

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SAVING OF GUATEMOC

Now after this dreadful day I was kindly dealt with by the people of Tobasco, who gave me the name of Teule or Spaniard, and no longer sought to put me to sacrifice. Far from it indeed, I was well clothed and fed, and suffered to wander where I would, though always under the care of guards who, had I escaped, would have paid for it with their lives. I learned that on the morrow of my rescue from the priests, messengers were despatched to Montezuma, the great king, acquainting him with the history of my capture, and seeking to know his pleasure concerning me. But the way to Tenochtitlan was far, and many weeks passed before the messengers returned again. Meanwhile I filled the days in learning the Maya language, and also something of that of the Aztecs, which I practised with Marina and others. For Marina was not a Tobascan, having been born at Painalla, on the southeastern borders of the empire. But her mother sold her to merchants in order that Marina's inheritance might come to another child of hers by a second marriage, and thus in the end the girl fell into the hands of the cacique of Tobasco.

Also I learned something of the history and customs, and of the picture writing of the land, and how to read it, and moreover I obtained great repute among the Tobascans by my skill in medicine, so that in time they grew to believe that I was indeed a child of Quetzal, the good god. And

the more I studied this people the less I could understand of them. In most ways they were equal to any nation of our own world of which I had knowledge. None are more skilled in the arts, few are better architects or boast purer laws. Moreover, they were brave and had patience. But their faith was the canker at the root of the tree. In precept it was noble and had much in common with our own, such as the rite of baptism, but I have told what it was in practice. And yet, when all is said, is it more cruel to offer up victims to the gods than to torture them in the vaults of the Holy Office or to immure them in the walls of nunneries?

When I had lived a month in Tobasco I had learned enough of the language to talk with Marina, with whom I grew friendly, though no more, and it was from her that I gathered the most of my knowledge, and also many hints as to the conduct necessary to my safety. In return I taught her something of my own faith, and of the customs of the Europeans, and it was the knowledge that she gained from me which afterwards made her so useful to the Spaniards, and prepared her to accept their religion, giving her insight into the ways of white people.

So I abode for four months and more in the house of the cacique of Tobasco, who carried his kindness towards me to the length of offering me his sister in marriage. To this proposal I said no as gently as I might, and he marvelled at it, for the girl was fair. Indeed, so well was I treated, that had it not been that my heart was far away, and because of the horrible rites of their religion which I was forced to

witness almost daily, I could have learned to love this gentle, skilled, and industrious people.

At length, when full four months had passed away, the messengers returned from the court of Montezuma, having been much delayed by swollen rivers and other accidents of travel. So great was the importance that the Emperor attached to the fact of my capture, and so desirous was he to see me at his capital, that he had sent his own nephew, the Prince Guatemoc, to fetch me and a great escort of warriors with him.

Never shall I forget my first meeting with this prince who afterwards became my dear companion and brother in arms. When the escort arrived I was away from the town shooting deer with the bow and arrow, a weapon in the use of which I had such skill that all the Indians wondered at me, not knowing that twice I had won the prize at the butts on Bungay Common. Our party being summoned by a messenger, we returned bearing our deer with us. On reaching the courtyard of the cacique's house, I found it filled with warriors most gorgeously attired, and among them one more splendid than the rest. He was young, very tall and broad, most handsome in face, and having eyes like those of an eagle, while his whole aspect breathed majesty and command. His body was encased in a cuirass of gold, over which hung a mantle made of the most gorgeous feathers, exquisitely set in bands of different colours. On his head he wore a helmet of gold surmounted by the royal crest, an eagle, standing on a snake fashioned

in gold and gems. On his arms, and beneath his knees, he wore circlets of gold and gems, and in his hand was a copper-bladed spear. Round this man were many nobles dressed in a somewhat similar fashion, except that the most of them wore a vest of quilted cotton in place of the gold cuirass, and a jewelled panache of the plumes of birds instead of the royal symbol.

This was Guatemoc, Montezuma's nephew, and afterwards the last emperor of Anahuac. So soon as I saw him I saluted him in the Indian fashion by touching the earth with my right hand, which I then raised to my head. But Guatemoc, having scanned me with his eye as I stood, bow in hand, attired in my simple hunter's dress, smiled frankly and said:

'Surely, Teule, if I know anything of the looks of men, we are too equal in our birth, as in our age, for you to salute me as a slave greets his master.' And he held his hand to me.

I took it, answering with the help of Marina, who was watching this great lord with eager eyes.

'It may be so, prince, but though in my own country I am a man of repute and wealth, here I am nothing but a slave snatched from the sacrifice.'

'I know it,' he said frowning. 'It is well for all here that you were so snatched before the breath of life had left you, else Montezuma's wrath had fallen on this city.' And he looked at the cacique who trembled,

such in those days was the terror of Montezuma's name.

Then he asked me if I was a Teule or Spaniard. I told him that I was no Spaniard but one of another white race who had Spanish blood in his veins. This saying seemed to puzzle him, for he had never so much as heard of any other white race, so I told him something of my story, at least so much of it as had to do with my being cast away.

When I had finished, he said, 'If I have understood aright, Teule, you say that you are no Spaniard, yet that you have Spanish blood in you, and came hither in a Spanish ship, and I find this story strange. Well, it is for Montezuma to judge of these matters, so let us talk of them no more. Come and show me how you handle that great bow of yours. Did you bring it with you or did you fashion it here? They tell me, Teule, that there is no such archer in the land.'

So I came up and showed him the bow which was of my own make, and would shoot an arrow some sixty paces further than any that I saw in Anahuac, and we fell into talk on matters of sport and war, Marina helping out my want of language, and before that day was done we had grown friendly.

For a week the prince Guatemoc and his company rested in the town of Tobasco, and all this time we three talked much together. Soon I saw that Marina looked with eyes of longing on the great lord, partly because of his beauty rank and might, and partly because she wearied of her captivity in the house of the cacique, and would share Guatemoc's

power, for Marina was ambitious. She tried to win his heart in many ways, but he seemed not to notice her, so that at last she spoke more plainly and in my hearing.

'You go hence to-morrow, prince,' she said softly, 'and I have a favour to ask of you, if you will listen to your handmaid.'

'Speak on, maiden,' he answered.

'I would ask this, that if it pleases you, you will buy me of the cacique my master, or command him to give me up to you, and take me with you to Tenochtitlan.'

Guatemoc laughed aloud. 'You put things plainly, maiden,' he said, 'but know that in the city of Tenochtitlan, my wife and royal cousin, Tecuichpo, awaits me, and with her three other ladies, who as it chances are somewhat jealous.'

Now Marina flushed beneath her brown skin, and for the first and last time I saw her gentle eyes grow hard with anger as she answered:

'I asked you to take me with you, prince; I did not ask to be your wife or love.'

'But perchance you meant it,' he said dryly.

'Whatever I may have meant, prince, it is now forgotten. I wished to see the great city and the great king, because I weary of my life here and would myself grow great. You have refused me, but perhaps a time will come when I shall grow great in spite of you, and then I may remember the shame that has been put upon me against you, prince, and all your royal house.'

Again Guatemoc laughed, then of a sudden grew stern.

'You are over-bold, girl,' he said; 'for less words than these many a one might find herself stretched upon the stone of sacrifice. But I will forget them, for your woman's pride is stung, and you know not what you say. Do you forget them also, Teule, if you have understood.'

Then Marina turned and went, her bosom heaving with anger and outraged love or pride, and as she passed me I heard her mutter, 'Yes, prince, you may forget, but I shall not.'

Often since that day I have wondered if some vision of the future entered into the girl's breast in that hour, or if in her wrath she spoke at random. I have wondered also whether this scene between her and Guatemoc had anything to do with the history of her after life; or did Marina, as she avowed to me in days to come, bring shame and ruin on her country for the love of Cortes alone? It is hard to say, and perhaps these things had nothing to do with what followed, for when great events have happened, we are apt to search out causes for them in the past that

were no cause. This may have been but a passing mood of hers and one soon put out of mind, for it is certain that few build up the temples of their lives upon some firm foundation of hope or hate, of desire or despair, though it has happened to me to do so, but rather take chance for their architect--and indeed whether they take him or no, he is still the master builder. Still that Marina did not forget this talk I know, for in after times I heard her remind this very prince of the words that had passed between them, ay, and heard his noble answer to her.

Now I have but one more thing to tell of my stay in Tobasco, and then let me on to Mexico, and to the tale of how Montezuma's daughter became my wife, and of my further dealings with de Garcia.

On the day of our departure a great sacrifice of slaves was held upon the teocalli to propitiate the gods, so that they might give us a safe journey, and also in honour of some festival, for to the festivals of the Indians there was no end. Thither we went up the sides of the steep pyramid, since I must look upon these horrors daily. When all was prepared, and we stood around the stone of sacrifice while the multitude watched below, that fierce paba who once had felt the beatings of my heart, came forth from the sanctuary of the god Quetzal and signed to his companions to stretch the first of the victims on the stone. Then of a sudden the prince Guatemoc stepped forward, and addressing the priests, pointed to their chief, and said:



'Seize that man!'

They hesitated, for though he who commanded was a prince of the blood royal, to lay hands upon a high priest was sacrilege. Then with a smile Guatemoc drew forth a ring having a dull blue stone set in its bezel, on which was engraved a strange device. With the ring he drew out also a scroll of picture-writing, and held them both before the eyes of the pabas. Now the ring was the ring of Montezuma, and the scroll was signed by the great high priest of Tenochtitlan, and those who looked on the ring and the scroll knew well that to disobey the mandate of him who bore them was death and dishonour in one. So without more ado they seized their chief and held him. Then Guatemoc spoke again and shortly:

'Lay him on the stone and sacrifice him to the god Quetzal.'

Now he who had taken such fierce joy in the death of others on this same stone, began to tremble and weep, for he did not desire to drink of his own medicine.

'Why must I be offered up, O prince?' he cried, 'I who have been a faithful servant to the gods and to the Emperor.'

'Because you dared to try to offer up this Teule,' answered Guatemoc, pointing to me, 'without leave from your master Montezuma, and because of the other evils that you have done, all of which are written in this scroll. The Teule is a son of Quetzal, as you have yourself declared,

and Quetzal will be avenged because of his son. Away with him, here is your warrant.'

Then the priests, who till this moment had been his servants, dragged their chief to the stone, and there, notwithstanding his prayers and bellowings, one who had donned his mantle practised his own art upon him, and presently his body was cast down the side of the pyramid. For my part I am not sufficient of a Christian to pretend that I was sorry to see him die in that same fashion by which he had caused the death of so many better men.

When it was done Guatemoc turned to me and said, 'So perish all your enemies, my friend Teule.'

Within an hour of this event, which revealed to me how great was the power of Montezuma, seeing that the sight of a ring from his finger could bring about the instant death of a high priest at the hands of his disciples, we started on our long journey. But before I went I bid a warm farewell to my friend the cacique, and also to Marina, who wept at my going. The cacique I never saw again, but Marina I did see.

For a whole month we travelled, for the way was far and the road rough, and sometimes we must cut our path through forests and sometimes we must wait upon the banks of rivers. Many were the strange sights that I saw upon that journey, and many the cities in which we sojourned in much

state and honour, but I cannot stop to tell of all these.

One thing I will relate, however, though briefly, because it changed the regard that the prince Guatemoc and I felt one to the other into a friendship which lasted till his death, and indeed endures in my heart to this hour.

One day we were delayed by the banks of a swollen river, and in pastime went out to hunt for deer. When we had hunted a while and killed three deer, it chanced that Guatemoc perceived a buck standing on a hillock, and we set out to stalk it, five of us in all. But the buck was in the open, and the trees and bush ceased a full hundred yards away from where he stood, so that there was no way by which we might draw near to him. Then Guatemoc began to mock me, saying, 'Now, Teule, they tell tales of your archery, and this deer is thrice as far as we Aztecs can make sure of killing. Let us see your skill.'

'I will try,' I answered, 'though the shot is long.'

So we drew beneath the cover of a ceiba tree, of which the lowest branches drooped to within fifteen feet of the ground, and having set an arrow on the string of the great bow that I had fashioned after the shape of those we use in merry England, I aimed and drew it. Straight sped the arrow and struck the buck fair, passing through its heart, and a low murmur of wonderment went up from those who saw the feat.

Then, just as we prepared to go to the fallen deer, a male puma, which is nothing but a cat, though fifty times as big, that had been watching the buck from above, dropped down from the boughs of the ceiba tree full on to the shoulders of the prince Guatemoc, felling him to the ground, where he lay face downwards while the fierce brute clawed and bit at his back. Indeed had it not been for his golden cuirass and helm Guatemoc would never have lived to be emperor of Anahuac, and perhaps it might have been better so.

Now when they saw the puma snarling and tearing at the person of their prince, though brave men enough, the three nobles who were with us were seized by sudden panic and ran, thinking him dead. But I did not run, though I should have been glad enough to do so. At my side hung one of the Indian weapons that serve them instead of swords, a club of wood set on both sides with spikes of obsidian, like the teeth in the bill of a swordfish. Snatching it from its loop I gave the puma battle, striking a blow upon his head that rolled him over and caused the blood to pour. In a moment he was up and at me roaring with rage. Whirling the wooden sword with both hands I smote him in mid air, the blow passing between his open paws and catching him full on the snout and head. So hard was this stroke that my weapon was shattered, still it did not stop the puma. In a second I was cast to the earth with a great shock, and the brute was on me tearing and biting at my chest and neck. It was well for me at that moment that I wore a garment of quilted cotton, otherwise I must have been ripped open, and even with this covering I was sadly torn, and to this day I bear the marks of the beast's claws upon my

body. But now when I seemed to be lost the great blow that I had struck took effect on him, for one of the points of glass had pierced to his brain. He lifted his head, his claws contracted themselves in my flesh, then he howled like a dog in pain and fell dead upon my body. So I lay upon the ground unable to stir, for I was much hurt, until my companions, having taken heart, came back and pulled the puma off me. By this time Guatemoc, who saw all, but till now was unable to move from lack of breath, had found his feet again.

'Teule,' he gasped, 'you are a brave man indeed, and if you live I swear that I will always stand your friend to the death as you have stood mine.'

Thus he spoke to me; but to the others he said nothing, casting no reproaches at them.

Then I fainted away.