

A black and white portrait of Henry Rider Haggard. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair, a full beard, and a mustache. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows on the right side of his face. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt and a dark tie.

Henry Rider Haggard

Heart of the World

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DON IGNATIO

HOW THE PLOT FAILED

THE SEÑOR STRICKLAND

THE SUMMONS

THE LEGEND OF THE HEART

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“EL NORTE”

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FAREWELL

ENVOI

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Heart of the World

DON IGNATIO

The circumstances under which the following pages come to be printed are somewhat curious and worthy of record. Within the last few years a certain English gentleman, whom we will call Jones, because it was not his name, chanced to be employed as the manager of a mine not far from the Usumacinto River, the upper reaches of which divide the Mexican State of Chiapas from the Republic of Guatemala.

Now life at a mine in Chiapas, though doubtless it has some compensations, does not altogether fulfil a European's ideal of happiness. To begin with, the work is hard, desperately hard, and though the climate is healthy enough among the mountains, there are valleys where men may die of fever. Of sport, strictly speaking, there is none, for the forests are too dense to hunt in with any comfort, and, if they were not, the swarms of venomous insects of various degree, that haunt them, would make this particular relaxation impossible.

Society also, as we understand it, is conspicuous by its absence, and should a man chance even to be married, he could not well bring his wife into regions that are still very unsettled, across forest paths, through rivers, and along the brinks of precipices, dangerous and impassable enough to strike terror to the heart of the stoutest traveller.

When Mr. Jones had dwelt for a year at the mines of La Concepcion, the fact of his loneliness, and a desire for acquaintances more congenial than the American clerk of the stores and his Indian labourers, came home to him with some force. During the first months of his residence he had

attempted to make friends with the owners of some neighbouring *fincas* or farms. This attempt, however, he soon gave up in disgust, for these men proved to be half-breeds of the lowest class, living in an atmosphere of monotonous vice.

In this emergency, being a person of intelligence, Jones fell back upon intellectual resources, and devoted himself, so far as his time would allow, to the collection of antiquities, and to the study of such of the numerous ruins of pre-Aztec cities and temples as lay within his reach. The longer he pursued these researches, the more did they fascinate his imagination. Therefore, when he chanced to hear that, on the farther side of the mountain, at a *hacienda* called Santa Cruz, there dwelt an Indian, Don Ignatio by name, the owner of the *hacienda*, who was reported to have more knowledge of the *antiguos*, their history and relics, than anybody else in this part of Mexico, he determined to visit him upon the first opportunity.

This, indeed, he would have done before, for Don Ignatio boasted an excellent reputation, had it not been for the length of the journey to his home. Now, however, the difficulty was lessened by an Indian who offered to point out a practicable path over the mountain, which brought the *hacienda* of Santa Cruz to within a three hours' ride on mule-back from La Concepcion, in place of the ten hours that were necessary to reach it by the more frequented road. Accordingly, one day in the dry season, when work was slack at the mine, owing to the water having fallen too low to turn the crushing-mill, Jones started. This was on a Saturday, for on the Monday previous he had despatched a runner to Don Ignatio announcing his intended visit, and received in reply a most courteous and well-written letter, begging him to pass the next Sunday at the *hacienda*, "where any English gentleman would always be most welcome."

As he approached the *hacienda*, he was astonished to see the *façade* of an enormous white stone building of a semi-Moorish style of architecture, having towers and ornamented doorways at either end, and a large dome rising from the centre of its flat roof. Riding through the *milpas*, or corn-fields, and groves of cocoa and coffee bushes, all in a perfect state of cultivation, which covered many acres on every side of the building, Jones came to the gateway of a large *patio*, or courtyard, where grew several gigantic *ceiba* trees, throwing their grateful shade over the mouth of a well. From under these trees an Indian appeared, who evidently had been watching for his arrival, and, taking the horse, informed him, with many salutations, that the Señor Ignacio was at even-song with his people in the chapel yonder, according to his habit, but that the prayers would soon be finished.

Leaving his horse in charge of the Indian, Jones went to the chapel, and, its great doors being open, he entered and sat down. So soon as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, he perceived that the place was unusually beautiful, both in its proportions and its decorations.

The worshippers also were many—perhaps they numbered three hundred, clearly all of them Indians employed upon the estate; and so intent were they upon their devotions that his entry was not even noticed. To his mind, however, the most curious object in the building was a slab of white marble, let into the wall above the altar, whereon the following inscription was engraved in Spanish, in letters so large that he had no difficulty in reading it:

“Dedicated by Ignacio, the Indian, to the memory of his most beloved friend, James Strickland, an English gentleman, and Maya, Princess of the

Heart, his wife, whom first he met upon this spot. Pray for their souls, of your charity, O passer-by.”

While Jones was wondering who this James Strickland, and Maya, Princess of the Heart, might be, and whether it was his host who had set up the tablet to their memory, the priest pronounced his benediction, and the congregation began to leave the church.

The first to pass its doors was an Indian gentleman, whom Jones rightly took to be Don Ignatio himself. He was a man of about sixty years, but one who looked much older than his age, for sorrow, hardship, and suffering had left their marks upon him. In person he was tall and spare, nor did a slight lameness detract from the dignity of his bearing. His dress was very simple and quite innocent of the finery and silver buttons which have so much attraction for the Mexican mind, consisting as it did of a sombrero of Panama straw, with a black ribbon in place of the usual gilt cord, a clean white jacket and shirt, a black tie fastened in a bow, a pair of drab-coloured trousers, and brown boots of European make.

Indeed, the only really remarkable thing about Don Ignatio was his face. Never, thought Jones, had he beheld so beautiful a countenance, or, to be more accurate, one that gave him such assurance of its owner's absolute goodness and purity of nature. The features were those of a high-bred Indian, thin and delicately cut; the nose aquiline, the cheek-bones and brow prominent, while beneath the latter shone a pair of large and soft black eyes, so tender and trustful in their expression that they seemed almost out of place in the face of a man.

He stood by the door of the chapel, in the light of the setting sun, leaning somewhat heavily on a stick, while the Indians filed past him. Every one of

these, man, woman, and child, saluted him with the utmost reverence as they went, some of them, especially the children, kissing his long and finely-shaped hand when they bade him good-night in terms of affection, such as “father,” and called on the Saints to guard him. Jones, watching them, reflected upon the difference of their attitude from that of the crouching servility which centuries of oppression have induced in their race towards any master of white blood, and wondered to what his host’s influence over them was due. It was at this moment that Don Ignatio turned and saw him.

“A thousand pardons, señor,” he said in Spanish, with a shy and singularly engaging smile as he lifted his sombrero, showing his long hair, which, like his pointed beard, was almost white. “You must indeed have thought me rude, but it is my custom at the end of the week’s work to attend worship with the peons—do not press round the noble *Inglese*, my children—also I did not think that you would arrive before the sun was down.”

“Pray don’t apologise, señor,” answered Jones; “I have been much interested in watching all your servants at their devotions. What a beautiful chapel this is! May I look at it before you shut the doors?”

“Certainly, señor. Like the rest of the house, it is fine. The old monks who designed it two hundred years ago—for this was a great monastery—knew how to build, and labour was forced in those days and cost nothing. Of course I have repaired it a great deal, for those who lived here before me did not trouble about such things.

“You would scarcely think, señor, that in the old days, twenty years ago, this place was a nest of highway robbers, smugglers, and man-slayers, and that these people whom you see to-night, or their fathers, were slaves with no more rights than a dog.

“But so it was. Many a traveller has lost his life in this house or its neighbourhood. I, myself, was nearly murdered here once. Look at the carving of that altarpiece. It is fine, is it not? Those *sapote* wood columns date from the time of the old monks. Well, I have known Don Pedro Moreno, my predecessor, tie human beings to them in order to brand them with red-hot irons.”

“To whom does that inscription refer?” asked Jones, pointing to the marble slab which has been described.

Don Ignacio’s face grew very sad as he answered:

“It refers, señor, to the greatest friend I ever had, the man who saved my life at the risk of his own when I came by this limp, and one who was dear to me with a love passing the love of woman. But there was a woman who loved him also, an Indian woman too, and he cared for her more than he did for me, as was right, for has not God decreed that a man should leave his friends, yes, his father and mother even, and cleave unto his wife?”

“He married her then?” said Jones, who was growing interested.

“Oh, yes; he married her, and in a strange place and fashion. But it is an old story, señor, and with your permission I will not tell it; even to think of it revives too many painful memories, memories of death and loss, and disappointed ambition, and high hopes unfulfilled. Perhaps, one day, if I have the courage and live long enough, I will write it all down. Indeed, some years ago I made a beginning, but it wearied me, and what I wrote seemed foolishness, so I gave up the task.

“I have lived a rough life, señor, and met with many adventures in it, though, thanks be to God, my last years have been spent in peace. Well, well, it is coming to an end now, and were it not for the thought that my

people here may fall into evil hands when I am gone, that would not trouble me.

“But come, señor, you are hungry, and the good father, who has promised to eat with us, must ride to-night to celebrate a mass to-morrow at a village three leagues away, so I have ordered supper early. The porter with your bag arrived safely; it has been placed in your chamber, the Abbot’s room it is called, and if you will follow me I will show you a short path to it from the chapel.”

Then he led the way to a little door in the wall. Unlocking this door, they passed up some narrow stairs, at the head of which was a landing-place with a window, or rather *grille*, so arranged that, while it was invisible from below, an observer standing there could hear and see all that passed in the chapel.

“This was the place,” said Don Ignatio, “whence the old abbots kept secret watch upon the monks, and it was here that once I saw a sight which I am not likely to forget.”

Then he passed on through several long and intricate passages, till he came to a sitting-room filled with handsome old Spanish furniture.

“Your sleeping-place lies beyond, señor,” he said, opening another door that led into a large and dreary-looking chamber, lighted by heavily-barred windows, of which the sills were not less than ten feet from the ground.

On the walls were frescoes of the Last Judgment, and of scenes inspired by the bloody drama of the Inquisition, grim to look on and somewhat injured by damp, but executed with great power and vivid, if distorted, imagination. Below the centre window, and reaching to within three feet of the floor, was an ancient full-length portrait of one of the abbots of the

monastery, life-size and painted in oils upon a panel, representing a man of fierce and evil countenance, over whose tonsured head the Holy Spirit was shown hovering in the shape of a dove. For the rest, the room was well, if lightly, furnished, and boasted the luxury of squares of matting laid upon the brick floor.

“I fear that you will think this but a dismal apartment, señor,” said Don Ignatio, “still it is our guest-chamber; moreover, there is a room attached which I thought might be useful to you to write in, should you wish to do so. The people here say that the place is haunted, but I know you Englishmen do not bother about such things. It is not wonderful, however, that they talk thus, seeing that murders were done in this chamber in the time of Don Pedro Moreno. Indeed, he laid a plot to kill me and my friend here, and, though he did not succeed in that instance, when I came into possession afterwards, I found several skeletons beneath the floor—two of them, I remember, just where the bed stands now—and gave them decent burial.”

Jones, as in honour bound, declared himself to be totally indifferent to representations of tortures of the Inquisition, memories of departed abbots, skeletons of murdered men beneath the floor, ghosts, and *hoc genus omne*. Still, though he never confessed it to his host, his first night in the abbot's chamber, owing probably to the strong coffee which he had drunk, was not altogether a pleasant experience. In after days, however, he became well accustomed to the place, and, indeed, preferred it to any other room in the *hacienda*.

In contrast to the rude and ill-dressed fare with which Jones was fain to satisfy himself at the mine, Don Ignatio's supper was a feast worthy of Epicurus, especially as it was free from the horrible messes, compounded

of oil and the inward parts of animals, that figure so largely in Mexican cookery.

After their meal, cigars and black coffee were handed round, of which the raw materials had been grown on the estate, and never in his life did Jones smoke better tobacco. When the *padre*—a gentle and well-informed man—had departed, Jones began to speak of the antiquities of the country. Soon he found that his host's knowledge of the subject had not been exaggerated, seeing that he was even able to decipher hieroglyphic writings of which the key was supposed to be lost, and to give an outline of the history of the races who built the great temples and palaces, whereof so many ruins are to be found in the Palenque district.

“It is sad to think,” said Jones presently, “that nothing in which the breath of life remains is left of all this civilisation. If only the old legend of the Golden City, hidden away somewhere in the unexplored recesses of Central America, were true, I think that I would give ten years of my existence to visit it. It would be a glorious thing to step back into the past, to see a system at work, and mingle with a people of which the world has lost all count and knowledge; for, let the imagination be active as it will, it is practically impossible to reconstruct these things from ruins and traditions. In fact, Don Ignatio, I do not understand how it is that you, who have never seen the *antiguos* in the flesh, can talk about them so certainly.”

“If I had never seen them, señor,” he answered, quietly, “it would be wonderful. Indeed, you might be justified in setting me down as a teller of tales, but it chanced that I *have* seen the Golden City of fable and its civilisation, and I can assure you that its wonders were far greater than any that have been told of in legend, or even by the Spanish romancers.”

“What!” gasped Jones, “what! Have I been drinking too much of your excellent wine? Am I asleep, or did I hear you say that you, the gentleman sitting before me, with your own eyes had seen the secret city of the Indians?”

“You heard me say so, señor, though I did not in the least expect you to believe me. Indeed, it is because I cannot bear to be thought a liar, that I have never said anything of this story, and for this same reason I shall not repeat it to you, since I do not wish that one whom I hope will become my friend should hold me in contempt.

“In truth I am sorry that I have spoken so freely, but, in support of my veracity, I will beg you to remember that among the huge forests, wildernesses, and *sierras* of Central America, where no white man has set his foot, and whence the Indians vanished generations since, there is room for many ancient cities. Why, señor, within two hundred miles or less of where we sit to-night, there exist tribes of *Lacandones*, or unbaptised Indians, who have never seen a white man and who still follow their fathers’ faiths. No, señor, that story shall never be told, at any rate in my lifetime, for I have nothing to show in proof of it, or at least only one thing ——”

“What is it?” asked Jones, eagerly.

“You shall see if you wish, señor,” his host answered, and left the room.

Presently he returned with a little leather bag from which he extracted a very curious and beautiful ornament. It was a great emerald, by far the largest that Jones had ever seen, uncut, but highly polished. This stone, which was set in pure gold, obviously had formed the clasp of a belt and could also be used as a seal; for on it, cut in *intaglio*, was the mask of a

solemn and death-like human face surrounded by a hieroglyphic inscription, while on the reverse were other hieroglyphics.

“Can you read this writing?” asked Jones, when he had examined the ornament.

“Yes, señor. The words in front are: ‘O Eyes and Mouth, look on me, plead for me.’ And those on the back: ‘Heart of Heaven, be thou my home.’”

“It is wonderful,” said Jones, restoring the relic with a sigh, for he would have given everything that he had, down to his shoes, to possess it. “And now will you not make an exception in my favour, and tell me the story?”

“I fear that I cannot oblige you, señor,” Don Ignatio answered, shaking his head.

“But,” pleaded Jones, “having revealed so much, it is cruel to hide the rest.”

“Señor,” said his host, “will you take some more coffee? No. Then shall we walk a little on the roof and look at the view; it is pretty by moonlight, and the roofs here are wonderful, all built of solid stone; there is a tradition that the old monks used to dine on them in summer. They have a loop-holed wall round them whence that abbot, whose portrait hangs in your sleeping-chamber, beat back a great attack of the Indians whom his oppression stirred into rebellion.

“To-morrow I shall hope to show you round the lands, which have repaid me well for my twenty years of cultivation. Everybody in Mexico runs after mines, but its soil is the richest mine of all. I knew that, and, seeing the capacities of the place, I sold the other emeralds which went with this clasp—they were fine stones, but unengraved, and therefore of no particular interest—and bought it cheap enough. Now that the country is more

settled, and I have planted so much, its value has become great, and will be greater still when all the young cocoa bushes are in full bearing a few years hence.

“There, thanks be to the Saints, the stair is done—of late my back hurts me when I climb up steps. The air is sweet, is it not, señor, and the prospect pleasing? Look, the river shines like silver. Ah! how beautiful is God’s world! It makes me sad to think of leaving it, but doubtless He will provide still finer places for us to work and serve Him in, gardens where sin and grief cannot enter. Surely there is room enough yonder,” and he nodded toward the sky.

This was but the first of many nights that Jones spent under Don Ignatio’s hospitable roof, where, as the months went by, he grew more and more welcome. Soon he conceived a great affection for the grave, sweet-natured, kindly old Indian gentleman, whose mind seemed to be incapable of any evil thought, and whose chief ambitions were to improve his land and do good to all about him, more especially to his Indian servants or peons.

In the beginning of their intimacy they made several expeditions together to inspect ruins in the neighbourhood, and once Don Ignatio came to stay with him at the mine of La Concepcion, where his visit proved of the greatest use to Mr. Jones and the company he served. One of the difficulties in working this particular mine lay in the scarcity of labour. At a word from Don Ignatio this trouble vanished. He sent for a *cacique*, who lived in the mountains, and spoke to him, and, lo! within a week, fifty stalwart Indians appeared to offer their services at the mine, thus affording one of many instances that came to Jones’s knowledge, of his friend’s extraordinary influence among the natives.

As time went on, however, these excursions ceased, since Don Ignatio’s health grew too feeble to allow him to leave the *hacienda*.

At length, it was when they had been acquainted for nearly two years, a messenger arrived at the mine one morning, saying that he was instructed by his master, Don Ignacio, to tell the Señor Jones that he lay dying and would be glad to see him. He was to add, however, that if it should be in any way inconvenient, the Señor Jones must not trouble himself to come for so small a matter, as his master had written a letter which would be delivered to him after his death.

Needless to say the Señor Jones travelled across the mountains as fast as the best mule he owned would carry him. On arriving at the *hacienda* he found Don Ignacio lying in his room, almost paralysed and very weak, but perfectly clear-headed and rejoiced to see him.

“I am about to make my last journey, friend,” he said, “and I am glad, for of late I have suffered a great deal of pain in my back, the result of an ancient injury. Also it is time that a helpless old man should make room for a more active one.” And he looked at his visitor strangely, and smiled.

Jones, whose feelings were touched, made the usual reply as to his having many months to live, but Don Ignacio cut him short.

“Don’t waste time like that, friend,” he said, “but listen. Ever since we knew each other you have been trying to extract from me the story of how I came to visit the city, Heart of the World, and of my friend, James Strickland, whom, thanks be to God, I so soon shall see again.

“Well, I never would tell it to you, though once or twice I nearly did so when I saw how my silence chagrined you, partly because I pride myself upon being able to keep a secret when pressed to reveal it, and also because I am selfish and knew that so soon as you had heard my story, you would cease to interest yourself in a stupid, failing old man, for who is there that cares about the rind when he has sucked the orange?

“Also there were other reasons: for instance, I could not have related that history without displaying unseemly emotion, and I know that you Englishmen despise such exhibitions. Lastly, if I told it at all, I desired to tell it fully and carefully, keeping everything in proportion, and this it would have been difficult to do by word of mouth. Yet I have not wished to disappoint you altogether, and I have wished that some record of the curious things which I have seen in my life should be preserved, though this last desire alone would not have been sufficiently strong to move me to the task which I finished ten days ago, before the paralysis crept into my arm.

“May I trouble you to open that cupboard near the foot of the bed, and to give me the pile of writing that you will find in it. A thousand thanks. Here, señor, in these pages, if you care to take the trouble to read them, is set out an account of how I and my English friend came to visit the Golden City, of what we saw and suffered there, and of some other matters which you may think superfluous, but that are not without their bearing upon the tale. I fear that my skill in writing is small, still perhaps it may serve its turn, and if not, it matters nothing, seeing that you seek the spirit, not the letter, and are not sufficient of a Spanish scholar to be too critical.

“Now take the book and put it away, for the very sight of it wearies me, recalling the hours of labour that I have spent on it. Also I wish to talk of something more important. Tell me, friend, do you propose to stop in this country, or to return to England?”

“Return to England! Why, I should starve where there are no mines to manage. No, I am too poor.”

“Then would you return if you were rich?” asked the dying man anxiously.

“I do not know; it depends. But I think that I have been too long away to go to live in England for good.”

“I am glad to hear that, friend, for I may as well tell you at once that I have made you my heir, so that henceforth you will be a wealthy man as we understand wealth in this country.”

“You have made me your heir!” stammered Jones.

“Yes. Why should I not? I like you well, and know you to be a good and honest man. I have no relations and no friends, and, above all, I am sure that you will deal justly and gently by my people here, for I have watched your bearing towards those who work under you at the mine. Moreover, I have conditions to make which will not be the less binding on you because they are not set out in the will, namely, that you should live here yourself and carry on the work that I have begun, for so long as may be possible, and that, if you are forced to sell the place by any unforeseen circumstance, or to leave it away by testament, you should do so to an Englishman only, and one of whom you know something. Do you accept?”

“Indeed, yes, and I know not how to thank you.”

“Do not thank me at all, thank your own character and honest face which have led me to believe that I can make no better disposal of my property. And now go, for I am tired, but come to see me again to-morrow morning after the priest has left.”

So Jones, who had entered that room possessed of a hard-earned eight hundred a year, departed from it the owner of a property which, before long, became worth as many thousands annually, as any who have visited him at Santa Cruz can testify. Three days later Don Ignatio passed away peacefully, and was laid to his rest in the chapel of the *hacienda*.

This, then, was how the story of the city, Heart of the World, and of Don Ignatio and his friend, James Strickland, who saw it, came into the hands of him whom we have called Jones.

Here follows a translation of the manuscript.

HOW THE PLOT FAILED

I, Ignatio, the writer of this history, being now a man in my sixty-second year, was born in a village among the mountains that lie between the little towns of Pichaucalco and Tiapa. Of all that district my father was the hereditary *cacique*, and the Indians there loved him much.

When I was a lad, perhaps nine years old, troubles arose in the country. I never quite understood them, or I may have forgotten the circumstances, for such things were always happening, but I think that they were caused by some tax which the government at Mexico had imposed upon us unjustly. Anyhow, my father, a tall man with fiery eyes, refused to pay a tax, and, after a while, a body of soldiers arrived, mounted upon horses, who shot down a great number of the people, and took away some of the women and children.

Of my father they made a prisoner, and next day they led him out while my mother and I were forced to look on, and sat him by the edge of a hole that they had dug, holding guns to his head and threatening to shoot him unless he would tell them a secret which they were anxious to learn. All he said, however, was that he wished that they would kill him at once, and so free him from the torment of the mosquitoes which hummed around him.

But they did not kill him then, and that night they put him back in a prison, where I was brought to visit him by the *padre*, Ignatio, his cousin and my godfather. I remember that he was shut up in a dirty place, so hot that it was difficult even to breathe, and that there were some drunken

Mexican soldiers outside the door, who now and again threatened to make an end of us Indian dogs.

My godfather, the priest Ignatio, confessed my father in a corner of the cell, and took something from his hand. Then my father called me to him and kissed me, and with his own fingers for a few moments he hung about my neck that thing which the priest had taken from him, only to remove it again and give it to Ignatio for safe-keeping, saying: "See that the boy has it, and its story with it, when he comes of age."

Now my father kissed me again, blessing me in the name of God, and as he did so great tears ran down his face. Then the priest Ignatio took me away, and I never saw my father any more, for the soldiers shot him next morning, and threw his body into the hole that they had dug to receive it.

After this, my godfather, cousin, and namesake, Ignatio, took me and my mother to the little town of Tiapa, of which he was priest, but she soon died there of a broken heart.

In Tiapa we lived in the best house in the place, for it was built of stone and set upon a bank overhanging a beautiful rushing river with water that was always clear as glass, however much it rained, which river ran a hundred feet or more below the windows.

About Tiapa there is little to say, except that in those days the people were for the most part thieves, and such great sinners that my cousin, the *padre*, would not shrive some of them, even on their death-beds. There was a church, however, whereof the roof was overgrown with the most beautiful orchids. Also the roads were so bad that, except in the dry season, it was difficult to travel either to or from the town.

Here in this forgotten place I grew up, but not without education, as might have been expected, seeing that my cousin was a good scholar, and did all he could to keep me out of mischief.

When I was about fifteen years of age, of a sudden a desire took hold of me to become a priest. It was in this wise: One Sunday evening I sat in the church at Tiapa, looking now at the sprays of orchid flowers that swung to and fro in the breeze outside the window, and now at the votive pictures on the walls, offerings made by men and women who had called upon their patron saints in the hour of danger and had been rescued by them—here from fire, there from murderers, and here again from drowning; rude and superstitious daubs, but doubtless acceptable to God, who could see in them the piety and gratitude of those that out of their penury had caused them to be painted.

As I sat thus idly, my godfather, the good priest, began to preach. Now, it chanced that two nights before there had been a dreadful murder in Tiapa. Three travellers and a boy, the son of one of them, passing from San Christobel to the coast, stopped to spend the night at a house near our own. With them they brought a mule-load of dollars, the price of the merchandise that they had sold at San Christobel, which some of our fellow-townsmen, half-breeds of wicked life, determined to steal.

Accordingly, to the number of ten, these assassins broke into the house where the travellers lodged, and, meeting with resistance, they cut down the three of them with *machetes*, and possessed themselves of the silver. Just as they were leaving, one of the thieves perceived the boy hiding beneath a bed, and, dragging him out, they killed him also, lest he should bear witness against them.

Now, those who had done this deed of shame were well known in the town; still none were arrested, for they bribed the officers with part of their

booty. But my godfather, seeing some of them present in the church, took for his text the commandment—"Thou shalt do no murder."

Never have I heard a finer sermon; indeed, before it was finished, two of the men rose and crept from the church conscience-stricken, and when the preacher described the slaughter of the lad whom their wicked hands had of a sudden hurled into eternity, many of the congregation burst into tears.

I tell this story because it was then for the first time, as I thought of the murdered boy, who some few days before had been as full of life as I was myself, that I came to know what death meant, and to understand that I also must die and depart for ever either into heaven or hell. I shook as the thought struck me, and it seemed to me that I saw Death standing at my elbow, as he stands to-day, and then and there I determined that I would be a priest and do good all my life, in order that I might find peace at the last and escape the fate of the evil.

On the morrow I went into my godfather's room and told him of my desire. He listened to me attentively, and answered: "I would that it might be so, my son, holding as I do that the things of the world to come outweigh those of this present earth ten thousandfold, but it cannot be, for reasons that you shall learn when you are older. Then, when my trust is ended, you may make your choice, and, if you still wish it, become a priest."

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Five more years passed away, during which time I grew strong and active, and skilled in all manly exercises. Also I studied much under the teaching of my godfather, who sent even to Spain to buy me books.

Among these books were many histories of my own race, the Indians, and of their conquest by the Spaniards, all that had been published indeed. Of such histories I never tired, although it maddened me to read of the misfortunes and cruel oppression of my people, who to-day were but a nation of slaves.

At length, on my twentieth birthday, my godfather, who now was grown very old and feeble, called me into his chamber, and, having locked the door, he spoke to me thus:

“My son, the time has come when I must deliver to you the last messages of your beloved father, my cousin and best friend, who was murdered by the soldiers when you were a little child, and tell you of your descent and other matters.

“First, then, you must know that you are of royal and ancient blood, for your forefather in the eleventh degree was none other than Guatemoc, the last of the Aztec emperors, whom the Spaniards murdered, which descent I can prove to you by means of old writings and pedigrees; also it is known and attested among the Indians, who even now do not forget the stock whence sprang their kings.”

“Then by right I am Emperor of Mexico,” I said proudly, for in my folly it seemed a fine thing to be sprung from men who once had worn a crown.

“Alas! my son,” the old priest answered sadly, “in this world might is the only right, and the Spaniards ended that of your forefathers long ago by

aid of torture and the noose. Save that it will earn you reverence among the Indians, it is but a barren honour which you inherit with your blood.

“Yet there is one thing that has come down to you from your ancestor, Guatemoc, and the monarchs who ruled before him. Perchance you remember that on the night previous to his death, your father set an amulet upon your neck, and, removing it again, gave it to me to keep. Here is that amulet.”

Then he handed me a trinket made of the half of a heart-shaped emerald, smooth with wear, but unpolished, that, if joined to its missing section, would have been as large as a dove’s egg. This stone was not broken, but cut from the top to the bottom, the line of separation being so cunningly sawn that no man, unless he had one half before him, could imitate the other. The charm was bored through so as to be worn upon a chain, and engraved upon its surface were some strange hieroglyphics and the outline of half a human face.

“What is it?” I asked.

The old priest shrugged his shoulders, and answered:

“A relic which had to do with their wicked heathen magic and rites, I suppose. I know little about it, except that your father told me it was the most valued possession of the Aztec kings, and that the natives believe that when the two halves of this stone come together, the men of white blood will be driven from Central America and an Indian emperor shall rule from sea to sea.”

“And where is the other half, father?”

“How should I know,” he answered testily, “who have no faith in such stories, or in stones with the heads of idols graven upon them? I am a priest, and therefore your father told me little of the matter, since it is not lawful that I should belong to secret societies. Still, some such society exists, and, in virtue of the ownership of that talisman, you will be head of it, as your ancestors were before you, though, so far as I can learn, the honour brought them but little luck.

“I know no more about it, but I will give you letters to a certain Indian who lives in the district of which your father was *cacique*, and, when you show him the stone, doubtless he will initiate you into its mysteries, though I counsel you to have nothing to do with them.

“Listen, Ignatio, my son, you are a rich man; how rich I cannot tell you, but for many generations your forefathers have hidden up treasure for an object which I must explain, and the gold will be handed over to you by those of your clan in whose keeping it is. It was because of this treasure that your father and your great-grandfather were done to death with many others, since the rumour of it came to the ears of those that ruled in Mexico, who, when they failed to force its secret from them, tormented and killed them in their rage.

“Now, this was the message of your father to you concerning the wealth which he and his ancestors had hidden:

““Tell my son, Ignatio, should he live to grow up, that there has never departed from our family the desire to win back the crown that Guatemoc lost, or at least to drive out the accursed Spaniards and their spawn, and to establish an Indian Republic. To this end we have heaped up wealth for generations, that it might serve us when the hour was ripe; and because of this wealth, of which the whisper could not altogether be hid in a land

which is full of spies, some of us have come to cruel deaths, as I am about to do to-night.

“But I shall die keeping my secret, and when my son grows up others may rule at Mexico, or the matter may have been forgotten: at least the gold will be where I left it. Now, say to my son that it is my hope that he will use it in the cause to further which it has been amassed; that he will devote his life to the humbling of our white masters, and to the uplifting of the race which for centuries they have robbed, murdered, and enslaved.

“Nevertheless, say to him that I lay no commands upon him as to these matters, seeing that he must follow his own will about them, for I cannot forget that, from generation to generation, those who went before him have reaped nothing but disaster in their struggle against the white devils, whom, because of the sins and idolatry of our forefathers, it has pleased God to set over us.’

“Those were your father’s words, my son, which he spoke to me in the hour of his murder. And now you will understand why I said that you must wait before you determined to be a priest. If that is still your wish, it can be fulfilled, for your father left it to you to follow whatever life you might desire.”

When he had finished speaking I thought for a while, and answered: “So long as my father’s blood is unavenged I cannot become a priest.”

“It is as I feared,” said the old man with a sigh, “that cursed talisman which lies about your neck has begun its work with you, Ignatio, and you will tread the path that the others trod, perchance to die in blood as they died. Oh! why cannot man be content to leave the righting of wrongs and the destinies of nations in the hands of the Almighty and His angels?”

“Because for good or evil the Almighty chooses men to be His instruments,” I answered.

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Within a week from this day some Indians came to Tiapa disguised as porters, whose mission it was to lead me to the mountains among which my father had lived, and where his treasure still lay hidden.

Bidding farewell to my godparent, the priest, who wept when he parted from me, I started upon my journey, keeping my destination secret. As it chanced, I never saw him more, for a month later he was seized with some kind of *calentura*, or fever, and died suddenly. The best thing I can say of him is that, with one exception, there lives no man in heaven above whom I so greatly desire to meet again.

On the third day of my journey we reached a narrow pass in the mountains, beyond which lay an Indian village. Here my guides took me to the house of one Antonio, to whom the *padre* Ignatio had given me letters, an old man of venerable aspect, who greeted me warmly, and made me known to several *caciques* who were staying with him, I knew not why.

So soon as we were alone in the house, one of these *caciques*, after addressing me in words which I could not understand, asked me if I had a “Heart.” To this I replied that I hoped so, whereat they all laughed. Then the man Antonio, coming to me, unbuttoned my shirt, revealing the talisman that had belonged to my father, and at the sight of it the company bowed.

Next the doors were locked, and, sentries having been posted before them, a ceremony began, which even now it is not lawful that I should describe in detail. On this solemn occasion I was first initiated into the mysteries of the Order of the Heart, and afterwards installed as its hereditary chief, thus becoming, while yet a boy, the absolute lord of many thousand men, brethren of our Society, who were scattered far and wide about the land.

On the day after I had taken the final oaths, Antonio handed over to me the treasure that my ancestors hoarded in a secret place, which my father had left in his keeping, and it was a great treasure, amounting to more than a million dollars in value.

Now I was rich, both in men and money, still, following the counsel of Antonio, I abode for a while in the village, receiving those who came from every part of Mexico to visit me as Holder of the Heart, and as first in rank among the fallen peoples of the Indians.

It was during these months that I made the great error of my life. Some three miles from the village where I dwelt, lived two sisters, Indian ladies of noble blood, though poor, one of them a widow, and the other a very beautiful girl, younger than myself. It chanced that, riding past their house upon a certain Sunday evening, when most of the inhabitants of the valley were away at a *festa*, I heard screams coming from it.

Dismounting from my horse I ran in at the door, which was open, and saw one of the sisters, the widow, lying dead upon the ground, while two bandits, Mexicans, were attacking the younger woman. Drawing my *machete*, I cut down the first of them before he had time to turn, then I fell upon the second man with such fury that I drove him back against the wall. Seeing that his life was in danger, he called upon me not to kill him for the sake of a low Indian girl, which insult maddened me so that I slew