THE FAIR GOD.

BOOK FIVE.

CHAPTER VII.

(Continued.)

The king and the Lord Cuitlahua exchanged glances of satisfaction.

"At last the labors of the *teotuctli* were rewarded. I saw him tear a heart from a victim's breast and study the signs; then, with a loud cry, he ran and flung the heart into the fire before the altar of Huitzil'; and all there joined in the cry, which was of rejoicing, and washed their hands in the blood. The holy man then came to me and said, 'Say to Montezuma, the wise king, that Huitzil', the Supreme God, has answered, and bids him begin the war. Say to him, also, to be of cheer; for the land shall be delivered from the strangers, and the strangers shall be delivered to him in trust for the god. Then he stood in the door of the sanctuary and and made proclamation of the divine will. And that was all, O king."

"To Huitzil' be the praise!" exclaimed the king, piously.

"And to Montezuma the glory!" said Cuitlahua.

And the queens and Tula kissed the monarch's hand, and at his feet Io' knelt and laid his shield, saying:

"A favor, O king, a favor!"

"Well."

"Let not my years be counted, but give me a warrior's part in the sacred war."

And Cuitlahua went to the suppliant and laid a hand upon his head, and said, his massive features glowing with honest pride, "It was well spoken, O my brother, well spoken. The blood and spirit of our race will survive us. I, the oldest, rejoice, and, with the youngest, pray; give us each to do a warrior's part."

Brighter grew the monarch's eyes.

"Your will be done," he said to Io'. "Arise." Then looking toward the sun he added with majestic fervor, "The inspiration is from you, O holy gods! Strengthen it, I pray, and help him in the way he would go." A moment after, he turned to Cuitlahua, "My brother, have your wish also. I give you the command. You have my signet already. To-morrow the drum of Huitzil' will be beaten. At the sound, let the bridges next the palace of Axaya' on all the causeways be taken up. Close the market to-night. Supplies for one day more Malinche may have, and that is all. Around the *teocallis*, in hearing of a shell, are ten thousand warriors; take them, and, after the beating of the drum, see that the strangers come not out of the palace, and that nothing goes through its gates for them. But until the signal, let there be friendship and perfect peace. And"—he looked around slowly and solemnly—"what I have here spoken is between ourselves and the gods."

And Cuitlahua knelt and kissed his hand, in token of loyalty.

While the scene was passing, as the only one present not of the royal family, Hualpa stood by, with downcast eyes; and as he listened to the brave words of the king, involving so much of weal or woe to the realm, he wondered at the fortune which had brought him such rich confidence, not as the result of years of service, but, as it were, in a day. Suddenly the monarch turned to him.

"Thanks are not enough, Lord Hualpa, for the report you bring. As a messenger between me and the mighty Huitzil', you shall have reason to rejoice with us. Lands and rank you have, and a palace; now"—a smile broke through his seriousness—"now I will give you a wife. Here she is." And to the amazement of all, he pointed to Nenetzin. "A wild bird by the Sun! What say you, Lord Hualpa? Is she not beautiful? Yet"—he became grave in an instant—"I warn you she is self-willed and spoiled, and now suffers from a distemper which she fancies to be love. I warn you, lest one of the enemy, of whom we were but now talking, lure her from you, as he seems to have lured her from us and our gods. To save her, and place her in good keeping, as well as to bestow a proper reward, I will give her to you for wife."

Tecalco looked at Acatlan, who governed her feelings well; possibly she was satisfied, for the waywardness of the girl had, of late caused her anxiety, while, if not a prince, like Cacama, Hualpa was young, brave, handsome, ennobled, and as the proposal itself proved, on the high road to princely honors. Tula openly rejoiced; so did Io'. The Lord Cuitlahua was indifferent; his new command, and the prospects of the morrow, so absorbed him that a betrothal or a wedding was a trifle. As for Hualpa, it was as if the flowery land of the Aztec heaven had opened around him. He was speechless; but in the step half taken, his flushed face, his quick breathing. Nenetzin read all he could have said and more; and so he waited a sign from her—a sign though but a motion of the lip or hand. And she gave him a smile—not like that the bold Spaniard received on the temple, nor warm, as if prompted by the loving soul—a smile witnessed by all present; and by all accepted as her expression of assent.

"I will give her to you for wife," the monarch repeated, slowly and distinctly. This is the betrothal; the wedding shall be when the war is over, when not a white-faced stranger is left in all my domain."

While yet he spoke, Nenetzin ran to her mother, and hid her face in her bosom.

"Listen further, Lord Hualpa," said the king. "In the great business of to-morrow I give you a part. At daylight return to the tempie, and remain there in the turret where hangs the drum of Huitzil'. Io' will come to you about noon, with my command; then, if such be its effect, with your own hand give the signal for which the Lord Cuitlahua will be waiting. Strike so as to be heard by the city, and by the cities on the shores of the lake. Afterwards, with Io', go to the Lord Cuitlahua. Here is the signet again. The *teotuctli* may want prof of your authority."

Hualpa, kneeling to receive the seal, kissed the monarch's hand.

"And now," the latter said, addressing himself to Cuitlahua, "the interview is ended. You have much to do. Go. The gods keep you."

Hualpa, at last released, went and paid homage to his betrothed, and was made still more happy by her words, and the congratulations of the queens.

Tula alone lingered at the king's side, her large eyes fixed appealingly on his face.

"What now, Tula?" he asked tenderly.

And she answered, "You have need, O king and good father, of faithful, loving warriors. I know of one. He should be here, but is not. Of to-morrow, its braveries and sacrifices; the ministrels will sing for ages to come; and the burden of their songs will be how nobly the people fought, and died, and conquered for you. Shall the opportunity be for all but him? Do not so wrong yourself, be not so cruel to—to me," she said clasping her hands.

His look of tenderness vanished, and he walked away, and from the parapet of the *teocas* gazed long and fixedly, apparently observing the day dying in the west, or that stretched out of sight from the base of the castled hills.

She waited expectantly, but no answer came—none ever came.

And when, directly, she joined the group about Nenetzin and Hualpa, and leaned confidently on Io', she little that his was the shadow darkening her love; that the dreamy monarch, looking forward to the succession, saw, in the far future, a struggle for the crown between the prince and the 'tzin; that for the former hope there was not, except in what was now to be done; and that and that yet there was not hope, it the opportunities of war was as open to one as the other. So the exile continued.

(To be continued.)

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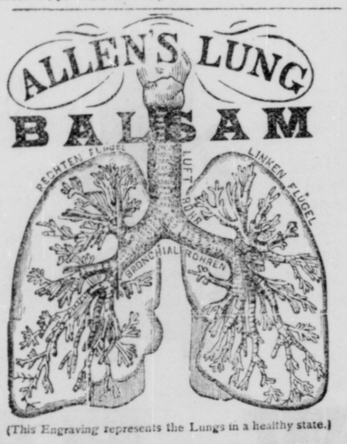

(This Engraving represents the Lungs in a healthy state.)

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