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TALES OF MAYALAND

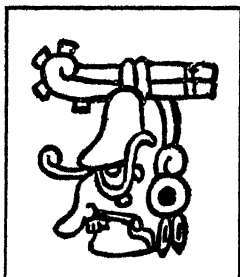
TALES OF MAYALAND

by

Blanche Collet Wagner

with

Illustrations by the Author



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I. The Great Itzamna

One April morning in 102 B. C., Olal, the seven year old daughter of the great chief and warrior Ahlon-Che, the head of the Serpent Clan, stood in the second courtyard in one of the big palaces built on a pyramid. She was dancing so with excitement that the slave who was dressing her had a difficult time in making her stand still as she slipped over her head a *pik* or underskirt made of one piece of cotton, and then the *huipil* or overdress.

“Please stand still, dear,” said the slave, “Or some of the beautiful embroideries on your best *huipil* will be torn.”

Deftly she slipped the dress over the little girl’s head. Of course Olal stood still as she did not want her best dress torn when she was going with her father and family to carry offerings of flowers and other rich presents to the God of Plenty, Xochipili.

The rainy season was over, and the forests, the fields, and the meadows were in bloom. At twilight the night before squads of men and women slaves had gathered flowers with which to connect the

blooming trees planted on either side of the sacred way leading to the Temple. The whole population had picked enough greens and flowers to decorate the front of the temples and the palaces.

Olal was especially excited, because she was one of those chosen to strew flower petals before the litters of the Emperor and Empress. Everyone loved the great ruler, Itzamna, who had founded the beautiful and sacred city of Chichen-Itza and dedicated it to all the gods of the Mayan religion.

As Unal, the slave, finished smoothing Olal's dress the little girl turned to her and asked sweetly, "Unal, please tell me again what our Emperor has done for us? I love to hear about it."

"He, the great ruler of our Empire, named Itzamna or the son of the Feathered Serpent, who in his turn is the son of our God, the Sun, has made our country large and beautiful," said the slave in a kind of singsong voice, as if she was telling a fairy tale.

"How did he make our country so big?" asked the little girl proudly, anticipating the answer which she knew, but wanted to hear again.

"Our great Emperor defeated all our enemies with his powerful and brave army and your father, the famous General Ahlon-Che Caan, helped him to subdue and civilize the wild races of the earth."

Olal was thrilled to hear the deeds of her father spoken of, as she worshipped him, "Please tell me some more," she begged.

“After the Empire was peaceful our great Lord distributed work and land to the people, as keeping busy makes us happy, rich, and contented. He started the building of our magnificent Temples in which we worship our Gods, and he invented our writings or hieroglyphics. He also had the workmen make a paste of the fiber of the maguey plant and press it down very thin, until we had paper to make books.”

Olal clapped her hands joyfully, and with much excitement, she exclaimed again “All of us boys and girls love our ruler. We know he is a God, and we worship him,” and she bowed her head as if in prayer.

The little girl’s stepmother came in just as the slave was fastening leather sandals trimmed with silver on her feet.

“Mother,” she exclaimed, “Do you think I will get a prize this year?”

Her eyes smiled at Olal, who looked very pretty with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, but she said sternly, “You must stand still for a minute or we shall never be ready when the signal comes from the palace. Let me comb your hair now, dear.”

She took out a comb made of cactus needles and gently pulled it through the little girl’s black hair. “How glossy your hair looks, and these hibiscus flowers in a crown are just what you needed to match the embroidery in your dress. You did very well with it, my child,” and she caressed her gently.

"Oh, you did most of it, Mother," Olal answered, "I cannot sew as well as I should, but I am going to try harder than ever now."

At this, the lady hugged Olal as she said, "You are still a tomboy and you would rather go in the woods with your father when he is hunting than sew. I do not mind though; as you are well and quite obedient we will wait for a little while until we make a grown lady of you."

Then she turned to a slave and took from her hand a very delicately woven hemp basket filled with fragrant rose leaves. She put the red cord around the neck of her stepdaughter and contemplated her work. The child looked lovely.

"May I go now?" asked Olal.

"Patience!" answered the lady, "You cannot go before the signal is given."

"But Mamma, where is father? He said he was coming to take me."

"I am sorry, dear," her mother said gently, "But your father had to leave before daylight. Our great ruler, Emperor Itzamna, may he rule forever, sent for him."

The little girl's face fell and tears came into her eyes. She adored her father, who, although he was a fierce warrior and general in the army of the great Mayan Emperor, loved his daughter very much.

In the meantime Olal's stepmother had taken out of a bag a beautiful turquoise necklace. Handing

it to her she said smiling, "As your father could not take you he sent you this."

Olal's eyes grew round as she saw the precious turquoise necklace and she looked at it in silent admiration for a moment. Soon, however, she began to dance around and sing a song which she made up as she went along, "I love my dear father. How good I am going to be. I will not give him more bother. Sweet Mama you will see."

Olal's mother laughed at the little rhyme, but then a frown wrinkled her forehead, "I wonder what can be delaying the procession?" she mused, "It was to have started at daybreak and now the sun is getting warm."

The two waiting on the top of their pyramid hurried to the edge to look at the multitude who were waiting below for the Emperor and Empress to come down from their palace.

"Look, Mother," exclaimed Olal, "There are over two hundred girls assembling near the palanquins of their majesties. Oh! Isn't it lovely! See the garlands of flowers that join together all the blooming trees on the Sacred Way to the Temple, and all the houses and trees are covered with flowers. Our God Xochipili is well honored."

"It is beautiful, indeed. The nobles are gathering at the foot of the palace stairs. What gorgeous headdresses they wear! Your father is among them. I wish we could see him, but we shall later. He may be near his Highness. Your father

is a great general, Olal," said the lady proudly.

Suddenly the sound of the big shell horn was heard from the top of the pyramid on which the palace of the Emperor stood. The family of the great chief, Ahlon-Che Caan, hurried to take their places in the procession of the lord of the land. Olal joined the other girls, and her stepmother went with the women who followed the litter of the Empress.

In a very short time more than two hundred girls of Olal's age were standing in front of the two litters in which the ruler and his wife were to be carried by slaves. The litters were decorated with a mass of flowers.

When the Emperor and his wife appeared, the crowd cheered. Then heads were bowed, and respectful silence reigned. The great potentate took his seat in his litter and the gracious Empress did the same. They were the only ones to be carried to the Temple, which was nearby. The rest of the court walked.

Near the Emperor stood Ahlon-Che Caan, the great chief, in his war garb. Although he looked very fierce with his black and red war paints and his immense turban with the Quetzal bird feathers sticking out of the top, Olal knew that under that fearsome appearance was a heart that loved her dearly. When her father's eyes located her among the other girls, Olal, to show how pleased and happy she was, took her necklace and kissed it,

showing her father how grateful she was and thanking him in this way for the present he had given her.

The Emperor and Empress sat cross-legged on the cushions in their litters as the procession moved slowly towards the Temple. The buglers came first. They carried large shells from which a few loud shrill notes were blasted forth from time to time. Then came the bodyguard followed by the little girls in two separate rows, leaving an empty space in the middle for the litters, which were borne on the shoulders of the slaves. Other slaves were at hand to bring more perfumed leaves to replenish the supplies of the little girls as they scattered their rose petals before their rulers.

As the procession took its measured way, sunbeams sparkled here and there on the rich clothing of the Emperor and Empress. The Emperor wore a new headpiece which was very high but not heavy as it was made of light wood. The workmanship was so intricate that it had taken long to make it. First, sculptors had fashioned it, then goldsmiths had covered it with gold, and jewelers had set in turquoises. Finally, women had stuck lovely colored feathers on it. Around his neck Itzamna wore a necklace in the form of a cape with row upon row of turquoise stones and a fringe of feathers. A pectoral also hung low on his chest. It was the picture of Xochipili, fat and happy as the God of Plenty should be.

Whenever the little girls dared raise their eyes

they peeked to see what the Empress was wearing. Her *pik* and *huipil* were richly embroidered in many colors. There were designs of figures and flowers and especially of the beautiful Quetzal bird, which was so sacred that it was used only by the great. Some of the women had covered themselves with a cotton cloth, but it was warm and the Empress wore a light coat, so intricately worked with designs of flamingo feathers and with the brilliant short red feathers of the royal tanager that it shimmered as if covered with jewels.

Olal looked at the people around her and was so accustomed to seeing them as they were that it seemed natural to look at men who were mostly undressed, except for a belt and two flaps about eight inches wide. One of the flaps was worn in the front and one in the back and they had rich embroidery on them. There were fringes around the bottom and around the belt. The tattooing of the men and the paint on their bodies did not seem strange to Olal either. She had often watched her father paint himself with horrible designs in red and black to frighten his enemies.

When the procession arrived at the Temple, at the foot of the pyramid, the Emperor and his wife left their litters and, helped by the great nobles, began the ascent of the pyramid between two lines of soldiers, holding their lances, as the buglers at the bottom of the stairs blew their shell horns.

The great potentate ascended the steep steps of

the Temple amid the silence of the kneeling people. Only a few nobles could accompany him, because the Temple was very small, and the upper platform was so narrow that there was not enough room for all the court attendants.

The presents offered by the Emperor and his wife were very elaborate and included cotton materials richly embroidered, jewels, feathers of the brilliant birds of the jungles, little gold and copper bells attached to necklaces, jewels of elaborate designs set with precious stones, meats and vegetables, chattering parrots, early berries and all kinds of delicacies. All these gifts were brought to the God Xochipili by the ruler and his nobles.

When the offerings of the King had been presented at the four corners of the platform to the four cardinal points, East, West, North, and South, by the high priest, he put them himself at the foot of the statue. Incense burners were lighted by the under priests, the *Chilans*, who with the high dignitary of the church had stood at the top of the pyramid to receive their Lord. The incense was made with the sap of the copal tree and shaped into little balls, used only for the Gods and considered most holy.

After the offerings, prayers and chants of the priests were made, the King and his suite went down the long steps and the royal couple left in their litters, while the hushed audience gave vent to cheers for their ruler.

The departure of the court and the guards left the way free for the populace to go up the steps and give their small offerings to the God. Flowers, especially in large cones, were brought; and some of the guilds of workmen gave rare pieces of their work.

The whole morning was occupied with this performance, and Olal was a very hungry girl indeed when at last she returned home at noon. She had her midday meal and was sent to her siesta. The weather was hot in the middle of the day and the best thing for young and old to do was to take a rest.

At three o'clock Olal reappeared, dressed and freshly combed, ready to call on her father, who was then seated with his wife and some friends in the first patio of the house. Permission was asked for her to appear; and when it was given, she came in, blushing and lovely, to make her bow to her elders. She did this so gracefully that her father was charmed. He took her in his arms and kissed her. Nestling near his ear, she thanked him again for the lovely necklace he had given her that morning. He whispered in her ear in turn, that if she would be a good girl and obey her mother when he went away, he would give her the matching bracelets. Again, Olal danced with joy.

Suddenly the sound of the shell horn reached them. This time it was to call the young boys and girls to the central plaza where there was to be a

race and other amusements for them, with prizes given by the Emperor and his consort.

When Olal and her family arrived at the meeting place, all the boys and girls were pleased to see her. The children chattered louder and faster than all the magpies in the world put together; but when Itzamna joined them and took his proper place, they were quiet for a moment or two. Itzamna, however, was pleased that they were having such a good time and wanted them to go on playing, but as soon as he was settled in his place the races began.

Little Olal joined the other girls of her age at the starting line. Her father watched her proudly as she waited tensely for the signal. The little girls got off to a good start, with legs and *huipils* flying, but Olal soon took the lead and kept it. She ran beautifully, with long even strides and she was not even short of breath when she reached the finish line, far ahead of the rest of the girls. She won the first prize in her race. She had been the constant companion of her father when he went into the woods to hunt, and the long marches had helped to make her so swift and strong that she could easily outdistance the other girls.

Ahlon-Che regretted very much that his first-born was not a boy. Therefore, if some people thought he raised Olal more like a tomboy it did not matter to him. He had loved her mother very dearly, and he was beginning to notice that as his

daughter grew older she was becoming more and more the image of his late and lamented wife.

The Emperor was pleased that Olal, the daughter of Ahlon-Che, was so quick and graceful on her feet. He handed her a necklace of pyrite polished stones, with two small bells of copper, which jingled every time she walked. She was very happy. Later, when she appeared before the Empress with her new *huipil* and with a crown of fresh flowers in her hair she received another small prize. Transported with happiness, she followed her father through the intricate mazes of the town to the ball court where the great game of the Mayas, *pok-ol-pok*, was played. It was a ball game.

As they passed through the part of the town where the workingmen were located Olal plied her father with questions.

"How do you get to be a sculptor, a jeweler, or a weaver?" she asked.

"If a father is a sculptor," answered Ahlon-Che, "his sons, and the sons of his sons become sculptors, and the same is true of the jewelers, weavers, and other workers. As the young people start to work quite early in life they become very skilled in their crafts, and each generation can teach more to the next."

At last Olal and her father arrived at the ball courts and they found seats near the platform where Itzamna sat with his wife and large family. The ruler was seated on a throne and a wand-bearer

stood behind him holding his staff of office. At a sign from him, the shell horns emitted a piercing blast, and the multitude stood mute and expectant. The two teams of ball players entered, one wearing short shirts of green cotton and the other wearing pink ones.

At another peal of the shell horns, the two teams placed themselves on either side of the court. The banners floated in the breeze, and the garlands of flowers surrounding the throne swayed gracefully to and fro. The men, attired in their high feather headdresses, and the women in their richly-embroidered dresses, all wearing many jewels, were as excited as the poor class of people who stood on the walls surrounding the court. .

The teams were cheered by the multitude, who wore either the green of Chichen-Itza or the pink of Uxmal. The cheering was deafening when the players took their places on the court. Many flowers were thrown to them by the admiring crowd, but these offerings were quickly swept away by the attendants, so that nothing would interfere with the players.

The high priest appeared from the Tiger Temple and lifted his hands. He held the ball made of rubber. Carrying the ball high, he walked in the four directions of the cardinal points. He was followed by the chanting attendants of the Temple. The players went to their posts again and waited in tense suspense.

The high priest came down from the steps of the Temple; and when he reached the last one, he threw the ball into the center of the court. It bounded high in the air, and one of the players received it, catching it against his hip. The game was on; the ball was sent from one side of the court to the other, always being received on the hips, the elbows, or the shoulders of the players.

After a long struggle, the team representing the Itzeas of Chichen-Itza was victorious. The most handsome member of that team had succeeded in throwing the ball through the ring—a very great feat, considering that only the hips and not the hands were used.

After the game, the losers left the ball court as quickly as they could, because it was the privilege of the winners to strip them of all their garments. To the enjoyment of the onlookers, a few were caught and left in the center of the ball court, dressed only in their own pigment.

Little Olal was so tired after all these festivities that she begged her father to carry her home in his strong arms. She hung on his neck giving him kisses, unaware that she was smearing the red and black paint. Her new *huipil* was very dirty before she got home.

“Oh,” she whispered, when they had finally climbed the steps of their pyramid and reached their home at the top, “It was such a lovely day!”



Olal, a little Maya girl of 102 B. C., ready for the Feast of Spring. Her *pik* or underskirt, made of cotton cloth, was embroidered by her own hands. She also embroidered the long overdress which was called *huix*. Only cotton and the fiber of the maguey and hemp plants were used in weaving by the Maya Indians as they knew nothing of silk or wool.

The basket was full of rose leaves to throw on the road over which the Emperor and Empress had to pass on their way to the Temple where they would deposit flowers at the foot of the statue of Xochipili, the God of Flow and Mirth.



The great warrior, Ahlon-Che Caan, in full war regalia with black paint. He is wearing a big redwood headdress, covered with gold ornaments and rimmed with feathers of the sacred Quetzal bird. Draped around it is a gold snake, which is the emblem of his clan.

As he was a brave chief, his nose was pierced and an ornamental stone passed through it. Some of his jewels represent the sun and the moon, while others have a significance unknown to us. Under his arm he has a shield made of thickly stuffed cotton goods to protect him from the lances of his enemies. In his left hand he has a flint pick, and in his right a kind of



Itzamna, the great Mayan Emperor, who reigned in 102 B. C., the sacred city of Chichen-Itza. The tribe inhabiting this part of Yucatan called "the Itzeas".

This great ancient city has been purchased by an American, E. Thompson, who has recovered archeological treasures from the deep Sacred Well. These treasures have been bought by many of our great museums throughout the country.

Itzamna was the idol of his people and became the most important in their religion. He is always represented with a long nose and a large earring. He is dressed in full regalia here. His name, Itzamna, means "M



A wand-bearer was a slave who carried the wand of office of his Emperor. His long hair was kept up by a bamboo to simulate the tail of a snake. His necklace was made of copper and his bracelets of stone. His coat and breech-cloth were pink cotton, the color of Chichen-Itza. The feathered serpent was the divinity of the Holy Town, where Tlaloc, the God of Rain, was supposed to be in the most Sacred Well.

II. The Market Place

In the year 94 before our era, three children stood in a patio of one of the houses built on a pyramid in the town of Chichen-Itza in Yucatan. The two boys, Hunac-Ceel and Na-Chau, were nine and eleven, and Nichte was seven.

Na-Chau, dressed and painted to look like a warrior, was standing as proud as a peacock. He was trying as much as possible to be like his warrior father. He was tall for his age and very slender; and he was more fortunate than many of the poor class of Mayas. He had been well cared for, and had not been carried astraddle his mother's back, as if riding a donkey, when he was too small to walk; therefore his limbs were very straight. Hunac-Ceel was Na-Chau's best friend. He, too, was tall and straight because he was the son of Chac-Cib-Chac, the Emperor's historian. His family had also been careful to keep him from getting bow-legged, cross-eyed, and with an elongated flat forehead and pointed head. The parents of both families had forbidden the slaves, who took care

of the children when they were infants, to shake a piece of cloth near their eyes to make them cross-eyed or to tie pieces of wood to their heads to give them the pointed features so much admired by the poorer class of Mayas.

Now Hunac-Ceel and Nichte were watching Na-Chau with admiration. He was wearing a plumed headdress which he had arranged in the shape of a serpent, the symbol of the Caan clan to which his father belonged.

As Na-Chau held forth in his right hand a hatchet made of six blades of sharp obsidian and cried "Beware!" Nichte stepped backward.

"Do not be afraid, Nichte," said Hunac-Ceel, "You know Na-Chau is only pretending. Besides, your father and his, the great noble and warrior Ahlon-Che Caan, has given him this outfit and arms so that he can become efficient as a warrior and be prepared to become his successor in riches and title. Na-Chau must practice often. Please show us how the arrows are thrown, but of course don't really throw any; just pretend!"

The arrows hung in a bag on Na-Chau's back. Now he took the crooked spear with which the Mayas threw their arrows with great dexterity and went through all the motions of taking out an arrow and throwing it. Then he made believe he was throwing the hatchet.

Hunac-Ceel and Nichte stood contemplating the young warrior with love and admiration. They were

under a spell, and they gazed in wonder at this display of ability in handling the weapons. Brandishing the hatchet with a mighty sweep, Na-Chau nearly hit the two; and they scuttled away from him in terror.

He was yelling in a big, fierce voice, "Thou art the enemy of my king and great lord of the earth! Thy last day has come. Beware!"

He made a lunge at the imaginary opponent, and very unexpectedly, to the amusement of the onlookers, he lost his balance and fell headlong on the floor of the patio. This brought a shriek of laughter from the slaves, who were in attendance on the children, and concern to his two companions.

Nicte and Hunac-Ceel rushed forward to help him get up; and they saw with pleasure that he had hurt nothing but his pride. They both refrained from laughing, because they did not want to hurt his feelings. He still had the hatchet in his hand; and furious because the two slaves made fun of him, he threw his weapon at them, just missing one by a hair's breadth.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself, you overbearing boy? You are getting impossible. I do not know why our father does not punish you. That is no way to treat a slave!" exclaimed a lovely young woman standing on the threshold of the patio.

"They laughed at me!" yelled Na-Chau.

"I do not blame them for laughing. You looked terribly funny. I laughed myself when I heard you

boast. Were you not playing? Then why be so angry? You have too much false pride. Come, be good now!"

Sententiously, as if he were an older man, Hunac-Ceel said, "You have laughed many times at others falling."

"True enough," replied the lady. "Let us forget the incident."

This beautifully dressed woman was the Princess Olal, who had married the son of the good and great Emperor Itzamna. She was an older daughter of Ahlon-Che from a previous marriage, a daughter-in-law of the Itzea king who had built the magnificent Sacred City of Chichen-Itza in which they were living.

Na-Chau was indeed ashamed, and in a few words he excused himself. But to Hunac-Ceel he said, "It is well for you to talk, but I wonder sometimes what blood runs in your veins. You pass your time writing, learning hieroglyphics, reading. For what? I want to be a soldier like my father. I want to exterminate the enemies of my King. I love my country and our great Emperor. I am a Maya noble of the great Serpent Clan. I am descended from the great Feathered Serpent, our God."

"I want to be a great historian like my father," answered Hunac-Ceel. "I have no other wish than to record the greatness of our people on our new maguey paper, as the sculptors are doing on our monuments."

“You are both right to have ambitions,” said the lady graciously, “But do not endanger the innocent and peaceful. I came to take you to the market place.”

“The market place!” All three shouted with joy. This was the biggest treat the Maya children knew. At the news the three of them became most excited and made as much noise as the parrots in the forest.

Princess Olal put her hands over her ears and exclaimed, “Stop screeching like *mot-mots* (blue jays)! Go and wash yourself, brother. Your face is very dirty. I shall wait for you below.” And she flew gracefully down the long flight of stairs from the top of the pyramid on which General Ahlon-Che Caan’s house stood.

It was a joyous group that ten minutes later reached the bottom of the stairs. Awaiting them was a litter, in which Olal and her half sister, Nichte, took their places; and sitting cross-legged they were carried away on the shoulders of their stalwart slaves.

On they went through the beautiful central plaza, full of magnificent temples, palaces, and official buildings. The ten slaves who followed had a provision of pink shells, some little nuggets of gold, and a great amount of semi-precious stones unmounted. In those days business was carried on by exchange and barter. There was no money to buy anything, and each person tried to exchange what

he had for what he needed. The shells and the precious stones were used as ornaments, and the gold was supposed to be the metal of the sun, their great and powerful God.

As soon as they arrived, Na-Chau said, "Look here, I want a red cape. May I buy it, Olal? Father gave me some shells and gold to spend."

"If you want it, certainly buy it, little brother, but do not forget your sister. She must have something out of these purchases."

"I have my own shells. Father gave them to me before we left," said the little girl, blushing shyly.

Olal bent down and kissed the child, saying, "You dear little humming bird. Father loves you as he loved me. It is so strange that a big warrior like him has so much love for his daughters. I hope my husband will also be like that. You know, dear, other little girls are not so happy as we have been."

Nicte put her arms around her sister's neck and hugged her. Then she followed the others, who had stopped before the display of cotton and hennequin woven goods. Some of the materials were already dyed in many brilliant colors; and Na-Chau, full of enthusiasm to be a warrior, bought a radiant red piece of cotton goods for his coat.

He draped the piece of cloth around himself and walked proudly ahead of them all. He looked so funny that the rest of the family began to giggle. The giggles changed to shouts of laughter when he exclaimed in a high-pitched voice, "Clear the way!

Clear the way! Let the Princess Olal and her family pass!"

He looked very much the traffic policeman, trying to straighten the crowd in a big town. He strutted like a peacock in his new and brilliant coat; and the Princess and the two children walked behind him, all in the gayest of moods.

Princess Olal purchased pieces of cotton cloth, to be embroidered by her slaves in many intricate patterns. After she had bought all she wanted at the cloth stand, the group made its way to a booth where dyes were sold. At this booth the Princess exchanged a little of her gold and precious stones and some of her pink shells for red dye, which came from the little animals called cochineal, for blue dye, which came from the indigo plant, and for yellow, which came from the pistachio tree. By mixing these two last colors, the loveliest green was made, which was used a great deal in embroidering flowers and leaves on the dresses of the ladies.

"Oh, my!" exclaimed the Princess, when the slaves had received the packages of dye, "I have forgotten to buy perfume. Come with me, children!"

The perfume vendor was only too glad to allow Princess Olal and Nichte to dab various scents on their skin, to see which they liked best. Nichte had quite a difficult time to decide which perfume she preferred; there was such a variety. They were essence of flowers mixed with grease.

Finally, the choice was made, however, and by this time Na-Chau had forgotten his importance. At the booth of dyes he had become interested in the dyes and paints, and had bought some greasy paint with which to decorate himself. While the Princess and Nigte were buying perfume the throng was much amused to see the boys smearing themselves with paint in a way which made them appear ridiculous. Na-Chau, who was the taller, looked very much like a totem pole of the Alaska Indians. They seemed very pleased as they continued on their tour of the market place.

A few steps farther they came to a jeweler's shop. The jeweler was seated in front of a little charcoal stove, melting gold. The three children at once squatted down beside him on the ground; and Hunac-Ceel, who was more studious than the others, asked, "Sir Jeweler, would you kindly tell me how you make this lovely gold work?"

"Certainly, my little lord," answered the goldsmith.

The three children listened eagerly, as he told them about melting the gold again and again, pouring it into forms, and explained the rest of the intricate process. When he had finished, Princess Olal thanked him very much for his kindness and bought ornaments from him.

The party then approached a booth, or rather, a small place reserved in a corner of the market under an awning made of reeds to protect the

merchant from the sun. When the children saw what was offered for sale, there were many "Oh's" and "Ah's". This man had come from far in the interior of the country and had brought with him little statuettes made of baked clay. These small figures showed men and women working at their trades and daily chores. It was a rare collection. The children had never seen any like it before. The merchant said that he had brought them from the State of Chiapas.

"What are these?" cried the three grimy children in a chorus.

"Be quiet, you magpies!" the Princess said, "You are so noisy. I will ask the gentleman to explain what they are."

"Indeed, I will," answered the merchant. "The little clay figurines represent our Gods, Emperors, priests, big warriors, and tradespeople. The most unusual of all, as you can see, are these which show women in the costume of our day and at their work. You know that no one portrayed women before, and we are the first ones to make these clay figures."

Each of the three children purchased a statuette. One of the boys chose a doll, or figurine, of a warrior with his arms; the other chose a scribe, sitting cross-legged with a porcupine quill to which some soft feathers were attached.

"I want that one!" cried Nichte, as she pointed to a lady doll, dressed in the finery of the time,

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with an embroidered underskirt, or *pik*, and a rich long dress, or *huipil*. Even Princess Olal exclaimed at the tiny design worked in feathers on the doll's coat.

Proudly carrying their dolls themselves, as they would not trust the slaves with them, they passed on before the booths of vegetables, of wild game and fowl. There were no domestic animals, no horses, donkeys, chickens, cows or sheep. All the meat and fish was killed and caught by a certain part of the population selected by the Emperor for this hunting. They stopped in front of a pile of baskets and bought some made of hennequin thread, the same as we use today for our ropes and mats. They also purchased mats in variegated colors.

As they were walking away, little Nichte announced importantly, "I am going to buy something else."

She stopped before an awning which shaded a very old Indian woman who was selling a kind of sandal used for shoes. The little girl exchanged her shells for a pair of brilliantly embroidered sandals. Happy with her purchase she joined the others at once, showing them her new acquisition. She was very proud when they admired it.

Princess Olal and her group moved on, coming to a man who had a supply of rubber balls. These were the kind used in the game of *pok-ol-pok* in the ball ring. Na-Chau was quite a vainglorious

boy. He loved to show his dexterity, so he urged Hunac-Ceel to take a ball and throw it into the air, so that he could receive it in the prescribed fashion on his hip. As the market place was too crowded, however, this did not go as planned. In bouncing back, the ball fell loud and hard on the bald head of a decrepit warrior who was sitting sunning his rheumatic joints. This old grumpy fellow gave a terrible yell, and he would have struck the boy if his sister, Princess Olal, had not called her slaves to protect him.

She scolded Na-Chau for his foolishness. And he was glad to get away from the old man, who thought he had been deliberately insulted. For a while after this episode, the children were very quiet, but not before they had had a good laugh at Na-Chau's expense. They teased him unmercifully and said that he was a boy who liked to play ball on pink stones.

Continuing on their way, they passed great quantities of corn which was the main nourishment of the Mayas. Bales of cotton were stacked in huge piles, ready to be sold and made into materials, and then to be dyed in different colors. They stopped at the feather merchant's, and Nichte bought a Quetzal feather for her father. She also bought lovely, soft pink flamingo feathers for her mother to trim her coat. When it came to paying for these, she did not have enough shells or gold left, but Hunac-Ceel gave her the difference that she needed,

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so everything was all right. Nichte should have had enough gold to buy what she needed because Ahlon-Che had given each of the children the same amount of the gold nuggets, precious stones, and pink shells with which to trade at the market. But Na-Chau had traded his pink shells for Nichte's gold. She had been satisfied with this transaction because she thought the pink shells were so pretty. She did not know that they were worth less than the gold, and Na-Chau would not let Hunac-Ceel tell her. It was not very kind of him to treat his little sister that way; and as they walked toward the market Hunac-Ceel reproached Na-Chau for his selfishness. He then gave part of his share to the little girl, because he thought her brother had not treated her fairly.

Na-Chau, the busybody, put his nose into every corner of the place. The women who stuck the feathers on the headdresses had left a big gourd full of vegetable glue in one corner; and without looking where he was going, Na-Chau stepped right in it.

There is nothing that glues so hard and so quickly as vegetable glue, and poor Na-Chau hopped around on one foot like a stork, trying in vain to get rid of the glue gourd. Once again, the family had to call the slaves to help, and everyone around them made fun of the young boy. As he was overproud and not very patient, these misfortunes made him exceedingly angry. He walked ahead in a

dudgeon, ignoring the laughter of his friends, and gathering much dirt on his sticky foot. Everything he stepped on stuck and made him thoroughly miserable. His right foot soon looked like a porcupine.

At last they stopped at a place where pottery was sold; and one of the slaves procured some water and washed his foot. After that he felt better. The lovely Princess, seeing that Na-Chau had regained his good humor, went about buying plates, vessels and jars, small and large, for the household. Some were highly decorated, having designs in beautiful colors baked into them. But unfortunately the quiet did not last very long, and Princess Olal was again interrupted in her buying. This time it was the sedate Hunac-Ceel who was the hero of the misfortune. As he was walking around, looking curiously at the pottery, he stepped on a fruit peeling and fell backward into a big jar. He was a sturdy boy and the jar was too small for his body; it broke in many pieces. The rest of his pink shells paid for the big vessel.

Hunac-Ceel was not so haughty as Na-Chau, and he thought it a good joke. Things had been happening so fast that the Princess thought they should have something to soothe their nerves. She led the way to a fruit stand where cakes and sweet drinks were also sold. They sat cross-legged on rush mats under an awning of beautiful brilliant colors. The slaves brought them fruit and honey drinks and corn cakes sweetened with honey. They had a

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choice of guava marmalade, fresh berries, and many kinds of strange tropical fruits: papayas, mameys, chirimoyas, limes, lemons, oranges, mangos, tunas, and many others. The bananas were the preferred fruit in the southern Americas, as they still are today.

The children and Princess Olal had some chocolate which had been taken from the cacao plant and ground by hand with a pestel in a stone mill, then boiled and sweetened with honey.

After they had drunk more sweetened, fruit-flavored fresh water, the sisters returned to their litter. And the concourse of slaves, laden with purchases, and the two boys on foot, travelled homeward. All were contented and happy.

When they reached the bottom of the pyramid on which the great Lord Caan lived, the brother and sister went up the steps, followed by two slaves, who carried their purchases. They ran up the steps like two light-footed fawns and raised their arms in a last greeting when they reached the top.

Princess Olal and her little retinue went on with Hunac-Ceel until they arrived at his home, which was not on a pyramid, but was one of the biggest houses in town. He thanked the Princess for taking him with her brother and sister.

Olal answered him, "I am very glad you could come. You are not so hot-headed as my young brother, and you make him behave by your good reasoning."

“I wish I also were your brother,” said the boy. “I love you very much.” Hesitating a little, he added, “And I adore Nichte.”

The lovely Princess laughed, and as she kissed the young boy on his forehead, she replied, “Maybe you will be a real brother to me some day. I know that Nichte likes you very much.”

With a shout of joy the young boy ran into his home, even forgetting to say his last goodbye. But the Princess forgave him, because he was a very nice boy and had thanked her very politely before for her kindness.

III. The Gods of Fire and Rain

Once more we join our three friends in the house of the great captain, Ahlon-Che Caan. This time it is the month of June in the year 92 before our era. It was very hot, as it usually is in summer in Yucatan and in the town in which they lived—Chichen-Itza. The two boys, Na-Chau and Hunac-Ceel, were sitting on their heels at the feet of the great Ahlon-Che, who was stretched on a heavy rush matting covered with wonderful embroidered purple cotton, with his head propped against a few soft cushions.

He said to his little daughter, Nichte, who was kissing him, "You look more and more like your sister Olal, my dear child. You are like her in many ways."

"Is it true?" the delighted child exclaimed. "I hope I really look like her. She is so beautiful and so good."

"Indeed, my dear, she is as good as she is beautiful, and I know that my last born little girl will be just like her. May the Gods protect you, little daughter, and make you happy too!"



This little statue was found in the ruins of Quirigua in Guatemala is supposed to be the representation of a goddess who was the protectress of beauty and charm.

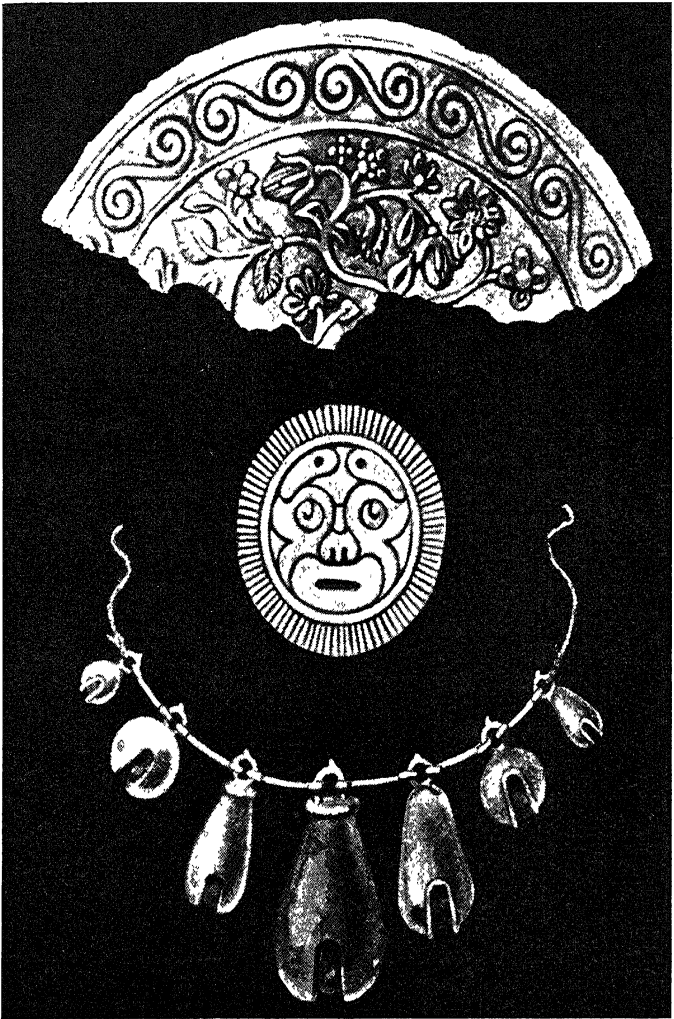


Yum-Kak, the God of Fire. This statue is in Chichen-Itza. There is a large cavity in the abdomen of the figure, in which the people used to put their offerings.



Tlaloc, God of Rain, was greatly worshipped by the Mayas; as much, in fact, as the Feathered Serpent, which they believed to be the personification of the sun.

The real name of the God Tlaloc was Nohoch-Yumchac. Many offerings were made to him, and objects of value were thrown into the Sacred Well where he was supposed to dwell.



Many little bells like these were made of copper and gold. They were much in favor with the Mayas, who used them as necklaces and ornaments. Mr. Edward H. Thompson found many of these bells in the Sacred Well when he dredged it.

He also found rich jewels and a number of objects which told us much of the Maya manner of living.

"I will make her very happy," piped in Hunac-Ceel. "Is it not true that we are going to be man and wife when we are tall?" he asked Nichte.

Whereupon Nichte giggled and gurgled, as girls have done through centuries of life. The boy reddened and his eyes blazed with fire. "You promised me," he said, "and now you make fun of me. That is not nice."

Nichte turned to her father with a look of mischief in her eyes. Laughing heartily, he said to his younger daughter, "You little flirt, can you not wait three or four more years before you begin to have a suitor? You are only eight and a half years old."

"Well," replied the little girl, blushing, "my little friend Uxal was engaged, by her parents, when she was eight years old. Now she is thirteen, and in three years she is going to be married."

"That may be," answered the captain, "but I do not think it is a good thing for young children to talk of marriage before they are of age. Just think of amusements and learning for the time being. By the way," he changed the subject, "did you see the Temple to our great God Yum Kak, the God of Fire? It is finished now. You remember, I told you to watch the way it was built. Which one of you will tell me how it was done?"

As Hunac-Ceel was the most observant and most studious of the three, he told of what they had seen. Stones and earth had been piled in the form of a pyramid seventy-five feet high.

"The earth and the stones were brought by thousands of men," he said, "and it seemed to me that their labor would never end. They carried the material on their backs, and they had to go very far from the city for the stones. If you remember, sir, it took more than five years to bring the pyramid to its desired height. Do you recall the day last year when you sent us to look, sir, when the workmen were nearly through and the architects and the engineers were measuring very carefully to see if all the parts were perfect in proportion? Well, I went up with them. They let me go because they knew I would not spoil the work. There was a hole in the side between two stones; and as I approached, a big snake came out and made a rush towards us. I do not think I ever saw such a big one before. The *chilan* said, it was a good omen, as the Temple was protected by the Gods. I did not mind the snake, because it was afraid and ran away, but I was afraid of the scorpions. There were so many!"

Na-Chau laughed boisterously and exclaimed, "Oh! yes, I remember. You were scared to death!"

"And so were you," answered Hunac-Ceel. "If you will recollect, you did not go up. You went home at once, but I followed the architects."

Everyone laughed, and Na-Chau was very angry and vexed.

Ahlon-Che then said, "I would be afraid myself if many of these animals were around me, but after

all when you watch the way they run, it is easy to know how to kill them."

"Yes, indeed," continued Hunac-Ceel, "that is what happened. The men knew how to kill them, and we were not molested."

"Then what took place?" asked Ahlon-Che.

Hunac-Ceel went on with the description of how the pyramid was built. "After the engineers and architects had measured and found the pyramid in the right proportion, they ordered the sculptors to bring the smooth, square stone slabs which they had in preparation for years. They were clamped on the surface, leaving the space for the stairs on the four sides. Then they constructed the staircase."

"And how did they do that?" prompted Ahlon-Che.

"They graded it, while the other workmen piled the dirt and stones together. These men had let it settle so it would be a solid mass. They brought huge stones prepared as steps and placed one on the top of another. It was difficult to carry these heavy things, and it took many men."

"Yes," interrupted Nichte, "the stones are so high it makes my legs ache when I go up there."

"Oh, little baby," mocked Na-Chau, "she cannot go up the stairs. Her legs are too short."

"Do not tease your sister, Na-Chau. It is not nice for a boy of your age. You should, on the contrary, talk to her nicely. I do not like my son to be disrespectful to women. It is true they are not so strong

as we are, but we should respect them for their weakness and be good to them. You had small legs yourself not so long ago.”

Everyone laughed, and even Na-Chau accepted the rebuke of his father very well.

Hunac-Ceel proceeded with his narrative. “When the stairs were finished, I was amazed to see how wide they were all the way up. The architect told me that they enlarged each consecutive step as they were building the stairs, so that it would not look too narrow from the bottom of the pyramid. I went down and up again, and saw that this was so. The stairway is beautiful.”

“Were they patient with you—the architects—when you asked all these questions?”

“Oh yes, sir, they knew that I was interested and wanted to learn, and they answered my questions.”

“That was nice of them. And then what occurred?” asked Ahlon-Che Caan once more of the little speaker.

“As you know, sir, it took quite a while to place and fit the stones into one another on the surface and to finish the two platforms. Then the stones of the Temple itself were brought and placed on the very top platform. It looks beautiful. Do you not think so, sir? The sculpture which covers it is simply lovely. There is not a place without design. The writings on it are sacred.”

“Thank you for telling us how the Temple was built. I think you have a great power of observa-

tion. You will be a famous artist, my boy," said Ahlon-Che kindly. "In another week or two," he added, "the great priest is going to read the stars and find out when the statue of Yum Kak, the God of Fire, should be dedicated. Then the populace will go and worship him, because without fire we could not cook our food."

"I saw the statue being placed on the altar," remarked Na-Chau, as if awakening from a dream. "It is beautiful and very big. I am glad we are going to have another feast. Are we going to have plays too?"

"Yes, indeed," answered the father in good humor. "We are going to have a great feast, and we shall all enjoy ourselves, I am sure."

Nicte, not to be outdone, interrupted and said, "They have not placed the statues at the entrances of the stairs, but I heard a *chilan* say that they would be brought soon."

"Then all will be ready," said the father. "I am glad you took so much interest. It is good for all of us to know how things are made." Then suddenly remembering something, he exclaimed, "Oh! I had forgotten to tell you that Olal has sent word that she will be here soon. You are to go together with your mother and offer presents to our God of Rain, the great Nohoch-Yumchac. We have had so much drought that we must pray for rain, or we will not be able to exist. I want you to go and join your

prayers with theirs. Pray fervently, my dear children, and the Gods may bless you!"

The children were not so enthusiastic about this outing as they would have been about going to the market place, although they looked forward to passing through the market afterwards on their way home. Still, they must go to worship the God of Rain, whom the people called "Tlaloc". The children liked to call him Tlaloc too, because it was a simpler name than Nohoch-Yumchac, and was one well known to the ordinary Maya and the slaves. Everyone worshipped this God, for they all realized how necessary are rain and dew for the life of mankind.

There was a great scramble among the children. They hurried to make their preparations for going to the Temple—to wash and to adorn themselves—and they were ready when word was received that Princess Olal was waiting at the bottom of the stairs with a retinue of slaves. The little company joined her after a parting kiss to their elder, who was pleased to see the children so obedient and happy.

Their mother had already taken her place in a litter. And the Princess Olal was in hers. A small one was ready for "little Nichte", as she was called, but by this time she was a quite good-sized girl. She resented being called "little" sometimes. It made her feel so much like a baby that she always reproved her brother when he teased her in this way.

She sat cross-legged, and at once the small company started on its way. They were surrounded by many slaves loaded with rich presents for the greatly venerated God.

The children's mother was at the head of the procession, because she was the oldest of the group. It was the custom of the country for people of high rank to travel, surrounded by servants; this party was particularly outstanding, for it included not only slaves from the Caan household, but slaves from that of the Princess Olal. The two boys, erect and composed, walked together near the litters.

The retinue moved slowly towards the Temple. All the people bowed when they passed, as Princess Olal was greatly beloved, not only because of the people's admiration for her father, the great captain, but for herself, as she was kind and generous to the poor.

Olal was beautifully dressed with a dark pink *pik* and a lighter colored *huipil*, the whole heavily embroidered. Over her shoulder was thrown a coat of pale green cotton cloth, to which black feathers had been added, woven into a pattern of the four cardinal points, the circle of the sun, and a smaller circle representing the moon. These made a beautiful design, very effective and decorative. Although the Mayas had nothing but cotton and the thread of the hennequin plant, they succeeded in making most gorgeous dresses and coats by dyeing them in brilliant colors and embroidering them luxuriously.

After a time the little procession, passing through the sacred way in silence, arrived at the foot of the big pyramid on which the Temple, dedicated to Tlaloc, the God of Rain, was erected. This God and the Sun God were worshipped more than any others in the mythology of the Mayas. This Temple stood near the sacred well in which the divinity, Tlaloc, was supposed to dwell.

The mother and the two sisters alighted at the foot of the great staircase. Followed by the two boys and the slaves, who carried the presents and the flowers to present to the God, they went up the steep stairs. The offerings were lovely and numerous.

As they reached the platform of the high Temple, they were received by a beatific old *chilan*, or priest, who after bowing low went to call the high priest to receive the Caan family, the Princess Olal, her half-brother and sister, their mother, and their friend. The old gentleman appeared in his dark, priestly robe, which was trimmed with macaw feathers taken from the breasts of these parrots. He was an imposing figure. In his turn, he bowed graciously to the two ladies. Then taking the presents from the arms of the slaves, he carried them, one after the other, to the four corners of the platform. Followed by his attendants and chanting an incantation, he offered them to the four cardinal points. He brought them back to the altar where there stood an effigy of Tlaloc carved in stone. The

statue, which looks very ugly to us, appeared to them a thing of beauty. It was covered with precious gems and gold ornaments. The cloths and flowers made into elongated conical bouquets were placed at the foot of the divinity. Balls of incense were burned before the statue. The remainder of the gifts were kept to throw into the sacred well. Before these incense balls, which were made of the sap of the copal tree could be thrown, the high priest broke them in two, so the soul of whatever was offered to the God Tlaloc in the deep well could escape.

Every object sent down into the green waters was prepared in the same way. The children had brought small bells of gold, considered very precious in those times, and before offering them to the God, the high priest took the soul out of them by flattening them with a stone mallet. A beautiful plate of baked clay covered with lovely designs was also pierced through the center, in order to let out the soul before it joined the copal balls, the rubber balls and the other presents which had to be sent into the watery kingdom of Tlaloc, the God of Rain.

During this long ceremony, the children behaved very well. They had only to make a last appeal with a prayer at the brink of the well before the ceremony would be finished and they would be able to leave. The little company went down the long steps of the Temple, receiving the blessings of the high priest. At the foot of the stairs they turned toward

the sacred well, sixty feet deep, at the bottom of a forty-foot slope. The *chilan*, who had accompanied them, threw the presents into the green waters, and after another prayer to the God the little party started on its way to the market place.

Noting the direction in which they were traveling, the children sighed with relief and were full of glee. They had been so quiet and attentive throughout the ceremony that now they were going to have a treat to reward them. When they reached the immense plaza on which the market stood, the boys rushed to the booth of sweets, while Nichte remained sedately with the ladies.

When all had taken their places, Princess Olal said softly, "Now, boys, you may have all you want of the cakes and drinks made of lime juice and honey, but please do not drink too much chocolate; it is so rich!"

"It is so good, sweetened with honey, the way they fix it here, please let us have as much as we want," they begged.

The Princess smiled, but was firm, and as she allowed them each three cups they were well satisfied. They were all as happy as could be when they had finished their refreshments and at once began a tour of inspection.

The first thing they saw on the other side of the plaza was a group of people busily engaged in putting a big stone before one of the temples. The stone was carved with magnificent designs and

hieroglyphics recounting the happenings of the past five years in the vast Empire. These steles, or carved stones, were blessed by the priests and placed on the front of the temples.

The children were fascinated as they watched the workmen but the sun was high in the heavens, it was near noon and they had to go home for their midday meal and their siesta. On the way to their litters, they stopped before a public scribe who was drawing figures and hieroglyphics on prepared skins and maguey paper.

After watching him draw men in different formal poses and make other signs, which to them were just like our letters in writing, Nichte whispered to her brother, "Na-Chau, please ask him to write a letter to our father."

"That is a good idea," answered the boy.

In the letter they told Ahlon-Che how much they loved him. Taking the writing with them when it was finished, they walked towards the waiting slaves. But again they stopped; this time to watch the women stick the feathers of wild birds together. These feathers were used to decorate the head-dresses of the men and were also put on the helmets and other adornments after the sculptor had made the shape, the jeweler had pounded in the gold, and the lapidaries had set the semi-precious stones.

Na-Chau, the bad boy, took one of the feathers, put it on his head, and began to dance a war dance

THE GODS OF FIRE AND RAIN

—to the great pleasure of all. Many people gathered around; the group was made the center of attraction. At last he stopped, and his mother and big sister, half-laughing and half-scolding, brought him away from the crowd. They started home, all happy and contented because they had prayed for rain and had learned something interesting during the morning.

As they approached the house of Ahlon-Che, a great clap of thunder resounded overhead and water fell over them as if a reservoir had broken in the sky. With screeches of delight, they all ran up the steps and reached the top soaked through.

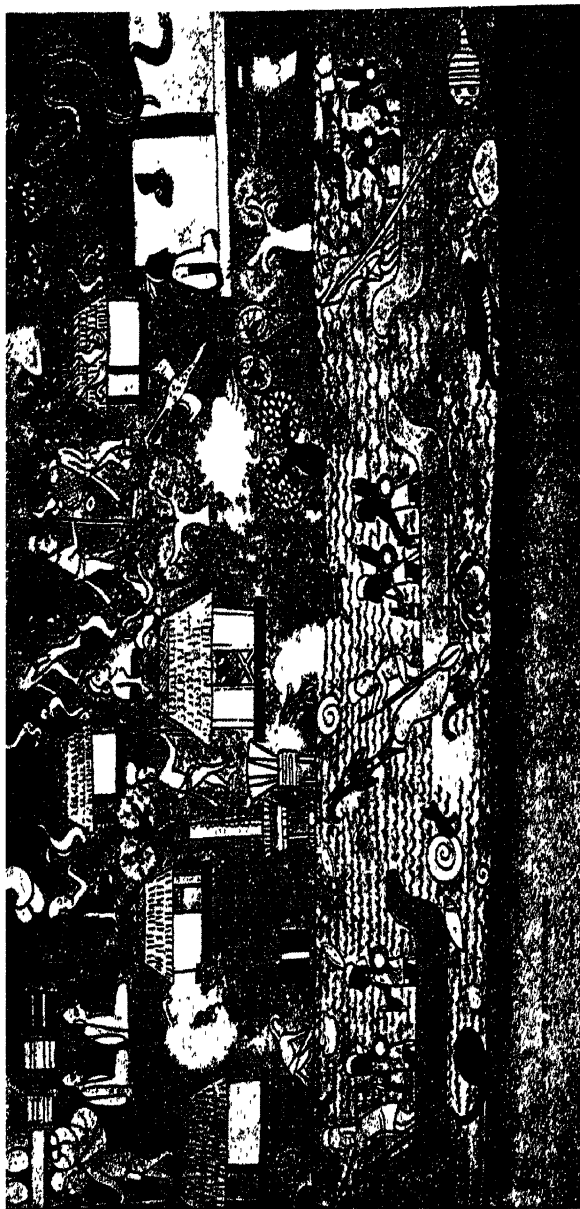
The father, Ahlon-Che, received them with pleasure and complimented them for having prayed so well that Tlaloc had answered their prayers at once. They then gave him the letter the scribe had written in the market place, and he was so pleased that he kissed them heartily.

The household of Ahlon-Che Caan was a happy one.



A stele, or date stone, found in Quirigua, Guatemala. These stones made of one block of stone and of many different shapes, were erected every five years. Some looked like turtles or frogs; but the elongated ones were most common. They were the records and accounts of occurrences which had taken place during the five years.

The hieroglyphics of dates, months, years, and cycles, are the only ones that can be read. The other signs cannot be deciphered.



This painting was found in one of the monuments in Chichen-Itza. The place is called the Temple of the Warriors. It is a mural and represents the life of the people on a sea coast town. The little curlycues above the people's heads and above the houses are supposed to be words.



Kukul-Caan, the great white Toltec, became Emperor of the Mayas 1027 A. D. He wore a pectoral of gold representing the thunder bird the Toltec. His head-piece was made of turquoise, which to this day much prized by all Indians.

He was greatly revered for having re-established peace in the Ma Empire. After he sailed away in a skiff and was never again heard of, was worshipped as a God and was called Quetzalcoatl. His former name Kukul-Caan, which means "The Son of the Feathered Serpent."



Ahpul, a great noble, who had been a fisher boy when he was called the Captain of the Toltec soldiers to appear before Kukul-Caan.

He wears a headdress made of turquoise stones, parrot and Quetzal feathers. The pectoral of gold represents the great God of the Mayas, the Sun, whose son, the feathered serpent, was worshipped by all the Mayans. His coat is of yellow cotton with small feathers of the humming bird woven into it.

IV. The Great Kukul-Caan

One December morning, of the year 1026 A. D., Ahpul, a young boy of fifteen years of age, was standing at the mouth of the Quatzalcoalco River, in Tabasco, near Campeche, looking at the sun rising over the hills. He was waiting for the great orb to appear, so that he could pray and ask this God to send a messenger to save his country from the war and strife which was causing desolation. He loved to look at the majestic Sun-God, and he prayed fervently to him, asking protection for his family and for himself.

When the sun had appeared and he had finished praying to this great divinity of his religion, he remembered that his father had sent him to catch fish for Cancoh, the Cacique of the tribe, whose temper and meanness had doubled lately with the bad habit of many drinks of corn alcohol. Ahpul therefore hastily turned his eyes toward the shore of the sea at the mouth of the river, which we today call the Gulf of Mexico. To his great astonishment, he beheld an immense group of men advanc-

ing toward him. As the wind blew strongly from the east and Ahpul had been intensely occupied with his prayers, he had not heard their approach. The young boy was not only astonished but much alarmed. As he turned to flee toward the village, which was not very far from the shore, a well-directed arrow planted itself at his feet and a loud voice hailed him from afar in a peremptory manner.

Then Ahpul knew that he must wait. In a short time he was surrounded by many warriors. His heart beat fast, but none of this agitation showed in his countenance. To all appearances he was very cool. The captain spoke in a dialect which the young boy could not understand. He did not know what to answer, until a warrior translated to him what the captain had said.

"He told you," said the warrior, "to come with him and speak to our King."

More men continued to advance, but in the confusion Ahpul stood proudly and kept a dignified demeanor. He was taken a little farther down to the shore. On approaching, he saw a man seated on a cushion under a very rich canopy. When he was brought close to the King, he was rooted to the spot with amazement. Finally, at long last, he remembered his good manners and fell to his knees and saluted the great chieftain.

What Ahpul saw was most astonishing to a Maya. Before him was a tall and graceful figure reclining on several richly-decorated pillows. He

was so white of skin that the like of it had never been seen before in that land of dark-reddish people. This unusual man was not only fair of complexion, but he had a fiery red-blond head of hair and a long beard of the same color falling on his chest. Ahpul thought that the man seated before him was a God, and that was why he fell to his knees to worship him.

The great chief, who was named Kukul-Caan, which translated into our language means "Son of the Feathered Serpent", awed the young boy so much that he could not speak.

Seeing that Ahpul was timid, the King spoke to him in the Maya language in a very kindly manner, asking him his name and where he lived. This great lord was pleased with the answers Ahpul gave him and with the lad's frank and good-looking face. He explained that he did not want to molest his people; on the contrary, he was going to help them straighten out their difficulties. At that time, the Mayan Empire was in a very bad condition. Wars were waged among the different chiefs and kings of the many Mayan tribes, and they fought one another incessantly. These interminable wars brought famine and desolation throughout the land.

The great Kukul-Caan explained that he had come to restore peace and prosperity. The boy, filled with admiration and faith in this man, replied, "Great Lord, if thou bringest peace to our land, my father and his sons and his descendants

will worship thee as a God. My father says that we need a great man to make our Empire once more the envy of all. May it be thee, Son of the Feathered Serpent, and we will be thy faithful servants."

These words pleased Kukul-Caan very much, and he sent the youth as a messenger to his village and told him to order the Cacique Cancoh to appear before him. The lad, accompanied by three warriors, went first to his father's house; and after explaining what had occurred and relaying the orders he had received, the father and son went to the house of the chief of the village. They found Cancoh still under the influence of liquor; but when he was told that a great number of men had come to conquer the Maya land, he became sober at once and made preparations to save himself, not thinking of the people he was supposed to rule and help. Soon Ahpul's father persuaded him that it was too late — that there were many thousands of men already surrounding the village. Abusing Ahpul and his father, he followed them to appear before Kukul-Caan. When he was presented to the ruler, who asked him civil questions, he was most insolent. After a while the King, losing patience, ordered his soldiers to take him away. The boy never saw him again.

Ahpul presented his father, Nohkay, to the fair-skinned man. Kukul-Caan saw at a glance where the boy had learned his manners. Nohkay was a very unusual man. He was an artist who wrote

books in hieroglyphics, the picture writing which contained the history of the race, in the most marvelous way. But because he had not obeyed the orders of one of the high priests in Mayapan, he had been exiled to this fishing place, where he and his family eked out a very poor living from the sea. Kukul-Caan immediately appointed him head of the village.

Nohkay soon explained to Kukul-Caan the condition of the country. And in their many talks during the following week, they made plans for conquering and pacifying the Empire — plans which were amazingly carried out without much bloodshed. In the year 1027 the great Empire once more became the center of arts, under the kind rule of the white King, Emperor Kukul-Caan. This great monarch encouraged arts and letters and united all the small tribal kings of the Empire into a single and powerful federation. Each section of the country exchanged its products with the other, and from north to south the land became prosperous. The great Kukul-Caan was venerated as a God.

He never changed his opinion of Ahpul. The devotion of that intelligent boy was rewarded by the Emperor, who made him a great noble and gave him much land and many slaves. He became powerful, in his turn, through the influence he had with his King.

Kukul-Caan, followed by a great army, entered the country accompanied by Ahpul and his father

as guides. Every time they approached the territory of a King who had stopped paying allegiance to the Mayan Emperor, the young boy was sent ahead as a merchant, with goods, to the market place, so that he could hear and learn what was going on in the town. No one had any suspicion of the youth. He was most useful to Kukul-Caan in learning of the quarrels among the Kings of the little kingdoms which formed the great Mayan Empire.

One fine spring day of the year 1027, Ahpul entered the town of Mayapan, which was then the capital of Mayaland. He had left the army of Kukul-Caan in the woods a day's journey away and had entered the town to go to the market place, as usual.

Ahpul had grown a great deal since the time he had left Mayapan, in exile with his father. He was a man now. Exercise and training for war had given him strong limbs and good health. He was naturally very intelligent, and the education his father had given him and constant attendance on the King Kukul-Caan had developed his mind.

He was dressed very simply in the garb of a scribe when he reached the great plaza on which the market stood. He listened carefully to the people who were busy around him. He learned that the old King of Mayapan was very ill. In fact, he was so ill that he could not be expected to live. His son was very much disliked for his cruelty and his

meanness. No one wanted him to succeed his father. There were many threats and much talk among the people.

Ahpul had to find a peaceful place to take notes and rest a while before he could go back to give his report to Kukul-Caan. He had bought food; and as it was nearing night, he went up a small hill which seemed to belong to the countryside around the town. He sat on the grass and ate his dinner, thinking deeply, and resting. He thought for a long time and watched the moon appear over the horizon. It was full and the night was serene and clear.

In the silence, he heard a noise. He listened; but as there was no recurrence of the sound, he said to himself, "It must be the wind in the leaves." He lay down again, but after a few moments, he heard a cry of anguish and a sob. He got up suddenly, and like a real hunter he located the place where the noise came from. There was a clearing bathed in the moonlight. In the center stood the image of a God. He saw something moving at its base. In one jump he was near the form, which was groping before the huge stone.

To his great astonishment, he discovered that it was a woman praying. He bent down and questioned, "Why are you sad? Can I help you?"

The woman on the ground was very frightened. Trembling, she looked up at the youth but did not answer at once. Ahpul repeated his question. At last, seeing she had to deal with a stranger who was

very handsome, she stood on her feet. The young man, full of excitement, beheld a beautiful girl of about sixteen years of age. She was really lovely, and the tears which were still moistening her face made her most appealing.

The youth, knowing she was frightened, said softly to quiet her fears, "Do not be afraid. My name is Ahpul, son of Nohkay, the artist who is learned in book writing."

Extending her hand to Ahpul, the girl exclaimed, "Do you not remember me? When I was a little girl I used to play with your sister, before your father was sent away in exile."

"Yes, I do remember you now. But you have changed a great deal. Why were you crying, Uxal?"

The girl answered, sobbing again, "My father is dying, and last night my oldest brother came into the women's quarters. He mistreated us and told us that now he was the King. He took all our gold jewels and precious stones. Some of my half sisters refused to give them to him, and he beat them. I ran away and came to pray to our great God Itzamna, the son of the dew, to protect me. And," she caught her breath, "our dear God has sent you to save me from my horrible half brother. He is so cruel, I am afraid of him. He wanted me to marry him against the laws of our land, which forbid a brother, or half brother, to marry his sister. I fear to go back."

“Come with me,” answered Ahpul, “I will take you to the great Kukul-Caan, who is kind and merciful. He must be very near the town by now. Do not be afraid; this great King will save you. He is here to help the Mayas. He is my friend. Come.”

He took off his coat and threw it over her light dress. Unobserved they walked rapidly into the forest; and after three quarters of an hour’s march, they arrived in a big clear space in which the camp of the Toltec King had been pitched. A sentinel challenged them. After giving the password, Ahpul went to the place where Kukul-Caan was lying sound asleep under a tent.

As Ahpul approached, the King awakened. Recognizing the youth, he began to ask him many questions. The young man made his report and introduced the girl. Kukul-Caan questioned her also, and when he learned of her troubles, he sent emissaries to the town to tell Ahkin that he had found his sister in the woods and that he should come to get her.

Ahkin had not been named King as yet, because his father was still alive; but it was expected that the aged man would go to the land of his forefathers soon. The young Prince, with a retinue, came to call for his sister at once.

When he arrived, he was taken to the great Kukul-Caan’s presence, and he spoke to him very arrogantly. The Toltec King showed a great deal of patience, but at last annoyed, he made him his

prisoner and kept him with guards. The rest of the party was freed.

Preparations were soon made, and the whole Toltec army marched over to the town of Mayapan. When they reached there, they learned that the King had gone to meet his Gods in heaven and had left his kingdom to his second son, Nachi-Cocom, who was very much liked. This made further bloodshed unnecessary. Young Nachi-Cocom received Kukul-Caan well and helped him to call together for a meeting the Kings of the different kingdoms which formed the great Mayan Empire.

The people were happy to be reunited under one great ruler. The Toltec King, Kukul-Caan, became Emperor of the Mayas and stayed in Mayapan a long time. Ahpul became his right-hand man and Kukul-Caan often teased him by calling him "The little fisher lad". They were very devoted and congenial to each other and the great Emperor was so pleased with Ahpul's work that he gave him for wife the lovely Uxal. They lived a long time and had many beautiful children.

Peace reigned for many, many years in the beautiful land of the Mayas, but Kukul-Caan, having become very old, decided to leave. He wanted to go again to the Toltec land in Tlascalala, which was situated in the center of the land of Mexico and which extended to the coast on the Gulf of Mexico. When the monarch spoke of going away, tears were shed by all his people. He had made

them prosperous again and given a new impetus to their arts, which at the time seemed to more than offset the two great scourges which he had brought with him, but which later proved to be very serious calamities to the Empire. The one was *pulque*, a liquor made of the juice of the maguey plant, which is stupefying; and the other, the sacrifice of humans to the many Gods of their religion.

It was a sad and bereaved population that stood on the shore of Yucatan at the place where lowly little Ahpul had first seen the Toltec legions come into Yucatan. The great lord Ahpul was a very desolate and sad man, for he had become the right-hand of Kukul-Caan, who had treated him like a son. Tears ran down the cheeks of Ahpul, as he prayed on his knees for the success of the journey of his ruler.

Kukul-Caan was afterwards known as the great God Quetzalcoatl, God of the Air. He was worshipped by the Mayas, Toltecs, and Aztecs alike, through many centuries. He went away alone in a small skiff, leaving behind him a tradition which lasted until the end of the Montezumas. The legends said that "a man like Kukul-Caan would come with many others of a strange race to conquer the Mayas, taking their riches and their beautiful land, and enslaving the people."

And so, long after Ahpul's time, this came to pass.

V. The Feast of Fire

A distinguished looking old Maya nobleman was seated on a stone chair like a throne, talking severely to a youth. It was in the year A. D., 1507, three centuries after the Aztecs had conquered the Mayas. With a worried look on his face, he said reproachfully, "Ahlon-Che, I have begged you not to fight with the son of the Prince of Huexotla. Why do you always disobey me?"

"Father," answered the handsome, well-built youth, "he insulted my sister; he said that he was going to buy her from our Emperor as a slave."

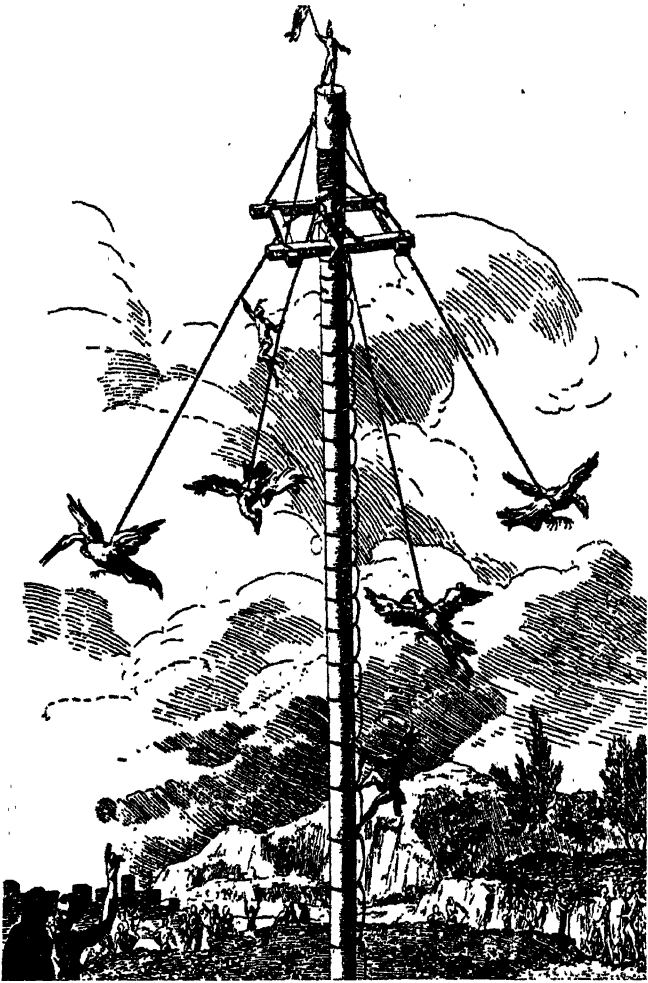
The old nobleman, Uxmal Caan, paled and tears of fury came into his eyes. He exclaimed, "My daughter is a free Maya woman and not to be bought by anyone!"

He was going to say more, but his son interrupted hurriedly. "You see then, Father, why I have been fighting him this last year. Cuitlahuatzin is most overbearing and insolent. I will not stand his insults to my family!"

"You are right, of course," answered Uxmal



Montecuhzoma, who lived in the sixteenth century, was so wealthy that he had more than three thousand headdresses and costumes. He had many elaborate long tunics. These were held at the waist by belts with fringes or pompons. Emeralds were set in his crown or headdress. His earrings were made of jade, and the gold ornament on his neck was the God of Rain, with sparkling jewels representing the lightning.



This unique game took place at various intervals and was played by the Aztecs on their great feast days, especially during the last Feast of the Fire, which took place in the year 1507. It was called the year *Ome Calli*, the last year of the Aztec cycle. (Aztec cycle is only 52 years).

The Feast of the Fire was called *Toxiuhmolpia*, or end of the century. The Indians played this game only once after the conquest.

This picture was drawn by a Spaniard in the sixteenth century.

Caan gently, "but you must remember that we are Mayas and we have very little chance for protection from the Emperor." He sighed sadly, "You must be careful, my son."

For a time they were both silent; the old noble seemed to be thinking deeply. Then he said again, "Keep away from him. The Feast of the Fire takes place tomorrow. If the Gods permit us to renew the sacred fire and if the sun comes over the hills and gives us its warmth, then we shall see. In the meantime, we must break all our household goods and idols and sacrifice them to the Gods. May the Gods of our forefathers help us!"

"But, Father," argued the youth, who was sixteen years of age, "why should we have to break the statues representing our Gods, our pottery, and everything we love? It was not the Maya's custom."

"That is true, my son," replied the great chief Uxmal sadly, "but you must remember that our race has been conquered by the Aztecs for nearly three centuries. We are their serfs. Our people have suffered a great deal, and we must not do anything that will bring their fury on us or we will suffer for our rash acts. You must obey and break all your pottery and idols, and I shall do likewise."

The young boy groaned. He cried bitterly, "They have taken everything from us, our arts, the knowledge of the stars, even our calendar," and he looked at the wall where there was a sign of the fifty-two years cycle.

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He sighed and continued, "We are their superiors, but still they treat us as prisoners and many of our people have suffered greatly through them."

"It is true, my child, but we must not aggravate them, or they will hate us more, and the rest of our nation will be persecuted. Be good! Please do as I say. We are told to break everything we possess to please the Gods. It is the order of the high priest and the Emperor. We must obey!"

Ahlon-Che stood respectfully before Uxmal without answering, but he was unconvinced. Only the great fear that his father and family would be persecuted made him accept the old man's advice. Very upset he left the room and went to his own quarters. He sat down with his left hand under his chin, holding up his head which was heavy with troubled thoughts, while with his right he absent-mindedly drew a figure of the last day.



The chief, Uxmal Caan, was a Maya noble of very old lineage, a descendant of the great general, Ahlon-Che Caan, who had been the right-hand man of the famous Emperor Itzamna. They were the blue blood of their race, and even after centuries the traditions of his great ancestor's valor and courage had been carried on.

The town in which this noble family lived was situated in Aztec land. Their own home in Yucatan had been devastated and the nobles made prisoners. Some of the bravest and most intelligent of these nobles had been spared. The town where our story is laid was named Tenochtitlan, which today is the City of Mexico. This city was the capital of the Aztec Empire, and for centuries was the Venice of Central America. The houses were built on small islands in a very large lake. The name of the lake was Texcoco. Many of the islands were joined by wooden bridges. The palace of the Emperor Xocoyotzin, the last of the Montezumas (in Aztec, Montecuhzoma), was on the biggest island. The Emperor was extremely pretentious and most powerful. He had so many attendants that they filled his palace. The mansion was composed of three huge houses built around patios and made into one palace. It contained much riches, gold plates, silver, and all kinds of valuable goods.

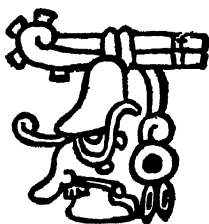
This last and best known of the Montezumas had ordered an immense feast in this Year of our Lord 1507. The people were to rejoice and have

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a great holiday if the Gods gave life to him and to his people. This feast was called the "Feast of the Fire." The day our story begins was the last day of their century, which was not one hundred years but only fifty-two. They believed that if the sun did not appear over the horizon in due time and if the sacred fire which had been extinguished that day by the priests in the high temple did not rekindle, the world would come to an end.

They broke everything which was movable and offered it as a sacrifice to please their Gods and frighten the bad spirits and phantoms in which, like all ignorant people, they believed. It was this act which our young Ahlon-Che had discussed so heatedly with his father. He did not want to break his possessions; he loved them and did not believe in his heart that the world would stop its turning and the sun stop giving its warmth if he did not do so.

The boy went to his quarters in a very bad temper. The first thing that met his eye was a big round vessel which served him as a bathtub. It had the yearly sign of 360 days painted on its



side. This bathtub had been left by him in the center of the room and as he was very angry he gave it a mighty kick and sent it sailing across the big room. It hit the wall and broke in many pieces. It pleased his mother very much to see him break the vessel, because she thought he was doing it to obey the rules. Unknown to him she had followed from the big room to further admonish him, but she saw she was not needed. Smiling, she disappeared.

After this tremendous show of temper, Ahlon-Che had to rub his toe for a long time. He had hit the tub so hard that his sandals had not been protection enough. He stood there like a wild bird on one foot holding his injured toes. Surveying his surroundings, he saw many chests of lovely embroidered clothing, headdresses, beautiful arms hanging on the walls, and rich jewels. The family was a prominent one, even after the Aztecs had conquered them; they still had a great fortune. He was so angry, however, that he would have kicked any one who came near him. At last he could put his foot on the ground without too much pain; and when he stood again on his two feet, his pet gazelle, who had followed him, came to lick his sore foot. He caressed the lovely animal and set about obeying the commands of his father.

He called a slave and with his help made a very large hole under his reed mats which served him as a bed at night. When this was finished, he dis-

missed the boy. Turning to an altar on one side of his room, facing the East, he exclaimed, "Oh, Gods of my forefathers, help me to see the light! I do not wish to see your images destroyed. Our race nearly perished because we took the Gods of the Toltecs unto us. Oh, mighty Lakin-Chan, revered Itzamna, protect my family and our people. If I commit a sin, punish only me, not them."

The boy fell on his knees and prayed fervently. It made him feel better; then as the night approached, he worked very rapidly. He buried the idols in the bottom of the hole. Then he put in with them his arms, his headdresses, coats, wearing apparel, and a few pieces of pottery which he liked very much. He broke all the rest of the vases and utensils for which he did not care, and he used the broken pieces to cover that which he had buried.

By the time he had finished night had come, and he went to join his father. They shut their doors and went away, following a multitude of men. It was the custom for people on the last day of the century to go on house tops or high peaks of the surrounding mountains to watch for the first rays of the sun. If these rays did not appear, they thought it would be the end of the world. The women servants with children, and the slaves also went on the tops of the dwellings to get away from the power of the *Tzitzimes*, or phantoms, which they feared, as all the uneducated fear ghosts. The sick women shut themselves in the grain rooms, with masks on

their faces. These masks, made of maguey leaves, were supposed to protect them from turning into wild beasts and eating the population alive. To be sure that the children would not go to sleep and offend the Gods, they pinched them incessantly. They thought if the children fell asleep, they would be turned into rodents.

The procession was formed out-of-doors. It was headed by the high priests. The Emperor and nobles followed, and last came the rest of the men. They walked in the dark, in silence, toward the hill of Ixtapalapan. And they walked slowly, so as not to reach there before midnight when the stars would have time to cross the sky.

Chief Uxmal and some of the noble Mayas from the court of the mighty Montezuma followed the Emperor in the group of nobles. Ah-lon-Che walked beside his father. The youth was the most unhappy being of the whole concourse. He had disobeyed his father by hiding his possessions and not destroying them, as the mighty King and high priests had ordered. Now, he reproached himself bitterly for his stubbornness and for thinking that he knew more than his parents. The darkness and solemnity of the occasion contributed to his fear; he shivered, and his teeth chattered. He was remorseful, and miserable. He prayed incessantly to the old Maya Gods, asking them to protect him and his family. He did not dare to tell his father of his disobedience. He was so afraid that

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when at last they reached the bottom of the hill on which the incantations and ceremonies were to take place, he fell on the ground, prostrate and praying.

The priests went up on the mountain, while the rest of the people stood in the valley below. All trembled with suppressed fear. They waited in great suspense for the light of the new cycle to appear. The priests did their work rapidly. Rubbing sticks of dry wood together, as the northern Indians also did, a spark was produced. A few very dry leaves started to burn, which in turn ignited quantities of dry sticks. These were grasped by the deliriously happy people and carried around, lighting new fires everywhere. They all rejoiced that the world had not come to an end and that the sacred fire would burn in the great *Teocalli* (Temple) for another fifty-two years.

At first Ahlon-Che was stunned by the fact that he was still alive after disobeying the laws of the land. He shouted with joy, and embracing his father, he begged for permission to join the hunters. He went with them to kill the game which was going to be consumed by the people during the day of feasting which always followed the end of the cycle. But before he could go, he had to wait for the broad golden disk of the sun to appear on the horizon. When it rose in all its splendor, everybody kneeled and worshipped.

This was the last time the Aztecs and their vassals performed these solemn rites. In 1521 the

Spaniards vanquished them and introduced Christianity into the land.

The great lord, Uxmal Caan, returned to his home after the ceremony, happily thinking that his son had at last seen the light and that his race would last as long as the Gods would see fit to renew the fires of life. Ahlon-Che had gone hunting with a light heart.

Soon the provisions were brought, and the women and slaves began the cooking. The Emperor, or as he was called in Aztec, the Montezuma Xocoyotzin, had ordered a great celebration and rejoicing. The palace was in an uproar. The slaves cooked quantities of food, and all the nobles, their attendants, and sons were invited to come to the banquet. Montezuma ate alone in his throne room, and no one broke his fast until he was through.

The three succeeding days were to be filled with amusements in which the young and old could participate. There were to be foot races in which the fleet-footed Ahlon-Che was to take part and to win a prize. There was to be a display of skill and the throwing of arrows with the *hul-che*, or throwing stick, as they did not use bows. There were to be jumping contests, regattas on the lake, playing, dancing, and a great amount of eating. It was a difficult time for the slaves and the women, as they had to work very hard to cook and serve the men. These warriors and nobles ate heartily the game, fish, and vegetables that were prepared for them.

They had a great many of the vegetables and fruits that we have, including tomatoes, *mais* or corn, greens like spinach and salad, avocados, bread-fruit, and an immense quantity of juicy fruits. Everyone was happy, except the ones who had to work hard and the ones who had to fight the wild animals in the arena.

The most wonderful part of the three days' feast came on the afternoon of the first day of the century. The game played that early afternoon was *toxuh-molpia*, the flying game. This remarkable sport took place in the center of the town. No other people had ever played a game like this in the history of mankind.

On this day only people of noble birth were asked to fly. Ahlon-Che was one of those asked. A stout, tall pole, made from a large tree without branches or bark, was erected in the center of the flying field. On the top was a drum, which revolved on a small platform. A man of great strength stood on the top of the drum and by dancing with symbolic movements he kept it moving faster and faster. There were four thick, heavy ropes tied around this wood frame, spaced at equal distances apart, so as to face the four cardinal points. Several other Indians attached themselves to the tree under the drum to help the one standing above to make the drum revolve rapidly. Then four youths were attached to the four hanging ropes. The boys were dressed as eagles with large spreading wings. They threw

themselves into space and seemed to be flying swiftly over the multitude. Symbolically, this flying meant that the mighty Aztec race would command the world for another century. Also, the eagle represented one of their Gods—the God of the air, Quetzalcoatl.

It happened that one of the youths who was to fly at the end of a rope was the hated Cuitlahuatzin. This boy, who was not quite seventeen, was the most cruel and jealous boy among the noble families. The slaves hated him because he mistreated them and told lies to his father to make them be whipped when they would not, or could not do what he wanted. His father was extremely rich, and the boy could indulge in every whim his fancy desired. He cordially hated Ahlon-Che because Ahlon-Che, although a half year younger than he, was taller, better looking, extremely strong and well-proportioned, and had the great dignity of the Maya race.

Ahlon-Che was loved by all. On leaving his father's house, he was surprised to see a woman of middle age approach him. Handing him a flower, she said, "Good youth, some slave has tampered with one of the double ropes on the big pole. Look well before the signal is given for you to fly, as the rope will be half sawed off."

Seeing the surprise and incredulity on the boy's face, she repeated, "Beware! It is the truth. Beware of Cuitlahuatzin!"

Ahlon-Che thanked her graciously and went to

the flying field. When he reached there, he spoke to his father of what he had heard.

The old gentleman, who at this time had the friendship of the Emperor, approached the great exalted ruler and in a casual way said, "Oh, most high lord of our realm—great ruler of the world—it is an unlooked-for honor bestowed upon my son to be able to fly as a God. May he show you before the entertainment begins some of his skill in flying? It might please your worship to see something amusing."

Montezuma was in good humor, and he agreed. Ahlon-Che approached the big pole and asked the slaves to let down the ropes, every one of them. This was done to the great dismay of Cuitlahuatzin, because he knew then that his trickery would be discovered. Ahlon-Che made believe that he was arranging the ropes in a certain way and at a certain height, and he discovered the one which had been tampered with. He showed it to the master of ceremonies, who at once had it changed. When this was done, the young boy began to throw himself about, grabbing one rope after the other, and he did so many acrobatics with the ropes that the great Montezuma and the rest of the court were entertained. After this show of high gymnastics, the real flying began and went very well as usual, to the satisfaction of all.

When the game was over, the Emperor asked Chief Uxmal Caan to bring his son and present the

youth to him. The boy was introduced. He threw himself at the feet of the Emperor and kissed his gold sandals. His Highness was tremendously pleased with Ahlon-Che and said, "Why have I not seen your son before, great Uxmal?"

"Because, Son of the Feathered Serpent, he is too young, although very tall for his age."

"He is not too young to serve me. I want him to join our warriors. It is my wish."

The great Uxmal was pleased and bowed very low, expressing his gratitude. It was time now for the younger men to take their places for the regatta on the lake. Ahlon-Che was happy. His prayers had been answered. He was going to be a soldier.

Montezuma went up with his courtiers to the flat roof of his palace, where comfortable seats had been prepared for them. They had a magnificent view of the lake, and the small canoes began to line up at once. There were thirty entries of canoes manned by two men and twenty large canoes manned by more men. Ahlon-Che had entered his small canoe in the race. A friend of his, a young Aztec named Ahuizotl, who was as tall and as strong as he, was to paddle with him. The two of them could out-paddle the rest of them easily.

The signal was given, and the small boats started at once. They went astonishingly fast for small skiffs, and the happy chief Uxmal could see his son swiftly passing the others. The only one who was a little ahead of him was Cuitlahuatzin and

a friend, who were exerting all their strength to win. As Ahlon-Che was about to pass them, he saw the other boat swerve, and one of the boys raised his paddle to strike him on the head. As quick as lightning, the young boy raised his own; and as he had a longer arm than his aggressor, he pushed him over, upsetting the boat and its occupants in the water. Undaunted, Ahlon-Che kept on paddling and reached the goal several yards ahead of any of the other twenty-eight boats.

This feat was acknowledged with a great uproar by the people on the shore and on the house tops. The winners received rich presents from the hands of the Montezuma. Once more Ahlon-Che had vanquished his enemy, who had swum to the shore amidst catcalls and shouts of ridicule.

When Uxmal went to his son's room that night, to tell him how happy he was over his great victories, he found the boy down-hearted and very tired. The good man, who adored his son and was immensely proud of him, asked why he was so downcast after his two great successes. The boy exclaimed, "Father, please forgive me. I have deceived you. I did not break all my idols and my precious things. I simply buried them."

The old gentleman looked in horror at his son. "Did anyone see you?" he asked hurriedly.

"No, no one saw me; and the treasures are buried under the mats on which I sleep."

"Foolish boy that you are! If anyone saw you

and reported you, there would be a massacre of not only our family but of all the Mayas living in town. It is over now, but be careful not to unearth those things for many months to come. I will tell you when you may. Remember that you have three sisters and your mother to protect. You have also a powerful enemy in the son of the Prince of Huexotla. Beware! You are walking on a volcano. How unkind you have been to me, my son! How rash!"

This mild rebuke from his respected and beloved father made Ahlon-Che very ashamed, and he fell on his knees asking for forgiveness. "Dear Father," he said, "I will never disobey you again. I know now that what you tell me is very wise. It is the first time I have not done exactly what you told me. It will be the last."

The two embraced each other, and the young man escorted his father to his room, where he helped him to his matting covered with cushions filled with cotton. He bid him a tender good-night.

When he re-entered his room, he prayed fervently to the Gods of his ancestors to protect his father and family, and then he took a well-earned rest.

On the next day there were more festivities. It was the turn of the warriors and the older men. There were foot races for the children too. The young women performed beautiful mystic dances before Montezuma, who stood on the big plaza in front of his palace under a magnificent canopy made of purple cloth woven with threads of gold. He was

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covered with gorgeous jewels. A cape of feathers was over his bright red garments, and his beautiful headdress was the most ornate one among those of the thousands of courtiers who surrounded him. The day passed smoothly, and everyone did his best to win the valuable prizes which were given by the Emperor. The eating and celebrating continued far into the night. No one went to sleep before he was completely exhausted.

The third day of the new century was marked by a very unusual show. The big plaza which was at the entrance of the palace on the principal island of the lake where the mighty Emperor resided had been completely changed during the night. The innumerable slaves, taken by the Aztecs from their enemies, had worked laboriously. By early morning a jungle scene presented itself to the eyes of Montezuma and the beholders. There were bushes and trees arranged so that they looked like a miniature forest.

The Emperor was seated before the spectacle was begun. He gave a signal, and a great many hunters came forward with their arrows and lances to hunt the wild animals that had been captured alive and released into the miniature woods. The hunters were received with roars of appreciation by the onlookers. A hunt followed, which showed the skill of the people of those times. No prizes were given, but the exhibit of skill in hunting wild animals caused the ones who saw it to fear many times for the lives of the hunters. Like the regattas, the flying game, and

the races, this unusual show was greatly admired. The pleasures and entertainments of the three days were a great success.

Ahlon-Che was one of the hunters. While tracking a puma in the make-believe jungle, he heard an arrow whistle past his ear. He skillfully killed the animal, and then looked around carefully to see who was near him. After a while, he discovered a slave, whom he knew belonged to Cuitlahuatzin, sneaking away from behind a bush. He seized him and forced him to acknowledge that he was the one who had tried to kill him. He said that he was but obeying the orders of his master. After the poor wretch had grovelled in fear at his feet for a moment, Ahlon-Che let him go and told him to tell his master to stop trying to kill him and that after the Feast of the Fire was over, they would have an open fight. It would take place before the King and the court.

“I wonder,” said Ahlon-Che, “if your master is brave enough to accept. I want an answer.”

The hunt was over, but Ahlon-Che waited at the edge of the jungle for his answer. An hour later the same slave returned and said that the challenge was accepted and that the fight would be arranged the day following. Ahlon-Che went to his father and told him what he had done.

“My son,” said the old warrior, “I am proud of you. You are within your rights, and the Gods who for a long time have protected our family will help

you. Pray to the Gods of our people. Rest well, and keep a stout heart. I will see to it that you have fair play."

So, with a light heart, Ahlon-Che went to sleep above the idols he had not destroyed, and prayed to them fervently.

Toward morning, at about five-thirty, when everyone was preparing to begin his work again, after so many holidays, the earth seemed to move and shift under the feet of the frightened people, throwing many on the ground. Although some of the walls cracked, platters and pitchers fell down, and all the household goods were tossed about, no one in the household of Lord Uxmal Caan suffered any injury from the earthquake. It was not so, however, with some of the other people; many were hurt.

While Ahlon-Che was getting ready for the fight, a slave of Cuitlahuatzin came with the amazing news that he had disappeared. No trace of him was left. "It was the most astonishing thing that has ever occurred," said the news-bearer. "Our young lord was standing in front of our palace near the water's edge. As he was going to step into the boat, the earth shook and opened before him. He was pulled down by the Gods of the underworld and nothing has been seen of him since."

Uxmal sighed with relief when he heard this news. He had not thought that his son would be vanquished, but he knew that if the son of the Prince of

Huexotla was killed or hurt in any way, revenge would take place quickly.

Once more Lord Uxmal and his son fell on their knees and gave prayers of thanks to the great Gods of the old Mayas who had for so many centuries protected their family and saved them from dispersal and slavery. The whole family assembled and went to the Temple to give thanks to the deities and to make valuable offerings. They made the high priest smile with pleasure. Uxmal Caan was thankful that he and his family were safe; he hoped it would be the same for many years to come.

In a few days Ahlon-Che was called upon to join the army as the noble Montezuma had ordered. It was a great experience for him. He learned how to use different arms. He went with an expedition sent to conquer the people of the province of Atlixco. The chief of that expedition was the great Prince of Huexotla, the father of the one who had hated him. This great captain did not know of his son's cowardly attacks on Ahlon-Che; and seeing his braveness and obedience to his orders, he made him one of his lieutenants. The boy covered himself with glory in that expedition, and on his return home was fêted by his great father and the rest of the family, as well as by his numerous friends.

The Prince, his chief, who had lost his only son in the earthquake, offered his daughter in marriage to Ahlon-Che, who had always admired her. The fathers arranged the wedding, and Ahlon-Che be-

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came a great figure in the history of the Aztec Empire. As if he had waited only long enough to provide a good husband for his daughter, the Prince of Huexotla joined his forefathers in the land of the Gods. He had no other heirs than his beautiful daughter and Ahlon-Che, who thus became one of the richest nobles in the Empire.

In 1509, Ahlon-Che was again sent on an expedition, against the Chalcos. And during this year he became the father of a lovely boy who he knew would carry on the traditions of his great race and the courage of his ancestors. His father, Uxmal, was aging rapidly. His three sisters were well married.

At last the young captain could unearth without fear the idols and the things he had buried under his bed. He knew that all had been forgotten and that no one would recognize them. He placed the little statues on his childhood altar and prayed fervently to them to protect him as they had done previously.

Also, in 1509, there was a remarkable occurrence. It was the apparition of a comet in the East. It was called the *Mixpamitl*. It filled the people with terror, and the high priests found through the reading of the stars that the great empire of the Anahuacs would be destroyed soon by a powerful race of strange people. These tidings brought panic into the hearts of the Aztecs. To add to their fear the comet appeared more than forty days successively. They endowed it with a superhuman power, and it

was the cause of the nine years' war with the Chalco Indians.

When this star or comet first appeared it looked like a brilliant streak of flame. It was immense and of pyramidal form, having the same shape as the Temples built by the Mayas. The people of the great Anahuac Empire (Aztecs and other races) saw this extraordinary phenomenon at night and contemplated it in astonishment; to them it looked like a flaming Maya Temple nailed to the sky. This astral body gave so much light that it obliterated the radiance of the other stars. It went on its course like any other star, and was completely eclipsed by the rays of the sun in the morning.

Prayers and offerings were redoubled by the Montezuma Emperor, the nobles and the population. They feared the wrath of the gods, and to assuage their fury they started a nine years' war to procure riches to offer to the deities.

Ahlon-Che who now was a famed captain, was sent to the war against the Chalco Indians, as mentioned before. It was a long and tedious war. Although it seemed to last forever to Ahlon-Che, he succeeded in returning to Tenochtitlan several times to see his sweet wife and most beloved father. He had more sons and daughters, who proved to be as good looking as their father and mother.

In the year 1518, Uxmal Caan died. He had lived long enough to see his son a most famous chief, with many heirs. The old gentleman was over one hun-

dred years old. Ahlon-Che was very much touched by the loss, but he knew that his brave and kind parent had gone to meet his ancestors in a blaze of glory.

Ahlon-Che became a great prince; and when the Spaniards invaded the land, he had risen to such high repute that his extraction as a Maya had been forgotten. But this was never forgotten by him. In his heart he was a Maya, and he fought like a brave Mayan against the invaders who came to conquer the Anahuac Empire, whose last Emperor was the Montezuma Xocoyotzin.



The old priest, Colec, in his regalia and festal headdress. This headdress also represents the Serpent worshipped by the Mayans. The five gold jewels in the back represent the rattles of a snake.

His face is tattooed in black, with curious circles around his eyes and mouth. His nose is pierced and has a gold piece passed through it. A gold button also adorns his lower lip. This was considered the height of beauty. To be cross-eyed was also a mark of distinction.



The Sacred Quetzal bird—whose plumes were only used to trim the head-dresses and coats of the Mayan Emperors, the nobles, and the high priests.

There are a few of these birds left in the mountains of Honduras, but they have nearly disappeared. They are a brilliant green with a few short red feathers on the breast.

VI. The Coming of the Spaniards

In the town of Chichen-Itza, in the year 1520, the twins, Nichte and Uxmal, a girl and boy fourteen years old, were seated on the doorstep of an old, half-ruined nunnery building. They were born in this town, and had lived there all their lives. It was indeed a sad-looking place. Gone were the houses of the workmen in the different quarters of the town, which with the market place had given life to the city. Gone were the nobles and the great emperors and the priests with their rich costumes. The Temples and palaces were in ruins. Only a few very poor Itzeas remained in the town, living in crumbling rooms which had been part of the Temples and residences of the rich. Famine and droughts had caused the people to leave the town in the general exodus two hundred and fifty years before.

The twins were living with the priest, Colec, a mean man who was a distant relative of theirs. He had taken them in, together with a very old woman who had cared for them when they became orphans.

Nichte said to her brother, "Uxmal, you must go

with your arrows and hunt something to eat. We must also have fruit and breadfruit. We have nothing left, and the corn is all gone. You had better go now, and be back soon, as we have nothing to give Colec for his mid-day meal."

Uxmal rose, and taking his arrows obediently started toward the forest. In a very short time he returned with a rabbit and some breadfruit he had taken from a tree near the edge of the forest. Having to provide all the food for the household had made him a first-class hunter. Nichte's work was to take care of the house. With the help of the old woman, whom they called "Auntie", she did all the cooking, cleaning, and washing. These two young children had to work very hard indeed.

Their lives were uneventful and sad. The priest Colec did not bother them. If good food were served him, for which he paid nothing, all went well; but if what was offered him was not to his taste, Colec became very angry. It took all their energy to keep the old man satisfied, although Nichte and Uxmal gave better care to the house and better food to Colec than had been given for a long time. The old lady also helped, encouraging them and saving them many scoldings.

Since the Mayas had been conquered two hundred and fifty years previously by the Aztecs, who lived in northern Mexico and who had vanquished the Toltecs, and many other tribes, horrors upon horrors had been perpetrated upon the race of the

Itzeas. Before Yucatan and the rest of the Mayan Empire were taken, the old Empire had been in turmoil and civil wars, as in the time of Kukul-Caan's coming. But the Aztec Emperors were not men of foresight like the great Toltec chieftain, and instead of helping the Mayas to rehabilitate themselves, they persecuted them in many terrible ways, especially with heavy taxation. When the Mayas had nothing to give, the Aztecs took with them the strongest men for slavery or as sacrifices to be offered to their innumerable Gods.

One day in August, the feared collectors of taxes appeared. There were several of them, accompanied by soldiers. On seeing them, the twins shuddered; a presentiment of evil hung over them. They loved each other dearly and were as alike as two peas in a pod—at least as much as a boy and girl can look like each other. Uxmal was taller than his sister because he lived in the open, hunting and collecting fruit and greens for the table of Colec; consequently, he had grown more than she had. Nichte was beautiful, as many young Indian girls were at this age. One could see that in two years more she would be a marvelous looking woman.

A day of anxiety passed, without any event in the Colec household. But the children heard the cries of the women and children and the groans of the men who were being whipped for not having enough to give to the collector. Many had run away into the woods, and this made the chief collector

very angry. He therefore passed his fury on everyone. Not finding anything of value, he took nearly all the young men and women available for slavery, leaving only the old and the children.

At last the collectors appeared at the door of Colec's house. This crafty old man began to complain and tell them how poor he was, as his people had nothing to give him for his support, for his prayers and help in sickness. He sat on the floor and rocked with well-feigned tears falling over his face. He was a magnificent actor, and the collectors half believed him. But Hunac, the chief collector, would not let him go so easily. He asked him what he was doing for a living. Colec then had an inspiration, and he said, "If you promise to let me go free of taxes until I die, I shall give you two jewels—in truth, a very valuable present."

Whereupon he called the brother and sister, and they appeared before him, clean and dressed in their best clothes, as two young children of their birth and standing should be. Seeing them together, so beautiful, so innocent, holding each other's hands, and so much alike, Hunac and his men were amazed.

He cried, "Indeed, old man, thou speakest the truth. I take them in payment of thy debt."

Nicte and Uxmal were speechless with horror and could not understand how Colec could have given them as slaves to these fierce men. They fell on their knees and begged to be left where they were, but their pleas were heard with jeers on all sides.

They had to follow the rest of the prisoners, and they were taken away.

The old woman, who lived at the priest's house with them, begged one of the soldiers to let her speak to the head man.

"You old hag," he answered, "what thinkest I am, a slave who needs must carry out thy wishes? Begone, or I shall give thee something to remember!"

"Be kind, lovely youth. Thou hast all in the world—youth, beauty, strength. I am a poor old woman that bids thee one favor, to speak to thy chief. Here are some lovely feathers of our sacred Quetzal bird for thee. Thou wilt get good barter for them on thy return to thy land."

The soldier smiled and replied, "Wait here, old woman, I shall see what I can do."

He was gone for a long time, but at last he returned with the good news that she could go with him. She fell on her knees when she faced Hunac, and in a whisper she said to him, "Pa-Pa, thou hast the strength of the tiger and the glory of the Feathered Serpent as well as its vision. If thou wishest to sell the twins for a good price, I shall tell thee where a fortune lies."

Cunning Hunac exclaimed, "Begone, old woman! I do not believe what thou sayest. There are no riches in this place. The only thing they have here is lice. Begone, thou filthy creature, or I shall punish thee for taking my valuable time."

"I do not lie, my lord," the old lady answered. "Only come with me and see. Thou wilt give me my two children when thou seest what I will show thee."

She seemed so sincere and in earnest that he promised to go where she wished, if he could take a bodyguard, because he was afraid of an ambush. She shook her head and reassured him that she only wanted to save the children. Hunac looked at her and saw nothing but fear. Anyway, she was so old that she could not harm him; and with six soldiers accompanying him, he followed the old lady to one of the deserted Temples.

They entered the low door at the bottom of the pyramid on which the Temple had stood. Taking a burning rosin torch from the hall, the old woman led them through a long corridor. To their surprise they found old Colec seated in a big room near a mountain of jewels, of dazzling gold and sparkling precious stones. There were quantities of pieces of colored cottons also, elaborately embroidered, and many other treasures gleaming in the light of their torches.

Colec was so angry at the old woman for having brought the men to see his treasures that the old miser rose up in fury to strike her a hard blow; but he had forgotten his advanced age. Staggering, he turned red, then black, and then fell down.

The collector and his myrmidons took the treasure away, to be carried for them by the prisoners. In the morning, the old woman made her way to-

ward the moving column, to which, alas, many people she loved had been added. She begged the chief again for the freedom of the young boy and girl, but Hunac refused.

It was a long and painful journey that followed for Nichte and Uxmal. They were very sad and had lost almost all hope. Their only consolation was the kindness of the fifteen men and women friends who had been taken prisoners in Chichen-Itza. These good people helped them all they could.

After a year of weary and incessant travelling, they arrived at Tenochtitlan, the Venice of Central America and the capital of the Aztec Empire. In those days the Mexicans, as well as the Mayas, had no horses, no donkeys, and no cattle. Their tremendous building was done by man power alone, and the only means of transportation was by foot. The two young people were very tired when they arrived in the capital of the Aztec Emperor, who also was the Emperor of the old Mayan Empire. The territory covered by that immense kingdom was 150,000 square miles. It extended from Texas to Honduras in South America. Montezuma, the Emperor, was extremely rich, as he received tithes from all these countries. Throughout the year, his thousands of agents travelled, collecting, abusing, robbing the poor people and bringing men and women as slaves or as victims of their sacrifices. It is said he had more than three thousand costumes and headdresses,

besides rooms full of gold, jewels, silver, and precious stones.

Nicte and Uxmal became slaves in the house of the collector, Hunac, but they were well-treated by his wife and his three children, who were younger than they, and to whom they taught many new games. After the twins had had a rest and been given new clothes, they looked very pretty. On the whole, they were much happier than they had been with the old priest, Colec, who was always in a bad humor. They had to work hard, but they did not suffer; and they were very glad to be living together in the same house.

Some time passed and during the absence of Hunac, who had been gone three years in the southern part of the Empire to collect taxes for his Emperor, some very serious things had happened. He had left in the early part of the year 1519. And as he had been far south, he had not heard of the arrival of Hernando Cortes and his men, who had landed on Holy Friday, in March, 1519, in Vera Cruz near what is now known as San Juan de Ulua.

Hunac was very much surprised, therefore, to find on his return to the capital, with all the booty and prisoners, that the Quetzalcoatl prediction had been fulfilled and that white men had landed and had been the guests of Montezuma in Tenochtitlan in the year 1520.

Cortes, who had been received kindly by Montezuma, had to leave Alvarado to watch his inter-

ests in Tenochtitlan, while he went back to fight Narvaez, who planned to seize what Cortes and his companions had already conquered. But Cortes was a wily man, and he persuaded the soldiers of Narvaez to join him. Thus Narvaez was left alone.

During Cortes' absence, Alvarado, whose complexion was fair, and who, according to the Maya and Aztec traditions, was the image of Kukul-Caan, had misbehaved himself and permitted his men to commit so many horrible abuses that the Mexicans revolted. When Cortes returned, Alvarado and his men decided to leave the city, for fear of an assault. They took their leave on the night of June 30, 1520, carrying their treasures with them. They tried to escape without being molested, but a woman washing clothes saw them and gave the alarm. The fight lasted a long time, and only a hundred and fifty or two hundred Spaniards were saved. With their troops of Tlascalans, those able to escape were a sorry lot. It was a very dispirited group which finally reached the town of Tacuba, where they rested under the big tree which now faces the Church, and which is still called the "Tree of the Sad Night"; in Spanish, "El Arbol de la Noche Triste."

Before leaving, Cortes had given the order to kill Montezuma, and this order was carried out. The great Cuhathemoc, his nephew, succeeded him.

All this, Hunac learned on his return in May, 1521. Of course, Nichte and Uxmal did not understand the seriousness of the situation; and when

Hunac sent them with his family to the country near Chapultepec, still so-called, all the young ones were as happy as could be.

Hunac's eldest son went hunting every day with Uxmal, and he learned so much woodcraft in this association that his father treated the twins better, day by day. Nichte taught his daughters new embroideries and many new ways of cooking, which made the task of Hunac's wife much easier. They all felt that the Gods had been kind to them in giving them the twins, but in reality it was their own kindness which rewarded them.

One day Uxmal and his young friend were hunting in the thick woods of Chapultepec, when they heard the sound of a multitude of men approaching. These men were making much noise with their heavy guns and their thousands of tramping feet. Uxmal hid his companion in the bushes; then stealthily, like a real hunter, he went close to the principal road to see what was happening. To his great astonishment, he saw hundreds of white men with beards like the God Quetzalcoatl. Some of the men had dark beards, and some yellow ones, like the gold which was the precious metal of the Sun God. The sight of the horses filled him with terror. Like the rest of the inhabitants, he did not know what they were, and he ran away, greatly frightened.

When Uxmal and his friend returned to the place where they had been living, they found to their surprise that they had been abandoned, but soon they

heard the voice of Nichte calling to them. They thanked their Gods for finding each other, and began to walk away; but when they reached the road again, they found it filled with Indians, the followers and allies of the Spaniards. Once more the three returned to the house, where they had been staying. The place was deserted, but there was some food. Although they heard the thunder of the cannon for several days, they did not see anyone.

Tenochtitlan was surrounded by the Spaniards; and on August 13, 1521, after a terrible battle the Aztecs surrendered. The city was in ruins. The Mexicans had fought superbly, but they were conquered by the superiority of the military arts and arms of the Spanish *conquistadores*.

For several days the three children lived in the old house. They were very careful not to go out of the woods, and they hid as soon as they heard someone approaching. But Hunac, the younger, as he was called, going to the middle of the road to see what was taking place, was caught by two Spaniards, whom he took for Gods, because one of them had an especially big reddish-blond beard.

He was asked many questions by these strange beings. And as he was very frightened, he told them about Uxmal and Nichte in the woods, and the two soldiers made him show them the place. One of the soldiers, Hernando de Regla, was a tall young man about nineteen years of age. Of very fair complexion and blue eyes, he was a descendant of the

Visigoths who had once owned Spain. This kind youth was amazed at the great beauty of the twins. Like all the Yucatecas or Mayas, they were very clean; and Nichte had put a crown of wild flowers on her head. She looked so beautiful that the soldier's heart went out to her. The twins, who had been raised to think that a very fair God would come to take their country away from them, saw in young Hernando de Regla the fulfillment of the tradition and at once they fell on their knees and kissed the bottom of the young man's coat.

Hernando was charmed with them, and he fell in love at first sight with Nichte, whom he took to the reverend father of his battalion. Under the care of this good man, she learned the doctrines of the holy faith and became a Christian. They were married soon thereafter. Hernando was proud of his wife, and they had a big family of lovely children. Later, Nichte became a great lady of the court of Spain, after her husband made a lot of money from a gold mine in Mexico.

Uxmal became a great leader among the allied Indians and married one of the daughters of Hunac.

All of them were very happy under the rule of the Spaniards.

One thousand copies have been printed of the first edition. The type used is a contemporary version of a design by Giambattista Bodoni in the late eighteenth century.

