

glare of the mid-day sun, the ground was covered with cotton tapestry, while all his subjects of high and low degree, who lined the sides of the causeway, bent their heads and fixed their eyes on the ground, as unworthy to look upon so much majesty. Some prostrated themselves on the ground before him, and all in that mighty throng were awed by his presence into a silence that was absolutely oppressive.

The appearance of Montezuma was in the highest degree interesting to the Spanish general and his followers. Flung over his shoulders was the *tilmatti*, or large square cloak, manufactured from the finest cotton, with the embroidered ends gathered in a knot round his neck. Under this was a tunic of green, embroidered with exquisite taste, extending almost to his knees, and confined at the waist, by a rich jeweled vest. His feet were protected by sandals of gold, bound with leathern thongs richly embossed with the same metal. The cloak, the tunic, and the sandals were profusely sprinkled with pearls and precious stones. On his head was a *penuche* of plumes of the royal green, waving gracefully in the light breeze.

He was then about forty years of age. His person was tall, slender, and well proportioned. His complexion was somewhat fairer than that of his race generally. His countenance was expressive of great benignity. His carriage was serious, dignified and even majestic, and without the least tincture of haughtiness, or affectation of importance; he moved with the stately air of one born to command, and accustomed to the homage of all about him.

The strangers halted, as the monarch drew near. Cortez, dismounting, threw his reins to a page, and, supported by a few of his principal officers, advanced to meet him. What an interview! How full of thrilling interest to both parties! How painfully thrilling to Montezuma, who now sat before him, standing on the very threshold of his citadel, the all-conquering white man, whose history was so mysteriously blended with his own; whose coming and power had been foreshadowed for ages in the prophetic traditions of his country, confirmed again by his own most sacred oracles, and repeated by so many signs, and omens, and fearful prognostics, that he was compelled either to regard him as the heaven-sent representative of the ancient rightful lords of the soil, or to abandon his early and cherished faith, the religion of his fathers, and of the ancient race from which they sprung.

Putting a royal restraint upon the feelings which almost overwhelmed him, the monarch received his guest with princely courtesy, expressing great pleasure in seeing him personally, and extending to him the hospitalities of his capital. The Castilian replied with expressions of the most profound respect, and with many ample acknowledgements for the substantial proofs which the Emperor had already given of his more than royal munificence.—He then hung on the neck of the king a sparkling chain of colored crystal, at the same time making a movement, as if he would embrace him. He was prevented, however, by the timely interference of two Aztec lords from thus profaning, before the assembled multitudes of his people, the sacred person of their master.

After this formal introduction and interchange of civilities, Montezuma appointed his brother, the bold Cuiclahua, to conduct the Spaniards to their quarters in the city, and returned in the same princely state in which he came, amid the prostrate thousands of his subjects. Pondering deeply, as the train moved slowly on, upon the fearful crisis in his affairs which he had now arrived, his ear was arrested by a faint low voice in the crowd, which he instantly recognized as Karee's, breathing out a plaintive wail, as if in soliloquy with her own soul, or in high communion with the spirits of the unseen world. The strain was wild and broken, but its tenor was deeply mournful and deprecatory. It concluded with these emphatic words—

The proud eagle may turn his cyrie again,
But his pinions are clipped, and his foot feels the chain,

He is monarch no more in his wide domain—
The falcon has come to his nest.

With an air of bold and martial triumph, their colors flying, and music briskly playing, the Spaniards, with the singular trail of half savage Tlascalans, the deadly enemies of the Aztecs, made their entrance into the southern quarter of the renowned Tenochtitlan, and were escorted by the

brave Cuiclahua, to the royal palace of Axayacatl, in the heart of the city, once the residence of Montezuma's father, and now appropriated to the accommodation of Cortez and his followers.

As they marched through the crowded streets, new subjects of wonder and admiration greeted them on every side. The grandeur and extent of the city, the superior style of its architecture, the ample dimensions, immense strength, and costly ornaments of the numerous palaces, pyramids and temples, separated and surrounded by broad terraced gardens in the highest possible state of cultivation and teeming with flowers of every hue and name—the lofty tapering sanctuaries, and altars blazing with unextinguishable fires,—and above all, the innumerable throngs of people who swarmed through the streets and canals, filling every doorway and window, and clustering on the flat roof of every building as they passed, filled them with mingled emotions of admiration, surprise and fear.

The swarming myriads of Aztecs were, on their part, no less interested and amazed at the spectacle presented by their strange visitors. An intense and all-absorbing curiosity pervaded the entire mass of the people. Nothing could surpass their wonder and admiration of the prancing steeds, or four legged and double-headed men, as to their simple view they seemed to be, the rider as he sat with ease in his saddle, appearing to be but a part of the animal on which he rode. The piercing tones of the loud mouthed trumpets, astonished and delighted them exceedingly. But the deep thunder of the artillery as it burst upon them amid volumes of sulphurous smoke and flame, and then rolled away in long reverberated echoes among the mountains, filled them with indelible alarm, and made them feel that the all-destroying god of war was indeed among them in the guise of men.

While these scenes were enacting in the city, the palace was shrouded in the deepest gloom.—When the monarch arrayed himself, in the morning, to go forth to meet the strangers, several incidents occurred, which were deemed peculiarly ominous, confirming all the superstitious forebodings of the king, and tending to take away from the yet trusting hearts of his household, their last remaining hope. The imperial clasp, which bound his girdle in front, bearing as its device, richly engraved on the precious *chalchicill*, the emblem of despotic power, which was the eagle pouncing upon the ocelot—snapped in twain, scattering the fragments of the eagle's head upon the marble pavement. The principal jewel in the royal diadem was found loose, and trembling in its setting. But, more portentous than all to the mind of the devout Montezuma, the priest who had charge of the great altar on the Teocalli of Huitzilopotchli, had been seized with convulsions during the preceding night, and fallen dead at his post. The perpetual fire had gone out, for want of a hand to replenish it, and when the morning sun shot his first beams upon that high altar, there was not a spark among the blackened embers, to answer his reviving glow.

It was impossible to shake off the influence of presages like these. From infancy, he had been taught to read in all such incidents, the shadowy revealings of the will of the gods, the dark lines of destiny foreshown to the faithful. The soul of Montezuma was oppressed almost to sinking.—But he roused himself to his task, and went forth, feeling, as he went, that the ground trembled beneath his feet, while an untimely night gathered at noon-day over the sky.

Among the noble princes who graced the court of Montezuma, there was no one of a nobler bearing, or a loftier heart, than his nephew Guatimozin, the favored lover of Tecuichpo. Unlike her disappointed suitor, the Prince of Tezcuco, he had uniformly and powerfully opposed the timid policy of the king, and urged, with Cuiclahua, a bold and unyielding resistance to the encroachments of the intruding Spaniards. His reluctance to their admission to the capital was so great, that he refused to witness the humiliating spectacle; preferring to shut himself up in the palace, and sustain, if he could the fainting courage of the princess, and her mother. All that could be done by eloquence, inspired by patriotic zeal and inflamed by a pure and refined love, was attempted by the accomplished youth, till, excited and inflamed by his own efforts to comfort and persuade others, and nerved to higher resolves, by a new contemplation of the inestimable heart-treasures, which were staked upon the

issue, a new hope seemed to dawn upon the clouded horizon of their destiny.

"My fair princess," cried the impassioned lover, "it shall not be. These wide and glorious realms, teeming with untold thousands of brave and patriotic hearts, ready and able to defend our altars, and our hearths, shall never pass away to a mere handful of pale-faced invaders. They *must*, they *shall* be driven back. Or, if our gods, have utterly deserted us,—if the time has indeed come, when the power and glory of the Aztec is to pass away for ever, let the Aztec, to a man, pass away with it.—Let us perish together by our altars, and leave to the rapacious intruder a ravaged and depopulated country. Let no one remain to grace his triumph, or bow his neck to the ignominious yoke."

"Nay, my sweet cousin," she replied, with a tone and look of indescribable tenderness, "we will indeed die together, if need be, but let us first see if we cannot live together."

"Live?" exclaimed Guatimozin. "O! Tecuichpo, what would I attempt, what would I sacrifice, to the hope of living, if I might share that life with you. But my country! my allegiance! how can I sacrifice that which is not my own—that inheritance which was all my birthright, and which, as it preceded, must necessarily be paramount to, all the other relations of life."

"But, my father! dear Guatimozin! must he not be obeyed?"

"Yes, and he shall be, But he *must* be persuaded, even at this late hour, to dismiss the strangers, and banish them for ever from his domains. He has no right to yield it up. It belongs to his subjects no less than to him. He belongs to them, by the same sacred bond that binds them all to him.—He may not sacrifice them to a scruple, which has in it more of superstition than of religion. I must go to the Temple of Cholula, and bring up the hoary old prophet of Quetzalcoatl, and see if he cannot move the too tender conscience of your father, and persuade him that his duty to his gods cannot, by any possibility, be made to conflict with his duty to his empire, and the mighty family of dependent children, whom the gods have committed to his care."

"Oh! not now, Guatimozin, I pray you. Do not leave us at this terrible moment. Stay, and sustain with your courageous hopes the sad heart of my dear father, who is utterly overwhelmed with the dire omens of this dismal morning."

"Omens! Oh! Tecuichpo, shall we not rather say that the gods have thus frowned upon our cowardly abandonment of their altars, than that they design, in these dark portents, to denounce an irreversible doom, which our prayers cannot avert, nor our combined wisdom and courage prevent?"

At this moment Montezuma returned. But the deep distress depicted in his countenance, and the air of stern reserve which he assumed in the presence of those whose counsels would tend to shake his resolve, effectually prevented Guatimozin from pursuing, at that moment, the object nearest his heart. He retired into the garden, where he was soon joined by the fair princess, who wished to divert him from his purposed visit to Cholula, knowing full well it would be a fruitless mission.

"But why, my brave cousin, may not my father be right, in feeling that these strangers are sent to us from the gods? And if from the gods, then surely for our good; for the gods are all beneficence, and can only intend the well-being of their children, in all the changes that befall us here. Perhaps these strangers will teach us more of the beings whom we worship, and direct us how we may serve them better than we now do, and so partake more largely of their favor?"

"Alas! my beloved, how can we hope that they who come to destroy, whose only god is gold—to the possession of which they are ready to sacrifice life, love, honor, every thing—how can we hope that they will teach us any thing better or higher than we learn from the ancient oracles of our faith and the holy priesthood of our religion? No, it cannot be. Their pathway is drenched in blood, and so it will be, till the throne, and he who honors it, are laid in dust at their feet, and you and I, and all the myriads of our people, have become their abject slaves."

"Say not so, I beseech you, dear Guatimozin.—Where my father leads, I must follow, and hope for the best. And you must follow too, for I can-

not go without you. Here, take this rose, and wear it as a pledge to me, over this sparkling fountain, that you will no more hazard the imperial displeasure, and the anger of the gods, by your bold and rash resistance of the known decrees of fate.—And I will weave a chaplet of the same, to lay upon the altar, to propitiate for us all the favor of heaven."

There was too much real chivalry in the heart of Guatimozin, to resist the earnest love and eloquent persuasion of his lady-love. He kissed her fair cheek in token of submission to her sway, and then led her to the palace, to learn if any thing new had transpired to encourage his hope that his wishes would yet be realized, in the exclusion of the Spaniards from the city. As they passed along, they heard Karee-o-than, the garrulous pet of the Princess, seemingly soliloquising among the branches of the flowering orange that hung over the favorite arbor. They paused a moment, but could gather nothing from his chattering, but "Brave Guatimozin! noble Guatimozin! all is yours."

"An omen! my sweet cousin, a genuine emphatic omen! Even Karee-o-than encourages me, in my treason. I wish I knew how she would respond to the name of this redoubtable Cortez.—Pray ask her, Tecuichpo, what she thinks of the Spaniard."

"Fear you not to trifle thus?" asked Tecuichpo.

"Fear not, brave Guatimozin!" responded the parrot.

"There, I have it again, my love; all she says is against you. And what do you say of Malinche's pretty Karee-o-than?"

"Poor Malinche! brave Guatimozin."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Prince, "the bird is as good as an omen, and I!"

At that moment, Karee appeared, and coming towards them in great haste and trepidation, informed them that the Spaniards had already reached their quarters in the old palace, and that Montezuma had gone thither, in royal state, to receive them.

"And what think you of all these things, my fairy queen," asked Guatimozin, playfully.

"Wo! wo! wo! to the imperial house of Tenochtitlan!" energetically replied Karee,—"its glory is departed for ever,—its crown has fallen from the head of the great Montezuma, and there is none able to wear it, or redeem it from the hand of the spoiler. Thou, most noble Prince, wilt do all that mortal courage and prowess can do, to rescue it from desecration, and to protect the house of Montezuma from the cruel fate to which she has delivered it up; but it will be all in vain. *He* must perish by an ignominious death. They must pass under the yoke of the strangers, and thou, too, after all thy noble struggles and sacrifices, must perish miserably under their cruel and impleacable rapacity."

This was too much for Tecuichpo. She looked upon Karee as an inspired prophetess, and had always found it exceedingly difficult to sustain the filial confidence which sanctified every act and every purpose of her royal father, when the powerful incantations of Karee were directed against them. It was a continual struggle between an affectionate superstition, and filial love. But that first, and holiest, and strongest instinct of her heart prevailed, and she clung the more warmly to her father, when she found that every thing else was against him. But now the shaft had pierced her another and an unguarded point. Her spirit fainted within her. She swooned in the arms of Guatimozin, and was borne to her apartment in a state of insensibility, where, under the kind and skillful nursing of Karee, and the affectionate assurances of Guatimozin, she was soon restored to health, and her accustomed cheerfulness. But these ceaseless agitations, these painful alterations of hope and fear, were slowly wearing upon her gentle spirit, and undermining a frame so delicately sensitive, that, like the aspen,

It trembled when the sleeping breeze
But dreamed of waking.

CHAPTER VI.

MUNIFICENCE OF MONTEZUMA—THE ROYAL BANQUET—THE REQUITAL—THE EMPEROR A PRISONER IN HIS OWN PALACE.

"Was that thunder?"

Those splendid halls resound with revelry,
And song, and dance lead on the tardy dawn.

From the hall of his fathers in anguish he fled,
Nor again will its marble re-echo his tread.

Montezuma was always and every where munificent. When he had, though reluctantly, admitted the strangers into his capital, he prepared to give