

THE FAIR GOD.

BOOK SEVEN.

CHAPTER II.

(Continued.)

Close by the wall Father Bartolome overtook him, and after giving rein to his mule, and re-adjusting his hood, said, gravely, "If the tinkle of my servant's bell disturb not the musing, Senor—I have been through the files, and bring thee wot of the new men."

"Welcome, father," said Cortes, laughing. "I am not an evil spirit to fly the exorcism of the bell, not I; and so I bid thee welcome. But as for whereof thou comest to tell, no more, I pray. I know of what the varieties speak. And as I am a Christian, I blame them not. We promised them much, and—this is all; fair land, strange city—and all without people! Rife with enough I grant; but, as matter more serious, what say the veterans? Came they within thy soundings?"

"Thou mayst trust them, Senor. Their tongues go with their swords. They return to the day of our first entry here, and with excusable enlargement tell what they saw then in contrast with the present."

"And whom blame they for the failure now?"

"The Captain Alvarado,"

Cortes' brows dropped, and he became thoughtful again, and in such temper rode to the city.

Within the walls, everywhere the visitors looked, were signs of life, but nowhere a living thing; neither in the street nor in the houses, nor on the housetops—not even a bird in the sky. A silence possessed the place, peculiar in that it seemed to assert a presence, and palpably lurk in the shade, lie on the doorsteps, issue from the windows and pervade the air; giving notice, so that not a man, nor veteran, but was conscious that, in some way, he was menaced with danger. There is nothing so appalling as the unaccountable absence of life in places habitually populous; nothing so desolate as a deserted city.

"Por Dios!" said Olmedo, toying with the beads at his side, "I had rather the former reception than the present. Pleasant the sullen multitude than the silence without the multitude."

Cortes made him no answer, but rode on abstractedly, until stopped by his advance guard.

"At rest!" he said angrily. "Had ye the signal? I heard it not."

"Nor did we, Senor," replied the officer in charge. "But, craving thy pardon, approach, and see what the infernals have done here."

Cortes drew near, and found himself on the brink of the first canal. He swore a great oath; the bridge was dismantled. On the hither side, however, lay the timbers, frame and floor. The *tamames* detailed from the guns replaced them.

Bartolome, good father, said Cortes confidentially, when the march was resumed, "thou hast a commendable habit of holding what thou hearest, and therefore I shame not to confess that I, too, prefer the first reception. The absence of the heathen and the condition of yon bridge are parts of one plan, and signs certain of battle now ready to be delivered."

"If it be God's will, amen!" replied the priest, calmly. "We are stronger than when we went out."

"So is the enemy, for he hath organized his people. The horries that started at us so stupidly when we first came—were the curse of the saints upon them!—are now fighting men."

Olmedo searched his face, and said, coldly, "To doubt is to dread the result."

"Nay, by my conscience! I neither doubt nor dread. Yet I hold it not unseemly to confess that I had rather meet the brunt on the firm land, with room for what the occasion offers. I like not yon canal, with its broken bridge, too wide for horse, too deep for weighted man; it putteth us to disadvantage, and hath a hateful reminder of the brigantines, which, as thou mayst remember, we left at anchor, mistresses of the lake; in our absence they have been lost—a most measureless folly, father! But let it pass, let it pass. The Mother—blessed be her name!—hath not forsaken us. Montezuma is ours, and—"

"He is victory," said Olmedo, zealously.

"He is the New World!" answered Cortes. And as it chanced that the poor king was centre of thought for both the "tain and his enemy—the dread of one and the hope of the other."

CHAPTER III.

LA VIRUELA.

A long interval behind the rear guard—in the very last of the army, and quite two hours behind—came four Indian slaves, bringing a man stretched upon a litter.

And the litter was open, and the sun beat cruelly on the man's face; but plaint he made not, nor motion, except that his head rolled now right, now left; responsive to the cadenced steps of his bearers.

Was he sick or wounded?

Nathless, into the city they carried him. And in front of the new palace of the king, they stopped, less wearied than overcome by curiosity. And as they stared at the great house, imagining vaguely the splendor within, a groan startled them. They looked at their charge; he was dead! Then they looked at each other, and fled.

And in less than seven days they too died, and died horribly; and in dying recognized their disease as that of the stranger they had abandoned before the palace—the small-pox or in the language which hath a matchless trick of melting everything, even the most ghastly, into music, *la viruela* of the Spaniard.

The sick man on the litter was a negro—first of his race on the new continent.

And most singular, in dying, he gave his masters another servant stronger than himself and deadlier to the infernals than swords of steel—a servant that found way everywhere in the crowded city, and rested not. And everywhere its breath like its touch was mortal, insomuch that a score and ten died of it where one fell in battle.

Of the myriads who thus perished one was a KING

(To be continued.)

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May 18—Champion, McPherson, Pictou, coal; Samuel Ober, Gillis, Cow Bay, do; William Dunbar, Craig, Melon, bal; Genesta, Clay, Pugwash, herring; J H Hilly, Martell, Pictou.

DEPARTED.

May 17—Ida Maud, Pardy, S'side, mdse, 18th—Martha, Rivers, Pownal, bal; I A G C, Reid, Pictou, American Union, Townsend, Bale de Chaleur, bal; Champion, McPherson, Wallace, Advate, Orr, Shediac, coal; Isabella, Fraser, Newcastle, bal.

CLEARED.

20th—Albion, Wry, Bactouche, lumber; Mary Cowell, Chapman, do; Sarah Elizabeth, Ferguson, Arichat, limestone; Wallace, Davies, Port Hawkesbury, do; Minnie R McKen, McNeil, Pictou, coal; Confederate, Forrest, Pictou, do; William and Mary, McRae, do; Erema, Ledwell, Liverpool, mdse.

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