

THE FAIR GOD.

BOOK SIX. CHAPTER X. (Continued.)

Seven days the assault went on—a week of fighting, intermitted only at night, under cover of which the Aztecs carried off their dead and wounded—the former to the lake, the latter to the hospitals. Among the Christians some there were who had seen great wars; some had even served under the Great Captain; but, as they freely avowed, never had they seen such courage, devotion and endurance, such indifference to wounds and death, as here. At times, the struggle was hand to hand; then, standing upon their point of honor, the infidels perished by scores in vain attempts to take alive those whom they might easily have slain; and that it was this fatal point of honor—more than superiority in any respect, that made great battles so bloodless to the Spaniards. Still, nearly all of the latter were rounded, a few disabled, and seven killed outright. Upon the Tlascalans the losses chiefly fell; hundreds of them were killed; hundreds more lay wounded in the chambers of the palace.

The evening of the seventh day, the 'tzin, standing on the western verge of the teocallis from which he had constantly directed the assault, saw coming the results which could alone console him for the awful sacrifice of his countrymen. The yells of the Tlascalans were not so defiant as formerly, the men of iron, the Christians, were seen to sink wearily down at their posts, and sleep, despite the tumult of the battle; the guns were more slowly and carefully served, and whereas, before Cortes' departure there had been three meals a day, now there were but two; the supply of provisions was failing. The ancient house, where constructed of wood, showed signs of demolition; fuel was becoming scant. Where the garrison obtained its supply of water was a marvel. He had not then heard of what Father Bartolome afterwards celebrated as a miracle of Christ—the accidental finding of a spring in the middle of the garden.

Then the assault was discontinued, and a blockade established. Another week, during which nothing entered the gates of the palace to sustain man or beast. Then there was but one meal a day, and the sentinels on the walls began to show the effect.

One day the main gate opened, and a woman and a man came out. The 'tzin descended from his perch to meet them. At the foot of the steps they knelt to him—the princess Tula and the prince Io.

"See, O 'tzin," said the princess, "see the king's signet. We bring you a message from him. He has not wherewith to supply his table. Yesterday he was hungry. He bids you re-open the market, and send of the tributes of the provinces without stint—all that is his kingly right."

"And if I fail?" answered Guatemozin. "He said not what, for no one has ever failed his order."

"What shall I do, O son of the king?" "In all the fighting, Io' had stayed in the palace with his father. Through the long days he had heard the voices of the battle calling to him. Many times he walked to the merlons of the azoteas, and saw the 'tzin on the temple, or listened to his familiar cry in the street. And where—so ran his thought the while—were his equals? Happy fellow! What glory he must have won—true warrior-glory to flourish in song forever! A heroic jealousy would creep upon him, and he would go back miserably to his chamber.

"One day more, O 'tzin, and all there is in the palace—king and stranger alike—is yours," Io' made answer. "More I need not say."

"Then you go not back?" "No," said Tula. "I came out to fight. Anahuac is our mother. Let us save her, O 'tzin."

"And the 'tzin looked to the sun; his eyes withstood its piercing splendors awhile, then he said calmly: "Go with the Princess Tula where she chooses, Io'; then come back. The gods shall have one day more, though it be my last. Farewell."

They arose and went away. He returned to the palace. Starvation had come. And now the final battle, or surrender? Morning passed; noon came; later, the sun began to go down to the sky. In the streets stood the thousands—all the house-tops, on the temple they stood—waiting and looking, now at the leagured house, now at the 'tzin seated at the verge of the teocallis, also waiting.

Suddenly a procession appeared on the central turret of the palace, and in its midst, Montezuma.

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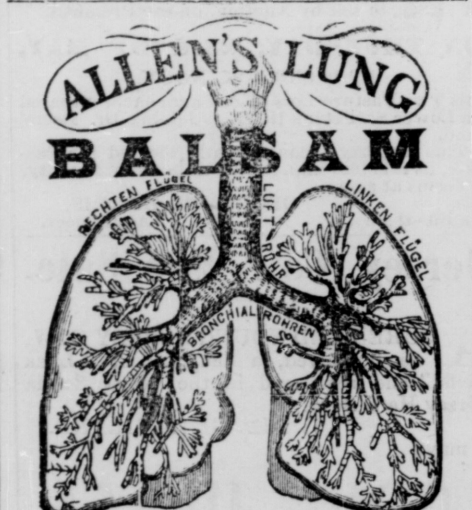
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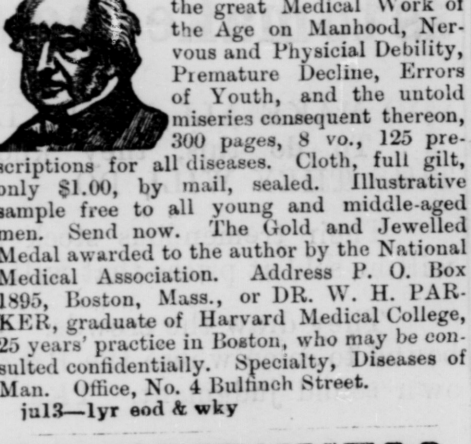
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