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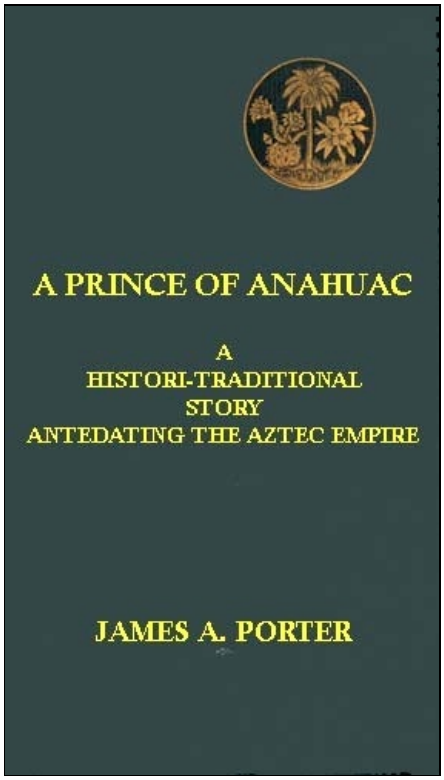

LAKE TEZCUCO, 1400 +

A PRINCE OF ANAHUAC

A HISTORI-TRADITIONAL STORY ANTEDATING THE AZTEC EMPIRE

BY

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PREFACE.

In placing this volume before the public we would ask the critical reader to regard with leniency its imperfections, in view of the fact that an exigency, arising through serious misfortune to the writer, made the issue a necessity.

The narrative is based upon the Tezcucan historian, Ixtlilxochitl's, brief account of the overthrow of his ancestral government by Tezozomoc, the Tepanec king, in 1418; and its restoration, under Prince Nezahualcoyotl, eight or ten years later.

The wonderful experience of Nezahualcoyotl—Hungry Fox—(abbreviated, for convenience, to 'Hualcoyotl) is made the nucleus around which the story is woven. So far as possible, the incidents related of him, his condemnation to death by Maxtla, the son and successor of Tezozomoc, his remarkable escapes therefrom, and other personal trials, have been given in accordance with the historian's account. The descriptive portions, including what relates to the country and manners of the people, are based upon conclusions drawn from reading a traditional history, and, therefore, to some extent, hypothetical; yet are, no doubt, quite as correct as a great deal of what has been written and put out as authentic.

The narrative is a representation of the writer's conception as to how the triumph of Tezcuco over her oppressors might have been brought about, together with such incidental situations and characterization as appear best suited to make it attractive. Whether or not success has been attained in the work, the public must decide.

The characters introduced, with the exception of Hualcoyotl and Maxtla, which are historical, are fictitious, created to meet the exigencies of the situations.

The pronunciation of names will be greatly simplified by the reader bearing in mind that x and ch are convertible, the sound of sh being substituted, as in Ix, which is pronounced Ish; Teochma—Te-osh-ma; Xochitl—Zosh-itl, and Ixtlilchoatl—Ish-thlil-sho-atl. S being an unused letter, z is frequently given a soft sound, as in tzin, which is pronounced tsin; Euetzin—U-et-sin; Oza—Os-a; Itzalmo—I-tsal-mo, and Itlza—I-tel-sa. H is silent, as in Hualcoyotl, which is pronounced U-al-co-yotl; Hualla—U-al-la, and maquahuitl—ma-ka-u-itl.

With these brief explanations we conclude our preface, hoping that our labor has not been in vain, but that the production of it may furnish some instruction and a few hours' pleasurable pastime.

THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION.

The great valley of Anahuac—the valley of Mexico—if not now, was once a grand and beautiful spot, such as is rarely found upon the face of our terraqueous globe. When nearest its natural state, in the time when its inhabitants directed their efforts to beautifying and not to marring it, it might well have been denominated an Eden. We refer to that period in its transition which covered a century or two prior to the fall of Montezuma.

The majority of the people of Anahuac were not, strictly speaking, Aztecs, but became so by centralization: the Montezumas and their immediate predecessors becoming, by the trend of events, masters of the situation.

The great Aztec empire had scarcely a half century of existence, and was preceded by a condition of things in which tribal distinction prevailed, the Aztec being only one of many tribes, and not greatly superior, if superior at all, to some of its neighbors. In fact, the Aztecs, prior to the overthrow of the Tepanec empire, unquestionably occupied a position of inferiority. From this time on, however, their power and influence may be said to have rapidly increased, until their supremacy was assured in the formation of an empire with their ruling prince at its head.

That the reader, who is not informed with respect to the Anahuacans and the conditions which prevailed among them, may be better prepared for an intelligent perusal of our story, the following brief account of them is presented.

They were a remarkable people, in many respects; and, when the lack of opportunities which hindered, and the peculiar conditions which influenced them, are taken into account, were wonderfully intelligent and well advanced in civilization. Although of the Indian race, they had nothing in common with their red brethren of the north in their habits and manners.

Their religion was based on an incongruous and exaggerated mythology, which, through the influence of superstition and the machinations of a perniciously insinuating priesthood, resulted in idol worship and the terribly vitiating practice of human sacrifice. They believed in a supreme being, whom they supplicated, but in an indirect way. They were unable to conceive of a personal unity so comprehensive in attributes of perfection as is the Great Creator and Savior of man, and, therefore, supplicated through inferior ministers—presiding deities, represented in great images set up in their teocallis—temples.

They had a system of education, which embraced a traditional history, astronomy, mechanics, arithmetic, and a means of communicating ideas by written signs, designated hieroglyphical painting, which was imparted to the youth through the medium of a public school, under the management of the priesthood.

Their domestic habits, and the rules regulating intercourse between the sexes, were most advantageous for the women. They, unlike their red sisters of the north, and, we might add, some of the whiter ones of Europe, were required to do no labor that was counted the man's, but were left strictly to the performance of their domestic duties. They were treated with the greatest consideration, especially by their husbands; and, when sought after in marriage, were courted in a manner truly chivalrous.

Of their young women we quote from a well-known and authentic writer: "The Aztec maiden was treated by her parents with a tenderness from which all reserve was banished.... They conjured her to preserve simplicity in her manners and conversation, uniform neatness in her attire, with strict attention to personal cleanliness. They inculcated modesty as the great ornament of a woman, and implicit reverence for her husband a duty."

When circumstances would allow of it the women beguiled the time in the lighter work of adornment; or, not infrequently, passed it in quiet indolence. It is said of them that they were quite pretty, not at all like what may be seen to-day in their miserable descendants. Their long and profuse black hair was usually confined by a web of some kind, or adorned with wreaths of flowers, or strings of glittering beads, formed from the precious metals and the richer gems of stone and pearl. A scarf was sometimes worn upon the head, the fashion or design of which we will not attempt to describe. There is scarcely anything said by writers of their dress. We may infer, however, that it was worn with a view to convenience, neatness, and show. The prevailing skirt, we dare say, was of a length which did not hamper the movement, but was, nevertheless, a work of art, as were the jackets and leggings which were worn by the higher classes, in which elaboration and richness of decoration were often indulged to a degree approaching gorgeousness.

The sexes shared alike in occasions of festivity. They indulged in banqueting and other social gatherings, which were conducted with elegance and a remarkable degree of refinement. We quote briefly on this point: "The halls were scented with perfumes and the courts strewed with odoriferous flowers, which were distributed in profusion among the guests as they arrived.

Cotton napkins and ewers of water were placed before them as they took their seats at the board; for the venerable ceremony of ablution before and after eating was punctiliously observed." Here is evidence of an elevated social condition, and certainly would indicate the obtaining of a high regard for forms in which love of the beautiful is shown and a commendable decency inculcated.

They smoked tobacco and indulged in intoxicants—marks of civilization, but to become drunken was a disgrace, which was punishable in the young.

The governments were in some instances republican in the manner of operating them, though subject to the rule of a prince whose position and rights were inherited, and who was surrounded by a class of persons dignified as nobles. However, the disposition of the king had much to do with restricting or extending the privileges of his subjects, which occasionally resulted in despotism, as in the case of the Tepanecs.

The people were encouraged to become producers, especially in the matter of agriculture. This branch of industry was closely studied, and, considering the disadvantages labored under by the farmer in the absence of draft animals, was very successfully conducted. They appeared to understand the management of the ground, the dryness of which was relieved by irrigation.

The principal products of the farm were maize, cacao (chocolate), and a variety of garden vegetables—the food supply—while cotton and maguey furnished the material from which various kinds of cloth and paper were produced, and we are told the land teemed with an abundance thereof.

Slavery existed in various phases, the conditions being fixed according to the circumstances governing the case. Much of the labor was, of course, done by this class of persons.

The forests were carefully preserved and heavy penalties imposed to prevent their destruction.

The men were not permitted to pass their time in idleness, but were furnished employment by the government in the promotion of public improvements, such as the building of great aqueducts and highways, and expansive public edifices, palaces and temples, an example of public economy worthy of imitation by the more enlightened people of the world.

Polygamy was practiced according to the means and inclination of the individual. It was mostly confined to the nobility, however.

With all their severity the laws protected a man completely in his personal rights, not only as a proprietor and master, but as a slave.

The marriage relation was regarded with the greatest reverence and adhered to with fidelity.

The sovereign was especially protected in his marital affairs, death being visited upon the man who in the least degree usurped his place in the affections of a wife or one chosen to be a wife, and the woman concerned, we infer, was not held guiltless, but on the other hand was counted *particeps criminis*.

With these few references and the information with which the narrative abounds, the reader, we feel, will be enabled to proceed intelligently and with satisfaction in its perusal.

A PRINCE OF ANAHUAC.

CHAPTER I.

In a private and secluded apartment of his ancestral palace sat Huälcōyōtl, [1] the then reduced prince of Tezcuco, deeply engrossed in the mysteries of some hieroglyphical manuscript lying on a table before him. While thus engaged, his personal servant, Ozā, appeared at the door of his apartment, and paused in an attitude of waiting. The prince, happening to look up, saw him, and said:

"What is your errand, Oza?"

"If it will please my master, Itzalmo would have speech with him," replied he.

"Bid Itzalmo come; and, Oza, stand without; I may want you."

In the early part of the fifteenth century, and about one hundred years prior to the conquest of Mexico by Cortes, the Anahuac was just entering on its "Golden Era." It bloomed then, as it never has since, with an almost endless variety of tropical vegetation, and under the skillful hand of its inhabitants was made to appear like a vast park or garden. Its cities were marvelous in the peculiarity of their construction. On its lakes were beautiful floating gardens; emparked villas—charming landscapes within a landscape—dotted it over, and groves of magnificent forest trees—the oak, cypress, and other timbers, which raised their imposing heights toward heaven—stood sentinel, as it were, over the beautiful vales and lakes below.

Of the many tribes of people then occupying the Anahuac, the Tezcucans, Tepanecs, Mexicans (Aztecs), and Tlacopans were among the larger and most prominent. Our narrative has to do with all these, but more particularly with the first named, who were the descendants of the Acolhuans, whose advent to the Anahuac took place near the close of the twelfth century, and nearly simultaneously with that of the Mexicans and Chichimecs—the latter, possibly, the race from which sprang the Tepanecs and others of the more savage tribes.

The Acolhuans were a mild and peaceably disposed people, and intelligently superior. Their descendants, the Tezcucans, so called from the name of their chief city, inherited their admirable characteristics, and sustained their superiority for intelligence.

The laws which governed the Tezcucans, as a nation, were, comparatively speaking, just and equitable, having in them little of an oppressive nature, which can not be said of some of the other tribes. A few years previous to the time at which our story opens they were a happy and prosperous people, and were ruled by a king who had a kind and generous disposition, and who always held the welfare of his subjects of first importance, for which he was greatly beloved by them. Their seat of government was Tezcuco, a populous city at that time, situated on the eastern border of Lake Tezcuco, nearly northeast, across the lake, from Tenochtitlan—the Mexican capital.

The city of Tezcuco, if not at that time the most royal capital on the lake, was perhaps the oldest and largest; and noted especially for its intelligence and order. Besides its teachers and scholars it had its artisans; the latter hardly less skilled than were those of the proud city of Azcapozalco, a rival and the capital of its greatest enemy and despoiler. Its buildings were substantial; its palace commodious; its temples commensurate with the demands of their votaries, while its *tianguez* (market place) was broad and ample.

About the year 1418 the king of the Tepanecs found cause for declaring war on the Tezcucans, and a bitterly contested struggle ensued, which terminated in the overthrow of the government and subjugation of the people of the latter, and the massacre of their good king, together with many of his nobles.

Among those who escaped the death-dealing hand of the victors was the king's son, the young prince Hualcoyotl, heir to the Tezcucan crown. He was present at the bloody and disastrous ending of the strife; but, being concealed among the branches of a sheltering tree, from which position he witnessed the cruel murder of his father, he was not discovered by the foe. He was captured later, however, and thrown into a dungeon in his own city, where, though closely guarded, he remained only a short time, his friends effecting his escape by the substitution of another person, who willingly gave his life in his young master's stead. He fled to the city of Tenochtitlan, where he found refuge with friends. After a time he was permitted, through the influence of the Mexican king, who was friendly toward his people, to return to Tezcuco and his ancestral palace, on condition that he would live a retired and secluded life. He was there taken charge of and instructed by an old tutor named Itzalmo, who had been his preceptor previous to the overthrow of his country and death of his father.

Hualcoyotl was about sixteen years old when he went into retirement. He was unusually bright,

and gave promise, in his deportment and youthful precociousness, of reaching a splendid manhood. Eight years passed by, during which period he remained in undisturbed seclusion, acquiring knowledge and wisdom under the skillful training of the good Itzalmo, and finding, in his hours of leisure, divertisement in the society of a few chosen companions. He had not disappointed the expectations of his friends, but, at the age of twenty-four, had ripened into a man of surpassing physical and intellectual force—a worthy representative of a noble line of princes. His adherents recognized in him their future king—their hope of deliverance from Tepanec usurpation.

About this time, 1426, the even tenor of the prince's life was interrupted by the sudden and unexpected death of the destroyer of Tezcucan independence—the old king, Tezozomoc, at Azcapozalco, the Tepanec capital.

The government of this nation, and its subjugated provinces, would now devolve upon Prince Maxtla, the deceased king's son, who was looked upon as a very unscrupulous and dangerous man—more so, if possible, than was his father, whose rule had always been despotic and tyrannical, especially over his foreign vassals.

But to return to the prince's apartment.

The servant retired with his master's message, and Itzalmo came soon after. Advancing before Hualcoyotl, the old vassal dropped on one knee in salutation.

"Arise, Itzalmo," said the prince, kindly. "You have requested speech with me. Hualcoyotl is pleased to grant any favor you may ask which is his to bestow. Of what would you speak?"

"Hualcoyotl, the prince, is very kind. If it please him, his servant would speak of the king."

"What of the king, good friend?"

"The king is dead."

"The king dead, you say? How came the news?"

"By special courier but now."

Hualcoyotl's countenance took on a grave and thoughtful expression. After a short pause he remarked:

"Maxtla will be king."

"Yes, Maxtla is already king," replied Itzalmo; "crowned by his father's hand—an event greatly to be deplored, surely; and well might we ask, O Prince, what will be the issue?"

"An inauspicious succession, good friend, to say the least; and one full of painful uncertainty," spoke the master; and, after a brief silence, he suddenly said; "Itzalmo, thou hast excellent command of thy knowledge—thou art wise; I would know what is in thy mind. What discernest thou in the old king's death? How will it effect our people's condition?"

"Hualcoyotl is the son of a noble father, and, like he was wont to do, gives his first thoughts to his people. Be assured, O Prince, that no good, but evil only, will come to Tezcuco from Maxtla. He is an unscrupulous prince, and hath not the fear of the gods in his heart. The oppressor's hand has been very heavy—the weight of it will not grow lighter; the shackles which bind us are galling—they will not be loosed." The old man's voice grew sadly eloquent. Raising his eyes and looking off as if in contemplation of his enthralled and unhappy country, he exclaimed: "Tezcuco, O Tezcuco! Thou art indeed distressed; and the end is not!"

"Itzalmo, good friend, it is not a cheerful picture you hold up before me in this perplexing hour, and I fear greatly that you have not overdrawn. What would you advise? For eight years you have been like a father to Hualcoyotl—yes, for eight years your hand has pointed out the way, and it has been Hualcoyotl's pleasure to walk therein. Speak, Itzalmo, good friend; I repeat: what would you advise?"

"It is a troublesome question you would have me answer. Time has not been given me in which to consider. At best, we can only wait and watch. A few days may enlighten us much in regard to Maxtla's disposition and purpose; especially with reference to yourself. Our friends at the king's palace will be sleeplessly vigilant; his every movement will be closely watched, and, if of a menacing character, reported immediately."

"You speak truly, Itzalmo, when you say we can only wait and watch. Our hands are indeed helpless. But do not let us anticipate troubles—they come fast enough. Have done with that, then, and look at this," returned the prince, calling the old preceptor's attention to the manuscript on the table, which proved to be the work of his own hand, and of which he desired a critical inspection by Itzalmo.

After a close scrutiny of the manuscript the old tutor said, showing his gratification and approval:

"Hualcoyotl has done well. The pupil has become a master, and Itzalmo's labors, as his instructor,

are about at an end. The builder has not builded in vain, and his heart rejoices that it is so."

"Hualcoyotl has been fortunate in the matter of an instructor, if in nothing else. Itzalmo has been a faithful teacher, and his reward shall be commensurate, the gods befriending us," replied the prince, in grateful tones.

"May the gods befriend you, good master, not for my sake, but for your own and that of your oppressed people!" prayerfully responded the old tutor.

"Your words are overkind, Itzalmo, good friend; and they will be remembered with gratitude," returned the prince, feelingly.

Having accomplished the object of his visit to the apartment of Hualcoyotl, Itzalmo saluted him and withdrew.

When left to himself the prince became thoughtful for a time, when he was suddenly reminded that his servant was without, waiting for orders. He struck, lightly, a small, bell-shaped instrument suspended near him, and Oza immediately appeared in the doorway.

"Oza," spoke the master, "ask the tzin [2] Euet to favor me with his presence."

Tzin Euet, or Euetzin, was the son of a once prominent Tezcucan noble, Euzelmozin, who was a close friend of the late king of Tezcuco, and a high official in his court; and who shared, with many others, the fate of his royal master on the sanguinary field, where the best blood of a nation was shed to satisfy the instinctive cruelty of a barbarian tyrant.

When the young prince Hualcoyotl went into retirement it was thought necessary that he should have a companion, about his own age, who would be to him an attendant and associate, whose duty it would be to relieve, by his presence, the monotony of his seclusion.

From the close official relation of the fathers and the intimacy of the families grew a warm and lasting friendship between the boys; and, as a result, Hualcoyotl's choice of a companion fell upon tzin Euet.

The young tzin was a student; and, under the direction of Itzalmo and the favor of the prince, had spent the years in perfecting his education.

A genuine affection had gradually come between the young men, and they were more like brothers than else.

They were physically unlike; Euetzin being of medium height, yet of no inferior mould, with a light cast of complexion; while the prince was tall, muscular and dark. In age there was about a year's difference, Hualcoyotl being the senior. They were fine specimens of their race.

Oza delivered his master's message to the tzin, who promptly responded. The young lord never forgot that his friend was also his prince, and always saluted him profoundly when they met, which he did on entering his apartment.

"Thanks, noble tzin, for your promptness in coming to my relief. I am wearied of my work, and would have exercise. Will you go with me to the court?" kindly spoke the prince.

"With gladness, O Prince. You ought to know by now that your slightest wish is a law unto your friends, especially to myself, in whom obedience to you is the fullness of pleasure, born of affection," answered Euetzin, his countenance beaming with an expression which emphasized his words.

"Euetzin, I believe you; for without affection a friendship so true as yours could not exist. But come; let us to the court."

The ancestral palace of the Tezcucan princes at this period was not to be compared with what it was later, yet was, presumably, an expansive structure, if not massive, built on three sides of a court, the court terminating at the rear of it in a beautifully arranged garden.

In the front, or main portion, of the palace were the audience hall and council chamber; also various other apartments, among them those intended for the private use of the king and his numerous household; many of which, after the subversion of the government and death of the king, fell into disuse by the dispersion of the occupants.

In one of the back wings which extended along the side of the court, were the culinary establishment, banqueting hall, and, communicating with the latter, saloons, or reception rooms. There were other apartments connected with this wing for the accommodation of servants, the ordinary vassals of the king, of whom there were a very great number in his time, but which were

now reduced to the actual necessities of the prince and his companions.

In the other wing of the palace was an extensive conservatory, where were cultivated the choicest flowers and shrubs to be found in the valley, of which there was no lack. The Anahuacans took great delight in floral displays, and no home was complete without its flowers.

When the prince and his companion reached the court they found some of their attendants playing at ball. This was one of Hualcoyotl's favorite means of obtaining exercise and relief from the depressing effects of his enforced seclusion, and they immediately joined in the game.

After indulging in the sport to their satisfaction the prince requested Euetzin to withdraw with him to the rear of the court, where they found a pleasant retreat and protection from the sun's heat in an inviting arbor, which was especially arranged for their comfort and enjoyment in leisure hours. When they were at ease the prince said:

"Are you aware, tzin Euet, that the king is dead?"

"Yes, Prince. Itzalmo informed me soon after receiving the message."

"Itzalmo is of opinion that the coming of Maxtla to the throne will, if anything, add to the distress of our people. I have great regard for his sagacity, yet withal, being deeply concerned personally, I would have your opinion also, tzin Euet, and have brought you here to obtain it. You may be able to throw some light on the matter, and, by so doing, change the present aspect of it. Maxtla is king; and, as we have reason to believe, a king without scruples, and not to be relied on. Were Tezcuco in position to demand the restoration of her rights as a nation we would know how to proceed; but she is not, and we are left with only one alternative, that of submission. Thus unhappily environed, our only recourse is to seek to mollify the king. How to do this, friend Euet, is the present and very important question."

Hualcoyotl paused, and looked inquiringly at the tzin.

"Yourself, O Prince, will be the one most affected by the change of rulers, and through you the new king must be mollified, if such a thing be possible. I fear very much that any overtures in that direction will be met by a scornful rejection, especially with reference to your own case," was Euetzin's rather discouraging reply.

"On what grounds, tzin Euet, do you rest your fears?"

"On the character of the man who now becomes the wrongful ruler of our people. His exceedingly bad record as a young man—a record full of meanness, largely made up of diabolism and cruelty, evidence of which is not lacking, furnishes sufficient grounds for fear and apprehension. I will venture an assertion, O Prince, which may seem overstrong to you, yet I feel confident I do not err in my conclusions. It does not require a prophet to foretell a thing when the conditions portend it. You, O Hualcoyotl, the rightful prince of Tezcuco, and Maxtla, the king, can not both continue to live under the same government. Mark me well! Sooner or later you will be compelled to fly or suffer death."

It was with a pale, stern face the tzin uttered his concluding words. The prince looked at him in amazement, considering the enormity implied in the prediction; yet, when he spoke, it was with perfect calmness.

"You undoubtedly believe what you say, my dear tzin; yet I am slow to think myself so obnoxious to the king as your words imply."

"You are obnoxious to him, noble prince, to the extent of being feared. He is a jealous and suspicious man, in addition to his many other faults, and will brook no possible rival to his authority over Tezcuco. While Hualcoyotl, the beloved prince of an enslaved people, lives, and is, in a measure, at liberty, Maxtla will not rest in security. Believe, O noblest of friends, I beg you, that I would not unduly excite you in this matter; but being deeply impressed with the thought that your life is in jeopardy, I am impelled to raise my voice in warning."

After a moment's pause the prince said:

"Tzin Euet, I must know to a certainty if your apprehensions of peril to myself are correct. Have you any plan to offer? You seem to have given the matter thought. What would you do?" inquired Hualcoyotl, showing unusual concern.

"I would go to Azcapozalco, and into the king's presence at once, and offer him allegiance. If he contemplates harm to you he will show it. He will not dare to molest you openly without cause. Your return may be fraught with danger, yet it is worth the hazard to learn his mind," replied the tzin.

"The past has taught me, Euetzin, that your opinions are usually well grounded. The character established by Prince Maxtla in the past, as you say, is sufficient cause for apprehension. Your words have stirred me deeply, and I think I will act upon them; though, before doing so, I must have time for thought. Say nothing to anyone of what is in your mind respecting this matter, not even to Itzalmo; he would only oppose my going before the king," returned the prince; and

continuing, he said: "I pray your judgment may be in error this once; though, looking at it as you do, I fear the worst."

The young men, feeling somewhat dejected, very soon left the arbor and returned, each to his own apartment.

CHAPTER II.

Lake Tezcuco, the principal one of several situated in the great valley of Mexico, four and three quarter centuries ago, when the present Mexican capital (then Tenochtitlan) stood a league or more within its borders, was quite an inland body of water, covering well on to four hundred square miles of surface. Since that time this lake has shrunken to a remarkable degree, leaving the great valley city, and the sites of others now reduced to insignificance, miles away from it.

At the time to which our narrative refers nearly all the chief cities of Anahuac were situated on its shores, among which was the Tepanec capital, Azcapozalco, located near the northwest corner of the lake. To this city we now have occasion to turn briefly.

Azcapozalco was designated as the royal city, which, if it signified anything, meant that in the time of its ascendency it was the most magnificent seat of government on the lake, if not on the Anahuac. It was a city of walls we are told, and must have boasted of elegant structures of stone and sun-dried brick, which suggests the idea of towering temples, a grand palace and court, and extensive avenues, where swarmed an aggressive and busy population. Its artificers, it is said, were superior in skill to those of any other city on the great plateau, which meant much, when we consider that among these were to be found jewelers who could unify metals so perfectly as to represent objects, harmoniously variegated, by alternately intermixing of silver and gold.

Of their weavers we may speak equally well.

The ancient Mexicans were the first people to use the cochineal for purposes of coloring, which, after the conquest, was introduced into Europe by the Spaniards. Their weavers were enabled with it to make the products of the loom not only brilliant but beautiful.

The fineness of their fabrics varied in texture as well as in dye, the most finished being made of cotton, one of their principal products, with which was interwoven the finest animal hair, forming a web fit to be worn by a king.

A royal city, we may well believe, was Azcapozalco, when Maxtla, the tyrant rival of Prince Hualcoyotl, became the arbiter of its destiny.

Maxtla was seated on his throne, in the audience hall of his palace, surrounded by his chiefs and advisers—nobles of his realm, holding conference with them regarding the duties of their respective positions, and arranging other matters pertaining to his new and exalted station.

The king was a man of medium stature, with a well-rounded physique, swarthy complexion, and very course features. His eyes were small and black, and lighted up with a gleam of cunning and ferocity, which gave to his countenance a decidedly disagreeable expression, and one that boded no good to those whom he might deem his enemies.

The costume he wore consisted of a loose-fitting tunic and leggings made to fit his limbs closely to below the calf; the whole wrought from the finest cotton fabrics and ornamented with trimmings of gold. Over his shoulders was carelessly worn a rich mantle of featherwork. His feet were incased in sandals made from the skin of some wild animal; while on his head rested a crown formed of precious metals, and ornamented with gems and a *penache* of richly colored feathers.

His chiefs were similarly dressed, excepting the crown, but in a less gaudy manner.

A pause had fallen on the assembly, which was interrupted by the entrance of a herald, who announced Prince Hualcoyotl as desiring audience with the king. The mention of the prince's name caused no little commotion among the king's attendants. A cloud of disapproval came over Maxtla's face, and the evil expression upon it was intensified. After a moment's hesitation he directed that the prince be admitted.

On entering the hall, Hualcoyotl advanced before the king and saluted him in the accustomed manner: kneeling on one knee, placing his right hand on the ground and then to his forehead. While in this position he laid at the scowling Maxtla's feet an offering of flowers, which was emblematic of his peaceful intentions. The king gave a momentary glance at the prostrate prince, and then, with malice and hatred depicted on his countenance, silently and haughtily turned his back upon him. This action on the part of Maxtla was highly significant: it was intended as a humiliation to the prince, and signified that his offering was rejected; also, that no favor might be expected by him from the throne.

Hualcoyotl rose to his feet deeply moved by the conduct of the king; and, after a moment's hesitation, quietly walked out of the hall. As he left the door he was accosted by one of the king's attendants, who begged him to withdraw from the palace and city, and return to his own as

quickly as possible, for his life was in great danger. He was soon on the road to Tezcuco, where he arrived safely, but much perturbed in spirit and perplexed in mind.

He went immediately to his private apartment, and summoned Euetzin into his presence. In a very short time the tzin appeared, and, after saluting him, said:

"I am here in answer to your summons, noble prince, and would know your pleasure."

"Be at ease, good friend," returned Hualcoyotl, gravely, motioning the tzin to a seat. A brief silence followed, which was broken by the prince.

"Euetzin," he began, fixing his passion-lit eyes on his friend, "the wisdom and penetration of an older head than might be expected has been given to you, as my appearance before the king has proven."

"You have seen the king?" inquiringly interrupted the tzin.

"I have," answered the prince, reflectively, looking beyond. Another short pause intervened, and recovering himself he continued, adopting a manner of expression peculiar to his race.

"The lion is loosed, and the fire of anger is in his heart; the fox must be wary, or his cunning may not save him. Do you interpret in these words the nature of my reception by the king?"

"I do, and know that I read him truly."

"You did, most truly. In accordance with your opinion and advice I went before the king, and in the presence of his assembled chiefs tendered my fealty and peace offering to his majesty with the accustomed formalities. My offerings were rejected, and I, the Prince of Tezcuco, was spurned by him in the most humiliating manner, and compelled like a coward to slink from his presence under the infliction of the indignity, without the power to resent it. Euetzin, something must be done, and quickly; for Maxtla evidently contemplates harm to myself, his supposed rival, and will stop at nothing short of my destruction. It must be victory for Tezcuco or death for her prince, as it now appears."

Euetzin felt that a reply was expected and said:

"Hualcoyotl, the son of our lamented king, can rely upon his friends in any emergency. They are devoted to their country and prince, and only await an opportunity to avenge the wrongs which have been laid upon them."

"Your words, tzin Euet, are encouraging, for they strengthen an impression which I have hopefully entertained: that our people are still imbued with patriotism and love for their country, and may be led by incitement to do battle for its redemption. If our hope is not a vain one, which can only be ascertained by investigation, someone whose soul is in our cause must go abroad to inspire, arouse and prepare them for revolt. By my peculiar position I am unfortunately placed. I can not go to those with whom I would counsel, neither can they come to me; for my every movement will henceforth be under strict and secret surveillance. On you, therefore, my trusted friend, must fall the work which I would, but can not, do—the work of stimulating our people to action and organizing them into an army of resistance to the Tepanec despot, Maxtla. I need not inquire if you will do it; Euetzin is the son of Euzelmozin—that alone bespeaks his compliance."

"My life, O Prince, is at your disposal. You have but to command and I will obey."

"Spoken like the true Tezcucan that you are, noble Euet. That Hualcoyotl has not many more such loyal friends in his misfortune!"

"The hour of need may discover to Hualcoyotl an army of friends not less worthy of trust than Euet," replied the tzin modestly.

"Friends worthy and true, possibly—never but one Euet," returned the prince, with a look which voiced the affectionate esteem in which he held his companion.

The tzin was considerably affected by the prince's fervent manner and language, and appeared confused for want of a suitable reply, which the latter observed, and, quickly continuing, reverted to the main question under consideration.

"The mission on which you are about to go is a very dangerous one," said he. "Should you be discovered, death would undoubtedly be the consequence."

"I am aware of that, O Prince, yet I beg you will have no fears for my safety. I will choose my own companions, and, be assured, they will not be of the emissaries of Maxtla."

"I believe you; and now, since you are to go, let there be no delay. Seek our friends and counsel with them. Learn the true feelings of our people, and, if possible, the number of our adherents available for soldiers; also, if so desirable an end may be attained, secure the cooperation of other states which are friendly to us. Work with the wisdom and judgment of which I know you to be possessed, and according to the success of your labors shall be your reward. May our nation rise, under your hand, from the ashes of her former greatness, is our most earnest prayer. Go as

soon as you can arrange to do so, and may the gods of our fathers be with you and keep you. You will see your excellent mother and sister; bear to them, I pray you, my profound respect, and say that I would come to them could I do so with safety."

Euetzin at leaving would have saluted the prince in the accustomed manner, but was stopped by him, and, instead, was received upon his breast in a strong embrace, which signified that he was, for the time at least, accepted as an equal in all respects.

Realizing the very grave circumstances under which they were parting, the friends separated with feelings of deepest sadness.

The prince's confidence in the loyalty and integrity of his friend was full and complete, as we have seen, and the sequel proved that it was wisely placed.

When the tzin had withdrawn from the prince's apartment the latter fell into deep meditation, as was his wont in the recent past. His thoughts at length appeared to turn on his aged preceptor, for he spoke audibly, as if addressing someone:

"Yes, the good Itzalmo must not be overlooked in this matter. He has been like a father to me, and should share fully in my confidence. His wisdom and sagacity may yet be of invaluable service to me, as they have been in the past."

He arose and straightway sought the old servitor in his private apartment, where he found him poring over his hieroglyphics. Salutations were exchanged, and the prince proceeded to relate the particulars of his visit to the palace of Maxtla; also to express his fears as to the consequences liable to ensue, and his determination to meet them by a speedy preparation for resistance.

Itzalmo was not pleased that the prince had gone before the king unknown to him, yet his solicitude was instantly aroused in his behalf, and a careful study of the situation followed.

The old preceptor was a man of marked shrewdness and cunning, and more than a match for Maxtla if open violence was not resorted to. Friends, known to no one but himself, were to be found in the king's palace who quickly notified him when anything of importance occurred in his majesty's household or court. In this manner he was kept informed and always forewarned.

Acquainted, as the old Tezcucan was, with the treacherous disposition of the Tepanecs, and Maxtla in particular, he felt that the strictest watchfulness would be necessary to avoid surprise. He had saved the prince from the wrath of the old king, and hoped he might be able to save him again, should the emergency arise. He therefore begged him to be discreet and trust to him.

"You are young, O Prince, and with little experience to guide you," he said. "I pray you, be not incautious, but let your actions be governed by wisdom and understanding. Do not forget, O Hualcoyotl, that the destiny of a people rests with you. Listen to him who has counseled and shown you the way in the past. Itzalmo is your proven friend; he will do for you what no other can."

The old man's earnestness was remarkable, and the prince felt it. He said:

"Itzalmo, I know that I may trust you wholly; for have you not, indeed, proven it in many ways? Be assured, then, my ever faithful friend, that your counsel shall not be ignored. I will be guarded in what I do. You have my promise."

As he concluded, the prince passed from the apartment of the loyal old vassal, the latter sending after him a prayerful benediction.

CHAPTER III.

"Zelmonco is very lonesome, mother. How rarely does anything come to disturb the sameness of our lives. No change from day to day: only the voice of Nature, in the songs of birds and the murmur of the leaves, is heard; and, much as I love these sounds, they make me sad."

These words were addressed by a young girl to an elderly appearing woman a short distance off, who was at the moment giving attention to a beautiful cluster of blooming rosebushes.

"Yes, the villa does seem lonesome; still we have each other, my child, which is much to be thankful for," was answered.

"True, mother; but that does not relieve the quietude of our home. I wish that Euet would come. He remains from us longer this time than usual. Do you think we may expect him soon?"

"Euet does, indeed, stay from home longer than usual, but is no doubt detained. Still, I hope he will be here before the day is gone," replied the elderly woman.

The persons engaged thus in conversation were in the open air, strolling leisurely about, rearranging a disturbed bush or vine, plucking a flower here and a twig there, and drinking in the sweet perfumes rising from the odoriferous flowers and shrubs which met them at every turn. They were the mother and sister of Euetzin, the friend and companion of Prince Hualcoyotl, who were out for an hour's stroll in the beautiful grounds fronting their villa home—a place very dear to them for the sacred memories which clung around it; memories of other and happier days, when home associations and ties were unbroken and complete.

Euzelmozin, the husband and father, as we have stated previously, perished with his king on the battle field, where Tezcucan liberty went down under the bloody hand of a cruel victor. He left them a beautiful home, however, with gold and other wealth sufficient to make them independent.

By paying promptly the required tribute to the Tepanec king they were permitted to live undisturbed in their isolation.

The mother, whose name was Teochma, had passed middle life. She still possessed a vigorous womanhood, and showed her age in the hair only, which was freely sprinkled over with gray.

Itlza, the daughter, was fair and of medium size. About nineteen years had marked her young life, but, being a child of a sunny clime, she appeared older. She was not beautiful, yet upon her face there was a sweet, confiding look, which attracted and charmed the beholder, impressing his or her mind with a pleasing sense of acquaintanceship. The light of geniality beamed upon her countenance, and a spirit of mirthfulness sparkled up from the depths of two bright, laughing eyes. A pair of carmine-tinted lips, as delicately colored as the lovely rose she was carelessly twirling between her thumb and finger, backed by two perfect rows of pearly teeth, adorned a pretty, tempting mouth, which completed the charm and brightness of an otherwise plain face.

They were dressed becomingly in the manner of their people. The character of their dress was not greatly dissimilar to that worn by the women of other Indian nations, except in its completeness. Among the higher classes of native Mexican women the costume was usually gorgeous in gay colors, and adorned with trimmings of gold and featherwork.

The mother and sister of tzin Euet were the wife and daughter of a fallen Tezcucan noble; and, though robbed of the title of nobility, still endeavored to sustain, in their manner of living, the dignity of their former rank.

Zelmonco villa, the home of the family, was situated on an eminence, about two leagues from Tezcuco, and commanded a fine view of the adjacent country and the city in the distance. Euetzin was in the habit of visiting it often, to enjoy, for a brief season, the society of his loved and honored mother and very dear sister.

It becomes necessary at this point for us to return to the time of parting between the tzin and prince, which occurred some hours earlier than the incident which opens this chapter.

On withdrawing from Hualcoyotl's apartment, Euetzin made a hasty preparation to leave the city. His first object was to pay a hurried visit to his mother and sister, and then go forward in the performance of his mission. When the necessary preparations for his departure were completed, he left the palace, going out through the court onto a thoroughfare, which he followed for some distance. On reaching the outskirts of the city he took a southeasterly course and walked briskly in the direction of his home. He had about six miles to go, but thought nothing of it. The Aztec mode of traveling was almost entirely pedestrial; in fact, none but the wealthy and the nobility traveled in any other way. The palanquin, a kind of chair, borne by slaves or hired servants, was their only conveyance—burden-bearing animals being unknown on the Anahuac previous to the advent of the conquerors. The men were, as a consequence, trained pedestrians from necessity

and habit.

As Euetzin neared the villa, the anxiety to see his loved ones grew upon him, and his movement became proportionately quicker. He had to pass up through the park to reach the house; and, anticipating he would find his mother and sister strolling there, carefully guarded his approach from observation, hoping to give them a sudden and pleasant surprise.

The words addressed to his mother by Itlza, and the replies were distinctly heard by the tzin as he drew near.

Itlza continued to address her mother:

"Do you think, mother, that the old king's death will effect the prince in his retirement?" she asked.

"Maxtla will be king; evil is in Maxtla's heart—the prince must beware," replied the mother.

"Why does Hualcoyotl remain so passively a prisoner in his own palace? Is he a slave that he endures his restraint without an effort to obtain his freedom?" questioned Itlza, with much warmth.

"I know of but one way by which he might gain his freedom, my child; and that is too terrible to think about."

"You allude to a revolt, mother?"

"Yes, it was that I had in mind; and yet, though it would bring sorrow to many hearts, and possibly to ours, I could not say my people nay should they attempt it, for they are but slaves to the Tepanec king," replied the mother, in accents of sadness.

"You speak truly, mother; for Euet would—" Itlza's half-formed sentence was here suddenly broken off. She was seized from behind and held firmly for a moment, while a hand was placed over her mouth. When she was released, she turned quickly to learn who her assailant was, and met the laughing face of her brother, who saluted her in a most loving manner and completed her unfinished sentence by saying:

"Euet would that you drop so unpleasant a subject—there is only sadness in it."

"A bad brother is Euet, to give his sister such a fright!" exclaimed she, pleasantly.

The tzin answered her badinage with a closer embrace; and, releasing her, saluted his mother in an affectionate manner, who said:

"Euet, my son, you are most welcome after so protracted an absence. Your sister and myself were beginning to wonder at your remaining away so long, and would in a little while have become uneasy about you."

"My mother and sister are very good to remember me so kindly, but they should not forget that Euet is no longer a boy. A man's responsibilities are now his, and he has duties to perform which sometimes interfere very much with his plans for gratifying the cravings of his heart. I am not forgetful of the filial obligations which bind me with golden chords of love to my estimable mother and sweet sister; yet there are times, in the press of worldlier things, when even these most precious of all obligations are neglected."

"You are right, my son; a mother's love is selfish. I had not considered well—but you are tired and need refreshment. Let us go in."

As they moved toward the house the conversation was continued. The mother presently inquired:

"How fares the good prince?"

"The prince is well, though somewhat dejected at the turn affairs have taken since the old king's death, of which you have already heard," answered the tzin.

"Yes, the news of his death has spread quickly. Your allusion to it prompts me to inquire about his successor. Maxtla has ascended the throne, I suppose, and now rules in his father's stead?" inquiringly returned the mother.

"Maxtla is king," replied Euet; "and even now may be laying plans for the destruction of the prince."

The faces of the mother and daughter quickly took on an expression of anxiety.

Hualcoyotl had spent many of his boyhood hours at the home of his friend Euet, which had resulted in his holding a warm place in the heart of each member of the family. Itlza and her mother had not seen him for a number of years, yet in Euetzin was found a link which bound them still to their young friend of other and more auspicious times.

"What are we to understand by those ominous words, my son?" inquired the mother in anxious

tones.

"Good mother, I will explain, but not now. My walk has made me ravenous, and I do not intend that even your anxiety for the prince shall deprive me of my supper," replied he, playfully.

"How thoughtless of me to forget for a moment that you are hungry," returned she, with maternal concern. "Itlza, see that refreshments are served immediately; and now, my son, you must pardon your mother for her negligence."

"Thank my mother for her goodness, rather, in being thoughtful of my friend," replied the tzin, imprinting a filial kiss upon her brow.

This act and the accompanying words were in a vein of affectionate mirthfulness which brought the mother's heart into her eyes, and she could only look her gratitude. The tzin led her to the board where refreshments were served, and mother and daughter were soon partaking of a spirit of cheerfulness which his presence imparted....

The day was nearly spent; approaching night was beginning to cast her shadows over the earth, and her dusky mantle would soon envelope all. The family were seated in the spacious drawing-room of their home. Euetzin was relating the particulars of the prince's experience at the palace of the king, and his mother and sister were listening with the most intense interest to his recital. When he told of the prince's determination to prepare for resistance, and that he, the tzin, was then on his way to engage in inciting it, the mother could keep silent no longer, but cried out in anguish of heart:

"Oh, my son, can it be that my fears are to be realized so soon, and must we indeed lose you?"

"Be calm, good mother; do not make my duties heavier by inflicting greater sadness upon my heart. You would not counsel your boy to shrink from the call which must come, sooner or later, to every true son of Tezcuco? The prince has seen fit to send me as his representative among the people, and has charged me with a great and responsible duty. Shall the son of Euzelmozin cowardly shirk it, or shall he, like his lamented father, be fearless in the face of danger? What greater danger, O Teochma, my mother, could arise than that which now threatens the destruction of our prince, and a lower degradation for our deeply wronged country?"

"Forgive me, my son, if I showed in my words a feeling of resentment to the fates that would rob me of my boy. You know your mother too well to believe that she would for a moment counsel you contrary to the dictates of patriotism. No, Euet; though my heart may bleed for the sorrow it will feel, yet would I say, go to your duty, perform it to the best of your ability, and prove yourself a worthy son of Zelmozin and Tezcuco."

"Thanks, my noble mother; with your approval, so patriotically expressed, I will go out into the midst of dangers, fearing only to do wrong."

When the morning came the tzin was gone, and the unwonted stillness of the villa told of saddened hearts within.

CHAPTER IV.

When suspicious jealousy culminates in anger it is but a step to malicious madness. In such a conflict of the passions reason is unable to hold its sway; especially is this true if the natural impulses of the heart are evil. The fatal step is taken and destruction inevitably follows upon the victim, and too often upon those who are innocently the cause.

Maddened at the sight of his supposed rival, and no longer the unimpassioned arbiter of a king's court, Maxtla, immediately on the withdrawal of Prince Hualcoyotl, dismissed from his presence the chiefs and vassals about him, and retired to his own apartment, where, by giving way to the dominant passions of his nature, he wrought himself into a very demon. In his terrible anger he resolved that Hualcoyotl should die, and ordered a meeting of his privy council, whose duty it was to pass upon the decisions of the king, to take place at once.

The council convened in a chamber set apart for that purpose. When the members were all seated the king addressed them. He appeared unusually stern and determined, and evidenced the deep, terrible, and inflexible purpose which moved him. He said:

"Your king has commanded your presence here at this hour to obtain your approval to a decree of death, which he has laid upon one who is a menace to our authority. Hualcoyotl, the prince of Tezcuco, is the only surviving heir to the Tezcucan crown. While he is permitted to live the Tepanec supremacy over that nation will be as unstable as would a habitation on yonder burning mountain. [3] The voice of the murmuring wind is not more distinct than is the murmur of repining and disaffection which rises from among our subjugated vassals, the Tezcucans, who would have this prince to rule over them. Shall we fold our arms and wait for the storm of insurrection and rebellion, which his existence makes possible, to sweep down upon and overwhelm us, or shall we be wise in precluding the possibility of such an event by his removal? The desolation of our kingdom would no doubt be attempted, and possibly accomplished, should he be raised to power; and I warn you, if accomplished, more than Maxtla would find a grave beneath the ruins. We must strike, worthy chiefs, nobles, for self-preservation. Your king has decreed it—Hualcoyotl must die; are you prepared to approve the decision?"

The members of the council felt that the king was in no humor to brook opposition, and as it was a personal as well as public consideration with them the decree was confirmed.

It was decided, in accordance with the wishes of the king, to have the prince put out of the way in a quiet manner. Agreeable to this decision, arrangements were made for a private party to be given by one of the king's officers in Tezcuco, to which the prince was to have a cordial and pressing invitation, and at which he was to be secretly put to death.

Itzalmo was informed of the diabolical plotting of the conspirators by a friend who was close to the king, and shrewdly defeated their design to assassinate his young master; but tradition says another perished in his stead.

The failure of the plan to entrap the prince so enraged the king that he threw off all disguise and publicly proclaimed the decree condemning him to death. The execution of the mandate was imposed upon one of his chief officers, who was ordered to go with a party of soldiers to Tezcuco, and there to enter the palace, seize the prince and put him to death.

On the second day subsequent to the one on which the attempt was made to create an opportunity in which to assassinate the prince—the consummation of which was prevented by the old preceptor's cunning, Hualcoyotl was seated alone in his private apartment. There was a notable change in his appearance. The past few days, with their important and, to him, momentous events, had made him seem older. The youthfulness and freshness of his former self were gone, and the sternness of a determined man had settled upon him.

The tzin had been gone several days, and the importance of his mission under the light of recent developments was greatly heightened. The prince felt that his friend's prediction relative to the king's probable conduct toward himself was likely to be verified; yet he hoped for time, that organized resistance might be effected before extreme measures were resorted to by his enemy. Still he was not sanguine: the uncertainty of the situation because of the meagerness of knowledge possessed regarding the temper and disposition of his people was a source of discouragement. A consciousness of his present helpless state, also, had its depressing effect. Hope, however, supported by a strong faith in the patriotism of his immediate friends sustained him. He could not work, and had fallen into one of his thoughtful moods. His countenance was ever expressive of his emotions, the character of his thoughts being clearly reflected upon it. Now a dark cloud would cover his face, its shadows deepened and intensified by the flashes of angry light which gleamed from his dark eyes, plainly showing the feelings which agitated his

troubled and fearless soul. Again, the subduing influence of more gentle thoughts would follow, and the hard lines upon his countenance would pass away, giving place to a softened expression which clearly said the nobler man within had risen, and that thoughts according with his better nature held his mind.

Love of country, pity for his oppressed people, sorrow for those whose loss he mourned, and affection for his immediate friends and companions were ruling passions in him, and could not be repressed for any great length of time. So he sat and pondered, trains of thought the while, ladened with bitter and sweet, coursing their way across his active brain, till suddenly he exclaimed: "Beware! O Maxtla, perfidious monster; the hunted ocelotl [4] may turn and rend you." With these words, which broke the spell, Hualcoyotl awoke from his reverie, little dreaming that at that very moment death was on his track and closely stealing to take him unaware.

The news of the issuing of the king's decree condemning the prince to death had just reached Itzalmo; and, almost at the same moment in which Hualcoyotl uttered the exclamation which broke in on his reverie, a servant approached his door to say that the watchful old servitor wished to communicate with him.

"Inform Itzalmo that I will see him in his own apartment," said the prince, in answer to the message.

Hualcoyotl was greatly surprised on entering the old man's room to find him very much agitated, and at once surmised that something of a very serious nature was the matter; for Itzalmo was ever dignified and composed in his demeanor, seldom permitting anything to visibly disturb him. After the accustomed civilities he addressed the prince:

"I have just received startling intelligence from our friends at the palace of Maxtla to the effect, most noble prince, that your life is in imminent peril. The failure of the king's plan to entrap you two days since has so enraged his majesty that he has thrown off all restraint, and publicly proclaims your existence a menace to his authority, and that it must be terminated. He has ordered an officer with a number of soldiers to come here and murder you—yes, murder you in your own palace. Your only safety lies in flight. Go at once, O Prince; for they may come at any moment."

Hualcoyotl's habitual serenity was somewhat shaken by the knowledge of his public condemnation to death; but it was only for a moment, for he quickly recovered, and when Itzalmo finished speaking, said:

"You are a true friend to me, Itzalmo, but in your anxiety for the safety of your prince forget your teachings. What you propose might be the best thing to do; such a course, however, would not be in accordance with my training; neither would it meet the approval of my feelings. No, good friend, I'll turn my back upon no man. Let them come—I will remain to receive them."

"You, O Hualcoyotl, prince of Tezcuco, forget your duty to your people, and remember only your pride of honor," remonstrated Itzalmo.

"My dear, good friend, I forget nothing, except that I am Maxtla's slave," returned the prince, with flashing eyes. "If the gods forsake us not," continued he, "Hualcoyotl, prince of Tezcuco, will yet meet this monster king on equal terms, and when he does, the skill at arms which thou hast taught shall serve him well; or, failing, leave him a lifeless thing at Maxtla's feet! A truce to further discussion of the matter except as to where and how these assassins are to be received."

Itzalmo was greatly discouraged by the prince's refusal to fly the palace, but not less determined to do all in his power to save him. It was agreed that he should repair to the court and engage in a game of ball, trusting to his good luck and the cunning of the old tutor to deliver him from the dangers which encompassed him.

When the soldiers arrived they were received in the palace and informed that Hualcoyotl was playing at ball in the court. This had the desired effect of leading the officer to infer that he had found the prince and his household ignorant of the contemplated assassination of the former; thus rendering it less difficult for Itzalmo to further and accomplish any meditated plan looking to the frustration of the murderous design upon his young master's life.

When the soldiers reached the court they were received in a very courteous manner by the prince, who said:

"The soldiers of Maxtla, the king, do me great honor in visiting my palace at this time, and will add to my pleasure if they will enter with me and partake of refreshments to relieve the fatigue of their journey."

The prince's demeanor was dignified and fearless, and his speech the essence of suavity, which threw the officer off his guard, who, feeling secure in the ultimate accomplishment of his purpose, replied:

"Hualcoyotl, the prince, honors the king's service in extending to his soldiers the hospitality of his board, and as the soldiers of the king are not unlike other men, but, like other men, require

sustenance, they accept the kind invitation."

The prince led the way to the banqueting hall, where the party was seated and refreshments ordered to be served. The refreshments were brought from an adjoining saloon, between which and the banqueting hall was a broad, arched doorway, with hangings, or portieres, richly adorned with gold and other trimmings, now drawn to each side and held by ornamental holders.

It was the custom of the natives of Anahuac, when an honored guest was being entertained, to place a burning censer in a conspicuous place and feed it with aromatics during the time of entertainment. The censer, on this occasion, was placed in the doorway between the banqueting hall and saloon.

While the party were engaged in eating and drinking, the prince suddenly had occasion to call a servant. No servant responded to the call, however, which seemed to arouse his ire. With an impatient gesture he arose from his place at the board and passed to the saloon as if in search of one. As he left the hall a fresh supply of aromatics was thrown into the censer, sending up dense clouds of incense, which enveloped him and filled the doorway, thus obscuring his movements from the eyes of the soldiers. At this moment a servant entered from another direction, as if in answer to the prince's summons.

"Did my master call?" he inquired.

"He did," replied the officer, "and is now in search of you."

The servant busied himself about the table for a short time, and then took a position at a respectful distance, apparently waiting his master's return.

The minutes went by and the prince did not return. It suddenly dawned upon the mind of the officer that something was being done to thwart him—that he had been duped; and, quickly rising from his seat, he rushed into the saloon, followed by his men. No trace of the prince was found, and a general search of the palace was ordered. It proved fruitless, however, for the prince was not discovered, nor could anything be learned from the servants concerning him. He had vanished, to all appearances, in the clouds of incense which enveloped him as he passed from the banqueting hall to the saloon.

CHAPTER V.

Among the many ruins of ancient Mexico, and not the least of interest and wonder, were those of the great aqueducts, by means of which vast quantities of water were brought from distant points to supply an extensive system of irrigation, and, presumably, the palaces and villas of the rulers and their wealthy adherents.

The Tezcucan palace, while Hualcoyotl's father was yet a prosperous and independent sovereign, was furnished with all the advantages attainable, among which was an abundant supply of water, brought into the palace through a large conduit, or earthen pipe. After the subjugation of the Tezcucans, and death of their king, this pipe fell into disuse and ruin.

There was a passageway leading from within the palace to the abandoned conduit, which was concealed by a secret door. In this outlet Itzalmo saw a sure avenue of deliverance for his young master, and devised a plan of escape for him through its offered adaptedness, which was successfully carried out, as recorded at the close of the last chapter.

The plan of escape, so ingeniously devised by the old preceptor, was communicated to the prince, who, after being again urged to save himself for the sake of his people, concluded to acquiesce; for he began to realize that death certainly awaited him should he remain, while in the plan of Itzalmo there was hope, a strong argument against his false notion of defiance in the face of such overwhelming odds.

When Hualcoyotl left the banqueting hall and entered the saloon he was hurried to and through the secret door into the passageway and on to the conduit, where he found present security. It was not his purpose to reenter the palace, but to follow the pipe to a point where an opening had, in the gradual decay of the structure, appeared in its side, and from there make his escape. To do this was not an easy task, for he had a considerable distance to go, and the pipe being too small to permit him to rise, he was compelled to proceed in a crawling manner, and, frequently, to work his way through accumulated obstructions. After much vexatious toiling he found himself nearing the opening in the conduit, through which he expected to make his exit. A flood of light, most welcome, was streaming in through the breach, the sight of which freshened his flagging energies and relieved the arduousness of his advance. The goal was finally reached, and just beyond was freedom—to him, however, a freedom to be gained only under cover of darkness.

It had been arranged that the prince should remain in the conduit until night, when, at a preconcerted signal, to be given by his faithful and trusted attendant, Oza, to assure him that the way was clear, he should come forth and be conducted to a place of safety.

The time passed tediously to the anxious fugitive in his close quarters, and he was beginning to feel the effect of it on his endurance, when his attention was attracted by a sound not unfamiliar. A short period of silence ensued, and then followed the signal to quit the conduit. He was quickly at Oza's side, of whom he inquired:

"Whither do we go?"

"To the cottage of Kan, the weaver. Let my master follow his servant," cautiously replied Oza, moving noiselessly away.

While Hualcoyotl was waiting in the conduit for night to come to his relief, a former vassal and ardent adherent of his father's, a weaver of *nequen* (maguey cloth) by the name of Kan, who lived on the outskirts of the city, was seen and consulted with reference to his safety. The weaver immediately interested himself in the son of his old master, and proposed that he be brought to his cottage, where he could remain until a better and safer refuge was found for him. The proposal was gladly acceded to, and the fugitive, at leaving the conduit, was conducted to his house, where he was made comfortable and secure for the time being.

The officer who had charge of the expedition to the Tezcucan palace, with a view to taking Hualcoyotl's life, was greatly chagrined at the effectual manner in which he was tricked. After exhausting his ingenuity in futile efforts to find a clue to the prince's mysterious disappearance, he placed a guard over the palace and returned in haste to his master, the king, to whom he reported the failure of his mission, but in such manner as to save his own head, which would no doubt have been required of him for his incautiousness, had the king been correctly informed.

Maxtla became greatly enraged when he learned of the failure of the expedition and escape of his hated rival. Troops of armed men were ordered to scour the country in every direction in search of him, and, in addition, a large reward was offered for his capture, dead or alive. The hand of a noble lady, and a rich domain to accompany it, was promised to whoever should take him, regardless of the captor's previous condition in life.

The perils to which the prince was being subjected by his powerful enemy, and the persistent efforts made to destroy him, were becoming generally known. Among his friends—the Tezcucans, who were deeply incensed at the unjust treatment of their favorite—a latent hatred of everything Tepanec was being wrought into a feeling of antagonism, which was rapidly engendering a spirit of resistance to the relentless and malicious persecutor.

"Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad," was assuredly exemplified in the brief and despotic career of the tyrant Maxtla; for by his unkingly conduct toward the unoffending Hualcoyotl he was digging a pit, so to speak, broad and deep, which would engulf not only himself, but his nation as well, of whose proud capital, the royal city of Azcapozalco, no vestige would remain to mark the spot whereon it stood; nor track, nor trace of all the mighty host of those o'er whom by right he ruled, but only waste and desolated space, on which, to emphasize a conqueror's hate, it was decreed the slave-man's mart should be. [5]

Some days subsequent to the coming of Hualcoyotl to the weaver's cottage a band of soldiers appeared in its vicinity. Every house was being searched, and it was soon learned that he was the object of the search. Measures were immediately taken to prevent his discovery.

When two of the soldiers presently entered Kan's place they found him busily engaged at his work, preparing the fibers of maguey for the loom, a quantity of which was lying in piles about him. One of the men, addressing him, said:

"The soldiers of the king are searching for Hualcoyotl, the fugitive prince, who is thought to be hiding somewhere in this part of the city. We are here to look through your cottage, weaver."

"The soldiers of the king know their duty, and must perform it, though it will avail them nothing to search my place. Kan, the weaver, has other business to occupy his time than that of hiding royal aristocrats, who would take no more account of his life than they would of an ocelotl's," was the curt and not inapt reply.

"There is truth in what you say, weaver," returned the soldier. "Small value is put upon a man's life by them, especially if he is in their way."

Without further delay he proceeded, with his companion, to search the few apartments of the cottage, giving them a thorough examination.

Kan never worked more diligently than he did while the soldiers were looking through his place. The fibers of the maguey fairly flew through his hands, and higher and wider grew the pile of thready stuff at his left. Although his movements were rapid, he showed no evidence of disquiet. His countenance wore its customary stern look, and yet, beneath, there was poignant solicitude for his royal charge. It appears to have been a characteristic of his people to forget self in their devotion to others. He took no account of his own personal risk: the penalty he incurred in harboring the fugitive—a penalty the measure of which would depend on the caprice of a suspicious and tyrannizing king.

After a protracted search into all the nooks and secret places about the weaver's premises, the men returned to the room in which he was working. This room was quite plain, without recess or other receptacle where a man might have found concealment. The spokesman looked critically over it, and said:

"The fugitive is surely not hiding with you, friend; for we find nothing of a suspicious character about your house. Sorry we were obliged to trouble you, but orders must be obeyed."

"Right, soldier!" returned Kan. "You have performed your duty, and no harm has been done."

The weaver spoke with affected carelessness, which he did not feel, for every moment which the soldiers spent in the room was one of anxiety to him.

Casting his eyes over the apartment once more, the soldier said:

"Since everything with you appears straight and satisfactory, we'll relieve you of our presence. Good luck to you, weaver."

"The same to the soldiers of the king," replied Kan, with a supreme effort at indifference, as the searchers turned to leave his place.

The party was hardly beyond the curtained doorway when the weaver's assumed carelessness gave place to cautiousness.

"Hist! do not stir!" he ejaculated guardedly. Rising, he went to a small window, a safe point from which to watch the soldiers' movements. When he was satisfied they would not return, and that all present danger was past, he went to the pile of selected fibers, which had grown so rapidly under his supreme efforts while the soldiers were searching his place, and, lifting them, said:

"You may rise now from your uncomfortable position. The soldiers seem to be satisfied with their search of my premises, and are gone."

The prince rose from the floor, on which he had been lying beneath the pile of fibers, and,

glancing at his greatly disordered apparel, said, in a soliloquizing manner:

"Hualcoyotl is indeed fallen. I never expected to reach a state so far beneath my manhood as this; but, since it is for country and freedom, submission must be the rule, however humiliating the conditions." Fixing his eyes on the weaver, he continued: "Your reply to the soldier, Kan, in which you referred to royal aristocrats and the indifference usually shown by them for the lives of their subjects, has taught me a valuable lesson—one that I will not soon forget. It is too true that rulers are often disposed to hold the lives of their subjects lightly. Should it be my good fortune to regain my heritage, Kan and his words, so aptly spoken, shall not be forgotten."

"I pray, O Prince, that you will believe me. The words were not spoken out of disrespect, but to mislead the soldier that his search might not be too close." Spoken humbly and out of fear that he had given offense. "Kan is only one of many," he continued, "who would delight in serving and honoring Hualcoyotl as their king."

"It does not matter, Kan, what prompted the use of the words," replied the prince, kindly; "they were well said and timely, and you need have no regrets for having uttered them. At this moment I may be indebted to them for my liberty, if not my life. But let them pass; I would not they were unsaid. My escape from detection was narrow, indeed," he went on; "and due, my faithful friend, to your sagacity alone. I can no longer consent to your life and home being put in jeopardy on my account. There is no place in Tezcuco that will furnish me a safe retreat—my flight must be resumed. I will go into the mountains, in the direction of Tlascala, where refuge may be found in their fastnesses until my people are ready to avenge themselves on the authors of their degradation. If you will find a way, Kan, to inform Oza that I would see him, you will confer a favor which may be the last you will have an opportunity to bestow upon your unfortunate guest." The prince's closing words expressed deep dejection, and Kan hastened to answer by way of encouragement:

"May the son of my murdered master be mistaken in that, is the prayer of Kan. May he live to deliver his people from the power of the hated Maxtla, and be crowned king in the place of his noble father!"

"You have my thanks, Kan, for your kind and prayerful words; and, now, let Oza be summoned and preparations made for my departure to-night."

Oza came, and on being informed of the prince's purpose, became greatly worried over it. That he should go off to the mountains alone was not to be thought of for a moment. He was willing and ready to share his master's hardships, and insisted on being permitted to do so with so much earnestness and show of fealty that Hualcoyotl finally consented that he should, for a few days at least.

The preparations for their departure were speedily consummated, including a visit by Oza to the palace; and night, which was to shield them in their flight, was waited for in patient silence.

When the hour came for leaving, the prince bade his preserver a kind good-bye, with promises of future remembrance, and, with Oza for a companion, went out into the darkness—a fugitive from an unjust condemnation.

CHAPTER VI.

Off from Lake Tezcuco, in the direction of Tlascala, the country is rough and mountainous, and, at the time in which our story is laid, was a wild and woody district. We are not informed as to what nation or nations then possessed this territory; but, from the fact that it was a common hunting-ground, and frequently invaded by bands of soldiers, irrespective of tribal connections, it may be inferred that it was regarded neutral. Since this phase of the question is best suited to our purpose, we accept it as the true one.

Notwithstanding the wildness of the country, it had its denizens, though few in number and sparsely located. There were narrow, level stretches of ground-plateaus, found here and there on the range, sometimes extending for miles around the base of a mountain, or along the cliffs and crags which abounded. These plateaus, in most cases, were places of habitation; the men occupying them being of a class who preferred the life of a free mountaineer to living in the thickly settled districts. The territory was extensive, and game, consisting of wild fowl and small animals, was abundant. Herein was the charm which made a life there one of preference to those who found a home upon it. The occupation of the inhabitants was, therefore, chiefly that of hunting; and it may be added, in this connection, that many of the markets of the valley towns and cities were indebted to them for their supply of wild meats.

Some of the more thrifty and accumulative residents cultivated the plateaus on which they had fixed their habitations. When such was the case the mountaineer divided his time between farming and hunting; and, in some instances, a surprising degree of prosperity and comfort was the result. The better class prided themselves on their hospitality, and often carried it to a fault, to the truth of which hunters from the valley, and others who made excursions into the district, were ever ready to bear witness.

The most prominent person living in this mountainous region, and one who will hold a conspicuous place in our narrative, was a man named Tezcot, who did farming, besides being a most successful hunter. He was a person of intelligence, and showed in his intercourse with men that he had been well trained in his youth. He was never heard to refer to his early life, and all that could be learned of it was, that, for causes best known to himself, he had cut loose from his people, and, with his young wife, sought and found a home among the free hunters of the mountains.

As the years passed, this man grew in the estimation of his fellow mountaineers, until his position among them became one of preeminence. His goodness of heart, integrity of purpose, and excellent judgment made him a wise counselor. He was, consequently, consulted on all questions of importance. His advice was invariably good, and his decisions on questions referred to him for adjustment were always acquiesced in. As a result, peace and harmony prevailed where confusion and discord might otherwise have been expected. He was nominally the hunters' chief, ruling them by the power of his wisdom, integrity, and kindness.

Tezcot's dwelling was, comparatively, of a superior character. It was constructed of stone, and thatched with maguey leaves, and contained several apartments designed for supplying the needs of a family. Commodious porches protected its front and rear from the heat of a tropical sun, and furnished a pleasant retreat in leisure hours for the inmates. It was, altogether, a very convenient mountain home.

In addition to the dwelling there were quarters for servants, whom the mountaineer kept to perform the necessary labor about the place. [6]

The farm work was conducted mostly by an experienced and trusted vassal, while much of the master's time was spent on the mountains in pursuit of game.

Tezcot's household consisted of himself, his wife, and two daughters. The eldest daughter, who was about eighteen years of age, was a fine specimen of the Indian maiden, the pride of her immediate friends, and an object of admiration to all who knew her. She was known among the denizens of the range as the "Mountain Princess," to which appellation she was certainly entitled, if personal graces and womanly charms, together with the prominence of her father, counted in the elemental forces which fixed upon her a title so expressive of the high esteem in which she was held. Mitla was the name bestowed upon this nymph of the hills by her parents, and by which she will hereafter be known.

The second daughter of the hunter was not so queenly as her sister, and, being the younger, was looked upon as little more than a child. Her fifteen years were not sufficient to gain for her the consideration accorded the "Mountain Princess." Oxletta, or Oxie, as she was called, was an agreeable and comely appearing girl, and gave promise of developing into a splendid woman.

The mother was not an old woman, and still possessed much of the attractiveness and vivacity which had undoubtedly distinguished her in the bloom of womanhood. From her the daughters

inherited much of the comeliness which marked them as objects of admiration and esteem. Her name was Xochitl, signifying wild flower, which evidenced, in its application, no small degree of loveliness even in the first years of her life. She was called "Zoei" by her acquaintances, and it fitted her well, so expressive of affection and gentleness, prominent characteristics of her disposition.

The daughters were given all the advantages possible under the isolated circumstances with which they were surrounded. The father and mother were fairly well educated, and through their efforts the girls became proficient in many things. Aside from being instructed in the history and traditions of their race, they were well trained in domestic affairs.

It is said of the Aztec women that they were adepts in the culinary arts. Their tables, when the occasion required it, we are informed, were replete with deliciously prepared sauces, confections, and other delicacies, which would have tempted the most fastidious epicurian palate; and Zoei, the good wife of the hunter Tezcot, was not an exception.

Spinning, embroidery, and featherwork were also considered essential accomplishments, in which the sisters were thoroughly instructed by their mother.

Featherwork was an art of peculiar interest to the Anahuacans, and they greatly excelled in it. Abundant material for its practice was always at hand in the beautiful plumage of the myriads of tropical birds: the parrot, the hummingbird, the pheasant, and many others of the feathered tribes which might be named, congruous to that latitude and country.

In addition to her other attainments, Mitla was a fine archer, and was often to be found on the mountains in pursuit of its practice.

It was evening, and the twilight was rapidly verging into night. At this hour three persons might have been seen wending their way around the southwestern slope of the mountain at the base of which stood the dwelling of Tezcot, the hunter. The fast fading light of the departing day penetrated with its crimson-tinted rays the thickly standing trees, throwing sombre shadows athwart the pathway of the sojourners, warning them of the nearness of night. It was evident, from the rapid movement of the party, that they were not unfamiliar with the rough trail they trod. They were moving along in single file. In the lead was a man of large mold, who, though apparently past middle life, was yet in the prime of manhood. Upon his back was strapped a javelin and bow, with an accompanying quiver, which, with his general appearance and dress, distinguished him as a hunter. His companions were following closely behind him, bearing a heavy burden between them, the end of the pole or support of the burden resting on a shoulder of each. They were silent as the noiseless forest through which they moved. Not a sound was heard save the measured tramp of their feet as they hastened on. Finally emerging onto the plateau, and seemingly relieved from the sense of solitude with which the deep silence of the forest had impressed them, the hunter said:

"It is a heavy load ye bear, lads; but the end is near, and ye'll soon be rid of it."

"Yes, master," said the foremost man; "it is, indeed, a heavy load, and would try us greatly to go much farther."

"Think what is ahead of ye yonder: a bracing meal, and, by my life, ye shall have a refreshing mug of *pulque* [7] to wash it down. D'ye hear?" returned the hunter, encouragingly.

"Ah, good master, you are very kind," answered the man.

"If to be mindful of a willing hand is kindness, then be it so, lad," was the hunter's benignant reply.

The hunter and his companions were now moving along the border of a narrow stretch of level ground, which extended far around the mountain. They suddenly rounded a sharp point which brought into view a dwelling, from which a faint glimmer of light penetrated the gathering darkness. The dwelling was the home of Tezcot, and the advancing hunter the mountaineer himself, accompanied by two servants, returning from a hunting excursion.

As the party approached the house, Tezcot saw that a man, who proved to be a strange hunter, occupied the front porch alone. When near enough to speak he stopped, his attendants passing on. Addressing the stranger, he said:

"Hail, friend! Peace and good-cheer to thee, and welcome to such fare as may be found in this, my mountain home. I am Tezcot. Who art thou?"

The stranger arose and, saluting, answered:

"The gods be with you and yours, most liberal of hosts. Cacami, a Tezcucan hunter, is he whom the good genii have directed to this excellent mountain home, where the tired applicant for nourishment and rest is ever met by generous impulses and unrestrained hospitality."

Tezcot scanned the stranger with not a little curiosity at hearing his gracious speech. The language bespoke him more than a mere hunter. He was a young man, and, from appearances, one enjoying superior advantages. The mountaineer was very much pleased at hearing words so eulogistic of himself and his, and could not repress his gratification. It was his chief pleasure to be reminded that he was generous and hospitable. He replied:

"Your speech commends us, friend, and we pray it may be deserved. We can say of a truth, and not boastingly, that no man ever turned from Tezcot's door hungry or weary."

"What you say needs no proof, generous host; it is but an echo of the voice of those who have eaten of your bread and drank of your excellent pulque. No man, in or out of the valley, hath in so great a degree the esteem and good will of the hunters of Anahuac as yourself. With them Tezcot is counted the prince of hosts, and a chief among men," added the stranger, warmly.

"I see, O Tezcucan, whence comes your favorable opinion of us," returned Tezcot. "A word of praise from our good friends in the valley is not less pleasing because it comes to us in this way. May the favorable impressions of us you bring with you not suffer by personal contact."

This dialogue was carried on standing, the mountaineer in the meantime relieving himself of his hunter's outfit. He now suggested that they be seated, and after being so he turned to his guest and inquired:

"Is this your first visit to these parts?"

"To this locality, yes; to the mountains, no. For several years I have made occasional incursions to the district in pursuit of that charm which sometimes leads the best of men—as in your own case —to choose for a home the most solitary scenes," replied the Tezcucan.

"A wonderful fascination, truly, is found in the life we lead, or how could we endure its solitude?" answered the mountaineer reflectively; and again, "You are not one who hunts for profit, I judge?" he added, interrogatively.

"No, for pleasure only; still I sometimes sell, or permit my men to do so, when we secure more game than we want."

"You are not alone, then?"

"No; I have two attendants who are being cared for by your servants. Your good wife has already looked after their comforts."

"And, be assured, O Tezcucan, that they will suffer no discomfort while under her care," returned Tezcot, showing his appreciation of his wife's excellence. He then added: "Referring to them, by the way, reminds me that others are needing refreshment. Zoei!" he called.

"Well, Tezcot, what is it?" came back from within.

"My jacket hangs limp as a dead hare's leg. Haven't ye something to put under it, eh?"

"Yes, supper is ready. Bring our guest and come."

Rising, Tezcot turned to the stranger, and said:

"Come, friend, you are doubtless as ready as myself to dispatch a good sized block of well prepared supper. There is nothing like a sharp appetite and a well loaded board to make a man satisfied with himself and all the world."

"A philosophical utterance, certainly," returned the Tezcucan, following his host into the house.

The evening meal consisted of maize bread, cold meats of game, fruit, and chocolate. The hunter's favorite mug of pulque, which he always relished after a day on the mountains, was in its place near him, while one was immediately passed to the guest.

Tezcot was here reminded of his promise to his men, and ordered a glass of the beverage for each taken to them; then taking his own from the board, he said:

"Drink, friend, and let our drinking be a pledge of future good will between us."

"Most cheerfully, kind host; and may I not add for myself, your excellent family as well?"

The mother smiled and the daughters blushed, while the host and his guest quaffed their pulque with keen and appreciative gusto.

"Superb!" exclaimed the Tezcucan. "Your friends do not overestimate the quality of your pulque, and I shall join their ranks at once."

"We are glad it pleases you. Your appreciation is our recompense," returned Tezcot, much gratified. "And, now," he continued, "let us try some of the substantials."

The suggestion was equivalent to a command, and all went to eating.

When the meal was fairly begun, Mitla gathered sufficient courage to say:

"Father, tell us about your hunt to-day. From the quantity of game brought in, good luck must have attended you."

"Yes, the day was fine, and brought us extra good luck," he answered, and then paused to indulge his keen appetite for a moment. "Game was plentiful," he went on, "and we secured quite a bunch. There were some fine targets for testing an archer's skill, which would have delighted your heart, child, could you have been with us."

Mitla was the hunter's favorite, as was Oxie the favorite of her mother. The father's preference arose from the fact that Mitla, like himself, loved the mountains and their forest solitudes.

In reply to her father's reference to herself, she said:

"How much it would have delighted me, could I have been with you, I can not express; but you know how dearly I love to use my bow and arrow; let that speak for me. You often tell me, however, father, that I am too tender-hearted to engage in hunting."

"Yes, that's a fact, Mit, and I'm not sorry for it. I would not that ye were disposed to be cruel, for ye are a woman," he replied, in approval of her weakness, or, more fittingly, her innate sympathy.

"Your daughter is a fine archer, I infer?" remarked the Tezcucan inquiringly, addressing the mountaineer.

"Her arrow is true—I might say unerring," replied the father proudly. "And yet few know that she is an archer, at all."

"My father, you see, is a little extravagant in his praise of my archery," interrupted Mitla.

"He, no doubt, has reasons for being so," said Cacami. "It is a delightful accomplishment, and I'm sure you realize much pleasure from it. I am not unskilled in the use of the bow, and greatly enjoy its employment." Turning to the younger sister, he continued: "You, my young friend—Oxie, I believe, do not engage in its practice?"

"No, my sister's excellence and my own awkwardness have always discouraged me, so I have given up trying," she answered a little ruefully.

"Oxie, if not an archer, has other accomplishments really more womanly," spoke the mother, joining in the conversation to defend her favorite.

"Your daughters are both, without doubt, worthy of all praise, each for those accomplishments best suited to her disposition," replied Cacami with tact, addressing his hostess.

"Good girls, friend, both of them," interrupted Tezcot, stripping the meat from the bone of a pheasant; "differently constituted, that's all." Then abruptly turning the subject, he said: "Have you been successful, Cacami, in chasing the charm to which you alluded this evening, the charm which we of the mountains find in pursuing the hunter's calling?"

"You may be assured, O Tezcot, that I have no cause for complaint. My success has always been very satisfactory," replied Cacami; and continuing, he inquired: "How do you hunters manage to dispose of your game aside from what you consume?"

"Take or send it to the nearest market. My men will go in after another day to dispose of our surplus, which is now quite large," replied the mountaineer.

"I brought in a fine lot with me to-night, and as I never carry game from a worthy host's door, you may consider it a part of your surplus, which I hope will obviate the necessity of your going to the mountains to-morrow, thus affording you a day's rest," said Cacami, evidently bent on meeting the generosity of his host.

"It requires no such sacrifice, O Cacami, to prove your heartiness of will. We can not allow it," remonstrated Tezcot. "No, no, my friend, you must not think of it."

"I have so decided, good host, and beg that you will allow me to have my way," returned Cacami respectfully, but in a manner that settled the question.

"Well, friend, you seem bent on carrying out your purpose, which we hope is not prompted by any doubt of the unselfishness of our hospitality," said the hunter, feeling that his cherished reputation for generosity was being questioned.

"Not at all, most hospitable of men. On the contrary, the giving of the game is intended as a trifling mark of my appreciation of your unequaled liberality," urged Cacami. "The value of game, to me, is gone," he continued, "when I have it in hand. It is the pursuit of it, and not its possession, which brings satisfaction, excepting when I can dispose of it in the way I propose; then it does become of value, not intrinsically, but for the pleasure it returns when thus bestowed."

"You are kind, very kind, Cacami," rejoined the hunter, relenting. "And since you will have it so,

be assured it shall not be lost to you."

"And why should it be counted lost at all? Does the hospitality of the great-hearted Tezcot amount to so little? The game is an insignificant return, I assure you, for the gratification it will afford me to recall having eaten of your bread and drunken of your pulque," returned Cacami warmly.

Supper was here concluded, and, yielding to the Tezcucan's fervency, Tezcot said:

"So be it, friend; providing, however, that you remain our guest another day, and join Mit and me in a short excursion on the mountain."

"That I will most cheerfully do, and count the day happily spent," responded Cacami graciously.

The majority of the little group we have introduced in this chapter—the home of the hunter's chief and the adjacent mountains, will figure extensively in this narrative. With our brief sketch of the persons presented, we leave the reader to perfect the individuality of each, forgetting for the moment to what race they belonged. An eminent mountaineer hunter, a man of noble impulses, proficient in everything required of him; an excellent wife and mother, who was a worthy companion to the father of her children; two beautiful maidens, who, though of directly opposite temperaments, were equally devoted in their home relations—an exceptional family, together with their Tezcucan guest, a young man whom the reader, we hope, will find an agreeable accession to the *personnel* of our story.

CHAPTER VII.

The laws by which the nations of Anahuac were governed were comprehensive as well as very severe. Every subject was expected to have knowledge of them, and the people were, accordingly, instructed in them by means of hieroglyphical paintings.

Crimes against society were punished with slavery or death, according to the magnitude of the offense. Theft and robbery were placed in this category, and met with the severest punishment. If the accused was found guilty, his fate was sealed; there was no escape from the penalty, so rigidly were the laws enforced.

These conditions, together with the strict surveillance of the military police, made it hazardous for any one to be abroad at night, unless adequate reason for it could be made apparent.

Protected in this thorough manner, the people had no fear of depredators, and took no precautions against them. No bolts, bars or other fastenings, as a protection, were to be found on their doors, when doors were used; in fact, more times than otherwise, only a curtain shielded the privacy of a home from the outside world. They felt as secure with an open door as the most enlightened Christian citizen would amid the highest order of civilization, behind his locks and bolts, supplemented by the latest improved burglar-alarm.

We now return to Zelmonco villa. We find it wrapped in deepest silence; the inmates are lost in the oblivion of sleep; the birds that make glad its environs under the light of day are perched in confidence and security on their chosen limb. The hour is that in which Nature wraps with sleep her children closest 'round about—the midnight hour, silent and solemn.

At this unseemly time two shadowy forms steal noiselessly into the park at the foot of the hill, and pause in an attitude of listening. No sound is heard, save the beating of a heart by each. After satisfying themselves that no living thing is astir within their hearing, they move cautiously up toward the house; and presently, when near its entrance, pass within the protecting shadow of a thickly foliaged tree and stop.

Before leaving the weaver's cottage, Hualcoyotl had decided to stop at Zelmonco villa, where he purposed remaining over one day, while Oza would be sent on to communicate with a good friend —a loyal Tezcucan who lived a short day's journey toward the mountains—to inform him of the prince's perilous situation and desire to find shelter and concealment with him for a few hours.

The night was not dark, for the stars were shining very brightly, as they always seem to in the clear sky of that sunny clime. To the fugitives their luster appeared to be remarkably brilliant, causing them to shun the roadways for fear of discovery and arrest; as a consequence, halts and frequent change of course made their progress slow, and the hour of their arrival at the villa late.

The reader has, no doubt, guessed who it was that entered Zelmonco park at midnight, and, passing up to the villa, paused in the shadow of a tree near its entrance.

The prince's breathing, when they stopped—for it was he and his attendant—was somewhat labored. The long and arduous walk from the city, and the effort required to gain the summit of the hill on which the villa stood, had severely tested the strength of his wind; which, from long confinement and inactivity, had become, in some degree, ennervated. He quickly regained his composure, and, while they yet stood within the tree's shadow, his thoughts turned upon himself and his peculiarly discouraging situation. He mentally soliloquized: "Like a rudderless boat on yonder lake, left to the caprice of the elements, tossed hither and thither by wind and wave, I am out in the world, a fugitive, condemned, driven, I know not whither! Oh, would that I could forecast my destiny and know it, though the worst should be revealed!" After a moment's pause he continued: "Yet, perhaps, it is better as it is: The Great Unseen will keep me if there is a purpose in my life!" Turning to Oza he said, in a subdued voice:

"There is safety in this house, the home of Euetzin, for a short time, if we might enter. Stand you here, while I endeavor to secure the attention of someone." He cautiously advanced to the door, which he found ajar, and gave two or three raps. No answer being obtained, the raps were repeated a little louder.

"Who raps?" suddenly inquired a voice from within.

"A friend of tzin Euet, who would communicate with Teochma, his mother," answered the prince, with caution.

"Stand inside, I will call her," returned the voice, and its owner, as the prince entered, went to summon his mistress.

The person who answered the prince's knock was a slave, whose sleeping-place, for convenience, was near the door.

In a few minutes the tzin's mother appeared, bearing a lighted taper. When she saw the muffled figure near the entrance, she paused and inquired:

"Who seeks to communicate with Teochma?"

"One who is a fugitive, with a price upon his life, comes to ask of Teochma shelter for a short time, until the way is made clear for him to go on," was answered.

"Prince Hualcoyotl!"

"Sh! Have a care, O Teochma; speak not that name so loud, even here, beneath this friendly roof. Walls do not always confine the voice's sound, and the winds are treacherous. Should that name be borne to traitorous ears, and my presence in your house be made known to my pursuers, desolation would surely come upon it, and distress to those it shelters."

The prince had dropped the mantle from about his face, and while he yet spoke Teochma saw that it was indeed the royal friend of her son. From custom she was about to offer him obeisance, but he quickly interposed, and said entreatingly:

"No, Teochma, do not so. Let the good mother of Euetzin treat as a servant, rather, him who stands in her presence. When the winds cease to bear upon their wings the cry of my enslaved and degraded people for deliverance, which rises hourly from a thousand homes, then, and not till then, may he to whom you would do honor receive the homage due his station!" He bowed himself before her in salutation, and continued: "Thus may it be in this hour, good mother of my friend—and mine, I could wish, O Teochma!"

"Rise, my son; it is not fit that you should humble yourself in this manner. Teochma is grateful for your condescension, and is pleased to welcome you to a shelter in her home." Hualcoyotl arose, and she continued: "But come, enter here and be seated," saying which, she motioned for him to pass to an adjoining room.

"Give me yet a moment, good Teochma. There is one without, an attendant, who waits to be called. If it please you, I will bid him come in."

"Assuredly, my son, bid him come."

The door, which the prince had closed, was quietly opened, and Oza directed to enter.

The Anahuacans of the fifteenth century were well skilled in art, both mechanical and decorative. With tools of bronze, made from an alloy of tin and copper, they were enabled, by the use of a flinty powder, to shape the hardest substances into articles of use and adornment.

Vessels of gold and silver were moulded and fashioned by them, having upon them representations of birds, animals, flowers, and other objects; and it is said of their goldsmiths that they could blend the metals in such a manner as to represent the feathers of a bird or the scales of a fish, alternately, in gold and silver.

With their natural fondness for display, and the inexhaustible supply of material for its indulgence at their command, it is not surprising that the homes of the nobility and wealthy were gorgeously magnificent in furnishment, especially in the matter of adornment. And, withal, though none of the modern appliances for the promotion of elegance and ease, which now distinguish the mansions of the opulent, were then at hand, their abodes were not without comfort for the physical man.

As in this age, a reception, or drawing-room was an indispensable apartment in the dwellings of the higher classes, and the completeness of its design and arrangement usually indicated not only the wealth and position of the owner, but, also, the taste and accomplishments of the occupants.

The room into which the prince and his attendant were conducted was a model apartment of its kind, and deserves from us at least a passing notice.

The floor was almost hidden under a profusion of mats and gaily wrought rugs. Fancy stools and comfortable divans were placed about the room in a kind of orderly disorder, relieving it from any appearance of disuse or exclusiveness. Across one corner of the room stood an especially attractive divan, over which was a glittering canopy, suspended from the beak of a dead *quanhtli* (eagle.) From its elevated perch the bird's appearance was so natural that the first glance at it would cause the observer to hesitate before taking a seat beneath it. A second thought, however, would dispel the momentary delusion. Spread out on this divan was the preserved and decorated skin of a Mexican tiger-cat.

The walls were adorned with gorgeous and beautiful hangings, the scintillating glimmer of the

reflected light of the taper upon them, as they were gently moved by the force of a passing draught of air, producing a very agreeable effect.

In every nook and corner were to be seen vases of odorous flowers, and images of animals or birds.

On a wall-shelf, at one side of the room, was a peculiarly attractive pot of flowers, over which, suspended by a thread of gold so fine that it required a sharp eye to detect it, was poised a golden-hued hummingbird, apparently about to thrust its prying nib into the unexplored recesses of a half opened flower just below it.

In a conspicuous place on the wall was a showy piece of feather-work, in which was blended the plumage of many birds. There were in it the changeful hues of the parrot, the brilliant colors of the pheasant, and others less attractive, all woven into a perfect representation of beautiful mosaic.

As the prince took a seat his quick eye observed the exquisite surroundings; and through it all he saw Teochma's experienced hand. His mind reverted quickly to other times—his boyhood, and the home where once ruled a beloved mother, not less accomplished than Teochma. After a moment's silent contemplation of the apartment and its attractions, some of which were still familiar to him, he turned to his hostess and said:

"The span of years which separate this hour from the past, when—a joyous, happy boy—I stood within this room, with no visible cloud upon the bright horizon of my future to warn me of the approaching storm and subsequent night of sorrow and despair which has followed, seems but a delusion—a horrible dream, from which I have only this moment awakened. And yet, O Teochma, my waking may be likened to a lucid interval in the mind of one crazed by delirium or the confusion of reason; for soon the gloom of my impending doom will hold and wrap me about, and this sweet reflection of the happy past be obscured in the blackness of darkness again."

He paused, and, taking advantage of the pause, Teochma said:

"Your presence here at this hour, and the purport of your words, tell me that you are in trouble. Hualcoyotl the boy is lost in Hualcoyotl the stately prince; and our love for the former in profound esteem and respect for the latter. Teochma is your loyal subject and friend; no assistance which is within her power to render shall be withheld from you. Speak, good friend, as would my own son Euet, and make your wants known, that we may serve you."

"I was sure of your sympathy and assistance, else I had not come this way. The fidelity of Teochma, and hers, to the cause of the unfortunate Hualcoyotl is a source of deepest gratitude to him. May the hour come when he can express his gratitude more fittingly than by weak words!"

Here followed a narration of as much of his late experience as was necessary to make his situation known.

Teochma's sympathies were much excited, and the prince was assured of a welcome shelter and concealment at the villa for as long a time as he desired.

"I can only risk a stop of a few hours," said he; "just long enough for my attendant to make arrangements for me a few leagues ahead. The emissaries of Maxtla may yet consider it worth while to pay you a visit in their search for me. Should they do so, no knowledge of my having been here at this time must reach them; for they are heartless, and might cause you serious trouble, if nothing more."

He turned to Oza, and gave him the necessary instructions regarding what he was expected to do; and told him to go at once, and perform the mission quickly as possible. The man cheerfully acquiesced in his master's plans, and, after partaking of refreshments, set out on his journey.

The prince was conducted to an apartment in a retired portion of the villa, where he soon found forgetfulness in sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

The morning broke over the beautiful Anahuac in loveliness and splendor. Nature, in all her forms, sent forth anthems of praise to the Almighty Creator. The forests rang with a medley of happy sounds, which rose from myriads of living things—the warbling of the inimitable mockingbird, and the trill and coo of its less melodious neighbors; the chirp and bark of the frisking little animals, together with the incessant whir and hum of the insect hosts—a grand chorus of thanksgiving, spontaneously rendered by an indiscriminate multitude of God's inferior creatures, all filled with the unalloyed happiness of an unconsciousness of evil, an unconsciousness which is denied to man, who is created in the image of his Maker, and endowed with that supreme attribute, the power to reason.

Such was the morning, and the waking it brought, of the day which followed the arrival of Hualcoyotl at Zelmonco villa.

The summons of a servant awoke the prince to a realization of his surroundings. Sounds of joy and life fell upon his ear from without, and stirred his soul with an emotion of sadness.

"Why should I be so environed," he soliloquized, "while all the rest of the world are happy and free? No, not all; my people are neither," he quickly added, as they rose up before his mind's eye in reproval. "Yet," he further added, "their lot is preferable to mine."

Shaking off his unhappy feelings, he performed his morning ablutions and clothed himself preparatory to going into the presence of his hostess.

When he appeared at the door of his apartment he found a servant there, who had been sent to conduct him to the eating-room, where breakfast was waiting, and, better still, the little girl, now grown to woman's stature, with whom he had romped and raced the hillsides over a hundred times in the years of his happy boyhood, also waiting to receive him. But how different were their positions and circumstances at this meeting. Not children, but man and woman, stood face to face.

"Itlza!" exclaimed he, with surprise and admiration depicted on his countenance and expressed in his voice, advancing toward her at the same time.

A momentary confusion came over the maiden, and she stood undecided how to act. The last time she saw him he was only a youth and she scarcely more than a child. Now he was a great, strong man, with intellectual superiority stamped on every feature, and dignity in every motion, while she had bloomed into a coy and blushing young woman, a sufficient cause for confusion in one so little acquainted with the world as she. He saw her embarrassment, and coming close to her, said:

"Has the little girl I once knew so well, and for whom I held a most tender regard, but who has now grown away from me, no word of welcome for her childhood friend?"

This gave Itlza time to recover, and she began a reply by saying:

"Our noble prince—"

"No, no; Itlza! address me not thus," he said, quickly interrupting her, and speaking earnestly. "I pray you, call me anything but that in this hour of a renewal of our friendship. I like it not, coming from your lips."

"Hualcoyotl, then, if it please you," she replied, smiling at his earnestness.

"That is better, for it has in it the echo of a friendship I do not forget," said he, interrupting her again; "a friendship, the memory of which is very dear to me."

"You are very good, not to have forgotten your little friend after so long a time," she replied. "Since I realize the change which has come to both of us, it seems like a dream to have known you. Hualcoyotl, who stands before me now, is not the Hualcoyotl I remember; he was only a boy. When I saw you enter, confusion came upon me; I knew not whether I should salute you as our prince, or greet you as an old friend."

She had recovered her composure, and spoke with ease.

"Your surprise was not greater than my own when I beheld, not my little girl friend of other years, but a pretty young woman waiting to receive me," was his gallant reply.

"There, now, don't let the breakfast spoil because of too many fine words. Come, sit you down, my son; and you, my daughter, order the chocolate," said the mother, not at all displeased at the gallantry shown her child by the distinguished guest.

"Yes, mother," returned Itlza, going to execute the command, at the same time looking very

happy.

The eyes of the prince followed her admiringly as she left the room, and he remarked:

"The years have, indeed, wrought changes in us all, but in Itlza the greater. She has grown into an admirable woman."

"Yes," replied the gratified mother. "She has changed much in the last few years."

The return to the room, at this moment, of the object of their remarks, cut off further allusion to her. She took her seat at the board, and, after customary formalities, the morning repast was begun.

The prince had made no reference to his friend, the tzin; but was, nevertheless, much concerned about him, and, without further delay, inquired:

"Teochma, I would hear something of Euetzin. Have you any knowledge of his whereabouts?"

"Not of a certainty. He expected to be in Tlacopan about this time, if nothing should occur to occasion delay."

"I wish that I might see him; but driven, as I am, to hasten on, I can not hope to be so fortunate." After a short pause he continued: "How long did he stop with you on his way out?"

"Only one evening—a brief stay, indeed; too brief to satisfy a mother's heart," answered Teochma.

"Yes, the time, no doubt, seemed very short to you," returned Hualcoyotl, "but the errand on which he has gone is of too great importance to admit of delay, and no one realizes it more than he."

"We do not underrate his mission, noble friend, yet feel our deprivation none the less," replied the mother.

"I believe you, good Teochma; and, be assured, if our cause is triumphant, the reward shall be commensurate."

"Why should a reward be looked for by anyone in a revolt against Tepanec oppression, save the deliverance of our people? The hope of freedom for Tezcuco, and the privilege of helping to gain it, ought to be a sufficient reward, and I am sure it would be for my brother Euet," said Itlza with a fervency which was a surprise to the prince. He looked at her well pleased, and said:

"You are a true and loyal daughter of Tezcuco, Itlza, and I thank you for your patriotic words. They are as pure gold, and could only emanate from the heart of a child of Zelmozin and Teochma." As he spoke the prince's eyes were fixed upon her with an expression of admiration and deep sincerity.

"Hualcoyotl gives me entirely too much credit for my bit of enthusiasm. It is not deserving of so much praise as he has seen fit to bestow upon it," replied she, somewhat confused by the earnestness of his language.

"Your feelings, which prompt you to depreciate the very laudable sentiment which you so forcibly expressed, and of which I could not withhold my approval, are only natural; they could not be otherwise, yet do not alter the case. I am glad the words were spoken in my presence, and I shall remember them because they were yours," he gallantly responded.

The prince was deeply and favorably impressed with the artlessness and womanly bearing of his young friend, and had circumstances permitted him to follow the lead of the thoughts which at that moment filled his mind he would certainly have studied to win her love. The affections which held the heart of the boy for the little girl had not died out. His hungry heart was quickly ablaze from the smouldering spark when fanned by the coy and winsome smile of Itlza, but he would not, then, situated as he was, build on a hope which in all probability could never be realized; still, he made a mental resolve, should fortune favor his cause, to claim the charming Itlza for his queen.

In the conversation which followed, the prince appreciating the danger which menaced his peace of mind, and which he felt was already yielding to the subtle influence of Itlza's presence, gave his attention more closely to Teochma. The topics of conversation varied, but finally reverted to the tzin. As they arose from their seats at the conclusion of breakfast, the prince said:

"I have faith in your noble son, good Teochma, and believe he will yet occupy a high place among the warriors of his people. Considering him a born leader of men, I have entrusted my future interests to his hands with a perfect confidence. If he should fail, it will be because he has undertaken an impossibility. But, Teochma, good mother of my friend, do not be discouraged; he will not fail."

"Your faith in my son is very gratifying. We will hope, with you, for the best," she replied.

The prince retired to his room, where he sat long, meditating on the possibilities of the future; and as the panoramic pages of fantasy passed athwart his brain, a picture not unlike the laughing face of Itlza beamed upon him from everyone.

The day passed in solitude to him. He would not risk exposure, and, therefore, remained in close seclusion.

Night and darkness came at last, and soon after Oza made his appearance.

At an early hour the fugitives took their departure from the villa.

When about to leave, the prince said, as a further encouragement to his friends:

"Have courage, good Teochma." Then turning to Itlza, he continued with a fervency he did not try to conceal: "And you, my boyhood's sweet child friend, continue faithful to the cause for which, in golden words, you have proven your devotion."

Addressing both, he spoke hopefully: "The darkness of the night is but the obscurance of the sun, the giver of light; so the darkness of this hour in our country's enthrallment, let us hope, but precedes the dawn of a bright and glorious day for her. Farewell, dear friends. May the gods of our fathers shield and keep you!"

He turned away, and a moment later was gone.

The mother and daughter were again alone; and thus we leave them to contemplate, in sad silence, the rapidly changing conditions of their lives.

CHAPTER IX.

The close and intimate relation of tutor and pupil, which was sustained between Itzalmo and Hualcoyotl for so long a period, gives the character of the former a certain degree of prominence. We, therefore, at this point, return to the Tezcucan palace to follow for a brief time the fortunes, or more fittingly the misfortunes, of the old servitor.

By reason of the peculiar and unfortunate circumstances which surrounded him, the old preceptor was brought under the malicious displeasure of the king, and caused to suffer for his fidelity to his young master. Before entering on an account of what befell him, a few preliminary references will be necessary.

The king's officer, after reporting the failure of the expedition sent out to destroy Hualcoyotl, returned to Tezcuco and established himself in the palace with a view to prosecuting the search for him.

The attendants of the prince's limited household were not disturbed, except being required to serve the officer and his men.

Itzalmo retired to his apartment, out of which he was seldom seen.

The idea that the prince was concealed somewhere in the palace was soon abandoned, and for a few days nothing occurred to cause commotion or interrupt the quiet of the place. Thus matters stood, when one morning a soldier accidentally came upon the secret door through which the prince made his escape. The discovery was reported to the officer, who, after making a thorough investigation, in turn reported it to the king.

The officer, in advising the king of the discovery, also reported Itzalmo as, in his opinion, having knowledge of the prince's whereabouts. Maxtla instructed him to question the old man with a view to gaining such information as would lead to the capture of the fugitive. If he refused to impart the desired information, the officer was ordered to bring him before his majesty.

Itzalmo was kept posted with reference to the prince's movements, and was aware of his having gone to seek refuge in the mountains. He was sorely troubled because of the perils to which his *protégé* would be exposed, and he no longer at hand to advise and assist him. No thought of impending danger to himself had entered his mind. His concern for his young master had caused him to entirely overlook such a contingency.

It was about noon of the day following that on which Hualcoyotl left the weaver's cottage that the old Tezcucan received a summons to appear before the king's officer. He was at once aroused to a realization of the fact that peril might be threatening him. The impression that such was the case came with so much force that he hesitated for a moment, in indecision, as to what course he should pursue. It was only for a moment, for, on second thought, he decided to answer the summons, but did so with the gravest apprehension. When he entered the officer's presence, that individual said:

"You are Itzalmo, Prince Hualcoyotl's instructor and adviser, are you not?"

"I have been, for many years, the prince's preceptor," he replied.

"You have been more than a preceptor to him; you have not only taught, but directed him by your counsel, and have at all times stood sentinel over his person. It was you who effected his escape, thus placing yourself in opposition to the king, in defiance of his authority. Further than this, I am of opinion that you know where he is concealed, and have so reported to the king. The secret of his sudden disappearance is at last in our possession. The hidden door through which he quit the palace has been disclosed, and the concealed passageway explored, leaving no doubt as to how he eluded us. As yours was the directing hand, we advise you to secure immunity from the penalty of your conduct by revealing to the king the prince's hiding place. By doing so you will remain undisturbed in your present quarters; otherwise, the orders are to take you before the king."

"If such are your orders, your duty is plain; perform it. I am in your power," was Itzalmo's calm reply.

"You refuse to impart the information, do you?" questioned the officer.

"You are answered, for you have said it."

"Such being your decision, you will get ready to accompany me to the king's palace at once. Here, soldier," he called to one of his men, "attend Itzalmo to his apartment, and when he is ready, return with him to this room. Do not tarry, old man," said he, again addressing Itzalmo. "There is no time to lose, for the day is already more than half gone."

Guarded by the soldier, Itzalmo went to his room, where he made a hurried preparation to go to Azcapozalco, before the king. When he was ready he was reconducted to the officer's presence, and after a short delay placed in charge of two men, who, with him between them, followed the officer from the palace.

The distance from Tezcuco to the Tepanec capital was not great, and yet, to a pedestrian, quite a journey. While to the soldiers it was only pastime to travel it, to Itzalmo, who was unaccustomed to walking, it was long and tiresome.

The day was well spent when the party set out, and only a few leagues were covered when darkness overtook them. The officer was not disposed to do any traveling after night came on, so on coming to a station where persons going to and from the capital were wont to stop, he put up. This was a great relief to Itzalmo, for it divided the journey and gave him a full night's rest.

They were on the road again at an early hour the next morning, and arrived at their destination late in the afternoon, after a hard day's travel. On arriving at the palace grounds, the officer led the way through a spacious court into the building, going directly to the audience hall, which was found closed, the king and his council having retired.

A messenger was dispatched to inform the king of the arrival from Tezcuco of the officer with Itzalmo.

Maxtla was found in his private apartments, walking back and forth across the floor in a disturbed and agitated state of mind. It might well have been said of him: "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." He was beginning to realize that his course would prove disastrous to his authority should he fail in his designs upon the life of his rival. He was angered to the verge of desperation by the humiliation and chagrin he felt in consequence of the failure of all his attempts to destroy the prince. The good Itzalmo had, indeed, fallen under calamitous circumstances, and could expect only the direst consequences because of his loyalty to his royal pupil.

The king's slaves were near at hand, listening for his slightest command, ready to execute it instantly.

The messenger was announced, and, on coming into the presence of his master, prostrated himself before him, at the same time delivering the message.

"Arise," said Maxtla, "and return; say that the king will attend."

The messenger withdrew, and the king, after summoning his council, followed. He entered the audience hall, and ascended to his seat on the throne. A moment later his advisers filed in, and took their accustomed places about him. Itzalmo's official conductor now advanced before the throne, and, making his obeisance, said:

"The orders of the king, with reference to the old instructor of the Tezcucan prince, have been obeyed. He has refused to impart to your servant the information asked for, and has been brought here to appear before your majesty. What is my master's pleasure, concerning him?"

"We would question the old Tezcucan. You will present him before us."

When Itzalmo's official conductor went forward to learn the king's pleasure with reference to the disposal of his charge he left him in care of the two soldiers. While awaiting the officer's return the tired prisoner was permitted to sit down. The journey had left its impress of weariness upon him, and even a moment off his feet was a welcome relief.

The old man entertained no hope of clemency, for it was not in his nature to be else than loyal to his young master, which would bring upon him the infliction of a most terrible doom—a death of purposely protracted agony. Yet, as he sat there dumb and motionless, he presented a perfect picture of stoicism. If a thought in anticipation of his impending fate disturbed his mind he did not show it. Such a mind as his, however, could not possibly avoid dwelling upon the possibilities of the hour; and it naturally followed that, under the exhibition of supreme indifference which he presented, there was an active intelligence present, the run of which no move or sign attested.

The officer presently returned, and Itzalmo was told to arise and follow. A few steps brought him to the throne, where he was presented before the king and his council. He appeared haggard and worn, yet his bearing was firm and dignified. He did not forget his duty as a subject, though an unwilling one, but saluted the king in the usual manner.

Maxtla bade him rise, and said:

"We are told that you are Itzalmo, the person who has been tutor and counselor to the prince of Tezcuco. Are we correctly informed?"

"Itzalmo is before the king. He has been the preceptor and servant of Hualcoyotl, the prince," he answered, decorously.

"We know what your relation to the prince has been, and think you have served him well," replied

Maxtla, rather mildly for him. He had an object, however, in dealing thus with his prisoner. "We also have reason to believe that his present place of concealment is known to you," he continued. "Your presence here is by our order, and the council's approval. We would obtain from you information which will lead to the royal fugitive's apprehension. Will you give it?" he concluded, a little more firmly.

"I am before your majesty because your officer failed to gain the information you want. Itzalmo is not a woman. Let that suffice for his answer," he replied fearlessly.

"You will give us the information we want, or suffer the consequence of your obstinacy," returned the king, his anger rising. "Your hand, old man, has been the one to defeat, in every instance, the efforts made to destroy the disturber of our peace. You have forfeited our clemency; yet if you will tell us where the prince may be found, your life shall be spared; you shall go free, and have great riches beside. Will you speak the words which shall give you life, liberty, and wealth, or will you persist in being obstinate, and bring upon yourself the consequences of your treasonable conduct?"

"Maxtla is a mighty king; Itzalmo an old man, whose life is of little account to anyone, least of all to himself. Was his life a thousand times more valuable than it is, it would yet be as many times too small a price to purchase that which you ask. Itzalmo has lived true to his prince, and will die as he has lived. Let Maxtla do his worst; I have spoken," was the heroic reply of the old Tezcucan.

"You forget, old man, in whose presence you are, and to whom you speak. Know you, that a word from us would consign you to the sacrifice? Have a care, or your age may not save you," said the tyrant, his face darkening with suppressed passion. He paused and looked with an angry scowl upon the brave and silent man before him. "Hark you, Itzalmo," he continued, "and mark well what I say; if you give us not the information we have asked for, it is our decree that you shall starve; yes, rot, in the lowest and foulest dungeon at our disposal. For the last time I ask, will you divulge the prince's hiding place?" The rising wrath of the tyrant was fearful to behold, and would have shaken the firmness of a less courageous man than Itzalmo; but his answer was in keeping with his character.

"The threats of Maxtla are to Itzalmo as the play of the idle winds," said he. "The king may kill, but he can not force Itzalmo to turn traitor to his prince. Clemency I do not expect, but death. I am done."

"Take the insolent traitor hence, and put him where the light of the sun will never reach him. There let him die the death, if he will, inch by inch. Away with him ere in our wrath we strike him dead," fairly roared the infuriated and disappointed despot.

Itzalmo was half dragged from the presence of the king and his council, out of the audience chamber, and down a massive stairway to a wide hall below; thence back to a narrow, paved court at the rear of the palace. A flight of stairs led from this court to a hallway below, which ran far back under the building. The old Tezcucan was hurried down these stairs and along the hall to another stairway, which led still lower down to a subterranean passage. Here a light was obtained, and the party descended. When the passageway was gained, a turn to the left was made, and directly another. They went quite a distance before changing their course again, when they entered a narrow avenue leading to the right, at the end of which were located a number of dungeon cells. Into one of these Itzalmo was thrust, and informed that nothing but death or a compliance with the king's demands would deliver him from it.

CHAPTER X.

The prince left Zelmonco villa with an added weight to the gloom which burdened his soul and saddened immeasurably his heart. A new feeling possessed him—a feeling which had been awakened by the charm of a contact with the object of his boyhood's affections. It seemed to have suddenly become a part of his being, arousing within him almost a sense of bitterness at his unhappy lot. His good sense, however, came to his support. While the sentiment which had aroused the disturbing feelings that oppressed him was not adverse to his sensibilities, but, on the contrary, one that he would have gladly encouraged; still, to yield to it at such a time, he felt, was unworthy of his manhood. He accordingly set his face toward the mountains, and turned his back upon the attractions which lured him from his purpose, and went forward to achieve the object for which he had started out—the present security of his person and life, and the ultimate liberation of his people.

It was several leagues from the villa to the home of the loyal Tezcucan; yet, under ordinary circumstances, the distance could have been covered easily before morning, with time to spare; for the natives were a people who traveled very rapidly when the occasion required it. But the prince was a fugitive, fleeing from the emissaries of his relentless foe, and had to be continually on his guard against surprise. As a consequence his progress was greatly impeded, and daylight found him still on the road. However, he was not discovered, and his journey of the night finally ended in safety.

By lying over through one day, and traveling one more night, the fugitives would arrive at a point where discovery by recognition was considered a very remote probability. This being the case, the balance of the journey could then be pursued by daylight with little fear of detection. Accordingly the prince and his companion rested and refreshed themselves at the house of the former's friend, until evening, when their journey was resumed.

Another night on the road was gone through, which carried them well on their way toward the mountains. At the approach of the morning's dawn a secluded spot off from the highway was looked for, where a few hours' sleep could be had without fear of molestation. Such a spot was found, and the tired and travel-worn sojourners gave themselves over to recuperation in the forgetfulness of slumber.

The sun was well up toward the meridian when they awoke from a refreshing sleep and resumed their journey.

At the end of a league or more they came to a small hamlet where much-needed refreshments were procured. Being greatly invigorated by having partaken of a substantial meal, they proceeded on their way with increased confidence.

Several leagues were covered without interruption, and the wayfarers were beginning to feel quite free from anxiety, when, about the third or fourth hour of the afternoon, their fancied security was disturbed and grave apprehension aroused by the appearance, in front of them, of a party of six Tepanec soldiers. They were near a bend in the road, and the approach of the soldiers was not observed until too late to avoid meeting them by turning aside. To have done this after being seen would have aroused suspicion in the minds of the advancing troop, and caused the immediate detention and possible recognition of the fugitives. Their only safety, under the circumstances, lay in going straightforward and taking the chances of discovery. When they came face to face with the soldiers, great was the prince's surprise and perturbation at recognizing in a member of the band one of his guests of the day on which he fled the palace. Should he be recognized he could scarcely hope to escape, as the only, means of defense he carried was a stout walking-stick, while Oza did not have even a stick. He realized fully the peril of the moment, and felt it to be more critical than any he had been called upon to pass through. Walking boldly forward, he passed the soldiers. That strange sense of uneasiness and uncertainty which is produced by the mingling of hope and apprehension—a feeling often experienced by those who are on the border between danger and safety, was upon him.

"Halt!" came the stern command which broke the spell, and caused him to look back. "You are the one addressed," continued one of the soldiers, who appeared to be the leader of the band, in answer to the prince's inquiring look.

"From whom comes the authority for halting a traveler thus on the highway?" demanded the prince, in return.

"That, you shall quickly learn," answered the soldier. "From Maxtla, the king, comes the authority for halting you. You are the fugitive prince, Hualcoyotl, whom we have orders to secure, dead or alive. I now command you, in the king's name, to surrender. If you are not Prince Hualcoyotl, you will be quickly restored to liberty."

"What reason have you for supposing that you now address the person of Prince Hualcoyotl?"

inquired he.

"This man," said the soldier, pointing to the one previously recognized by the prince, "is my informant. He saw you at your palace, he says, the day you escaped from the king's officer."

"He is mistaken," returned the prince. "I am a chief, going on important business. You will do well not to detain me."

As he said this, Hualcoyotl turned to move on.

"Halt! or we will make your body a target for our arrows," called the soldier, imperatively, and his men brought their bows to place, to carry the threat into execution. At the same time the speaker advanced in the direction of the prince.

"Stop, soldier!" exclaimed Hualcoyotl, in a voice of command which caused the warrior to pause. "Advance farther at your peril," he continued, swinging his heavy stick into position to defend himself. "The life of him who approaches me with evil intent shall pay the penalty of his temerity."

"You can not escape us, Prince Hualcoyotl. The orders are to secure you, and you will have to yield," said the soldier.

"Never! except by force. If you want me, take me," was the prince's defiant answer.

"Then take you we will; alive if we can, dead if we must. Forward, men!" Two of the soldiers gave their attention to Oza, while the other four advanced quickly but cautiously upon the prince. A determined effort was made to get in on him, but without avail.

Hualcoyotl was a strong man, vigorous and skillful, and being forewarned was not to be taken without a desperate struggle. The stout stick in his trained hand was a weapon to be feared. He succeeded in beating off his assailants, and stood eyeing them like a fierce animal at bay, grim and defiant.

Oza was quickly secured by the two soldiers, who now came to the assistance of their comrades. Another advance was made upon the prince, the soldiers approaching him from every point. He met them with heavy, telling blows, and one of their number went down under his stick to rise no more. It was a fiercely contested struggle, and had the stick in the prince's hand been a more formidable weapon the soldiers would have found in him more than a match. But skill, backed by only a heavy walking stick, though wielded by a strong right arm, could not long hold out against such odds. He saw that he would be compelled to yield, and was about to do so, when, to his great astonishment, and the amazement of his assailants, a shout rang out upon the air at their very ears, which staggered the soldiers for the moment with confusion. Before they could recover they were attacked with the deadly Indian sword, the *maquahuitl*, in the hands of one who evidently knew how to use it. The struggle was quickly terminated. The suddenness of the onslaught, and its fatal result to two of the party, who were placed *hors de combat*, filled the survivors with consternation, which caused them to seek safety in flight. A number of arrows were sent after them by the newcomer, which had the effect of facilitating their departure, and they were soon out of sight.

Oza was quickly released from his uncomfortable predicament, and found to have received no personal injury.

Saluting his rescuer in a very humble manner, the prince said:

"To whom are we indebted for our happy deliverance?"

"To a hunter, only," replied the newcomer, who was none other than our recent acquaintance, Cacami, the Tezcucan hunter, whom we left enjoying the hospitality of the mountaineer, Tezcot, and who was now *en route* home. "Seeing you unfairly set upon by a troop of villainous Tepanec soldiers," he went on, "I thought I'd take a hand, and see how quickly fled the cowardly pack, except these three—" He paused to examine the fallen soldiers, to learn what was their condition, and then continued, "who, I fear, are past the aid of man."

"Your coming, friend, was most timely; a moment later and we would have been in their power," said the prince.

"That was about the situation, stranger, as I saw it," returned the hunter.

"You have done us a very great service, and I regret that we are unable to suitably reward you. Words will not do it, which leaves us poor, indeed, at this moment. An expression of our deep gratitude is all we have to offer you. Inadequate as it is, it is sincere," spoke the prince, feelingly.

"There is nothing to reward, friend, nor is there any call for an expression of gratitude. What I did for you I would do for another, under the same circumstances," replied Cacami, who was disposed to depreciate the service he had rendered the prince.

"And yet you would be justified in pronouncing us ungrateful were we silent and unfeeling in the matter," said Hualcoyotl.

"I only did my duty, stranger; that's all. So, say no more about it," persisted the hunter.

"You will at least give us your name," urged the prince. "We would be glad to know and remember it."

Cacami looked at the dead soldiers, two of them victims of his own sword; and realizing the magnitude of his offence against the king, decided not to make himself known. He said, very courteously, in reply to the prince:

"I do not doubt your gratitude, friend, for the service rendered you. It was done impulsively, and with unfortunate result to two of these men, lying here, dead, almost at our feet. I would not be remembered for such service, and beg that you will permit me to pass on unknown."

"We will not press you, hunter, but deeply regret that your feelings lead you to withhold your name. You have done a greater service than you can at present be aware of," pursued the prince in tones which conveyed an impression of mystery. "Should you become known to us, we will, if in our power, reward you for it in a fitting manner."

Cacami looked wonderingly at the prince, because of the hidden significance which was evident in his remark. He was, apparently, on the point of putting an inquiry, but suddenly changed his mind, answering only by a look of depreciation.

The prince, casting his eyes in the direction taken by the retreating soldiers, continued, by saying:

"Our assailants may return with assistance; I think we had better be gone. In parting from you, hunter, we would once more express our gratitude, with a hope that we may meet again, under more auspicious circumstances."

"All right, stranger; I join you in the hope, but have no doubt that this little incident will have been forgotten then," returned Cacami.

"No, that could not be; at least, not by one of us."

With these words the prince turned away, and moved rapidly down the road, followed by his attendant.

Cacami's appearance and outfit bespoke him the citizen hunter. The Indian sword (*maquahuitl*) he carried marked him as such, for hunters, as a class, did not carry that weapon, on account of its weight. He was undoubtedly a successful hunter if the game secured was taken into account. Standing some distance off from where he was were two men who proved to be his servants. They had charge of a fine collection of birds and small animals, which he had secured since leaving Tezcot's. The men appeared to be awaiting orders from him; for on being signaled to move up they did so promptly.

The dead soldiers were moved to one side of the road by Cacami and his men, and left there to be disposed of by others, or, possibly, to become prey for carnivorous birds and beasts.

So soon as the prince and Oza got beyond the bend in the highway and out of view, they betook themselves to the fields and woods for better protection. Hualcoyotl's confidence in his security was gone, and he again became the anxious and watchful fugitive.

The mountains, in which refuge and safety were sought, were finally reached. In a fastness among the rocks the prince found a fairly comfortable retreat, and preparations were made for a temporary sojourn in it.

The soldiers who escaped the deadly sword of the hunter, instead of returning to look after their unfortunate companions, hurried to the nearest point and reported their adventure to the military.

This was the first information received by the Tepanec authorities of the prince's whereabouts. Troops were dispatched immediately in the direction of the mountains in pursuit of him, and his place of concealment soon became menaced by straggling bands of them, making the matter of procuring food a very serious one. It was hardly safe for the fugitives to venture out on the mountain, leaving out of the question the idea of going from it. For days they had nothing to eat except roots and berries; as a consequence, their situation became very distressing.

The prince insisted that Oza should return to Tezcuco, and leave him to his fate, but the faithful slave would not hear to it.

"Why sacrifice two lives, Oza, when one may be saved?" urged he.

"It is useless to urge me, good master; I would be a base coward to leave you now," was the loyal answer.

"As you please, but remember you are free to go whenever you so desire," said the generous prince.

CHAPTER XI.

The mission which tzin Euet had undertaken to perform was essentially one of secrecy. The fact that he was little known outside of Tezcuco was greatly to his advantage, making it unnecessary for him to lay aside his personality. He assumed the character of a trader prospecting for future business. His primary object was to obtain certain information which he could not secure except by contact with his fellow Tezcucans, and then only through their confidence, which he was very successful in gaining.

The tzin was a young man of superior natural resources, and, being of an agreeable and affable disposition, his efforts were rewarded in a very satisfactory degree. He found the thoughtful men of his tribe, outside of Tezcuco, ready to talk sedition to anyone whom they could trust; and, as the sum of the tyrant's inhumanity grew in proportion with the passing of every sun, their language became more pronounced.

The young agitator quickly came to the conclusion that the times were almost ripe for insurrection, and decided to proceed at an early day to practical measures—which meant the organization of an army of resistance.

The attempted assassination of Hualcoyotl at his palace, and his sudden and mysterious disappearance, followed by the issuing of the king's proclamation, making him an outlaw with a price upon his life, when brought to the tzin's notice, caused him the deepest anxiety. Realizing, however, that his presence would be of no advantage to the fugitive, even could he reach him, he continued to prosecute his mission, holding, at all times, an open ear for further information regarding him. He obtained no additional intelligence of his friend, meanwhile, which worried him considerably; so much, indeed, that he decided, on arriving at Tlacopan, to return to Tezcuco in quest of it. He set out accordingly, and later on we find him at a small village within a short day's journey of his destination, where he has just entered a hostelry with a view to procuring supper and a night's lodging. On entering the hostelry he cast his eyes about him, as a person will at entering a public place, especially if a strange one. They fell upon a young man whose appearance was that of a hunter, and, for some undefinable cause—a congeniality of spirit possibly—which under peculiar conditions draws one person unconsciously toward another—his attention was instantly attracted to him. The young man was, seemingly, weary; for at the moment in which the tzin entered he was more sleeping than waking. He was disturbed by the look which was fixed upon him, and raised his eyes, revealing to us again the now familiar countenance of the hunter Cacami, who only a few hours before had saved, unawares, the life of the fugitive prince. An expression of inquiry came over his face, as much as to say: "Did you speak?"

Euetzin moved near to where he sat, and addressed him.

Cacami straightened himself up, and a conversation was opened.

Following a few incidental remarks, the tzin said:

"You appear to be a stranger here, like myself."

"Yes, I am; entirely so. My home is more than a day's journey from this place," replied Cacami.

"If I read you correctly, you are a Tezcucan," continued the tzin.

"If a man at this time may make such a claim, yes. I live with my father, who resides about two leagues north of the city of Tezcuco."

"Are you going to or from home?" inquired the tzin, hoping it might be the former, in which case he would have a companion for the rest of his journey.

"I am homeward bound, and have only stopped for the night, intending to go on in the morning."

"I am glad to hear you say that," replied the tzin, his face brightening. "My destination is Tezcuco, or near there," he continued, "and it would please me much to be permitted to join you for the remainder of my journey."

"Nothing would suit me better; so let us consider it settled that we will travel together," replied Cacami, well pleased.

"I find it very solitary traveling alone," pursued the inexperienced tzin. "A good companion is appreciable when one is on the road."

"Yes, that is true; and yet I have learned that a person may become accustomed to traveling unattended."

"You have the appearance of being a hunter; is that your occupation?" inquired Euetzin.

"Not exactly. I am what you might call a citizen hunter. I do not hunt with the object of gain. My father is a wealthy farmer and trader; consequently there is no hurry for me to choose an occupation. Being inclined to the chase, I devote a part of my time in its pursuit."

"You would make a fine soldier," remarked the tzin, his thoughts reverting to the subject in which he was immediately interested. "Have you never thought of the warrior's calling as being especially suitable for a man of your superior physique?"

"Yes, I have thought of it," replied Cacami, at the same time looking searchingly at his questioner. "And should the future bring the opportunity which would make it agreeable for me to do so, I may adopt the calling. I would not be a soldier of the ranks, however, for I could not endure the drudgery of such a life. I engage in the practice of arms a great deal, and delight in the pursuit."

"Then you are, no doubt, well skilled in using them."

"Yes, especially in handling the javelin. I have given that arm much study, and think I may claim to be fairly good at throwing it. The bow and maquahuitl are not strange to me; I can use them when it is necessary," he replied, showing confidence in his skill.

The conversation was here interrupted by the announcement of supper, and was not again renewed during the evening.

The morning succeeding the evening on which Euetzin and Cacami met in the public apartment of the hostelry was an auspicious one for the young men, promising them an enjoyable day's journey together. At a seasonable hour they took the road for Tezcuco, and stimulated by a delicious and bracing atmosphere, fairly bounded over the ground as they passed from the village into the open country. Notwithstanding the invigorating effect of the pure morning air upon them, they were not very communicative when first starting out. They had not yet awakened to an appreciation of the life and beauty which lay before them.

The country through which the travelers had to pass was grandly beautiful and picturesque, impressing the reflective beholder with a sublime conception of Nature's enchanting handiwork.

To the left of them, stretching away in the distance, were the placid waters of lake Tezcuco, on the unruffled bosom of which, here and there, floated the garden and home of some ingenious Aztec, the like of which a century later presented a scene of astonishment and wonder to the Spanish conquerors. To their right, gently rising toward the ascending sun, swept a view of incomparable loveliness—a view which was then unsullied by the touch of vandal hands; now, alas! marred and scarred by the march and tread of a rapacious and unappreciative civilization.

The day, which was one of sunshine and fruition, grew apace, and the young men became more companionable as their knowledge of each other widened. The tzin early inquired the name of his fellow sojourner, and, also, by making himself known, drew from him his views on tribal affairs. When he had gained this, to him, important information, he expressed himself as follows:

"I thank you for your frankness; and would add that I not only hope, but believe, our coming together at this time will lead to a true and profitable comradeship. Tezcuco needs the aid of all her true sons to reestablish her in her former place among the nations of Anahuac, to accomplish which the courage and patriotism of her people will be sorely tested. War to the death must be met and stubbornly waged ere that desirable end may be reached. In such a test of courage, where, I would ask, will be found the hunter, Cacami?"

"I would not be counted a boaster," replied the hunter; "but, when the test is required of me, the friend of Hualcoyotl may be assured that my arm will be found where maquahuitl and javelin shall find the most to do for Tezcuco's deliverance."

"You say well, O Cacami, and I commend you heartily!" exclaimed the tzin, approvingly. "The same spirit of loyalty which inspires you inspires all the best men of our tribe. Take heart with me, O friend, for the future holds, at least, a hope of freedom for our country."

The tzin's zeal affected his companion not a little, who added an unqualified wish that the hope might not be a vain one.

The day passed pleasantly away, bringing the wayfarers, at a late hour in the afternoon, to a point opposite Zelmonco villa, which was situated some distance off from the highway.

Cacami was counting on reaching Tezcuco, a league and a half further on, before night, where he purposed stopping until morning. When the time came for parting company, Euetzin interfered very materially with his plans by extending to him a cordial invitation to become his guest, pressing the invitation with so much earnestness that he reluctantly consented.

The young hunter had impressed the tzin most favorably, and, in addition to extending to him the hospitality of his home, he designed making an ally of him.

The villa was a full half league from the main thoroughfare, but the young men were good walkers, and soon had the satisfaction of ending their day's journey.

The park, fronting the villa, was gained; and as they passed up through it, Cacami was forcibly struck with its great attractiveness—a veritable hill of flowers, showing, in its conception, an advanced degree of tact and taste.

Teochma saw her beloved boy coming up the walk, and came hurriedly to meet him. He saluted her affectionately, and, in turn, was joyfully welcomed back to his home.

Cacami was kindly received, and on bended knee, as was the custom, rendered respectful obeisance to the mother of his friend.

"We give you a hearty welcome to Zelmonco," she said, cordially.

"Your kindness is most gratifying, especially since we meet as strangers," he humbly replied.

"We meet as strangers, 'tis true, but will part as friends, I'm sure," she answered, affably. "Our door is always open. The stranger may enter it, even as a friend. Come," she concluded, turning toward the villa door, at which they were met by Itlza, the sight of whom was a genuine surprise to Cacami. Euetzin had said very little to him regarding his family, and nothing at all of her. The young hunter was, therefore, not expecting to meet a maiden—especially one of such peculiar attractiveness.

The brother and sister greeted each other lovingly, and Cacami was made known to the latter. She received his salutation with coy reserve, and the surprised young man said:

"This is a pleasure I was not looking for. That my friend might have a sister never once entered my mind."

Observing the brightness of her beautiful, sparkling eyes, he was led to express almost abruptly, but in a voice full of unfeigned admiration, the thought they inspired:

"Itlza is a very pretty name," he said; "yet, if I might be permitted to do so, I would substitute another—one that would be peculiarly appropriate."

They all bent upon him an inquiring look, which encouraged him to go on. Continuing, he said, gayly: "'The Laughing-eyes'; would not that be delightfully expressive?"

Cacami's implied admiration for the rare beauty of Itlza's eyes, which was her redeeming attractiveness, was not a breach of any rule of native etiquette, but, to her friends and herself, only a pleasing mark of his appreciation. The tzin looked surprised, but not displeased; Teochma smiled a loving approval, while Itlza blushingly showed her gratification in the pleased look which lit up her face.

"Cacami is very free with his compliments," said the mother; "and, as a flatterer, might prove a dangerous acquaintance."

"I am not a flatterer, I assure you. My compliments are only bestowed where they are deserved," he replied, looking at Itlza.

"There, that will do for an introduction," quoth she, turning away.

The hunting outfit of the guest was passed to a servant to be cared for, and, following Itzla, all entered the villa.

A brief description of Cacami will not, we think, be out of place just here. He was tall and finely formed; straight as an arrow, and agile as an ocelotl. His countenance was, usually, placidity itself, though easily disturbed by an excited emotion. It was a pleasant face, and gave out a favorable impression—the expression of it being open and candid. His eyes were dark, but not so piercing black as were those of most of his race. There was no uncertainty or want of courage in their look; they were unhesitatingly fixed on the person or object before them with perfect frankness. His complexion was of the lighter cast, though showing the effects of exposure from his outdoor life. His mind had received the advantages of an early training—such advantages as were attainable for a wealthy farmer's son. The practical had not been overlooked. He was a farmer by education—a calling which was considered by the Aztecs a most honorable one. He had a strong passion for the chase, and of late years his time had been divided between the field and forest. He also delighted in the sports which were common among his people. This led him to become familiar with the use of arms, in which he had few, if any, superiors. His fine looks and genial disposition made him a favorite wherever he was personally known, giving him a decided advantage with the young folk.

The formalities of an introduction being over, the family endeavored to make their guest feel at ease. The customary refreshments were served, of which the hungry travelers partook liberally.

When the repast was ended, they all repaired to the drawing-room to have a talk.

The thoughts which were foremost in the tzin's mind were of his friend Hualcoyotl. Almost the

first inquiry he made was of him.

"Can my mother tell us aught of the prince?" he asked; and, continuing, he said: "I have come all the way from Tlacopan to be informed, having failed to learn anything about him since his escape from the palace."

Teochma cast an inquiring look from Euetzin to Cacami, as much as to say, "Can we trust him?"

The tzin comprehended, and added:

"Cacami is a true and loyal friend, and may be taken into our confidence. My mother need have no fears on his account."

"It is well. Much depends on our guarding carefully the secrets of our home, in these times, from those we may not trust. It would not please the king to know that we had favored the prince," she answered.

Euetzin caught her meaning, and became deeply interested. Teochma continued:

"Hualcoyotl was here, at the villa, four days ago, remaining over one sun. He came in the night, and left the following evening. He had one attendant with him; Oza, I think he called him. If no ill has befallen them, they are now on the mountains, off toward Tlascala. The prince went there, hoping to find in the mountain fastnesses a safe refuge from his pursuers."

Euetzin looked the picture of surprise, and was slow to speak, while Cacami suddenly became deeply concerned; and, when Teochma concluded, said, somewhat abruptly and abstrusely:

"A vexing oversight, truly; and lacking in courage as well!"

All eyes were immediately turned upon him, and Teochma asked, much astonished at the remark:

"To what do you allude?"

"Forbear, O friends; I would not appear rude. I allude to an incident with which I had to do, on my way in from the mountains. Your information with reference to the prince's movements, good Teochma, I regard as coming to me in the light of a revelation."

"How so?" inquiringly questioned the now interested tzin.

"Your excellent mother has just informed us that Hualcoyotl left Zelmonco four days ago, accompanied by one servant, going in the direction of Tlascala. Two days later I met with an incident in which, I feel assured, I was his defender in an encounter with a band of Tepanec soldiers. I have said there was a vexing oversight, also a lack of courage; and, I now add, 'twas in my own conduct. Listen, and judge me, if you will. Two days ago, as I was coming from the mountains, beyond Chalco, I came suddenly on a party of Tepanec soldiers, who were making a violent assault upon a traveler. The man had defended himself the best he could, with a stout walking-stick, but there were too many against him. At the moment of my coming up he was on the point of yielding, and, a little later, would have been a prisoner. I grasped my sword, which I always carry when I go to the mountains, and made a vigorous attack upon them. A few effective strokes sent two of their number to earth and the rest to flight. The rescued traveler had one attendant, who was lying bound and helpless by the roadside. He was quickly released, and found to have received no bodily harm. The traveler was very grateful, and expressed himself in warm terms. He asked of me my name; but, for what I considered a sufficient reason, I begged that he would permit me to pass on unknown. From a peculiar remark he made, I was, at one time, almost led to inquire who he was. He said I had done a greater service than I could then be aware of, which struck me as containing a hidden meaning. Inadvertently, I decided not to make the inquiry, which, I see now, was an inexcusable oversight. Fearing a return of the soldiers, he again expressed his gratitude, and went on toward the mountains. I am quite convinced the rescued traveler was none other than Hualcoyotl."

"What was your reason for withholding your name?" asked the tzin.

"I had slain two of the king's men, under circumstances which laid me liable to the severest penalty. I considered the course taken the safest, not knowing who the traveler was."

"And why do you now look upon your course as an oversight and lacking in courage?" questioned the tzin.

"For the reason that, through fear of the tyrant, Maxtla, I was silent, making no exertion to learn who it was I had defended," replied Cacami, in a self-accusing spirit.

"The traveler, quite likely, would have acted in the matter just as you did: declining to inform you. In fact, if it was the prince, I am sure he would; for any guarantee you might have given, as to your identity, would have been insufficient to satisfy a man fleeing from the wrath of the king. I do not think you have cause for self-blame at all, but, on the contrary, have for self-approval. You may have been overcautious—nothing more. Your conduct was anything but cowardly, and, I would assure you, it will not go unrewarded, should our cause become propitious. Hualcoyotl has a kind heart, and does not forget a generous act, especially where courage is involved, as in this

instance. If the rescued traveler proves to have been the prince, Tezcuco can never render adequate honor to the hunter, Cacami, for saving his life," spoke the tzin, whose great affection for his friend made him deeply grateful to his rescuer.

"I do not look upon the act of rescuing the traveler as being more than the discharge of an obligation which one man owes to another. I would have done the same had it been the poorest slave," replied Cacami, in a depreciating manner.

"I am sure that you would; that such is the case does not detract from the worthiness of the act, but rather magnifies it. A man who acts in such emergencies from a sense of duty is deserving of the highest consideration. I have only words of praise to bestow upon you. Our love for Hualcoyotl makes the act of saving his life doubly meritorious. Language fails to express what we feel," returned the tzin, exhibiting a deep sensibility.

Euetzin was more than ever impressed with the idea of making an ally of his new friend; and, later, sought to gain his consent to join him in his work. He explained to him the nature and object of it, and assured him how gratified he would be to have his assistance.

Cacami expressed his gratitude for the tzin's confidence, and said, further:

Should I follow my own inclination I would join you at once; but, notwithstanding I am beyond the age of paternal control, respect for the will of my father demands that he should be consulted first. I have no doubt as to the result of a conference with him, for he is a strong advocate of Tezcucan independence. You may count on a favorable report from me, I think, if it will please you to wait."

"It is well. Your regard for the will of your father is praiseworthy. I trust to your discretion in the matter, and will only add: do not forget the importance of a silent tongue."

"Be assured, my good friend, that your secrets and plans shall be as safely guarded as my life. I will be only too glad if they shall become, in part, my own."

The evening passed away pleasantly and quite advantageously for our young friend Cacami. A high estimation of him was formed by the several members of the family. Itlza looked upon him as a real hero, and admired him accordingly.

At an early hour the party separated, and the weary young men, anxious to find the rest they needed, retired to their couches.

CHAPTER XII.

The hunter, Cacami, was heart free when he first entered Zelmonco Park, but not unsusceptible to heart wounds when subjected to such fascinating glances as greeted him from Itlza's eyes. An impassioned admiration for her was quickly awakened, and a way prepared for him to become an easy prey to Cupid's subtle influence.

When about to leave the villa the next morning, to continue his homeward journey, he sought the maiden with a view to having a parting word with her. Great was his disappointment when he learned that she was absent, and that no one knew where she was. He had counted on finding in his departure an opportunity in which to reveal to her, by word or action, something of the feelings with which she had inspired him. But the fates appeared to order it otherwise, and he would be compelled to forego the pleasure such a parting would afford him. Concealing his disappointment under a semblance of cheerfulness he bade his host and hostess adieu and started for the highway.

Leaving the park he came to the road leading away from the villa, and turned his face toward Tezcuco. As he did so the first object to meet his eye and arouse him from the effects of his disappointment was Itlza herself, approaching from the opposite direction. Was it chance or design which caused the maiden to be there just at that time? She alone could have answered. But no matter; the sight of her lifted Cacami from the slough of despond, so to speak, into which he had fallen, and made him doubly glad in the sudden revulsion of his feelings. His whole appearance was changed in an instant, and with quickened pulse he hastened forward to meet her. He came up to her with pleasure beaming from his countenance, and in accents full of tender meaning exclaimed:

"O Laughing-eyes, light of thy home! why were you not present to gladden my departure from the villa but now? To Cacami the brightness of Zelmonco was gone because you were not there to receive his good-by."

"Why should my absence so affect the hunter, Cacami, when only a night hath divided the days which have made us known to each other?" she answered, naively.

"It is not the number of days that affect our lives, O Laughing-eyes, but what they bring," he replied. "To Cacami those beautiful, sparkling orbs, your eyes, O Itlza, are as two newly risen stars. To have been deprived of the privilege this morning of again looking into their wonderful depths would have robbed his stay at Zelmonco of its greatest charm, and cast a regretful shadow on his pathway home."

"Cacami is neither discreet nor wise in the use of language. The words he speaks are pleasing; and Itlza, being a woman, might believe them spoken in sincerity, when only gallantry is intended. Have a care, O Cacami, that thy tongue lead thee not into deception," she replied with a coquettish air.

"I pray you, Laughing-eyes, believe me sincere. Were I possessed of a deceitful tongue, which I can not think I am, I could not impose it on the sister of my good friend, the tzin. That would be baseness of which Cacami is not capable," he protested. "The clear crystal fountains which spring from the side of yonder mountain are not more pure than are the thoughts which he holds for Laughing-eyes," the young hunter went on, with an earnestness which bespoke sincerity.

"Cacami may be sincere, and his words well meant, but Itlza should not hear them. Let us talk of something else. Have you a sister?"

"Yes, two, who will give me welcome home when I cross my father's threshold," he replied with respectful deference.

"You ought to be very happy, then, in your homecomings," she replied.

"So I have ever been. It is a good and pleasant home which always waits me, and it will be very hard to leave it," he returned, with a shade of sadness in his voice.

"Why should you leave it?" she questioned, her voice tinged with a responsive sympathy.

"Why should anyone leave their childhood's home? Even Laughing-eyes will one day go from her beautiful Zelmonco to find another home. To do so is her natural destiny, as it is mine to leave the home I love," he answered, with an expression of tenderness, at the same time watching closely to observe the effect his words might have upon her. If she suspected a hidden meaning in them she did not show it.

"Is it far to your home?" she asked, appearing heedless of his impassioned voice.

"As far beyond as it is from here to Tezcuco—about four hours," he answered. "Your question admonishes me that I must not tarry. I would that Laughing-eyes will hold me kindly in her

thoughts. Could I be assured that she will, it would please me more than she can know," he said, seriously.

"You will come again and I will know you better; till then good-by," she answered airily, accompanying her words with the same fascinating glance which had won his admiration. His already excited pulse quickened under its influence.

As she hastened away in the direction of the villa he looked after her with a strange, uncertain sensation, which made him feel as if he had found a priceless gem and was now about to lose it. He watched her receding form until out of sight, and then mentally soliloquized:

"Why should this strange maiden so impress me? More beautiful have I looked upon, and yet no such feelings as she has awakened have ever stirred me before. Can it be that I have found a mate in Laughing-eyes?" His concluding thought was not an unpleasant one, as the expression on his face clearly indicated. Again his steps were turned toward Tezcuco, and with rapid strides he widened the space which separated him from the object of his thoughts.

Cacami may not have found a mate in the sister of his newly made friend; yet, if appearances were any criterion, had the object of his first love.

Itlza was not void of self-pride, and following on the very favorable impressions she had formed of the young hunter, the flattering words addressed to her by him were not without effect. She recalled some of them with a pleasurable satisfaction, and held them as something to be remembered, a very dangerous thing for a young girl like her to do if she would not be ensnared in the meshes of love's enthralling web.

Cacami returned from his home to the villa about noon the following day. Euetzin was expecting him, as he had assured the tzin that he would report the result of a conference with his father immediately, let the conclusion be what it might. When he came up to Euetzin, who had gone to the lower side of the park to meet him, it did not require words to communicate his decision. The glad confirmation of the tzin's wishes was seen on his radiant countenance.

"My friend is pleased, and I do not have to inquire the cause," said he, in greeting him. "I read upon your face, Cacami, that we are to be comrades in the fight for freedom."

"Yes, we are," returned Cacami. "This good right arm," he continued, raising it by way of emphasis, "I have pledged, through my father, to the cause of Tezcuco and her prince. Your proposition, that I should become your assistant in the work which you have undertaken was favorably considered, and I am here to join you."

"Your decision is gratifying. In it the cause which has become so dear to me has found a strong arm to labor in its defense, and I a worthy comrade. But come, you have traveled, and are, no doubt, hungry and thirsty. Refreshments are waiting."

As they were ascending the hill, through the park, Cacami inquired:

"Have you had any news from the palace of the prince, since your return?"

"What news might I expect? Hualcoyotl is not there."

"True, the prince is not there, but Itzalmo—is not that the name of the old man who was his tutor?"

"It is, but what of him? Your words remind me that I have been remiss; I should have gone to Itzalmo ere this," replied the tzin.

"That you could not have done, for Itzalmo is in prison."

The tzin stopped and looked at Cacami as if he did not comprehend, and said:

"In prison, did you say? And for what offense, pray?"

"For what offense I did not learn."

"Where and when did you hear of his imprisonment?"

"On the streets of Tezcuco, yesterday. Six days ago, 'tis said, the king's officer took him to Azcapozalco," answered Cacami.

"And he has not returned?"

"No, he is still in prison."

"I must learn more of this matter, immediately," returned the tzin thoughtfully.

They entered the house, where Cacami met with a kindly greeting from Teochma and Itlza.

After refreshments were served, Euetzin made known his purpose of going to Tezcuco to obtain further information relative to Itzalmo. He left Cacami to be entertained by Itlza, observing that she could show him the beauties of the park, and thus keep him from becoming lonesome.

O, thoughtless brother! Lonesome, indeed! Nothing could have delighted Cacami more than the prospect of a whole afternoon with Itlza.

Euetzin had been gone quite a while, and Itlza, as he had suggested, had taken Cacami over the ground which comprised the villa park, showing him the most interesting of its features, of which the family were justly proud. She had finally brought him to her favorite retreat, in the shade of an old oak tree, at the foot of which stood a rustic bench, and, a little way off from it, a beautiful flowing fountain, which added coolness to the spot, and made it especially inviting.

Itlza was seated on the bench beneath the tree, toying with a bunch of odorous flowers, while Cacami reclined on the ground, almost at her feet.

"You are fleet of tongue, O Cacami, and your voice is like the cooing of a dove. The words fall from your lips as readily as flowing water from a hillside spring. But the thoughts which fill your mind are hidden. Who but yourself may read them?" she was saying, provokingly, in answer to something he had said.

"Surely, Laughing-eyes, you can not think me capable of holding thoughts, which are not in accord with my words? I may be impulsive and hasty, but not deceitful," he answered, with an honest emphasis on his words.

It was clearly a case of love at first sight with Cacami, and his impulsiveness led him to show it plainly. Itlza was more discreet, and would not so easily surrender to the dictates of a smitten heart. She was, nevertheless, fast falling under the influence of the subtle little archer, though, woman-like, persisted in fighting it off. In answer to Cacami's expostulation, she said:

"I would not seem unkind, but would put a check upon your tongue. You are scarcely more than a stranger to me. Two days ago you did not know that such a person lived as I; and yet, in that short time, you are pleading to hear a song from the little love-bird which nestles in Itlza's heart. Know you not, O Cacami, that the little bird is chary, and may be easily frightened away?" she replied archly, but kindly.

"Your words are severe, Laughing-eyes, yet of them I may be deserving, for I have been impetuous; but I can not think my conduct should drive you from me, in that you are surely jesting. I am not a trifler, Itlza, and, believe me, never one spoke more sincerely. Only bid me hope, and I will be your silent slave."

We would not have the reader think that Cacami was foolish, for he was not. He was unquestionably stricken with that peculiar affection which, ever since the first man and woman were brought face to face, has held the loftiest minds, and brought under subjection the strongest wills, making slaves of all, willing or unwilling, to the object through the attraction of which the affection is produced, causing men of intelligence, not infrequently, to fall into ridicule. Still, recognizing the innateness of the thing, we look upon such conduct as a natural consequence.

Cacami's fault was in not restraining his impulsiveness. He read in the words which fell from Itlza's lips that she was not wholly indifferent to his wooing, and, as a last earnest, plead for a hope.

Itlza's reply was not very encouraging.

"To bid you hope might be to deceive you," she said. "No, you must not ask it of me. If the time should come when the little love-bird would sing its song for Cacami, he shall know it. Promise, then, to speak no more of love until you have permission, and Itlza will be your friend."

"A wish from you, O Laughing-eyes, is a command to me. I will do the best I can; but should I fail, it will be for love of you." He spoke pathetically, and Itlza's heart went out to him with a sudden impulse, and a more adroit wooer than he might have won there and then, but Cacami had promised, and the opportunity passed unimproved.

"I have your promise, then?" asked the persistent Itlza.

"Yes," he answered, resignedly.

She laughed at his sober acquiescence and pathetic yes, and said:

"Your ready submission almost persuades me to believe you sincere. But, there, do not speak," she suddenly added, anticipating him, as he looked up at her fondly, showing in his expression that he was about to put some thought into words. She placed her hand over his mouth, and continued: "I do believe you would violate your promise before it is cold upon your lips."

He put her hand away gently, and said:

"You shall not again have occasion to check me. Laughing-eyes shall learn that Cacami can hold

his tongue."

Euetzin came back from Tezcuco toward evening, and found the twain still lingering under the oak tree near the fountain. The mother came from the house, too, and a half hour was passed in listening to an account of his visit to the city and what it revealed, at the conclusion of which they went in for refreshments.

The day ended, and night followed, bringing the morning, when Euetzin, with his newly acquired friend and comrade, set out to continue the prosecution of his patriotic mission.

CHAPTER XIII.

Tenochtitlan, later the city of Mexico, was founded by the primitive Mexicans (Aztecs), early in the fourteenth century, about two hundred years prior to the advent of the Spaniards on the Anahuac. The city was situated, originally, on a group of small islands in the southwestern portion of lake Tezcuco, nearly one league from the shore, and was, for more than a century, a very frail and peculiarly constructed place. Its houses were built chiefly of wood, reeds, and rushes, with the exception, perhaps, of the principal structures and *teacollis* (temples), which were, doubtless, of sun-dried blocks of clay. Many of the houses, for want of space, were built over the water, supported by driven piles, upright posts, and were approachable in many instances only by canoe. A canoe was therefore an indispensable possession to an inhabitant of the island city.

The absence of stone in the construction of buildings in the first century of the city's existence was, no doubt, attributable to the fact that it was reached by canoe, only, previous to the construction of causeways; after which followed a rapid transformation in its composition and appearance, until, at the time of the conquest, it had become a wonderful city of stone palaces and temples, with grand squares and broad avenues.

Notwithstanding Tenochtitlan, at the time of which we write, was greatly inferior in its construction to the other large cities of the valley, it was a veritable beehive in the animation and density of its population.

It was the capital of a fierce and aggressive people, who were not only brave, but cunning, in their aggression, which led to their complete supremacy under the last Montezuma.

The question as to why the Aztecs chose so inconvenient a location on which to build their capital will naturally present itself to the mind of the reader. We have only space to say the idea was of miraculous origin, the result of a priestly superstition. [8]

There was a feeling of deep respect for the rights of nations maintained among the Anahuacans, and any violation of them engendered a general hostility toward the violator.

Sympathy hardly ever led a tribe to take sides between other tribes at war. Only when the grievances were common did they unite their forces.

The Mexicans were decidedly friendly to the cause of the Tezcucans in their war with the Tepanecs, and yet stood aloof and saw them humbled in the very dust. Their sympathies were still with them in their degradation.

In consequence of this friendly feeling, many Tezcucans were to be found in their capital and territory; some of whom had withdrawn from Tezcuco for the betterment of their condition; others because of their hatred for the nation which had subverted their government and subjected them to an onerous and hateful vassalage.

Old warriors, who preferred voluntary exile to servility; merchants and traders, who thought to find a better field in which to ply their vocations, and nobles, whose titles, since the death of their king and the subversion of his government, were only nominal, were to be found among them—all living and waiting in the hope of a restoration of their kingdom.

The determined efforts of King Maxtla to destroy Prince Hualcoyotl had not improved the former's standing in the Mexican capital, but, on the other hand, had produced just the opposite effect. The Tezcucans were outspoken in their denunciation of him and his government, and nothing was said or done to check them.

Euetzin had discovered this antagonistic feeling among his countrymen, and was now abroad to take advantage of it. His first effective work, after leaving home the second time, was done in the Mexican capital, among them.

Situated on the city's market place was an expansive structure, which was one story in height—their buildings were very seldom higher. The building referred to was used principally as a store-house for unsold marketable products, and was divided up into suitable apartments—rooms and booths. In one of the rooms, fronting on the *tianguez*, was a cafe, or restaurant, kept by a Tezcucan. A part of the room—the back portion—was cut off from the front by means of a curtain, for the convenience of parties desiring to be served privately. There was a door opening from this part of the room into a hallway, which extended back the full length of the building. Some distance back, at the side of this hallway, three or four steps were situated, which led downward to a very short hall, from which an entrance was to be had to an apartment in which meetings, often of a secret character, were held.

It was night. The streets and squares of the city were almost deserted. At this hour an unusual influx to the Tezcucan's cafe was taking place. Men were seen to pass in, at brief intervals, and

disappear. Presently, two young men entered, and one of them addressing the proprietor, said:

"We are seeking friends."

"Where from?" he inquired.

"Tezcuco," was the brief reply.

"The way is clear; pass in."

Nothing further was said. The party passed back and out into the hallway, along which they went to the steps previously referred to. Here they paused a moment, in a listening attitude. Hearing nothing of a disturbing character, they descended. A few steps brought them to a door, before which they stopped and gave one rap. The following response was elicited:

"What seek ye?"

"Our own," replied the same person who had addressed the keeper of the cafe. The door was opened, and they entered. Passing on to another door, two raps were given, and a voice from within inquired:

"What have you to offer in pledge?"

"That which, if taken, can not be restored: life," answered one of the seekers for admission.

"It is a royal offering. Enter." The door was opened, and the young men were admitted. For a moment, while the door was again closed, they stood in black darkness; then a curtain was drawn to one side, discovering to them a low, dingy, dimly lighted chamber. Men, old and young, who had entered in the same guarded manner as they, were seated about the room. The newcomers were told to pass in, which they did, and were seated like those who had preceded them.

Perfect silence prevailed while the chamber was filling up. Upon each man's face was a stern and determined look. Not a sign of recognition passed between them. It was an assembly of people whose taciturnity was always pronounced under circumstances of an impressive character.

When the proper time arrived, a man of middle age and commanding presence arose and addressed the meeting. He was evidently a prominent Tezcucan. He said:

"The hour has come when the ear should be open to catch the sound, and the tongue silent that it may not escape. Euetzin, son of the noble Euzelmozin, is here. He bears a message from his brother Tezcucan." Turning to the foremost of the two young men with whom we entered, he continued: "Let Euetzin speak. The men of his tribe have ears, and they are open."

Euetzin it was, sure enough, who now arose to address the assembly. Amid the profoundest silence, he began, using a metaphorical expression, speaking in a very impressive manner:

"The lion hath made his spring, but the prey he sought was the cunning fox. The fox escaped, and the lion is full of wrath." He paused a moment, and then continued, changing his manner of speech: "Men of Tezcucan blood—you who love and revere the memory of a noble though fallen king, and a country once proud and happy—give ear. I am here," he went on, "to arouse you from the lethargy of a hopeless indifference, and to assure you, as I believe, that Tezcuco may yet be free. Though our prince is a fugitive, outlawed, with a price placed upon his life; the land which gave us birth trodden under the heel of a usurping tyrant, and our people made subject to a shameful vassalage; yet there still lives in the hearts of these people a patriotic love of country, which, if stirred, will break asunder the shackles which bind them, and bid defiance to the authors of their degradation." The tzin spoke with remarkable force, and was listened to with the profoundest attention. "Are we men, or are we only slaves," he vociferated, "that we shake not off the spell which binds us hand and foot, and holds the tongue till it speaks not? Awake, ye men of Tezcuco, awake! and let your ears be open; for the voice of your prince cries from the mountain fastnesses for help. Shall it be a vain cry, or shall it find a quick response in the hearts of his people and a speedy resistance to his despotic persecutor? If you are true to the memory of our good king, who was slain for naught but conquest, then put forth a hand and let us raise high the standard he loved: the standard of our own Tezcuco, and pause not until her loyal sons everywhere are enrolled under it, and the usurper has been driven by our patriotic legions beyond her borders.

"He who will join me in the glorious work of redeeming Tezcuco from dishonor and a hated vassalage rise, and, with his hand over his heart, repeat after me the obligation which shall pledge us, arm and life, to the cause of our country and prince."

Every man in the chamber quickly stood up and was heard to repeat, in deep and solemn tones, the following, to them, awful obligation:

"Tezcuco, my own once illustrious, but now degraded Tezcuco! my life, and all I have, I pledge and obligate to thee in defense of thy prince, his cause and people! I swear it, and, failing in my duty, may my blood run red on the altar of Huitzil, [9] whose aid I now invoke!" A moment of impressive silence followed, and the men resumed their seats. Euetzin continued:

"In this hour, life and motion have been infused into the cause of Tezcuco, which many have looked upon as lost. We have each, by our obligation, made ourselves the active moving element in its sudden resuscitation. What shall be the outcome? What shall be the end of this altogether splendid beginning? Be this our unqualified answer: Tezcuco shall be free!"

The assembly was thoroughly aroused, and during a moment's pause in the tzin's speech a spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm took place. "Tezcuco shall be free!" was the reiterated acclaim which resounded through the chamber. When quiet was restored the tzin went on:

"And now, since we are pledged, let us, every man, be up and doing. Let no loyal Tezcucan be overlooked. Move silently and quickly, ceasing not the work until the fire of patriotism, which has been enkindled in our hearts to-night, shall have spread to the farthest borders of Anahuac, and every true friend of Tezcuco has espoused her cause, and enrolled himself under the banner of Hualcoyotl and liberty. Let not your ears be closed, for the call will surely come which will claim the fulfillment of your obligation."

When the young conspirator concluded and had taken his seat, an old warrior rose up and said a few encouraging words. He spoke as follows:

"The spirit of loyalty and devotion evinced by our young leader, the tzin, for his unfortunate country and prince, does honor to Euzelmozin, his noble father, who was my friend. Age has left the Matzatl a weak and broken sword. His day of fighting is past; yet the Matzatl would live to see his country rescued from the hand of the spoiler. Young men, hearken to the words of the young tzin and follow his counsel. Matzatl has faith in the son of Euzelmozin, and is assured that he will lead you to victory. Our brother, whose words first greeted us to-night, spoke wisely when he said: 'The hour has come when the ear should be open to catch the sound, and the tongue silent that it may not escape.' See to it that ye hear the sound and hold it."

Others, including Cacami, addressed the assembly briefly, urging a faithful adherence to the cause which they had sworn with their all to defend.

At a suggestion from Euetzin a permanent organization was formed, which was designated a council, and an experienced warrior chosen to officiate as its chief. Thus was the object of the meeting attained; the first step toward the organization of an army accomplished, and the hearts of those present inspired with confidence in their cause, and zeal to labor for its promotion and final establishment.

The meeting had been brought about through the influence of the tzin, with the assistance of a few leading spirits, whose special duty was to see each one personally and instruct him in the passwords, that no man who was not known to be true and loyal might gain admission.

The men quietly dispersed and the world outside was none the wiser that an organization was begun, having for its end an object freighted with consequences, the measure of which was not comprehended by the originators themselves.

The same proceeding was enacted in every city and town where Tezcucans were found in sufficient numbers to make it possible. Not only were Euetzin and Cacami engaged in it, but others who had entered the work with heart and soul imbued with the spirit of resistance and a life pledged to the accomplishment of their country's liberation. It was all being done with such quiet stealth that no move or sound gave evidence of the rapidly spreading conspiracy.

CHAPTER XIV.

Hunger was pressing hard upon the fugitive prince and his companion, and it became an absolute necessity for one of them to venture out in search of food. Hualcoyotl took it upon himself to do this.

The natives were adepts in the practice of imitating certain birds and animals, and a signal of this kind was agreed upon, to be used in emergencies.

Before setting out on his venture, Hualcoyotl enjoined upon his man the strictest watchfulness, and that he should on no account leave his retreat, unless driven from it by threatened danger; also to listen for the signal, but not to answer until it had been repeated.

It was night, and black darkness enveloped the mountain, especially within the dense woody growth which covered it. The prince stole noiselessly forth from his hiding-place, and with that stealth which is characteristic of the American Indian, passed down the mountain's side, and out onto the plain below. Food in abundance was just before him, but to undertake to secure it would be at the risk of discovery, and, possibly, death. The maddening pangs of hunger were impelling him on; and in his starving condition the tempting food, which was almost within his reach, outweighed the instinctive sense of self-preservation. With cat-like tread he moved away from the mountain's base, knowing that, at any moment, he might come upon a camp of his enemy. In his weak and nervous condition the noise made in the rustling of a leaf, or by the breaking of a twig, was magnified a dozenfold in his imagination.

Though desperation was leading him on, the prince did not for an instant relax his vigilance.

At last he was in the midst of plenty; fields of corn just in the milk, and fruit, on shrub and tree, to be had for the plucking. Securing a quantity of each, he started to return. The same watchful vigilance was observed returning as in going out. He was moving cautiously along, with his senses wide awake, when a sound, very like the noise of some one moving near him, arrested his attention.

"Pish!" he ejaculated, after listening a moment. "'Twas but the flapping of a wing by some nightbird."

The thought had scarcely crossed his mind when a screech most dismal, and quite close, struck upon his sensitive ear, sending a chill to his very heart. Reduced as he was by hunger, with nerves up-strung to their utmost tension, the shock was very severe, and he felt, for an instant, as if he would sink to the earth.

"What a woman I have become!" he muttered, chidingly, to himself. "This will not do. To allow the scream of a bird to affect me thus is cowardice."

Bracing himself against further weakness, he resumed his cautious movement toward the foot of the mountain. When he reached it, he attempted to ascend, but now, that he was in a measure safe, the nervous rigor and force of will, which had sustained him, relaxed, and he was compelled to sit down until his exhausted powers were restored.

While he lingered thus, his thoughts reverted to his palace home; to old Itzalmo, his faithful friend and counselor; to Euetzin, his companion and confidante, and to Zelmonco villa, the home of Itlza. Thoughts of her awakened a pleasurable thrill in his soul, and his features softened under the touch of a sentiment which, if not love, was something very nearly akin to it. To himself he said:

"Am I, indeed, in love with my friend's sweet sister? Yes, it must be so; for I feel that I could sacrifice the man who would dare to come between us!"

When he felt himself sufficiently recovered to ascend the mountain, he arose and proceeded slowly up its side, and on toward his retreat. As he approached his hiding-place he became more wary. What if, in his absence, his retreat had been discovered by his enemy? The thought impressed itself upon him so forcibly that he paused frequently to listen for unusual sounds; but nothing reached his ear save the low and familiar murmur of the night winds, lulling, with their monotonical song, nature's wearied hosts to rest.

When near enough to give it, he sounded the signal, so like the real that the shrewdest woodsman might have been deceived. Again it pierced the silent woods, and quickly came back the echo in Oza's answer.

Hualcoyotl, now relieved of his apprehensions, went boldly forward, and was gladly welcomed back by his anxious attendant.

They could not risk a fire in the nighttime, and were compelled to make a supper on uncooked maize and fruit. Very soon sleep, "Nature's sweet restorer," claimed her own, and they were lost

to the dangers about them.

The next morning, before the sun was up, a fire was built, and a breakfast of roasted maize duly prepared. They had no salt with which to season it, but that was of little consequence to them; hunger furnished the added relish, and gave it a flavor that all the condiments required by necessity and art, for man's gratification and need, could not have given. It was a delicious feast to the half-starved fugitives, and was repeated several times during the day.

The first venture of the prince having proved successful, others followed as often as circumstances required it. With each recurring trip he became more bold, and less vigilant, and finally it was decided to make a daylight venture. The first was successful, but the second proved unfortunate, and the last. On this occasion he got too far away from the base of the mountain, and, in returning, was intercepted by a party of Tepanec troops. They were discovered to each other about the same time. The soldiers, to be sure of their man, sent up a savage yell, which had the desired effect, for the prince immediately started to run for his life, making his identity quite certain, and a chase began at once.

Hualcoyotl was fleet of foot, and had recovered, in the past few days, much of his former vigor. He gained rapidly on his pursuers, which gave him an opportunity to change his course. The deflection he made took him out of sight of the soldiers, but their continued yells indicated a hot and determined pursuit.

He was becoming hopeful of his ability to evade them, if he could only hold out. The gaining confidence within him added strength to his limbs. On, on, he almost flew; and, as he ran, the yells of his pursuers impelled him forward in his flight.

The course the fugitive was now pursuing was nearly in the direction of the mountain, and he was speeding along on the wings of hope, when, as he dashed into a narrow vale, he came suddenly upon another party of soldiers. He was right in their midst before he was aware of their presence. "The gods defend me now!" was the prayerful ejaculation which escaped him as he took in the situation.

The moment the prince came into their midst the soldiers surmised who he was, and, closing around him, seized and laid him on the ground. A large drum, which they had with them, was then brought forward and placed over him. When this was done, they began to sing and dance around it.

When the pursuers of the prince came in sight of the party of soldiers who were dancing around the drum under which he was lying, they suddenly stopped and viewed the scene with an air of bewilderment, as if uncertain what to do. The pause was of short duration, however; for, with a yell of disappointment and rage at the disappearance of the prince, they changed their course so as to pass the dancing party, and were soon out of sight and hearing.

Hualcoyotl's wonder and astonishment were great when his captors began to sing and dance around the drum. The song did not indicate a spirit of hostility, but, on the other hand, friendliness. What did it mean? Could it possibly be that he was not in the hands of an enemy? These queries passed quickly through his mind.

The mystery was very soon cleared away. When his pursuers had disappeared, his captors lifted the drum from over him and assisted him to rise. He was free; no hand was upon him, and the faces about him were wreathed in smiles of satisfaction, while he was told that he was among friends. His astonishment, and the joy he experienced because of his deliverance, were very great. His captors were men of Tlacopan, a friendly nation, whose singular conduct was explained when they informed him that on his appearance in their midst they guessed who he was, and that his pursuers were emissaries of Maxtla. There was no time to lose in explanations, then, if they would save him; so he was quickly seized and placed under the drum as a means of concealment.

Hualcoyotl expressed his gratitude in words of no uncertain meaning, and commended the soldiers for their ready shrewdness in devising and executing the plan to save him.

He remained with them until night, when he was escorted by them to within a short distance of his retreat, where they left him with a feeling of personal friendliness, and also one of satisfaction at having done a kind act in the service of a good man.

Oza was overjoyed at his master's safe return, for he had given him up as lost or captured.

After explaining the cause of his protracted absence, the prince said:

"And now, Oza, we must leave this place at once, and get as far from it as possible before daylight to-morrow morning. My pursuers will scour these rocks and hills in every direction without delay in search of me. If we would escape them, we must lose no time in getting away."

The prince took his bearings, and they started. It began to rain, and the night grew wet and dark. They suffered much from the inclement weather, and the hurts and bruises which they got in their efforts to cross the mountain. All night through they dragged themselves wearily on, over

the rough and rocky ground. When day dawned they knew not where they were, nor did they care, so they were beyond pursuit.

The first thing to be done after daylight was to find a suitable place, safe and comfortable, in which to fix a temporary habitation.

In a small, narrow ravine among the rocks a spot was found which promised protection from the sun and rain by adding a covering of boughs and leaves, which was speedily accomplished. After partaking of a light breakfast of maize and fruit, the last they had excepting a few ears of the former, they disposed themselves to rest; and being greatly worn and fatigued from the laborious tramp of the night, soon found oblivion in sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

"That was a good shot, Mit! Your old father couldn't have done it better." Such was the comment made by Tezcot, the hunter, on the result of a well directed arrow from a bow in the hands of Mitla, the "Mountain Princess."

They were out on the mountain, hunting. Tezcot often went on short excursions of the kind to please Mitla, and it gave him genuine pleasure to do so. Being very kindly disposed, as he was, it afforded him much gratification to make others happy, especially his children.

"He's a fine specimen of his kind," he continued, holding the bird up before him, "and will increase your stock of plumage, and, as well, add another feather to your archer's cap."

The prize was a most beautiful pheasant; and for a moment Mitla's eyes were bright with excitement, but as she gazed upon the lovely bird, lying dead and bleeding at her feet, where her father had carelessly thrown it, the woman's heart within her was touched with feelings of compunction, and she said:

"Father, is it well to kill such beautiful birds? My heart is sad because I have done this."

"It's all the same, child, whether the bird is beautiful or ugly; the one suffers equally with the other, when it comes to that," philosophized he. "Hello, Menke! Is that you?" he continued, addressing a hunter, who just then came up to where they were.

"Wull, yes, it's me, ef I know myself; an' think I should, for some folks do say that Menke an' me are right sociable," jestingly replied the newcomer, a well known mountaineer hunter, who was much addicted to talking to himself, to which addiction his remark referred.

"That ye are, Menke, we all know," answered Tezcot, appreciating the hunter's reference to his peculiar habit, "but it doesn't make ye any less friendly toward the rest of us."

"Wull, no; Menke's about the same all over," returned he, and, suddenly changing the subject, continued: "Goin' far up the mountain, Tez?"

"Not far. We're only out for a short hunt this morning. Mit, there, enjoys a trip to the mountains occasionally."

"Good mornin', Princess," he said to Mitla. "Had any luck, eh?"

"Yes, I have one beautiful bird, a pheasant. See! Is it not a pretty one?" she replied, showing him the prize.

"Nice bird, Princess. Shot it yerself, eh?"

"Certainly, but wish I had not; it is such a lovely bird," she returned, looking sorrowfully at it.

"That's the woman of ye, Princess. Women don't make good hunters; they're too squeamish," he observed, rather contemptuously.

"You, no doubt, speak truly, Menke; but it is our nature, and we can not help it," she replied, her eyes fixed on the bird with an expression of sadness.

Menke turned to Tezcot, and said:

"Say, Tez, wish ye'd jine me in a trip across the mountain to-day. Can't do it, eh?"

"Not to-day, Menke; it would spoil Mit's sport. Some other day I'll go with you."

"All right, Tez; ye know yer own business. The mornin's goin' right fast, an' I'll have to be goin' with it, ef I'd get roun' 'fore night. Good mornin', Princess."

"Good morning, and success attend you, Menke," she returned.

With a parting word to his friend Tezcot the hunter left them, moving rapidly up the mountain, and was soon lost to view among the timber.

Tezcot and Mitla, at a later hour, awoke to the fact that they were farther from home than they had intended to go at starting out. They were more than a league and a half away, and the hunter thought it time to call a halt. Their hunt had proven fairly successful, quite a bunch of game having been secured, rendering the excursion very satisfactory.

"Father," said Mitla, when a return had been decided on, "let us visit the hermit's cave, on our way, going home. I have not been there for a long time."

"If a visit to the hermit would please ye, Mit, we'll go that way."

"Thank you, father; it would, indeed, please me very much to visit the hermitage again."

So it was settled the hermitage should receive a visit from them.

The hermit's cave was the abode of a recluse, whose identity and previous life were a profound mystery. By accompanying the hunter and Mitla to it, we will at least get an insight into the character of the man.

About a league from Tezcot's house was a long, narrow, and dark ravine. It was fully a half mile in length, and was inwalled on either side by steep elevations. Its gloomy wildness was seemingly filled with an awe-inspiring presence, and only a few of the denizens of the mountainous range would venture into it. Stories were told of strange sights and sounds haunting its lonely recesses, which readily found credence in the minds of the more superstitious of them.

Tezcot, and a few other fearless hunters of the locality, took the stories for what they were—creations of fancy or design, and occasionally explored the place in quest of game.

Since the advent of the hermit on the mountain, which took place some years prior to the incidents narrated here, these bolder mountaineers might have been seen at intervals cautiously invading its solitudes, going, in most cases, to the hermitage to visit its strange occupant.

The ravine was situated east and west, and those who were familiar with its dark depths found it most easily entered from the eastern terminus.

When Tezcot and Mitla arrived there, they went in without hesitation. They found the ground rough, and frequently quite sloping, yet made good progress over it.

After going some distance into the ravine, they turned toward the south, and began the ascent of the steep acclivity in that direction, along a natural depression in its side.

Going well up out of the ravine they made a turn to the west, and went around the side of a mountain until they came to a dense growth of underbrush, which had the appearance, in its denseness, of being impenetrable. Tezcot, however, knew the ground well, and quickly found a place that would admit of their passing through. When they came out on the opposite side of the thicket, it was to find themselves on a kind of shelf in the side of the mountain, at the back of which rose an almost perpendicular wall of rock. Following this rocky wall for a short distance back, they came to a great recess in its face, which had the appearance of a natural vestibule. In the rear of this recess was an opening, which proved to be the entrance to a cavern. Tezcot went familiarly forward, passing through the aperture into a tunnel-shaped cave, which appeared as running far back into the mountain. The interior was only dimly lighted from the entrance; yet the semi-darkness did not seem to impede the hunter's movement, for he went confidently in, until he came to an opening in the side of the tunnel, before which he stopped, and gave a peculiar signal.

In response to the signal there presently appeared before the visitors the form of a man dimly outlined in the faint light of the cavern. In a voice which was deep and solemn, he inquired:

"Who would break in on the solitude of Ix, the anchorite?"

"Tezcot, the anchorite's friend, and Mitla, his child, who have come to pay their respects to him, and hear again the words of wisdom which his lips are wont to speak," replied the hunter, respectfully.

"Tezcot and his are ever welcome in the home of Ix, the hermit. Enter, and find rest."

Tezcot laid aside his hunter's outfit, and, followed by Mitla, passed into the recluse's lonely abode.

The cell, or room, occupied by the hermit as a habitation, was a natural cavity in the side of the main cavern, situated, as we have seen, some distance back from the entrance. It was square shaped, and answered well the purpose for which it was used.

A burning taper shed a dim and sickly glimmer over the room, giving barely light enough to reveal its contents. At one side of the apartment was a couch, made up of animals' skins, and opposite to it a rough table, on which was placed a burning taper.

Such was the scanty furnishment of the hermit's cell, except the necessary arms of a hunter, with which he was supplied, and which were lying and hanging about the room.

Good friends, like Tezcot, would often give the recluse sufficient provisions to last for days, yet he would sometimes venture out on the mountain, when no eye was near to watch him, in quest of game, which he seldom failed to secure, for he handled his weapons with efficiency.

His food was prepared in the main cavern, leaving his cell free from that inconvenience.

A question frequently asked, but never answered, was: "Who is he, this Ix, the hermit?" He was in truth, and to all, a man of mystery.

The more ignorant of the mountaineers—those who believed the ravine haunted—thought the mysterious individual superhuman in character, and shunned the locality as an abode of spirits.

Ix encouraged this feeling and belief among them, so far as he could, though always very grateful to the few who were above such notions, and who were ever welcome visitors to his cavern home.

The hermit could afford no better accommodations than skins thrown on the ground, as a protection, to sit on, and his visitors were seated in this manner. When they were comfortably settled, the anchorite said:

"How is it with my wise friend—thyself, O Tezcot, and those who share with thee the bounteous favors which bless thy mountain home?"

"It is well with us. And thou, O friend, hath good or evil come to make or mar thy peace, of late?" replied the hunter inquiringly.

"My lonely life is seldom interrupted. Its simplicity could only lead to peace if the mind were less active. But who can say, O, mind, be still, and trouble not thyself with what is past, or what may come?"

The hermit's words showed that he was not in his usual temper of mind. They indicated that his meditations sometimes disturbed him. On no previous occasion had Tezcot heard him intimate that disquieting recollections were ever present to interrupt the peacefulness of his lonely life. And yet, why not? The man had not always been a hermit. The surprise to Tezcot was in the yielding of his habitual restraint upon his speech, so far as to give utterance to such a thought. He did not immediately respond to the hermit, and, after a moment's pause, the latter continued:

"You have come from the world of light, O Tezcot, and know much that is dark to Ix. If it please you, will you tell me something of what is passing there? How fares it with the people in the valley?"

"Why should Ix, the hermit, who has gone from the world to find seclusion in a mountain fastness, seek knowledge concerning the people and of what is passing beyond? Does the anchorite tire of his lonely mountain cell, and long for a place among them, that he turns from his solitude to inquire after the people's welfare?"

"Tezcot is wise, but he reads only from that which his eyes behold. There are sealed records from which even he can not read. Ix is one of these to all the world, yet not without his sorrows. Memory is not less bright because of the darkness which hides external things," rejoined the hermit, with deep pathos in his voice.

"Tezcot is rebuked," returned he, regretfully. "The wisdom of Ix is greater than his. The hermit's desire to learn something of what is passing among the people in the valley shall be gratified. There is peace on the beautiful Anahuac, and the people appear to be happy; still, there is unrest and repining beneath it all. The signs bespeak a coming storm—not of the heavens, which we wot of when the sky is overcast and chains of fire flash across it—nor yet when the waters descend and the thunder's deep and awful voice is heard. No, it is not a storm like that, but one in which the passions of men shall sway them as the tempest sways the mighty tree; a storm in which blood shall flow and once more stain and soil the beautiful face of Anahuac; and sorrow shall find place in the hearts of many people, and lamentation shall ascend."

The voice of the hunter was like one inspired. The hermit felt it, and replied:

"The language of Tezcot is the language of a prophet. Whose hand is in the strifeful storm of which he foretells?"

"The hand of Maxtla, king at the royal city of Azcapozalco, is in it," answered the hunter.

At the mention of Maxtla's name, an expression of fierceness came over the hermit's face, but the taper's dim light did not reveal it. He inquired, in a voice in which there was evident displeasure, causing the hunter to give him a closer look:

"Where is the old destroyer of Tezcucan liberty, Tezozomoc, that Maxtla is king at Azcapozalco?"

"The old king is dead," replied Tezcot.

"The world is none the worse for that, I'm sure," returned the hermit, showing unmistakable enmity.

"It is surely not any better since Maxtla is king," answered the hunter, observing with interest the hermit's relaxing reserve.

"What would he—this Maxtla of Azcapozalco?" inquired Ix.

"It is known that he would destroy the Prince of Tezcuco, because of jealousy and hatred." A gleam of intelligence might have been seen to light up the anchorite's countenance on hearing these words, but it was not observed by the hunter, who continued: "The prince is a fugitive, hunted as a fox by the vassals of the king."

The hermit was silent and thoughtful for a moment, and then asked:

"Whence come the signs which speak to Tezcot of an approaching conflict?"

"If Ix would read the signs himself, let him go into the valley where dwell the Tezcucans—the oppressed people of the fugitive prince. The deadly serpent lies motionless in our path, but should our foot perchance fall upon it, our destruction would follow swift and sure; though not more surely than retribution on the man who tramples human rights beneath his heel," replied the hunter, impressively.

"The words of my wise friend are full of meaning. They come to Ix like a message from the world. He will treasure them up and give them thought, for they are portentous. Things of which the wise hunter hath no knowledge press heavily upon Ix's mind. His heart is sad because of the wickedness of men," returned the hermit, in gloomy accents.

Tezcot was acquainted with some of the hermit's peculiar moods, and felt, from his manner, that a longer stay would be neither pleasant nor profitable; so, after a brief silence, he arose and said they would depart, inasmuch as their absence from home had been prolonged in order to make the hermitage a visit.

The hermit expressed his gratification for the visit, and said further:

"My friend has brought much food for thought, for which I am grateful. Do not forget, O Tezcot, that you and yours are ever welcome in the home of the hermit. Tarry not away; for Ix would hear more of the signs of the hour and what they portend."

"When the signs speak more clearly I will come again, that Ix may have knowledge of their import," returned the hunter, turning to leave the hermit's cell.

They passed into the main cavern, where a liberal division of the game was made, of which the hermit received a goodly portion. It was accepted with expressions of gratitude; and, after the customary salutations, the visitors took their departure, leaving the recluse to his solitude and lonely cogitations, the nature of which could only be surmised.

The hunter went from the hermitage with conflicting thoughts. He had talked with the hermit many times, but had never before looked so far into his character. He was nearer the solution of the oft repeated, but still unanswered question, "Who is he?" than at any previous time; and yet his theories were vague and unsatisfactory. He determined to know more of the man of mystery, and resolved to see him frequently.

CHAPTER XVI.

The day was one of brightness and warmth on the mountain where we left Hualcoyotl and his attendant. The storm of the previous night had entirely disappeared before the refulgent rays of the morning sun. Hours came and passed, and the day was three-fourths gone; yet, fairly well protected in their new quarters, the prince and Oza slept on in an unbroken slumber, so worn were they from the almost superhuman efforts of the night before. The sleep of exhaustion was upon them, and the ordinary noises of the mountain wilds with which they were surrounded were without effect to disturb them. Now and then a bird would alight quite near and shie its bright eye at the sleepers, then hurry away. Animals frisked unconcerned about them, and the pestiferous insect filled the air with its ceaseless and annoying hum; still the tired fugitives continued profoundly unconscious of it all.

Such was the situation of the sleepers about the middle of the afternoon, when a piercing scream, like the cry of a person in extreme distress or peril, only much louder and inexpressibly awful, awakened the slumberers to a sudden impression of impending danger. The prince quickly raised himself to a listening posture, and exclaimed:

"What means that cry?"

"Hist, master; look there! What is that?" spoke Oza, in an excited whisper, at the same time pointing to an object just above and in front of them.

The prince looked in the direction indicated by his attendant, and there, not twenty feet away, beheld, crouched on an overhanging limb, a ferocious looking beast, with eyes which shone like balls of fire fixed menacingly upon them. The animal's lips were parted, showing its great ugly teeth, which caused a savage grin to overspread its fierce and threatening visage. Its tail, cat-like and menacing, was moving slowly to and fro; and, altogether, the monster's appearance was anything but reassuring to contemplate. The situation was, indeed, alarming.

The position of the animal was such that, to get away, the prince and Oza would have been compelled to pass almost under it. To have done this would have been to invite an immediate attack, which they could not afford to do in their defenseless condition.

Hualcoyotl recalled having heard some time in his life that such animals would not attack a person whose eyes were kept fixed upon them. The thought suggested the idea that the beast might be kept at bay in this manner until, tiring, it would leave of its own accord. The plan was immediately put into execution, and a peculiar contest began.

The fiercely grinning beast gave stare for stare, and never once turned its eyes away. For a full half hour, which seemed an age to the prince, the battle of the eyes went on, and still there was no letting up in the belligerent attitude of his fierce looking adversary.

Thus matters stood when there came a sudden thud-like sound, followed by a terrible howl from the animal, which leaped from its position into the ravine, falling dead almost at the feet of the imprisoned fugitives.

The long, uninterrupted stare into the eyes of the snarling beast had proven to be a very trying ordeal to Hualcoyotl; and when it sprang so suddenly into the ravine as if to attack them, he was almost prostrated from the shock given his tensified sensibilities. He quickly recovered when he saw that deliverance, from an unknown and unexpected source, had come to them through the death of the animal. Directly a voice, apparently just above them, was heard to say:

"Menke, ye couldn't have missed that feller no how. Queer the brute 'lowed me to come so close; never moved till I sent the jav'lin right into his ugly carcass. There he lies, sure enough, at the bottom o' the ravine, dead as a stone. Ol' feller, ye got yer everlastin', an' no mistake. Hello! What's that?" was the exclamation which followed the discovery of the prince's quarters. "Looks as ef somebody'd gone to house-keepin'."

The foregoing talk was carried on by Menke, the hunter, who was introduced to the reader in the preceding chapter. It was in the nature of a soliloquy, in which, as we have before observed, the hunter frequently indulged.

In pursuing his hunt through the mountain forests he had chanced to pass near the place where the prince and Oza were sheltered, and seeing the animal with fixed attention, crept cautiously up and gave it a death thrust with the javelin. He was too deeply intent on securing the animal as a prize to notice the retreat of the fugitives until the moment his exclamation was uttered.

Hualcoyotl very naturally concluded, on hearing the voice, that there were at least two persons in the party. He also surmised, from the character of the language used, that they were denizens of the mountains.

"They are surely not soldiers," he thought, "and may prove to be friendly."

The hunter descended into the ravine for the purpose of securing his prize, hardly expecting to find any one under cover of the shelter he had just discovered. When he reached the bottom near where the animal was lying, his eyes fell upon the forms of the prince and Oza, who had remained quietly waiting developments. He quickly took in the situation and said, with an air of surprise:

"Wull, now, what kind of a nest d'ye call that, eh?"

"It might be a worse one, hunter," returned the prince, recognizing Menke's calling by his general appearance, at the same time coming out of his sheltered retreat. "We were endeavoring to get some sleep, after a very tiresome tramp over the mountain," he continued, "when the cry of this beast aroused us rather unceremoniously; and for the past half hour we have been trying to drive it from us by looking it steadily in the eyes. But it has been provokingly persistent, and might have worried us out in time, had you not opportunely come along and relieved us with your javelin."

"That 'counts for the brute payin' no 'tention to me; 'lowin' me to come right onto 'im, an' givin' me such a fine show for his skin," returned the hunter.

"Yes, its fixed attention made it a splendid target for your javelin. But, friend, where are your companions?" the prince asked, seeing no one but the hunter.

"My companions," quoth Menke. "Don't understand ye, stranger."

"We certainly heard you talking with someone just before you came into the ravine," replied the prince.

"Wull, now, that's so; I was doin' some talkin', I reckon, but it was to myself. Ye see, stranger, when a feller's alone 'bout all the time, as I am, he gets real sociable with 'imself, an' falls into that way o' doin'. No, there's no one 'long o' me, an' ef I did any conversin', it was entirely onesided," returned the hunter, in his peculiar manner of expression. "Ye've got a right snug place here," he continued, taking a look at the fugitives' shelter. "Goin' to stop a while, eh?"

"That will depend on circumstances," replied the prince. "Do you live near here?"

"Wull, no; it's some distance to my place. There are folks livin' hereabout, but their way o' livin's kind o' tough. Ye'd better go round 'em, stranger. Some good people on the plateaus, though. Now, there's Tezcot—lives th' other side of yon mountain. He's a man ye can fasten to an' know ye're safe. He's a kind o' chief 'mong the mountain people. Ef ye happen to run onto Tez, ye'll find 'im true as his arrer, an' that's sayin' a heap."

"We'll try to remember your friend Tezcot, hunter, and should we meet him, will feel that we are fortunate."

"S'pose ye're on a huntin' excursion, eh?" said Menke, forgetting the strangers could not be supplied with arms, else the animal would hardly have held them prisoners.

"Well, not exactly. Our business is, to some extent, searching for roots and berries," replied the prince, expressing a sudden thought which suggested a way of misleading the hunter and avoiding immediate discovery.

"Medicine man, eh?" responded the hunter, in an ejaculatory manner.

The prince found it necessary to change the subject, which he did by inquiring:

"Do you ever get any news from the valley, hunter?"

"Wull, yes. 'Casionally meet a hunter from there who has news; an' then the soldiers—thick as mosquitoes round here o' late—they have a heap to say. Some o' them—the Tepanecs, are lookin' for the Tezcucan prince, who's hidin' somewhere in the mountains. Maxtla, the new Tepanec king, is after his life."

"Have you seen this prince you speak of?"

"Wull, no; haven't had that pleasure."

"What would you do, hunter, should you meet with the prince on the mountain—make him a prisoner and claim the reward?"

"No, stranger, I'd do nothin' o' the sort; I'd let 'im alone."

"You certainly have not heard of the extraordinary reward which, I understand, has been offered for his capture, dead or alive—a noble lady's hand in marriage, and a rich domain with it, to him who takes the prince. Is that not worth considering?" said Hualcoyotl, endeavoring to draw the hunter out still farther, to be more fully assured that he might trust him.

"Not to a man o' family, stranger," replied the hunter.

"With the wealth included in the reward you could support several wives. The matter of a family

would be of small consequence," pursued the prince.

"All the same, stranger, I'd sooner be a free man o' the mountains than to have all Maxtla has to give for the prince's capture. I'll never be a slave to any man, and surely not to Maxtla. Ef the prince should come my way, I'll show 'im what a mountaineer can do fur the son o' his father, a man who was loved by his people fur the good that was in 'im." At this instant a thought occurred to the hunter which caused him to look sharply at the prince. After a moment of close scrutiny, he said: "Come to think of it, ye're askin' a good many questions 'bout the prince. Wouldn't be s'prised ef ye'd turn out to be the 'dentical chap, yerself. Curious I haven't s'pected that afore. Who are ye, any way?"

"Hunter, your expressions of good will assure me that I can trust you. I have the confidence to believe you would not betray a pursued and unjustly persecuted man. You see in me Hualcoyotl, the fugitive prince." As the prince said this he seemed to grow taller, for he stood proudly erect while he waited for the surprised hunter to speak.

Menke's astonishment, at finding his suspicion verified, was little short of amazement. After a moment, he said:

"Wull, ef I aint clear beat; been talkin' to a live prince all this time, an' didn't have gumption 'nough to know it." Looking Hualcoyotl over, he continued: "So ye're the prince. Wull, that knocks me crookeder 'an that animal's leg; I'd 'bout as soon take yer man fur a prince. Can't see but ye're just like other folks—nothin' extra, either."

The prince could not repress a smile of amusement at hearing the hunter's very expressive language. Menke continued:

"D'ye know, Prince, ye took my measure exactly when ye said ye thought ye could trust me? Ye can do it, sure as ye live. May the next lion I come across eat me jacket and all, ef ye can't!"

"Thank you, hunter," returned the prince. "You can not know how much relief and encouragement your words afford us. Our situation was very critical before you came to our assistance, and we feel very grateful to you. The disposition of kindliness which you evince toward us is most assuring, and makes us feel as if we were not wholly friendless."

"That's all right, Prince. It doesn't cost much to be obligin', an' it turns up a good profit; so don't let it trouble ye. Menke—that's me—'ll do all he's promised, an' more too ef it's needed. How're ye fixed fur somethin' to eat?" he concluded, thoughtful of the fugitives' physical wants.

"Rather poorly, hunter. We have nothing except a little green maize which we brought with us when we came here—hardly worth mentioning."

"Ye are a little short, that's a fact. My luck hasn't been the best to-day. Only got a pheasant or two an' one hare. Ye're welcome to 'em, Prince."

"Again we have to thank you, hunter; you are very kind."

"Can't see why I'm more'n I should be; ye've nothing to eat an' I have; that means a divide to Menke, Prince."

"I have often heard of the liberality and hospitable character of the men of the mountains. You have proven, by your kindness, Menke, that the report is well founded.

"It doesn't matter how you put it, Prince; that's our way o' doin'; an' ef ye've no objection to remainin' here alone, I'll take yer man 'long o' me—what's 'is name?" he suddenly asked, looking at Oza. The name was given, and he continued: "Wull, Oza, ef yer master's willin', ye can g'long o' me, and I'll find ye somethin' more than pheasant an' hare to eat."

It was arranged for Oza to accompany the hunter to the plateau, to bring in such food as he might procure for them. When ready to go, Menke threw the carcass of the mountain lion (for such it was) over his shoulder, and started to leave the ravine.

"Hunter!" called the prince, as he was moving off, "you will keep our hiding-place a secret. Do not mention to anyone, not even to your closest friends, that you have seen us; curiosity might lead to our discovery."

"Don't 'low any such notion as that to spoil yer sleep, Prince," returned the hunter. "When Menke undertakes to do somethin', he doesn't count on callin' in his neighbors. Think he knows what's what, if he does live on the mountains." With this brusk and emphatic reply he left the ravine, followed by Oza.

Hualcoyotl was now alone. His situation was not the happiest, and was calculated to call up disturbing reflections.

For some time after the departure of the hunter and Oza, he remained in his retreat, pondering on his peculiarly trying position. Growing nervous and uneasy, he concluded to venture out on the side of the mountain, which he did. Finding a place whence he could observe unseen the approaches to his quarters, he put himself on guard. As the hours passed and Oza did not return,

he grew still more uneasy. He had eaten nothing during the day, and hunger was becoming a disturbing influence. When night came on and Oza had not returned, he felt that some mishap had certainly befallen him. He went back to his retreat, under cover of darkness, feeling much depressed in spirits, where we leave him, to follow the hunter and Oza.

After leaving the prince, they passed noiselessly down the side of the mountain and out on to a narrow, level stretch of ground, along which they went for a short distance, passing, on their way, some rudely constructed huts, formed of sticks and earth, which were inhabited by the class of mountaineers referred to by Menke as living tough.

The hunter's object was to procure for the fugitives a supply of uncooked food, but he did not deem it expedient to apply to the occupants of the huts for it, so passed on.

They had not gone far, after passing the huts, when they were met by a squad of soldiers, the sight of whom almost paralyzed the heart of Oza.

"Hist, Oza!" quietly ejaculated the hunter, when he discovered the soldiers approaching. "Ye're my servant; d'ye understand? Take this animal on yer back an' fall behind." Oza comprehended, and quickly obeyed.

Menke advanced boldly up to the soldiers, and one of them, looking at Oza's burden, said:

"What have you there, hunter?"

"A lion, soldier—a very savage kind of animal. I'd caution ye to look out fur 'em; they're plenty 'round here, 'specially on the mountains."

"Your very liberal with your advice, hunter, which may be good, but think we can take care of ourselves."

"All right, soldier; ef ye want to furnish a meal or two fur the hungry beasts, don't 'low me to hinder ye."

"Never mind the beasts, hunter; we care nothing for them. We're looking for a different kind of animal—a run-away prince, who is known to be hiding somewhere in these mountains. Haven't come across such a fellow in your travels, eh?" questioned the soldier.

"Wull, now, wouldn't be sure, but think I've seen the man ye're lookin' fur," returned Menke, making a show of trying to recall the circumstance. "Yesterday—yes, 'twas yesterday, on th'other side o' the mountain. Tall chap—"

"Yes," interjected the soldier.

"Kind o' dark skin?"

"Exactly, hunter," again put in the soldier.

"Was lookin' fur somethin' to eat," pursued Menke.

"Just what he'd most likely be doing. Think you've seen our man," replied the soldier. "Could you tell us," he continued, "about where to look for him?"

"Wull, now, soldier, I might guess at it, but 'twould be like shootin' an arrer at the moon—I'd come 'bout as close to one as th'other. Guess I can't enlighten ye. Sorry, soldier, but I can't," concluded Menke, moving on, and giving no heed to the scowling looks which followed him.

The meeting with the soldiers caused the hunter to modify his plans somewhat. It would not be prudent to build a fire on the mountain, with which to cook food, while the soldiers remained in such uncomfortably close proximity. This made it necessary to procure it in a prepared state.

The provisions could be obtained at Menke's home, but to go there would consume much time. Then, there was danger of the soldiers going up into the mountain in their search for the prince. He ought to be informed of their presence. And yet, he must have something to eat.

All this was thought over by the hunter, who finally determined to take the risk of leaving Hualcoyotl to look out for himself, and started to procure the victuals from his own home.

The trip was accomplished as quickly as possible; nevertheless, darkness overtook them before they got back; and it was well for them that it did, for they came very near running into a band of soldiers who were camping close to the point where the hunter had intended beginning the ascent of the mountain. This made it necessary for them to retreat and make a detour in order to reach cover.

The soldiers were becoming numerous on the plateaus, and Menke realized that sharp practice would be required to elude them. Having become deeply interested in the welfare of the fugitives, he decided, in view of the gravity of the situation, to return with Oza to their retreat; and, with the prince's approval, conduct them to a place of concealment, at or near his home.

After some delay a bushy undergrowth, which grew thickly at the foot of the mountain, was

reached, into which, followed by Oza, the mountaineer disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII.

Darkness covered the mountains, and the prince still waited impatiently in his retreat for his attendant to return from the plateau. A feeling of anxious suspense, mingled with a sense of dread, as if impending calamity was threatening, oppressed him—a feeling which may cowardize the bravest heart under less discouraging circumstances than those which surrounded him at that moment. He was about to leave his shelter again, to seek relief from the uncomfortable sensation which disturbed him, when a peculiar cry attracted his attention, and caused him to rouse up and listen. A moment later, to his great relief, it was repeated. He moved away from his retreat a short distance, to find a safe position from which to send back an answer, which, if it were Oza, would bring him in. The return signal was given and the result awaited with anxiety. His suspense was brief; for in a very short time two persons came into the ravine and cautiously approached the sheltered recess. The prince was not expecting that the hunter would return, and for a moment was undecided what to do. Oza quickly reassured him by calling, in a subdued voice:

"Master!"

"Here," returned he, leaving his concealed position.

"Didn't catch ye nappin', eh, Prince?" said Menke.

"No, my friend; with the anxious listening and watching I have done in the last few hours that would hardly have been possible," returned he, and, continuing, he said: "I was not expecting that you would return with Oza; so when two came, instead of one, I was not sure of its being him."

"Hadn't thought of returning to-night, Prince; but findin' danger to yerself gettin' thicker an' thicker, concluded I'd better come."

"What have you discovered, hunter?" anxiously inquired the prince.

"Tepanec soldiers. They're gettin' too thick fur comfort round here. What they'll do when mornin' comes I wouldn't stay to find out ef I 'as the one they're lookin' fur," replied the hunter, emphatically.

"Have you seen the soldiers, that you speak so positively?" questioned the prince.

Here Menke gave an account of the meeting with the soldiers going out, and the difficulties encountered returning. When he concluded, Hualcoyotl said, despondently:

"What can I do, or where go, to find safety from my pursuers? Hunter, you know these mountains well; can't you tell us where we may find refuge?"

"That's just what I'm here fur, Prince. Ef ye'll go 'long o' me I'll try to put ye where ye'll be safe. Ye'll have to take some risk in goin', but think we can dodge the pesky Tepanecs an' reach my place all right. Will ye go?"

"We believe you to be a good friend, hunter, and will trust you. Yes, we'll go with you."

"Good! When the night is darkest, and sleep has bound the soldiers, I'll lead ye from here to a better and safer concealment. But ye must eat. Here are bread and meat," continued the hunter. "Be liberal to yerself, Prince; there's plenty more where we're goin'," he said, giving each a bountiful supply of the provision.

They all partook heartily of the food; after which Menke insisted that the prince and Oza should lie down and sleep, while he would remain on watch.

When the hour came around for leaving, the still tired fugitives were sleeping soundly. The hunter aroused them, and said it was time to go. The food remaining from the supply which he had provided was divided among them, and they started.

The prince was not insensible to the peril to which he was about to expose himself, and, very naturally, experienced some uneasiness in consequence. He did not doubt the fidelity of his guide, but, realizing how powerless they were for defense against a band of armed soldiers, should they be discovered, he could hardly feel otherwise. He did not follow blindly, but was guarded and ready for any emergency.

The direction taken to reach the plateau was different from that followed by the hunter and Oza the day before. This course was adopted with the hope of avoiding the soldiers known to be encamped at the foot of the mountain.

Their progress was slow, and much time was consumed in the descent. It was finally accomplished, however; but before leaving cover the hunter made a careful reconnoisance to

ascertain if the way was clear. Finding no indications of the presence of soldiers, the party sallied out upon the open ground, and cautiously crossed to the opposite side of the plateau. Turning to the right they moved along in single file, with gulches, crags and deep ravines to the left of them, and small fields of ripening maize and chia-plant, scattered here and there on the tillable ground, lying between them and the mountain they had just left. The stars shone brightly down upon the trail they were pursuing, and the trio were proceeding on their way with increased confidence, at an easy pace, the hunter in the lead. Jam up against him came the prince and Oza. He had suddenly stopped.

"Why do you halt?" inquired the prince.

Menke only had time to whisper in reply, "Escape, ef ye can; we're discovered!" when they were set upon by a band of Tepanec soldiers.

The attack was made near a patch of corn, and the prince quickly saw in it a way of escape. He still carried the stout stick which did him such excellent service on a former occasion. It was swung into position for defense, and when the soldiers rushed upon them he met their onslaught with a resistance they were not expecting. In less time than is required to record it he cleared a way to the corn, into which he disappeared, and was lost under the cover of night ere the assaulting party discovered his intention. Some of the soldiers followed, but to no purpose; it was a case of life or death to him, and his pursuers were soon left floundering in confusion behind.

When the hunter discovered that the prince had gotten away, he quietly surrendered.

The soldiers could only have presumed that Hualcoyotl was one of the party they were attacking. If he was, a sudden seizure would secure him. On this hypothesis they had no doubt acted. It was not their purpose to injure anyone unnecessarily, and the struggle ended as suddenly as it had begun.

Putting on a bold front, Menke, in a very stern voice, said:

"Why d'ye jump onto a feller an' his men in this way? We're not outlaws."

"Not so sure of that, stranger," answered one of the soldiers, looking the hunter over. "You are not the man we want, at any rate; one of your companions may be. Who are they?"

"They're my servants," replied Menke.

"Which you expect us to believe, of course," returned the soldier, doubtingly.

"Oza, where's Yuma?" inquired the hunter, holding to his assumed position of master, hoping it would divert the soldiers from a pursuit of the prince.

"Yuma ran away like a coward, master," answered Oza, comprehending the hunter's design.

"Let 'im go; he'll come back with the sun," said Menke, with a show of indifference.

The soldiers were not to be hoodwinked so easily, but proceeded to inspect Oza closely. After satisfying themselves that he was not the person wanted, the spokesman turned to the hunter and said:

"You are quite clever with your tongue, stranger. What you say, may be true, but we are not obliged to believe it. Your Yuma, who ran away, showed too much skill to be a servant. We are inclined to believe him the man we are after."

"As ye please, soldier. Havin' made up yer mind to think that way, there's no use o' wastin' words 'bout it; an' ef ye've no further use fur us, we'll move on," spoke Menke, decidedly.

"You can go," returned the soldier, shortly.

The hunter, without deigning to notice the soldiers farther, moved away from them, followed by Oza. When far enough off to be secure from observation, he paused to consider what should be done next.

The situation was rather perplexing. It would not do to signal the prince; that would attract the attention of his pursuers, and make his position more critical. The hunter was too shrewd to do that. The only alternative, therefore, was to wait for daylight to come to their assistance. Having decided on this course a safe place in which to stop was found, where we leave them to follow Hualcoyotl.

After going some distance into the corn patch, the prince paused to listen for the noise of pursuit. He could distinctly hear the rustling of the stalks, but too far away to give him any present concern. He was safe, he felt, until daylight—at which time, however, he wisely concluded he would not be if he remained on the plateau; for the soldiers would surely search it over from end to end, so soon as it became light enough to see. He must get away, and the sooner he went the

better would be his chances of eluding them. But where should he go, was the all-important question. His eyes turned toward the mountain he had just left.

"No, it will not do to go there," he thought; "there is danger in that direction." He quickly decided to take an opposite course and started.

The uncertainty of the situation led him to dismiss at once the consideration of an immediate reunion with the hunter and Oza, and caused him to think only of his personal safety.

He left the patch of corn into which he had fled, and passed stealthily out onto the uncultivated ground, which he found covered with weeds and bushes, and very rough. He was compelled to move slowly and pick his way over it. Coming to another patch of corn he entered it, and after going a short distance, paused. Casting his eyes about him he discovered, plainly outlined against the horizon, a mountain, seemingly not very far off, which until now had escaped his observation, and to which he determined to go. It took quite a while to reach it, for it proved to be farther away than he had reckoned. Finally, after a laborious tramp, he stood at its base, and was glad when he entered its dense wood where he might rest once more in comparative security. He went far enough up the side of the mountain to render his position reasonably safe, where he found a spot which was thickly covered with bushes, into which he crept to await the morning's dawning. When daylight spread itself over the scene he was unconscious of it; for he slept. Later on he awoke to find the sun shining brightly through the thick foliage about him. His location was found to be well protected and secure, and he decided to remain in it for the time being.

The prince's situation was now more discouraging, if possible, than at any previous time. In his efforts to get away from his pursuers he had put himself beyond the help of the hunter and Oza. It was hardly possible that they would find him where he was; and it was out of the question for him to attempt to go to them. His case was hourly becoming more desperate. Fate seemed to be driving him helplessly before it. Thus, in temporary security, we leave him for the present.

When day dawned Menke and Oza were on the lookout for Hualcoyotl; and the soldiers were seen scouring their vicinity in search of him. But, as the reader knows, Menke and Oza, and the soldiers as well, were doomed to be disappointed, for the man they were looking for was at that hour sleeping on a mountain, several miles away.

The soldiers finally gave up the hunt for him on the plateau, and, as good luck would have it, turned their attention to the mountain he had previously occupied, believing he had sought the nearest shelter.

The hunter and Oza waited about the place all day, and when night came on reluctantly turned their steps toward the home of the former.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Euetzin and Cacami, with the assistance of their colaborers, had done a splendid work among the men of their tribe for the cause of Tezcuco. Everywhere they had labored the Tezcucan heart was thoroughly aroused, and the secret preparations for resistance to Maxtla's rule were rapidly assuming proportions highly encouraging to the promoters. The comrades were now returning to the once proud capital of their nation to continue the work of organization at the very threshold of the enemy.

The work in Tezcuco had been deferred until assurance of success was made reasonably certain elsewhere; and, now, since a perfect confidence in the ultimate triumph of their cause was felt by the conspirators, the work was to be pushed into that city as a final effort in the creation of the mighty and silent forces which were intended to strike the shackles from the oppressed Tezcucans.

The young men reached Zelmonco villa, on their way to the city, in the afternoon, where they proposed to stop a few hours with Teochma and Itlza. It was a very happy meeting, for weeks had elapsed since the tzin and his companion turned their faces away from the home of the former.

Itlza's welcome to Cacami was very encouraging to him. The weeks of absence he was compelled to endure had strengthened the attachment he had conceived for her, and he was longing for some token of reciprocation, which would release him from his pledge of silence. He thought he saw a realization of his hopes in the greeting he received; and, notwithstanding he was pledged, when he came face to face with the object of his love he felt that his feelings would impel him to speak, should the opportunity for doing so be presented.

The days had not been without effect upon Itlza, too. She had grown thoughtful, and the thoughts which held her most were thoughts of Cacami. She had often gone to the oak tree, where she sat for hours and, dreamingly, lived over again the few pleasant moments she had spent there with him; and, as the dreaming went on, her heart could not do otherwise than go out to the object of her thoughts.

After an hour of pleasant talk, and the subjects of inquiry had been exhausted, the little party broke up. Euetzin went to look about the villa, Teochma to see that suitable refreshments were prepared, and Itlza and Cacami for a short stroll in the park.

Persons who are in love are usually inclined to reticence in the presence of the beloved, except when talking on the subject which is ever uppermost in their minds. Thus it was with Cacami and Itlza. He was thinking of his promise, and was not a little vexed at himself for having given it, now that so favorable an opportunity was presented for pleading his cause. She was thinking of the same thing; and, remembering that she had exacted the promise from him, was endeavoring to devise a way to let him know that he was absolved from it. The consequence was a rather awkward silence between them. He finally managed to say:

"How has Laughing-eyes occupied the time since her brother and myself went away?"

"As she always does—eating, sleeping, and dreaming," she replied, jocosely.

"Were your dreams in your sleeping or waking hours?" he asked, looking at her with quizzical interest.

"You should not question so, Cacami. To be truthful I might be compelled to say in both; then you would think me a dreamer," she answered, coquettishly.

"I should never find fault with your dreaming, Laughing-eyes, if I might be assured of a part in it," he said, with a look of fondness.

"Selfish Cacami!" she exclaimed, with mock solemnity.

"Yes, Laughing-eyes, Cacami is selfish where you are concerned," he rejoined, with unfeigned tenderness.

She could not mistake the trend of his manner, and hoped earnestly that he would disregard his promise, and speak the endearing words she had herself checked upon his lips before she realized that her best love was his.

"I must have a care for myself; selfish Cacami might choose to spirit me away," she said, archly, at the same time giving him a look which tempted him severely, and almost loosed his tongue. With a heroic effort he controlled himself, and, with strained facetiousness, replied:

"When I do that, Laughing-eyes will furnish the spirit wings."

To this quasi repartee she answered only with a coquettish little laugh.

They had come to the lower side of the park, near the roadway. A short pause had followed Cacami's last remark, and he was fixedly and tenderly contemplating his strangely fascinating companion.

The art of fashioning flowers, as well as feathers, into varied and beautiful designs was an accomplishment frequently attained by the native women, and in which Itlza was an adept. She had plucked some choice varieties, here and there, as she walked along, and wrought them into a delicate, heart-shaped bouquet. She noticed her companion's quiet demeanor, and, feeling a magnetic influence from his fixed gaze, turned to look at him.

"Why are you so silent?" she asked, her voice expressive of sympathetic tenderness. She continued: "And what are your thoughts, that the look from your eyes burns into my very heart?"

Her eyes were fixed on his as she spoke, and the love-light, which shone from them, became suddenly intensified. For an instant she was overcome by the power of his superior magnetism, and, holding out both hands, involuntarily exclaimed:

"O, Cacami!"

When Cacami heard the impassioned cry, and saw the no less impassioned light which beamed upon him from the liquid depths of her intensely luminous eyes, the temptation was too strong, and, forgetting his promise, he impulsively clasped her hands in both his own, and, for one moment of blissful thralldom, two souls stood blending on the verge of rapture.

"Itlza!" called the mother, from the hill above.

The spell was broken, and the passionate words which trembled on Cacami's lips remained unsaid.

Itlza quickly withdrew her hands, and answered her mother's call; but the flower-heart was left in Cacami's possession.

With quickened pulse the lovers turned from the blissful spot, and walked toward the house.

The emotions which filled the heart and moved the soul of Cacami, in that to him ecstatic moment, can not be described. Those who have in like manner realized the dearest wish of a heart's first and purest love only can know what his feelings were. Itlza had, not in words, but in the language of soul speaking to soul, surrendered to him the citadel of affection—her heart, which was typified in the beautiful heart of flowers which he now possessed.

An hour in Cacami's society had shown to Itlza how deep was the love she felt for him; and, ere the moment of revelation came, the little love-bird which nestled in her heart was fluttering to be released, that it might sing its song for him. She had wrought the flower-heart for her lover, but knew not how it would reach him. The moment came, as we have seen, unexpectedly to Cacami at least, which transferred it to his hand and revealed to him the fact that he was loved.

When the lovers came up to Teochma, who stood waiting for them at the top of the hill, they had overcome their agitation and met her with no perceptible signs of confusion. She said, with a slight expression of impatience:

"Refreshments are waiting, while Cacami and Itlza are lost to the flight of time, and neglect them."

"If I have been remiss, the pleasure of a stroll with Itlza must be my excuse," said he humbly.

"And, Itlza, what have you to say of your conduct?" asked the mother in a quizzical but affectionate manner, at the same time watching the effect of her question. If she thought to fathom the sentiment which moved the young people she failed; for Itlza answered demurely, casting an arch glance at her companion:

"It was Cacami's fault, mother; he had so much to tell that I forgot."

"Well, well, I'm inclined to think you are both to blame; and since it is so, I can not scold. But you must be more thoughtful in the future;" at saying which Teochma turned and led the way into the house.

After refreshments were served, the family, with Cacami, repaired to the reception room, where the evening was passed in pleasant conversation. The young people had no opportunity to communicate farther except in a general way. Thus they were left for another interval of time to meditate on what might have been.

The tzin was in deepest sympathy with the demands of the hour upon him from his enslaved countrymen and their subverted government; and, regardless of the entreaties of his mother and Itlza, and the pressing desire in his own heart to remain longer, cut short his stay, and with Cacami, who was sadly disappointed at not being permitted, by even a brief interview with Itlza,

to verify the hopes with which her latest conduct had inspired him, struck out at an early hour the next morning for Tezcuco, where the work in behalf of Tezcucan independence was to be continued.

On entering the city the tzin felt forcibly drawn toward the palace of the prince. It had been a home to him for the past eight years, and now, returning to its very threshold to remain for a time, it seemed like forsaking an old friend to turn away from it.

But the place was still under surveillance by the enemies of his royal master, and, unknown though he was to them, his presence there, he felt, might expose him to suspicion, which would mark him as a person to be watched, thereby causing him annoyance and possible interruption in his labors. He therefore passed it by with a sigh of regret, and sought accommodations elsewhere, which he found at the home of a patriotic Tezcucan.

No time was permitted to elapse unimproved by Euetzin and his coworkers. The necessary steps, which had become a fixed proceeding, were taken, and ere four and twenty hours had passed, a council of leading Tezcucans was organized, and each member of it, with the obligation still warm upon his lips, was laboring secretly and zealously for country, home and Hualcoyotl.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was in the afternoon of a day a week or ten days subsequent to the time when Hualcoyotl became separated from Menke and Oza, in eluding the Tepanec soldiers on the plateau, that Mitla, the daughter of Tezcot, had gone around the mountains for an hour's pastime with her bow and arrow; and, having grown weary of the diversion, was returning home. She had just passed a sharp extension at the foot of the mountain and was sauntering leisurely along the border of a patch of ripened chia-plant, which her father's servants had gathered into piles and left lying on the ground, when her attention was attracted by a distant yelling, heard from the plateau behind her. She stopped, and, while listening to the repeated yells, which were growing louder and nearer, was suddenly startled by the appearance of a man running toward her from the direction in which the hallooing was heard. He was evidently fleeing from threatened danger, and almost exhausted. His appearance was one of deep distress, and when he came nearer she saw that a look of despair was depicted on his pale and haggard face. She comprehended the situation at a glance, deciding that he was being pursued by a foe, and instantly conceived the idea of concealing him. Without waiting for explanations, she raised a pile of the chia-plant, and, when he came up to her, told him to get under it, which he tried to do, but only succeeded in falling in a helpless heap upon the ground. Mitla did not wait for a further effort on his part, but speedily covered him with the stalks of the plant where he had fallen. Telling him to lie still—hardly a necessary thing to do, to a man in his exhausted condition—she moved quickly from the spot in the direction of her home.

The man's concealment had been accomplished none too soon, for Mitla had taken scarcely a dozen steps when a party of Tepanec soldiers came in sight around the mountain in hot pursuit of him. So soon as they came in view she stopped and looked at them a moment; then turned and fixed her gaze on a rise in the ground just ahead of her, as if something had attracted her attention to that point. On being asked if she had seen the fugitive, she answered by pointing in the direction of the rise. Her ruse was successful, for the soldiers, without further question, set off on a brisk run. Mitla followed them, to get as far from the fugitive's hiding place as possible.

When the soldiers gained the opposite side of the rise they were completely nonplussed, and appeared undecided what to do. Mitla approached them with perfect composure, and, when interrogated, as to what direction she thought the man had gone, encouraged them to think he had taken to the mountain. This seemed to agree with their own conclusions, and, to her delight, they dashed away, and were quickly hidden among the bushes, in search of him.

Mitla wisely concluded it would not do to go back to the place where the man was concealed, just then; so, to consume a little time, went on to the house. After informing her mother and Oxie of her adventure, and cautioning them not to show any interest in her movements, she returned by a roundabout way to the chia patch. Coming to the pile of stalks under which the man was lying, she said—only loud enough for him to hear:

"Do not attempt to rise; the soldiers are searching for you among the bushes near by, and might discover you. You will be informed when all danger is past."

After thus enlightening him, she went leisurely back to the house, to await her father's return from the mountains, where he had gone in quest of game.

The hunter returned early, and Mitla told him of her adventure. He decided at once that the man could not be relieved with safety before dark. In coming to this conclusion he felt, in his kindness of heart, that it was hard on the poor fellow to be left in such a trying position for so long a time, but, with the soldiers in the vicinity and liable to appear at any time, he must bear it if he would escape.

The hunter suspected the fugitive's identity, and, while waiting for night to come, when he could go to his relief, occupied the time in ruminating as to how he might best serve him. He haply hit upon an idea which appeared so plausible to him that, with an emphatic slap of the knee, he exclaimed:

"Just the thing! I'll save him, or my name's not Tezcot."

"What is 'just the thing,' father; and who are you going to save?" asked Mitla, who was present, and somewhat startled by the hunter's sudden outburst.

"The prince, child. Who else could I save just now?" he answered, absently.

"The prince! what prince?"

At this moment a revelation came to Mitla's mind, which was quite a surprise to her, and she said, expressing it:

"What a simpleton I have been, father, not to have thought of it before—the man under the pile of

chia-stalks is Hualcoyotl, the Tezcucan prince! Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, Mit, that is just what I mean."

"And you think you can save him?"

"I'm sure I can, Mit," answered the hunter, positively. "But, child, ye must ask no questions; I can not answer ye."

"Very good, father. I'm sure you will do whatever you think you can," she replied, with the confidence of an unqualified belief in his infallibility.

The time dragged along very slowly to the kind-hearted hunter after his conception of a plan for relieving the fugitive. He felt that the poor fellow must certainly be suffering no little agony in his painful position, and his sympathy was stirred accordingly.

Night, which was impatiently waited for, came on at last, enveloping the mountains in darkness, obscuring from observation objects at a very short distance. It was the hour of relief for the hapless wanderer hidden out in the chia patch.

Tezcot and Mitla quietly left the house, and approached the spot where the man was concealed. The latter pointed out the pile of stalks which covered him, and the former lifted them off his motionless form. They found him in a pitiable condition, quite unable to rise. The hours of confinement under the chia stalks, together with his previous enervation, had rendered him benumbed and helpless. He was assisted to his feet, but his limbs refused to sustain him, and it was found necessary for the hunter to carry him to the house. He was taken to a private apartment, and placed on a comfortable couch. A mug of pulque was given him to drink, after which it was thought best to leave him for a time to himself, to recover, in a measure, from his spent condition.

More than a week of enforced concealment on the mountain, without food to stay his increasing hunger, had passed to Hualcoyotl since he became separated from his servant and the hunter Menke. He had not been disturbed in his hiding place, but the distress arising from his protracted fasting, together with a consequent nervous anxiety, had brought him to the verge of desperation. He must, and would, have something to eat, and, regardless of danger, started out to find it. He reached the plateau, and having boldly emerged upon it, stood looking about him for a house where the much needed food might be obtained. While thus occupied he was made aware of the fact that a party of soldiers were approaching; they had discovered him, and were watching his movements. It took him but a moment to determine what he would do. He did not feel equal to the exertion which would be required in an effort to elude them by climbing the mountain; so, on observing a projection extending out from it, only a short distance from where he was, he promptly decided to round it if possible, and find concealment beyond. He started off at a careless gait, though feeling very shaky. When the soldiers saw that he was walking away, they increased their movement; he did the same, which brought from them a savage yell, which sent him forward with a bound. For a short distance he ran with his usual fleetness, but the impelling force was excitement, which did not last. He succeeded in turning the point, but in an almost exhausted condition. It was at this juncture he came upon Mitla; what followed, the reader knows.

When the hunter returned to the prince's couch, he found him in a very much improved condition. By a little exertion of his own, aided by the stimulating effects of the pulque, his circulation was rapidly reasserting itself, and his forces, though in a weakened state, were reviving. Refreshments were brought in, of which he was permitted to eat a sufficiency but not excessively.

Tezcot avoided referring to the prince's identity, deferring his inquiries until the latter should be more fully restored.

Hualcoyotl did not suspect that his host had a suspicion as to who he was—at least showed no sign that he did. He was inclined to be reserved and uncommunicative; however, took occasion to express his gratitude for the kindness shown him.

The hunter, after giving his unhappy guest all necessary attention, and assuring him of his safety, left him for the night.

The next morning Tezcot repaired to the apartment occupied by the prince, and found him quite comfortable. Food, and a night's rest on a soft couch—the first he had enjoyed for many days, did wonders in restoring his exhausted forces.

The hunter was quite sure that his guest was Prince Hualcoyotl; but before proceeding to carry out his plan for securing him from further pursuit, he wished to obtain an acknowledgment of his identity; so, after assisting him to prepare for the morning meal, he addressed him, saying:

"Your presence in this house is known to no one outside of the family of Tezcot, the hunter." The prince's countenance brightened at once on hearing that name, which had been spoken of in such warm terms by Menke, and his hopes were renewed and buoyed by the confidence it imparted.

He listened more attentively while the mountaineer continued: "Since it is no secret that Hualcoyotl, the Prince of Tezcuco, is a fugitive, and hiding somewhere in these mountains, you can not be greatly surprised when told that we think you are that person. Do not feel any concern for your safety, for Hualcoyotl is as secure with Tezcot as he would be in his own palace, surrounded by his friends."

The prince, though surprised that his identity was suspected, was greatly relieved and encouraged by the hunter's language, and his confidence went out to him at once; for he felt sure that he had found in him a friend—a friend who had been raised up to help him in his darkest hour. To the kindly spoken words of his host he replied:

"And you are the great mountaineer, Tezcot, the chief of hunters. Hualcoyotl is indeed fortunate in finding refuge with such a man. The name of Tezcot relieves me from all concern, for it is an assurance of good-will and security. For the first time in weeks I am glad to acknowledge my identity. Yes, glad to say, I am Hualcoyotl. Your divination is correct, kind friend; for the fugitive prince stands before you, profoundly grateful for his deliverance."

It was now Tezcot's turn to be surprised, for he inferred from the prince's language that he was not unknown to him. Hualcoyotl continued:

"When the good hunter Menke said that Tezcot was a man true as his arrow, and worthy of the utmost confidence, it did not occur to me that I would so soon be thrown upon his generosity. But such are the ways of the Great Unseen, whose purposes we can not comprehend. Hualcoyotl is surely an object of His protecting care," he concluded reverently.

Tezcot was deeply impressed by the exhibition of reference manifested by the prince for the Unseen Power which seemed to be shielding his life and proving him in the crucible of adversity, to prepare him for the great future which then lay hidden before him. Wonder prevailed, however, and he said:

"Your words are astonishing. Do you mean to tell me that you have met the hunter Menke, and yet are here a rescued fugitive?"

"Yes, Tezcot; but days have passed since we met and were unfortunately separated," replied the prince.

"Still, I'm puzzled to account for your being here as you are, after meeting so good and shrewd a friend as Menke," returned the hunter.

"No doubt you are; but be assured, kind friend, it was no fault of his that it is so." The prince went on and related the circumstances of his meeting with Menke, and what followed.

"Menke is a good friend, but a little odd," said Tezcot, when the prince had concluded. "He has no doubt looked for you in every place but the right one," he continued. "You certainly have reason to think, from what you have seen of us, that you have nothing to fear from the mountaineers. If they might do it, I am sure all of them would be glad to afford you assistance."

"I believe you, Tezcot, and heartily appreciate the disposition of friendliness. Especially do I feel thankful to yourself for what has already been done for me. That such an excellent friend was raised up to help me so opportunely fills me with unmeasured gratitude."

"Your feelings are natural; but, my friend, you are not yet beyond danger. Let us look to your further safety. If you will permit it, I think something may be done to secure you from any future discomfort, so far as the Tepanec soldiery is concerned," said Tezcot, getting round to his purpose.

"I am in no condition to decline the proffered assistance of anyone, nor will I that of Tezcot and his friends. My present weal is in your hands. What would you have me do?"

"Only this: put your trust in the mountaineers, and follow me without question. You will have no cause to regret it, should you do so," replied the hunter.

"At this moment I am no more than a child. I need no assurance that your intentions are worthy of my whole confidence. I trust you, my friend, implicitly; do with me what you will," he answered, showing how weak and dependent he had become.

"It is well. When the stars alone shall give light to guide us, we will go to a retreat which only an army may successfully invade to disturb you. But, come; breakfast waits."

When the prince entered the eating-room, his appearance, as compared with what it was the night before, was greatly improved. His apparel was considerably soiled; but after a good cleaning and rearranging, which it had received at the hands of Tezcot's servants, made him appear more like the well-bred person he was.

The hunter named each member of his family by way of introduction. Hualcoyotl immediately turned toward Mitla, and said:

"To this young woman a debt is due from me which all the wealth of Anahuac, in my hands, could

not cancel. Words are meaningless when drawn upon to express what I feel for the ready thought which prompted the action whereby I was saved from an implacable enemy. Hualcoyotl will ever owe one debt which can not be paid."

Mitla was greatly embarrassed by the words and manner of the prince, addressed to her so unexpectedly; yet, after a moment's hesitation, she recovered herself, and said:

"Your words are very kind, and more than repay me for what I did to save you from your pursuers. I shall always be glad that I was where I could help you."

The prince was pleased with her reply. It showed a degree of intelligence he was not expecting to find in a mountain girl, and he said:

"I am having a peculiarly diverse as well as adverse experience. Yesterday I was a miserable, suffering fugitive, hunted by a relentless foe into a condition of absolute incapability; this morning the conditions are entirely and happily reversed by your wonderful presence of mind at a rare and perplexing moment. In the midst of extremest adversity I am suddenly brought to realize a sense of security and happiness by being thrown upon the generosity of this most generous family. First there comes to me this morning the kindly expressed sympathy of the noble hunter, Tezcot, assuring me of my safety; and now the generous words of my admirable young preserver. What can I say in return for your magnanimity?"

"Don't try to say anything, Prince. Forget your gratitude for a little while; cease to praise us, and fall to eating heartily, that you may have strength to endure what is before you," interrupted the host pleasantly.

"One could not do less than eat heartily in this excellent mountain home," he replied, looking kindly at Zoei.

Tezcot rejoined in a jocular manner, and the conversation continued, varying as the meal progressed.

Breakfast was over, the prince had retired to his apartment, and Tezcot was gone. The latter had taken his hunting outfit and disappeared, but not without a word of caution to the former.

It was not an uncommon thing for the hunter to take his javelin, bow and quiver, and go away for a day's hunt; so, on this occasion, there was nothing thought of it.

CHAPTER XX.

It was mid-afternoon, and quiet reigned in and about the mountaineer's home. Tezcot was still on the mountain, where he had gone in the morning, presumably to hunt. Hualcoyotl, though still very weak from privation and the effects of the distressing ordeal through which he had passed the previous day, was enjoying, in undisturbed seclusion, a peacefulness of mind he had not experienced since his wanderings began. Mitla and Oxie were passing a leisure hour in the inviting shade of a large cypress tree, which stood a short distance from the house. To this spot they often went to while away their unoccupied time in chatting, and, if industriously inclined, to fashion some article for the adornment of the person or home. Mitla, on this occasion, was engaged in arranging a piece of feather-work, while Oxie, less diligent, lazily disposed herself on the warm, dry sward near by.

The happiness of innocent girlhood was enjoyed by both these maidens, for no disturbing influence had, up to this time, come to mar the rustic simplicity of their lives. The passion of love, which sooner or later stirs the heart of youth, was yet unknown to them.

Oxie was saying:

"I think the prince is very handsome, sister, don't you?" She spoke with shyness, as if the expression involved a thought to which she ought not give utterance. Mitla looked up with no little surprise and said, inquiringly:

"When did your eyes open to the thought that men are sometimes handsome, Oxie?"

"My eyes have long been open to that which is attractive, Mitla. Would you have me close them now, that the object is a man?" she replied, with some show of impatience.

"Not so, sister; but coming from you, the words sounded oddly. It seems only yesterday that you were a child. Your question tells me you are one no longer. But to answer you: The prince is fine looking, yet does not impress me as being admirable. Under more favorable circumstances he would, no doubt, be quite handsome."

"It is when he speaks that the beauty of his countenance is seen," said Oxie with more courage, which Mitla's answer had imparted. "His eyes are so bright, they fairly dazzle one. When he spoke to you this morning at breakfast I could not help admiring him. It surely was not wrong, sister?"

"I can not say if it was wrong or not; yet, Oxie, I would not encourage such thoughts; they might wound your heart," replied Mitla, not yet having realized that older hearts than Oxie's were subject to impressions that often wound.

"Why do you say that, sister?" asked Oxie, somewhat curiously. "Why should it wound my heart to think well of the prince's looks?"

"Do you know what such thoughts lead to, Oxie?" rejoined Mitla, soberly.

"I can not say that I do; but surely not to anything serious?" still curious.

"Well, sister, I will tell you. After admiration follows love, which in this case would indeed be serious. The folly of a mountain girl falling in love with a noble, and he a prince at that, should be apparent even to you, Oxie," Mitla answered, a little severely.

"Why folly, sister, if her love should be returned?" asked the infatuated maiden. This was too much for Mitla's philosophic mentality, and she concluded that a further discussion of the subject would only tend to strengthen the impressions made upon Oxie's inexperienced mind by the person of the young prince. She answered evasively:

"I only know, sister, from what I have heard, and think I would prefer to say no more about it. See!" she suddenly exclaimed, "yonder comes father. Let us run to meet him," and away they sped to meet the hunter, whose appearance was hailed by Mitla as being very opportune.

"You are early at home to-day, father," she said, when they came up to him. "Has anything happened to you?"

"Yes and no, child. You double up your questions so, I scarcely know how to answer," said he, in reply. "I was a little anxious about the prince, and returned earlier on that account. He's all right, eh?"

"He seems to be, father. We would not know that he is in the house, from any noise he makes," answered Mitla.

"Where is your game, father?" inquired Oxie, noticing that he brought none with him. "You never before came home with an empty hand."

"No, child; not if I were hunting."

"Have you not been hunting, father," she pursued.

"No, Oxie. Other business has claimed my attention to-day."

"I can guess where you have been, father," said Mitla, eager to give expression to a suddenly conceived thought.

"I wouldn't wonder, child, if you should," he replied, apparently indifferent as to whether she could or not.

"You have been to see the hermit. Am I not correct?"

"Yes, Mit, you are correct. I went to have a talk with Ix about the prince."

"I know now what you meant yesterday, when you declared you would save the prince, while he was still under the chia stalks," added Mitla. "It was thoughtful in you to see in the hermitage a refuge for him," she continued, her voice expressing approval, which was also reflected on her animated countenance. "Will the hermit approve of it?"

"Yes, child, but I'd rather not discuss the matter farther now. I'll tell you all about it another time," urged the father, kindly.

They were drawing near to the house, to enter which they were obliged to pass the little window of the prince's apartment, at which he was seated, looking out. The hunter and Mitla greeted him with a friendly smile of recognition as they passed. Oxie, who had fallen behind for a moment, to pluck a few flowers which she arranged into a neat little bouquet, on coming to the window, blushingly handed them to him. He looked pleased, and acknowledged the gift by saying:

"You are very good to remember me in this manner. Your kindness, Oxie, will not soon be forgotten."

There was that in the voice and manner of the prince which affected the simple, girlish heart of Oxie greatly. She was too much confused to reply, and, dropping her eyes under his piercing look, hurried on after her father and Mitla, who had already entered the house.

Hualcoyotl was always considerate of the feelings of those with whom he came in contact, no matter what might be their station in life; as a consequence he was kindly regarded by all who came, in any degree, to know him. His words addressed to Oxie, in acknowledgment of the gift of flowers, were spoken with no thought other than that of kindness; yet, what he said was indelibly fixed on her keenly receptive mind, especially the words: "Your kindness, Oxie, will not soon be forgotten." They would prove a secret treasure put away in memory's hidden recesses to be drawn upon

"When in silent, contemplative mood."

When the mountaineer left home in the morning, instead of going to hunt he went directly to the hermit's cave. His purpose was to have a talk with Ix, the "man of mystery," regarding the prince, and to arrange for bringing him to the cavern for safety. He felt sure the hermit would raise no objections to having the fugitive for a close neighbor, if not a companion. He was received with the hermit's accustomed cordiality, and listened to with close attention while he made known the object of his visit.

Notwithstanding his habitual serenity, Ix gave evidence in his mien of both interest and sympathy as the account of the prince's distressed condition, when rescued, was told to him by the hunter. He said nothing, however, until the latter was through.

"I know not of what blood you are, O Tezcot, nor do I ask to know; but, from the words you have often spoken in my presence, to which I have hearkened with pleasure, together with the deep concern you now manifest for the welfare of the Prince of Tezcuco, I am assured that you are kindly disposed toward his people. Although Ix is without a country, still he has his preferences. Your sympathy for the young prince finds an echo in my lonely heart. Fetch him hither, good friend, and let him abide with me, for mine is a dreary cell to which his presence will bring a welcome relief." Such was Ix's gratifying response to Tezcot's plea for Hualcoyotl.

Expressing his gratification in a very hearty manner for the hermit's ready consent to receive the prince as a companion, and promising to see him again in the evening, accompanied by the latter, the hunter took his departure.

After leaving the cavern, Tezcot went to talk with a few of the leading mountaineers about the prince; and, especially, with reference to putting the hermitage under a close surveillance. The cavern would afford a comparatively safe refuge as it was, but to make it so beyond a doubt was an important part of the hunter's plan. To do this would require the cooperation of a number of his friends. He found the mountaineers whom he went to see cheerfully acquiescent, and ready to

assist in any way they could.

In order that no delay might ensue in arranging for Hualcoyotl's security it was decided that a council of friendly hunters should be held at one of their homes, conveniently located, where explanations could be made and an organization effected to meet the exigency. Runners were dispatched accordingly, to notify those whose presence at the council was particularly desired. After matters were shaped agreeably to the hunter's ideas, he turned his footsteps homeward, where his arrival has already been noted.

Everything was working well for securing the safety of the royal fugitive, and greatly to the satisfaction of his deeply interested friend, who felt in his big heart a profound sense of self-approval for what he was doing for suffering Tezcuco, by giving aid to her persecuted prince.

Night came on, and the mountaineer's home was enveloped in deep darkness. The hour was at hand when Hualcoyotl was to be conducted thence to the hermit's cave. In taking leave of the hunter's family he had words of kindness for all, especially for Mitla, whom he looked upon as a deliverer, and toward whom he felt a profound sense of gratitude. He could not forget that her quick thought and ready hand had saved him from capture and a subsequent cruel death at the hands of his enemy, and placed him in the way of a final escape, as he believed, from his pursuers. Whatever that was worth to him he owed to her.

To Oxie he said, holding up the little bouquet of flowers she had given him a few hours before:

"I bear away with me this token of your kindness, Oxie. It will soon fade and pass from my keeping; not so a recollection of the giver. That," turning to Zoei, "with the remembrance of the peaceful hours I have enjoyed beneath your hospitable roof, will pass from me only with my life. Good-by." The next moment he was gone, disappearing with his conductor in the deep shadows of the night.

There was no particular danger to be feared on the way to the hermitage, except a possible attack from some prowling beast; still Tezcot deemed it prudent to go armed for any emergency. He had undertaken to do a thing, and was firm in his purpose that nothing should intervene, through any act or omission of his, to prevent its accomplishment. He was wide awake, and his uncommonly quick ear and penetrating eye were wonderfully alive to the surroundings, ready to catch any sound, or spot any object, of a suspicious nature which might suddenly arise.

The prince's enervated physical condition, together with the roughness of the ground over which it was necessary to pass, made their progress unavoidably slow. He had the utmost confidence in his conductor, and followed him in silence. However, not having been informed as to their destination, his mind was actively ruminating amid the realms of conjecture and anticipation.

Not a word was spoken by either, after leaving Tezcot's house, until the cavern was reached, and then not before the signal was given, and Ix's deep and solemn voice was heard in answer to it, bidding them welcome to his humble abode.

The hermit's expression of language was always impressive, especially so in the presence of those whom he looked upon as having superior intelligence, entitling them to consideration. The presence, therefore, of the Prince of Tezcuco was of sufficient importance to call for his most imposing manner.

After Tezcot had in a few words introduced the prince to his cavern retreat and its mysterious occupant, and the prince had given expression to his great surprise and gratification, the hermit said significantly:

"The wise hunter counted well when he numbered Ix among the friends of Hualcoyotl;" then turning to the latter he continued: "Content yourself with me, O Prince of Tezcuco, until the great Huitzil is ready to avenge you, which he will surely do."

We will not pause to detail what followed at the hermitage on this occasion, except to say briefly, that Tezcot, after assuring himself that the prince would be comfortable, and promising an early return, took his leave, saying as he did so:

"The gods befriend you both, and confuse the emissaries of Maxtla."

A no less sincere benediction from two grateful hearts followed the departing friend.

The hermit and prince were alone. What transpired between them the reader will be left to conjecture. We will say, however, that the association resulted in a friendship which proved of inestimable advantage to both of them in an auspicious future.

Tezcot went from the hermitage to the meeting of the friendly hunters, which resulted in the organization of a mountain patrol, and anyone going to the hermit's cave the next morning would have found its approaches watched by eagle eyes in hunter's guise.

Thus we leave the fugitive prince, who had at last found a perfect refuge, where he could bide his time without fear of molestation.

CHAPTER XXI.

The spirit of rebellion among the Tezcucans was now thoroughly aroused, and never did agitators meet with greater success than had those who were working under the direction of tzin Euet. The secret councils, which were to constitute the army of resistance to Maxtla's despotic rule, sprang into existence so rapidly as to surprise even the conspirators themselves. With these encouraging conditions the time arrived when it was deemed advisable to locate the prince, and, if possible, communicate with him. As the royal representative of his people, it was felt that he should be informed of the progress which had been made in his favor; and also be consulted with reference to the future movements of his friends in the valley. This duty very naturally from the tzin's peculiar position and relation to the fugitive devolved upon him, and his next move was to be in the direction of the mountains in search of him.

The prince's friends were assured by the continued silence of the Tepanec soldiery that he was still at large, and hidden somewhere in the mountains; for his capture or death at their hands would have been quickly heralded throughout the valley.

As the immediate neighborhood of the fugitive's hiding place was unknown to the tzin, in starting out to find him he would have to be guided in a great measure by reports coming through the enemy. Notwithstanding this was the case, he felt confident of success and was eager to be on the move. He was just now waiting for Cacami to come in from his home, where he had gone to visit with his people. As his young compatriot, who had become his closest friend, was to accompany him, the time of starting on the expedition depended on his return.

It was the day of all days in the city of Tezcuco, as was a similar one in all the cities of the valley: the people's market day. And here let us digress long enough to acquaint the reader with the exigencies which rendered such a day necessary; and also to briefly notice some of its features.

The business methods of the Anahuacans were peculiar. They had neither shops nor stores of a public character where goods of any description were displayed and sold. Only on the *tianguez*—great square, or market-place—which every city possessed, were the products of the country exhibited for barter or sale.

The trades were not carried on in the ordinary way, but each particular mechanical pursuit was localized in some suitable portion of the city and placed under the supervision of a chief; and, it may be added, had its tutelary god and attendant celebrations.

Their merchants, who were usually very wealthy, might better be termed merchant traders. They were itinerant in character, and did a transient business, moving through the country at the head of a caravan, composed of *tamanes* (burden-bearers) and an adequate guard for protection. They visited the larger cities to be present at the weekly fairs, market days, which were conducted on a colossal scale in the great square, the city's tianguez. On these occasions, which occurred regularly once a week (a week in the chronological reckoning of the Anahuacans consisted of five days), every branch of industry was represented separately in suitably arranged booths; and both great and small, from far and near, were present to buy or sell, or more frequently to exchange their produce and wares for needed articles of consumption.

Here was an individual who talked persuasively of the superior finish and beauty of his jewelry—it was not necessary to speak of its genuineness, for spurious goods were presumably unknown to the natives; a condition which no doubt existed, because of the unlimited supply of genuine raw material, and, we may add further, owing to the severe penalties prescribed for fraudulent impositions on the people. Another no less glib talker exploited in appealing voice, and flourished his flaunted featherwork before the eyes of the swarming multitude, all of whom delighted in this beautiful but expensive luxury. Others—dealers in sacred images and silver and earthenware, makers of furnishings and apparel, and last, but not least, the farmer, with his products of the soil, all bent on gathering in the cash, which consisted of quills of gold dust, Ts of tin, and bags of cacao, a kind of money which precluded the possibility of hoarding, leading us to conclude that no misers had a place among the Anahuacans. Blessed money, that gave no encouragement to the avaricious!

The tzin, to while away some of his unemployed time, which was beginning to hang heavily on his hands, had come upon Tezcot's *tianguez*, and stood silently observing the peculiarities and movements of the people, gathered there from all the country around, many of whom, like himself, were present out of curiosity, though the purpose of nearly all, an army in numbers, appeared to be to trade, buy, or sell.

While thus occupied in contemplating the wonders of the great fair and its heterogeneous patrons, his attention was attracted by a pulling at his mantle. Turning quickly to learn the cause,

he stood face to face with Oza, the prince's attendant.

"Oza!" he exclaimed. "Do I dream, or is it indeed you?"

"You do not dream, good master Euet. It is Oza."

"How is it, man, that you are here, and where is your master?" quickly inquired the tzin, somewhat apprehensive.

"I would have much to tell you to answer your question," said Oza in reply; and looking around upon the crowd, he added: "The people might hear."

"True, Oza. We will find a more suitable place to talk. But you look tired and hungry. Have you had anything to eat to-day?"

"Only a little in two days, master."

"Follow me," said the tzin, leading the way to a refreshment stall, where food was procured and Oza's hunger appeased. When this was done, they left the *tianguez* and went to the tzin's boarding place.

"Now, Oza," said he, when they were comfortably fixed in his private apartment, "tell me about the prince, and why you are here. What has occurred to cause your return to the city? Did he send you?"

"No, master Euet; the prince doesn't know I'm here," replied the servitor, in answer to the tzin's last question.

"The prince does not know you are here!" exclaimed Euetzin in amazement. "How does that happen? Have you not been with him?"

"Yes, master, up to a few days ago, when we lost him in a fight with the soldiers."

The doubtful character of Oza's phraseology, taken in connection with his unexpected and, as yet, unexplained appearance in the city, was sufficient cause for increased apprehension in the tzin's mind of some serious mishap to the prince. He was much disturbed by Oza's clumsily worded reply, and, at its conclusion, exclaimed:

"Lost him? Do you mean to tell me that the prince has been killed or captured?"

"No, master Euet; not so bad as that," Oza quickly rejoined. "The prince got away all right, but we couldn't find him afterward."

"That sounds quite differently, and relieves me greatly," returned the tzin, feeling very much inclined to scold Oza for his awkwardness of speech, but the man was only a slave, and better could not be expected of him. "Who was with you beside the prince when the soldiers made the attack?" the tzin then asked.

"Menke, a hunter."

"I can not understand, Oza, how the prince could evade the soldiers, and, also, become separated from the hunter and yourself, unless it was under cover of darkness," queried the tzin.

"It was dark, master—away in the night; the hunter was taking us to his own home," answered the servant.

"I see," rejoined Euetzin, beginning to comprehend the situation. "That explains the matter more fully. You said you could not find the prince. Did you make much of an effort to do so?"

"Yes, master; for three days we looked for him."

"And failing to find him you returned to the city?"

"Yes."

By continuing to question the vassal at some length, the tzin succeeded in eliciting a fairly good account of Hualcoyotl's experience after leaving Zelmonco villa, confirming, in the one instance, Cacami's supposition that it was the prince he rescued from the Tepanec soldiers on the highway. In concluding he asked:

"Could you conduct us to the place where the soldiers attacked you?"

"Will you go, master Euet?" questioned Oza, omitting, in his eagerness, to answer the inquiry.

"That is our present purpose," was answered.

"It is good; I can lead you," quickly responded the delighted vassal.

"All right, Oza. Your return to the city, just now, is very fortunate for us, though quite the reverse for your master, for it makes his situation still more desolate and trying. It relieves us, however, of a perplexing quandary—the matter of finding the locality in which he is hiding. As our guide,

you will help us out of that difficulty, and put us into position to enter upon the search at once. That is an advantage we were not counting on."

After a moment's pause, having noticed the destitute condition of the servant, he continued:

"Your appearance, Oza, is not what it should be; the attendant of a prince ought, at least, to be clothed."

Rising, as if to go, he went on:

"I will go at once to look after your needs. In the meantime you will remain in my apartment," on saying which he withdrew, and returned to the *tianguez* to procure the necessary articles for Oza's apparel.

Cacami came back to the city that same evening, and Oza's story was repeated to him. Euetzin also informed him as to the course he had decided on pursuing, since a definite knowledge of the prince's whereabouts had been obtained.

After hearing what his friend had to impart, and being asked for his opinion, Cacami said:

"Your plan is good; still, I think there is a better one. Have I your permission to make it known to you?"

"Certainly, Cacami; I desire that you will speak freely; was it not so, I should not have asked for your opinion," was the assuring reply.

"Oza would, no doubt, conduct us to the spot where he last saw his master, and, if necessary, to Menke's," he proceeded to say; "but, tzin Euet, there are other considerations to be taken into account, which make the course I would suggest more preferable. If I get a correct impression from your rehearsal of Oza's report, the prince's disappearance occurred within a few leagues of the mountaineer Tezcot's home, a man with whom I had the satisfaction of spending two very pleasant evenings and one day the last time I was on the mountains. My plan would be to go directly to Tezcot's. If the prince has been discovered he will, very likely, be apprised of it; if not, he can give us any information we may want, for he knows every mountaineer on that range and every foot of ground for leagues around; and, by the way, is the most generous of hosts."

"Master," said Oza suddenly and eagerly, interrupting Cacami, "I heard Menke speak to the prince about a great hunter named Tezcot."

"There, tzin Euet!" exclaimed Cacami; "that certainly strengthens the plausibility of my plan. Then think of the fact that a hospitable reception will be given us, with the added pleasure of meeting two charming maidens."

"Your last information, O Cacami, commends the course you propose to our serious consideration. We will go directly to Tezcot's, as you suggest," said the tzin, facetiously.

The point of destination having been decided upon, preparations for an early departure were begun at once. In two days the party was ready to start. The tzin and Cacami were dressed and equipped as hunters, while Oza, in fresh attire, after a good rest and cleaning up, looked like another person, and accompanied them as an attendant. Hunting parties were a common, every-day sight on the streets and highways, consequently their appearance in leaving the city attracted only a passing notice. They stopped at the villa, on their way out, to refresh themselves and say good-by to Teochma and Itlza. We will not pause to narrate what transpired there, or describe the parting, except to say: Let the reader imagine a mother's deep concern for her son; a sister and sweetheart's pale, sad face as the brother and lover take their leave, the latter showing no signs of the feelings which fill his breast, save those which Itlza alone is permitted to see; an affectionate waving of hands as the young men go out of sight, and the moments of sadly thoughtful silence which follow.

Almost two days of continued walking, much of the journey over a rough and hilly way, found Euetzin and his party nearing their destination. The sun of the last afternoon seemed, to the tired wayfarers, to move reluctantly away from the meridian, and to finally approach, at a snail's pace, the western horizon. Time may appear to pass quickly or slowly, yet it is unchangeable, and Old Sol, its mighty keeper, marks, with unerring regularity, the recurring periods of morning and evening. So, on this day, the latter came in due season, and with it, stealing softly over the scene, the gray and sombre light which precedes the slowly falling night-shades in the mountains, followed by the inharmonious and strikingly dismal croaking of the multi-vociferous heralds of night, rising from mountain pools and gorges, with an added gloom from the doleful notes of the whippoorwill. Such were the last hours and ending of the journey, which our friends had accomplished, when Cacami suddenly exclaimed:

"We are through at last, for yonder house is the mountaineer's home."

Then, falling behind, he continued:

"You take the lead, tzin Euet, and make such inquiries as may please you."

They soon stood before the hunter's dwelling, and the tzin, passing under the porch, was met at the door by Mitla, who, in answer to his inquiry if that was Tezcot's, said:

"Yes, this is Tezcot's. Will you come in?"

"We will, if refreshments may be obtained," he replied.

"Our evening meal is now being prepared. When it is ready you will be welcome to share it with us."

This was said with so much cordiality that Euetzin led the way into the house without farther questioning.

"Cacami!" exclaimed Mitla, when she recognized him. "You here, and allow your companion to ask if this is Tezcot's?" inquiringly. "But, I see, you wished to surprise us. Well, at any rate, I am glad to bid you welcome, and your companions as well."

Cacami presented the tzin, formally, who was struck with wonder and astonishment at meeting, under such surroundings, a girl so bright and charming. His feelings would have been very different had he known that from childhood Mitla had been schooled by the presence, in her father's home, of many of the best-mannered and most intelligent men of the Anahuac, who came to the range on excursions, and who always made it a point to have a meal, if nothing more, with Tezcot. Ignoring sentiment, however, he proceeded at once to the prosecution of his mission by inquiring if the hunter was at home.

"Yes, I am here; what would you have of me?" answered Tezcot himself, who at that instant entered the room through an inner door.

"Meat and drink, and, in addition, important information," replied Euetzin.

"Meat and drink you shall have, but the information will depend on the nature of it."

At this moment he discovered in Cacami his former hunter guest, and exclaimed:

"Well, well, my Tezcucan friend; you may give me a prey to ocelotls if I'm not glad to see you! Your coming here at this time augurs well for me. Who are these, your companions?" he asked, looking first at the tzin and then at Oza.

"That is Euetzin, better known as tzin Euet; and this other person, Oza, our attendant," answered Cacami, designating each.

Tezcot's countenance fairly shone with satisfaction and pleasure as he said, addressing Euetzin:

"Tzin Euet, I am very, very glad to meet you just now. The discovery of Cacami, joined to your inquiry for important information, led me to surmise that you might prove to be Euetzin or some other person who would meet an exigency which has this day arisen; and I am more than gratified to learn that it is yourself. Oza's presence here with you explains your errand. You are in search of Hualcoyotl?" he said, questioningly. "Your arrival at my house to-night is most opportune, for it makes easy, or rather relieves me of, an important and perplexing duty. The morning's dawn would have found a messenger on his way to Tezcuco to find and inform you of the prince's safety; also to request you to come here immediately."

"Are we to understand that Hualcoyotl is safe, and that you know where he is?" interrupted the tzin.

"Yes, I know where he is; and farther, that he is safe so long as Maxtla is kept in ignorance of his hiding place. An army might reach him, but never a band of soldiers."

"Your information is most cheering. We came here thinking you might know something of him; and that we did so is fortunate indeed," replied the tzin; and forgetting for the moment his tired condition in his desire to see his friend, he said: "With your permission we will go to him at once."

"No, not to-night; you shall see him to-morrow," replied Tezcot firmly. "At present he is needing rest. I would not disturb him at such an hour."

"You say well, friend, and we cheerfully defer to your wisdom. But will you not explain how the prince came to be so well secured?"

"Yes, after supper, which I see is waiting for us."

After disposing of their equipments the young men were conducted to the eating room, where an excellent repast was spread for them, to which, after ablution, they did ample justice.

During the meal Mitla's eyes frequently encountered those of the tzin; and as often as they did she felt that subtle influence, call it magnetism, if you please, which impresses itself so forcibly and mysteriously upon the susceptible mind, awakening suddenly and unconsciously feelings that may be described by only one little word. So it was in this supreme moment with Mitla, when for

the first time she stood face to face with her fate.

In the conversation which followed during the meal Euetzin addressed her several times, and was so well pleased with her charming manner that he resolved to know her better.

When the meal was finished the men were reconducted to the family room, where Tezcot proceeded to give an account of the prince. He related what he knew of his experience after becoming separated from Menke and Oza, up to the time of his concealment by Mitla under the pile of chia-plant, which resulted in saving him from capture. At this juncture the tzin became intensely interested, and when he fully comprehended the invaluable service rendered his royal master by the beautiful girl, he interrupted the hunter by saying:

"Your daughter did that?"

"Yes, it was she who saved the prince from his pursuers," answered he, proud of his favorite's conduct.

"Noble girl!" passionately exclaimed the tzin. "All loyal Tezcucans will bless her name." Then to the hunter, earnestly: "As the nearest friend of Hualcoyotl, I would like to express to her the profound gratitude of a Tezcucan. Will you kindly request her to come here?"

Tezcot, appreciating the high estimation in which Mitla's conduct was regarded by a Tezcucan lord, especially by the first friend of the prince, bade her come into the room as requested.

Euetzin rose to his feet as Mitla entered, and, looking admiringly at her, said:

"Your father has just informed us that to you we are indebted, as Tezcucans and friends of Hualcoyotl, for his continued existence. My life is pledged to his service; the hand that strikes at him strikes at me; the hand that reaches out to save him I would bless. As the rescuer of Hualcoyotl, your name will be long and kindly remembered by Tezcucans everywhere, and, as one of them, I would here and now express to you the grateful thanks of my people; and farther, as a pledge of my sincerity, I desire that you will accept from me this little token, a souvenir of the great service you have rendered a deeply stricken nation, and also as a mark of my personal appreciation." As he concluded, the tzin placed in her hand a beautifully wrought miniature shield of gold, on which were engraven the armorial emblems of the royal family of Tezcuco. It was a highly prized keepsake which he had long carried on his person, and it required more than mere sentiment to cause him to part with it.

While Euetzin was speaking, Mitla stood with eyes cast down, but when he was done, raised them to his face. A glistening moisture was seen to gather on her beautiful, dark lashes as she said:

"Your great kindness has filled my heart with a strange feeling. My tongue refuses to utter the words I would speak. I can only thank you for your beautiful gift, and for thinking well of what I did for the prince."

"No words which you might utter would add to the favor and esteem to which you are entitled, and which you will have, from the friends of Hualcoyotl," said the tzin, earnestly.

Tezcot, observing the embarrassment under which Mitla was placed, motioned for her to withdraw, which she was glad to do.

The account of the prince's rescue was continued to a conclusion, and the young men, glad of an opportunity to lie down, were disposed of for the night.

CHAPTER XXII.

Munificent Old Sol, never more brilliant, had covered fully half his ascending course from horizon to zenith, when Tezcot led the three Tezcucans into the hermit's cave.

Ix's deep and sombre-toned voice, always a source of wonder and astonishment when heard for the first time, struck the tzin and his companions as something marvelous, coming, as it did, from the depths of the cavern, in answer to the hunter's signal.

After the customary salutations between the hunter and hermit, the former requested that Hualcoyotl should come from his retreat, which he promptly did. He was permitted to look the party over, while the hunter addressed him, and, designedly, took up a little time in apologizing for the liberty he had taken in bringing strangers to the hermitage. The cavern's dim light, together with the dress worn by the visitors, made it quite impossible for the unsuspecting prince to recognize him. When Tezcot realized this fact he said:

"Euetzin, salute Prince Hualcoyotl."

The tzin stepped forward and dropped on one knee in salutation.

Hualcoyotl, recovering from the astonishment which the sudden discovery of his friend caused him, exclaimed:

"Euetzin, my brother! This is, indeed, a glad surprise. Rise, that I may greet you as an equal—not as a vassal."

The tzin arose to his feet, and the prince embraced him affectionately. He then inquired:

"Who are these that accompany you?"

"Oza, salute your master," was the tzin's response.

"Oza here, too!" exclaimed, again, the now delighted prince. "I see through it all, Oza; to you it is that I am indebted for this most happy moment. You have my blessing, and more—your freedom, from this hour!"

The slave had prostrated himself before his master, who now bade him rise.

"I would not be free, master, if it will take me from you," said the devoted vassal, in reply.

"It shall not take you from me, Oza, except to permit you to march with the army of liberation. You shall be an honored soldier."

The moment was a happy one for the ever faithful slave, and the change in his condition would only make him a more willing servitor.

"Here, O Prince, is a friend whom you will be pleased to greet, I am sure; for in him you see Cacami, the hunter, who delivered you from the Tepanec soldiers on the highway," said Euetzin, turning to his friend, who stood waiting to be presented.

Cacami saluted the prince, who, in return, gave him a cordial greeting, and said:

"Yes, Euetzin, I am more than pleased to know and greet the valiant hunter Cacami; for it is a hope realized, an opportunity I have truly wished for. More than gratitude is due from us to him, and when we are in position to requite his service he will find us not unmindful of the fact."

Passing over Cacami's reply, except to say that he deprecated an allusion to the occurrence, which he regarded as a very little thing for him to do, and, with the presentation of the party to the hermit, who found in the occasion another opportunity in which to be profoundly impressive, we leave the friends to engage in explanations and consultation, and return to Tezcot's.

Mitla was not so bright as was her wont, all through the morning hours. She was inclined to avoid conversation, and sought, more than was her practice, to be alone. After the mid-day meal she took her archer's outfit and sauntered off along the plateau, around the mountain. She was heedless, alike of time and distance. Her bow was seldom brought into use. A parrot or pheasant seemed to have no attraction for her. In one or two instances, however, when the mark was so conspicuous that the attention of a less interested person would have been drawn to it, she let go an arrow with good effect, but showed no animation at the result; she was manifestly *distrait*.

The afternoon wore on, and Mitla was far from home ere she took account of where she was, or the distance she had gone. She was in the act of facing about to retrace her steps when she noticed, for the first time, three men approaching from the opposite direction. She did not wish to meet them, and, turning, walked briskly in the direction from which she had come. She did not look back for fear of attracting their attention, but, gradually increasing her step, hastened homeward. The first intimation she had that the men were following, with a view to overtaking

her, was when one of them called:

"Not so fast, pretty maiden; we would keep you company."

Mitla turned quickly, in surprise, and discovered that the men had nearly overtaken her.

Three Tepanec soldiers, not more than a dozen steps away, showing a menacing disposition, was a sight to strike terror to the stoutest woman's heart. Mitla was terribly frightened at seeing them, and her heart instantly leaped into her throat. There was not a house within a mile of where she was, and, if the men meditated harm to her, her situation was indeed alarming. Her bow could hardly be deemed a means of defense against the soldiers, who were now close upon her. What should she do? was a question that called for prompt decision. She was quick of foot and in vigorous health; she might get away from them by running. It was worth trying. From the impulse of the thought she gave a bound forward, and shot away from her menacing pursuers like a frightened fawn. The soldiers immediately entered on a determined chase, and, to her, it now became a run for self-preservation. She kept up well for a short distance, and then began to flag. The shock from her fright, together with the awful sense of dread which filled her heart, unnerved her, and a growing weakness followed. She thought of her friends: if some of them were only near to come to her relief! But they were not, and her heart sank lower and lower. By an occasional glance over her shoulder she could see that her pursuers were rapidly closing the intervening distance between them, and would surely overtake her. It was a terrible moment to the fleeing maiden, who was naturally courageous and brave under ordinary circumstances, but, in her present desperate dilemma she became an impotent, helpless thing, about to sink to the earth from exhaustion. The foremost soldier was within an arm's length of her, and in another moment she would be at their mercy.

When the hunters' chief and his Tezcucan companions returned from the hermit's cave, about the middle of the afternoon, the first thought of the tzin was of Mitla. On being informed that she had gone around the mountain, presumably to do some shooting, he determined to go in search of her. He saw in the circumstance an opportunity to further his acquaintance, which he would not fail to improve. He accordingly threw his hunting outfit across his back, and started off in the direction she had gone.

Quite a distance had been covered by the tzin when his attention was attracted to a beautiful golden pheasant which flew into the wood just ahead of him. He turned aside to get a shot at it, hoping to secure it for Mitla. It escaped him, however, and, disappointed, he returned to the plateau. As he emerged from the bushes he was startled and horrified at what he saw. Only a few steps away Mitla was struggling to free herself from the hands of the Tepanec soldiers, who had only just overtaken and seized her. The tzin was upon them in an instant, and, sending an arrow into one and his javelin at another, they were quickly made to desist. His sword, which he carried more as a weapon of defense than to be used in the pursuit of game, was raised to strike, but before he could use it the villains drew off. He could not follow them; for when Mitla was released she staggered, and would have fallen to the ground had he not caught her in his arms, thus saving the miscreants from his deadly *maquahuitl*. Mitla had swooned, and he could only vent his indignation and wrath in words. He exclaimed:

"Beasts, ocelotls, in the guise of soldiers! Were I free to do it, I would punish you as you deserve. Go, if you would escape a just retribution for your iniquitous conduct."

One of the soldiers was badly wounded, and they were only too glad to get away, knowing they merited all the punishment and denunciation Euetzin had meted out to them; and more—should they fall into the hands of the mountaineers, they would be summarily dealt with. They did not wait to be addressed the second time, but moved off as rapidly as they could with the wounded man to look after.

It was some minutes before Mitla recovered sufficiently to free herself from the tzin's arms. During the time of her unconsciousness he used every convenient means known to him to restore her, and succeeded very well in his efforts. When he saw that she was conscious, he inquired:

"Have you received personal injury?"

Mitla answered by a shake of the head, at the same time giving him a look of trustful helplessness. The look spoke more than words could have expressed, and told how grateful she was for the deliverance his coming had brought her, from a fate too terrible for contemplation.

When Euetzin's support was no longer required, he conducted her to a place where she could be seated, and waited for her to speak. After a moment's pause she turned her eyes, beaming with gratitude, full upon him, and said:

"It is now Mitla's turn to be grateful. If I have done aught to place a debt upon the prince, or his friends, you have paid it a hundredfold. I shall never cease to regard you as my preserver from a fate against which death would be a welcome deliverance."

"Any true man, in my place, would have done the same for you," he answered. "I am entitled to no especial gratitude for doing my duty, I would assure you. Because I happened to be here at the right moment to rescue you from the hands of those villainous soldiers, the act should not make a hero of me."

He spoke jocularly, hoping to impart cheerfulness by a cheerful manner.

"Your words do not affect the sense of obligation which fills my heart, and that it is so I am glad, for I could not be generous were I ungrateful," she returned, still deeply affected.

"I shall certainly bear in mind, with no little satisfaction, Mitla, that I have earned a place in your remembrance. Let that suffice to reward me for the service done, and think no more about it," he replied, endeavoring to dispose of the matter by depreciation, in which he failed, for Mitla said:

"I am sure you are generous. Will you not, then, permit me to be so, too? Would you have me stifle the feeling which fills my heart—the feeling of immeasurable gratitude which goes out to you, my deliverer?"

Her eyes shone with intense brightness as she spoke, showing how deep were the fires of passion in her nature, which only required stirring to become irresistible. The passionate vehemence with which her words were uttered was affective. The tzin was human, though a young man with the profoundest sense of right; for the nonce, however, he allowed himself to yield to impulse, and replied to her impassioned appeal with the warmth, almost, of a lover:

"I am reproved. I would not that you stifle one generous impulse of your peerless woman's heart. I shall not soon forget the glowful expression which but now lighted up your beautiful face—so earnestly fixed in kindness upon me. The recollection of it will be an ever-present reminder of the noble girl I rescued from peril, and whose friendship I shall always prize."

For these words she bent on him an expression which carried with it more than gratitude. It recalled him to himself, and he discovered, all too late, that he had said too much. He was honorable in a high degree, and held it a discreditable act to encourage in a maiden a sentiment he could not fully reciprocate. Her passionate utterances had caused him, for the moment, to forget his conscientiousness, and he overstepped the bounds of propriety. He was not in position to play the role of lover, and, recalling what he had said, he became greatly disturbed.

A silence ensued, until, presently, Mitla moved as if to rise, which the tzin anticipated by lifting her to her feet. She was sufficiently recovered to go home, and, leaning on the arm of her escort, she was conducted from the scene of her terrible struggle with the villainous Tepanec soldiers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A week had elapsed since the tzin and his party arrived at Tezcot's so opportunely, much of which time had been spent at the cavern in formulating plans and instructions for the direction and government of the prince's friends, in the operations which would follow Euetzin's return to the valley.

The final consultation had been held, and the instruments of authority, which made the tzin the accredited representative of Hualcoyotl, were in his possession; and Cacami and he, it was decided, would start for the scene of their future labors the next day, leaving Oza to attend his master.

The blessings of the gods had been invoked upon the young men and the cause they were engaged in promoting; a final leave had been taken of the prince and hermit, and they were now at Tezcot's waiting for the advent of to-morrow to speed them on their way to Tlacopan, their first point of destination.

It was in the last hour of day—an hour on the mountains which brings with it a peculiar sense of subduedness—that Euetzin and Mitla strolled away from the house to find a spot where they could be alone for a short time to have a final talk before his departure, which he purposed taking at an early hour the next morning.

After the adventure with the Tepanec soldiers, when the tzin inadvertently allowed himself to say more than he should have said, he was very careful to avoid giving further encouragement to Mitla's evident regard for him; matters, therefore, had not progressed in that direction to any appreciable extent.

"Has it been well with my friend, to-day?" he inquired casually, by way of saying something as they sauntered along together.

Mitla glanced up at her companion doubtfully with her large, full eyes, looking very sorrowful. Friend is a very cold sounding word when applied by a loved one to the one who loves, and thus it sounded to her, coming from Euetzin.

"Yes, it has, thanks to you, my preserver," she answered dispiritedly. She could not forget for a moment, when in his presence, the great service he had rendered her. Thoughts of it seemed to dispossess all else in her mind, and she continually referred to it in their conversations. Her voice, sad and low, attracted Euetzin's notice, and, looking at her, he caught her eyes as they were raised to his seemingly almost ready to weep, and he said concernedly:

"You are not happy; your eyes look too sadly appealing for that. Are you in trouble?"

"My eyes reflect the sadness which is in my heart." She could say no more; and the tears were seen to start, which she tried to conceal, but could not.

"Why, Mitla, you are surely ill! Why do you weep?" the tzin asked solicitously.

"Can you not guess? Is it not enough to sadden my heart to know that you are going away, perhaps never to return?" was her tearful reply.

"Am I, indeed, so much to you that my going should affect you thus?" he asked, not only surprised, but deeply moved by her evident distress.

"You will never know, because you can not realize it, how much you are to her whose honor you preserved inviolate. I will never see you again; it is for this that my heart is filled with sadness and my eyes with tears," she said sorrowfully.

Coming to a little shaded mound they sat down, and the tzin said:

"When I am gone you will soon forget, and only remember me as the friend of Hualcoyotl." Her answer to this was a reproachful look. An expression of pain passed over her countenance, and her eyes suddenly became suffused again with tears. Euetzin saw that her feelings were deeply wounded by his words, and, taking her hand, he hastened to say, repentantly:

"I have hurt you by my careless expression. May I not recall my words, and assure you of my great sorrow for having spoken them? I will come again, if only to learn more of the beautiful mountain girl who holds for me so much of kindly feeling. Yes, I will come again. You will forgive me now, I'm sure, for having caused you pain." He spoke rapidly, and his voice grew almost impassioned in his earnestness.

A happy smile lit up the weeping Mitla's face, for she read in the tzin's fervent manner that he was not wholly indifferent toward her. She said in reply:

"If you have said aught for which forgiveness might be asked, you are forgiven. I am a foolish girl,

Euetzin, to weep and laugh almost in the same moment. But I can not help it: your words give me pain or joy, just as they impress me. I am a child; do not mind me," she replied meekly.

The tzin saw that the girl's gratitude, which was very great, had changed to love, a love that knows no bounds, and he was greatly troubled. It was by no means displeasing to him, for he was a man; yet, he felt it to be most inopportune. In the few days he had been at Tezcot's Mitla had won his profound respect—possibly more, which he was not ready to admit—and he was truly sorry that he was compelled to go away so soon. There was something about the beautiful mountain girl which pleased and charmed him; and it was with difficulty he restrained himself from giving vent to feelings in which he felt he could not afford to indulge; still, notwithstanding his efforts to refrain from doing so, he had once or twice, and but now, permitted his feelings to get the better of him. He was not sure, therefore, of his disinterestedness: the feelings with which he regarded her, he thought, might be awakening love, or might prove to be only fancy. He would wait and see before committing himself. But what of Mitla's loving heart, should it prove to be the latter? This was the thought which gave him pain, and which would have much to do with moulding the impressions which would move him later.

The tzin's promise that he would come again had a cheering effect upon Mitla, and she became quite animated.

After a half hour of more cheerful conversation they went back to the house, one of them, at least, feeling much brighter for their talk.

The sun had just dropped behind the western horizon; that conscious impress of loneliness which affects the mind in the twilight of evening, especially in the open country, was beginning to pervade not only the animate, but the inanimate. The animals showed by their actions that they felt it; so, also, did the fowls and birds, by seeking their accustomed roosts. The unwonted stillness of the leaves, the drooping of the flowers, the gentle purling of the running brook, and the placid surface of the lake's waters, all gave evidence of the near approach of Nature's resting time.

Two men, hunters, from their appearance, were trudging along the highway, going in the direction of Tlacopan, which lay just ahead of them. The tired motion of their limbs—of one of them, at least—accorded well with the silent voice around them, and told, in language mute but distinct, how welcome to them would be the rest which comes with the night.

In those travel-worn pedestrians we would have recognized the young Tezcucans, Euetzin and Cacami, who were nearing the end of their return journey from the mountains, which, owing to the fact that the tzin was a slow traveler, had taken nearly two full days to accomplish. Their destination, as has been intimated, was Tlacopan, which they were making strenuous efforts to reach before dark.

"You are much the better traveler, Cacami," the tzin was saying. "While my steps are flagging, yours are light and firm."

"You have not been trained, like myself, to physical toil; to work the ground for bread, and climb the hills in quest of meat. Yours has been a life of seclusion, and, I might add, luxury—a life which little fits one for enduring long journeys," replied Cacami.

"That is true," returned the tzin. "However, our journey will soon be ended, and, with a good night's rest in Tlacopan, the morning will find us fresh as ever."

The city of Tlacopan, with its grand *teocallis*, magnificent palace, and ample *tianguez*—of the latter more will be said later—and other objects of interest, has long since disappeared from the earth, and in its stead now stands Tacuba, an unimportant Mexican village. The city of Tlacopan, in the "Golden Era" of Anahuac, was the capital of a small tribe of people who were kindred to the Tepanecs, but not in accord with them. Mäc-ū-ā, the ruling prince, stood high among the nations, and was thought worthy to be associated with the greatest. The city was situated about two leagues southwest of Tenochtitlan, off from the lake, high and dry, and was constructed, chiefly, of stone, which was convenient and abundant.

At the time of the conquest its people had become a part of the great empire of the Aztec monarch, Montezuma, and subsequently became absorbed in the race revolution which wiped away all distinction between the native tribes, resulting in the present mixed and degenerate race condition of to-day in Mexico.

The reckless disregard of the rights of others by the emissaries of Maxtla, and the new king's evident purpose to extend his empire by conquest and subjugation, as his father before him had done, so alarmed some of the lesser ruling caciques that a coalition, for self-defense and a better security, was being seriously considered by them, and a secret council had been determined on.

The times were propitious for the cause of Tezcuco.

The tzin's object in visiting Tlacopan at this time was to have audience with Macua, and, if possible, effect an alliance with him. He was not yet aware of the uneasy feeling which had been aroused by Maxtla's conduct, for the disquieted chiefs were very close-mouthed in such matters; yet he believed the king of Tlacopan would not be unfavorable to an alliance, if he could be convinced of the advantage which would accrue from such a step.

Thus circumstanced, the tzin's visit to Tlacopan just now could only be considered a venture in the line of his mission.

The day following their arrival in the city found Euetzin and his companion early at Macua's palace, seeking admission to his presence. In due time they were gratified by being conducted to his audience chamber.

The presence of the pseudo hunters in the hall, showing so great a dissimilarity in their manners and dress, caused quite a flurry of speculation and comment. Hunters, as a rule, were not a cultivated class; and the marked exception to the common, in the case of our friends, was so plainly shown that the attention of those present was attracted to them.

Macua, king of Tlacopan, was a young man of pleasing address, who was highly regarded by his subjects. He was easily approached, and, though firm in his purposes, was kindly disposed. He received the strangers very cordially, and, when informed that they desired an audience with him, said:

"We will hear what you have to say, but ask that you will be brief, for our time is much occupied."

"The king of Tlacopan is very gracious," spoke the tzin, with an obeisance. "What we have to say must be communicated in the presence of Macua, the king, and his chief counselor, alone. Will it please your majesty to hear us?"

"Your communication must be of very great importance, indeed, to require a proceeding so unusual as a private audience," replied Macua, a little severely.

"It is a matter of not only great but grave importance, of which we desire to speak, and it should be communicated privately to the king," returned Euetzin with dignity.

"Such being the case, if you will wait the departure of our subjects you shall have private audience," the king answered, urbanely.

"Macua, the king, is most generous. We will wait," said the tzin, saluting him and turning away to be conducted to a seat.

When the king's business with his vassals was disposed of he dismissed his advisors, excepting his chief counselor, a man of advanced years, and, addressing the tzin, said:

"We are ready to hear what you have to say; proceed."

"Before your majesty are two Tezcucans—Cacami and Euetzin. Macua, the king, has no doubt heard of Hualcoyotl, our prince, whose life Maxtla, the Tepanec monarch, seeks to destroy," said the tzin, pausing for a reply.

"Yes; we have heard of the young prince, who is now a fugitive," the king answered, looking wonderingly at Euetzin, and in turn waited for him to proceed.

"We are friends of Hualcoyotl and Tezcuco. We desire that the emissaries of Maxtla be driven from our city and country, and that Hualcoyotl be put upon the throne of his fathers. To accomplish this, Tezcuco must have help from other states. We appear before you, O King, as the representatives of Hualcoyotl, seeking friendship and coalition." Spoken with due deference and self-respect.

"What assurance can you give that you are friends and representatives of Hualcoyotl?" questioned the king.

"Relying on the honor of your majesty, we offer as evidence of our truthfulness this writing. Will you examine it?" replied the tzin, handing to the king a paper which was covered with hieroglyphics. Macua received and scrutinized it carefully, then passed it to his chief, who also examined it. After a short consultation between king and counselor the former said:

"We are satisfied that you are Tezcucans, and that you come from Hualcoyotl, or some other person who has been highly honored by our knightly order. Can you inform us as to the number of soldiers Tezcuco can furnish in the event of a coalition?"

"There is an army of men in the valley, composed principally of Tezcucans, who are waiting to be led against the Tepanec king, numbering twice that of Tlacopan," replied Euetzin, confidently.

"How know you that?" asked Macua, with a shade of resentment in his voice.

"When Tlacopan has shown her willingness to join Tezcuco in a war with Maxtla of Azcapozalco,

the proofs of what we declare shall be placed in Macua's hands," rejoined the tzin, decisively.

"The friend of Hualcoyotl is shrewd. It is well. The matter shall have consideration. When the fifth sun is on its upward course, if you will come again, you shall have our answer," said the king.

"How may we be assured that Macua will be faithful to the confidence which we have reposed in him?" asked the tzin, with the object of securing some pledge from the young king.

"By the kingly honor of Macua, and this," he answered haughtily, handing the tzin a ring on which was the king's sign of distinction, the possession of which made the holder an accepted embassador, and gave him a pledge which the tzin well knew would be respected.

The position and person of an embassador was sacredly regarded among the nations of Anahuac. "They were lodged and entertained in the great towns," says the historian, "at the public charge, and were everywhere received with courtesy, so long as they kept within certain prescribed bounds." The king's signet was, therefore, a passport to the tzin in any part of Macua's kingdom, securing him the hospitality of the people, and free entertainment; it was not his purpose, however, to take advantage of it. The signet was to him only a pledge of Macua's faith.

On receiving the ring Euetzin said:

"The king's pledge is more than satisfactory to the friends of Hualcoyotl. When the fifth sun is on its upward course we will come for Macua's answer, and bring with us proofs of what Tezcuco can do." This ended the interview, and, saluting his majesty very profoundly, the young men withdrew.

The tzin was well pleased with the result of his audience with Macua, and was much encouraged by it. He felt certain that he was about to secure an important ally for Hualcoyotl in the king of Tlacopan, and went about his business with the added stimulus of a stronger confidence.

Euetzin had much to engage his attention in the time which would intervene before the advent of the day fixed for the second meeting with Macua. He decided first of all to visit a few of the chief cities for the purpose of securing data from which to proceed in carrying out the prince's instructions; and also to enable him to present an approximate estimate of Tezcuco's undiscovered but existent oath-bound hosts to the king of Tlacopan, in support of his declaration. Also to offer a word of explanation and encouragement to his coadjutors.

After calling on the leading Tezcucans in Macua's capital, he and Cacami crossed over to Tenochtitlan.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The continued good fortune of the prince in evading capture was a source of great annoyance and aggravation to the evil disposed Maxtla. He was daily becoming more violent and overt in his conduct, ruling with an arbitrary hand. He had terrorized his household, and the sound of his voice was sufficient to cause a flurry of trepidation to agitate its members. His subjects regarded him with fear and trembling, and his comportment toward his weaker neighbors was a growing menace. His soldiers seemed to partake largely of his evil tendencies, for, in their search after Hualcoyotl, they became a dread to the inhabitants of the valley and surrounding country in consequence of their flagrant and atrocious acts.

After weeks of determined but unsuccessful efforts to secure the person of the prince, Maxtla decided on a council with his advisers over the matter, and they were accordingly ordered to assemble in the council chamber. The subject was duly considered, but without any definite conclusion. As was customary, when a question of so much importance proved unsolvable by the council, the oracles (high priests) were called upon for a solution of the matter, which resulted in their declaring that the gods were favoring the fugitive prince as against the king, and must be propitiated. Agreeably to this decision, an early day was fixed for the sacrificial ceremony which was to mollify the wrath of the particularly offended deities, and the priests were instructed to have ready the necessary number of victims for the occasion.

The temples (*teocallis*) of the ancient Mexicans, which were numerous, were peculiar structures, usually rising in pyramidal form to various heights, depending, doubtless, on the importance attached to the presiding deities which they represented and to whom they were dedicated. They were constructed solidly of earth, incased around with stone, or blocks of clay, which were hardened by some peculiar process of their own. The structure usually consisted of several stories—as many as four or five—each of which rose twenty or more feet, terminating at a terrace of accommodating width, which extended clear around the temple. Four or five of these terraces carried the structure up as much as a hundred feet, culminating in a broad, flat, paved area, on which were situated the sanctuaries of the gods, and in which a great sculptured image of each was placed. In front of each sanctuary was an altar, whereon the sacred fire was kept constantly burning, and which, not infrequently, was stained with human blood.

Near the altars stood the sacrificial block on which the victim was immolated in the horrible and sickening act of tearing the heart from the breast and laying it on the altar as a conciliatory offering to the offended deity, while the organ was still pulsating.

The terraces were gained by steps on the outside, leaning at an angle with the wall, which inclined toward the center.

The ceremonies were always public, and from the situation at the summit were to be viewed from any part of the city.

The processions engaged in by the priests—a multitude in themselves, winding their way as many times as there were terraces around the great *teocalli*, from base to summit—were impressive spectacles, at which the people were expected to be present as witnesses; and, as one author has said, since a ceremony of some sort occurred almost every day, it is difficult to understand how the ordinary business of life could, under such conditions, go on.

The day appointed by Maxtla for the propitiating of the gods was ushered in by the sound of the doleful drum. The people, who were assembled by thousands, arrayed in their most gorgeous attire—when arrayed at all—filled the city's public places. A religious chant, accompanied with dancing and contortions of the body, and a representation of minstrelsy, in a multiplication of weird noises, was begun and continued throughout the procession and ceremony.

One by one the victims were led or borne to the sacrificial block, and if, perchance, they paused upon the area of the temple's summit, their anointed bodies, which were shielded only by a girdle about the loins, glistened in the sun's intense light—a mollifying spectacle for Aztec gods.

When the ceremony had progressed to that point when all the bloodthirstiness which such sights must surely beget in the savage mind had taken possession of the witnesses, a thought seemed to occur suddenly to Maxtla, who was a delighted spectator of the bloody carnival, and he exclaimed:

"Bring hither Itzalmo, the traitorous friend and counselor of Hualcoyotl, and prepare him for the sacrifice. Let him die for the appeasing of the gods."

The prison-keeper, who had charge of Itzalmo's dungeon, took the necessary assistance and proceeded to execute the order of the king.

When the dungeon to which Itzalmo had been consigned was reached by the prison-keeper and his assistants, the door was thrown open, and they entered to secure the prisoner, but a surprise awaited them which they were not anticipating—the cell was empty; Itzalmo was not there.

The prison-keeper was speechless with amazement at the discovery, and, on contemplating the consequences to himself of the prisoner's escape, became horrified at the thought of the fate which certainly awaited him. He returned to the presence of the king, fully realizing the awful strait in which the situation put him. Prostrating himself at Maxtla's feet, he cried out, in accents of despair:

"Woe is come to thy servant, O King, and he is undone; for Itzalmo, the prisoner, is gone! He has fled his prison cell."

Maxtla looked for a moment, in menacing silence, on the prostrate man before him, his face becoming, as he did so, livid with rage. When he spoke, his accents were inhuman—demoniacal.

"Miserable dotard!" he exclaimed. "Thy cowardly, cringing body is fit only for sacerdotal hands. A heart for a heart it shall be—not Itzalmo's, but thine, shall fall to-day, to assuage the offended gods. Take him hence to the block, and let his blood condone his offense." Thus did the keeper of Itzalmo's dungeon become, innocently, the victim of Maxtla's ferocity.

The sacrificial ceremony was at last concluded. The sanguinary rites, in compliance with the demands of the offended deities, had been formally observed, and Maxtla, according to the declarations of the oracles, was thereby restored to favor. The assembled multitude dispersed, self-satisfied with its part in the bloody festival, and quiet once more prevailed in Azcapozalco.

Maxtla was not a man to be thwarted in his designs without a supreme effort to accomplish them. Itzalmo had escaped, but the whole Tepanec empire should be called to the support of the king, that his purposes might be made good. Pursuant to this end an edict was issued, to the effect that Itzalmo was outlawed, and, furthermore, his delivery to the Tepanec authorities, dead or alive, would be amply rewarded.

Unfortunately for Maxtla, in his purpose to not only retake Itzalmo, but to discover his abettors, who, if taken, would suffer equally with the escaped prisoner, he had, in sacrificing his prison-keeper, removed the only person who might have found a clue to the party concerned in the liberation. By his destruction the security of the liberators, if not Itzalmo's, was assured.

When it was learned by the friends of Itzalmo, who were members of the king's retinue, and who, during his imprisonment, had looked well to his comforts, that a sacrifice to the gods was contemplated, they became alarmed for his safety, and at once set about arranging for his escape. The necessary preparations were effected, and the night prior to the day on which the sacrifice was to take place was fixed upon as the time to deliver him from his imprisonment.

Agreeably to arrangements, about the hour of midnight two men entered the passage which led to the stairway down which they had to go to be on the same ground as was Itzalmo's dungeon. They were not unacquainted with the locality, and quickly gained the avenue leading to the cell. One of the party carried a lighted taper, which greatly facilitated their movements. When the cell was reached, the fastenings were removed and the door thrown open. As it swung back on its hinges, one of the party inquired:

"Are you ready, Itzalmo?"

"Yes, I am ready. Lead on," he answered, and walked forth a free man once more.

When he was outside of the dungeon the fastenings were replaced, and the party moved silently and cautiously to the stairway, and up. Here the taper was extinguished, making their progress from this point necessarily very slow. They finally emerged upon the narrow court at the rear of the palace, and from there into the great inclosed court, where one of the conductors turned aside, leaving the other to accompany Itzalmo alone.

Leaving the great court, Itzalmo and his conductor came out onto a wide street, feeling somewhat apprehensive as to the outcome of their undertaking. The city was thoroughly policed by the soldiers of the king, who were supposed to be, without exception, his adherents. However, Itzalmo was a stranger to all of them, whether friends or foes, which was greatly in his favor.

The old Tezcucan's friends had taken the precaution to furnish him with a suit of priestly attire, making it an easy matter to offer a pretense for being on the street at so unseasonable an hour. Under such conditions the liability of detection was greatly lessened.

The avenues of the royal city being broad and extensive, Itzalmo and his conductor could hardly expect to travel them, even at the late hour of midnight, without being discovered, and, in all probability, stopped. So the bold plan of moving nonchalantly through the streets was adopted.

An exhibition of nonchalance does not always indicate unflinching bravery, and is never assumed

by a brave man, except as a means to an end.

Though men of the dare-devil stamp, who are nonchalant, and appear to be careless of consequences, may not, under such circumstances as surrounded the old Tezcucan and his escort, feel in any degree apprehensive, it is not always the result of true courage, but more often lack of consideration. Such men are not to be classed in any sense with the conscientious, considerate man, who, anxious and expectant, steps into the unexplored and doubtful breach, uncertain as to what awaits him there—the man who, realizing that danger, and perhaps death, may be just ahead, sets hard his teeth, and, with paling cheek, goes bravely forward to meet it. The latter is the man who wins battles, and, if needs be, dies a hero, while the former far too often proves himself a blustering braggart, who, when death stalks forth, forgets all else save his own safety, and ignominiously becomes a turn-tail.

We have seen Itzalmo, with dauntless courage, face the tyrant Maxtla, the most cruel and heartless man in all the Anahuac; still, he was not a dare-devil, but a conscientious, unswerving friend, who could die in the performance of a duty, as only such men can. His courage, however, was not a feelingless one. His heart, no doubt, beat quicker, while his face grew less florid; yet, in the consciousness of well-doing, and the strength of an unyielding faithfulness, he was capable of heroic action.

When the distance of about two squares had been gone over, they were challenged by the demand:

"Who goes there at this late hour?"

"A priest and escort, on their way to visit the sick," was the quick reply.

"Ah, Melca, is that you?" questioned the guard, who recognized an acquaintance in the voice of Itzalmo's companion.

"Yes, it is me," he answered. "I am seldom out at this hour," apologetically, "but the call of a friend in distress must needs be answered, even though it be at midnight."

The escort was not a little disturbed at his sudden recognition by the guard, though, on second thought, saw security in Itzalmo's perfect disguise. The old man made a venerable representative of the character he had assumed, which the soldier could easily discern in the semi-darkness; and as great reverence for that class of citizens was generally entertained, there was hardly a possibility of detection. After a brief scrutiny of the priestly appearing Itzalmo, the guard said:

"It is well, Melca. Pass on; and may your friend find consolation from your visit."

Since he had succeeded without difficulty in deceiving an acquaintance, Melca was assured that they would have no trouble in passing out of the city, and so it proved. They met with several guards, who readily passed them along when informed of the mission they were on. Thus they got safely beyond the city's limits and out into the country, where a consultation was held as to where they should go.

It was wisely concluded to keep away from Tezcuco, as it would undoubtedly be the first place visited by the emissaries of Maxtla in their search for the condemned Itzalmo. They decided, accordingly, to get out of the tyrannical king's dominions as quickly as possible, and seek concealment in some secluded locality. A road leading to the south, along the western border of the lake, was taken and followed until Tlacopan was reached, where a stop of one day was made to give Itzalmo a resting spell; after which they went on around the lake until they came to a small, isolated hamlet, situated on the lake's border, among the trees which grew there, and by which it was almost hidden, where the old man found refuge with some loyal countrymen, with whom we leave him for the present, in company with Melca, his escort, who decided, after being recognized by the guard, that it might not be safe for him to return to Azcapozalco.

CHAPTER XXV.

One night and a day in Tenochtitlan found Euetzin and Cacami ready to proceed to some other point, they having effected the object of their visit to the Mexican capital.

The tzin had laid out to spend one night at home; and, as Tezcuco must necessarily be visited in his short tour of inquiry, it was decided to go to Zelmonco first, and from there to the city. Their plan was to cross the lake to a small village which was situated about two leagues and a half south of Tezcuco, and go from there to the villa, which would save time, distance, and a walk of one league, as compared with their going to Tezcuco by one of the barks which plied regularly between the two great cities for the purpose of transporting persons and merchandise.

There is sufficient ground for believing that traffic between Tenochtitlan and other cities on Lake Tezcuco was carried on at that time exclusively by canoes, and it is not an unreasonable thing to suppose that it was done systematically, and with a view to gain.

So, in the afternoon of the day following their arrival at Tenochtitlan, Euetzin and his companion secured the services of a boatman to row them across to the little town. It was quite a pull for the boatman and his one assistant, for the distance was between three and four leagues. The trip was made, however, in time for our friends to reach Zelmonco just at dusk of evening. We will not undertake to describe the meeting which followed their arrival at the villa. It is sufficient to say that it was a happy one, and that the evening was passed by the reunited family and their guest in a most agreeable manner.

Cacami was an early riser, and usually up with the sun. The morning following his coming to Zelmonco was not an exception in his commendable habit; he was out in the park betime, enjoying the invigoration which the first hour of the day imparts. The morning's breath was most delightful, too, loaded as it was with the exhalations of a thousand buds and flowers.

The time and conditions were especially favorable for thought; particularly to a man affected as he was. Itlza had not been out of his mind for a moment during his absence, except when important matters were in, or when he was sleeping, and not always then. When in the presence of Mitla and her vivacious young sister a pair of laughing eyes continually rose up before him, reminding him of one who seemed to exercise an influence, even in her absence, which made him almost negligent of the hunter's daughters. Euetzin, knowing nothing of the attachment which his companion had formed for his sister, thought it very strange that the young fellow should be so indifferent to the charms of the mountain girls—Mitla especially; and, yet, away down in his heart the tzin experienced a sense of relief and gratification that such was the case.

Believing that a suitable opportunity would reveal the fact that his hopes, which Itlza's actions at their last meeting had quickened, were well founded, Cacami heartily wished that one might arise before the hour for his departure should come around.

In pursuing his solitary stroll through the park he came to the oak tree by the fountain, and had paused for a moment to contemplate upon the pleasant surroundings. He had only been there once before; yet, the spot was endeared to him because of his meeting with Itlza on that occasion. Recalling the felicitous event his eyes lingered fondly on the rustic seat, where she had sat and looked down upon him with her beautiful, laughing eyes, as he reclined on the ground almost at her feet. He remembered the pledge of silence she had exacted of him, which he felt was no longer binding since the episode of the flower-heart, the trend of which he had rightly interpreted. Feeling thus, he resolved to renew his wooing at the first offered opportunity. While he stood indulging in his retrospective reverie, he was suddenly made aware of the approach of someone. Turning to see who it was, he discovered, to his delight, the charming Itlza coming toward him from the villa.

It was a supreme moment to the very much enthralled Cacami; the culmination of his most cherished desires were reached when he beheld the idol of his thoughts advancing toward him. Nothing could have happened so perfectly in accord with the conditions—his feelings, the hour and its alluring train of exquisite delights—as Itlza's unexpected but longed for advent upon the scene. He waited her approach with a pleased sense of expectation, for he saw in her coming the opportunity he had only just been wishing for. He greeted her with a delight to which he gave full expression, both in manner and voice. He said:

"You come, O Laughing-eyes, to add by your presence the crowning joy to a splendid morning stroll, which I have had."

"I shall be pleased if my coming out will add to the pleasure of your ramblings, which are just a little too early to agree with my habits," she answered, with a sparkling eye and smiling face. He looked admiringly at her and said:

"The air at such a time and in such a place is always delightfully fragrant. To drink of its sweetness is a pleasure no one should fail to enjoy, not excepting the leisured Laughing-eyes."

"Yes, it is a pleasure; but what an effort some of us would have to make to gain it. Then, oft repeated, it loses much of its charm," she replied, and, continuing, inquired: "How long have you been out in the park?"

"For more than an hour I have been strolling among the shrubs and flowers; but, delightful as the beautiful park is, there was one thing wanting to make it perfect: one flower which I did not find —the loveliest that blooms at Zelmonco; it was not there," he said, fixing on her a look which plainly revealed his meaning. She returned the look with one expressing comprehension, and answered, jestingly:

"You came out too soon to find the flower you are pleased to think so lovely; it does not bloom so early."

"It has bloomed but now; and I am more than happy to find it here," he said, taking her hand and leading her to a seat at the foot of the oak tree. With her hand still resting in his he continued: "Do you remember, Laughing-eyes, our tryst on this love-inspiring spot, which seems to me so very long ago, and like a dream?"

"Yes, I remember; and more," she answered, looking up at him archly, while she continued: "I remember that you gave me a promise, Cacami, which I fear you are about to forget." This rejoinder was uttered insinuatingly, and accompanied by a coquettish side glance. Cacami, believing that the words were intended to be convertible, put his own construction on them, and said:

"I do not forget, Laughing-eyes, but only remember my promise now as a thing of the past, and no longer binding upon me. The flower-heart, and the voice of the little love-bird singing through your beautiful eyes, which came to me that day, when Teochma's call so cruelly disturbed us, were the signs which made me free. Is it not so, Laughing-eyes?" Cacami's voice and manner were full of pleading, and Itlza, loving as she did, could not resist their influence, and said:

"Yes, Cacami, I may not longer trifle; you have read my thoughts and actions rightly. The flower-heart, in which was entwined my best love, was wrought for you, and made the messenger of release."

"I thought as much, and yet there was a doubt, which your blessed words have removed, and I am free to tell you how dear you are to me. From the moment when I first looked into those laughing eyes I have loved them and their adored possessor. You must recall how earnest was my wooing from the very beginning—not a happy wooing either, Itlza, for I thought it was in vain. But now I know it was not, for the love of the Laughing-eyes is mine. When the battle comes my sword shall make me worthy of it. Then you shall pledge yourself to be my wife—not before. Until that hour love alone shall keep us for each other," he spoke with passionate emphasis.

"It shall be as you have said—love shall keep us for each other," she replied, looking beseechingly into his face. "My heart is sad, even while it is happy," she continued. "War is ever terrible, but doubly so when those we love are in it—Euetzin, my brother, and you, my new-found love." Here her disengaged hand was laid lovingly on his arm, and her eyes, moist with the dew of affection, looked pleadingly up to him. "Both must go. Will both, or even one, return?" She dropped her head upon his hand and wept.

"Be brave, dear heart; those bright, laughing eyes were never made for tears," said he, consoling her tenderly. "The gods, you may be sure, will shield your loved ones in the fight for freedom, and bring them safely back to you." Said encouragingly.

A call to the morning meal interrupted further conversation on the subject so near to the hearts of the twain; and they went in, happy now in each other's love, yet sad from the thoughts which had caused the Laughing-eyes to weep.

Two hours later Euetzin and Cacami were on the road to Tezcuco. That their stay at the villa had to be so brief was a source of regret to both.

The fond associations of a beautiful and attractive home, the dearest of which were found in the presence and love of Teochma and Itlza, were pressing inducements for the tzin to prolong his stay, but there was no time to spare just then for gratifying the tenderer impulses; so, stifling the cry in his heart—the voice of filial love—he went sadly away, in answer to duty's call.

Cacami, in the character of an accepted lover—though somewhat regretful at having to go from the scene of his late successful wooing so soon, possessed as he was with the blissful assurance of a reciprocated affection—could not be other than felicitous. Still, his happiness was not cloudless. There was mingled with it a disquieting doubt as to the acquiescence of the aristocratic mother and brother in his *affaire* with Itlza. He was hopeful, however, in view of his intimacy with the brother. He had no intention of informing them, at this time, of the state of his feelings, and was confident that Itlza would be equally reticent. When he had won honor and fame as a warrior he could approach them with a stronger assurance of approval.

Thus it happened that a knowledge of the existing state of their feelings toward each other was kept from Teochma and the tzin by the lovers, which, as it subsequently proved, was an unfortunate course for them to pursue; and yet, in view of the fact that no betrothal had taken place, they were not to be blamed for keeping the matter a secret between themselves.

On arriving at Tezcuco Euetzin went about his errand of procuring information and the transaction of other business, for which he had come to the city. While he was thus occupied, Cacami went to visit for a brief spell with his people, returning in time to accompany him to other points, and finally back to Tlacopan for the appointed audience with Macua, the king.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The fifth day subsequent to the one on which Euetzin and Cacami made their first visit to Macua, King of Tlacopan, and the one appointed for a second audience with him, had dawned, and the sun was on its upward course.

A number of notables—princes, caciques, and chiefs—had recently arrived in Tlacopan, and were being entertained by Macua, at the king's palace. Much speculation was indulged in by the city's denizens, as to what they were there for. Their mission, however, was of a secret character, known only to themselves, the king and his advisers, and was scrupulously guarded by the close-mouthed leaders.

An important council was about to convene, the result of Maxtla's aggressiveness, which proved, in the end, to be a memorable event in the lives of those who took part in it, and also for those in whose interest it was held.

The meeting took place in the audience hall of the king's palace, and the most prominent person present was the king himself. He was seated on his throne, arrayed in magnificent attire, and bore himself with kingly dignity, as one after another the gathering warriors advanced to salute him as the presiding official of the occasion.

On looking over the body of dignified and sober appearing individuals there assembled, one would have decided at once that it was no ordinary gathering of the king's subjects. Seated on his right was a man whose dress and bearing were significant of royalty; while on his left was another equally as notable. Richly caparisoned caciques and warriors were present, some seated, and others standing about the chamber, all waiting expectantly for the king to announce the opening of the council.

Macua presently rose to speak, and every eye was fixed upon him with interested attention. When perfect silence prevailed he said:

"I am pleased to witness the presence here at this time of so many nobles and warriors, who have come to engage in important deliberations. I have reason to believe that all of you are inspired by a common thought: that of a mutual defense of our liberties. The promptness with which the call has been met presages success in what shall follow this meeting. As the head of this nation I extend to all a cordial welcome to Tlacopan." Turning to a person who was evidently the keeper of records, he continued: "The names of those who are to sit in council with us will now be read, and the person named will rise and acknowledge the same in the usual manner."

As the name was announced the person bearing it rose and made an obeisance. After a number of names were gone over and acknowledged, the recorder called out:

"Euetzin of Tezcuco!" to which no one responded. The tzin had not arrived. At this moment an interruption occurred in consequence of the entrance to the hall of a person who was conducted into the presence of the assembly, causing a suspension of the roll call.

The newcomer appeared to be a stranger to all present, for no one seemed to recognize him. If he was known his identity was not apparent. Advancing before the king he saluted his majesty very profoundly. Macua acknowledged the courtesy, but gave no sign of recognition.

"You do not remember me, O King, for which omission you are pardonable, since my former appearance before you was in an assumed character. This," he continued, holding up a signet, "may prove a reminder to you."

"Euetzin of Tezcuco!" exclaimed Macua. "We were looking for a hunter, not a tzin."

"I am the accredited representative of a prince to-day, if your majesty pleases," replied Euetzin, with proper dignity.

"You are; and as the King of Tlacopan I greet you as such," returned Macua, leaving the throne to extend to the tzin an honor seldom conferred except upon a prince.

Euetzin was attired in the costume of a tzin, which changed his appearance greatly, preventing his recognition by the king. His dress was of the finest material, but not gaudy; showing a conservatism in his notions of apparel. In this his second appearance before Macua he felt that the dignity of his position as the representative of Hualcoyotl demanded that he should be becomingly clothed; he accordingly came to Tlacopan prepared to abandon the character and garb of a hunter, and appear, temporarily, in his rightful one.

After greeting the tzin the king bade him take a seat with the assembly.

The call of the roll was resumed and completed. It was found that all were present who were expected to take part in the council. At its conclusion Macua again arose and said:

"We are assembled here to-day to consider a matter of vital interest to all of us: the matter of a threatened invasion of our territories by Maxtla, the new king at Azcapozalco. The fate of Tezcuco is before us. Shall this man be allowed to spoil us while our eyes are open? This, friends, is the question you have been called together to consider. Let your words be words of wisdom, that our council may result in good."

After a brief period of silence an old man—a Tlacopan chief—rose up, and addressed the king:

"Your majesty's words are words of warning. We are, of a truth, menaced by this Maxtla, of Azcapozalco, whose power is great. The army of Tlacopan, combined with the armies of all the principalities here represented, would be as naught before the hosts of his mighty empire. Have you not something to say that will give encouragement? What is in your mind that has not been revealed to us?"

The king spoke in reply:

"The armies of all the principalities represented here to-day would, indeed, be unequal to cope with Maxtla in the field; but, friends, there is offered us a hope in a union with the oppressed Tezcucans. A voice has come to me from Tezcuco: Tezcuco would be free. Euetzin, a representative of that people, is with us to-day. He is here as the envoy of Hualcoyotl, their prince, who is now a fugitive, unjustly pursued—a man who is beloved of his own, but hated by the monarch we fear. We would join the Tezcucans in a war against Maxtla, if the appearances are favorable to success. We would hear what Euetzin may have to offer us."

There was a stir about the chamber at this declaration from Macua, and the tzin at once became an object of much interest. He arose, at a motion from the king, and, after casting his eyes over the assemblage of stern-looking warriors, said:

"Tezcuco will be free, or go down deeper into the slough of oppression. To Maxtla she will no longer submit, if a mighty struggle will give her liberty. An army of patriots, though unseen, are now waiting for the signal to march to victory, death, or a lower degradation. Tezcuco would secure the aid of those who would have the Tepanec usurper overthrown. Many would make our victory sure. I am here, to-day, seeking coalition." Turning about, he addressed Macua: "Will it please the King to read this paper?" As he concluded, the tzin handed a document to the king, which proved to be an estimate of the Tezcucan forces, based on their secret enrollment.

When Macua had perused and understood the significance of the contents of the paper, he looked at the tzin in astonishment, and said:

"I am filled with wonder at what is here set forth. If Tezcuco can do so much, then, indeed, is there hope. Maxtla might well tremble for his supremacy, did he know the magnitude of his opposition."

After a further examination of the paper the king continued:

"With your consent, Euetzin, I would make known to our friends what is here written."

"The wisdom of Macua must direct him. He should understand the importance to Tezcuco of the knowledge which is contained in the paper. Should it be made public it would be most unfortunate for her cause," replied the tzin, courteously.

"I have faith in our friends, and will be responsible for their silence," returned Macua, proceeding to acquaint the council with the contents of the document. Its members were no less astonished than was the king at the measure of their significance. Macua then said:

"We remember the mild and generous disposition of the late king of Tezcuco, and how deeply our people regretted his fall, and the subversion of his government. A restoration of that government under the rule of his son, Prince Hualcoyotl, would give us complete security. Euetzin comes to us bearing evidence, which we can not doubt, that he is, in truth, the representative of the Tezcucan prince, and, as such, would not deceive us by misrepresentation. I, therefore, as the King of Tlacopan, having confidence in him, am ready to accept his statements as correct, and, with the consent of my advisers, will join Tezcuco in a war against the Tepanec king."

There were a number of high officials present from two states, besides Tlacopan, who were unanimous in their approval of Macua's declaration. It was, therefore, sustained by his chiefs, which led to an agreement of coalition being entered into, and its ratification in their accustomed manner.

After a further consideration of the matter as to plans of procedure, it was decided to hold a great tourney at Tlacopan on a certain day in the near future, which would afford the Tezcucans a pretense to withdraw from Tezcuco for the purpose of massing. It was also decided that envoys should be sent to Azcapozalco, to appear before Maxtla the same day on which the tourney was to take place, to present to him the ultimatum of the allied states, the principal condition of which should be the liberation of Tezcuco, and the enthronement of her prince.

It was further agreed that the army of each state should be under the command of its own prince and warriors, the whole to be commanded by the prince furnishing the greatest number of

soldiers. The council then broke up, subject to a call from Macua.

There was much to accomplish before the time appointed for holding the tournament, which was to be nothing more nor less than the assembling of the hosts of the allied states. The secret councils of Tezcucans had to be notified and instructed, and the arms, which were already provided for their equipment, transported secretly to the vicinity of Tlacopan. In addition to this, Hualcoyotl was to be brought secretly to Tlacopan, for it was expected that he would be placed at the head of the army. These preparations would depend largely on the tzin and his companion, and they permitted no time to go by unimproved, but proceeded at once to the consummation of them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Euetzin and his fellow conspirators found the time very brief for completing their preparations for the massing of the insurgent army of Tezcuco on the day appointed. The work was attended with so much secrecy that it had to be carried on in a very quiet manner, keeping them constantly on the alert. This being the case, the tzin and Cacami were kept continually employed, with not a moment of time to spare in which to visit their homes. However, just before starting for the mountains, to escort Hualcoyotl into Tlacopan, they took time to go and say good-by, and procure what was necessary to complete their outfits.

While the Tezcucans were secretly pushing forward their preparations, Macua was busily engaged in replenishing his store-houses with provisions and other supplies for the armies.

A commendable feature in the economy and foresight of the Aztecs—and no less that of the other nations of Anahuac, for what may be said of one will apply to all—was the establishment of great granaries, or store-houses, where supplies were garnered up to meet future exigencies. This was accomplished by tribute from the agricultural districts of the province.

The time appointed for holding the tournament was at hand, and Tlacopan was gorgeously attired for the occasion. The day was propitious, and the city was filled to overflowing with people, who had come from far and near to witness the achievements of the contestants.

The number of foreigners present was unprecedented. The primal cause of this unusual spectacle will be apparent to the reader.

The hour for the tourney to open had arrived, and an immense throng of people was assembled on the city's market-place, where it was thought best to hold the meeting, in view of the expected crowd. The *tianguez* was a great square, inwalled by buildings, store-houses, etc., and made to accommodate anywhere from twenty-five to fifty thousand people. Much of its space, on this day, was protected by coverings, cotton awnings, canopies, etc., and was arranged to seat a multitude.

Tournaments were not an uncommon occurrence among the nations of Anahuac, and the people were encouraged to participate in them by awards of merit—jewels, medals, decorations, etc., which were bestowed upon the successful contestants. Every ruler of any importance was provided with a suitable place in which to hold the contests, usually a great inclosed court attached to the king's palace, but which, on this occasion, was not adequate to the demands.

In many instances, among the more barbarous nations, the tourney of the Aztecs was not less bloody than those of the ancients of Pompeii and Rome, resulting purposely in the death of one or more of the contestants.

In view of the immense concourse of people in attendance at Tlacopan, the occasion would prove a proud one for the victors.

Contests with the bow and arrow, and tilts with the javelin, were to be especial features of the approaching tourney, which were open to all comers.

It was not required of a contestant that he or she be personally known; a badge, however, was usually worn, denoting the tribal connection.

A trial of skill between bowmen was announced, and the babbling throng became hushed. The signal for the contestants to appear was sounded, and a score or more of athletic warriors leaped into the arena. They were clothed in their military tunic, which covered the body and thighs. About the head was a band surmounted with featherwork. Ornaments and decorations of different kinds, denoting former victories, were worn by a number of them. A buckler, or shield, was carried by each one as a protection against the arrows of an opponent.

There were two points of excellence considered in this contest: the accuracy with which the arrow was dispatched, and the dexterity with which it was caught upon the shield.

The contest was opened by two of the warriors taking positions opposite and facing each other, at a fixed distance apart. The assembled multitude became instantly stilled, and all eyes were centered upon them. The bows of the opposing bowmen were deliberately brought to position, and at a given signal two arrows sped across the space which separated them, and which were neatly stopped by the respective shields. The effect upon the audience was electrical; a shout of approval went up for the splendid exhibition of skill manifested by the contestants. The opponents, in this instance, were of Tlacopan and Tenochtitlan. After three trials the score was recorded in favor of the latter.

Another two advanced to position, and a record was made. Thus the contest proceeded to the fifth entry, when a Tepanec and Tezcucan stood opposed. Two trials were successfully achieved, but at the third the arrow of the Tezcucan clipped a piece from the ear of the Tepanec, carrying

away the ring which adorned it. A prolonged shout of exultation from the Tezcucans present followed the discovery of the result of the shot.

The wounded contestant was a warrior of note in his own country, which was evidenced by the number of decorations he wore. He was greatly chagrined and angered at his mishap, and retired from the arena with bitterness in his heart, and a vengeful scowl upon his face. He was stoutly built, and would prove a dangerous adversary in a contest of strength.

The first of the series of contests was conducted to a finish, and the second was called, which was to be a contest in target shooting, to which none but women were admitted.

When the signal for their entrance was given, an array of beauty, in person and dress seldom witnessed, glided upon the scene. There were princesses, the wives and daughters of caciques and chiefs, and others with no royal blood to give them prestige—a double score.

We will not pause to describe the costumes—suffice it to say that the majority of them were gorgeous in the extreme, with elaborately wrought trimmings of gold and silver, and beautifully designed featherwork, making altogether a most fanciful picture of barbaric splendor.

The target, which in this case was the representation of a heart, was placed, and the contest opened.

The order of succession had been determined, and the first archer stepped to the front, receiving, as she did so, a good round of applause. After a moment's deliberation the arrow from her bow was sent on its harmless mission. It was well directed, but did not cut the target. She moved to one side, and another took her place.

"Look!" exclaimed a spectator to an associate as the second archer stepped into position. "By the bearded Quetzal, there's a beauty for you! Superb, isn't she?" The contestant was a stranger to that vast throng, but, had the reader of our story been present, a glance would have sufficed to reveal who it was; for it was none other than Mitla, the "Mountain Princess," who, through the persuasion of the tzin, had consented to enter the contest. After taking position she paused to recover her composure, giving the spectators time to note her admirable physique. A buzz of admiration was heard to pass through the great audience, and then as her bow was deliberately raised to shoot, all became silent! The silence was breathless—almost oppressive—while the vast crowd awaited the result of her shot. A snap was heard to break the stillness, followed by a sudden shadowy streak, which touched the target and disappeared; but the substance of it, the arrow from Mitla's bow, was left buried directly in the center of the heart. When the splendid feat of archery she had accomplished was realized, it was greeted with the wildest demonstrations of delight, accompanied by a shower of flowers, which fell in profusion about her. She had won the heart of the multitude by her superb, native presence, and unexcelled exhibition of skill.

Mitla cast her eyes in the direction of the king's canopied platform, and the look drew forth from friends there lively manifestations of recognition and applause. Coming, as these demonstrations did, from Macua's place on the *tianguez*, they were regarded by those who observed them as highly significant, fixing upon her the prestige of royal favor, raising the unknown archer, in their semi-barbarous minds, far above the plain of her uneventful life.

Many splendid shots were made by Mitla's competitors, but to no purpose. Her unerring accuracy could not be excelled, and at the close of the contest, amid shouts and acclamations of satisfaction, she was declared the winner.

The victorious girl was conducted before King Macua, who presented to her the prize she had won—a beautiful necklace of gold and gems, which was clasped about her throat by the hand of Euetzin, who was of the king's party. It was a superlatively happy moment to the beautiful mountain girl, and her eyes were effervescing with love's softest light as they rested on him whom, unknown to all save herself, she almost worshiped.

Mitla at once became an object of royal favor, and was escorted onto Macua's platform, and given a place with the king's elect.

A tilt with javelins was the next thing in order. This was in the nature of a challenge contest; a very dangerous one for the participants, and exciting to the beholders.

A challenge to engage in a tilt, or contest, was always in order, and usually proved to be the most popular and exciting feature of the tourney.

The signal for the bout to commence was hardly sounded before the Tepanec warrior who had been wounded in the bowmen's contest was in the arena. His challenge was directed to the Tezcucan who had inflicted humiliation upon him. His appearance and actions showed that his object was to have revenge for the disgrace which the peculiar wound he had received in the bowmen's contest would fasten upon him.

The challenge was accepted, and the two warriors stood face to face, awaiting the moment of action; hatred depicted on the countenance of one, the other calm and defiant. They were each equipped with javelin and heavy buckler, and clothed about the body and thighs with a thick

cotton tunic—the arms and lower limbs being entirely free from covering. They were without the customary headgear—a band only being worn to confine the long, coarse, black hair.

The instructions to the opposing warriors were to advance rapidly to a given point, and throw their weapons to kill—injury or death being avoided by dodging or catching the javelin on the buckler.

The great crowd was again hushed. The signals were given, and the rush of the opponents quickly followed. A whiz and crash were heard, and the Tezcucan was almost thrown from his feet by the force of the Tepanec's javelin, which he had succeeded in catching on his buckler. He immediately recovered himself, and faced his opponent, who, having dodged his adversary's weapon, stood fiercely watching the effect of his throw.

The advantage gained by the Tepanec over the Tezcucan, in the tilt, was not hailed with any degree of enthusiasm. There were too many friends of the latter, and others, present, in whose hearts burned the bitterest national hatred—a hatred for grievances inflicted—for which every Tepanec, no matter what his position, high or low, was held responsible.

It was evident that the Tepanec was the superior adversary, and he knew it. He was not satisfied with the result of the bout, and a second trial was demanded. Rather than be branded a coward, the Tezcucan granted it, but, in doing so, realized that he was no match for his enemy, and could hardly expect to come out of the contest with a whole skin, if he did not lose his life.

The lancers took their respective positions for a second trial. The signals were given, and they advanced quickly to the throwing point. A cutting of the air was heard, followed by a crash of javelins and shields, and the Tezcucan was knocked from his feet to the earth, where he lay powerless to rise, his buckler having been torn from his hand, and the weapon of his opponent buried in his body.

The Tepanec warrior, now insane with rage, rushed upon his fallen foe, with the evident intention of dispatching him.

Savage as they were, the Anahuacans had a profound sense of fair play. When the purpose of the crazed contestant was fully comprehended, the spectators, as by a single impulse, jumped to their feet, and a shout of derision went up from them for his wicked and unmanly design. The time was brief, but not too brief for an avenging hand to come between the would-be murderer and his fallen adversary. While all eyes were bent upon the insane victor, with no other thought but that he would accomplish his revengeful purpose, a hunter leaped into the arena, and, before the mad deed was consummated, a javelin was sent flying through the air, which struck the warrior in the neck, felling him, a lifeless heap, at the side of the prostrate Tezcucan.

The excitement was now intense. The dead Tepanec and his severely wounded adversary were forgotten for the moment by the excited audience, whose attention became centered on the hunter. This man, whose hand had sent the messenger of death, which so materially affected the aspect of the tragedy, suddenly became an object of speculation and the hero of the hour.

The king commanded that the slayer of the insane warrior be brought into his presence. When he appeared, in obedience to the command, great was the surprise and pleasure of Macua, and those with him, to see in the expert lancer the tzin's companion, Cacami.

The king said:

"We would honor the man who can throw a javelin so true, and at such a time; especially do we take pleasure in honoring Cacami. Wear this," he continued, placing upon Cacami's breast a decoration which carried with it honorable preferment, "as a mark of distinction, and also as a memorial of the valorous deed you have this day performed in behalf of a fallen man."

A shout of approbation ascended from the assembled throng, while the tzin warmly embraced his comrade and friend.

Cacami was a spectator only, not having determined to take part in the tournament, because of his engagements, especially on account of his recent journey to the mountains to assist in bringing the prince to the city. He was greatly interested in the tourney, however; particularly so in the tilt with javelins, and excitement might have led him to enter the contest had the first bout not ended as it did. No eye in that immense throng took in the situation as promptly as did his; and, instantly comprehending the purpose of the maddened warrior, he did not stop to think twice, but sprang to the defense of his fellow Tezcucan, which resulted, as we have seen, in his killing the vicious Tepanec.

When quiet was restored and the arena cleared, the tourney was conducted to a finish, and the great throng gradually melted away, most of it, however, to reassemble in a different capacity and place outside of Tlacopan.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

While the exciting scenes of the tourney were being witnessed on Tlacopan's *tianguez*, events of an entirely different nature were transpiring in the palace of Maxtla, at Azcapozalco. The embassy, consisting of three prominent persons and their attendants, which had been sent to him with the ultimatum of the allied principalities, arrived at his capital in great pomp the day preceding the one on which they were instructed to present it.

The envoys were royally entertained, as was the custom, by fete and feast, and made to feel that they were guests of a great monarch.

The nature of their mission was not known beyond the three representatives, nor was it expected to be until officially announced. Maxtla had not the slightest idea as to the significance of it.

In the forenoon of the day following their arrival at the palace, and about the time of the opening of the tourney at Tlacopan, an audience was granted the envoys; and, in the presence of the king and his counselors, the embassy's mission was made known, and the conditions of the ultimatum presented.

Maxtla was astounded and exasperated by what seemed to him the audacity of his petty neighbors. He, however, held his feelings partially under subjection. With all his fierceness and cruelty of disposition he was politic and cunning. He saw, as he thought, in the action of Tlacopan and her allies, a pretense for advancing his interests in that direction—the very thing he had been scheming to bring about, and shaped his course accordingly.

His reply to the envoys was to the effect that the action of the governments they represented was an insult, not only to his own dignity as a monarch, but that of his great empire. Tezcuco, he said, was his by conquest, and would not be relinquished except by force of arms. The enthronement of the despised Hualcoyotl, he further said, would be resisted to the last extremity.

"Go back to your masters," said he, "and say to them that we scorn their implied threats, and will resent the insult they have offered us with the whole force of our empire."

Maxtla's reply to the conditions of the ultimatum was equivalent to a declaration of war, and as such the embassy interpreted it.

Every respect was shown the envoys and their suit; and, when they departed from the Tepanec capital, they were escorted with due courtesy beyond the city's confines.

In a very short time after their departure the word went abroad throughout Maxtla's dominions that a war was imminent. His scattered forces began immediately to concentrate, and orders were issued for new levies to be made on Tezcuco and his other dependencies for additional troops.

In due time the couriers returned from Tezcuco with the startling intelligence that all the Tezcucans proper, who were subject to military duty, had gone to attend the tourney at Tlacopan, leaving only his own adherents available for immediate service.

Maxtla was thunderstruck at this information, for he saw in it the secret of Tlacopan's temerity. His eyes were opened to the fact that he had been outwitted by somebody, and that Tezcuco was about to slip away from him. His anticipations of an easy conquest of the little states opposed to him assumed a somewhat doubtful aspect, and instead of an extended empire he saw before him a struggle to maintain his supremacy over his already acquired territory. Realizing that celerity of action was imperative, if he would succeed, no time was lost in getting ready for the strife.

The circumstances attending the situation pointed to Tezcuco as the probable field of contention, and troops were therefore sent forward to that locality as rapidly as organization was effected.

While Maxtla was marshaling his hosts for war, Macua and his confederates were not idle at Tlacopan.

When the concourse of people, which had assembled to witness the tourney, quietly melted away at its close, preparations were at once begun to get the allied armies into a condition of mobility. It was not expected that Maxtla would accede to the demands made in the ultimatum, so the work of organization went on.

In the evening of the same day on which the embassy had audience with Maxtla, advance couriers reached Tlacopan with his reply. Its import was anticipated, but definite action could not be taken before it arrived.

Orders were immediately issued for the armies to be ready to move for concentration the next morning. It was no longer a secret that war was to be waged with the Tepanec king, and great excitement and bustle prevailed on the heels of the tournament. The excitement was of the

profound and solemn sort which is peculiar to preparations preceding a sanguinary strife for supremacy between opposing armies, especially with a semi-civilized people. The priests were actively engaged in their incitations to self-immolation by ceremonies accompanied with dolefully tuned cantations, causing a weirdness to pervade the very heart of the multitude, which brought a hush of awe upon the scene, giving it an aspect at once ominous and funereal.

All through the fore part of the night following the tournament the secret councils of Tezcuco were moving in a disorganized but orderly procession away from Tlacopan, going to the place of armament. When the morning dawned, an army of them might have been seen massed on the border of lake Tezcuco, east of the city. Some of them were already armed, while others were arming, preparatory to marching for concentration.

The armies of the nations of Anahuac were, to say the least, picturesque, and, from a historical standpoint, worthy of a brief description.

The higher grades of warriors—caciques, chiefs, etc.—wore, as a protection to the body, a heavy, quilted, cotton tunic, over which was usually thrown and fastened their superbly elegant *tilmatli* —mantle of featherwork. Their legs, in most cases, were protected by leggings made from various kinds of material, and elaborately fringed with trimmings of gold and silver, or other bright substance. Short boots, made from animal skin, or close fitting moccasins encased their feet. Their headgear was varied in character, often representing the head of some animal, a fish or other object. The more grotesque and hideous it was made to appear, the nearer was its purpose attained. However, the indispensable feather decorations generally prevailed.

It is quite safe to venture the assertion that the dress of the lords of Anahuac was not only gorgeously grotesque, but truly magnificent; while, on the other hand, the uniform of the common soldiers was strikingly undress, consisting, as it did, for the most part, of a plain gird about the loins, and a band of some kind to confine the hair—nothing more. There may have been exceptions to this airiness of apparel, but, as a rule, not enough to place the very convenient costume in danger of being superseded by a more elaborate and less airy one.

The principal arms used by them in battle were the bow and arrow and javelin. They were also provided with sling and dart. These instruments of warfare were pointed with either copper, bone, or obsidian (*itztli*, a transparent mineral substance, very hard, and capable of being reduced to the sharpness of a razor).

The Indian sword (*maquahuitl*) was a heavy staff, on which were inserted, at regular intervals, short, sharp blades of obsidian. This weapon was used by the principal warriors.

The ensemble of an army consisted of battalions, divisions and grand divisions. The first named numbered four or five hundred warriors; the second, six or eight thousand; and the last, proportionately larger; each division and subdivision being under the command of a proper official—cacique, or chief. At the head of each organization was borne an appropriate banner, on which was usually to be seen the insignia of the commandant; while the national standard—the armorial ensign of the ruling house—usually indicated the position of the person in command—great chief.

The ancient standard of Tezcuco was once more unfurled to the breeze, and her patriotic hosts stood organized, and ready to receive their prince.

Hualcoyotl, accompanied by a retinue of chosen warriors, among whom were our friends Euetzin and Cacami, both having been generously remembered by the prince in the distribution of honors, was advancing to assume command. When discovered by the army, and recognized, they were received with the acclamation: "Hualcoyotl! Hualcoyotl! Long live Hualcoyotl and Euetzin!" The latter was regarded for his untiring efforts in behalf of Tezcuco's independence as being entitled to all the honor due to any Tezcucan living, and his people were ready at all times to accord it.

The hour was a proud one to the two young men: To Euetzin in view of the crowning of his labors with the grand military display which was there spread out before him; to the prince for the opportunity which placed him in position to meet his cruel persecutor on equal footing, where he could demand, at the point of the javelin, his rights as the Prince of Tezcuco. He spoke as follows:

"Warriors, men of Tezcuco: after many years of degradation and enslavement, you are again permitted to stand beneath your own loved banner, which was once the delight of our fathers and the pride of our nation. It has been trailing in the dirt for long; but your determined look assures me that it will no longer be thus dishonored. There is no need for me, as your commander, to say, stand firm in the cause of liberty, for I read upon your faces the will to do or die. Then let us waste no time until Maxtla and his hordes have been met and brought to feel the avenging power of wronged Tezcuco's arm. Let our war cry be—"

"Hualcoyotl and victory! Hualcoyotl and victory!"

The words which the prince would have spoken were left unsaid, and the acclamation with which he was interrupted passed like a wave from right to left, and back again. When quiet was restored, he only said:

"As you will, and may your victory be complete."

The order was given to march, and the army of patriotic Tezcucans was quickly in motion, and on its way to join the allied armies at the place of rendezvous.

To strike the confederate armies Maxtla was obliged to march all his forces around the north end of lake Tezcuco, and south through Tezcucan territory, as the possessions of the Mexican king were on the west, and could not be crossed except in disregard of the laws of neutrality. It therefore required several days for him to get his army into position for taking the offensive.

A day or two after the allied armies began to move, they were united on the borders of Tezcuco, south of its capital city. The combined army was formed in a hollow square, to receive its commanding general. A procession approached, which was led by an escort composed of men who were peculiarly dressed. They were dressed more like hunters than warriors. In the rear of the escort a palanquin was borne by four men who were dressed in the same manner as was the escort. When the square was reached the escort halted, and the chair was borne forward into the inclosed space.

Six men walked in front of the palanquin, in five of whom we would have recognized Hualcoyotl, Macua, tzin Euet, and the other two ruling caciques. The dress of the sixth person was the same as that worn by the men in the escort, with the addition of a *tilmatli*. A closer scrutiny would have made us acquainted with his identity, for in him we would have found an estimable friend. It was Tezcot. He was the chief of the escort which was composed of his friends, the mountaineers. The reason for their being there in the capacity they were will be presented later.

When the center of the closely packed square was gained the palanquin was placed on the ground, and the occupant emerged from it. Hualcoyotl advanced to his side, and, in a strong voice, addressed the army:

"Warriors, friends: When the good king, who was the father of him who now addresses you, ruled the people of Tezcuco, he was surrounded by wise men and great generals. Many of them shared his fate, which was death at the hands of the despoilers of our country. One of them, however, a wise man and great warrior, who was counted lost, escaped from Tezcuco, and became an unknown refugee. By the stipulations of coalition, under which this army is organized, I should be its commander; but, for the good of our cause, I put aside personal ambition and the honor the high position would confer upon me, and will name as your commander Ixtlilchoatl, the great warrior, to whom I have just alluded, who for more than eight years has been living alone in a fastness on yonder mountains, and known to the mountaineers as Ix, the hermit. Warriors, in this wise man, who has returned to his own," continued the prince, taking the hermit by the arm, "behold your general. Long live Ixtlilchoatl!"

The acclamation, with which the prince concluded, was taken up by the army, and vociferated with a will, when it again became still.

"For this day I have prayed," spoke Ix. "Not that I might stand where I do at this moment, but that Tezcuco might find friends to help her in a mighty effort to regain her freedom. To you, who are allied with us to-day in the cause of liberty, my heart goes out in gratitude. Our people will remember you in kindness always, no matter what may be their condition. I have faith in the patriotism of this great army, and trust in its might. Be firm when the shock of strife shall come, and the victory will be yours."

When Ix concluded, he reentered the palanquin and was borne back whence he came. At the same time the armies began to move for the purpose of taking up their respective positions, to wait for the advancing host of Maxtla to offer them battle.

CHAPTER XXIX.

In order to make plain certain things which have come under our notice in the last two chapters, it will be necessary for us to go back to Tezcot's, and the hermit's cave, and note the doings of our mountain friends in the interim between the departure from there of Euetzin and Cacami and the holding of the tournament at Tlacopan.

Mitla became a changed girl. She had lived to learn that older hearts than Oxie's were liable to impressions that wound, and that to fall in love with a noble was, indeed, a serious matter for a mere mountain girl to do. Her formerly bright and joyous life was clouded. She went about her duties with a half-heartedness, and seemed most contented when alone. Her parents and sister divined the cause of the great change in her disposition, and left her to occupy the time as best suited her. Knowing so well her generous nature, and how deep was her gratitude to the tzin for her rescue from the rascally Tepanec soldiers, they were not surprised that her feelings toward him had become those of a consuming passion. They treated her with true sympathy, deeply regretting the circumstances which had led to her unfortunate condition of mind.

Tezcot became an almost constant companion of the prince and Ix, and appeared to have lost all interest in his hunting exploits.

The management of the surveillance over the hermitage, which had been established for the protection of the prince, had been intrusted to Menke, who performed the duty faithfully, securing the vicinity of the cavern-retreat from intrusion.

The prince, on being introduced to the hermitage, thought he saw something familiar about its mysterious occupant, and, becoming interested, finally discovered who he was. He was at a loss to understand why the hermit, for several days, persistently avoided all allusions to himself, unless it was to satisfy a whim. The fact of the matter was that Ix wished to fathom the character and disposition of the prince before openly declaring himself. When he found Hualcoyotl to be a worthy son of his illustrious father, the hermit gave him his cordial adherence and valuable counsel.

It is true that Ix gave the prince and tzin his invaluable assistance on the occasion of the latter's first visit to the hermitage; and it was he that inserted certain signs and language in the document which Euetzin bore away with him, that assured the king of Tlacopan of its genuineness, and secured his confidence in the bearer. Of this, however, the prince and tzin were not aware at the time.

Though only a boy, with no particular interest in government affairs, when his father's sovereignty was so suddenly and disastrously terminated, the prince remembered Ixtlilchoatl as a person who stood high in the councils of the king. His discovery of so wise and experienced an adherent was highly gratifying to him, for he felt that he needed just such a man to give him counsel. So, after due consideration, he decided to make him his supervisor of military affairs, which, subsequently, led to his being placed in command of the allied armies.

Tezcot was taken into the secret of Ix's identity, which brought an acknowledgment from him as to his own nativity. He was a descendant of the Acolhuans, whose gentle nature he inherited, though not a born Tezcucan. The prince and Ix welcomed him to their councils, and he became an almost daily participant in their deliberations.

Hualcoyotl had always been of a thoughtful turn of mind, and, as an occupant of a lonely hermit's cave, could scarcely have been expected to put aside a habit which had become a characteristic. In the hours of restraint which he was compelled to endure he might have been found often in a state of abstraction, when visions of future weal, and, perhaps, exaltation to the high position which his royal ancestors had filled, would occupy his thoughts. In these absent moods, which were only waking dreams, it was natural that his favorites should be brought into an imaginary existence, to give to his fancies a semblance of reality. Who but Itlza, of Zelmonco, could have shared his dreamings as a queen, the partner of his fancied exaltation, since the affectionate regard of his boyhood for her had, through a later contact, suddenly developed into a passionate desire to possess her for his own. And now that there was reason to hope for the early restoration of Tezcuco to her former place among the nations of Anahuac, this desire was further strengthened by the possibilities to which such a state of affairs would give rise.

On the occasion of his brief stop at Zelmonco villa, while journeying toward the mountains, he resolved, as may be remembered, that, should the circumstances warranting it ever obtain, she should become his queen; and the resolution had lost none of its force, but, on the other hand, had become a fixed purpose. So it happened that the drifting of events, and the conditions attending them, pointed to the wrecking of somebody's hopes, which, apparently, only waited a convenient season for their realization.

Successful beyond his most sanguine expectations in the achievements which crowned his second visit to Macua, King of Tlacopan, on which occasion he found himself a conspicuous figure in the midst of an assembly of men high in authority, who only required the encouragement of a promise of success to make them the determined allies of Tezcuco in a war with Maxtla, Euetzin's first impulse was to go immediately and communicate the good news to the prince; but, after calmly weighing the matter, changed his mind, and proceeded first to arrange for the massing and equipping of the secret councils of Tezcuco preparatory to their joining the allied army. When this work was about completed he left the chiefs of councils to finish it, and, with Cacami and a strong guard of Tlacopan soldiers, set out with a view to escorting Hualcoyotl in from the mountains. At the same time he carried an urgent request from Macua, the King, for the prince to repair to his palace, to remain the guest of his majesty until the beginning of hostilities, when he could take his proper position at the head of the army.

On arriving in the vicinity of Tezcot's, a suitable spot was found for an encampment, and the soldiers were left to occupy it, while the tzin and his companion went on to the hunter's alone.

The friends arrived at the mountaineer's house in the afternoon, and, as luck would have it, found the hunter at home. They were received in a very friendly manner by the family, and made to feel that they were most welcome. Mitla was not so demonstrative as the others, but not less happy that such was the case. She could suppress all outward exhibition of her feelings, but could not obscure the passionate light which shone from her dark eyes as they rested on him whom she loved to the verge of idolatry. Euetzin saw the expression of gladness, intense in its fervidness, which greeted him, and, while Cacami occupied the attention of the rest of the family, found opportunity to say:

"I read my welcome in your eyes, Mitla, which are wonderfully bright to-day, and full of gladness. Their language is better than words, for words are sometimes deceptive."

"My eyes would always betray my feelings, yet I do not care now, for I would have you know how truly glad I am that you are here," she replied, the expression of pleasure deepening, if possible, in its intensity.

"I am glad if I bring you pleasure. It is worth a longer journey than we have made to see you looking so happy," he returned.

"I wish that words were not sometimes deceptive," she replied, putting a marked stress on the expression which she borrowed from him, "then would I, indeed, be happy at hearing you say that."

"You do not doubt my sincerity, Mitla?" he questioned, slightly confused at having his own words applied to himself.

"No, I do not doubt your sincerity; at least, not your desire to be so—that would be ungenerous; yet I can not help feeling that your desire to give me pleasure causes you to say what your mind, not your heart, suggests." This was said, accompanied by an appealing look which the tzin could not fail to observe. He said, feelingly:

"I am very, very sorry that you feel so, for nothing that I can say will make you feel differently." These words were true, and yet not true. Doubting, as he did, the character of the sentiment which her presence ever inspired, honor still forbade the utterance of the declaration which would have made them untrue, yet the declaration might have been consistently made. It was doubt alone, then, which made them true.

"I am sure you speak truly, and that you will be generous in your thoughts, forgiving a feeling in me which is beyond my control," she said, giving him a look at once tristful and yearning.

"I shall not try to controvert your feelings, for they may be just," he answered, kindly. "But, Mitla, I must be about my business. Our stay must be very short on the mountains; the time allowed us for coming and returning will not admit of an hour's extension. However, I will try to find a little time in which to talk with you before we go away." Her answer to this was an approving smile; and the tzin turned to Tezcot and informed him as to the object of their mission, and the necessity of its hasty accomplishment. The hunter was quick to appreciate the situation, and immediately set about getting ready to accompany them to the hermit's cave.

Passing over the explanations which followed the party's arrival at the cavern, and the arrangements which led up to the situation as we left it at Tlacopan, except to say that Euetzin and Cacami learned with astonishment and pleasure the true character of the hermit, and rejoiced with Hualcoyotl in view of the prospective restoration to Tezcuco of her great general.

All saw the importance of Ix's presence, and as well that of the prince, at Tlacopan, and not a moment was lost in getting ready to leave the hermitage.

Ix was loth to part from his friend Tezcot, who had done him uncounted acts of kindness, and relieved many of his lonely hours with his presence. He conceived the idea of forming a bodyguard for himself, and proposed that his friend should be made its chief. The project was warmly seconded by the prince and tzin, and pressed so earnestly by all, that the hunter finally

yielded, with the proviso, however, that his friends, the mountaineers, should be asked to form the guard. This was agreed to, which resulted in the acquiescence of the hunters, and their appearance with the army, as we have seen.

The friends left the hermitage with varied emotions, which we will not try to interpret. They went slowly down the side of the mountain into the long ravine, thence out upon a more cheerful lay of the ground, where they found the walking more to their liking. They were in no hurry to reach the hunter's home; for darkness, they decided, should cover their entrance to it.

A half hour after the arrival of the party at Tezcot's found Cacami on his way to the camp of the soldiers to inform them of the intended early departure for the valley on the morrow; and also to make a detail of men to be at the hunter's at an early hour in the morning, to bear the palanquin in which the hermit was to make the journey. At the same time Euetzin and Mitla were out for a quiet talk. They were just approaching the little knoll where their last meeting occurred some weeks before, and he was saying:

"This spot would presently become memorable to us if our meetings on it should be continued."

"Yes, and you might add, for me, at least, not less endeared than memorable," she replied.

"I shall take pleasure in looking back to it, be assured, Mitla, and will try to imagine that I see you seated upon it in quiet happiness," he said, as they were sitting down. "And I am going to ask that you will permit your thoughts to occasionally dwell upon this hour, and that other; for, Mitla, I wish to be remembered."

"Can it be, tzin Euet, that you deem it possible for me to forget you, though a cycle in years were added to my natural life? How little do you understand the heart of woman, especially mine, so full of undying gratitude," returned the stricken maiden, her voice suddenly subsiding in a hush of sadness; for his words told her that the door of his heart was still shut against her.

"You say truly, Mitla; I am, indeed, incapable of understanding the heart of woman, or I would not be continually saying things which should be left unsaid. I know very well that for either of us to forget is an impossibility; for, to do so, it would be necessary to forget an incident, the terrible circumstances of which are indelibly fixed upon each of our memories. You must forgive my blundering, and believe me truly regretful, Mitla, that I am so thoughtless of speech," said he, contritely.

"There is nothing to forgive. I am foolishly sensitive, that is all," she answered, with a sigh. "Forget it."

"No, Mitla, I shall not forget it," he replied, "but will only let it pass, to be a reminder, in the future, that I must guard my tongue."

"As you please, but, pray, do not allow it to annoy you," she returned, with an effort at cheerfulness.

Seeing the effort, and thinking to encourage it, the tzin said:

"Now you appear more like yourself—more like the Mitla I first knew. Cheerfulness is natural to you, and you should continually court its presence, for its absence leaves you a loser."

"I am sorry if it does, for I fear it has forever gone from me," she answered, falling into the same sad vein again.

"I can tell you, Mitla, what will restore your cheerfulness," suddenly spoke the tzin, as if a happy thought had just then come to him, which caused her to look up expectantly. "Come with your father to Tlacopan, and shoot for the archers' prize, which the king has offered."

"On what occasion is the prize to be awarded? I am not informed," she questioned.

"That is true; you could hardly have heard it. There is to be a great tournament soon, at Tlacopan, in which women will contest with bow and arrow for a beautiful prize. Your father and others are going, and you can come with them. It will do you good to be there and become interested in the contest."

"It would be very foolish of me to think of winning a prize in a contest with archers who have had experience in the arena," she replied, dubiously.

"I do not think so. Your arrow is as true as any that will be there on that day. Your success would depend on the deliberation with which your shooting is done. If you are able to compose yourself, under such circumstances, I think you could win the prize," he said, persuasively.

"Would it please you to have me go and shoot for the prize?" she asked, artlessly.

"It would, indeed, please me, Mitla; and I am sure your chances for winning it are as good as the best," he replied, with a sincerity equaling her simplicity. His answer decided the matter in her mind, for to please, and, at the same time, be near him, she would have done anything in reason. She said, by way of acquiescence:

"If my father will not object, I will go, if only in obedience to your wish."

"I am grateful for your consideration of my wishes, Mitla, and shall hold it an honor to have been instrumental in bringing into the arena an archer who, I am certain, will do credit to herself and her friends. I will obtain your father's consent; so you may consider it settled that I shall have the pleasure of seeing you shoot at the tourney."

She answered smilingly, and with evident satisfaction:

"I hope you will not be disappointed in your debutante."

"I am sure I shall not be, even should she fail to win," he rejoined, pleased at the happy change the idea had produced in her.

After some little time spent in explanations and talk about the tournament they were interrupted by Cacami coming along, on his return from the soldiers' camp. They joined him, and together went into the house.

The next morning found the hunter's house a scene of lively preparations for the departure of the tzin and his party. A rude palanquin had been hastily constructed in which to transport the hermit, who was not considered equal to the accomplishment of the journey on foot. Hualcoyotl had been furnished by the tzin with a Tlacopan warrior's outfit, which would secure him from detection.

The soldiers who had been detailed to bear the palanquin were early on the ground, and everything was in readiness for moving.

Mitla was sadly disappointed in the result of her meeting with the tzin; there appeared to be no cause for hope in a requital of her great love by a return of his. When the moment came for parting she would have slipped away to hide the signs of her despair, which she felt must be apparent; but the tzin prevented it by insisting on her going a short distance with him. So it happened, when the cortege moved away from the house, she was walking at his side; while Oxie, vivacious and happy, walked and talked with the prince.

The opportunity for the development of Oxie's suddenly acquired admiration for Hualcoyotl into a stronger sentiment had not been afforded, as in the case of Mitla for Euetzin; she was, therefore, under no restraint, though in that peculiar mental condition which would have required but little encouragement to arouse a passionate sentiment which was only slumbering, and not profoundly either.

The tzin had secured the hunter's promise that Mitla should accompany friends to Tlacopan, to be present at the tourney and contest for the king's prize. On learning this she became quite cheerful, in view of the fact that she would soon see him again, and the parting, as a consequence, had comparatively little of sadness in it for her.

Good-byes were said, and the hunter and his daughters returned to their home, feeling that sense of loneliness which ever follows the breaking up of associations that have become dear to the heart.

The prince bade adieu to the mountains, in the fastnesses of which he had suffered so much, with no feelings of regret. Ix had learned to love the solitude of his hermitage, and, while rejoicing in the prospect of being restored to his people and country, felt a tinge of sadness as he cast his eyes for the last time toward the mountain which had given him security for eight long years.

CHAPTER XXX.

The battles of the Anahuacans were not fought on scientific principles. They had no conception of even the ordinary maneuvers of an army. What they did was done by main force and strategem. Their tactics were the result of untutored cunning, rather than intelligent design. To be sure, their armies were organized—as has been previously described—and, with their gaudy and glittering war paraphernalia of gorgeously decorated banners, bright shields, helmets, and cuirasses, presented a sight truly magnificent—according to the story of writers contemporaneous with the conquerors—as they moved forward in "so admirable order." They usually aimed to overwhelm an adversary, especially if the strength of numbers was on their side. They advanced amid the noises of rude drums, trumpets, and other instruments, singing their war songs, and vociferating their war cries, which was, no doubt, a kind of whistle-to-keep-up-your-courage proceeding. When on the defensive they resorted to cunningly devised ambuscades and other sudden surprises. They also practiced that peculiar manner of fighting common with savages, known as guerilla warfare, in which men have stooped to engage, in this nineteenth century, who claimed to be civilized.

Ixtlilchoatl's plans for meeting his adversary had been decided upon. He purposed standing on the defensive, and, if Maxtla was not informed as to the make-up of his army, felt that he could defeat him. He accordingly, at their request, placed three grand divisions—those of Tlacopan and the other two allies—in front to meet the onslaught of the enemy, while two divisions of Tezcucans were conveniently located to support them. The right of his line was made especially strong, in accordance with his plan of defense. The sixth grand division, the flower of the Tezcucan councils, was situated some distance to the left, and ordered to remain in concealment behind a strip of woods until the engagement was fairly opened, when it was to advance quickly and attack the enemy from that direction. Thus disposed, the army awaited the assault of the foe.

The Tepanec army was splendidly caparisoned and equipped, and, as it marched across the country with its gorgeous banners flapping in the breeze, and the glittering armor and other belongings of its warriors scintillating in the sun's refulgent rays, left behind it the impression that it was an invincible force. The people, whose hearts beat in sympathy with those who were to oppose the mighty aggregation, despaired of its defeat as they looked upon its dazzling splendor. It was clearly the stronger of the two opposing belligerents in equipment if not in numbers, and yet, the difference was more than equalized by the spirit of determination, which inspired the hearts of its opponents, especially the Tezcucans, who had witnessed their country wasting under the hand of oppression, their homes made desolate by poverty and distress, and their people gradually sinking into a condition of ignorance and degradation, while, in the advancing hosts of Maxtla they recognized the power which had wrought these disheartening deteriorations. Was it not enough to make each Tezcucan arm a nemesis in itself, when the sufferer and the author of his suffering stood face to face, on equal footing?

Some of the allied armies were as gaudily, if not so richly, accoutered as their adversary. The Tezcucans, however, although well armed, were indifferently dressed, and remarkably free from tinseled decoration, except in a few instances among the chiefs.

Maxtla, on learning that his enemies were in the field, determined to attack them at once, as delay would give them time to strengthen and perfect their organization, in which he was, to a certain extent, correct; for recruits and reinforcements from various points were hourly arriving to swell the allied army.

He was not aware of the deliberate manner in which the rising had been brought about, and expected to meet in the Tezcucan insurgents only a mob of undisciplined rebels. He had yet to learn how perfectly they were organized, and that Ixtlilchoatl was in command.

On came the imperial hosts, intent upon crushing the insurrectionists and their allies at a single blow. Ixtlilchoatl's advance sentinels were forced back upon the main body of his warriors, and, with hideous yells and a multiplicity of deafening noises, the minions of Maxtla swooped down upon the waiting confederates.

A perfect silence held the expectant lines of the patriotic allies. The showers of arrows and other missiles which fell about and on them moved them not. When the moment for action came, a shout of defiance went up from them, and the confident hosts of the enemy were given a reception they were not looking for. The javelin was used with telling effect, and the advancing lines of Maxtla's vassals were shaken from right to left, and the force of his onslaught broken. For a moment the attacking warriors were checked, and appeared to waver; but, quickly recovering, renewed the assault, and it now became a matter of force in numbers. In this Maxtla had the advantage, and Ix's left was forced back, as it was expected it would be. His right, however, being well supported, held the first advantage gained, and pressed the enemy hard. The left continued to fall back slowly, though contesting every inch of ground. This encouraged the Tepanec leaders, and they poured their reserve forces onto this point, thinking to crush the

slowly retreating divisions. To an eye witness the situation at this moment would have looked very unfavorable for Ixtlilchoatl and his prince, if not absolutely critical. But now was the time for the sixth grand division of Tezcucans to strike where a stroke was least expected. Its commander was prompt to take advantage of the opportunity, and out from the thick woods poured a host of vengeful warriors, with Tezcuco's prince at their head. The battle-cry of "Hualcoyotl and Victory" struck upon the ear of the enemy like a knell, as they fell upon the rear of his right like an avalanche of destruction. The retreating left took up the cry and leaped forward with a will; the middle, or center, Macua's splendid division of Tlacopans, reechoed it, and it soon reached the right, the warriors of which sent back an inspiring shout, and from it gathered renewed strength for the conflict, which now became one of fierceness and desperation.

Many were the heroic deeds enacted in that hour of terrible and sanguinary strife.

While the battle is raging, let us turn briefly to those in whom we are specially interested.

Hualcoyotl, as we have seen, led the grand division of Tezcucans from its concealed position to the sudden attack upon the rear of Maxtla's right. Cacami was at his side, and with his sword, along with that of the prince, dealt death to the now inwalled warriors of the enemy. Such an exhibition of fearlessness as these two young leaders showed, and the severe punishment they inflicted on the foe with their heavy swords, was an example which could not fail to stir their followers to deeds of savage daring. The enemy in their front became confused and demoralized by the impetuosity with which they fought, and from which confusion they were not allowed to recover, but were forced back upon their own men, carrying demoralization with them. More than once the life of the prince was saved by Cacami's strong arm, which seemed to wield with magic power the heavy maquahuitl in his hand.

Tzin Euet, who was at the head of the Tezcucans supporting the right, was quickly drawn into the fight when the shock of the first assault came. He led his warriors gallantly into the fray, and by his intrepid conduct nerved their hands for the conflict. In the midst of the hottest and decisive tug of the strife he suddenly disappeared, and when the great struggle ended could not be found.

Ixtlilchoatl remained calmly in his chair, watching from a position of eminence the progress of the mighty struggle in front of him. So long as the fighting went on in accordance with his plans he saw no reason for disturbing his chiefs by interfering. However, when he saw that Maxtla had fallen into his trap, messengers were hurriedly sent with orders to the leaders to meet the situation, and, as the battle waged, he saw that he would win. His guard of mountaineers, with Tezcot at their head, stood ready to strike for Ix, the hermit, as they still regarded him, should necessity require it.

Macua, with his grand division of Tlacopans, was doing good work in the front and center. In the closing scenes of the engagement his warriors gathered in a host of prisoners.

Everything was now in the allies' favor. Half of Maxtla's forces were surrounded, and the other half was being hard pressed by as determined a body of warriors as ever threw a javelin or swung a *maquahuitl*. The Tepanec tyrant saw that the battle was going against him, and his efforts were at once directed toward extricating his army from its precarious position. The signal to retreat was sounded, and the surrounded warriors, with the force of desperation, fought their way through the human wall which encircled them, and joined the main body, which began to slowly fall back.

It was late in the afternoon when the Tepanec army commenced its retrograde movement. The victorious allies followed up their advantage so long as it was possible, fighting and harrassing their retreating foe. Darkness finally came on, which put a stop to the strife.

It was not so much an object to kill, with the Anahuacans, ordinarily, as it was to capture.

Prisoners of war were reserved for sacrifice to the gods; and in order that greater numbers might be secured, incentives were held out to the soldiers to encourage the taking of them. They did not engage in the barbarous practice of scalping a fallen foe, but made a warrior's standing and promotion depend on the number of prisoners taken by him in battle, and any violation of his rights, by depriving him of his due as a captor, was severely punished—in extreme cases by death. For this reason their battles were attended with comparatively little loss of life.

The losses of the allies were mostly in prisoners, the number of their killed being quite small. Maxtla's losses, on the contrary, were chiefly in killed, for the reason that the Tezcucans, on this occasion, fought a fight of extermination. At least one fifth of the defeated army was left in the hands of the victors.

The victorious allies bivouacked for the night on the field of battle. The wounded were cared for and the dead disposed of, while the prisoners were put under a strong guard and sent to the rear.

When order was brought out of confusion, and the missing warriors reported, Euetzin was found to be among them. This was a heavy blow to the prince and Ixtlilchoatl; for, of all the army, he was the man whom they would have had join them in rejoicing over their victory. His ominous absence robbed it of much of the joy their triumph would otherwise have brought them. They

knew only too well the doom that awaited him if in Maxtla's hands; if not liberated, his fate was sealed.

A council of war was held; and, as the tzin stood high in the esteem of all the princes, it was decided to push Maxtla to the wall, and, if possible, save the young cacique from the terrible fate of a prisoner of war. Ixtlilchoatl accordingly issued orders for the army to march at dawn the next morning, for the purpose of again engaging the enemy in battle.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Tzin Euet was a prisoner, and very severely wounded. Eagerness to engage the enemy, and the impetuosity with which he led his warriors to the support of the allies, brought him, quickly, into the thickest of the fray. He fought as men only fight who realize the importance of a complete victory, which, in this instance, depended on the tenacity of the right wing of the army in holding the foe in check and calling for the engagement of his whole force by pressing him vigorously, which was according to Ixtlilchoatl's plan of defense, and of which Euetzin was fully advised.

When the Tezcucan battle-cry was heard coming from the sixth grand division as it fell upon the enemy's right flank, and was carried from left to right by the sister organizations, a fresh impetus was given to the momentum of the whole repelling army, and the battle, if possible, grew more fierce and sanguinary. In the struggle which ensued the tzin was carried into the very midst of the seething mass of human tigers, where he became separated from his men. When too late to extricate himself, he discovered, to his dismay, that he was surrounded by Tepanec warriors, who, seeing in him an important capture, struck him down with the javelin, and bore him, a bleeding prisoner, from the field.

In the retreat of the defeated army the prisoners were placed in the van—the severely wounded borne on stretchers. Euetzin was among the latter, feeling very much discouraged in view of his almost helpless condition, though glad of heart for the splendid victory his people had won.

Soon after darkness came on, Maxtla called a halt and his shattered forces went into camp. In the arrangement of the bivouac the wounded were placed apart from the regular organizations, and put in charge of surgeons, with which the armies were well supplied, and of whom the historian has said, in commendation: "Not with a view to prolonging the ill to extend the bill," as might be said of some modern practitioners, "was their skill directed, but to a speedy restoration of the patient to health."

Such a thing as a night attack was never considered by the Anahuacans in carrying on a war, and, so long as darkness covered the earth, an army of warriors could go to sleep with the assurance that they would not be disturbed by the enemy. A guard, therefore, was not established anywhere in Maxtla's army, except about the prisoners. This left the wounded almost free from surveillance.

Soon after the Tepanec forces went into camp a lad, apparently about fourteen or fifteen years of age, and rather stoutly built, might have been seen moving about among the soldiers. His dress was somewhat odd, indicating no particular connection or occupation. When asked as to who he was and where he lived, he answered, evasively, that he lived over near the lake, which was not a league away. He did not appear to be a person who might be suspected of having a special object in being there, and require watching. He was, therefore, permitted to move about of his own free will.

During the evening the youngster found opportunity to go among the wounded. He appeared to be searching for someone, for he scrutinized each person closely, as he passed. When he came to the tzin, and got a good look at him, his countenance quickly brightened—he had discovered the object of his search. Gaining Euetzin's attention, he gave him a sign of caution, and moved carelessly on.

The tzin recognized in the strange visitor a lad he had seen on several occasions, in the last few days before the battle, apparently doing duty as a messenger for someone in the allied army, and wondered greatly at his being in the Tepanec camp. He was sure from the boy's actions that he had something to communicate, and kept on the lookout for his return. He came, sure enough, and unconcernedly approached the tzin, who said:

"Do you wish to speak to me?"

In response to the inquiry the lad came quite close, and whispered:

"When the fires have burned out, and darkness hides you, come to a tree just beyond the camp—almost to the west—where you will find help to escape. Do not hesitate." Without waiting for a reply the strange youth turned slowly away, and disappeared.

Euetzin was greatly astonished. "What interest can the boy have in me, that he is here to aid in my escape?" he questioned. "And yet," he pursued, "he may be the agent of another. If I only might," he concluded, realizing his seemingly helpless condition. He had quite a little while in which to think over the matter before the fires would burn sufficiently low to enable him to withdraw from the camp unseen. He doubted his ability to succeed, for he was feeling very sore. His wound was a serious one, and that he might try to get away was not thought of by the doctors. He knew that it would be endangering his life to make the attempt, but when he considered that death was ahead of him if he remained a prisoner, he concluded that it had better be met in an effort to escape than at the hands of the Tepanec priests, later. Thus

persuaded, he decided to take the risk.

When the time arrived at which he thought he might safely attempt to go he raised himself to a sitting posture, and looked about him to be assured that everything was favorable. Nothing could be seen or heard to deter him from starting at once, and quietly rolling from the stretcher onto his hands and knees, he crawled slowly and noiselessly from among the wounded warriors, careless as to whether they were sleeping or not, so long as his movements were not discovered. He almost forgot his suffering in the excitement he experienced from the hope of a possible escape, which grew stronger as, by degrees, he approached the limits of the camp. After getting safely beyond he attempted to rise to his feet, but found the exertion too painful to be endured, and sank back upon the ground, where he lay until the pain subsided, when he again started off, crawling. He had pursued, as nearly as he could estimate, a westerly course from the camp, and when he had gone a short distance farther from it, stopped to look for the tree alluded to by the boy. He discovered one off to his right, which he concluded must be the right one, and again resumed his slow and painful movement in its direction. It proved to be the tree referred to, for, on coming close to it, he was discovered by the lad, who was on the watch for him, and seemed highly delighted at his appearance.

"I am so glad!" he exclaimed, "for I feared you would not come."

"What is it to you, boy, whether I come or stay?" asked the tzin, abruptly.

"It is much to me, which I hope you will live to learn. But now, tzin Euet, let it be enough for you to know that I am here to help you," returned the lad in some confusion, caused by tzin's abruptness.

"But I would like to know who you are, that takes so much interest in my welfare."

"My name is Hualla, tzin—just Hualla, but you must not question me. Time is precious to us, and we must hasten. In yonder woods, toward the lake, we may find security. When we are there you shall know where I came from."

"I already know where you came from, for I have seen you in our army; but I would know more: I would know why you are interested in me," persisted the tzin.

"We are losing time; let us be off," returned the youth, evasively, and with increasing anxiety.

"Is there no one with you?" questioned the tzin.

"No one; I am alone."

"My young friend, I can not walk; how then, do you imagine, am I going to reach those woods without assistance?" Spoken in a tone of disappointment.

"I will assist you. I am strong, if not very large," was the confident reply.

"You are very good, Hualla, in being so willing and anxious to help me, but I fear you will not be equal to the demands which my crippled condition will require in an effort to gain the cover of yon woods."

"You will let me try, tzin; I may be stronger than you think," said the lad, taking hold of Euetzin's arm to assist him to rise.

"Yes, you may try. Until you have done so, we will not despair; our combined efforts may prove successful," said Euetzin, getting onto his feet, with the assistance of the youth.

"Now lean on me," said Hualla, putting his arm around the tzin's body. "In this way I think we can get on."

A heroic effort was now made by both to get away from the vicinity of Maxtla's camp. The tzin suffered intensely at every step, and his face, could it have been seen, would have shown a deathly pallor. While the effort continued he found it necessary to gradually lean more heavily upon his support, until the youth, from sheer inability to proceed farther, allowed his burden to sink to the ground.

They had covered in the effort quite a little distance, and the lad, though considerably exhausted, was encouraged. But just here a new complication entered into the situation: the bandages which confined the tzin's wound had become disarranged by his exertions, and hemorrhage ensued. There was no alternative in the matter: they must stop and rearrange the disordered bandages.

Stretching himself on the ground, the tzin gave directions to Hualla as to how he should proceed, and the bleeding was checked. In performing the operation, no woman's fingers ever worked more gently than did Hualla's.

The tzin once more endeavored to rise to his feet, but failed in the attempt because of the extreme pain it caused him.

"I can go no farther, Hualla," he said, in deep distress.

The lad appeared to be greatly affected by the failure, as Euetzin could discern, even in the darkness. He walked away a few steps, as if to hide his emotion. Returning presently, he said, in an excited tone of voice:

"Tzin Euet, you must escape. Macua, my master, and Hualcoyotl—yes, Ixtlilchoatl, too, would have it so. I will carry you."

Euetzin was astonished at the vehemence in the youth's actions, and also at his allusion to Ix and the two princes. He quickly inquired:

"Are you a servant to Macua, and here at his bidding?"

"Yes, I am a servant to Macua, but he knows nothing of my being here. I heard the voice of sorrow when it was discovered that you were missing, and in that moment resolved to save you, if it could be done," replied the youth, fervidly.

"You are a noble lad, Hualla, and should I escape to live, your conduct shall be richly rewarded."

"You must escape," repeated the youth in a voice of great earnestness. "Get upon my back, and I will bear you to the woods."

"I do not think you have the strength, Hualla, to do that; and if you had, it would be too much to expect of you."

"Yes, it would be much to expect of me, if it were not a case of life and death. That makes the difference, tzin, and you must allow me to make the attempt."

Euetzin was silent for a moment, and then said:

"Hualla, I think we will have to give your proposition a trial, as it appears to be our only hope, though a slight one, of reaching those woods."

The tzin was not a small man, nor was he large, but, nevertheless, a heavy load for such a person as Hualla to carry for any considerable distance. The feat was undertaken with some degree of success; and as the tzin was borne along on the back of the youth a tinge of shame might have been seen to redden his tawny brow, brought there by a thought of his unmanly position, and the boy's wonderful and almost superhuman efforts to get him into the woods.

Hualla succeeded in covering more than half the distance they had to go, but it was a fearful draught upon his strength, and he finally had to succumb from complete exhaustion. He said not a word, but dropped upon the ground and fairly gasped for breath.

Euetzin was deeply moved by the evident distress of the brave lad, who lay panting at his side, and for whom he could do nothing. He silently waited for him to recover, wondering the while if there was not some other incentive than that of devotion to his master back of the prodigious efforts he was making in his behalf.

Hualla lay perfectly still for some time, when he suddenly got up and said:

"Another effort like that, tzin, will bring us safely within the woods. If you are ready, I will try again."

"You will not try again, Hualla," replied the tzin, firmly. "If we can not gain the woods in some other way I will remain where I am. You shall not again exhaust yourself thus for my sake."

"I will do anything, tzin Euet, to secure your safety," was the lad's earnest rejoinder.

"I believe you would, Hualla. Still, I do not intend that you shall hurt yourself in doing it. I can not understand why you—a stranger—should exert yourself to the extent you are doing to secure my safety. The thought of it amazes me."

"Do not think of it, then, tzin. So long as I am pleased to help you, it should not be so very wonderful. I have my own reasons for doing it; let that satisfy you—until you are safe, at least."

"It is wonderful, nevertheless, my lad. However, if it pleases you to serve me in this way, and the service is accepted—which it is, with unbounded gratitude—its acceptance should be without question. So, Hualla, I'll trouble you no more about it. If you will permit me to lean on you for support, we will make another effort—such as we made in starting out. I will try my best to endure the attendant suffering," said the tzin.

Hualla assisted him to his feet, and caught him about the waist, holding him for a moment, until he was assured of his ability to proceed. The pain, which the effort cost him, was great, but, shutting hard his teeth, and leaning heavily on the lad, who put forth his best efforts, the tzin slowly, but surely, reduced the distance to the woods, until, finally, after several successful efforts, he entered its sheltering confines, where the two—one bruised and sore, the other almost exhausted—laid themselves down to await the coming morn, which was not very far away.

CHAPTER XXXII.

At the dawn of morning, the day following the one on which the great battle was fought, the allied armies, after being addressed by their respective caciques, began to advance, with a view to another engagement with Maxtla, for the purpose, chiefly, of securing, if possible, the liberation of the prisoners in his hands. The chiefs, in addressing their warriors, dwelt especially on the capture of tzin Euet, the man—as they expressed it—who had done so grand a work for Tezcuco and the cause of liberty, who, above all others, they felt, should enjoy the fruits of that work, and whose release it was hoped might be brought about by the further discomfiture of the enemy.

Flushed with the stimulus of a great victory, and anxious to again measure strength with the Tepanec hosts, the warriors of the coalited army marched away from their bivouac with a zeal which augured well for them and the confusion of their adversaries, should they meet again in deadly conflict.

The camp of the enemy was known to have been pitched on a plain situated on the further side of a piece of woodland which lay just north of the field of the recent battle. Ixtlilchoatl moved his forces cautiously through this piece of woods, expecting to find Maxtla encamped beyond, in blissful ignorance of their approach. Great was the surprise, then, of the eager and expectant allies, when they came out onto the plain, to find the enemy gone—the bird had flown, though, evidently, only a short time before. A rapid pursuit was immediately ordered, and ere long the retreating foe was overtaken and another great battle fought.

The advantages, in point of numbers and excellence of organization, together with the prestige of former successes, which were on the side of the Tepanec army when it entered the field against the allies, had been swept away by a disastrous defeat, and its warriors, further disheartened and demoralized by a humiliating retreat, which left them wholly unfitted to cope with an equally numerous army, whose members were energized by a consciousness of right, the invigoration of victory, and a determination to overthrow the power which had long been a menace to tribal independence.

The second battle was fought by the Tepanec leaders more on the line of self-preservation and the hope of getting off with a whole skin than with the expectation of doing their opponents material damage. A desperate conflict ensued, however, in which every inch of ground was stubbornly contested by them, but which, as might have been expected, ended in that wicked and tyrannical son of a barbarian despot—Maxtla—being again discomfited and forced to yield to his hated foe. A disastrous retreat followed, and, had not darkness come on to check the avenging hosts of Tezcucans, who pursued with deadly havoc the vanquished horde, the routed army would have been effectually disintegrated, if not wholly annihilated.

The prisoners, with whom Euetzin was supposed to be, were not found, and therefore not liberated. Thus was defeated one of the chief motives which had led to the sudden advance of the allies.

Victory was won, and with it a crown, but at what a cost to Prince Hualcoyotl's mind, in the contemplation of the awful fate which he now felt awaited his best-beloved friend. Great as was the success achieved, he had no heart, in that supreme hour, for exultation. He bowed his head in sorrow for his lost friend, and, leaving the management of affairs to Ixtlilchoatl and his subordinates, retired to a spot where he could be alone, that he might wrestle with his deep mental distress.

Maxtla, realizing that his army was crushed beyond hope of immediate reconstruction, continued his flight by night, to get as far from the victorious allies as possible before the light of day should reveal to the country the crippled and demoralized condition of his army. No stop was made until he had passed around and beyond the city of Tezcuco into his own territory, where a bivouac was established, and his warriors given a rest. So far as it could be done, order in his shattered ranks was restored, and the march to his capital resumed and ended.

No acclamations or demonstrations of approval greeted the return of the imperial army to Azcapozalco. With solemn, funereal tread it entered the royal city, which soon became filled with a wail of woe ascending from the bereaved and stricken inhabitants, who mourned for the missing and slain. How different was its departure!

Maxtla did not despair under the greatly adverse conditions in which he found himself after his short and disastrous campaign, but immediately set about reorganizing his army, with a view to recovering his imperial standing. His domain embraced a thickly populated territory, and was not lacking in material from which to reconstruct his depleted forces. The outcome of it was that, in a very short time, he was better prepared for war than when he went forth to meet the allies.

The prisoners taken in the battles by his warriors were brought safely through, and, as was the

custom, placed in confinement to await their doom of sacrifice upon the altars of the Tepanec deities.

Ixtlilchoatl, greatly elated over the successes which had so suddenly been achieved by the armies under him, and, having conceived the idea of giving Hualcoyotl a magnificent reception back to his own, began at once to get things in shape for a grand entry into Tezcuco. Then followed the memorable march to the city, which, we are told, was one continued ovation to the returning prince. "He entered his capital," says the chronicler, "not like a proscribed outcast, but as the rightful heir to a throne, receiving, at the same time, the homage of his joyful subjects." His triumph was complete, but, with it all, there was an aching void in his heart: his enemy had escaped, and carried with him, as he supposed, the best of all his friends.

He was back in his palace, surrounded by the men who had stood with him in the fierce and deadly conflicts through which he was compelled to pass to reach it. Ix, the warrior hermit, whose intelligence and sagacity had directed the army to victory; Macua and his princely consorts; Tezcot, the wise hunter and good friend; Cacami, now a warrior whose undoubted bravery and skill were conspicuously shown in more than one furious encounter, and which were fully appreciated by the prince; and Menke, Oza and Kan, and many others who have held no particular place in our narrative, yet worthy of it when valorous deeds are considered, were there engaged in celebrating, in an enthusiastic manner, the event of their lives—the victorious close of a remarkable conflict.

Now, indeed, was Tezcuco free from Tepanec enthrallment, her people restored to their ancient privileges, and her prince brought back from an outlawed condition to the enjoyment of his inherited rights.

The power of the military immediately supervened, but its rule was not oppressive, for Ix, the hermit, was not a tyrant.

The greatest activity in all things suddenly became apparent. The king's palace quickly became a scene of rustling animation. While artisans were laboring to restore it to its ancient splendor, the prince and his attendants were busily engaged in bringing order out of chaos. Ah, how he missed his two best friends, Euetzin and Itzalmo, in that hour of incipient well-being and future greatness!

The teocallis were receiving needed attention, after years of neglect and waste, in anticipation of the coming rites, which were to be celebrated in honor of the prince's coronation.

The spirit of self-interest and industry, which had lain dormant in the hearts of the enslaved Tezcucans since the subversion of their government, was revived with their restoration to liberty, and activity prevailed where only a few days before was lethargy and inaction. Wonderful transformation! The people were free!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

We will turn once more to Zelmonco villa, on which sorrow has again fallen through the afflicting hand of war.

It is a beautiful evening, an hour after the night-shades have swept away the last gleam of day. The moon's golden-hued disc is beaming refulgently down upon the glowing face of Anahuac. The unruffled foliage of shrub and tree is overcast with a silvern tinge, the reflection of Luna's mellow light on Nature's inimitable green, while, like groups of twinkling stars from afar, are seen in the distance the sacred fires which light up every temple's summit, and which are never permitted to go out. At such an hour, in which inanimate Nature, superbly robed and serenely smiling, wholly unresponsive to the sorrow which saddens her animate sister, as represented in the grief-stricken inmates of the villa home, we are privileged, as visitors, to stroll in the direction of the old oak tree, under which, in the past, the now mourning Itlza has found her chief pleasure in idle moments. As we approach the spot the first object to attract our attention is the flowerlike appearance of the beautiful fountain. We pause for a moment to view with delight the graceful turn and fall of its translucent waters, which resemble in the moon's soft rays a great white lily. In the excitement of our admiration we are led to repeat, mentally:

> "Into the moonlight, whiter than snow,
> Beautiful, flower-like, ceaseless thy flow.
> Glorious fountain——!"

What sound is that which breaks in upon our reflection, scarcely louder than a murmur, rising in gentle undulations above the ripple of the fountain's flow as it falls into the effervescing pool below?

"My heart is sad—very, very sad, and were it not for your safe return, O Cacami, desolation would, indeed, overwhelm me."

It was Itlza's voice, low and sorrowful, addressing her lover, who had improved the first favorable moment, after the army became settled in Tezcuco, to visit the villa, where he found Teochma prostrated with grief, and Itlza very sad, though supported by the expectation of an early visit from him.

"Despair not, O Laughing-eyes; Euetzin may yet find favor with the gods. He is not dead, or his body would have been found upon the battle field."

"It were better, Cacami, if he were dead; for, oh, what a fate awaits him, if he is a prisoner!" she replied, sorrowfully.

"Let us not think of that, but rather hope against such a fate, and for a little while rejoice that we are once more brought together."

"I do rejoice, Cacami, in your preservation, and that I have you with me again; but how can I forget, for one moment, my poor, unfortunate brother?"

"Do not forget him, Laughing-eyes, but be cheered by the hope that he is not lost."

"I will try, and you will help me by recounting of yourself. How do you rank in this hour of our people's triumph?" she questioned, with a supreme effort at rallying from her dejection.

"I have no particular rank as yet, Laughing-eyes, more than that of one of the prince's chief attendants. I stood with him through both battles, and we have come to be very good friends."

"I see that you have been decorated, but do not know the significance of the badges you wear. Tell me about them, Cacami."

"This decoration," he said, directing her attention to a beautifully constructed and highly ornamental badge, "was awarded me by Hualcoyotl for doing my duty—he called it valorous conduct in battle. I prize it above all else, for it tells me I am no longer unworthy of your love." Looking up at her fondly.

"Who but yourself ever thought you unworthy?" she quickly answered.

"It was enough that I should think so, Laughing-eyes, without consulting the thoughts of others."

"Well, I'm glad you have changed your mind, at any rate," she rejoined, in quite a happy vein. "But this other one, Cacami, what deed of bravery brought you that?" she continued, lifting from his breast a superbly finished medal.

"No deed of bravery brought me that, Itlza. It was won by skill; and is the price of a man's life."

"O, why did you tell me that?" interrupted she, dropping the blood bought bauble.

"Wait, Laughing-eyes, until you have heard the story; then you will not think so badly of it," he replied, in answer to her repellantly ejaculated question. "It was given me by Macua, king of Tlacopan, at the great tourney in token of his appreciation of my skill in throwing the javelin. I was not a contestant, but, notwithstanding, had occasion to use my weapon. It happened in this wise: In a bout between lancers a Tepanec warrior was bent on murdering his opponent after he had struck him down. When I saw his purpose I sprang to the defense of the fallen man, killing the would-be assassin with my javelin before he accomplished the foul deed. And know, O Laughing-eyes, the defeated lancer was a Tezcucan. Can you blame me for doing what the people applauded, and Macua rewarded?"

"No, Cacami, I can not blame you. I should have judged you better. The badge becomes you; wear it where Macua placed it, but only as his gift, forgetting it was won at such a cost."

"I felt sure you would not blame me for defending a fallen countryman, even at the cost of a foeman's life. He was a foeman, Laughing-eyes, a foeman of Tezcuco's, or why his bitter hatred for the warrior whom he had fairly defeated?"

"Yes, it must have been hatred that lead him on to his death; but, Cacami, such scenes are best forgotten; let us talk of something else."

"Shall we talk of love, then, Laughing-eyes?"

"Better that than of scenes of blood. Yes, let us talk of love. What of the troth, O Cacami, which was left unpledged until you, with your sword, should win honor and fame? Are you not a decorated warrior now?"

"Yes, Laughing-eyes, I am; but is it well to talk of pledges now? Had we not better wait? I am not less desirous than yourself to seal our love with the sacred kiss of troth; but, Itlza, your brother, the best friend I ever had, may yet be saved; and, should he be, I want him to know, and Teochma, your mother, too, before our pledge is sealed. Our love will keep, as it has in the past. Who knows, but ourselves, that we are lovers? And, since this is so, who may come between us?"

Ah, Cacami! if you had only known what lay beyond, we think you would hardly have plead for delay, though in doing so you showed an honorable disposition.

"Who, indeed, may come between us?" returned Itlza, in a spirit of concession. "It were honorable in you, Cacami, to be considerate of my mother and brother's pleasure in the matter of our troth. I should not be the one to urge it against your reason, nor will I. No; as you say, our love will keep."

While Cacami and Itlza, secure in their own minds as to a final and happy consummation of their dreams, were felicitous—though sad—in each other's society, Hualcoyotl sat alone in his palace apartments laying plans, which, if successfully carried out, would bring about their separation, and the frustration of their cherished hopes. And yet, he was ignorant of the fact that two lives were to be made unspeakably wretched by the course he was planning to pursue. He loved Itlza, but never stopped to think that she might love another; and, possibly, did not consider such a contingency of sufficient importance to require a serious thought; for was he not soon to be made a king, whose will would be law, even in the choice of a wife? His affection for his lost friend, and the sympathy he felt for the bereaved mother and sister awakened in his already predisposed mind thoughts of an immediate union with the latter, and he planned accordingly.

It was the custom of the ruling princes of the Anahuac, when a queen was to be chosen, to have the intended royal consort brought to the palace of the prospective royal groom, to receive such instructions as would fit her for the high position she would be called to fill. With this end in view, the prince decided that Itlza, with her mother as a chaperon, should be transferred to his palace at once. He was not yet a king, and had no authority to issue a command. What he did at this time was necessarily done by courtesy. When the power to command should be placed in his hands he would be less persuasive; before, however, his ends would have to be reached by the milder methods. The mother was accordingly apprised of his wishes, and asked to give them her immediate and favorable consideration.

Teochma was not aware, as the reader knows, that matters had gone so far with Itlza and Cacami as to reach an avowal of their attachment for each other; although she felt they were more devoted than they should be, since in her mother-heart had been fostered a hope that Itlza might yet fill the exalted position of Queen of Tezcuco. Attributing the prince's proposal to the right motive, she saw in it the possible consummation of her aspirations, and would not have been human had she not experienced a certain degree of elation at the prospect. She acceded to the proposition, and looked forward to her temporary establishment in the palace as but the entrance to her future exalted position of mother to the queen.

The ready acquiescence of Teochma to his wishes was very gratifying to the prince, and preparations for receiving his intended at the palace immediately followed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

After reaching the woods, and fixing himself as comfortably as he could, the tzin tried to get some sleep, but could not succeed in wooing to himself the coveted forgetfulness. The signs in his condition were not at all favorable; he was feverish, and his wound quite painful. Hualla showed much concern, and, when it grew light enough to see, insisted on being permitted to redress his wound. The tzin was not disposed to allow him to undertake it, fearing he would do him more harm than good, but, growing rapidly more distressed and restless, finally yielded, and the lad proceeded with the dressing. Euetzin was agreeably surprised at the handy manner in which it was done. The relief to him, which followed, was so marked, and the result so soothing, that he quickly dropped off to sleep. When Hualla saw that he slept, he laid himself on the ground near by, and was soon sleeping soundly, from a head to foot weariness.

The sun was well up toward the zenith when the lad awoke. He arose and approached the sleeping tzin, who appeared to be suffering even while slumbering. His breathing was heavy, and accompanied by a sound very much like a moan. After looking at him searchingly for a moment, the youth turned away with an anxious expression on his face, and went to the border of the woods to ascertain if the Tepanec army was still on the plain. Discovering that it was not, he returned to find Euetzin just waking. On attempting to rise to a sitting posture, the tzin found that he could not, and fell back with a groan. Seeing his failure to get up, and the evident suffering the effort caused him, Hualla went quickly to his side and said:

"Let me help you, tzin."

"No, Hualla, it is not for want of strength, but in consequence of pain, that I can not rise. I fear your assistance will no longer avail, since I am so sore and stiff."

"I am willing to do anything to serve you, tzin Euet. Can't you advise me?" questioned the lad, anxiously.

The voice in which these words were spoken was so like something he had heard before, that Euetzin looked sharply at the speaker. He could discover nothing, however, in his appearance, which would justify the thought inspired by the seemingly familiar sound, and allowed it to pass as a possible similarity, or, perhaps, only a freak of the imagination.

"Will you learn if Maxtla's army is still on the plain, Hualla?" he said.

"It has gone, tzin Euet. I have only just come from looking."

"Then, Hualla, you must go, at once, to Hualcoyotl for help. I will remain where I am until you return. Please to hasten."

The lad started immediately on his fruitless errand, from which he returned soon after noon, with the discouraging intelligence that the allies had also gone. Euetzin groaned under the weight of a helpless discouragement at the announcement.

"What am I to do, my lad, now that I am helpless?" he said, showing much mental distress.

Hualla tried to comfort him, and proposed to go still farther in search of help. It was the only course left them, under the circumstances. After eating some of the food which he had procured at the deserted camp, the lad started off in the direction of the lake, hoping to find someone there, a fisherman or boatman, who might be induced to come to their assistance. He was most fortunate, and correspondingly elated, in finding a party of boatmen who had just landed at the beach, with whom he succeeded in making arrangements for the tzin's conveyance to a small town, which was situated on the lake, a league or so away.

Having succeeded so well, Hualla was now greatly encouraged at the prospect of soon getting his charge to a place where he could have the immediate attention of a doctor. One thought, however, gave him considerable anxiety; it was of the suffering the wounded tzin would be compelled to undergo while being transferred to the beach. The distance was more than a mile, and the trip, he feared, would prove very distressing to him, should it be necessary for the men to carry him on their arms. This difficulty was quickly overcome by the boatmen, whose native cleverness soon put them in possession of a roughly constructed litter, on which he was borne to the beach with but little trouble, and only a slight addition of discomfort.

When Euetzin learned that Hualla had found assistance to relieve him from his discouraging situation, he could hardly find words strong enough to express his gratitude. His appreciation of the lad's services was hourly growing more and more heartfelt, and he could not but marvel at the exhibition of interest manifested by him for his comfort and safety. It was, apparently, a phenomenal manifestation of disinterested kindness.

The tzin bore his distress bravely, and helped, by an occasional cheerful expression, to relieve the transit of some of its wearisomeness.

When the beach was reached he was carefully borne to a boat, on which he was placed, and in due time safely landed at the little Tezcucan town, where suitable quarters were secured for him, and the attention of a physician obtained, who soon had him feeling quite comfortable.

So soon as it became known that a wounded Tezcucan cacique had escaped from Maxtla's army, and found his way to the little town, everybody became interested, and nothing was too good with which to provide him.

Hualla received his due in praises for his brave conduct, as represented by Euetzin. He, however, did not seem to relish it, receiving it with a good deal of embarrassment.

Proof of the lad's cleverness in the matter of wound dressing had been furnished the tzin in two instances, and, by his request, he was installed as his nurse. The youth was provided with an apartment of his own, from which he was seldom seen except when at the bedside of the tzin.

In less than a day after his arrival at the town, Euetzin became quite ill. The exhaustive efforts which he had made to get away from the camp of the enemy, and the unavoidable aggravation and neglect of his wound, were followed by very serious consequences. A fever set in, and, owing to the dangerous character of his injury, a complication was brought on which, but for the careful administrations of his two faithful nurses and a vigorous constitution to aid them, might have terminated fatally.

Who was the second nurse? we imagine the reader will wonder. We answer, none other than the good old Itzalmo.

The old preceptor, soon after his flight from Azcapozalco, came to this town for better security; and, being too old to take part in the struggle for liberty, had remained there in concealment, waiting the result. Having no intercourse with the people of the town, he did not learn of the wounded cacique's arrival until the following day. He had, however, in the meantime learned of the great victory which had been won by the allies, and the retreat of Maxtla's army. This emboldened him, and he left his seclusion to rejoice with his brethren over the good news. By doing so he quickly learned of the presence of the wounded chief, and at once decided to make him a visit, thinking he might, in some way, be of service to him. The old man was not informed as to the tzin's identity, and made his visit from purely humane and patriotic motives. On presenting himself at his apartments he was greatly surprised at discovering in the supposed stranger his young friend and pupil, tzin Euet; and as a serious turn in the tzin's condition was just then evident, he became deeply concerned about him, and immediately gave his whole attention to the case, proving himself to be a most devoted and skillful attendant. When he fully realized the dangerous condition of his young friend he insisted upon notifying the prince regarding him, to which, for some reason, the tzin objected.

"Wait a few days," said he, "when I will be well enough to go to Tezcuco by boat." Thus were his friends kept in ignorance of his escape and whereabouts. The few days were more than doubled before his consent could be obtained, because of the unconscious condition into which he suddenly passed, and in which he remained for several days. A messenger was finally dispatched with particulars of his situation, the communication being signed by Itzalmo, with the simple statement that the writer was with him.

Hualla was always at the bedside of the tzin when Itzalmo was not, and appeared anxious and watchful for encouraging signs in the patient's condition. When a change for the better was at last discovered, he was wonderfully elated for a youngster like him, and especially one who had so lately entered into the endangered life.

One day, while the tzin slept, the youthful nurse leaned over the bed to listen to his breathing; possibly to learn if any change had taken place in the condition of it. Suddenly, as if from an irresistible impulse, he pressed a kiss upon the sick man's brow. As he did so the word "Mitla" might have been distinctly heard coming from the sleeper's lips. Hualla drew back quickly, and could his face have been seen in that moment, the observer would have been astonished at the singularly happy expression upon it. The word uttered carried with it a revelation.

As the days went by, Hualla became more devoted to the afflicted tzin, and actions expressive of ardent attachment were of frequent occurrence on his part.

The patient was rapidly recovering; the nurses, however, had not relinquished their posts of duty, but continued careful of his every want. It was in Hualla's watch that we find him quietly dozing, or apparently so, while the young nurse sat in his accustomed place near the bed. Presently the latter rose from his seat and approached the bedside, and, as he frequently did, leaned over the sleeper and gazed intently into his face. As he was thus occupied Euetzin suddenly opened his eyes to encounter an earnest, loving expression, which the watcher was unconsciously revealing. Only a pair of undisguised eyes were seen by the tzin, in which he beheld, not Hualla, but one with whom he had at last come to realize he was in love, and, quick as the thought which impelled him, he caught the watcher's form, and drew it to him, while he exclaimed:

"Mitla, my own true love! How is it that you are here?" and, when he had said this, imprinted a fervent kiss upon Hualla's lips.

"The assurance that you love me brings a great joy to my heart. I am repaid for all that I have endured for love's sake. But, Euetzin, you must not forget that you are ill. Excitement might do you harm," returned the young nurse in surprising language.

"Such excitement will make me well," replied the tzin. "But, Mitla, you have not told me how you came to be here," still holding the form in his close embrace.

"Have you forgotten Hualla?"

"No, no! I have not forgotten Hualla, nor will I ever; but, my dear girl, what has he to do with your presence here?"

"Hualla has everything to do with my presence here; for Hualla and Mitla are one and the same, Euetzin," was the answer which fell with surprising effect upon the tzin's ears. In astonishment he let go his hold of the yielding form, and held it off at arms' length. There was no mistake; what he had just heard was, indeed, true; for it was certainly Hualla who stood, smiling and happy, before him. He looked at the metamorphosed Mitla for a moment, and then, as if suddenly realizing the wonderful depth of devotion she had shown for him, he said in a voice exhibiting profound emotion:

"Never love more ardent and powerful moved the heart of woman than that which has inspired you to do what you have done! The devotion of Hualla, and the familiar tone of his voice, which has often startled me, are now explained. From the horrors of an awful death the hand of Hualla —your hand, O best beloved of my heart—hath rescued me. What do I not owe you?" He paused, and, drawing Mitla to him, kissed her fondly.

"Let this be my pledge of troth," he said impressively; "my pledge that she who has risked and done so much for me shall be my wife."

Mitla's devotion to the man she loved so wildly, and the brave heart which had struggled through so great dangers and fatigue for his sake, were rewarded at last, and she made unspeakably happy. Her joy was so great that she could have rested indefinitely in his embrace, but Itzalmo must not know that Hualla was other than he seemed. She disengaged herself from Euetzin's arms, and when the old man came he found his fellow attendant in his accustomed place, and the patient looking unusually bright and cheerful.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The object of the coalition against Maxtla having been achieved, and Tezcuco once more in position to defend herself, the league was dissolved. The foreign armies quietly withdrew from the city, and returned to their respective capitals—the hunter-guard having early gone back to their mountain homes.

The parting between the old warrior chieftain, Ix, and his friend Tezcot, was expressive of a deep and lasting regard. The latter promised, at leaving—to please his hermit friend—that, providing his affairs at home would admit of it, he would return to witness the prince's coronation, which event was then paramount to everything else in the minds of the disenthralled and happy people, who were bent on making it a memorable occasion—a day on which not only the crowning of their new king should take place, but a grand celebration, also, in honor of Tezcuco's independence and their liberation from an enforced vassalage.

It was customary, when an event not down on their calendar was to be observed, to select one of their festal days on which to celebrate it, of which they had a great number, every deity having one especially set apart for its service. One of the most prominent on their calendar was, accordingly, chosen for the occasion—prominent because of the latitude which would be afforded the priesthood, in it, to exercise its peculiar functions, not omitting the revolting ceremony of human sacrifice, in which its members seemed to delight. Not since the subversion of their government had a festival so impressive in character been celebrated in Tezcuco, and the priests, awake to the importance of an occasion which would restore to them privileges so long withheld, were active in its promotion, and a great number of victims—chiefly prisoners of war—were selected for sacrifice.

Hualcoyotl was greatly averse to the shocking scenes of blood and agony, which always attended the sacrificial ceremony, but had no power—not even as a king—to stop it, for the authority of the priesthood in such matters was supreme.

We have it from fairly reliable sources—mostly traditional, to be sure, yet worthy of credence—that he made it an especial effort of his long and prosperous reign to have the inhuman practice abolished, and bring his people to worship according to the belief which he had early conceived to be the correct one—which, in the light of his surroundings, was truly remarkable. He believed in "One unseen Cause of Causes"—"One all-powerful God"—a unity, to whom appeals should be made direct. In this particular he showed a high order of intelligence, for it is an established opinion, if not a fact, that the simplicity of the idea of one God, who has no need of inferior representatives to execute his will, is too vast for the conception of narrowed understandings, and, as a consequence, resort to a multiplicity of deities follows.

The great Tezcucan was only partially successful in his efforts, because of the vitiating influence of his Aztec neighbors, who exceeded all the other races of Anahuac in barbaric practices, between whom and his people there existed the closest political relations, almost from the day of his coronation up to the time of the conquest.

The prince's failure to establish his belief in "One Supreme Intelligence" did not abate in the least his personal convictions on the subject, but as the years went by he became more firmly fixed in his faith, which, if not a Christian faith, was so near to it that the difference could only be found in the fact that he was a barbarian, having no knowledge of the Christ; and, yet, who shall say, when ways and means for the acquiring of religious knowledge are considered, that Hualcoyotl's religion was not as acceptable to "Him by whom we live" as was that of the shepherd king?

Itlza and her mother were in due time transferred to the Tezcucan palace, and no royal host was ever more considerate of the wants and comforts of his guests than was he of their's. The mother was elated to a degree which almost made her forget her affliction. In the transfer the first step leading to high honors for her daughter was taken, a sufficient cause for the excitement of a more enlightened intelligence than her's. Itlza, on the other hand, between love for Cacami and sorrow for her lost brother, took no account of the significance which was to be attached to the transfer of her residence from Zelmonco to Tezcuco, and entered upon the change with no suspicion of what it portended.

The prince, in making his proposal to Teochma that she and Itlza should take up their residence in the palace, had put it as near in the form of a command as he could without making it direct. He pressed it upon her as an honor which should not be treated lightly, and being ambitious of her child's advancement she readily complied. As an obedient daughter, who really had no choice in the matter, Itlza acquiesced, and, amid the bustle and confusion with which the city and palace were filled, found the change from quiet Zelmonco very agreeable.

The prince took advantage of the first opportunity offered, after the transfer was made, to have a talk with Teochma regarding Itlza, and his intentions with reference to her. She gave him to understand that his will was her pleasure, but did not deem it politic to make any show of the satisfaction she experienced at having her divinations verified. He directed that the matter should remain a secret between them for the present, as he desired, before revealing to Itlza his purposes, to establish himself in her favor. Thus the matter was left to rest, the prince, the while, using every possible means at his command to gain the affections of his intended queen. Itlza treated him most kindly, accepting his attentions as a matter of course, which encouraged him to persevere.

While seated with Teochma in his family apartments one day, talking in a confidential way, Hualcoyotl was informed by his personal attendant that a strange messenger awaited his pleasure.

"You will ascertain if his business is of a private nature, Oza, and report to me at once," he said, and then turned to resume his conversation with Teochma.

Notwithstanding Oza was a free man, the prince having made good his promise that he should have his freedom, he was still in the latter's service. Their experience together on the mountains had given rise to a warm, mutual attachment between the master and his servant, which resulted in Oza's retention as a special and favored attendant.

The faithful servitor withdrew, and in a few minutes returned, bearing a written message, which he placed in the prince's hand. The latter, after dismissing his man with the injunction to remain near by, proceeded to peruse the writing. On glancing over it he suddenly turned to Teochma, his face beaming with an expression of joyful surprise, and exclaimed:

"Rejoice, O mother of Euetzin, your son lives, and is among friends!"

Teochma was dazed and speechless for a moment, from the sudden and unexpected announcement. Recovering herself, she, in turn, exclaimed:

"My son, my Euet alive, and among friends! O Prince, do not unsay that!"

"I shall not unsay it, Teochma; for it is Itzalmo who writes—Itzalmo, Teochma, who is truth itself," returned he, with a glad emphasis.

"Itzalmo, Prince; is he, too, alive and with my son?"

"Yes, he is with the tzin, but does not explain. It is enough to know, O Teochma, that they are not prisoners. Now, indeed, may we rejoice!" returned the now joyful prince.

The communication was the one sent by the old preceptor, to which allusion was made in the last chapter.

The good news quickly spread, and the cloud of sorrow which had hung like a pall over the friends of the tzin and the old tutor was lifted, and general rejoicing succeeded.

Hualcoyotl immediately sent a summons to Cacami, who was at his home in the country, to come to him at once. The young warrior came promptly, in obedience to the summons, and was not less joyful than the prince at the surprising intelligence. He was ordered to take a sufficient number of men and go to the little town for the purpose of bringing the wounded tzin and his aged companion to the city. The duty, under the circumstances, was a most agreeable one to Cacami, who stood not upon the order of his going, but set off at once to perform it.

From a house of sorrow and mourning the palace was changed to one of joy and gladness by the joyful news. Its halls and corridors rang with the music of happy voices, impressing the royal household as the inhabitant of the winter frozen north is impressed by the glad notes of spring, heard in the songs of the returning forest minstrels, after a long and dreary season of storm and cold—incomparable waking of ecstatic emotions.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

In order that the reader may be made acquainted with the circumstances in Mitla's case, which led to her appearance, so opportunely for Euetzin, in the camp of Maxtla's defeated army, it will be necessary for us to go back to the holding of the tournament at Tlacopan, and notice, briefly, a few of the incidents connected with her movements.

When Ix's mountain guard came to that city to join the army, they did so as individuals, and were accompanied by a number of their people, consisting mostly of women and men servants, who came, especially, to witness the tourney. Mitla was of the party, coming at the request of Euetzin to take part in the archers' contest, and whose skill, it will be remembered, proved such an interesting feature of the occasion.

The real object for which the tournament was gotten up had not become known beyond the circle of close-mouthed projectors of the movement against Maxtla, and Mitla, as one of the public, was therefore ignorant of what was to follow. She was to have returned to her home at the conclusion of the tourney, with her party, but when the excitement, which ensued upon the heels of it because of the unavoidable publicity of the movement, became absorbingly intense, and she learned the true situation of affairs, she determined on pursuing a different course. Her love for the tzin, which had so quickly become an irresistible, absorbing passion, and which had given added fervency by the grandeur of the scene in which he was a conspicuous figure, and she an object of special attention and admiration—together with a longing desire to be near him, which had suddenly taken possession of her—outweighed all other considerations, and she resolved on following him to the field. How to accomplish this, without her presence in the army becoming known to him, was a matter of no little moment—especially to her, an inexperienced mountain girl. However, love knows no barriers too great to be surmounted, and hers was not an exception. She settled the question by procuring the necessary apparel with which to change her appearance to that of a boy, which she carried away with her when she left the city—presumably to return to her home.

The first night out, after leaving Tlacopan, the madly infatuated maiden took advantage of circumstances to quietly slip from among her people, with a view to carrying out her determination to follow the tzin. Getting far enough away from the camp of her friends to feel reasonably secure from discovery, she made the intended transformation, at the same time deepening the color of her complexion by using a stain procured from the bark of a tree. When the disguise was completed, and her discarded clothing carefully concealed where it could be found, should the opportunity ever come around for recovering it, she started on her backward journey.

Mitla was now completely lost in the character she had assumed. Her closest friends would not have recognized her, so perfect was the disguise. Instead of a beautiful young maiden, a stoutly-built, well-appearing lad, with a very dark complexion, moved with hurried step, and eyes peering almost expectantly into the darkness ahead of him, in the direction of Tlacopan.

The adoption of a name for herself, corresponding with her disguise, before reaching her destination, now became a necessary expedient, and Mitla's genius for that kind of invention was for the first time—and, we might add, the last—brought into operation. After calling up all the names within her recollection, and, inventing not a few, she finally settled upon Hualla—very appropriate and well suited, and under it found her way into the allied army.

Fear of detection made the disguised maiden wary of getting into a too close proximity to those who knew her best. This led her to avoid the mountain guard and her Tezcucan friends, and to go in search of the gallant young leader of the Tlacopan army, for whom she had conceived quite a liking, from his genial and kindly disposition. After considerable trouble and worry she found the gracious Macua, and, on being admitted to his presence, told him that she wished to go with the army, and could think of no position which she could fill except that of messenger, in which capacity, she asked, would he kindly allow her to serve him. She made an attractive appearing youth, and readily found favor with the young chief, who immediately installed her a member of his military household. To become an attachee of Macua's official family was not to become a slave, by any means, and our mountain heroine found frequent means for gratifying her peculiar longings.

To be where she could occasionally have a look at the man she so wildly loved, her idol, was the sole object of Mitla's self-imposed masquerading. The tzin's division of Tezcucans was soon located by her, and no move or change was made by it that she was not aware of. Whenever her duty brought her near to where the young cacique—a title the tzin had acquired by virtue of his position as a leader—was stationed, she made it a point to have a good look at him, on several of which occasions he saw her, but, thinking her only an inquisitive lad, paid little attention to her actions.

When the great battle occurred, Mitla stationed herself where every move the tzin made could be

watched by her unerring eye of love. When Maxtla made his attack, she saw with bated breath the terrible struggle which ensued, and when Euetzin, at the head of his Tezcucan legion, rushed to the aid of the hard pressed allies, her heart stood still from fear and dread. It was not long after this when it became a difficult matter to distinguish friend from foe, and the tzin passed from her sight to be seen not again until found by her in the enemy's camp. His disappearance relieved the nervous strain the sight of his exposure caused her to experience, yet deepened her anxiety for his safety. The time seemed an age to her in which the opposing forces struggled with each other for the mastery. Victory finally came, however, to crown the efforts of those in whom she was interested, and when it did come she was quickly mingling with the triumphant warriors of the tzin's division, to learn if he were safe or not. When it was discovered that he was missing, her feelings of grief and dread were indescribable. She could be brave while Euetzin was near and safe; but, if lost, what should she do? After learning to a certainty that her beloved was surely a prisoner, as the failure to find his body on the battle field had proven to the satisfaction of the leaders, she resolved to follow the retreating army, and, if he were discovered, to liberate him or die in the attempt. She put her resolution into execution, with the happy result already known to the reader.

Euetzin experienced a good deal of solicitude for Mitla's people after learning what had been her course. Their anxiety and distress at her strange and mysterious disappearance, he thought, could not be other than extreme, and he determined that they should be relieved at the earliest possible moment. He communicated his feelings on the subject to her, and found that she was not a little worried over the matter herself, now that her identity was revealed. It was decided, in view of the unpropitious circumstances, that she should go home so soon as arrangements for a suitable escort could be made. It was at this juncture of the situation that Cacami and his party came upon the scene.

The meeting between the two friends was very cordial, which evidenced the warm feelings of friendship which had grown up between them.

The particulars of the tzin's capture and escape, in which the invaluable services rendered by Hualla in effecting the latter were made a subject of special mention, were detailed to Cacami, who heard the account, especially that portion of it relating to the lad's conduct, with no little astonishment. His astonishment in this connection, however, was not to be compared with that which followed when he was let into the secret of Hualla's identity, and informed by the tzin that it was his purpose to make the brave girl his wife.

"I am lost in amazement," he exclaimed, "at the surprises which seem to meet me at every turn! When will they cease?"

"Not until you have found your affinity, Cacami; have made your proposal, and surprised us with a denouement," replied the tzin pleasantly, little dreaming that his friend had already found his affinity in his own dear sister, and that a surprise would come out of it, in comparison with which the surprise of Cacami at his declaration would be as nothing—but we anticipate.

Euetzin was not yet sufficiently recovered to bear moving, and as Cacami would be obliged to wait or return to Tezcuco without him, the latter, on learning of the tzin's desire that Mitla should return quickly as might be to her people, proposed that he and his men should be her escort. Euetzin thanked him for the suggestion, and accepted it as a most opportune way out of a very peculiar dilemma.

A transformation now took place, and Hualla ceased to be, except in the recollections of the tzin, as an inseparable factor in a portion of his experience which he could never forget, and which went to make up the most eventful period of his life; while Mitla, happy in the consciousness of a requited love—though realizing that her beauty was somewhat marred by the unnatural darkness of her complexion—sat by the bedside of her afflicted lover listening to the words of endearment which he was speaking.

"Hualla, the noble lad, to whom I owed so great a debt, is no more," he was saying; "yet he will never be forgotten. He has left a legacy to you, Mitla, in my gratitude for his brave conduct in my behalf. Thus you will have a double portion: my gratitude to him, and my best love for your dear self. Are you not happy, Mitla?"

"Yes, Euetzin, more happy than I can tell," was her reply; still, her actions did not warrant it. The thought that she must part from him at this time pressed heavily upon her heart, and when she had spoken, she dropped her head upon the hand which she was holding; as she did so, a tear trickled down over her cheek and fell upon it.

"Why, Mitla!" exclaimed the tzin, anxiously, "you are in tears! What has disturbed you?"

"They are tears of joy, Euetzin, mingled with sadness—sadness that I am about to leave you, and you so ill. I would remain to nurse you back to health, but you have advised, wisely, no doubt, that I should go; and I feel restrained, against inclination, to do so, that my people may no longer

mourn for me as lost."

"Yes, Mitla, it will be better so. I will soon be well—thanks to you—and back in Tezcuco, where you shall early join me, to go away no more; then our happiness will be complete. You must be brave; it were not like Hualla to weep," spoke the tzin, persuasively.

"I will weep no more, Euetzin; you shall see that she whom you love is brave, even as Hualla," she replied, wiping away her tears.

Euetzin realized that the time was close at hand when the escort would come to take his loved Mitla from him, and drawing her to him, he said:

"Your unbounded love, which saved and brought me where I am, is worth more than all else in the world to me; and my life's best effort shall be to make you happy. Go from me with this assurance, and think only of the joy our reunion will bring."

The lover's parting kiss was exchanged, and Mitla disengaged herself from the tzin's embrace—none too soon either; for just then Cacami entered to say that the palanquin awaited her occupancy. A few minutes later she had taken her seat in the chair, and the little procession moved away.

Under Cacami's careful direction Mitla was transported in comfort and safety back to her mountain home. Her arrival there was the return of a loved one given up as lost. The meeting was very affecting, filled as it was with a terrible struggle between love and joy, and a feeling of injured confidence and resentment for the mastery in the hearts of the aggrieved parents. Cacami, fearful that harsh treatment might be in store for the offending daughter, pleaded her cause with earnestness and eloquence:

"Mitla, though blamable from a prudential standpoint, has proven herself a heroine. Had not her hand, O Tezcot, the hand of your child, brought succor and release to Euetzin, he would to-day, if alive, be in the hands of Maxtla, awaiting the awful fate of a prisoner of war. It was her great love that saved to us a noble friend. Such devotion is worthy the reward it has won: Euetzin's plighted troth. They will wed, and the daughter of the wise hunter, the friend of the great Ixtlilchoatl, will become the happy wife of a noble, who will assuredly be among the exalted of the king's household. Forget her imprudence, O Tezcot, O Xochitl, and forgive. Euetzin asks it, and I plead for it."

"Mitla is dear to the hearts of all her people, and we do not forget, while blaming her, that she should have our sympathy, for she was greatly affected by love for the tzin," replied the generous Tezcot. "Yes, we will forget and forgive, for our love's sake, and the sake of our friends. So say you to Euetzin."

After a day of rejoicing and feasting with the family of the hunter, Cacami and his party started on their return journey, the young warrior leader happy and exultant from the success of his efforts as a peacemaker.

In due time the little party was back with the tzin, to find him sufficiently recovered to allow of his transfer to Tezcuco.

Happy, indeed, was the hour in which Euetzin and Itzalmo were set down in the Tezcucan palace, and the little circle of friends, so ruthlessly broken up by the Tepanec despot, was again complete. To emphasize his pleasure, the prince ordered a grand reception and banquet to be given in honor of the restoration of his friends. It was a glorious time of rejoicing, hardly less affecting than were the scenes which followed the prince's return to his joyful people a victorious leader.

"Let joy be unconfined!" Hualcoyotl might have proclaimed in that hour of a happy reunion; and yet, how deep was the mental affliction which, all unknown to him, was then hanging over and threatening not only his own peace of mind, but that of nearly all the chief participants in the pleasurable event.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

We pass over the ceremonies which made Hualcoyotl a king, except to say that the occasion was of an exceptional character, and one that could take place only under conditions in which barbaric ideas of pomp and splendor are brought into operation in the achievement of a climax at once imposing and ostentatious. Many of the nobility from the surrounding principalities were present to witness the grand pageant, among whom was the Aztec monarch, one of the line from which sprang the first and second Montezumas—possibly Itzcoatl, a son of the first. He was there not only as a witness of the pageantry, but to congratulate his young kinsman, the Prince of Tezcuco, on his accession to the throne of his ancestors; and, also—we may further presume—to seek an immediate alliance with him for the purpose of waging a war of extermination against Maxtla, whose arbitrary and insolent conduct had so wrought upon the feelings of the Mexican prince that he had resolved, with the help of his neighbor, to destroy the power and influence of the Tepanec dynasty forever, by its complete subversion.

Hualcoyotl could not be assured of a continued and uninterrupted reign so long as his powerful and mortal enemy was permitted to exercise his despotic and aggressive disposition, and readily consented to join his royal cousin, of Tenochtitlan, in a crusade against him.

The first business of the new king, however, was the organization of his governmental household —the selection of his chief officials who should comprise his privy council. In filling the most exalted positions, he remembered those who had been his personal friends when friendship was at a premium with him. Itzalmo was made his chief counselor, Ixtlilchoatl his chief war officer, and Euetzin his chief officer of state. In the latter he invested unusual authority, placing in his charge all matters of a tribal character. Cacami was not forgotten, but, by his own expressed wish, assigned to an important position in the army, near the person of Ixtlilchoatl.

Tezcot and Menke, who were in attendance at the ceremony of enthronement, were pressed to unite their destiny with Tezcuco, but, preferring a life in the mountains to one of luxury at the capital of their newly acquired friends, declined to do so. This the appreciative prince regretted, for he was anxious to express his gratitude, in some substantial manner, for the friendship they had shown him when he was an outlawed wanderer—which he could do best by making them favored retainers in his official retinue.

Hualcoyotl was not too busy to think of carrying out his purpose of making Itlza his queen, and now, that he was a king, sought, without delay, an opportunity in which to communicate to her his intentions.

The extensive conservatory, connected with the palace, of which previous mention has been made, was a favorite retreat of Itzla's, which the prince had discovered, and here he determined to find and acquaint her with his designs.

At a certain hour on each day, in the afternoon, it was her custom to go into this pleasant and retired place alone. That she remained unaccompanied while there may be doubted, however, since Cacami spent much of his time at the palace.

On an afternoon only a few days subsequent to the crowning of the prince, Itlza entered the conservatory with light and eager step. Her face was brightened by a joyous gleaming which beamed from her beautiful laughing eyes, and there was upon it an expression of expectancy, as if some pleasurable event was anticipated and near at hand. She hummed, in monotone, a droll little theme of native music, as she moved about the place on pleasure bent.

Although the work of restoration had been commenced, and the erstwhile beauty of the once enchanting resort had begun to reassert itself; still, traces of neglect, which had been permitted to creep over and mar a former perfection of arrangement, were present in the conservatory to disenchant the esthetical beholder. Yet, to a person who might have been suspected of only seeking a means whereby to gain an end, as in Itlza's case, the imperfection was of little consequence.

Presently, and without notice to the happy dreamer, she was brought face to face with Hualcoyotl, who had come upon her unobserved. She greeted him courteously, yet was slightly confused and uneasy, as if a pleasant anticipation had suddenly been broken in on.

"Will you be seated, Itlza?" said he, graciously, directing her to a low bench a little distance away. "I have something of interest—at least of interest to me, and which ought to be to yourself—to say to you."

What could the surprised and disquieted maiden do but comply? A request from Hualcoyotl was to her a command, and she permitted herself to be conducted to the bench. When she was seated, he continued:

"Are you happy, Itlza, in this palace home of mine?"

"Your home is very enjoyable, and will be beautiful and full of pleasantness when you are through with its improvement. I would be very unappreciative not to enjoy it to the extent of being happy," she replied, wondering to what the question would lead.

"Yes, my home will be beautiful; but, Itlza, it will be like the cage of a bird, the one occupant of which is without a mate," he returned, looking at her with an expression of fondness, which, when she raised her eyes inquiringly to his, she did not fail to comprehend. She became much disturbed, but thought she must say something, and spoke as follows:

"The King of Tezcuco need not be long without a mate; for there is many a charming *cihuatl* (woman) who would be pleased to come into his palace home to reign as queen. He has only to command, and the most beautiful princesses in all the Anahuac will be his to choose from."

"Itlza, have you forgotten the hours, long ago, when a lad and little lass played and romped over the hills of Zelmonco?" he questioned. "If you have forgotten, I am sorry; for I have not. Blissfully ignorant were we then," he went on, "of the sorrows and griefs of the future; and happy in our innocent simplicity, thinking only of the joys and pleasures of an artless childhood."

"No, I have not forgotten. Those were, indeed, happy times," she replied, a frightened look covering her face.

"In those times, Itlza, I thought of you as my future mate, and now that I am a man, with wisdom to choose, I would verify those boyish dreams by making you my queen. You will fill that place in my heart, as well as in my palace, as no other can, though she were the greatest princess of Anahuac; for, Itlza, I love you." He paused an instant to watch the effect of his declaration. "I would have you come to me," he continued, "not by command, but by choice. Will you be my queen, Itlza?"

The graveness of the situation now dawned upon her mind with a terrible force—Hualcoyotl had chosen her to be his queen. She was dumbfounded, and consternation was depicted on her face. She did not dare to look up. The prince, after waiting a moment for a reply, again spoke:

"You are silent, Itlza; have you nothing to say for the honor I am about to confer upon you?"

Recovering herself sufficiently to speak, she said, in a scared tone of voice:

"Your proposal, O Hualcoyotl, has come upon me so suddenly that I am confused; I was not expecting it. What says Teochma, my mother?"

"That Itlza shall be Queen of Tezcuco," he replied, piquantly, being disappointed and displeased with her reception of his proposal.

"It is all so sudden, so startling, I am overwhelmed with confusion. You will, I'm sure, O noblest of friends, give me time to think?" she questioned, hoping to secure a respite, if only for a little time, that she might become reconciled to the inevitable, if such a thing were possible.

"Yes, I will give you time, Itlza—a few days, but I may not be disappointed, for I have set my heart upon making you Queen of Tezcuco—my queen."

Unobserved by the prince and Itlza, another person, a man, entered the conservatory, hurriedly and expectantly, but, on coming near to where they were, he heard the sound of someone talking, which caused him to stop and listen. His position was screened from observation by foliage, and, had he been so disposed, he might have remained an unseen listener to what followed, but he did not. He recognized the prince's voice, and, although he could not see her, he felt sure it was Itlza he was speaking to. He caught the words, "for I have set my heart upon making you Queen of Tezcuco—my queen," and they fell upon his ear like the crack of a fearful doom. He waited to hear no more, but quickly turned away and left the place as hurriedly as he had entered it.

Itlza gathered herself together for a final plea, and said:

"I would not seem unkind or unappreciative toward the dear friend of my childhood, whom I esteem above all men, and look upon almost as one of my own blood. You are like a brother to me, noble Hualcoyotl, but not like a lover."

"You will yet learn to love me, Itlza. You shall remain in my palace, and I will teach you," he rejoined, persuasively.

"Is there not someone else, O prince, more worthy and lovable than I, who would be pleased to become your queen, whose love might be had for the asking?" she pleaded, paying no attention to his persuasive tones.

Hualcoyotl was inexorable. He had resolved on a purpose, and was not to be dissuaded from pursuing it to the end. He said decidedly:

"The King of Tezcuco may find others to love him, but not another to be his queen. You, O Itlza, my first and only love, shall fill that place. I am king—my word is law. I have said it. Be wise, O Itlza, in this matter, and study to become the chief lady of the nation." As he finished speaking he knelt on one knee, took her hand and pressed it to his forehead—a mode of affectionate

salutation, the kiss being reserved for those who were endeared—after which action he turned away, leaving her to the terrible realization of the hopelessness of her love for Cacami, and the certainty of a compulsory marriage with him, which death alone could prevent.

She was now alone, in the saddest sense, with no eye to witness the anguish of soul with which she was stricken, and to which she now gave away. Throwing herself prostrate upon the ground she forgot all else but her crushed hopes, and moaned in the agony of despair. She did not realize the quick approach and presence of the one for the love of whom she was now caused to suffer. He stood over her for a moment, contemplating her agony, while on his face was unmistakable evidence of great distress of mind. Though strong in his manhood, he could not entirely restrain his feelings, and could not have been expected to while his breast was being torn by a tempest of conflicting emotions. He presently kneeled at her side, and called softly:

"Itlza!" At the sound of her name on her loved one's lips she arose, and, throwing herself into his arms, cried in accents of unutterable woe:

"Cacami! Cacami!"

The lovers had arranged for a meeting in the conservatory, and Itlza, happy in the anticipation of an hour of sweet converse with her beloved, had come to fulfill her tryst, and, as we have seen, was met by the prince. Just when the latter, with mind wholly absorbed in the object which had brought him to the conservatory, was becoming impatient and imperative in his language at the unexpected evidence of a disinclination on the part of the former to look with favor upon his proposal to honor her above all other women, and she, too much frightened to think of anything save the terrible fact that her anticipations of a happy future with him she loved were about to be shipwrecked—forever swept away—Cacami, unheard by them, came upon the ground in the joyful expectation of soon meeting the object of his love. On discovering that Hualcoyotl was there ahead of him, talking with Itlza, and learning the significance of his presence from the few words which reached him, he was overwhelmed with amazement at the disclosure. He could not in honor remain to hear another word, so, quickly turning on his heel, withdrew.

The hopelessness of his suit with Itlza was at once apparent to the astounded lover; a king stood between them, and, according to law—an established fiat, especially favorable to rulers to protect them in their family relations, particularly in the choice of a wife—death would be the consequence should he marry her, or even persist in meeting her clandestinely and be detected in it.

It would have been different had he made Itlza his affianced previous to her coming to the palace, even without the knowledge of the mother and brother; and possibly afterward had he anticipated the prince; but now his chance was gone; and, O, how he regretted the delay. No one, save themselves, knew that they were lovers, so closely had they guarded their secret; and since no pledge of troth had been exchanged, they must bide the result.

How could he give her up? The more he reflected on the matter, the greater became his distress of mind. He did not for a moment think of Itlza as a willing listener to the king's proposal to make her his queen, and he resolved to return to the conservatory so soon as his royal rival should depart from it, to condole with her, which he did, only to find her in the throes of an utter hopelessness. Their discovery of each other, so full of woebegoneness, has been noted.

The despairing maiden clung to her lover, pleadingly, as if he might have saved her from her impending fate. He held her to his breast in a close embrace, and if endearing words and passionate kisses—the first he had dared to bestow—could have effected a relief to her overwrought feelings, they must have found it in his.

"You must not be torn from me thus," he said, passionately, after she had explained, between sobs and moans, how determined the prince was in his purpose. "No, dear, sorrowing Laughing-eyes, death alone shall separate us."

"What, indeed, O Cacami, but death or submission is left for both of us," moaned the hapless maiden.

"You put it well and true, Itlza. I had not thought of death for you; I was thinking only of myself; but, alas! the result will be the same for both of us. I should not ask of you so great a sacrifice. No, my poor, lorne love, I must give you up."

"You shall not give me up, Cacami! Let it be mine to choose whether I will wear a crown, or cleave to you at the risk of death. It will be no fault of yours, then, if I should choose to die," she answered, determinedly.

"What can I say? If I alone were held responsible I could quickly choose; but you, poor darling, must suffer too."

"If you can suffer for the love of me, why not I for a like reason? Is my love less powerful than

yours, that I am a woman? Cacami, you shall not choose to cast me off, even if it be to save my life. The choice, I pray you, shall be mine."

"Then, if you will, choose wisely, Laughing-eyes; remembering that a crown and the love of a noble man are on one hand, while on the other are only Cacami and death."

"Yes, I will choose between you—the good king and Cacami—but it will not be to trample on my love—my heart. No, not for a crown at the hands of so good a man as Hualcoyotl," she answered, earnestly. Continuing, she said: "I would not lead you to death, O Cacami, my love; yet, I choose to go with you, even to that end."

"Then be it so; we will stand or fall together," he returned, holding her in a closer embrace.

An idea at this instant occurred to Itlza, and, gathering a little courage from it, she said:

"Why may we not escape to another country, Cacami, or to the mountains—anywhere, so we be not separated?"

"Hualcoyotl would find us though we were hidden in the fastness of the farthest mountain. No, Laughing-eyes, there is hope only in marriage, and the kindness of the court which shall try us; otherwise it must be separation or death," he replied, despondingly.

"Then, let us wed. I will be your bride, though it be unto death," she said, creeping closer to him.

"If you so decide, thus it shall be, my brave Laughing-eyes. We will wed, and, if need be, die together."

"I vow to you, O Cacami, that naught but death shall part us, and, since thus to you I give my pledge, I pray you bind it with the seal of troth," she said, trustingly, putting up her carmine-tinted lips to receive the kiss which was to seal the sacred compact. Their lips met, and two souls were united unto death by one prolonged, loving embrace, from which they drew calmness—the calmness which is found in the strength of a plighted faith, made enduring by the kiss, which, to them, was a seal, indissoluble except by death.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

An alliance between the Mexican and Tezcucan kings, for the purpose of engaging in a crusade against the Tepanec monarch, was duly effected, and the usual preliminaries—a declaration of war, etc.—were gone through with, preparatory to the opening of hostilities.

Maxtla had reconstructed his imperial army, and his faith in its ability to cope with the combined armies of his adversaries led him to meet the demands made upon him with reckless defiance. He reckoned on having all the advantages of a defensive warfare on his side in which his opponents would be compelled to meet him on ground of his own choosing—a situation which would put him in a position of vantage not to be contemned.

Hualcoyotl, meanwhile, made many kindly advances with a view to reconciling Itlza to their contemplated union. She received his attentions with due respect, and at the same time tried to be affable, but there was that in her conduct which was not natural—a lack of spontaneity of manner, so marked in her former naive, unaffected bearing. The prince saw that he was not succeeding to any appreciable degree, and decided to let matters rest as they were, for the present, hoping that time, and a proper consideration of the advantages held out to her in a marriage with him, would work a favorable change in her inexplicable attitude, thus avoiding a resort to compulsory measures. Having decided on this course, he turned his attention wholly to state affairs, and the necessary preparations for leading his army to the field against his old enemy.

Ixtlilchoatl was again placed where he could exercise his wonderful genius as a leader of armies, by being put in command of the combined forces of Mexico and Tezcuco, leaving the kings to lead their respective warriors. The great aggregation, with the hermit chief at its head, was soon on the move, and the fight began. The campaign was a vigorous one, which, after a series of hard-fought battles, ended in Maxtla being forced back behind the walls of his capital, where he was encompassed and a close siege of the royal city entered upon.

In his confidence of being able to repel the invaders of his imperial domain the Tepanec monarch had neglected to provide against such an emergency as a siege, and was, therefore, wholly unprepared for it. Under such conditions it became, in due time, a question of surrender, or marching out and giving the beleaguerants battle. The result was a mass sally, and the ensuance of a desperate and bloody struggle, which terminated in the complete rout and dispersion of the beleaguered army, and Maxtla's undiscovered flight for personal safety.

The proud city of Azcapozalco was totally destroyed, and those of its inhabitants who were not killed, or did not get away, were doomed to a life of slavery, or death by sacrifice, while the territory of the once dominant empire was converted into a great slave mart—which, in after years, became the central market for that nefarious traffic for the whole of Anahuac.

Maxtla was hunted down, captured and turned over to the mercies of the Aztec king, who condemned him to death at the hands of the priests—a victim of sacrifice to the Mexican gods. Thus perished the most cruel and despotic of all the named princes of Anahuac, and was avenged one who proved himself to be the peer of the noblest.

In the destruction of the Tepanec domination was removed the only cause of apprehension to the new king of Tezcuco. He returned to his capital in the confidence of a perfect security, and engaged in his kingly duties with a mind free from the fear of invasion or opposition, and with the determination to make his reign a successful and brilliant one, which he did, as history records; in fact, it excelled in wisdom and grandeur that of any known prince of Anahuac, not excepting the Montezumas.

The king was again brought into daily intercourse with his household, a member of which Itlza continued to be. She had kept her own counsel, so far as her affairs with the prince and Cacami were concerned, leaving her family in ignorance of what had transpired. There had come a settled purpose in the expression of her face, which was careworn and deeply thoughtful.

Feeling secure in his rights as the king of Tezcuco, Hualcoyotl now felt that his palace should have a queen, and he resolved to bring matters between himself and Itlza to a crisis. So the first opportunity which should offer itself was to be improved to inform her that the marriage must take place at an early day. He had gone too far to recede from his purpose of making her his wife. He was a man of firmness, and would not be defeated in the accomplishment of designs so closely affecting his honor. He was a king, and the wish of a king was law.

It so happened that he met Itlza at the entrance to the conservatory, and, deeming it a favorable opportunity to make known his wishes, he requested her to accompany him within. He conducted her to the same bench on which she was seated at their former meeting.

Itlza divined the object he had in asking her to go with him to that sadly memorable spot, and her soul was filled with apprehension as to what would follow. When she was seated, Hualcoyotl, who

continued to occupy a standing posture before her, began by saying:

"Itlza, you no doubt understand why I have brought you here. It is to talk with you about our marriage. You asked me for time. I have granted it to you to an extent which should satisfy you that I am desirous of showing you the greatest consideration. I have chosen to exalt you by making you my queen; in doing which I feel that I am conferring honorable distinction upon a most worthy family, as well as gratifying the fondest wish of my heart. I now ask that you will prepare to wed me at an early day. Let us have done with pleadings and expostulations, and look forward to our union with that happy anticipation which should mark the period of an approaching coronation of a lovely queen."

"You and yours, O King, have ever been friends of my people. From time immemorial my ancestors have served yours, and will doubtless continue to do so, faithfully and loyally. May I not ask, as the child of Euzelmozin, O Hualcoyotl, and, still, as the sister of your loyal servitor and friend, Euetzin, that you will deal kindly with us—me and mine, in this hour of my distress? I am sorely troubled, yes, even unto death."

Her pleading look and words were strangely at variance with the subject of marriage which the king had introduced, and he looked deeply perplexed—dazed—in consequence.

"Those are strange words, Itlza, very strange, indeed, coming from you, whom it is proposed to raise to the highest place a woman can fill in our country. What is the matter? It can not be that I am so repulsive, so repellant. Speak, Itlza, tell me; is this so?"

"O, no! no! You are the peer of the greatest and best, and worthy to wed whom you will; but, Hualcoyotl, I can not be your queen. I throw myself at your feet, and upon your compassion, imploring that you will send me away—forget me." She had dropped upon her knees in front of him, and was looking beseechingly up into his face. He gazed at her in confused amazement, and presently said:

"What have I done, O Itlza, to merit this remarkable rejection of my proposal?"

"You have done nothing, O best of friends. It is all my own doing; I have put an impassable barrier between us," she answered, dropping her head as if to hide her face from an expected blow.

"A barrier between us! What do you mean? Speak, I beseech you, and end this unparalleled and humiliating scene," spoke the patience-tried prince.

With head bowed down, the kneeling maiden answered in a shrinking voice:

"I mean, O king, that I am the wife of another."

Now, indeed, was Hualcoyotl dumbfounded. Had the earth opened at his feet he could not have been more astounded. He finally said, becoming angry and excited:

"Who has dared to come between the king and his chosen—his intended queen?"

Itlza was almost prostrated from the strain upon her feelings; and now, at hearing the prince's angry tones, began to sink, but managed, in a hoarse whisper, to say "Cacami," and then fell to the ground insensible.

Hualcoyotl was staggered as by a blow when he heard the name of Cacami fall from Itlza's lips. That estimable young warrior, counted among his closest friends, had deceived him. He turned away for a moment to strive with his rising anger and feelings of resentment; then back to where Itlza was lying. He looked at her in a commiserating manner, and exclaimed in a hard, pained voice:

"Itlza! Itlza! this from you, whom Hualcoyotl would have delighted to honor, and been so proud!" Her appearance seemed to stir the nobler impulses within the man, for he knelt down and began trying to bring about her resuscitation. While thus engaged he was suddenly made aware of the presence of Itzalmo, who, in passing through the conservatory, had discovered him striving with the unconscious maiden, and, becoming alarmed, cried out:

"Father of Light! what is the meaning of this? Is the child dead?"

"She is not dead, but 'twere better if she was," returned the prince, without pausing in his efforts to restore her to consciousness.

"Your words, O King, are very strange. Why do you speak thus?"

"I can not explain to you now, Itzalmo. You will retire, and at the instance of the king have Cacami arrested immediately. Go at once, and seek not to know more at present," returned he, showing great but restrained excitement.

Itzalmo left the conservatory in a state of wonderment at what he had seen and heard, and went immediately to execute the command of the king.

Itlza gradually returned to consciousness, through the endeavors of the prince, and, when sufficiently recovered to walk, was conducted in silence to her mother, who was told that she had fainted.

In a semiconscious condition she was taken charge of by her attendants, while the king passed to his private apartments to compose, if possible, his overwrought feelings.

In obedience to the king's fiat, Itzalmo had Cacami arrested and placed in confinement, to await the further action of his royal master.

Cacami was not surprised at his apprehension. He felt quite certain that a disclosure of his secret marriage would take place, should the king persist in pressing his suit with Itlza, which he did not doubt he would do, and which would be followed by his arrest and committal. He had taken the fatal step, knowing the consequences which would in all probability ensue, and now met them as became a man of courage, which he had on more than one occasion proven himself to be.

The king was distracted to the verge of madness at what he considered his humiliation, and in the heat of passion could think of nothing but punishment for the man who had brought it upon him. He therefore permitted no delay to occur in entering his charge against Cacami. In placing his charge, he put the case beyond his authority, and at the absolute disposal of a Tezcucan court of justice.

Hualcoyotl, in reestablishing the Tezcucan government, among other things, we may presume, adopted the laws and means of enforcing them which had prevailed at the close of his esteemed father's reign.

Although the governments of Anahuac were to a certain extent despotic, there was to be found much in them that was commendable; especially was this true of Tezcuco.

The enforcement of the laws was vested in a tribunal of justice, composed of judges appointed by the king, an appeal from which might be taken to a supreme magistrate, the highest authority in the government, from whose decision there was no appeal, not even to the king himself, though he had the power to make or unmake the court. We infer that, under certain circumstances, these courts were combined, forming a court whose findings were final. In the hands of such a tribunal rested the fate of Cacami and Itlza, the latter depending on the result of the former's arraignment.

We are told that the court proceedings were conducted with the greatest decorum. The judges wore a peculiar and appropriate dress, and were attended by officers whose duty it was to preserve order, while others summoned and brought the parties into court.

The court records were portrayed in hieroglyphical paintings, from which the decision of the judges was made. If the sentence proved to be capital, it was indicated by a line traced with an arrow across the portrait of the condemned, which was always a part of the record.

When the lovers determined to stake their lives on their fidelity to each other, they proceeded to settle the matter, at once and for all, by uniting themselves in marriage, which they did just before the armies of Mexico and Tezcuco marched against Maxtla, in which campaign Cacami bore a brave and honorable part. The ceremony of marriage was performed by a priest, in the prescribed form, and no earthly power could nullify its force, except a due process of law, and then only on just grounds for divorce, so strict was the law of marriage among these semicivilized people.

When Euetzin and his mother learned the true situation of affairs, the latter was horrified at the terrible dilemma into which her child had been brought, and was entirely overcome and prostrated from the effects of it. Euetzin was greatly troubled, dividing his sympathy between his friends. Having so lately experienced the power of love in his own case, with Mitla, he was deeply moved with compassion for his much-loved sister, and also felt a deep, friendly interest for Cacami. He was more hopeful of a favorable termination of the matter than anyone else, if, as he suspected, there was reason in the mad step they had taken. He resolved to enter the case, and, if in his power, clear the good name of his beloved sister, and that of his friend, from all opprobrium, and restore to them their freedom and their love.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The case of Hualcoyotl against Cacami was one of the first, of a special character, which came up for trial under the new organization of the courts.

The sessions of the court which was to try the case were held in a hall set apart for court purposes, called the hall of justice.

The day set for the hearing was at hand, and the court had convened. The judges, dressed in their court costumes, which gave them a solemn and dignified appearance, were in their seats. The chief officer in attendance had commanded silence, and a hush of expectancy had fallen upon those present. The case was an interesting one in its character, and prominent from the fact that the king was a party to it, and had attracted quite a large audience to witness the proceedings, which were opened by the presiding justice saying, very impressively:

"The keeper of records will read the order of the court for the delivery of one Cacami into its presence."

The official indicated rose up and read, in a manner peculiarly his own, yet native in the nasalized expression with which his delivery was effected:

"It is ordered," he began, scrutinizing with care the hieroglyphical painting, which he held up before him, "that Cacami, a warrior, be brought into the presence of this, the king's highest tribunal of justice, that he may have opportunity to show why he should not suffer the penalty of death for the violation of a sacred and duly established law of the realm."

The keeper of prisoners retired, and, after a few minutes' absence, returned, accompanied by Cacami. The young warrior was looking pale, but resolute. He walked with a firm step to his place in the court; and being a man of superb physique, admirably proportioned, with a bright eye and handsome face, his appearance elicited a murmur of voices, which was evidently an expression of admiration. Directly followed Itlza, in company with Euetzin. She was beautifully but plainly dressed, and never looked more attractive. The audience was perfectly quiet for a moment, while she was being seated, when its tongue again became active and a subdued buzz arose from it.

Itlza was given a seat near her husband, while the tzin occupied one only a short distance off. When she sat down, her hand quickly found its way into Cacami's, the clasp of which seemed to give her courage.

The officer, whose duty it was to observe order, commanded silence, and the chief justice proceeded to say:

"The keeper of records will read the charge under which the prisoner at the bar is held accused."

Again the nasalated twang of the recorder's voice was heard to wring out quite distinctly, as he read:

"It is charged that Cacami, a warrior and subject of the realm, contrary to, and in defiance of, a most sacred law of the same, did hurt and injure the feelings, and spoil the affections of Hualcoyotl, the king, by engaging and marrying with Itlza, a daughter of Euzelmozin, who was the chosen of Hualcoyotl to be his queen; to which charge Cacami shall give satisfactory answer, or stand convicted, and shall, if it be so decided, suffer the penalty therefor, which is death."

"What has the prisoner, Cacami, to say in answer to the charge under which he stands committed?" asked the judge of the accused.

Cacami rose in his place, and calmly replied:

"I will abide the decision of the court. Let the trial proceed."

We are informed by traditional history that the profession and practice of law was not extant among the Anahuacans. No counsel was, therefore, at hand to be employed in the defense of a prisoner or litigant. The parties involved in the trial stated their own case, and won or lost, according to the weight of the evidence furnished through their witnesses. In criminal cases the procedure was necessarily different, charges being preferred and published in open court, which the accused was compelled to refute or stand convicted.

The laws regulating testimony were most liberal. The accused was entitled to give evidence, and, if he so desired, address the court in his own behalf, and the force of what he said was not impaired by the fact that he was on trial.

After a few preliminary matters were attended to, the judge again addressed the accused:

"Cacami, the prisoner, will rise and answer."

Cacami stood up, and the judge continued:

"How long have you been acquainted with Itlza, the daughter of Euzelmozin?"

"I met her first, and made her acquaintance, about the time of Hualcoyotl's escape to the mountains."

"When did the desire to possess the maiden first enter your heart?" continued the judge.

"My heart went out to Itlza the first time I saw her, and I resolved to win her if I could."

"Did Itlza encourage you in this?"

"She certainly did."

"In what manner?"

"By teaching me to love her."

"When did Itlza become your affianced?"

"Only a few days before we were married."

"And when were you married?"

"Just before our army moved against Azcapozalco."

"Was there no understanding between you previous to the time of your betrothal that you were to wed?"

"There was not, except in the fact that we were acknowledged lovers, intending, in due time, to become affianced."

"About what time did you become acknowledged lovers?"

"A short time previous to the tourney at Tlacopan."

"The love was mutual?"

"I believe it was."

"And you said nothing about it to anyone?"

"I did not, and do not think she did."

"You should have informed the mother and brother of your attachment, if only in justice to them. Just here was your first mistake." Continuing, the judge inquired:

"Did you know at the time of your marriage that Itlza had been chosen by Hualcoyotl to be his queen?"

"I did."

"Were you aware of the consequences of such a step, under the circumstances?"

"I was."

"And took the step in the face of such knowledge?" questioned the judge in a severe stress of voice.

"Even so," answered Cacami, undaunted by the sternness of the judge; "rather than see her whom I love the wife of another, though that other was the king."

This answer produced such a commotion and hum of voices that the officer in attendance had to command order.

"Thus did you err a second time, and grievously," said the judge, and the court looked grave and foreboding.

Cacami was now told to be seated.

"Itlza will rise and answer," said the judge, addressing her courteously. When she had risen he continued:

"You are the wife of Cacami, the prisoner at the bar?"

"I am proud to acknowledge myself the wife of Cacami," was her earnest reply, accompanied by an affectionate glance at the object of her adoration.

"Did Cacami persuade you to do so unwise an act as to wed with him under the grave circumstances which existed at the time of your marriage?"

"Cacami did not persuade me. My love was pledged to him, and I was the first to say, let us wed, though it be unto death."

This declaration from Itlza was received by the spectators with evident admiration for her courage and fidelity; and, had it not been for the great respect in which the court was held, would have been followed by a demonstration of approval. The gravity of the judges, on the other hand, deepened, for in her answer, so earnestly and honestly given, she had convicted herself of voluntary complicity with Cacami in the offense against the king. It was not necessary to question her further, and she was told to be seated.

The tzin looked perplexed and troubled, on account of the gravity of the position in which his beloved sister's ingenuous reply had placed her.

"Euetzin will rise and answer," said the judge, at which the witness was not a little surprised, as he was not expecting a call at the moment.

"When did you learn of the marriage of your sister with the prisoner?"

"At the time of Cacami's arrest," he replied.

"Had you no previous knowledge or intimation of the sentiments entertained by the young people for each other?"

"None whatever. I did not even suspect it, though, since the facts have become known, I can see that I might have done so with reason."

"You have been a close and intimate friend of Cacami's, tzin Euet. Will you state to the court what you know of him personally?"

The court, like the audience, had been favorably impressed with the bearing and perfect candor of the young people, who were being tried for their lives, and was evidently seeking palliating conditions relevant to their case. The last quest of the judge could have been made with no other intent. It was just the position in which the tzin desired to be placed; for it gave him the ear of the court, and the liberty to address it in behalf of his friend, without the fear of interruption so long as he observed a due regard for its dignity. He began by saying:

"The court is very kind in conferring upon me the liberty to address it—a privilege I very much desired, for which I am profoundly thankful." Here the tzin made his obeisance to the court, and continued:

"I have known Cacami long enough, and well enough, to be able to speak of him in no doubtful language. Cacami and myself labored side by side for the freedom of Tezcuco, in times that tried the patriotism of her sons. I know him to be a patriot and true friend, which I have proven, not only once, but many times. He is a brave and valiant warrior, to which our noble Hualcoyotl can bear abundant testimony. He is a true man, in that he has staked his life in an issue which involves those emotions and sentiments of the heart which honor a man above all others—a pure, unsullied love for the woman of his choice. He stands to-day, though a prisoner at the bar of justice, a man to whom Tezcuco owes as much as to any one person within or without her borders. Had it not been for the strong right arm of this valiant man, both as citizen and warrior, Hualcoyotl would not be king to-day. You look at me in amazement, and well you may, for the words I speak are the words of truth and soberness; and when this court condemns to die the warrior Cacami, for following the dictates of an attachment stronger than the fear of death, it robs Tezcuco of one of her bravest and best; a man to whom every Tezcucan should give honor and respect, which is his due; for out of his hand came the life of Hualcoyotl, the king, whom all delight to honor." The audience, at this point in the tzin's speech, was like a mine prepared, ready to break out in a storm of approval, from the effect of his impressive eloquence. His heart was in the subject, and his face illumined by the earnestness of his effort to place the character of his friend in the best possible light before the judges. He continued:

"The words of commendation which I am compelled to speak in behalf of the warrior Cacami are not spoken out of sympathy for a friend who is passing through an ordeal, but from a feeling of regard for his personal worth. I admire a man who is brave and fearless in the discharge of his duty, be that duty what it may. Such a man is found in the prisoner at the bar—the man whom you are to liberate or condemn to death. I do not negative the possibility that a feeling of friendship for the accused may influence me to some extent in what I say; it could hardly be otherwise; but, while this may be admitted, there underlies it all an esteem and admiration for the man—as a man—which have developed through daily intercourse and observation, and which would obtain were we less friendly. My language has not been too strong, I would impress upon you, but rather lacking in strength; for the words have not yet been coined that will do justice to the worth of him whom the law would condemn. Were the king to stand in my place at this moment, I believe that he would, in the magnanimity of his noble nature, be compelled to reecho the words I have spoken. If worth, in those attributes which are esteemed above all others in a

man's character: honesty, fidelity, courage, and patriotism, may be counted in the prisoner's favor, then I pray the court to give him the benefit of its weight; for, if any man is entitled to it, that man is Cacami, the defendant at the bar."

It will be in order here to enlighten the reader relative to the demeanor of the king during the time which elapsed after he entered the charge against Cacami up to the day of his trial.

When too late to recall his action, the sting of mortification and chagrin having subsided sufficiently to permit him to reason, Hualcoyotl became conscious of the fact that he had acted rashly and unwisely. When he recalled the many instances wherein Cacami had stood between him and death, especially when, a stranger to him, he had undoubtedly saved him from the fate which finally overtook his enemy, the Tepanec king, he was filled with remorse for the ungenerous course he had taken. He had promised to remember his deliverer in the future, and how had he done it? By committing him to the mercy of an exacting tribunal of justice, from the decision of which there was no appeal.

The day of trial found the repentant king wrought up to a degree of mental excitement so great that he could not be composed for a minute. He walked the floor of his apartments almost incessantly, and would see no one. He was waiting impatiently for a summons to appear before the court, but no summons came. It came to that point when he could endure the suspense no longer, and he resolved to go to the hall uncalled, where he would listen to the proceedings unobserved. He came to the door of the court-room and paused, just in time to hear Itlza's last answer, which condemned her, in the minds of the judges. When the tzin rose to give in his testimony—which proved to be more in the nature of a speech—he was all attention, and heard every word the speaker said, apparently forgetting his distress of mind in the absorption of the moment, while listening to his friend's eloquent plea.

When Euetzin concluded his address to the court, and was seated, Hualcoyotl entered the hall and walked straight to the spot on which the former had stood, and paused. The court and spectators were astonished alike at the singular conduct of the king. His majesty was laboring under suppressed excitement and, for a moment, after facing the court, appeared unable to speak. He, however, quickly recovered his equanimity, and spoke as follows:

"Well, and true, did my friend, the tzin, speak, when he said the king would be compelled to reecho his words were he standing in his place. I am here to confirm, in the presence of this great tribunal, the words Euetzin has spoken. And, further, to admit that, while overwhelmed with humiliation and chagrin at my defeat, I did err in causing the arrest and committal of the warrior Cacami. Hualcoyotl would better kiss than smite the hand that delivered him from his enemy. The defendant at the bar once saved your king from a terrible death at the hands of Maxtla; and, now, instead of remembering the brave act of his deliverer, as he should, your king so far forgot his obligation as to consign him to a fate hardly less severe than that from which he rescued him. The disposition of the case is in the hands of this tribunal, from the decision of which there is no appeal. If, in the end, Cacami is found guilty, he must die, and with him Itlza, his wife, who is equally liable. Since it was my hand that brought the accused to his present position of a threatened destruction, most willingly would I step into his place, if I might, and bear the penalty of his offense, but that can not be; our laws recognize no substitutions, and the defendant must suffer if found guilty of the charge. If there be extenuating circumstances favorable to the warrior Cacami, your king prays the court to employ them to his advantage. If, by any honorable means, a suspension of action, or mitigation of sentence might be effected, great will be the relief and satisfaction of your sovereign."

The king took a seat near the accused, and at once assumed the relation of an interested friend. Itlza saw him now as the noble and magnanimous prince he had always seemed to her; Cacami felt the weight of his impending doom grow lighter in the friendly attitude of the king, while Euetzin only recognized in the action the generous, forgiving man he knew his royal friend to be.

The judges consulted together for a few minutes, when an adjournment of the court followed.

The court retired to another room for the purpose of holding a private consultation, at which the king was invited to be present. After an absence of quite a half hour it returned and the session was resumed.

Cacami was in his place, with the faithful Itlza beside him.

The presiding judge proceeded to address the prisoner and his friends. After informing them that a decision had been reached by the court, he continued, by saying:

"The case we have been called to consider is an extraordinary one. The accused is represented to be a man of sterling qualities, and worthy of our highest regard. He is charged, however, with a grave offense against his king. The evidence is not wanting to make a case against him, but there have come to our notice, during the trial, conditions which place the court in doubt as to the wisdom of a further prosecution of the defendant. Since this is true, the court has decided, at the instance of the king, who is the injured party, to dismiss the case. The accused is, therefore, honorably discharged from the custody of the court."

Itlza, forgetting all save her great joy, in knowing that Cacami was free, threw herself upon his breast and wept.

Cacami was deeply affected, but he belonged to a race of men who scorned to exhibit a weakness, under any circumstances, and was calm while he held in his strong embrace the weeping Itlza.

Hualcoyotl was the first to speak to them, and, in doing so, assured his now successful rival that he experienced great pleasure in knowing that he was free.

Euetzin was quite rejoiced, and, with a happy smile upon his face, so lately covered by a cloud of anxiety, conducted his now joyful sister and her forever-famous young husband from the court-room, and into the presence of Teochma, the mother, who received them with demonstrations of joy and gladness, forgetting, in the happiness of the moment, her disappointment at not becoming the mother of a queen.

CHAPTER XL.

Immediately after the trial Cacami and Itlza accompanied Teochma to Zelmonco villa, where the twain remained for a time in the enjoyment of each other's society, made unspeakably felicitous by a love which had been purified and intensified, in the crucible of affliction. The reward of their fidelity was a rich one—the consciousness of having been true to each other through an ordeal little less terrible than death itself.

The stay of the happy couple at the villa was suddenly brought to a close by an edict from the king, conferring upon Cacami a title of nobility, accompanied by a domain commensurate with the dignity it entailed. He was ordered to appear before the proper authority, that he might be inducted into the high and honorable station he was to fill, and be put in possession of his estates, which included a beautiful villa, provided with everything necessary to make it a home worthy of one who was to be an associate of the king.

The prescribed forms were complied with, which raised the young farmer warrior to a position of distinction, and he and his faithful wife were duly installed in their new home.

Itlza, if not a queen, was the happy, loving consort of a noble, who in after years became one of the great men of his nation.

Euetzin was in due time wedded to Mitla, at the king's palace.

Hualcoyotl, remembering the act which saved him from capture by the Tepanec soldiers and brought him to a final refuge, expressed a wish to the tzin that the marriage ceremony between Mitla and himself should be celebrated in his presence. The latter, as a result of the request, made a trip to the mountaineer's home—not, however, as on previous occasions, in a pedestrial fashion, but as a dignitary, within a royal palanquin borne by *tamanes*—for the purpose of consulting the wishes of the hunters' chief and his family, with reference to the matter. The prestige such a wedding would confer upon the favored ones was sufficient inducement to cause a concurrence in the arrangement by the hunter and his family, and the tzin returned to his royal patron the bearer of the gratifying intelligence that he was to be chief sponsor of the occasion.

While elaborate preparations for the event were going on, Tezcot and his family were brought to the palace of the king to become his guests until after the nuptial ceremony.

The eventful day came around, and Mitla, beautiful as she was happy, became the wife of Euetzin, the man who was enshrined in her heart and mind a veritable hero.

No real princess was ever wedded amid scenes of greater splendor. The munificence of the king was lavished upon her, and the occasion, with prodigal liberality, which ended only when he bestowed upon the tzin and herself a magnificent palace home near his own.

The villa of Zelmonco reverted to Euetzin by entailment, and much of the time of Mitla and himself was spent there in the society of his mother, who continued to be its mistress and head.

Ixtlilchoatl and Itzalmo lived to see their country raised far above its pristine glory, and died in the fullness of years, honored for their respective excellence and upright lives.

Oza, though a freeman, was installed in the king's household as an over-servant, with liberal provisions for his comfort.

Kan, the weaver, whose cottage had given shelter to the prince at the time of his escape from the palace, and whose words, addressed to the Tepanec soldier, no doubt, in after years, proved a blessing to more than one Tezcucan subject, was not forgotten, but remembered in a substantial manner by the king.

Thus did Hualcoyotl remember all his friends.

One of the first acts performed by the prince on his accession to power was to extend amnesty to all those who had cast in their lot with Maxtla and his predecessor. It is written that he should have said: "A monarch may punish, but revenge is unworthy of him." Being averse to punishing, in this case, his alienated subjects were all restored to citizenship.

Soon after the restoration of the Tezcucan government a triple alliance was formed between the states of Mexico, Tezcuco, and Tlacopan for offensive and defensive purposes. In this alliance, which was never abrogated by the parties themselves, was undoubtedly to be found the incipiency of the great Aztec Empire, which ended with the downfall of the last Montezuma, and the supremacy of the Spaniards.

Hualcoyotl remained unmarried for many years, in consequence of his disappointment in not securing Itlza for his queen. He finally, however, determined to marry.

In referring to this chapter in his life we are impelled, out of regard for the many excellent

qualities which history attributes to him, to disregard that portion of it which is prejudicial—the manner in which he secured his queen; a parallel case with that of David and Uriah, an account of which can be found in Prescott's "Conquest of Mexico."

As the years advanced, Oxie, the younger daughter of Tezcot and Xochitl, developed into a very attractive woman. Much of her time was spent at the home of Euetzin, and the king was often brought into intercourse with her.

The little episode of the bouquet of flowers at the hunter's home, when the prince was in hiding there, was not forgotten; and, from it, there grew a friendship, which finally ended in a declaration of preference, if not of love, from Hualcoyotl, and Oxie became one of his favorite wives.

The king had a great fondness for country life, which was to be seen in the many magnificent villas he possessed. These grand resorts were furnished with everything the heart could wish, to beautify and make them pleasant. His chief and favorite retreat was the villa of Tezcotzinco, so named, we opine, in honor of the hunters' chief, who, after the marriage of both his daughters, decided to become a subject of Hualcoyotl's, and was rewarded for it by having the title of tzin conferred upon him, and his being established at the king's most attractive resort, where he lived to enjoy a good old age.

The ruins of Tezcotzinco have long been designated as the "Baths of Montezuma," which, there is reason for saying, is an erroneous application, perpetuated through the ignorance of the natives.

A description of the villa Tezcotzinco, as it existed in its ancient beauty and grandeur, according to traditional history, will be interesting in this connection, to give the reader some idea of the splendor and elegance of the great Indian Prince, Hualcoyotl's, manner of living.

The villa was situated on a cone-shaped hill, about two leagues from the city of Tezcuco. We here quote from the historian: "It was laid out in terraces, or hanging gardens, having a flight of steps five hundred and twenty in number, many of them hewn in the natural porphyry. In the garden on the summit was a reservoir of water, fed by an aqueduct that was carried over hill and valley for several miles on huge buttresses of masonry. On a lower level there were three other reservoirs. From these copious basins the water was distributed in numerous channels through the gardens, or was made to tumble over the rocks in cascades. In the depths below, marble porticoes and pavilions were erected, and baths excavated in the solid rock, which have become noted as the 'Baths of Montezuma.' The visitor made the descent by steps cut in the rock and polished so bright as to reflect like mirrors. Toward the base of the hill, in the midst of cedar groves, rose the royal villa, with its light arcades and airy halls."

Such was Tezcotzinco, the chief country seat of Prince Nezahualcoyotl, to which he often retired to throw off the cares of state, and recuperate his jaded spirits in the society of his favorite wives, of whom Oxie was one, and especially favored. Here he often entertained his royal brothers of Mexico and Tlacopan, and other close friends, in the pleasures of the chase through the grand forests that surrounded the villa, or in the milder pleasures of its paradisaical bowers and alluring shades.

The prince did everything he could to promote and broaden the intelligence of his people. Among other things, of an educational character, which he established, was a tribunal before which, on stated days, compositions of prose and poetry were recited by competitors for valuable prizes. The compositions in prose were restricted to the subjects of science and history; while the poems treated of moral and traditional topics.

The great benefit derived from this and similar institutions was seen in the Tezcucan authors and orators, who stood far in advance of those of any other nation of Anahuac.

Prince Hualcoyotl himself was one of the most illustrious of their writers, especially in compositions of a poetical nature. Such lines as the following are attributed to him by historians:

> "If there are bounds to pleasure, the saddest life must also have an end.
> Then weave the chaplet of flowers, and sing thy songs in praise of the all powerful God, for the glory of this world soon fadeth away.
> Rejoice in the green freshness of the spring, for the day will soon come when thou shalt sigh for these joys in vain."

And again:

> "The goods of this life, its glories and riches, are but lent to us;
> The substance is but an illusory shadow, and the things of today shall change on the coming of the morrow.
> Then gather the fairest flowers from the gardens, to bind round thy brow, and seize the joys of the present ere they perish."

In the poetic thoughts which these lines represent we have the reflection of a mind endowed with

beauty and simplicity—attributes of greatness; and, though surrounded by the darkness of ignorance and superstition, the man who possessed it lived to honor the high position he was born to fill, that of A Prince of Anahuac.

Footnotes

[1]
See Preface with reference to pronunciation of names.

[2]
A word synonymous with "lord."

[3]
Popocatepetl.

[4]
The Mexican tiger-cat.

[5]
NOTE.—The royal city of Azcapozalco was razed to the ground, and the wasted territory was henceforth reserved as the great slave-mart for the nations of Anahuac.—*Prescott*.

[6]
NOTE.—Voluntary servitude obtained among the Anahuacans, and of this class were those who served with Tezcot, the hunter.

[7]
NOTE.—An intoxicant, made from the juice of maguey, pronounced pull-kē—a drink much used by the Mexicans to this day.

[8]
NOTE.—See Hale's Mexico.

[9]
NOTE.—The Aztec god of war.

Transcriber's Note: Minor typographical errors have been corrected without note. Irregularities and inconsistencies in the text have been retained as printed. The Table of Contents was not present in the original text and has been produced for the reader's convenience.

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