the kneeling ranks he stood, without trappings, without a shield even; a *maquahuil*, edged with flint,

sharp as glass, hard as steel, was his only weapon; behind him appeared an irregular mass of probably half a thousand men, unarmed and almost naked. Even as the good captain looked, the horde sprang forward, and by pressing between the files of spearmen, or leaping panther-like over their shoulders, gained the front. There they rushed upon the horsemen, entangled amidst the spears, — to capture, not slay them; for, by the Aztec code of honor, the measure of a warrior's greatness was the number of prisoners he brought out of battle, a present to the gods, not the number of foemen he slew. The rush was like that of wolves upon a herd of deer. First to encounter a Christian was the chief. The exchange of blows was incredibly quick. The horse reared, plunged blindly, then rolled upon the ground; the flinty *maquahuil*, surer than the axe, had broken its leg. A cry, sharpened by mortal terror, — a Spanish cry for help, in the Mother's name. Christians and infidels looked that way, and from the latter burst a jubilant yell, —

"The 'tzin! The 'tzin!"

The successful leader stooped, and wrenched the shield from the fallen man; then he swung the *maquahuil* twice, and brought it down on the mailed head of the horse: the weapon broke in pieces; the steed lay still forever.

Now, Alvarado was not the man to let the cry of a comrade go unheeded.

"Turn, gentlemen! One of us is down; hear ye not the name of Christ and the Mother? To the rescue! Charge! *Christo y Santiago!*"

Forward the brave men spurred; the spears closed around them as before, while the unarmed foe, encouraged by the 'tzin's achievement, redoubled their efforts to drag them from their saddles. In disregard of blows, given fast as skilled hands could rise and fall, some flung themselves upon the

legs and necks of the horses, where they seemed to cling after the axe had spattered their brains or the hoofs crushed their bones; some caught the bridle-reins, and hung to them full weight; others struggled with the riders directly, hauling at them, leaping behind them, catching sword-arm and shield; and so did the peril finally grow that the Christians were forced to give up the rescue, the better to take care of themselves.

"God's curses upon the dogs!" shouted Alvarado, in fury at sight of the Spaniard dragged away. "Back, some of ye, who can, to Serrano! Bid him advance. Quick, or we, too, are lost!"

No need; Serrano was coming. To the very spears he advanced, and opened with cross-bow and arquebus; yet the infidels remained firm. Then the dullest of the Christians discerned the 'tzin's strategy, and knew well, if the line in front of them were not broken before the companies coming up the street closed upon their rear, they were indeed lost. So at the word, Mesa came, his guns charged to the muzzles. To avoid his own people, he sent one piece to the right of the centre of combat, and the other to the left, and trained both to obtain the deepest lines of cross-fire. The effect was indescribable; yet the lanes cloven through the kneeling ranks were instantly refilled.

The 'tzin became anxious.

"Look, Hualpa!" he said. "The companies should be up by this time. Can you see them?"

"The smoke is too great; I cannot see."

Some of his people attacking the horsemen began to retreat behind the spearmen. He caught up the axe of the Spaniard, and ran where the smoke was most blinding. In a moment he was at the front; clear, inspiring, joyous even, rose his cry. He rushed upon a bowman, caught him in his arms, and bore him off with all his armor on. A

hundred ready hands seized the unfortunate. Again the cry,—

"The 'tzin! The 'tzin!"

"Another victim for the gods!" he answered. "Hold fast, O my countrymen! Behind the strangers come the companies. Do what I say, and Anahuac shall live."

At his word, they arose; at his word again, they advanced, with levelled spears. Faster the missiles smote them; the horsemen raged; each Spaniard felt, unless that line were broken his doom was come. Alvarado fought, never thinking of defence. The bowmen and arquebusiers recoiled. Twice Mesa drew back his guns. Finally, Don Pedro outdid himself, and broke the fence of spears; his troop followed him; right and left they plunged, killing at every step. At places, the onset of the infidels slackened, halted; then the ranks began to break into small groups; at last, they dropped their arms, and fairly fled, bearing the 'tzin away in the mighty press for life. At their backs rode the vengeful horsemen, and behind the horsemen, over the dead and shrieking wretches, moved Serrano and Mesa.

And to the very gates of the palace the fight continued. A ship in its passage displaces a body of water; behind, however, follows an equal reflux: so with the Christians, except that the masses who closed in upon their rear outnumbered those they put to rout in front. Their rapid movement had the appearance of flight; on the other hand, that of the infidels had the appearance of pursuit. The sortie was not again repeated.

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Seven days the assault went on,—a week of fighting, intermitted only at night, under cover of which the Aztecs carried off their dead and wounded,—the former to the lake, the latter to the hospitals. Among the Christians some there were who had seen grand wars; some had even served under

the Great Captain: but, as they freely averred, never had they seen such courage, devotion, and endurance, such indifference to wounds and death, as here. At times, the struggle was hand to hand; then, standing upon their point of honor, the infidels perished by scores in vain attempts to take alive whom they might easily have slain; and this it was, — this fatal point of honor, — more than superiority in any respect, that made great battles so bloodless to the Spaniards. Still, nearly all of the latter were wounded, a few disabled, and seven killed outright. Upon the Tlascalans the losses chiefly fell; hundreds of them were killed; hundreds more lay wounded in the chambers of the palace.

The evening of the seventh day, the 'tzin, standing on the western verge of the *teocallis*, from which he had constantly directed the assault, saw coming the results which could alone console him for the awful sacrifice of his countrymen. The yells of the Tlascalans were not as defiant as formerly; the men of iron, the Christians, were seen to sink wearily down at their posts, and sleep, despite the tumult of the battle; the guns were more slowly and carefully served; and whereas, before Cortes' departure there had been three meals a day, now there were but two: the supply of provisions was failing. The ancient house, where constructed of wood, showed signs of demolition; fuel was becoming scant. Where the garrison obtained its supply of water was a marvel. He had not then heard of what Father Bartolomé afterwards celebrated as a miracle of Christ, — the accidental finding of a spring in the middle of the garden.

Then the assault was discontinued, and a blockade established. Another week, during which nothing entered the gates of the palace to sustain man or beast. Then there was but one meal a day, and the sentinels on the walls began to show the effect.

One day the main gate opened, and a woman and a man

came out. The 'tzin descended from his perch to meet them. At the foot of the steps they knelt to him, — the princess Tula and the prince Io'.

"See, O 'tzin," said the princess, "see the king's signet. We bring you a message from him. He has not wherewith to supply his table. Yesterday he was hungry. He bids you re-open the market, and send of the tributes of the provinces without stint, — all that is his kingly right."

"And if I fail?" asked Guatamozin.

"He said not what, for no one has ever failed his order."

And the 'tzin looked at Io'.

"What shall I do, O son of the king?"

In all the fighting, Io' had stayed in the palace with his father. Through the long days he had heard the voices of the battle calling to him. Many times he walked to the merlons of the *azoteas*, and saw the 'tzin on the temple, or listened to his familiar cry in the street. And where, — so ran his thought the while, — where is Hualpa? Happy fellow! What glory he must have won, — true warrior-glory to flourish in song forever! A heroic jealousy would creep upon him, and he would go back miserable to his chamber.

"One day more, O 'tzin, and all there is in the palace — king and stranger alike — is yours," Io' made answer.

"More I need not say."

"Then you go not back?"

"No," said Tula.

"No," said Io'. "I came out to fight. Anahuac is our mother. Let us save her, O 'tzin!"

And the 'tzin looked to the sun; his eyes withstood its piercing splendors awhile, then he said, calmly, —

"Go with the princess Tula where she chooses, Io'; then come back. The gods shall have one day more, though it be my last. Farewell."

They arose and went away. He returned to the *azoteas*.

Next day there was not one meal in the palace. Starvation had come. And now the final battle, or surrender! Morning passed; noon came; later, the sun began to go down the sky. In the streets stood the thousands, — on all the housetops, on the temple, they stood, — waiting and looking, now at the leaguered house, now at the 'tzin seated at the verge of the *teocallis*, also waiting.

Suddenly a procession appeared on the central turret of the palace, and in its midst, Montezuma.

"The king! the king!" burst from every throat; then upon the multitude fell a silence, which could not have been deeper if the earth had opened and swallowed the city.

The four heralds waved their silver wands; the white carpet was spread, and the canopy brought and set close by the eastern battlement of the turret; then the king came and stood in the shade before the people. At sight of him and his familiar royalty the old love came back to them, and they fell upon their knees. He spoke, asserting his privileges; he bade them home, and the army to its quarters. He promised that in a short time the strangers, whose guest he was, would leave the country; they were already preparing to depart, he said. How wicked the revolt would then be! How guilty the chiefs who had taken arms against his order! He spoke as one not doubtful of his position, but as king and priest, and was successful. Stunned, confused, uncertain as to duty, nigh broken-hearted, the fighting people and disciplined companies arose, and, like a conquered mob, turned to go away.

Down from his perch rushed the 'tzin. He put himself in the midst of the retiring warriors. He appealed to them in vain. The chiefs gathered around him, and knelt, and kissed his hands, and bathed his feet with their tears; they acknowledged his heroism, — they would die with him

but while the king lived, under the gods, he was master, and to disobey him was sacrilege.

Then the 'tzin saw, as if it were a god's decree, that Anahuac and Montezuma could not both live. ONE OR THE OTHER MUST DIE! And never so wise as in his patience, he submitted, and told them, —

"I will send food to the palace, and cease the war now, and until we have the voice of Huitzil' to determine what we shall do. Go, collect the companies, and put them in their quarters. This night we will to Tlalac; together, from his sacred lips, we will hear our fate, and our country's. Go now. At midnight come to the *teocallis*."

At midnight the sanctuary of Huitzil' was crowded; so was all the *azoteas*. Till the breaking of dawn the sacrifices continued. At last, the *teotuctli*, with a loud cry, ran and laid a heart in the fire before the idol; then turning to the spectators, he said, in a loud voice, —

"Let the war go on! So saith the mighty Huitzil'! Woe to him who refuses to hear!"

And the heart that attested the will was the heart of a Spaniard.