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AMERICAN TABLEAUX,

No. 1.

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**SKETCHES**

**OF**

**ABORIGINAL LIFE.**

'Tis like a dream, when one awakes,—  
These visions of the scenes of old;  
'Tis like the moon, when morning breaks;  
'Tis like a tale round watch-fires told.

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**By V. V. VIDE.**

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## PREFACE.

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The American Tableaux lay no claim to the respect and confidence, which is justly shown to authentic history; nor do they anticipate the ready favor usually accorded to high wrought romance. They are neither the one nor the other. The general outline is designed to be historical, and true to the characters of individuals, and the customs of nations and tribes; and the drapery in which it is arrayed is intended rather to illustrate the truth, and place it in bolder relief, than to weaken its force by irrelevant inventions. It is proposed rather to shade and color the naked sketches of history, and restore them to their natural setting and accompaniments, than to alter or distort them. The characters of history are usually stiff, cold, and statue-like, and their drapery, if they have any, is of the same marble rigidity with themselves. The Tableaux would transfer them to canvass in their natural colors, strongly relieved by a back-ground of familiar scenery and every day associations, and shaded or lightened, as the case may be, by the sorrows or joys of social life, and the cares or honors of public station. It may be presumptuous to hope that all this has been accomplished. It is safer to say, it has been attempted.

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## THE AZTEC PRINCESS,

OR

### DESTINY FORESHADOWED.

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Rapacious Spain  
Followed her bold discoverer o'er the main;  
A rabid race, fanatically bold,  
And steeled to cruelty by lust of gold,  
Traversed the waves, the unknown world explored,  
The cross their standard, but their path the sword;  
Their steps were graves; o'er prostrate realms they trod,  
They worshipped Mammon, while they vowed to God.

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## THE AZTEC PRINCESS.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF TECUICHPO.

Tell me, ascribest thou influence to the stars?

“Wo! wo! wo! to the imperial House of Tenochtitlan! Never saw I the heavens in so

inauspicious an aspect. Dark portentous influences appear on every side. May the horoscope of the infant daughter of Montezuma never be fulfilled.”

These were the awful words of the priestly astrologer of Tenochtitlan, uttered with solemn and oracular emphasis from the lofty Teocalli, where he had been long and studiously watching the heavens, and calculating the relative positions and combinations of the stars. A deep unutterable gloom seemed to pervade his soul. Several times he traversed the broad terrace, in a terrible agitation; his splendid pontifical robes flowing loosely in the breeze, and his tall majestic figure relieved against the clear sky, like some colossal moving statue,—and then, in tones of deeper grief than before, finding no error in his calculations, reiterated his oracular curse—“Wo! wo! wo! to the imperial House of Tenochtitlan!” Casting down his instruments to the earth, and tearing his hair in the violence of his emotions, he prostrated himself on the altar, and poured forth a loud and earnest prayer to all his gods.

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“Is there no favoring omen in any quarter, venerable father?” inquired the agitated messenger from the palace, when the prayer was ended—“is there no one of those bright spheres above us, that will deign to smile on the destiny of the young princess?”

“It is full of mysterious, portentous contradictions,” replied the astrologer. “Good and evil influences contend for the mastery. The evil prevail, but the good are not wholly extinguished. The life of the princess will be a life of sorrow, but there will be a peculiar brightness in its end. Yet the aspect of every sign in the heavens is wo, and only wo, to the imperial House of Montezuma.”

Faith in the revelations of astrology was a deeply rooted superstition with the Aztecs. It pervaded the whole structure of society, affecting the most intelligent and well-informed, as well as the humblest and most ignorant individual. In this case, the prophetic wailings of the priestly oracle rolled, like a long funereal knell, through the magnificent halls of the imperial palace, and fell upon the ear of the monarch, as if it had been a voice from the unseen world. Montezuma was reclining on a splendidly embroidered couch, in his private apartment, anxiously awaiting the response of the celestial oracle. He was magnificently arrayed in his royal robes of green, richly ornamented with variegated feather-work, and elaborately inwrought with gold and silver. His sandals were of pure gold, with ties and anklets of gold and silver thread, curiously interwoven with a variegated cotton cord. On his head was a rich fillet of gold, with a beautiful plume bending gracefully over one side, casting a melancholy shade over his handsome but naturally pensive features. A few of the royal princes sat, in respectful silence, at the farther end of the chamber, waiting, with an anxiety almost equal to that of the monarch, the return of the royal messenger.

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The apartments of the emperor were richly hung with tapestry of ornamental feather-work, rivalling, in the brilliancy of its dyes, and the beautiful harmony of its arrangement, the celebrated Gobelin tapestry. The floor was a tessellated pavement of porphyry and other beautiful stones. Numerous torches, supported in massive silver stands, delicately carved with fanciful figures of various kinds, blazed through the apartment, lighting up, with an almost noontide brilliancy, the gorgeous folds of the plumed hangings, and filling the whole palace with the sweet breath of the odoriferous gums of which they were composed.

The emperor leaned pensively on his hand, seemingly oppressed with some superstitious melancholy forebodings. Perhaps the shadow of that mysterious prophecy, which betokened the extinction of the Aztec dynasty, and the consequent ruin of his house, was passing athwart the troubled sky of his mind, veiling the always doubtful future in mists of tenfold dimness. Whatever it was that disturbed his royal serenity, his reverie was soon broken by the sound of an approaching footstep. For a moment, nothing was heard but the measured tread of the trembling messenger, pacing with unwilling step the long corridor, that led to the royal presence. With his head bowed upon his breast, his eyes fixed upon the pavement, his person veiled in the coarse *nequen*,<sup>[A]</sup> and his feet bare, he stood before the monarch, dumb as a statue.

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“What response bring you,” eagerly enquired the emperor, “from the burning oracles of heaven? How reads the destiny of my new-born infant?”

“The response be to the enemies of the great Montezuma,” replied the messenger, without lifting his eyes from the floor, “and the destiny it foreshadows to the children of them that hate him.”

“Speak,” exclaimed the monarch, “What message do you bring from the priest of the stars?”

“Alas! my royal master, my message is full of wo—my heart faints, and my tongue refuses its office to give it utterance. The old prophet bade me say, that the celestial influences are all unpropitious; that the destiny of the infant princess is a life of sorrow, with a gleam of more than earthly brightness in its evening horizon. And then, prostrating himself upon the great altar, he groaned out one long, deep, heart-rending wail for the imperial House of Tenochtitlan, and the golden realm of Anahuac.”

A deeper shade came over the brow of Montezuma, and heaving a sigh from the very depths of a soul that had long been agitated by melancholy forebodings of coming evil, he raised his eyes to heaven, and said, “the will of the gods be done.” Then, waving his hand to his attendants, they bowed their heads, and retired in silence from the apartment.

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“It has come at last,” inwardly groaned the monarch, as soon as he found himself alone—“it has come at last—that fearful prophecy, that has so long hung, like the shadow of a great cloud, over



my devoted house, is now to be fulfilled. The fates have willed it, and there is no escape from their dread decrees. I must make ready for the sacrifice."

Nerved by the stern influence of this dark fatalism, Montezuma brushed a tear from his eye, and putting a royal restraint upon the turbulent sorrows and fears of his paternal heart, hastened to the apartments of the queen, to break to her, with all the gentleness and caution which her delicate and precarious circumstances required, the mournful issue of their inquiries at the court of heaven, into the future destiny and prospects of their new-born babe.

A deep gloom hung over the palace and the city. Every heart, even the most humble and unobserved, sympathized in the disappointment, and shared the distress, of their sovereign. And the day, which should have been consecrated to loyal congratulations, and general festivities, became, as by common consent, a sort of national fast, a season of universal lamentation.

The little stranger was welcomed into life with that peculiar chastened tenderness, which is the natural offspring of love and pity—love, such as infant innocence wins spontaneously from every heart—pity, such as melancholy forebodings of coming years of sorrow to one beloved, cannot fail to awaken. She was regarded as the most beautiful and the most interesting of all her race. Every look and motion seemed to have its peculiar significance in indicating the victim of a remarkable destiny. And it is not to be wondered at, that a superstition so sad, and an affection so tender and solicitous, discovered an almost miraculous precocity in the first developments of the intellectual and moral qualities of its subject. She was the attractive centre of all the admiration and love of the royal household. Imagination fancied a peculiar sadness in her eye, and her merry laugh was supposed to mingle an element of sadness in its tones. Her mild and winning manners, and her affectionate disposition made her the idol of all whom she loved; and each one strove to do her service, as if hoping to avert, in some measure, the coming doom of their darling; while she clung to the fond and devoted hearts around her, as the ivy clings to the oak, which receives its embraces, and is necessary to its support.

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When the young princess, who received the name of Tecuichpo, had arrived at the age of one year, she was given in charge to a young and beautiful slave, whom the Emperor had recently obtained from Azcapozalco. Karee was gifted with rare powers of minstrelsy. Her voice had the sweetness, power and compass of a mocking bird, and all day long she warbled her ever-changing lays, as if her natural breathing were music, and song the natural flow of her thoughts. She soon became passionately devoted to the little pet, and exerted all her uncommon gifts to amuse and instruct her. She taught her all the native songs of Azcapozalco and Mexitli, instructed her in dancing, embroidery and feather-work, and initiated her into the science of picture-writing and the fanciful language of flowers. Karee and her royal charge were never apart. Gentle and timid as the dove, Tecuichpo clung to her new nurse, as to the bosom of a mother. Even in her early infancy, she would so sweetly respond, like an echo, to the gentle lullaby, and mingle her little notes so symphoniously with those of Karee, that it excited the wonder and admiration of all. Karee was passionately fond of flowers. It was indeed an element in the national taste of this remarkable people. But Karee was unusually gifted in her preceptions of natural beauty, and seemed to have a soul most delicately attuned to the spirit and language of flowers, the painted hieroglyphics of nature. She loved to exercise her exuberant fancy in decorating her little mistress, and often contrived so to arrange them upon the various parts of her person and dress, as to make her at different times, the emblematic representation of every bright and beautiful spirit, that was supposed to people their celestial paradise, or to hover, on wings of love and gentle care, about the path of those whom the gods delighted to favor.

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It was the daily custom for Karee to carry the young princess into the apartment of the Emperor, as soon as he rose from his siesta, to receive the affectionate caresses which her royal father was so fond of lavishing upon her. At such times, Tecuichpo would often take with her some rich chaplets of flowers which Karee had woven for her, and amuse herself and her father, by arranging them in a coronet on his brow, or twining them, in every fantastic form, about his person, to make, as she said, a flower-god of *him*, who was a sun to all the flowers of her earthly paradise.

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One day, when the young princess was sleeping in her little arbor, the ever watchful nurse observed a viper among the flowers, which she had strown about her pillow, just ready to dart its venomous fang into the bosom of her darling. Quick as lightning she seized the reptile in her hand, and, before he had time to turn upon her, flung him upon the floor, and crushed him under her sandalled heel. Passionately embracing her dear charge, she hastened with her to the apartments of the queen, and related the story of her narrow escape, with so much of the eloquence of gratitude for being the favored instrument of her deliverance from so cruel a death, that it deeply affected the heart of the queen. She embraced her child and Karee, as if both were, for the moment, equally dear to her; and then, in return for the faithful service, rendered at the hazard of her own life, she promised to bestow upon the slave whatever she chose to ask. "Give me, O give me freedom, and a chinampa, and I ask no more," was the eager reply of Karee to this unexpected offer of the queen. The request was immediately granted; and the first sorrow that ever clouded the heart of the lovely Tecuichpo, was that of parting with her faithful and loving Karee.

A *chinampa* was a floating island in the lake of Tezcuco, upon whose very bosom the imperial city was built. They were very numerous, and some of them were large, and extremely beautiful. They were formed by the alluvial deposit in the waters of the lake, and by occasional masses of earth detached from the shores, held together by the fibrous roots, with which they were penetrated,

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and which in that luxurious clime, put out their feelers in every direction, and gathered to their embrace whatever of nutriment and support the richly impregnated waters afforded. In the process of a few years accumulation, the floating mass increased in length, breadth and thickness, till it became an island, capable of sustaining not only shrubs and trees, but sometimes a human habitation. Some of these were from two to three hundred feet square, and could be moved about at pleasure, like a raft, from city to city, along the borders of the lake. The natives, who were skilful gardeners, and passionately devoted to the cultivation of flowers, improved upon this beautiful hint of nature, to enlarge their means of supplying the capital with fruits, vegetables and flowers. Constructing small rafts of reeds, anchoring them out in the lake, and then covering them with the sediment drawn up from the bottom, they soon found them covered with a thrifty vegetation, and a vigorous soil, from which they were able to produce a large supply of the various luxuries of their highly favored clime.

It was to one of these fairy gardens that the beautiful Karee retired, rich in the priceless jewel of freedom, and feeling that a chinampa all her own, and flowers to train and commune with, was the summit of human desire. Karee was no common character. Gifted by nature with unusual talents, she had, though in adverse circumstances, cultivated them by all the means in her power. Remarkably quick of perception, and shrewd and accurate of observation, with a memory that retained every thing that was committed to it, in its exact outlines and proportions, she was enabled to gather materials for improvement from every scene through which she passed. Her imagination was exceedingly powerful and active, sometimes wild and terrific, but kept in balance by a sound judgment and a discriminating taste. Her love of flowers was a passion, a part of her nature. For her they had a language, if not a soul. And there was not one of all the endless varieties of that luxuriant clime, that had not a definite and emphatic place in the vocabulary of her fancy. The history of her life she could have written in her floral dialect, and to her, though its lines might have faded rapidly, its pages would have been always legible and eloquent. Her attachments were strong and enduring, and there was that element of heroism in her soul, that she would unhesitatingly have sacrificed life for the object of her love.

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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 fullest 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 dismal superstition. Though accustomed to an awful 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.

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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, invested her, in the view of the multitude, with something of the dignity, and much of the superstitious charm of a prophetess.

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[A] A mantle of coarse cotton fabric, which all who approached the emperor were compelled to put on, in token of humility and reverence.

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## 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.

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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 exceeding loveliness was the theme of many a song, and the fame of her beauty and her accomplishments was published 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 beautiful mimic, to whom she gave the name of Karee-o-thán—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-thán was often flying about in the gardens, and soliloquizing in the arbors, the favorite resorts of her beautiful mistress, and often attracted the notice of Cacamo.

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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, that filled the garden with its delicious perfume, repeated the name of his mistress, as often as her lover uttered it, occasionally connecting with it 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 induce 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 Tenochtitlan, 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.

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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 heroism worthy 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 refined gaieties of the palace, the grave deliberations 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 unspeakably beautiful and winning to those whom he loved, and terrible to those on whom he frowned. He was mild, humane, generous, confiding; yet sternly and heroically just. His country was his idol. The one great passion of his soul, to which all other thoughts and affections were subordinate and tributary, was patriotism. On that altar, if 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 wail, 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 ineradicable 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 re-possess their ancient inheritance.<sup>[B]</sup> 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 Azteca 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.

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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, unfitted 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.

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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 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 thrice 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 Tenochtitlan, 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 this small 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, sternly, as the forked lightning leaped into the heart of the imperial palace, "The gods help only those who help themselves."

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Filled and agitated with the stirring 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. Weaving 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, cast off 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-struck 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 unwonted even 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—

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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 thee.

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.

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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 the violence of 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 unrolled the scroll, he seemed for a moment, as if struck with instant paralysis. Fear, astonishment, dismay, seized upon 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, while 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 skilfully 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.

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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.

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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 alarum. He awoke 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 steps of the messenger were soon heard, measuring with solemn pace, the long corridor of the royal mansion, as one who felt that he was approaching the presence of majesty, and bearing a message pregnant 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 touched the ground with his right hand, and then, his eyes bent to the earth, delivered his pictured scroll, and retired. It was a courteous and complimentary message from the strangers he so much dreaded, requesting that they might be permitted to pay their 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.

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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 any thing 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 already fully prepared to yield. It was strongly seconded by his superstitious reverence for the heaven-sent strangers, and his mortal dread of their superhuman 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 munificent 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.

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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.

The meeting of the parties was one of no little pomp and ceremony, for the courtly manners and chivalric bearing of the European cavaliers were scarcely superior, in impressiveness and effect, to the barbaric splendor, and graceful consciousness of power, which characterized the flower of the Aztec nobility. The chief, advancing towards the invaders, bowed low to earth, touching the ground with his right hand, then raising it to his head, and presenting it to his guest, announced himself as the envoy and servant of the great Montezuma, sole monarch and master of all the realms of Anahuac; and demanded the name of the stranger, the country from which he came, and the motives which induced him to trespass upon the sacred territories of his royal master, and to presume to ask an interview with the emperor, in his capital. The Castilian chieftain, with a courteous and knightly bearing replied, that his name was Hernando Cortez—that he was one of the humblest of the servants of the great Charles, the mighty monarch of Spain, and sovereign ruler of the Indies, and that he had come, with his little band of followers, to pay his court to the great Montezuma, and to bear to him the fraternal salutation of his master, which he could only deliver in person.

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The reply of the Mexican was dignified, courteous, and pointed, and left no hope to the Spaniard, that he would then be able to effect his purpose, of visiting in person the golden city. "If," said the prince, "your monarch had come himself to our shores, he might well demand a personal meeting with our lord, the emperor, but when he sends his servant to represent him, he surely cannot presume to do more than communicate with the servants of the great Montezuma. If it were possible that another sun should visit yonder sky, he might look upon our sun, in his march, and move and shine in his presence. But the moon and the stars cannot shine when he is abroad. They can look upon each other only when he withdraws his light."

The royal message having been delivered, the presents which accompanied it were brought forward, and spread out upon mats, in front of the general's tent. The Spaniards were struck, with surprise and admiration at the fineness of the texture of the cloths, the richness of their dyes, the gorgeous coloring and tasteful arrangement of the feather-work, the masterly workmanship and exquisite finish of the jewelry, and, above all, the immense value, and magnificent size of the golden toys which were presented them. They conceived, at once, the most exalted ideas of the riches of the country, and the munificence and splendor of the monarch that ruled over it. Their avarice and cupidity were strongly excited, and more than one of the inferior officers, as well as their general, formed the immediate resolution, that, in despite of the imperial interdict, they would endeavor, either by diplomacy or by force, to win their way to the capital, which they supposed must of necessity be the grand depository of all the treasures in the empire. Their intentions were kept secret, even from each other, and, under cover of a specious submission to the expressed will of the monarch, Cortez requested permission to delay his departure, till his men should be recruited, and his stores replenished for his long voyage.

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Meanwhile, taking advantage of this unauthorized reprieve, the artful and indefatigable Castilian contrived to draw off from their unwilling and burdensome allegiance to Montezuma, the Totonacs, a considerable tribe, residing in that part of the country where he had effected his landing; and so to impress them with a sense of his own power and the lenity of his government, as to bind them to him in a solemn treaty of alliance. He also sent an embassy to the Tlascalans, a nation that had long maintained its independence against the ambitious encroachments of Mexico, and held Montezuma their natural and only foe. They were a brave and warlike people, and nearly as far advanced in the arts of civilization as their enemies. Their government was a kind of republic. Cortez, with magniloquent pretensions of invincible power, and inexhaustible resources, proposed to assist the Tlascalans in reducing the power of Mexico, and putting an end

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to the oppressions and exactions of Montezuma. For this purpose, he asked leave to pass through their country, on his march to the great capital.

Distrusting the intentions of the strangers, and fearing that, instead of a disinterested friend and ally, they should find in them only a new enemy, whom, once admitted, they could never expel from their dominions, and whose yoke might be even harder to bear than that which the Aztec monarch had in vain attempted to fasten upon them—the proposed alliance of the Spaniards was rejected, with such bold and ample demonstrations of hostility, as left no room for doubt, that any attempt to force a passage through their territories, would be fiercely and ably contested.

Never daunted by obstacles, though somewhat perplexed, the brave Cortez rushed forward, encountered the almost countless hosts of the Tlascalan army, and, after several severe and deadly contests, in which the skill and prowess of his handful of men, with their terrible horses and yet more terrible fire-arms, were nearly overpowered by the immense numbers, astonishing bravery, and comparative skill of the enemy, he succeeded in terrifying them into submission, and winning them to a treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive, against the tyrant Montezuma, the common enemy of all the nations of Anahuac. By these singular and unparalleled successes, the little band of Castilian adventurers found themselves fortified, in the heart of the country, in close alliance with two powerful tribes, who swelled their army to ten times its original number, besides supplying them liberally with all the provisions that were needed for themselves and horses.

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Never was adventure so rashly undertaken, or so boldly pushed, as this singular expedition of the Spanish cavaliers. And never, probably, were there associated, in one little band, so many of the master spirits of chivalry, the true material of a conquering army. The compeers of Cortez, who submitted to his authority, and acted in perfect harmony with him, as if they were but subordinate parts of himself, were each competent to command a host, and lead it on to certain victory. The impetuous, daring Alvarado, the cool, courageous, trusty Sandoval, the high-spirited, chivalrous Olid, the rash, head-long, cruel Velasquez de Leon, and others, worthy to be the comrades of these, and of Cortez—when have the ranks of the war-god assigned so many master spirits to one enterprize? And the brave, the gifted, the indomitable Xicotencatl, the mountain chief of Tlascala, whom the Spaniards, with so much difficulty, first subdued and then won to their cause, as an ally—what a noble personification of the soul and spirit of heroism, realizing in personal bravery, martial skill and prowess, and in all the commanding qualities of person and of character, which go to constitute the victorious warrior, the best pictures of the type-heroes of epic poetry and history.

In all their previous discoveries in the New World, the progress of the Spaniards to victory was easy, and almost unresisted. The invaders of Mexico, however, found themselves suddenly introduced to a new people, and new scenes—to nations of warriors, to races intelligent, civilized, and competent to self-government and self-defence. And all the skill, courage, and energy of their ablest commanders, and their bravest men, would have availed them nothing in their herculean enterprize, if they had not craftily and skilfully worked upon the jealousies and differences existing between the various tribes and nations of Anahuac, and fomented the long smothered discontents, and unwritten complaints of an over-taxed and sternly-governed people, into open and clamorous resistance to the despotic sway of Montezuma. It is curious and melancholy to observe, how eagerly they shook off the golden yoke of their hereditary monarch, for the iron one of a new master, and exchanged their long-established servitude to their legitimate king and their pagan gods, for a more galling, hopeless, and wasting slavery to the cruel and rapacious invader, under the life-promising Sign of the Cross, the desecrated banner of the Prince of Peace.

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- [B] 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.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### SUPERSTITIOUS FEAR AND VACILLATING POLICY OF MONTEZUMA.

The land was ours—this glorious land—  
With all its wealth of woods and streams—  
Our warriors, strong in heart and hand,  
Our daughters, beautiful as dreams.

— — — — —  
And then we heard the omens say,  
That God had sent his angels forth  
To sweep our ancient tribes away—



While these events were transpiring in the ever moving camp of the victorious invaders, the imperial court of Tenochtitlan was agitated and distracted by the divided counsels and wavering policy of the superstitious, fear-stricken monarch, and his various advisers. At one time, deeply offended by their audacious disregard of his positive prohibitions, and roused to a sense of his duty as a king, by the prophetic warning of Karee, which never ceased to ring in his ears, Montezuma was almost persuaded to give in to the war-party, and send out an army that should overwhelm the strangers at a blow. But, before this noble purpose had time to mature itself into action, all his superstitious fears would revive, and, without coming to any decision either to move or stand still, he would pause in timid inaction, till some new success had made the invaders more formidable than before, and invested their mission with something more of that preternatural sacredness, which alone had power to unman the monarch, and disarm his craving ambition. At each advance of the conquering Castilians, he realized the growing necessity of prompt and efficient measures of defence, while at the same time he felt a greater reluctance to contend with fate. The result was, that he only dallied with the foe, by continually sending new embassies, each, with larger and richer presents than the preceding, having no effect but to add fuel to their already burning thirst for gold, and strengthen their determination to accomplish their original purpose.

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These royal embassies were less and less firm and peremptory in their terms, until they assumed the tone of expostulation, and assigning various and often conflicting reasons why the Spaniards should not pursue their route any farther towards the imperial city. At length, when the courier announced the arrival of the mysterious band at Tlascalala, and the consummation of the alliance between them and his old and bitter enemies, together with the defection of many cities and districts, he felt it impossible to remain any longer undecided. His throne trembled under him. He must act, or it would fall, and involve him and his house in inevitable ruin. Instead, however, of a bold and masterly activity in the defence of his capital and crown, he changed his policy altogether, and sending a new embassy with more splendid gifts than ever, invited the strangers to his court, and promised them all the hospitalities of his empire. He designated the route they should pursue, and gave orders for their reception in all the towns and cities through which they should pass.

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Montezuma was politic and wise in some things; and the purpose he had now in view, if it had not been frustrated, would have been deemed a master-stroke of policy, worthy of the ablest disciples of the Macchiavellian school. Perceiving the necessity of breaking up this combination of new and old enemies, he had recourse to stratagem to effect it, intending that the strangers, whom he dared not to oppose with direct violence, should fall into the snare they had laid for themselves, in thrusting themselves forward, in despite of his repeated remonstrances, into the heart of his empire. He feared to raise his own hand to destroy them, because they were, in his view, commissioned of heaven to overturn his throne; but he deemed it perfectly consistent with this reverence for the decrees of fate, to lay a snare into which they should fall, and so destroy themselves. He little understood the watchfulness and circumspection of the man he had to deal with, or the tremendous advantage which their armor of proof and their engines of destruction gave the Europeans over the almost naked Mexicans, with their primitive weapons of offence. It was his plan to separate the foreigners from their new Indian allies, and invite them to come alone to the capital, as was first proposed. And he designed to assign them accommodations in one of the ancient palaces, in the heart of the city, where, surrounded by high walls, on every side, they should be shut up from all intercourse with the people, and left to perish of famine.

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When this purpose was formed, the monarch kept it a profound secret in his own breast. The ambassadors whom he sent to the Castilian camp, were of the highest ranks of the nobility, and were accompanied by a long train of slaves, bearing the rich presents, by which the wily monarch hoped at the same time to display his own royal munificence, and to propitiate the favor of the dreaded strangers. Every new display of this kind only served more effectually to defeat his own hopes; for the avarice of the Spaniards, whose lust of gold was absolutely insatiable, was so far from being satisfied with this profusion of royal gifts, that it was only the more inflamed with every new accession to their treasures. The only effect, therefore, of these repeated embassies was to confirm the Spaniards in their convictions of the conscious weakness of the Mexicans, and make them the more resolute in pushing forward to complete the subjugation of the whole country, and possess themselves of all its seemingly inexhaustible treasures of gold.

Montezuma had now another difficulty to contend with, in his endeavor to rid himself of the intruders. The Tlascalans represented him to Cortez as false and deceitful as he was ambitious and rapacious, and used every argument in their power to dissuade him from committing himself to his hands. But the bold adventurer, always confident in his own resources, seemed never to think of danger when an object was to be accomplished, or to regard any thing as impossible which he desired to attain. As soon as the door was thrown open to his amicable approach to the capital, he set himself to prepare for the march. The expostulations and suspicions of the Tlascalans made him, perhaps, more careful in his preparations against a surprise, and more rigorous in the discipline of his little corps, than he might otherwise have been. Wherever he was, his camp was as cautiously posted, as fully and rigidly guarded as if, on the eve of battle, he was hourly expecting an assault. This watchfulness was maintained throughout the whole adventurous campaign, as well when in the midst of friends and allies, as when surrounded by hostile legions.

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After the royal ambassadors had departed with their pacific message, the mind of Montezuma was harassed and agitated with many doubts of the propriety of the course he had adopted. His



nobles, and the tributary princes of the neighboring cities of Tezcuco, Tlacopan, and Iztapalapan, were divided in their opinions. Some complained, though not loudly, of the weak and vacillating policy of the king. Some, even of the common people, feared the consequences, anticipating the most disastrous results, in accordance with their superstitious veneration for the oracles of their faith. The third day after the departure of the envoys, the king was pacing up and down one of the beautifully shaded walks of the royal gardens, listening with a disturbed mind to the powerful expostulations of his brother, Cuitlahua, who, from the beginning, had vehemently opposed every concession to the invaders, and urgently solicited permission to lead the army against them, and drive them from the land. Suddenly, a voice as of a distant choir of chanters arrested his ear. The melody was solemn, sweet and soothing. It seemed to come sometimes from the upper regions of the air, in tones of silvery clearness and power, sometimes from beneath, in suppressed and muffled harmony, as when the swell organ soliloquises with all its valves closed,—sometimes it retreated, as if dying into an echo along the distant avenues of royal palms and aged cypresses, or the citron and orange groves that skirted the farther end of the garden, and then, suddenly, and with great power, it burst in the full tide of impassioned song, from every tree and bower in that vast paradise of terrestrial sweets. Enchanted by the more than Circean melody, the brothers paused in their animated discourse, and stood, for a few moments, in silent wonder and fixed attention. Presently the chanting ceased, and one solitary voice broke forth in plaintive but emphatic recitative as from the midst of the sparkling jet that played its ceaseless tune in the grand porphyritic basin near which they stood. The words, which were simple and oracular, struck deep into the heart of Montezuma, and found a ready response in that of his royal brother.

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The lion<sup>[C]</sup> walks forth in his power and pride,  
The terror and lord of the forest wide—  
When the fox appears, shall he flee and hide?

— — —

The eagle's nest is strong and high,  
Unquestioned monarch of the sky—  
Should he quail before the falcon's eye?

— — —

The sun rides forth through the heavens afar,  
Dispensing light from his flaming car—  
Should he veil his glory, or turn him back,  
When the meteor flashes athwart his track?

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— — —

Shall the eagle invite the hawk to his nest?  
Shall the fox with the lion sit down as a guest?  
Shall the meteor look out from the noonday sky,  
When the sun in his power is flaming by?

The pauses in this significant chant were followed by choral symphonies, expressing, as eloquently as inarticulate sounds could do, the most earnest remonstrance, the most moving expostulation. When this was concluded, the same sweet voice broke forth again, in tones of solemn tenderness and majestic power, in a prophetic warning to Montezuma.

Beware, mighty monarch! beware of the hour,  
When the pale-faced intruder shall come to this bower!  
Beware of the weakness that whispers of fear,  
When the all-grasping, gold-seeking Spaniard is near!  
Beware how thou readest the dark scroll of fate!  
Its mystic revealings may warn thee too late,  
That the power to command, and the strength to oppose,  
Are gone, when thou openest the gate to thy foes.  
The white men are mortal—frail sons of the earth,  
They know not, they claim not, a heavenly birth;  
They bow to disease, and they fall by the sword,  
Pale fear can disarm them, grim death is their lord;  
And those terrible coursers, so fiery and strong,  
That bear them like ravenous tigers along,  
The fleet winged arrow shall pierce them, and slay,  
And leave them to eagles and vultures a prey.

Up, monarch! arouse thee—the hour is at hand  
When the dark howling tempest shall sweep o'er thy land.  
Thy doubts and thy fears, ever changing, are rife  
With peril to liberty, honor and life;  
And this timid inaction shall surely bring down  
To the dust, in dishonor, thy glorious crown;  
And leave, to all time, on thy once-honored head,  
The curse of a nation forsaken, betrayed.  
Oh! rouse thee, brave monarch! there's power in thy hand  
To scatter the clouds that hang over thy land.  
Speak, speak but the word, there is magic in thee,  
Before which the ruthless invader shall flee,  
And myriads of braves, all equipped for defence,

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Shall leap at thy bidding, and banish him hence;  
And the gods, who would frown on the recreant slave,  
Will stand by their altars, and fight for the brave.

The effect of this mysterious warning upon the mind of Montezuma was exceedingly powerful, and seemed, for a time, to change his purpose and fix his resolution. With an energy and decision to which he had long been a stranger, he turned to his brother, and said, "Cuitlahua, you are right. This realm is mine. The gods have made me the father of this people. I must and will defend them. The strangers shall be driven back, or die. They shall never profane the temples and altars of Tenochtitlan, by entering within its gates, or looking upon its walls. Go, marshal your host, and prepare to meet them, before they advance a step further."

Exulting in this sudden demonstration of his ancient martial spirit in his royal brother, and fired with a double zeal in the cause he had so much at heart, by the thrilling influence upon his soul of the mysterious oracle, whose message had been uttered in his hearing, Cuitlahua scarcely waited for the ordinary courtesy of bidding farewell to the king, but flew with the speed of the wind, to execute the grateful trust committed to him. Despatching his messengers in every direction, only a few hours elapsed before his army was drawn up in the great square of the city; and, ere the sun had gone down, they had passed the gates, traversed the grand causeway that linked the amphibious city with the main land, and pitched their camp in a favorable position, several leagues on the way to Cholula.

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The ardent imagination of the prince of Iztapalapan kindled at the prospect now opened before. The clouds, so long hanging over his beloved country, were dissipated as by magic, and the clear light of heaven streamed in upon his path, promising a quick and easy conquest, a glorious triumph, and a permanent peace. He had been in many battles, but had never been defeated. He believed the Mexican army invincible any where, but especially on their own soil, and fighting for their altars and their hearths. Terrible as the invading strangers had been hitherto, he had no fear of the coming encounter. He confidently expected to annihilate them at a blow. Happily his soldiers were all animated with the same spirit, and they took to their rest that night, eager for the morning to come, that should light them on their way to a certain and glorious victory.

No sooner had the army departed, than a change came over the spirit of the ill-fated Montezuma. The demons of doubt and fear returned to perplex and harass his soul, and to incline him again to that vacillating policy, those half way measures, by which his doom was to be sealed. In an agony of distrust and suspense, he recounted to himself the history of the past, reviewing all those dark and fearful prophecies, those oft-repeated and mysteriously significant omens, which, for so many years, had foreshadowed the events of the present day, and revealed the inevitable doom of the empire, sealed with the signet of heaven. The impressions produced by the recent warnings of Karee faded and disappeared before the deep and indelible traces of those ancient oracles, on which he had been accustomed from his youth sacredly to rely. He was once more adrift in a tempest of contending impulses, at one moment abandoning all in a paroxysm of despair, at another, vainly flattering himself with the hope of deliverance in some ill-formed stratagem, but never nerving himself to a tone of resolute defiance, or venturing to rest a hope on the issue of an open encounter.

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The result of all this agitation was, another abandonment of his noble purpose of defence, and a new resort to stratagem. But the plan of operations, and the scene of execution, were changed. Cholula was selected as the theatre of destruction. The Spaniards had already been invited to take that city in their route, and orders had been given, and preparations made, for their hospitable reception. It was now resolved to make their acceptance of that invitation the signal and seal of their destruction. They were to be drawn into the city, alone, under the pretence that the presence of their Tlascalcan allies, who were the ancient and bitter enemies of the Cholulans, would be likely to create disturbance in the city, and lead to collision if not to bloodshed. The Cholulans were instructed to provide them with a place of encampment, in the heart of their city, where they could easily be surrounded, and cut to pieces. The streets of the city were then to be broken up by deep pits in some places, and barricades in others, to impede the movements of the horses, more dreaded than even the thunder and lightning of their riders. This being completed under cover of the night, the city was to be filled with soldiers ready to do the work of execution, while the brave Cuitlahua, with the flower of the army of Tenochtitlan, was to encamp at a convenient distance without the walls, to render prompt assistance, in case it should be needed.

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This plan being fully arranged in the mind of the Emperor, messengers were despatched with the light of the morning, to arrest the movements of Cuitlahua, and convey the necessary orders to the governor of Cholula. The warlike chieftain was deeply chagrined, and bitterly disappointed, in finding his orders so suddenly countermanded. He saw only certain ruin in the ever-wavering policy of the king, and was unable to conceive of any hope, except in striking a bold and decisive blow. He was willing to stake all upon a single cast, and drive back the insolent invader, or perish in the attempt. But Montezuma was the absolute monarch. His word was law; and, though not irreversible like that of the Medo-Persian, it was never to be questioned by any of his subjects. The hero must therefore rest on his arms, and await the issue of a doubtful stratagem.

Meanwhile, the eager and self sufficient Castilians had pushed forward to Cholula, and entered its gates, under a royal escort, that came out to meet them, and amid the constrained shouts and half hearted congratulations of a countless multitude of natives, who with mingled fear, hatred and curiosity, gazed on the conquerors as a superior race of beings, and made way for them on every side, to take possession of their city. They were received with the greatest deference and

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consideration by the chiefs of the little republic, and the ambassadors of Montezuma, who had halted on their way, to prepare a more honorable reception for their guests, and further to ingratiate them with their master, by doing away, as far they could, the unfavorable impressions of him and his people, which might have made on their minds, by their intercourse with their old and implacable enemies of the republic of Tlascalala.

Such was the mutual jealousy and hatred of these neighboring nations, that, while the Cholulans could, in no wise agree to admit the Tlascalans to accompany Cortez into their city, they, on their part, were extremely reluctant to allow him to go in alone, assuring him in the strongest terms, that they were the most treacherous and deceitful of men, and their promises and professions utterly unworthy of confidence. Scorning danger, however, and determined at all hazards, to embrace every opening that seemed to facilitate his approach to the Mexican capital, he marched fearlessly in, and took up his quarters in the great square, or market place. Here, ample accommodations were provided for him and his band. Every courtesy was extended to them by the citizens and their rulers. Their table was amply supplied with all the necessaries and luxuries of the place. They were regarded with a kind of superstitious awe by the multitude, as a race of beings belonging to another world, of ethereal mould, and supernatural powers; and their camp was visited by those of all ranks, and all ages, eager to catch a view of the terrible strangers.

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A few days after their arrival, a new embassy from the imperial palace was announced. They held no communication with Cortez, but had a long consultation with the previous envoys still remaining there, and with the authorities of the city. From this time, there was a striking change in the aspect of the Cholulans towards their guests. They were soon made to perceive and feel that, though invited, they were not welcome guests. The daily supplies for their table were greatly diminished. They received but few and formal visits from the chiefs, and but cold attention from any of the nobles. Cortez was quick to perceive the change, but unable to divine its meaning. It caused him many an anxious hour, especially when he remembered the serious and urgent representations of his Tlascalan allies of the deceitful and treacherous character of the Cholulans. His apprehensions were by no means diminished, when he learned from the morning report of the night guards, that through the entire night, which had hitherto been a season of perfect silence and repose in the city, sounds were heard on every side, as of people earnestly engaged in some works of fortification, sometimes digging in the earth, sometimes laying up stones in heaps, and in various other ways, "vexing the dull ear of night with uncouth noise." It was found, on examination, that the streets in many places were barricaded, and holes, in others, were lightly covered with branches of trees. Unable to explain these matters, and not wishing to give offence to his entertainers by enquiring too curiously into what might be no more than the ordinary preparation for a national festival, he sent one of his chief officers to report to the Tlascalan commander, without the gates of the city, and enquire what might be the meaning of these singular movements. Having learned in reply, that a hostile attack was undoubtedly contemplated, and that a large force of Mexicans, under command of the brave Cuitlahua, brother of Montezuma, was encamped at no great distance, ready to co-operate with the Cholulans at a moment's warning, and that a great number of victims had been offered in sacrifice, to propitiate the favor of their gods, the haughty Spaniard found his position any thing but agreeable. He was a stranger to fear, but he was certainly most sadly perplexed. And, when, in addition to the information already received, he learned from Marina, his female interpreter, that she had been warned by a friend in the city to abandon the Spaniards, that she might not be involved in their ruin, he was, for a time, quite at a loss what to do. To retreat, would be to manifest fear, and a distrust of his own resources, which might be fatal to his future influence with the natives. To remain where he was—inactive, would be to stand still in the yawning crater of a volcano, when the overcharged cauldron below had already begun to belch forth sulphureous flames and smoke.

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The character of the conqueror was one precisely adapted to such exigencies as this. Through the whole course of his wonderful career, he seems to have rushed into difficulty, for the mere pleasure of fighting his way out. In order to extricate himself, he never lost a moment in parleying or diplomacy. His measures were bold, decided, and direct, indicating a self-reliance, and a confidence in his men and means, which is the surest guaranty of success. In this case, having satisfied himself of the actual existence of a conspiracy, he sent for the chief rulers, upbraided them with their want of hospitality, informed them that he should leave the place at break of day the next morning, and demanded a large number of men, to assist in removing his baggage. Promising to comply with this demand, which favored the execution of their own designs, the chiefs departed, and Cortez and his band, sleeping on their arms, prepared for the coming conflict.

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Punctually, at the peep of dawn, the princes of Cholula marched into the court, accompanied by a much larger number of men than Cortez had required. With a calm bold air, the haughty Castilian confronted them, charging them with treachery, and detailing all the circumstances of the concerted massacre. He upbraided them with their duplicity and baseness, and gave them to understand that they should pay dear for their false-hearted and cruel designs against those, who, confiding in their hospitality and promises of friendship, had come to their city, and slept quietly within their gates.

Thunderstruck at this unexpected turn of affairs, and fearing more than ever the strange beings, who could read their very thoughts, and fathom the designs which were yet scarcely matured in their own bosoms, the disconcerted magnates tremblingly pleaded guilty to the charge, and attempted to excuse themselves, by urging their allegiance to Montezuma, and the duty and

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necessity of obeying his commands, however repugnant to their own feelings.

It was not the policy of Cortez to admit this plea, in extenuation of their treachery. He preferred to cast the whole burden upon them alone, and leave the way open for an easy disclaimer on the part of the emperor, hoping thereby the more readily to gain a peaceable entry into the capital. Without waiting, therefore, for any further explanations, or instituting any inquiry into the comparative guilt of the parties, he gave the signal to his soldiers, who, with a general discharge of their artillery and fire arms, rushed upon the unprepared multitude, mowing them down like grass, and trampling them under the hoofs of their horses. A general massacre ensued. Not one of the chiefs escaped, and only so many of their panic-struck followers, as could feign themselves dead, or bury themselves, till the tempest was past, under the heaps of their slain comrades.

Thus taken by surprise, and driven, before they were ready, into an unequal conflict with enemies who had, by some miracle, as they supposed, anticipated their movements, and struck the first blow, the Cholulans rushed in from all parts of their city, hoping to retrieve, by their numbers and prowess, the disadvantage of the lost onset. Cortez had prepared for this. He had ordered his artillery to be stationed at the main entrances to the square, where they poured in a raking fire upon the assailants, rushing in from all the avenues. The surprise being so sudden, and the leaders having been shot down at the first charge, confusion and consternation prevailed among the discomfited Cholulans, who alternately fled, like affrighted sheep, from the scene of slaughter, and then rushed back, like exasperated wolves, to the work of death.

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In anticipation of this conflict, the Spanish general had concerted a signal with his Tlascalan allies, without the gates, who now came rushing in, like hungry tigers, revelling in the opportunity to inflict a terrible vengeance upon their ancient enemies. Falling upon their rear, as they crowded in from the remoter quarters of the city towards the field of carnage, they drove them in upon the weapons of the Spaniards, from which there was now no escape. Turning upon this new enemy, they fought with desperate bravery, to win a retreat. But they were cut down on this side and that, till the streets were scarcely passable for the heaps of the dead and dying that cumbered them. Those who took refuge in their houses and temples, found no safety in such retreats, for they were instantly fired by the Tlascalans, and their defenders perished miserably in the flames.

There was one scene in the midst of this desolating conflict, that was truly sublime,—one of those strange combinations of moral and physical grandeur, which sometimes occur in the dark annals of human warfare, investing with a kind of hallowed interest, which the lapse of ages serves only to soften, but never destroys, those spectacles of savage but heroic cruelty, where every death is elevated into a martyrdom, and the very ground saturated with human blood becomes a consecrated field, clothed with laurels of never-fading green. It was the last act in that bloody drama, enacted on the lofty summit of the great Teocalli, the principal temple of Cholula, and the centre of attraction to all the votaries of the Aztec religion, throughout the wide realms of Anahuac. Driven from street to street, and from quarter to quarter, and falling back, as a forlorn hope, upon the sanctuary, and the support and encouragement of the hoary men, who presided over the mysteries of their faith, they made a bold and desperate stand, in defence of all that was dear and holy in their homes and their altars. Step by step, they contested this hallowed ground, till they reached the upper terrace, where the great temple stood. This was an area of four hundred feet square, at an elevation of two hundred feet from the level of the surrounding streets. On this elevated platform, the furious combatants fought hand to hand; the priest, in his sacred garments, mingling in the savage conflict with the humblest of his followers—the steel-clad Castilian, the Tlascalan and the Cholulan, of every rank and grade, each eager only to slay his man, grappled in the mortal conflict, till one or the other fell in the death struggle, or tumbled over the side of the mound, to be dashed in pieces below. As the half-armed, half-naked natives melted away before the heavy and destructive weapons of the invulnerable Spaniards, they were repeatedly offered quarter, but scorned to accept it. One only submitted, when, pierced with countless wounds, he could stand no longer. All the rest, to a man, fought desperately till he fell, and many, even then, in the agonies of the last struggle, seized their antagonists by the legs, and rolled with them over the parapet, to the certain death of both.

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At length the conflict ceased for want of a victim, and the conquering Castilian, with a few of his Tlascalan allies, stood alone, in undisputed possession of this lofty vantage ground. The disheartened Cholulans, without leaders, without counsellors, seeing their sacred temple in the hands of their enemies, felt that all was lost. Not another blow was struck, but every where they bowed in submission to the irresistible conqueror.

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The thunder of the artillery, and the smoke of the burning buildings, rising in a heavy column to the skies, announced to the Mexican army the conflict that was raging within the city. But, having orders not to engage in the fray, unless notified by the Cholulan chiefs that his assistance was necessary, the brave Cuitlahua was compelled to wait the summons. Burning to vindicate the honor of the Mexican arms, the hero chafed under this cruel restraint, like a tiger chained in full view of his prey. He little doubted that the Castilians would fall by the hands of the Cholulans, encompassed as they were on every side, with no room for escape, or for the action of their horses. But he longed to have a share in the victory. Drawing up his forces in the order of march, he stood, the whole day, in readiness to move at a moment's warning; and in this attitude, he was still standing, when the tidings of the terrible disaster in the city reached him.

His veteran legions were with difficulty restrained from rushing to the rescue. The army was almost in a state of mutiny, from their eagerness to avenge their slaughtered brethren in Cholula;

and all the military authority, and unbounded influence of Cuitlahua were required to keep them in a state of due subordination.

The influence and authority of Cortez, on the other hand, were scarcely sufficient to restrain his victorious allies from ravaging the city, and putting men, women, and children to an indiscriminate slaughter. So bitter and pervading was the old national animosity, that life was scarcely worth possessing to a Tlascalan, if he must share its daily blessings side by side with the Aztec. He hated the whole nation with a perfect implacable hatred. He execrated the very name, and never uttered it without a curse. Of this universal malediction, the Cholulan was honored with more than his appropriate share. The other subjects and tributaries of Montezuma they feared as well as hated. The Cholulans they affected also to despise, though their contempt was not so thorough as to mitigate in the least their fierce and uncontrollable hatred.

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[C] As Americus Vespuccius, in his letter to Lorenzo Di Pier-Francesco De Medici, reports having met with the lion in South America, I have taken the liberty to introduce him as a native in our forests, notwithstanding the prevalent opinion of naturalists to the contrary.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### AGITATIONS IN THE CAPITAL—THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD—THE SPANIARDS STEADILY ADVANCING.

For monarchs tremble on their thrones,  
And 'neath the gem-lit crown,  
Care, fear, and envy dwell—

— — —

— — They come,  
Mysterious, dreaded band!  
With clang of trumpet, torch and brand;  
With lightning speed, with lightning power,  
They scale the lofty mountain tower,  
And sweep along the vale—  
Who shall arrest their proud career,  
And save our doomed land?

This position of affairs suited the timid and vacillating policy of Montezuma. Finding that Cuitlahua, and his forces, had taken no part in the affair, and had not even visited the city, he immediately sent an embassy to the Spanish camp, disclaiming all participation in the treacherous counsels and doings of the Cholulans, and severely blaming them for their unheard of outrage upon the rites of hospitality. Whether the sharp-sighted Castilian placed any confidence in these professions, or not, it suited his designs to appear to do so. With the utmost seeming cordiality, he assured the royal messengers that it gave him the most heartfelt satisfaction to know that the treatment he had received at Cholula was not instigated or countenanced by their august master, that it was unworthy of a great and wise monarch, and that he should proceed on his route to the capital, with the same confidence as before, and visit the emperor as if nothing had happened to hinder his progress.

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Withdrawing the forces under Cuitlahua, and giving orders every where for the hospitable reception and entertainment of the Castilians, whom he had no longer the heart to oppose either by stratagem or by force, Montezuma retired within his palace, and for several days shut himself up from all intercourse with his chiefs. He was now fully convinced that his destiny was sealed, and with it that of his family and crown. He was in the hands of an unappeasable fate. He gave himself up to fasting, prayer and sacrifice. He consulted all his oracles anew. But they gave no response. He then sought counsel of his chiefs, and the sages of his court. Here again he was distracted by the divided opinions of his friends. While many of the princes, overawed by the invincible courage and invariable success of the Castilians, advised a frank and courteous reception, there was still a powerful war-party, with the brave Cuitlahua at their head, who were eager to measure lances with the strangers, and show them that, in order to reach the capital, they had other foes to contend with and overcome, than half savage Tlascalans, or trading Cholulans.

Montezuma found no difficulty in following the counsel of the majority, though the mystic warning of Karee had not wholly faded from his mind. A new embassy was immediately despatched, consisting of a numerous suite of powerful nobles, and a long train of servants bearing rich presents of gold, and other valuables, and charged with a message couched in terms of humble and earnest supplication, proposing, if the Spaniards would now return, not only to send them home laden with gold to their utmost wish, but to pay an annual tribute of gold to their master, the king of Spain. Finding that this bribe only fired the grasping conqueror with a more fixed determination to secure the whole prize for which he had so long, and against such fearful odds, contended, the messengers yielded the point, and threw wide open to the dreaded foe

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every avenue to the heart of the empire, assuring him, in the name of the Emperor, that he should be received as a brother, and entertained with the consideration due to the powerful representative of a mighty monarch.

The march of the Spaniards was now a continued triumph. No longer compelled to fight their way on, they had time to enjoy the rich and varied scenery, to scale the mountain, explore the caverns and ravines of the sierras, and the craters of the volcanoes, and show to the admiring natives, by their agility and love of adventure, that fighting and conquest had neither tamed their spirits, nor exhausted their physical powers. As they advanced, they were continually surprised and delighted with the growing evidences of civilization and high prosperity which met them on every side. In the cultivation of the land, in the style of architecture, and in all that constitutes the refinement, or contributes to the comfort of life, the regions they were now traversing very far exceeded the best of those through which they had passed. They were continually gaining more exalted ideas of the power, wealth and glory of the great Montezuma, and more enlarged views of the magnificence of their own adventure, and the importance of their position and movements. The ambition of Cortez reached to the viceroyalty of this splendid empire; and, though accompanied by a mere handful of men, their past achievements inspired him with confidence, that he could carry every thing before him.

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Though entertained with lordly munificence in every place through which he passed, and visited and complimented by envoys from all the states embraced in the Mexican domain, the sagacious Spaniard relaxed none of his vigilance, nor diminished aught of the strict discipline of his little corps. With an eye ever awake to his own safety, and feeling that the artful contriver of one stratagem could easily invent another, he advanced from post to post, in martial array, always ready for the exigency that might arise. His course, however, was unmolested. The resources and hopes of the great king seemed to have been exhausted. In passive despair, he was waiting for the hour of his doom.

The terror of the events we have described fell not alone upon the unfortunate Montezuma; nor did they affect him only as monarch of the realm. As a parent, fondly devoted to his children, whose destiny was wrapped up in his, as the father of his people, to whom he had been a kind of demi-god, the vicegerent of heaven, entitled to their unqualified reverence, obedience and love, he felt with tenfold intensity the bitterness of his humiliation. In all his sufferings and distresses his wives and children shared, showing, by every token in their power, their profound respect and affection, and their tender sympathy in all his cares.

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In these lovely demonstrations of filial affection, none were more assiduous or warm-hearted, and none more successful in reaching the heart of the broken spirited monarch, or winning from him an occasional smile of hope, than Tecuichpo. Just ripening into womanhood, with every gift of person, mind and heart that could satisfy the pride of the monarch, and requite to the full the yearning love of the father, the fair princess lavished on him all her powers of persuasion and condolence. It was all in vain. It even aggravated his sorrows; for it was on *her* account, and that of others dearer to him than his own life, that he suffered most deeply. The mysterious shadows that had brooded so darkly over the infancy of his lovely daughter, had never ceased to shed a chilling gloom over his mind. Her clouded destiny was linked with his, not merely as a child, but as one specifically marked out, by infallible signs from heaven, for a signal doom. His superstitious faith invested her and her fate with a peculiar sacredness. She was as one whom the gods had devoted to an awful sacrifice, from which neither imperial power nor paternal love could rescue her. It therefore pierced his soul with a deeper pang to gaze upon her loveliness, and witness her amiable efforts to soothe and sustain him in the midst of calamities that were more terrible and overwhelming to her, than even to himself. If, by offering himself as a sacrifice to his offended gods, he could have propitiated their favor for his family and his people, and handed down to his posterity an undiminished empire and an untarnished crown, he would have gone with as much pride and pleasure, to the altar, as to a triumphal festival that should celebrate his victory, and clothe his brow with unfading laurel. But in this sacrifice there was no substitution. He was himself the most distinguished victim, destined to the highest and hottest place on the great altar of his country, where a hecatomb would scarce suffice to appease the anger of the offended gods.

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Gathering his royal household around him, he explained to them the peculiarity of his position, avowing his entire confidence in the ancient prophecy, which declared that the realm of Anahuac belonged to a race of white men, who had gone away, for a season towards the rising sun, and who, after the lapse of ages, were to return in power, and claim their inheritance. It was the predestined arrangement of the gods, and could not be resisted. He had, from the beginning felt that resistance was wholly vain, and had only attempted it, in deference to the urgent advice and solicitations of his best and most experienced counsellors. For himself, he was ready, at any time, to stand at his post, and die, if necessary, in defence of his crown and his people. But he could not contend with the gods. Empires and crowns, and the lives and happiness of nations, were at their disposal, and kings and subjects alike must submit to their righteous requirements. It was but the dictate of common piety to say "the will of the gods be done." Hard and trying as it was, he felt it incumbent on him to relinquish his crown and his honors, at their bidding, as cheerfully as he should lay down his life, when his destined hour should arrive. He counselled them to bow submissively to their inevitable fate, in the hope that, though humbled, broken and scattered in this world, they might meet and dwell together in peace in the paradise of the gods.

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His wives and children wept around him. They besought him to hope yet for the best—to turn away his thoughts from the dark visions on which he had dwelt too long and too intensely. Their

mysterious forebodings of evil might yet be averted, through the favor of the gods, to whom a childlike, cheerful confidence in their benignity and paternal regard, was more acceptable, than that blind abandonment, sometimes mistaken for submission, which views them as stern, arbitrary, and implacable tyrants, rather than as parents of the human family, watching over it for the good of mankind, and ordering all events for the welfare of their true children.

This was a cheerful faith, and, seasonably adopted, might have saved the life and throne of Montezuma, and preserved, for many years, the integrity of his empire. But his heart was not prepared to receive it. Steeped in the dismal superstitions of the Aztec faith, and yielding himself unreservedly to the guidance and dictation of its constituted oracles, he had never, for a moment, allowed himself to falter in his conviction, that the Aztec dynasty was to terminate with him, and that he and his family were doomed to a terrible destruction, in the overthrow of the sacred institutions of his beloved land.

The scene was too thrilling for the tender heart of Tecuichpo, and she swooned away in the arms of her father, who had drawn her towards him in an affectionate embrace. The attendants were called, and, as soon as the unhappy princess was restored to consciousness, the king directed the royal barges to be prepared, and went out, with all his household, to enjoy the invigorating air of the lake, and seek relief from the dark thoughts that oppressed and overwhelmed them, in contemplating, from various points in view, the rich and varied scenery of that glorious valley.

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It was a brave spectacle to behold, when the imperial majesty of Tenochtitlan condescended to accompany his little fleet on such an excursion. The gaily appointed canoes, with their gorgeous canopies of embroidered cotton, and feather-work; the splendid robes and plumes of the king and his attendants; the rich and fanciful attire of the women; the light, graceful, arrowy motions of the painted skiffs, as they danced along the waves; together with the wonderful beauty of the lake, and its swimming gardens of flowers, presented a *toute ensemble* more like the fairy pictures of some enchanted sphere, than any thing we can now realize as belonging to this plain, prosaic, matter-of-fact world of ours. On this occasion, it seemed more gay and fairy-like than ever, in contrast, perhaps, with the deep gloom that had settled on the land, pervading every heart, with its sombre shadows.

The light pirogues of the natives, flying hither and thither over the glassy waters, on errands of business or of pleasure, arrayed in flowers, or freighted with fruits and vegetables for the grand market of Tenochtitlan, made way, on every side, for the advance of the royal cortege, which, threading the shining avenues between the gaily-colored *chinampas*, that spotted the surface of that beautiful lake, like so many islands of flowers on the bosom of the ocean, danced over the waters to the sound of music, and the merry voices of glad hearts, rejoicing in the sunny smiles that now played on the countenance of the king, as if the clouds that had so long overshadowed it, were never to return. Tecuichpo, restored to more than her wonted gaiety, was full of life and animation. Never had she seemed, in the eyes of her doting father, and of the admiring courtiers, half so lovely as at this moment. She was the centre attraction for all eyes. Her resplendent beauty, her fairy-like gracefulness of motion, and the artless simplicity of her manners, won the admiring notice of all. Her gaiety was infectious. Her merry laugh reached, with a sort of electric influence, every heart in that bright company, and compelled even her father to abandon, for the time, his sad and solemn reflections, and give himself up to the spirit of the hour and the scene.

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Guatimozin was there, and exerted all his eloquence to keep up the spirit of the hour, in the earnest hope that Montezuma would put on all the monarch again, and assert the majesty of his insulted crown, and the rights of his house and his people, in despite of omen or legend, and in the face of every foe.

Tecuichpo became more and more animated, till she seemed quite lifted above herself and the world about her. Suddenly rising in the midst, and pointing, with great energy of expression, to the royal eagle of Mexico, then sweeping down from his mountain eyrie, to prey upon the ocelot of the distant valley, she exclaimed—

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'Tis he! 'Tis he! our imperial bird!  
Whom the gods to our aid have sent;  
I saw him in my dream, and heard,  
As down from his airy flight he bent,  
His victor shout, with the dying wail,  
Of the coming foe, borne on the gale;  
While the air was dark with the gathering throng  
Of bold young eaglets, that swept along  
From every cliff, in fierceness and wrath,  
To gorge on their prey, in the mountain path.

When she ceased, an echo from a richly cultivated chinampa, which they were then passing, seemed to take up and prolong the strain.

I saw it too, and I heard the scream,  
In the midst of my dark and troubled dream;  
'Twas a dream of despair for our doomed land,  
For his wings were bound by the royal hand;  
His talons were wreathed with a golden chain,  
He smelt the prey, and he chafed in vain,



For they trampled him down, in their brave career,  
While our monarch looked on with unmanly fear,  
Till his crown and his sceptre in dust were laid low,  
And proud Tenochtitlan had passed to the foe.

The last words of this solemn chant died away on the ear, just as the royal barge rounded the little artificial promontory, which the ingenious Karee had constructed, for the double purpose of an arbor and look-out, at one of the angles of her chinampa. Leaning over the brow, and supporting herself by the overhanging branch of a luxuriant myrtle, she dropped a wreath of evergreen upon the head of Tecuichpo, and said—

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Oh! child of doom,  
Thy long sealed destiny is come—  
One brief, dark, dreadful night,  
Then on those blessed eyes  
Another day shall rise,  
Fair, glorious, bright,  
With an unearthly endless light.  
Thou shall lay down  
An earthly crown,  
To win a starry sceptre in the skies

At this moment, signals were heard among the distant hills, which, answered and repeated from countless stations along the wild sierras, and reverberated by a thousand echoes as they came, burst upon the quiet valley, like the confused shouts of a mighty host rushing to battle. It fell like a death-knell upon the ear of Montezuma. It announced the arrival, within the mountain wall which encompassed his golden valley, of the dreaded strangers. It heralded their near approach to his capital, and the exposure of all he held dear to their irresistible power—their terrible rapacity. His heart sunk within him. But he had gone too far to retract. It was the act of the gods, not his. Banishing from his mind the impressions of the scenes just passed, he waved his hand to the rowers, and instantly every prow was turned, and the gaily caparisoned, but melancholy, terror-stricken pageant moved rapidly back to the city.

Tenochtitlan was now alive with the bustle of preparation. It was the preparation, not for war, which would far better have suited the multitude both of the chiefs and the people, but for the hospitable reception and entertainment of the strangers. The great imperial palace, which had been the royal residence of the father of Montezuma, was fitted up for their accommodation. With its numberless apartments, its spacious courts, and magnificent gardens, it was sufficient for an army much larger than that of the Castilians, swelled as it was by the company of their Tlascalan allies. Every room was newly hung with beautifully colored tapestry, and furnished with all the conveniences and luxuries of Mexican life. The appointments and provisions were all on a most liberal scale, for the Emperor was as generous and munificent as the golden mountains from which he drew his inexhaustible treasures.

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Intending that nothing should be wanting to the graciousness of his submission to this act of constrained courtesy, Montezuma proposed to his brother Cuitlahua, to choose a royal retinue from the flower of the Aztec nobility, and go out to meet the strangers; and bid them welcome, in his name, to his realm and his capital. From this the soul of the proud undaunted soldier revolted, and he entreated so earnestly to be excused from executing a commission, so much at variance with his feelings and his convictions, that the monarch relented, and assigned the mission to Cacama, the young prince of Tezcuco.

Nothing could exceed the gorgeous splendor of this embassy. Borne in a beautiful palanquin, canopied and curtained with the rarest of Mexican feather-work, richly powdered with jewels, and glittering with gold, Cacama, preceded and followed by a long train of noble veterans and youths, all apparelled in the gayest costume of their country, presented himself before the advancing host. His approach, and the errand on which he came, having been announced by a herald, Cortez halted his band, and drew up his forces in the best possible array, to give him a fitting reception.

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The meeting took place at Ajotzinco, on, or rather within, the borders of the lake Chalco, the first of the bright chain of inland lakes which the Spaniards had seen, and the place where they first saw that species of amphibious architecture, which prevailed so extensively among the Mexicans. When the royal embassy arrived in front of the waiting army, Cacama alighted from his palanquin, while his obsequious officers swept the ground before him, that he might not soil his royal feet, by too rude a contact with the earth. He was a young man of about twenty five years, with a fine manly countenance, a noble and commanding figure, and an address and manners that would have done honor to the most courtly knight of Christendom. Stepping forward with a bland and dignified courtesy, he made the customary Mexican salutation to persons of high rank, touching his right hand to the ground, and raising it to his head. Cortez embraced him as he rose, and the prince, in the name of his royal master, gave the strangers a hearty welcome, assuring them that they should be received with a hospitality, and treated with a respect, becoming the representatives of a great and mighty prince. He then presented Cortez with a number of large and valuable pearls, which act of munificence was immediately returned by the present of a necklace of cut glass, hung over his neck by Cortez. As glass was not known to the Mexicans, it probably had in their eyes the value of the rarest jewels.

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This interview being over, the royal envoy hastened back to the capital, while the Castilians and their allies, in the two-fold character of hostile invaders and invited guests, followed his steps by slow, easy and cautious marches. After a few days, during which they passed through large tracts of highly cultivated and fertile ground, and several of the beautiful towns and cities of the plateau, they arrived at Iztapalapan, a place of great beauty, and large resources, and the residence of Cuitlahua, the noble brother of Montezuma. At the command of the Emperor, Cuitlahua, as governor of this place, received the strangers with courtesy, and treated them with attention. But it was a cold courtesy, and a constrained attention. With a proud and haughty mien, the brave soldier exhibited to the wondering strangers, all the riches and curiosities of the place, disposing every thing in such a manner as to impress them most powerfully with the immense wealth of the empire, and the irresistible power of the Emperor. He collected around him all the richest and most potent nobles in his neighborhood, and displayed a magnificence of style, and a prodigality of expenditure, that was truly princely. The extent and beauty of his gardens, his beautiful aviary, stocked with every variety of the gorgeously plumed birds of that tropical clime, his menagerie, containing a full representation of all the wild races of animals in Anahuac, struck the Spaniards with surprise and admiration; while the architecture of his palaces, and the many refinements of his style of living, gave them the highest ideas of the advanced state of civilization to which the Mexicans had attained.

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But, so far from disheartening them in their grand design, all they saw of wealth and splendor in the inferior cities, only served to inflame their desire to see the capital, and learn if any thing more brilliant and wonderful than they had yet seen, could be furnished at the great metropolis. While they were daily more and more convinced of the power and resources of their enemy, and the seeming impossibility of their own enterprise, they were also daily more and more inflamed with the desire and purpose to possess themselves of the incalculable treasures which every where met their eyes. The cold aspect, and lofty bearing of the Prince Cuitlahua, the commander-in-chief of the Mexican armies, and heir apparent to its throne, left no doubt that the final struggle for power would be ably and bitterly contested, and that the wealth they so ardently coveted, would be dearly bought. To a heart less bold and self-reliant than that of Cortez, it would have been no enviable position, to be shut up, with his little band of followers, within the gates of a city, commanded by so brave and experienced a soldier, whose personal feelings and views were known to be of the most hostile character. To the iron-hearted Castilian, it was but a scene in the progress of his romantic adventure; and, the greater the difficulty, the more imminent the peril, the more cordially he trusted to his good genius, or his patron saint, he seems not to have known which, to carry him triumphantly through.

They were now but one day's march, and that a short and easy one, from the imperial city. Already they had seen it from a distance, resting, or rather riding, on the bosom of the lake, glowing and glittering in the sunbeams, like some resplendent constellation, transferred from the azure above to the azure below. They had seen its noble ally, the metropolis of the sister kingdom of Tezcuco, shining in rival though unequal splendor, on the opposite shore of the lake, and many other splendid cities, beautiful towns, and lovely hamlets, studding its bright border, in its entire circuit, like mingled gems and pearls, richly set in the band of the imperial diadem, all reposing under the shadow, and eclipsed by the superior glory, of the capital, the crowning jewel of the Western World. They had seen the *chinampas*, those wandering gardens of verdure and flowers, seeming more like the fairy creations of poetry, than the sober realities of life, and reminding them of those islands of the blest, which they had been told, in their childish days, floated about in the ethereal regions above, freighted with blessings for the virtuous, and sometimes stooping so near to earth as to permit the weary and the waiting to escape from their toils and trials here, and find repose in their celestial paradise. They had seen and admired the wonderful works of art, the causeways of vast extent, constructed with scientific accuracy, and of great strength and durability—the canals and aqueducts, and bridges, which would have done honor to the genius and industry of the proudest nation in Europe. It now remained to them to see the imperial lord of all these wide and luxuriant realms, and to enter, as invited guests, into the gates of his royal abode.

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## CHAPTER V.

### ARRIVAL OF THE SPANIARDS AT THE CAPITAL—THEIR RECEPTION BY MONTEZUMA—DETERMINED HOSTILITY OF GUATIMOZIN.

Hark! at the very portals now they stand,  
Demanding entrance. Can I shut them out,  
When all the gods commission them to come?  
Can we admit them, and preserve intact  
Our honor and the state?

The spectacle of this day, the eighth of November, 1519, has not its parallel in the annals of history, and will probably never be repeated in the history of man. The sovereign and absolute

monarch of a populous and powerful empire, stooping from his imperial throne, flinging wide open the gates of his capital, and condescending to go out, and receive with an apparent welcome an invading foe, whom he had in vain attempted to keep out, but whom he had now the power to crush under his feet in a moment. That invading foe consisted only of a few hundred adventurers, three thousand miles from home, in the heart of the country they had ravaged, and surrounded by countless thousands of exasperated foes, burning to revenge the injuries and insults they had received at the hands of the strangers, and only held back from rushing upon them, like herds of ravening tigers, by the strong arm of the royal prohibition. Their position was like that of a group of children in a menagerie, amusing themselves with teasing and exasperating the caged animals around them. The furious creatures glare on them with looks of rage, growling fiercely, and gnashing their teeth. The keeper sympathizes with his enraged subjects, burning to let them loose upon their annoyers, but restrained by that mysterious agency, in which the divine hand is every where moulding and subduing the natural impulses of humanity, and working out its own wise ends by the wrath and passions of men.

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Let the keeper but raise the bar of that cage for a moment, and not one of the bright group would be left to tell the tragic issue of their sport. Let the terror-stricken Montezuma put on once more the air of a monarch, and raise his finger as a signal for the onset, before the enemy has become entrenched in his fortress, and few, if any, of that brave band would be left to tell the world of their fate—the marvellous story of the Conquest would never be told; the Aztec dynasty would outlive the period assigned it by those mystic oracles; and Montezuma, recovered from the dark dreams of an imagination disordered by superstition—the long dreaded crisis of his destiny passed—would have swayed again the sceptre of undisputed empire over the broad and beautiful realms of Anahuac. Having once vanquished and destroyed the terrible strangers, and stripped them of that supernatural defence, which the idea of their celestial origin threw around them, he would never again have yielded his soul to so unmanly a fear. If such had been the issue of the invasion of Cortez and his band, it is doubtful whether the Aztec dynasty would ever have been overthrown. The civilization of Europe would soon have been engrafted upon its own. Christianity would have taken the place of their dark and bloody paganism; which, with a people so far enlightened as they were, could not have endured for a moment the noon-day blaze of the gospel; and the terrible power of that heathen despot would have been softened, without weakening it, into the consolidated colossal strength of an enlightened, Christian, peaceful empire. Christianity propagated by fire and sword consumes centuries, and wastes whole generations of men, in effecting a revolution, which they who go with the olive branch in their hand, and the gospel of peace in their hearts, require only a few years to accomplish. Witness the recent triumphs of a peaceful Christianity in the Sandwich Islands, as contrasted with the bloody and wasting Crusades of Spaniards in all portions of the new world.

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With the earliest dawn, the reveille was beaten in the Spanish camp, and all the forces were mustered and drawn up in the order of their march. Cortez, at the head of the cavalry, formed the advanced guard, followed immediately by the Castilian infantry in solid column. The artillery and baggage occupied the centre, while the dark files of the Tlascalan savages brought up the rear. The whole number was less than seven thousand, not more than three hundred and fifty of whom were Spaniards. Putting on their most imposing array, with gay flaunting banners, and the stirring notes of the trumpet, swelling over lake and grove, and rolling away in distant echoes among the mountains, they issued forth from the city, just as the rising sun, surmounting the eastern cordillera, poured the golden stream of day over the beautiful valley, and lighted up a thousand resplendent fires among the gilded domes, and enameled temples of the capital, and the rich tiara of tributary cities and towns that encircled it. Moving rapidly forward, they soon entered upon the grand causeway, which, passing through the capital, spans the entire breadth of the Tezcucan lake, constituting then the main entrance, as its remains do now the principal southern avenue, to the city of Mexico. It was composed of immense stones, fashioned with geometrical precision, well laid in cement, and capable of withstanding for ages the play of the waters, and the ravages of time. It was of sufficient width, throughout its whole extent, to allow ten horsemen to ride abreast. It was interrupted in several places by well built draw bridges for the accommodation of the numerous boats, that carried on a brisk trade with the several towns on the lake, and for the better defence of the city against an invading foe. At the distance of about half a league from the capital, it was also traversed by a thick heavy wall of stone, about twelve feet high, surmounted and fortified by towers at each extremity. In the centre was a battlemented gateway, of sufficient strength to resist any force that could be brought against it, by the rude enginery of native warfare. This was called the Fort of Xoloc.

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Here they were met by a very numerous and powerful body of Aztec nobles, splendidly arrayed in their gayest costume, who came to announce the approach of Montezuma, and again in his name to bid the strangers welcome to the capital. As each of the chiefs presented himself, in his turn, to Cortez, and made the customary formal salutation, a considerable time was consumed in the ceremony; which was somewhat more tedious than interesting to the hot spirited Spaniards.

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When this was over, they passed briskly on, and soon beheld the glittering retinue of the Emperor emerging from the principal gate of the city. The royal palanquin, blazing with burnished gold and precious stones, was borne on the shoulders of the principal nobles of the land, while crowds of others, of equal or inferior rank, thronged in obsequious attendance around. It was preceded by three officers, bearing golden wands. Over it was a canopy of gaudy feather-work, powdered with jewels, and fringed with silver, resting on four richly carved and inlaid pillars, and supported by four nobles of the same rank with the bearers. These were all bare-footed, and walked with a slow measured pace, as conscious of the majesty of their burden,

and with eyes bent on the ground. Arrived within a convenient distance, the train halted, and Montezuma, alighting from his palanquin, came forward, leaning on the arms of his royal relatives, the lords of Tezcuco and Iztapalapan. As the monarch advanced, under the same gorgeous canopy which had before screened him from the public gaze, and the 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.

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The appearance of Montezuma was in the highest degree interesting to the Spanish general and his followers. Flung over his shoulders was the *tilmatl*, 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 *panache* 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 cavaliers, advanced to meet him. What an interview! How full of thrilling interest to both parties! How painfully thrilling to Montezuma, who now saw 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.

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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 and ample acknowledgments 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 Cuitlahua, 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 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—

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The proud eagle may turn to his eyrie 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 Cuitlahua, 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 inextinguishable fires,—and above all, the innumerable throngs of people who swarmed through the streets and canals, filling every door-way and window, and clustering on the flat roof of every building as they passed, filled them with mingled emotions of admiration, surprise and fear.

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The swarming myriads of the 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 indescribable 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 engraven on the precious *chalchivitl*, 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.

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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.

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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 Tezcucó, he had uniformly and powerfully opposed the timid policy of the king, and urged, with Cuitlahua, 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.

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"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 not 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. "Oh! Tecuichpo, what would I not attempt, what would I not 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 birth-right, and which, as it preceded, must necessarily be paramount to, all the other relations of life."

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"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?"

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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."

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"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 cannot 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-thán, the garrulous pet of the Princess, seemingly soliloquising among the branches of the flowering orange that hung over her favorite arbor. They paused a moment, but could gather nothing from his chatterings but "Brave Guatimozin! noble Guatimozin! all is yours."

"An omen! my sweet cousin, a genuine emphatic omen! Even Karee-o-thán 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 Malinché, pretty Karee-o-thán?"

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"Poor Malinché! 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 to 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 he 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 implacable 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

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her at 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 skilful 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 alternations 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.

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## 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 them a royally hospitable entertainment. Partly by way of triumph in the success of their movements hitherto, and partly by way of amusing, and at the same time overawing their entertainers, the Spaniards, the day after their arrival in the city, made a grand military display in their quarters, and in the neighboring streets. They exercised their prancing steeds in all the feats of horsemanship, racing, leaping, and careering, in all the wild majesty of the trained charger, under the three fold discipline of bit and spur, and cheering shout. They rushed upon each other in the mock warfare of the tournament, with clashing sword and glancing spear, and then, discharging their carbines in the air, separated amid clouds of dust and smoke, as if driven asunder by the bolts of heaven in their own hands. The astonished natives, accustomed only to the simple weapons of primitive warfare, looked on with undisguised admiration, not unmixed with fear. The strange beings before them, wielding such unwonted powers, seemed indeed to have descended upon earth from some higher sphere, and to partake of that mysterious and fearful character, which they had been wont to ascribe to inhabitants of the spiritual world. But when, in closing off the day's entertainment, they brought out the loud-mouthed artillery, and shook the very foundations of the city with their oft-repeated thunders, the spirit of the Aztec sunk within him, and he felt, as he retired to his dwelling, that it was for no good end, that men of such power, having such fearful engines at their command, had been permitted to fix their quarters in one of the fortresses of Tenochtitlan.

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“Alas!” said an ancient Cacique from the northern frontier, “we are fallen upon evil times. Our enemies are even now in the citadel—enemies whom we know not, whose mode of warfare we do not understand, whose weapons defy alike our powers of imitation and resistance. Let us abandon the field, and retire to the far north, whence our fathers came, and rear a new empire amid the impregnable fastnesses of the mountains.”

“Who talks of abandoning the field to the enemy?” interrupted Guatimozin,—“Let no Aztec harbor so base a thought. Rather let us stand by our altars and die, if die we must.”

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“Right,” cried the youthful prince Axayatl, from the southern slope of the Sierra, “why should the all-conquering Aztec tremble at this display of the mysterious strangers? Are not the millions of Anahuac a match for a few hundred of their enemies, in whatever form they come? Be they gods, or be they demons, they belong not to this soil, nor this soil to them, and, by all our altars and all our gods, they must retire or perish, though we, and our wives, and our children perish with them.”

“Give us your hand, brave Axayatl,” exclaimed Cuitlahua and Guatimozin, at the same instant, “be that our vow in life and in death, and wo to the base Aztec, that abandons the standard of Montezuma, or whispers of submission to the haughty stranger.”

Thus were the councils of the people divided between a timid superstition, and a bold uncompromising patriotism. There wanted not the material, if well directed, to annihilate, at a blow, the hopes of the daring invaders. The arm of the nation was strong and sinewy, but “the head was sick, and the heart faint.” The Emperor, the hitherto proud and self-sufficient Montezuma,—

Like a struck eagle fainting in his nest,



had cowered to a phantom of his own diseased imagination, and weakly consented to regard *them* as gods, whose passions, appetites and vices proved them to be men, and whose diminished numbers, after every battle they had fought, showed they were of mortal mould.

On the following day, a magnificent banquet was prepared for Cortez, and his officers, in the imperial palace. It was graced by the presence of all the nobility of Azteca, with all the pride and beauty of their household divinities—for, among this refined people, the wife and the daughter held her appropriate rank, and woman exercised all the influence, which, among (so called) civilized nations, Christianity alone has assigned her. Every apartment of that spacious and magnificent pile blazed with the light of odoriferous torches, which sent up their clouds of incense from hundreds of gold and silver stands, elaborately carved and embossed in every form that fancy could suggest, or ingenuity invent. Flowers of every hue and name were profusely distributed through the rooms, clustered in beautiful vases, or hung in gorgeous festoons and luxurious chaplets from the walls. The costume of the monarch and his court was as rich and gorgeous, as the rare and variegated *plumagé*, with a lavish use of gold and gems, could make it. The women were as splendidly apparelled as the men. Many of them were extremely beautiful. Some were distinguished for their easy refinement of manners, which charmed, no less than it astonished, the Castilian knights, who had been accustomed to suppose that nothing so beautiful, or refined, could be found without the borders of Spain.

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By special command of the Emperor, all his nobles were present at this festival, so that Guatimozin, contrary to his own will and purpose, was brought into contact with Cortez, and his steel-clad cavaliers. Tecuichpo also was there, in all her maiden loveliness, outshining all the stars of that splendid galaxy. And yet she was as a star in eclipse, for her soul was oppressed with those mysterious shadows that hung over her destiny and that of her father, as connected with the coming of these white men. Karee was there in attendance upon her mistress, as she still delighted to call her; but her attention was more absorbed by the strangers than by Tecuichpo. She watched every movement, and scanned every countenance with a scrutiny that did not escape their observation, in order to read, as well as she could, the character of each. Her scrutiny satisfied herself, and she whispered in the ear of the Princess, that "if these were gods, they came from the dark, and not from the sunny side of heaven."

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It was a rare spectacle, which this royal banquet presented. The contrast between the steel-clad cavaliers of Castile, whose burnished armor blazed and glittered in the brilliant torch-light, and rung under their heavy martial tramp upon the marble floor, and the comparatively fairy figures of the gaudily apparelled Aztecs, was as strong as could possibly be presented in a scene like this. The costumes and customs of each were matter of wonder and admiration to the other. The Aztec trembled at the mysterious power, the incomprehensible weapons, of the white man. The Castilian, if he did not tremble, fully appreciated the danger of a little band, separated and scattered among a festive throng of warlike men, amid the interminable labyrinths of the imperial palace, and under the eye of a monarch whose word was absolute law to all the myriads of his people.

But, whatever was passing in the inner man, the Aztec and the Castilian, alike, appeared perfectly at ease, each abandoning himself to the festivities of the occasion, as if each, unannoyed by the presence of a stranger, were revelling in the security of his own castle, and celebrating some time-honored festival of his own people.

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With a benign dignity and grace, the Queen, and her suite of high-born ladies, received the homage of the cavaliers, after they had been presented to the Emperor. She was struck with admiration at the graceful and dignified bearing of the Castilian, which, while it showed all the deference and respect due to her sex and her rank, had nothing in it, of that abject servility, which placed an impassable barrier between the Aztec noble and his monarch, and made them appear to belong to distinct races of being. To the chivalrous, impassioned Castilian, accustomed to worship woman, and pay an almost divine homage to beauty, in the courtly halls and sunny bowers of Spain, the scene presented a perfect constellation of grace and loveliness. The flashing eye of the Aztec maiden, as lustrous and eloquent as any in the gardens of Hesperides; the jetty tresses, glittering with gems and pearls, or chastely decorated with natural flowers; the easy grace of the loose flowing robe, revealing the full rich bust and the rounded limb, in its fairest proportions, won the instant admiration of every mailed knight, and brought again to his lips his oft-repeated vows of love and devotion.

But of little avail were honied lips and eloquent tongues to the gallant cavaliers at that magic fête. They formed no medium of communion with the bright spirits, and gay hearts around them. The doom of Babel was on them all, and there was no interpreter. Nothing daunted by obstacles seemingly insurmountable, the gay Spaniards resolved, that, where bright eyes were to be gazed on, and sweet smiles won from the ranks of youth and beauty, they would make a way for themselves. The first ceremonies of presentation over, each knight addressed himself to some chosen fair one, and by sign and gesture, and speaking look, and smile of eloquent flattery, commenced a spirited pantomimic attack, to the infinite amusement of all the gay throng around. It was met with wonderful spirit, and ready ingenuity, by the Aztec maidens, to whom the dialect of signs, and the language of hieroglyphics was perfectly familiar; that being the only written language of all the nations of Anahuac.

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The spirit and interest of the scene that followed surpasses all attempt at description. Abandoned to the gaiety of the hour, the Spaniards forgot alike their schemes of ambition and aggrandisement, and the peculiar perils which surrounded them; while the Aztec revellers

dismissed, for the moment, both their superstitious dread of the white man, and their patriotic disgust at his daring pretensions to universal dominion.

The noble Sandoval, attracted by the mild beaming eye, and sweet smile of the Princess Tecuichpo, with a profound obeisance, laid his plumed helmet at her feet, and choosing, from a vase at her side, a half blown rose, which he gracefully twined with a sprig of amaranth, he first pressed it to his own heart and lips, and then placed it among the glittering gems upon her bosom. With queenly courtesy and grace, the fair princess received this gallant token, and instantly responded to it, by stooping down, and weaving among the plumes, so courteously laid at her feet, another, of such rare beauty and brilliancy of hue, that it quite eclipsed the gayest feather in the hall.

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Cortez and Alvarado were, each in his turn, struck with the deep, dark, piercing eye of Karee, and each put forth his best endeavor to win from her a smile. But it was so coldly given, and accompanied with a look so deep and searching, that the general quailed before it, as he had never done before to mortal eye.

Instantly recovering himself, he put on such a smile of blended grace and dignity, as melted at once the icy reserve of the maiden, and opened the way for a long and animated parley. It was full of sparkles and power, but could not be translated into any living tongue, without losing all its force and brilliancy.

Meanwhile, an animated discussion had arisen between Guatimozin and the Prince of Tezcuco, touching the propriety of receiving gifts from the strangers, or, in any way, acknowledging their claims as friends. The showy trinket, which Cacama had received from Cortez at Ajotzinco, and which he displayed on his person at this festival, gave rise to the dispute.

"It is wrong," urged Guatimozin, "wrong to our country and wrong to ourselves. Let them gain what they can from the exuberant munificence of the Emperor, and let them stay in peace, while he permits and requires it,—but let us not weaken our hands, by touching their gifts, or accepting their tokens. When they depart, let them not boast that they have left any remembrancer behind them, or laid claims upon our hands, by their gifts, which we have freely accepted."

"Surely, my dear cousin," said the Princess, "you make too much of so small a matter. They are but common courtesies, and too trifling for such grave consideration and argument."

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"Not so, believe me, my fair cousin. They take us on the weak side of the heart—they blind our eyes to our true relations, unnerve our arms, and blunt our weapons of defence."

"What then would you do," asked Cacama, as if more than half persuaded that Guatimozin was right in his views of duty.

"Do," replied the Prince, with startling energy of tone and manner, "I would fling it at his feet, or trample it under my own, before his eyes, and show him that I scorn him and his gifts alike."

Tecuichpo turned suddenly round at this remark, as if fearing the stranger would understand it, and in her agitation, dropped a magnificent jewel from her dress, and with it the rose so gallantly presented by Sandoval. A dozen princes and cavaliers sprang, at the same instant, to replace the precious toy. Pedro Orteguilla, the beautiful young page of Cortez, was so fortunate as to recover it. Doffing his cap, and kneeling gracefully at her feet, he presented it to the Princess with an air of admiring deference, and, by signs, solicited the honor of replacing it upon her arm.

This little incident put an end to the discussion, which was growing too warm for the occasion, and the festivities went on as gaily as before.

A group of sprightly, mischief loving girls, who had clustered round the cool basin of a sparkling *jet d' eau*, and were amusing themselves by free and fearless comments upon the appearance and manners of the strangers, arrested the eye of the impulsive, humor loving Alvarado, and drew him to solicit a share in their sport; for, in beating a retreat from the eagle glance of Karee, he had strolled into an illuminated arbor, in one of the open courts of the palace. With hand, and eye, and lip, now appealing in emphatic gesture to the stars above, and now, with ready tact and admirable sagacity distributing the flowers among the gay naiads of the fountain, he soon ingratiated himself into their favor, and engaged them in a brilliant and animated pantomime, which, if it wanted the eloquence of words, found ample compensation for that defect, in the merry shout and ringing laugh, that accompanied each labored attempt to utter, or interpret, a sentiment. The gallant cavalier soon found himself loaded with a profusion of floral favors. For every flower he bestowed upon the fair nymphs, he received an appropriate return, till his hands were full, and he found it necessary to arrange them upon his person.

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Instantly the whole group, as by one impulse of artistic taste, seized the idea, and resolved to array him as a flower-god. The magnificent cactus flashed among the plumes of his helmet—a pair of splendid magnolias, tastefully adjusted on either shoulder, supplied the place of the silver epaulette—a rich cluster of unfading *forget-me-not*, covered and eclipsed the gilded star upon his breastplate; while every joint in his armor, and every loop and button of his doublet, was set with its appropriate garden gem. Long wreaths of a blossoming vine were dexterously intertwined with flowers of every brilliant hue, and hung like a gorgeous sash over his right shoulder, its gay streamers waving in the gentle breeze, or winding themselves about the scabbard of his sword. His hands were gloved with a moss of the most delicate green velvet, dotted with golden stars, and his boots transformed into buskins of the most approved classic pattern, by alternate bands

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of jessamine and scarlet lobelia, crossed and plaided with strings of anemone and hyacinth.

Thus arrayed, his face skilfully masked with the flowering wax-plant despoiled of its leaves, he was conducted into the presence of the Queen, under a continually increasing escort of bright girls and fair dames, where, with due reverence to her majesty, and with the gallantry becoming a true knight, he begged, by significant looks and signs, to be permitted to lay all his bright honors at the feet of the lovely Tecuichpo.

The signal being given at this moment, he offered his arm to the Princess, and led the way into the banqueting hall, where the luxuries of all the climes of earth seemed to be spread out in endless profusion, and where, the native song of the Aztec alternating with the martial strains of the Castilian band, the night wore away with feasting and revelry.

The day had almost dawned, when the strangers, laden with presents of inestimable value, returned to their quarters, burdened with the weight of their treasures, and deeply impressed with the more than regal munificence of their host, and the unimagined loveliness and grace of the fair beings, who gave life and beauty to his magnificent court.

"If these white gods can be bought, dear father," the Princess naively remarked, as they took their leave, "you have surely paid a price worthy of the ransom of the proudest monarch on earth." [Pg 108]

"The more you bribe them," interrupted Guatimozin, "the less you bind them. They have not the soul of an Aztec, who scorns to receive a favor that does not pledge his heart in return. The Spaniard's heart has nothing to do with his hand. He takes your gift, only to be the better able to plot and compass your ruin."

The Emperor sighed, as he listened to a remark, to which he could make no reply. It brought again before his agitated mind, the only course he could safely adopt in the present crisis of his affairs. In vain did his paternal heart second the suggestion, and his kingly pride urge its immediate adoption. He had not the moral courage to execute his own resolve. Superstition had wholly unmanned him.

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The victorious Spaniard had now reached the goal he had so long aimed at. But his position was far from agreeable, or promising. With a small force, he was completely shut up in the heart of an immense and powerful empire, teeming with millions of warriors, who were deemed terrible and invincible by those whom he had found so formidable, and who might, at a word or a look from their sovereign, either rush in and overwhelm him at once, or withhold all supplies, and leave them to perish of famine in their quarters.

Cortez realized the critical position into which he was drawn, and resolved immediately on one of his bold measures, to turn it to his own advantage. Soliciting an interview with Montezuma, in which he was accompanied by some of his bravest cavaliers, he informed the monarch, that it was not an idle curiosity that had drawn him to encounter the perils, and undergo the toils, of the adventure that had brought him to the capital. He came, as the accredited ambassador of the mighty monarch of Castile, to whom many kings and many broad lands were tributary, and who was the rightful lord of all the territories on which his armies had set their foot. And the object of the present interview was, to demand of the king an acknowledgment of his allegiance to his royal master, and his consent to pay an annual tribute for his crown. [Pg 109]

The mind of the superstitious Montezuma had long been preparing for this acknowledgment. With little apparent constraint, therefore, he responded to this haughty demand—that the oracles of his religion had long ago instructed him, that the territories over which he reigned belonged to a race of white men, who had removed to other lands beyond the rising sun, but would return, in process of time, invested with more than mortal power, to claim their original inheritance. For his part, he was fully convinced that that time had now arrived—that the Spaniards were the men of destiny foretold by a long line of presages and traditions, and that he was fully prepared to acknowledge the king of Castile as his lord, and pay allegiance to him as such.

"And recognize me," interposed the wily Castilian, "as his accredited ambassador, and representative?"

The monarch assented.

The Aztec nobles, who surrounded the throne, were thunderstruck at the humble tone, and humiliating attitude assumed by their once proud and imperious lord. But they were accustomed to unqualified and unquestioning submission to the word of the king. They accordingly, at his command, gave a full assent to all that he had said, and agreed to recognize Cortez as the representative of their new sovereign. Guatimozin left the hall in disgust, and hastened to Iztapalapan, to report the progress of their humiliation to Cuitlahua. [Pg 110]

Even with this arrangement, which had been accomplished so much more easily than he had expected, Cortez was by no means satisfied. He was still in the power of the Mexican, and could never feel safe in the position he held, without some substantial pledge, that the peace of the city would be preserved, and the ground he had already secured be left to him in undisturbed possession. To secure this, he conceived and executed a bolder and more audacious measure than that which we have just related. Soliciting another and a private interview with the

Emperor, and directing his best and bravest cavaliers, with some of their chosen men, to keep near and about the palace, and be in readiness to sustain and defend him, if any resistance or outbreak should follow his daring attempt, he entered the royal presence. As the Spaniards always carried their arms, it excited no suspicion, to see them on this occasion fully equipped.

This disposition of his men and officers being effected, the bold cavalier addressed himself, in a stern voice, to the Emperor, charging him with secretly designing the destruction of his guests, and alleging, in support of the charge, some of the incidents already related, and others of more recent occurrence, in which some of the vassals of Montezuma had surprised and slain a party of Spaniards, who relied upon their hospitality. These were artfully woven into a tale of imaginary wrongs, for which he boldly pretended to claim instant redress, or rather security against their repetition.

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The monarch was thunderstruck at the charge, while he, as well as the few attendants that remained near his person, with difficulty restrained the expression of their indignation at the disrespectful tone of the address, so unlike that to which the royal ears were accustomed. He peremptorily denied the charge. But Cortez was not to be foiled thus. He knew that he had now gone too far to retract, and that the change of feeling now produced would ensure his speedy destruction, if he failed of securing the object of the present interview. He, therefore, repeated the charge, assuring the monarch that such was the belief of all his men, and that nothing would convince them of his innocence, or make them willing to rest quietly in the capital, but the consent of the king to transfer his residence, for a time, to their quarters. And this he boldly demanded of him, in the name of their common sovereign, the great king of Castile, and he could not refuse obedience, without breaking allegiance with him.

"When was it ever known," exclaimed the astonished and offended king, "that the monarch of a great people voluntarily left his own palace, to become a prisoner in the camp of a foreign nation. If I should consent to such indignity, my own subjects would every where cry out against it, and a storm would be raised, which could only be hushed when the last Spaniard was sacrificed to the outraged honor of their king, and the wrath of their offended gods."

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"No, my imperial lord," replied the politic and smooth tongued knight, "your majesty entirely misapprehends my meaning, and the position in which I would place you. I only propose a temporary removal from one of your royal palaces to another, a thing of frequent occurrence, and therefore not likely to excite remark among your people. You can bring all your household and your court with you, and have the same royal attendance, as you now do. This show of confidence and regard, on your part, will inspire my men with new confidence in your kind intentions, and give stability in the eyes of your own people, to the friendly relations existing between us."

Montezuma still protested that it was unworthy the dignity and majesty of the sovereign lord of Anahuac, thus to submit his motions to the direction of strangers, as it was a daring presumption and impiety, on their part, to suggest it. He therefore, peremptorily declined the proposal, and requested the general to say no more about it, if he would retain the position he now held in his regard, and that of his people.

Upon this, the iron-souled Castilian assumed a loftier aspect, and a bolder tone, and abruptly assured the monarch that it was a point he was not at liberty to dispense with. If he would not remove peaceably and quietly to the Spanish quarters, he must be carried there forcibly, though it should involve a struggle that should drench the palace in blood, and sacrifice the life of every man in his army.

Suddenly, the spirit of the monarch was gone. His old dread of the white man revived in all its power. He felt himself compelled by his destiny, to do as he was required. Signifying his assent to the haughty demand of the stranger, he ordered his nobles to make ready his palanquin, that he might go in royal state, and not appear in the eyes of his subjects, as he passed along, as a prisoner in his own capital.

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With looks of astonishment, not unmingled with indignation, the proud chiefs obeyed, marching under their royal burden, with solemn pace and downcast looks, in utter silence, but nursing in their hearts an implacable hatred against the insulting Castilians, and a burning rage, which was yet to burst upon their devoted heads in an overwhelming storm of wrath. As they passed the threshold of the imperial palace, which their once proud but now humbled lord was never to recross, they heaved a deep sigh, as if the dark shadows of the future already hung frowningly over their heads. It was responded to by a deep, mysterious, sepulchral groan, which seemed to issue from the very heart of the earth, while, at the same instant, a royal eagle, sailing proudly over the capital, struck by an invisible leaden messenger from one of the sure-sighted marksmen in the Castilian camp, fluttered in his lofty flight, drooped his strong wing, and, with a terrible death shriek, the blood streaming freely from his wound, fell into the court, at the very feet of the royal procession.

The fate of Montezuma, and of his empire, was now sealed. He had, with his own hand, taken the crown from his head, and laid it at the feet of the Spaniard. And, more than all, he had humbled himself in the eyes of his own subjects, and diminished, though few were hardy enough to avow it, the profound respect and reverence with which they were accustomed to regard him. To his own immediate household, he had represented this removal as a voluntary act of courtesy, on his part, designed to compliment the strangers, by becoming, for a time, their guest, and to inspire them, by his personal presence among them, with confidence in his professions of regard, as well as to show his own people how strong the bond of amity was between them. At the same time,

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however, that he assured them of his personal safety and his confidence that all would end well, he recommended his wives and children to leave him, for the present, and take up their abode in his rural mountain palace at Chapoltepec.

The timid and sensitive Tecuichpo was thrown into the deepest distress by this suggestion. She could not doubt the repeated assurances of her royal father, and yet she could not divest herself of the sad impression that his liberty, and perhaps his life, was in danger, in thus separating himself from the strong arms and devoted hearts of his own people, his natural protectors, and throwing himself, unarmed, into the garrison of the fearful strangers. What security could she have that he would ever return, or that violence would not be offered to his sacred person by those who looked upon him only as the vassal of their own sovereign, to be used for his purposes and theirs, as their own selfishness and rapacity might dictate.

"Leave us not, my dear father," she exclaimed, "or at least compel not us to leave *you*. Rather in darkness and in trouble than at any other time, would we stand at your side, to administer, as far as we may, to your comfort, and to share, and perhaps lighten, your sorrows."

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"Nay, my beloved child," the grateful monarch calmly replied, "I have no need, at this time, of your solace, or your counsel. I go among friends, who respect my person and my authority, and who well know that their own safety in Tenochtitlan, depends entirely upon retaining my friendship, which alone can shield them from being overwhelmed, and swept away like chaff, before the countless hosts of my warrior bands. Why then should I fear for myself. But for you, and your mother, and your sisters, the camp of the strangers is not a fitting place for you. They have customs of their own, and are slow to recognize the propriety of ours, deeming us, as they do, an inferior race of beings. They are bold and free in their manners, quite too much so for the refined delicacy of an Aztec maiden, or an Aztec matron, as you yourself both saw and felt, at the festival of their reception. How shall I expose you to the rude gaze of these foreign cavaliers, and perhaps to the rude speeches of their soldiers. No, my beloved, go to your retirement at Chapoltepec, and train the flowers there for my coming, which will be at the approaching festival of the new moon."

"But will you certainly come to us then, my dear father? Karee says"—

"Trouble me not with the dreams of Karee, my sweet child. They are not always as loyal as they should be. I believe I am right in what I am now doing, and I cannot be diverted from it by the mystic night visions of your favorite. Go, and the gods be with you."

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So saying, he tore himself from her embrace, and returned to his own apartments to attire himself for the removal.

The fiery, high spirited Guatimozin was so disgusted with this act of suicidal cowardice, on the part of his royal master, that he withdrew at once from the city, taking with him his servants and retainers, as well as his immense private treasures, and took up his abode at his country palace or castle, where he lived in all the pseudo-regal state and magnificence of a feudal baron, or a petty sovereign. Here he opened a correspondence with a large number of the principal nobles of the realm, who, like him, felt that the time had come to prepare for a terrible crisis. They concerted no measures, for they dared not move openly without the command or assent of their master; but they exchanged sentiments, and encouraged each other in their patriotic purpose, to defend their country from subjugation to a foreign foe, and their altars from desecration.

Passing Chapoltepec on his way, the noble Prince sought an interview with his lovely mistress, to inform her that, while the pledge he had given, in accepting the proffered rose, over the sparkling fountain of Tenochtitlan, should be sacredly regarded, he must be allowed to see with his own eyes, when danger was near, and to raise his arm in her defence, and in that of his country, from whatever quarter the threatened danger might come. He found her, bathed in tears, wandering wildly up and down, amid the shade of the tall cypresses that overhang and almost bury that mountain retreat. Her raven hair had escaped from its pearl-studded band, and was flying loosely in the breeze; the wonted bloom was gone from her cheek, and the brilliant lustre of her dark flashing eye had given way to a sad and subdued expression, which was more in keeping with the uniform mildness and gentleness of her spirit. Separated from her adored parent, and banished from the city of her love and her pride, she began to feel more deeply than she had ever done, the terror of those dark omens which had clouded her destiny, and marked her out as the doomed Princess of Anahuac. While she could cling to her father, and feel that she was to share all that might befall him, and perhaps, by sharing it, extract some portion of the bitterness from the cup which he was compelled to drink, she was calm and hopeful. But now, the sheet-anchor of her soul was gone, and she was drifting, at the mercy of the waves, she knew not whither.

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"My sweet cousin," said Guatimozin gently, as he arrested her flying step, "why this sudden abandonment to grief and despair. Dark as the clouds may be over our heads, all is not lost. Know you not, my love, that ten thousand times ten thousand brave hearts and strong arms are pledged, by every bond of loyalty and love, to rush to the rescue, the moment that any violence is offered to the sacred person of our lord. Be assured not a hair of his head shall be touched."

"Ah! my brave Guatimozin! I know full well your courage and your zeal. But of what avail to us will be the direst vengeance your arms can wreak on the strangers, after the violence is done, and the honored head of my father—oh! that I should live to speak it!—laid low at their feet!"

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"Fear not, my beloved, they dare not, with all their boasted power, they dare not lay a rude hand

upon that sacred person. They know, they feel, that they are treading on a mighty volcano, that may burst out at any moment, and overwhelm them in hopeless destruction. It is this sense of impending danger only that has induced them to invite the Emperor to their quarters, and so to urge their suit, that he could not, as their professed friend, deny it. While he is there, they will feel safe, for his hand alone can stay the pent up fires, that they break not forth at once. Fear not. I go to-night to Iztapalapan, to confer with your royal uncle, the intrepid Cuitlahua. The noble Cacama joins us there, convinced already that his was a mistaken policy, when he counselled your father to receive the strangers courteously, and treat them as friends."

"And what can Cacama do?"

"That is yet to be seen. He is convinced of his error, and is ready to atone for it with his life. With Cacama, with Cuitlahua, with a thousand more like them—chiefs who never feared danger, and never knew defeat—why should we despair, or even doubt?"

"But how know you, Guatimozin, that these Castilian strangers regard their own safety as any way involved in that of Montezuma?"

"I gathered it from the oracle, my love, and from omens which never deceive."

"What oracle? What omens? I pray you explain?"

"The omens were their own troubled looks and clouded brows, while this strange negotiation was pending, and the guarded watchfulness, with which they now protect their guest, and prevent the intrusion upon his privacy of any considerable number of his friends, at the same time." [Pg 119]

"Prince Guatimozin, do I understand the import of those terrible words? Is my father already a prisoner in his own palace?"

"What else, my sweet cousin, seeing he cannot come forth, if he would, and we can only approach him by permission?"

"O ye gods! has it come to this? Fly, Guatimozin. Fly to Iztapalapan. I release you from your pledge. Sound the alarm throughout the realm. And, if need be, *I* will arm, and with you to the rescue."

"Not so fast, brave princess; it is just this rashness that may endanger the precious head we would rescue. His life is safe at present; let us not put it to hazard, by moving too soon, or striking a useless blow."

"But I see not yet, my dear cousin, how it is ascertained that my father is secure from further outrage. May it not be their policy to take away the head, hoping thus to dishearten and distract our people, and make them an easy prey to their victorious arms."

"If so, they know not the spirit of the Aztec. To a man, throughout these broad realms, they would shed their last drop, to avenge the foul sacrilege, nor rest in their work of vengeance, till every altar in the land was drenched in the blood of the captive foe. But you forget that I have oracle as well as omen to sustain my faith."

"What oracle has condescended, at last, to give us light? I thought they had all been silent, not deigning, since the advent of these mysterious strangers, any response to our prayers." [Pg 120]

"Karee is never deaf, or silent, where the welfare of Tecuichpo is concerned."

"Karee?"

"Yes, love, Karee! I want no better or more trusty oracle. She has, you know, a sort of ubiquity. Nothing escapes her keen observation. Few mysteries are too deep for her sagacity to unravel. In her brief occasional encounters with the strangers, she has gathered the meaning of not a few of the words of their strange tongue. What she has once heard she never forgets. Presuming that no one could understand them, they have talked freely and boldly in her presence. And it is from her that I learn, that the Castilian general said to one of his officers, as he crossed the court yard, this morning—"While we have the Emperor with us, we are safe. We must see to it, he does not escape."

"Escape?" shrieked the agitated Princess; "then he is indeed a prisoner. But these white men are gods, are the gods treacherous?"

"The gods of the deep are all treachery, but not those of the blue fields and bright stars above us. But, be they gods from below, or gods from above, they are not the gods of Anahuac, nor shall they claim a foot of its soil, till it is drenched with the blood of the Aztec. Farewell. Fear not. I will yet see you return in triumph to the imperial halls of Tenochtitlan."

## CHAPTER VII.

And bloody treason triumphed.

———

Feeling dies not by the knife;  
That cuts at once and kills; its tortured strife  
Is with distilled affliction, drop by drop  
Oozing its bitterness. Our world is rife  
With grief and sorrow; all that we would prop,  
Or would be propped with, falls; where shall the ruin stop?

Passing lightly over some of the subsequent incidents of this stirring period, we must hasten to the catastrophe of our long drawn tale.

Secure in the possession of his royal prisoner, Cortez now thought he might safely leave the capital, for a while, and respond to a demand which pressed urgently upon him, to relieve his little colony at Vera Cruz, threatened with destruction, not by the natives, but a new band of adventurers from Spain, who had come to dispute the spoils with the conquerors. Leaving one of his principal officers in command, with a part of the forces, he placed himself at the head of the remainder, and marched quietly off on his new expedition.

Alvarado was a brave knight, but of a rash and headlong disposition, and utterly destitute of that cool prudence and far-seeing sagacity which was requisite for so important a station. He soon involved himself in a most wicked and unjust quarrel with the Aztecs, which had well nigh overwhelmed him and his diminished band in utter ruin. [Pg 122]

Not long after the departure of Cortez, one of the great national festivals of the Aztecs occurred, at which the flower of the nobility, not of Tenochtitlan alone, but of all the neighboring cities and towns, were present. They came only to the peaceful performance of the wonted rites of their religion, and consequently came unarmed. Their numbers were very great. They were all apparelled in the richest costume of their country. Their snow white vestments, their splendid mantles of feather-work, powdered all over with jewels; their sandals of gold or silver, and their gaudy head-dresses of many-colored plumes, made an imposing and magnificent display, as they moved in solemn procession, to the simple music of their shells and horns, towards the court yard of the great Teocalli, where the festival was to be celebrated. The immense area was thronged with the gay multitude of worshippers, who, unsuspecting of treachery, gave themselves up to the wild dances and all the customary evolutions of Indian festivity. In the midst of their solemn sports, Alvarado, with his band of armed followers, rushed in, like so many tigers let loose upon their prey, and put them to an indiscriminate slaughter. Scarce one of that gay company escaped the ruthless massacre. The holy place was drenched with the best blood of Anahuac, and mourning, desolation, and wo were carried into all the principal families in the land. [Pg 123]

It was a fearful stroke, and fearfully was it repaid upon the heads of the guilty murderers. On every side the cry of vengeance arose, and its hoarse murmurs came rolling in upon the capital, like the distant howlings of a gathering tempest. Myriads of outraged Aztecs, smarting and chafing under their wounds, and thirsting for a worthy revenge, thronged the avenues to the capital, and demanded the treacherous strangers to be offered in sacrifice to their offended gods. Guatimozin, and many other brave, powerful, fearless chiefs were there, eager to seize the opportunity to chastise the insolent intruder. Day after day, they stormed the quarters of the beleaguered foe, pouring in upon them volleys of arrows, darts and stones, that sorely discomfited, though it could not dislodge them. Every assailable point was so well guarded by those terrible engines of destruction, the fire-belching artillery, that the assailants, numerous as they were, and spurred on by an ungovernable rage, could make but little impression upon them. Nevertheless, they would inevitably have carried the defences, and swept away the little band of ruthless murderers, had not Montezuma interposed, and besought them, for his sake, to desist from their hostile attacks. From regard to his safety, they suspended their active operations, but did not relinquish their settled purpose of vengeance.

One means of annoyance was left to them, which would soon have reduced the fortress to submission, had not an unexpected succor arrived. All supplies were cut off from the camp,—already famine began to stare them in the face, and relax the iron sinew and with it the iron will, of the haughty Castilian. They were beginning to be reduced to extremities. A few days more, and the undefended garrison would have fallen into the hands of those merciless avengers of blood, who would have doomed every individual to the sacrifice. [Pg 124]

At this critical juncture, the all powerful, invincible Cortez returned, his forces greatly increased by the accession of the very band that had been sent against him—Narvaez, who had been commissioned to displace him, having become his friend, and arrayed himself, with his whole company and munitions of war, under his banner. Hearing of the disastrous position of his friends in the capital, he hastened with rapid strides and forced marches to their relief. His progress was unimpeded by any hostilities on the part of Aztecs, or their allies, till he entered the city, and joined his forces with those of Alvarado in the beleaguered citadel. It seems to have been the purpose of the chiefs to permit a free ingress of the entire force of the enemy, preferring rather to shut them up to famine there, than to meet them in the open field.

No sooner was the General, with his augmented army, enclosed within the walls of the fortress, than active and fearful demonstrations of the roused and unappeasable spirit of the people began



to be made. The streets and lanes of the city, which were silent and deserted as he passed through them to his quarters, began to swarm with innumerable multitudes of warriors, as if the stones, and the very dust of the earth, were suddenly transformed into armed men. The flat roofs of their temples and dwellings were covered on every side with fierce wild figures, frantic with rage, who taunted the Spaniards with their cruel treachery, and threatened them, in the most violent language, with a terrible revenge. "You are now again in our power," they cried, "and you cannot escape. Shut up in your narrow quarters, you are doomed to the lingering tortures of famine, and wo to the traitorous Aztec, that furnishes a morsel to relieve your hunger. When, at length, the faintness of death overtakes you, and you can no longer offer resistance to our arms, we will again spread the tables in your prison-house, and fatten you for the sacrifice."

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No longer restrained by their reverence for Montezuma, whose pusillanimity had been the cause of all his and their troubles, they recommenced their active operations, and stormed the defences with an energy and perseverance that was truly appalling. Day after day they deluged the place with arrows and missiles of every kind, which fell in pitiless showers upon the heads of the besieged, till scarcely one was left without some wound or bruise. In vain did they apply, as before, to their royal prisoner, to appease the rage of his subjects, and induce them once more to send them the customary supplies. In moody silence he shut himself up in his room, brooding over the ingratitude and treachery of Cortez, and the injuries and insults he had received at his hand.

Exasperated by this sudden reversal of his schemes of conquest, and maddened by the sense of hunger which began to be severely felt in his camp, Cortez resolved to strike terror into the ranks of the besiegers, by a vigorous sortie at the head of all his cavalry. First sweeping the avenue by a well directed fire from his heavy guns, which were planted at the main entrance of the fortress, he rushed out, with all his steel clad cavaliers, trampling the unprotected assailants under the iron hoofs of the horses, and dealing death on every side. The mighty mass gave way before the terrific charge of the advancing column, but immediately closed in upon its rear as it passed, till it was completely swallowed up in an interminable sea of fierce and angry foes, whose accumulating waves swept in from every avenue, and threatened to sweep them all away, in despite of the fury and power of their dreaded chargers. Convinced of his danger, the intrepid Castilian wheeled his horse about, and with a furious shout, called on his brave band to break a way through the serried ranks of the enemy. Plunging, rearing and leaping, under the double spur of the rider, and the piercing shafts of his foe, the fiery animals broke in upon the living wall that impeded their way, and rushed fiercely on, trampling down hundreds in their path, till they regained the open avenue, that was defended by their own artillery. It was not without serious loss, however, that this retreat was achieved. The fierce Aztecs threw themselves upon the horses, in the crowd, hanging upon their legs, sometimes inflicting serious wounds upon them, and sometimes grappling with their riders, dragging them from their saddles, and carrying off to captivity or sacrifice. At the same time, they were sorely beset by showers of stones and darts that poured upon their heads from every building as they passed, battering and breaking their armor, and terribly bruising both the horse and his rider.

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These sorties were several times repeated, but always with the same doubtful success. The loss of the Spaniards was always much less than that of their enemy. But the latter could better afford to lose a thousand, than the former to lose one. Their ranks were instantly replenished with fresh combatants, who crowded in upon the scene of conflict, like the countless thousands of the over-peopled North, that swarmed upon the fair fields of Italy, as if some used-up world had been suddenly emptied of its inhabitants. Their numbers seemed rather to increase than to diminish with every new onset. In the same proportion their fierce resolution increased.

The haughty Spaniard was now convinced that he had wholly mistaken the character of the people, whom he had thought to trample down at his pleasure. A spirit was raised which could not be laid, either by persuasion or by force. He saw and felt his danger, without the power to avert it. At length, either by threats or entreaties, or both, he prevailed on the captive Montezuma once more to interpose in his behalf, by employing what authority remained to him against his own best friends and faithful subjects.

The Aztecs, forsaken of their monarch, had bold and talented leaders, who were competent both to devise and to execute the measures deemed necessary for the public good, and to lead on their marshalled hosts, to battle and to victory. Cacama, the young Prince of Tezcuco, burning to retrieve his fatal error in counselling and aiding the friendly reception of the Spaniards, now joined all his resources with those of Cuiclahua and Guatimozin, in endeavoring to recover the ground they had lost. Their first object was, to rescue the Emperor from his inglorious imprisonment, never doubting that, with his sacred person at their head, they would be able to annihilate the treacherous intruders at a blow.

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Not far from the city of Tezcuco, and standing out on the bosom of the lake, several hundred yards from the shore, was a solitary castle of a heavy and sombre architecture, built upon piles, at such an elevation as to be above the influence of any extraordinary swell in the waters of the lake. Consequently, when at its ordinary level, boats could pass freely under. At this place the princes were accustomed to meet for private deliberation.

Cortez was informed of these meetings, and knew too well the effect of the counsels there matured, not to wish them broken up. With a boldness of design peculiar to himself, he resolved to make Montezuma the instrument of their destruction. He represented to that monarch the danger to his own interests, of allowing such a junto of able and ambitious men to assume the

guidance of the public affairs, and undertake to direct the movements of the people. "What can they do more," he craftily exclaimed, "but assume the reins of government, under the specious pretence, which they now falsely set up, that their king is deprived of his freedom to act, and therefore no longer a king. If, now, you would save your sceptre and your crown, assert at once your imperial prerogative—show them you have still the power to speak and to act—command them, on pain of your royal displeasure, to lay down their arms, desist from their treasonable assemblages, and repair at once to your court, to answer for their unloyal designs."

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Misled by false representations of the facts, and deceived by the specious arguments of the Spaniard, Montezuma despatched a message to the lord of Tezcucó, under the great seal of the empire, which it was high treason to disregard, commanding him instantly to appear before his master, to answer for his irregular and ill-advised proceedings. Cacama was too well aware of the real position of Montezuma, and of the constraint under which he acted, to give any heed to his mandate.

"Tell my royal master," he replied, "that I am too much his friend to obey him in this instance. Let him banish the false-hearted Spaniards from his capital, the vipers whom he has taken to his bosom—let him ascend once more his imperial throne, not as a vassal, but as the rightful lord of all these realms, and Cacama will joyfully lay his crown, his life, his all, at his feet. Montezuma is my master when he is master of himself. To that dignity we intend to restore him, or perish in the attempt."

On the evening of the fourth day after the return of the royal messenger, with this spirited reply of Cacama, a light pirogue, guided by a single hand, its sole occupant, might have been seen gliding silently over the Lake to the water-palace, the chosen rendezvous of the patriot princes. By the proud and majestic bearing of the boatman, it could be no other than Guatimozin. Securing his skiff by a cord passed through the fingers of a gigantic hand, curiously carved from the jutting rafters on which the floor of the palace was laid, he ascended the steps to the hall, which he found unoccupied and still. He was presently joined by Cuitlahua and Cacama, arriving from different directions, in the same stealthy manner. Their number was soon increased by the arrival of four Tezcucan lords, from whom some important communications were expected. Scarcely had they entered the hall, and seated themselves, when, a slight noise from without attracting his attention, Guatimozin rose, and went towards the door, to ascertain the cause.

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"It is only the chafing of our pirogues against the piles," said one of the new comers—"let us proceed to business."

Guatimozin, true to his own impulses, heeded not the remark. Stepping upon the outer battlement, he discerned a slight figure in a canoe, moving in the shadow of the building, and apparently seeking concealment. Supposing it might be a servant, left by the Tezcucans in charge of their boats, he was about returning, when a gentle voice whispered his name.

"Who calls Guatimozin?" he replied in a whisper, at the same time leaning towards the intruder.

"Beware of the Tezcucans, beware." The voice was Karee's, but the skiff shot away, like an arrow, before the Prince had time for further parley.

Returning to the council, he instantly demanded, as if nothing had happened, that the plans of the evening should be laid open.

A pictured scroll was then produced by the Tezcucans, representing the contemplated movements of the enemy, which they professed to have ascertained from authentic sources, and delineating a plan of operations against them. Guatimozin, somewhat bewildered by the warning he had received, sat down with his friends to the examination of this scroll. But, while seemingly intent upon that alone, he contrived to keep a close watch upon the movements of the Tezcucans. It was soon evident that their thoughts were not wholly engrossed by the business before them. A slight noise from without, followed instantly by an exchange of significant looks between two of the party, confirmed his suspicions. Instantly dashing away the false scroll, and springing to his feet, he boldly charged the traitors with a conspiracy; and demanded an immediate explanation. Alarmed at this mysterious and premature disclosure of their designs, the chief of the party, without venturing a word of reply, gave a shrill, piercing whistle, which was immediately responded to from without. Finding himself entrapped, and not knowing what numbers he might have to contend with, Guatimozin sprang to the door, stretching one of the conspirators on the floor as he passed, and succeeded in reaching his skiff, just as a band of armed men rushed in from the other quarter. Cuitlahua also effected his escape, though not without a desperate encounter with one of the advancing party, who attempted to arrest his flight.

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To seize his antagonist with a powerful embrace, to fling him over the parapet into the water, and to plunge in after him, was the work of an instant. Swimming under water for some distance, and rising to the surface within the shadow of the building, he took possession of the nearest canoe, and, following in the wake of Guatimozin, was soon out of the reach of danger, or pursuit.

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Cacama, unsuspecting of danger, and intent only on the object of their meeting, was so engrossed with the scroll, and the plans delineated upon it, that he did not fully comprehend the meaning of this sudden interruption of their council, until his two friends had disappeared, and, in their place, a band of twenty armed men stood before him. Resistance was vain. By order of the chief of the conspirators, he was seized, securely bound, and carried a prisoner to Tenochtitlan. There, though treated with indignity by Cortez, and with severity by Montezuma, he maintained a haughty and independent bearing, sternly refusing to yield, in the slightest degree, to the

insolent dictation of the one, or the pusillanimous policy of the other. Cuitlahua was afterwards seized in his own palace of Iztapalapan; but, after a short detention, was released again, at the instigation of Montezuma.

These outrages, so far from intimidating the people, only excited and incensed them the more, and led to other and more desperate assaults upon the beleaguered foe, till Cortez, apprehensive of ultimate defeat and ruin, applied once more to Montezuma, proposing that he should appear in person before his people, and require them to lay down their arms, retire to their homes, and leave his guests in peaceable possession of the quarters he had voluntarily assigned them.

Arrayed in his royal robes, with the imperial diadem upon his head, preceded by his officers of state, bearing the golden wands, the emblem of despotic power, and accompanied by a considerable train of his own nobles, and some of the principal Castilian cavaliers, the unfortunate monarch appeared on the battlements, to remonstrate with his own people for their zeal in the defence of his crown and honor, and appease the rage of his subjects for insults offered to his own person, and to those of his loyal nobles. His presence was instantly recognized by the thronging multitudes below and around. Some prostrated themselves on the earth in profound reverence, some bent the knee, and all waited in breathless silence to hear that voice, which had so long ruled them with despotic sway.

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With a sad, but at the same time a calm and dignified tone, the monarch addressed them, "My children," said he, "why are you here in this fierce array. The strangers are my friends. I abide with them as their voluntary guest, and all that you do against them is done against me, your sovereign and father."

When the monarch declared himself the friend of the detested Spaniard, a murmur of discontent and rage arose, and ran through the assembled host. Their ungovernable fury burst at once the barrier of loyalty, and vented itself in curses upon the king who could, in the hour of their peril, thus basely forsake his people, and endeavor to betray them into the hands of a treacherous and blood thirsty foe. "Base Aztec!" they cried, "woman! coward! go back to the viper friends whom you have taken to your bosom. No longer worthy to reign over us, we cast away our allegiance for ever." At the same moment, some powerful arm, more fearless than the rest, aimed a huge stone at the unprotected head of the king, which brought him senseless to the ground. His attendants, put off their guard by the previous calm and reverential attention of the crowd, were taken by surprise. In vain they interposed their shields and bucklers, to protect his person from further violence. The fatal blow was struck. The great Montezuma had received his death-wound from the hand of one of his own subjects, who, but a moment before, would have sacrificed a hundred lives, had he possessed them, to shield the person of his monarch from violence and dishonor.

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The effect of this unexpected catastrophe seemed equally appalling to both the belligerent parties. The Aztecs, struck aghast at their own sacrilegious deed, dispersed in sorrow and shame to their homes; while the Spaniards felt that they had lost their only remaining hold upon the forbearance and regard of a mighty people, whose confidence they had shamefully abused, and whose altars and houses they had wantonly desecrated. It was a season of agonizing suspense. To retreat from their post, and abandon the conquest which they once imagined was nearly achieved, might be as disastrous as it would be humiliating. To remain in their narrow quarters, surrounded with countless thousands of exasperated foes, on whom they must be dependent for their daily supplies of food, seemed little better than madness. To the proud spirit of the haughty Castilian, the alternative was scarcely less to be dreaded than martyrdom. It was manifestly, however, the only resource, and he resolved to evacuate the city.

Meanwhile, active hostilities had been temporarily suspended. The unhappy Montezuma, smitten even more severely in heart than in person, refused alike the condolence of his friends and the skill of the Castilian surgeon. Tearing off the bandages from his wounds, "leave me alone," he cried, "I have already outlived my honor and the affection and confidence of my people. Why should I look again upon the sun or the earth. The one has no light, the other no flowers for me. Let me die here. I feel indeed that the gods have smitten me, when I fall by the hand of one of my own people."

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In this disconsolate mood, the spirit of Montezuma took its flight. In vain did the Castilian general endeavor to suppress, for a time, the tidings of his death. The loud wailing of his attendants, would have published it far and wide among the thousands of affectionate hearts, that listened for every sound that issued from the palace, if they had not, unknown to the Spaniards, established a kind of telegraphic signal, by means of which they communicated to the priests on the great Teocalli, daily reports of the progress of his disease. When the sad signal was given, announcing the solemn fact, that the great Montezuma had laid down his honors and his troubles together, it was responded to by the mournful tones of the great drum of the temple, by ten measured muffled strokes, conveying the melancholy intelligence to every dwelling in Tenochtitlan.

The breathing of that populous city was now one universal wail, that seemed to penetrate the very heavens. Partly from a sincere regard for the fallen monarch, and partly from the hope that he might thus conciliate the good will of his afflicted subjects, Cortez directed his remains to be placed in a splendid coffin, and borne in solemn procession, by his own nobles, to his palace, that it might be interred with the customary regal honors. It was received by his people with every demonstration of affectionate joy and respect. Conveyed with great pomp to the castle of Chapultepec, followed by an immense train of priests, nobles, and common people, it was interred amid all the imposing ceremonies of the Aztec religion. His wives and children, frantic

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with grief, gathered around those hallowed remains, and testified, by all those tender and delicate tokens which seem the natural expression of a refined feminine sorrow, their profound sense of the inestimable loss they had sustained.

By one of those singular coincidences, which tend so strongly to confirm the too easy credulity of the superstitious, and give an unnatural emphasis to the common accidents of life, it was the festival of the new moon, the very day on which Montezuma had promised Tecuichpo that he would join the household circle at Chapoltepec, that his lifeless remains were borne thither, in the solemn funereal procession.

"Alas! my father," she cried, "is this the fulfilment of that only promise which sustained my sinking courage in the hour of separation?" She said no more. The more profound the sorrow, the fewer words it has to spare. "The shallow murmur, but the deep are dumb."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### BRIEF REIGN OF CUITLAHUA—EXPULSION OF THE SPANIARDS— GUATIMOZIN CHOSEN EMPEROR—HIS MARRIAGE WITH TECUICUPO.

Grief follows grief. The crowned head  
So late the nation's hope, is laid  
Low in the dust.

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Defeat and triumph, tears and smiles,  
Life, death, true glory and the depths of shame,  
The funeral pall and the pure bridal robe,  
In close proximity—

The sacred dust restored to its native earth, and the last hallowed rites performed over the sepulchre of the departed, the thoughts of the people were immediately turned to the succession. All eyes were fixed on Cuitlahua, the noble brother of Montezuma, whose intrepid spirit, and deadly hatred of the intruding Spaniards, accorded with the now universal sentiment of the nation. He was elected, without a dissenting voice, by the grand council of the nobles. Accepting, with alacrity, the post of responsibility and danger, he was immediately inaugurated and crowned, with all the gorgeous rites, and imposing ceremonies which a pagan priesthood delight to throw around every important event, in which their holy influence is necessarily involved.

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During the progress of these mournful and exciting events, the rigors of the siege had not been materially relaxed, though all active hostilities had been suspended. They were now to be renewed with tenfold energy, under the lead of their warlike monarch, who had often led the armies of Anahuac to victory, and who had never known defeat.

When the Castilian general was informed that the heroic Cuitlahua had been placed on the throne of Montezuma, and was about to take the field in person, he perceived the necessity of adopting prompt and decided measures. The retreat had already been resolved on. It was now to be put in execution, and that, without delay. As it was the custom of the Aztec, to suspend all hostilities during the night, Cortez determined to avail himself of that season to make his escape. Accordingly, every thing being made ready for the departure, and the city being hushed in a seemingly profound repose, the gates were thrown open, and the little army, with its long train of Indian allies, sallied stealthily forth, not to the stirring notes of drum or trumpet, but with hushed breath and a cautious tread, ill accordant with the haughty bearing, and vaunting air, with which they had hitherto attempted to lord it over the proud metropolis of Anahuac.

But, though quiet, the sagacious and determined Aztec was wide awake. He had anticipated this stealthy movement of his pent up foe, and resolved that he should not thus escape the snare into which his own audacious insolence had drawn him. The last files of the retreating army had not yet passed out from their entrenchments, when a long loud blast from the horn of the great Teocalli, stirred the city to its utmost borders, calling out the mighty host, who had slept upon their arms, eager for the summons which should bring them once more to an engagement with their foe.

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Confident as the Spaniard was in the overwhelming power of his cavalry and artillery, he preferred rather to make good his retreat, while he could, than to show his prowess in these perilous circumstances. The hoarse distant murmurs which fell upon their ears at every street as they passed, indicated too plainly the mustering of a mighty host, which soon came rushing in upon them from all quarters, like the swelling surges of a stormy sea, each higher and more terrible than that which preceded. They fell upon the flying foe with the ferocity of tigers, about to be disappointed of their prey. From every lane and alley, and from the roof of every house, they pelted them with ceaseless volleys of stones. They grappled with them, man to man, reckless of life or limb, so that they could maim or destroy an enemy.

Alvarado, with a portion of the cavalry, brought up the rear of the retreating army, in order to repel, with an occasional charge upon the enemy's ranks, those furious onsets which might have overwhelmed the small body of Spanish infantry, or the unmailed and lightly armed Tlascalan allies. The cavalier and his horse, encased in armor of proof, could better cope with the weapons and missiles of their assailants, while they often turned upon them, with a fierce and irresistible charge, trampling hundreds in the dust, and mowing down whole ranks on this side and that, with their trenchant broadswords.

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In this manner the fugitives defiled through the great southern avenue, and came out upon the grand causeway, by which they had twice entered the city. Here they were met by new and fresh squadrons of the enemy, thronging the sides of the dike in their light canoes, and showering down arrows thick as hail upon the advancing column. Sometimes keeping upon the causeway, they would grapple each with his man, and drag him off into the water, to be picked up by those in the canoes, and hurried off to a terrible and certain fate, on the great altar of their War-god. Their numbers increased every moment, till the lake was literally alive with them.

At length the advancing column was brought to stand; while a cry of despair from the van revealed the fearful position in which they stood in the midst of their implacable foes. The bridges which intersected the dike had been removed by order of the Emperor. They had now reached the first opening thus made in the causeway. A sudden shout from the myriads of Aztec warriors that hung about them on all sides, told at once their own wild triumph, and the awfully perilous position of their enemy. Crowded together on a narrow causeway, in ranks so close as to render their arms and their weapons almost entirely useless—arrested in front by a wide chasm which it was impossible to pass—their retreat cut off in the rear, by the living masses that blocked up every avenue, and pressed them forward upon the crowded ranks of their comrades—assailed on both sides from the water, through the whole length of the closely compacted column—while all these dangers were enhanced a hundred-fold by the darkness of the night—there seemed no possibility of escape for one of that brave host.

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Cortez was with the principal part of the cavalry in the centre of the column, so wedged in by the compacted mass of his own forces, as to be quite unable either to advance or retreat, without trampling them under his feet, or crowding them off the causeway. He comprehended in a moment the perilous position he was in. But such was the utter confusion and dismay of the whole army, and such the horrid din of clashing arms, and the yet more horrid yells of the savage foe, that he in vain attempted either to direct or encourage his men. His voice was drowned in the uproar.

Sandoval, one of his bravest and most trusty officers, who led the van, with a few other cavaliers as bold as himself, resolved to push forward at any personal hazard, rather than stand still to perish in one confused mass, dashed their steeds into the water, and made for the other side of the gap. Some succeeded in effecting a landing, while others, with their horses, perished in the attempt, or fell into the hands of the watchful boatmen. The first movement being thus made, an impetus was given to the moving column from behind, that drove the front ranks, *nolens volens*, into the breach. By far the greater part sank to rise no more, or were picked up by the Aztecs, and hurried away to a far more terrible death. At length the breach was filled up by the bodies of the dead, and the baggage and artillery which occupied the centre, so that the rear had a clear passage over the fatal chasm.

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A second and a third breach was yet to be passed. It was accomplished as before, only by making a bridge of the bodies of one half, for the other half to walk upon. Meanwhile the enemy hung upon flank and rear, with unappeasable rage, striking down and picking up vast numbers of victims, until, when the last breach was cleared, and a footing gained upon terra-firma, there was scarce a remnant left of the gallant band that entered upon that fatal causeway. The iron-hearted Cortez was so overcome with the sight of his shattered band, and the absence of so many brave comrades, when the morning light appeared, that he sat down upon a rock that overlooked the scene of desolation, and gave vent to his emotions in a flood of tears.

Had the Mexicans followed up this success by falling upon the broken dispirited remnant of the Castilian army, they would probably have vanquished and destroyed them to a man. They were suffered, however, to proceed unmolested for several days, until their strength and spirits were somewhat recruited. Then, though attacked by immensely superior numbers, they succeeded in putting them to rout.

The new Emperor, Cuitlahua, having signalized his accession to the throne by the almost total destruction of the formidable foe, who had spread the terror of his arms far and wide through all the realms of Anahuac, proceeded to fortify his capital and kingdom against another invasion. The dikes and canals were thoroughly repaired, the walls were strengthened and extended, the army enlarged and improved in discipline by some of the lessons which so able a general, was not slow to learn from the Spaniards. The immense treasures they had drawn from the munificent Montezuma, and which, in the disasters of that melancholy night, they had been compelled to leave behind, were all recovered and expended in these works of defence. Their arms, too, were gathered up, and served to improve and render more effective many of the more primitive weapons of the Aztecs. In the midst of these wise and patriotic efforts to guard against the probable return of the Spaniards, Cuitlahua was seized with a loathsome disease, which in a few days brought him to the grave, after a brief reign of four months.

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This was a terrible blow to the nation. It was felt throughout all the borders of Anahuac, as the severest frown of their gods. But partially recovered from the shock occasioned by the death of

Montezuma, they were now beginning to feel their hopes renewed, and their courage reviving, under the bold and decided measures, and the signal successes of their new Emperor. He was the idol of the army. His intrepid bravery, his high military talents, his unyielding patriotism, and deadly hatred of the white men, had secured for him the confidence of all the wisest and best men of the realm, so that, with one heart and one voice, they rallied around his standard, assured that, under his energetic sway, the ancient glory and pre-eminence of the Aztec crown would be not only ably asserted, but effectually re-established.

His fall, like a mighty earthquake, shook the empire to its centre. For a moment it seemed as if all was lost—hopelessly, irretrievably lost. The long funereal wail, that swelled up from every dwelling and every heart in that devoted land, seemed like the expiring groan of a world. But it was only for a moment. The first shock past, they found themselves still standing, though among ruins. Their land, their temples, their dwellings, still remained. Their wise and experienced counsellors were all in their midst. Their host of armed men were still at their post, unbroken, undivided, unappalled. The imperial mantle had not fallen to the earth.

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As by immediate direction from heaven, all eyes were turned to Guatimozin. He was nephew to the last two monarchs, and though only a young man, had distinguished himself both in the council and in the field. He had uniformly opposed the admission of the Spaniards to the capital. He had been prominent in all the recent attacks upon their quarters, and had especially signalized himself in the terrible overthrow of the disastrous night of their retreat. He had all the coolness and intrepidity of a veteran warrior, with all the fire and impetuosity of youth. He was about twenty-five years of age, of an elegant commanding figure, and so terrible in war that even his followers trembled in his presence.

The young prince felt the extreme difficulty of the crisis, but did not shrink from the arduous and perilous post assigned him. With a prudence and circumspection, only to have been expected from one long accustomed to the cares and perplexities of government, he set himself to fortify every assailable point, and to prepare for the worst that might arise, in the event of another invasion. The works commenced during the brief reign of Cuitlahua were carried forward to their completion. By means of regular couriers and spies, a constant communication was kept up with all parts of the country. The movements of the Spaniards were narrowly watched, and their supposed designs frequently reported to the Emperor. Nothing was omitted which a sagacious and watchful monarch could do or devise, to make ready for a severe and protracted contest, in whatever form it might come.

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Thus established on the throne, and strengthened against a sudden surprise, the ardent young monarch repaired to Chapoltepec, where the bereaved household of Montezuma still remained, in sad but peaceful seclusion, and claimed the hand of the fair Princess Tecuichpo. Her retiring disposition would have preferred a humbler and more quiet station. She had seen enough of the agitations and burdens of a crowned head; enough of the gaudy emptiness of life in a palace, and longed to hide herself in some sweet, sequestered spot, away from the noisy parade and anxious bustle of a court, where her own home would be all her world.

“Oh! that that crown had fallen on some other head,” she exclaimed. “Though there is not another in Anahuac so worthy to wear it, not one who would so well sustain its ancient glory, yet I would not that *you* should bear the heavy burden, or be exposed to that desolating storm that is gathering over our devoted capital and throne.”

“Said I not, my beloved, that I would yet lead you back in triumph to the royal halls of your ancestors? I have come to redeem my pledge. Shrink not from a station which no other can so well adorn. Rather, far rather would I, if I could, retire with you to the quiet shades of private life, and find a home in some sweet glen among the mountains, than wear the crown and claim the homage of a world. But, my sweet cousin, the crown *must* be defended, the throne *must* be sustained against the insolent pretensions of these strangers. And *I* must do my part in the defence. I dare not, either as monarch or as subject, withhold myself from this great work. If I perish, I fall in the service of my country and her altars. And the higher the station I hold, the greater the service I render—the heavier the burden I bear, the brighter the honors I shall win. As well perish on the throne, as fighting at its foot. I should be unworthy of the daughter of Montezuma, if I held any thing too dear to sacrifice on the shrine of my country.”

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“Noble Guatimozin, my heart is yours—my life is devoted only to you. Lead me where you will, so that I can share your burdens, and lighten your cares, and not prove unworthy of such a father and such a lord. But you forget that mine is a doomed life, that oracles and omens, signs and presages, have all conspired against me from my birth.”

“Nay, my love, it is you that forget, not I. For the very oracles and omens that foreshadowed for you a clouded morning, promised with equal distinctness a bright and glorious evening. The tempestuous morning is passed. The glorious mid-day and the golden evening are yet to come.”

“You are quite too fast, I fear, my brave cousin, it was only the evening that was to have light. The sunset hour of life was to be clear. But what, my dear Guatimozin, what do you suppose that light is to be? and whence shall it come?”

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“What *can* it be, but to restore, in your own person and family, the disputed pre-eminence of the Aztec dynasty, the tarnished glory of its crown. Rely upon it, my gentle cousin, *that* is your destiny. The timid dove of Chapoltepec shall be transformed to the royal eagle of Tenochtitlan.”

“That cannot be. I rather fear that the deep cloud of my doom will overshadow and darken your

life. Better far that I should suffer and perish alone.”

“It *must* be, Tecuichpo, it shall be. Have not the gods given you to me? Have they not made me the defender of the Aztec throne? How then can you doubt that they call *you* to share and adorn it?”

“Oh! my lord! those terrible omens—they are but half fulfilled, and the promised light is yet far in the distance. Could I be sure that you would share that light with me—.”

“Come then with me to the palace. It will be all light for *me* when *you* are there, and sure I am that time will re-interpret those sad omens for you, and turn them all to sunshine.”

Suddenly the palace of Chapoltepec was changed from a house of mourning to a house of feasting. The nuptial rites of the youthful Emperor with the beautiful princess, were celebrated with great pomp. The festivities continued through several days, and were honored by the presence of all the nobility of the empire. The most costly entertainment was provided for the numerous guests. The most munificent royal largesses were bestowed upon the priests, and upon those who took a prominent part in the grand ceremonies, and gifts of great value lavishly distributed among all the inferior attendants. The brilliant and odoriferous treasures of the royal gardens, and of the chinampas of the great lake were exhausted in adorning the halls and chambers of the palace. The refined taste, and exquisite invention of Karee was every where apparent. The place, on the day of the nuptials, might have been taken for the realm and palace of Flora. The very air was redolent of the incense of flowers, which brightened the day with their bloom, and of the odoriferous gums, whose blaze extended the reign of day far into the realms of night.

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It was a national festival, a season of universal rejoicing. The people now believed that their days of darkness and temporary depression were passed, and that all the power and glory of the days of Montezuma would be restored, under those happy auspices which made his favorite daughter a sharer of his throne. The priests sanctioned and confirmed this belief, to the utmost of their power and influence, giving it out, with that oracular force and dignity, which they so well knew how to assume, that such was the true interpretation of all the singular predictions and presages, which intimated that the life of the princess would close with unusual splendor. In this manner, they encouraged the hopes of the nation, confirmed its allegiance to its new Emperor, and united all its forces in a solid phalanx of resistance to every foreign encroachment.

When these ceremonies were concluded, and the imperial pageant passed from Chapoltepec to the capital, there was a new and still more imposing display of the reverence and loyalty of this singular people, and of the more than oriental magnificence with which they sustained the splendors of royalty. The road, through the entire distance, was swept, sprinkled, and strewed with flowers. The elite of the army, and the nobility in the gayest costumes, formed a brilliant and numerous escort, accompanied with flaunting banners, and every species of spirit-stirring music then known to Aztecs. The imperial cortege, consisting of a long array of magnificent palanquins, with their gorgeous canopies of feather-work, all a-blaze with gold and jewels, borne on the shoulders of princes and nobles, occupied the centre of the grand procession. Those of the Emperor and Empress, which moved side by side, were distinguished by the exceeding costliness and beauty of their decorations, and by the superior height of their canopies, whose sides and ends curved gracefully to a point in the centre, about three feet above the cornice, which was surmounted by the imperial diadem of Mexico. These were followed by the queen mother, and other members of the royal household, conveyed in a style but little inferior to the first. This cortege was immediately preceded and followed by all the priests and prophets of the nation, in their splendid pontificals, and bearing the showy insignia of their various orders. An immense train of the most respectable citizens, merchants, mechanics, artizans, husbandmen, and men of every honorable profession brought up the rear. They were scarcely less gay and brilliant in their costume than the escort and immediate attendants of the monarch, though somewhat less uniform in the style of their decorations. The road, through its entire length, was flanked by women and children, young men and maidens, in their gala dresses, with baskets and chaplets of flowers, which they continually showered upon the path, in front of the royal palanquins, thus renewing, at every step of its progress, the floral carpet, whose freshness and beauty the long escort had trampled out. Ever and anon a shout would go up from that vast multitude, so loud and long, that its echoes, reverberated along the mountain walls that shut in that beautiful valley from the great world, would be heard for many a league around. Then, from some little group of trained chanters, a song of right loyal welcome would burst forth, accompanied with showers of roses, and followed by a chorus from thousands of sweet voices—

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Welcome! welcome! warrior, king—  
Thrice welcome with the prize you bring.  
Star of Montezuma's line,  
O'er the empire, rise and shine!  
Flower of Montezuma's race  
Return, thy father's halls to grace!  
Welcome, thrice welcome, mighty one!  
The nation's heart shall be thy throne.



## CHAPTER IX.

### FESTIVITIES AT THE COURT OF GUATIMOZIN—HYMENEAL VOW.

Heaven gave to Adam one, and so proclaimed  
Her full equality to man. He who  
Can ask for more, knows not the worth of one,  
And so deserves not any—

The imperial court of Tenochtitlan was now again the radiant centre of attraction to the confederated and tributary nations of Anahuac. The terror of Guatimozin's arm was even more dreaded than that of Montezuma. He was a mighty man of valor, of that impetuous courage, and that bold directness of action, which executes at a blow the purposes and plans, which, with common minds, would require time and deliberation. He was at the same time of a generous magnanimous disposition, open, frank, unsuspecting, and won the affectionate regard, as well as the prompt unquestioning obedience of his people. He had too much good sense, and too wise a regard to the dignity of those who should attend upon the person of majesty, to require of his nobles, the officers of his court and household, those humiliating attentions which were exacted by Montezuma. He saw that the only effect of such exactions was to weaken and effeminate the character of some of his greatest chieftains, reducing them from proud and powerful friends to fawning cringing slaves. They were no longer shrouded in the sombre *nequen*, as they entered the royal presence, nor did they go barefoot, with their eyes cast down to the earth, when they bore the monarch in his luxurious palanquin. Arrayed in all their costly finery, with golden or silver sandals, and with a bold, manly, cheerful bearing, as if they gloried in the precious treasure which it was their privilege, more than their duty, to protect and to care for, the imperial palanquin seemed rather their trophy than their burden, which they were far more ready to bear, than their master was to occupy. He was too active and stirring a spirit, to submit often to such a luxurious conveyance. He was ever in the midst of his chiefs, consulting and acting for the public good. He freely discussed with them the great measures of defence, which he put in progress, and evinced the remarkable and rare good sense, to adopt wise and politic suggestions, however humble the source from which they emanated, and to change his opinion at once when it was shown to be wrong. He superintended, in person, the repairing and enlarging of the fortifications, and the improvement of the tactics and discipline of the army. By a frugal expenditure of the vast revenues of the crown, and a careful preservation of the treasures left by his predecessors, he accumulated an amount more than equal to the exigencies of a long and wasting struggle with all the combined foes of the realm.

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Meanwhile, the gay saloons of the palace of Montezuma were gayer than they had ever been. For a brief season, the clouds that had so long hung over the fate of the lovely Tecuichpo seemed to be dissipated. The skies were all bright above her, and every thing around her wore a cheerful and promising aspect. Attracted by her resplendent beauty, the unaffected ease and graciousness of her manners, and the queenly magnificence of her court, the youth, beauty, wit, talent and chivalry of the nation, gathered about her, and made her life a perpetual gala-day, rivalling in brilliancy and effect the best days of the gayest courts in Europe.

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Conspicuous among the gay multitude that flitted about the court, was Nahuitle, Prince of Tlacopan, a young chief of the Tepanecs. He was just ripening into manhood, of an uncommonly lithe and agile frame, exceedingly fair and graceful, and gifted with unusual powers of intellect. He was one of the rarest geniuses of the age, and astonished and amused the court with the variety and beauty of his poems, and other works of taste. Nor did his intellectual accomplishments exceed his heroism and loyalty. Guatimozin had not an abler or more devoted chieftain in all his realm. It was he who fought side by side with the Emperor in all his after conflicts, endured with him the horrors of the wasting siege and painful captivity which followed, and finally shared his cruel and shameful martyrdom, at the hands of the then terror-stricken and cowardly Cortez, declaring with his last breath, that he desired no better or more glorious lot, than to die by the side of his lord.

Nahuitle, like all good knights and brave soldiers, to say nothing of true poets, had a heart warmly susceptible of tender impressions, and could not resist the bright eyes and witching smiles, that illuminated the saloons and gardens of the imperial palace. Promiscuous flirtation was less hazardous in Tenochtitlan than in most of the capitals of Christendom. The wealthy nobles being allowed to marry as many wives as they could support, the young prince could win the affections of all the bright daughters of the valley, without at all apprehending a suit for breach of promise, or a conspiracy against his own life, or that of his favorite, by some disappointed rival. How many conquests he made in one brief campaign, does not appear in the chronicles of the day. Atlacan, a princess of Tezcuco, was his first trophy. She was very fair and highly gifted, resembling in many points of person and character, the guardian genius of the young Empress, the talented Karee.

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At his first encounter with the Tezcucan princess, Nahuitle was deeply impressed with a peculiar expression of thoughtfulness, shading a brilliantly beautiful countenance, and imposing a kind of constrained awe upon the stranger. This shadow gradually disappeared upon a further acquaintance, till the whole face and person were so lighted up with the fire of her genius and wit, that it seemed as if invested with a supernatural halo. Their intercourse was a perfect

tournament of wit, and their brilliant sallies and sparkling repartees, were the theme of universal admiration.

The princess Atlacan was always attended by a very prudent, watchful, anxious chaperone, of a fair exterior, and pleasing manners, who had passed the meridian of life, and begun to wane into the cool of its evening. She had also a brother, Maxtli, considerably older than herself, who, from a two-fold motive, seemed to delight in disappointing her expectations, and thwarting her plans. He was a cold, mercenary, selfish man, who sought only his own aggrandizement. The princess was a special favorite of her father, who was a prince of the highest rank, and nearly related to the reigning king of Tezcuco. She had already received many substantial proofs of parental partiality, which her avaricious brother would fain have claimed for himself. Her brilliant qualities and growing influence made her an object of jealousy, as seeming to stand in the way of his own preferment. He had used every exertion to dispose of her in marriage to some of her numerous suitors, and had particularly advocated the cause of a wealthy young merchant of Cholula, who rejoiced in the euphonous name of Xitentlólóxtliltl, from whom Maxtli had received large presents of gold and jewels.

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Atlacan despised the merchant, who fondly imagined that his gold could purchase any jewel in the realm. She would not listen to his proposals. It was not pride of family, for in Anahuac, under the Aztec dynasty, the merchant was a man of note, scarcely inferior to the proudest noble. But the merchant was *only* a merchant, a man of one idea, and that was gold, without refinement, without sentiment, without heart, like the majority of the same class of mere money mongers all the world over.

Maxtli was enraged by his sister's refusal of this alliance, which, if it had been consummated, he would have made subservient to his own interests. He determined, from mere revenge, to throw obstacles in the way of her alliance with the gifted prince of Tlacopan. The annoyances he invented, and the frequent prudential interposition of her cautious chaperone, who was in the pay of Maxtli, made her position rather a difficult one, and often put her disposition to the severest test. It chanced, one lovely evening, that the lovers had stolen a march upon both their tormentors, and found, in the royal gardens, a few moments of that unwatched uninterrupted conference, which only those in the same delicate relation, at the same period of life, know how to appreciate. Their absence from the saloons was soon noticed. The duenna was severely censured, and sent in pursuit of the fugitive. Karee, who was in the secret of the escape, led her a long and wearisome chase, through the numberless halls and corridors of that immense pile, and finally left her, at the furthest extremity of the building, to find her way back as she could. Then, returning to Maxtli, who could scarce restrain his rage that they had so long eluded him—

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"My lord," said she, "can you tell me where I shall find your sister? I have a message for her, which I can only deliver to her personally."

"I know not," he replied angrily, "but she is probably flirting somewhere with that fool fop, the royal bard of Tlacopan. But from whom does your message come?"

"That can only be made known to herself. I saw her some time since, in the garden, leaning upon the arm of this same royal bard, the only young prince in Anahuac worthy of such a jewel."

The prince bit his lip with vexation, and Karee ran off toward the garden. In a few moments, the poor old chaperone came blustering along, out of breath and out of humor.

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"Fie upon the giddy girls of this generation," she exclaimed, "they know nothing of propriety. I wonder what would have been thought of such actions when *I* was young!"

"Hasten to the garden," said Maxtli, impatiently, "your hopeful pupil is there, and that rhyiming fop is with her."

He might as well have sent her to the labyrinth of Lemnos or Crete. Covering an immense area, and traversed in every direction by serpentine walks, shaded lanes, and magnificent avenues, one might have wandered up and down there a week, without finding one who wished to elude pursuit. She obeyed his directions, however, and was soon lost in mazes more intricate and perplexing than those of the palace.

Presently the truants returned, by a different path from that which their pursuer had taken. The princess wore in her bosom a significant flower, which she had received and accepted from her admirer. With a light and joyous step, he led her through the crowded saloon, and presented her to the queen, craving her sanction to the vows they had just plighted to each other. Gracefully placing a chaplet of white roses and amaranths on their heads, the Empress gave them her blessing. Guatimozin, approaching at the same instant, confirmed it with hearty good will, and requested that the nuptials might be celebrated at an early day, and in his own palace.

So distinguished a favor could not be refused. In the course of the next week the solemn ceremonies were performed; with all the imposing pomp of the Aztec ritual. A royal banquet was prepared, and the palace resounded with joyous revelry and music.

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When the officiating priest had uttered the last solemn words which sealed the indissoluble bond, Nahuítla stood forth, and publicly avowed his belief, that the gods designed only one woman for each man, solemnly renounced the old doctrine of polygamy, and pledged to his young bride, in the presence of his royal master, and the brilliant throng that had witnessed his vows of love and constancy, an undivided heart, and an undivided house.

Struck with surprise and admiration at this unexpected scene, and impressed with the truth and purity of the sentiments, and the soundness of the conclusions, which the brave prince had proclaimed, the Emperor rose from his throne, and, with a bland but dignified and solemn air, addressed him:—

“You are right, Nahuítla, my brave prince; I feel it in my heart, you are right. I feel it in the claim which *your* Empress and *mine*, (looking affectionately at Tecuichpo,) has in the undivided empire of my heart, and in that sacred bond of union which is so close, that it cannot be shared by another without being broken. In the presence of these holy men, and of these my witnessing people, I solemnly subscribe to the same pure vow which you have uttered, pledging my whole self, in the marriage covenant to this my chosen and beloved queen, even as she has pledged her whole self to me. And I ordain the same, as the law of this my realm, and binding on all my loyal subjects for ever.”<sup>[D]</sup>

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If the noble Guatimozin had been permitted to sway the Aztec sceptre in peace, his name would be embalmed in the hearts of all the women of Anahuac, and the anniversary of the nuptials of Nahuítla and Atlacan would be celebrated, to this day, as the household jubilee of the nation.

The conclusion of this festival—the last of the kind that was ever celebrated in the halls of Montezuma—was a unique and magnificent specimen of Aztec taste and luxury. At a signal from the master of ceremonies, the royal garden was suddenly illuminated by a thousand torches, borne by as many well trained servants in white livery. They were so stationed as to represent, from different points of view, groups of bright figures whirling in the mazy evolutions of a wild Indian dance. The harmony of their movements, and the picturesque effect of their frequent changes of position, was truly wonderful. It seemed more like magic than any thing belonging to the ordinary denizens of earth. By continually passing and re-passing each other, approaching and receding, raising and depressing their torches, the bearers were enabled to describe a great variety of fantastic figures. So well did they perform their parts, that, to the crowd of spectators from the palace, it was a perfect pantomime of light.

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At length the dance ended, and the figures of the various groups in light, gathering around a high altar, all of fire, seemed waiting for some sacred rite to be performed. Presently a tall princely figure was seen, approaching with slow and solemn pace, leading a lovely female to the altar. The high priest joined their hands in the indissoluble bond, and waved his wand of fire over their heads, in token of the divine blessing; upon which the dance of the torches was instantly renewed, accompanied with strains of the most joyous music, each group breathing out its peculiar airs and melodies, while the whole were beautifully blended and harmonized by the master spirit of the fête. It seemed like the bridal of two angels of light, witnessed and celebrated by all the stars and constellations of the celestial spheres.

The sudden extinguishment of these pantomimic stars, revealed to the surprised revellers the presence of the dawn, before whose coming the stars of every sphere go out, and revelry gives place to the sober realities of life.

[D] If this incident be deemed apocryphal, by the rigid historian, the fable is fully justified by the known state of public sentiment among the Aztecs at this time. Sagahun, according to a note in Prescott, states, that polygamy, though allowed, was by no means generally practised among them; and that the prevailing sentiment of the nation was opposed to it. One of the very few relics of their ancient literature, which were preserved in the general devastation of the conquest, is a letter of advice from a father to his child, on the eve of her marriage, in which he declares that it was the purpose of God, in his grand design of replenishing the earth, to make the sexes equal, and to allow only one wife to each man; and any deviation from this arrangement, was contrary to the plainest laws of nature.

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## CHAPTER X.

### RETURN OF CORTEZ—SIEGE OF TENOCHTITLAN—BRAVERY AND SUFFERINGS OF THE AZTECS.

What will not man endure, and woman too,  
To guard the hearth and altar? Give to each  
A thousand lives, and hedge them close around  
With all that makes it martyrdom to die,  
And agony to suffer—freely still,  
With all their wealth of blood, and love, and tears,  
They'll yield them every one, and dying, wish  
They had a thousand more to give—

Guatimozin was kept constantly informed of the preparations and movements of the Spaniards. His faithful spies followed them in all their marches, and found no difficulty in divining their

general intentions and plans, as their courage revived on their arrival at Tlascala, and still more on the accession of a large reinforcement of Spaniards at Vera Cruz. Cortez was now as resolute as ever in his purpose of conquest, and determined to regain his position in the capital, or perish in the attempt. He went with the sword in one hand and the olive-branch in the other, if that can be called an olive-branch, which admits of no answer but submission, and offers no alternative but slavery or death. With a large increase of cavalry and artillery, an ample supply of ammunition, and a force both of Castilian and Indian allies, more than double of that which accompanied him on his former expedition, he took up his line of march from the friendly city of Tlascala, to cross the mountain barrier that separated him from his prey. Previous to his departure, he gave orders for the construction of a considerable number of brigantines, under the inspection of experienced Spanish shipwrights, conceiving the singular and original idea of transporting them, on the shoulders of his men, across the mountains, and launching them upon the lake of Tezcuco, to aid him in laying siege to the city. His march was unchallenged till he arrived on the very shores of the great lake, and stood before the walls of Tezcuco.

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Here he halted, and sent a message to the governor to throw open his gates, and renew his allegiance to the crown of Castile. The messenger returned with a request that the Spaniard would delay his entry into the city, until the next morning, when he should be prepared to give him a suitable reception. Cortez, suspecting that all was not right, ascended one of the Teocalli in the neighborhood, to ascertain if any hostile movement was contemplated. To his surprise, he saw immense crowds of people, thronging the thoroughfares on the other side of the city, and going, with as much of their substance as they could carry, towards the metropolis. Supposing that the city, when evacuated, would be given up to the flames, and that he should thus be cut off not only from supplies, but from a place of shelter and retreat, he instantly sent forward a strong body of horse, with a battalion of infantry, to arrest the fugitives, and to demand an interview with the cacique.

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Flight having been resolved upon, and the city having been devoted to destruction, as the most effectual annoyance to the Spaniards, no preparations were made to resist such a movement as this. The unarmed fugitives returned to their homes, in great numbers, and the city, with all its abandoned palaces and temples, offered ample accommodations to the invaders. The person of the chief was not secured, he having effected his escape, with the principal part of his nobles, and all his army, to the capital. Cortez, assuming to act in the name of the king of Castile, for whom he claimed the sovereignty of all these lands, immediately deposed the reigning chief, absolving the people from all further allegiance to him, and installed his brother, who was favorable to the cause of the Spaniards, in his place.

Thus secured in such commanding quarters, the haughty Castilian surveyed the field around him, and prepared himself, with great diligence and deliberation, to regain possession of it. The most liberal and conciliating overtures were made to the Emperor, if he would peaceably acknowledge the sovereignty of Castile, and admit him, as the representative of that crown, to the capital. These overtures were promptly and scornfully rejected, and every avenue to amicable negotiation effectually closed. The people of the country were sternly forbidden, on pain of death, from holding any intercourse with the strangers, or from administering, in any manner, to their wants. Large rewards were offered for captives, and every inducement held out to encourage the natives in a resistance, that should admit of no quarter, and terminate only in the utter extermination of one of the parties. Guatimozin was a man every way adapted to a crisis like this. Of a firm indomitable spirit, patient of suffering and of toil, and skilful in all the strategy of war and defence, and possessed of the entire confidence and affection of his own people, he applied himself to the work of self-preservation, with an energy and fertility of resource, which scarcely ever, in a righteous cause, fails to ensure success. That he was suffered to fail, is one of those inscrutable providences which stand frequently out on the page of history, to confound the short-sighted sagacity of man, and restrain his too inquisitive desire to fathom the counsels and purposes of heaven.

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Perceiving that the ground was to be contested, step by step, and that not a foot would be yielded but at the point of the bayonet, and the mouth of the cannon, Cortez resolved on reducing the smaller towns first, and so approaching the capital, by slow degrees, leaving no unfriendly territory behind him, to cut off his supplies, or annoy his rear. In this manner, after almost incredible hardships, and many severe contests, in which his forces were very considerably reduced, he succeeded in wresting by violence, or winning by diplomacy, many of the tributary cities and districts from their allegiance to the Mexican crown. In their attempt upon Iztapalapan, which was led by Cortez in person, they were near being entirely overwhelmed by an artificial inundation of the city. The great dikes were pierced by the natives, and the waters of the lake came pouring in upon them, in torrents, from which they made their escape with the utmost difficulty, with the loss of all their booty and ammunition, and not a few of their Indian allies. The place, however, was reduced to submission. Chalco, Otumba, and many other important posts were soon after added to the number of the conquered.

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This work of subjugation among the tributary provinces and cities, was not a little facilitated by the memory of the iron rule of Montezuma, and his severe exactions upon all his subjects, to maintain the splendors of the imperial palace. They had long felt these exactions to be most burdensome and unequal, and had only submitted to them by force of the terror of that name, which made all Anahuac tremble. They were, therefore, not unwilling to embrace any opportunity to throw off the Aztec yoke, when they could do it with the hope of ultimate protection from its vengeance. They had not long enough tested the administration of Guatimozin, to look for any

relief from their burdens under his reign. He came to the throne at one of those signal crises in the affairs of the empire, which demanded all its resources, both physical and pecuniary, and was therefore compelled, for the time, rather to increase than diminish their taxes, and make heavier requisitions than usual upon their personal services. They were ready for a change of masters, and, as is usual in such cases, did not stop to consider whether the change might not be rather for the worse than for the better. As soon, therefore, as they ascertained that the Spanish power was sufficient to protect them against the fury of their old oppressors, they rushed to their standard, and arrayed themselves against the brave defenders of their native land. The event proved that the rod of iron was exchanged for a two-edged one of steel, a natural sovereign of their own race, for a worse than Egyptian task-master, and a subjection which left undisturbed their ancient customs, and the common relations of society, for an indiscriminate slavery which respected neither person nor property, and levelled alike the public and private institutions of the land.

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Meanwhile the brigantines, which had been rapidly progressing at Tlascala, were completed. They were thirteen in number. They were first put together, and tried upon the waters of the Tahnapan; then taken to pieces, and the timbers, with all the tackle and apparel, including anchors, transported on the shoulders of the Tlascalan laborers, over the hills, and through the narrow defiles of the mountain, a distance of sixty miles, and re-constructed within the walls of Tezcuco. To open a communication with the lake, it was still necessary to make a canal, a mile and a half in length, twelve feet wide, and as many deep. This was accomplished in season for launching the little fleet, having eight thousand men employed upon it during two months. It was a day of great rejoicing and appropriate religious solemnity, when that little squadron appeared, with the ensign of Castile floating proudly at each mast head, their white sails swelling in the breeze, the smoke of the cannon rolling around, and the deep thunder reverberating from every side of the distant mountains.

There is, perhaps, no single achievement in the annals of human enterprize, more remarkable than this. There is certainly none which more clearly shows, or more beautifully illustrates, the daring indomitable spirit, and mighty genius, which alone could have achieved the conquest of Mexico. Who but Cortez would have conceived of such a design? Who but Cortez would have attempted and successfully executed it? To construct thirteen vessels of sufficient burthen to sustain the weight and action of heavy cannon, and accommodate the men and soldiers necessary to navigate and defend them, at a distance of twenty leagues from the waters on which they were to swim—to convey them over mountains, and through deep and difficult defiles, on the shoulders of men, without the aid of any species of waggon, or beast of burden, and to do this in the midst of a country, and with the aid of a people, where nothing had hitherto been known beyond the primitive bark canoe, and where the natural associations, and prevailing superstitions of the natives, were totally adverse to his design—to accomplish this alone would immortalize any other man. What was the passage of the Alps by Hannibal, or by Napoleon, compared to this? Yet, so replete was the whole expedition of Cortez with adventures of unparalleled difficulty, and achievements of dazzling splendor, that this is but a common event in his history, with nothing small or insignificant to place it in commanding relief. It was one of the infelicities in the career of this wonderful man, that he was continually eclipsing himself, showing an originality and power of conception, a fertility of invention and resource, and a determination and energy in overcoming difficulties, and making occurrences, seemingly the most adverse, bend to his will and subserve his designs, which wearies our surprise and admiration, and actually exhausts our capacity of astonishment.

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Nothing was now wanting to complete the arrangements of the invader for laying siege to Tenochtitlan. By the aid of the brigantines, he was able to command the entire lake, sweeping away the frail canoes of the natives, like bubbles on the surface. All the cities and towns on its border had fallen, one after another, into his hands, though not without a desperate defence, and frequent and wasting sallies from the foe. The metropolis, that beautiful and magnificent gem upon the fair bosom of the lake, now stood alone, deserted by all her friends and supporters, the object of the concentrated hostility of the foreign invader, the ancient enemy, and the recent ally.

In that devoted capital, now so closely and fearfully invested, there was a spirit and power fully equal to the awful crisis. As soon as Guatimozin perceived, by the movements of his enemy, that the city was to be assailed rather by the slow and wasting siege, than by the storm of war, he made every possible preparation to sustain himself at his post. The aged, the infirm, the sick, and, as far as possible, all the helpless among the inhabitants, were sent off among the neighboring towns, and country; while all those who were able to do service in the army, were brought thence into the city. Provisions were collected in great quantities, and all the resources then left to the empire concentrated upon one point, that of making an obstinate, unyielding defence. In this condition of affairs the siege commenced; a large part of the fighting men of the neighboring cities and towns being in the capital, preparing to defend it against enemies with whom those cities and towns were now in close alliance. Though it thus brought the father against the son, and the son against the father, in many instances, it did not, in any case, disappoint the confidence of Guatimozin, or undermine the loyalty of his troops. There were no deserters from his standard. Through all the horrors of that wasting siege, they stood by their sovereign, and their capital, as if they knew no other home, no other friend.

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In vain did the Castilian commander propose terms of accommodation to the beleaguered city. The Emperor would not condescend even to an interview. His chiefs and his people, whenever they had an opportunity to do so, treated every attempt at compromise with utter scorn. They

derided Cortez upon his disastrous evacuation of the capital on "the melancholy night," assuring him that, if he should enter its gates now, he would not find a Montezuma on the throne. They taunted their Tlascalan allies as women, who would never have dared to approach the capital, without the protection of the white men.

Sustained by this spirit, the warlike Mexican did not content himself with mere measures of defence. Frequent and desperate sallies were made upon the outposts of the enemy, until it seemed as if the hope of the noble Guatimozin might possibly be realized, that he might slowly and gradually destroy an enemy, whom he could not encounter in a pitched battle.

It was not until the last avenue to the surrounding country was cut off, by divisions of the invading army, planted upon all the causeways, supported in all their movements by the thundering brigantines, that the true spirit of the besieged began to show itself. Till then, their tables had been plentifully supplied, and their hopes continually encouraged by the occasional losses of their enemy, whose numbers were too small to admit of much diminution. The priests were unremitting in their appeals to the patriotism of the people, and in promises of peculiar divine blessings on all who should persevere to the last, in defence of their altars and their gods. Guatimozin was ever among his people, encouraging them by kind words, and an example of unyielding defiance to every advance of the foe. He showed that he was not less the father of his people, than their king, suffering the same exposure, and enduring the same fatigues with the boldest and hardiest of his subjects.

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Such was their confidence of ultimate success in the defence of the capital, that the splendor and gaiety of the court was little diminished, until famine began to stare them in the face. The aqueduct of Chapultepec had been cut off, and there was no longer any supply of wholesome water in the city. The dark visions of the lovely queen were now renewed. For a brief season, she had been permitted to revel in daylight, with scarcely a cloud to darken the sky above her. Suddenly that light was obscured. All was gloom and darkness around her. War, desolating war hovered once more about the gates of the beloved city. Wan faces, and haggard forms began to take the places of the gay, happy, spirited multitudes, that so recently thronged the palace. The image of her father, insulted by the stranger, murdered by his own people, rose to her view. His melancholy desponding look and tone, as he gave way to the doom which he felt was sealed upon him, his frequent assurances that the white men were "the men of destiny," the heaven appointed proprietors and rulers of the land, and that wo would betide all who should oppose their pretensions, or offer resistance to their invincible arms—all these came up fresh to her thoughts, and filled her with sadness. Her own ill-starred destiny too, marked by every possible sign and presage, as full of darkness and sorrow—the thought was almost overwhelming. Fain would she have severed at once the bond that linked her fate with that of Guatimozin, for she felt that he was only sharing her doom, and on her account was exposed to these terrible shafts of fate. The love of Guatimozin, the faithful devotion of Karee, though they soothed in some measure her troubled spirit, could not wholly re-assure her, or dissipate the dreadful thought, that all these terrible calamities were come upon the nation only as a part of that dark doom, for which the gods had marked her out, on her very entrance into life.

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It was long before the Emperor and his immediate household, were made aware of the awful pressure of famine within that devoted city. Watchful and observing as he was, the people, with one consent, had contrived to keep him in comparative ignorance of the growing scarcity, in order that they might be permitted to supply his table, as long as possible, with all the necessaries and luxuries of life. So far was this loyal devotion carried, that multitudes, both of the chiefs and of the common people, were daily in the habit of denying themselves of every thing but what was absolutely necessary to sustain life, and sending to the palace every article of fresh food, or delicate fruit, which they could obtain from their own gardens, or purchase from those of others. This noble devotion on the part of his people, was discovered and made known to the Emperor by Karee. She was the almoner of the bounty of the queen to multitudes of the poor and the sick, in different quarters of the city. On one of her errands of mercy, while she was administering to the comfort of a poor friend, in the last stages of mortal disease, made ten-fold more appalling by the absence of almost every thing that could sustain nature in the final struggle, she overheard the conversation of a father with his child in the adjoining room.

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"Nay, my dear father, you must eat it. Your strength is almost gone, and how can you stand among the fighting men, and defend your king and your house, when you have eaten nothing for two whole days?"

"My precious child, I shall find something when I go out. But this morsel is for you, for I know you cannot live till I come home, if you do not eat this. And what will life be worth when you are gone."

"Father, dear father, I cannot eat it. It will do me more good to see you eat it, for then I shall be sure you can live another day at least, and then, who knows but the gods will send us help."

Karee could listen no longer. Rushing into the apartment whence these melancholy sounds proceeded, she beheld the shadow of a once beautiful girl leaning on the arm of the pale and wasted figure of a man, endeavoring to draw him towards a table on which lay a single morsel of dried fruit, which he had brought in for her, it being the only food that either of them had seen for two days.

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"Take this," said she, offering the sweet child a portion of what she had prepared for the invalid, but which she was too far gone to receive, "and may it give you both strength till the day of our

deliverance." And she instantly returned to the death-bed of her friend.

To the famishing group it was like the apparition of an angel, with a gift from the gods. The savory mess was readily divided, though the affectionate self-denying child contrived to cheat her father into receiving a little more than his share, while he tried every effort in vain, to persuade her to take the larger half. The wretched pair had not had such a feast for many a long week. "Ah!" exclaimed the daughter, as she wept over the luxurious repast, "if our dear mother could have had such a morsel as this, before she died, to stay her in that last dreadful agony."

"Yes, my beloved child," replied the subdued and bitterly bereaved father, "but she has gone where there is plenty, and no tears mingled with it."

The dried fruit was laid away for the morrow. But the same kind hand that relieved them on that day, was there again on the morrow, and on every succeeding day, till the city was sacked, and the wretched ghosts of its inhabitants given up to an indiscriminate slaughter.

When Guatimozin was made acquainted with this incident, he resolved on making another desperate sally, with the whole force of his wasted army, in the forlorn hope of breaking through the ranks of the enemy, and procuring some subsistence for his famishing people. Having drawn them up in the great square, his heart sunk within him, when he saw their pale faces and emaciated forms, and contrasted them with the fierce, stout, and seemingly invincible host, whom he had so often led into battle. But the feeling of despondency gave way instantly to that stern fixed purpose, that terrible decision of soul, which is the natural offspring of desperation. With a firm voice, he addressed them.

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"My brave soldiers, we must not any longer lie still. The enemy is at our gates, and we are perishing in our own citadel. Have we not once driven them, with a terrible and almost exterminating slaughter, along those very causeways which they now claim to occupy and to close up? Are they more invincible now than then? Are we less resolute, less fearless? By our famishing wives and children, by our desecrated altars and gods, let us rush upon them and overwhelm them at once."

The monarch had not yet finished his stirring appeal, when a courier rushed in, bringing tidings that the several divisions of the besieging army were moving up the causeways, and approaching the city on every side.

"They come to their own destruction," said the monarch, bitterly, and immediately proceeded to distribute his men, to give them a fitting reception. The larger part of the forces were ordered to occupy several somewhat retired places, amid the great public buildings in the centre of the city, where they should be in readiness to obey the royal signal. The remainder were to go out, in their several divisions, to meet and skirmish with the advancing foe, doing them as much mischief as possible, yet suffering themselves to be driven before them, till they were decoyed into the heart of the city. The signal would then be given, when every man who could draw a bow, or wield a lance, or throw a stone, would be expected to do his duty.

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It was a stratagem worthy of Guatimozin, and, in its execution, had well nigh overwhelmed the Spaniards, and saved the city. Cortez had appointed with the captains of each division of his army to meet in the great square of the city. Each one being eager to be first at the goal, they followed the retreating Aztecs without consideration, and without making any provision for their own retreat. The watchful agents of Guatimozin were behind as well as before them; and when they had passed the gates, and were pressing up, with all the heat and enthusiasm of a victorious army, into the heart of the city, the bridges were taken up in their rear, to cut off, if possible, their retreat. When this was effected, the fatal horn of Guatimozin blew a long loud blast, from the summit of the great Teocalli. In an instant, the retreating Aztecs turned upon their pursuers, like tigers ravening upon their prey; while swarms of fresh warriors poured in from every lane and street and avenue, rushing so fiercely upon the too confident assailants, as to bring them to a sudden pause in their triumphant career. At the same moment, the roof of every house and temple, along the whole line of their march, was covered with men, who poured upon them such a shower of stones that it seemed impossible to escape being buried under them. The tide of battle was now turned. The too daring invaders were thrown into confusion, and compelled to retreat. This they soon found, to their bitter cost, was nearly impossible. When it was discovered that the bridges, over which they had so recently passed, were removed, the utmost consternation prevailed. The heavy cannon were all on board the brigantines, so that they were unable, as in former times, to mow down the solid ranks of their foes, and break a way for their retreat. Their cavalry was of little service, for they could not leap the wide chasms made by the removal of the bridges. Cut off in front by the solid masses of warriors that blocked up every avenue, and in the rear by these yawning chasms, and hemmed in on each side by the massive stone walls of the buildings, they could neither protect themselves, nor effectually annoy their enemy. They were in imminent danger of perishing ignobly in the ditch, without even striking a blow in their own defence.

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Fortunately for the invaders, their sagacious and ever-wakeful general had anticipated the possibility of such a scene as this, and had taken some measures to forestall it. His officers, however, were too high-spirited and self-confident to condescend to the cowardly drudgery of carrying out his precautionary measures. They thought only of victory, and the spoils of the glorious city, which they now regarded as their own.

In this fearful dilemma, the genius of Cortez did not desert him. When the first shout of battle

reached his ears, as he was advancing cautiously along the avenue, he instantly conjectured the cause. Ordering his own column to halt, and selecting a chosen band of his best cavalry, he wheeled about, dashed furiously down the avenue, and put to flight the unarmed Aztecs, who were doing the work of destruction for him, and had then almost succeeded in tearing away the foundations of the great bridge. Making his way through the deserted streets, with the speed of the wind, he came round into the other avenue, where one division of his army was hemmed in, in the manner above described. Charging impetuously upon the gathering crowds of Aztecs, he succeeded in forcing his way up to the chasm, where he stood face to face with his own troops on the other side. Here, in the midst of a pitiless tempest of stones, and darts and arrows, he maintained his stand, while his men, with incredible labor, attempted to fill up the chasm.

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The work was at length accomplished, though not without the most serious loss to Cortez. Some of his bravest officers fell in that merciless contest with foes who would neither give nor receive quarter. Many were pelted down with the huge stones, that ceased not to rain upon them from all the neighboring house tops. Some were taken by the feet as they labored to maintain a precarious footing on the slippery causeway, and dragged into the canals, either to be drowned in the desperate struggle there, or carried off in the canoes to captivity or sacrifice. Cortez himself narrowly escaped immolation.

At length, through the indomitable perseverance of the general, the breach was so far filled up as to make a practicable passage for the troops. A retreat was sounded, and that gallant band, which, a few hours before had rushed in with flaunting banners, and confident boastings of an easy victory, was glad to escape from the snare into which they had fallen, their numbers greatly reduced, their banners soiled and tattered, and their expectations of ultimate success terribly shaken. They were pursued through all their march by the exulting Aztecs, and many a broken head and bruised limb attested the truth of Guatimozin's taunting challenge, that the Spaniards, if they entered the capital again, would find as many fortresses as there were houses, as many assailants as stones in the streets.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### STRAITNESS OF THE FAMINE. THE FINAL CONFLICT. FLIGHT AND CAPTURE OF GUATIMOZIN. DESTINY FULFILLED.

Death opens every door,  
And sits in every chamber by himself.  
If what might feed a sparrow should suffice  
For soldiers' meals, ye have not wherewithal  
To linger out three days. For corn, there's none;  
A mouse, imprisoned in your granaries,  
Were starved to death.

This shameful defeat was a tremendous blow to the ardent anticipations of the conqueror. Many of the timid and the discontented in his own ranks availed themselves of the opportunity to create divisions, and withdraw from the doubtful contest. The Mexicans, strengthened by the spoils of their assailants, and yet more by the new courage which their late success infused into every heart among them, immediately commenced repairing their works, clearing their canals, and making the most vigorous preparations for maintaining the siege. Their priests, infuriated with the number of sacrifices which they had been enabled to offer to the gods, from the captives of high and low degree taken in the conflict, declared with authoritative solemnity, that the anger of the gods was now appeased, and that they had promised unequivocally, the speedy annihilation of their invading foes. This oracular declaration was, by the order of Guatimozin, published in the hearing of the Indian allies of his adversary. It was a politic stroke, and, if the oracle had not imprudently fixed too early a day for the execution of the predicted vengeance, its effect might have been such as to break for ever the bonds of that unnatural alliance, and leave the little handful of white men, with all their boasted pretensions to immortality, to perish by the hands of their own friends.

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But why dwell longer upon the appalling details of this miserable siege. The day of predicted vengeance arrived, and the Spaniards survived it. Their superstitious terror-stricken allies returned to their allegiance. By a judicious administration of reward and discipline, of promise and threatening, all disaffection was hushed. New measures of offence were concerted, with a determination, on the part of the besiegers, to press into the city by degrees, securing every step, as they advanced, by levelling every building, and filling up every ditch, in their progress, till not one stone should be left upon another in Tenochtitlan. This terrible resolution was carried into effect. Every building, whether public or private, palace, temple, or Teocalli, from which they could be annoyed by the indomitable Aztec, was laid waste. The canals were filled up and levelled, so as to give free scope for the movements of the cavalry and artillery. The beautiful suburbs were reduced to a level plain, a dry arid waste, covered with the ruins of all that was dear and sacred in the eyes of the Aztec. Slowly, but surely, the Spaniard pressed on towards the

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heart of the city, in which the heroic monarch, with his miserable remnant of starving subjects and skeleton soldiers were pent up, dying by thousands of famine and pestilence, and yet ready to suffer a thousand deaths, rather than yield themselves up to the mercy of the foe.

There was now absolutely nothing left, in earth or air, to sustain for another day the poor remains of life in the camp of the besieged. Every foot of ground had been dug over many times, in quest of roots, and even of worms. The leaves and bark had been stripped from every tree and shrub, till there was not a green thing on all those terraces, which were once like the gardens of Elysium. The dead and the dying lay in heaps together, for there was neither life nor spirit in any that breathed, to do the last office for the departed. Pestilence was in all the air, so that many even of the besieging army snuffed it in the breeze that swept over the city, and fell victims to the very fate which their cruel rapacity was inflicting on the besieged.

Famine, cruel, gnawing famine, was in the palace of the Emperor, as well as in the hovel of his meanest subject. That noble prince quailed not before the fate that awaited himself. Had he stood alone in that citadel, with power in his single arm to keep out the foe, he would have stood till death, in whatever form, released him from his post, and spurned every suggestion of compromise or quarter. But the scenes of utter distress which every where met his eye—the haggard ghosts of his friends, flitting restlessly before him, or crawling feebly and with convulsive moans among the upturned earth, in the forlorn hope of finding another root—the dead—the dying—the more miserable living longing for death, and glaring with their horribly prominent, but glazed and expressionless eye-balls on each other—this, this was too much for the heart of Guatimozin.

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“What!” he exclaimed, “shall I submit to see my last friend die before my eyes, and my own sweet wife perish of hunger, only to retain for another hour the empty name of king. No. I will endure it no longer. I will go to Malinché, alone, and unaccompanied, and offer my life for yours. He only wants our gold. Let him find that if he can. He will spare *you*, and wreak all his vengeance on my head.”

A faint murmur ran through the crowd, and then a feeble expiring “No, never,” burst feebly from many lips. One, a little stronger than the rest, arose and said—

“Most gracious sovereign, think not of us. We only ask to live and die with and for you. And the more cruel the death, the more glorious the martyrdom for our country and our gods. Trust not Malinché.”

The speaker fainted and fell, with his fist clenched, and his teeth set, as if he felt that he held the last foe in mortal conflict.

“No, never—trust not Malinché—let us die together,” was echoed by many sepulchral voices, that seemed more like the groans of the dead, than the remonstrances of the living.

“Trust not Malinché, remember my father,” whispered the fond, devoted, faithful, affectionate wife, now the shadow of her former self, beautiful in her queenly sorrow, sublime in her womanly composure.

Guatimozin, the proud, the lofty chief, whose heart had never known fear, whose soul had never been subdued, bowed his head upon the bosom of his wife, and wept. The strong heart, the lion spirit melted.

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“Who, who will care for Tecuichpo? Who will cherish the last daughter of Montezuma?”

“Think not of me, Guatimozin, think of yourself and your people, I am resigned to my fate. If I may but die with you, it is all I desire—for how could I live without you. But think not of trusting Malinché. Let us remain as we are. Another day, and we shall all be at rest from our sufferings. And surely it were better to die together by our altars, than to fall into the hands of the treacherous stranger.”

“Trust not Malinché,” added Karee. “Was it not trust in him that brought all this evil upon us? Think not of submission. You shall see that women can die as well as men. Let Malinché come, and take possession of the remains of these mutilated walls and desolated gardens, but let him not claim one living Aztec, to be his slave, or his subject.”

A murmur of approbation followed, and then a long pause ensued. It was like the silence of death. The whole scene would have made an admirable picture. At length the silence was broken by the voice of the young Cacique of Tlacopan.

“My sovereign,” said he, in a faint voice, but with something of the energy of despair, “there is yet hope. Let us muster what force we can, of men who are able to stand, and sally out upon the enemy. We cannot do him much harm. But, while he is occupied with us, you and your family, with a few attendants can escape by a canoe over the lake. As many of us as have life and strength to do it, will follow you, under cover of the coming night. Your old subjects will flock around you there, and we may yet, when we shall have tasted food, and become men again, make a stand somewhere against the foe, and drive him out.”

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“It is well! it is well!” was the feeble response on every side.

“I cannot leave you,” replied the monarch. “What! shall your king fly, like a coward, while his people rush upon the enemy only to cover his retreat? No, that were worse than death—worse

than captivity!"

"It is not flight, my beloved sovereign," responded the Cacique, "it is an honorable stratagem of war, for the good of the nation, not less than your own. When *you* are gone, we have no head, and we fall at once into the captivity we so much dread. Leave us but the name and person of Guatimozin to rally around, and it will be a tower of strength, which can never fail us."

"Yes, yes, it is right," was whispered on every side—"Go, noble monarch, go at once. It is a voice from heaven to save us."

To this counsel the priests added their earnest advice, and even Tecuichpo ventured to say, "it whispered of hope to her heart." Guatimozin suffered himself to be overruled. The canoes were made ready in the grand canal, which yet remained open on the eastern side. All that could be safely taken of treasure, and of convenient apparel, was carefully stowed. The Queen and other ladies of the court, with her faithful Karee, all wasted to skeletons, and moving painfully, like phantoms of beauty in a sickly dream, were conveyed to the barges. The Emperor and his attendants followed, and all was in readiness for the departure. At that moment the martial horn was sounded from the great Teocalli, and the shadowy host of the Aztec army staggered forth to offer battle to the enemy. It was a fearful sight. It seemed as if the armies of the dead, the mighty warriors of the past, had risen from their graves, to fight for their desecrated altars, and to defend those very graves from profanation. Feebly, but fearfully, with glaring eyes and hideous grin, they rushed upon the serried ranks of the besiegers. A kind of superstitious terror seized them, as if these shapes were something more than mortal. For a moment they gave way to panic, and fell back without striking a blow. Roused by the stentorian voice of Cortez, they rallied instantly, and discharging their heavy fire arms, swept away whole ranks of their frenzied assailants. It was a brief conflict. Many of the Aztecs fell by the swords of the Spaniards, and the spears of their merciless allies. Some fell, faint with their own exertions, and died without a wound. Some grappled desperately with the foe, content to die by his hand, if they could first quench their burning thirst with one drop of his blood.

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At length, a long blast from the horn sounded a retreat. The poor remnant turned towards the city, and were suffered to escape unmolested to their desolate homes.

Meanwhile, the little fleet of Guatimozin had put forth upon the lake. The canoes separated, as they left the basin of the canal, taking different directions, the better to escape the observation of the brigantines. The precaution was a wise one, but unavailing. The watchful eye of the besieging general was there. The brigantines gave chase to the fugitives. Bending to their paddles with the utmost strength of their feeble emaciated arms, they found their pursuers gaining upon them. Casting their gold into the lake, Guatimozin directed them to cease their exertions, and wait the approach of the enemy.

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"Not without one little effort more, I beseech you," exclaimed Karee. "See, my chinampa is close at hand. Let us try to gain that. It has food on its trees for many days, and I have there a place of concealment, curiously contrived beneath the water, where you and the queen may remain without fear of detection, till we can effect your escape to the shore."

In an instant the paddles were in the water, and the canoe shot ahead with unusual speed. The combined energy of hope and despair nerved every arm, and fired every heart. They neared the beautiful chinampa. Their eyes feasted on its fresh and cooling verdure, and its ripe fruits hanging luxuriantly on every bough. Their ears were ravished with the music of the birds, who had long since deserted their wonted haunts in the capital.

While the chase was gaining rapidly upon them, another of those fearful brigantines, which had hitherto been concealed by the thick foliage of the chinampa, rounded its little promontory, and appeared suddenly before them. Instantly, every paddle dropped, every arm was paralyzed. Not a word was spoken. In passive silence each one waited for his doom, which was now inevitable. When the Spaniard had approached within hailing distance, the Emperor rose in his little shallop, and, waving his hand proudly, said, "I am Guatimozin."

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The royal prisoners were treated with the utmost deference and respect. Being brought into the presence of Cortez, the monarch, pale, emaciated, the shadow of what he had been, approached with an air of imperial dignity, and said—

"Malinché, I have done what I could to defend myself and protect my people. Now I am your prisoner. Do what you will with me, but spare my poor people, who have shown a fidelity and an endurance worthy of a better fate."

Cortez, filled with admiration at the proud bearing of the young monarch, assured him that not only his family and his people, but himself should be treated with all respect and tenderness. "Better," said Guatimozin, laying his hand on the hilt of the general's poignard, "better rid me of life at once, and put an end to my cares and sufferings together."

"No," replied Cortez, "you have defended your capital like a brave warrior. I respect your patriotism, I honor you valor, and your firm endurance of suffering. You shall be my friend and the friend of my sovereign, and live in honor among your own people."

The keen eye of the monarch flashed with something like indignation, when allusion was made to the king of Castile, and to himself as his vassal.

"In honor I *cannot* live," he said proudly, "for I am defeated. A king I *cannot* be, for he is no king

Renewing his politic assurances of friendship and favor, the conqueror sent for the wife and family of his captive, first ordering a royal banquet to be prepared for them. Supported by Karee, leaning on the arm of the devoted Nahuítla, the lord of Tlacopan, the queen was ushered into the presence of the conqueror. Her appearance struck the general and his officers with admiration. Timid as she was by nature, she had the air and port of inborn royalty; and, in deference to her husband, she would not have allowed herself to quail before the assembled host of Castile, dreaded as they were, and had long been. With a becoming courtesy, she returned the respectful salutations of Malinché and his cavaliers, and asked no other favor than to share the fate of her lord.

What that fate was, and how the Castilian knight redeemed his pledges to his unfortunate and noble captives, is matter of historical record. It is the darkest page in the memoir of that wonderful chief—a foul blot upon the name even of *that* man, who was capable of requiting the superstitious reverence and confidence of a Montezuma, with a treacherous and inglorious captivity in his own palace, and a yet more inglorious death at the hands of his own subjects. History must needs record it, dark and painful as it is. Romance would throw a veil over it.

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Years of intense suffering, of harrowing bereavement, of insult, humiliation, and every species of mental and social distress, were yet appointed to the daughter of Montezuma, the bride of Guatimozin. Her predicted destiny was fulfilled to the letter. She bowed meekly to her fate, sustaining every reverse with a fortitude and composure of soul, that indicated a mind of uncommon resources. It was a long, dark, stormy day, “but in the evening time there was light.” It was the light of faith. She abandoned the false gods of her fathers, and found true and lasting peace in the cross of Jesus Christ.

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## THE FLIGHT

OF

### THE KATAHBA CHIEF.

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Go now to Greece,  
Or Rome—to Albion’s sea-girt isle—to Gaul,  
Ancient or modern—to the fiery realm  
Of Turk or Arab—to the ice-bound holds  
Of Alaric and Attila—and find,  
If find thou canst, a nobler race of men—  
More firm, more brave, more true—swifter of foot,  
Or readier in action.

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## THE FLIGHT OF THE KATAHBA CHIEF.

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Go not to the chase, my brave hunter, to-day,  
There’s a mist o’er the sun—there’s a snare in the way;  
Manitto revealed last night in my dream  
A deep dark shadow o’erhanging the stream;  
The deer, from his thicket, sprung out in thy path—  
Then he changed to a tiger, and roared in his wrath—  
Then the warrior hunter, so fearless and brave,  
Was driven away, like a captive slave;

Then the smoke rolled up, and the flames curled high,  
And the forest rung with the foeman's cry;  
Then the wind swept by with a desolate wail—  
The avenger of blood was on thy trail;—  
Minaree looked out at the cabin door,  
But her bold brave hunter returned no more.  
Go not to the chase, my brave hunter, to-day,  
There's a mist o'er the sun—there's a snare in the way.

So, in sweetly plaintive strains, chanted the beautiful young bride of a Katahba chief, as she prepared his frugal morning meal, while he was busying himself in examining the string of his bow, replenishing his quiver with straight polished shafts, and renewing the edge of his trusty hatchet.

In all the forest homes of the native tribes, there was not a fairer flower than Minaree, the loved and devoted wife of the brave Ash-te-o-láh. The only daughter of a chief of the Wateree tribe, which was one branch of the great family of the Katahbas, she inherited the spirit and pride of her father, with all the simple beauty, and unsophisticated womanly tenderness of her mother. She was the idol of Ash-te-o-láh's heart; for, savage as the world would call him, and ignorant of the codes of chivalry and of the courtly phrase of love, he was as true to all the warmer and purer affections, which constitute the bliss of domestic life, as to the lofty sentiments of heroic virtue, which made him early conspicuous in the councils of his people. Though fearless as the lion, fleet as the roe, and adventurous, sagacious and powerful as any that ever sounded the war-whoop, or startled the deer, in those interminable wilds—he was noble, generous, warm-hearted, and devotedly tender to the objects of his love. [Pg 194]

The winning tones, and the affectionate glances of Minaree, as she chanted her simple prophetic lay, had almost won Ash-te-o-láh from his purpose. But, half doubting whether her oracular dream was any thing more than a little artifice of affection, and always superior to that prevailing superstition of his people, which gave to dreams all the sanctity and force of divine revelation, and excited by the preparations he had been making, he flung his rattling quiver to his back, whispered a gentle intimation that Ash-te-o-láh feared neither tiger nor foeman, and returning the affectionate glance of his bride, left the wigwam.

It was a clear bright summer morning. There was a balmy sweetness in the air, and melody in all the groves; but they won not the ear, they regaled not the sense of Minaree, whose heart sunk within her, as she saw her beloved Ash-te-o-láh launch his canoe into the stream, and dash away over its glassy surface, like a swallow on the wing. Ere he dipped his paddle in the water, he turned and gracefully waved her a parting salute, the affectionate desire to stay and soothe the troubled spirit of her dream, still struggling with that lofty pride which told him that he had never yet shrunk from any form of danger, or known the name of fear. [Pg 195]

The lands bordering on the Katahba, were covered, for many a league, with a dense and thriving population. More than twenty tribes were clustered there into one powerful fraternity, capable of bringing two thousand warriors into the field. Their grounds were extensively cultivated, their forests abounded with the choicest game, and their rivers with fish, and they regarded themselves as the most prosperous of the nations.

Nothing could exceed the romantic beauty and loveliness of some of their villages. Stretching along the banks of the rivers, and embowered deeply in the luxurious forests of that favored clime, the numerous wigwams, simple enough in their construction, but adorned here and there with the trophies of war or the chase, and often alive with the athletic sports of the young Indians, formed a scene as animated and picturesque as ever glowed on the bosom of the earth—a scene of patriarchal life, such as cannot now be found among all the families of men.

Conspicuous among them all was the wigwam of Ash-te-o-láh. The hand of Minaree was visible in the tasteful arrangement of a few simple ornaments about the door, and the trailing of a white flowering vine over its walls, which fell in luxuriant festoons, or floated in feathery pensiles on every side. [Pg 196]

Minaree stood in the door of the wigwam, watching the retreating form of her lord, as his light canoe swept down with the current of the river, till it was lost in the distance, and then pensively, and as if unconsciously to herself, resumed her solemn chant, weaving the while a wreath of her wild flowering vine.

He has gone to the chase, my brave hunter has gone—  
He will not return in the moonlight, or morn;  
Minaree shall look out at the cabin door,  
But her bold brave hunter shall come no more;  
There's a cloud in her wigwam—a fire in her brain,  
For her warrior hunter shall ne'er come again.

Gently and placidly flowed the Katahba—every tree and shrub mirrored in its beautiful waters. Not a sound disturbed the perfect stillness; not even the hum of the cricket, or the song of the bird. It seemed an utter solitude. Then a light canoe was seen slowly gliding down the stream. A noble looking Indian was standing in it, erect and tall, with his paddle poised, as if wrapped in meditation, or unwilling to disturb the quiet and charm of the silence. It was a scene to awaken a sense of poetic beauty, even in the mind of an untutored savage. It thrilled the soul of Ash-te-o-

láh, and held him some moments in admiring contemplation. Suddenly starting from his unwonted reverie, he rounded a jutting promontory, and moored his skiff, carefully concealing it amid the overhanging shrubs.

There was something surpassingly graceful and majestic in the figure of this noble son of the forest. Formed by nature in her most perfect mould, tall, sinewy, athletic, yet with every feature and every limb rounded to absolute grace, he was a fine subject for a painter or sculptor. His dress consisted of a beautiful robe, gracefully flung over one shoulder, and confined at the waist by a richly ornamented belt. His hair was wrought into a kind of crown, and ornamented with a tuft of feathers. Equipped with bow and quiver, he seemed intent on game; and yet one might have imagined, from his keen glance and cautious manner, that he expected a foe in ambush.

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Ash-te-o-láh was soon on the track of the deer, which, starting from the thicket, bounded away with the speed of the wind. Pursuing with equal pace, the bold hunter dashed into the depths of the forest, watching for a favorable moment to take the deadly aim. The arrow was on the string, and about to be raised to fly at his panting victim, when the shrill war-whoop burst suddenly on his ear. It arrested his step, for a moment, but not his arm; for the arrow sped as if nothing had occurred to divert its course, and buried itself in the heart of the flying deer.

Perceiving, at a glance, that a party of the Senecas, the old and deadly enemies of the Katahbas, were down upon him, and had cut off his retreat to the river, he held on his course, as before, but with redoubled speed, intending, if possible, to secure a refuge from his pursuers, in a cavern about five miles distant. Fleet as the wind, he would have gained his purpose, if the course had been direct, for there was not a red man in the wide forests of America, who could outrun Ash-te-o-láh. Dividing themselves into several parties, and taking different courses to intercept his flight, his enemies gave instant chase to the fugitive. One party followed close on his trail, but he was soon lost to their view. Another struck off northwardly, towards a bend in the West Branch, where the rapids afforded an opportunity for crossing the stream without impeding his flight. A third made for a deep cut, or ravine, about a mile further down, where a fallen tree, extending from bank to bank, served the purpose of a bridge.

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Ash-te-o-láh soon perceived that his enemies were divided, and resolved that, if they *did* intercept or overtake him, it should cost them dear. Halting a little in his flight, and taking to the covert of a tree, he drew upon the foremost of his pursuers, and laid him dead in the path. The next in the pursuit, pausing a moment over his fallen brother, shared the same fate. Knowing, as by instinct, that the other parties would endeavor to cut him off at the rapids and the bridge, he dashed forward, in a straight line for the stream, plunged into the water, and holding his bow aloft, struggled with a powerful arm to reach the other side. He gained the bank, just as his pursuers made their appearance on the opposite shore. Turning suddenly upon them, he levelled another shaft with such unerring aim, that one of their number fell bleeding into the stream. Another and another, in the act of leaping over the bank, received the fatal shaft into his heart. Hearing the distant whoop, which indicated that the other party had reached the bridge, Ash-te-o-láh waited not for another victim, but bounded away for his mountain fastness. The little delay which had been necessary to cut off five of his pursuers, had given an advantage to the other parties, who were now on the same side of the stream with himself, and gaining upon his steps. No sooner was this perceived, than the heroic fugitive turned upon the nearest of them, and, with the same infallible aim, laid him dead in the path. Still another had fallen before his sure aim, and his bow was strained for another shot, when one of the other party, who had made a circuit, and come up behind him unperceived, leaped upon, and held him pinioned in his powerful grasp. His struggles were terrible; but he was immediately surrounded, overpowered and disarmed.

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Though seven of their number had fallen in this brief chase, the brave Senecas were so struck with admiration at the wonderful skill and noble bearing of their captive, that they did not, as usual, instantly avenge the slain, by taking the life of the slayer; but resolved to take him along with them, and to lead him in triumph into the midst of the council of their nation, there to be disposed of by the united voices of their chiefs.

It was a sad triumph, for they were filled with grief and mortification for the loss of so many of their brave kindred, all fallen by the hand of one of the hated Katahbas, and he now completely in their power. Though stung with shame, and thirsting for a worthy revenge, yet such was their love of martial virtue, that, during all their long journey homeward, they treated their haughty captive with far greater respect and kindness than if he had acted the part of a coward, and suffered himself to fall into their hands without any attempt at resistance. As for him, with an unsubdued spirit, and an air of proud superiority, he marched in the midst of his enemies, as if defying their power, and scorning the vengeance from which it was impossible to escape. To one unaccustomed to the modes of Indian warfare, and the code of Indian etiquette, who might have witnessed that triumphant procession, Ash-te-o-láh would have appeared the proud and absolute prince, surrounded by his admiring and subservient life-guard, rather than the subdued and helpless captive, escorted by his enemies to an ignominious execution.

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Arrived within the territories of their own tribe, the triumph of the captors began. The whole nation was roused to revenge the death of their lost heroes. In every village, as they passed along, the women and children were permitted to beat and insult the unresisting captive, who bore every indignity with stoical indifference, and proud disdain, never indicating by word or look, the slightest sense of mortification or pain, nor bating one jot of his lofty and scornful bearing.

Before the great council of assembled chiefs, he maintained the same tone of fearless dignity and

self-respect. His very look was defiance, that quailed not before the proudest glance of his enemy, nor showed the slightest symptom of disquietude, when the decision of the council was announced, condemning him to die by the fiery torture. It might reasonably be imagined that his past sufferings, his tedious marches, his scanty fare, lying at night on the bare ground, exposed to the changes of the weather, with his arms and legs extended and cramped in a pair of rough stocks, the insulting treatment, and cruel scourgings of the exasperated women and children, who were taught to consider it a virtue to torment an enemy, along with the anticipation of those more bitter sufferings which he was yet to endure, would have impaired his health, and subdued his hitherto proud and unyielding spirit. Such would have been the effect of similar circumstances upon the physical frame, and stout-hearted fortitude of the great majority of the heroes of that pale-faced race, who boast of a proud superiority over the unlettered children of the forest. There are few so hardy, that they could endure, not only without a murmur, but without shrinking, what Ash-te-o-láh had already suffered—few so courageous, that they could hear, with an unmoved countenance, the terrible doom which his enemies had prepared for him, or witness undisturbed the fearful arrangements, and horrid ceremonies, that were designed to give intensity and effect to its infliction.

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Ash-te-o-láh was insensible to fear, and would sooner have undergone a thousand torturing deaths, than permit his enemies to see that he was conscious even of suffering. So nobly did he sustain his courage amid the trial, so well did he act his heroic part, that his enemies, who admired and inculcated the same unflinching fortitude, were surprised and vexed at his lofty superiority, and resolved, by every possible aggravation of his sufferings, to break down and subdue his proud indomitable spirit.

The hour of execution had arrived. The pile was ready for its victim. Every engine of torture, which savage ingenuity could invent, was exhibited in dreadful array, within the area selected for the trying scene. The whole nation was assembled to witness, and take part in the ceremony, which had, in their view, all the solemnity and sacredness of a religious rite. Ash-te-o-láh was led forth, unopposed, into the midst—for the red man would scorn the weakness of leading a victim in chains to the altar.

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The place of sacrifice was an open space near the bank of the river, the dark forest frowning over it on every side, the entire foreground being filled and crowded with an eager, angry multitude, to whom a sacrifice was a feast, and revenge the sweetest luxury that could be offered to their taste. Their wild parade, their savage dances, their hideous yells and demoniacal looks and gestures, designed to terrify, only fired the soul of Ash-te-o-láh to a yet prouder and more majestic bearing. His firm step, his unblenching eye, his fearless and lofty port, touched even his executioners with admiration, and struck his guards with a momentary awe.

Suddenly, as with a bolt from the cloud, he dashed down those who stood in his way, sprung out, and plunged into the water, swimming underneath, like an otter, only rising occasionally to take breath, till he reached the opposite shore. He ascended the steep bank at a bound; and then, though the arrows had been flying thick as hail about him from the time that he took to the water, and though many of the fleetest of his enemies were, like very blood-hounds, close in pursuit of him, he turned deliberately around, and with a graceful and becoming dignity, took a formal leave of them, as if he would acknowledge the extraordinary favors they had shown him. Then, raising the shrill war-whoop of defiance, as his last salute, till some more convenient opportunity should be afforded him to do them a warrior's homage, he darted off, like a beast broke loose from its torturing enemies. Inspired with new strength by his sudden release, and the returning hope of life, he flew with a winged speed, so as entirely to distance the fleetest of his eager pursuers. Confident in his speed, and assured that his enemies could neither overtake nor surprise him, he rested nearly a whole day, to recruit his wasted strength, and watch an opportunity to gain, if possible, some further advantage over those who were scenting his track, and thirsting for his blood.

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Passing a considerable distance beyond a spot, which his well-trained sagacity told him would be the natural resting place of his pursuers, he retraced his steps, walking carefully backwards, and planting each step with great precision, in the very tracks he had just made, so as effectually to conceal the artifice of his return. In this way, he came to a high rock, in which there was a considerable fissure, very narrow at the top, but widening toward the ground, and so concealed by the dense shrubbery that grew around, that it could only be discovered by the most careful scrutiny. Into this fissure he thrust himself, scrupulously replacing every leaf that had been disturbed by his entrance, and adjusting the whole so as not to excite the slightest suspicion in his keen-sighted enemies. Here he awaited their approach.

It was near night of the second day, when the Senecas reached the spring where Ash-te-o-láh lay concealed, and where he had already rested nearly a whole day. Following his track some distance beyond, and not doubting he was yet in advance, they returned without suspicion to the spring, lighted their fires, partook hastily of their simple meal, and laid themselves down to sleep, in perfect security. They were five in number, powerful men, and thoroughly armed, after their own peculiar fashion. Ash-te-o-láh, from his narrow cavern, had watched all their movements. He well knew that they slept soundly, for they had satisfied themselves that no danger was near. But he also knew equally well how wakeful is the sleep of an Indian, and how almost impossible it is to surprise him, even in his soundest sleep. Every circumstance of his situation occurred to him, to inspire him with heroism, and urge him to attempt an impossibility, though his life was the certain forfeit of a failure. He was naked, torn, and hungry. His enraged enemies, who had so recently held him in their toils, and made him ready for a sacrifice, were now come up with him.

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In their little camp was every thing to relieve his wants. He would not only save his own life, but get great honor and sweet revenge, if he should succeed in cutting them off.

Resolution, a convenient spot, and a sudden surprise, might effect this main object of all his wishes and hopes. Creeping cautiously out from his covert, and approaching the sleepers with the noiseless and stealthy cunning of a fox, he seized one of their tomahawks, and wielding it with inconceivable power and rapidity, left four of them in an eternal sleep, before the fifth had time to awake and spring to his feet. The struggle that ensued was terrible; but Ash-te-o-láh had the advantage in every respect, and the conflict ended in a very few minutes, by leaving him alone in the camp of his enemies.

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Selecting from the spoils of the fallen a suitable dress for himself, with the choicest of their bows, a well-stored quiver, a tomahawk, and an ample pouch of provisions, and securing to his belt the scalps of his yet breathing victims, Ash-te-o-láh set off afresh, with a light heart, and a bounding step, for the sunny vales of the Katahba. Resolved not to hazard any of the advantage he had gained, he did not allow himself any sleep, for several successive nights, only as he reclined, for a few moments, a little before day, with his back to a tree, and a clear space about him, where he could not be taken by surprise. Growing more secure, as he approached his home, and discovered no sign of his pursuing enemy, he sought out the spot where he had killed seven of the chase, in the first day of his flight, opened their yet fresh graves, added their scalps to the five then hanging to his belt, burnt their bodies to ashes, and returned in safety, laden with his hard earned trophies, to gladden his humble wigwam, and thrill the council of his people with the story of his singular adventures.

Her prophetic dream had made so deep an impression upon the mind of Minaree, that, from the first, she did not expect "the bold hunter's return." His lengthened absence troubled, but did not surprise her. She yielded him to a stern fate, from which there was no escape; and with a calmness which we, of another race, too often regard as coldness and insensibility, prepared to follow him to the spirit land. His return was to her soul like a visit from that land—a gift from the Great Spirit—and ever after, to the deep devotion of her early love, was added that peculiar reverence, that tender, holy affection, which the Indians every where cherish for the departed.

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When the second party of the Senecas, in the course of the third day of the pursuit, arrived at the camp of their slaughtered people, the sight gave them a greater shock than they had ever known before. In their chilled war council they concluded, that he who had performed such surprising feats in his defence, before he was captured, and since that in his naked and unarmed condition, would, now that he was well armed and free, be a match for them all, if they should continue the pursuit. They regarded him as a wizard enemy, whose charmed life it was vain and wicked to attempt. They, accordingly, buried their comrades, and returned, with heavy hearts, to their homes.

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## MONICA,

OR

### THE ITEAN CAPTIVE.

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What glorious hopes, what gloomy fears  
Have sunk beneath time's noiseless tide!—  
The red man at his horrid rite,  
Seen by the stars at night's cold noon,—  
His bark canoe, its track of light  
Left on the wave beneath the moon;—  
His dance, his yell, his council fire,  
The altar where his victim lay,  
His death song, and his funeral pyre,  
That still, strong tide hath borne away.

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## MONICA.

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“Speak not, but fly—  
There are a thousand winged deaths behind,  
Thirsting for blood. Hope, life, and liberty  
Are all before; and this good arm is pledged  
To guide thee.”

The grave of the Indian is a temple, a sort of gateway to heaven. Around it linger the tenderest affection, the purest devotion of the surviving friend. The grass and flowers that grow over it are never suffered to wither. The snow and the rain are not permitted to remain upon it. The least profanation of that sacred place would be visited with a more terrible vengeance than an affront to the living. Nothing illustrates more clearly the cruel injustice we have done to our red brethren of the forest, by regarding and treating them only as savages, and delineating them always and every where, as destitute of all the refined sympathies of humanity—than this prevailing national characteristic, an affectionate reverence for the dead, and a religious regard for the sepulchres and bones of their ancestors. It touches one of the deepest cords in the human heart. It springs from the very fountain head of social and moral refinement. It links the visible and material, with the unseen and spiritual world; blending all that is tender, and pure, and subduing, in the one, with all that is bright, hopeful, and inviting, in the other. Its existence in any heart, or its prevalence among any people, is proof sufficient that that heart is not wholly hardened in selfishness, and that people not wholly given over to barbarism.

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The infant child of an Itean mother lay dead in her tent. He was a beautiful boy, and already the fond mother had read in his brilliant eye, and the vigorous movements of his tiny limbs, the heroic deeds of the future chieftain. But her darling hope was nipped in the very germ. Her only son was shrouded for the grave, and the hour of burial had come. His shroud was a blanket, in which the head, as well as the body, was completely enveloped. His bier was a train, or Indian sled, in the form of a common snow-shoe, on which the body was laid, without a coffin, and secured by bandages from side to side. Into this train was harnessed a favorite dog of the family, when it was drawn with slow and solemn step, to the grave, preceded by the priest or medicine man of the village, in his gorgeous robes of office, and followed by the parents and sister of the child, with all the inmates of the neighboring wigwams.

Arriving at the grave, the procession stopped, and gathered round the bier, the women and children seating or prostrating themselves on the ground, the men standing in a grave and solemn circle around them. The dog, still remaining in his harness, was then shot, and the medicine man, standing over it, addressed it in the following strain, “Go on your journey to the Spirit land. Long and weary is the way you have to go. Linger not on the journey, for precious is the burden you carry. Swim swiftly over the river, lest the little one be lost in the stream, and never visit the camp of its fathers. When you come to the camp of the White-headed Eagle, bark, that they may know who it is you bring, and come out and welcome the little one among its kindred band.”

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The body was then laid in the grave, on its little train. The dog was placed by its side, with a kettle of food at its head, to supply it on the journey. A cup, containing a portion of the mother’s milk, freshly drawn, was also put into the grave for the use of the child. The earth was laid gently over it, and covered with the fresh sod, the mother, and her female friends, chanting, the while, a plaintive dirge, designed to encourage the spirit of the departed on its dark and perilous journey. The mother held in her hand a roll of bark, elaborately decorated with feathers and bead-work, encompassed with a scarf of broadcloth, highly embroidered. This was intended as a memento of the deceased, to be sacredly preserved in the family lodge. Such mementoes are always seen there, after the death of a friend, and one may always know, by their number, how many of that household have gone to the spirit-land. It is usually placed upright in the spot where the departed was accustomed to sit, dressed in the same ornaments and bands that he wore while living. At every family meal, a portion of food is set before it. If it be a child who has died, the mother offers it a cup of milk, wraps it in the cradle bands of her lost infant, and bears it about with her wherever she goes.

An Indian grave is a protected spot. That which is described above, was surrounded by a small enclosure of logs, and covered with a roof of bark, to shield it from the rain. At its head, a small round post was set, painted with vermilion. Other decorations were displayed upon the wall of the enclosure, which were carefully guarded, and frequently replaced, as they were soiled by the rains, or torn and defaced by the violence of the winds. Day after day, the bereaved mother and sister visited that grave, taking their work with them, and sitting down by its side, chanted their plaintive lullaby to that sleeping infant, and cheered on that faithful dog in his wearisome journey, charging him not to lag or go astray in traversing the plain, nor suffer his precious burden to fall into the water, in crossing the deep dark rapid river to the spirit land.

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Weeks and months had passed since that humble grave was made, and that precious treasure



confided to its bosom. It was a calm glorious evening in mid-summer. The moon shone brightly on the Itean encampment. There was not, in the whole valley of the west, a more beautiful spot for a settlement. The smooth open green-sward was closely surrounded with trees on three sides. On the other, the land gradually sloped towards the river, which flowed quietly by, ever and anon sparkling in the moonbeams, or reflecting the dark forest and flowery banks in its azure depths.

The wigwams in the opening were all closed. Their inmates were at rest. Presently, the buffalo-skin, that served as a door to the principal cabin, was drawn aside, and the beautiful daughter of the chief emerged into the light, and passed swiftly on to the river. Following its course a short distance, by the narrow path that threaded the woods on its bank, she came to the little grave, threw herself on the earth by its side, and wept. It was Monica, the sister of that buried infant, the same whom we saw at his grave when it was first opened, and who had daily, since that time, sung over it her simple song.

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The grief and disappointment of the mother, in the loss of her only son, was not more deep or sincere, or enduring, than that of this affectionate and devoted sister. From the moment of his birth, he was the idol of her soul. She looked forward to the time, in her ardent imagination very near at hand, when, emulating the virtues and deeds of his father, he should become the noblest chief of his tribe. She had pictured to herself the many wonderful exploits he should achieve, and the love and veneration with which he would be regarded throughout the nation. But now, those hopes were blasted, those visions had all faded into darkness. Time had not soothed her disappointment, or softened the poignancy of her grief. Waking or sleeping, the image of her lost brother was before her. She longed to follow him, that she might overtake him on the way, and help him in his passage over that fearful stream.

She had laid down that night, as usual, and slept by the side of her mother. Her dreams were troubled. She thought that arid plain and dark river were before her. The faithful dog was struggling with the waves. The little ark which held that precious treasure, was buffeted about by the winds. Chilled with the cold, and terrified by the dark howling storm, the lone child sobbed bitterly, and looked imploringly round for his mother. In her distress and agitation, she awoke. Unable to sleep, or even to rest, she rose, and ran to the grave.

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“I come, I come, my precious one,  
I am ever by your side—  
Fear not, your voyage is almost done  
Over that dismal tide;  
The winds shall hush, the storm pass o’er,  
And a friendly band shall come  
To meet you on the spirit shore,  
And bid you welcome home.  
Fear not, for love that never sleeps  
Shall guard you o’er that wave;  
And mother her constant vigil keep  
Beside your quiet grave.”

Having chanted her simple lay of love, Monica turned from the grave, stepped into a canoe, and paddled down the stream. Overcome with grief, she dropped her paddle, sat pensively down in her shallop, and left it to follow its course down the current. For several hours it glided silently on. She gave no heed to the hours, till morning broke in the east. Suddenly starting up from her long dream, she looked for her paddle. It was gone. Seeing a bough floating on the water near her, she leaned out to catch it, as the canoe passed on. It was decayed, and broke in her hand. Throwing it from her, she looked eagerly about for some other means of reaching the shore. At length, passing under the shadow of an immense tree, that overhung the stream, she seized a branch that almost dipped into the water, and drawing herself in to the bank, sprang on shore.

Slowly and doubtfully the timid girl threaded the thick forest, scarcely knowing which way to turn. Hoping to find some friendly wigwam near, she sounded the shrill call of her tribe. The call was instantly answered, but not by a friendly voice. Two stern and stalwart warriors of the Pawnee tribe, who were deadly enemies to the Iteans, chanced to be passing that way, and, recognizing the call as that of an enemy, sprang from the thicket, seized the trembling maiden, and bore her away in triumph. Many a weary league she travelled on by the side of her merciless captors, ere she reached their distant encampment. Worn, exhausted in strength and desponding in heart, she fell to the earth in the midst of the throng that gathered around her, and besought them to kill her at once, and let her go to her poor infant brother.

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The Pawnees were not only hostile to the Iteans, but were, in some respects, the most savage tribe in the great valley. They alone, of the North American Indians, continued, down the present century, and far within it, to practice the savage rite of sacrificing human victims on the altar of their gods. With them it was a propitiatory sacrifice, offered to the *Great Star*, or the planet Venus. This dreadful ceremony annually preceded the preparations for planting corn, and was supposed to be necessary to secure a fruitful season. The victim was always some prisoner, who had been captured in war, or otherwise; and there was never wanting an individual who coveted the honor of making a captive from some hostile tribe, and dedicating the spoils of his prowess to the national benefit.

The captors of Monica were in quest of a victim for this sacrifice, when they wandered away alone, and prowled for several days, about the encampment of her tribe. With this view, they bore

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her away in triumph, deaf to all her entreaties and tears, and gave her in charge to the priests, to be made ready against the return of the season.

The best wigwam in the village was assigned for her accommodation. Cheerful companions of her own age were given her. The most sedulous attention was paid to her wants. She was dressed in gay apparel, continually feasted on the choicest luxuries which their fields and hunting grounds afforded, and treated with the utmost tenderness by all about her. Every possible means was employed to allay her grief, and promote that cheerfulness of spirit, which is essential to health and comeliness, in order that she might thus be made a more suitable and acceptable offering.

The personal charms of Monica required no such system of treatment, in order to their full development. She was a rare specimen of native grace and loveliness, and would have been a fitting model, in every feature and limb, for a Phidias or a Praxitiles. The exceeding beauty and gentleness of their captive, while it won the admiration and regard of all her young companions, only made her, in the view of the priests and chiefs of the tribe, a more desirable victim for the altar.

For a long time, Monica was inconsolable. Deprived of that dearest privilege of visiting daily the grave of her brother, distracted in view of the anxiety which her mother would feel for her, she refused to be comforted, or to take any pleasure in the means employed to amuse her. Time and kindness, however, and the promise that she should, by and by, return to her father-land, restored, in a degree, her serenity of mind. She was too affectionate and confiding, to reject the sympathy and kindness even of an enemy. Grateful for the unwearied efforts which her companions made to amuse and comfort her, she came, at last, to regard them as friends. Gratitude begat affection. Affection created confidence. She unburdened her heart of the sorrows that oppressed it. By that effort, the burden was lightened. Something of the elasticity and vivacity of youth returned. She sang and played, if not to amuse herself, yet to gratify others, whose assiduous kindness, and seemingly generous sympathy, she had no other means of repaying. Thus, entirely ignorant of the terrible doom that awaited her, Monica passed the winter of her captivity, looking ever forward to the opening spring as the period of her promised release, and return to the wigwam of her mother.

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At length the fatal day arrived, and every thing was ready for the sacrifice. The whole Pawnee tribe was assembled to witness and take part in the solemnities. From every side, they were seen emerging from the thick forest, or gliding noiselessly over the bosom of the silver stream, leaping from cliff to cliff of the distant hills, or winding down their steep passes and narrow defiles, to meet in the great central village, around the grand council fire of the nation. The whole tribe was there—the chiefs in all their gaudy array of bead-work, feathers, and paint, their embroidered moccasins, their gaily wrought tunics and belts, their polished rifles, and glittering tomahawks—the women and children, and the rank and file of the people, in all the finery and gewgaws they could command. It was a brave sight to those accustomed to the barbaric finery and wild sports of the Indian, but fearful and hideous to one unused to the rude painted visages and half naked forms of the warriors.

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The awful hour of those dreadful orgies was announced by all those discordant shouts and hideous yells, which, with those primitive races, serve the purpose of trumpet, drum and bell. The stake was set, and the faggots made ready, in the centre of the great opening. The priests stood at their post, and the vast multitude of eager excited witnesses thronged around, waiting in terrible expectation for the consummation of that horrid rite, and kindling into phrenzy in view of the mad revelry that would follow. Presently, the outer ranks of that crowding circle made way, and opened a passage to the ring within. Through this living avenue, a company of chiefs marched in, singing, or rather shouting, a wild song, and dancing in fantastic measures. At their head was the captor of Monica, leading the timid girl by the hand. She was arrayed in the most showy and expensive style of Indian costume, the various decorations of her person comprising all that was beautiful and rare in ornament, according to the uncultivated taste of that people. Unconscious still of the doom that awaited her, and hoping, perhaps, that this was to be the festival of her freedom, when she would be sent away in peace to her home, she entered the circle with a cheerful face, and an elastic step, smiling on her young companions as she passed, and wondering at the cold look, or sometimes averted eye, with which her salutation was answered.

It was not until she was led quite up to the stake, and saw the fearful faggots piled around it, that she comprehended the meaning of these mysterious preparations. Her awful doom flashed upon her, like a bolt from heaven. With one loud, piercing, heart-rending shriek, she fell to the earth, and called upon her mother. She was lifted up by the stern priest, placed upon the pile, and bound to the stake. With wild incantations, and horrid yells, the dread orgies were commenced. The torch was lighted, and ready to be applied. At that instant, a shrill whoop burst from the adjoining wood. A brave young warrior, leaping into the midst of the circle, rushed to the stake, cut the cords that bound the helpless victim, tore her away from the pile, and, dashing back through the panic-struck crowd, flung her upon a fleet horse which he had prepared for the occasion, sprung himself upon another, and was soon lost in the distant windings of the wood.

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It was the act of a moment. Even the Indian warriors, who are not easily surprised, or put off their guard, were confounded and paralysed. Before they could comprehend the object of this sudden phantom, this rash interruption of their festival, their victim was gone. The bare stake, and the useless heap of faggots were there. The proud chief, who furnished the victim, and the fierce-looking priests, who were to officiate in the dark rites of the sacrifice, stood in blank

astonishment around, as if a bolt from the cloud had smitten them. A momentary silence prevailed among that mighty throng. A low murmur succeeded, like the distant moans of a coming storm: then, like the tempest, bursting in all its wrath, fierce cries of vengeance from a thousand flaming tongues, furious discordant yells and shouts, accompanied with frantic gestures, and looks of rage, such as would distort the visage of a fiend. Some of the fleetest started off in hot but vain pursuit. Those who remained, promised themselves a day of terrible retribution. The mothers secretly rejoiced in the escape; while those of the young girls who had been the chosen companions of the captive, gave vent to their joy and gratitude in wild songs and dances.

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In this manner, that turbulent assembly broke up. Without the usual feast and its accompanying games, they scattered to their several homes, coolly meditating revenge, and darkly foreboding the famine that should ensue from the absence of the accustomed sacrifice.

Meanwhile, the fugitives held on their way, with the speed of the wind. Not a word was spoken. It was a race of life and death, and every faculty of the rescuer as well as of the rescued was absorbed in the one idea and effort to escape. Over hill and plain, and shallow stream, those foaming steeds flew on, pausing not even to snuff the breeze, till they had cleared the territory of the Pawnees, and reached a sheltered nook within the precincts of a neutral tribe. Here, as among all the Indian tribes the woman is considered competent to take care of herself in all ordinary emergencies, her deliverer left her, giving her ample directions for the way, and cautioning her to use the utmost diligence to avoid pursuit.

"But, tell me first," she cried, tears of grateful joy standing in her eyes, "tell me to whom I am indebted for this miraculous escape—that, in all my prayers to the Great Spirit, I may call down his blessing upon your head."

"I am Petalesharro," replied the youth, modestly. "My father is Latalashaw, the chief of my tribe. We do not believe, with our people, that the Great Spirit delights in the sacrifice. He loves all his red children, and they should all love one another."

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"But, will not your chiefs revenge upon your head this interference with their solemn rites? If any national calamities follow, will they not charge them all to your account? I could not bear that my generous deliverer should be struck down by those terrible hands, in the prime of his youth, as the reward of his heroic benevolence. Better that I should return and submit to the fate they had prepared for me."

"Fear not for me, Monica. Petalesharro fears not to meet the assembled council of his nation. Not a brave among them all will raise a hand to hurt him. He will make them know that the Great Star needs not the blood of the captive. And never again shall the fires be kindled for that cruel sacrifice."

Encouraged by the words of the young chief, Monica turned, with a strong heart, towards her home, still some four hundred miles distant. The same kind providence which had rescued her from the devouring flames, still guided and guarded her solitary way, and gave her strength and spirits for her toilsome journey.

On the second day of her pilgrimage, as she climbed the summit of a range of hills that ran athwart her path, she was alarmed by the appearance of a considerable body of armed men, just emerging from a distant ravine of the same range, in a direction that would lead them immediately across her path. They were too far off to enable her to discern, by their dress and accoutrements, to what tribe they belonged. She supposed they must be Pawnees in pursuit of their lost captive. If she attempted to pass on before them, they would discover her track, and soon overtake her flight. She had nothing to do, therefore, but wait till they had passed, in the hope of eluding their eager scent. Concealing herself in the thicket, in a position that overlooked the valley, she awaited with composure the coming of that fearful band. They descended into the valley, and, to the utter consternation of Monica, began to pitch their tents under the shade of a spreading oak, on the bank of a little stream. She watched the movement with an anxious heart, not knowing how she should escape, with a pursuing enemy so near. Her consternation and anxiety were soon, however, changed to joy, when one of the company, approaching the vicinity of her hiding place, to cut a pole for his tent, was recognized as a chief of her own tribe. Springing from the thicket with a scream of delight, which startled the whole encampment, and brought every brave to his feet, with his hand on the trigger of his rifle, she rushed into the midst of her astonished people, and was received with silent joy, as one restored from the dead. Under their protection, the remainder of her journey was safely and easily performed. Before the moon, which was then crescent, had reached her full, Monica had embraced her mother, and added a fresh flower to the grave of her brother.

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The brave, the generous, the chivalrous Petalesharro returned to his father's tent with the fearless port and composed dignity of one whose consciousness of rectitude placed him above fear. He was a young man, just entered upon manhood, and a general favorite of his tribe.<sup>[E]</sup> His countenance, as represented in Col. McKenney's magnificent work upon the North American tribes, is one of uncommon beauty of feature. In its mildness of expression, it is almost effeminate. But in heart and soul he was a man and a hero. His courage, and the power of his arm, were acknowledged by friend and foe; and on the death of his father, he was raised to the chieftaincy of his tribe. The season which followed his noble act of humane, may we not say religious chivalry, was one of uncommon fertility, health and prosperity. "*The Great Star*" had not demanded the victim. And the Pawnees never again polluted their altars with the blood of a

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- [E] Major Long, in his "Expeditions to the Rocky Mountains," thus describes Petalesharro, as he appeared in his native wilds, and among his own people, in the full costume which he wore on the occasion of some great festival of his tribe.

"Almost from the beginning of this interesting fete, our attention had been attracted to a young man, who seemed to be the leader or partisan of the warriors. He was about twenty-three years of age, of the finest form, tall, muscular, exceedingly graceful, and of a most prepossessing countenance. His head-dress, of war-eagles' feathers, descended in a double series upon his back, like wings, down to his saddle-croup; his shield was highly decorated, and his long lance by a plaited casing of red and blue cloth. On enquiring of the interpreter, our admiration was augmented by learning that he was no other than Petalesharro, with whose name and character we were already familiar. He is the most intrepid warrior of the nation, the eldest son of Letalashaw, and destined, as well by mental and physical qualifications, as by his distinguished birth, to be the future leader of his people."

Petalesharro visited Washington in 1821, where his fine figure and countenance, and his splendid costume attracted every eye. But there was that in his history and character, which had gone before him, that secured for him a worthier homage than that of the eye. His act of generous chivalry to the Itean captive was the theme of every tongue. The ladies of the city caused an appropriate medal to be prepared, commemorating the noble deed, and presented it to him, in the presence of a large assemblage of people, who took a lively interest in the ceremony. In reply to their complimentary address, the brave young warrior modestly said—"My heart is glad. The white woman has heard what I did for the captive maid, and they love me, and speak well of me, for doing it. I thought but little of it before. It came from my heart, as the breath from my body. I did not know that any one would think better of me for that. But now I am glad. For it is a good thing to be praised by those, who only praise that which is good."

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## **TULA,**

OR

### **THE HERMITESS OF ATHABASCA.**

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I thought to be alone. It might not be!  
There is no solitude in thy domains,  
Save what man makes, when in his selfish breast,  
He locks his joys, and bars out others' grief.

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## **TULA.**

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Death is not all—  
Not half the agony we suffer here:  
The cup of life has drugs, more bitter far,  
That must be drained.

That solitary wigwam, in the outskirts of the village, was the home of Kaf-ne-wah-go, an aged Chippeway warrior, who had weathered the storms, and outlived the wars, of three score and ten seasons, and was yet as fiery in the chase, and as mighty and terrible in battle, as any of the young chiefs of his tribe. His voice in the council was, like the solemn tones of an oracle, listened to with a reverence approaching to awe, and never disregarded. His sons all inherited the spirit of their father, and distinguished themselves among the braves in fight, and the sages in council. Three of them fell in battle. One was principal chief of the western division of the Chippeway

family. Another, the brave Ish-ta-le-ó-wah, occupied the first in that group of wigwams in yonder grove, about a hundred yards from his father's.

The only daughter of the good old sachem, the child of his old age, and "the light of his eyes," was the fairest and loveliest wild-flower, that ever sprung up amid the interminable wildernesses of the Western World. Tula, the singing bird, was distinguished among the daughters of the forest, not only for those qualities of person and character which are recognized as graces among the Indians, but for some of those peculiar refinements of feeling and manner, which are supposed to be the exclusive product of a civilized state of society. She was remarkable for the depth and tenderness of her affection, and for her ingenuity, industry and taste. Her dress, and those of her father and brother, exhibited the traces of her delicate handiwork; while the neat and tasteful arrangement of the humble cabin, superior in all that makes home comfortable and pleasant to any in the village, bore testimony to her industry and skill.

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Tula had many suitors. There was scarce a young brave in the tribe who did not seek or desire her. But O-ken-áh-ga, the only son of their great chief, won her heart. She became his bride, but she remained, with him and their first-born child, in the tent of her aged parents, who could not live, as they said, "when the singing bird, the light of their eyes was gone."

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It was mid-summer. The night was still, clear, and lovely. All nature seemed to breathe nothing but calmness and peace. But the heart of man—how often and how sadly is it at variance with nature! The inmates of that humble wigwam were all wrapped in a profound sleep, not dreaming of danger near. The infant, nestling in his mother's bosom, by a sudden start roused her to partial consciousness. A deep groan, as of one in expiring agonies, awakened all her faculties. She sprung up and called upon her husband—

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"O-ken-áh-ga, what is the matter?"

Another deep groan, and a stifled yell of triumph, was the only answer.

Staring wildly round, what a scene of horror met her eyes! Her father, her mother, her husband, pierced with many wounds, and weltering in their yet warm blood, lay dead before her; while a band of fierce and terrible enemies, of the Athapuscow tribe, stood over them, with the reeking instruments of death in their hands, their eyes gleaming with savage delight, and their whole faces distorted with the most fiend-like expression of rage and triumph. With the true instinct of a mother, she clasped her infant to her breast, and bowed her head in silence, utterly unable to give any utterance to the bitterness of her wo. It was this silence that saved her and her child from an instant participation in the fate of the mangled ones around her. The first word spoken, would have brought down that reeking tomahawk upon their heads. The Athapuscows were few in number, and their only safety consisted in doing their work of revenge with secrecy and despatch, for the Chippeways were many and powerful, and to disturb the slumbers of one of them would be to rouse the whole tribe in a moment.

The work of death was done. The scalps of their victims hung dripping at the belts of the murderers, and the spoils of the cabin were secured. The spoilers turned to depart, and Tula, in obedience to their word, without complaint or remonstrance, rose and followed them. Gathering up a few necessary articles, among which she contrived to conceal her babe, she took one farewell look upon the loved ones, whom death had so suddenly and fearfully claimed, and left them, and the home of her youth, for ever.

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With cautious stealthy steps, the murderous band plunged into the deep forest, threading their way through its intricate mazes, with inconceivable skill and sagacity, till they reached an opening, on the bank of the Wapatoony river, where a considerable detachment of their tribe was temporarily encamped. Delivering their prisoner into the hands of the women, the braves proceeded at once to the council of the chiefs, to show their trophies, and relate the incidents of their scout.

When the Athapuscow women, in examining the contents of the poor captive's bundle, discovered the still sleeping infant, they seized him as they would have done a viper, and dashed him on the ground. In vain did the fond mother plead for her child. In vain did the voice of nature, and a mother's instinct in their own bosoms, plead for the innocent. It was an enemy's child, a hated Chippeway, and that was enough to stifle every other feeling in their hearts, and make even "an infant of days" an object of intense and implacable hatred. With the Indian, the son of an enemy is an enemy, doomed only to death or torture. The daughter may be spared for slavery or sacrifice.

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The morning dawned with uncommon brilliancy and beauty upon the Chippeway village, and warriors and children were astir with the earliest light, some to fish in the smooth stream, that, like a silver chain, bound their two beautiful lakes together—some to look after the traps they had set over-night—some to prepare for the hunt—and some for the merry games and athletic sports of the village. The quick eye of Ish-ta-le-ó-wah soon discovered that all was not right in the tent of his father. Kaf-ne-wah-go was not abroad, as usual, with his net in the stream. O-ken-áh-ga was not seen among the hunters with his bow, nor among the wrestlers on the green. No smoke

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was seen curling among the branches of the old tree that overshadowed his mother's tent. All was still as the house of the dead.

"Why sleep the brave so long, when the light of day is already on the hill-top, and coming down upon the valley. Has the snake crept into the tent of Kaf-ne-wah-go, and charmed the father with the children? I must go and see."

The loud and piercing yell of Ish-ta-le-ó-wah, as he looked in upon that desolate wigwam, roused the whole village, like the blast of a trumpet. The counsellors and braves of the nation were soon on the spot. The whole scene was understood in a moment, as clearly as if a written record of the whole had been left behind. Pursuit, and the recovery of the captive Tula and her child, were instantly resolved; and, ere the sun had surmounted the eastern barrier of their beautiful valley, Ish-ta-le-ó-wah, with a band of chosen braves, was on the trail of the foe.

With the keen eye and quick scent of a blood-hound, they followed the almost obliterated track, through forest and brake, through swamp and dingle, over hill and prairie, till it was lost on the border of the Athabasca lake. Though the party in retreat was large, so well were they all trained in the Indian tactics of flight and concealment, that it required a most experienced eye to keep on their track. They had marched, according to custom, in Indian file, each carefully walking in the steps of the other, so that, to an unpractised observer, there would appear to have been but one wayfarer in the path. Wherever it was practicable, the path was carried over rocks, or the soft elastic mosses, or through the bed of a running brook, with the hope of eluding the pursuer. But no artifice of the Athapuscow could elude the well-trained eye of the Chippeway. He would instantly detect the slightest trace of a footstep on the ground, or the passage of a human body through the thicket. In one place, the edges of the moss had been torn, or a blade of grass trampled in upon it; in another, the small stones of the surface had been displaced, showing sometimes the fresh earth, and sometimes the hole of a worm uncovered, with half the length of its astonished occupant protruded to the light, as if investigating the cause of the sudden unroofing of his cell. Here some dry stick broken, or the bark of a protruding root peeled off, would betray the step of the fugitive; and there a shrub slightly bent, or a leaf turned up and lapped over upon another, or a few petals of a wild flower torn off and scattered upon the ground, would reveal the rude touch of his foot, or arm, or the trailing of his blanket, as he passed. Even on the bare rock, if a few grains of earth had been carried forward, or a pebble, a leaf, a dry stick, or a bit of moss, adhering to the foot had been deposited there, it was instantly noticed and understood. The rushing of the waters in the brook did not always replace, in a moment, every stone that had been disturbed in its bed, nor restore the broken limb, nor the bent weed, to its place. So quick and intuitive were these observations, that the march of the pursuer was as rapid and direct as that of the pursued. The one would seldom lose more time in hunting for the track, than the other had consumed in his various artifices of concealment.

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On arriving at the lake, it was evident that a considerable number of the enemy had been encamped, and that they had just embarked. Their fires were still smoking, and the rocks were not yet dry, from which they had pushed off their canoes, in the haste of their departure.

The Chippeway was not easily diverted from his purpose. With the speed of a chamois, he climbed a tall cliff, which, jutting boldly out into the lake, concealed its great eastern basin from his view. Arrived at the summit, he discerned, dimly relieved in the distant horizon, a number of moving specks, which he knew to be the canoes of the retreating foe. In the double hope of avenging the dead, and recovering the living from captivity, he continued his course along the shores of the lake, and, early the next morning, fell once more upon the trail of his enemy. Pursuing it a short distance into the forest, it suddenly divided, one part continuing on to the east, and one striking off toward the south. In neither of them could he discover the track of his sister. Her captors had placed her, with their own women, in the middle of the march, so that the large and heavy track of the warriors who came after, should cover and obliterate the lighter traces of her foot.

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Taking the eastern track, and moving on with accelerated speed, he overtook the flying party in the act of encamping for the night. Concealing himself carefully from view, and watching his opportunity when all were busily engaged in pitching their tents, he raised the terrible war-whoop, with a volley of well directed arrows, and rushed, with his whole band, upon his unarmed victims. Not one of them escaped; and, so sudden and complete was the retribution, that not one remained to tell where the captive Tula had been carried. The real murderers had escaped with their captives, and the vengeance intended for *them* had fallen upon the heads of their innocent comrades.

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Tula was treated with kindness by the Athapuscow chief, who claimed her as his own. Every means was tried to reconcile her to her new lot, and to make her content to be the wife of her enemy. But her heart was bound up with the memories of the dead. Her parents, her husband, her child, filled all her thoughts. And the idea of being for ever bound to those whose hands were stained with the blood of these precious lost ones, was not to be endured for a moment. She was inconsolable, and her captors, for a time, respected her grief. Day after day, they travelled on, with long and weary marches, till the face of the country was changed, and the green forest gave way to the barren and rocky waste, that skirts the northern borders of the great valley of prairies. As they advanced, they grew more and more secure against pursuit, and less watchful of

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their captive. At length, she suddenly disappeared from their view.

They had pitched for the night, on the bank of the north branch of the Saskatchewan. The night was dark and tempestuous. The lightnings flashed vividly from the dark cloud, and threatened to "melt the very elements with fervent heat." The hoarse thunders roared among the wildly careering clouds, and reverberated along the shores of the stream, and the cliffs of the distant mountains, as if those everlasting barriers were rent asunder, and nature were groaning from her utmost depths. The Indian feared not death, in whatever shape it might come. But he feared the angry voice of the Great Spirit. He shrunk with terror to the covert of his tent, and covered his eyes from the fearful glare of those incessant flashes, and prayed inwardly to his gods.

The poor disconsolate captive lay trembling under the side of the tent. She thought of the storm that had swept over her beautiful home, and desolated her heart in the spring time of its love. She looked at her savage captors, now writhing in the agonies of superstitious fear, which her more absorbing private grief alone prevented her from sharing to the full. They heeded her not. They scarcely remembered that she was among them. Something whispered to her heart—"No eye but that of the Great Spirit sees you. He bids you escape from your enemies."

In the ten-fold darkness that follows the all-revealing flash from the storm-cloud, Tula slipped noiselessly under the edge of the robe that sheltered her from the beating rain, and plunging into the stream, swam with the current a few rods, till she was arrested by a thick covert of overhanging shrubs, which grew to the water's edge. Thinking she might be able to cover her head with these bushes, while her body was hid by the water, she crept cautiously under, close to the bank, when, to her surprise and joy, she found that this shrubbery covered and curiously concealed a crevice in the jutting rock, sufficiently large to admit a free entrance to an ample cave within. Having carefully adjusted every limb and leaf without, and replaced with instinctive sagacity, the mosses that had been disturbed by her feet, she devoutly thanked the good spirit for her hope of deliverance, and anxiously watched for the morning.

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The dark cloud of the night had passed over. The voice of the tempest was hushed. The day broke clear and cloudless, amid the singing of birds, and the quickened music of the swollen stream. The first thought of the Athapuscow chief, as he started from his troubled slumbers, was of his captive. But she was gone. With a shrill and angry whoop, he roused the whole band, and all started in pursuit. The old woods rung again with the whoop and yell of the pursuers, and were answered by the sullen echoes of the hills and cliffs around. But neither wood, nor hill, nor cliff, revealed the hiding-place of the captive. The heavy torrents of rain had obliterated every mark of her footsteps, and neither grass, nor sand, nor the yielding soil of the river-bank afforded any clue to the path she had taken.

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Safe in the close covert of her new found retreat, the poor captive heard all the loud and angry threats of her disappointed pursuers. She even heard their frequent conjectures and animated discussions of the means to be adopted for her recovery, and often, they were so near to her place of refuge, that she could see their anxious and angry looks, as they passed, and almost feel their hands among the bushes that sheltered her, and the quick tramp of their feet over the roof of her cave. But there was no track or mark, on land or water, to guide them to that spot, and so naturally had every leaf been adjusted, that it had not attracted a single suspicion from any one of those sagacious and quick-sighted inquisitors.

Two hours of fruitless search for a hiding place, or a track that should reveal the course of her flight, brought them to the conclusion that the Great Spirit had taken her away, and that it was not for man to find her path again. With this conviction, they struck their tents, swam the stream, and resumed their march to the south.

Too cautious to leave her covert at once, and wearied with her anxious watchings, Tula composed herself to sleep, as soon as the last sound of the retiring party died on her ear. The sun had declined half way to his setting, when she awoke. She listened, with a suspicious ear for every sound without. The singing of birds, the rustling of the leaves, and the murmur of the waters, were all that disturbed the silence of the scene. She put her ear to the rock, but it brought nothing to her sense that revealed the presence of man. With extreme caution, she ventured to look out from her cave, and, by slow degrees, peering on every side for some concealed enemy, she emerged into the light, and dropping noiselessly into the stream, swam to a point on the opposite shore, from which she could obtain a good view of the recent encampment. It was deserted and still. Not a trace was left behind, except the trampled grass, and the blackened embers.

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Recrossing the stream, she commenced, with a light step, and a hopeful spirit, the seemingly impossible task of finding her way back to her home and her people. The consciousness of freedom buoyed her up, and inspired her with a new hope, at almost every step. With a light heart, and an elastic step, she bounded away over the desolate waste, that lay between the river and the forest, having neither path, nor track, nor land-mark, to guide her way, and with nothing but the instinct of affection to point out the course she should take. She had been so absorbed with her many griefs, during the long and weary march hitherto, and so little did she dream of the possibility of escape, that she had scarcely taken any notice of the direction, or attempted to observe any land-marks to guide her return. The way by which she had been led was circuitous and irregular, and she had only the vague general ideas, that her home was near "the star that never moves," and that she had been leaving her shadow behind, to aid her in her solitary wanderings. With a hopeful courageous heart, she sought only to widen the distance between her cruel captors and herself, trusting that her way would open as she went, and that her guardian

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angel, her tutelar divinity, would keep her from going astray. *Her* tutelar divinity was the moon, whose light and protection she invoked, with a devout, if not an enlightened faith. While she could enjoy her mild clear light, she was always happy and secure; but when those beams were withdrawn, a shadow came over her soul that was full of dark forebodings and anxious fears.

She had travelled several leagues, without seeing a track of any kind, and without the consciousness of fatigue or hunger. When night came on, she was just entering a deep forest, whose impenetrable shade made a sudden transition from twilight to utter darkness. With no star to guide her, and with no appearance of a path through thickets which seemed never to have been penetrated by a human footstep, she was soon bewildered, and felt that it was vain to proceed. With a few half-ripe nuts for a supper, and the soft moss which had gathered about the trunk of a fallen tree for a bed, she committed herself to sleep.

About midnight, her slumbers were disturbed by a heavy rustling among the bushes, at no great distance, accompanied by a constant crackling, as of some large animal, trying to penetrate the thicket. Perceiving that it approached nearer at every step, she seized a club, with which she had provided herself before entering the forest, and hastened to climb into the nearest tree. As she ascended, it began to grow lighter overhead. The stars looked smilingly down upon her, but it was darker than ever below. She breathed a silent prayer to the star of her faith—the bright orb where she supposed her guardian angel resided—and took courage. The mysterious step approached nearer and nearer. She soon perceived that it was a bear, and supposed he would follow her into the tree. She therefore seated herself upon a stout limb, a few feet from the main trunk, and prepared to give him a warm reception. Presently the heavy trampling ceased, and was followed by a silence vastly more oppressive than the previous noise.

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In this condition, the remaining hours of the night passed away. With the first light of the morning, the shaggy intruder was discerned, quietly reposing near the foot of the tree, and showing no signs of being in haste to depart. That he was conscious of the presence of a stranger, was evident only from an occasional upward glance of his eye, and a significant turning of the nose in that direction, as if there was something agreeable in prospect.

Tula would have been no match for Bruin on level ground, but she felt confident of her power in the position she had chosen, and therefore quietly waited the movements of her adversary. For two or three hours, he behaved himself with the gravity of a true philosopher, coolly expecting to weary out the patience of his victim by a close siege, and so save himself the trouble of taking the tree by assault. But Tula was as patient and prudent as Bruin, and could endure hunger, and thirst, and wakefulness as well as he. Rousing at length from his inactivity, he travelled round and round the tree, as if taking its measure, and estimating the probable result of an encounter. Tula watched his motions with more interest than anxiety, hoping soon to be relieved from her imprisonment, and at liberty to pursue her journey. It was near noon, when, having satisfied himself that offensive measures were necessary, he began to climb the tree. Having reached the leading branch, and embraced the trunk to raise himself to that on which Tula was seated, the brave girl rose suddenly to her feet, and brought down her club upon the enemy's nose with such desperate and well directed force, as to send him, stunned and insensible, to the ground. Without allowing him a moment to recover, she leaped down to his side, and dealt a succession of heavy blows upon his head, till the blood flowed in torrents, and his struggles and his breathing ceased.

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In this manner, many days and nights passed on, during which she encountered many imminent dangers, and severe conflicts, and made but little progress. Hunger, weariness, a continual sense of danger, and that sickness of the heart, which solitude and suspense beget, were her inseparable companions. Every day, her hope of ultimately reaching the home of her childhood grew fainter and fainter. But she had a woman's endurance, and a woman's fertility of resource. She never for a moment repented her flight. She would have preferred death in any form to a forced espousal with the murderer of her family. Sometimes with roots and herbs, sometimes with nutritious mosses, and sometimes with wild fruits and nuts, she continued to satisfy the cravings of appetite, and to sustain her severely tried fortitude, for the fatigues and perils that were yet before her.

The forest seemed interminable; and so indeed it might well have been regarded, for she was continually travelling round and round, in the same track, having only an occasional glimpse of the sun to direct her way, or a view of the stars, when she climbed some tall tree at night. She knew little of the direction in which she was going; but she was sure that that forest lay between her enemy and her home, and was therefore resolved, at any expense of labor and suffering, to find her way through it, or perish in the attempt.

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After several weeks of incredible toil, fatigue, hardship and danger, the brave persevering Tula emerged into a wide opening, having a considerable mountain on one side, and a large sheet of water, and a stream from the mountain pouring into it, on the other. It was a beautiful spot, but the whole aspect of it was new and strange. She was confident she had not passed that way, while a captive in the hands of the Athapuscows. She was now wholly at a loss which way to turn. To retrace her steps through the intricacies of that dark forest, would be as vain as the thought of it was appalling. To go on, when she was absolutely certain she was out of her track, seemed little less than madness. To choose either the right hand or the left, was to leap in the dark, and involve herself in new doubts and difficulties. She needed rest. Her apparel was torn by her



difficult passages through the tangled thickets, and her frequent contests with the enemies she found there. Pondering deeply on the difficulties before her, she began to think, that if there was any place of shelter near, she would make herself a new home, and live and die alone in the great wilderness.

"And why," said she to herself, "why should I return to the wigwam of my father? Kaf-ne-wah-go is not there. My mother, she has gone with him to the spirit land. O-ken-áh-ga waits no longer for my return. I left my brave chief in his blood. His voice will no longer be heard in the valley, with the hunters, nor his shout in the battle. He fell in the glory of his strength, like the young oak that is full of sap, and whose roots have struck deep into the earth. And my child, the son of O-ken-áh-ga, alas! he has not even a grave to sleep in. He lies on the cold bosom of the earth, and I know not where. Why then should I return to a desolate home, only made more desolate by the memory of what it was?"

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With such thoughts as these, she beguiled her inward yearnings for the spot where all her joys had been, and where all her hopes were buried. Wandering on the shores of the lake and the stream by day, and seeking such shelter as she could find in the clefts of the rocks at night, she sought for a place where she might provide a suitable protection against the cold and the storms of winter, which were not far distant. Wild berries and fruits afforded her only sustenance for a considerable time, until her own ingenuity provided her with the means of procuring a more certain substantial diet.

Having found a convenient spot in a deep ravine of the mountain, which opened towards the south, and was consequently always exposed to the sun, she immediately commenced the construction of a place to dwell in. The spot selected was romantic and beautiful in the extreme, and seemed to have been designed by nature "for some especial use." It was sufficiently elevated to command a fine view of the opening, including all the meanderings of the river, and the whole extent of the lake, and yet it was not difficult of access, nor so high as to be too much exposed to the wintry storms. It was a little nook, chipped out from the solid rock, having a smooth slaty floor, about twelve feet square, with a semi-circular recess of about half that depth into the side of the mountain. A jutting rock, about ten feet above this floor, and overhanging it on every side, formed a natural ceiling. It only needed to be enclosed on two sides, to make a lodge that any of the great caciques of the wilderness might be proud of.

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Fortunately Tula was not entirely destitute of tools to work with. A piece of an iron hoop, about six inches in length, and the shank of an arrow head, also of iron, both of which she had picked up while among the Athapuscows, constituted her whole stock. With these, which she sharpened upon the rocks, she contrived to cut down a number of young saplings, and shape them to her purpose. Planting two of them upright upon the outer line of the floor, and laying the end of one against the inside, and the end of the other against the outside of the cornice, or overhanging ceiling, she bound them firmly together with green withes. In this manner she went all round, leaving a space open for a door on the sunny side. This done, she wove it, inside and out, with willow boughs, stuffing the intervening spaces with moss, till it was entirely impervious to the weather. The door was of close basket-work hung at the top, and secured at the sides, in a storm, or during the night, by means of withes fastened round the door-posts. This served the double purpose of door and window, while a crevice in the rock above, performed the part of a chimney.

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The work went on slowly and heavily at first, but patience and perseverance, which can conquer all but impossibilities, accomplished it before the cold weather set in. Meanwhile, the ingenuity of the fair builder had found means to make a fire upon the hearth. Her materials for that purpose were two hard sulphureous stones, which, by long friction, or hard knocking, produced a few sparks. These, communicated to touchwood, were soon formed into a blaze.

When fruits, berries and nuts failed, her ready ingenuity supplied her with other means of sustaining life. She had, among her scanty stock of furniture, a few deer-sinews, which, with the Indians, are a common substitute for thread. With the aid of these, she managed to snare partridges, rabbits and squirrels. She also killed several beavers and porcupines. The sinews of the rabbit's legs and feet were twisted with great dexterity, to supply the place of deer-sinews, when *they* were gone. Their skins also, with those of the squirrels, served to replenish her exhausted wardrobe, supplying, under her skilful hand, a neat and warm suit of winter clothing. Her industry was as untiring as her ingenuity was fruitful of resources. Forlorn as her situation was, she was composed and resigned, if not contented, and seemed to find pleasure in employing every moment of her waking hours in some useful or ornamental contrivance.

Her dress evinced much taste, and exhibited no little variety of ornament. The materials, though rude, were very curiously wrought, and so judiciously arranged, as to give to the whole a pleasing and romantic effect. Her tunic was composed of the skins of squirrels and rabbits, in alternate strips of grey and white. It was secured at the waist by a belt of skin, beautifully wrought with porcupine quills, colored pebbles, and strips of bark of various brilliant hues. Her mantle, which was large, was of the fairest and most delicate skins, arranged with a certain uniformity and harmony of design, which gave it all the grace and beauty, without the stiffness, of a regular pattern. It had a tasteful border, of brilliant feathers, and, like the belt before described, was fastened by a clasp of an unique and original contrivance, being made of the beaks and claws of her captives, arranged and secured so as to interlock with each other. Her head-dress, leggings and moccasins, were equally perfect in style and effect.

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Besides accomplishing all this work, in her solitude, and even laying in a stock of provisions in advance, sufficient for her wants, in case of a long season of storms, sickness, or any other

exigency, she had found time to make several hundred fathoms of net-twine, by twisting the inner rind, or bark, of willow boughs, into small lines. Of these, she intended to make a fishing-net, as soon as the spring should open, and thus enlarge her sources of subsistence and enjoyment.

---

It was past mid-winter. The snow lay deep and hard upon all the northern hills and valleys. The lakes and rivers were frozen. The fountains of nature were sealed up, and verdure, and fruitfulness, and almost all the elements of life, seemed to have followed the sun in his journey to the far south. A company of English traders, under the guidance of a party of Indians, were traversing the country from Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean, in quest of furs and peltries. Emerging from a deep forest into a broad open plain, they discovered the track of a strange snow-shoe, which, from its lightness, they judged to belong to a woman. Not knowing of any encampment in that vicinity, it excited the more curiosity. They followed it. It led them a considerable distance out of their way, across the valley, and into the gorge of the mountain on its southern side. Pursuing it still, as it ascended by a circuitous path, they came to a small cabin, perched like an eagle's nest in the clefts of the rock. They entered, and found a young and beautiful woman sitting alone at her work. It was Tula, the hermitess of Athabasca. For more than seven moons she had not seen a human face, nor heard a human voice, nor did she ever expect again to see the one, or hear the other. She had become reconciled to her lot. She loved the solitude where her spirit could commune with the departed, undisturbed, and where only the sun, the moon, and the stars, and the Great Spirit that controlled and guided them all, could read her thoughts, and know the history of her griefs.

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The first surprise being over, Tula offered the strangers a place by her fire, and such other hospitalities as her cabin afforded.

"How comes the dove alone in the eagle's nest?" enquired the leader of the party.—And then, regarding her with a look of admiration, added—"does she not fear the hawk or the vulture, here in the cold cliffs of the mountain?"

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Tula replied by relating the story of her life—her bereavement—her captivity—her escape—her weary wanderings—her hardships—and the repose she had found in her solitude; and concluded by saying, "If the eagle's nest be lonely and cold, it is quiet and safe. It is not too high for the moon to smile upon. It is not too cold for Tula."

"Would the 'singing bird' seek out her people, and let her song be heard again among the trees of the valley?"

"Tula is no longer the singing bird. Her song is shut up in her heart. Her heart is with her kindred in the spirit land. Her father's cabin is more desolate than the wilderness, or the mountain top. Her tree is plucked up by the roots. It cannot live again."

After some considerable persuasion, in which the voice of the humane Englishman—suggesting that, if the Ottawas had discovered her retreat, the Athapuscows might discover it also,—had its full share of weight, the fair hermitess consented to accompany the strangers; though she could not conceal her regret, in abandoning her snug little castle, to set off on a new pilgrimage, she knew not whither.

"It matters little to Tula where she goes, so that she does not meet the Athapuscow. His hands are red with the blood of her father, her husband, her child. Let her never see his face, or walk in his shadow."

---

The singular romance of Tula's story, the comeliness of her person, and her approved accomplishments, touched the hearts of some of the young braves of the party. They had not gone far on their way, before a contest arose between them, who, according to immemorial usage among the tribes, should claim the privilege of making her his wife. The dispute—to which she was no party, for her views were not so much as consulted in the matter—ran very high, and had nearly resulted in serious consequences. The poor girl was actually won and lost, at wrestling, by near half a score of different men, in the course of as many days. When, at length, a compromise was effected, and the prize awarded to Lak-in-aw, a young warrior of the Temiscamings, Tula refused to receive the pipe at his hands, or to listen in any way to his suit.

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"Tula is buried in the grave of O-ken-áh-ga," she said. "Tula will walk alone on the earth. Her heart is in the spirit land. It will never come back. It has nothing here to love."

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Onward—onward—over interminable fields of snow and ice, where scarce a green thing appeared to relieve the utter desolation, the party proceeded, with their prize, on their journey to the far north. She was treated with chivalric tenderness and respect, and her comfort and convenience consulted in all the arrangements of the way. She needed but little indulgence, and solicited *none*. She was capable of enduring the fatigues and hardships of a man. She never flagged in the march, nor lingered a moment, when the word was given to go forward.

[Pg 250]

In traversing a deep valley near the eastern extremity of the Great Slave Lake, their track was crossed by that of a considerable party of Indians, returning from an expedition to the fur regions of the north. Their course lay along the southern border of the lake. Perceiving their encampment at no great distance, on the other side of the valley, it was resolved to visit them, and, if they were found to be friendly, to join their camp for the night. On approaching the spot, they were met by the chief, who, with a few attendants, came out to bid them welcome to his tent. He was a fine specimen of a young Indian brave—one who, in his green youth, had gained laurels, which it usually requires a life-time to win. His costume, though adapted to the severity of the climate, was tasteful and picturesque, and so fitted and arranged as to develop, to the best advantage, the admirable proportions of his person.

The parley that ensued was a fine specimen of Indian courtesy and diplomacy. But it was suddenly and violently interrupted, when Tula, who had remained in the rear of her party, with the Englishmen, came up. At the first sight of the young chief, she uttered a loud and piercing shriek—for the extremes of joy and grief use similar tones and gestures—and rushing forward, pushed aside friend and stranger alike, and flung herself upon his neck, exclaiming—“Ish-ta-le-ó-wah!—my brother! my brother!”

### TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The following changes were made to the original text:

Accents were restored to the Table of Contents.

Pg 5, “Ka-ree-o-than” changed to “Karee-o-thán”  
(Tezcuco—Karee-o-thán)

Pg 12, “Kaf-na-wa-go” changed to “Kaf-ne-wah-go”  
(wigwam of Kaf-ne-wah-go)

Pg 20, “skillfully” changed to “skilfully” (craftily and  
skilfully worked)

Pg 35, “paralasis” changed to “paralysis” (struck with  
instant paralysis)

Pg 40, “acknowledgements” changed to  
“acknowledgments” (ample acknowledgments)

Pg 50, “terrestrial” changed to “terrestrial” (paradise of  
terrestrial sweets)

Pg 53, “harrass” changed to “harass” (harass his soul)

Pg 58, “anything” changed to “any thing” (his position  
any thing but)

Pg 60, “discomfitted” changed to “discomfited” (among  
the discomfited Cholulans)

Pg 66, “unappeaseable” changed to “unappeasable” (an  
unappeasable fate)

Pg 67, “suprised” changed to “surprised” (continually  
surprised and delighted)

Pg 73, “cortége” changed to “cortege” (the royal  
cortege)

Pg 78, “mein” changed to “mien” (proud and haughty  
mien)

Pg 102, “chastly” changed to “chastely” (chastely  
decorated)

Pg 121, “it's” changed to “its” (Oozing its bitterness)

Pg 125, “beseiged” changed to “besieged” (heads of the  
besieged)

Pg 193, “to day” changed to “to-day” (my brave hunter,  
to-day) [First instance]

Pg 205, “calmess” changed to “calmness” (a calmness  
which we)

Pg 227, “Kaf-ne-wa-go” changed to “Kaf-ne-wah-go”

(home of Kaf-ne-wah-go)

Pg 227, "Ish-ta-le-áh" changed to "Ish-ta-le-ó-wah" (the brave Ish-ta-le-ó-wah)

Pg 245, "patridge" changed to "partridge" (to snare partridges)

Pg 247, "controled" changed to "controlled" (controlled and guided)

Pg 250, "grief" was typeset on the incorrect line and was repositioned accordingly (joy and grief use)

All other inconsistencies in spelling and hyphenation were retained as printed in the original text.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SKETCHES OF ABORIGINAL LIFE \*\*\*

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