

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."

The face of the crafty leader changed quickly.

"Ola, father!" he said. "Here is one malcontent, because I would have him stay and take care of us while we climb the stairways. What say'st thou?"

Olmedo answered solemnly, "What ye have in mind now, Señores, — the disgrace of the false gods who abide in this temple of abominations, — is what hath led us here. And now that the end is at hand, the least circumstance is to be noted; for the wise hear God as often in the small voice as in the thunder. Doubt not, doubt not; the prompting of the good captain is from Him. Be this lower duty to the unassoilied Tlascalans: go we as the love of Christ calleth. Verily, he who doeth this work well, though his sins be many as the sands of the sea, yet shall he become as purity itself, and be blessed forever. Take thy measures quickly, Señor, and let us be gone."

"Amen, amen!" said the cavaliers; and Cortes, crossing himself, hastened in person to make dispositions for the further emprise.

The Tlascalans he set to hold the *coatapanlli* from attack without. To the arquebusiers and cross-bowmen he gave orders to cover him with their fire while he climbed the stairways and was driving the enemy around the terraces. When the *azoteas* was gained, they were to ascend, and take part in the crowning struggle for the sanctuaries. The cavalry, already dismounted, were to go with him in the assault. To the latter, upon rejoining them, he said, —

"In my judgment, gentlemen, the fighting we go to now is of the kind wherein the sword is better than axe or lance; therefore, put away all else."

He took place at the head, with Alvarado and Sandoval next him in the column.

"And thou, father?" he asked.

Olmedo raised his crucifix, and, looking up, said, —

"*Hagase tu voluntad en la tierra asi como en el cielo.*"
Then to Cortes, "I will follow these, my children."

"Forward, then! Christ with us, and all the saints!" cried Cortes. "*Adelante! Christo y Santiago!*"

In a moment they were swiftly climbing the lower stairway of the temple.

Meantime Io', from the *azoteas*, kept watch on the combats below. Two figures charmed his gaze, — that of Cortes and that of the 'tzin, — both, in their separate ways, moving forward slowly but certainly. Before he thought of descending, the Christians were in the precinct of the *coatapanlli*, and after them streamed the long line of Tlascalans.

As we have seen, the prince had been in battles, and more than once felt the joyous frenzy nowhere else to be found; but now a dread fell upon him. Did Malinche's dream of conquest reach the gods? Again and again he turned to the sanctuaries, but the divine wrath came not forth, — only the sonorous throbs of the drum. Once he went into the presence chamber, which was full of kneeling *pabas*, The *teotuctli* stood before the altar praying. Io' joined in the invocation; but miracle there was not, neither was there help; for when he came out, all the yard around the temple was Malinche's.

Then Io' comprehended that this attack, unlike Escobar's, was of method; for the ways of succor, which were also those of retreat, were all closed. The supreme trial had come early in his career. His spirit arose; he saw himself the stay of the religion of his fathers; the gods leaned upon him. On the roof and terraces were some two thousand warriors, the fighting children of the valley: Tezcucans, with countless glorious memories to sustain their native pride; Cholulans, eager to avenge the sack of their city and the massacre of their countrymen; Aztecs, full of the

* Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

superiority of race, and the inspiration of ages of empire. They would fight to the last man. He could trust them, as the 'tzin had trusted him. The struggle, moreover, besides being of special interest on account of its religious character, would be in mid-air, with the strangers and all the tribes and companies as witnesses. So, with his caciques, he went down to the landing at the top of the lower stairway.

A yell saluted Cortes when, at the head of the cavaliers, he appeared on the steps, and, sword in hand and shield overhead, commenced the perilous ascent. At the same time javelins and spears began to rain upon the party from the first terrace. Up they hurried. Half the height was gained and not a man hurt, — not a foot delayed! Then, slowly at first, but with longer leaps and increasing force, a block of stone was started down the stairs. Fortunately, the steps were broad, having been built for the accommodation of processions. Down sped a warning cry; down as swiftly plunged the danger. Olmedo saw three figures of men in iron follow it headlong to the bottom; fast they fell, but not too fast for his words of absolution; before the victims touched the pavement, their sins were forgiven, and their souls at rest in Paradise.

The stones and timbers placed on the landing by the 'tzin's order were now laid hold of, and rolled and dragged to the steps and hurled down. Thus ten Christians more were slain. Even Cortes, deeming escape impossible, turned his battle-cry into a prayer, and not in vain! From below, the arquebusiers and cross-bowmen suddenly opened fire, which they kept so close that, on the landing, the dead and wounded speedily outnumbered the living.

"The saints are with us! Forward, swords of the Church!" cried Cortes.

Before the infidels recovered from their panic, he passed the last step, and stood upon the terrace. And there, first

in front of him, first to meet him, was Io', whom pride and zeal would not permit to retire.

The meeting — combat it can hardly be called — was very brief. The blades of Io's *maquahuil* broke at the first blow. Cortes replied with a thrust of the sword, — quick, but true, riving both the shield and the arm. A cacique dragged the hapless boy out of reach of the second thrust, and took his place before the conqueror.

The terrace so hardly gained was smoothly paved, and wide enough for ten men to securely walk abreast; on the outer side there was no railing or guard of any kind, nothing but a descent of such height as to make a fall certainly fatal. Four times the smooth, foot-worn pavement extended around the temple, broken in its course by six grand stairways, the last of which landed on the *azoteas*, one hundred and fifty feet above the level of the street. Such was the highway of the gods, up which the adventurous Christians essayed to march, fighting.

"To my side, Sandoval! And ye, Alvarado, Morla, Lugo, Ordas, Duero, — to my side!" said Cortes, defending himself the while. "Make with me a line of shields across the way. Let me hear your voices. No battle-cry here but Christ and St. James! When ye are ready, shout, that I may hear ye!"

One by one the brave gentlemen took their places; then rose the cry, "*Christo y Santiago! Christo y Santiago!*"

And then the voice of Cortes, —

"Forward, my friends! Push the dogs! No quarter! *Christo y Santiago!*"

Behind the line of shields moved the other cavaliers, eager to help when help should be needed.

And then were shown the excellences of the sword in a master's hand. The best shields of the infidels could not bar its point; it overcame resistance so quietly that men fell,

wounded, or slain outright, before they thought themselves in danger; it won the terrace, and so rapidly that the Christians were themselves astonished.

"*Ola, compañeros!*" said Cortes, who in the fiercest *mêlée* was still the watchful captain. "*Ola!* Yonder riseth the second stairway. That the heathen may not use the vantage against us, keep we close to this pack. On their heels! Closer!"

So they mounted the steps of the second stairway, fighting; and the crowd which they kept between them and the enemy on the landing was a better cover even than the fire of the bowmen and arquebusiers. And so the terraces were all taken. Of the eight other Christians who fell under the stones and logs rolled upon them from the heights above, two lived long enough to be shrived by the faithful Olmedo.

The *azoteas* of the temple has been already described as a broad, paved area, unobstructed except by the sacrificial stones and the sanctuaries of Huitzil' and Tezca'. A more dreadful place for battle cannot be imagined. The coming and going of worshippers, singly or in processions, and of barefooted *pabas*, to whom the dizzy height was all the world, had worn its surface smooth as furbished iron. If, as the combat rolled slowly around the terraces, rising higher, and nearer the chiefs and warriors on the summit, — if, in faintness of heart or hope, they looked for a way of escape, the sky and the remote horizon were all they saw: escape was impossible.

With many others disabled by wounds, Io' ascended to the *azoteas* in advance of the fight; not in despair, but as the faithful might, never doubting that, when the human effort failed, Huitzil', the Omnipotent, would defend himself. He passed through the ranks, and with brave words encouraged the common resolve to conquer or die. Stopping upon

the western verge, he looked down upon the palace, and lo! there was a rest in the assault, except where the 'tzin fought, with his back to the temple; and the thousands were standing still, their faces upturned, — each where the strange truce found him, — to behold the hunted gods in some majestic form at last assert their divinity. So Io' knew, by the whisperings of his own faith.

Again he turned prayerfully to the sanctuaries. At that instant Cortes mounted the last step of the last stairway, — after him the line of shields, and all the cavaliers, — after them again, Olmedo with his crucifix! Then was wrought an effect, simple enough of itself, but so timely that the good man — forgetful that the image of Christ dead on the cross is nothing without the story of his perfect love and sorrowful death — found believers when he afterwards proclaimed it a miracle. He held the sacred effigy up to be seen by all the infidels; they gazed at it as at a god unfriendly to their gods, and waited in awe for the beginning of a struggle between the divine rivals; and while they waited, Cortes and his cavaliers perfected their formation upon the *azoteas*, and the bowmen and arquebusiers began to climb the second stairway of the ascent. The moment of advantage was lost to the Aztecs, and they paid the penalty.

Io' waited with the rest; from crucifix to sanctuary, and sanctuary to crucifix, he turned; yet the gods nursed their power. At last he awoke; too late! there was no escape. Help of man was not possible, and the gods seemed to have abandoned him.

"Tezcuco! Cholula! Tenochtitlan! Up, up, Tlateloco, up!"

Over the *azoteas* his words rang piercing clear, and through the ranks towards the Christians he rushed. The binding of the spell was broken. Shook the banners, pealed war-cry, conch, and atabal, — and the battle was joined.

"Hold fast until our brethren come; then shall our swords drink their fill! *Christo y Santiago!*"

Never was the voice of Cortes more confident.

Need, nevertheless, had the cavaliers for all their strength and skill, even the nicest cunning of fence and thrust. Every joint of their harness was searched by javelin and spear, and the clang of *maquahuitts* against the faces of their shields was as the noise of a thousand *armeros* at work. The line swayed and bent before the surge, now yielding, now recovering, at times ready to break, and then — death awaited them all on the terraces below. For life they plied their swords, — no, not for life alone; behind them to and fro strode Olmedo.

"Strike, and spare not!" he cried. "Lo, the gates of hell yonder, but they shall not prevail. Strike for Holy Church, whose swords ye are! For Holy Cross, and room to worship above the Baals of heathendom! For glory here, and eternal life hereafter!"

So he cried as he strode; and the crucifix on his lance and the saintly words on his lips were better than trumpets, better than a hundred Cids in reserve.

The great drum, which had been for a while silent, at this juncture burst out again; and still more to inflame the infidels, forth from the sanctuaries the pabas poured, and dispersed themselves, leaping, dancing, singing, through the ranks. Doubtless they answered the Christian priest, promise for promise, and with even greater effect; the calm and self-possessed among their people became zealots, and the zealots became frantic madmen.

At last the bowmen and arquebusiers appeared upon the scene. When Cortes saw them, — their line formed, matches lighted, bows drawn, — he drew out of the combat to give them directions.

"*Viva compañeros!*" he said, with a vivacity peculiar to

himself, "I bid ye welcome. The temple and its keepers are ours. We with swords will now go forward. Keep ye the stairway, and take care of our flanks. Ply your bolts, — ply them fast, — and spare not a cur in the kennel!"

They made no answer, spake not a word. Stolidly, grimly they gazed at him under their morions; they knew their duty, and he knew them. Once more he turned to the fight.

"To the sanctuaries!" he shouted, to the cavaliers. "We have come for the false gods: let us at them. Charge, gentlemen, Christ with us! Forward all!"

Back came their response, "Forward! *Christo y Santiago!*"

They advanced their shields suddenly; the play of their swords redoubled; the weapons in front of them splintered like reeds; war-cries half uttered turned to screams; under foot blood ran like water, and feathered panoply and fallen men, dying and dead, blotted out the pavement. Surprised, bewildered, baffled, the bravest of the infidels perished; the rest gave way or were pushed helplessly back; and the dismay thus excited rose to panic when the bowmen and arquebusiers joined in the combat. A horrible confusion ensued. Hundreds threw away their arms, and ran wildly around the *azoteas*; some flung themselves from the height; some climbed the sanctuaries; some took to piteous imploration of the doomed idols; others, in blind fury, rushed empty-handed upon the dripping swords.

Steadily, as a good craft divides the current and its eddies, Cortes made way to the sanctuaries, impatient to possess the idols, that, at one blow, he might crush the faith they represented, after which he made no doubt of the submission of the nations in arms. A rare faculty that which, in the heat of battle, can weave webs of policy, and in the mind's eye trace out lines of wise conduct.

When, at last, the end was nigh, such of the pabas as survived withdrew themselves from the delirious mob, and assembled around the sacrificial stones. Some of them were wounded; on many the black gowns hung in shreds; all of them had one purpose more, usually the last to linger in an enthusiast's heart. There, where they had witnessed so many sacrifices, and, in eager observance of auguries, overlooked or savagely enjoyed the agony of the victims, they came themselves to die, — there the sword found them; and from their brave, patient death we may learn that Satan hath had his martyrs as well as Christ.

About the same time another body collected in the space before the presence chamber of Huitzil'. They were the surviving caciques, with Io' in their midst. Having borne him out of the fray, they now took up a last position to defend him and the gods.

Upon them also the battle had laid a heavy hand; most of them were hurt and bleeding; of their beautiful regalia only fragments remained; some were without arms of any kind, some bore headless javelins or spears; a few had *maquahuills*. Not a word was spoken: they, too, had come to die, and the pride of their race forbade repining.

They saw the last of the pabas fall; then the rapacious swords, to complete the work, came to them. In the front strode Cortes. His armor shone brightly, and his shield, though spotted with blood, was as a mirror from which the sun's rays shot, like darts, into the eyes of the infidels attracted by its brightness.

Suddenly, three warriors, unarmed, rushed upon him; his sword passed through one of them; the others caught him in their arms. So quick, so bold and desperate was the action that, before he could resist or his captains help him, he was lifted from his feet and borne away.

"Help, gentlemen! Rescue!" he cried.

Forward sprang Sandoval, forward Alvarado, forward the whole line. The caciques interposed themselves. Played the swords then never so fast and deadly, — still the wall of men endured.

Cortes with all his armor was a cumbrous burthen; yet the warriors bore him swiftly toward the verge of the *azoteas*. No doubt of their purpose: fair and stately were the halls awaiting them in the Sun, if they but took the leap with him! He struggled for life, and called on the saints, and vowed vows; at the last moment, one of them stumbled and fell; thereupon he broke away, regained his feet, and slew them both.

In the door of the sanctuary of Huitzil', meantime, Io' stood, biding the sure result of the unequal struggle. Again and again he had striven to get to the enemy; but the devoted caciques closed their circle against him as compactly as against them. Nearer shone the resistless blades, — nearer the inevitable death. The rumble and roar of the drum poured from the chamber in mighty throbs; at times he caught glimpses of the *azoteas* strewn with bloody wreck; a sense of the greatness of the calamity seized him, followed by the sullen calm which, in brave men dying, is more an accusation of fate than courage, resignation, or despair; upon his faculties came a mist; he shouted the old war-cry of the 'tzin, and scarcely heard himself; the loves and hopes that had made his young life beautiful seemed to rise up and fly away, not in the air-line of birds, but with the slow, eccentric flight of star-winged butterflies; then the light faded and the sky darkened; he reeled and staggered, but while falling, felt himself drawn into the presence chamber, and looking up saw the face of the *teotuccli*, and heard the words, "I loved your father, and he loved the god, who may yet save us. Come, come!" The loving hands took off his warlike trappings, and covering him with the frock

of a paba set him on the step of the altar at the feet of the god; then the darkness became perfect, and he knew no more.

Directly there was a great shout within the chamber, blent with the clang of armor and iron-shod feet; the *teotuctli* turned, and confronted Olmedo, with Cortes and the cavaliers.

The Christian priest dropped his lance to the floor, threw back his cowl, raised his visor, and pointing to the crucifix gazed proudly into the face of the infidel pontiff, who answered with a look high and scornful, as became the first and last servant of a god so lately the ruler of the universe. And while they faced each other, the beating of the drum ceased, and the clamor stilled, until nothing was heard but the breathing of the conquerors, tired with slaughter.

Then Cortes said, —

“Glory to Christ, whose victory this is! Thou, father, art his priest, let thy will be done. Speak!”

Olmedo turned to that quarter of the chamber where, by permission of Montezuma, a Christian shrine and cross had been erected: shrine and cross were gone! Answered he then, —

“The despoiler hath done his work. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. Take this man,” pointing to the *teotuctli*, “and bind him, and lead him hence.”

Alvarado stepped forward, and took off the massive silver chain which he habitually wore twice encircling his neck, and falling down low over his breast-plate; with it he bound the wrists of the prisoner, who once, and once only, cast an appealing glance up to the stony face of the idol. As they started to lead him off, his eyes fell upon Io'; by a sign and look of pity, he directed their attention to the boy.

“He is not dead,” said Sandoval, after examination.

“Take him hence, also,” Olmedo ordered. “At leisure to-morrow we can learn what importance he hath.”

Hardly were the captives out when the chamber became a scene of wild iconoclasm. The smoking censers were overthrown; the sculpturings on the walls were defaced; the altar was rifled of the rich accumulation of gifts; fagots snatched from the undying fires in front of the sanctuaries were applied to the carved and gilded wood-work; and amid the smoke, and with shouting and laughter and the noisy abandon of school-boys at play, the zealots despoiled the gigantic image of its ornaments and treasure, — of the bow and golden arrows in its hands; the feathers of humming birds on its left foot; the necklace of gold and silver hearts; the serpent enfolding its waist in coils glistening with pearls and precious stones. A hundred hands then pushed the monster from its sitting-place, and rolled it out of the door, and finally off the *azoteas*. Tezca' shared the same fate. The greedy flames mounted to the towers, and soon not a trace of the ages of horrible worship remained, except the smoking walls of the ruined sanctuaries.

Down from the heights marched the victors; into the palace they marched; and not a hand was raised against them on the way; the streets were almost deserted.

“*Bien!*” said Cortes, as he dismounted once more in front of his quarters. “*Muy bien!* We have their king and chief-priests; we have burned their churches, disgraced their gods, and slain their nobles by the thousand. The war is over, gentlemen; let us to our couches. Welcome rest! welcome peace!”

And the weary army, accepting his words as verity, went to rest, though the sun flamed in the brassy sky; but rest there was not; ere dreams could follow slumber, the trumpets sounded, and the battle was on again, fiercer than ever.

The sun set, and the night came; then the companies

thought to rest; but Cortes, made tireless by rage, went out after them, and burned a vast district of houses.

And the flames so filled the sky with brilliance that the sun seemed to have stood still just below the horizon.

During the lurid twilight, Olmedo laid away, in shallow graves dug for them in the palace-garden, more than fifty Christians, of whom six and forty perished on the temple and its terraces.

—•••—

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE INTERVAL OF THE BATTLE—LOVE.

THE *chinampa*, at its anchorage, swung lightly, like an Indian cradle pendulous in the air. Over it stooped the night, its wings of darkness brilliant with the plumage of stars. The fire in the city kindled by Cortes still fitfully reddened the horizon in that direction, — a direful answer to those who, remembering the sweetness of peace in the beautiful valley, prayed for its return with the morning.

Yeteve, in the hammock, had lulled herself into the sleep of dreams; while, in the canoe, Hualpa and the oarsmen slept the sleep of the warrior and laborer, — the sleep too deep for dreams. Only Tula and the 'tzin kept vigils.

Just outside the canopy, in sight of the meridian stars, and where the night winds came sighing through the thicket of flowers, a *petate* had been spread for them; and now she listened, while he, lying at length, his head in her lap, talked of the sorrowful time that had befallen.

He told her of the *mantas*, and their destruction; of how Hualpa had made way to the presence of Nenetzin, and how she had saved his life; and as the narrative went on, the listener's head drooped low over the speaker's face, and

there were sighs and tears which might have been apportioned between the lost sister and the unhappy lover; he told of the attack upon the palace, and of the fall of Iztzil', and how, when the victory was won, Malinche flung the gods from the temple, and so terrified the companies that they fled.

"Then, O Tula, my hopes fell down. A people without gods, broken in spirit, and with duty divided between two kings, are but grass to be trodden. And Io,' — so young, so brave, so faithful —"

He paused, and there was a long silence, devoted to the prince's memory. Then he resumed, —

"In looking out over the lake, you may have noticed that the city has been girdled with men in canoes, — an army, indeed, unaffected by the awful spectacle of the overthrow of the gods. I brought them up, and in their places sent the companies that had failed me. So, as the sun went down, I was able to pour fresh thousands upon Malinche. How I rejoiced to see them pass the wall with Hualpa, and grapple with the strangers! All my hopes came back again. That the enemy fought feebly was not a fancy. Watching, wounds, battle, and care have wrought upon them. They are wasting away. A little longer, — two days, — a day even, — patience, sweetheart, patience!"

There was silence again, — the golden silence of lovers, under the stars, hand-in-hand, dreaming.

The 'tzin broke the spell to say, in lower tones and with longer intervals, —

"Men must worship, O Tula, and there can be no worship without faith. So I had next to renew the sacred fire and restore the gods. The first was easy: I had only to start a flame from the embers of the sanctuaries; the fire that burned them was borrowed from that kept immemorially on the old altars. The next duty was harder. The images

were not of themselves more estimable than other stones; neither were the jewels that adorned them more precious than others of the same kind: their sanctity was from faith alone. The art of arts is to evoke the faith of men: make me, O sweetheart, make me master of that art, and, as the least of possibilities, I will make gods of things least godly. In the places where they had fallen, at the foot of the temple, I set the images up, and gave each an altar, with censers, holy fire, and all the furniture of worship. By and by, they shall be raised again to the *azoteas*; and when we renew the empire, we will build for them sanctuaries richer even than those of Cholula. If the faith of our people demand more, then—"

He hesitated.

"Then, what?" she asked.

He shuddered, and said lower than ever, "I will unseal the caverns of Quetzal, and, — more I cannot answer now." The influence of Mualox was upon him yet.

"And if that fail?" she persisted.

Not until the stars at the time overhead had passed and been succeeded by others as lustrous, did he answer, —

"And if that fail? Then we will build a temple, — one without images, — a temple to the One Supreme God. So, O Tula, shall the prophecy of the king, your father, be fulfilled in our day."

And with that up sprang a breeze of summery warmth, lingering awhile to wanton with the tresses of the willow, and swing the flowery island half round the circle of its anchorage; and from the soothing hand on his forehead, or the reposeful motion of the *chinampa*, the languor of sleep stole upon his senses; yet recollection of the battle and its cares was hard to be put away: —

"I should have told you," he said, in a vanishing voice, "that when the companies abandoned us, I went first to see

our uncle, the lord Cuitlahua. The guards at the door refused me admittance; the king was sick, they said."

A tremor shook the hand on his forehead, and larger grew the great eyes bending over him.

"Did they say of what he was sick?" she asked.

"Of the plague."

"And what is that?"

"Death," he answered, and next moment fell asleep.

Over her heart, to hush the loudness of its beating, she clasped her hands; for out of the chamber of the almost forgotten, actual as in life, stalked Mualox, the paba, saying, as once on the temple he said, "You shall be queen in your father's palace." She saw his beard of fleecy white, and his eyes of mystery, and asked herself again and again, "Was he indeed a prophet?"

And the loving child and faithful subject strove hard to hide from the alluring promise, for in its way she descried two living kings, her father and her uncle; but it sought her continually, and found her, and at last held her as a dream holds a sleeper, — held her until the stars heralded the dawn, and the 'tzin awoke to go back to the city, back to the battle, — from love to battle.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"LEAVE the city, now so nearly won! Surely, father, surely thou dost jest with me!"

So Cortes said as he sat in his chamber, resting his arm on the table, the while Olmedo poured cold water on his wounded hand.

The father answered without lifting his face, —

“Go, I say, that we may come back assured of holding what we have won.”

“Sayest thou so, — thou! By my conscience, here are honor, glory, empire! Abandon them, and the treasure, a part of which, as thou knowest, I have already accounted to his Majesty? No, no; not yet, father! I cannot — though thou may'st — forget what Velasquez and my enemies, the velveted minions of the court, would say.”

“Then it is as I feared,” said Olmedo, suspending his work, and tossing his hood farther back on his shoulders. “It is as I feared. The good judgment which hath led us so far so well, and given riches to those who care for riches, and planted the Cross over so many heathen temples is, at last, at fault.”

The father's manner was solemn and reproachful. Cortes turned to him inquiringly.

“Señor, thou knowest I may be trusted. Heed me. I speak for Christ's sake,” continued Olmedo. “Leave the city we must. There is not corn for two days more; the army is worn down with wounds and watching; scarcely canst thou thyself hold an axe; the men of Narvaez are mutineers; the garden is full of graves, and it hath been said of me that, for want of time, I have shorn the burial service of essential Catholic rites. And the enemy, Señor, the legions that broke through the wall last evening, were new tribes for the first time in battle. Of what effect on them were yesterday's defeats? The gods tumbled from the temple have their altars and worship already. Thou may'st see them from the central turret.”

The good man was interrupted. Sandoval appeared at the door.

“Come,” said Cortes, impatiently.

The captain advanced to the table, and saluting, said, in his calm, straightforward way, —

“The store for the horses is out; we fed them to-night from the rations of the men. I gave Motilla half of mine, and yet she is hungry.”

At these words, the hand Olmedo was nursing closed, despite its wound, as upon a sword-hilt, vice-like, and up the master arose, brow and cheek gray as if powdered with ashes, and began to walk the floor furiously; at last he stopped abruptly: —

“Sandoval, go bid the captains come. I would have their opinions as to what we should do. Omit none of them. Those who say nothing may be witnesses hereafter.”

The order was given quietly, with a smile even. A moment the captain studied his leader's face, and I would not say he did not understand the meaning of the simple words; for of him Cortes afterwards said, “He is fit to command great armies.”

Cortes sat down, and held out the hand for Olmedo's ministrations; but the father touched him caressingly, and said, when Sandoval was gone, —

“I commend thee, son, with all my soul. Men are never so much on trial as when they stand face to face with necessity; the weak fight it, and fall; the wise accept it as a servant. So do thou now.”

Cortes' countenance became chill and sullen. “I cannot see the necessity —”

“Good!” exclaimed Olmedo. “Whatsoever thou dost, hold fast to that. The captains will tell thee otherwise, but —”

“What?” asked Cortes, with a sneer. “The treasure is vast, — a million *pesos* or more. Dost thou believe they will go and leave it?”

But Olmedo was intent upon his own thought.

"*Mira!*" he said. "If the captains say there is a necessity, do thou put in thy denial; stand on thy opinion boldly; and when thou givest up, at last, yield thee to that other necessity, the demand of the army. And so —"

"And so," Cortes said with a smile, which was also a sneer, "and so thou wouldst make a servant of one necessity by invoking another."

"Yes; another which may be admitted without danger or dishonor. Thou hast the idea, my son."

"So be it, so be it, — *aguardamonos!*"

Thereupon Cortes retired within himself, and the father began again to nurse the wounded hand.

And by and by the chamber was filled with captains, soldiers, and caciques, whose persons, darkly visible in the murky light, testified to the severity of the situation: rusted armor, ragged apparel, faded trappings, bandaged limbs, countenances heavy with anxiety, or knit hard by suffering, — such were the evidences.

In good time Cortes arose.

"*Ola*, my friends," he said, bluntly. "I have heard that there are among ye many who think the time come to give the city, and all we have taken, back to the infidels. I have sent for ye that I may know the truth. As the matter concerneth interests of our royal master aside from his dominion, — property, for example, — the Secretary Duero will make note of all that passeth. Let him come forward and take place here."

The secretary seated himself by the table with manuscript and pen.

"Now, gentlemen, begin."

So saying, the chief dropped back into his seat, and held the sore hand to Olmedo for further care, — never speech more bluff, never face more calm. For a time, nothing was heard but the silvery tinkle of the falling water. At length

one was found sturdy enough to speak; others followed him; and, at last, when the opinion was taken, not a voice said stay; on the contrary, the clamor to go was, by some, indecently loud.

Cortes then stood up.

"The opinion is all one way. Hast thou so written, Señor Duero?"

The secretary bowed.

"Then write again, — write that I, Hernan Cortes, to this retreat said, No; write that, if I yield my judgment, it is not to any necessity of which we have heard as coming from the enemy, but to the demand of my people. Hast thou so written?"

The secretary nodded.

"Write again, that upon this demand I ordered Alonzo Avila and Gonzalo Mexia to take account of all the treasure belonging to our master, the most Christian king; with leave to the soldiers, when the total hath been perfected and the retreat made ready, to help themselves from the balance, as each one may wish. Those gentlemen will see that their task be concluded by noon to morrow. Hast written, Duero?"

"Word for word," answered the secretary.

"Very well. And now," — Cortes raised his head, and spoke loudly, — "and now, rest and sleep who can. This business is bad. Get ye gone!"

And when they were alone, he said to Olmedo, —

"I have done ill —"

"Nay," said the father, smiling, "thou hast done well."

"*Bastante*, — we shall see. Never had knaves such need of all their strength as when this retreat is begun; yet of what account will they be when loaded down with the gold they cannot consent to leave behind?"

"Why then the permission?" asked the father.

Cortes smiled blandly, —

"If I cannot make them friends, by my conscience! I can at least seal their mouths in the day of my calamity."

Then bowing his head, he added, —

"Thy benediction, father."

The blessing was given.

"Amen!" said Cortes.

And the priest departed; but the steps of the iron-hearted soldier were heard long after, — not quick and determined as usual, but slow and measured, and with many and long pauses between. So ambition walks when marshalling its resources; so walks a heroic soul at war with itself and fortune! He flung himself upon his couch at last, saying, —

"In my quiver there are two bolts left. The saints help me! I will speed them first."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KING BEFORE HIS PEOPLE AGAIN.

GUATAMAZIN'S call at the royal palace to see the king, Cuitlahua, had not been without result. When told that the monarch was too sick of the plague to be seen, he called for the officer who had charge of the accounts of tribute received for the royal support.

"Show me," said the 'tzin, "how much corn was delivered to Montezuma for Malinche."

A package of folded *aguave* leaves was brought and laid at the accountant's feet. In a moment he took out a leaf well covered with picture-writing, and gave it to the 'tzin, who, after study, said to a cacique in waiting, "Bring me one of the couriers," and to another, "Bring me wherewith to write."

When the latter was brought, he sat down, and dipping a brush into a vessel of liquid color, drew upon a clear, yellow-tinted leaf a picture of a mother duck leading her brood from the shore into the water; by way of signature, he appended in one corner the figure of an owl in flight. On five other sheets he repeated the writing; then the missives were given each to a separate courier with verbal directions for their delivery.

When he left the palace, the 'tzin laid his hand upon Hualpa's shoulder, and said, joyfully, —

"Better than I thought, O comrade. Malinche has corn for one day only!"

The blood quickened in Hualpa's heart, as he asked, — "Then the end is near?"

"To-morrow, or the next day," said the 'tzin.

"But Montezuma is generous, —"

"Can he give what he has not? To-night there will be delivered for his use and that of his household, whom I have had numbered for the purpose, provisions for one day, not more."

"Then it is so! Praised be the gods! and you, O my master, wiser than other men!" cried Hualpa, with upraised face, and a gladness which was of youth again, and love so blind that he saw Nenezin, — not the stars, — and so deaf that he heard not the other words of the 'tzin, —

"The couriers bear my orders to bring up all the armies. And they will be here in the morning."

* * * * *

In the depth of the night, while Cortes lay restlessly dreaming, his sentinels on the palace were attracted by music apparently from every quarter; at first, so mellowed by distance as to seem like the night singing to itself; afterwards, swollen into the familiar dissonant minstrelsy of conch and atabal, mixed with chanting of many voices.