

[Continued from first page.]

Her attachments were strong and enduring, and there was that element of heroism in her soul, that she would unhesitatingly have sacrificed life to the object of her love. It is not to be wondered at that, with such qualities of mind and heart, Karee was deeply impressed with the solemn and imposing superstitions of the Aztec religion. The rites and ceremonies by which they were illustrated and sustained, were well calculated to stir to its very depths, a soul like hers, and give the noblest exercise to her wild imagination. That pompous ritual those terrible orgies, repeated before her eyes almost daily from her infancy, had become blended with the thoughts and associations of her mind, and intimately related to every scene that interested her heart or engaged her fancy. Yet her soul was not enslaved to that dark and dreary superstition. Though accustomed to an awe of veneration of the priesthood, she did not regard them as a superior race of beings, or listen to their words, as if they had been audible voices from heaven. Her spirit shrunk from many of the darker revelations of the established mythology, and openly revolted from some of its inhuman exactions. Its chains hung loosely upon her; and she seemed fully prepared for the freedom of a purer and loftier faith. Her extreme beauty, her bewitching gaiety, and her varied talents, attracted many admirers, and some noble and worthy suitors. But Karee had another destiny to fulfil. She felt herself to be the guardian angel of the ill-fated Tecuichpo, and her love for the princess left no room for any other passion in her heart. She therefore refused all solicitations, and remained the solitary mistress of her floating island.

Karee's departure from the palace, did not in any degree lessen her interest in the welfare of the young princess. She was assiduous in her attention to every thing that could promote her happiness; and seemed to value the flowers she cultivated on her chinampa chiefly as they afforded her the means of daily correspondence with Tecuichpo. She managed her island like a canoe, and moved about from one part of the beautiful lake to another, visiting by turns the cities that glittered on its margin, and sometimes traversing the valleys in search of new flowers, or exploring the ravines and caverns of the mountains for whatever of rare and precious she might chance to find. The chivalry of the Aztecs rendered such adventures perfectly safe, their women being always regarded with the greatest tenderness and respect, and treated with a delicacy seldom surpassed in the most civilized countries of Christendom.

This chivalric sentiment was, not improbably heightened, in the case of Karee, in part by her extreme beauty, and in part by the power of her genius and the brilliancy of her wit. She commanded respect by the force of her intellect, and the purity of her heart; while the uncommon depth and splendor of her imagination, when excited by any favorite theme, and the seemingly inexhaustible fruitfulness of her mental resources, moved her, in the view of the multitude, with something of the dignity, and much of the superstitious charm of a prophetess.

CHAPTER II.

YOUTH OF THE PRINCESS—HER EARLY LOVE REVEALED—PROPHETIC ANNOUNCEMENT AND SUDDEN ARRIVAL OF THE SPANIARDS.

Breathe not his noble name even to the winds, Lest they my love reveal.

I have mystical lore, And coming events cast their shadows before.

The childhood of the fair princess passed away without any event of importance, except the occasional recurrence of those dark prophecies which overshadowed her entrance into life. Her father, who had exercised the office of priest before he came to the throne, was thoroughly imbued with the superstitious reverence for astrology, which formed a part of the religion of the Aztecs. To all the predictions of this mystic science he yielded implicit belief, regarding whatever it foreshadowed as the fixed decrees of fate. He was, therefore fully prepared, and always on the look-out, for new revelations to confirm and establish his faith. These were sometimes found in the trivial occurrences of every-day life, and sometimes in the sinister aspect of the heavenly bodies, at peculiar epochs in the life of his daughter. With this superstitious foreboding of evil, the pensive character of the princess harmonized so well, as to afford, to the mind of the too credulous monarch, another unquestionable indication of her destiny. It seemed to be written on her brow, that her life was a doomed one; and each returning year was counted as the last, and entered upon with gloomy forebodings of some terrible catastrophe.

As her life advanced, her charms, both of person and character, matured and increased; and at the age of fourteen, there was not a maiden in all the golden cities of Anahuac, who could compare with Tecuichpo. Her excessive loveliness was the theme of many a song, and the tone of her beauty and her accomplishments was pursued in all the neighboring nations. While yet a child, her hand was eagerly sought by Cacamo, of the royal house of Tezcuco; but, with the true chivalry of an unselfish devotion, his suit was withdrawn, on discovering that her young affections were already engaged to another. The discovery was made in a manner too singular and striking to be suffered to pass unnoticed.

In the course of her wanderings, in the forest, Karee had taken captive a beautiful parrot of the most gorgeous plumage, and the most astonishing capacity. This chatterer, after due training and discipline, she had presented to her favorite princess, among a thousand other tokens of her unchangeable affection. Tecuichpo loved the beau-

tiful minnie, to whom she gave the name of Karee-o-than—the voice of Karee,—and often amused herself with teaching her to repeat the words which she loved best to hear. Without being aware of the publicity she was thus giving to her most treasured thoughts, she entrusted to the talkative bird the secret of her love, by associating with the most endearing epithets, the name of her favored cavalier. While strolling about the magnificent gardens attached to the palace of Montezuma, Cacamo was wont to breathe out, in impassioned song, his love for Tecuichpo, repeating her name, with every expression of passionate regard, which the language afforded. Karee-o-than was often flying about in the gardens, and soliloquizing in the affords, the favorite words of her beautiful mistress, and often attracting the notice of Cacamo.

One evening, as the prince was more than usually eloquent in pouring into the ear of Zephyr the tale of his love, the mimic bird, perched upon a flowering orange tree, had filled the garden with its delicious perfume, repeated the name of his mistress, as often as her lover uttered it, occasionally connecting with the name of Guatimozin, and then adding some endearing epithet, expressive of the most ardent admiration. The prince was first amused, and then vexed, at the frequent repetition of the name of his rival. In vain did he endeavor to make the mischievous bird to substitute his own name for that of Guatimozin. As often as he uttered the name of the princess, the echo in the orange tree gave back 'noble Guatimozin,' or 'sweet Guatimozin,' or some other similar response, which left no doubt on the mind of Cacamo, that the heart of his mistress was pre-occupied, and that the nephew of Montezuma was the favored object of her love. The next day, he bade adieu to Tecuichpo, placed himself at the head of the army of Tezcuco, and plunged into a war then raging with a distant tribe on the west, hoping to bury his disappointment in the exciting scenes of conquest.

Guatimozin was of the royal blood, and, as his after history will show, of a right royal and heroic spirit. From his childhood, he had exhibited an unusual maturity of judgment, coupled with an energy, activity, and fearlessness of spirit, which gave early assurance of a heroic worthiness of the supreme command, and an intellectual superiority that might claim succession to the throne. His training was in the court and the camp, and he seemed equally at home and in his element, amid the remotest gardens of the palace, the grave decorations of the royal council, and the mad revelry of the battle-field. His figure was of the most perfect manly proportions, tall, commanding, graceful—his countenance was marked with that peculiar blending of benignity and majesty, which made it unexpressably beautiful and winning to those whom he loved, and terrible to those on whom he frowned. He was mild, humane, generous, considerate, yet stern and heroically just. His country was his idol. For one great passion of his soul, to which all other thoughts and affections were subordinate and tributary, was patriotism. On that altar he had possessed a thousand lives, he would freely have laid them all. Such was the noble prince who had won the heart of Tecuichpo.

Meanwhile, to the anxious eye of her imperial father, the clouds of fate seemed to hang deep and dark over the realm of Anahuac. Long before the prophetic war, which welcomed the lovely Tecuichpo to a life of sorrow, Montezuma had imbibed, from the dark legends of ancient prophecies, and the faint outgivings of his own priestly oracles, a deep and indelible impression that some terrible calamity was impending over the realm, and that he was to be the last of its native monarchs. It was dimly foreshadowed, in these prophetic revelations, that the descendants of a noble and powerful race of men, who had many ages before occupied that beautiful region, and filled it with the works of their genius, but who had been driven out by the cruelty and perfidy of the Toltecs, would return, invested with supernatural power from heaven, to repossess their ancient inheritance. To this leading and long established faith, every dark and doubtful omen contributed its appropriate share of confirmation. To this, every significant event was deemed to have a more or less intimate relation. So that, at this particular epoch, not only the superstitious monarch, and his priestly astrologers, but the whole nation of Aztecs were prepared, as were the ancient Jews at the advent of the Messiah, for great events, though utterly unable to imagine what might be the nature of the expected change.

These gloomy forebodings of coming evil so thoroughly possessed the mind of Montezuma, that the commanding dignity and pride of the monarch gave way before the absorbing anxiety of the man and the father, and, in a manner unnoted him for the duties of the lofty place he had so nobly filled. He yielded, as will be seen in the sequel, not without grief, but without resistance, to the fixed decrees of fate, and awaited the issue, as a victim for the heaven-appointed sacrifice.

It was about fifteen years after the prophetic announcement of the doom of the young princess of the empire, that Montezuma was reclining in his summer saloon, where he had been gloomily brooding over his darkening prospects, till his soul was filled with sadness. His beautiful daughter was with him, striving to cheer his heart with the always welcome music of her songs, and the affectionate expression of a love as pure and deep as ever warmed the heart of a devoted child. She had gone

• One version of this singular prophetic legend represented the expected invaders, as the descendants of the ancient god Quetzalcoatl, who, ages ago, had voluntarily abdicated the throne of Anahuac, and departed to a far country in the East, with a promise to his afflicted people, that his children would ultimately return, and claim their ancient country and crown.

that day into the royal presence to ask a boon for her early and faithful friend, Karee. This lovely and gifted creature, now in the full maturity of all her wonderful powers of mind, and personal attractions, had often been admitted, as a special favorite, into the royal presence, to exhibit her remarkable powers of minstrelsy, and her almost supernatural gifts as an improvisatrice of the wild melodies of Anahuac. Some of her chants were of rare pathos and sublimity, and sometimes she was so carried away with the impassioned vehemence of her inspiration, that she seemed an inspired messenger from the skies, uttering in their language the oracles of the gods. On this occasion, she had requested permission to sing a new chant in the palace, that she might seize the opportunity to breathe a prophetic warning in the ear of the emperor. She had thus dreamed that the dark cloud which had so long hung over that devoted land, had burst in an overwhelming storm, upon the capital, and buried Montezuma and all his house in indiscriminate ruin. She had seen the demon of destruction, in the guise of a snow-white angel, clad in burnished silver, borne on a fiery animal, of great power, and fleet as the wind, having under him a small band of warriors, guarded and mounted like himself, armed with thunderbolts which they hurled at will against all who opposed their progress. She had seen the monarch of Teuochtitlan, with his hosts of armed Mexicans and the tributary armies of Tezcuco, Islacapan, Chalco, and all the cities of that glorious valley, tremble and cower before that little band of invaders, and yield himself without a blow to their hands. She had seen the thousands and tens of thousands of her beloved land fall before this handful of strangers, and melt away, like the mists of the morning before the rising sun. And she had heard a voice from the dark cloud as it broke, saying, so only, as the lurid lightning leaped into the heart of the imperial palace, 'The gods help only those who help themselves.'

Food and agitated with the strong influence of this prophetic vision, Karee, who had always regarded herself as the guardian genius of Tecuichpo, now imagined the sphere of her duty greatly enlarged, and deemed herself specially commissioned to save the empire from impending destruction. Waving her vision, and the warning it uttered, into one of her most impassioned chants, and arraying herself as the priestess of nature, she followed Tecuichpo, with a firm step into the royal presence, and, with the boldness and eloquence of a prophetess, warned him of the coming danger, and urged him to arouse from his apathy, unbecoming the monarch of a proud and powerful nation, east of the slavery of his superstitious fears, and prepare to meet, with the power of a man, and the wisdom of a king, whatever evil might come upon him. Rising with the kindling inspiration of her theme, she ventured gently to reproach the awe-stricken monarch with his unmanly fears, and to remind him that on his single will, and the firmness of his soul, hung not only his own destiny but that of wife and children; and more than that, of a whole nation, whose myriads of households looked up to him, as the common father of them all, the heaven-appointed guardian of their lives, liberty and happiness. At length, alarmed at her own energy and boldness, so unbecoming to the proudest noble of the realm, in that royal presence, she bent her knee, and, baring her bosom, she lowered her voice almost to a whisper, and said imploringly—

Strike, monarch! strike, this heart is thine,
To live or die for thee;
Strike, but heed this voice of mine
It comes from heaven through me;
It comes to save this blessed land,
It comes thy soul to free
From those dark fears, and bid thee stand
The monarch father of thy land,
That only lives in fact.

Strike, father! if my words too bold
Thy royal ears offend;
The visions of the night are told,
Thy destiny the gods unfold—
Oh! be thy people's friend,
True to thyself, to them, to heaven—
So shall this lowering cloud be riven
And light and peace descend,
To bless this golden realm, and save
Tecuichpo from an early grave.

The vision of the beautiful pythoness had deeply and powerfully affected the soul of Montezuma; and her closing appeal moved him even to tears. Though accustomed to the most obsequious deference from all his subjects, even from the proudest of his nobles, he had listened to every word of Karee with the profoundest attention and interest, as if it had been from the acknowledged oracle of heaven. When she ceased, there was a breathless silence in the hall. The monarch drew his lovely daughter to his bosom in a passionate embrace. Karee remained prostrate, with her face to the ground, her heart throbbing almost audibly with her emotions. Suddenly, a deep long blast from a distant trumpet announced the arrival of a courier at the capital. It was a signal for all the attendants to retire. Tecuichpo tenderly kissing her father, took Karee by the hand, raised her up and led her out, and the monarch was left alone.

In a few moments, the courier arrived and entering, barefoot and veiled, into the royal presence bowed to the very ground, handed a scroll to the king and departed. When Montezuma had unfolded the scroll, he seemed for a moment, as if struck with instant paralysis. Fear, astonishment, dismay, seized his soul. The vision of Karee was already fulfilled. The pictured tablet was the very counterpart of her oracular chant—the literal interpretation of her prophetic vision. It announced the arrival within the realms of Montezuma, of a band of pale faced strangers, clad in burnished

armor, each having at his command a beautiful animal of great power, hitherto unknown in that country, that bore him with the speed of the wind wherever he would go, and seemed, what he was mounted, to be a part of himself. It described their weapons, representing them as having the lightning and thunder at their disposal, which they caused to issue sometimes from dark heavy engines, which they dragged along the ground, and sometimes from smaller ones which they carried in their hands. It delineated, faithfully and skillfully their water houses, or ships, in which they traversed the great waters from a far distant country. The peculiar costume and bearing of their commander, and of his chiefs, were also happily represented in the rich coloring for which the Aztecs were distinguished. Nothing was omitted in their entire array, which could serve to convey to the eye of the emperor a correct and complete impression of the appearance, numbers and power of the strangers. It was all before him, at a glance, a living speaking picture, and told the story of the invasion as graphically and eloquently as if he had been himself a witness of their debarkation, and of their feats of horsemanship. It was all before him, a terrible living reality. The gods whom he worshipped had sent these strangers to fulfil their own irresistible purposes—if, indeed, these were not the gods themselves, in human form.

The mind of Montezuma was overwhelmed. Like Belshazzar, when the divine hand appeared writing his doom on the wall, his soul fainted in him, his knees smote together, and he sat, in blank astonishment, gazing on the picture before him, as if the very tablet possessed a supernatural power of destruction. Paralyzed with the influence of his long indulged fears so singularly and strikingly realized, the monarch sat alone, neither seeking comfort, nor asking counsel of any one, till the hour of the evening repast. The summons aroused him from his reverie; but he regarded it not. He remained alone, in his own private apartments, during the whole night, fasting and sleepless, traversing the marble halls in an agony of agitation.

With the first light of the morning, the shrill notes of the trumpet, reverberating along the shadowy slopes of the cordilleras, announced the approach of another courier from the camp of the strangers. It rung in the ears of the dejected monarch, like an alarm. He woke at once from his stupor, and began to consider what was to be done. The warning of Karee, rushed upon his recollection. Her bold and timely appeal struck him to the heart. He resolved to be once more the monarch, and the father of his people. Uttering an earnest prayer to all his gods, he awaited the arrival of the courier.

Swift of foot as the mountain deer, the messenger were soon heard, measuring with solemn pace, the long corridor of the royal apartments, as one who felt that he was approaching the presence of majesty, and bearing a message of great and with the most important issues to the common weal. Bowing low, with that profound reverence which was rigorously exacted of all who approached the presence of Montezuma, he stepped on the ground with his right hand, and then bent to the earth, delivered his message, and then retired. It was a courier as an ordinary messenger from the strangers, much degraded, requesting that they might be permitted to pass, respects to his imperial majesty, in his own capital. The quick-sighted monarch perceived at once that prudence and policy required that this interview should be prevented.

A council of the wisest and most experienced of the Aztec nobles was immediately called. The opinions of the royal advisers were variously expressed, but all with one accord, agreed that the request of the strangers could not be granted. Some counselled a bold and warlike message, commanding the intruders to depart instantly on pain of the royal displeasure. Some recommended their forcible expulsion by the army of the empire. The more aged and experienced, who had learned how much easier it is to avoid, than to escape, a danger, proposed a more courteous and peaceable reply to the message of the strangers. They deemed it unworthy of a great and powerful monarch, to be angry, when the people of another nation visited his territories, or requested permission to see his capital. To manifest, or feel anything like fear, in such a case, would be a reproach alike upon his courage and his patriotism. So long, therefore as the strangers conducted themselves peaceably, and with becoming deference to the will of the emperor, and the laws of the realm, they should be treated civilly, and hospitably entertained.

To this wise and prudent counsel, the monarch was fully prepared to yield. It was strongly seconded by his superstitious reverence for the heaven-sent strangers, and his mortal dread of their supernatural power. He, therefore, selected the noblest and wisest of his chiefs as ambassadors, to bear his message, which was kindly and courteously expressed; at the same time conveying a firm but respectful refusal to admit the foreigners to an interview in the capital, or to extend to them the protection of the court, after a reasonable time had elapsed for their re-embarkation. This message was accompanied with a magnificent royal present, consisting of the richest and most beautiful suits of apparel for the chief and all his men, with gorgeous capes and robes of feather-work, glittering with jewels—precious stones richly set in gold, and many magnificent ornaments of pure gold.

At the head of this embassy were princes of high estate, and most noble bearing, commanding in person, and of great distinction, both at the court and in the camp. When they arrived near the encampment of the strangers, which was the spot where the city of Vera Cruz now stands, they sent a courier forward, to announce their approach, and prepare for their reception.

[To be continued.]