

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE END OF GUATEMOC

Now for a while we dwelt in quiet at the City of Pines, and by slow degrees and with much suffering I recovered from the wounds that the cruel hand of de Garcia had inflicted upon me. But we knew that this peace could not last, and the people of the Otomie knew it also, for had they not scourged the envoys of Malinche out of the gates of their city? Many of them were now sorry that this had been done, but it was done, and they must reap as they had sown.

So they made ready for war, and Otomie was the president of their councils, in which I shared. At length came news that a force of fifty Spaniards with five thousand Tlascalan allies were advancing on the city to destroy us. Then I took command of the tribesmen of the Otomie--there were ten thousand or more of them, all well-armed after their own fashion--and advanced out of the city till I was two-thirds of the way down the gorge which leads to it. But I did not bring all my army down this gorge, since there was no room for them to fight there, and I had another plan. I sent some seven thousand men round the mountains, of which the secret paths were well known to them, bidding them climb to the crest of the precipices that bordered either side of the gorge, and there, at certain places where the cliff is sheer and more than one thousand feet in height, to make a great provision of stones.

The rest of my army, excepting five hundred whom I kept with me, I armed with bows and throwing spears, and stationed them in ambush in convenient places where the sides of the cliff were broken, and in such fashion that rocks from above could not be rolled on them. Then I sent trusty men as spies to warn me of the approach of the Spaniards, and others whose mission it was to offer themselves to them as guides.

Now I thought my plan good, and everything looked well, and yet it missed failure but by a very little. For Maxtla, our enemy and the friend of the Spaniards, was in my camp--indeed, I had brought him with me that I might watch him--and he had not been idle.

For when the Spaniards were half a day's march from the mouth of the defile, one of those men whom I had told off to watch their advance, came to me and made it known that Maxtla had bribed him to go to the leader of the Spaniards and disclose to him the plan of the ambushade. This man had taken the bribe and started on his errand of treachery, but his heart failed him and, returning, he told me all. Then I caused Maxtla to be seized, and before nightfall he had paid the price of his wickedness.

On the morning after his death the Spanish array entered the pass. Half-way down it I met them with my five hundred men and engaged them, but suffered them to drive us back with some loss. As they followed they

grew bolder and we fled faster, till at length we flew down the defile followed by the Spanish horse. Now, some three furlongs from its mouth that leads to the City of Pines, this pass turns and narrows, and here the cliffs are so sheer and high that a twilight reigns at the foot of them.

Down the narrow way we ran in seeming rout, and after us came the Spaniards shouting on their saints and flushed with victory. But scarcely had we turned the corner when they sang another song, for those who were watching a thousand feet above us gave the signal, and down from on high came a rain of stones and boulders that darkened the air and crashed among them, crushing many of them. On they struggled, seeing a wider way in front where the cliffs sloped, and perhaps half of them won through. But here the archers were waiting, and now, in the place of stones, arrows were hailed upon them, till at length, utterly bewildered and unable to strike a blow in their own defence, they turned to fly towards the open country. This finished the fight, for now we assailed their flank, and once more the rocks thundered on them from above, and the end of it was that those who remained of the Spaniards and their Indian allies were driven in utter rout back to the plain beyond the Pass of Pines.

After this battle the Spaniards troubled us no more for many years except by threats, and my name grew great among the people of the Otomie.

One Spaniard I rescued from death and afterwards I gave him his liberty. From him I inquired of the doings of de Garcia or Sarceda, and learned that he was still in the service of Cortes, but that Marina had been true to her word, and had brought disgrace upon him because he had threatened to put Otomie to the torture. Moreover Cortes was angry with him because of our escape, the burden of which Marina had laid upon his shoulders, hinting that he had taken a bribe to suffer us to pass the gate.

Of the fourteen years of my life which followed the defeat of the Spaniards I can speak briefly, for compared to the time that had gone before they were years of quiet. In them children were born to me and Otomie, three sons, and these children were my great joy, for I loved them dearly and they loved me. Indeed, except for the strain of their mother's blood, they were English boys and not Indian, for I christened them all, and taught them our English tongue and faith, and their mien and eyes were more English than Indian, though their skins were dark. But I had no luck with these dear children of mine, any more than I have had with that which Lily bore me. Two of them died--one from a fever that all my skill would not avail to cure, and another by a fall from a lofty cedar tree, which he climbed searching for a kite's nest. Thus of the three of them--since I do not speak now of that infant, my firstborn, who perished in the siege--there remained to me only the eldest and best beloved of whom I must tell hereafter.

For the rest, jointly with Otomie I was named cacique of the City of Pines at a great council that was held after I had destroyed the Spaniards and their allies, and as such we had wide though not absolute power. By the exercise of this power, in the end I succeeded in abolishing the horrible rites of human sacrifice, though, because of this, a large number of the outlying tribes fell away from our rule, and the enmity of the priests was excited against me. The last sacrifice, except one only, the most terrible of them all, of which I will tell afterwards, that was ever celebrated on the teocalli in front of the palace, took place after the defeat of the Spaniards in the pass.

When I had dwelt three years in the City of Pines and two sons had been born to me there, secret messengers arrived that were sent by the friends of Guatemoc, who had survived the torture and was still a prisoner in the hands of Cortes. From these messengers we learned that Cortes was about to start upon an expedition to the Gulf of Honduras, across the country that is now known as Yucatan, taking Guatemoc and other Aztec nobles with him for he feared to leave them behind. We heard also that there was much murmuring among the conquered tribes of Anahuac because of the cruelties and extortions of the Spaniards, and many thought that the hour had come when a rising against them might be carried to a successful issue.

This was the prayer of those who sent the envoys, that I should raise a force of Otomies and travel with it across the country to Yucatan, and there with others who would be gathered, wait a favourable opportunity

to throw myself upon the Spaniards when they were entangled in the forests and swamps, putting them to the sword and releasing Guatemoc. Such was the first purpose of the plot, though it had many others of which it is useless to speak, seeing that they came to nothing.

When the message had been delivered I shook my head sadly, for I could see no hope in such a scheme, but the chief of the messengers rose and led me aside, saying that he had a word for my ear.

'Guatemoc sends these words,' he said; 'I hear that you, my brother, are free and safe with my cousin Otomie in the mountains of the Otomie. I, alas! linger in the prisons of the Teules like a crippled eagle in a cage. My brother, if it is in your power to help me, do so I conjure you by the memory of our ancient friendship, and of all that we have suffered together. Then a time may still come when I shall rule again in Anahuac, and you shall sit at my side.'

I heard and my heart was stirred, for then, as to this hour, I loved Guatemoc as a brother.

'Go back,' I said, 'and find means to tell Guatemoc that if I can save him I will, though I have small hopes that way. Still, let him look for me in the forests of Yucatan.'

Now when Otomie heard of this promise of mine she was vexed, for she said that it was foolish and would only end in my losing my life. Still,

having given it she held with me that it must be carried out, and the end of it was that I raised five hundred men, and with them set out upon my long and toilsome march, which I timed so as to meet Cortes in the passes of Yucatan. At the last moment Otomie wished to accompany me, but I forbade it, pointing out that she could leave neither her children nor her people, and we parted with bitter grief for the first time.

Of all the hardships that I underwent I will not write. For two and a half months we struggled on across mountains and rivers and through swamps and forests, till at last we reached a mighty deserted city, that is called Palenque by the Indians of those parts, which has been uninhabited for many generations. This city is the most marvellous place that I have seen in all my travels, though much of it is hidden in bush, for wherever the traveller wanders there he finds vast palaces of marble, carven within and without, and sculptured teocallis and the huge images of grinning gods. Often have I wondered what nation was strong enough to build such a capital, and who were the kings that dwelt in it. But these are secrets belonging to the past, and they cannot be answered till some learned man has found the key to the stone symbols and writings with which the walls of the buildings are covered over.

In this city I hid with my men, though it was no easy task to persuade them to take up their habitation among so many ghosts of the departed, not to speak of the noisome fevers and the wild beasts and snakes that haunted it, for I had information that the Spaniards would pass through the swamp that lies between the ruins and the river, and there I hoped

to ambush them. But on the eighth day of my hiding I learned from spies that Cortes had crossed the great river higher up, and was cutting his way through the forest, for of swamps he had passed more than enough. So I hurried also to the river intending to cross it. But all that day and all that night it rained as it can rain nowhere else in the world that I have seen, till at last we waded on our road knee deep in water, and when we came to the ford of the river it was to find a wide roaring flood, that no man could pass in anything less frail than a Yarmouth herring boat. So there on the bank we must stay in misery, suffering many ills from fever, lack of food, and plenitude of water, till at length the stream ran down.

Three days and nights we waited there, and on the fourth morning I made shift to cross, losing four men by drowning in the passage. Once over, I hid my force in the bush and reeds, and crept forward with six men only, to see if I could discover anything of the whereabouts of the Spaniards. Within an hour I struck the trail that they had cut through the forest, and followed it cautiously. Presently we came to a spot where the forest was thin, and here Cortes had camped, for there was heat left in the ashes of his fires, and among them lay the body of an Indian who had died from sickness. Not fifty yards from this camp stood a huge ceiba, a tree that has a habit of growth not unlike that of our English oak, though it is soft wooded and white barked, and will increase more in bulk in twenty years than any oak may in a hundred. Indeed I never yet saw an oak tree so large as this ceiba of which I write, either in girth or in its spread of top, unless it be the Kirby oak or the tree that



is called the 'King of Scoto' which grows at Broome, that is the next parish to this of Ditchingham in Norfolk. On this ceiba tree many zaphilotes or vultures were perched, and as we crept towards it I saw what it was they came to seek, for from the lowest branches of the ceiba three corpses swung in the breeze. 'Here are the Spaniard's footprints,' I said. 'Let us look at them,' and we passed beneath the shadow of the tree.

As I came, a zaphilote alighted on the head of the body that hung nearest to me, and its weight, or the wafting of the fowl's wing, caused the dead man to turn round so that he came face to face with me. I looked, started back, then looked again and sank to the earth groaning. For here was he whom I had come to seek and save, my friend, my brother, Guatemoc the last emperor of Anahuac. Here he hung in the dim and desolate forest, dead by the death of a thief, while the vulture shrieked upon his head. I sat bewildered and horror-stricken, and as I sat I remembered the proud sign of Aztec royalty, a bird of prey clasping an adder in its claw. There before me was the last of the stock, and behold! a bird of prey gripped his hair in its talons, a fitting emblem indeed of the fall of Anahuac and the kings of Anahuac.

I sprang to my feet with an oath, and lifting the bow I held I sent an arrow through the vulture and it fell to the earth fluttering and screaming. Then I bade those with me to cut down the corpses of Guatemoc and of the prince of Tacuba and another noble who hung with him, and hollow a deep grave beneath the tree. There I laid them, and there I

left them to sleep for ever in its melancholy shadow, and thus for the last time I saw Guatemoc my brother, whom I came from far to save and found made ready for burial by the Spaniard.

Then I turned my face homewards, for now Anahuac had no king to rescue, but it chanced that before I went I caught a Tlascalan who could speak Spanish, and who had deserted from the army of Cortes because of the hardships that he suffered in their toilsome march. This man was present at the murder of Guatemoc and his companions, and heard the Emperor's last words. It seems that some knave had betrayed to Cortes that an attempt would be made to rescue the prince, and that thereon Cortes commanded that he should be hung. It seems also that Guatemoc met his death as he had met the misfortunes of his life, proudly and without fear. These were his last words: 'I did ill, Malinche, when I held my hand from taking my own life before I surrendered myself to you. Then my heart told me that all your promises were false, and it has not lied to me. I welcome my death, for I have lived to know shame and defeat and torture, and to see my people the slaves of the Teule, but still I say that God will reward you for this deed.'

Then they murdered him in the midst of a great silence.

And so farewell to Guatemoc, the most brave, the best and the noblest Indian that ever breathed, and may the shadow of his tormentings and shameful end lie deep upon the fame of Cortes for so long as the names

of both of them are remembered among men!

For two more months I journeyed homeward and at length I reached the City of Pines, well though wearied, and having lost only forty men by various misadventures of travel, to find Otomie in good health, and overjoyed to know me safe whom she thought never to see again. But when I told her what was the end of her cousin Guatemoc she grieved bitterly, both for his sake and because the last hope of the Aztec was gone, and she would not be comforted for many days.