

# AMAZING STORIES

## Quarterly

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### Our Cover

this month represents a scene from the story entitled, "The Other Side of the Moon," by Edmond Hamilton, in which the scientist is shown on the moon, just after he has sent the ray up, and while he is attempting—despite the efforts of the turtle-men—to reverse the switch in order to enable his friends to return in the tube to the earth.

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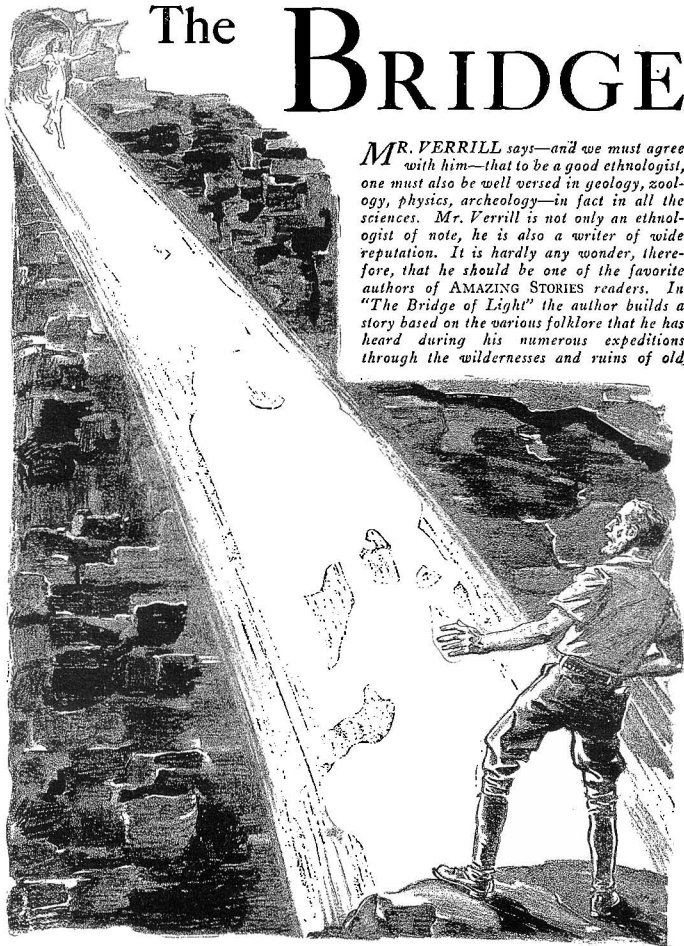
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# The BRIDGE

*MR. VERRILL* says—and we must agree with him—that to be a good ethnologist, one must also be well versed in geology, zoology, physics, archeology—in fact in all the sciences. Mr. Verrill is not only an ethnologist of note, he is also a writer of wide reputation. It is hardly any wonder, therefore, that he should be one of the favorite authors of AMAZING STORIES readers. In "The Bridge of Light" the author builds a story based on the various folklore that he has heard during his numerous expeditions through the wildernesses and ruins of old



¶ *With a contemptuous toss of her head she stepped forward—stepped over the verge of that terrible chasm!*

# of LIGHT

Mayan tradition, each of which probably has some basis of fact. Many astounding stories of prehistoric times might well be uncovered when some of the engraved hieroglyphics which have been found are deciphered. It is not impossible that the ancient Indians had made astounding discoveries in the use of some minerals of which we have just recently become cognizant. How else can some of the remarkable relics which are unearthed from time to time be explained?

Perhaps when flying becomes a more common mode of travel, there will be more scientists venturing into the wilds of unexplored countries, because then a good many of the hardships and inevitable risks of going through jungles and dangerous country will be eliminated. We may well look forward to amazing finds in the near future—some inklings of which we are given here. We know you will agree with us after you have read it, that "The Bridge of Light" is one of Mr. Verrill's best.

## CHAPTER I

### A Strange Find

LOOKING back upon it now I can scarcely believe it ever happened, and find it difficult to convince myself that I actually passed through such amazing and almost incredible experiences. Yet I have but to look at my left arm and see the scars that cover it in order to bring it all vividly back. And there is the tattooed symbol upon my chest. And if I needed further confirmation of the actuality of it all, there is Itza. Surely she is very real, and should occasion arise she could confirm the greater portion of the story. Even as I am writing, I have but to glance up from my table to see her, seated in the hammock swung on the porch, her dark head bent over some delicate bit of handiwork, her rounded cheek and the curve of her neck glowing like old gold in the diffused light—even in her conventional surroundings—as exotic as an orchid flower. But I find I am disgracing—as I invariably do when I see or think of Itza.

It all began in a most ordinary way at Vigo. I was returning to England from an expedition to South America, and as my ship was to remain several hours at Vigo, I decided to stretch my sea-weary legs by a stroll through the quaint Spanish port and, incidentally, have a look at some of the second-hand shops where, on more than one occasion, I had picked up some very interesting old books and other curios.

By

A. Hyatt Verrill

Author of: "Through the Crater's Rim,"  
"Death from the Skies," etc.

Illustrated by  
WESSO

Crossing the quay, and with a few sharp words in their own tongue quickly silencing the importunities of the piratical-looking boatmen, the bandit-like taxi drivers, the loathsome beggars and the swarm of would-be guides, I ascended the steep Calle San Sebastian, reached the Avenida Principal with its rush of traffic, its swarms of fashionably-attired women and men, its smart shops and its honking automobiles, and turning to the right, entered a narrow, dark alley. A moment later I passed under a mediæval archway and found myself in the Plazuela de Tres Santos. Within five hundred feet of where I stood was the hustling, noisy, modern avenue, but it might have been five hundred miles distant. When I passed under the old arch, I stepped into old Spain. About the tiny flagged plaza, scarcely larger than a courtyard, were ancient, sagging, time-aged houses with outjutting balconies, iron-grilled windows and shady, mysterious patios. Olive-skinned señoritas lounged on the balcony rails gazing half-curiously, half-coquettishly at the stranger who had entered the plazuela; older women in their bright rebosas and flaring, gaudy skirts sat on stools outside their doorways, stringing onions, weaving on crude hand-looms or gossiping with their neighbors; swarthy, fiercely-mustached men besashed, and wearing berets, lounged about or played idly upon guitars; and everywhere swarmed children as happy, as dirty and nearly as naked as the pigs and puppies that were equally as numerous.

But all this was an old story to me. Scarcely glancing to left or right, I picked my way across the court to where a once gorgeous signboard informed all who were interested that one, Miguel José Salceda, was the proprietor of the ramshackle shop wherein were to be found antiques, second-hand articles, books, native handiwork, cigars, tobacco and onions—a strange assortment truly, but quite the usual thing in the confines of the plazuela. The shop itself was a mere cubby hole in the massive stone wall of what had once been a monastery, but Miguel José had the entire plazuela at his disposal, and he had taken possession of several square yards of it. On boxes, tables and upon the stone flagging the overflow of his stock was spread and piled—looking for all the world as though the shop had spilled itself into the square—and, seated in the midst of the

aggregation of everything imaginable in the shape of junk and odds and ends, was the *don* himself. Propped against the wall in the sunshine, his touselled gray head sagging forward on his bare hairy chest, his hands clasped across his paunch, Señor Salceda was enjoying his afternoon siesta—as his raucous snores testified to all the world.

Having no need to disturb his slumbers, I moved about among his wares, examining the litter of battered and dust-covered books upon a rough deal table. Presently, Salceda raised his head, yawned prodigiously, stretched himself and, slowly and reluctantly opening his single eye, caught sight of me.

Instantly, and with surprising agility for a man of his build, he sprang to his feet and hurried forward, grinning until his leathery, unshaven cheeks resembled a relief-map of his native Pyrennes, and exposing two yellow tusks in his otherwise toothless gums.

"Gracias a Dios, 'tis the Señor Ingles again!" he cried, patting me on the back, embracing me in Spanish fashion and exuding an almost overpowering odor of garlic. "And how is the illustrious Señor, and his dear Mamá and his most lovely Señora, and his four—no, I mistake, it is five—niñitos?"

"No, Don Miguel," I replied with a laugh, "it is not the English Señor but the Americano, and unfortunately, as I have neither mother, wife nor children—either four or five—I cannot tell you how they may fare. Personally, amigo, I am in excellent health. And how is Don Miguel and his family?"

THE old fellow grinned wider than ever. "Si, I remember," he muttered as he rolled a cigarette. "But of what importance, Señor, whether Americano or Ingles? They are the same species; all are rich, all are fond of old books, and all will have their little joke. And as for the others—Valgame Dios—if you have no mother now, you had one once—may her soul rest in peace; and such a simpatico Señor should have a lovely Señora and the four—may five—little ones. *Bien pues!* What would you? But of a truth I am overcome with joy and happiness to find your highness well. Permit me, Señor, to offer you a sip of wine."

To refuse would be to jeopardize friendship and the chance of a good bargain, and as I had by now selected two rare old volumes that I greedily wanted, a good bargain was desirable. Besides, Salceda always had most excellent wine.

Good fellowship having been thus established, I asked the old fellow the price of the two books. One was a scarce edition of "Don Quixote," the other a copy of a quaint work on the Antilles, and both were battered, stained, their covers torn and warped, but in good condition within. Salceda, I knew, had no knowledge of the true value of his stock, but priced articles in accordance with the status of the purchaser and his desire to acquire them. So, scarcely looking at the two volumes, he glanced appraisingly at my face and informed me that they were worth twenty pesetas.

"Not to me," I assured him, tossing the books upon the table. As I did so, one of the books slipped to the pavement, and as Miguel stooped to recover it, a piece of folded, stained and frayed paper dropped from between the leaves.

"Bueno, then, how much will your excellency pay?" he asked, as he glanced at the paper in his hand and replaced the book.

"Ten pesetas, no more," I declared.

"It is nothing, nothing for such fine old books," he exclaimed, "but the Señor Ingles—or is it Americano—knows what he can pay. So ten pesetas it is, your excellency." As I counted out the money, Salceda half-unfolded the piece of paper he still held, and then,

unexpectedly deciding it worthless, turned as if to toss it into a pile of rubbish. But something about the thing had attracted me. I had caught a glimpse of figures, of dull red, blue and green upon it, and, thinking it might be an old map, I stayed his hand.

"Hold on," I exclaimed. "That belongs to the book!"

"No, Señor, I think not," he said, as he squinted at it with his one good eye, "but perhaps a map, or some old picture left in the book by mistake. Of no value, your excellency; but the illustrious Americano—or is it Ingles—cares for old things, and this is very old. Si," as he again focused his bulging eye upon it and cocked his head on one side. "Si, of a truth, I should say it is antediluvian!" He chuckled at his own humor. "So," he continued, "if the Señor desires it—well, perhaps a peso or two."

He was a sharp old Gallego—none sharper—and the bit of stained and colored paper that a moment before had been condemned to the rubbish pile had suddenly acquired a value. Not much to be sure, but better than nothing by a long shot. Very possibly, I thought, it really belonged with the rubbish. But I was curious to learn what it was and, handing Don Miguel two pesos in addition to the price of the books, I slipped the paper into one of the volumes and departed with his fervent, "May you go with God, Señor," in my ears. Little did I dream, as I made my way back to the ship, what a strange investment I had made or through what amazing experiences and remarkable places that ragged, folded paper would lead me.

Indeed, at the time, I gave it so little thought that I completely forgot about it, until we were well at sea, when, in my cabin after dinner, I opened the "Explorations, Discoveries, Strange Sights and Remarkable Adventures in the Indies, etc.," by imaginative old Sebastian Gomez, and once more came upon my two-peso purchase. Unfolding it carefully, for it was creased and old, I actually gasped, staring incredulously at what I had revealed. My first glance at the fresher, cleaner inner surface of the sheet was enough. It was a codex—one of those strange pictographic records kept by the ancient Aztecs and Mayas! Less than a dozen originals, I knew, were in existence. Could this be an original? Could it be one of the lost Codices? If so it was priceless, irreplaceable, and with trembling fingers, almost reverently, I examined it and studied the texture of the material through my lens. The material was unquestionably ancient papyrus! The color, the technique of the green, red, blue and yellow figures proved it no copy! The old Spaniard had spoken more truly than I had imagined when he had jokingly called it "antediluvian."

Incredulously I studied the codex that, by sheerest good fortune, had come into my possession. I puzzled my brain to decipher or decode it, to recognize the figures of conventionalized human beings, of gods and other objects. I was familiar with Aztec pictographs, familiar with Mayan glyphs, but somehow this did not appear like either. And yet, of the two it was far more Mayan than Aztec. A hope rose in my breast, a hope that I had stumbled upon one of the long-lost, missing codices of the Mayas. Only three Mayan codices were known, yet there must have been hundreds, and in all probability many had been taken back to Spain as curios by the returning conquerors. Was it therefore beyond the bounds of possibility—even of probability—that some of these might still be preserved, their value unknown to their owners, perhaps regarded as worthless scraps of old maps, and that one of these should have been tucked between the pages of the ancient volume I had bought?

The more I thought of it the more reasonable it seemed. And if the bit of papyrus should prove to be a



missing record of the Mayas, then I had stumbled on a bit of luck. Not only would it be of inestimable scientific interest, but it would possess a very tangible value in pounds sterling or dollars and cents. That, to me, I must confess, was a very important factor. Scientists must live and, like most scientists—more especially those devoted to ethnology and archeology—I was not overburdened with worldly goods. My last expedition had drained my resources, and even when I had disposed of my collections—a slow and uncertain procedure—I would be little better off than when I had started. But if the ancient scrap of paper before me actually proved to be a Mayan codex, I need have little worry over my future. I chuckled to myself as my thoughts dwelt on this possibility. How strange are the whims of Fate. Here I had devoted years to explorations in far-off lands, had undergone hardships, had had my share of sufferings, had risked health and life a thousand times, and (if my hopes proved true) had made a greater find in a second-hand shop in Vigo, Spain, than in all my wanderings.

I BROUGHT myself back to earth with an effort. I was building castles in the air with no tangible basis to work on. The thing might be comparatively worthless, a copy or perhaps even a codex made subsequent to the Spanish conquest. Until I could have its origin, its age and its value established by experts, I would dismiss it from my mind.

My first act, when I had reached London and had established myself in my apartment in Eardly Crescent, was to visit the British Museum with my find. For once my old friend, Dr. Joyce, lost his habitual nonchalance as he examined the codex. He uttered an ejaculation of amazement, his eyes sparkled, and he became obviously excited.

"Extraordinary!" he exclaimed. "What a jolly find! Of course I cannot be positive of its identity on such a superficial examination," he continued, "but it is unquestionably a codex, and I should surmise of Mayan origin. The cartouches and date symbols are assuredly Mayan, but there are other details, other features that excite doubt. But of course we know so little about Mayan codices. And it seems to bear certain Nahua characteristics. Possibly it is a codex of one of the independent Mayan states that came under Nahua influence. But we should be able to ascertain its age—these date symbols are very clear."

He studied it closely. "Ah, here it is!" he cried jubilantly. "If I am not greatly mistaken this glyph reads 8 Ahau 12—no 13, or is it? Well, either 12 or 13. The unit symbols are difficult because they are so highly decorated and involved. But 8 Ahau and either 12 or 13 Ceh in the Calendar-round. There appears to be an Initial Series date also. However, the Calendar-round will place it approximately. Let me see, that would be about 90-94 B. C."

I gasped. The codex, if my friend was right, and Dr. Joyce is perhaps the greatest living authority on the subject—was more than two thousand years old! But to my disappointment Dr. Joyce could make little more of the ancient document than I could. And before I could realize on it, before it had any real scientific or monetary value, I would be compelled to find someone who could establish its origin, its identity and its relationship. At Dr. Joyce's suggestion I next visited Oxford and called on Professor McLeod, who, as everyone knows, has made a life study of ancient American glyphs and symbols. But this visit gave no more definite results than before.

Following this I made the rounds of nearly all the archeologists and students of pre-Columbian American art and writings in Great Britain, but without result.

All agreed that my discovery was a codex, all agreed that it bore the earmarks of Mayan origin, all agreed on the date symbols, and all agreed that it was so at variance with all the previously known Mayan and Aztec codices that it was an insoluble puzzle to them. They all agreed, also, that if its origin could be established, it would be the most valuable codex in existence, and readily saleable for many thousands of pounds.

Possibly, in the United States, they suggested, I might be able to succeed where I had failed in England and, very sensibly, added Dr. Joyce, as it would unquestionably be eventually purchased in America, why not submit it to the American experts?

But when I reached the country of my birth and called on various archeologists, I found that they could give me little more information than I had obtained from the British scientists. The American Museum in New York, the Museum of the American Indian, the Peabody Museum of Cambridge, the Pennsylvania State Museum and scores of others were visited in turn. But neither Dr. Whistler, Professor Saville, Dr. Spinden, Dr. Gregory, Dr. Mason nor any other of the scores of authorities on the subject dared express a definite opinion. The codex was genuine, it was remarkable, it was priceless, and its date was established. But whether it was entirely Mayan, whether it was Aztec with Mayan addenda or vice versa, or whether it was the work of some undetermined independent state of Mexico or Central America, no one could state. It was, in fact, the greatest puzzle that had confronted the world's most prominent archeologists in many years.

But I did secure some information. Dr. Whistler of the American Museum established the fact that the codex recorded some very important historical event and a migration. Professor Saville of the Heye Museum was positive it recorded a myth or a prophecy and identified the symbol of Kukulkan, the Mayan hero-god or "plumed serpent" as the dominating figure, and Professor Henderson discovered and partially deciphered symbols indicating that the codex embodied the features of a map and gave a description of some location. Several also suggested that it might prove to be a copy of a more ancient codex, or possibly an abbreviated or condensed form of several, or that it might be a codex index or key referring to some more elaborate codex.

By this time my interest increased, and I determined to take my treasure to Mexico and consult the authorities in the Museo Nacional.

PROFESSOR ALESSANDRO CERVANTES received me with Spanish American cordiality and enthusiasm. I had not seen him for many years, and we had much to talk over, but all else was forgotten when he saw my codex. He was tremendously excited, declared positively it was genuine, announced that it was unquestionably Mayan, and unhesitatingly placed it as belonging to the Old Empire period of the Mayan civilization, and therefore of Guatemalan origin.

"But *amigo mio!*" he exclaimed. "Of a truth it is most wonderful, most astounding. In all the world there is no such another. All others are of the New Empire. It is beyond price, *amigo*. If it can be deciphered it will solve many mysteries. *Por Dios*, yes, *amigo*. It will probably prove to be the key to much that we have puzzled over for years. It deals with Kukulkan, as my good friend Saville says; it tells of a prophecy and of a migration both, and it is historical, symbolical, religious and mythological all in one. But," he shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands, "my poor knowledge is inadequate to decipher it. However," he continued as he noticed my disappointment, "I have a very good friend who, I feel sure, can succeed where all others have failed. He dwells not here in Mexico.

No, amigo, his home is in the little town of Xibaltango in Guatemala."

"In that case," I assured him, "I shall go to Guatemala. Can you give me a letter of introduction to your friend?"

"Most gladly!" he declared with enthusiasm. "He is but a poor priest—a most holy and devoted Padre, who gives his last centavo to the poor Indians of his parish and goes hungry that they may eat, and when I scold him for so doing, what answer does Fray José make me? That it is the duty of all Spaniards, and of priests in particular, to make what amends they may for the cruelties and wrongs inflicted upon the Indians by the Spaniards in the past. *Caramba, amigo*, what reasoning! Were I, with the blood of the Aztecs in my veins, to go in rags and in bare feet and with empty stomach, would it bring Montezuma back to life; would it ease the sufferings of Guatemozom on the rack under Cortes? But Padre José is, as I say, most holy and, *amigo*, most wise and a deep student of all the past of his country. Si, Señor, he speaks a dozen of the native dialects, he knows the myths and the legends of the Indians as well as they themselves do; he takes part in their *fiestas*, and he is beloved by them all. And he reads the ancient Mayan glyphs as easily as he reads his own Castilian or the Latin of his office. Si, *amigo*, Fray José is the one man who may solve the riddle of your most wonderful codex."

I FOUND Fray José in his modest quarters adjoining the ancient church in the tiny Indian village of Xibaltango. I had expected to find a cowed and tortured priest, a gray ascetic, bent with years and seamed with the marks of self-denial, fasting and a rigorous life; in fact, I expected to find the living counterpart of a saint or martyr. Instead, the man who greeted me was short, rather corpulent, with a round, brown face, merry gray eyes, and in place of cassock and cowl he wore a suit of native homespun cotton. If, as Professor Cervantes had said, he starved that his Indians might eat, then most assuredly he thrived on starvation, for he looked the picture of health. He was as jolly and merry as his features implied, and he welcomed me most cordially, apologizing for his home but assuring me, in the usual Spanish fashion, that it was all mine.

"But what would you, Señor?" he cried, dusting off an antique leather chair with his berretta and proffering it to me. "What would you? I am remote, alone, in the wilderness, among Indians, and Señor mio, I see not one white man, one stranger in many years. Yet, Señor, I am not lonely. I am happy, I love the Indians, though, of a truth I must admit it—my labors are of little avail, si. They are all Christians; all come to my little church, all are baptized, all are christened and married and buried according to the rites of the Church; but—as the illustrious Señor knows—they are pagans at heart. Not one there is, I am sure, who does not in secret worship the old gods, who does not follow out the old religion. They are Christians to please me, to gain what they may, and because they feel not too certain whether the Christian or the pagan God is the more powerful. Ay de mi, Señor, the longer I dwell among the Indians, the more I feel that never will they be other than pagan at heart. But they are good children, Señor, kind and simple and lovable and generous, and I find life not dull between my religious duties and studying the ancient traditions and striving ever to unravel the mysteries of the past. And my very good friend, the Professor Alessandro, tells me in his letter you have a codex even he cannot decipher. I fear me, Señor, that if he has failed, my poor knowledge will be of little service."

But Padre José deprecated his ability and his knowledge. "Wonderful!" he cried as he looked at the codex.

"It is of the Old Empire; it is a sacred codex, a religious myth and a history dealing with Kukulcan. But, Señor, it is unlike anything else. It is Señor, I am sure, a codex in cipher. Often, on the monuments, I have found inscriptions that I feel sure are cipher, and in this so wonderful codex I see some of the same symbols. That, Señor is why no one has been able to read it. One must know the key, the code, to unravel its meaning or—hold—perchance this is the key by means of which the Mayan ciphers were read. Ah, mi Señor, you may possess that which will solve the manifold mysteries of the Mayas. But, though I regret to admit it, only a Mayan of the priest-cult could decipher it."

I was terribly disappointed. I had traveled thousands of miles; had wasted months of time and exhausted my resources, only to find that I had accomplished nothing. I laughed derisively. "In that case," I said bitterly, "the codex will never be deciphered. It is worth only its value as a specimen, curio. In order to find the man who could read it, I would have to go back several centuries and be here before the conquest. The Mayan priests are a thing of the past."

FRAY JOSE'S eyes twinkled and he chuckled. "Perhaps, my son," he said, "I may be able to help you to go back those several centuries. Would you care to do so and meet one of the long-dead priest clan?"

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed. "Do some still exist?"

He nodded. "Many things exist of which the outside world knows nothing," he declared. "Many of the Indians still worship in the ancient temples of their ancestors, and to do so they must have priests of the ancient faith. Though it is kept a secret, yet the old priest-clans still survive. I alone of all white men have learned something of them. The Indians trust me, and I devoutly believe, love me for what little I have done for them, and have confided in me to some extent. Si, Señor, I know of temples wherein they still worship, and I know of one priest of the cult of Xibalda who might reveal to you the contents of the codex. Could I in person go to him, then I feel sure he would do so, but that, Señor, I cannot do, for my duty is here; however, I will give to you that which will win his confidence and mayhap—with your knowledge of the Indians' ways, you may induce him to aid you. *Quien sabe?*"

I was elated. Even if I accomplished nothing in regard to the codex, I would have an opportunity of studying the ancient priest clan, anyhow, and I felt confident that the scientific discoveries I would make would repay me. But I soon learned that my visit to the Mayan priest was not to be accomplished as easily as I had thought.

"Katchilcan speaks only his own Zutugil dialect," Fray José informed me. "No doubt he understands some Spanish—perhaps he may even be able to converse in Spanish, but he won't do it. If you are to visit his village, in fact if you are to journey through the country, you must learn the Mayan tongue. But that, to you who have learned so many dialects of the Indians, will not be difficult nor will it take a great time, my son. My own knowledge is not accurate enough to enable me to teach you, though before you start I can aid you somewhat by imparting a knowledge of the most useful words and phrases. But I have a friend—a native Indian who cares for the little chapel at Totil—who speaks the Spanish and is most intelligent. It was he who himself taught me, and if the Señor will not mind the time and the journey, he can stop at Totil and from Pedro acquire the knowledge of the Zutugil. Totil is on the way to the village of Katchilcan."

Once having made up my mind to exhaust every chance of deciphering the codex or of establishing its

identity beyond question, I was not to be balked by the obstacle of learning a new Indian dialect, and a few days later, I bade Fray José farewell and started for the distant village of Totil.

## CHAPTER II

### The Prophecy

THE "that" which Fray José gave me to serve as an open sesame to the Mayan priest was a strange combination of the old and the new, of the pagan and the Christian. Upon a sheet of paper bearing the figure of the Cross, he had written a message in hieroglyphic symbols, and accompanying this, was a tiny bag of painted hide containing a medal of St. Christopher and a tiny golden image of a Mayan deity. Good Fray José was no narrow-minded bigot but was willing to recognize conditions as they were and to make necessary concessions to the occasions that arose. If the Indians were willing to please him by assuming the veneration of Christianity, he was quite willing to reciprocate by pleasing the Indians to the extent of employing pagan symbols and following pagan customs, though he had no more faith in them than the Indians had in his Church and its rites.

It is needless to describe the details of my trip to Totil or to narrate my experiences while I remained in the isolated little Indian village, studying the ancient Zutugil language under the tutelage of the painstaking patient Pedro, a dignified-looking Indian, who, being in charge of Fray José's most outlying chapel, regarded himself as a dignitary of the Church of Rome and the most important and exalted personage in the district. But, being Indian, he was Indian to the core, and I was both interested and amused to discover that he had painted the images of all the saints a mahogany brown, and had painted the figure of Christ upon the crucifix inky-black.

"It is that the people may regard them with greater reverence," he explained when I asked him about it. "How can one expect an Indian to adore the white Santos when they have received nothing but harm from those of white skin?" he asked. "And," he added, "how can the white Santos or the white Cristo know what is good for the brown Indians?" Then, a bit hesitantly and shamefacedly, "and besides, the great God of our ancestors was black and with a black Cristo before them they feel that they are worshipping Ekah and are more devout. Does the Señor think I have done wrong?"

I assured him I did not. If, by painting the images, he won more converts or added to the sincerity of their devotions, I considered the means were justified by the end. But I felt quite sure that Pedro himself preferred a black Saviour and brown saints to those with white skins, for which I could not blame him quite either.

But regardless of his religious idiosyncracies, Pedro was an excellent teacher of his native tongue, and at the end of six weeks in his village, he assured me that I had mastered enough of the Zutugil language to continue on my journey; although, he added: "No white man can learn the tongue of my people. Even Fray José speaks it always with the tongue of the white man."

Accompanied by four Indians who acted as guides, porters and camp-boys, I started on what I believed at the time to be the last lap of my journey.

Truly my visit to that little shop in Vigo was leading me far afield. At Totil I left civilization behind. Beyond was wilderness; unknown, almost uninhabited country; vast forests, great mountains, wide plains; land seldom or never trod by white men, where even the old conquerors had not penetrated. For hundreds

of miles there were no signs of human beings; along our route were only the occasional huts of half-savage Indians, or clusters of thatched homes of the tribesmen once—centuries before—under Mayan dominion, though now showing no traces of the culture of that wonderful race. But if no traces remained in the people, there were abundant evidences in the mute remains the Mayas had left behind. Time and again we came upon huge columns or stelæ of sculptured stone in the forest, wonderful monoliths that under any other conditions I would have examined and studied with the most intense interest. Twice, too, we passed enormous ruined temples, great trees growing from their summits, tangled vines and tropical shrubs sprouting from the crevices between the stones, their wonderfully carved façades defaced by time and the elements; their interiors choked with debris, but still imposing in their majestic proportions; their beauty of design and the intricacy of their sculptured stone work. Once, too, we gazed from a hilltop upon the ruins of an immense city, upon a plain beside a river. But all was silent, deserted, forgotten.

FOR eleven days we traveled, sometimes following trails visible only to the eyes of my Indian guides, at other times heaving a way through the jungles, again following the rivers, ascending mountains, marching through great open forests. The way seemed endless; I began to fear my Indians had lost their way, when, issuing from the forest, we came to a cleared plain. Tilled fields of maize, cane, sweet potatoes and others plants covered many acres, and in the centre of the cultivated lands was a village of thatch-roofed houses gleaming like gold in the sun. That the modern village occupied the site of an ancient city was evident. Ruins of stone walls and buildings rose above the waving corn and banana trees. Towering above the village was a great pyramid Kus\* topped by a temple bearing an ornate roof-comb, and as we entered the village, we passed between two rows of sculptured stone columns. I gazed at them in amazement. They were gay with red, green and white paint; at their bases were flowers and fruits. There was no doubt of it. Here in this remote village, the old faiths still lived, the old gods were still worshipped. Very likely, the people still worshipped in the ancient temple. There, no doubt, the priest, Katchikan, still officiated, though Fray José had not mentioned it.

My thoughts were cut short as we reached the village and I glanced about at the inhabitants. Some scurried out of sight at our approach, others stared curiously at us, still others wore hostile expressions, while some smiled friendly greetings; but one and all were totally different from any Indians we had seen. I seemed to have stepped back five hundred years, to have dropped into a Mayan village of the time of the conquest. Living duplicates of Mayan sculptures were on every side. Here were the artificially distorted skulls, the heavy noses, the elaborately ornate costumes of the Mayan bas-reliefs. Not that every individual was of that type. The features of many were typically Indian, but in every case the costumes were those of the old Mayas. There was not a coat, a shirt, a pair of trousers or a hat in the entire village. Fray José had left much untold—perhaps he had wanted to give me a surprise; perhaps it was so familiar to him that he had forgotten to mention the details. Whatever the reason—with such people before me, with the great temple on its lofty Kus now rising above my head, it seemed perfectly natural that in this spot the old priest-cult of the

\* KUS—A mound, usually pyramidal—supporting a temple, a shrine or an altar used for religious or ceremonial purposes.

Mayas should still survive and hold its power. And it spoke volumes for Fray José's sympathy with the natives, for the Indians' confidence and faith in the jolly Padre, that he had been allowed to visit this village, had become friendly with the priest, and that I also had been allowed to reach the place without molestation.

We had now passed through the village, had skirted the base of the temple-mound and had approached a low, ancient stone building with a sculptured frieze of jaguar heads and entwined serpents.

As we neared the building, a man stepped from the doorway, and instantly my Indians halted, stooped, and gathering handfuls of dust from the roadway, scattered it on their heads. That gesture of humbling themselves was enough to identify the man in the doorway as the high-priest of their ancient faith. I gazed at him with intense interest. He was very old. His hair was white, his brown face seamed, wrinkled, and creased until it resembled a withered, shrivelled sapodillo.\* His cheek-bones seemed about to break through the tightly-drawn skin; his eyes were so sunken that they appeared mere pin points of light in the depths of the sockets, and between his eagle-beak nose and his sharp, bony chin his thin lips were like a gash among cavernous wrinkles. In his ears he wore huge plugs of carved jade; about his scrawny, turtle-like neck was a necklace of huge turquoise, garnets and crystal from which depended a gold disk representing the sun. About his head was a band of cotton woven in an elaborate geometrical pattern of red, white and green, and with two long tail feathers of the *Quetzal* rising above his forehead. He was dressed in a single loose robe of black cotton ornamented with intricate designs in the sacred red, white and green of the ancient Mayas, and he leaned upon a polished staff of black wood elaborately carved and with the upper portion covered with turquoise mosaic work.

FOR a moment he peered at me in silence, and a frown deepened the wrinkles on his forehead. I stepped forward, greeted him in Zutugil, and handed him the letter and the little skin bag I had received from Fray José.

Instantly, as his claw-like hand grasped the token, his manner changed. The frown vanished, he nodded, his head, and he welcomed me to his village. Such was my meeting with Katchilcan, high-priest of Tohil, the Rumbler—god of the Kitché-Maya, descendant of the royal line of the Great Snake of Mayapan. Fray José had spoken truly when he had said he would help me to step into the past, for Katchilcan was the past personified.

But though he was of the past, yet he was thoroughly aware of the present. How old he was no one—not even he—could say, and undoubtedly he exaggerated his age, when he declared that his parents had been killed by the soldiers of Tonatiuh (Alvarado) and that he could remember the Padre Landa. Yet who can say? Who can declare positively that an Indian may not live for three centuries or more? Be that as it may, the priest was very, very old—a centenarian beyond question—with all the wisdom of his years, a keen, alert brain, and steeped in the lore, the involved mythology, the legends, the customs and the history of his people.

Though he sedulously carried out the ceremonials and practices of his faith, though his people revered and respected him, yet he realized that his faith and his people were doomed. Never having come into contact with any Christian priest other than Fray José (unless

his seemingly impossible tale were true and he had known Bishop Landa in his youth) he regarded the good Padre as the head of both the Christian Church and the entire white race, and as such held the most profound respect and reverence for him, aside from his personal friendship and a deep gratitude for some service rendered him, but what it was he would not reveal. For these reasons he received me as the direct representative of Fray José and treated me as the Padre's envoy. But I was far too familiar with Indian psychology to broach the purpose of my visit at once. Impatient as I was, I was forced to bide my time, to become acquainted with Katchilcan, to win his entire confidence, to lead the conversation by degrees to the myths and history of the Mayas, before I showed him the codex.

But when at last I felt the time was ripe and I spread the papyrus before him, I was wholly unprepared for the effect. With a strange, sharp cry he fell upon his knees, cast dust upon his head, and in his thin cracked voice began chanting in an unintelligible dialect. Then, rising, he reverently returned the codex to my hands.

"Blessed of the gods are you, my lord," he cried in Zutugil. "I am an old man, my lord, but were I a youth in my strength, gladly would I give half my life to possess that book."

I gasped. What secret, what import did the codex hold? What had caused the old priest to be so deeply affected by his first glance at it? Why would he have given "half his life" to have owned it? Eagerly I questioned him. For a time he was silent, motionless, thinking deeply. Then at last he spoke.

"My lord does not know?" he asked. "My lord knows not that he has the book of Kukulcan? That he holds in his hands the prophecy of him who was known to Mayapan as the 'snake with feathers'? That he holds the secret of that prophecy and its fulfillment, that he holds the symbols that no other has seen? Know you, then, my lord, that in the long ago, ere Kukulcan the 'plumed serpent' departed, he gave unto my people a prophecy. Great should the people of my race be, mighty their power and their conquests, but in the end they should wither and die. Those who build the temples and carved the stones and placed the great images should vanish, and the gods should be forgotten, and those who remained should war one with another and should be scattered far and wide. And they should each speak with a different tongue and be divided among themselves, and should forget their greatness and their gods and their arts. But some few of the great ones should survive, and they should go far from their homes to a place called Mictolan and there they should remain and worship their old gods and have their temples and should abide, until, in the fullness of the allotted time, they should be called forth by their gods and should once more rule the land and be great again and should cast down the new gods. And that they might know when the gods called them forth, the wise Kukulcan caused to be made a book telling of the prophecy and of Mictolan, and of the hidden people, and bearing the symbol that would serve as a token to let the people know that the allotted time had passed when the book with the symbol was brought to them. And to you, my lord, has come that token, which borne to the people at Mictolan, shall call them forth to rule the land and be great once more and shall cast down the new gods. Blessed by the gods of my fathers is my lord. And that it should fall to a white man to bear the symbol and to fulfill the prophecy is not strange, for Kukulcan, the Plumed Serpent was white of skin and was bearded, and it was said in the prophecy that a son of his sons' sons should bear the book with the token of Kukulcan."

\* A tropical tree bearing an edible fruit; its sap yields edible gum, now in demand for making chewing-gum.

I WAS utterly astounded at his words. But equally, of course, I did not take them literally. Much of what he said was the same well known ancient legend or myth. Much of the so-called prophecy I had heard before, for it was common to the Aztecs, the Mayas and even the Incas, and much of what had been foretold centuries before the conquest had occurred exactly as prophesied. Or perhaps, Indian like, the prophecy had been invented to fit the facts. Yet, over and over again, I, like many others, had heard the tale, the rumors of the remnants of the race dwelling in some remote, unknown, secret district, where they retained their ancient customs and religion. Was it not possible there might be truth in these stories; some foundation of fact? Such things had occurred before. There was that Aztec colony in the hidden valley in Mexico of which Professor Cervantes had told me. There was that isolated group of Incas in the interior of Peru, that had been discovered and described by Dr. Armand. And I could see no reason why, somewhere in the wild interior of Guatemala or southern Mexico, a similar colony of the Mayans might not also exist. For that matter, here was this village where I sat, where the old priest Katchilcan still held sway, where the ancient temple was still in daily use, where the sacred fires still burned continuously, where Tohil the Rumbler-god and Xibalba the Great Snake were still worshipped, where the people still lived in the past, and yet neither hidden nor secreted from the rest of the world. If such villages and people could survive almost unaltered, was there anything improbable in the idea of others, entirely cut off from the world, retaining even more of their ancient life? At any rate, of one thing I was convinced. My codex was the record of the prophecy of Kukulcan, it was Maya, and it was of the Old Empire. All I had journeyed so far to learn was now clear. I possessed a priceless document of the Mayas, a codex more valuable than any in existence, and if Katchilcan had not drawn upon his imagination, the actual work of that semi-mythical herod, the Plumed Serpent, Kukulcan, or as he was known to the Aztecs, Quetzalcoatl, himself. I was elated, overjoyed. But I wondered about that story of the isolated colony, and I wondered just how much old Katchilcan really knew, how much he had left unsaid.

"And did the prophecy fall out as told?" I asked. "Do the survivors of your race still worship their old gods and await the coming of the token? And where O, most Wise One, is this place called Mictolan?"

The old fellow's eyes held a far away look, as though he were gazing into the past and seeing the glories of the civilization of his ancestors. But at my words he came back to earth and turned towards me, his deep-set eyes, like pin-points of fire, seeming to pierce my innermost thoughts.

"That I cannot say, my lord," he replied. "But being a prophecy of the mighty Kukulcan, of a surety it must have been fulfilled. Did not my people vanish? Did they not forget their gods? Are they not scattered? Do they not speak the Pipil, the Kitcho, the Zutugil, the Katchiquel and other tongues? Why then should I doubt that they still dwell in Mictolan? But where that spot may be, I know not. Upon the book that my lord has, a part of the symbol is missing. But I can read that it is to the north and west." He waved his skinny arm in a wide, all-embracing gesture towards the endless mountains. "And, my lord," he continued, lowering his voice, "maybe of this I should not speak; mayhap I have said too much already. But to him who has the Master's book, I feel I may speak freely. And my lord is not like other white men. To him has been given the token, and he must be the son of the sons of Kukulcan who also was bearded and white of skin. But even though my lord is not of the sons of the Master, yet all

men, white or red, are brothers at heart, although some are bad and seek only to rob and destroy. But to you, my lord, may I speak with freedom, for you come with the pledge of the great priest of your people, of him whom I know and trust as a brother though we worship different gods.

"Though I cannot say where lies this place of Mictolan, yet in the book it is written that great bars were placed in the way and cleverly was it hidden, and magic surrounds it. To reach it one must pass through the Valley of Death, through the Tunnel of the Serpents, through the pit of the great Zo'olnal (alligator); and even then one must cross the eight deserts with the raging whirlwind that cuts the solid rock, and must face the demon Ixputeque and the fiend Netzpehua in the realm of hot ashes and the two blazing mountains, and at last must enter the cave of bats and cross the bridge of life. Did I not say, my lord, that I would give half my life to possess the book of Kukulcan? And why, my lord? Ah, for it is foretold that to him who has the book and comes by it by honest means, the way to Mictolan shall be made easy, and he shall be welcomed as a great lord and shall gain great peace and happiness and shall abide forever with the gods. So, my lord, I was told by my father, who had it from his father and from his father's father before him for many generations, aye, till one goes back even to those far-off days when all this land was of my people, and the old gods ruled and walked among men, and sacred fires burned before all the altars, and sons of the Plumed Serpent sat in their palaces."

Very impressive were the old priest's words. There was something indescribably convincing about his manner, perhaps something hypnotic. There, in the ancient room, with the ancient priest so like a Mayan sculptured figure, with the still more ancient codex—the Book of Kukulcan—in my hands, there seemed nothing improbable, nothing incongruous in his story. The prophecy seemed very real. Though under any other circumstances, among any other surroundings, I might have scoffed at it all, might have put the whole thing down as a fanciful myth, yet there, with the words of Katchilcan in my ears, somehow I felt a conviction that I was destined to find that hidden spot called Mictolan, that the whole chain of circumstances, from finding the codex in the book at Vigo to my coming to this village and meeting Katchilcan, seemed destiny and fate, and that I would fulfill that destiny.

Strange as it may appear now, at the time it never occurred to me that I might fail, that, having no definite knowledge of the site of Mictolan, if for that matter there was such a spot, I might never find it. And, quite as though I had planned to do so from the beginning, I at once set about making preparations to start on what, to me in my sober senses, would have appeared the wildest of wild goose chases, the most preposterous of adventures.

## CHAPTER III

### The Valley of Death

OLD Katchilcan seemed to take it as a matter of course that I would set out to carry the codex to Mictolan. That, however, was only natural, for he believed implicitly in the prophecy, the legend and the codex, and so believing, he had equal faith in my being the chosen means of carrying the foreordained word to the hidden people. In fact, as the days passed, I became absolutely convinced myself that there was far more than a foundation of fact in the priest's story. There was the codex. If I could obtain the key to it from Katchilcan, I could decipher much of it myself.

In fact, now that I examined it from the new viewpoint, I marveled that one of the many experts who had studied it, had not deciphered it. To be sure they had come very close to solving the riddle. They had recognized it as dealing with Kukulcan, they had declared it a record of a migration and a place, they had decided that it was a combination of religious, historical and geographical symbols, and they had even suggested that it was a key to some other codex. And in these surmises they had been correct. It dealt with all—Kukulcan, a migration, a locality, a prophecy, and it was a key or a symbol, though the most important part of that symbol—the location of the hidden city of Mictolan, was missing.

I would have given a lot to have had that missing edge of the papyrus, but there was no sense in bemoaning its loss. And as I studied the codex, and, in the light of Katchilcan's reading of it, understood it better and better, I realized why the scientists had been so puzzled over its peculiar features, its resemblance to both Aztec and Mayan codices, for it dealt with a prophecy common to both races. Kukulcan and the Aztec Quetzalcoatl were identical, and I was convinced that the precious document was prepared in the style of the picture records of the semi-mythical Toltecs, so that, in case it came into the hands of either Aztecs or Mayas, its meaning and importance would be equally plain. Now that I was sure of the immense scientific and monetary value of the codex, I was determined that no harm should befall it, and for several days I busied myself making a very accurate copy. I then packed the original in a wrapping of oiled silk and sealed it in an aluminum container.



*I saw with amazement that in his outstretched hands he held a copy of the codex*

Meanwhile, I had made every possible enquiry regarding the district to the northwest and, with the aid of Katchilcan, had scoured the services of several Indians who claimed to be familiar with the country and all routes leading into the district. But they confessed that their knowledge was limited to a comparatively short distance. Beyond that all was unknown, unexplored, and regarded with superstitious fear by the natives. Indeed, I was surprised that I could find any Indians who would accompany me, but no doubt the old priest had had a hand in it. In all probability he assured them that I was under the direct protection of their gods, perhaps he had even hinted that I was on a sacred mission. At last all was in readiness. Supplies of maize, cacao, cassava and dried venison had been prepared, and hammocks had been made. These, with the outfit which I had brought, were enough to see my party through an expedition of at least two months, by which time I would either have succeeded, or failing, would return to the village. So, having written a long letter to Fray José, in which I told him of the results of my visit to Katchilcan and of my hare-brained undertaking, I left the village with Katchilcan's blessing, and headed for the distant mountains.

For several days it was fairly easy traveling. There were many trails, the country was fairly level, and the forests were open. But the district seemed absolutely uninhabited. Then, as we began to ascend the foothills, the trails became fewer and at last vanished; the country became wilder, and we were obliged to go entirely by the general direction and the easiest route. Often large streams, deep ravines or impassable cliffs barred our way, and we were forced to make long detours. But ever nearer and nearer the great mountains loomed ahead, and ever steeper became our way. Then one day we came suddenly upon the ruins of what had once been a great temple. I became hopeful again. Here was proof that the district had once been inhabited, that the Mayas had been here. Carefully I examined the sculptured lintels of the massive doorways searching for date-glyphs.\* The few that had remained unobliterated by time were chipped, flaked and partly effaced, but among them I found two that bore dates that proved the building to go back to the Old Empire. That was reassuring. If there was any truth in the old legend, if the Mayas had migrated this way towards the hidden city, it was reasonable to suppose that their migration took years to accomplish, that they erected temples and monuments on the way. And almost daily we came upon monuments; sometimes rudely carved rocks; sometimes stelae covered with figures and symbols; and at other times remains of buildings. And as I examined these, as I realized what stupendous labor must have gone into the cutting of the great stone blocks, the time that must have been expended upon carving the intricate ornate decorations that covered every inch of their surfaces, the ever present mystery of how it was accomplished came back to me with redoubled force.

By what means, by what magic had the ancient people accomplished feats in stone-cutting, in sculpture that we, with modern methods and steel tools, could not duplicate in years of unremitting labor? Was I fated to solve that riddle? What a scientific triumph it would be if I did succeed in finding an isolated city of the Mayas, a spot where they still carried on their ancient arts, where I could actually watch the process by which they accomplished their wonderful feats!

Filled with such conjectures, possessed with a strange feeling of assurance, I led my Indians onward.

\* Engraved characters disclosing or registering dates.

IT was the nineteenth day after leaving Katchilcan's village, and we had been toiling steadily up a steep mountain side. Suddenly the forest ended and we halted in amazement. Before us the flat mountain top had been cleared, and in the centre stood a low, massive building of a type I had never before seen. Filled with scientific interest, at the time giving no thought to the peculiar fact that the vegetation had been cleared away, I hurried forward, intent only on examining the strange temple. It was in remarkably good condition and, anxious to examine its interior, I stepped through the huge doorway flanked by carved stone columns representing conventionalized jaguars with serpents' heads. A strange odor filled the interior. Sniffing suspiciously, trying to identify the smell, I stood motionless, waiting for my eyes to become accustomed to the semi-darkness. Then it came to me; it was the odor of burning flesh. What did it mean? Was it possible that?—yes, it must be—the temple must have been recently used. Memory of the clearing, of the condition of the building, swept over me. The temple was still in use; somewhere, very recently, a sacrifice had been made upon an altar within the building. Somewhere in the vicinity there must be Indians, who still worshipped their gods at the ancient temple. I glanced about. Opposite to where I stood was another doorway. I stepped forward towards it. The smell of burning flesh was stronger. I reached the doorway, peered within and halted in my tracks, staring agape at what I saw. On a raised dais was the gigantic image of the god Zozzilaha, grotesque, hideous, with his death's head, his outspread bat-like wings, his misshapen body. Before him upon a sacrificial altar of polished jasper was the half-consumed body of a girl resting on the dull red embers of a fire. But I scarcely saw the god of the sacrifice, for prostrate before the image and the altar were dozens of naked Indians.

To enter that sacred spot would be to meet with instant death. Only the fact that the savages' attentions were riveted upon the god had prevented me from being seen. At any instant I might be discovered. Quickly, with fast beating heart, I stepped back. My elbow knocked against the wall, a bit of dislodged masonry rattled to the ground. Instantly every Indian turned in my direction; a savage shout came from their throats, and leaping to their feet, they rushed at me. Why I was not struck down, killed instantly and offered as a sacrifice to their outraged god, I shall never know. Perhaps they preferred to capture me alive, to torture me. Perhaps I was the first white man they had ever seen and they were in some awe or fear of me. Whatever the reason, I was not harmed. I was overpowered before I could resist, though to have attempted to resist would have been hopeless. I was bound, trussed up, and with triumphant shouts was borne into the room and thrown upon the floor before the altar with its gruesome sacrifice.

Was this to be the end of my quest? Was I to be sacrificed upon that altar? Even in my extremity and my terror—for I admit I was terrified—I found myself wondering about the identity of my captors. In fact, I began to wonder whether they might not be the people I had come to find; if, through the centuries, they had not degenerated, reverted to semi-savagery, and if the hidden city was not a myth and the old temple all that remained of what had once been a real town. My speculations were cut short by one who appeared to be the priest or chief. He wore numerous gold ornaments, a feather headdress, and, if anything, was more savage-looking than his fellows. He addressed me angrily, but I could not understand a word of what he said. I tried him with Zutugil, with Spanish, with Nahuatl; all without success. He grew impatient, shook me by the shoulders, and as he did so, the copy of my codex fell

from the breast pocket of my coat. As he pounced upon it, I mentally thanked Heaven that it was not the original. For an instant, the savage stared at the strip of paper. Then, with a wild cry, he leaped forward, a long-bladed obsidian dagger gleaming in his upraised hand. I felt sure my last minute had come. But instead of plunging the weapon into my breast, he slashed through the cords that bound me, and prostrated himself before me. I glanced about, rose to my feet. Everywhere the Indians were on their knees, their foreheads touching the ground. Whoever they were, whatever their race, they knew the meaning of the codex. The Book of Kukulcan had saved me.

Slowly they rose, glancing apprehensively at me, regarding me as they would a superior being—which is exactly what I seemed to them. But I had no mind to remain in that chamber of human sacrifice. Picking up the codex, I strode to the door and into the open air, followed by the silent, half-terrified, half-wondering, but wholly subdued savages.

To my dismay, my Indians were nowhere to be seen. Nothing remained but my bags and packages, which were where they were dropped. No doubt they had heard the savage yells from the temple, and having no desire to become martyrs in my behalf, they had taken to their heels.

What was I to do? Without porters to transport my outfit, I could not go on. For that matter, I could not turn back. I was stranded, deserted among these wild Indians of the mountains.

THE chief solved the problem for me. Timidly approaching me, he pointed to my abandoned baggage; by graphic gestures, he indicated the flight of my men. Then he pointed at his companions, grinned, again pointed at the baggage, and swinging about, waved his hands in the direction of the higher mountains. No one could have misunderstood him. He realized what had occurred and he was offering to send his men with me as porters. Probably he felt that he was being greatly honored by serving me; very likely he felt that he must make amends for treating me as he had. At any rate, I indicated my acceptance. Springing forward, the chief himself shouldered the largest package as his fellows almost fought for the chance of carrying the others. I did not know where those savages lived; whether they had a village near, whether they came from afar; or whether they dwelt in huts in the forest and visited the temple only to make sacrifices to the ancient Mayan god. Neither did I know how they knew my purpose or my route, unless the chief deciphered the codex, but they seemed to know the direction to follow and, thinking that possibly they had some inkling of the location of the city of the Book of Kukulcan, I followed after.

For three days we climbed mountains, descended precipitous slopes, waded rushing streams, struggled through jungles. I could not converse with the Indians except by signs, but we managed to get along. They made the camps, secured game, caught fish, cooked the food and carried the burdens. And when, on one occasion, we came suddenly upon a tapir, and whipping out my revolver I shot the beast, I had ample evidence that they had never before been in contact with white men. With wild cries they dropped their loads, fell flat upon the ground, and fairly grovelled at my feet. And when, after some difficulty, I got them up and they examined the dead tapir, they instantly prostrated themselves a second time. They had never seen or heard firearms—of that I was certain—and I had but to touch the butt of my pistol to cause them to shake with terror and hob their heads to the earth. To them it seemed supernatural; I controlled the thunder and lightning,

IT was the nineteenth day after leaving Katchilcan's village, and we had been toiling steadily up a steep mountain side. Suddenly the forest ended and we halted in amazement. Before us the flat mountain top had been cleared, and in the centre stood a low, massive building of a type I had never before seen. Filled with scientific interest, at the time giving no thought to the peculiar fact that the vegetation had been cleared away, I hurried forward, intent only on examining the strange temple. It was in remarkably good condition and, anxious to examine its interior, I stepped through the huge doorway flanked by carved stone columns representing conventionalized jaguars with serpents' heads. A strange odor filled the interior. Sniffing suspiciously, trying to identify the smell, I stood motionless, waiting for my eyes to become accustomed to the semi-darkness. Then it came to me; it was the odor of burning flesh. What did it mean? Was it possible that?—yes, it must be—the temple must have been recently used. Memory of the clearing, of the condition of the building, swept over me. The temple was still in use; somewhere, very recently, a sacrifice had been made upon an altar within the building. Somewhere in the vicinity there must be Indians, who still worshipped their gods at the ancient temple. I glanced about. Opposite to where I stood was another doorway. I stepped forward towards it. The smell of burning flesh was stronger. I reached the doorway, peered within and halted in my tracks, staring agape at what I saw. On a raised dais was the gigantic image of the god Zotzilaha, grotesque, hideous, with his death's head, his outspread bat-like wings, his misshapen body. Before him upon a sacrificial altar of polished jasper was the half-consumed body of a girl resting on the dull red embers of a fire. But I scarcely saw the god of the sacrifice, for prostrate before the image and the altar were dozens of naked Indians.

To enter that sacred spot would be to meet with instant death. Only the fact that the savages' attentions were riveted upon the god had prevented me from being seen. At any instant I might be discovered. Quickly, with fast beating heart, I stepped back. My elbow knocked against the wall, a bit of dislodged masonry rattled to the ground. Instantly every Indian turned in my direction; a savage shout came from their throats, and leaping to their feet, they rushed at me. Why I was not struck down, killed instantly and offered as a sacrifice to their outraged god, I shall never know. Perhaps they preferred to capture me alive, to torture me. Perhaps I was the first white man they had ever seen and they were in some awe or fear of me. Whatever the reason, I was not harmed. I was overpowered before I could resist, though to have attempted to resist would have been hopeless. I was bound, trussed up, and with triumphant shouts was borne into the room and thrown upon the floor before the altar with its gruesome sacrifice.

Was this to be the end of my quest? Was I to be sacrificed upon that altar? Even in my extremity and my terror—for I admit I was terrified—I found myself wondering about the identity of my captors. In fact, I began to wonder whether they might not be the people I had come to find; if, through the centuries, they had not degenerated, reverted to semi-savagery, and if the hidden city was not a myth and the old temple all that remained of what had once been a real town. My speculations were cut short by one who appeared to be the priest or chief. He wore numerous gold ornaments, a feather headdress, and, if anything, was more savage-looking than his fellows. He addressed me angrily, but I could not understand a word of what he said. I tried him with Zutugil, with Spanish, with Nahuatl; all without success. He grew impatient, shook me by the shoulders, and as he did so, the copy of my codex fell

from the breast pocket of my coat. As he pounced upon it, I mentally thanked Heaven that it was not the original. For an instant, the savage stared at the strip of paper. Then, with a wild cry, he leaped forward, a long-bladed obsidian dagger gleaming in his upraised hand. I felt sure my last minute had come. But instead of plunging the weapon into my breast, he slashed through the cords that bound me, and prostrated himself before me. I glanced about, rose to my feet. Everywhere the Indians were on their knees, their foreheads touching the ground. Whoever they were, whatever their race, they knew the meaning of the codex. The Book of Kukulcan had saved me.

Slowly they rose, glancing apprehensively at me, regarding me as they would a superior being—which is exactly what I seemed to them. But I had no mind to remain in that chamber of human sacrifice. Picking up the codex, I strode to the door and into the open air, followed by the silent, half-terrified, half-wondering, but wholly subdued savages.

To my dismay, my Indians were nowhere to be seen. Nothing remained but my bags and packages, which were where they were dropped. No doubt they had heard the savage yells from the temple, and having no desire to become martyrs in my behalf, they had taken to their heels.

What was I to do? Without porters to transport my outfit, I could not go on. For that matter, I could not turn back. I was stranded, deserted among these wild Indians of the mountains.

THE chief solved the problem for me. Timidly approaching me, he pointed to my abandoned dunnage; by graphic gestures, he indicated the flight of my men. Then he pointed at his companions, grinned, again pointed at the baggage, and swinging about, waved his hands in the direction of the higher mountains. No one could have misunderstood him. He realized what had occurred and he was offering to send his men with me as porters. Probably he felt that he was being greatly honored by serving me; very likely he felt that he must make amends for treating me as he had. At any rate, I indicated my acceptance. Springing forward, the chief himself shouldered the largest package as his fellows almost fought for the chance of carrying the others. I did not know where those savages lived; whether they had a village near, whether they came from afar; or whether they dwell in huts in the forest and visited the temple only to make sacrifices to the ancient Mayan god. Neither did I know how they knew my purpose or my route, unless the chief deciphered the codex, but they seemed to know the direction to follow and, thinking that possibly they had some inkling of the location of the city of the Book of Kukulcan, I followed after.

For three days we climbed mountains, descended precipitous slopes, waded rushing streams, struggled through jungles. I could not converse with the Indians except by signs, but we managed to get along. They made the camps, secured game, caught fish, cooked the food and carried the burdens. And when, on one occasion, we came suddenly upon a tapir, and whipping out my revolver I shot the beast, I had ample evidence that they had never before been in contact with white men. With wild cries they dropped their loads, fell flat upon the ground, and fairly grovelled at my feet. And when, after some difficulty, I got them up and they examined the dead tapir, they instantly prostrated themselves a second time. They had never seen or heard firearms—of that I was certain—and I had but to touch the butt of my pistol to cause them to shake with terror and bob their heads to the earth. To them it seemed supernatural; I controlled the thunder and lightning,



sacrifice! It would be of no further use to me; in a moment more we would both be swept to our deaths.

Still he held the codex. Why did he wait? Fascinated, I watched him. The air vibrated to the terrific flood that was now raging in the cañon, the very ground shook. In the darkness, the upflung, boiling waves leaped white and ghastly. Now the hissing, raging maelstrom was curling about the chief's feet. Still he remained there, shouting or chanting or praying—I know not which. A moment more and the irresistible tide would boil into the cavern, would overwhelm us. And then a strange thing happened. Below the Indian's outstretched hands, with the paper spread between them, the water seemed suddenly to recede; the roar diminished, the thunder died in the distance. Slowly but surely the rushing torrent dropped back towards the river bed. The deafening turmoil died to the normal rush of the stream, and the chief, turning, folded the codex and returned it to me. We were saved, saved as if by a miracle. No doubt it was a mere coincidence; certainly the codex and the chief's invocations had nothing to do with it. The flood had reached its apex before it could wash into the cave and destroy us. But to the Indian's mind the Book of Kukulcan was responsible. Even the forces of nature must bow to the will of the Plumed-Serpent god. And somehow, despite my common sense and my reasoning, there was something about it that even to me savored of the supernatural.

Morning dawned at last, dawned to find us two alone, marooned in the cañon, with only a fraction of our supplies remaining. We were in a desperate situation. Our only course, our only chance was to go back, to return whence we had come. Soon we found that even that was impossible.

The gulley down which we had come had vanished; only a smooth precipice remained. The chief seemed unperturbed. Perhaps he still had sublime faith in the power of the Book of Kukulcan to safeguard us; perhaps it was merely the stoicism of his race. Gesturing in the direction of down-stream he shouldered his load and led the way. A mile farther on we came upon the body of one of the Indians, battered, mangled, the flesh torn in shreds from the bones. Three others were found later, and as we passed the last, for we could not bury the bodies in the bare rocky cañon, a sudden thought flashed through my mind. The Valley of Death! Was this it? Were the words of Katchikan being borne out? I shivered a bit at the thought. His words came vividly back to me: "But for him who holds the Book of Kukulcan, the way will be made easy." Surely, if ever a place could be called the Valley of Death, this terrible cañon was it, and assuredly to me and to the chief who had held the codex in his hands above the raging waters, the way had "been made easy" as compared with the fate of the four Indians. But would the "way be made easy" for the rest of our journey? Would we eventually find a way out?

#### CHAPTER IV

##### Through the Tunnel of the Serpents

MY question was soon answered. The cañon narrowed and swung sharply to one side. Rounding the bend, we halted in dismay. Before us the walls met in a sheer cliff. At its base was a yawning black opening into which the river poured like a gigantic mill-race. The way was barred; we were in a cul-de-sac.

We were trapped, only one slender chance of escape remained: to retrace our steps, follow up the stream and trust to finding some lower spot, some slope or side gulley, near the head of the cañon. The chief realized our predicament and our one chance as quickly as I did.

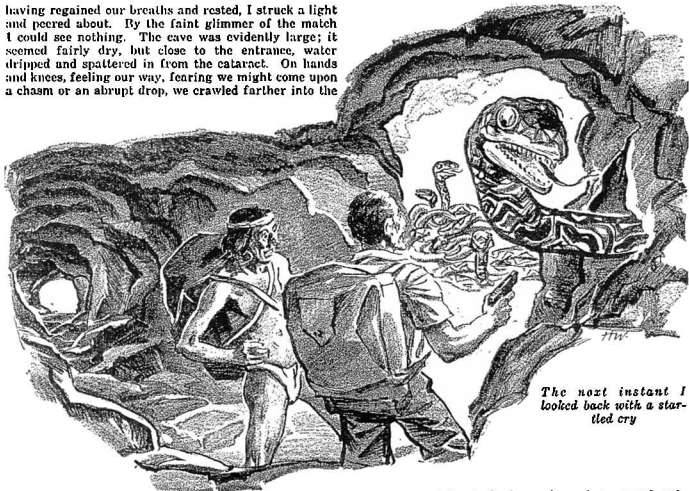
Without a word, he wheeled and led the way up stream. Wearily, slowly—for walking over the water-worn ledges and rough, loose cobbles was torture—we stumbled up the cañon, our backs aching with our burdens. Mile after mile we traveled, not halting even for a midday meal, for our one thought, our one desire was to escape from that Valley of Death before darkness overtook us and we were forced to spend another night in the fearful place. The cañon seemed endless, though it was probably not over twenty miles in length, and it was mid-afternoon before we passed the cave that had been our shelter the night before.

Hurrying, stumbling, slipping, cursing as the way became rougher and the grade steeper, we forced our blistered, bruised feet onward. The walls of the great cleft drew nearer and nearer together, until they seemed to overhang our heads, and we were in semi-darkness in the depths. Presently, from ahead, came a new sound, a low reverberating roar, and a mile or so farther on we came in sight of the head of the cañon, and our hearts sank in dismay. Once more we were faced with a mighty wall of rock down which the stream poured in a series of cataracts. There seemed no escape, no hope. We were doomed. But as I stared at the flashing, roaring falls, a faint hope rose in me. On either side of the descending water, the cliff had been worn and cut into rough, irregular masses. It might be possible to ascend the precipice in that spot. I tried to explain it to the chief, to indicate my intention, and presently he grasped my meaning and nodded. But to climb that perpendicular wall even with the rough crags and footholds would be utterly impossible with the heavy packs upon our shoulders. We must abandon our loads or resign ourselves to remaining in the cañon to die like trapped rats.

Ripping open the packages, I filled my pockets with the most essential things, made up two small packs, and strapping these to the shoulders of my comrade and myself we commenced the difficult and perilous ascent. It was terrible work. The rock was rotten, and at any instant might give way and precipitate us to the rocks below. Inch by inch we struggled upward, often so close to the falls that we were drenched, at other times straddling and crawling far to one side, clinging with toes and fingers, our hands torn and bleeding. Twenty, forty, fifty feet we ascended, when we came to a narrow ledge or shelf running diagonally across the face of the cliff. To the right the ledge dwindled to nothing; above us there was not a crevice, not a finger hold in sight; to the left, the shelf vanished beneath the column of water falling from far above. Our only chance was to pass beneath the fall and trust to finding a passable way upward on the farther side.

There was no time to lose, the bottom of the cañon was already hidden in blackness, the sun had set, and to be caught by darkness upon the face of the cliff would mean certain death. Flattening ourselves against the wall, edging along with the utmost caution, we crept along the narrow ledge and beneath the cataract. Spray and dripping water drenched me to the skin and poured from the naked body of the Indian; the rock underfoot was slippery with slime and moss, but the ledge widened as we proceeded. We were half way through, the worst of the passage was over when with my outstretched left hand, I felt the solid rock come to an end, and an instant later, I found myself at the entrance to a dark cavern in the cliff. I peered within. All was blackness. But here at least was a refuge where we might pass the night. It was far better than attempting to scale the rest of the cliff in the darkness, and utterly done, famished, and spent, I stepped within the cave, threw down my pack and dropped to the floor. Like my own shadow, the chief did the same. Presently,

having regained our breaths and rested, I struck a light and peered about. By the faint glimmer of the match I could see nothing. The cave was evidently large; it seemed fairly dry, but close to the entrance, water dripped and splattered in from the cataract. On hands and knees, feeling our way, fearing we might come upon a chasm or an abrupt drop, we crawled farther into the



*The next instant I looked back with a startled cry*

cave. Then, having reached a spot beyond the reach of spray and water, we rummaged in our packs and ravenously devoured most of the few scraps of dried meat, the sour tortillas and the parched corn they contained. To build a fire was impossible. We had no fuel, nothing that could be burned, and in the dense blackness we threw ourselves upon the bare rocky floor and dropped instantly to sleep.

I awoke cramped, aching in every joint and muscle. But it was broad daylight outside the cave, a soft light streamed into the entrance, and by its faint illumination I could distinguish our surroundings. Less than a yard above our heads was the arched roof, on either side were smooth water-worn walls, but in the rear the tunnel-like cave vanished in impenetrable blackness.

Everything about it—the smoothly-cut rock walls, roof and floor—the absence of debris and litter, the shape of the cavern, indicated that it had once formed a subterranean channel for the river, or for a portion of it. Perhaps even now it formed an overflow for the waters when in flood. And as this dawned upon me, a new hope rose in my breast. Perhaps, possibly, the cavern might connect with the open air. By following it, we might come out above the falls. There were one hundred chances to one against it; we might find it ended in narrow cracks or fissures; it might lead to a perpendicular shaft; it might bring us to the verge of an underground pool or stream. But the one chance was worth trying, and, having breakfasted upon the last of our provisions, we started on our exploration of the tunnel.

**F**OR an hour or more we crept forward. The tunnel remained the same size; it led gradually upward, and my hopes that it would lead us to freedom increased

as we proceeded. And when, after what seemed endless crawling, we saw a faint light ahead, I felt sure we would soon be safely in the outer air. Brighter and brighter the light became, and we hurried forward. The light came from above and illuminated a mass of fallen rock that half-filled the tunnel before us.

As we reached the debris and I started to scramble over the stones, the air suddenly vibrated with a strange whirring sound that seemed to issue from every side. For an instant I hesitated, listening, yet vaguely conscious that I had heard that same sound before. The next instant I leaped back with a startled cry. From a crevice among the rocks, a great flat, arrow-shaped head had darted out, had struck viciously at me, and had missed me by the fraction of an inch. Now I knew. The place was a den of immense rattlesnakes!

The chief fairly shook with terror, his eyes rolled and he glanced furtively to right and left, seeking some spot where his naked skin would be out of reach of the angry serpents that now were wriggling, coiling, swarming among the rocks about us. Again the prophecy of Kukulkan had been borne out; here indeed was the tunnel of the serpents!

To go back was useless, the passage led only to that dismal cañon, and even had we wished to do so we could not return. Already, dozens of the great diamond-marked snakes were coiled with threatening, swaying heads and vibrating rattles behind us. To go forward seemed equally impossible. We could not even remain where we were, for at any instant a serpent might appear from the crevices beneath our feet. Yet to reach the opening, to gain the exit to the tunnel that now was clearly before us, we must cross a dozen yards of the serpents' den. Whichever way we turned, we seemed doomed to a terrible death. Then a seeming miracle happened. There was a sharp squelch, dirt and pebbles rattled down from above, and the next second a peccary

tumbled into the tunnel. Snorting, squealing, leaping about, the angry, terrified creature dashed hither and thither, utterly unmindful of our presence, every bristle on his thick neck on end, his tusks clashing, his wicked eyes gleaming, froth drooling from his upcurled lips. The deadly enemy of all snakes, fearless in attacking the most venomous serpents, the wild pigs or peccaries of the American jungles will go out of their way to kill snakes and seem to go absolutely mad when they are near them. And this peccary had accidentally, or possibly intentionally, slipped into a den of snakes. In a perfect frenzy he dashed at every snake in sight, moving with incredible speed, slashing at them with his razor-edged tusks, leaping upon them with his sharp-pointed hoofs. In less time than it takes to tell it, the place was filled with dead and dying, mangled and headless serpents, and those remaining alive had their attentions fully occupied with the maddened pig and his insatiable lust to kill. Springing forward, we reached the opening, and grasping roots, digging our toes and hands into the rotten rock, we scrambled up and drew ourselves panting upon the ground under the forest trees.

For a time the grunts and squeals of the peccary came from the depths of the pit, but gradually they ceased and, crawling to the verge of the hole, I peered down. But the creature to whom we owed our lives had vanished.

Perhaps he knew another way out, perhaps he had dashed down the tunnel to the waterfall and had scrambled up by some narrow trail that only a peccary could follow. But to the chief there was but one explanation of the pig's opportune arrival and its disappearance as soon as we had been saved. To his primitive mind, the peccary was the direct instrument of Kukulcan, a god or spirit in porcine form. Plucking a sharp thorn from a nearby vine, he pierced his tongue, smeared the blood from the wound upon a pebble and cast it into the rattlesnakes' den. He had paid his debt, had made a blood sacrifice to his gods.

Still, we were not out of our imminent peril. We were in an unknown forest, completely at a loss as to which way to turn, without supplies or food.

I was ravenously hungry and I presume my Indian companion was as famished as I was. The first thing to be done was to secure something to eat, and to do this in the tropical forest is not such a simple matter. Had the chief possessed weapons, he no doubt could have secured game of some sort in a short time; but he had lost his bow and arrows somewhere in the cañon; he could not use my revolver, and our only chance appeared to lie in stalking some bird or quadruped that I could kill with my pistol. And I well knew, from past experiences, that game is always scarcest when it is wanted the most. Luck, however, was with us still. We flushed a big wild turkey from her nest. As she ruffled her feathers and gobbled defiance at us, I brought her down with an easy shot, and to my delight—though it mattered little to my companion—the eggs proved fresh. I still had matches in a watertight case, and presently a fire was blazing and the appetizing odor of broiling turkey filled our nostrils.

IT was while we were dining on the half-scorched, but delicious-tasting meat, that I made an important discovery. Hitherto I had been able to make no headway in my efforts to converse with my companion. I had tried again and again to learn something of his dialect, but without success, although I had acquired a few simple words and could now and then catch the meaning of what he said. I had tried every Indian dialect I could remember—in vain. But now, as I gnawed a drumstick of the turkey, it brought to mem-

ory a meal that I had eaten under somewhat similar circumstances in Honduras years before. And with that memory came sudden recollection of the Tecun dialect I had once known. Some of the words and phrases came back to me, and with no least expectation that he would understand them, I repeated them to the chief. He dropped the bone he was gnawing, a gleam of understanding illuminated his face, and to my unbounded joy and amazement, he answered me in Tecun.

No one who has never been alone with a fellow man and unable to converse with him can appreciate what it meant to be able to talk with the savage beside me. To be sure, his knowledge of the Tecun was as limited as my own, but we could understand each other, could express thoughts, could ask questions and give replies and could even converse to a limited extent. The chief was as pleased as myself. He informed me his name was Maliche, that he and his tribe dwelt in a large village near the "Great Water," which I took to be Lake Itzaltango, and that they were returning from a war with the Mitzes and were celebrating their victory by making an offering of one of their prisoners, when I had come upon them in the ancient temple. I tried my best to learn if he and his people were of the Maya race, if he believed in the Maya gods, but my command of the Tecun was too limited. But from the manner in which he had behaved at his first sight of my codex, and his action when the flood had threatened us in the cañon, I felt sure that the gods of the Mayas were his and that his ancestors had been under Mayan rule, if not of the Maya race. It was far more important for us to find food and to proceed on our way than to discuss racial affinities and religions, however. The first problem was soon solved by Maliche. In less than an hour, he had fashioned a crude but serviceable bow and several long arrows of cane tipped with palm wood, and if I had had any doubts as to the ability of my companion to provide food for us with his hastily manufactured weapons, they were soon dispelled, for within twenty minutes after we had started on our way, he had killed a small deer.

But even the savage instinct and attainments of Maliche could not solve the question of our route. To



Unmindful, the peccary dashed back and forth among the group of poisonous snakes

be sure, our direction had been towards the northwest when we had come to the cañon, and it was a simple matter to continue in a northwesterly direction. But we had no means of knowing whether we were five, fifteen or fifty miles north, east, south or west of the spot where we had descended into the Valley of Death, as I now mentally called it.

Strangely enough, it never occurred to me to turn back, to try to retrace our way toward civilization. I seemed to be urged onward, drawn by some power or force, and to this day that, to my mind, was perhaps the most remarkable feature of the whole astounding and incomprehensible adventure. To proceed through an unknown country with no outfit, no comforts, practically no necessities of life; with no provisions except what food could be met on the way; to wander aimlessly for an unknown goal would have been nothing short of madness, viewed from a point of common sense. Yet I, an old hand at tropical exploration, with years of experience, was doing what, in any other, I should have condemned as suicidal. Yet at the time, I was filled with a sublime confidence and faith. Except when face to face with some imminent peril, I felt no fear of the outcome and, looking back upon those days of wanderings, I feel positive that some power far greater than my own will led me onward. It may sound ridiculous, fanciful, superstitious, even incredible. But in view of the many incredible happenings that followed, nothing to me will ever appear incredible or impossible again.

But I am getting ahead of my story and must go back to the point where Maliche and I were wandering through the vast forest of the mountains.

Had we been able to get a view of the country about, we might have recognized landmarks, might even have caught a glimpse of the distant volcanoes which, I was convinced, were the two "blazing mountains" indicated on the codex.

But we were hemmed in by higher ridges than the one we were on, and we were, moreover, steadily descending, getting deeper and deeper between the surrounding mountains. By mid-afternoon we were in a valley covered with dense jungle and giant bamboos. The ground was wet and soggy; here and there were pools of stagnant water, and often we were forced to make long detours around impassable swamps. To camp in such a place was out of the question, and we pushed on, hoping to reach drier and higher land before nightfall. Suddenly Maliche, who was leading, sprang back with a half smothered cry of mingled fear and surprise. Reaching his side, I peered ahead.

**S**TRETCHING from the edge of the bamboos, through which we had been forcing our way, was a small lake, its waters inky-black and as smooth as oil, a dismal, ominous-looking pool made far more dismal and more ominous by the presence of a gigantic stone image rising from the very centre of the lake. Instantly I recognized it. The half-recumbent figure with flexed knees, upraised head and with hands upon stomach was unmistakable. It was a colossal image of Chac-Mool the Mayan rain-god. But it was different from any statue of Chac-Mool I had ever seen, for it rested upon the back of an enormous crocodile with open, hideous jaws and upraised tail startlingly life-like in its details. Fascinated by the marvel of the stupendous piece of sculpture, for it appeared to have been cut from a solid mass of living rock that jutted from the lake, I stared at it, only half conscious that Maliche had prostrated himself before it. The next instant I leaped back with a shout of terror. Within a dozen feet of where I stood, the black water had broken, an enormous head with unwinking green eyes and long jaws set with gleaming teeth had appeared, and with a rush, the huge saurian

had dashed towards me. I was only just in time to seize the praying Maliche by his hair and drag him to one side. Carried half his twenty-foot length out of the water by the force of his rush, the crocodile's jaws met in a crash within six inches of the chief's legs.

And the horrible monster was not alone. Everywhere the placid black surface of the lake was being churned into waves by dozens, hundreds of immense, ravenous crocodiles all rushing towards us. Neither were we safe from their attacks on land. Snapping their jaws, lashing to right and left with their ponderous tails, racing over the muddy ground far faster than I would have imagined their short legs could carry them, the horde of monsters came after us. I ran as I had never run before. Bursting through bamboo thickets, torn by thorns, cut by razor grass, stumbling, plunging into the mire, tripping over snake-like vines and roots, we raced for dry land, and only ceased when we had gained the hillside and dropped exhausted, out of possible reach of the demoniacal beasts that were still thrashing and snapping in the dense jungle beneath us.

Truly old Katchikan had been right when he had said that "great bars were placed in the way to Mictolan." And an involuntary shudder ran through me, a strange sensation of superstitious fears caused my scalp to tingle, as I realized how literally all he had said had come to pass! The Valley of Death, the Tunnel of the Serpents, the Pit of Zotianal (the sacred alligator-god) all had been met exactly as foretold, exactly as was written in the codex!

Was it possible, could it be possible that all the rest would prove true also? I shook off the foolish, superstitious idea with an effort, and strove to use my common sense. Everything so far might have been mere coincidences. The cañon was only a valley of death because the Indians had lost their lives in it. Practically every underground tunnel and cavern might harbor snakes, and alligators swarmed in every forest lake. Yet, there was that image of Chac-Mool upon the giant alligator's back, and there were the two volcanoes I had seen, and I knew—without looking at my codex—that it bore the symbol of Chac-Mool above the figure of a conventionalized crocodile. But the rest—the eight deserts, the whirlwind, the demon, the fiend and all the other supernatural impossible things, they of course were utter nonsense. For that matter—I laughed at my fears as it occurred to me—the Pool of the Alligators was no bar to us; we could go around it easily enough. Casting all surmises and half-formed fears aside, I rose, told Maliche we would camp on the mountain side, and led the way to a spot far up the hillside where a spring gushed from between the rocks and the wide-spreading roots of a giant tree afforded excellent shelter from a possible shower.

## CHAPTER V

### The Demon of the Night

**I**HAD been overconfident when I had assumed that it would be possible to go around the lake and that it formed no real bar to our progress. Everywhere, the water extended for miles among the clumps of bamboos and jungle, and we gave it a wide berth, keeping well up on the hillside and searching for a dry spot where we might cross the valley. But in this we were fated to be disappointed.

The water dwindled to a narrow lagoon barely fifty feet in width, and then expanded into a second lake. It would have been a simple matter to have waded across the place had it not been for the alligators or crocodiles (I am not sure which they were); but their presence was attested by the snouts, backs and eyes that every-

where dotted the surface of the water like half-submerged logs. There was, however, one way of crossing it. An immense tree had toppled from the mountain side and had fallen athwart the black pool, its summit resting on the opposite shore. But it was a ticklish bridge at best. It was round, slippery, and its lower surface was in the water itself, so that as one crossed by it, one's feet were scarcely a yard above the pool with its watchful, lurking inhabitants waiting with hungry jaws to dash at one. For an hour or more we waited, trying to summon up the courage to attempt the crossing, until at last, unable to endure the inaction longer, I rose, removed my shoes, and telling Maliche I was going to risk it, I slipped as silently as possible towards the roots of the fallen tree.

Realizing that if I were to reach the farther shore in safety, I must make a dash for it, I waited for a moment, breathing deeply, and then, with a silent prayer and with my eyes fixed on the opposite shore, I took my life in my hands and raced over the log. A dozen times I slipped and nearly fell, a dozen times I had an almost irresistible temptation to glance to one side or the other, to look down at the water. My ears sensed the splashing of dozens of tails, the snapping of dozens of terrible jaws. The log seemed endless, but at last, with panting lungs and pounding heart, I covered the last few yards of the natural bridge, stumbled through the tangle of dead branches, and dropped, faint and trembling, upon the opposite bank.

A moment later Maliche joined me. Slowly, one by one, the baffled alligators sank from sight, and thankful indeed that we had survived, we resumed our way. Several hours later we reached the summit of the mountain and to my delight saw the twin peaks of the volcanoes looming sharp and clear a little to the east. Pointing to these landmarks, I told Maliche our way led towards them, and to make my meaning clearer, I showed him the codex with the volcanoes indicated upon it. Instantly he burst out in a torrent of wild incomprehensible words, he shook his head, his eyes were wide with fear, and he gestured excitedly. Even when, partly calmed, he tried to explain in Tecun, I could not make head or tail of his meaning. But when I asked him bluntly if he was afraid to go on, and informed him I was going anyway, he shook his head, declared he was my slave and my shadow, and denied all dread. Poor, good, faithful Maliche! Savage cannibal though he was, yet he was as brave, as true, as fine a man as ever lived. To him I owe a debt of gratitude I can never repay, for without him and his companionship, all my efforts would have been in vain. And had I but known what he was trying to tell me, had I understood his dialect, much that followed might have been avoided. And yet, perhaps, it was all in the plan, all a part of the destiny that beckoned me, with an unseen but irresistible finger, from beyond those smoking cones to the east.

We marched steadily all that day, traversing rolling hills covered with forest, meeting with no adventure, fortunate in securing game, and always with the twin cones in sight.

For two days this continued. The land was almost park-like in its beauty, its open glades, its flashing streams, its giant trees. We fared well, the weather was perfect, and all our past sufferings and perils were forgotten. But on the third day the surroundings changed. The forest gave place to scrubby, brushy jungle; the soft earth was replaced by rough, rocky, sterile ground; great boulders were to be seen here and there, and in places we crossed bare areas of jagged broken rock. Rapidly the vegetation grew more and more sparse and the rock-strewn areas wider. Aloes, cacti and spiny bromeliads took the place of vines, shrubs and trees, and by mid-afternoon we came to the last of the vege-

tation and halted at the edge of a vast barren expanse of raw red rock, immense black boulders and dunes of glaring multicolored sand. I had thought a desert could not exist, but here before us was a veritable desert—the burnt-out, cinder-blasted, lava-covered plain, desolated by some past eruption of the volcanoes, that now towered to the zenith within a dozen miles of where we stood.

And once more I felt that strange tingling of my scalp, that indescribable fear of the supernatural, as I remembered the prophecy—the words of Katchilcan, "and beyond the Pit of the great Zotional, even then one must cross the eight deserts."

**B**UT once again I laughed my fears away. There was nothing strange, nothing supernatural about this lava flow. It was exactly the same formation as the "Bad Lands" of our own northwest. Provided with plenty of water and food anyone could cross it. It was barely a dozen miles in width—a few hours' tramp to the farther side—and there was only one desert.


But to cross so late in the day would be foolish. It was wiser to camp for the night, and start fresh at dawn before the cinder and lava scintillated with the heat of the tropical sun.

Moreover, and this thought quite drove any lingering foolish fears from my mind, the fact that everything so far agreed with the codex and with Katchilcan's words, pointed towards my ultimate success, towards the actual existence of the hidden city of Mictlan, though I very much doubted if the ancient secret city would still be inhabited. More probably, I thought, it would be in ruins, for in the two thousand years and more that had passed since the Book of Kukulcan was made, there was every chance that the people—always provided there had been any—would have died out, migrated to other localities, been decimated by wars or would have reverted to a semi-savage nomadic life. Cut off from the rest of their race, no longer under the rule of the ancient empire, and outside the influence of the culture and civilization of their fellows, there was scarcely a chance that the colony had survived as an entity, or at least as a civilized community, for twenty centuries and more. The whole known history of the Mayas was against it. The empire had fallen and vanished through the jealousies and feuds of various leaders and the political wars. States and cities had been split up, divided into factions, and I felt sure that the same causes and the same racial traits that had caused the abandonment of such cities as Copan, Chichen-Itza, Lubanantun and other great Mayan centres would also have resulted in the abandonment of Mictlan, if that city had existed.

We decided to camp at the desert's edge, as I have said, but, there was no water at the spot, and Maliche slipped away and returned within an hour with two large gourds or calabashes filled with water from a stream we had passed several miles back. Even though the bare area was so small, I felt that it would be wise to carry a supply of water with us. In the tropical jungles, where there is always a superfluity rather than a scarcity of water, no one ever dreams of carrying a canteen, but the calabashes would serve excellently for the purpose. The night passed uneventfully, and before the sun had risen, we were up and tramping across the barren waste towards the dim shapes of the volcanoes, whose summits emitted a soft red glow against the rapidly-paling sky.

The air was cool and fresh, and even though the sharp bits of rock and loose ash of the desert were hard on our feet, it was a rather welcome change—at least to me—after the interminable jungles. Maliche, however, was ill at ease. As the sun rose higher, he glanced apprehensively about, kept close to me and

was little better than the desert itself; a growth of harsh dry grass, dull-green cacti, stiff-leaved aloes, thorny bromeliads, stunted shrubs and bushes and a few spiny-stemmed dwarf palms. Farther in, the growth was thicker, greener and more promising, but there was no water, and the few drops remaining in our calabashes barely wotted our dry and dusty mouths. Maliche, however, had the instincts of the primitive savage, the ability to make the most of Nature's scantiest resources, and though I am quite sure he had never before seen a desert or desert plants, though he had never been in want of water, yet he at



*A giant pterodactyl swooped down, apparently heading straight in our direction*

seemed nervous. Possibly it was merely the Indian's inherent dread of the unknown, perhaps it was superstition, or a premonition, or again it may have been merely the effect of the strangeness, the newness of a desert, upon a man accustomed all his life to forests and jungles. As the sun rose higher we suffered from the heat and glare, but we had already made good headway, and I flattered myself we would be at the farther side of the desert before the hottest part of the day. But though we tramped for hours, though the sun reached the zenith, although the ashes under our blistered feet felt like red-hot iron, though the air was like the blast from a furnace, though our eyes ached and blurred with the blinding glare, we seemed no nearer the distant volcanoes, and the farther side of the desert seemed ever to recede as we advanced. Our throats were parched and dry and the warm water in the gourds seemed only to add to our thirst. Still we kept on, and by the middle of the afternoon we could see that we actually were making progress, that the green hillsides behind us were faint and hazy in the distance, that the vegetation ahead was nearer, clearer, though the twin cones seemed as far away as ever. Not until the sun was sinking in the west did we reach the edge of the blasted plain and the vegetation beyond it. But the spot that had appeared green and cool from a distance

once rose to the emergency. Cutting off the top of a huge barrel-shaped cactus, and scooping out the pithy interior, he soon had several quarts of clear cool sap which—although slightly bitter in taste—was the most delicious draught that ever passed my lips. Too tired to go a step farther, we stopped where we were, ate what remained of our meat, and slept on the bare sand. Little did we know what lay before us when, on the following morning, we rose with aching limbs and swollen feet, and with only cactus sap to allay our hunger, again resumed our way. We were buoyed up with the expectations of finding water and game, of traveling through the cool forests once more; we felt the worst was over, and we pushed our way through the dusty thorn-covered vegetation, but we had not gone one hundred yards when the brush thinned and before us stretched a second ash-covered plain. The vegetation that I had thought was the limit of the desert was

merely a narrow strip, a hedge between the desert we had crossed and the one before us.

**WEARY**, hungry, blistered as the plain before us was no choice but to continue. The plain before us was smaller than the first, and having filled our gourds with the cactus juice, we grimly faced the burned-out world and the sufferings we knew were ahead of us. By noonday we had crossed it, had reached the luring vegetation on the farther side, only to find that beyond that was still another desert.

But we were slightly better off now. Maliche stalked and killed a gopher-like animal that resembled a giant prairie-dog; we tasted the pulpy fruits of a cactus and found them edible, and I discovered a hollow in the sand filled with the eggs of some large lizard. With our stomachs filled, we felt far better, and the barren waste ahead appearing small, we decided to attempt the crossing before dark. The next few days—I lost all track of time—were a nightmare. Whether there were eight or eighty deserts I shall never know. They seemed interminable, endless, each promising to be the last, only to deceive us as another appeared beyond. And still those silent smoking peaks with their baleful glare at night seemed as distant as ever. My brain reeled, visions hovered before my bloodshot, smarting eyes; my entire body seemed shriveled, dried, desiccated.

We ate whatever came our way—lizards, snakes, horned-toads, even insects. Maliche's ribs and joints seemed on the point of breaking through his skin; my face and hands were raw; streamers of skin hung in shreds from my neck and wrists, but still we kept on, and at last, more dead than alive, came to the end of the hellish wastes of lava and ash and reached the black basaltic ridges that led up to the flanks of the mighty volcanoes now close at hand. Between the frowning cliffs a stream flowed through a green swale, and with our last remaining strength, we reached the bank and plunged into the water.

For hours we lay there, our burned, tortured bodies laved by the cool water, absorbing it, reveling in it, until at last, refreshed, our smarting raw flesh comforted and eased, hunger forced us to emerge and search for food.

Alone I might have starved after all, but Maliche was a child of the wilderness; he seemed able literally to smell game if it were near, and he soon secured two pheasant-like birds, while I felt quite proud of myself for having captured a dozen or more big crayfish from beneath the stones in the river's bed.

We had been through a terrible ordeal, and I thanked God that the "whirlwind that cut the rocks" had been spared us, even though all the other terrors of Katchikan's story had materialized according to schedule. Still—and I glanced apprehensively about and shivered at the thought—there was yet time, for despite my common sense and reason I was becoming imbued with the idea, obsessed with the conviction that the Book of Kukulcan would be borne out to the letter. Indeed, so foolishly (or so I considered it) superstitious, or credulous, had I become that my half-formed fears of what was to come were allayed by remembrance of the old priest's statement that the way would be made easy to him who owned the codex. I rather smiled at the thought. If our way across those terrible deserts had been "easy," then Heaven have mercy on the unfortunate to whom the passage was hard!

But whatever might be in store, there seemed nothing threatening in the spot where we were at the moment, and I cannot hope to describe the delight, the comfort, the luxury of the soft green foliage, the cool moss-covered earth, and the babbling of the stream after

those nightmarish days of endless sand, lava and scorching, blistering sun.

With our stomachs filled with good food, with our weary limbs rested, with the musical sound of the brook and the chirping of insects in our ears, we stretched ourselves upon the soft earth and slept.

With a start, an involuntary yell, I leaped up, dazed, bewildered, trembling. Was it a nightmare or a reality that had awakened me, terrified me? Maliche too, was awake. He, too, was shaking, glancing about with terror on his face. Had the same thing aroused him, to leave him weak, filled with nameless dread, or had my yell, my movement, awakened him? With stammering tongue, I formed a question. But the words died on my lips, my face blanched and I shook, shivered, covered as the still night air was rent by a blood-curdling, piercing, demoniacal scream from somewhere in the blackness.

As the terrible, unearthly, banshee-like wail died down in a long-drawn quivering howl, I could hear Maliche's teeth chatter, and chills ran up and down my own spine. What was it? What dread creature had emitted that awful sound? I had heard jaguars, pumas, ocelots, every wild beast and bird of America—but none were like this; they howled, no other cry or sound held in it the terror, the weird, the ghastly, nightmarish, supernatural quality of this cry. Then, once more, the night was shattered by that cry that might have issued from a tortured soul in Purgatory. Maliche fairly babbled with fear, I had an insane desire to cover my head, to flatten myself on the ground, to stuff my ears, to shut out that unearthly sound that rose and fell and that seemed to come from every side. And then, as with fear-wide eyes I glanced up, scream after scream came from my lips. Above us, moving swiftly, silently back and forth, a great black shadow against the starlit sky, was an immense shape—a monstrous something with huge eyes that glowed like green fire. Maliche saw it at the same instant. With a scream of abject terror he flung himself on the earth. "¡Izputeque!" he yelled, "¡Izputeque!"

Like a volplaning airplane the thing swooped towards us, uttering that blood-freezing shriek as it came. In a frenzy of fear, powerless to move, bereft of thought, I unconsciously whipped out my revolver, and as fast as I could press trigger, fired all six shots at the horrible thing. As the reports of the shots thundered and echoed from the surrounding cliffs, a scream more horrible than those that had gone before came from the huge, winged thing. I felt a rush of wind, a nauseating odor filled my nostrils; there was a terrific crash, and all was still.

Trembling, shaken, wide-eyed we sat there. But only the chirping of insects, the burbling of the stream, the soft sighing of the night wind and the occasional cry of an owl broke the silence. Whatever the terrible thing was, it was not supernatural. It had not been immune to soft-nosed .45 calibre bullets, and somewhere in the dark shadows it was lying dead, crushed and forever stilled.

But there was no more sleep for us that night, and neither of us could summon up enough courage to investigate the fallen demon of the night in the darkness.

## CHAPTER VI

### The End of Maliche

**WITH** the dawning of another day, our courage returned. And as soon as it was light enough to see we rose and peered about—still a bit fearfully—in search of the living nightmare I had shot down. We did not have far to seek. A few rods from where we stood, a confused, black mass rested upon the

ground, looking so much like the wreck of a cracked-up airplane that for a moment I felt sure I had inadvertently brought down an aircraft. But as we cautiously approached it, I saw it was no machine of fabric and metal, but the body of a gigantic beast. With amazed eyes, half-credulously, I stepped nearer and examined it, while Maliche, all his superstitions aroused, fell on his knees and bowed his head to the earth. I could not believe my eyes, could not credit my senses, and yet there was no doubt about it. The broken motionless thing was a gigantic Pterodactyl! There were the great bat-like membranous wings now crumpled, torn and twisted. There was the long skinny neck ending in the immense scaly head with six-foot, sharp-toothed jaws. There were the huge, baleful, staring green eyes now glazed in death, and there were the powerful, long-clawed, alligator-like feet. The thing was a survivor of long-past ages, a flesh and blood fossil! I had killed a monster that was supposed to have become extinct hundreds of thousands of years before! I had brought down a specimen that—had I had the means of preserving it—would have brought me a fortune, that would have made me famous. And as I gazed at the gigantic, horrible looking, but now harmless thing, I bitterly regretted that it must lie there and rot, that it should provide many a meal for the hungry vultures already circling overhead, that it would be forever lost to science and that—if I ever succeeded in reaching civilization—my story would unquestionably be scoffed at and I would be dubbed a liar. I would have given much for a camera, even for the possibility of preserving a portion of the monstrous thing. Even in death it was horrible, uncanny, fiendish, and with a start I remembered Maliche's terrified words of the night—"Izputeque!" and the words of Katchilcan; "and one must face the demon Izputeque." Was this fearsome prehistoric creature the demon? Was it possible he might have existed, might have haunted this spot for centuries. Was it possible he had been here when the Book of Kukulcan was made? Or were there others; had the things survived here when in all other parts of the world they had become extinct? And would the "Fiend Nextpehua" eventuate? Would it prove to be some weird, monstrous, prehistoric leftover?

There was no use in speculating, but with that crumpled Pterodactyl lying on the ground before me almost anything seemed possible, even probable. To Maliche, however, the creature was far more than a dead winged lizard. To him it was the incarnate form of his demon-like god, Izputeque, and he was muttering prayers and making a blood offering to it as I turned away.

Our route that day was directly towards the nearer of the two volcanoes, whose rumblings we could now distinctly hear. By following the narrow valley between the bare rocky ridges, the way was easy, for there was no jungle, there were few patches of forest, and it was much like walking through a huge park. Game, however, was scarce. Indeed, with the exception of a few small birds, we saw no forms of life, and I assumed that the great Pterodactyl had practically exterminated the denizens of the place. But there were plenty of fish and crayfish in the stream, and we did not worry over our food supply. Before sundown we had ascended fully one thousand feet and could look back over a vast extent of country with the glaring red, white and yellow deserts spread like a map below us. Nothing disturbed our rest that night and, feeling that the worst part of our journey was over, we resumed our march the next morning. As we climbed higher, the country became rougher and wilder; great jagged black crags rose on every side, long debris slopes of glistening obsidian broke the green hill-

sides; the stream tumbled in flashing cascades down outjutting ledges, and ever louder and louder was the dull, rumbling, growling roar in the bowels of the volcano under our feet. In the afternoon we met many other signs of volcanic activity. Springs of hot water bubbled from sulphur and lime-encrusted pools; sulphurous steam rose from fissures and fumaroles, and in one spot a group of splendid geysers shot their fountains of boiling water fifty feet in air. Further upward progress became impossible, and swinging westward we followed a ridge or plateau that encircled the mountain like a gigantic terrace. It was odd, I thought, that Maliche should show no fear of the volcano or of the natural phenomena, but when I questioned him, he replied that there was a similar smoking mountain near his home, and that he was familiar with such sights. But, he added, he was sure this volcano was the home of terrible gods. Had we not met the demon-god Izputeque? And at any time others might appear. But the white man's magic, the thunder and lightning from his magic tube, were more powerful than these wicked gods, and he had no fear. Brave Maliche, he was to learn all too soon how futile was the white man's "magic" to which he trusted so implicitly!

We had now circled the first volcano and had reached the pass that led between the two cones. Here there was a dense forest, the interlaced, tangled tops of the trees forming a canopy that shut out the light of the sun, and in the semi-twilight we passed onward between the giant tree trunks that rose like the fluted columns of some vast cathedral.

SOON after we entered the forest, Maliche shot a small deer, and having been on slender rations since the previous day, we stopped then and there, cooked and ate a hearty meal, and prepared to spend the rest of the afternoon and night there.

Presently Maliche rose, and mumbling that he was going on a hunt to secure food for the morrow, he vanished among the trees. It was the last time I ever saw him alive. Perhaps half an hour after he had left I was startled by a faint, far-away scream, the terrified cry of a human being, and I leaped to my feet, alert, listening, filled with fears. Then once again came the scream, suddenly cut short in a faint, choking groan. Something had happened. Maliche was in trouble! Leaping forward, dashing between the trees, I sped in the direction of the sound. Presently, I saw a lighter spot, the trees thinned, and before me stretched an open space in the forest.

At the sight that met my eyes, the blood seemed to freeze in my veins. I fairly shook with terror, and a horrified cry rose to my lips. Squatting in the center of the open space was the most monstrous, the most horrible, the most repulsive being that ever the eyes of man have looked upon.

At first sight I had thought the thing a hideous sculptured stone idol. There, fully thirty feet above the ground, was the great, misshapen, grotesque head, a head adorned with an upstanding crest of huge spikes, a head with bestial fiery red eyes, with a gaping cavernous mouth armed with immense, curved white fangs. There was the great monolithic body of dull-green, covered with intricate geometric patterns in relief. There were the crooked short arms with talons in place of fingers, and there were the columnar bowed legs, all as massive, as hard, as unreal as any sculptured Mayan god. But the illusion was only momentary. Behind the terrifying monster extended a gigantic scaly tail, the huge corpse-white paunch rose and fell as the thing breathed, the scarlet eyes moved from side to side. The stupendous, indescribably horrible



thing was alive, a creature of flesh and blood! I felt sick, faint, nauseated as my bewildered brain and horror-filled eyes took in the scene. In one gigantic front foot, clasped tightly against its chest, the monster held the body of Maliche!

Blood dripped down the livid white belly and crimson foam drooled from the huge mouth, as the fiendish thing masticated something in its titanic jaws. The next instant I realized what it was crunching between its terrible teeth. The mangled decapitated body of the Indian told the story. It was Maliche's head!

Madness, Berserk fury took the place of my fear, my horror, my nausea at the sight. For a moment I was mad, crazed, utterly bereft of reason. With a hoarse shout, a savage yell, I drew my pistol and fired at the breast of the cannibalistic demon before me. But I might as well have fired at a monument of solid rock.

The bony scales of the monster's body were as impervious to my bullets as plates of steel.

Possibly he did not even feel them. But my shout, the report of my pistol, distracted his attention from his gruesome, repulsive meal. Slowly, as if trying to locate the sound, he ceased chewing, turned his head and peered towards me with one gleaming eye. At that instant I fired my last shot. I saw the baleful eye vanish in a blur of red as my final bullet ploughed its way in, and I gave vent to a wild shout of triumph.

For an instant I thought my lucky shot had killed the monster. His head sagged, his front foot relaxed, the torn and bleeding body of Maliche dropped unheeded to the ground, and the gigantic creature swayed unsteadily.

But the next second I realized my mistake. I realized that my bullet had only momentarily stunned and confused the terrible beast. With a hoarse bellow he dropped to all fours, swung his head quickly to right and left and then, evidently locating me, he leaped with a prodigious bound directly at me. But I had already turned to run. I heard the colossal thing crash against a tree, I heard him panting, bellowing with pain and baffled rage; but I did not turn, did not glance back. Realizing even in my mad terror and my extremity that such an enormous beast would find it difficult to make speed among the trees, I dodged between the trunks, plunging deeper and deeper into the forest, paying no heed to direction.

In my roar I could still hear the monster in pursuit, crashing, hurtling into the trees, roaring hoarsely, shaking the very ground with his thundering tons of infuriated flesh. He was like a whole herd of elephants charging through the forest. Small trees went down like straws before his onrush, and only the fact that he was half-blinded and unable to see me as long as I kept to the right, and was therefore obliged to keep his head turned to avoid blundering into trees, saved me from Maliche's fate.

Even as it was, I barely held my own, barely kept my scant two hundred feet in advance of my terrible



*Squatting in the center of the open space was the most monstrous, the most horrible, the most repulsive being that ever the eyes of man had looked upon*

raiser. And each minute, each second I was growing weaker, becoming more and more spent. My breath wheezed in my throat, my lungs seemed bursting, a mist swam before my eyes. Soon I knew I must slow down, must stop. At any moment my heavy feet might trip upon a root and the next instant the terrible man-eating beast would be upon me.

Then, as I felt I must give up, as I had made up my mind to slip another cartridge into my pistol, and end my life rather than be torn to pieces, the forest came to an end and, unable to check my headway, I slipped, plunged head-first and rolled, head-over-heels down a sharp, bare slope. Dazed, frightened, my eyes blinded with dust, my mouth and nostrils filled with choking powder, dimly aware of blistering, burning heat, I brought up with a jarring, sickening thud against a mass of rock.

Bruised, shaken, sputtering, I spat the sand from my mouth, wiped the dust from my eyes and glanced about. Up from where I lay upon a ledge of rock surrounded by coarse grass and stunted trees, stretched a long steep slope of glaring white sand. Here and there slender columns of steam rose from it. Dull yellow patches of sulphur dotted its surface, and an uneven, irregular furrow marked the course of my fall. At the summit of the slope rose the forest trees and, issuing from them, was the gigantic monster still in pursuit.

But I could not move, could not make an effort to escape. I was utterly done, utterly exhausted. I felt for my pistol, but the holster was empty. In a moment more the colossal beast would come sliding, bounding upon me.

FASCINATED, I stared at him. One glance he gave about, and then, with a bound, he was on the slope. My heart seemed to stop beating, numbing terror paralyzed me. But I need not have feared. Little did I know the character of that delectable of white, innocent-appearing sand. Instead of racing down the slope, the monster sank into it as though it had been liquid. He thrashed, struggled, belowed, lashed with his enormous tail, but all in vain. Every movement buried him deeper and deeper. The soft, fine, almost impalpable dust could not support his weight. It gave way beneath him, closed in clouds above him. It was like a quicksand, and presently only the tip of his upflung tail and the thrashing, gnashing jaws were visible.

And then an amazing phenomenon occurred. Up from the spot where he was vanishing, a great column of steam shot fifty feet in air, hissing, roaring. The next instant it subsided, and only the smooth unbroken slope remained.

And as I glanced about at my surroundings, my heart still pounding, I realized what had happened, what manner of place I had so fortunately fallen into. I was in an ancient crater; the slope down which I had slid was merely a pile of fine volcanic ash covering the boiling, steaming, heated mass below, a mere crust over an inferno. Somewhere within the depths, the carcass of the dinosaur—for such I knew the monster must have been—was being boiled to shreds. My own weight had not been sufficient to break through the surface in my swift descent; I had moved too rapidly to be badly burned by the scalding steam and hot ashes, but the monster's weight had spelled his doom. But Maliche was dead. I was alone. "My God!" I exclaimed, as a sudden realization came to me. I was in the "realm of hot ashes" of the prophecy. Was the monstrous dinosaur I had seen destroyed, the "fiend Nezipehua"?

I was convinced it was so, positive that the dinosaur had been there since the days of Kukulkan. And a strange elation, a sudden unaccountable joy thrilled

me. Everything had come out precisely as it had been foretold. I had met every peril, every danger of which Katchican had warned me. So far, I had come unharmed through all. My way had been "made easy." Was there some unknown, some supernatural power watching over me? Was there some magic in the Book of Kukulkan? I tried to reason, tried to convince myself it was all nonsense, all superstition, all the state of my nerves, of my overtaxed muscles and brain. But I could not shake off the belief, could not argue mentally against obvious facts. So fully had the idea possessed me, that I felt absolutely convinced that I would yet come to the Cave of the Bats, to the Bridge of Life and would enter the hidden city of Mictolan.

But first, I must get out of the crater. As I have said, the spot where I had been arrested in my involuntary descent of the ash slope was rocky and was surrounded with coarse grass and a few gnarled and stunted trees. This was not surprising, for in many other active craters, especially in the West Indies—I had seen the same forms of vegetation growing in the sand and sulphur-impregnated deposits surrounded with steam and boiling water. As I rose and pressed through the thin growth—taking great care not to step into a pool of boiling water, I gave a cry of delight. Lying among the bits of rock was my revolver. Refilling its empty chambers and replacing it in the holster, I passed through the scrub, and reaching the farther side carefully surveyed the crater, searching for a passage out. I was at the bottom of an immense crater—I remember that at the time it reminded me of the titanic pit of a gigantic ant-lion, and I thanked Heaven there had been no such voracious creature lurking in the bottom to gobble me up as I came tumbling into its waiting jaws. On one side was the slope down which I had fallen and which had swallowed up the dinosaur. On two other sides there were perpendicular rocky walls seamed with golden-yellow sulphur veins, but on the fourth side the crater wall was broken down and filled with loose masses of stone between which grew red-flowered weeds, climbing cacti and coarse, brake-like ferns. It was the only passable exit, and crawling carefully over the loose and treacherous rocks, I surmounted the barrier and to my delight found that the brushy mountain side stretched unbroken to a wooded valley far below. As I moved easily down the hillside, many thoughts and conjectures filled my mind. Would I be able to sustain life without Maliche's aid? Would I—even if I reached the hidden city—ever be able to return to civilization? Of what use would it have been to have journeyed so far, to have undergone so much, to have found the city, if I spent the rest of my days here? And in that case, of what value would be my precious codex? I laughed grimly to myself as I mentally reviewed the strange events that had followed in such an unbroken chain since my visit to the little junk shop in far-off Vigo. From the moment I had seen the faded, ancient document, my entire course of life, yes, even my mental processes, had been altered. I had been bewitched, obsessed with the thing. Why hadn't I been content to dispose of it for what it would bring—a far greater sum than I had ever before possessed at one time—instead of traveling here, there and everywhere, trying to find someone to interpret it?

And why, even at the eleventh hour, hadn't I been satisfied with old Katchican's information and interpretation, without plunging into this wilderness on my wild-goose chase for the mythical city of Mictolan? Why? I could find no answer save that it was fate, destiny, that I had come honestly into possession of the Book of Kukulkan and had therefore to bring the long-awaited token to the Mayas in the hidden city. But in that case, why had not some other done so long before?

Surely others must have owned the codex honestly. The old shopkeeper in Vigo, for instance. I laughed heartily as I tried to picture paunchy old Don Miguel Salceda on this journey—crossing the deserts, crawling through the snake-infested tunnel, rolling down the ash-covered crater's slope, running away from a charging dinosaur.

And the dinosaur! Were there other, perhaps even more terrible prehistoric creatures in this land? I had had proof that pterodactyls and dinosaurs still survived there. Was it not possible there were others of their kinds, or even more ferocious living fossils? A Triceratops would be a most unpleasant "demon" to meet, an Iguanodon might be even worse. It behooved me to go carefully, to watch my step, to pass my nights where I would be safe from attack. And, thinking of passing the night, reminded me that the sun had set behind the peak, and that darkness was near at hand. To find a place in which to sleep would be simple—the rocks on either side of the valley were full of fissures and caves, but I was hungry and thirsty, and I could see no prospect of either water or food. Below me, to the right, the vegetation seemed greener, fresher. Possibly water was there and, meanwhile keeping a sharp watch for any possible game or even some edible berries or fruits, I hurried in the direction I had picked out. As I had hoped, a tiny stream trickled from among the rocks. A recess in a ledge formed a secure resting place, but I went supperless to bed and hunger prevented me from sleeping much that night.

THE next morning, however, I was in better luck. I came unexpectedly upon a raccoon and secured him with my pistol and, a little later, I found a huge land tortoise. I dined well, and feeling much better, swung on down the valley. To my delight I now found I had passed beyond the volcanoes, and somehow I had a feeling that I was nearing the end of my journey. I had been puzzled many times at not having found any traces of the country ever having been inhabited. There had been no signs of Indians, no ruins, no monuments, not even inscribed rocks since we had passed that great statue of Chac-mool in the pool of the crocodiles. If in the long ago the Mayas had passed this way, surely, I thought, they would have left some traces. Hardly had the thought crossed my mind when, rising above the trees ahead, I saw the remains of stone buildings. The ruins were in bad shape, the walls had fallen apart, but they were unquestionably ancient Mayan. But there was one thing about them that puzzled me. In several places were sculptured figures and symbols unlike anything I had ever seen, and in one doorway was a true arch. The Mayas, I knew, had never—as far as known—discovered the arch. They joined their walls either by "stepping in" the stones until they met, or they connected them by means of wooden beams or lintels of stone. But here was an arch, without a keystone to be sure, formed of stones cemented together, and that still remained, though the walls about it had crumbled and fallen. I had made an epochal discovery—though it was of little value to me or to the scientific world, but it whetted my desire to find the hidden city. If the ruins I was examining were the remains of the work of the people of Mictolan—as I felt sure they were—then those people had developed beyond the other Mayas and, in the many centuries that had passed since they had been separated from the rest of their race, they might have reached most astounding heights and have made most remarkable discoveries.

A little later, I came upon something that puzzled and interested me even more than the ruins with the arch. Hidden in the brush was an immense stone monument

lying half buried in the earth. One portion of its upper surface was elaborately carved with beautiful bas-reliefs, but the lower portion was unmarked, and the plain surface graded evenly into the carved surface. There was every gradation from the deeply-cut sculptures to shallow carvings, from these to mere outlines, and from these to the smooth stone. And there were no signs of tool marks upon it, nothing to show that the design was being chiseled away. Eagerly I examined the other visible surfaces. They were exactly the same. It was precisely as if the immense stone column had been steel and had been dipped into some acid that had deeply etched the submerged portion, leaving the rest untouched. Of course I knew that nothing of the sort actually had occurred. I merely thought of it as an appropriate simile, but the mystery of how the Mayas accomplished their wonderful sculptures had always fascinated me, and I had never before seen, or even heard of, a column that was partly carved like this one. However, it proved the Mayas had been here, and from time to time, during several hours thereafter, I came upon other remains of the ancient race. At any time now, I thought, I might come within sight of Mictolan. Little did I dream what lay ahead of me.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Bridge of Light

SOON the valley became narrower and deeper, with precipitous cliffs on either side, until coming through a fairly thick wood, I found farther progress barred by a sheer cliff. But my disappointment, my chagrin at thus finding it impossible to continue on my way, was forgotten as I gazed at the rocky wall before me. Cut in the surface of the reddish rock was the huge figure of a Mayan god. So deeply sculptured was the image that it appeared more like a separate monolith set into a recess than a part of the cliff itself; a marvelous piece of work, the most superb example of ancient Mayan art that I had ever seen. The elaborate head-dress of quetzal feathers and rattlesnakes would have identified it as a representation of Kukulkan, even without the bearded face, the long robe covered with the most intricate designs, the symbols of the sacred quetzal and the two-headed serpents, and the whirling wind symbols. Fascinated, I stared at it, taking in every detail and searching for date-glyphs. But not a single cartouche enclosing numerical symbols could be seen. Then—"By Jove!" I exclaimed, as my roving eyes rested upon the oval, pendant ear ornaments. Upon them, so cleverly arranged that they appeared like mere ornamental patterns, were columns of tiny carvatures with the inscriptions for which I had been searching. But from where I stood I could make nothing of them. They were fully thirty feet above my head, and forgetting all else in my desire to examine, and if possible, decipher the dates, I clambered up the sculptured legs, and finding a foothold on the god's ceremonial staff, I grasped the arm to draw myself still farther up. As I did so, I felt the immense mass of rock sway, my feet slipped, I clutched wildly at the arm, uttered one terrified yell and fell crashing to the earth below. Dazed, stunned but luckily unhurt, I sat up and stared incredulously at the colossal image above me. Standing out at right angles to the cliff, staring down at me from directly above my head, was the huge stone face of the god, while in place of the flowing robe and sandaled feet, a black opening yawned in the face of the precipice. I gasped. The gigantic carving was movable, my weight or my touch upon the arm had swung the upper portion forward and had disclosed a hidden opening, a secret door! What did it mean?

What lay within that dark portal in the cliff? That it was something of the utmost importance, something inexpressibly sacred or precious was certain. To have carved that gigantic figure, to have designed the mechanism, to have balanced the many tons of carved stone so nicely that it could be swung at a touch must have been an herculean, a most difficult, task requiring the labor of years; a work that never would have been undertaken except for some vital, some most important purpose. And the fact that the massive pivoted door had been formed in the likeness of Kukulkan, pointed to the secrets within the opening being associated with that god. Perhaps—my pulse quickened at the thought and I felt a strange thrill—perhaps I was at the threshold of Micoltan, at the portal of the hidden city I sought!

I peered half fearfully within. All was impenetrable blackness. If I entered that mysterious chamber I would need a light, and I hurried to the nearby trees and sought for some inflammable material for a torch. I hoped to find a gum-elastic tree, but not finding this, I sought out a wax palm, gathered a quantity of the oily, waxy fruits, wrapped them tightly in the dry mast of the trunk, and had a torch that I knew would burn with a brilliant flame for two hours at least. Still, as I had no idea how long I might be within the place and no mind to be caught without a light, I prepared three of the torches. Lighting one of these I stepped—a bit hesitatingly I admit—within the entrance. But the next second I sprang back. How was I to know that the door might not close to behind me? The thing had opened to my weight or the pressure of my hand, I was not quite positive which. There might be some mechanism so arranged that, the moment I passed within, the titanic statue would swing back into place. To be trapped in that black hole would be a horrible fate, and very cautiously, very watchfully, I examined the sides of the opening, the portions of the idol both inside and outside. I could detect no mechanism, no mechanical device connected with the image. As far as I could determine, the whole huge idol was hung upon a pivot or trunnions and so balanced that the weight of a man would swing the upper portion forward.

It could be operated from the outside, but the inside was plain smooth stone with no means of swinging the image. Whoever had placed it there had not intended it to be opened from within. Yet an accident might happen. A thing so nicely balanced might swing to with a jar, even with a sudden gust of wind; certainly with an earthquake. If I wished to feel certain of having my line of retreat open, I must find some means of preventing the ponderous door from closing. This was not a difficult matter. All about were masses of rock, and by dint of hard work and blistered hands, I rolled several good-sized boulders within the opening, placed them against the inner surface of the rock about the doorway and then, to make assurance doubly sure, I dragged a large log to the doorway and placed it across the inner side of the opening. Even the immense weight of the great idol would not be enough to force the door shut with these obstacles in its way, and quite confident that I could now retrace my way at any time, I held my blazing torch aloft and stepped into the chamber. That I was in a vast natural cavern was obvious. The walls were rough and water-worn, stalagmites covered the floor, and far above my head the flare of the torch reflected faintly from pendant stalactites. The place was immense. I could see only a small part of the floor, only a small portion of the walls.

**L**IGHTING my way by the torch, I followed the wall to the right. I had proceeded several hundred feet when, staring from the blackness before me, I saw a pair of glowing red eyes! Beyond them were others

—ten, a dozen, a whole line of glowing eyeballs, like living coals, in the darkness beyond the light of my torch. Fear gripped me. Lurking there in the shadows were wild beasts, savage creatures, perhaps—and I shivered at the thought—perhaps more of those fearsome pterodactyls, perhaps some other horrible prehistoric creatures. What a fool I had been to enter the place! In the glare of the torch I was plainly visible to the things crouching there while they were invisible to me. Even if I drew my pistol and fired at those baleful savage eyes, I could not hope to kill more than one, and there were dozens lurking there. If I turned and ran, they might be upon me. I seemed fascinated, hypnotized, unable to move. Something rustled, something was creeping stealthily along the walls! A cold chill ran up and down my back! My scalp tingled! There was a rush of air, a soft swishing sound, and some dreadful invisible thing brushed against my shoulder. I uttered a piercing shriek and leaped aside, trembling from head to foot. But the eyes still remained there, staring, fixed. They fascinated me. Unable to take my eyes from them, shaking with terror, shrinking from dread of that invisible, moving something, I took two, four, six steps forward. Then a wild, a maniacal hysterical laugh came from my lips. Ranged along the wall was a row of squat grotesque figures, their lifeless eyes set with jewels. I had been terrified at the reflection of my own torch! And yet, some living creature had touched me.

Fearfully I peered about, but all was silent as the grave. I stepped close to the images, and the next instant gasped and stood staring. The things were not idols of carved stone; they were corpses—mummies! There was no doubt about it. The dried skin, drawn tight across the skulls, the grinning jaws, the hair—all were real. Overcoming my momentary dread, my involuntary start, I stepped forward and examined them closely. Upon the heads were most elaborate crowns of feathers and golden ornaments, huge gold discs hung over the ears, upon the shriveled chests were necklaces of jade, crystal, turquoise, lapis-lazuli, carnelian and gold; the shrunken bodies were wrapped in cotton robes woven in intricate patterns. They were the mummies of ancient Mayan chiefs or priests, and unique, marvelous specimens. Before me was a fortune in gold and jewels, several fortunes if I could have transported the mummies to the outer world, where museums would have paid any price for them. But like everything else I had found, like my codex even, it was worthless to me. But other thoughts were racing through my mind as I gazed at these remains of long-dead Mayans. Was I in the tomb of the kings of Micoltan? Were the ruins I had passed all that remained of the hidden city? Or did the place still exist somewhere in the vicinity? It was all conjecture, and turning from the silent dead, I continued on my exploration of the cavern.

Presently, wondering how far I had progressed, I turned and glanced back toward the door. I could not believe my eyes, the door had vanished!

Only a few moments before it had been there, a square of light in the blackness. Now there was no sign of it. I blinked, rubbed my eyes, stared. But the opening had gone. Was it possible the statue had fallen back into place? No, I could not believe that, or I would have heard the jar, heard the crash as it struck the stones and logs I had placed as a barricade. And I felt positive that it could not have shut closely enough to blot out all light from without. And I felt equally sure that I had turned no corner, had passed no out-jutting portion of the wall that might hide the opening. Possibly, I thought, one of the stalagmites, or perhaps a rock mass or pillar, in the center of the cavern might

conceal the opening. I stepped first to one side, then the other. But all was blackness; not a sign of the opening was to be seen!

WITH a tremendous effort I conquered my desire to rush madly in the direction of the door. With all my will power I forced myself to remain reasonably calm, to think, to use my brains. I reasoned with myself that the entrance must be there; that it could not have vanished without cause; that it was explicable. My only course, I told myself, was to retrace my steps, locate the mummies, follow the wall and reach the spot where I had last seen the entrance. But the next minute I realized this was impossible. I could not find the wall, could not locate the mummies! Somehow, somewhere I had got turned around, had lost my sense of direction. Wildly I sought about, here, there, everywhere. Whichever way I turned I found only vast, black empty space. I was hopelessly lost! Lost in the great cavern with the Mayan dead! And then, once more, I heard that weird swishing noise and once more that invisible ghostly hand touched me! I screamed and leaped aside. A cold soft hand passed across my face! On every side I heard whisperings, low moans, the swishing of unseen draperies, the passing of invisible bodies! I wonder I did not go mad. I shrieked, cowered, waved my flaming torch madly, threw myself on the ground. Something soft, moving, horrible fell upon my back. Madly, maniacally I grappled with it. The ghostly thing struggled in my grasp. Sharp claws tore at me. Teeth were buried in my flesh. And then I knew, and peal after peal of hysterical mad laughter echoed through the cavern. The awful things were no ghosts, no spirits. They were bats!

And with my realization of this, with the reaction of my tensed, my shattered nerves, came a flash of memory. The Cave of the Bats! Could this be it? Was this the place old Katchican had mentioned? Was I on the right trail? Was the end of my journey near?

I felt sure this was the Cave of the Bats of the prophecy, and, forgetting all my fears, all my terrors, of the circling, rustling myriads of bats, forgetting even that I was lost, that the entrance had disappeared, I rose to my feet and peered about. If I were right, if this was the Cave of the Bats of Katchican's legend, then somewhere near at hand should be that Bridge of Light. But where, in what direction? How should I find it? One thing was certain. To stand there idle, gazing into the blackness while my torch burned out was useless. It was getting me nowhere. And, as long as I had no idea which way I had come nor which way to go, one way was as good as another. If I walked straight in any direction, I must eventually reach a wall—no cavern could be endless, and once I reached the wall I could follow along it until I came to the entrance or to some other exit, for there must be another exit, else the bats could not be here. Besides, the air was clear, sweet and fresh.

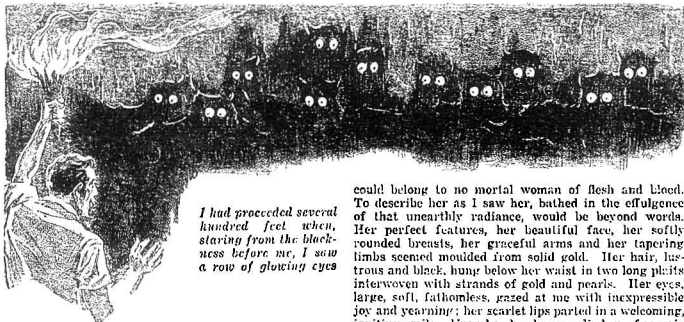
That gave me an idea. If there was a circulation of air, there must be a current, a draught. I could follow that and find the outlet. I held the torch aloft, standing it, watching the flame and the oily smoke. Yes, there was a draught, the smoke drifted to one side, the flames flared in that direction. Elated, feeling sure I could find a way out, I stepped forward, stopping frequently to steady the torch and check up my direction. As I proceeded, the draught became stronger; the smoke drew ahead of me, and the flames flickered and flared. Soon I did not even have to hold the torch aloft, the sooty smoke swirling before me led me on, and I made rapid progress.

Ever about me hovered and flitted the bats; often they would brush my body, my head, even my face; but

though I instinctively drew away and shuddered at their touch, yet now that I knew they were merely bats—and apparently harmless bats at that—I was not really troubled by them.

How far I followed the smoke of the torch, I do not know. Whether I walked straight, whether I turned many corners, whether I ascended or descended, I cannot say. I lost all sense of time, all sense of distance, all sense of direction. I thanked Heaven I had brought more than one torch. My first fluttered and went out. I lit a second. That, too, burned low, flickered and died. I lit the third and last, and hoped again hope that before that failed, I might find an exit from the accursed place. Terror beyond words filled me as I saw the torch burning steadily, inexorably down. One third, one half was consumed. In less than half an hour it would be finished. My fate was sealed if I did not reach an opening, light, within the next thirty minutes. Strange, incongruous, confused thoughts filled my mind while my feet hurried me on. All that had transpired since I had landed at Vigo passed before my vision like a moving picture. I saw the little quay with the red-sailed fishing smacks moored beside it, the rocky hillside with the tall, square houses, the lounging, red-sashed, beretted boatmen; the Avenida with its stream of motor cars and creaking wine carts; the little Plazauela de Tres Santos. The image of paunchy, tousel-headed, greasy Salcedo rose before me. As in a dream I saw myself haggard with him over the old books, heard his suave, flowery words, even smelled the odor of garlic that exuded from him. In the flickering torch and swirling smoke I seemed to see the figures, the strange symbols of the mysterious codex. In turn I visualized the squat, massive, smoke-blackened British Museum, Doctor Joyce with his trim gray Vandeyke beard; New York with its thunder of traffic, its roar, its skyscrapers; the great plaza of Mexico; Cervantes bending above my codex, his keen black eyes gleaming with interest, his swarthy face alight. Before me, like a wraith in the glare of my torch, I again saw jolly-faced, rotund Fray José. I passed like a disembodied spirit through the little Mayan village and heard Katchican's droning voice relating the ancient prophecy in the soft guttural Zutugil. As plainly as though it were actually before my eyes, I saw the nude body of the Indian girl, charred and seared upon the altar of the temple on the mountain. I seemed to feel the bonds cutting into my flesh, to see the flash of Maliche's upraised obsidian knife. Then the terrible cañon, the Valley of Death, the horrible Tunnel of Serpents, the nightmarish Pool of the Alligators.

Again, in my strangely disordered mind, I traversed the scorching, glaring deserts; in my ears rang the unearthly cry of the great pterodactyl. I shuddered as the vision of the awful dinosaur with Maliche's headless body in his talons rose before me. All had come to pass; all that the prophecy had foretold, all that was written and pictured in the Book of Kukulecan had been borne out, and now I was in the Cave of the Bats, was racing onward, following the streaming smoke of my last torch. No doubt it was the hypnotic effect of gazing steadily at the light that produced the visions; yet I was not dreaming. I was fully awake. One portion of my brain was normal, living in the present, alive to my dangers, to the rapidly diminishing torch; the other half seemed detached, moving back through time, seeing each and every detail of all that I had passed through. I can compare it only to that period between wakefulness and sleep when one dreams impossible things yet knows that one is dreaming. And so thoroughly aware was I that the mental visions were not realities that when I saw a strangely greenish wavering light, I felt it was a part of the phantasma.



*I had proceeded several hundred feet when, staring from the blackness before me, I saw a row of glowing eyes*

**B**UT the next moment I knew it was no vision. About me the cavern was bathed in a peculiar glow, a soft light that seemed to change from green to blue, to purple, to pink, to red, to yellow—to pass through every color of the spectrum exactly like the lights thrown upon the curtain of a theatre by multicolored electric lights. With a sharp cry, as the last flicker of the torch burned my fingers, I cast it aside. No need of it now. I could see plainly. The cavern had narrowed. The roof was barely ten feet above my head, the walls were within reach of my outstretched hands. I was in a tunnel, and before me, streaming through a semi-circular opening, was the remarkable prismatic glow.

I was safe. I had found an exit. Before me was the open air. I dashed forward towards the opening, gave a horrified yell and checked myself in the nick of time. Beyond the opening yawned a vast, black, fathomless abyss!

Another foot and I would have plunged to death in its awful depths. I shuddered and clung to the rocks as I gazed into it. Still trembling at my narrow escape, I looked up. Above my head the walls rose for hundreds, thousands of feet, until they seemed to meet. To right and left the stupendous precipices joined. It was a vast chasm, a bottomless crevice in the bowels of the mountain, and I was as effectively trapped as though I were still within the vast black cavern.

Yet, I scarcely noticed these things, I hardly realized the predicament I was in, for the marvelous inexplicable phenomena that confronted me held all my attention, all my thoughts. Across the vast rift from where I stood, perhaps two hundred feet distant, was a second opening in the precipice, and from below this, streaming across the chasm as though projected from some titanic searchlight, was a great beam of vari-colored light that shimmered, flashed with rainbow hues, and glowed with transcending beauty. It seemed almost like a solid thing, like a giant beam of transparent iridescent glass spanning the chasm. It was the most marvelous sight I had ever seen.

As I gazed upon it fascinated, forgetting all else, filled with awe and admiration, I gaped and stared with incredulous, unbelieving eyes. Outlined in the opposite opening, seeming to materialize from the light, appeared a woman!

Every detail of her face, her figure, her garments was clearly outlined. And as I gazed at her, feeling that she was a vision, a fragment of my overtaxed brain, I drew a sharp short breath, for surely such beauty

could belong to no mortal woman of flesh and blood. To describe her as I saw her, bathed in the effulgence of that unearthly radiance, would be beyond words. Her perfect features, her beautiful face, her softly rounded breasts, her graceful arms and her tapering limbs seemed moulded from solid gold. Her hair, lustrous and black, hung below her waist in two long plaits interwoven with strands of gold and pearls. Her eyes, large, soft, fathomless, gazed at me with inexpressible joy and yearning; her scarlet lips parted in a welcoming, inviting smile. Upon her head was a diadem of mosaic in turquoise, rubies and pearls. Her only garment was a skirt of soft, semi-transparent cloth richly embroidered with gold and bordered with feather work in red, white and green. Upon her tiny feet were sandals fastened with golden lacings, and about her slender neck was a golden chain bearing a jewelled pendant that rested in the curve of her breasts and rose and fell and flashed like living fire as she breathed.

For a moment she stood there, her wonderful eyes fixed upon me, compelling, seeming almost to speak. Then lifting her arms, she held them towards me. A madness raced through my veins. My temples throbbed. I longed to throw myself into those outstretched arms, to hold her close, to pour passionate words of love into her ear, to crush her lips with kisses. But hundreds of feet of abyss lay between us; we were as far apart as though we had been on separate planets. Her lips moved. Her words—soft, musical, imploring, floated to me, though they were unintelligible to my ears. I suffered, as I stood there, overwhelmed with love, with longing for that wondrous being; calling to me, beckoning to me from across that awful chasm.

And then, with a little gesture of despair, with a contemptuous toss of her head, she stepped forward, stepped over the verge of that terrible chasm! I was too horrified, too overcome, too numbed with the horror of it, to utter a sound.

Then my horror changed to wonder, to incredulous, inexpressible amazement. The girl had not fallen, had not plunged downward to a fearful death. She was floating through air, coming towards me. Could it be possible, could it be real? She was walking upon that beam of light!

Was I dreaming? Had I gone mad? Was it a delusion, a vision of my brain? The next moment she was beside me, and as I seized her in my arms, and felt the pressure of her warm palpitating body, and pressed kisses upon her unresisting lips, and her soft arms stole about my neck, I knew that it was no vision, no dream. She, at least, was very real.

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Hidden City

**V**ERY gently she drew herself from my embrace and spoke, to my surprise and delight, using a dialect of Zutugil, and fervently I thanked heaven—and Fray José—that I had learned that tongue.

"My lord has been long in coming," she said. "Long

have we awaited my lord. For many Tuns and Kaluns, aye, even for many Baktuns, have the maidens of Kinich Ahau awaited thy coming at the Bridge of Light."

Bridge of Light! At her words comprehension dawned upon me. Strange I had not thought of it before—in Zutugil, light and life were synonymous, the same word served for both—the bridge of life of the prophecy was the bridge of light the girl had crossed!

"But to me, Itza, has come the honor of welcoming my lord," she continued, "and blessed by the gods am I. And"—she dropped her eyes and blushed—"I am glad to find you good to look upon, my lord. I had thought to see my lord ugly—even with the savage face and great teeth of the images, and at times I feared and thought perchance my lord might even suck my blood or devour me, as Kinchi Haman says the gods are wont to do. But my lord is kind and gentle and he honors and blesses me with caresses, and"—her golden skin flushed rosy and her eyelids drooped—"and, the caresses of my lord are very sweet."

At last, with a deep sigh, she again released herself. "We must go to Kinchi Haman, my lord," she said. "He would be angry indeed if he knew I were detaining my lord. Let us delay no longer."

Holding my hand, she led me towards the chasm. But as I glanced into the terrible abyss spanned by that shimmering beam of light, I drew back. There are limits to human faith, to credulity, and though I had seen Itza walk safely across the Bridge of Light, and though I knew she was no wraith, no spirit, no supernatural being, no figment of my imagination, yet to believe that I could do the same was utterly beyond me. By what magic, by what mysterious unknown power she had accomplished the seemingly impossible feat I did not know, could not imagine, but that the streaming light would support my weight was unthinkable, utterly preposterous.

Itza looked at me with surprise in her glorious eyes. "Does my lord fear?" she asked. Then, with a merry rippling laugh: "Fear not to follow me, my lord," she said, and stepped forward. I gasped, took a step forward to restrain her, but she was out of reach, walking upon that multicolored light, leaving me alone within the entrance to the cavern. Better to be dashed to my death than to lose Itza, and fully expecting to feel myself hurtling through space, I leaped after her.

Miracle of miracles! My feet trod upon an invisible something as firm as the rock itself. In a moment I was at Itza's side. In a moment more we had crossed the chasm and stood within the opening in the opposite cliff. I had crossed the Bridge of Light, had accomplished the utterly impossible!

In impassioned words, with husky voice I told her of my love, whispered soft Zutugil endearments in her ears and declared, as I believed and as I still believe, that Fate had drawn me hither and Destiny had guided and guarded me that I might find and have her. "And I, too, love thee, my lord," she whispered. "Aye, I love thee more than life. Blessed am I above all women that my lord should love me, but mortal woman cannot mate with the sons of the gods, my lord, and Kinchi Haman has chosen me to be the bride of Kinich Ahau with the coming of the next moon of the Tonalmatl."

"Curse your Kinchi Haman, whoever he may be!" I exclaimed. "I'll have something to say about whose bride you are to be, my Itza, my beloved one! And as for being a son of the gods! I am as much a mortal as thyself."

Itza drew away, her eyes frightened, wide. "Hush!" she warned me in a terrified whisper. "Curse not the great high-priest, my lord. And say not that you are

mortal. Aye, I know you come in the form of man, for so it has been foretold, but even Kukulcan 'walked the earth in the form of man and thou, my lord, art his son. But we must make haste, my lord. Already the sun seeks the nether world, so let us hurry onward to my people and to Kinchi Haman."

Still holding my hand, she led me down the rocky passage, while all about us the strange light glowed. Whence it came I could not discover. I could see no device, no contrivance, no source to account for the light. Even where it streamed across the chasm, where it formed that miraculous bridge of light, it seemed to issue from the solid rock. It was all incomprehensible, incredible. The only real, natural, understandable thing I had seen was Itza, and while she was real and natural and lovable enough, yet even some of her words were incomprehensible to me. That she had mistaken me for a god, for the descendant of the Plumed-Serpent, was not surprising. She and her people, of course, knew of the ancient prophecy, they had—as she herself had said—been long awaiting the appearance of some messenger bearing the token, the symbol of the Book of Kukulcan, and when she had seen me, a white man and bearded, she had naturally thought me either the bearded god himself or one of his sons. But who was this high-priest Kinchi Haman whom she both revered and feared? Who was this Kinich Ahau, whom she was to wed at the next new cycle of Tonalmatl? Well, I'd soon know, and would have something to say about whom she was to wed. And if Itza's people looked upon me as an incarnated god, as the son of Kukulcan, what I had to say would carry weight. Even a high-priest would hardly dare defy the son of the Plumed Serpent, the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan. And even if he did, I'd have Itza for myself despite him and his fellows. If it came to a matter of force, I was quite prepared to slay the priest with my own hands. So elated was I, so filled with my new found happiness, so overwhelmingly in love with Itza, that no thought of danger; no thought of failure entered my mind. I felt able to cope with anything, to overcome anything, to defy the world if necessary. Nothing mattered but Itza, and I drew her to me and kissed her head, her neck, her upturned lips as we hurried on.

But even in my obsession I noted something of our surroundings. I saw that the tunnel through which we were passing had been cut by hand—tool marks were everywhere visible upon the walls and roof, and at frequent intervals the rock was covered with sculptured figures and glyphs. In places, too, it led downwards in series of steps, and descending one of these flights of stone stairs and turning sharply to the left, we came abruptly to the end of the passage with an arched opening framing a section of a gorgeous sunset, of golden and crimson clouds above a purple range of lofty mountains.

AS we reached the opening, and I gazed upon the scene spread before me, I uttered an involuntary cry of admiration. Never had I beheld a more beautiful picture. Enclosed within an encircling ring of towering mountains was a valley perhaps thirty miles in diameter, a valley rich and verdant, with patches of dark woodland, with lush green meadows, and with a broad tranquil river winding through the centre and shimmering in the fading light of the setting sun. Fields of golden-yellow corn, or snowy cotton, of tobacco, alternated with acres of flowers—crimson, white, pink, mauve and scarlet, until the cultivated lands looked like a vast multicolored crazy-quilt. In every direction straight roads, bordered by stone walls and shade trees, divided the whole valley into even, symmetrical squares, and from where we stood, a broad highway led—

straight as an arrow—to the great city that occupied the very centre of the valley. It was the hidden city, the city of Mictolan!

Hundreds of low, one-storied houses glowed in the rosy light of the sunset. Here and there a taller, more imposing building rose above the others; four magnificent temples with enormous, intricate roof-combs towered, on their lofty pyramidal mounds, far above the lesser buildings, and even higher than these, surmounting an enormous "kus" or pyramid fully two hundred feet in height, with its gleaming, painted comb soaring another hundred feet in air, was a magnificent temple rising from the huge open plaza in the centre of the city.

From where we stood, we could see the tiny forms of people moving about; strolling through the streets, lolling on the flat roofs of their houses, plodding from their labors in the fields towards thatched cottages embowered in flowering shrubs and trees, but all so silent, so still, that it seemed more like a picture thrown upon a screen than a reality. And as the last light of the sun faded and was gone, and twilight descended on the valley, a strange effulgence, a luminous glow overspread the city and the valley, seeming to come from nowhere, to be conjured from the air, and bathing the wondrous scene in a soft, mysterious light.

Itza's touch drew my eyes from the marvelous scene, and again I crushed her to me, drank deep of the sweetness of her lips and felt the thrill of her responsive love. Then, side by side, we stepped from the opening in the mountain and, in the strange, soft purplish light, moved forward along the highway towards the city. Our presence was already noted. Before we had gone fifty feet, the faint, far-away sound of horns, of booming drums, of shouting voices were borne to us from the city, and from the summits of the five temples lambent flames shot to the zenith, shifting from gold to white, to red, to green, like a display of the Aurora. Ahead of us the wide road was filled with hurrying, thronging, shouting people. Men, women and children came dancing, laughing towards us. All were golden-skinned, all were clad in richly woven cotton garments, all were figures that might have stepped bodily from some ancient Mayan sculpture. Prostrating themselves as we approached, strewing the road with gorgeous flowers, chanting songs, they formed a lane through which we passed. Now and then I caught a word, a sentence, amid the confusion of shouts, laughter and songs: "He comes! The bearer of the symbol comes!" "Look upon the son of Kukulkan!" "Beseech his blessings!" "Itza leads him to us!" "Blessed by the gods is Itza!" "Our day is at hand!" "Behold the deliverance of Mictolan!" "Welcome to thee, O son of the Plumed Serpent!" "Great is our rejoicing, O our lord!" "Long have we awaited thee, but thou hast come at last!" "Lo, the prophecy has been fulfilled!" Then, as we passed where the crowd was still closer, I heard someone exclaim: "May he who bears the token choose Itza for his bride!"

"Hush! speak not so," warned another. "Know you not she is betrothed to Kinich Ahau? She weds at the coming of Tonalmatl."

"And what of that?" persisted the first speaker, and at his words my heart went out to him and I stared into the sea of faces striving to identify him—a tall serious-looking young fellow in a dark red costume and a plumed golden casque—"What of that?" he repeated. "Who dares say the bearer of the token nay? Can aught prevail against the power of the lord of Kukulkan?" The reply was lost as we passed on and the welcoming din increased. Never had a man a more vociferous, a more whole-hearted, a more triumphant welcome.

Itza touched my arm. "Look, my lord!" she exclaimed in a whisper. "He comes, Kinich Haman comes forth to welcome my lord. My task is done, my lord. I must leave thee. But O, my lord, that I might be forever at thy side! Oh, but thy carcasses are very sweet, my lord!"

I grasped her almost roughly by the arm. "Go not!" I commanded her. "Your tasks are but just commenced. I, too, desire you forever at my side, and none—no, not even your Kinich Haman, dare dispute the commands of him who bears the token of Kukulkan."

A troubled, half-frightened expression came over her face but she smiled and glanced trustfully at me and made no further effort to leave my side as we halted and awaited the approaching procession. In the lead, clearing the street of the crowds, and forcing them back by means of heavy wooden staves, were several dozen Indians clad only in loin cloths but wearing tight-fitting leather caps adorned with blue feathers. Behind these marched several columns of warriors in robes of quilted cotton, their heads covered with shining copper helmets bearing nodding plumes of red, white and green. Each carried a long bronze-headed lance and a round shield decorated with mosaic symbols of the Plumed Serpent. Following these was a band playing upon double-ended drums, long reed pipes and pottery whistles, while behind the musicians was a knot of long-robed, long-haired men ablaze with gold and jewelled ornaments and surrounding a marvelous litter borne on the shoulders of eight men. Even in the soft subdued light which resembled bright moonlight, the palanquin scintillated and sparkled with iridescent hues as though sprinkled with diamond dust. But at the time I scarcely glanced at the golden, gem-encrusted litter, for my eyes were fixed upon the man who sat within it—the high-priest of Mictolan, Kinich Haman.

NEVER have I seen a more repugnant, a more repulsive creature. He seemed a fiend in human form if ever there was one, and he was scarcely human at that. His face was indescribably horrible, for some affection or disease had eaten away the cheeks and nose until the jaw bones were visible; he had the appearance of a living death's head. Above the yawning black holes that should have been a nose, his malignant eyes burned in deep bony sockets. A shock of coarse hair, dyed red by lye, grew low on his artificially flattened forehead and hung about his shoulders, and although I did not know it at the time, he was a hunchback with weak bowed legs and gorilla-like arms. He was dressed in a long robe of black with a border of symbols in the sacred red, white and green, an immense carved emerald was suspended by a chain of heavy gold links about his neck and upon his head was a narrow gold band bearing two long tail feathers of the sacred Quetzal trogan.

As he saw Itza beside me, his eyes flashed, his lips drew back over the fleshless jaws and he was the personification of fury.

"Back to your home, Daughter of Kinich Ahau, he snarled. "How dare ye walk in the presence of him who comes, shameless one that thou art?"

Itza, terror on her face, shrank back, but I tightened my hold on her arm. Have no fear, beloved," I whispered.

The priest seemed mad with fury as he saw the girl make no move to obey. "You dare defy me?" he screamed, half-rising from his litter, and quivering with rage. "Have a care that thou art not flayed alive and wed in blood to Xipe instead of becoming the bride of Kinich Ahau." Then, turning to his soldiers, "seize her, beat her until she falls," he ordered.



Two of the men stepped forward, their stern faces a strange mingling of fear of approaching me, the bearer of the token, and terror of disobeying the monstrous, fiendish priest.

"Stand back!" I ordered, drawing Itza to my side. "He who dares lay hand upon the maiden Itza dies by the curse of Kukulcan."

Instantly the warriors drew hastily back, and still holding Itza, trembling and terrified, I strode directly toward the raging, infuriated priest. My part was to bluff, to overawe. From the instant I had set eyes upon Kinchi Haman I had known that he and I were fated to clash, that either his power or mine must prevail and there was no better time than the present to determine once and for all who was to wield the power. My part was to overawe, to bluff to terrify by my supposedly semi-divine personality. But would the priest's fears of offending the gods override his vicious, cruel nature and his fear of losing prestige? I would soon know.

Looking him contemptuously up and down and then with a savage frown staring straight into his bloodshot, wicked eyes, I stepped to within a yard of where he sat, like the living counterpart of a hideously distorted idol.

"And who art thou to defy the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan?" I demanded. "A strange welcome you give the bearer of the sacred token, O, Kinchi Haman. Know you, misshapen one, that I, the long expected one, chose to have this maiden Itza remain beside me. More, O, priest of Mictolan, I, not Kinich Ahau, shall wed the maiden. Disobey my wishes, little priest, and the lightning and thunder at my command shall destroy you and your people."

At my words, a deep half-moan, half-sigh arose from the crowd. They, through their priest, had offended the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan. Dire vengeance might fall upon them at any moment, and with groans and supplications they prostrated themselves upon the earth. But the effect of my words upon the priest were very different. He was a brave man, despite his cruel, vindictive nature, and, so I suspected at least, was not as superstitious as his people. And though I could see he was terrified at heart and recoiled before me, yet he was: one to willingly acknowledge defeat so readily.

"Thou speakest boldly," he muttered, his eyes ablaze, "but what proof have we that thou art the bearer of the token? And even if thou art, it is I, Kinchi Haman who rules here. And the maiden I say is to wed Kinich Ahau." Then to his guard. "Seize her, I command you. The one who falters dies the seven deaths."

A burly fellow sprang towards Itza at the priest's words. There was no time for argument, no time for anything but instant action. I must prove my words, must make good my boast. I drew my revolver, fired from the hip, and the soldier plunged forward. But his fall was scarcely noticed by the amazed, horror-stricken, terrified people. Screams, yells, groans came from them as they groveled in the dust while the priest, flinging himself from his litter, threw himself at my feet chattering incomprehensible gibberish and pleading for mercy.

I had won the day. To be sure it had been at the cost of a man's life and I regretted having been forced to kill the fellow who was, after all, only obeying the priest's orders, but it could not be helped and, I felt, it had probably saved many lives (including Itza's and my own) that would have been sacrificed had I not at once asserted myself.

**P**LACING my foot upon the neck of the prostrate priest—a somewhat theatrical pose I admit, but perfectly appropriate under the circumstances—I harangued the people. Timidly, fearfully they raised their heads at sound of my voice, and with frightened

eyes gazed at me, fairly trembling with terror of another demonstration of my power over thunder and lightning.

"People of Mictolan!" I cried, "Arise and fear not: I, the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan come to you in peace and friendship. Bear witness O, People of Mictolan, that Kinchi Haman defied him who brings the token, and behold him humbled and in the dust. He has been spared death by the magic of my thunder and my lightning because he is of the priesthood of Kinich Ahau, but no other shall be spared who defies me, and even he will feel the vengeance of Kukulcan if he bows not to my will. And bear witness O, People of Mictolan that the maiden Itza weds with me and not with Kinich Ahau. Should ill befall her, should harm come to her, the vengeance of the Plumed Serpent will fall upon the city and its people."

A great sigh arose from the throng. "Thy will is law, O, son of Kukulcan. Thy words shall be obeyed," they chanted, almost as with one voice.

"Arise, Kinchi Haman," I ordered the still groveling priest, removing my foot. "You have heard my words. Bear them well in mind, O, Most Ugly One."

Shaking, terrified, the priest managed to gain his feet, but despite his physical—and his superstitious fear—malignant hatred and vindictiveness were in his burning deep-set eyes. But his words were humble, apologetic, as he begged pardon for defying me.

"You asked, O, priest, what proof you had that I was the bearer of the symbol," I said. "Is not my presence here enough? Who, but the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan, could pass the Valley of Death, the Tunnel of the Serpents, the Pool of the Alligators, the Eight Deserts, the Whirlwind, the Fiend Netzpueha, the Demon Ixtequite, the Blazing Mountains, the Realm of Hot Ashes, the Cave of the Bats and the Bridge of Light? But that none may doubt, here O, priest, is further proof."

As I spoke, I handed him the copy of the codex. Every neck craned forward, every breath was held as the priest studied the document. Dropping to his knees, he knocked his forehead in the dust. "O, great and mighty son of Kukulcan!" he cried, as he again arose. "Son of the mighty Gucumatz, Lord of the Thunder and the Heavens, we do you homage. At thy feet we prostrate ourselves and our gods bow before you. Thy will is law and thy breath our life. Great is our rejoicing that thou hast come unto us of Mictolan at last. Mighty will be our praise to Kinich Ahau, Lord of the Sun, for thy coming, and great will be the sacrifices on our altars. One hundred maidens shall be wed to Kinich Ahau on the moon of the Tonalmat, and—"

"Stop!" I ordered, interrupting him. "There will be no sacrifices. Know ye not that Kukulcan in the long ago ordered that the people of Xibalba, the Kingdom of the Great Snake, were to make no sacrifices of their fellow men? Know ye not that it was disobedience of this order that caused Kukulcan to leave you, to hide his face for many Baktuns; that in punishment, the people were destroyed and only those of the City of Mictolan were saved? And yet you, O, Kinchi Haman, would disobey that order, and that in the presence of the son of Kukulcan! Have a care that the vengeance of the Lord of Thunder falls not upon thy head, O, priest."

He glowered. I saw that in him I had an implacable enemy. But he was too fearful of my pistol, too fearful of my presence openly to protest, too fearful of popular opinion. Though he cursed me inwardly, for he was a cruel and bloodthirsty old rascal, yet his words were suave and humble enough. "It shall be as my lord wishes," he declared. "He is the son of Kukulcan; he is our master and the gods bow to his will. But my Lord tires, he has come far. His place is awaiting him

as it has been awaiting him for many Katuns in the past. Come, my Lord, to thy temple that thou mayest rest."

Turning, he beckoned to his litter bearers who came forward with his gorgeous, golden, gem-encrusted palanquin, and with it another even more wonderful which had been brought for my own use. With a quick motion I lifted Itza, seated her in the glorious vehicle, and took my place by her side. Never have I seen a more hideous, a more intense expression of hatred and anger than that which, for a brief instant, showed upon the death's head features of the high priest as he saw the girl beside me in the litter.

"You and I are coming to grips soon, old rascal," I muttered to myself, as the bearers lifted my litter to their shoulders and started forward. "And," I added mentally, "the sooner you start trouble, the sooner your career will be finished, you old faker," for I felt quite certain that Kinchi Haman did not in the least believe me a divinity.

## CHAPTER IX

### The Prince Aczopil

**R**ECLINING on robes of the most magnificent feather-work, within the litter of carved wood covered with gold plates and mosaic work of precious stones, Itza and myself were borne upon the shoulders of gorgeously-clad nobles, while on every side the throngs cheered, shouted welcomes, threw flowers before and upon us and, falling into line in our rear, formed a colorful, noisy procession. Before us rode the high-priest in his litter, with the warrior guard and band leading the way towards the central plaza and the great temple. As we passed slowly along, I was filled with intense scientific interest. The people, their costumes, the litter I was in were all so strange, so marvelous that I could scarcely realize it was real. Then there was that strange, diffused, inexplicable light that illuminated the valley; the still stranger multicolored lambent beams that emanated from the temples. What was it? How was it produced? And what weird, mysterious, impossible light was that upon which Itza and I had crossed the chasm? It was utterly beyond me, wholly inexplicable, and I determined that my first care would be to investigate these phenomena.

Then I beheld another wonder. From the distance, as I had looked upon the valley in the light of the last rays of the setting sun, I had seen fields of maize, of potatoes, of vegetables and of flowers. There had seemed nothing unusual about them. But now, as we passed through a field, I gazed in utter astonishment. The maize was fully fifteen feet in height; I saw a melon as large as a barrel, and every vegetable and flower was of equally gigantic proportions. Never had eyes of man seen such stupendous vegetable growths. Here, by some means, agriculture had accomplished miracles. Many of the ripening ears of corn were more than two feet in length with each kernel nearly an inch in diameter, and sweet potatoes, lying upon the earth where they had been freshly dug, were as large as my body. What had caused such results? Was it due to the light, to the fact that there was no night here? I did not know, but later I discovered that this was primarily the cause, although the quality of the light and its origin had much to do with it. By this time we were at the plaza, a large open space bordered with immense trees and flowering shrubs above which the vast pile of the temple towered toward the zenith. Thrice around the base of the mighty stone-faced *Kus* we were carried, and then up another broad avenue. Between rows of splendid buildings, all typically Mayan except for the

fact that many had arched doorways, the procession moved slowly towards an imposing, elaborately sculptured edifice which was evidently a palace.

Here our litters were lowered to the ground, and the hideous, hunchbacked, skeleton-jawed priest, with many obeisances and elaborate words of welcome, which were belied by his smouldering, vengeful eyes and savage expression, bade me enter, informing me that it was to be my home. Itza, trembling and hesitating, held back as the priest glared at her; but fearing to let her leave me for an instant, I drew her with me into the palace. It was a magnificent building, its outer walls a marvel of sculpture, its inner walls covered with marvelous frescoes of gods, heroes, priests, semi-human personages, beasts, reptiles and symbols, the whole combined in such a manner as to produce a symmetrical design very different from anything I had ever seen. Everywhere, however, the sacred red, white and green of the Plumed Serpent cult predominated, and everywhere Kukulcan in all his manifold forms and symbols appeared in the sculptures and frescoes. Even the portal, flanked with two immense stone columns carved to represent conventionalized serpents with feathered bodies, indicated that the palace was dedicated to the serpent-god, and as I passed through the first great chamber I felt quite sure that the place had been erected, ages before, to provide a home for the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan when he arrived. Flowers were everywhere; from incense burners of solid gold and silver, sweet-scented smoke arose, and from an inner room came the sounds of low music and of singing. Forming a lane through which we walked, were several dozen young girls who smiled and threw flowers before us, and passing through a second doorway we entered a large room. Here feather robes, skins, rush mats and great cushions were upon the floor. Upon a low table were immense fruits; grim, armed guards in golden casques and breastplates stood about the walls; men, evidently servants or slaves, stood about, and from a huge golden bowl a most appetizing odor arose. Not until then did I fully realize how hungry I was. I had had nothing to eat for nearly thirty hours, but the excitement of the day and evening had driven all thoughts of food from my mind. But now I felt famished, and throwing myself upon a pile of robes and cushions with Itza beside me, I ate ravenously of the thick stew that was served in deep silver dishes.

The high priest, explaining that he had religious duties to attend to, had withdrawn, but there was little privacy, for nobles, officials and other prominent personages came and went, bringing presents, paying homage and welcoming the supposed son of Kukulcan. Among these I noticed the young man to whom I had been attracted earlier in the evening because of his remark regarding Itza and myself. Pointing him out to the girl, I asked her who he was.

"He is the Prince Aczopil, my lord," she replied. "But for Kinchi Haman he would be the king of Mictolan. When our good king Tutil-Nima died, two Tuns past, Kinchi Haman declared himself both king and priest."

Instantly I realized that in the deposed prince I would find a true friend and ally, for from the few words he had spoken, and which I had overheard, and from what Itza told me, I felt sure the Prince Aczopil was no friend of the high priest. And if he had a household and wife or sisters, it might solve my problem as to what to do with Itza, until I could consummate our marriage. She could not well remain with me in the palace—although she had expressed her willingness to do so and saw nothing out of place in doing so, and I had no intention of allowing her to return to the home of the maidens of Kinchi Ahau, the Vestal Virgins of

the temple, where she would be in the power of the rascally old priest.

"And is the Prince Aczopil married?" I asked Itza, "Has he sisters or a mother?"

"Yes, my lord," she replied. "He is wed with the Princess Tutuil and he dwells with his sister, the Princess Mitchi Ina."

MY mind was made up. I beckoned to the Prince, who was now near. "Greetings Prince of Mictolan," I exclaimed, as, somewhat hesitatingly and evidently overwhelmed at being so honored, he approached. "To the son of King Tutuil Nima the son of Kukulcan gives welcome as to a brother. You shall be my counsellor and friend, and into the care of you and of the Princess Tutuil and the Princess Mitchi Ina I give the maiden Itza, until such time as she shall be my wife. Look to it, O Prince, that no harm befalls her, and guard her as you would your life."

Never have I seen a man so overcome with mingled surprise and delight. To his mind he was, of course, being favored by a divine being, by the son of Kukulcan, and had been honored above all others—not even excepting the high priest in the city. Just as I had instinctively known that in Kinchi Haman I had an implacable enemy, so I knew that in the Prince Aczopil I had a staunch friend, a man whom I could depend upon and who, no doubt, had a vast amount of power and influence among the inhabitants, even though he was not officially their ruler. Falling upon his knees before me he poured out a torrent of words of gratitude and pledged himself and all his family to guard and protect Itza.

She, poor girl, was almost heartbroken at being forced to leave me even for the night; but she had no fear as she trusted Aczopil implicitly and after an affectionate farewell, I gave her into the Prince's care. Then having managed to dismiss all my visitors and my far too numerous attendants, I threw myself upon the soft rugs and cushions and instantly fell into a dreamless sleep.

The following day I was up betimes, having been awakened by the servants moving about, and had scarcely finished my breakfast before the old priest put in his appearance. He seemed much more affable than on the preceding evening and, to my relief, made no inquiries as to the whereabouts of Itza, though I had no doubt that he knew all that had happened. The servants and my attendants were all of his choosing, and unquestionably kept him advised of my every move and word. But I intended to change that very soon and to surround myself with men and women loyal to Prince Aczopil. Neither was I hoodwinked by Kinchi Haman's assumed friendliness. He could not hide the expression of his eyes nor the tone of his voice, though I could hardly blame him for feeling peevish and far from friendly towards me. I had defied him, had humbled him before his people. I had forbidden him to hold human sacrifices though I much doubted if he had obeyed me in that matter; I had raised the deposed prince to a place of high honor, and I had robbed him of Itza. Had I actually been divine or the descendant of Kukulcan, this might not have troubled him over much, for to be superseded by a divinity or semi-divinity would have been expected. But somehow, from the moment he had defied me, I had felt sure he was aware that I was mortal and an alien. Despite his horrible appearance, due to his mutilations and deformities, he was keen and intelligent, as well as crafty.

While he did not dare incur the danger of bringing down the wrath of his people by denouncing me as an impostor, though he had to acknowledge that I possessed the symbol and had come unscathed through all the perils as was foretold in the prophecy; though he

was in mortal dread of my seemingly magic control of thunder and lightning, yet, aside from his natural superstitions and perhaps some lingering doubts, he was convinced that I was not all I represented myself to be. Had he felt otherwise, he would never have acted as he had. He would have prostrated himself before me; he would have welcomed me and would have bowed without question to my commands. Why or how his suspicions had been aroused I do not know, but on this first morning, as he conversed and asked veiled questions, I knew perfectly well that he was endeavoring to confirm his suspicions. Fortunately I knew the ancient prophecy, as related by old Katchilcan, by heart, and I took the opportunity of referring to it as we talked. But I dreaded that he might produce a codex or some form of writing for me to read. And when he asked abruptly how soon I would lead his people forth from the valley of Mictolan, as provided for in the Book of Kukulcan, I was in a decided jam.

In the first place I had no intention of fulfilling this part of the contract. In the second place, even had I desired to do so, it would not have been feasible, and would surely have resulted in suffering and death, for the Mayas would have been utterly at a loss in the outside world. No doubt, when Kukulcan (for I was now as firm a believer in the Plumed Serpent as was any Maya) had segregated the people in the hidden city and had foretold that they would one day come forth and repossess the land, he had expected that they would increase and multiply enormously and that there would be only a handful of enemies to overcome. But for some reason the population increased little, if at all. There were, I judged, not more than ten thousand inhabitants at the most—and that particular portion of the prophecy had been set at naught. However I had no intention of telling the old priest that. Whether I was a divinity or not, I had come—according to his belief and the belief of the people—as the promised messenger to lead the Mictolans forth to regain their lost power and their lost lands. My only play was to procrastinate and delay, to find some plausible excuse for remaining in the city, until I could slip off with Itza.

This plan of procedure had not occurred to me before, and for a moment I was in a quandary. But my mind worked quickly and I doubt if Kinchi Haman even noticed my hesitancy. There were many things to be done before the people left Mictolan, I told him. I had been instructed by the great Kukulcan to investigate all things and conditions at Mictolan before I ventured anything. I had been charged to make sure all of Kukulcan's ancient laws and orders had been fulfilled, because, I added, unless the people of Mictolan were living and worshipping in accordance with Kukulcan's wishes, their deliverance would not be possible. At these words I saw the old villain wince. Well he knew that he, at least, had not followed the laws of the ancient Mayas; that he had perverted the religion; had usurped the powers of the king, and had been a law unto himself. And when, ignoring his suggestion that I should conduct my observations in his company, I declared my intention of making my investigations in my own way, I saw by his expression and his blazing eyes that he was prepared to stop at nothing to prevent me from learning the truth. But he did not press the matter further. Then I had a shot at him myself. I desired, I said, to meet the King of Mictolan, and I pretended to be vastly insulted at the monarch's failure to visit me.

The old fellow was frightened, I could see. But he quickly recovered himself. The king, he declared, had died two years previously, and as the people had not been able to agree upon his successor, they had appointed him, Kinchi Haman, to act as regent.

I pretended to accept this explanation, but he was ill at ease, and presently, pleading religious duties, he withdrew—much to my delight.

**H**ARDLY had he left when Aczopil arrived with Itza. She seemed even more beautiful than before and rushed to my arms with a happy cry. Holding her close, I received the Prince's salutations, told him I wished him to dismiss the present retinue of the palace and provide persons of his own selection, and then, feeling perfect confidence in him, I told him of my suspicions of the priest. I was not sorry I confided in him. He was as frank with me as I had been with him. He had no doubt that Kinchi Haman was my enemy, though he declared that the priest would not dare to do anything to arouse the enmity or the wrath of the son of Kukulcan (for of course the prince believed me such) but, he added, it might be different with Kinchi Haman's attitude towards him and his friends. However, he had no fear of the priest. The royalist party was very strong and powerful. With me as his friend, he feared nothing, and he doubted if the old rascal would dare defy me or show his enmity towards the prince, as long as I favored and honored him. He also confirmed all my suspicions regarding Kinchi Haman. The priest had run things to suit himself. He had practised human sacrifices upon the temple altars, he had oppressed the people; he had declared himself supreme, and he had become overbearing, cruel, vindictive and ruthless. And as he talked and acquainted me with the conditions and affairs, I learned of the terrible fate to which Kinchi Haman had doomed my beloved Itza. She had spoken of being betrothed to Kinich Ahau, of being pledged to wed him on the moon of the Tonalmatl, but what this meant had not occurred to me. Obsessed with my love for her, and with so much else to occupy my mind, I had failed to realize what it meant. But now, as Aczopil referred to it, I wondered that I could have been so dull. Kinich Ahau was the Sun God. Itza was a Virgin of the Sun, and she had been selected to wed the god in symbolic form by being cast alive into the yawning black depths of the sacred well!

Cold shivers ran down my spine at the mere thought of that possibility and I fervently thanked God that I had come to Mictolan in time to save her. She had spoken of it calmly, quite as a matter of course. But, I realized later that this was only natural. To her and her fellow maidens it would have been an honor. By thus dying in the sacred well they would—they believed—become the mates of the Sun God; they would dwell forever in paradise; it was a martyrdom they sought with religious fervor.

But Itza was very human, very feminine. Once her love had been aroused, her religious fanaticism dwindled, and she was as anxious to live and become my bride as she had been anxious before to meet death, to become the bride of Kinich Ahau. I drew her closer to me as I thought of those other maidens who were doomed to be cast into that hideous well. I determined that they should not be killed. Even though the Sacrifice of the Virgins was a sacred universal custom of the Mayan religion, it should not occur while I was in Mictolan. No, not even if I were forced to hurl the priest into the depths myself to prevent it. But the day of sacrifice was distant. Only on the moon of the cycle of Tonalmatl were the virgins wed to Kinich Ahau, and that was still several months ahead. Much might happen before then, and telling the prince I wished to see the city, I asked him to accompany me, and with Itza clinging to my hand we left the palace.

That day was a day of the most amazing discoveries, of incredible surprises beyond my wildest dreams. I

was quite prepared to find that these Mayas had advanced far beyond the civilization at the time of the conquest, and the fact that they had discovered the arch, that they had developed many of their arts to such a high degree, confirmed this. But I had never imagined for a single moment that they had advanced to such astounding heights in some directions, nor that it was possible for a race to acquire a knowledge of certain forces beyond that of any other race, and yet remain so primitive, so archaic in other directions. That, to me at the time was—and for that matter is even now—the most incredible, the most astonishing feature of the place. Here was a race, or rather a community, still in many respects no nearer the highest civilization than their ancestors centuries before had been—a people without even the knowledge of the wheel, a race ignorant of steel, a community cut off from the entire world, following an immeasurably ancient religion, yet controlling forces of which we, the most highly advanced of known races, knew nothing. And yet in a way, it might have been expected. I knew that the ancient Mayas had, ages before the dawn of the Christian era, developed the most perfect numerical system in the world; that they had invented a calendar more accurate than anything up to the time of the revised Gregorian calendar; that they had an intimate knowledge of astronomy; that their glyphed or written language was without a parallel in the world, and yet they had never learned how to make an arch.

These were facts known to every student of American archeology and were inexplicable puzzles, mysteries as great as how the Mayas produced their wonderful sculptured monuments, how they worked the hardest of precious stones, how they accomplished many remarkable feats. But here, in Mictolan, their strange paradoxical development had gone beyond all bounds of imagination. They still used their ancient—their immeasurably ancient—system of mathematics, the vigesimal system; they still used the equally ancient calendrical system of the Tonalmatl or religious calendar, the Calendar-Round the Initial Series dates, the Long Count and the Cycles by which any date could be established within a period of five million years, and they still used the glyph writing. Had they possessed wheels, had they discovered the use of iron or steel, had they even acquired a knowledge of machinery, of chemistry, of electricity, I might not have been so greatly astonished. But they had none of these, and yet they possessed an intimate knowledge of matters undreamed of, unsuspected by any other race on earth, of matters that seemed downright uncanny, supernatural and utterly beyond belief.

## CHAPTER X

### The Gods Who Carved the Stones

**I** HAD already noticed the gigantic size of vegetable products, and I had assumed that their size was partly, if not wholly, due to the fact that there was no darkness in the valley. In this surmise I found I was correct, but the light itself, which was the basic source of this light that so puzzled me, was most astounding. In fact, its source was also the source of everything amazing that I observed. It was radium, or at least some intensely radio-active material, which apparently existed in vast quantities in a certain section of the valley. How the people had learned to make use of this marvelous force of nature of which we know so little, I cannot say; but as will be seen, certain things that I discovered led me to believe that it had been used, for certain purposes, from the most ancient times by the Mayas—and possibly by other prehistoric Amer-

ican races. This was my first epochal discovery, and it explained many hitherto inexplicable matters. We had passed through the city and had wandered across the fields beyond, when, in gazing across the valley to the east, I noticed a barren, desolate area. Calling the prince's attention to it, I asked about it. To my astonishment he replied that it was "the sacred place of the gods who cut the stones." I felt I was on the verge of a most interesting and epochal discovery, so I started towards the spot despite the protests of Azcopil, who seemed to have a superstitious terror of the place. Itza, too, held back, evidently in fear, but neither could give a lucid or intelligent reason for his dread. The gods, or spirits (the two are synonymous in the Zutugil), were powerful, they brought illness and death upon all who invaded their domain, and though they were those "who carved the stones" they must be paid for their work by lives and, added the prince, for many Katuns the people had not employed them to cut the stones as the toll of lives was too great, but had used painted stones instead. Indeed, he declared, at one time in the distant past, so many lives had been taken by those "who carved the stones" that the city had been nearly depopulated. At that time, he said, the people did not know why they sickened and died, but a wise priest, one Tutul Hunac, had made a great sacrifice to the god Hunabku, who had revealed the cause of the deaths to the priest. Here was a mystery. I had noticed that there were many monuments and buildings covered with painted or frescoed designs, that all the sculptures appeared very ancient, and I had wondered about it. Now Azcopil was telling me a strange, involved story—a myth or legend or allegory—to account for it. More intent than ever on learning what it all meant, who or what were the "gods who carved the stones," I laughed at his fears, reminded him that I, the son of Kukulcan, was more powerful than his evil gods, and bidding him remain behind with Itza, and if I had no mind to expose her to any dangers either real or imaginary, I hurried towards the dismal looking spot.

I had never seen anything just like it. It seemed to be an expanse of black, clay-like material, the decomposed debris that had fallen from a vein in the hillside above it and, all about it, were immense blocks and columns of squared stone. Examining these, I discovered that the surfaces of some were covered with a peculiar gum-like material laid on in complicated patterns. One of these rested at the very edge of the black deposit, and as I stooped over it, I uttered an involuntary exclamation of amazement.

Wherever it had touched the blackish material, the surface of the stone had been deeply cut or eaten away, leaving the portions covered with the gummy coating in high relief! Sudden realization flashed upon me. The "gods who carved the stone!" The forbidding black clay! The stuff itself was the prince's "gods!" It possessed some power, some quality to eat into the solid rock as acid eats into steel. The whole mystery of how the Mayas accomplished their marvelous sculptures was solved! The stone monuments, the façades of their buildings, had not been carved by hand. They had been etched, etched on a gigantic scale by means of this strange, black mineral substance. What was it? What terrible corrosive power did it possess? I shuddered and shrank back. A substance that could eat into the hard rock was to be given a wide berth. No wonder the prince had feared the place. Then I remembered his story, the toll of lives exacted by the "gods who carved the rock." It was clear enough now.

All who had come into contact with the terrible substance had been destroyed. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, must have been employed in hauling the countless masses of stones to the spot, in painting the lacquered

designs upon their surfaces, in placing the stones in the corrosive clay, in withdrawing the stones after they had been etched, in handling and cleaning them. And all of these men who had touched the incredibly powerful material, had succumbed to its effects.

I shuddered as I thought of what agonies they must have suffered, of how their flesh and bones must have been eaten away as if by fire. Perhaps even the emanations of the material were deadly, and I hurriedly retreated at the thought. Azcopil had said that in the past the valley had been almost depopulated by the "gods who carved the stones." As I recalled his words, I remembered the prophecy as related by old Katchilkan—"The people shall wither and die. Those who carved the stones and placed the images shall vanish." Here was the explanation, the solution of the mystery of the disappearance of the Mayas! They had been destroyed, wiped out by the very means they had employed to produce their greatest monuments! I felt sure of it, convinced of it. If the horrible stuff existed here, if the people had used it for etching the stones, it must have existed elsewhere, must have been used in other places. That no one had hitherto discovered it, meant nothing. Perhaps, during the centuries, it had disintegrated, disappeared. Perhaps it still existed in some remote, hidden localities. But that it had been the prime factor in the destruction of the civilization, I felt assured.

Here in Mictolan the segregated survivors of the people had come close to utter annihilation by it. They had only escaped extermination by the wise old priest, Tutul Hunac, who put an end to etching the stones. No doubt, elsewhere, the people had gone blindly on, believing superstitiously that the gods demanded human lives in return for carving the stones, until the race had been decimated, reduced to a handful of survivors. But what could the material be? What mineral could possess such powers? A wild idea occurred to me. Was it, could it contain radium? Was the black mineral exuding from the mountain side pitchblende? It had



*I stared at it fascinated and stepped closer*

all the earmarks of that wonderful ore. And there was that strange fluorescent light. Had these people harnessed the mysterious powers of radium? Had they a knowledge of forces of which we had not dreamed? Was I on the verge of discoveries even more remarkable, more incredible than any I had yet made? For a space, my brain whirled, my thoughts ran wild, I gave my imagination full rein. But I was soon to learn that the actuality was far beyond my wildest dreams.

RETURNING to Itza and the prince—who were vastly relieved at seeing me alive and unharmed—I plied Azcopil with questions. But he could give me little intelligible information. The light that came at night was a gift of the gods, he declared; it had always been so; but the light from the temples, the bridge of light—only the high priest knew their secrets. And, he added, hesitantly and with furtive glances, the priest knew other secrets; he possessed powers unknown to all others.

"Aye, even power over the Monster of Sacrifices," put in Itza, in affrighted tones.

"Monster of Sacrifices?" I reiterated. "Who or what, my beloved, is this monster of whom you speak?"

"I cannot say, my lord," she replied. "Only Kinchi Haman may see the monster; for others it is death to look upon him. And each month a maiden or a youth must be sacrificed unto him."

"Hm," I muttered, "I must look into this. There is no monster that the son of Kukulcan may not look upon." It sounded to me like the old Minotaur myth. I wondered what the old faker had up his sleeve.

"And where does this monster dwell?" I asked.

"Within the sacred innermost temple," replied Azcopil, "where no one but the priest may enter."

"The son of Kukulcan may enter all places," I declared. "I shall look upon him and shall destroy him. The law of Kukulcan forbids the sacrifice of human lives."

The faces of Itza and the prince paled. "But, my lord!" exclaimed Azcopil, "though it is a monster, yet it is a god and cannot be destroyed."

I laughed. "God or no god, yet I shall destroy it," I assured him.

For a space the prince was lost in thought. Then: "My lord," he said earnestly, "until now I have not spoken of it. But the words of my lord force me to speak. We, of the House of Nima Kiche, in the long ago, had given unto us a prophecy. From the lips of my father, Tutil Nima, I heard it, even as he heard it from the lips of his father, Xima Tutil, and as each eldest son has heard it from his father since the days when it was given unto our house.

"To none should this prophecy be revealed until the house of Nima Kiche no longer ruled, and unto Mictolan came one who would again raise our house to power. He, so goes the prophecy, should be a stranger and should cast down our enemies, and he should mate with a maiden of the Itzaes, and should destroy the Monster of the Sacrifices. So, my lord, when I looked upon my lord as he passed with the maiden Itza by his side, I knew that the stranger of the prophecy had come, and now that my lord says he will destroy the Monster of the Sacrifices, I know that the hour has come to reveal the prophecy of the house of Nima Kiche. Blame me not, my lord, for the words of the prophecy. They are not mine, but have come down through many Baktuns, aye even from the days of Tohil the Rumbler. It is even more ancient than the Book of Kukulcan, and, in this prophecy, it is foretold that the land of the Kiche Maya should be overrun by strangers of white skins and bearded faces, and that the people of the Kingdom of Zibalba should be destroyed and scattered,

and that new gods should be set up and only in the City of Mictolan should the house of Nima Kiche survive. And Kukulcan should never come unto his people, but that the bearer of his token should be a stranger and a mortal, and one who possessed the power of the stranger's gods. And that the people of Mictolan should forever remain within the city and that there should be war and battle and the stranger's gods should prevail and the priests of the cult of the black Enchua should be cast down, and that the bearer of the token should wed with a maid of the House of Itza and should depart from Mictolan and the House of Nima Kiche should again rule in the land. And as much of the prophecy has come to pass, my lord, I know that it is true, and that all shall be fulfilled, even as it is foretold."

Itza had listened, wide-eyed, with bated breath, to the words of the prince. And now, as he ended, she threw herself into my arms. "Oh, my lord, my loved one!" she cried. "Is it true? Is my lord then a mortal like myself? Then, my lord, I may wed with thee without fear, and great, indeed, will be my happiness!"

I nodded confirmation as I held her close. "Even as the prophecy says, it is so," I assured her. Turning to the prince, I said: "Then, from the first you, my brother, have known I was no son of Kukulcan? Think you, Kinchi Haman knows of this prophecy?"

Azcopil looked troubled. "Who can say?" he replied at length. "He has great wisdom and knows many things. It is said that he puts on the cloak of darkness, and unseen by men wanders about, listening to all. But what matters it, my lord. The prophecy says he will be overthrown; that you shall triumph, and as it is foretold so must it come to pass."

His faith in the prophecy was sublime, but I could not blame him for placing absolute confidence in it. Had I not seen the prophecy of Kukulcan fulfilled to the letter? Had not this new prophecy thus far been borne out? I am not superstitious, I have no belief in prophecies or in the occult, and yet—well, I could not deny the truth of what I had actually seen and experienced, and I confess I was beginning to believe that the old Mayas possessed some power of divining the future of which we know nothing. Still I was not yet enough of a fatalist, nor sufficiently convinced of the truth of the prophecy, to trust entirely to it. But there was no use in worrying over what might or might not happen. The revelations of the prince had cleared the air. No longer need I attempt to pose as a divinity with him. No longer did Itza look upon me as a superior being. And as the prince assured me that the greater portion of the inhabitants were loyal to his house, and secretly hated Kinchi Haman, I felt that, no matter what difficulties might arise, I could count upon having a majority on my side.

HAD I followed out my own wishes, I would have left Mictolan and its people to solve their problems as best they might and have taken the first opportunity to clear out with Itza. But I realized that such a course was impossible. Even alone, there was not one chance in thousands that I could ever reach civilization. The mere thought of the horrors, the dangers I would have to face, appalled me, and to expose the girl whom I loved more than my life, to almost certain death, and to the most terrible hardships and sufferings, anyway, was not to be thought of for a moment. Far better to remain forever in the valley, to live with Itza forever, cut off from civilization and my fellows, than to attempt flight. And, I felt, life in Mictolan, with Itza as my wife, and with the hideous old priest gone and Azcopil reigning as king, would be as pleasant and enjoyable an existence as any mortal man had a right to expect. I even began to have dreams of my future there, of the

things I might accomplish, of the modernities I might establish, of the busy interesting life I would lead teaching the Mictolans, helping them onwards, watching the development of their civilization, while I taught them about machinery, about electricity, about innumerable matters of which they knew nothing. Meanwhile, we had circled the valley and had come to the avenue leading from the city to the tunnel through which I had entered the valley. Filled with the most intense curiosity to see that marvelous bridge of light once more, I expressed my wishes to my companions.

But at Itza's words I halted, astounded, incredulous. There was no bridge of light, she declared. It had ceased as soon as I had reached the valley. It had existed only to afford me passage!

It seemed incredible. How and by whom had it been created? How and by whom could it have been destroyed? I could not believe her. I felt sure the thing was a natural, a mysterious, an inexplicable phenomenon, and that she was merely repeating some ancient myth or prophecy. Determined to learn the truth, to discover the source, the cause of the luminous bridge, I hurried towards the opening in the mountain side. The way was still illuminated by the soft glow, and having discovered the bed of radioactive clay, as I believed it to be, I assumed the light came from some similar material in the rock. My examination of the walls confirmed this. Minute particles of black were visible in the reddish rock, and I noticed that where these were most numerous, the tunnel was most brightly illuminated.

But when at last we came to the vast chasm, I stopped in utter amazement. It yawned before us, terrific, black, bottomless, with no sign of the gleaming, multicolored beam of effulgence spanning its depths like a bridge built of a rainbow. But my amazement, my wonder, was forgotten in my realization of what it meant. All retreat from the valley was cut off! No matter what happened, I was doomed to remain forever in Mictolan. I had no doubt that Kinchi Haman was responsible. Somehow, by some unknown, some almost magic power, he could control the bridge of light. He suspected me. He had no desire that I should escape, until such time as he saw fit to lead his people from the valley. And I was convinced that he would never do that, that he had no faith in the prophecy and that he knew far more of the outside world than I suspected or that anyone dreamed of.

To be sure, he had been as terrified of my pistol as any of his people, and I felt sure he was wholly unfamiliar with firearms; but that did not prove that he had not, by some means, learned that the white men had overrun the land, that it would be impossible for his people ever to regain their country and to restore the old order of things as provided in the Book of Kukulcan, and that, knowing this, he intended to keep me a prisoner and, by cutting off all possible means of escape, to put an effectual stop to his people attempting to leave the valley. Intuitively I had been suspicious of him from the very first, intuitively I had felt that he did not believe me other than a mortal, a stranger; but even my intuition fell far short of the truth.

I reflected, however, that both Itza and the prince had known beforehand that the bridge of light was no longer there. So perhaps, after all, the priest—if indeed he were responsible for its disappearance—had had no ulterior motive for removing it. I questioned them both, but the only reply I got was that it was tradition, common knowledge, that with the coming of the long-expected messenger, the bridge would vanish.

"But then," I asked, "how will the people of Mictolan go forth when the time shall come, as foretold in the prophecy?"

Azcpil's eyes opened wide in astonishment. "Does not my lord know?" he exclaimed. "Does not the Book of Kukulcan tell that the people shall go forth by another road? Does it not show the symbol by which they shall know that way? Always, from my father and from the priests, have I heard that the Book of Kukulcan holds the secret of the other road."

"I know nothing of that," I assured him, as I drew the copy of the codex from my pocket. "I see nothing of that other road. Look, you, Azcpil. Do you see the symbol that you speak of?"

The prince examined the codex intently, and Itza, as interested as either of us, studied it, also.

"I see it! It is here!" she cried suddenly, excitedly. "See, my lord, it is here—the symbol of Kukulcan together with a foot and the reed of promise."

"Aye, thou art right, little sister!" exclaimed the prince. "But," with a note of disappointment in his voice, "a portion of the book is missing. It says not which way one turns to find that symbol. Whether to the north, the east, the west, or the south. But that matters not, my lord will go with me to the sorcerer, Nohul Voh, and by his powers he shall show the way."

Itza drew back. "Oh, I like not Nohul Voh!" she cried. "He is most wicked and works spells and does strange things. It is said—" her voice fell to a whisper, "that he takes the form of a great bat. I fear him, my lord."

I laughed. "Fear not, dearly beloved," I reassured her. "Your Nohul Voh will not harm the betrothed of the son of Kukulcan, and to him as to all the others, I am that."

Azcpil smiled. "And he is a true follower of the house of my fathers," he declared. "His hatred of Kinchi Haman is great, indeed, and often have I gone to him for advice, though never will he show me his smoke of magic. But he told me of your coming, my lord; yes, told me days ahead, though I spoke not of it to anyone."

"What?" I cried. "You mean he knew of my coming? Come, then, O, prince, I would see this sorcerer. But call me not 'Lord,' Azcpil; nor thee, my Itza."

The prince grinned and Itza flushed and smiled. "Does my brother know that he has another name among my people?" he asked. "Everywhere they speak of you as Itzimin Chac (thunder and lightning). Would it please my brother if I called him Itzimin?"

"It will serve well," I told him.

"And most fitting," smiled Itza, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes as she glanced up at me. "For is not Itzimin Chac the master of the sky, Itza? And art thou not to me both lover and master?"

"Aye, a terrible master!" I laughed. "Fear you not my black anger and my roaring?"

"No more than the sky fears the thunder," she cried gaily. "Does not the sky always triumph and rule the thunder in the end?"

"As you, little tease, shall ever rule me," I declared.

The prince grinned. "That, Itzimin, is the most certain of all things," he said. "Was there ever a man who could really rule a woman?"

"That," I replied with a chuckle, "is a question you might better ask your Nohul Voh."

## CHAPTER XI

### The Sorcerer

THE home of Nohul Voh was on the outskirts of the city, a strange cylindrical structure of massive stones, topping a low mound in the center of a field, in which were growing gigantic weeds, herbs and strange flowers. No door, no window showed in the walls, but at several points narrow, vertical slits pierced



*I recognized the picture instantly—it was the valley beyond the Cave of the Bats!*

the masonry. As we approached, Azcopil nudged me. "It is a favorable time," he announced in a low voice. "See, the Nohul Voh is in his field gathering his magic herbs. I feared we might find him busy with the spirits or the stars."

Moving slowly about, and almost completely hidden by the huge plants, was a stooping figure. He was draped in a robe of black, ornamented with weird symbols and figures of many colors; long, tangled, white hair fell like a heavy mantle about his shoulders and his face, and as his back was towards us, his features were completely hidden. Without speaking, noiselessly, we approached him. And so wholly unexpected was it, that I actually jumped when he spoke. "Welcome, bearer of the Book of Kukulcan!" he rumbled in a deep voice that seemed scarcely human, and without turning or glancing up. "And welcome, Prince, and thee, Itza, maid of Kinich Ahau. I have been awaiting you, aye, since first you set out this morning and, passing by the Place Where the Gods Carve the Stones, you stepped aside and saw; since the moment when you, Prince of the House of Nima Kiche, related the prophecy of your father's fathers; since you entered to where the Bridge of Light is no more and, when finding not the place of the road of the children of Mictolan upon the Book of Kukulcan, you sought to learn the secret from Nohul Voh."

I could scarcely believe my ears, could scarcely credit my senses. How in the name of all things did the old sorcerer know our every movement, even our words, our thoughts? Did he possess some weird, uncanny power?

I felt Itza shudder as she snuggled close to me, and I confess I had a most peculiar chilly feeling myself, for

it was downright uncanny. Presently the sorcerer straightened up, turned, and approached us. I had expected to see a seamed, wrinkled, toothless, ancient man. His snow-white hair spoke of great age, and Azcopil had told me that Nohul Voh had been an old sorcerer in the days of his father's father's father. But the face he turned towards me was that of a youth, clear, smooth-skinned, bright-eyed, and with features as untouched by age as those of the prince beside me. Yet there was something about his face, something in the eyes, that spoke of great wisdom and of a knowledge beyond that of other men. And as he gazed steadfastly at me, I felt that he was looking into my inmost soul, was reading my most secret thoughts.

"My lord has come to Nohul Voh to learn of the road of the symbols," he said in his strangely deep voice. "He has come with the last of the House of Nima Kiche and with the maiden he desires to wed. It is well. The Kinich Haman plans and plots, but he can learn nothing of the book of the future from Nohul Voh. Yet unto you, Itzimin Chac, will I reveal much. Come, my lord."

Turning, he led the way through the giant weeds to the base of the mound, where, opening a massive wooden door, he stood aside, signalled for us to enter, and closed and fastened the portal behind us. For a few steps he led the way through a narrow dark passage. Then, without warning, a soft clear light burst upon us and I stared about in amazement. Had I been suddenly transported to the laboratory of an alchemist, I could not have been more surprised. We were in a large room, and everywhere the walls were hung with mystical figures on sheets of vellum, with bundles of dried plants and herbs, with the skulls of men and beasts, stuffed birds and quadrupeds, packages and bundles, and innumerable odd-shaped vessels and strange utensils.

Hanging near the ceiling in the center of the room was a sphere that glowed like a miniature moon and illuminated the entire chamber. Below this was a table of stone covered with sheets of papyrus bearing innumerable diagrams, symbols, and written Mayan characters, together with metal instruments and an abacus-like affair. At one side a pottery vessel, most marvelously like a retort, simmered over a charcoal brazier. Opposite this was a pillar of carved stone, perhaps three feet in height by four feet in diameter, and with upright rods of metal about its circumference. Above this, suspended in mid-air, without visible support, was a ball of polished green stone which rotated slowly upon its axis and swung in a circle above the top of the column, now and then touching one of the upright rods and emitting a low musical sound. I stared at it fascinated and stepped closer. What held it there? What unknown unseen power kept it ceaselessly rotating, following an orbit? Then I saw that the surface of the polished top of the column was covered with incised lines and glyphs and that, at the base of each upright rod, was an astronomical symbol. But before I could make head or tail of the remarkable device, before I could frame a question, the sorcerer spoke.

"My lord doubts the powers of Nohul Voh," he said. "He thinks the future may not be read even though the past may be known. He says in his heart there is no magic, nothing that cannot be explained, nothing that is not a law of the gods. My lord, Itzimin Chac, is right. There is no magic, nothing that is not according to the laws of the gods. But there is wisdom, there is knowledge that some possess, of which others know nothing. My lord has the knowledge of making the thunder and the lightning serve him, but of that knowledge even I, Nohul Voh, know nothing. But I, Nohul Voh, have knowledge of how to make forces serve me, of which my lord knows nothing. My lord knows not how



the fall of stone moves about, he cannot read the meanings of its motion. But to me it is clear, as clear as the future and the past, that I read in the smoke that the Prince Azcopil calls magic.

To no living man or woman will Nohul Voh reveal the future, for to know the future is to know unhappiness and fear. But to my lord who bears the Book of Kukulcan will I reveal some things that he desires to know. But only to my lord alone. Remain with the maiden here, O Prince, while Itzimin Chac learns what he desires."

HE was standing close beside me as he spoke, he was in full view. Then, before my amazed, incredulous eyes, he rose slowly in the air and, like a wisp of cloud, drifted across the room. Itza shrieked, the prince shrank back, and I stared, wide-eyed, gaping at the miracle. And as he floated towards the wall his lips moved and again he spoke. "Have no fear, Itza, beloved of Itzimin Chac," he said. "No harm will befall."

The next instant he had reached the wall. A massive stone swung noiselessly aside, revealing a secret opening, and Nohul Voh beckoned me to follow him.

In a daze, bereft of all senses save utter amazement, I sprang through the opening and found myself in a second, smaller room illuminated by means of the same mysterious light. The sorcerer was once more standing, a smile upon his lips, and, bidding me be seated upon a massive stone chair, he stepped towards a magnificent ceremonial incense-burner of immense size.

"First, my lord, you must have faith," he announced, his eyes fixed upon mine. "In your heart I read that you doubt, so I must convince you, even against your own will. For many days I have watched you, my lord, as you came onwards towards Mictlan. I have seen you conversing with the priest, Katchilcan, I have seen you in the ancient temple bound by the savages, I have seen you surrounded by the raging waters in the Valley of Death and passing with the chief through the Tunnel of the Serpents; I have seen you cross the Pit of the Alligators, have seen you destroy the fiend Netzephua and cross the eight deserts. I have watched you in the realm of hot ashes and the blazing mountains, as you led the demon Ixputeqe to its death, and I have seen you in the Cave of Bats, lost and wandering in the darkness, until you came unto the Bridge of Light and the maiden Itza and found your fate."

I was thunderstruck. I felt as though I were speaking my own thoughts aloud. Had he read my thoughts? Had he by some form of hypnosis been able to revisualize, step by step, all the scenes and incidents I had been through? I did not know. But I was positive that I was not consciously hypnotized. My mind was functioning clearly, I was reasoning, I was even planning some means, some question that would be a test; something, some secret known only to myself.

He had said he had seen me talking with Katchilcan. How much did he know of what had gone before? Could he tell me where I had found the codex that had led to all my astounding discoveries and adventures?

"It is all as you say," I assured him. "But tell me, Nohul Voh, whence came I to the village of Katchilcan?"

He shook his head. "To all things there is a limit," he said. "Does the loftiest mountain reach to the moon? Does the vulture perch upon the stars? Does the maize plant grow to height of the mountain? Does man live forever? No, my lord, even knowledge has its end fixed by the gods. Whence you came to the village of the priest I know not. Neither do I know when nor how you came by the Book of Kukulcan. But that you came by it honestly I know, for otherwise your way would not have been made easy, as was foretold in

the prophecy. Is my lord ready to believe what I may show him?"

I was even more amazed at his words than if he had told me of my every movement and action since I entered Salceda's shop at Vigo. For it was obvious, certain, that he did not read my thoughts, that I was not hypnotized. And I was convinced, even though my reason told me I should not be, that Nohul Voh possessed an uncanny, an almost supernatural power. If he could look into the past, might he not be able to look into the future? Was it not possible—even certain—that he had accomplished what countless men had dreamed of doing? Memories of theories of the fourth dimension, of extravagant fiction, of impossible, wholly imaginary stories raced through my brain. But none, nothing I had ever heard or read was as seemingly unreal, impossible and fictional as what was actually being demonstrated to me in this ancient city of the Mayas.

AT last I found my voice. "I am convinced, O Nohul Voh," I declared. "Whatever you may show me, I will believe."

He smiled. "Then, behold!" he exclaimed, removing the cover from the incense burner and stepping quickly to one side. For a brief moment I saw nothing. Then a thin, luminous wisp, similar to smoke in the beam of an electric light, rose from the great earthen vessel. Slowly it spread, mushrooming out, undulating, unfolding, until it formed a great cloud completely concealing the room beyond it. I gazed at it, watched it with fascinated eyes, hardly knowing what to expect. Lighter and darker areas appeared upon the now stationary bank of vapor. Patches of brown, of green, of blue appeared and slowly, little by little, like a dissolving view, a picture developed before my eyes. I recognized the picture instantly; it was the valley beyond the Cave of the Bats! There were the towering mountains, there was the cliff with the huge stone image of Kukulcan cut deeply into its surface. I seemed to be moving towards it. The valley and the hills came nearer and nearer. A stream dashed, foaming, through the valley. Beside a shaded pool a bare ledge jutted up, and upon the surface of the water-polished rock I saw the symbol that Itza had discovered in my codex—the symbol of Kukulcan, the foot and the reed.

Now the scene was fading away. The stream broadened into a river. The mountains became lower. I seemed floating upon the tranquil river in a boat, and before me rose a mountain side, a terrible precipice. At the base the river vanished in a black, arched tunnel. It raced towards me. Suddenly the smoke screen turned inky black. Then a speck of light appeared upon it. Rapidly it increased in size. A vast expanse of sparkling blue water appeared, gleaming under a sun-bright sky. Above its farther shores rose wooded hills, purple in the distance. Close to where I seemed to float upon the surface of the lake a rocky island rose, and clearly visible upon the surface of a water-washed cliff I saw the symbol once more. Slowly the picture faded, once more the glowing vapor rolled and writhed. It thinned, broke into wisps, and, stepping forward quickly, Nohul Voh replaced the cover on the huge urn. I lay back, weak, speechless. "My lord has seen the road of the symbol."

At his words I seemed to come out of a trance. I laughed almost hysterically. "And to what purpose?" I asked almost unconsciously, for my thoughts were a confused jumble. "I have seen neither the beginning nor the end."

"The end, I cannot show," he declared, shaking his mane of white hair. "And the beginning is here in Mictlan. Across the Bridge of Light and through the Cave of the Bats."

"Then, O, Nohul Voh, I have learned nothing," I

exclaimed. "With no Bridge of Light to cross, of what value the road beyond?"

He came towards me, seated himself close to me and spoke earnestly.

"My son," he said, "perhaps Kinchi Haman knows the secret of the Bridge of Light. But it will come again as always from the beginning it has come and gone.

"When the many-colored flames rise from the temples, then, my son, you may know that the Bridge of Light spans the chasm.

"Watch for those flames, my lord, and when they rise, hurry with the maiden and cross on that bridge of light without delay. Woe to you should the flames cease when you and the maid are midway from rock to rock!"

"And cannot you, who can read the future, say whether that may or may not happen?" I demanded, a tone of sarcasm in my voice.

"It would be of no avail, rather a hindrance, could I reveal it," he replied. "If I should say unto you that death awaited you and the maiden, it would cause you pain and suffering and life would not be worth the living. Should I tell you that you would cross in safety, and you believed me, you would have no uncertainty of the future and life would lose its greatest zest. Nay, my son, of the future I will not speak. But of the past or rather of the present I would say a word. I said I knew you had come by honest means to be the holder of the Book of Kukulcan. I said I knew not whence you came. But this I know, that you are not of my race, are not the son of Kukulcan. No, start not, it matters nothing. In the prophecy it is not said that the symbol should be brought by a man of the Kiche-Maya nor of the House of Kukulcan, but by a stranger. And also I know that the people of Mictolan will not be brought forth by you, my lord. Long ago has the allotted time passed.

"There is much in the ancient prophecy that none but I, Nohul Voh, can read.

"Nay, even Kinchi Haman knows it not, for while much of the Book of Kukulcan is written in the Itzao symbols, yet much was written for secrecy in the symbols of Ziyon Caan, known only to the House of Cocome Voh, of which I, Nohul Voh, am the last.

"And in that secret writing it is foretold, that if the messenger comes not with the symbol by the end of the thirteenth Katun, the power of the Kiche Maya will be forever at an end."

I gasped. The thirteenth Katun! I had made a rapid mental calculation as he spoke. That was somewhere about the twelfth century A. D. I had come a mere matter of some eight centuries too late!

But Nohul Voh was again speaking. "But even though the Kinchi Haman knows not this," he was saying, "he knows that the bearer of the symbol foretold in the prophecy must bear upon his breast the mark of the House of Tutul Zius, and my son bears not that mark. He dares not ask my lord, yet he but half believes, and he plots and schemes to see. And though I will reveal nothing of the future, even to you, my son, yet I am your friend and the friend of the Prince Azcopil and I would see the downfall of Kinchi Haman, and, if my lord consents, I will place upon his breast the secret mark of the Tutul Zius that is known only to those of the inner circles. And thus may the Kinchi Haman be betrayed."

I laughed. "Then, O, Nohul Voh, it must assuredly be written in the book of the future that I shall bear that mark placed upon my breast by your hand, and who can escape Fate. So be it, O, Great Sorcerer of the House of Cocome Voh."

### At the Temple of the Plumed Serpent

WHEN I rejoined Itza and Azcopil in the outer chamber, my chest bore a beautifully tattooed clan-mark of the Tutul Zius, and I felt as if a live scorpion was under my shirt. Nohul Voh had cautioned me not to mention the matter even to the prince or to Itza, nor to permit anyone to see the recently tattooed design for the present. In a week's time, aided by an unguent he had given me, he assured me that no one, not even Kinchi Haman, would guess I had not borne the symbol for years, and then, he added, the more who saw it the better.

Itza, poor girl, had been greatly worried at my absence, and as I entered the room she uttered a glad cry and rushed into my arms. She was very nervous, for she had the superstitious fears of her race for all things savoring of the unknown and for more than two hours she had been regaled by Azcopil's highly-colored tales of the weird doings of the sorcerer.

The prince, however, did not appear to have worried over my prolonged session with Nohul Voh. "Truly," he exclaimed with a laugh, "Nohul Voh has had time to show you the past and future from the beginning of time until the end of all things. Twenty times and more has the green ball moved about its circuit."

I stepped closer to the sphere, still swinging slowly around the circumference of the column top, and whirling around and around as it did so. I examined it from every angle, but could see no support, nothing that held it suspended, no connection with any other object. It seemed actually to float in air.

"My lord Itzimin wonders at the ball of time," rumbled Nohul Voh, who was watching me. "Fear not to touch it, if you so desire, my lord."

I did desire, and taking him at his word, I cautiously extended my hand and touched the gleaming green sphere. I had expected that my touch would stop it or at least disturb its motion. Judge of my utter amazement when it swung by my hand without veering a fraction of an inch from its circuit! With all my strength I pushed against it; but I might as well have pushed against one of the massive stones in the wall of the room! It was as immovable, as firmly fixed as though it were held by steel rods!

Nohul Voh chuckled. Azcopil gaped. Itza stared, half-frightened, at the seeming magic. I could scarcely credit my senses. It seemed impossible, absolutely contrary to all rules and laws of physics. All that had gone before—the vision of the smoke, Nohul Voh's description of my journey—were nothing in comparison with this phenomenon. I had already decided in my own mind that the smoke-cloud, the vision, were all delusions, some form of hypnosis. But there was nothing visionary, nothing of hypnotism about this floating, silently rotating sphere of green, that could not be moved, could not be diverted from its course.

The sorcerer seemed to read my thoughts. "Yet it is but the law of the gods," he declared. "Do not the stars float in the sky? Do not the sun and the moon move across the heavens? And can they be stopped, can they be moved? And the law of the gods that keeps the sun, the moon, the stars in their places keeps also the ball of green in its place. My lord Itzimin has great knowledge of matters of which I know nothing. I, Nohul Voh, possess knowledge of matters of which my lord knows no more. In days to come, each shall impart to the other that which it is desirable to know. Come unto me when you so desire, Itzimin Chac, and you shall learn much from Nohul Voh and shall teach me much, for so it is written in the Book of Destiny. May

happiness be yours, my lord, and yours my daughter, and yours, O, Prince."

As he spoke, the door swung open, and bidding Nohul Voh farewell, we stepped from the strange, mysterious chamber into the brilliant sunshine.

Clear against the deep blue sky the temple rose in a silhouette of silvery white, and half-expectantly, I glanced at its summit. There was no sign of the lambent, multicolored flames. The Bridge of Light was still cut off. Kinchi Haman awaited me in my palace. He frowned at sight of Azcopil, he glared at Itza, but he spoke quickly, courteously. The people, he said, awaited the son of Kukulcan within the temple. The gods awaited him to lead the people of Mictolan in worship. It was time that I did so. Would I come with him and conduct the ceremony of the setting sun?

My heart sank. The wily old rascal had me in a trap. As the semi-divine bearer of the symbol, and the descendant of the Plumed Serpent, I was the supreme head of the cult of Kukulcan. As a priest of his temple, I ranked higher than all others. But I had not the remotest idea of the ceremonies, the worship of the cult. That it called for elaborate rituals, for offerings, for prayers and chants in the secret sacred language of the cult, that it entailed self-sacrifices of the priest's blood, I knew. But how, at what points in the ceremony? If I attempted it, my every move, my every word would betray me, and the old priest would know I was an impostor. If I refused, both he and the people would know something was amiss.

ALL these thoughts and misgivings flashed through my mind in an instant. Then an inspiration came to me. I would bluff the old rascal, would catch him in his own trap. He wished to force me to betray myself by taking part in a ceremony of which I was ignorant. I would compel him to betray himself; would make him the laughing stock of his people.

I nodded assent. "It is indeed time, O, Kinchi Haman, priest of Kinich Ahau," I said solemnly. "I would give thanks to the gods for their favors, and to my father Kukulcan. Knowest thou the ritual beloved of the mighty serpent?"

An evil grin made his skeleton jaws more hideous still. "I, high priest of Mictolan, know all the ceremonies," he declared. "Am I not the Kinchi Haman, priest of the Supreme God?"

I shook my head dubiously and looked very serious. "Of Kinich Ahau, Lord of the Sun, yes," I declared judicially. "But perchance, in the many Katuns that have passed since my father walked with the Kiche Maya, much has been forgotten. Does not the prophecy say that the old gods shall be forgotten? That the religion shall be perverted? Even you?" I turned suddenly, and pointing my finger at him thundered the words—"even you have caused human sacrifices to be made in the temples of the Plumed Serpent! And thy face, O, priest, is that of Jayayab—he by whom the year is poisoned! Already the all-powerful Hunabok frowns upon you and upon your temples! Aye, it is high time the son of Kukulcan came forth to thy temples to redeem the people of Mictolan! And thou, O Kinchi Haman, thou who claimest to know all rituals, shall stand beside me before the gods and shall aid me in my ceremony and my offerings. Take heed that no false move, no wrong word, no mistake is made, or upon you will fall the vengeance of Kukulcan, as the false betrayer of his teachings!"

Terror filled the eyes of the priest as I stood over him, threatening, reviling, shaking my fist at him. He cowered back, his ghostly death's head face blanched, his teeth chattered. My random words and accusations had hit the mark somewhere. Still in doubt as to my exact

status, he was filled with superstitious dread. He was not by any means certain that I did not know more of the rituals of Kukulcan than himself, and at my assured confident tones, my scathing denunciation, he had become even less certain, had begun to doubt his own knowledge, had lost all self-assurance.

In his ambition, his desire for power, his ruthless tyranny, he had usurped the powers of the priesthood of other cults than his own. He had installed himself as high-priest of all the Mayan gods, though he well knew, as I and all others familiar with Mayan mythology knew, the priests of the Plumed Serpent cult were apart from all others, a distinct order possessing secret rituals known only to themselves and amenable only to the supreme priest of their own order. He had been able to hoodwink the people, to pretend that, by favor of the gods, he had been appointed supreme head of the religion. But, so he thought, he had not fooled me. At my words, his crafty, ever-suspicious mind, had jumped to the conclusion that I knew secrets of the ceremony of Kukulcan of which he was in ignorance, and he was shaking with deadly fear that he had gotten himself into a tangle from which he would be most fortunate if he could escape. He glanced furtively about, he babbled that he must attend his own temple and conduct its ceremonies. But I shook my head and refused to listen.

"Come, time passes," I commanded him. "Today Kinich Ahau must be satisfied with the offices of the little priests. Kukulcan demands your presence. Lead the way, O, Kinchi Haman."

There was nothing he could do but obey. Still shaking and terrified, he led the way to the waiting litters and, surrounded by the plumed guards and richly-clad nobles, we were carried to the great temple of the Plumed Serpent. Everywhere, filling the great plaza, covering the flat house-tops, crowding the streets, were the people, awaiting me, eager to witness the ceremony of the setting sun conducted by the Son of Kukulcan before the altar of his father. Up the broad stone stairs of the great pyramidal *Kus* we ascended. Thrice the terrace at its summit we passed, and then, descending from our litters, I followed Kinchi Haman into the narrow, tapering doorway of the temple proper. My every sense was on the alert, my nerves keyed up. I was rapidly approaching a climax that would end either in my death or by raising me to supreme power, and it behoved me to take advantage of every opportunity.

I noted every detail of my surroundings, took in everything. And despite the danger I was in, despite the strain I was under and the dangerous part I was to play, I found my scientific interest in my surroundings rapidly overriding all other considerations. Scores, hundreds of times I had delved and wandered among the ruins of ancient Mayan temples. The form, the entrance, the narrow yard-wide passageway, the sculptures upon the stones, the frescoes on the walls, the strangely stepped-in ceiling, all were familiar. But never before had an archeologist seen the interior of a Mayan temple as it was when in daily use. No other scientist had ever seen one of the temples when it was occupied, when it contained the fittings, the furnishings, the objects devoted to the worship of the almost unknown Mayan gods. And so little was known of the people and their religion, that no one—not even Joyce or Morley, Saville or even Cervantes, had ever been able to imagine or visualize these things. Yet here was I, following the high priest through the labyrinth of narrow corridors within a temple filled with objects such as no museum in the world possessed. Wonderful tapestries and textiles, and marvelous hangings covered with magnificent feather pictures covered the walls. In tiny niches, images of gods, of divinities, of sacred birds and beasts of

solid gold, of jade, of lapis, of crystal and of amethyst were placed.

A strange, soft, bluish light, like that of moonbeams, filled the windowless corridors. Upon the stone floors were carpets of woven matting, and sweet smelling, aromatic incense floated from mosaic-covered burners placed here and there. Everywhere the sacred red, white and green of Kukulcan was used to the exclusion of all other colors; everywhere the Plumed Serpent in all his manifold forms was prominent in the pictures and decorative motifs, and in one brightly illuminated room were arranged hundreds, thousands of stuffed or mummified Quetzal troglans, the sacred birds in whose form Kukulcan or Quetzalcoatl was first supposed to have appeared. Presently we entered a long, high, narrow chamber, and I glanced quickly about. Kinchi Hama was already donning ceremonial robes. Everywhere were carved stone chests and wooden cases filled with priceless ornaments, magnificent robes, feather crowns, ceremonial objects. Which were the ones I should use? To hesitate was to be lost. The gleaming eyes of the priest were watching my every move. I must act quickly, surely, must betray no hesitation.

Across my mind flashed the memory of Professor Cervantes' most prized possession—the painted sculptured door-lintel from Chichen Itza with its figure of a high priest of Kukulcan. And, coincidentally with this memory, came the mental picture of old Kanichclan, as I had seen him attired for the ceremony of the sunset. Every detail was instantaneously photographed upon my brain. I saw every ornament, every object as plainly as though it were before my eyes. I wheeled savagely on the priest. "And since when?" I demanded, "has the misshapen priest of Kinich Ahau been paramount in the temple of Kukulcan? I am the master here! You are but a menial, a slave! Bring me the robes, the crown, the sacred objects that I may attire myself for worship."

He fairly cringed. Once more I had bluffed him. With babbled excuses he scurried about, bringing me robes, sandals, crown. I studied each as he presented it, raked my memory to be sure. Twice I hurled the objects from me and berated him. One, an elaborated, magnificent feather headdress, bore blue and yellow plumes; the other, a great golden disk, bore the symbol of Itzama, the Moon God. Whether he tried to trick me, whether in his haste and nervousness he had made a mistake, or whether he did not know of their significance, I cannot say. But, in any case, my prompt rejection of the objects must have convinced him I was familiar with the ceremonial costume demanded.

AT last I was fully attired. In one hand I bore the double-headed serpent staff of turquoise mosaic, in the other the feather-woven basket containing the implements for blood-letting. I smiled to myself. As far as appearances went, I might have been the vitalized figure from a prehistoric Mayan monument.

The priest led the way once more. As we passed through another chamber, we were joined by a dozen or more young men in the tricolored robes of the Serpent God. In another, twenty virgins of the temple joined the procession, and with measured tread, with a low chant, with waving green plumes, we issued from the temple door and looked down upon the vast crowd beneath us.

Above our heads the temple walls and lofty roof-comb gleamed like molten gold in the rays of the sinking sun. Below us the plaza and the city were in dusky purple shadows. And in a great wave of sound the cheers of the people rose to us on the calm silent air of evening. Slowly we marched around the broad stone parapet. The acolytes and virgins prostrated themselves, and the

priest halted and made obeisance before a short flight of steps that led to a huge sculptured altar above which towered a gigantic image of the Plumed Serpent, a lordly, imposing figure with benign bearded face gazing steadfastly into the east.

My heart pounded in my breast. Despite my every effort, I felt nervous, shaky, filled with forebodings. The moment had come. Could I go through with the plan I had formed? Could I dominate the priest and the others. Could I bluff it out? Then thoughts of Itza swept through my troubled brain. Somewhere below me, somewhere in that vast crowd, she and the prince were watching. For her sake, for her love, I must triumph. No longer did I hesitate. A great hush had fallen upon the scene. Not a sound broke the intense stillness. Stepping past the prostrate priest, I mounted the first step, faced the huge image above me, bowed, and at the top of my lungs shouted—in English: "Good evening, old fellow; what do you think of your self-appointed son, Kukulcan?"

I wheeled in time to see the priest glance up with an amazed, startled, half-terrified, half-incredulous expression. Never before had he or anyone present heard a word of English from my lips. To him, to all, it was utterly incomprehensible. It must be the secret ceremonial language of the cult of the Plumed Serpent! Below me, already dim in the shadows, the people were prostrate. Once more I shouted, this time in the Zutugil they understood, for I did not intend they should miss any of the events to follow. "Rise, O, people of Mictolan," I cried. "Rise and look upon the ceremony of the setting sun." Then, in English to impress them the more, I added, "And upon the setting of the priest here."

Slowly, half fearfully, the people rose and gazed upward towards where I stood.

Once more I turned and deliberately and confidently ascended the steps, until I stood directly before the immense statue, whose knees were on a level with my head. Then again I faced the priest. I am not a particularly religious man, I belong to no definite sect, but I respect faith and religion in others, no matter what its form. Regardless of their belief, of the fact that they were pagans, the people who had gathered about the temple were there to worship. To them the place whereon I stood was sacred. To them I was a holy being, a priest. My flippant words of a few moments before had been thoughtlessly uttered, had been the first words that came to my lips. But now I was upon the altar itself, upon a sacred spot, and nothing was farther from my mind than to be flippant, to be blasphemous, to desecrate the temple by word or act that, could my words be understood, would arouse the resentment of the people of Mictolan.

THEY had gathered to hear me give thanks to the gods; they should not be disappointed. Kneeling in sight of all, I repeated the Lord's Prayer and, to the best of my ability, gave fervent thanks to God for His mercies and prayed that He might guard and protect Itza and that He would not desert us in our time of need."

Then, feeling I had done my duty, I rose. The sun was sinking behind the mountains to the west, and I felt that I must bring the ceremonies to a prompt end—with a fitting climax. The time had come for me to assert myself, to humble the rascally, hideous old priest.

"Behold, O, Kinchi Hama!" I cried in Zutugil so that all might hear. "Behold, the sun sets; Kinich Ahau hides his face and visits the nether world and he goes without seeing his priest by the side of the son of Kukulcan. Did you not say you knew the ritual of the Plumed Serpent? Did I not warn you that there was much that you knew not? Did I not caution you to

make no mistake, to not fail to utter the right words? But you have done nothing, nothing but hide your face of Unayayab, the Poisoner of the Year. You have not joined in prayer, have made no move to render thanks unto the great Kukulcan. False thou art, false to your trust, false to your faith! But Kukulcan is ever merciful. Though he might well wreak vengeance upon you, yet will he be satisfied with less. He calls for the blood sacrifice, O, Kinchi Haman; for the blood of the priest of Kinich Ahau. Come hither and give the blood that he demands!"

Speechless, trembling, urged on by the jeers, the shouts of anger from the multitude, fearful of disobeying one who seemed on such familiar terms with the giant god, Kinchi Haman fairly crawled up the stairs to my feet.

Silently I handed him the basket with the thorn-covered cord, the obsidian knives, the golden bowl for sacrificial blood-letting. In the crimson light of the dying sun he looked like a fiend incarnate. But the eyes of the people were upon him. I stood beside him, stern, threatening. Above him loomed the giant idol. With trembling hands he pierced his ears with the lancet, with sweat pouring from his brow he drew the sharp thorns of the cord across his tongue. In the golden salver he caught the dripping blood and, groaning with pain, he placed the offering at the feet of the great image.

"And now, O, Kinchi Haman," I shouted, "that thy repentance may be complete, remain here at the feet of Kukulcan until Kinich Ahau, Lord of Day, smiles upon Mictolan."

A thunderous cheer arose from the crowds below, and without glancing back at the disgraced, humiliated priest, I descended the steps, marched with the Virgins and acolytes to the temple door, removed my priestly garments and descended to the plaza to where Itza eagerly awaited me. My triumph was complete. If any member of the community had doubted my status before, all such doubts were dispelled. The very strangeness of my actions, the unexpected, unintelligible words I had spoken, and finally my treatment of their feared and hated priest, had served to convince them that I was the son of Kukulcan. They were Indians, they reasoned in accordance with Indian psychology. Anything they did not understand must be supernatural, divine. My words in English were meaningless to them, therefore they must be understood only by the gods and their chosen priests. My ceremony of the setting sun was unlike any they had ever witnessed, therefore it must be the right one, and Kinchi Haman had been deceiving them. The priest had obeyed my orders, therefore I was the mightier, and he bowed to my superior wisdom and power.

And of all the people, perhaps the prince was the most amazed, the most impressed. As we walked towards the palace—for I had dismissed the litter-bearers—he was unusually silent and stared at me, a puzzled, incredulous expression on his face. But once we were alone with Itza in my quarters, he spoke.

"Itzimin," he exclaimed, "I cannot understand it. When I told you of the secret prophecy of my House and frankly said I knew you to be but a mortal and no son of the gods, you told me it was so. And now, Itzimin, you appear upon the temple, you speak the tongue of the sacred ceremonies, and Kinchi Haman humbles himself before you."

Itza, too, seemed greatly troubled and declared she was filled with sorrow at the thought that I might be other than an ordinary man.

I laughed at their serious looks and words, kissed away Itza's doubts, and reassured Azcopil. "You are both right and wrong, my brother," I told him. "As

you well know, I am of another race than yours. Those of my race worship another God in other ways than yours. And the God of my people welcomes the prayers and the offerings of all, whether priests or not. Upon the temple of Kukulcan I gave forth the prayers that I and my people render to my God, and in the tongue we use. And Kinchi Haman bowed to me by the will of the God of my people, who is the greatest of all Gods."

Azcopil nodded. Then for a space he was silent, thinking deeply. Suddenly Itza lifted her head from where it nestled on my shoulder and smiled into my eyes. "Tell me, Itzimin, my beloved, of this God of your people," she begged. "Truly He must be great and good and powerful above all others. Did not Kukulcan permit you to worship this God of yours upon his altar? Did not Kinchi Haman tremble before Him? And you, Itzimin, are the best and greatest of men, so your God must be the best and greatest of gods, and I desire to know Him and to worship Him."

"Yes, Itzimin, tell us of your God," added the prince. I am no theologian, and I fear I made a mess of trying to explain the tenets of the Christian faith to Azcopil and Itza. To people accustomed for generations to an involved mythology with a multitude of gods, a simple religion with a single God is a most difficult matter to comprehend. Moreover, the Zutugil tongue was woefully lacking in words to express my meaning or to describe many things in my religion. But that they grasped the fundamental principles, I was sure, when the prince spoke again.

"It seems, Itzimin," he said, choosing his words and speaking slowly, "that your God is like our Hunabku, the Invisible and Supreme One. To him all other gods bow. He rules all earth, heaven, the air, yet never is he seen. And like your God, who sent His son to walk upon earth and teach the people, so our Hunabku sent his son Kukulcan to walk among the Kitehe Maya and to teach our father's fathers. So perchance, Itzimin, your God and the supreme god of my people may be the same, and I for one see little difference as to which one we worship, for both are the source of all things."

I nodded assent. I had no wish to try my hand at missionary work; to stir up religious questions was to stir up trouble, and trouble of any sort I desired above all else to avoid.

## CHAPTER XIII

### The Mystery of the Green Sphere

There was one man in Mictolan who had not been fooled by my involuntary rôle as a priest of Kukulcan. Old Nohul Voh chuckled over it when I next saw him.

"I know not what words you spoke, Itzimin Chac," he declared, "but that it was not the ritual of Kukulcan, I knew well. Neither did my lord carry out the ceremonies of the setting-sun as provided by my religion. Mayhap no man or woman of Mictolan knows how it should be done. Of a surety, Kinchi Haman does not know all. It is many Katuns since a true priest of the Itzaes held sway at the temple of Mictolan, and still longer since one of the Tutul Xius prayed at the altar of Kukulcan. But I, Nohul Voh, have looked upon the ceremony of the setting-sun in the holy city of the Plumed Serpents, in the temples of Chichen Itza, and I know the secret ritual as well as old Kachiquel Xius himself. But also I know my lord is not the son of Kukulcan and that the symbol of the Titul Xius upon his breast was placed there by my own hands. So between us two it will remain a secret, and it matters not, for it was foretold in the Book of the Future."

To relate all my conversations with the old sorcerer, to tell in detail all my moves, all my experiences, all my adventures and to describe all of my discoveries during the weeks that followed my triumph over Kinchi Haman, would be monotonous. Moreover, many were of little importance and finally, to tell the truth, I cannot for the life of me feel sure of the chronological order of the innumerable incidents nor the reasons and causes that led up to them.

The old priest seemed to have been completely squealed. I saw little of him and he was most servile and conciliatory when we met. But there was a fly in my ointment nevertheless. Once having taken the part, there was no way of getting out of it, and each night and each morning I was obliged to ascend to the temple and go through the ceremonies before the image of my supposed ancestor. Naturally, the ceremonies I inaugurated were most revolutionary, but as I found I was compelled to do something that savored of religion, I decided to do my best to carry out—as far as my limited knowledge permitted—the ritual of the Christian Church.

Perhaps, in fact undoubtedly, any priest or minister of any sect would have been most properly scandalized had he seen and heard me. I fear even good, jolly Padre José would have frowned upon me, for these services I conducted were a most hopeless hodge-podge of the Roman Catholic, the Episcopalian, the Congregational and half a dozen other denominations. From each I selected the most impressive and spectacular features I could remember, and if the good features of each did not bear fruit and win converts to the Christian faith, it was not the fault of my devotions, for I was very much in earnest, very serious and had no thought of sacrilege nor of burlesquing any church. And that the new form of religion appealed to the people was obvious, for the temple of Kukulcan became the favorite, and the attendance at the other temples fell off appreciably. But though this might previously have caused Kinchi Haman to writhe in anger, and to plan most horrible reprisals upon me, I now had little fear of him. In due time, and when Nohul Voh had approved of it, I had, quite as if by accident, managed to let the old rascal catch a glimpse of my chest, and by the manner in which he started and his eyes widened, I knew he had recognized the clan mark of the Tutul Xius, and that no longer did any doubt of my identity exist in his crafty old brain.

Much of my time I spent with the old sorcerer. He aroused not only my wonder and my curiosity, but my scientific interests as well, for I very soon discovered that Nohul Voh was a scientist in his way, a sage versed in lore unknown to the rest of the world and possessing secrets of nature that no other man had ever unlocked. If, as he claimed, he was actually centuries old, it is not surprising that he should have acquired vast knowledge, but, strangest of all, was the fact that his knowledge had been developed along entirely untouched and undreamed of lines. I must, however, qualify that statement somewhat. Rather, I should say, along lines that had been lost and forgotten in the dim past, for he assured me that, in the days of his youth, all the wise men or sorcerers of the Mayas had been familiar with principles and forces which he, the last of his clan of the sorcerers' cult, had perfected and developed. All, according to him, had been able to read the past and the future. And, so he told me, it was largely their reading of the future that had led to the fall of the Mayan Empire and the vanishing of their civilization. Being told that they were destined to be wiped out, that their empire would fall, they had become hopeless, bowed to destiny, and made no effort to struggle against fate.

"But how?" I asked him, "could they struggle against fate or the future if the future was to be? If they

had struggled, if they had continued, then the reading of the future would have proved false."

He shook his head. No, he argued. In the first place the Book of the Future gave no time. It might have been ten or one thousand years they had to exist. And, in the second place, man, he said, speaking as he always did in parables—man struggled daily to live, to go on, though he knew ultimately he must die.

"Still, if your Book of the Future be true, then must it provide that the Kinche Maya were fated to give up the struggle," I argued.

"That is as it may be," he declared. "Even I do not know all there is to know of these matters."

Also, he confirmed my suspicion that the Mayas had been decimated by using the radioactive clay for etching their sculptures. Nearly all of those who handled the stuff, or the monuments, became afflicted with a terrible malady. They withered away, their teeth fell out, their bones dissolved and they died in agony. Some few survived for years; some, still fewer, recovered, mutilated and deformed but physically sound. Such, he declared, was Kinchi Haman. And, he added, all those who recovered possessed most warped, cruel, vindictive and ruthless natures. This, too had led to the downfall of the Mayas. Men, who had been humane, wise, benign rulers, seemed to go mad. They oppressed the people, ordered wholesale human sacrifices, made war upon one another. Fathers fought sons and brothers fought brothers. "But that," he sighed, "was foretold in the Book of Kukulcan, as was the City of Mictolan."

And, as I have said, the presence of the clay in the valley nearly resulted in the extermination of the people here. But though the radioactive mineral had brought death and destruction to the race, it had also brought great blessings in the end. They had learned that, combined with certain other substances, it was not only harmless, it was even beneficial. In the form in which it occurred in the rocks, it illuminated the caverns and the interiors of the temples, and even cast a soft half-light over the entire valley. And he, Nohul Voh, he declared, had learned to harness it, to make use of its power.

I WAS amazed, yet I had half-suspected this. I could not account for his sphere of gleaming light that illuminated his chambers except by the theory of radium. Yet it seemed incredible that these people, who had not even discovered the principle of the wheel, who knew nothing of iron, who had not even availed themselves of water power, and who possessed no machinery, no mechanical devices, could have mastered that powerful, elusive, terrible element—radium. Very painstakingly Nohul Voh tried to explain it to me. The harmless ore that occurred in the rocks and which, as nearly as I could determine, was a form of a uranium mineral, when placed near a rare green rock, would cause the latter to remain poised in air. He pointed to the mysterious green sphere as an example. "But," he continued, "no power could move the green mineral either closer to or farther from the material."

But he had discovered that, by placing rods of various metals near the green mineral the latter would move towards them and upon touching them would move to the next. Moreover—and this was so astounding I could scarcely believe his words—the green stone revolved at the same time, and made one complete revolution between sunrise and sunset and another between sunset and sunrise! To him, who studied the stars and the heavens and computed the eclipses and was responsible for the keeping of the calendars, this instantly presented possibilities. He had made a sphere of the green rock, had arranged it above a polished surface

on which astronomical computations and figures could be engraved, and had arranged rods at definite distances about the circumference. He had thus divided the day and night into fractions, and—by some remarkable coincidence—he had provided *twelve* of these rods so that the sphere, rotating at twice the speed of the earth touched the twelve rods in succession during each revolution or in other words made twenty-four contacts during the complete period from sunrise to sunrise.

But he had gone even farther. He had made calculations and measurements, had checked up accurately on his observations, and by patient experimenting and testing had converted his apparatus into a miniature solar system from which, at any time, he could determine the solstices, the eclipses, the positions of the planets and the constellations. All this was astonishing, almost incredible, but he demonstrated it before my eyes. Moreover, he knew that the earth was round! Reasoning backward from his model he had become convinced that the earth was a sphere, that the other celestial bodies were also spheres, and he was keen on learning from me what lay on the other surfaces of our earth.

But the most astounding, the most amazing feature of it was, that his device was, at all intents and purposes, perpetual motion. I tried to explain this to him, to make him understand the wonder of it, but he seemed to think it a matter of course. "Do not the sun, the moon, the stars move on forever? It is the law of the gods. Why then should not the green ball move on forever, ruled by the laws of the gods?"

I confess I could not find an adequate or satisfactory answer to this. Why not, to be sure?

Nevertheless, to me, who had always regarded perpetual motion, or to put it better, motion without loss of energy, as an impossible visionary thing, his endlessly rotating sphere was marvelous, fascinating. I examined it, studied it from every angle, but could make neither head nor tail of it. All I knew was that it was so. Why did it remain there, a definite distance above the radioactive mineral in the stone column? What was the invisible force that permitted the sphere to revolve and rotate freely and yet held it as firmly in position as though fixed by iron bars? And why, by what law of nature was the rotation of the sphere timed to precisely twice the speed of the earth?

It was inexplicable. But whatever the answer, here, in this force was a power that, properly applied, put to useful purposes, would revolutionize the mechanical world. But unless the principle could be learned, unless it could be understood and harnessed it was no more than an interesting toy. For hours, night after night, I lay awake, cudgelling my brains, formulating theories, striving to recall all I had ever learned of physics, electricity, chemistry and the other sciences; hoping somehow, by some means, to hit upon a principle or an hypothesis that would fit the conditions. And no sooner had I worked out some theory than I found it inadequate or faulty.

Eventually, however, I evolved an explanation that, I feel sure, was very nearly correct. This was that the principle involved was an atomic or rather electronic flow between the radium ore and the green stone! In a way, perhaps, akin to the flow of electrons between the filament and the plate of a radio tube. That the sphere of green was held in place by this stream of invisible electrons that formed a solid band of waves—something like magnetic waves—and that the green material being polarized was forced to rotate. Each time it touched a rod, a current or wave of electrons rushed back to the active mineral in the column and allowed the sphere to move forward towards the next rod. It was in fact on the principle of an electric motor,

the radioactive material representing the electricity, the sphere the rotating armature, the upright rods the brushes. What a power this would be to put at the disposal of civilized man! No power needed to generate the primary force. No appreciable loss of the basic energy. No frictional loss of power or wear and tear. In my imagination I could picture the world's industries increased thousands of times, completely revolutionized by such a source of inexhaustible power.

I COULD visualize motor cars, ships, aircraft, trains speeding over land and sea and through the air without carrying fuel, with never a need of replenishing their power. I could see factories, mills, machinery of every kind operating without smoke, without waste. Grime, dust, ashes, coal and oil would be things of the past. It would be the greatest boon to mankind in the history of the world. And yet, unless I were vastly mistaken, it was an impossibility, a mere dream. Nohul Voh had told me that the green rock was extremely rare, that his sphere and a few small fragments were all of the mineral that existed as far as he knew, that these pieces had been handed down from father to son of his family for countless ages, and that their original source was unknown. Legend had it, however, that they were bits of a most sacred image that, in the very dawn of their history, had been worshipped by the first of the Kitché Mayas. Always, he declared, it had been credited with magical powers. Always, each sorcerer of his clan had prized it, guarded it; but only he had discovered its amazing properties. And probably, I thought, nowhere else but in this valley of Mictolan was there the peculiar radioactive mineral that was needed to produce the results.

But even if it were visionary, it was fascinating to speculate upon its possibilities, and, with my mind filled with it, constantly dwelling upon it, I began to wonder if the Bridge of Light was not also a variation of the same force. I questioned Nohul Voh, but he could give me little information.

Always, from the very beginning, he repeated, the Bridge of Light had been there—had not the Mayas crossed it when they had first entered the valley? And that it had some connection with the flames from the temple summit he felt sure, for always these rose, like banners against the sky, when the bridge spanned the chasm and vanished as the bridge vanished. Also, he felt sure, the high-priest knew the secret of the bridge—might even control it—but no one other than the Kinchi Haman himself was permitted within the innermost sacred precincts of the temple where dwelt the "Monster of Sacrifices," and so no one had ever learned the secret of the marvelous bridge. Even the sorcerer's ability to read the past and future, even his almost miraculous uncanny powers, had not enabled him to learn this secret of the high-priest.

"And what?" I asked him, "is this Monster of Sacrifices? Is he beast or man? I have vowed to destroy the thing and I would know more of it."

"That, my son, Itzimin, I cannot say," replied the old sorcerer. "Even when our fathers' fathers' fathers came unto Mictolan, a temple stood above the place and, so our legends say and so I heard from the priests who came hither and entered the temple, the monster dwelt therein and was tended by an ancient priest of another race more ancient than the Kitché Maya. It was his people who had made the great statue at the door of the Cave of the Bats; the mummies of his kings were those within that cave; his people had erected the temple, but he alone of all his race remained. To the high priest of Kinich Ahau he revealed all he knew—to him he delegated the care of the sacred Monster—and to him, no doubt, he imparted the secret of the Bridge

of Light. That, my son, is all I know. Even my knowledge, my powers, cannot pierce the walls and unmask the secrets hidden in the inner temple of the Kinich Ahau, God of Light and Life. To attempt to do so would be sacrilege, would bring down the wrath of the gods."

I smiled inwardly at the old fellow's psychology as related to his religion. "And yet," I reminded him, "you have no love for Kinchi Haman, you would humiliate him, destroy him. You deceive him by making him believe me a son of Kukulcan. Is that not also sacrilege?"

Nohul Voh shook his great white mane. "Nay, my son, the Kinchi Haman is but a man like ourselves. Outside his office he is an ordinary mortal—a most vindictive, cruel, undesirable mortal—and it is as a mortal I hate and despise him. But within the sacred precincts of his temple I would not raise my hand to do him harm."

"And," I persisted, "if Kinchi Haman should die—as die he must—or should he be destroyed, who, O, Nohul Voh, would take his place?"

The sorcerer showed surprise at my question. "Why, you, my son!" he exclaimed. "Though the Kinich Ahau, Lord of Day, rules above all other gods in the heavens, yet Mictolan is a city of Kukulcan and herein the Plumed Serpent rules supreme. Though the priest of Kinich

Ahau may not—rightly—become priest of Kukulcan—even though Kinchi Haman in his conceit and power did so contrary to law—yet the priest-head of the Tutul Zius may become high priest of Kinich Ahau. Aye, should Kinchi Haman pass on, you Itzimin Chac, would be supreme in all things in Mictolan."

"But I am no priest, I am not of the Tutul Zius clan, I am not even of the Kitché Maya," I reminded him.

"That matters not," he assured me. "Does not our history say that Kukulcan himself was of another race? Was not the first of the Tutul Zius house a warrior and not a priest? Is not my son the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan? And has not my son proved that he is inspired by the gods and gives a new ritual that is pleasing to the great Plumed Serpent?"

I laughed. "Still, O, Nohul Voh, I would be but a sorry priest of Kinich Ahau if Kinchi Haman died and left me not the secrets of the inner temple."

"To him who has much knowledge more will be given," declared the sorcerer with conviction. "Fear not, when the time comes the gods will impart to you the necessary wisdom."

**H**OWEVER, I had no intention of remaining in Mictolan even if I were fated to become its ruler, its high priest, the supreme head of the city and its people. At the first opportunity presenting itself, the moment the Bridge of Light spanned the chasm, I would flee with Itza and leave Mictolan forever, even if we were not married—that formality could be attended to when—if ever—we reached civilization. And, after our departure, the people could settle their religious and temporal affairs to suit themselves, though I hoped that the prince Aczopil would be restored to his throne.

That I had not already married Itza was not my fault or hers. I had discovered that only the high-priest could perform the ceremony, and Kinchi Haman refused to do so. She, he declared, had broken her vows as a Virgin of the Sun. She was to his mind, and in the eyes of the gods, an out-cast, as far as religion was concerned, and as a priest of Kinchi Ahau he could not marry an ex-communicant. To do so would be to insult his god. I threatened, argued, commanded, but though he trembled with fear, though he acknowledged my power, though he cowered and cringed, he was adamant.



"The Symbol," she cried. "See, Itzimin, there on the stone"



## CHAPTER XIV

## Innovations

Perhaps the old villain was sincere in his stand; possibly in his innermost soul he really believed he was true to his faith. I am willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. But I felt that it was only a pose, that he was taking this means of revenging himself upon me, and I would willingly have killed him on the spot, if doing so would have helped matters any. But I knew—as he did also—that killing him would merely make matters worse. I would be his successor. I could not marry Itza to myself, for in the eyes of the law and of the people's faith, she was a Virgin of the Sun and could not wed a priest of the Sun, and unless I married her before I stepped into Kinchi Haman's shoes, she could never, legally, be my wife. She could, of course, become my concubine at any time, for as the priest of Kukulkan, I was entitled to acquire any and as many unmarried women as I desired without question or interference. But I had no desire or intention of availing myself of this opportunity, although Itza, accustomed all her life to the religion and the social laws of her people, was quite willing to sacrifice herself on the altar of our love. Hence the hideous old priest felt that, in this one matter, he could defy me in private. But had I known what he was planning and plotting in his crafty, cruel brain; had I realized what was in store for us, and had I been more familiar with the laws and the religion, I would have put an end to him then and there, even though my act prevented my beloved Itza from ever being more than my mistress.

But even Nohul Voh could not read the thoughts of the priest—or if he could foresee the future in this instance, he refused to divulge it to me. So, telling Itza and Azcopil of my plans, I waited and watched for the reappearance of the Bridge of Light.

Repeatedly, too, I made my way to the chasm and spent hours examining the spot where the amazing bridge had spanned the abyss, hoping thereby to obtain some clue or inkling of the phenomenon, perhaps even to solve its secret. At risk of my life, I lay upon the very brink of the precipice, and leaning far over, examined the surface of the rock. But I could see no device, no apparatus that hinted at the origin or the operation of the miraculous thing. There was, however, a cavity or rather a group of small cavities a few feet below the verge of the cliff, and by listening intently, I could detect a peculiar hissing sound like escaping steam from within the holes. Also, I discovered that a draught or stream of air issued from them, for when I lowered a bit of rag attached to a cord, it was blown outward as though an immense fan was operating within the apertures in the rock.

That these holes and this jet of air had some connection with the bridge I felt sure, but rack my brains and puzzle my mind as I might, I could not see what the connection was or how a stream of light—even if it issued from the holes—could provide a firm span over which human beings could walk in safety.

Indeed, it seemed so utterly preposterous, so contrary to all laws of physics and of common sense, that at times I almost believed it was a figment of my imagination, that I had dreamed of it and actually had entered the valley by some other route. Yet Itza, the prince, Nohul Voh and everyone else knew of the Bridge of Light; with the exception of the sorcerer all regarded it as quite to be expected, as a supernatural manifestation, and no one, not even Nohul Voh, seemed to think it so very remarkable. In fact he and the others looked upon things that were everyday matters to me as far greater marvels than the Bridge of Light. Indeed, my own amazement, my own wonder that such an inexplicable thing as that span of light could exist was far less than their astonishment at such a simple matter as the wheel.

AS I had agreed to do, I told Nohul Voh and taught him much in exchange for what he told me.

And I have no doubt that he felt he had much the best of the bargain. He was fascinated, intensely interested in my descriptions of other lands upon the earth, of the great oceans, of other races and of our civilizations. Of course there was much of this that he could not grasp, because so many of our everyday affairs are based upon principles, mechanics and forces of which he was entirely ignorant. Not until I tried to explain matters to him did I fully realize this fact. I could not of course make him understand steam, electricity, the simplest forms of chemistry. I could not describe anything that depended upon iron or steel, for there were no words in his language for these common substances unknown to the Mayas. And I could not describe or make him understand our means of travel, our industries, our daily life, because all depended upon the principle of the wheel, and the wheel was unknown to him and his race. I drew sketches of various things—at which he was immensely delighted, for he, like all his race, was an excellent artist and could grasp the meaning, could visualize the reality of an object by means of a drawing. But though he thus acquired a perfect idea of the appearance of our houses, our people, our dress; our trains, boats, aircraft, motor cars and innumerable other objects, yet to him they were more than incomprehensible, more than impossible, because of the ever-present wheel.

The only way in which I could make matters clear was to give him a demonstration of this simple but most important of man's inventions, and I set about doing so. It sounds like a simple matter to make a wheel; but let my readers try to do so without the aid of a steel or iron tool—aside from a pocket knife—and see how simple it is! Here however, I must digress to call attention to the wonder that my knife had excited. My pistol, of course had been regarded with awe and terror; to the minds of the people it was the abode of a caged or captive god of thunder and lightning, and realizing fully the power it gave me and the fear it inspired, I had kept it hidden from sight in its holster. But my knife was a necessity. I used it constantly, and the people never tired of watching me use it, gazing with fascinated eyes as I cut a stick or pared my nails with the keen blade. Hence it had been a fairly simple matter to demonstrate the properties of steel to Nohul Voh.

But the wheel was a very different affair. Had I possessed a watch, I could have done so easily, but my watch had been lost somewhere in my wanderings—probably in my tumble down the crater as I fled from the man-eating dinosaur—and my entire possessions consisted of my knife, my pistol, my cartridges, my pipe and a lead pencil. Why I had not discarded my pipe, I cannot say. My tobacco had been exhausted weeks before I reached the valley, but still I had retained it. And I had been very glad that I had done so. The people of Mictolan were inveterate users of tobacco; they smoked both cigars and pipes, and only an old pipe smoker can appreciate the satisfaction, the enjoyment that I felt when, after weeks of forced abstinence, I again puffed away at my seasoned old briar.

But I am getting away from my story and the difficulties I met in trying to make the first wheel ever seen in Mictolan. The simplest method, I decided, was to cut a section of a log and fit an axle in its centre, a method used by many primitive and even civilized people. Even to cut a section of a log by means of stone and copper

tools, or by burning it off, was a laborious and slow operation. However, I decided that a model on a small scale would serve just as well, and selecting a stick of soft wood, I began whittling at it with my knife. I had cut about half-way through when a woman passed. As she stopped to look at me, gazing as always at my knife, I noticed that she was spinning cotton. The next instant I dropped my work and fairly roared with laughter. Why hadn't I thought of it before? The spindle she was using—the spindles every woman used—was a short, round stick with a hook at one end and a metal disk at the other. Here was a miniature wheel ready-made, even fitted to an axle! Telling the woman to bring me two of the spindles, I hurried her off, and as I waited for her return, I pondered on the strangeness of it all. For centuries—thousands of years, these people—as well as all other cultured American aboriginal races—had been using similar spindles—veritable wheels upon axles—and yet never in all those centuries, those tens of centuries, had anyone realized that the most important, the most basic of mechanical inventions was in daily use. It seemed almost incredible that the wheel should not have been discovered by accident; that sometime, someone dropping a spindle, should not have seen it roll and should not have grasped the principle. But I myself had failed utterly to grasp the possibilities of the spindles, even though I were familiar with wheels and had been cudgelling my brain as to how to make them. How many great and epochal discoveries might still remain, undreamed of, unrecognized, under our very eyes? Certainly, there seemed to me an endless supply.

MY thoughts were interrupted by the woman, who returned with the two spindles. I called to Nohul Voh, who was, as usual, busy among his herbs, and fitting both spindles on one stick, set the affair upon the ground and rolled it along. For a brief instant he and the woman stared at it with utter amazement. The next second they burst into shouts of delight, and, falling on his knees, the white-headed old sorcerer examined, rolled, turned and played with the thing like a child with a new toy.

But I was not finished. Two more spindles were secured; I attached a bit of wood to the axles, placed some stones upon it, and pushed the laden vehicle along. Never have I seen human beings more excited. They fairly shrieked with delight, trundled the crude thing back and forth, pushed each other aside in their eagerness to use it, and gabbled and chattered like magpies. Several passers-by stopped, people in nearby fields came hurrying to see what the excitement was about, and in a few minutes Nohul Voh's house was surrounded by a crowd of excited, jabbering, laughing, marveling people.

However, once they had grasped the idea of the wheel, they lost no time in putting it into use.

Within twenty-four hours there was scarcely a man or woman or even a child—in the whole of Mictolan—who did not have a wheeled vehicle of some sort. At first they made only miniatures, copying precisely the crude thing I had made, but with a little aid and instruction they learned that size had nothing to do with the new wonder, and carts and wheeled barrows of useful, practical size began to appear. And never have I found greater interest or greater amusement and pleasure than in teaching the people the innumerable useful purposes which the wheel would serve. I showed them how to pivot the front axle of four-wheeled carts, how to grease the axles, how to use mill-wheels or arastras for grinding their giant maize, and I even taught them the principle of the block and tackle and of the windlass. And always they showed the greatest interest.

THEN came my greatest triumph—a wind-mill. To be sure, my first was a mere model set up on a post close to Nohul Voh's home, and it called upon all my patience and ingenuity to make this. It was merely a toy, but to Nohul Voh and his people it was the most astonishing thing ever seen. For hours at a time they would stand entranced, watching it whirl in the breeze, swinging from side to side as the wind veered; wrapt in silent wonder at the thing. The old sorcerer, moreover, was the most fascinated of all. He could make nothing of it; the source, or rather the principle of its motion was as inexplicable to him as his green sphere had been to me, and I marveled that a man of such superior intelligence and wisdom should not be able to reason out the puzzle. But it was in perfect accord with all matters pertaining to these people.

Probably no race in the world's history presented more contradictory, paradoxical and mysterious features than the Mayas. How or why did the race develop the most perfect arithmetical system the world has ever known, invent and perfect a calendar by means of which any date could be definitely fixed within a space of more than five million years, and devise a written language, perhaps the most remarkable in the world, and yet fail utterly to discover the most elemental facts of chemistry, mechanics and other sciences? The Mayas of Mictolan had of course gone a great deal farther. They had learned to use the radium ores; Nohul Voh had created a marvelous miniature solar system; they—or their priest rather—had, as I had reason to believe, learned the secret of that amazing Bridge of Light, and Nohul Voh could either read one's thoughts or could actually look into the past and future. But, as far as I could see, not one of these strange and truly marvelous things was of the least practical value to the people. They still tilled their field with crooked sticks and stone-tipped implements, they still wove their cotton on crude hand looms, they still performed all labor by hand and, aside from the nobles, the priests and the favored few, not a man nor woman in the valley could either write or read their races' characters. But I intended—provided I was forced to remain long enough in Mictolan—to change all this. I would erect windmills, would make water-wheels, would manage to build simple machinery and would see what happened. And in doing this, I would enlist the cooperation of Nohul Voh and of Azeopol.

I tried to explain my ideas to the old sorcerer, and I was amazed to find how quickly he grasped the matter. Once the mechanical side of his brain was aroused, he was as apt a pupil as one could wish. He might have puzzled his brains for years before he discovered how the windmill worked, but it didn't take him three minutes to master the principle once I explained it to him. And he was an excellent mechanic, as was Azeopol. Indeed, like most Indians, the Mayas of Mictolan were born artisans and most painstaking workers. Moreover they could perform wonders and produce miracles with their crude, inefficient, primitive tools.

Very rapidly a six-foot windmill grew into being under my guidance, and while a vast amount of patience and perseverance was needed before I succeeded in getting the rods, cranks and other portions of its mechanism made from copper, silver and even gold, yet the final result was beyond my expectations.

I had given no little thought to what sort of a machine I would install for a demonstration of wind power. A pump was the simplest, of course, but on the other hand a mill of some sort—a pair of roller crushers for corn and cane or a pair of stones for grinding maize, would be more impressive and useful. But there were serious obstacles in the way of constructing these. They would require gear-wheels and gears were out of

the question. I finally decided that the pump was the only feasible apparatus.

To be sure a pump was not greatly needed. The stream ran past the town, and ollas or pots on the women's backs had served every purpose for transporting water for centuries. Still a town pump was not a bad scheme, and as the breeze blew continually across the valley, it would seldom fail. So the wind-mill was set up near the stream, the pump—a crude affair that would have brought roars of laughter from any real mechanic—was rigged up, and as the last connection was made and the big wheel began to revolve, the entire population fell upon their faces and made obeisance to what to them seemed actuated by the gods. And when, a few moments later, a stream of water began to gush from the pump's spout, pandemonium broke loose. Pushing, shoving, struggling, laughing, splashed with water, the women milled and crowded to fill ollas and jars at the miraculous stream brought by the power of the God of Air from the river to their doors. Like children they filled their vessels, emptied them and refilled them for the mere delight of watching the water come gurgling into the earthenware jars. But in a few hours the novelty wore off, the pump became as much a part of their everyday life as anything else, and though the windmill was always spoken of as *Mulac*, or the God of Wind, and although offerings of flowers and fruits were placed at its base each day, yet apparently the people never actually regarded it as a god or deity.

THE windmill was such an immense success that I determined to build a water-wheel. This was a far more ambitious undertaking, but I was glad indeed to have something to occupy my time and mind, for the weeks and months were passing, and I seemed no nearer making my escape from the valley than when I entered it, and I was getting more and more impatient to have Itza as my bride. Moreover, the old priest troubled me not a little. Frequently he asked, a crafty expression in his wicked eyes, when I planned to lead the people forth as provided in the prophecy. But I put an end to this query by suggesting that, if he was so anxious to have the prophecy fulfilled, he should ask his gods to restore the Bridge of Light so that they might pass out of the valley. I saw him give a start when I said this. Evidently he feared that I had guessed that he controlled the bridge, but he quickly recovered himself and promised to ask his god. But I was now thoroughly convinced that, from the first, he had feared I might lead the people from the valley and had cut off the bridge to prevent my doing so. I could scarcely believe that he wished to prevent me from leaving by myself. He had every reason to want to be rid of me. But I did not know the old rascal, had no conception of his mental processes, and never suspected the lengths to which he would go to attain something which compared to other things would seem a matter of little importance.

But by keeping myself occupied with my mechanical work, I managed to forget other troubles, to put the old priest's hateful presence from my thoughts, and to make time pass more quickly. Moreover, I had Itza with me constantly, for at my suggestion, Azcopil had taken up his residence with his wife and sister in the palace; Itza and the Princess Mitchi Inn had become inseparable, and we were a happy and intimate household.

But to return to the water-wheel. As there was an abundance of water and a natural fall where the stream tumbled over a six-foot ledge, I decided to construct a back-pitch wheel as being the simplest. Nearly two weeks were consumed in the construction of the wheel itself, but in the end I had the satisfaction of looking

upon a water wheel such as no human eyes had ever before seen. Its metal fastenings, the heavy bands about its wooden axle, the collars that secured the spokes in place, were of solid silver and its thirty-five buckets or paddles were of gold!

Meanwhile work on the wooden gears and the massive stone rollers had been going on, and by the time the heavy, cumbersome wheel was set up, the various units of the mill itself were complete. I had no intention of using wooden gear-wheels, but meant merely to employ the wooden ones as patterns with which to make moulds for casting metal gears. For this purpose I used an alloy of copper and silver—a sort of bronze—which was used by the natives for many purposes, and which was the hardest metal obtainable in the valley.

All went well and when, the sluice-way having been opened, the great wheel commenced ponderously to revolve and the gears meshed and rumbled and I fed a bundle of cane stalks into the rollers and the juice streamed out into the waiting trough, the ovation accorded the seeming miracle exceeded my wildest expectations. The people seemed actually to have gone mad. They fought merely to bathe in the water that flowed from below the wheel, they struggled for the privilege of sipping the muddy juice that flowed from the rollers; they cast flowers, fruits, even their most prized possessions into the sluice-way. Even the prince and Itza, who knew it was nothing more than a thing of wood and metal, were awed and made obeisance to it, while old Nohul Voh, who had had a hand in its construction and understood it perfectly, held up his arms, threw back his lionine mane and shouted praises and thanks to Chac Mool, the God of Waters, for so manifesting his favor to the people of Mictolan.

Even old Kinchi Haman had come to witness the marvel, but no pleasure, no delight, no surprise showed upon his horrible features. His eyes burned, I saw his hands clench and unclench, and I knew that my success had only added to his hatred and his jealousy. But Kinchi Haman was no longer of any great importance to anyone. The people who had formerly feared him seemed no longer in dread of him. His temple was almost deserted when he held his ceremonies, few even made obeisance to him. Ever since I had humiliated him at the temple of Kukulkan, he had lost prestige, respect, the power to instill fear or obedience. I could not blame him for detesting me, for feeling jealous, and I rather pitied him. But it was his own fault. Had he been reasonable, decent, existing conditions never would have occurred. From the first he had been tyrannical, overbearing, threatening and jealous.

But neither the people nor myself had time to bother our heads over the priest. The people had gone mechanics mad. Wonderful imitators that they were, they worked like beavers making windmills and water-wheels for themselves, and in an incredibly short time, the valley was dotted with windmills; at every available point on the river and its tributaries a water-wheel rumbled and ground; hand-carts and barrows were trundled through the streets and across the fields, and I was besieged with requests, prayers and supplications to show new wonders to the people. As I gazed across the valley and saw these signs of a dawning use of labor-saving devices, I chuckled at my own thoughts.

WHAT an incongruous, paradoxical situation it was, to be sure. Here were the people, going mad with excitement over the most primitive forms of utilizing the most obvious forces of nature, while all about them, unnoticed, undeveloped, were forces ten thousand times more powerful, more economical, and which would have caused as much excitement in the outside world as did the crude wind and water engines in this hidden

valley. Would these people, I wondered, ever learn to adapt the strange unknown forces of radium to mechanical needs? In years to come, would they go through the long, slow evolution of wind, water, steam, electricity, and in the end discover the terrific forces so long neglected? Would some future Mictlanian rediscover the inventions of old Nohul Voh and resurrect his name and immortalize the ancient sorcerer as the greatest scientist of his race? Would his discoveries be lost and forgotten? Or would some brilliant genius stumble upon the natural forces of the valley, solve the problem of controlling and using them and, in a single day—figuratively speaking—jump his people ages ahead of all other races?

Who could say? Who could foretell what might happen? Possibly old Nohul Voh. But when I half-jokingly asked him if his Book of the Future had foretold the wheels and the mills he shook his head and admitted it had not.

"The Book of the Future holds only those things to do with the race of the Kitché Maya," he said. "These things are of another race. As I could read nothing of your past ere you spoke with Katchilean, as I could read nothing of the future beyond the end of the road of the symbols, neither could I read of these things that dwelt within the mind of a man of another race."

I smiled. "You draw a fine line, O Nohul Voh," I said. "Though these things are, as you say, of my race, yet now they have to do with your people, so they should have been told to you in your Book of the Future." "Who can say," he replied. "It is the will of the gods." And he admitted freely that he could not foretell what I next planned to do.

I had noticed that there was iron ore in the valley and there was also lime. I had no doubt I could build a furnace and smelt the ore, but there was a simpler method. The natives had smelted copper, gold and silver for countless ages. Whenever they had done so, they had of necessity smelted a small quantity of iron at the same time, for all their ores contained iron. In the bottom of every crucible of the other metals, there must have been a tiny iron button, and why or how they had overlooked these bits of the much harder and more useful metal was a puzzle I could not explain. But that the iron was there I felt sure, and an examination of the broken clay crucibles and slag that had accumulated, confirmed my suspicions.

It was slow work picking over the heaps and separating the iron nodules, but I employed boys to do it, and so greatly were they impressed with everything I had done, that they looked upon the tedious work as the greatest privilege and vied with one another to secure the greatest quantities of the desired metal. Once I had obtained a fairly adequate supply, the rest was simple. The iron was easily refined, welded and forged, and to my surprise and delight I discovered that, due to the presence of some other metal, no doubt—the resultant was an excellent steel capable of taking a good temper and edge.

But I was bitterly disappointed at the reception the new metal received. Gold, silver and copper had answered every need of the people for countless generations. They had not lived long enough in a mechanical age to appreciate the value of a harder metal. They had long ago given up sculpturing rocks and had substituted painted decorations, and though the new iron tools were immeasurably superior to anything they had known for cutting wood, yet they did not impress the people as either remarkable or wonderful. To be sure they took to them readily enough, but they looked upon them as a matter of course. No doubt this was largely because they realized that the iron, like the other metals, was a natural product of the earth, whereas the mills

and wheels were the product of man. But at any rate I felt I had done the people a good turn, and moreover, I made good use of the iron myself.

I had, of course, been planning and preparing for my escape. I had accumulated torches and a store of parched corn to serve Itza and myself on our journey, and now, with iron at my disposal, I could provide myself with efficient weapons. My pistol must be reserved for emergencies—I had only a dozen extra cartridges left—and I busied myself making iron arrow-heads, spear-heads, a couple of light axes or hatchets and a machete or sword. Bows and arrows were in universal use and I had learned to use them as well as the Indians, so I felt that I was well equipped. But my hardest job was to fashion fish-hooks. I had always looked upon fish-hooks as simple things and had never given a thought as to how they were made. But when I came to try my hand at it, I realized that a fish-hook is, in its way, a masterpiece. Of course, if I had possessed wire, my task would have been much simpler, but with bar steel I had my work cut out for me. However, in the end, I managed to make some barbed objects that might have passed for fish-hooks, and having tested them out in the stream and found them efficient, I felt perfectly satisfied.

FOR the first time in my life I began fully to realize what a vast advance had been made when man stepped from the bronze to the iron age, and how each step in man's progress had made the next step easier and greater. When at last I had made steel, I could foresee machinery, steam engines, yes, even electricity, and in my day dreams I could visualize the valley humming with industry, with mills, factories, perhaps a railway and even motor propelled vehicles. Anything seemed within the bounds of possibility, and only patience and time were needed to make such visions come true. But time was what I most sincerely hoped I would not have.

And, after all, I wondered, would such things really be a blessing or a curse to the people? Were they any better off, any happier with their wheeled vehicles, their wind and water power than they had been before? I could not see that they were. Their every need, every want had been fully satisfied; their lives had been busy, happy, content, and I could not for the life of me see whereby I had in the least degree added to their happiness and well-being by teaching them what I had. But I must qualify that.

One thing I had shown them—perhaps the simplest of all—had undoubtedly benefited them. This was the means of making fire by flint and steel. Hitherto their only means of kindling fire had been by patiently rubbing two sticks together by means of a bow-drill, and the primitive flint and steel was a veritable godsend to them.

I had thought, when I first demonstrated the method, that they would regard it as a divine or supernatural thing, but I was vastly mistaken. The stone and the metal were natural products, and while they marveled at my ability or superior knowledge in knowing how to produce fire by striking the two together, they accepted it much as they had accepted iron.

It must not be thought that I devoted all my time and energies to my experiments and mechanical contrivances. I had my religious duties to attend to, I explored the valley—and in so doing proved to my satisfaction that there was no egress other than by the Bridge of Light; I visited and talked with the people, I spent many hours with Nohul Voh, and, of course, I devoted much of my time to Itza. She was very anxious to learn my language, and she, like all her race, being a born linguist and exceedingly quick to learn anything,

## CHAPTER XV

## Nohul Voh's Warning

proved a most apt pupil and rapidly learned to speak, read and write English. Very delightful were the hours I devoted to teaching her, reproving her for her mistakes by kisses, laughing merrily with her over her funny efforts to pronounce the new sounds, guiding her little fingers as she tried to form the various strange characters.

It was a wonderful satisfaction, too, to be able to converse with Itza in a dialect that no one else could understand; to be able to exchange our thoughts, our hopes, our desires and to make love without others overhearing us. Moreover, the fact that she could understand and converse in the strange language, which the people implicitly believed was the secret dialect of the Tutul Zius, raised Itza tremendously in the estimation of her people. To them, she was now semi-divine. She was the chosen mate of the son of Kukulcan, she conversed in the language of the gods, she could read the magic, sacred writing of Itzimin Chac, and she was accorded the homage, the respect and the reverence due a queen and a goddess. We wanted for nothing, there was no earthly reason why I should not have been happy, content, willing to remain forever in the lovely valley with Itza.

I had no kith or kin in the outside world; among my own people I would be forced to struggle, to work in order to maintain even a modest existence; I would be but a rather obscure unit among millions of my fellows; I could never hope for great wealth, position or prominence. Here in Mictolan my life was easy, work was rather a recreation than a necessity; I had everything man could ask—wealth, position, power, and, most precious of all, a loving devoted and most beautiful companion. Why could I not be content, satisfied to remain here, to accept conditions as they were, to forget the outside world, to resign myself to remaining the virtual ruler of these lovable, peaceful, simple people? It was not that I lacked anything, that I was not happy, that I could not marry Itza. I had long since cast the obstacle of that formality aside as an unreasonable, nonsensical and illogical impediment to our happiness. The ceremony of the priest—even had he been willing to go through with it—would have had no true significance to me or to my people; even had we been married according to the rites of the Mictolan faith, I should have wanted a Christian wedding if we ever escaped from the valley. Arguing to myself along these lines, I scrapped all my obsolete, old, narrow-minded, puritanical ideas aside and took Itza for my bride by the simple Scotch custom of declaring her my wife in the presence of the prince and the princesses, and subsequently announced it from the temple.

So I had no valid reason, no excuse for wishing to leave the valley. Indeed, strive as I might to analyze my mind, to psychoanalyze myself, I could not discover why I still longed to return to my own people, my own country. And yet I did. I was uneasy, discontented, and chafed at my enforced stay in the valley. But such is human nature. I had gone through hardships, sufferings, dangers, to find Mictolan. I had succeeded. I had found love, happiness—everything man longs for, strives for and holds dear—and yet I was as anxious to get away from the place as I had been to reach it. Possibly it was merely the inherited, ineradicable homing instinct of human beings. Perhaps some sixth sense warned me of impending disaster, or it may be that my scientific instinct, my desire to give the world the benefit of my discoveries was at the bottom of my unrest. However that may be, always, at the back of my brain, was the desire, the longing to escape, and not an hour passed that I did not glance, expectantly, at the temple, hoping each time to see the lambent fire that would mark the time for my safe escape with Itza.

I HAD begun to think that the Bridge of Light had vanished forever. That as soon as I had appeared as the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan, the amazing span had ceased to exist, or that old Kinchi Haman—if as I suspected he controlled it—had some ulterior motive in preventing me or anyone else from leaving the valley. Although I had seen so many inexplicable and incredible happenings, although I had had indisputable proofs of the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies, I had not yet become so convinced of their inspired origin or so weaned from my faith in hard and fast scientific facts, that I could accept matters as did the Mayas.

Although I did not pretend—even to my own mind—to explain many things, especially the Bridge of Light, yet not for a moment did I believe it supernatural. Either it was some natural, if inexplicable and entirely new, phenomenon, or else it was some equally inexplicable device of man.

In the first case it must be subject to natural laws; in the second it must be operated, produced by some one possessing its secret. Everyone agreed that the phenomenon had appeared and disappeared repeatedly in the past, hence if it were a natural thing there was every reason to believe that it would continue to appear and vanish. If natural and controlled by nature's forces, then the fact that it had ceased to exist just after I arrived was merely a coincidence. Moreover, if natural, and if it followed the ordinary and accepted laws of natural phenomena, there was every reason to expect that the periods of its existence and non-existence would be definite, well-established cycles. On the other hand, if it were a man-made and man-operated thing, it had unquestionably been cut off purposely as soon as I had passed over it, and its periods of existence in the past would have been, in all probability, irregular and erratic.

I was surprised that I had not thought of making a systematic study of its past, but I would lose no time in doing so now. Neither the prince, nor Itza, nor the princesses could give me any definite information on the matter, but old Nohul Voh, I felt sure, would be able to help me. We had become very friendly, really chummy in fact, and he had long before cast aside his assumed shell of mystery, and had been remarkably frank with me in regard to his knowledge and his powers. Only on the matter of his Book of the Past and Book of the Future, as he called them, was he reticent. He would divulge nothing of this matter, but I had become convinced that this was because of his inability to explain it rather than because of disinclination.

In fact, I firmly believed that—as I had thought in the beginning—it was some form of hypnotism, mental-telepathy or mind-reading, which was as much a mystery to him as to anyone else, but that rather than admit that he did not understand it, he pretended it was a secret he could not reveal. However, in all other matters he was frank with me. His mysterious sphere he had explained to the best of his ability, though even this was a mystery to him. Naturally he knew nothing of the atomic theory, of electrons, of ether waves, and hence he could not readily grasp the theory I had formulated to account for it. He had stumbled upon the force, had adapted it to his uses, and there he had stopped. It was the same with all his other knowledge and discoveries.

He possessed a vast knowledge of medicinal herbs, but he had no conception of chemistry. He extracted curative salts and drugs from earths and minerals, but he could not explain their nature, was entirely ignorant of the difference between acids and alkalis, and he knew

nothing of the laws and theories of chemical reactions. He had discovered that the radioactive mineral, in combination with certain ores, emitted a brilliant, apparently perpetual light, but he was unaware that the light was the result of the decomposition of the metallic element, radium.

And his most uncanny and seemingly supernatural power, that of appearing to fade and float through the air, was utterly inexplicable, he admitted. It was a trick or a power which, he claimed, had been inherited for countless generations by his clan; it was, so he declared, purely mental and not mechanical nor chemical, and though possibly—for I am broad-minded enough to admit there are more things in heaven and on earth than any scientist has dreamed of in his philosophy—it may have been the Indian Yogi's alleged power to transport themselves bodily for any distance, yet I believed and still believe it to be some form of hypnotism. He admitted that he could not perform the seeming miracle, except under certain conditions and in certain environments, and I mentally classed it with the rope-climbing, dismembering and mango-growing tricks of the Hindoo fakirs.

But regardless of all this, in spite of the fact that the old sorcerer was, scientifically speaking, as ignorant as any of his people, still he was a veritable storehouse of the history, the traditions, the legends and the records of his race. That he was extremely old was certain. That he had discovered the elixir of perpetual youth, as he claimed, seemed quite possible and even probable, when I looked upon his youthful face, his active muscular body and his snow-white hair. That he had always looked exactly the same, from the time of the earliest recollections of the oldest inhabitants of Mictolan, all agreed, and all declared also, that he had been the same in the days of their fathers and their fathers' fathers *ad infinitum*. But I knew, from long experience, how difficult, almost impossible, it is to disentangle fact and fiction in Indian traditions and memories, and whether he was a century or ten centuries of age, I could not hazard a guess.

**H**OWEVER that might be, there was no question that he had been the official keeper of the Mayan records, the astronomer, the soothsayer, the sage, the historian of the people of Mictolan for innumerable years. He had explained his method of making astronomical observations through the carefully calculated and accurately placed slits in his tower, and I had been astounded at his deep knowledge of the planets, the constellations and the celestial universe. Though, as I have said, he had adapted his green sphere apparatus to serve as a working model of the earth and its rotation, orbit and relation to the planets, and from this was able to work out problems by which he checked up on the Mayan calendar, yet he verified his calculations by observations of the heavenly bodies, and by the crudest and simplest of instruments.

And he proved conclusively to me, that the results were amazingly accurate. The Mayan calendrical system, as I already knew, was perhaps one of the greatest achievements of any race, and was considered superior to anything of the sort previous to that in use by ourselves at the present time. But I had never before fully realized how truly astonishing it was, the more especially in view of the manner in which it was worked out and checked for errors. To read of a thing, to see characters, dates and figures cut in cold stone, is one thing; but to stand beside a living man of a supposedly vanished race, and have him explain and demonstrate the same facts, is quite another.

As old Nohul Voh patiently explained the meaning and the calculations of the twenty Mayan days and their

names, the solar year of 360 days, with the addition of the five "unlucky days" or *Uayeb*, and the relationship of the divine year or *Tonalamatl* with the civic year, matters that had been confused and hazy before became clear and simple. It was the same with the Calendar Round and the Initial Days of the years, the Tuns, Katuns and Baktuns, the Long Count and the system of numerical glyphs. And his method of using the planet Venus for checking up on his observations was astounding and intensely interesting. By observing the periods elapsing between the appearances of this planet as the morning star, Star-periods of almost precisely 584 days—he knew that when the planet had appeared five times its appearance should tally with the eight years of 365 days each of his calendar. His arithmetical method of working out the Venus and calendrical coincidences was truly remarkable, both for its accuracy and its simplicity, and as I watched him, I began to appreciate the superiority of the Mayan vigesimal system over our decimal system, and realized how non-essential were the complicated higher mathematics employed by our scientists and astronomers.

Taking the Venus period or cycle of 584 days as a basis, he divided it by the twenty day signs of the Mayan month which gave him twenty-nine with a remainder of four. Hence every Venus cycle ended with a day-sign four days later than that preceding it. Then, dividing twenty by the four, he found five day signs were enough to serve as symbols for the terminations of Venus-cycles, and as the day signs were always combined with numerals from one to thirteen, and as thirteen divides 584 with a remainder of twelve, the terminal day of each Venus cycle was recognizable by its number being one less than the preceding one. Hence, as he pointed out, five times thirteen, or 65 Venus-cycles, must elapse before the same day name and number symbol could recur as an ending date to a Venus-period. Thus 65 Venus-cycles would equal two calendar Rounds of 52 years each or 104 years, and once in 104 years the Venus Count, the Calendar Count, and the Year Count would coincide to a day and hour.

All of this dissertation on Nohul Voh's astronomical knowledge and ability may appear to have no connection with my anxiety to find the Bridge of Light once more streaming across the chasm that barred escape from Mictolan. But, as a matter of fact, it had a most important bearing upon the matter. A man who nightly studied the heavens, who kept all the calendrical records, must, I believed, have observed when and how often and for how long a period the tell-tale flames from the great temple of the sun had flared against the sky.

He could scarcely have avoided doing so, and his memory was so remarkable, that I felt sure that even if he had not recorded the dates of the occurrences, he could recall them. So, filled with my new scheme of establishing some definite facts regarding the incredible bridge, I hurried to the old fellow and explaining my ideas and theories, asked if he could give me information or data bearing on the subject.

"My son," he said, after a moment's thought, "from the very beginning of time the Bridge of Light must have spanned the chasm. Does not the Book of Kukulcan speak of it? When I, a youth, came to Mictolan with those others who founded the city, we crossed the Bridge of Light, as I have said, and found the fires coming from the ancient temple wherein was that last priest of a vanished people. Ever since that distant time the Bridge of Light has come and gone, as no doubt it came and went for ages before the survivors of the Empire of the Great Serpent came unto Mictolan. In my mind the times of its coming and its going are not fixed. To me it meant nothing. But much that has fled my memory during the Katuns that have passed have been set

down by me, for who knows when the word let fall in jest may prove the greatest truth? Who can say that the stone tossed carelessly in air may not bring down the winging bird? Who can foretell that the seed, dropped by mischance, may not bring forth the greatest yield of grain? Perchance, among my records and my writings, I may find that which, noted and forgotten as of no worth, may be the answer that you so much desire."

Rising, he bent over a pile, made up of papyrus covered with the picture symbols and characters, of clay tablets and slabs of thin stone bearing the familiar cartouches of Mayan inscriptions and dates, and of strips of bark-cloth on which were mystic figures, diagrams and drawings.

"And will not your Book of the Past tell you more readily what you seek?" I asked, half-jestingly.

He shook his head. "Nay, Itzimin Chac," he replied. "The Book of the Past, even as the Book of the Future, deals not with matters here in Mictolan. Never do they reveal events within this valley. Why, I do not know. When you gazed upon the magic smoke and saw the road of the symbol you saw nothing of the valley, nothing of the Bridge of Light. When I watched you coming hither I saw nothing of your arrival after you entered the Cave of the Bats. All within the valley is black. Could I but see into the future or the past here in Mictolan, then, my son, would I know at what time the Bridge of Light would again give footing for my lord's passage with his bride; then would I know the secret of the Bridge of Light; then could I see the Monster of Sacrifices, and then, my son, could I see what the Kinchi Haman plots and plans for your downfall and could warn you. But all within the valley is hidden from my sight. Ah, here, my son, is what I seek."

**A**LTHOUGH Nohul Voh had kept no consecutive records of the phenomenon he had mentioned, the appearance of the flames from the temple at various times—no doubt he had found they interfered with his observations and had cursed them roundly at the time—and with a little calculation he was able to fix their dates beyond any question. For a number of years, as nearly as we could judge, the appearances and disappearances of the Bridge of Light had been almost uniform. The temple flames would appear, would flare steadily for forty days (two Mayan months) and would subside for thirty-two days.

Then came a record where for six months or 120 days they had burned steadily.

"I remember the time now," declared Nohul Voh. "See, the date is 2 Ahau 13 Tzec 2 Ahau. We took it for a sign that the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan was on his way; but I gazed into the Books of the Past and Future and saw him not."

"Two Ahau, 13 Tzec 2 Ahau!" I made a swift mental calculation. Good Lord! That was somewhere between A. D. 220 and 240! Impossible! Over sixteen hundred years ago! The old fellow was romancing; he could not—no living man could have been alive then.

But he was speaking again. "And then," he went on, studying his tablets, "for twenty Tuns (years) no light burned above the temple, and I, who know the secret writings of the prophecy, knew that the messenger of Kukulcan would never come unto Mictolan, for the appointed time had passed."

"Great Scott!" I thought to myself, "the old fellow actually believes he was alive then." For, up to that time I had never really taken his tale of extreme age seriously. Rather I regarded it as a sort of allegorical statement, a way of implying that he did not know his own age, that his clan or profession had always existed among the Mayas.

"And yet once more, the Bridge appeared," he continued. "And for long it spanned the chasm, and Maidens of Kinich Ahau were kept ever on guard to welcome the bearer of the symbols. But it came and went, always irregularly, though always the flames blazed from the temples upon the coming of the moon of the spring Tonalmatl. Nay, my son, not once has it failed to appear upon that date. Well I know, for that day to me is most important in my observations, and always upon that night the moon is dimmed and the night brightened by the flames from the temple. Well do I have cause to remember that, my son. And so, though you may feel that the Bridge of Light has gone forever, yet would I prepare myself and hold myself in readiness for its coming, for upon the eve of the Tonalmatl it will once more span the chasm to the Cave of the Bats."

I had learned nothing, I knew no more than before—unless I believed in the certainty of the bridge appearing at the Tonalmatl moon. Whether it was a natural phenomenon or a device whose secret was known only to the priest was still a mystery. If Nohul Voh's records were right, it had appeared and disappeared in regular cycles at one time and so might have been natural, but on the other hand it had afterwards become most erratic.

Personally, I had no great faith in the Bridge of Light putting in its appearance at the time of the Spring Festival, the beginning of the Religious Year. But the sorcerer seemed confident of it, and at all events I was ready and waiting. Then I recalled his other words—what he had said about Kinchi Haman plotting my downfall and warning me. Strange how the rascally priest was forever cropping up to trouble me. I had almost forgotten he existed, and now Nohul Voh's vague hints brought him vividly to my mind.

What did the sorcerer know? What did he suspect? What did he mean? I felt quite certain that he knew or suspected a great deal more than he had told me.

But in that case, being a friend of mine and an acknowledged enemy of Kinchi Haman, why didn't he tell me all he knew or guessed? And what could Kinchi Haman do, after all? He didn't amount to a row of pins in the estimation of the people, I felt certain. He dared not bring down their wrath by injuring me personally, I felt convinced. And I gave him credit for having enough acumen and enough knowledge of my intentions to know that I was as anxious to get away from the valley, as he was to be rid of me. If he had any control over the Bridge of Light all he had to do was to start it going and he'd never set eyes on me again.

How could I be sure he was not up to something? I had no means of knowing how many secret followers he had—even in his vast temple and its associated palaces, monasteries, nunneries and other buildings there were hundreds of fanatical followers of his cult. He possessed a large force of soldiers pledged to the service of Kinich Ahau, the Sun God, and, if he decided to carry matters with a high hand, he could no doubt get control of the city, make away with me and my friends and defy the people. But I knew he was superstitious, that in his own way and at heart he was deeply, fanatically religious, that he now accepted me as a lineal descendant of Kukulcan and therefore semi-divine and probably immortal, and I could not see that he could possibly gain anything by not minding his own business.

All these thoughts rushed through my mind in a far shorter time than it takes to tell. I plied Nohul Voh with questions, begged him to reveal anything he knew regarding the priest's plots, asked him what he suspected.

"I know nothing, my son," he declared, "but I suspect

much. Does the farmer trust the fox among his fowls? Does the hawk nest with the doves? Does the snake move in a straight line? Do melons grow on corn stalks? No, Itzimin! As the gods made them, so will they be, and they have made Kinchi Haman as deformed in brain as in body. Always has he been plotting and planning ill to someone. Always he gloats on suffering and on blood. He never forgives and never forgets. When I see the river run uphill, when I see fish fly in the air, then and not until then will I believe Kinchi Haman no longer plots and schemes harm to someone. But what it is or when or how, I cannot say. But remember, my son, the deer sleeps with his nose to the wind; the gopher rests at the mouth of his hole."

So the old fellow was merely suspicious after all—suspicious only because he mistrusted the priest. He had nothing to base his suspicions on. Like all old people he was something of a scare-head, I began to think. And of what use was it to be able to look into the past and the future, to have the reputation of being a sorcerer, of being possessed with the wisdom of the ages if, when one most wanted it, nothing definite could be learned?

NOHUL VOH seemed to read my thoughts. He was gazing fixedly, steadily at me. "My son," he said, a serious note in his voice, "a crackling twig frightens the hare but the tiger pays no heed to a falling tree. My lord feels secure in his strength, but the tallest tree is struck first by the lightning. You say to yourself: 'Nohul Voh fears without reason.' You think in your mind: 'Kinchi Haman dares do no harm unto you.' Perhaps it is so—often what we most fear is our least danger—but there are many in Mictolan who still are true to the priest of Kinich Ahau; there are many whom he can rely upon, and while the scorpion still has his sting, one should beware of him. Greatly have you injured Kinchi Haman. You have humbled his pride, you have robbed him of the Virgin he had selected as a bride for Kinich Ahau. You have honored the Prince Azcopil; you have made the Temple of the Plumed Serpent greater than that of the Lord of Day.

"And there is another thing, O Itzimin Chac, a matter of which I have not spoken. In the annals of the House of Tutul Zius is an ancient legend—perhaps a prophecy, which says that in the end, one of the Tutul Zius clan shall battle with one of the clan of the Ipa Hanaca, and there shall be bloodshed and death, and the Ipa Hanac shall be slain by the hand of the son of the Tutul Zius. And the legend tells, my lord, that the battle shall be because of a maiden and of a sacrifice, and that it shall take place on the day of Tonalmatl. Though you are not of the Tutul Zius clan, yet do you bear the symbol upon your breast. Kinchi Haman is of the clan of Ipa Hanac, and—the day of the Tonalmatl is but two days distant."

Something in his tones, in his words, frightened me. Why had he never told me this before? Was it an ancient legend or was it his way of warning me of some impending calamity? Whichever it was, it had aroused my lingering suspicions, my half-formed fears. I had seen too many of the legends and prophecies fulfilled to treat the tale as of no consequence. The instant he had mentioned a maiden, the sacrifice, the day of Tonalmatl, I had thought of danger threatening Itza, of the almost forgotten sacrifices held by the old priest. Was it not possible—even probable—that he was planning to injure my beloved one in revenge for having cheated his beastly god of her sacrifice? It would be a revenge, a diabolical way of getting back at me, well worthy of his warped, vindictive, inhuman brain.

What if the legend or prophecy or whatever it was said the priest would die? It did not say that that would

save the woman. Of what use to kill the priest if Itza were injured or destroyed? The very thought of harm coming to her drove me frantic. Unconsciously, unreasonably perhaps, I had assumed that the tale referred to me. Nohul Voh had hinted it broadly enough. Not for a moment did it occur to me that the legend, if legend it were, might refer to some other member of the Tutul Zius clan, to some other Ipa Hanac, to some woman other than Itza. But forewarned is forearmed. I would rush to Itza, I would guard her, watch her, remain by her side every moment until after the Tonalmatl had passed. I sprang to my feet, rushed towards the door. Before I had taken two strides, racing footsteps sounded in the outer passage, and wild-eyed, panting, ghastly pale, Azcopil dashed into the room.

"Itza!" he gasped. "Itza! She has gone—vanished!" I staggered back, faint, weak, too horrified, too overwhelmed to speak. Nohul Voh's warning had come too late. The blow had fallen!

## CHAPTER XVI

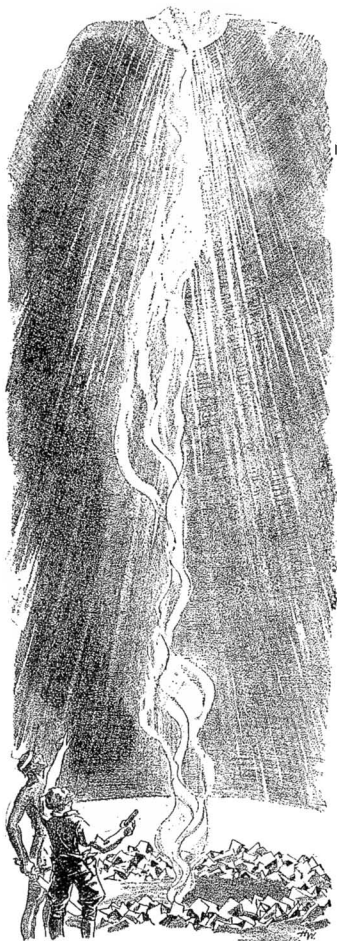
### The Monster of Sacrifices

AS if in a trance, I heard him stammer out the terrible news. She had been alone in the palace with the princesses, Tutul and Mitchi Ina. She had left them to go into the patio to gather flowers. A moment later they had heard a piercing scream, and, rushing to the patio followed by the attendants, they had found it empty. Terrified, they had searched the palace from end to end, but no trace of my beloved one could be found. The guards, ever posted at the doorways, had not seen her pass. Several servants had seen her enter the patio, but no one had seen her leave it. She had vanished, disappeared as completely, as mysteriously, as though she had dissolved in air. A terrified servant had found the prince, he had rushed to the palace, had learned of the terrible catastrophe, and had dashed to Nohul Voh's to tell me.

The sorcerer's voice brought me to my senses. "My son," he said, placing his hand upon my shoulder, "the serpent has struck, but his head shall be crushed beneath your heel. Upon your breast is the symbol of the Tutul Zius; bear your blow like a son of that clan, for it is written in the book of fate that you shall triumph in the end. And let not your brain be clouded nor your actions stayed by fear for the maiden Itza. No harm will befall her before the day of Tonalmatl. Seek her O, Itzimin Chac, even though the way leads unto the inner precincts of the Temple of the Sun, for in the City of Mictolan, even the portals of Kinich Ahau cannot bar the way to the betrayed bearer of the Book of Kukulkan. But beware, my son, that you crush not the serpent ere you have bared the secrets of his den. And seek not rashly and alone, for the venom of the serpent is deadly and he strikes most surely in the dark. Now go you with the favor of the gods and the prayers of Nohul Voh, for the clan of Ipa Hanac draws near to its end."

The words of the old sorcerer reassured me. He declared Itza was in no danger until the day of Tonalmatl. In that case I had thirty-six hours in which to find and rescue her, time enough to search every nook and corner in the whole of Mictolan, even the inner temple, Nohul Voh suggested. Telling Azcopil to join me with his own retainers, and to spread the news of Itza's disappearance and to promise immense rewards for news of her, I dashed to the palace. Everyone was excited, confused, terrified, and they chattered, moaned, lamented, besought mercy and pleaded for forgiveness at the same time. Impatient, maddened at the loss of time, I managed to quiet them at last, to make them understand there was no blame attached to anyone, and to get some





Far above our heads, two hundred feet and more above where we stood, showed a square of blue sky half hidden by wavering, swaying, lambent flames—

order out of chaos and some sort of a connected and intelligible account of what had happened. But there were no details, nothing added to what the prince had told me. Itza had vanished. She certainly had not left the palace by either of the two doors. But how, by what mysterious means could she have disappeared from the open flower-filled patio within a few yards of scores of attendants? Unless there was a secret exit, a hidden doorway, it seemed supernatural. And I could find no trace of such an opening. The flowers, shrubs and trees were undisturbed. The smooth paths revealed no sign of a trapdoor, and the ornate sculptured fountain in the centre splashed and tinkled as usual. But the question of how Itza had gone was of far less importance than where she was. Regardless of the manner in which she had vanished, or by whose hands, she must be somewhere within the city, and I would find her, rescue her, if I had to raze every building to do so.

Summoning my bodyguard of picked warriors, who heretofore had been wholly ornamental, I joined Azcopil, who arrived with a crowd of his friends and retainers. Already the news of my loss had spread like wildfire through the city. Crowds thronged and milled about some shouting vengeance on those who were responsible; others awed, terrified, declaring Itza had been carried off by some spirit or devil; others declaring the Sun God had taken her for his bride; others consoling me, still others volunteering their services. Somehow the rumor had spread that Kinchi Haman was at the bottom of the trouble, and among the curses, prayers, shouts and disputes, I heard many of the throng crying for the blood of the priest, demanding that he be seized and tortured. Quarrels arose, the people split into factions—one for Kinchi Haman, the other for me—and in a moment the streets became a riot, a pandemonium. But we paid no heed to the excited, struggling, arguing mob. Let them settle it as they might, let them break one another's heads, if they wanted to. Itza must be found, and at the head of our men, Azcopil and I hurried towards the Temple of Kinich Ahau. Into the great court we poured, thrusting aside the temple guards, disarming them, binding them.

Ordering a party of our men to search every outbuilding, to prevent anyone from entering or leaving the place, we dashed up the short flight of steps to the great sculptured doorway. A stalwart guard barred our way only to fall, gasping, from a savage blow of Azcopil's war club. A frightened dishevelled priest sprang forward and with upraised arms forbade us to enter. "Back!" he shouted, "Back, defilers of the Temple of the Lord of Day! What seek you here with noise and violence?"

I laughed hoarsely, wildly. "I seek the misshapen, evil thing you call your priest!" I cried. "The Kinchi Haman. Poisoner of the Year. Aside, man, or your spirit joins that of your guard yonder! This day Kinich Ahau bows to the will of Kukulcan."

"Kinchi Haman is not within," stammered the terrified priest. "Not since the ceremony of the Rising Sun has he been within the temple. Turn back, O, Itzimin Chac, and bring not the vengeance of the All Powerful upon you and yours!"

"That for your god and his vengeance!" I cried, snapping my fingers in his face. "You lie! Kinchi Haman is within."

With a quick motion I seized him by the long hair, swung him to one side, and followed by the prince and a scant half dozen of my men, burst into the temple. Cries, shouts, curses came from the throng of priests, servants, acolytes and attendants as, glancing to right and left, into passages and rooms, we hurried on. Which way should we turn? Where should we seek? The place was a labyrinth of passages, of narrow halls, of cell-like

rooms, a veritable warren, a miniature city within the vast pyramidal Kus. A cry from Azcopil caused me to wheel. We were alone. Our men, filled with superstitious fears at entering the sacred temple, had deserted us.

But neither the prince nor I thought for an instant of turning back. Somewhere within the temple was the high priest; never once did we doubt that he knew of Itza's whereabouts, and our only thoughts were to find him, threaten him, wring the truth from his grinning, hideous mouth. On every side were enemies, fanatical, outraged priests and temple servitors, buzzing like angry bees but, unarmed as they were, fearing to throw themselves upon us, contenting themselves with threats of their gods' vengeance, by calling down curses and maledictions upon us. We paid little heed to them. I felt sure that we would not find either Itza or the high priest in this part of the vast structure. He would be hiding—like the cowardly, lurking reptile he was, in some secret, innermost lair. But where? We were wasting time seeking blindly for a way to reach him. We might wander for hours aimlessly and be no nearer to our quarry. Roughly I seized a scowling, threatening priest and shook him until his teeth chattered. Then, holding my dreaded pistol at his head, I ordered him to lead us to the quarters of the high-priest. Hardly able to speak for terror, with shaking knees, he babbled that he could not, that the punishment of the gods would fall upon him if he did so.

"The curses of Kukulcan will fall upon you and all within the temple, if you do not!" I hissed at him. "And the thunder of Itzimin Chac will kill you where you stand!"

**P**ITIFULLY he begged for mercy, implored me to spare him. But before I could reply, before I could repeat a threat, Azcopil's spear flashed by my eyes and buried itself in the fellow's throat. Leaping forward, the prince seized a fat elderly priest, whose robes showed him to be of an exalted order.

Prodding him with his sword, threatening him with the most horrible tortures, Azcopil urged him forward. But little urging was required. The sight of my weapon, and of the dead priest upon the stone flagging, had been too much for the old fellow. The vengeance of the gods might eventually fall upon us, but it would be of little satisfaction to him if he was stark and stiff when the gods saw fit to act. And the gods seemed very slow. Babbling incoherently, vowing Kinchi Haman was not in the temple, he led the way at the point of the prince's spear. Up a flight of steps, through a narrow passage, between rows of giant, magnificently-sculptured idols he stumbled, with us at his heels. Even in my distress, obsessed with one idea of rescuing my beloved Itza, I noticed half-consciously that the temple was immeasurably ancient, that it was unlike anything hitherto known in America, and that the outer Mayan portion must have been erected over the original prehistoric structure.

Dimly, as though it were a fragment of some dream, I remembered Nohul Voh's words; "When our fathers' fathers' fathers' came to Mictolan a temple stood here—and the monster dwelt within." The old sorcerer had told the truth about the ancient temple. Was there really a monster here? Would I find the thing? Then a terrible, a sickening thought flashed through my mind. They spoke of it as the "Monster of Sacrifices"; Itza had said the high priest fed the fendish thing with maidens. What if Kinchi Haman had seized her—my Itza, to fill the maw of some horrible, loathsome creature! But Nohul Voh had assured me she would be safe until the day of Tonalmatl. Could I trust in him? How did he know?

Then suddenly, like a ray of light, it came to me. The day of Tonalmatl, the day of the spring florescence, the day of the sacrifice of girls married symbolically by death to the Sun God! Itza herself had been a chosen one! I saw it all now. The villainous, bloodthirsty priest had abducted her, stolen her to sacrifice her to his pagan god by hurling her into the sacred well! In that way he could avenge himself upon me and would appease his god at the same time. Nohul Voh must have suspected, must have guessed. That was why he had felt sure Itza would be unharmed until the day of Tonalmatl! My face blanched at the thought of Itza meeting such a fate. I groaned aloud. But there was some consolation in the thought. The fanatical priest would not harm a hair of her head, would not dare anger his god by defiling her with his touch, until the appointed time. And I still had nearly thirty-six hours.

**A**S these thoughts raced through my mind, we were still hurrying onward. How many steps we ascended, how many we descended, how many doors we entered, I shall never know. But at last, falling upon his knees, grovelling at our feet, he pointed to a closed door ahead, and in a paroxysm of terror whispered that the quarters of Kinchi Haman were beyond the portal.

Brushing him aside, we sprang forward. We hurled ourselves upon the door. It swung wide, and with ready weapons, we dashed into the room. It was empty! We stared about. Everywhere were signs of recent occupancy. There were discarded garments we recognized as belonging to the priest. In one corner was his couch, tumbled and tossed as when last used. Furnishings, clothing, papyrus books were scattered about. Everything told of a hurried exit. The priest had fled at our approach. But where, by what means? Not another door, not a window was visible!

I could see by the prince's expression that he was nervous, that he was filled with superstitious fears. Itza had vanished mysteriously, almost supernaturally. And here, in this room within the very heart of the temple, the high priest had also vanished. It would never do to let Azcopil become terrified. I counted upon him, must have him to fall back upon.

I laughed, made the place ring with my merriment. "The snake has gone!" I cried, "The door was open! Fools we have been! But we will find him yet."

The expression of nameless fear left Azcopil's face. His superstitions were stilled. But I felt somehow that Kinchi Haman had not fled by way of the door by which we had entered. Somewhere within the room there must be a secret door, a hidden opening. Madly I pulled the rugs, the hangings, the furnishings about. Suddenly I stopped, motionless, listening. From somewhere, seemingly beneath my feet, came a strange, rumbling growling roar. The prince heard it also. Terror filled his eyes, his mouth gaped. I felt my own scalp tingle, cold chills ran up and down my spine. Was it—? Yes, it could be nothing else; it must be the Monster of Sacrifices!

Somewhere close at hand, the Thing—whatever it was—was roaring, howling like a lost soul. What was it, where was it? I glanced fearfully about, half expecting to see some fantastic, horrible, ghastly, nightmarish creature spring from some secret hidden door. Then common sense came to my rescue. Whatever it was, wherever it might be, it was not probable that it was within reach of the priest's sanctum. He was no man to take chances. No doubt it was securely caged. If it devoured human beings, it was not the sort of beast to be kept as a pet. Reassuring the prince, calming his fears by such arguments, we again fell to searching the chamber while, in the back of my mind, was a determination to destroy the ghastly monster as soon as I

had finished with Kinchi Haman. In fact I had a half-formed idea of throwing the priest to the monster and, so maddened was I at the priest's escape and at the loss of Itza, that, had I been able to lay hands upon him, I would have gloated upon seeing him torn to shreds and devoured by the Thing.

A shout from Azcopil brought me to his side at a bound. He had pushed aside a huge golden idol, and as he had done so, a dark opening in the wall was revealed. Without hesitation we entered. From somewhere far overhead a glimmer of light entered. By the faint illumination we saw a flight of steep, narrow stairs leading downwards in a spiral.

Down, down, down we went. I felt as if we were descending to the very bowels of the earth. And each moment, as we descended, the horrible banshee-like wailing, the howling of the Monster, increased. The earth seemed actually to tremble at its roar. What terrible, unimaginable thing *could* it be? I could think of nothing but some stupendous, gigantic, prehistoric creature. And was Itza here, near this Thing, crazed with terror of its infernal din? I ground my teeth in inexpressible rage at Kinchi Haman at the thought. I imagined him gloating over her screams and shrieks, driving her mad by pretending to feed her to the ravenous beast. Let me at him! Let me get my grip upon his twisted body and I would show *him* what terror was!

And then suddenly we came into bright light and halted in our tracks, staring dumbfounded at what we saw. We were in a vast circular chamber of polished black rock. From far above light streamed down. Before us in the centre of the floor was a round hole or shaft, its rim raised a few feet and glistening with red, yellow and green crystals.

Up from the centre of this crater-like hole rose a column of thin yellowish vapor, while from the unseen depths came that awful, roaring, demoniacal howl! I glanced up. I gaped—stared in wonder. Far above our heads—two hundred feet and more above where we stood, showed a square of blue sky half hidden by wavering, swaying lambent flames! Sudden knowledge, sudden understanding came to me. From the bowels of the earth beneath the temple this geyser of inflammable gas rose to the temple top, and, ignited by the sacred fires ceaselessly burning there, spread its flaming banners against the sky. If Nohul Voh was right, then the Bridge of Light now spanned the chasm.

But of what use to me? Itza, my Itza was gone! By the irony of fate the way to escape had come when I could not use it.

Filled with bitterness, torn with my heart-breaking misery, I half-consciously stepped forward and, leaning over, glanced into the pit. A horrified cry escaped from my lips. Below me, perhaps twenty feet from where I stood, a broad shelf encircled the shaft. And upon it, twisted, contorted, ghastly, were dozens of human skeletons and human bodies! And still farther down, belching, roaring, howling from a great arched opening in one side of the pit and disappearing in a similar opening on the other side, was a column of luminous liquid or vapor like the jet of water from a stupendous, titanic flame. Fascinated, I gazed. With dread of what I *might* see, I peered at those grisly ghastly bodies, until convinced that all had been there for days—weeks. Then, and not till then did full comprehension come to me. *This* was the Monster of Sacrifices! This shrieking, howling torrent of gas or vapor or whatever it was, was the *Thing* I had pictured as some loathsome, horrible beast! Those mouldering bodies and whitening bones were the victims of sacrifices to the phenomenon! I laughed madly, hysterically as the

tenation on my nerves was released. To the prince, who feared I had gone mad, I explained. Incredulously he listened to my words and then, as he, too, understood, his maniacal laughter mingled with my own.

**S**UDDENLY I sprang to my feet with a triumphant shout. Now everything was clear. The Bridge of Light! The roaring horizontal column of vapor below us! They were one and the same! Through some subterranean passageway, the hissing, bellowing gas traveled to the chasm, the rocks there were filled with the radium ore; the gas was ionized, and as it spouted across the abyss, the molecules, the atoms that had been liquid became electrified ions, cations, solids—countless billions of infinitesimal bits of metal or mineral, moving, to be sure, streaming across the chasm, but under such pressure, so closely packed, that they formed a span as strong and unyielding as solid metal! It seemed incredible, but it was fact, I felt sure. Even a column of water, under pressure, will support a great weight, seems to become almost solid, and this great stream of electrified ions was ten thousand, a million times more solid than water.

And how natural, how easily explained everything was after all. No wonder the flames flared from the temple top when the Bridge of Light appeared. These two were one and the same thing in different forms. When the vast stream of gas rushed across the pit before us, its escaping vapors rose up and flamed at the temple-summit. Kinchi Haman had nothing to do with it. There was nothing mysterious, nothing secret about it. It was merely a natural force, a phenomenon of nature.

At any other time I would have been elated, overjoyed at my discovery, at my solution of the seeming mysteries. At any other time I would have rushed to the chasm, and with Itza by my side, would have sped across the Bridge of Light and would have left Mictlan forever.

But now, now what did it matter? Nothing mattered as long as I had lost Itza. I must find her, *would* find her! But one great worry, one immense load was off my mind. I felt sure she had not been sacrificed to Kinchi Haman's Monster of the temple.

Equally, I felt sure, she had not passed this way. She must have been secreted in some other portion of the temple. We must hurry back, must retrace our steps to the priest's quarters, must search elsewhere. Already we had lost valuable hours. Sunset and darkness were approaching; we must hurry. Back up the winding, interminable stairs we ran, panting, muscles tired and aching. We neared the top; ahead we could see the opening to Kinchi Haman's room, when, in the deep shadows, my eye caught the glint of light flashing from some object beside the stairway. My groping hands found it. A glad shout came from my lips, as peering close I examined it. It was a link of gold chain! I would have known it anywhere. There could be no mistake. It was a fragment of a chain I had given Itza! And it was caught, jammed in a crevice, in the crack of a cleverly hidden door!

Feverishly we searched for a fastening, a handle, for the door was of stone and fitted perfectly into the surrounding masonry.

We were on the right track. Itza had been brought this way. Her chain, dislodged by her struggles or trailing had been caught in the door as it was closed, and somewhere behind that secret doorway, we would find her.

Suddenly the prince uttered an exclamation. "Wait!" he cried, as he dashed up the few remaining steps. The next instant he was at the doorway to the priest's room. I saw him reach within, saw him draw the

golden idol towards him, and as he did so the solid masonry swung back before me!

Cautiously, feeling our way, with weapons in readiness for instant use, we crept along the dark and narrow passageway. For what seemed miles, we followed it. No doors opened from it; it was a damp, low-roofed noisome tunnel, and I shuddered as I thought of Itza in such a place. Then to our ears came the sound of falling water. The floor was wet and slippery. Narrow, uncertain streaks of light showed in the masonry, and we came to a halt at the end of the passageway. Above us water gurgled and splashed. We examined the walls, searched for some door, some hidden exit. My head bumped against some object. I stepped back with a cry of pain and glanced up. A bar of metal projected from the wall. Reaching up I grasped it, tugged at it. Slowly, smoothly it moved. A blaze of light fell upon us. A wide opening showed above our heads. I grasped the edge, swung myself up, and cried out in utter amazement. I was standing in the patio of my own palace!

## CHAPTER XVII

### The Secret Door

**T**HE mystery of Itza's disappearance was solved. A segment of the circular flagging about the fountain was movable; it could be opened by means of the lever within the tunnel, and Itza had been seized, dragged into the secret passage and carried to the temple. But knowing how she had been abducted did not help matters any. We were no nearer finding her now than we were before. We had lost valuable, precious time, wandering underground merely to find ourselves back in my own patio. We had followed the back trail from the temple, and I raved, swore, cursed in my extremity and my impotent rage. There was nothing to do but return to the deserted quarters of the priest and from there make a thorough, systematic search of every room, passage and chamber within the huge temple. But for us to undertake this alone seemed hopeless, almost suicidal. Torn with sorrow, maddened as I was, I had sense enough left to realize this. To blindly sacrifice myself and Azcopil would not help Itza, and I had no doubt that, when we returned to the temple, we would meet with a warm reception, that the priests and their attendants would be armed, and that we would stand little chance against their numbers. Moreover, how could we two hope to find Itza in the mazes of the temple? No doubt it was full of secret passages and hidden doors. We knew one such existed and where there was one there would be more. We might pass within a few yards, a few feet, of Itza without knowing it, and she might be carried from her hiding place to some room we had already searched. No, to have any chance of success, a large body of men would be needed, and we had already found that even the loyal retainers of the prince, and my own guards, would die rather than force their way into the Temple of the Sun.

Yet we must have men. I was determined to find Kinchi Haman and to search every nook and cranny of the temple, even if I was forced to tear the place to bits. Neither would this have been such an impossible feat as might be imagined. By closing the outlet at the top of the temple, thus confining the gas from that awful pit, and then igniting it, the structure could be blown to bits. And I mentally vowed that if I discovered Itza no longer lived, I would wreak that vengeance upon the place and its inmates. That such wild thoughts should have entered my head, that for one moment I should have contemplated the wholesale destruction of men and women who were in no way

responsible for my bereavement, proves the mental state I was in, proves that I was temporarily insane with grief and desperation. Indeed, at that time, I would have stopped at nothing, would have destroyed the entire city, if doing so would have brought Itza back to me.

The prince recalled me to my sober senses. The sun was setting, we were wasting valuable time. Only thirty hours now remained before the dawning of the day of Tonalmatl. The ruddy glare of the sinking sun brought a new thought to me. Would Kinchi Haman appear before the altar of his temple to conduct the ceremony of the Setting Sun? Would his religious fanaticism overcome his fear of my vengeance? Would he appear and openly defy me?

My thoughts were interrupted by Azcopil. "Itzimin," he said earnestly. "You must carry out the ritual of Kukulkan. If you fail, if the people find you have neglected this, they will turn against you, will lose faith in you and will swing to Kinchi Haman. It is hard, I know. I, your friend and brother, know how you are suffering, how you are tortured, Itzimin. But I know my people better than you do. To find Itza we must have men, must have support and the faith and confidence of my people. If they see you not upon the altar of the Plumed Serpent they will say the God of Day has cast you down for violating the sanctity of his temple; but if you appear, they will think your god is greater and more powerful than that of Kinchi Haman. And, Itzimin, from the temple you may call down the wrath of Kukulkan upon Kinchi Haman and all those who have a part in that tragedy that has befallen. Aye, Itzimin, my brother, and you may promise great things and the favor of the Plumed Serpent to those who are loyal and aid us. Do you not see, Itzimin?"

I saw. At first, as he spoke, I had been filled with rage that he, my best and closest friend, should have suggested such a thing. But as he continued I realized the truth of what he said, the importance of sacrificing my feelings in order to impress the people, the loss to my cause if I failed to carry out my rôle as priest of the Plumed Serpent, as the son of Kukulkan.

And so, despite my tortured mind and breaking heart, despite my grief, my rage, my impatience, my mad desire to be searching for my beloved one, I summoned my guard, entered my litter, and accompanied by the prince started towards the temple as usual. At my appearance, the crowds that thronged the streets gazed in amazement. What magic was this? They knew we had forced our way into the temple—our men had reported our rash and sacrilegious act—we had never come forth, and yet, here we were emerging from my palace, carried in my golden litter towards my own temple, unharmed, apparently as calm, as untroubled as ever. No wonder they stared at me incredulously. And then, from hundreds of throats, wild cheers, cries of delight, triumphant shouts arose. "The son of Kukulkan!" they screamed. "The Serpent God is the Great God!" "Itzimin Chac walks with the gods!" "The bearer of the token lives forever!" "Those who walk with Itzimin Chac have the favor of Kukulkan!" "The Prince Azcopil walks with the son of Kukulkan!" "The power of Kinchi Haman wanes!" "Where is the hunchback priest?" "Death to him who would injure the Great One!"

Yes, Azcopil had been right. My appearance had been a master stroke. Kinchi Haman was losing ground. From the temple I would exhort, threaten, promise the people. I would work upon their excitable, superstitious natures, and would rouse them to the point where they would follow me to the innermost sanctums of the Temple of the Sun. Yet there were many who still

avored Kinchi Haman. I could hear their shouts, their cries above the din. But they seemed to be greatly in the minority, and I noticed that those who were still loyal to the priest were of the poorest, most ignorant class, the rag-tag, and bobtail, the gutter-sweepings and ragamuffins of the city.

**I** REACHED the temple and mounted to the terrace, while high above the summit of the neighboring temple the multicolored flames waved like banners.

A terrible thought crossed my mind. Perhaps Kinchi Haman had left the valley, perhaps he had fled with Itza across the Bridge of Light! With a tremendous effort I put the thought from me. No, he was still here. Something told me, some premonition convinced me that both he and Itza were near at hand. But would he appear upon his temple? Dared he defy me? Half hoping that he would, for I would then know he was still within reach and that Itza was near, yet hoping he would not, I peered across at the other temple. But no sign of life appeared upon it, no procession wound its way around the great terrace at the summit of the Kus. How I went through the ritual I do not know. What I said I cannot remember. To me it was a terrible nightmare, separate from my conscious, tortured mind.

But my words, my scathing denunciation of the deformed priest and his deeds, my vows of vengeance, my pleas for support, and my exaltations of my own God (whom the people of course assumed was Kukulcan), my promises of rewards for those who were loyal and who obeyed me, must have had the desired effect, for a thunder of cheers rose on the still evening air. And the fact that Kinchi Haman had not appeared, that for once the ceremony of the Setting Sun was not celebrated upon the temple of Kinich Ahau, had an even greater effect upon the populace. The omission was, to their minds, conclusive evidence of the superiority, the triumph of the Plumed Serpent. Rumors that the priest had been destroyed by mysterious means, rumors that Kinich Ahau himself frowned upon his rascally priest, spread through the crowd.

And then, at the very moment when I felt we had triumphed, wild cries, excited shouts arose from the crowd, and all eyes were turned towards the Temple of the Sun. Standing before the great altar, clearly outlined in the glare of the flames above, looking like a fiend from the pit—was Kinchi Haman, his arms upraised, a triumphant grin on his hideous face. Beside myself with rage at sight of him, without stopping to think of consequences, heedless of the fact that he was separated from me by more than three hundred yards, I drew my pistol from beneath my robes and fired.

At the flash and the roar of the explosion, shrieks, wails, terrified cries arose from the multitude, and with one accord the people flung themselves prostrate upon the ground. But I scarcely realized this. My eyes had been fixed upon the distant priest, and at the report of my weapon I had seen him reel to one side and disappear. Had I killed him? Had my bullet by mere chance found its mark? Full realization of what that meant swept over me. If I had killed him I had perhaps destroyed the one man who knew where Itza was confined.

But there was one satisfaction. Kinchi Haman had not fled from Mictolan, Itza must still be in the valley. And if I had killed the priest, there was more opportune time to search the temple than the present. If he were dead, the place would be in an uproar, the attendants terrified would be disorganized. Itza would be forgotten, unguarded. Tearing off my ceremonial dress, I dashed down to the entrance where Azcopil was awaiting me. The plaza was almost deserted. Only my personal

guards and those of the prince remained. The crowds, awed, terrified at the flash and report of my weapon, horrified and frightened at seeing Kinchi Haman fall, fully believing that it was the vengeance of Kukulcan, had fled to their homes seeking hiding places from the vengeance of the outraged god. Even our soldiers were quaking with fear. It was bad enough to have two priests at daggers' points, to have the people split into factions and ready to break into open hostilities. But to have their two most powerful deities, their two great gods at war, was too awful. No one dared even guess where it might end, what calamity might result.

But my rash act in shooting at Kinchi Haman had had one good result. The soldiers were convinced that Kukulcan was the all-powerful god. They had seen my thunder and lightning strike down the priest of Kinich Ahau upon the very altar of the God of Day. His god had not protected him, had not wrought vengeance upon me. Hence, to their minds, Kinich Ahau bowed to Kukulcan, and they were prepared to follow me wherever I took them. And without loss of time I led them straight to the other temple. To my amazement, no one disputed our way. The door was unguarded, the passages were deserted.

I dashed up the pyramidal Kus, mounted to the altar. But there was no trace of the body of the priest. I searched for tell-tale drops of blood, but could find none. I did, however, find the spatter of lead from my bullet upon the sculptured stonework directly back of where Kinchi Haman had stood. Azcopil glanced furtively, half-frightened about. His superstitions were aroused again. It savored of mystery, of magic. Even to me it seemed inexplicable. But there was no time to bother about matters of such minor importance. We must search the interior of the temple.

Systematically, we went through the rooms, the passageway, the maze of chambers, vaults and cells. But there was no trace of Itza, no trace of the priest, not a living soul anywhere! What had happened? What had become of the scores of priests, guards and attendants? Where had they gone? It was uncanny, mysterious, inexplicable. Utterly discouraged, weary, with eyes aching and reddened from want of sleep, we stumbled from the empty temple to find the sun rising above the mountains to the east. Utterly hopeless and despondent, with stumbling feet and bowed heads, we made our way to the palace to find Nohul Voh awaiting us.

"Itzimin, my son," he exclaimed, placing his arm about me, "long have I awaited your coming. By the sadness of your face, I know you have no news of her whom you seek. But fear not, she is still unharmed. I have much to reveal to you, but first must you rest and eat, for you will need your strength. Much must be done today, for with the setting of the sun tonight the Tonalamatl begins."

**I** STARTED. Only a scant twelve hours remained! I had counted upon having all that day and the night as well, to continue my seemingly hopeless search.

Nohul Voh must have read my thoughts. He smiled reassuringly. "Fear not and have faith in the prophecy and in Fate," he said. "Though the Tonalamatl begins tonight by the stars, yet not until Itzamna, the Moon God, greets his Lord, Kinich Ahau, with the dawning of the day does the feast of the Tonalamatl take place. And now, ask no questions my son but eat, and you, O, Prince, eat and rest for much strength will you, too, require for what lies before you."

Not until we had eaten—though it was with difficulty I forced the food down my throat despite my famished state—would the old sorcerer speak again. Then, as we rested our weary bodies among the cushions, he

draw near. "Tell me," he asked, "all that has transpired, my son."

Briefly I related what we had done.

He nodded. "Kinchi Haman still lives," he declared, when I had ended. "He hides from your wrath. With him are those of the temple, for he hopes, by giving maidens to Kinich Ahau as brides upon the day of Tonalamatl, to win the favor of the god and so triumph over you, my son, and those who are your friends, and to make his god supreme in this valley of Mictolan. Until that time he and his fellows fear to show themselves, for they dread the power of the thunder that kills in the hands of Itzimin Chac. Already—"

"I've searched the temple and he's not there," I exclaimed impatiently, interrupting him.

He smiled enigmatically. "Aye, you have searched a part of the temple," he replied. "It was of this I have waited long to speak, my son. Did you not search the chamber of Kinchi Haman? Did you not find it empty? But did that prove the priest was not within the temple? Did you not by mereest chance find the doorway wherein was caught the bit of the maiden's chain? Have I not searched the skies for many years—for centuries—and do I not each night find new stars? Does not the rabbit have always two doors to his hole? Has my son measured the length of the Kus on the outside? Has he paced the length within? Has—"

I started up. His words electrified me. Fool that I had been not to have thought of this! The base of the pyramid was stupendous—it covered acres of ground. How could I be sure there were not two, three—a dozen portions separated by secret doors, or perhaps reached by tunnels like the one that led to my own patio?

"Has my son yet seen the home of the Virgins of the Sun?" continued Nohul Voh, "Has he seen the sacred well? Has he yet found the inner chamber wherein the sacred golden image of Kinich Ahau is worshipped by the Kinchi Haman and his priests? Yet, my lord, all these are within the temple. And—"

Again I interrupted him. I leaped to my feet. Dolt, fool that I had been! I had wasted time wandering about the outer, the most unimportant portion of the temple's passages and rooms. Why had Azeopil not reminded me of these other places? I started for the door, but the sorcerer checked me.

"Wait!" he exclaimed. "To beat with bare hands upon stone walls will but bruise your hands," he continued. "Does the jaguar try to outrun the deer? Does the wild hog try to push down the tree for the fruit he craves?"

"Very crafty is Kinchi Haman. Only he knows the secret of the moving stones that seal the doorway to the inner temple. For days, months, years you might search for it in vain, so cleverly is it hidden. But there is a way, a way known to Nohul Voh, and here, my son, is the key to that way."

From somewhere in his garments he produced a tube of bamboo with carved stoppers at the ends. Carefully removing one of these, he disclosed what appeared to be a stick of some reddish clay curiously mottled with yellowish flakes. Indeed, it resembled a stick of the ornamental red sealing wax filled with flakes of mica more than anything else.

I reached out my hand to examine it, but Nohul Voh checked me in time. "Touch it not!" he warned me. "Within this case it can harm you not, but touch it and your flesh will be seared to the bone. But it is the magic that will reveal the secret door of the inner temple."

I was puzzled. What did he mean? How could this thing—whatever it was—that he handled so gingerly, reveal the hidden door?

But the old sorcerer was explaining. "Together with

the prince and your men, enter once more the temple. First measure the length and the breadth of the outer side, and then pace the width and length within. By this shall you know, my son, where is the wall that holds the secret door and, knowing this, unstop the end of this tube and hold it above the seams and marks upon the stone. Thus will it reveal to you where is the door and which the solid rock. Having found that which you seek, the rest is in your hands, O, Itzimin Chac. And now lose no more time, for the hours pass and never do they come again."

Handing me the alleged miraculous object, he rose to go. But as he neared the door, he turned back. "Preserve well that which I have given unto you," he admonished me. "In time of need it may serve as well for a weapon as for finding the hidden doorway. And—mayhap, if you flee across the Bridge of Light with the rescued maiden, it may serve you well within that Cavern of the Bats."

FOR a space I remained motionless, pondering on the strange words of the sorcerer, staring at the harmless-looking bamboo in my hand. Had I not known Nohul Voh so well, I should have thought him mad. How could this thing reveal a door in the rock wall of the temple? How could it "serve as a weapon," unless I threw it at someone or used it as a club? Of what use could it be if—and the if loomed very large indeed—I ever reached the Cave of the Bats with Itza?

"Let us go!" exclaimed the prince. "Great is the wisdom of Nohul Voh. With his help shall we find Itza."

There was no harm in trying. I had intended to take the sorcerer's hint and measure the temple and find where the secret chambers were situated, and calling our men together we hurried to the base of the great Kus.

Carefully we paced the base on two sides. Then, entering the deserted passages, we repeated the operation within. To accomplish this was no easy matter, and I fumed and fretted at the time consumed in doing it. In no spot could we pace the whole length or width—walls, corners, columns and partitions intervened—but by measuring one room or passage, allowing for the thickness of the wall, and measuring the next and so on, we satisfied ourselves that the width of the place was so nearly that of the outer surface that no large secret chambers could be there. But the length fell far short of that on the outside. In fact, it was not half the extent, and somewhere beyond the sculptured wall that blocked us, we felt sure that Kinchi Haman, his followers and my Itza were concealed.

Wondering, uneasy, nervous, the men gathered about at our orders. Skeptically, with no confidence whatever, I unstopped the bamboo and pointed the open end at the massive masonry wall. I uttered an involuntary ejaculation of wonder. Azeopil started and leaped back. Before us a large circular area of the rock glowed with brilliant red light! It was as if I held a powerful electric flashlight with a red bulb in my hand, yet no light, no rays streamed from the uncanny thing. Deep sighs of wonder came from the awed soldiers as, still wondering, I moved it back and forth, up and down, searching the stonework for signs of a door. Every detail of the wall was clearly illuminated. Of course, that was what Nohul Voh had meant. The thing would give us light to find the door. He loved to surround everything with mystery. But there was nothing so very mysterious about the invention after all. It was probably some radium compound—he had warned me it would burn flesh—but if so, how could bamboo protect me? Perhaps it was some other substance, something unknown to the rest of the world. Well, in that case,

it was most interesting—would be a priceless thing if it could be commercialized. But, after all, as far as finding the door was concerned, it was no better than an ordinary torch. Such thoughts ran through my brain, as anxiously, impatiently I went slowly, carefully over the stonework with the prince beside me, for after the first surprise he had no further fear of the seemingly magic light.

Suddenly he sprang forward. Under the glare from the tube a beautiful bas-relief was clearly outlined, glowing as readily as though carved on the surface of a gigantic ruby. It was an enormous thing, sculptured on the faces of a dozen great stone blocks so well joined that the cement-filled seams were scarcely visible. All this I took in at a glance. Then I saw what had attracted the prince. As sharp and clear, as though painted in black pigment upon the stones, was the outline of a rectangle!

"Itzimin, look, the door!" ejaculated the prince.

I stared. Stepping close, I reached out my hand, feeling for the wide crevice that appeared to be there. But my fingers touched solid rock. There was no crack, no crevice! What did it mean? What miracle was this? That a door was there seemed indisputable. A door invisible without that glow, a door indetectable by touch, yet outlined in its entirety by the strange light emanating from the tube. Nohul Voh was right. The thing had revealed the hidden door. But how? Even in my impatience, my mad desire to force the portal, I found myself wondering, striving to solve the puzzle. Then, as I played the glow here and there, following the outlines of that hermetically sealed opening, I began to understand. Wherever there was solid rock, wherever there was cement or mortar the mysterious compound within the tube—some radium compound I now felt sure—caused the red glow. But where there was crack or crevice, an opening too minute even to see or feel, a black line was revealed. But my thoughts were cut short by a new discovery.

As the light or emanations of the tube flashed upon the floor close to the wall, a smaller, black rectangle showed. Just above it, upon the wall, the sculptured foot of the carved god was outlined in black, and the ornate sandal-fastening showed as a black mass. With a quick motion, Azcopil grasped the ring-shaped ornament. The god's foot swung inward. With a slight grating noise the rectangular stone in the floor moved upwards, and peering within the cavity revealed a metal lever. Stooping, I grasped it, pulled upon it. It moved smoothly, easily, and slowly the outlined section of the wall vanished before our eyes.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### The End of Kinchi Haman

**B**EFORE us was a dark passageway. Flashing the strange red glow from my bamboo tube upon the stone walls and floor, with nerves tense, noiselessly, we moved forward, while at our heels crowded our men, filled with nameless dread, their sharp, in-drawn, almost sobbing breaths, audible in the black silence of the tunnel. A dozen paces and the passage turned abruptly to the right and before us we saw a glimmer of light. Cautiously we stole forward. A heavy cloth drapery hung across the passage, and from beyond came the sounds of voices. With trembling fingers I carefully moved one edge of the curtain aside and looked into a large, brightly-lit room. Stalwart temple guards stood about; a dozen black-robed priests filled the chamber, and, seated in a throne-like stone chair, addressing them in earnest tones, was—Kinchi Haman!

At sight of the hideous priest responsible for all my

sufferings and troubles, insane fury swept over me. All caution, all sense fled from my mind. With a savage jerk I tore the hanging aside and sprang into the room with the prince beside me. Instantly all was confusion. Had we materialized from thin air, the occupants of the room could not have been more amazed. Deathly fear distorted the face of the Kinchi Haman; the terrified priests screamed, crowded back, struggled and fought to retreat. Springing from his seat, Kinchi Haman sheltered himself behind the milling, close-packed men.

Furious, all my senses focussed on reaching him, I rushed on them. Two guards sprang forward with up-raised weapons. One fell to a savage thrust from Azcopil, the other hurled himself at me. I swung my heavy-bladed sword, but before I could strike, an amazing thing happened. The golden cuirass of the guard seemed to burst into flame. With a shriek of agony, he staggered back. His weapon dropped from his hand, and with a crash, he sank lifeless to the floor! A nauseating odor of burning flesh filled the room. Where the golden breastplate had been, a horrible, scorched, blackened cavity showed on the dead man's breast. Shapeless blobs of molten gold smoked upon the flagging. Screams, shrieks, cries of horror and deadly fear came from the struggling, retreating priests. The guards dropped their weapons and fled. Here was magic—death instantaneous, terrible, invisible.

Solid metal burst into flame and ran like water at my approach! No wonder old Nohul Voh had said the bamboo tube with its contents would serve me well as a weapon! It was deadly, hellish. Its mysterious, invisible rays falling upon metal—at least upon gold—fused the metal instantly, burned the flesh beneath it to a crisp. I shuddered as I glanced at the terrible thing in my hand, at the seared, ghastly, contorted body of the dead guard at my feet. But my mind was centered upon Kinchi Haman. Nothing else seemed to matter.

Springing over the smoking body, hurling the struggling priests aside, striking to right and left, I forced myself through the huddled, fear-maddened throng. I was conscious that the prince was with me, from sounds in the rear I knew our men were close behind. A narrow door was packed, jammed with the priests in their stampede, and when at last—literally treading them underfoot—we gained the farther side of the room, Kinchi Haman had disappeared. There was only the one exit visible. Seizing the priests by hair, by garments, we dragged them aside, cleared a passage, and raced down the corridor beyond.

Ahead we heard the sounds of running feet. Into dark doorways and openings the fleeing priests and guards darted at our approach. But though we searched hastily in each, we found no trace of Kinchi Haman. On we rushed; somewhere beyond was the man we sought; mishapen, dwarfed, he could not run fast; we must soon overtake him. A startled yell came from the prince who now was leading. He checked himself and sprang back, collided with me, and together we rolled upon the floor and over us tripped our frightened but still faithful men. A metallic clang echoed through the passage and a massive metal gate dropped like a portcullis, barring the corridor before us.

For a moment we stared, dazed, balked. Then with a wild hope I seized the bamboo tube that had fallen from my hand, sprang forward, and pointed it at the metal bars. Instantly they glowed, and like bars of wax, they melted and vanished. Our way was clear; once again we dashed on. Before us rose a low flight of steps, and scrambling up these like a gigantic spider, we saw the high-priest. A moment more and he would gain the doorway at the summit of the steps and we would be too late. Drawing my pistol, I fired as I ran.

Like a clap of thunder the report roared in deafening echoes in the narrow passage; sulphurous smoke filled the air. The next second we reached the stairs, but Kinchi Haman had again eluded us. The door through which he had passed had been left ajar and it swung open at our touch. We found ourselves in a circular room like the bottom of a well, for it extended upwards to vast heights—perhaps to the very summit of the temple. The floor was flagged with huge stones so laid that their joints radiated from the centre of the room.

The beautifully frescoed stone walls were covered with intricate symbolic paintings of gods, priests, sacrifices and Mayan writing. In the centre of the place was a circular row of polished, tapering columns of vivid blue stone inlaid with gold, and rising for fully fifty feet to support an ornate roof or canopy of intricately wrought silver. In the centre of the row of columns was a raised dais of blood-red stone, and seated upon this was the image of a hideous, misshapen, bestial god; a thing with human limbs and body, leering savage eyes; with huge gleaming fangs projecting from half-opened jaws from which a slavering tongue protruded. In place of ears were the conventionalized heads of rattlesnakes; the nose was an eagle's beak; in one claw-like hand he held a human heart, in the other a ghastly distorted human head. He was carved from a single immense block of black stone, and covering his chest was a great, gleaming, gem-studded disk of gold bearing a human face surrounded by rays—the symbol of the sun.

WE were gazing at the sacred image of Kinchi Ahau! We were within that most holy, mysterious, forbidden shrine in the centre of the temple! The prince, awed, filled with superstitious fears, had prostrated himself. Our men were prone upon the floor, babbling prayers of repentance, half-crazed with terror of swift vengeance for having entered the most sacred spot. But I gave little heed to them. The high-priest had entered here. He was nowhere in sight. Yet there was no other opening, no place in which he could be concealed. I hunted everywhere. I tore aside tapestries, searched among the columns, about the dais. Cursing, fuming, seething with rage, I moved about the walls, turning the glow of the bamboo tube upon the stones. But nowhere was there a sign of a hidden door.

I turned to Azcopil, spoke to him sharply, roughly, scathingly. Trembling with fear, casting frightened glances at the monstrous god as if expecting it to come to life, he joined me. But in vain we shouted to the men. In the presence of the blood-thirsty black god they were nerveless, useless. Inch by inch I went over the stone floor, examining every block, every joint with the red rays. But in vain. Checkmated, utterly at a loss, beginning to feel, as did Azcopil and the men, that Kinchi Haman had vanished in this air by supernatural means, I stared about. I had searched everywhere, everywhere—but at the thought I sprang to the idol.

I had not searched the god! Over the dais I played the rays from Nohul Voh's gift. I turned it upon the god's feet, his legs, his back. With blanched awe-struck faces the men watched me. Never had such sacrilege been committed. Why did the vindictive god permit it? What mysterious power did I hold over him? There could be but one explanation to their minds. I, the son of Kukulcan, the Itzimin Chac, Controller of Thunder and Lightning; Bearer of the Symbol, Wielder of the Consuming Fire, was greater, more powerful than Kinchi Ahau. He bowed to my will, dared make no protest. In my service they were safe, and slowly, half-fearfully, they rose, grasped their weapons and watched my every move. Now I was committing even greater sacrilege than before. I had gone over every

portion of the idol within my reach. I grasped the flexed right arm of the idol to swing myself to his knees. The arm moved! Remembering the gigantic image at the entrance to the Cave of the Bats, I tugged at it, cautiously, watchfully, for there was no knowing how the mechanism operated. I could not know whether the thing would tip up, swing aside or drop down. Deep indrawn breaths of wonder and fear came from the men. The prince stared wide-eyed. Slowly the arm swung, and as it moved, the great golden disc revolved; the entire statue and dais slid to one side. I leaped down. Where the statue had stood was an opening in the floor with steps leading downwards. Kinchi Haman had escaped that way. We had lost valuable, precious time.

Shouting to the others to follow, I sprang down the steps. Close at my heels came the prince, but the men remained behind. They had reached the utter limit of their courage. To attempt to urge them, to command them to follow would, I knew, be useless; it would be merely a waste of time, and with no fear of results, contemptuous of the cowardly high-priest who kidnaped women and ran away at our approach, I hurried on. Fifty feet more and we came into a sudden blaze of light in the open air. On every side rose high, massive walls. Far above our heads rose the mighty temple with the swaying, gaseous flames at its summit. To right and left were low, rambling buildings with inward sloping walls and doorways. Beyond, and facing us, was a low mound before an image of the Sun God.

I dashed towards the nearest doorway, that of the building to the left. The carved wooden door swung open, and from within came shrieks, screams, shrill cries. I halted in my tracks at the sight that greeted me. The place was filled with women! Half-naked, clad in single garments of white, they crowded back, wild-eyed, shrieking hysterically. Instantly I realized who they were, what they were doing here. They were Virgins of the Sun, girls doomed to sacrifice, to that awful symbolic wedding to Kinchi Ahau; maidens, who before the dawning of another day, would be cast into the sacred well, if Kinchi Haman lived that long. A single rapid glance was enough to assure us he was not here. A single glance told me that my Itza was not among the terrified girls.

Where was she? Where was the high priest? We shouted to the poor things, tried to calm them, to reassure them. But though they ceased their screams, they were still panic-stricken, panting, as wild-eyed and breathless as frightened deer. Had they seen Kinchi Haman? Had they seen Itza? There was no reply. They might have been deaf and dumb. But Azcopil's quietly put questions met with better results. A tall, queenly girl recognized him. With an effort she controlled her voice. "She—Itza—she is there!" she gasped, pointing with trembling hand to the right. "Kinchi Haman—he—is there. He—he prepares the—the others; the first to be Kinchi Ahau's brides."

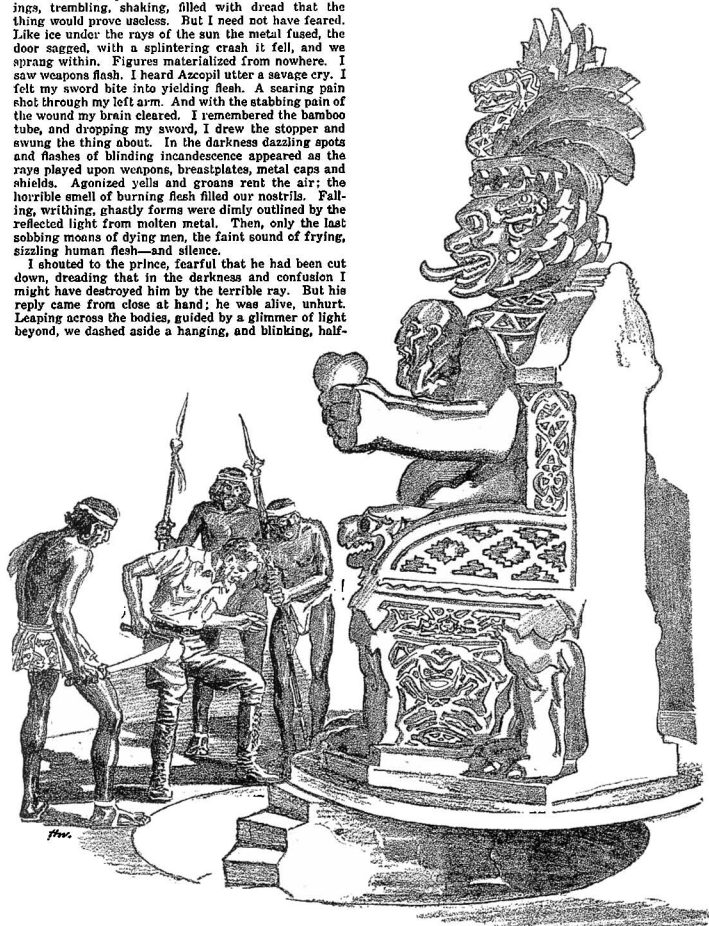
Before her last words were uttered, I had dashed to the door. Behind me Azcopil raced, panting, as I rushed for the building on the right. My Itza there! That hideous, bestial, devilish priest with her! Hot blood raced through my veins, my brain seemed on fire. I longed to tear the priest limb from limb with my own hands, to kill him by inches. For the time being I was a savage, a wild beast. The door was fastened! In vain we hurled ourselves upon it, battered at it, hacked at it. Dimly from within came screams, piercing shrieks. I seemed to recognize Itza's voice. Madly, impotently I threw myself at the door.

Azcopil seized me, shook me. "The magic tube, Itzimin!" he yelled in my ears. "Quick! See, the hinges are of metal!"



WITH a jerk I came back to my senses. Unstopping the tube, I pointed it at the massive metal fastenings, trembling, shaking, filled with dread that the thing would prove useless. But I need not have feared. Like ice under the rays of the sun the metal fused, the door sagged, with a splintering crash it fell, and we sprang within. Figures materialized from nowhere. I saw weapons flash. I heard Azcopil utter a savage cry. I felt my sword bite into yielding flesh. A scaring pain shot through my left arm. And with the stabbing pain of the wound my brain cleared. I remembered the bamboo tube, and dropping my sword, I drew the stopper and swung the thing about. In the darkness dazzling spots and flashes of blinding incandescence appeared as the rays played upon weapons, breastplates, metal caps and shields. Agonized yells and groans rent the air; the horrible smell of burning flesh filled our nostrils. Falling, writhing, ghastly forms were dimly outlined by the reflected light from molten metal. Then, only the last sobbing moans of dying men, the faint sound of frying, sizzling human flesh—and silence.

I shouted to the prince, fearful that he had been cut down, dreading that in the darkness and confusion I might have destroyed him by the terrible ray. But his reply came from close at hand; he was alive, unhurt. Leaping across the bodies, guided by a glimmer of light beyond, we dashed aside a hanging, and blinking, half-



Where the statue had stood was an opening in the floor, with steps leading downwards

blinded by the light, stood in a small cell-like chamber. Objects of apparel were strewn about, a jar of water had been upset, remains of food were scattered over the floor, tapestries upon the walls were torn down. Everything pointed to a struggle within the room, but there was no human being to be seen. With a choking cry I leaped forward.

Gleaming amid the tumbled cushions and coverings of a couch was the golden chain whose missing links had been caught in the secret doorway of the tunnel leading to my palace. Itza had been here! She had fought. The screams I had heard had been hers! Where—Oh God! Where was she now? Had—

A faint, smothered cry came from the rear of the room, seemingly from behind a tapestry on the wall. With a yell of rage, shouting Itza! Itza! I dashed across the room, swept the cloth aside and sprang through the narrow doorway that it concealed. A dozen strides along a narrow passage and I was in the open air once more. And at the scene that met my horrified eyes, I felt sick and faint; my blood seemed to congeal in my veins, my heart seemed to stop beating. I seemed powerless to move. I was rooted to the spot, paralyzed. Within thirty paces of where I stood was the statue of the sun God above the low mound. At its feet, bound, gagged, helpless, lay Itza, while above her, glistening, hideous, clad in sacrificial robes, his arms upraised as though exhorting the monstrous god before him, was Kinchi Haman, a long-bladed, obsidian knife gripped in one hand!

"The sacrifice!" gasped Azcopil, who unnoticed had reached my side.

His words broke the awful spell. I was galvanized into life, into swift understanding. An instant before I had been bereft of sense, of conscious thought. Unutterable horror had possessed my every faculty. But now my brain felt strangely, abnormally clear and calm. To move, to cry out would mean Itza's instant death.

At any second the priest might strike. There was but one chance, one hope of saving Itza from the terrible fate that threatened her. Noiselessly I drew my revolver from its holster. Slowly, with steady hand, I raised the weapon until the ivory bead upon the barrel covered the priest's back. With a prayer to God that I might not miss, I pulled the trigger.

A piercing shriek drowned the roar of the report. Through the haze of smoke, I saw the priest double up. The knife fell flashing from his hand; he awayed, half-turned, reeled backward, and with a second wild despairing scream, vanished utterly!

But I was already half way across the intervening space. I sprang towards the mound, towards Itza stretched upon the altar on the farther side. There was a sharp warning cry from Azcopil, his hand gripped my collar and I was jerked gasping, half-choked, to one side. And in the nick of time! Almost at my feet, concealed by the encircling mound, yawned a seemingly bottomless pit black, awesome, ominous. The prince had saved my life, had saved me from a horrible fate. Another stride and I would have plunged into the depths of the sacred well, into the gruesome waters that had closed forever over Kinchi Haman.

## CHAPTER XIX

### Long Live the King

ITZA was unconscious but unharmed. She had fainted and had been spared the maddening horror of lying on the altar and the awful suspense of awaiting sacrifice. Swiftly I tore away the choking gag that bruised her lips, and slashed through the cords that cut into her poor wrists and ankles.

Lifting her limp body tenderly, I carried her into the house of the Virgins of the Sun, and when presently her senses returned, she found herself in my arms and looked into my eyes which, like her own, were dim with tears of happiness.

Almost as happy as myself, the prince smiled down at her, while all about us the Virgins of the Sun hovered half-timidly and murmured soft words of sympathy and delight, for having been told of Kinchi Haman's death and assured that the sacrifices to the Sun God were at an end, they had forgotten their fears and had ministered to Itza, chafing her hands and bathing her forehead.

For a space we were oblivious to everything but our own great joy. We were in a world of our own, a world unknown to all but reunited lovers, until Itza noticed my bleeding, lacerated arm—which I had quite forgotten myself—and instantly she was all pity and solicitude. By the time the wounds had been washed and bandaged, Itza declared herself as strong and well as ever, and accompanied by the freed girls—who now would never become brides of Kinchi Ahau—we retraced our way through the hidden passages of the temple.

As we passed once more through that circular room with its monstrous image of the Sun God, I delayed a moment and having avenged the massive idol into place, I turned the gift of Nohul Voh upon the golden disc on the statue's chest. Before the amazed and wondering eyes of all, the metal fused and melted and forever closed the only way that led to the dismal well that formed the grave of Kinchi Haman. Out from the temple and into the waning sunlight of the afternoon we came at last, to find our men, cowering, shamefaced, surrounded by the awed, half-curious, half-terrified crowd awaiting they knew not what. From the lips of our wild-eyed men they had heard of what had transpired, of our having entered the holy of holies, of my desecration of the sacred image, and had Kinchi Ahau appeared in the flesh to wreak vengeance upon us, had the sun itself descended in righteous wrath, had the temple crumpled to bits to bury us beneath its ruins, the people would not have been surprised. But surprise and inexpressible wonder was theirs when they saw us emerge, unharmed, with Itza, and accompanied by the Virgins of the Sun. For a moment every sound, every voice was hushed, and then from thousands of throats a mighty cheer arose and with one accord the people prostrated themselves before us. And as the released maidens sought relatives and loved ones, and spread the news of the high priest's end, shouts of joy, cries of delight mingled in a bedlam of sound. It was as if a terrible incubus had been lifted from the city, and as the joyful people pressed about us, we were compelled to call upon our guards to force a way through which we could pass to the palace.

Behind us rose the great silent temple; from its summit the lambent banners of fire beckoned to me to be gone, pointed towards the spot where I knew the Bridge of Light still spanned the chasm. The way was clear; I was impatient to be gone. I knew that at any time the flaming signal might fade, the bridge might vanish, yet I could not leave. I was utterly exhausted, done. I had been under a terrific strain, my wounded arm ached and throbbed, and the reaction, now that it was all over and Itza was safe and in no further danger, left me weak, unnerved and utterly spent.

And there was Itza. Hardships, suffering, dangers known and unknown must be faced and overcome if we fled the valley and forced a way out to civilization, even though we found the way of the Symbols. A woman of my own race would have had no chance of getting through, and even Itza, a Maya, an Indian, would find it so difficult, would have to endure so much that, at times,

I had abandoned all thoughts of attempting it and had resigned myself to remaining forever in Mictolan. And she had suffered, had been under a strain that had left her as unfitted for such an undertaking as myself. Until we had rested, had regained strength and nerves, nothing could be done. Better to remain for the rest of my life in Mictolan with Itza than to lose her and perish in the unknown wilderness.

But there was one thing I was determined I would do before I threw my weary, aching body upon my couch and sought the rest, the blessed unconsciousness of sleep, that my throbbing head and burning eyes craved beyond all else. It was the eve of Tonalmatl, the most sacred, most holy day of the year, and the people would be gathering, hopefully, faithfully, expectantly awaiting the ceremony of the Setting Sun on this last evening of the dying year. If I failed them at this critical moment, who could say what dire results might follow.

They were restless, keyed up, in that tense psychological state where riot, revolt, unreasoning mobviolence might leap into flame at the first spark. Within the past few hours their traditions, their beliefs, their superstitions—even their religion—had been turned topsy-turvy. Their greatest temple had been desecrated, their Sun God defied, their high priest killed. Events had occurred too rapidly, revolutionary inexplicable things had followed one another too quickly for the people to be able to collect their thoughts, to reason, to fully realize what had happened. They were confused, astounded, amazed, frightened. They were for us at the moment, though in their superstitious minds they regarded me as the all-powerful, incarnated representative of the mighty Kukulkan, and felt relieved that the bloody tyrannical priest Kinich Ahau had been destroyed. Yet they might swing the other way on the slightest provocation.

If I failed to appear upon the temple, if I failed to maintain my power and my ascendancy, they might turn again to their Sun God. They might reason that their gods had deserted them, that Kinich Ahau was angered at the death of his priest and at being cheated of his virginal brides, and they might seek to appease him by wholesale sacrifices—even by seizing Itza.

Moreover—though I am loath to admit it—though I may lay myself open to charges of blasphemy and paganism, I felt a strong desire to stand before that lofty altar and give thanks to my God for His guidance and His protection, for His infinite mercy in having restored my beloved Itza safe and unharmed to my arms. No doubt, to many, to those who have never been in such a situation, who are accustomed to praying in the dim sanctity of their churches, who regard any faith but their own as infidel, the mere thought of offering prayers and thanks to God before a pagan altar and at the feet of a pagan idol will be horrifying, blasphemous. But to one who has dwelt long among those of other religions than his own, to one who has learned how deep-seated, how sublime is their faith, how rigorously, unalterably they strive to live up to its tenets, how absolute their trust in their own gods, one religion seems about as good as another.

And though I had no tendency to lean towards the religion and the gods of Mictolan, though I had no faith in Kukulkan nor in Kinich Ahau, yet I realized that, to the people of the valley, the temple was as hallowed, as sacred as our own churches and cathedrals were to us.

A Protestant may not believe in the Roman Catholic Church, a Hebrew may not believe in Christ, an Atheist may not believe in Almighty God, a Christian may not believe in Mahomet, a Mohammedan may not believe in Buddha, yet each respects the places of worship of the others. Each—though in his heart he may scoff at—

revile the others' faith—feels, when he enters the church, mosque or temple of the others that he is in a sacred spot; despite himself, he is impressed, awed; so it was with me when I stood above the city before the altar of the temple of the Plumed Serpent.

There was something inexpressibly impressive and sublime about the place. Standing there on the narrow terrace of that towering pile that had been erected centuries before the dawn of Christianity, whose gods had been worshipped by millions before the birth of Moses, one seemed apart from the world, lifted above the petty things of life, exalted, nearer to one's Creator, closer to God. And so, as with weary steps I toiled up the ascent and at last stood at the temple-top bathed in the glory of the setting sun, and gazed across that fair green valley and the silent, peaceful city, and looked down upon the shadowy sea of upturned expectant faces, a great peace came to me. The world for all its faults was very, very beautiful; it was good to be alive, to feel that there was one you loved and who loved you in return; that there were those to whom you were very dear, to whom you meant so much. Dropping to my knees, I poured out my thanks to God, prayed that He might guide and protect us and besought His blessings and His mercy for the coming year. Then, rising, I addressed the hushed and silent crowd below. Tomorrow, I reminded them, would be the day of Tonalmatl. The cruel sacrifices of Kinich Ahau were done away with forever, the inhuman priest had been swallowed up in his own accursed well. The gods had forsaken him as all knew. They had shown that his rituals, his sacrifices were wrong—and I pointed dramatically to the silent, deserted Temple of the Sun where no priest stood outlined in the glare of the wavering, lambent flames at the summit.

"O, people of Mictolan," I cried. "Let peace and happiness come to all with the dawning of the Tonalmatl! Let this be a day of thanksgiving and of joy. Forget the past and Kinich Hama, and celebrate the coming of the New Year by placing the Prince Azcopil upon the throne of Mictolan."

For a moment there was absolute silence. Then a thunderous cheer arose, and as the last crimson glow of the sunset faded from the sky, I descended the temple stairs, reached the plaza, and staggered like a drunken man towards my waiting litter. A dozen willing, eager arms caught me, lifted me. Dimly as in a dream I felt myself sink among the soft robes and cushions, I felt the swaying, lulling motion of my hurrying bearers and then—oblivion.

When I again opened my eyes, nearly twenty-four hours had passed. Itza was beside me—starry-eyed, beautiful, watchfully tender. I drew her to me and for long lay there, silent, perfectly at peace, sublimely happy in the presence of her yielding body, the gentle throbbing of her heart against my breast, the warm sweet touch of her lips.

At last, gently releasing herself, she spoke, asking me how I felt, if my wounded arm pained me, if I were rested, if I was not hungry. For answer I sprang up, seized her with my good arm, hugged her until she begged for mercy, and told her I was hungry enough to eat her up. I felt like a new man. I was rested, strong; my nerves were as steady as ever, and I ate ravenously—like a famished wolf. And though my wounded left arm still pained and throbbled it was far better, and I could use it to some extent. Had I slept long? I asked between mouthfuls. Where was the prince? Had Nohul Voh been around? Had anything occurred while I had been lost to the world?

Itza laughed gaily, merrily, and her eyes twinkled

mischievously. "Had anything occurred?" she reiterated. "Did her Itzimin think then that the whole world awaited his awakening with bated breath? Did he think he could sleep from sundown until the next afternoon without anything occurring?" Then, snuggling close and censoring her teasing, she chattered all the news. Yes, Nohul Voh had been there. He had dressed my arm, had assured Itza that it would be healed and well in a few days, and had promised to come again. The prince; well, the prince had been far too busy to call. But she forgot; there was no longer any prince. It was King Azcopil now. The people had obeyed my wishes, they had demanded that Azcopil should become their ruler, and though he begged that they should wait until I could be present at the coronation, they insisted that as I had called upon them to make him king on the morning of the Tonalmat, they must obey me or Kukulcan might be offended. The coronation of a king in Mictolan was not, it appeared, a very formal, complicated nor long-drawn-out ceremony. It was, however, spectacular, as vividly described by Itza, and I rather regretted I could not have been present. But I was glad they did not wait.

When dealing with Indians, delays are dangerous, there is nothing like striking while the iron is hot, and, as Itza prattled on—her sentences punctuated by kisses—I was delighted to learn that the new king had already asserted his authority in the right direction. He had announced that with the beginning of his reign, Kukulcan should be the paramount god of Mictolan. That the people would be free to worship Kinich Ahau and that the priests of the Sun God's cult might hold their ceremonies in their temple, but that all the old practices were at an end. There should be no secrets within it. It must be open to the public. No human sacrifices of any sort should be held.

These were drastic measures, and Azcopil alone might have met with strong opposition, or worse. But he had made old Nohul Voh his Prime Minister, and the people were in superstitious awe of the sorcerer. They feared him and his mysterious powers, next to the gods themselves, and the old fellow took full advantage of his authority. He had ever been an enemy of Kinichi Ihaman. Being of the House of Cocome Voh, and of the Titul Zius clan, he was preëminently, by descent, by tradition and by faith of the cult of the Plumed Serpent, and he regarded Kinich Ahau as a secondary lesser deity—indeed as scarcely a deity at all. As he had told me, Mictolan had been originally dedicated to Kukulcan; for generations its tutelary deity was the Plumed Serpent, and not until Kinichi Ihaman rose to power, by his own machinations and ruthless acts, had the Sun God been raised to prominence. And finally, to be revered as the Supreme God.

From the beginning I had suspected that Nohul Voh's underlying purpose had been to restore the old order of things, and now that Kinichi Ihaman had met his deserved end, now that the legitimate king ruled over the valley, and now that the old sorcerer found himself the right hand man of the king, he asserted himself. He had thundered at the people, had related the prophecies, had declared that my coming had been to reestablish the supremacy of Kukulcan, that the death of the hunchback priest had been his punishment at the hands of the Plumed Serpent.

He had assured the people that I had destroyed the Monster of Sacrifices, that Kinichi Ihaman had hoodwinked and deceived them, that while posing as a priest of the Sun God he had secretly offered sacrifices to the false gods of people who had occupied the valley before the coming of the Mayas, and he had ended by foretelling the most dire calamities and most awful results to all, if the people failed to obey their new king.

As Itza told of this I began to feel that I had become hopelessly entangled in the net of circumstances that I had helped to weave. I had become, willy-nilly, the high-priest of Kukulcan. The only other devotees of the Plumed Serpent god were the acolytes and lay-brothers—if I may use the term—of the temple, and if Kukulcan was to be the god of the people, they would naturally expect to have the ceremonies continued with pomp and regularity. And I had no desire and no intention of devoting my life to acting as a Mayan high-priest. Within a few days I planned to leave the valley—if Itza were willing—and I began to wonder if I would not meet with opposition on the part of Azcopil and Nohul Voh.

I WAS still puzzling my brain as to how I could manage matters when the newly-crowned king arrived with the old sorcerer. They repeated all that Itza had told me, with even more minute details, and complimented me upon my rapid recovery and my appearance. That Azcopil could have gone through so much without a sign of physical exhaustion and, with a few hours sleep, could have gone through with the ceremonies and duties of the day, amazed me more than anything else. But he had not been under the mental strain I had suffered, and he had the wiry, tireless almost incredible endurance of the Indian. Of course I congratulated him upon his coronation and voiced my approval of the new rules he had promulgated.

Old Nohul Voh smiled and chuckled. "He but followed out thy desires, O, Itzimin Chac," he declared. "Did not my son tell us of the one God of his faith? Did he not give the rituals of his own faith upon the temple, though the people thought he spoke in the secret tongue of the cult, and I alone—with perhaps the maiden Itza—know it was not so? And did not my lord overthrow the power of Kinich Ahau and destroy the Kinchi Ihaman with his thunder tube, and defy the Sun God even within the sanctity of his own temple?"

The wise man, O, Itzimin, observes and gives thought; the fool stubs his toe against the rock. Does not the farmer nurture the sweetest melon? Does not he remove the thorn vine that tears his flesh? Does the woodsman stand in the path of the falling tree and command it to fall aside? Does not one know that when the sun shines the rain will cease? And can one man, O my son, serve two masters? Nay, Itzimin Chac. Always in the world is one thing stronger or better than another. Always there is the good and the bad. Always there is the right and the wrong. Always one must bow to someone more powerful. And though the wrong may endure for a time, though the bad may be so twisted as to seem good, always in the end that which is good, that which is right, that which is strong, shall endure. Much have you told me of your people—much that seems beyond belief did I not know by the prophecies that it was so. Safely you have come through the dangers that barred the way to Mictolan, though you are not of the race of Kitché Maya. And you have triumphed over the Kinchi Ihaman, and through you, King Azcopil is ruler over Mictolan. Only in one way could you have done all this, my son; only by the help of that one God you worship. And so Nohul Voh, who is wise and has lived through many Katuns, and Azcopil, my king, who knows your heart, know that your God is the greatest god and that to us He is known as Kukulcan."

I was a bit dazed and tremendously astonished at this long and most surprising declaration of the old sorcerer. That he had become convinced that I was under divine protection, that he—as well as others—should have concluded that my God must be most powerful to have safeguarded me from the vengeance of Kinich Ahau,

would not have been surprising. Indeed, it would have been exactly in line with their psychology. But that they—that Nohul Voh, should have decided to adopt the God I worshipped, that they should have practically cast down their ancient, supreme Sun God and thus completely revolutionize their religion and their mythology, and that, by some incomprehensible manner of reasoning they should have identified the Plumed Serpent as God Almighty, was actually astounding. To a missionary—to good jolly old Padre José in fact—it would have been most gratifying to learn that the people had been so won over from their heathen practices and multiplicity of pagan gods. But I was no missionary; my religious activities had been forced upon me, and my only interest in their spiritual past, present or future lay in whether or not I had been appointed the head of their new church without being consulted in the matter; whether I was expected to continue to act the part of a priest, or whether I were free to follow my own inclinations in the matter. I was, in fact, about to put the question and settle it then and there when Nohul Voh's next words answered it for me.

He had examined my arm, had dressed the cuts, which were already healing, and he had declared that in three days more it would be as well as ever. Then, as he turned to go, he glanced keenly at me. "My son," he said, "though the Monster of Sacrifices will never more devour a maiden of Mictolan, yet the flames still stream from the temple. The Bridge of Light spans the chasm. The Way of the Symbols is open."

There was no doubt as to the meaning of his words. The hint was broad, plain enough. I was free to go—in fact the old fellow seemed anxious to have me go. What did it mean? Had he read my thoughts? Did he merely remember that I had wished to leave the valley with Itza and so realize that I could never be happy here? Or had he decided that my presence in Mictolan was not wholly desirable?

I couldn't say, and I didn't care. If Itza was willing, if she still wanted to leave her home and with me attempt to reach the outside world, we would start as soon as possible. But if she hesitated, if she wavered, I would remain, would abandon all thoughts of leaving. I would far rather remain in the valley forever than to make her unhappy, to cause her to pine for Mictolan and her people, to have her regret ever having left the valley. It would not be much of a hardship for me to remain there. I had Itza, I would have plenty to occupy my mind, to keep me busy and interested. I would be well-to-do, I would occupy a far higher and more important position than I could ever hope for among my own people.

Why, after all, did I want to leave? I really could not explain it myself. It was not homesickness, not a desire to be among my own race. I had been too much of a wanderer, had made my home in too many lands, among too many diverse and alien people, to miss the companionship of those of my race, to have any sentimental or patriotic longings. In fact I had no real home. To be sure I was an American by birth, but I had spent but a comparatively small portion of my life in the States. London, Madrid, Lima, Mexico, La Paz; the wild heights of the Andes, the silent jungles of the Amazon, the deserts of Peru; the Gran Chaco, the Llanos; Broadway, Piccadilly, the Prado of Havana, the Plazas de Armas of scores of Latin cities were all equally familiar, equally dear or equally unimportant to me. Nowhere had I a family or relations, nowhere but in Mictolan had I a heart interest, or truer, dearer friends.

Whatever it was, it was there. As long as the flames rose above the temple they would beckon me, urge me to be gone, and I hoped and prayed that if Itza decided

she preferred to remain, the Bridge of Light might vanish forever, thus putting an end to my longings and my hopes.

But Itza was as anxious to go as I was to have her. Indeed, she was, if anything, more enthusiastic. I knew the dangers, the hardships, the sufferings that faced us. I could foresee the weary miles, the dense jungles, the terrific mountains, the impassable streams, the vast wilderness that we would be forced to traverse. Even if we found that semi-mythical Way of the Symbols—in which I confess I had little faith—it would be no child's play, no picnic to wander for days through the unexplored country to some remote outpost of civilization. But Itza knew nothing of this. She had no kith or kin in Mictolan; she was an orphan, she had no ties other than me to bind her or hold her, and to tell the truth, her experiences had not been conducive to developing any great fondness for her native valley or her own people.

In vain I tried—now that she had expressed her willingness and desire to go—to dissuade her. I pointed out all the difficulties, the dangers. I tried to picture her life among strangers, aliens. I dilated on the dreary winters, the bitter cold of the north. But the more I said the more—woman like—she was determined to go. She would enjoy it, she was sure. With me to love her and to be loved by her she could be happy anywhere. Hardships, dangers meant nothing. Had she not been through far worse dangers, through greater sufferings? She wanted to see all the marvelous things I had related to her. She wanted to dwell among my people, to speak my language, to see the oceans. And after all I could not blame her. All her life—short as it was—had been spent in this one valley. All she knew, all she could imagine of the world was what she could see, hear and know in Mictolan. Beyond the valley was another world, a vast, unknown, undreamed of universe, as fascinating, as filled with real and imaginary wonders as another planet would have been to me.

I WOULD have set out that very day had my arm been fully recovered. At any moment, at any time the flames might disappear, the bridge might vanish. But that was a chance that had to be taken. To start off with a bad arm would have been more than foolhardy even on an ordinary expedition into the jungles. And to set forth on such a perilous, desperate venture as ours, with the handicap of a partly disabled arm would have been nothing short of suicidal. So, resigning myself to fate, I waited for the days to pass until my wounds were fully healed and my arm was again strong and whole. Each morning at dawn I gazed, half-fearfully, at the temple top; a dozen times a day my eyes turned to it; often in the night I would steal from Itza's side and peer into the soft effulgent light to assure myself the flames were still there. As Nohul Voh had said, the wounds healed in three days—his knowledge of herbs, drugs and cures was profound indeed, but it was ten days before full strength had returned to my lacerated arm.

Meanwhile I had kept my mind busy. I had spent many hours with Nohul Voh. I had been much with Azcopil, who with his queen were still our closest, dearest friends, and I had devoted no little time to adding to the mechanical advancement of the people. One thing I had done that pleased the people and amazed them immensely was to cast a large bronze bell for the temple. It was not a difficult job. The people were excellent metal workers, there was plenty of copper and silver, and it was merely a matter of making a mould and of smelting enough of the copper-silver alloy in several hundred crucibles at one time. Bells of small size and

of the sleigh-bell type were common, they were made of copper, silver and gold, but no one had ever before seen a large bell or a bell of the conventional type. Hence they had no idea what they were making, and, in order to surprise and impress them, I kept the matter a profound secret until the bell was finished. Then with infinite trouble and labor, it had been hauled and hoisted up the temple and hung beside the altar.

When all was in readiness and, standing upon the altar, I seized the heavy copper maul I had provided, and with all my strength swung it against the bell and the deep melodious tones rang out across the valley, the people rushed crowding to the streets and stared in dumb wonder.

Many could not at first locate the sound, and jumped and stared about and shaded their eyes and peered into the sky, striving to see the thing that emitted the strange, unknown sound. But presently all knew, and with wild shouts of joy, cried that their god was now speaking to them. Indeed, to them, this ringing, musical voice of their god was far more impressive, more convincing than any prayers or rituals I or any other priest had ever uttered. That they could not interpret the sounds made no difference; they were no more unintelligible than my words had been, and to have the deity speak to them directly, instead of through the medium of a human being, impressed them beyond belief. Moreover, it solved the problem of finding a priest to take my place, a problem that Nohul Voh, Azcopil and I had discussed at length, for the sorcerer and the king both knew that as soon as my arm was strong, I planned to leave them. But now there was no need of another priest. Any acolyte or temple attendant could mount to the great bell and pound upon it with the maul at sunrise and sunset.

**O**NLY once more did I ascend to the temple altar. Perhaps I did wrong, perhaps I may be severely criticized. But however that may be, the idea struck me to plant the symbol of the Christian faith on the spot where I had recited Christian prayers so often. And I have often wondered since, what would be thought if, at some distant time, explorers or archeologists should penetrate to Mictolan, and upon the deserted forgotten temple of the Plumed Serpent, they should find a bronze bell and a Christian cross beside the great stone idol of Kukulcan.

There was nothing now to delay our going. My arm was as strong as ever, the flames still streamed from the temple of Kinich Ahau, the Bridge of Light still spanned the chasm at the Cave of the Bats. We planned to leave secretly, to slip away without attracting the attention of the people, without their knowledge.

There were three reasons for this. In the first place, the people might object to my deserting them. In the second place, there was the prophecy foretelling that the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan would lead the people from Mictolan to reestablish the ancient empire of their race, and they might insist on accompanying me; while in the third place, as Nohul Voh naively suggested, my mysterious disappearance would be quite in keeping with my supposedly divine character and would do much to strengthen the people's faith in Kukulcan.

So, accompanied by the king and the old sorcerer, who insisted on seeing us off, we left the palace before dawn, and silently and unseen, hurried along that broad straight avenue down which I had come with Itza so many months before. How the others felt as we walked through the chill air on that memorable morning I do not know. But I for one felt more excited, more keyed up than ever in my life before. I was starting on a strange, a perilous adventure, and with me I was taking

Itza into dangers no one could foresee. And as I gazed about at the well-known scene, at the silent, flat-roofed houses, at the green fields and gigantic vegetation, at the frowning encircling mountains that hid the valley's secret from all the world, at the lofty temples spectral in the morning mist, a lump rose in my throat and I felt—strange thought as it was—much as I imagine a man must feel when he is going to his execution. I was leaving all this forever. Suddenly all seemed very dear to me, even the spidery windmills—incongruous things in this isolated valley—seemed like old familiar friends, and had Itza at that moment changed her mind, I would willingly have turned back. But she was all excitement, all gaily, all agog with the spirit of adventure.

At last we reached the entrance to the tunnel. I glanced back. Yes; the flames were rising above the Temple of the Sun, streaming straight upward in the still morning air. From where I had secreted them in a crevice of the rocks, I took my torches, my pack of provisions, and strapped them on my back. And then, to my amazement, Itza, with a merry laugh, rolled aside a rock and dragging out a second pack, adjusted it on her own lovely shoulders. In vain I protested. It was nothing, she declared. She hardly felt it. And we might need it. Why should her Itzimin carry all the burden? Was she not to eat her share of food? Why then should she not carry her share? Nohul Voh and Azcopil stood by her. It was useless to argue against three, and so, with a kiss and a caress, I gave in. A dozen paces more and before us was the black chasm spanned by the dazzling, iridescent, wondrous bridge of light. Fear, distrust, doubt filled me. I had crossed it before, yet try as I might I could not force myself to step from the firm hard stone onto that transparent, tenuous glow.

But Itza had no such fears. Swiftly she embraced King Azcopil, she threw her arms about Nohul Voh and planted a farewell kiss upon his cheek, and with a merry laugh and a wave of her hand stepped confidently from the verge of the rock. My heart skipped a beat, I uttered an involuntary cry as she did so. It seemed impossible that she would not be dashed to death in the abyss. But no. She might have been treading solid metal. Lightly she ran forward, calling me to follow. With a last clasp of my hand I stammered farewells to my two friends, and with gritted teeth and summoning all my courage, I stepped onto the incredible bridge and hurried after Itza.

A moment more and she sprang upon the ledge on the farther side. Turning, she waved her hand to the two men. Ten feet, five, three, separated me from her. Another stride and I would be beside her. And then, suddenly, without warning, the thing vanished under my feet. As if in a horrible nightmare I felt dropping into eternity. A wild despairing shriek came from my lips. I clutched wildly. My fingers gripped the rock, my toes dug into a crevice. With all my strength I fought to drag myself up. But the precipice was undercut and I could exert no leverage. I felt myself slipping, going. Then hands gripped my hair, my scalp seemed about to be torn from my head. With a last convulsive kick, a supreme effort, I felt my chest upon the ledge. Faint, half-senseless, with half my body and my legs dangling over the awful chasm, I was powerless to move another inch. But Itza's fingers were twisted firmly in my long hair. She had braced herself against an outjutting ledge, and she was by no means a puny weakling. Panting, tugging—each jerk bringing agonized groans from my lips—she dragged me to safety at last. I had escaped an awful death by the narrowest margin. Had the Bridge of Light failed ten, five seconds—even one second sooner, nothing could have prevented me from

being hurled to the depths of the abyss. I shuddered as I thought of it, shuddered still more at thought of what would have happened had the bridge ceased while Itza was crossing, if it had vanished with Itza on one side and myself on the other. And I thanked God that my left arm had not gone back on me. But I owed my life to Itza, to Itza whom I had thought too weak to withstand the dangers to be faced! She had dropped beside me and, woman-like now that the peril was past, she had burst into tears, sobbing out how terrified she had been, begging me to tell her if I were injured, pleading she was so sorry she had hurt me.

Controlling my shaken nerves, pulling myself together with an effort, I scrambled to my feet, raised her tenderly, and laughing at her fears stifled her sobs with kisses. Steeling myself to see that horrible chasm, I looked across to where Azcopil and Nohul Voh still stood. Then, waving our hands to them, shouting that all was well, we turned and entered the Cave of the Bats.

We had left Mictolan forever. There was no going back.

## CHAPTER XX

### The Way of the Symbols

THERE is little more to tell, for our adventures really ended when we crossed the Bridge of Light. I had come through the Cave of the Bats in the dark, blindly, wandering, lost. By merest luck I had found the exit where Itza and I now stood. But this time I had enough excellent torches to burn for hours, and lighting one of these, I held it up and peered about in its ruddy glare. I had no idea of the direction whence I had come, whether I had turned, doubled, run in circles or had followed a reasonably straight course on my former trip. I was not by any means sure how far I had come nor how much time I had spent in the cavern. Hence I had decided that the safest and surest—even if not the shortest—way of finding the entrance by which I had come would be to follow the wall of the cave. I felt confident there were no other exits, for had such existed the people would not have devoted so much care and labor to concealing the entrance by means of the great tilting idol. But we had not proceeded fifty feet—with Itza clinging to me and trembling with vague fears of the dismal place—when I found that my scheme was wholly impracticable.

There was no wall. Huge stalactites and stalagmites joined to form innumerable columns in the labyrinth of grottoes, narrow passages, galleries and corridors leading for unknown distances. The mountain was literally honeycombed with a maze of tunnels and caves. Any one of the countless openings might lead to the entrance, and to explore them all would take months—perhaps years. More than ever I realized how fortune or fate or Providence had guided my footsteps before. And more than ever I realized how difficult we would find it to cross the cave and reach the entrance we sought.

I halted, tried to collect my thoughts, to reason calmly, to concentrate upon the matter. The opening through which we had come was still visible, the morning sun streaming into it. As nearly as I could calculate, it faced southeast. I revisualized the surroundings of the tilting idol at the other entrance, and felt sure it faced the north. I have a rather remarkable sense of direction and I felt certain that I was not mistaken in this. In that case, one entrance would be almost directly opposite the other. Of course it might be far to one side or the other, far to the east or west, but if we followed a straight course towards the north,

we must eventually reach the limits of the cavern, and even if we did not see the light that indicated the opening, we could move east or west until we located it. And it would not be difficult to follow a straight line. By noting some peculiarity of a stone column ahead of us, and sighting back to the still visible entrance, we could move forward. Then we could select another column ahead, smudge the one beside which we stood with smoke, and move to the next. There were so many columns that it would be easy to align our course even after we lost sight of the entrance behind us.

Chatting to Itza to encourage her, and explaining my scheme to her, we started on. It was slow work. We had to use care, but all seemed to be going well. We had proceeded for at least an hour. I felt that at any time we might catch a glimpse of the light in the entrance ahead, when Itza uttered a surprised exclamation: "The symbol!" she cried. "See, Itzimin, there on the stone!"

I peered at the spot she indicated. She was right. Clearly outlined on the surface of an upjutting mass of rock was the deeply-cut symbol of Kukulcan with the reed and foot. But it pointed at right angles to the course we were following!

I was puzzled. Had we lost our way, had we become confused and was the symbol right, or did the symbol point the way to another entrance? Should we follow it—perhaps to find that in the ages that had passed since it had been cut, the entrance it led to had been blocked by debris? Or should we ignore it and continue on our course? Then I remembered that, in the vision I had seen, the same symbol was cut there in the valley near the giant tilting idol. That then must be the only exit; the symbol must lead to it. But how, where could we find the next mark? If we left the spot, if we wandered about hunting here, there and everywhere for the next symbol and failed to locate it, could we ever find our way back to the place where we stood, and could we again proceed in the straight line we were following? My torch illuminated only a small area of the cavern, we would have to search very carefully, very slowly for the mark, and there was the chance—the certainty almost—that many, if not most of the symbols, had been covered with the stalactitic material during the countless centuries. Suddenly memory of Nohul Voh's enigmatical words flashed across my mind, the words he had uttered when he had given me the bamboo tube that had served me so well and so mysteriously in the temple: "It may serve you well within that Cavern of the Bats." Strange that I should have forgotten it. What had the old sorcerer meant? Had he merely uttered generalities, meaning it might answer as a torch to light our way, or was there a deeper, hidden meaning?

Personally I couldn't see how the thing would help us any in our present quandary, but Itza—who was ever in awe of Nohul Voh and his strange knowledge and seemingly mystic powers—insisted that it would. Curious to see what the result would be, I dug it out of my pack, unstopped the end, and flashed its rays upon the rock with the carved symbol. As the strange red glare suffused the stone, I jumped as if I had sat on a lively hornet, and stood gaping in amazement. The symbol stood out in brilliant green light, and leading from it down the side of the rock, across the cavern floor, and disappearing between the stone columns in the blackness, was a row of shining green arrows!

Itza cried out with delight and clapped her hands at my surprise and her own triumph. Hadn't she said so? Hadn't she known Nohul Voh had spoken the truth? We hurried on, following the arrows. Suddenly I burst into a peal of laughter. It all seemed so

ridiculously familiar—"Follow the green arrows"—I could almost imagine myself in the subway at Times Square, in New York, glancing at the green line as I hurried towards the Lexington Avenue trains! But of course I couldn't explain this to Itza, and she glanced apprehensively at me wondering if I had suddenly lost my senses.

As we followed the arrows and the symbols that appeared from time to time, I realized how little chance we would have had, had we tried to find the entrance by moving in a direct line across the cavern. The marks turned, twisted, zig-zagged; swung to left, to right; doubled. I lost all sense of direction, but at last, far ahead, a patch of light showed in the blackness, and a moment later we stood at the entrance. Nothing had changed. The stones and the log I had placed three months before were still in position, and, passing through the opening beneath the idol, we stood once more in the blessed sunshine in the fair, green valley.

I looked up at the great image leaning far forward as if about to fall upon its knees. A question was in my mind. Should I leave the entrance open, so that any man who passed that way might enter and find Mictolan, so those within the valley might have free egress in case they ever deserted Mictolan? Or should I remove the props, swing the idol back in place and close the entrance?

Visions of Mictolan, of the peaceful happy life of its people rose before me. I saw Azcopil ruling the people wisely and well, I saw the lofty temples, heard the pealing of the great bell. Then I visualized the valley overrun with strangers, exploited by rough, unprincipled miners, the Mayas degraded, oppressed, debauched with the rum and vices of the white man. Better by far that they should always remain in their hidden valley, that Mictolan should remain forever unknown, inaccessible to the rest of the world.

Cautiously I removed the wedges and the logs. Carefully I clamored up the mighty image, studying it, examining it, testing it, until at last I found the secret of its mechanism and slowly, smoothly, with a slight jar it swung into place, sealing the entrance to the Cavern of the Bats.

There was little difficulty in finding the symbol on the rock beside the stream. My memory of that mysterious vision in the house of Nohul Voh was very vivid. I recognized every landmark I had seen in that mystic smoke. The rushing brook was exactly as I had seen it. There was the placid shaded pool, and even before we saw the sculptured symbol, I felt sure it would be there, cut deeply into the water-worn surface of the ledge. Beside the pool we decided to rest for the afternoon and night. My nerves were still a bit shaky, and I knew that Itza, unaccustomed to long walks with a pack upon her shoulders, was tired, although she would not admit it. She was so delighted with everything, that I doubt if she knew whether she was tired or not.

Even this first glimpse of the outside world was fascinatingly strange to her. The verdure, the rolling green hills, the distant hazy-blue mountains, the dense jungle, all were different from anything in her native valley. She insisted on bathing in the clear calm pool. It was an inviting-looking spot with its crystal water, its bottom of white and red pebbles, its little crescent of sandy beach. I longed for a swim myself and, having assured myself that there were no alligators or other dangerous inhabitants in the pool, we plunged in, and for an hour or more dove, swam, frolicked, splashed and had a glorious time. Refreshed, and with keen appetites, we emerged at last. I was anxious to conserve our slender stock of food for emergencies that might arise, and I felt certain that there were fish in

the stream. So, while Itza dried herself—like the golden statue of a Dryad—in the sunshine, I tried my luck with my hand-made hooks and line. No skill was needed to capture the denizens of that brook, they seemed anxious to be caught, and in almost as many minutes I had half a dozen beauties flapping on the grass. We dined royally and, having rested and smoked, I busied myself rigging up a palm-leaf shelter for the night.

As we were doing this—for Itza was more expert at such matters than I was—she touched my arm and pointed silently to where an unsuspecting deer had stepped from the jungle and stood looking at us curiously. That night we dined on broiled venison, and spent the evening "haricottling" the rest of the meat over a smoky fire. We now had plenty of food to last us for several days, even if no other game was obtainable and I had no further fear of going hungry for some time to come. The sun was just topping the mountains when we set off the next morning, following the course of the stream, happy and light-hearted. By noonday, when we stopped again to rest and eat, the brook had widened to a fair-sized river and, remembering the vision or whatever it was, that I had seen in the sorcerer's smoke, I looked about for material with which to construct a raft or boat of some sort.

Then for the first time, I realized that I was unconsciously assuming that I actually had looked into the future, or at least had, by some mysterious means, been enabled to view the route we were following. Nonsense! I said to myself. How could I have seen a place I had never visited? By some form of hypnosis or auto-suggestion Nohul Voh might have caused me to think I saw the valley near the cliff with the great idol, I had seen that before. But I had surely never been here by this broad stream. Yet there was the symbol on the rock by the pool. There was the stream. Try as I might to argue against it, I felt in my heart and innermost mind that everything would eventuate precisely as I had seemed to see it back in Mictolan. And at any rate, it would be far easier and quicker to travel down river by boat or raft than to follow the winding course of the stream afoot.

In the tropics, it is usually a simple matter to make some sort of a craft that is buoyant, easily handled and capable of supporting considerable weight in fairly calm water. There are always bamboos or the cork-like Balsa trees within easy reach when in jungle country, and where there are lakes or back-waters, there are the hollow reeds that, tied into bundles and lashed together, may be used to construct those light, seaworthy but strange crafts known as "balsas" by the Indians, who use them exclusively to navigate the waters of Lake Titicaca. And here, close to the stream, were bamboos, cork-like balsa\* trees and plenty of reeds. Itza fell to with a will and worked like a beaver. Her endurance and strength always surprised me. She did not give the impression of being a particularly strong woman, but the soft curves and contours of her body and limbs covered muscles that were almost equal to my own, and she possessed the remarkable endurance of her race. And when it came to performing any task that called for primitive methods or native skill, she was immeasurably superior to me, despite the fact that I always prided myself upon my knowledge and experience of woodcraft.

With her help we soon had several good-sized balsa logs ready, and by sundown we had practically finished a sort of combination raft and catamaran that would, I felt sure, serve us on the stream as long as we did not meet rapids or falls. The next morning we embarked,

\*A tropical wood of extreme lightness.



and thereafter, for days, we drifted swiftly, easily, down river without adventure, without effort.

TWICE, as we swept past cliffs, we saw the symbols pointing ever onward, and despite myself I was forced to admit that, regardless of how it had been done, old Nohul Voh had revealed the truth to me when he had showed me the "Way of the Symbols." So, being now convinced that it was so, I kept a sharp lookout for the precipice in whose base was the black tunnel through which the river flowed in the vision. Each day, as we drifted on, the mountains receded and became lower. Each day the river broadened, and I was constantly expecting to see Indian huts or villages and was as constantly surprised to find the country apparently uninhabited. Game was abundant, the stream was filled with fish, and though Itza missed the vegetable food to which she had always been accustomed, still she made no complaint and remained well and strong.

Often she laughingly twitted me on having pictured such bugbears of dangers and hardships. Since leaving the Cave of the Bats it had all been easy, safe, glorious fun to her. But we were not at the end of our journey yet, I told her.

Then, at last, one day we saw the expected mountain side stretching across the valley ahead, and presently, as we drew near, the black archway at its base was visible, exactly as I had seen it in my vision. By now I had become so thoroughly convinced of the accuracy of that glimpse into the unknown, that I felt perfectly sure that we would pass through the tunnel and emerge on the farther side in safety. But unfortunately the smoke-screen had not shown me the craft in which I was voyaging. Still, our balsam wood raft had proved most efficient, there was no sign of rapids or falls ahead—although the current increased and ran swiftly into the tunnel. But I was not taking any unnecessary chances. Running the raft ashore, I made it fast, and, with no little difficulty, made my way down stream until within a few feet of the opening in the cliff. But though we both listened intently, we could hear nothing that sounded like rapids or a fall—just a low, rushing, steady roar. Only one peril, I felt, remained. Could I feel sure that there was space enough between the surface of the stream and the roof of the tunnel for our craft and ourselves to pass? Fully ten feet of space showed at the entrance, but could I be certain it did not decrease within?

Then I noticed that the high water-mark—the highest point reached by the river in the rainy season—was not within four feet of the top of the opening. That settled it. The tunnel must be large enough to permit the whole volume of the river in the wet season to pass without backing up, and it was now the height of the dry season. Moreover, hadn't I seen myself floating safely on the lake at the farther end of the tunnel? I cast all doubts and fears aside, overhauled the raft, added lashings, strengthened it, and having lit two torches, we embarked, cast the raft free and were swept into the black hole. It was a strange weird scene with our torches casting a ruddy glare upon the swirling waters and the damp rocky walls. But within five minutes the walls vanished. No sign of rock could be seen to right, left or overhead, and I laughed aloud at my misgivings. Instead of becoming lower, the tunnel had opened into a vast cavern—vast indeed as I knew from the echo of my laughter. And it was not long. We seemed hardly to have entered the place—the arch was still outlined against the sunshine behind—when ahead we saw the glimmer of light. It increased rapidly in size, and more quickly than it takes to tell it, we swept out from the cavern and rocked gently upon the surface of a good-sized lake. As if I had known the

place all my life, I turned instinctively and peered at a rocky islet a few hundred feet distant. Though I had expected it, yet, when I saw the familiar symbol cut into the rock, I uttered a surprised ejaculation, and a peculiar sensation—as I imagine one might feel who sees or thinks he sees a ghost—caused a tingling of my spine. But Itza's eyes were sharper, quicker than mine. "Look, look, Itzimin mine!" she cried excitedly. "Houses! People!"

I shaded my eyes and stared incredulously. But there was no doubt of it. Less than half a mile distant a village stood at the edge of the lake, and people were moving back and forth upon the beach.

That they would be Indians was certain. But would they prove hostile or friendly? However, there was nothing we could do. The natives had already seen us and several canoes were coming swiftly towards us. As they drew near, I was relieved to see that they wore hats, that they were dressed in coarse native cotton shirts and—yes, there was no doubt about it—one fellow had on a pair of pants!

That settled it. I had no further fears. In fact, as the Indians drew near they were far more afraid of us than we had been of them. I shouted to them in Zutugil, but that appeared only to scare them the more. Then I tried Spanish, and with shouts of delight they replied in the same tongue. They were friendly, half-civilized, simple, harmless people, and ten minutes later we were in the village, objects of the most intense curiosity on the part of the villagers. But when, by chance, they caught a glimpse of the tattooed symbol on my chest, their curiosity changed instantly to wonder and adoration. They might be Spanish-speaking, degenerate, semi-Christianized, half-civilized members of their race, but they still recognized the mark of the ancient Mayan priest-kings and revered those who bore it. At this juncture, Itza bent towards me and whispered a question that brought roars of laughter from my lips.

"Are these people of your race, Itzimin?" she asked. To me there was something extremely ludicrous in her query, in her mistaking members of her own race for Anglo Saxons. But after all, why not? They were no more like the people of Mictolan than—well, I was about to say than like me, but honestly, of the two, I verily believe that, being a civilized man "gone native" as one might say, I looked far more like their kinsman than any man in Mictolan.

For a moment Itza looked hurt at my merriment over her quite natural and innocent question, but when I had explained, she regarded it as a good joke and laughed gaily herself. And as the Indians felt that there must be something funny, and that it would be discourtesy to their distinguished guest not to show appreciation of it, they, too, burst into peals and roars of laughter.

THEY were good-natured, simple folk, and in reply to my questions, informed me there was a white man in a village three days' walk to the south. He was, they added, a Padre, though why I, a member of the exalted, almost sacred Titul Zius clan, should want to find a white man or civilization was quite incomprehensible to them. That I was within three days of a village where there was a priest was not so surprising to me as it might seem. It is a remote Indian village indeed that is so far away to have its Padre, and that we had come far and deviously from the valley of Mictolan I knew. The hidden city might be two hundred, three hundred miles distant, and in that wilderness of unexplored mountain ranges such a place as Mictolan might well remain hidden forever, even though within one hundred miles of settlements and even of railways.

"And how is this village called, wherein dwells the Padre?" I asked my informant, who appeared to be the Cacique of the village by the lake.

"It is called the village of Xibaltango, my lord," he replied.

I gasped, speechless with surprise. Xibaltango within three days' march of where I sat! Jolly, good-hearted, riley-poly old Padre José barely sixty miles distant! I could scarcely believe my ears. But very possibly there was more than one Xibaltango.

"And know you not how he calls himself, the Padre?" I queried.

"Of a truth, most certainly, my lord," declared the Indian. "All the world knows that; all know him as the Padre José."

There was no doubt about it. By some whim of fate, of chance or of Providence the 'Way of the Symbol' had led us to—well, relatively speaking, to the front door of Padre José.

Three days later we stood before him, and the amazed, incredulous, utterly flabbergasted expression that came over his ruddy jovial face when he recognized me, is beyond words to describe.

"*Santísima Madre!*" he cried, devoutly crossing himself at his involuntary exclamation. "It is the Señor Americano! It is the Señor who had the codex and who went to Katchilcan! But, Señor, it is impossible, it is a miracle, it is an apparition! He—the Señor—you, were killed, destroyed, murdered by the Indios Bravos! I had word from Katchilcan—your—his—the Señor's bearers returned with the tale. I have said masses, prayers; have burned candles for the repose of you—the Señor Americano's soul. I have done penance for having sent you—him—into the wilderness.

Dios mio, it cannot be so, Señor, it is not—tell me it is true!"

I assured him that it was true, that I was very much alive, that I had never been killed.

He heaved an immense sigh of vast relief. Then, with a twinkle in his eye. "And the Senorita, Señor? Is she—the pretty one—also real or is she perhaps an apparition?"

"She, also, is most real *mi Padre*," I assured him. "It is a long, long story and greatly, I know, it will interest and amaze you. But first of all, would I ask that you convince yourself that we are both of flesh and blood by making us man and wife."

He pursed his lips and whistled. Placing the tips of his pudgy fingers together, cocking his head first on one side and then the other, he surveyed us critically. Then he burst out laughing.

"*Señor Americano!*" he exclaimed. "Many, very many and very strange things have I heard of you *Norte-Americanos*. Much that I could not believe; but the very strangest, the most incredible of all is what I hear from your own lips. You come to me with a so-strange codex. I send you to learn the Zulugil. From there you journey to see Katchilcan. He tells you some story, you vanish in the wilderness. You are killed, destroyed. I pray for the repose of your soul—though for all I know you are heretic—the months pass. Suddenly, from nowhere, a spirit, a ghost, an apparition, you appear. You have been transformed; no longer are you the *Señor Americano*. You are, you have become a savage, an Indio, and—*Madre de Dios*, yes, *si*, an ancient Maya—a figure from that so-strange codex. By your hand you lead a girl, an India, a most beautiful *muchacha*. An India such as I, who thought I knew all the tribes, have never seen. Do you tell me where you have been, Señor? Do you relate your tale? Do you explain why you still live? Do you speak of your codex? No, no indeed! Your first words are—'Marry me to this maiden!' It is sublime, marvelous! If I

had doubts before, I could have none now. Never—not for one moment! No one but an Americano, a Yanqui could be so mad! But I am impatient to hear your story. I am aflame with curiosity. So I *will* marry you, will baptize you, will make you both *Católicos* so I may do so. Only in that way can I get the story, Señor. That I can see. But," he added as if to himself, "very much do I doubt if in the eyes of God you will be any more man and wife than you are now."

To Itza that extemporaneous baptism, the short ceremony that made us legally man and wife, was all a most impressive, mysterious and wonderful affair.

Aside from myself, Padre José was the only white man she had ever seen, and having never seen me save bearded, unkempt, tanned, the fat, jolly, smooth-faced priest appeared like a being of a totally different race. To her, too, the little adobe church must have appeared a most poor and tawdry "temple." And though, for her benefit, Padre José used the Zutugil dialect in the ceremony, she went through it as though in a daze or a dream, and I doubt if she really understood what it all meant or what it was about. In fact, much later, she confided to me that at the time she thought it some mystic rite that all my race went through when they returned from distant places, and that the ring—that the priest produced from the Lord only knows where—was placed upon her finger as a mark to show she was my property. But there was one thing she *did* understand. She recognized the cross above the little altar, she realized that the figure of the Saviour was an image of my people's God. Falling upon her knees before it, she murmured the Lord's prayer I had taught her, and then, switching to her own tongue, gave thanks to Kukulcan.

Greatly touched was the jolly Padre at this, though he placed his hand over his mouth and his merry eyes crinkled at the corners when—like the little heathen she was—she addressed herself to Kukulcan.

SO we came to the end of our wanderings. Pages I might write describing Itza's wonder at all she saw, at the people, the cities, the railways, the steamships, the motor cars—at everything. But all that is apart from the story.

By the time we were back in New York Itza, ever adaptable and quick to learn—was, outwardly, as much the product of twentieth century civilization and fashions as any of the thousands of women upon the streets and avenues of the metropolis. In a city where all the races of the world mingle, her glowing golden skin and lustrous hair attracted no attention, but many an admiring and envious glance was cast at her unusual features, her wonderful eyes and her superb figure. But the great cities had no more charms for her than for myself. They amazed, astounded and terrified her. She longed for sunshine, verdure, mountains and quiet; the surroundings, the home, I had so often dreamed of. And at last, thanks to the codex that had by merest accident come into my hands in far off Vigo, and that had led me through such strange adventures, I found myself in a position to make those dreams come true. No wonder old Katchilcan had said he would give the half of his life to possess the Book of Kukulcan. How true had proved his words as I recalled them: To him who has the Book, and comes by it by honest means, his way shall be made easy and he shall gain great peace and happiness, and he shall abide forevermore with the gods."

And as I prepare to lay aside my pen, and Itza rises and with smiling lips and eyes comes towards me, I know that, for me, at least, the promise of the ancient prophecy has been borne out in full—beyond even my wildest expectations.

## Epilogue

SINCE writing the above story of my adventures and experiences in the city of Mictolan, I have read it to Ita. "Why!" she exclaimed, "You have left out some of the most important facts. You haven't explained about the Bridge of Light or Nohul Voh's tube or the light in his house. And after all the trouble and time you and your friends have devoted to studying them!"

To my surprise, I discovered she was right. I had mentioned the ideas and theories I had formed in Mictolan, but these, I had later found, were not entirely correct. Fortunately I had preserved the bamboo tube, and my friend Dr. Farrabee had written a special treatise on it. Its contents were, he found, an entirely new element related to radium but possessing several unique properties. Thus, while lead is (to all intents and purposes) a radium insulator, it offers no resistance to the rays of this new element that Dr. Farrabee has named Nohulite at my request. But remarkably enough, any cellulose tissue or fibre completely isolates Nohulite. As is well known, radium destroys organic tissue and affects bone. But Nohulite appears to have no effect upon bone itself, though it destroys animal fat almost instantly. Its most remarkable property, however, is that in the presence of metals it discharges rays or electrons in inconceivable quantities without appreciable loss of energy or bulk to itself. Although this discharge, this fusillade, if I may use the term, is quite invisible to the human eye, yet the instant it comes into contact with a metallic element it produces an intense heat and a colored glow, the amount of heat and the color of the glow depending upon the metal and its purity. This phenomenon, according to Dr. Farrabee's exhaustive monograph, is due to resistance. In other words, just as current of electricity passing through a resistant material, such as iron, will cause that material to become incandescent, so the discharge of electronic energy from Nohulite, striking a resistant material, produces heat and an incandescent glow. But contrary to what one would expect, the purer the metal the greater the resistance. Hence, when, in the passages of the temple, I turned the ray upon the rocks, a red glow—due to the presence of iron—resulted with comparatively little heat. But when it was turned upon gold—or pure copper—a tremendous amount of heat was generated instantly. Even the mysterious and seemingly inexplicable manner in which the rays had revealed the otherwise green arrows in the Cave of the Bats has been explained by Dr. Farrabee's experiments. Chromium oxides glow brilliant green under the rays, and no doubt the arrows were either cut into the rock, and filled with chrome—which would be indistinguishable by the naked eye from the rest of the stone—or they had been painted with some chromium oxide upon the rocks. Even if they were completely covered with a thin layer of limestone—as they probably were—they would still be revealed by the ray of Nohulite.

Unfortunately I brought back no samples of the other materials I had seen in the valley, and there were only my observations and descriptions of the various phenomena to aid in formulating theories and hypotheses. I had assumed that the Bridge of Light was a jet of vapor or gas ionized by contact with radium or some radioactive mineral. But neither Dr. Farrabee, Professor Le Conte nor Sir William Lillie agree with me. They are unanimous in declaring that, in their opinions, the vapor was in itself sufficiently solid to support the weight of human beings. At first this sounds incredible, for we invariably think of vapors or gases as thin, fluid and incapable of supporting solid objects. But it must be borne in mind that the terms "fluid" and "solid" are relative only. In comparison with air or helium gas, water is a "solid." In comparison with water, mercury is a "solid." Air will not support wood, but water will; water will not support iron, but mercury will. Conversely, compared to iron, mercury is liquid; compared to wood, water is a liquid. And whether or

not any material—so-called fluid or liquid—will support a given object depends entirely upon the relative weight—per cubic inch—of the two. Hence, if we can imagine a gas or vapor weighing more per cubic inch than a human body, that gas would support a man. And there is no scientific or other reason why there should not be gases heavy enough to do so; why there should not be gases as much heavier than water as helium or hydrogen gas is lighter than water. That the Bridge of Light glowed in various colors was perhaps (these eminent scientists admit) caused by radioactive minerals. In fact, such a stream of vapor, undoubtedly containing metallic elements or particles, if passing through rock containing Nohulite, would almost certainly glow with the various colors of the metallic elements produced by the Nohulite rays. Also, the scientists I have mentioned, as well as Professor Nordstrom, the world renowned authority on rare earths, seem to be fairly well convinced that Nohul Voh's light (as well as the various other lights of Mictolan) was produced by a use of the same remarkable Nohulite. Dr. Farrabee's experiments, as I have said, have proved that each metal, and metallic salt or solution, produces a distinct color under the Nohulite action. But so far he has been unable to find a single known metal that reacts with a white glow. The nearest he has come to this is by the use of a mixture of thorium and potassium. This gives a very brilliant but soft yellow light. Indeed, if any considerable quantity of Nohulite were available, had I in fact brought out a few hundred pounds of the material, I would have been a multimillionaire, and the artificial lighting systems of the world would have been revolutionized. So remarkable are the properties of that rare mineral, so insignificant its loss of energy that, ever since I have returned from Mictolan—and Dr. Farrabee completed his studies—a period of more than two years, his home and my home have been illuminated from top to bottom with Nohulite lamps. Each contains less than one-tenth of a gram of Nohulite, and each produces light of practically one hundred candlepower. And yet, so far, no diminution can be detected either in amount of light or the quantity of Nohulite.

Finally there is the strange, ever-rotating green sphere that so puzzled me in Nohul Voh's room. But no scientist has yet been able to formulate a more satisfactory or more reasonable theory to explain it than that which I decided upon myself.

There is one more paragraph I must add. I have hesitated hitherto to write this story of Mictolan. I realized that to do so would be to attract the attention of promoters, speculators, exploiters. And I realized that even if I had closed the entrance to the Cave of the Bats, even if the Bridge of Light never again spanned the chasm, even if I refused to divulge the exact location of the valley, it would be found as soon as the world learned of the riches of the place. An airplane could locate it easily; no matter how inaccessible it might be overland, airplanes could land in the valley. And for the same reason I had pledged my scientific friends to absolute secrecy regarding the origin of the priceless Nohulite.

But now all is changed. Mictolan, I feel sure, has forever vanished from the face of the world. Soon after the terrific and disastrous earthquakes that shook Guatemala four months ago, a government airplane, carrying relief to one of the stricken cities, reported passing over an immense lake filling what was apparently the crater of an enormous extinct volcano. The lake, so the observer reported, showed indications of having recently been formed. Dead and uprooted trees still floated upon its surface and, projecting a few feet above the surface of the water were the summits of two ancient Mayan temples. In every detail the description and the location of the lake coincide with Mictolan, and I am absolutely convinced that Mictolan, with all its people, was completely destroyed, completely submerged by the great cataclysm of nature.