

by the edge of the chasm. Since daybreak fighting, and but a square gained! The water, never so placid, was the utmost limit of his going. He looked at the *manta*, now, like that of Avila, a mocking failure. He looked again, and a blasphemy beyond the absolution of Olmedo, I fear, broke the clenching of his jaws, — not for the machines, or the hopes they had raised, but the days their construction lost him. As he looked, through a rift in the cloud still rising along the battle's track, he saw the great temple; gay banners and gorgeous regalia, all the splendor of barbaric war, filled that view, and inspired him. To the cavaliers, close around and in waiting, he turned. The arrows smote his mail and theirs, yet he raised his visor: the face was calm, even smiling, for the will is a quality apart from mind and passion.

"We will go back, gentlemen," he said. "The city is on fire, — enough for one day. And hark ye, gentlemen. We have had enough of common blood. Let us go now and see of what the heathen gods are made."

His hearers were in the mood; they raised their shields and shouted, —

"To the temple! To the temple! For the love of Christ, to the temple!"

The cry sped down the column; and as the men caught its meaning they faced about of their own will. Wounds, weariness, and disappointments were forgotten; the rudest soldier became a zealot on the instant. *Al templo! Adelante, adelante!* rose like a new chorus, piercing the battle's monotone.

Cortes stood in his stirrups, and lo! the enemy, ranked close, like corn in the full ear, yet outreaching his vision, — plumed, bannered, brilliant, and terrible.

"Close and steady, swords of the Church! What ye see is but grass for the cutting. Yonder is the temple we seek. Follow me. *Adelante! Christo y Santiago!*"

So saying, he spurred in deep amongst the infidels.

CHAPTER IX.

OVER THE WALL, — INTO THE PALACE.

THE duty Hualpa had been charged with by the 'tzin was not difficult of performance; for the bridges of the capital, even those along the beautiful street, were much simpler structures than they appeared. When he had seen the balustrades and flooring and the great timbers that spanned the canal — the first one south of the old palace — torn from their places, and hauled off by the canoemen whom he had collected for the purpose, he returned to the temple to rejoin his master.

The assault upon the palace, when he reached that point, was more furious than at any previous time. The companies in the street were fighting with marvellous courage, while the missiles from the *azoteas* and westward terraces of the temple, and all the houses around, literally darkened the air. Amidst the clamor Hualpa caught at intervals the cry, — "The 'tzin, the 'tzin!" He listened, and all the loyal thousands seemed shouting, "The 'tzin, the 'tzin! *Alalala!*"

"Has anything befallen the 'tzin?" he asked of an acquaintance.

"Yes, thanks to Huitzil! He has broken one of Malinche's towers to pieces, and killed everybody in it."

Hualpa's love quickened suddenly. "Blessed be all the gods!" he cried, and, passing on, ascended to the *azoteas*. It may have been the battle, full of invocations, as battles always are; or it may have been that Io', in full enjoyment of his command, and so earnest in its performance, stimulated his ambition; or it may have been the influence of his pecu-

liar sorrow, the haunting memories of his love, and she, its star, separated from him by so little, — something made him restless and feverish. He talked with the caciques and priests; he clomb the turret, and watched the smoke go softly up, and hide itself in the deeper blue of the sky; with Io', he stood on the temple's verge, and witnessed the fight, at times using bow and sling; but nothing brought him relief. The opportunity he had so long desired was here calling him, and passing away. O for an hour of liberty to enact himself!

Unable to endure the excitement, he started in search of the 'tzin, knowing that, wherever he was, there was action, if not opportunity. At that moment he saw a cacique in the street plant a ladder against the wall of the palace not far from the main gate. The Tlascalans defending at that point tried to throw it off, but a shower of stones from the terrace of the temple deluged them, and they disappeared. Up went the cacique, up went his followers; they gained the crest; then the conflict passed from Hualpa's view.

"Io'," he said, "when the 'tzin comes back, tell him I have gone to make a way for him through yon wall."

"Have a care, comrade; have a care!"

Hualpa put an arm around him, and replied, smiling, "There is one over the wall now: if he fears not, shall I? And then," — he whispered low, — "Nenetzin will despise me if I come not soon."

A dawning fell upon Io', and from that time he knew the power of love.

"The gods go with you! Farewell."

Hualpa set about his purpose deliberately. Near the door of the presence-chamber there was a pile of trophies, shields, arms, and armor of men and horses; he made some selections from the heap, and carried them into the chamber.

When he came out, under his *panache* there was a steel cap, and under his mantle a cuirass; and to some dead Spaniard he was further beholden for a shield and battle-axe, — the latter so called, notwithstanding it had a head like a hammer, and a handle of steel pointed at the end and more than a yard in length.

Thus prepared, he went down into the street, and forced his way to the ladder planted near the gate; thence to the crest of the wall. A hundred arrows splintered against his shield, as he looked down upon the combat yet maintained by the brave cacique at the foot of the banquette.

The wall, as I think I have elsewhere said, was built of blocks of wrought stone, laid in cement only a little less hard than the stone, and consequently impervious to any battery against its base; at the same time, taken piece by piece from the top, its demolition was easy. Hualpa paused not; between the blocks he drove the pointed handle of his axe: a moment, and down fell the capping-stone; another followed, and another. Alike indifferent to the arrows of the garrison and the acclamations of the witnesses outside, looking neither here nor there, bending every faculty to the task, he did in a few minutes what seemed impossible: through a breach wide enough for the passage of a double sedan, foemen within and without the wall saw each other.

And there was hastening thither of detachments. Up the ladder and over the wall leaped the devoted infidels, nothing deterred by waiting swords and lances; striking or dying, they shouted, "The 'tzin, the 'tzin! *Al-a-lala!*" Live or die, they strove to cover the steadfast workman in the breach.

De Olid, at the time in charge of the palace, drew nigh, attracted by the increasing uproar.

"Ye fools! Out on ye! See ye not that the dog is hiding behind a Christian shield! Run, fly, bring a brace of

arquebusiers! Bring the reserve guns! Upon them, gentlemen! Swords and axes! The Mother for us all! *Christo, Christo!*"

And on foot, and in full armor, he pushed into the press; for, true to his training, he saw that the laborer behind the shining shield was more worthy instant notice than the hordes clambering over the wall.

Still the breach widened and deepened, and every rock that tumbled from its place contributed to the roadway forming on both sides of the wall to facilitate the attack. But now the guns were coming, and the arquebusiers made haste to plant their pieces, against which the good shield might not defend. Suddenly Hualpa stood up, his surcoat whitened with the dust of the mortar; without a word he descended to the street: the work was done, — *a way for the 'tzin was ready!* Scarcely had he touched the pavement before the guns opened; scarcely had the guns opened before the gorge was crowded with infidels rushing in. The palace, wanting the column absent with Cortes, was in danger. To the one point every Christian was withdrawn; even the sick and wounded staggered from the hospital to repel the attack. With all his gallantry, De Olid was beaten slowly back to the house. Cursed he the infidels, prayed he the return of Cortes, — still he went back. In the midst of his perplexity, a messenger came to tell him the enemy was breaking through the wall of the western front.

Hualpa had not only made another breach, — De Olid found him inside the enclosure, with a support already too strong for the Tlascalans.

The fight the good captain was called to witness was that of native against native; and, had the peril been less demanding, he would have enjoyed its novelties. An astonishing rattle of shields and spears, mixed with the clash of *maquahuils*, and a deafening outcry from the contending

tribes saluted him. Over the fighting lines the air was thick with stones and flying javelins and tossing banners. Quarter was not once asked. The grim combatants engaged each other to conquer or die. Hither and thither danced the priests, heedless of the danger, now cursing the laggards, now blessing the brave. And at times so shrilly blew the conchs that where they were nothing might be heard but the shriller medley of war-cry answering war-cry.

I doubt if the captain took other note of the fight than its menace to the palace; and if he prayed the return of Cortes a little more fervently than before, it was not from fear, or confusion of mind; for straightway he appealed to that arm which had been the last and saving resort of the Christians in many a former strait. Soon every disengaged gun was in position before the western door of the palace, loaded full of stones not larger than bird's-eggs, and trained, through the crowd, upon the breach, — and afterwards there were those who charged that the captain did not wait for all his Tlascalans to get out of the way. The guns opened with united voices; palace and paved earth trembled; and the smoke, returning upon the pieces, enveloped everything, inasmuch that the door of the house was not to be seen, nor was friend distinguishable from enemy.

If my reader has been in battle, he knows the effect of that fire too well to require description of me; he can hear the cries of the wounded, and see the ghastly wrecks on the pavement; he can see, too, the recoil of the Aztecs, and the rush of the Tlascalans, savagely eager to follow up their advantage. I leave the scene to his fancy, and choose rather to go with a warrior who, availing himself of the shrouding of the smoke, pushed through the throng behind the guns, and passed into the palace. His steps were hurried, and he looked neither to the right nor left; those whom he brushed out of the way had but time to see him pass, or to catch an

instant's view of a figure of motley appurtenances, — a Christian shield and battle-axe, a close cap of steel, and the gleam of a corselet under the colorless tatters of a surcoat of feather-work, — a figure impossible to identify as friend or foe. The reader, however, will recognize Hualpa coming out of the depths of the battle, but going — whither?

Once before, as may be remembered, he had been in the ancient house, — the time when, in a fit of shame and remorse, he had come to lay his lordship and castle at the king's feet; then he had entered by the eastern portal, and passed to the royal presence under guidance: this time his entry was from the west, and he was alone, and unacquainted with the vast interior, its halls, passages, courts, and chambers. In his first visit, moreover, peace had been the rule, and he could not go amiss for friends: now the palace was a leaguered citadel, and he could hardly go amiss for enemies.

Whatever his purpose, he held boldly on. It is possible he counted on the necessities of the battle requiring, as in fact they did, the presence of every serviceable man of the garrison. The few he met passed him in haste, and without question. He avoided the courts and occupied rooms. In the heart of the building he was sensible that the walls and very air vibrated to the roar without; and as the guns in the eastern front answered those in the western, he was advised momentarily of the direction in which he was proceeding, and that his friends still maintained the combat.

Directly three men passed clad in *nequen*; they were talking earnestly, and scarcely noticed him; after them came another, very old, and distinguished by a green *maztlal* over his white tunic, — one of the king's councillors.

"Stay, uncle," said Hualpa, "stay; I have a question to ask you."

The old man seemed startled.

"Who are you?" he inquired.

Hualpa did not appear to hear him, but asked, "Is not the princess Nenetzin with the king, her father?"

"Follow this hall to its end," replied the ancient, coldly. "She is there, but not with the king, her father. Who is he," he continued, after a pause, — "who is he that asks for the false princess?"

With a groan Hualpa passed on.

The hall ended in a small *patio*, which, at sight, declared itself a retreat for love. The walls were finished with a confusion of arabesque moulding, brilliantly and variously colored; the tracery around the open doors and windows was a marvel of the art; there were flowers on the floor, and in curious stands, urns, and swinging baskets; there were also delicate vines, and tropical trees dwarfed for the place, amongst which one full grown banana lifted its long branches of velvet green, and seemed to temper the light with dewy coolness; in the centre, there was a dead fountain. Indeed, the *patio* could have been but for the one purpose. Here, walled in from the cares of empire, where only the day was bold enough to come unbidden, the wise Axaya' and his less fortunate successors, Tecociatzin and Avizotl, forgot their state, and drank their cups of love, and were as other men.

All the beauty of the place, however, was lost on Hualpa. He saw only Nenetzin. She was sitting, at the time, in a low *sedilium*, her white garments faintly tinted by the scarlet stripes of a canopy extended high overhead, to protect her from the too ardent sun.

At the sound of his sandals, she started; and as he approached her, she arose in alarm. In sooth, his toilette was not that most affected for the wooing of women; he brought with him the odor of battle; and as he knelt but a little way from her, she saw there was blood upon his hands, and upon the axe and shield he laid beside him.

"Who are you?" she asked.

He took off the steel cap and shapeless *panache*, and looked up in her face.

"The lord Hualpa!" she exclaimed. Then a thought flashed upon her mind, and with terror in every feature, she cried, "Ah, you have taken the palace! And the *Tonatih*?" — she clasped her hands despairingly, — "dead? a captive? Where is he? I will save him. Take me to him."

At these words, the uncertain expression with which he had looked up to her upon baring his head changed to utter hopelessness. The hurried sentences tore his heart, like talons. For this he had come to her through so much peril! For this he was then braving death at her feet! His head sunk upon his breast, and he said, —

"The palace is not ours. The *Tonatih* yet lives, and is free."

With a sigh of relief, she resumed her seat, asking, —

"How came you here?"

He answered without raising his eyes, "The keepers of the palace are strong; they can stay the thousands, but they could not keep me out."

The face of the listener softened; she saw his love, and all his heroism, but said, coldly, —

"I have heard that wise men do such things only of necessity."

"I do not pretend to wisdom," he replied. "Had I been wise, I would not have loved you. Since our parting at Chapultepec, where I was so happy, I have thought you might be a prisoner here, and in my dreams I have heard you call me. And a little while ago, on the temple, I said to Io, 'Nenetzin will despise me, if I come not soon.' Tell me, O Nenetzin, that you are a prisoner, and I will take you away. Tell me that the stories told of you on the streets are not true, and —"

"What stories?" she asked.

"Alas, that it should be mine to tell them! And to you, Nenetzin, my beautiful!"

With a strong effort, he put down the feeling, and went on, —

"There be those who say that the good king, your father, is in this prison by your betrayal; they say, too, that you are the keeper of a shrine unknown to the gods of Anahuac; and yet more shamelessly, they say you abide here with the *Tonatih*, unmindful of honor, father, or gods known or unknown. Tell me, O Nenetzin, tell me, I pray you, that these are the tales of liars. If you cannot be mine, at least let me go hence with cause to think you in purity like the snow on the mountain-top. My heart is at your feet, — O crush me not utterly!"

Thereupon, she arose, with flushed face and flashing eyes, never so proud, never so womanly.

"Lord Hualpa, were you more or less to me than you are, I would make outcry, and have you sent to death. You cannot understand me; yet I will answer — because of the love which brought you here, I will answer."

She went into a chamber, and returning, held up the iron cross, more precious to her, I fear, as the gift of Alvarado than as the symbol of Christ.

"Look, lord Hualpa! This speaks to me of a religion better than that practised in the temples, and of a God mightier than all those known in Anahuac, — a God whom it is useless to resist, who may not be resisted, — the only God. There, in my chamber, is an altar to Him, upon which rests only this cross and such flowers as I can gather here in the morning; that is the shrine of which you have heard upon the street. I worship at no other. As to the king, I did come and tell the strangers of the attack he ordered. Lord Hualpa, to me, as is the destiny of every woman, the hour came to choose between love and father. I

could not else. What harm has come of my choice? Is not the king safe?"

At that moment, the noise which had all the time been heard in the *patio*, as of a battle up in the air, swelled trebly loud. The tendrils of the vines shook; the floor trembled.

"Hark!" she said, with an expression of dread. "Is he not safer than that other for whom I forsook him? Yet I thought to save them both; and saved they shall be!" she added, with a confident smile. "The God I worship can save them, and He will."

Then she became silent; and as he could tell by her face that she was struggling with a painful thought, he waited, listening intently. At length she spoke, this time with downcast eyes:—

"It would be very pleasant, O Hualpa, to have you go away thinking me pure as snow on the mountain-top. And if—if I am not,—then in this cross"—and she kissed the symbol tearfully—"there is safety for me. I know there is a love that can purify all things."

The sensibilities are not alike in all persons; but it is not true, as some philosophers think, that infidels, merely because they are such, are incapable of either great joy or great grief. The mother of El Chico reviled him because he took his last look at Granada through tears; not less poignant was the sorrow of Hualpa, looking at his love, by her own confession lost to him forever; his head drooped, and he settled down and fell forward upon his face, crushed by the breath of a woman,—he whom a hundred shields had not sufficed to stay!

For a time nothing was heard in the *patio* but the battle. Nenetzin stirred not; she was in the mood superinduced by pity and remorse, when the mind merges itself in the heart, and is lost in excess of feeling.

At length the spell was broken. A woman rushed in, clapping her hands joyfully, and crying,—

"Be glad, be glad, O Nenetzin! Malinche has come back, and we are saved!"

And more the Doña Marina would have said, but her eyes fell upon the fallen man, and she stopped.

Nenetzin told his story,—the story women never tire of hearing.

"If he stays here, he dies," said Marina, weeping.

"He shall not die. I will save him too," said Nenetzin, and she went to him, and took his hands, bloody as they were, and, by gentle words, woke him from his stupor. Mechanically he took his cap, shield, and mace, and followed her,—he knew not whither.

And she paused not until he was safely delivered to Maxtla, in the quarters occupied by the king.

—o—o—o—

CHAPTER X.

THE WAY THROUGH THE WALL.

AL TEMPLO, *al templo!* to the temple!" shouted Cortes, as he charged the close ranks of the enemy. "*Al templo!*" answered the cavaliers, plunging forward in chivalric rivalry.

And from the column behind them rolled the hoarse echo, with the words of command superadded,—

"*Al templo! Adelante, adelante!*—forward!"

Not a Spaniard there but felt the inspiration of the cry; felt himself a soldier of Christ, marching to a battle of the gods, the true against the false; yet the way was hard, harder than ever; so much so, indeed, that the noon came

before Cortes at last spurred into the space in front of the old palace.

The first object to claim attention there was the temple against which the bigotry of the Christians had been so suddenly and shrewdly directed, — shrewdly, because in the glory of its conquest the failure of the *mantas* was certain to be forgotten. In such intervals of the fight as he could snatch, the leader measured the pile with a view to the attack. Standing in his stirrups, he traced out the path to its summit, beginning at the gate of the *coatapanli*, then up the broad stairs, and around the four terraces to the *azotecas*, — a distance of nearly a mile, the whole crowded with warriors, whose splendid regalia published them lords and men of note, in arms to die, if need be, for glory and the gods. As he looked, Sandoval rode to him.

“Turn thine eyes hither, Señor, — to the palace, the palace!”

Cortes dropped back into his saddle, and glanced that way.

“By the Mother of Christ, they have broken through the wall!”

He checked his horse.

“Escobar,” he said, calmly, through his half-raised visor, “take thou one hundred men, the last in the column, and attack the temple. Hearest thou? Kill all thou findest! Nay, I recollect it is a people with two heads, of which I have but one. Bring me the other, if thou canst find him. I mean the butcher they call the high priest. And more, Señor Alonzo: when thou hast taken the idolatrous mountain, burn the towers, and fear not to tumble the bloody gods into the square. Thy battle will be glorious. On thy side God, the Son, and Mother! Thou canst not fail.”

“And thou, Olea,” he added to another, “get thee down the street, and hasten Mesa and his supports. Tell

them the infidels are at the door of the palace, and that the captain Christobal hath scarce room to lift his axe. And further, — as speed is everything now, — bid Ordas out with the gun, and fire the *manta*, which hath done its work. Spare not thy horse!”

With the last word, Cortes shut his visor, and, griping his axe, spurred to the front, shouting, —

“To the palace, gentlemen! for love of Christ and good comrades. Rescue, rescue!”

Down the column sped the word, — then forward resistlessly, through the embattled gate, into the enclosure; and none too soon, for, as Cortes had said, though at the time witless of the truth, the Aztecs were threatening the very doors of the palace.

Escobar, elated with the task assigned him, arranged his men, and made ready for the assault. The infidels beheld his preparation with astonishment. All eyes, theretofore bent upon the conflict in the palace yard, now fixed upon the little band so boldly proposing to scale the sacred heights. A cry came up the street: “The ’tzin, the ’tzin!” then the ’tzin himself came; and as he passed through the gate of the *coatapanli*, the thousands recognized him, and breathed freely. “The ’tzin has come! The gods are safe!” so they cheered each other.

The good captain led his men to the gate of the *coatapanli*. With difficulty he gained entrance. As if to madden the infidels, already fired by a zeal as great as his own, the dismal thunder of the great drum of Huitzil’ rolled down from the temple, overwhelming all other sounds. Slowly he penetrated the enclosure; closely his command followed him; yet not all of them; before he reached the stairway he was fighting for, the hundred were but ninety.

Twenty minutes, — thirty: at last Escobar set his foot on the first step of the ascent. There he stopped; a shield of

iron clashed against his; his helmet rang with a deadly blow. When he saw light again, he was outside the sacred wall, borne away by his retreating countrymen, of whom not one re-entered the palace unwounded.

Cortes, meantime, with sword and axe, cleared the palace of assailants; and, as if the day's work were done, he prepared to dismount. Don Christobal, holding his stirrup, said, —

"*Cierto, Señor*, thou art welcome. I do indeed kiss thy hand. I thank thee."

"Not so, captain, not so. By my conscience, we are the debtors! I will hear nothing else. It is true we came not a moment too soon," — he glanced at the breach in the wall, and shook his head gravely, — "but — I speak what may not be gainsaid — thou hast saved the palace."

More he would have said in the same strain, but that a sentinel on the roof cried out, —

"*Ola, Señores!*"

"What wouldst thou?" asked Cortes, quickly.

"I am an old soldier, Señor Hernan, —"

"To the purpose, varlet, to the purpose!"

"—whom much experience hath taught not to express himself hastily; therefore, if thy orders were well done, Señor, whither would our comrades over the way be going?"

"To the top of the temple," said Cortes, gravely, while all around him laughed.

"Then I may say safely, Señor, that they will go round the world before they arrive there. They come this way fast as men can who have to —"

A long, exulting cry from the infidels cut the speech short; and the party, turning to the temple, saw it alive with waving sashes and tossing shields.

"To horse, gentlemen!" said Cortes, quietly, but with

flashing eyes. "Satan hath ruled yon pile long enough. I will now tilt with him. Let the trumpets be sounded! Muster the army! God's service hath become our necessity. Haste ye!"

Out of the gate, opened to receive Escobar and his bruised followers, marched three hundred chosen Christians, with as many thousand Tlascalans. In their midst went Olmedo, under his gown a suit of armor, in his hand a lance, and on that a brazen crucifix. Other ensign there was not. Cortes and his cavalry led the column, which was of all the arms except artillery; that remained with De Olid to take care of the palace.

And never was precaution more timely; for hardly had the gate closed upon the outgoers, before the good captain sent his garrison to the walls, once more menaced by the infidels.

The preparations of Escobar, as we have seen, had been under Io's view; so the prince, divining the object, drew after him a strong support, and hastened to keep the advantage of the stairways. On one of the eastern terraces he met the 'tzin ascending. There was hurried salutation between them.

"Look you for Hualpa?" asked Io', observing the 'tzin search the company inquiringly.

"Yes. He should be here."

The boy's face and voice fell.

"I would he were, good 'tzin. He left me on the *azoteas*. With the look of one who had devoted himself, he embraced me. His last words were, 'Tell the 'tzin I have gone to make for him a way into the palace.' And thereupon Io' told the story through, simply and sorrowfully; at the end the listener kissed him, and said, —

"I will find the way he made for me."

There was a silence, very brief, however, for a burst of

yells from below warned them of the fight begun. Then the tzin, recalled to himself, gave orders.

"Care of the gods is mine now. Leave me these friends, and go, and with the people at command, bring stones and timbers, all you find, and heap them ready for use on the terraces at the head of each stairway. Go quickly, so may you earn the double blessing of Huitzil' and Tezca'!"

In a little time the tzin stood upon the last step of the lowest stairway; nor did he lift hand until Escobar, half spent with exertion, confronted him shield to shield. The result has been told.

And then were shown the qualities which, as a fighting man, raised the tzin above rivalry amongst his people. The axe in his hand was but another form of the *maquahuil*; and that his shield was of the Christian style mattered not,—he was its perfect master. With a joyous cry, he rushed upon the arms outstretched to save the fallen captain; played his shield like a shifting mirror; rose and fell the axe, now in feint, now in foil, but always in circles swifter than eye could follow; striking a victim but once, he amazed and dazzled the Spaniards, as in the Moorish wars El Zagel, the Moor, amazed and dazzled their fathers. Nor did he want support. His followers, inspired by his example, struggled to keep pace with him. On the flanks poured the masses of his countrymen, in blind fury, content if, with their naked hands, they could clutch the weapons that slew them. Such valor was not to be resisted by the lessening band of Christians, who yielded, at first inch by inch, then step by step; at length, in disorder, almost in rout, they were driven from the sacred enclosure.

The victory was decided; the temple was safe, and the insult punished! The air shook with the deep music of the drum; in the streets the companies yelled as if drunk; the temple was beautiful with waving sashes and tossing shields

and banners; and on the *azoteas* of the great pile, in presence of the people, the priests appeared and danced their dance of triumph,—a horrible saturnalia. The fight had been a trial of power between the gods Christian and Aztec, and lo, Huitzil' was master!

The tzin felt the sweetness of the victory, and his breast filled with heroic impulses. Standing in the gate of the *coatapanlli*, he saw the breach Hualpa had made in the wall enclosing the palace, noticed that the ascent to the base of the gorge was easy, and the gorge itself now wide enough to admit of the passage of several men side by side. The temptation was strong, the possibilities alluring, and he fixed his purpose.

"It is the way he made for me, and I will tread it. Help me, O God of my fathers!"

So he resolved, so he prayed.

And forthwith messengers ran to the chiefs on the four sides of the palace with orders for them to pass the wall. From the dead Spaniards the armor was stript, and arms taken; and the robbers, fourteen caciques, men notable for skill and courage, stood up under cuirass, and helm or morion, and with pike and battle-axe of Christian manufacture, covered, nevertheless, with pagan trappings.

Still standing in the gateway, the tzin saw the companies in the street begin the assault. Swelled their war-cries as never before, for the inspiration of the victory was upon them also; rattled the tambours, brayed the conchs, danced the priests, and from the temple and housetops poured the missiles in a darkening cloud. Within his view a hundred ladders were planted, and crowded with eager climbers. At the gorge of the breach men struggled with each other to make the passage first. He called a messenger:—

"Take this ring to the prince Io'," he said. "Tell him the house of the gods is once more in his care." Then to

his chosen caciques he turned, saying, — "Follow me, O countrymen!"

With that, he walked swiftly to the breach; calm, collected, watchful, silent, he walked. His companions shouted his war-cry. From mouth to mouth it passed, thrilling and inspiring, —

"Up, up, Tlateloco! Up, up, over the wall! The 'tzin is with us!"

Meantime the besieged were not idle; over the crest of the parapet the Tlascalans fought successfully; through the ports and embrasures the Christians kept up their fire of guns great and small. Nevertheless, to the breach the 'tzin went without stopping.

"Clear the way!" he cried.

The guns within made answer; a shower of blood drenched him from head to foot. Except of the dead, the way was clear! A rush through the slippery gorge, — a shout, — and he was inside the enclosure, backed by his caciques. And as he went in, Cortes passed out, marching to storm the temple.

No doubt or hesitation on the 'tzin's part now; no looking about, uncertain what to do, while bowmen and gunners made a mark of him. He spoke to his supporters, and with them faced to the right, and cleared the banquettes of Tlascalans. Over the wall, thus cleared, and through the breach leaped his people; and as they came, the iron shields covered them, and they multiplied rapidly.

About eight hundred Spaniards, chiefly Narvaez' men, defended the palace. They fought, but not with the spirit of the veterans, and were pushed slowly backward. As they retired, wider grew the space of undefended wall; like waves over a ship's side, in poured the companies; the Aztecs fell by scores, yet they increased by hundreds.

Again the sick and wounded staggered from their quarters;

again De Olid brought his reserves into action; again the volleys shook the palace, and wrapped it in curtains of smoke, whiter and softer than bridal veils: still the infidels continued to master the walls and the space within. By and by the gates fell into their hands; and then, indeed, all seemed lost to the Christians.

The stout heart of the good Captain Christobal was well tempered for the trial. To the windows and lesser entrances of the buildings he sent guards, stationing them inside; then, in front of the four great doors, he drew his men back, and fought on, so that the palace was literally girt with a belt of battle.

An hour like that I write of seems a long time to a combatant; on this occasion, however, one there was, not a combatant, to whom, possibly, the time seemed much longer. In his darkened chamber sat the king, neither speaking nor spoken to, though surrounded by his court. He must have heard the cries of his people; knowing them so near, in fancy, at least, he must have seen their heroism and slaughter. Had he no thought in sympathy with them? no prayer for their success? no hope for himself even? Who may answer? — so many there are dead in the midst of life.

At length the 'tzin became weary of the mode of attack, which, after all, was but a series of hand-to-hand combats along lengthened lines, that might last till night, or, indeed, as long as there were men to fill the places of the fallen. To the companies crowding the conquered space before the eastern front of the palace, he passed an order: a simultaneous forward movement from the rear took place; the intervals between the ranks were closed up; a moment of fusion, — a pressure; then a welding together of the whole mass followed. After that words may not convey the scene. The unfortunates who happened to be engaged were first pushed, then driven, and finally shot forward, like dead

weights. Useless all skill, useless strength; the opposite lines met; blood flew as from a hundred fountains; men, impaled on opposing weapons, died, nailed together face to face. As the only chance for life, very many fell down, and were smothered.

The defenders broke in an instant. Back, back they went,—back to the guns, which, for a time, served as breakwaters to the wave; then past the guns, almost to the wall, forced there by the awful impetus of the rush.

The truly great leaders of men are those who, invoking storms, stand out and brave them when they come. Such was Guatamozin. The surge I have so faintly described caught him foremost in the fighting line of his people, and flung him upon his antagonists. With his shield he broke the force of the collision; the cuirass saved him from their points; close wedged amongst them, they could not strike him. Tossed like so much drift, backward they went, forward he. Numbers of them fell and disappeared. When, at last, the impetus of the movement was nigh spent, he found himself close by the principal door of the palace. But one man stood before him,—a warrior with *maquahuil* lifted to strike. The 'tzin raised his shield, and caught the blow; then, upon his knee, he looked up, and saw the face, and heard the exulting yell, of — Iztlil', the Tezcucan! Whirled the weapon again. The noble Aztec summoned all his spirit; death glared upon him through the burning eyes of his hated rival; up, clear to vision, rose all dearest things,—gods, country, glory, love. Suddenly the raised arm fell; down dropped the *maquahuil*; and upon the shield down dropped Iztlil' himself, carrying the 'tzin with him.

The Tezcucan seemed dead.

A friendly hand helped the 'tzin to his feet. He was conscious, as he arose, of a strange calm in the air; the clamor and furious stir of the combat were dying away; he stood

in the midst of enemies, but they were still, and did not even look at him. A shield not his own covered his breast; he turned, and lo! the face of Hualpa!

"Whence came you?" asked the 'tzin.

"From the palace."

"Thanks—"

"Not now, not now," said Hualpa, in a low voice. "The gods who permitted me to save you, O 'tzin, have not been able to save themselves. Look! to the temple!"

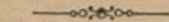
His eyes followed Hualpa's directing finger, and the same astonishment that held his enemies motionless around him, the same horror that, in the full tide of successful battle, had so instantly stayed his countrymen, seized him also. He stood transfixed,—a man turned to stone!

The towers of the temple were in flames; and, yet more awful, the image of Huitzil', rolled to the verge of the *azoteas*, was tottering to its fall! A thousand hands were held up instinctively,—a groan,—a long cry,—and down the stairway and terraces, grinding and crashing, thundered the idol. Tezca' followed after, and the sacrificial stone; then the religion of the Aztecs was ended forever.

As if to assure the great fact, when next the spectators raised their eyes to the *azoteas*, lo! Olmedo and his crucifix! The faithful servant of Christ had performed his mission; he had burst the last gate, and gained the last mountain in the way; and now, with bared head, and face radiant with sublime emotion, he raised the symbol of salvation high up in view of all the tribes, and, in the name of his Master, and for his Master's Church, forever, by that simple ceremony, took possession of the New World.

And marvellous to relate further, the tribes, awed if not conquered, bowed their heads in peace. Even the companies in the palace-yard marched out over their dead, and gave up the victory so nearly won. Guatamozin and Hualpa

followed them, but with their faces to the foe. Needless the defiance: as they went, not a word was spoken, not a hand lifted. For the time, all was peace.



CHAPTER XI.

BATTLE IN THE AIR.

AS Cortes, at the head of his column, drew near the gate of the *coatapantli*, he saw the inclosure and the terraces on that side of the temple occupied by warriors, and the edge of the *azoteas* above lined with *pabas*, chanting in dismal harmony with the deep music of the great drum. Ensigns and symbols of unknown meaning, and rich regalia pranked the dull gray faces of the pile with holiday splendors. Little note, however, gave he to the beautiful effect.

"God helping us," he said to his cavaliers, — and with such gravity that they knew him unusually impressed with the task before them, — "God helping us, gentlemen, we will do a deed now that hath no likeness in the wars of men. Commend we ourselves each, and all who follow us, to the holy Christ, who cometh yonder on the staff of Father Olmedo."

So saying, he reversed his sword, and carried the crossed handle softly and reverently to the bars of his helmet, and all who heard him did likewise.

In front of the gate, under a shower of arrows, he stopped to adjust the armlets of his shield, for his hand was yet sore; then, settling in his saddle again, he spurred his horse through the entrance into the enclosure.

Right into the mass waiting to receive him he broke, and whom his sword left untouched the trained steed bore down. After him charged the choicest spirits of the con-

quest, animated with generous rivalry and the sublime idea that this time the fight was for God and His Church. And so, with every thrust of sword and every plunge of horse, out rang their cries.

"On, on, for love of Christ! Death to the infidels! Down with the false gods!"

On the side of the infidels there was no yielding, for the ground was holy ground to them. When their frail weapons were broken, they flung themselves empty-handed upon the nearest rider, or under the horses, and, dying even, tried to hold fast locked the hoofs that beat them to death. In their aid, the pavement became heaped with bodies, and so slippery with blood that a number of the horses fell down; and, in such cases, if the rescue came not quickly they and their riders were lost. Indeed, so much did this peril increase that Cortes, when his footmen were fairly in the yard, dismounted the horsemen the better to wage the fight.

At length resistance ceased: the inclosure was won. The marble floor bore awful evidences of the prowess of one party and the desperation of the other.

The Christians took up their wounded, and carried them tenderly to the shade, for the sun blazed down from the cloudless sky.

Around Cortes gathered the captains, resting themselves.

"The Tlascalans must hold the yard," he said, well pleased, and with raised visor. "That charge I commit to thee, Lugo."

Lugo bared his face, and said, sullenly, —

"Thou knowest, Señor, that I am accustomed to obey thee questionless; but this liketh me not. I —"

"By the love of Christ —"

"Even so, Señor," said Lugo, interrupting him in turn. "I feel bidden by love of Christ to go up, and help cast down the accursed idols."