

THE FAIR GOD.

BOOK SIX.

CHAPTER IX.

(Continued.)

He turned pale. Who better than he knew the value of the liquid that saved them from the darkness so horribly peopled by hunger and thirst? If exhausted, where could they get more? Without further question he went through the chamber and collected the lamps, and put them all out except one. Then he brought the jar from the door and poured the oil back, losing not a drop.

Tecel remonstrated, and cried when she saw the darkness invade the chamber, blotting out the walls and driving the birds to their perches, or to the fountain yet faintly illuminated. But he was firm. "Fie, fie," he said. "You should laugh, not cry. Did I not tell you about the world above this, so great, and so full of people like ourselves? And did I not promise to take you there? I am come in your father's stead. Everything must contribute to our escape. We must think of nothing else. Do you understand? This chamber is but one of many in a house big as a mountain, and full of passages in which, if we get lost, we might wander days and days, and then get out, unless we had a light to show us the way. So we must save the oil. When this supply gives out, as if soon will if we are not careful, the darkness that so frightens you will come and swallow us, and we shall die, as did your father there."

The last suggestion sufficed; she dried her tears, and drew closer to him, as if to say, "I confide in you; save me."

Nature teaches fear of death; so that separation from the breathless thing upon the couch was not like parting from Mualox. Whether she touched his hand or looked in his face now, "Go hence, go hence!" was what she seemed to hear. The stony repulsion that substituted his living love reconciled her to the idea of leaving home, for such the chamber had been to her.

Here I may as well confess the page began to do a great deal of talking—a consequence, probably, of having a good listener; or he may have thought it a duty to teach all that was necessary to prepare his disciple for life in the new world. In the midst of a lecture the tinkle of a bell brought him to a hasty pause.

"Now, O Blessed Mother! now I am happy! Thou hast not forsaken me! I shall see the sun again, and brave old Spain. Live, my heart!" he cried, as the last tinkle trembled and died in the silence.

Seeing that she regarded him with surprise, he said, in her tongue, "I was thanking the Mother, Tecel. She will save us both. So now, and bring the breakfast—I say breakfast, not knowing better—and while we eat I will tell you why I am so glad. When you have heard me, you will be glad as I am."

She went at once, and, coming back, found him bathing his face and head in the water of the basin—a healthful act, but not one to strengthen the idea of his godship. She placed the tray upon the table, and helped him to napkin and comb; then they took places opposite each other, with the lamp between them; whereupon she had other proof of his kind of being; for it is difficult to think of a deity at table eating. The Greeks felt the incongruity, and dined their gods on nectar and ambrosia, leaving us to imagine them partaken in some other than the ordinary vulgar way. Verily, Tecel was becoming accustomed to the stranger!

And while they ate, he explained his plans; and talked of the upper world, and described its wonders and people, until, her curiosity aroused, she plied him with questions; and as point after point was given, we may suppose nature asserted itself, and taught her by what power there is in handsome youth, with its bright eyes, smooth face, and tongue, more winsome than wise, that life in the said world was a desirable exchange for the monotonous drifting to which she had been so long subjected. We may also suppose that she was not slow to observe the difference between Mualox and the page; which was that between age and youth, or, more philosophically, that between a creature to be revered and a creature to be admired.

CHAPTER X.

THE ANGEL BECOMES A BEADSWOMAN.

The stars at the foot of the last chapter I called in as an easy bridge by which to cross an interval of two days—a trick never to be resorted to except when there is nothing of interest to record, as was the case here.

Orteguilla occupied the interval very industriously, if not pleasantly. He had in hand two tasks—one to instruct Tecel about the world to which he had vowed to lead her; the other to fix upon a plan of escape. The first he found easy, the latter difficult; yet he had decided, and his preparations for the attempt sufficient, he thought, though simple, lay upon the floor by the fountain. A lamp shed a dim light over the scene.

"So, so, Tecel: are we ready now?" he asked.

"You are the master," she replied.

"Very good, I will be assured."

"He went through a thorough inspection."

"Here are the paint and brush; here the oil and lamp; here the bread and meat, and the calabash of water. So far, good, very good. And here is the mat—very comfortable, Tecel, if you have to make your bed upon a stone in the floor. 'Now are we ready?'"

"Yes, if you say so."

"Good again! The mother is with us. Courage! You shall see the sun and sky, or I am not a Spaniard. Listen, now, and I will explain."

They took seats upon the bench, this time together for the strangeness was wellnigh gone, and they had come to have an interest in a common purpose.

"You must know, then, that I have two relatives; first, the man who brings the tray to the door; next, the Blessed Mother."

"I will begin with the first," he said, after a pause. "The man is a slave, and, therefore, easy to impose upon. If he is like his class, from habit, he asks no questions of his superiors. Your father—I speak from what you have told me—was thoughtful and dreamy, and spoke but little to anybody, and seldom, if ever, to his servants. You are not so well versed in human nature; one day, no doubt, you will be; then you will be able to decide whether I am right in believing that the traits of master and slave, which I have mentioned, are likely to help us. I carried your father's body over to the corner yonder—you were asleep at the time—and laid it upon the floor, as we Christians serve our dead. I made two crosses, and put one upon his lips, the other on his breast; he will sleep all the better for them. As you would have done, had you been present, I also covered him with flowers. One other thing I did."

"He took a lamp, and was gone a moment. 'Here are your father's gown and hood,' he said, coming back. 'I doubt whether they will sell readily in the market. He will never need them again. I took them to help save your life—a purpose for which he would certainly have given them, had he been alive. I will put them on.'"

"He laid his bonnet on the bench; then took

off his boots, and put on the gown—a garment of coarse black manta, loose in body and sleeves, and hanging nearly to the feet. Tying the cord about his waist, and drawing the hood over his head, he walked away a few steps, saying—
"Look at me, Tecel. Your father was very old. Did he stoop much? as much as this?"

(To be continued.)

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