

THE FAIR GOD.

BOOK SIX. CHAPTER IX.

LIFE IN THE PAPA'S WORLD.

When the page awoke, after a long, refreshing sleep, he saw the fountain first and Teetel next. She was sitting a little way off upon a mat stretched on the floor. A number of birds were about her, whistling and coquetting with each other.

Now, Ortegulla was very sensible of her loveliness; he was no less sensible, also, that she was a mystery out of the common way of life; and had he been in a place of safety, in the palace of Axaya, he would have stayed a long time, pretending sleep, in order to study her unobserved.

The movement attracted the girls attention; she arose and waited for him to speak. "Good morning, if morning it be," he said.

"Come here," he continued. "I have some questions to ask." She drew a few steps nearer. A bird with breast of purple and wings of snow flew around her for a while, then settled upon her hand, and was drawn close to her bosom.

"I have no fear, I pray you," he said, misinterpreting her respectful sentiment. "You and I are two people in a difficult strait, and if I mistake not, much dependent upon each other. A God, of whom you never heard, but whom I will tell you all about, took your father away and sent him in his stead. The road thither, I confess, has been toilsome and dreadful. Ah, me! I shudder at the thought!"

"How long have you been here?" "I cannot say." "Can you remember coming, and who brought you?" "No."

"You must have been a baby." He looked at her with pity. "Have you never been elsewhere?" "No, never."

"Ah, by the Mother that keeps me! Always here! And the sky, and sun, and stars, and all God's glory of nature, seen in the valleys, mountains, and rivers and seas, have they been denied you, poor girl?" "I have seen them all," she answered.

"Where?" "On the ceiling and walls." He looked up at the former, and noticed its excellence of representation. "Very good—beautiful!" he said, in the way of criticism.

"Who did the work?" "Quetzal."

"And who is Quetzal?" "Who should know better than the god himself?" "Me?"

"Again he shrugged his shoulders. "My name, then, is Quetzal." Now, what is yours?" "Teetel."

"Well, then, Teetel, let me undeceive you. In the first place I am not Quetzal or any god. I am a man, as your father there was. My name is Ortegulla, and for the time I am page to the great king Montezuma. And before long, if I live, and get out of this place, as I most devoutly pray, I will be a soldier. In the next place you are a girl, and soon will be a woman. You have been cheated of life. By God's help I will take you out of this. Do you understand me?"

"No; unless men and gods are the same." "Heaven forbid!" He crossed himself fervently. "Do you not know what men are?" "All my knowledge of things is from the pictures on the walls, and what else you see here."

"Jesu Christo!" he cried, in open astonishment. "And did the good man never tell you of the world outside—of its creation, and its millions upon millions of people?" "No."

"Of the world in which you may find the originals of all that is painted on the walls, more beautiful than colors can make them." He received the same reply, but still, incredulous, went on.

"Who takes care of these plants?" "My father."

"A servant brings your food to the door—may he do so again? Have you not seen him?" "No."

"Where does the oil that feeds the lamps come from?" "From Quetzal."

Just then a lamp went out. He arose hastily, and saw that the contents of the cup were entirely consumed. "Teetel, is there plenty of oil? Where do you keep it? Tell me."

"In a jar there by the door. While you were asleep I refilled the cups, and now the jar is empty." (To be continued.)

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