

CHAPTER V

TAHN-TE AMONG STRANGERS

THE one thing to which the boy gave awed attention was that when the time came for the villages to fight — a leader would be born to them — if the people of the valley were true to their gods they would be strong always, Kipah the prophet told them to remember always the war star in the sky — the star Po-se-yemo had told them of, when it moved, the time to make war would be here.

And when the time came to fight, a leader would come to them, as he, Ki-pah had come! Because of this thought was the heart of the boy thrilled that he had been called a reed by the river — a reed through which music of the desert gods might speak.

He was filled with wild fancies of mystic things born of these prophecies. And the old men said that perhaps this was the time of which Po-se-yemo, the god, and Ki-pah, the prophet, had told!

The vote of a Te-hua council has to be the agreement of every man, and the star of the morning brought dawn to the valley before the last reluctant decided it was well to send a messenger to learn of the strange gods.

But as the sun rose Tahn-té bathed in the running water of the river, and his prayer was of joy: — for he was to go!

In joy, and with the light of exaltation in his face he said farewell to boy thoughts, and walked lightly over the highlands and the valleys to Ua-lano, and

thence followed the adventurers to Ci-cu-ye and bent the knee to Father Luis, and kissed the cross, and let water be sprinkled over him, and did all the things shown him with so glad a heart that the devoted priest gave praise for such a convert from the pagan people. So pleased was he with the eagerness of Tahn-té to learn, that he made him his own assistant at the ceremonies of the Holy Faith.

And after each one, the boy washed his hands in running water, and scattered prayer meal to the gods of the elements, and to the Sun Father God, and knew that in Provi-whah his mother was praying also that he be not harmed by the god of the gold hunters — and that he come back strong with the white man's magic.

The boy Ka-yemo of the Tain-tsain clan was also sent — but neither boy was told of the quest of the other. The old men decided it was better so. Without pay they went with the Spanish adventurers, one serving the men of arms and learning the ways of the strange animals, and the other serving the priests and learning the symbols of the strangers' creed of the one goddess, and two gods, and many Go-hē-yahs, called saints by the men of the iron clothes.

They both saw many strange things in Ci-cu-yé, and they saw the strange Indian slave, whom the old men of Ci-cu-yé instructed to lead the men of iron from their land with the romance of Qui-ve-ra. And the slave did it, and told the strangers of the mythic land of gold and gems, and lost his life in the end by doing so, but the life of the romance was more enduring than any other thing, and the spirit of that treasure search still broods over the deserts and the mountains of that land.

But the stay of Ka-yemo was not even the length of

the first winter with the strangers. For in Tigeux where the great captain (Coronado) wintered, and made his comfort by turning the natives out of their houses, there was a season of grievous strife ere the Spring came, and the two boys of Te-hua saw things unspeakable as two hundred Indians of the valley, captured under truce, were burned at the stake by the soldiers of the cross.

One of the reasons for the crusade to the north as written in the chronicles of Christian Mexico was to save the souls of the heathen for the one god,— and his advocates were sending the said souls for judgement as quickly as might be!

Tahn-té stood, pale and tense in the house where the chapel of Fray Juan Padilla had been established, — once it had been the house of the governor of the village who might even now be among the victims of the broken trust.

On the altar was a crucifix in gold on ebony, and the eyes of the boy were not kindly as he regarded it.

“They lie when they say you are a god of peace like our god Po-se-yemo,” he said. “They lie when they say you are the god of the red man — you are the white god of the white people — and you will let the red men hold not anything that your white children want!”

He heard himself speak the words aloud there alone where the new altar was — he seemed to hear himself saying it over and over as if by the sound of his own voice he could kill the sound of the tortured red men in the court.

A blanketed figure ran in at the open door, halted at the sound of Tahn-té's voice — and then flung himself forward. It was Ka-yemo and his teeth were chattering at the thought of the inferno without.

“It may be they will not look for us here,” he said as he saw who it was in the chapel — “Perhaps — if one keeps near — to their strong god: and you are close also — and —”

“I stay close because it is my work,” — said Tahn-te. “Some of the men tied to the stakes out there bent before their strong god and said prayers there. — Did it save them?”

“They will kill us — we will never see our people — they will kill us!” muttered Ka-yemo shaken with fear.

“I do not think they want to kill us: — they still need us for many things. We are only boys, we have not wives that we refuse to give to the white men — if we had it might be different, who knows?”

“Is that the cause?”

“The white men will give a different one — but that is the cause! The men of this valley think it is enough if they give their houses, and their corn, and their woven blankets to their fine white brothers: — the red men are foolish men, — so they burn at the stake out there!”

Ka-yemo stared at him, and crouched in his blanket.

“You say strange things,” he muttered. “I think when they get crazy with the spirit to kill that they will kill us all. I do not stay to be killed — I go!”

Tahn-té staring at the emblems of holiness on the altar scarcely heard him.

“I go, Tahn-té, — I go if I have to swim the river with the ice. — Do you stay here to be killed?”

“I am here to learn many things — I learn but little yet, I cannot go.”

“But — if you die?”

“I think it is not yet that I die,” said Tahn-té — “There is much to do.”

“And — if I live to see — our people?”

“Tell my mother I am strong — and I feel her prayers when the sun comes up. Tell the governor I stay to learn what the white god does for the red men; when I have things to tell the people I will come back to Povi-whah.”

But the ice of that winter melted, and the summer bore its fruit, and the second spring time had come to the land before Tahn-té crossed the mesas and stood at his mother's door.

“Thanks — that you have come,” she said, and wept, and he held her hand and did not know the things to say, only: — “Thanks that our gods have brought me back.”

“And the magic of the white man?”

“It is here,” and he opened a bag made of buffalo skin, and in it were books and papers covered with written words. She looked on them with awe. Her son was only a boy but he had won that which was precious, and earned honors from the men of her tribe and her clan.

“Not to me must you tell it first,” she said — “The Ruler will hear you, and the governor, — they will decide if it is to be known, or if it is to be secret.”

The old men sprinkled prayer meal — and smoked medicine smoke over the books to lift any lingering curses from the white men's god, and then the boy opened the pages and made clear how the marks stood for words, and the words put all together stood for the talk of the white god. It was a thing of wonder to the council.

“And it is a strong god?” asked the Ruler.

“It is strong for war: — not for peace,” said the boy.

“Ka-yemo brought back the words of the medicine-

man of the grey blanket who talked of their god. All his talk was of peace and of love in the heart. Is that true?"

"It is true. He was a good man. It may be that some men are born so good that even the gods of the men of iron cannot make them evil. And Padre Luis was born into the world like that."

"We listen to you to hear of the moons and the suns since you went away."

The boy told of the fruitless search to the east for the wonderful land of the slave's romance, where the natives used golden bowls instead of earthen vessels for food, where each soldier was so sure of gaining riches that the weight of provisions carried was small lest the animals be not strong enough to carry all the gold and the food also.

The old men laughed much at this search for the symbol of the Sun Father along the waters of the Mischipi, and commended the wise men of Ci-cu-yé who had the foresight to plan the romance, and to send the slave to lead the adventurers to the land of false dreams.

It was bad, however, that the strangers had not lost themselves in the prairies, or were not killed by the fierce tribes of the north:—it was bad that they came back to the villages of the Pō-sōn-gé river.

Then the boy told of the final despair of the conquerors, and their disheartened retreat to the land of the south. For two years they had terrorized the people of the land—worse enemies than the Navahu or the Comanche or the Apache fighter, then when they had made ruins where towns and gardens had been, they said it was all of no use since the yellow metal was not found in the ground.

"Did the wise men of iron not know that where

the yellow metal is in the earth, that there is ever the symbol of the Sun Father, and that it must be a thing sacred and a hidden place for prayer?"

"They did not know that: — no man told them."

Kā-ye-fah, the ancient Ruler blew smoke from his pipe to the four ways, and spoke.

"Yet among the men they burned to ashes in the village square were many who could have told them that, and three who could have told them where such prayer places were hidden! It is well, my children, that they did die, and not tell that which the Sun Father has hidden for his own people: — it is well!"

"It is well!" echoed the others of the council.

"We all die when the day or the night comes," — continued the old man. "It is well that we die in bravery for the sake of the others who have to live and walk the earth path. It is well that we have strong hearts to think about. One day I shall go in the ground with my fathers; I am old, and the trail has been long, and in my old days the sunlight has been covered for me."

Tahn-te did not know what he meant, but the other men bent their heads in sympathy.

"It is twice four moons since my child Kā-ye-povi was carried away in the darkness when we fought the Navahu in the hunting grounds to the west," — he continued. "No one has found her — no trader has brought her back. When a woman, she will not know her own people, or our own speech. I think of that, and grow weak. Our people have never been slaves — yet she will be a slave for our enemy the Navahu! So it is that I grow old more quick, and the time may come soon to sleep on our Mother — the Earth."

“We wish that it comes not soon,” said the governor, and the others signified their assent.

“Thanks, thanks that you wish it. I do not speak of it to give sad hearts. I speak because of the days when I may be gone, and another than me will hold the knowledge of a sacred place where the Sun Father hides his symbol. It is good that I hear of the men who let themselves go into ashes, and when if they had said once: — “I know where it is — the metal of the Sun!” all might have gone free and lived long days. My children: — it may be that some day one of you will hold a secret of the sacred place where strong magic lives! If it be so, let that man among you think in his heart of the twenty times ten men who let themselves be burned into ashes by the white men of iron! Guard you the sacred places — and let your ashes go into the sands, or be blown by the winds to the four ways. But from the sacred things of the gods, lift not the cover for the enemy!”

The old man trembled with the intensity of the thought and the dread of what the unborn years might bring.

After a moment of silence the governor spoke:

“It may be that you live the longest of all! No one knows who will guard the things not to be told. But no Te-hua can uncover that which belongs to the Sun Father, and the Earth Mother.”

“It is true: — thanks that it is true!” — said the other men, and Tahn-té knew he was listening to things not told to boys.

“Thanks that you speak so,” said the Ruler. “Now we have all spoken of this matter. It is done. But the magic of the white hunters of gold, we have not yet heard spoken. How is it, boy, that

you have brought all these signs of it: — what made blind their eyes? ”

“ Not anything,” said Tahn-té. “ It was a long time I was with them. Some men had one book, or two, other men had papers that came in great canoes from their land in Spain. Some had writings from their fathers or their friends. These I heard read and talked of around the camp fire. When they went away some things were thrown aside or given to the padres who were to stay and talk of their gods. All I found I hid in the earth. The people of Ci-bo-la killed Padre Juan, and I traded a broken sword for his books and his papers. The sword I also had buried. They were afraid of the books, I had learned to read them, and I was not afraid.”

“ And you came from Ci-bo-la alone? ” asked the governor,—“ it is a long trail to carry a load.”

“ All was not carried from there. I came back to Ci-cu-yé to learn more from Padre Luis who meant to live there. He did not live so long, but while he lived he taught me.”

“ The men of Ci-cu-yé killed him too? ”

“ They made him die when they said I must not take beans or meal to him where he lived in a cave, and where he made prayers for their shadow spirits.”

“ You wanted that he should have food? ” asked the Ruler.

“ I wanted that he should live to teach me all the books before the end came,” said the boy simply. “ It is not all to be learned in two winters and one summer.”

“ That is true,” said Kā-ya-fah the Ruler. “ All of a man’s life is needed to learn certain things of magic. It is time now that you come back and begin

the work of the Orders. You have earned the highest right a boy has yet earned, and no doors will be closed for you on the sacred things given to people."

"We think that is so," said the governor — "no doors will be closed for the son of Sāa-hanh-que-ah, the Woman of the Twilight."

This was the hour he had dreamed of through the months which had seemed horrible as the white man's hell. One needs only to read the several accounts of Coronado's quest for the golden land of the Gran Quivera in 1540-42 to picture what the life of a little native page must have been with the dissatisfied adventurers, by whom all "Indians" were considered as slaves should their service be required.

Men had died beside him on the trail — and there had been times when he felt he too would die but for the thought of this hour when he could come back, and the council could say — "It is well!"

"I thank you, and my mother will thank you," he said with his eyes on the stones of the kiva lest the men see that his eyes were wet. "My mother said prayers with me always, and that helped me to come back."

"The prayers of the Shadow Woman are high medicine," assented one of the men. "She brought back my son to live when the breath was gone away."

"As a little child she had a wisdom not to be taught," affirmed the Ruler — "and now it is her son who brings us the magic of the iron men. Tell us how you left the people of Ci-cu-ye."

"They were having glad dances that the Christians were gone, and that the padres were dead as other men die. So long as they let me I carried food and water to Padre Luis. Then they guarded me in the kiva, and laughed at me, and when they let me go I

knew it was because he was no longer alive. No: — they did not harm me. They were too pleased that I could tell them of where their slave whom they called the “Turk”—led the gold hunters searching for the Quivera of yellow metal and blue stones. They had much delight to hear of the woeful time of the white men. I could stay all my days at Ci-cu-yé and be precious to them, if I would talk of the trouble trail to Quivera, but when I had seen that the Padre was indeed gone to the Lost Others, my work was no more at Ci-cu-yé. I took his books also for my own — and all these things I have brought back at Povi-whah to make good my promise when I went away. Some things in the books, I know, and that I can tell you. Of the rest I will work until I do know, and then I can tell you that.”

“That is good,” said Kā-ye-fah the Ruler. “You shall be as my son and in the long nights of the winter moons we will listen. The time told of in the prophecies of Ki-pah is coming to us. He said also that in each danger time would be born one to mark the way for the people to follow — in each danger time so long as the Te-hua people were true to the gods!”

Tahn-té breathed on the hand of the old men, and went up from the kiva into the cool night of the early summer.

It was too wonderful a night for aught but to reach up in thought to the height of the warm stars. They came so close he could feel their radiance in his heart.

Twice had his name in council been linked to the prophecies of the wise and mysterious prophet of the ancient days! Always he had known that the Woman of the Twilight and he were not to live the life of the others. He had not known why they

were set apart for unusual experiences, but to-night he dared to think. With the words of the wise men still in his ears — the rulers who could make and unmake — he knew that no other boy had ever heard the praise and promise he had heard. He knew they thought they were giving words to one who would be a leader in the years to come — and this first night under the peace of the stars, he was filled with a triumph and an exaltation for which there were no words.

He would be a leader — not of war — not of government for the daily duties of village life, but of the Things of the Spirit which seemed calling within him to highest endeavor. He knew as yet nothing of Te-hua ceremonies — he had all to learn, yet he felt inspired to invent some expression for the joy which was his.

The new moon seemed to rest on the very edge of the mesa above him: — the uplifted horn looked like a white flame rising from purple shadows.

A white flame! — a *white* flame!

To the Indian mind all signs are symbolic,— and the flame was exactly above the point where the light was set ceremonially and regularly to light the Indian god back to his own people!

A point of white flame above that shrine of centuries!

No eyes but his saw it at exactly that angle — of course it was not meant for other eyes. It was meant that it should be seen by him alone on his first night with the people he meant to work for! With the memory of the prophecies in his ears had he seen it. It could mean only that the god himself set it there as a proof that the devotion of Tahn-té was acceptable — and that he had been born of his mother that the

prophecies might be fulfilled at the right time — and that the light of the moon on his face had meant ——

His thought came so quickly that all the air of the night appeared alive with the unseen — and the unseen murmured in his ears, and his memories — and in his heart!

Suddenly he stretched his open hands high to the stars, and then ran across the level to the foot of the bluff. It was high and very steep, but wings seemed his — his heart was on the summit, and his body must follow — must get there before the white flame sank into the west — must send his greeting to answer the greeting of the god!

In the pouch at his girdle was the fire flint, and a wisp of the silky wild flax of tinder. Two sticks of dead scrub piñon was there; he broke them in equal lengths and laid them in the cross which is the symbol of the four ways, and of the four winds from which the sacred breath is drawn for all that lives — the symbol also of union by which all human life is perpetuated. All fires of sacrifices, — or of magic power, must commemorate these things which are sacred things, and Tahn-té placed them and breathed upon them, and touched them with the spark from the white flint, and then arose in joy and faced the moon yet visible, knowing that the god had seen his answering flame on the shrine — and that it meant a dedication to the Things of the Spirit.

And as he stood there on the mesa's edge, exalted at the wonder of the night, he did not speak, yet he heard the echo of words in his own voice: — "*No one but Tahn-té shall gather the woods for the fire to light Po-se-yemo back; — and when he sees the blaze, and comes back, you will tell him it was his son who kept the fire!*"

Like a flash came the memory of that other time at the edge of that other mesa in Hopi-land! He had said those words to his mother — and had forgotten them. He could never forget them again, for the god had sent them back to him to remember. And Tahn-té trembled at the wondrous signs given him this night, and sprinkled meal to the four ways, and held prayer thoughts of exaltation in his heart.

And this was the last day of the boy years of Tahn-te.

He began then the years of the work for which his Other Self told him he had been born on earth.