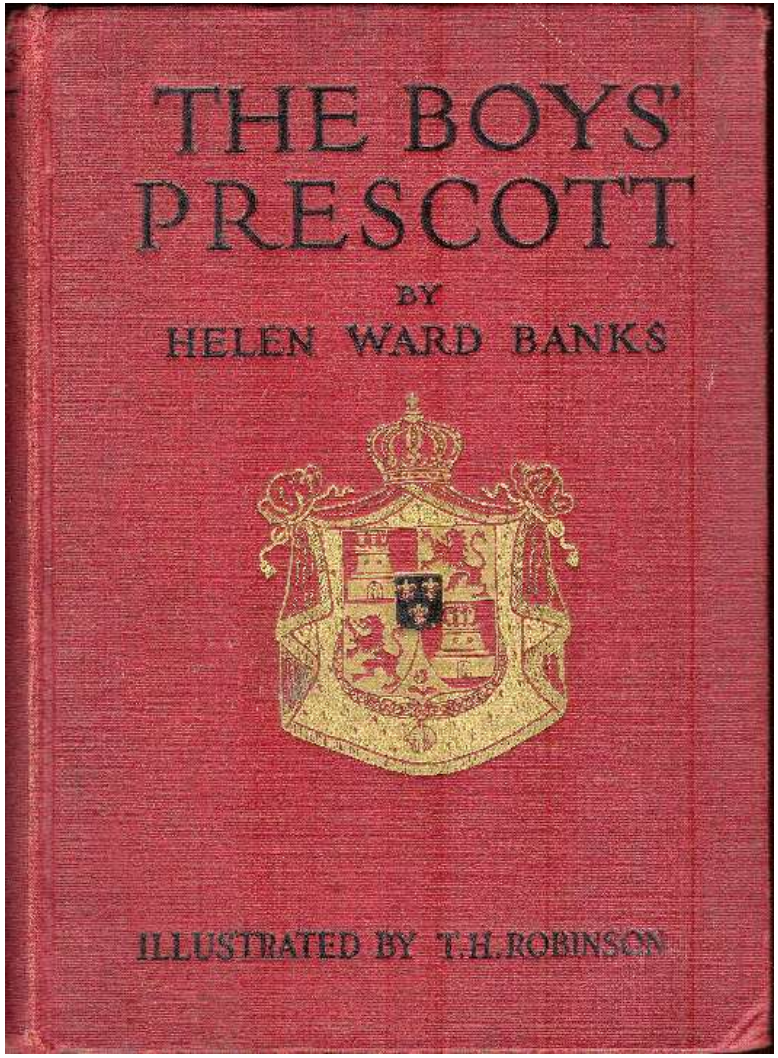

THE BOYS' PRESCOTT

THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO

BY

HELEN WARD BANKS

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY
T. H. ROBINSON

"I am constant to my purposes"
—*Hamlet*

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CONDITIONS AND TERMS OF USE

CORTES'S MEN WERE ACROSS THE DRAWBRIDGE AND ONCE MORE IN TENOCHTILAN.

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CHAPTER I

HERNANDO CORTES BEFORE HIS CHANCE CAME

1487-1518

Seven years before Columbus discovered America, there was born to Martin and Catelina Cortes, in the town of Medellin, in the south of Spain, a little son named Hernando, who was to grow up into a remarkable man. He was born on the same day as Luther, and someone has remarked that Hernando Cortes did as much to maintain the Catholic faith as Martin Luther did to destroy it.

Spain in this end of the fifteenth century was under the rule of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, whose marriage in 1479 had united these two kingdoms into one Spain, from which they determined to drive out the Moors who had held Grenada for many years. They were busy with this work when Hernando Cortes was born and were still at it when Columbus applied to Spain for help in discovering the New World.

Martin Cortes was a Captain of Infantry. He and his wife, Catelina, though not very rich were very much respected. The little Hernando was not strong at first but his mind was quick and ready for adventure. We may imagine the little lad listening with eager eyes and fast-beating heart to the stories about the brave Columbus whom the King and Queen of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, had sent across the unknown seas to discover a new world.

When Hernando was fourteen he was sent to Salamanca to study. His father, seeing his cleverness, thought to make a lawyer of him. But the boy, who was to grow into a man of wonderful intelligence and power in action, did not show any great love for books. He idled through two years of college and then went home again, much to the disappointment of his parents. All that he carried back of learning was a little Latin and the capability of writing good prose and poor verse.

The next year he spent at home, enjoying life more than did those with whom he lived, for he was most ingenious in inventing mischief. The very spirit of adventure which carried him to such heights as a man was, in a self-willed, undisciplined boy, a constant source of trouble to the quiet, well-ordered household of the Cortes family.

At seventeen Hernando decided he would follow his father's profession and enter the army. His parents, tired of his idle life, consented to his enlisting under the Great Captain, Gonsalvo de Cordova, who had made himself famous in the war against the Moors.

Medellin, however, was near the southern seaports of Spain which had sent off many explorers, and their influence was very alluring. After Hernando had obtained permission to be a soldier, he decided that he would rather try his fortune in the New World which seemed to promise certain glory to any man brave enough to adventure its perils. He made ready to sail in a splendid armament fitting out at that time, but at the last moment, in climbing a high wall one night during one of his foolish escapades, he loosened a stone which fell on him and bruised him so severely that he was in bed at the time the fleet sailed.

Two years more he stayed at home doing no better than before until, when he was nineteen, another squadron of vessels sailed from Spain to the West Indies. This time Hernando Cortes sailed with it. It was 1504 and Isabella, the good queen, died this same year.

The commander of the vessel on which Cortes sailed was Alonso Quintero, a man without much notion of loyalty or honor. When the little fleet touched at the Canary Islands to

take in supplies, Quintero got what he wanted as quickly as possible and then sailed out of harbor thinking to steal a march on the other vessels and reach Hispaniola first, that he might sell his goods without the competition of his companions. He did not accomplish much, however, for he ran into a storm that dismasted his ships and sent him back to the Canaries to refit. The squadron were generous enough to wait until Quintero was sea-worthy and they made the voyage together.

Quintero was scarcely worthy of their kindness. As they came finally near their journey's end, Quintero one dark night again ran away from the rest of the fleet, still meaning to get to Hispaniola ahead of the others. Again he met storms and head winds which drove him completely from his course and he lost his reckoning. For many days the boat was knocked about on an unknown sea until all the crew grew rather frightened and very indignant at their captain. At last one morning a white dove lighted on their topmast and brought them fresh courage for they knew land was not far away. Some of the men who later wrote Cortes' life thought the dove was sent as a special miracle to save Cortes from destruction. However that may be, the bird flew and the ship followed until it reached the island of Hispaniola, where Quintero received what he deserved in finding that all the rest of the squadron had arrived long before him and made their market while he was tossing on the seas.

The Governor of Hispaniola was named Ovando. Cortes had known him in Spain and went directly to him on landing. Ovando was away, but his secretary welcomed Cortes and told him he was sure to receive a liberal grant of land as an estate to settle on.

This promise did not greatly please Cortes.

"I came to get gold," he said in disgust, "not to till the soil like a peasant."

However, when the Governor returned and convinced Cortes that more gold was to be got by farming than by foraging, Cortes accepted the estate which Ovando bestowed on him, with a number of Indians as slaves, and settled down to country life.

This distribution of Indians among the Spaniards as slaves had been forbidden by Queen Isabella but it was still carried on. A commission of Friars sent to St. Domingo to inquire into the treatment of Indians justified the use of natives as slaves on the ground that the Indians would not work unless forced to, and that unless they came into contact with the whites by work, they could not be converted to Christianity. The commission tried to protect the slaves by just laws, but they were really at the mercy of their masters.

Cortes settled down on his estate and was appointed notary of the town of Aqua. Although he was a magistrate, he did not outgrow all at once his wild ways which took him into trouble more than once.

He had a taste of Indian warfare also in expeditions under Diego Velasquez, Ovando's lieutenant, who was sent to suppress several Indian insurrections. It gave Cortes a chance to study Indian tactics and to understand the toils and hardships of Indian warfare.

At length in 1511 Velasquez was sent from Hispaniola to take possession of Cuba. Velasquez was of noble birth and had had a good deal of experience in war. He is described as being "covetous of glory and somewhat more covetous of wealth." Those traits are apt to make a man suspicious and jealous, and Cortes in later years found Velasquez to be both. For the time, however, Cortes stood high in Velasquez's favor.

The natives of Cuba were as mild as the Indians of Hispaniola and were easily conquered. Only one chief resisted. When he was finally defeated and taken, Velasquez ordered him to be burned alive. The Spaniards urged him to become a Christian that he might at his death go to heaven. But the chief answered that he had no wish to go to a white man's heaven and meet again beings capable of such cruelty.

Cortes through all this campaign showed that however idle his life might so far have been he had the qualities of a pioneer soldier of fortune—always active, brave and gay, and a great favorite with his companions. His deeper qualities were still hidden but they were there under his gay outside ready to show when hard deeds called for them.

After Cuba was conquered, St. Jago in the southeast corner became its capital. Velasquez was made Governor of the island and Cortes was appointed one of his secretaries. By generous grants of land, Velasquez encouraged men to settle on the island, to cultivate the soil and to raise sugar-cane. He also worked the gold mines.

Cortes settled down on the large estate in Cuba which Velasquez gave him. He soon fell in love with a Spanish girl in the neighborhood, Catalina Xivarez, and was much annoyed when Velasquez disapproved of the affair. This brought about a quarrel between him and Velasquez. Cortes, joining the party of those who were fretting against Velasquez's rule, opened his house as their meeting place.

After a good deal of grumbling, these discontented ones determined to take their grievances to those higher authorities in Hispaniola who had given Velasquez his commission as Governor. As the voyage from Cuba to Hispaniola must be made in an open boat across a wide arm of the sea, they chose the boldest of their number for the errand. Cortes, who did not know the meaning of fear, agreed to go.

But in the meantime the matter had come to the ears of the Governor. He seized Cortes at once and put him in irons. The colonial governors had almost unlimited authority in those days as they were so far from home that they could either cover up their deeds or offer so big a bribe to their king that he was content to pass over their high-handed doings.

Velasquez would have hanged Cortes if he had not been afraid of Cortes' friends. Cortes did not stay long in prison. By his own ingenuity he unlocked the fetters on his legs, and with the irons themselves broke open the window of his jail. As he was up only one story he easily dropped to the street without being seen and ran to the nearest church to claim privilege of sanctuary.

The Governor, though angry that his prisoner had escaped, respected the holiness of the church and did not arrest Cortes while he was in it. But he had a guard ready close by, and one day Cortes grew impatient at doing nothing and stepped out a few paces from his place of protection. He was standing carelessly in front of the church when one of the guard sprang on him from behind and held his arms while the others bound him.

This time Velasquez determined to send Cortes at once to Hispaniola to be tried. His feet again fettered, he was carried on board a vessel which was lying in harbor ready to sail the next morning to Hispaniola. But Cortes did not mean to go. Little by little, with tremendous patience, not minding the pain it caused, he worked his feet free of the irons. He reached deck without being observed—perhaps his guards were not very anxious to see—and dropped over the vessel's side into a yawl-boat that floated underneath. Then very quietly he rowed away to shore. As he drew near the bank the waves ran so high that, afraid to trust his boat among them, he leaped into the water and swam the rest of the distance. It was a hard fight but Cortes was strong and a good swimmer and reached land in safety. Tired as he was after his effort, he did not stop to rest but went at once to the same church which had sheltered him before.

Some of the men who have written Cortes' life say that one night, tired of inactivity, Cortes went directly to the camp where Velasquez was at that time stationed and, completely armed, forced himself into Velasquez' presence. The Governor, though rather startled at seeing his enemy in arms before him, listened to what Cortes had to say. They had a hot dispute over his treatment of Cortes but the quarrel, according to the storyteller, ended in such perfect friendship that when

one of the guard came to tell Velasquez that his prisoner had again escaped from the church, he found Governor and prisoner asleep in one bed. More creditable history, however, has it that by the help of Catalina Xivarez' family, Cortes married the girl and finally became reconciled to the Governor.

Though Cortes was not put back into his position of secretary, he received a large estate in the neighborhood of St. Jago. For the next few years he remained with his wife on his land and gave all his energy to farming, stocking his plantation with different kinds of cattle, some of them brought by him into Cuba for the first time. He worked his gold mines, too, with such success that he grew rich. More saving than he had been in the old days, he did not spend all he made but gathered together little by little quite a fortune. Perhaps he was already planning what he would do with it; but whether he was or not, it was ready, and when his great chance came he did not have to refuse it because he was too poor to take advantage of it.

For there was coming now to Cortes the chance that would make him a great man.

CHAPTER II

THE CHANCE THAT CAME TO CORTES

1518

In the intervals of quarreling with Cortes after the subjugation of Cuba, Velasquez turned his thoughts to expeditions on the mainland. He was adventurous, as were all the Spaniards of that day, and what he heard of conquest and discovery and gold fired his spirit. Ponce de Leon had explored Florida in 1512; Balboa had discovered the Pacific in 1513; others had come back rich in material wealth as in experience. Velasquez longed to go and do the same.

He was again stirred to action by Cordova, an hidalgo of Cuba, who sailed in February, 1517, to the neighboring Bahama Islands to get slaves. He did not reach the islands, however, for a gale struck him and drove him far out of his course, so that after three weeks' sailing he landed on the northeast end of the peninsula of Yucatan near Cape Catoche.

He was much astonished at what he saw there. Instead of savages living in the open, he found semi-civilized men, buildings of stone and lime, highly cultivated ground, finely woven cotton garments and delicate gold ornaments.

Cordova knew that he had reached a different race of Indians from those on the islands. When he asked the name of the place, the natives answered "Tectelan," which meant, "We do not understand." Cordova, however, took it as the name of the place and called it Yucatan.

He did not find the natives friendly. Wherever he landed he met war. In one skirmish he himself received a dozen wounds. Before he reached Cuba again half of his company had died either of wounds or exposure.

Cordova lived to carry back to Cuba the news of his discovery and to exhibit to the Governor the spoils he had obtained, but he died soon after his return, worn out by the hardships he had gone through. He had lived long enough, however, to stir Velasquez to action.

Velasquez, seeing that Cordova had made a valuable discovery, was quick to get ready a squadron on his own account to carry it further. He fitted out four vessels and placed them under the command of his nephew, Juan de Grijalva, whom he knew he could trust. With Grijalva went Pedro de Alvarado, who later almost cost Cortes his conquest of Mexico.

The fleet sailed May 1st, 1518, following the course marked out by Cordova. Grijalva, like Cordova, was amazed at the signs of civilization shown everywhere, especially in the architecture. He was astonished, too, at finding in these heathen lands huge stone crosses, evidently used as objects of worship.

Grijalva met the unfriendly reception that Cordova had met, but he was prepared for it and so suffered less. One friendly chief met him in conference on the Tabasco River and gave him a number of gold plates fashioned into a sort of armor. A little later as Grijalva went on along the Mexican coast he met a body of natives under a cacique anxious to confer with him. To impress the cacique, Grijalva landed his whole party for the conference. The river where the conference was held was called the River of Banners.

The chief was a vassal of Montezuma who was Emperor of all Anahuac, and Anahuac was the country we now know as Mexico. The Chief had heard of the approach of the Spaniards and was anxious to find out about them all he could to tell his master. The white men and Indians could talk only by signs, but the conference lasted some hours and was most friendly. The Indians received with joy the beads and trinkets with which the Spaniards presented them and gave in exchange jewels and gold cups and ornaments of fine workmanship. Then the two companies parted.

Grijalva knew that Velasquez had sent him out to explore and to barter; he had received no commission to plant a colony and steadily refused all the begging of his followers to found a town on the spot. He would have liked to leave a settlement behind him in spite of the dangerous neighbors that surrounded him, but he had done the errand Velasquez had trusted him with and he thought it wiser to do no more.

He sent Alvarado back to Cuba in one of the caravels while he explored a little farther along the coast, going as far as the province of Pameco and touching at the "Isle of Sacrifices," where he found traces of the cruel human sacrifices which were such a terror afterward to the Spaniards. Grijalva was the first navigator who trod the soil of Anahuac and opened intercourse with the Aztecs.

While Grijalva was thus coasting the Mexican shores, Alvarado with his booty had reached Cuba. The Governor's heart swelled with joy when he heard Alvarado's story and saw all he had brought back. He grew impatient with Grijalva for delaying his return and at the same time blamed him for not planting a colony. Finally when he could stand it no longer he sent out Olid in search of him, and too impatient to await even Olid's return, determined to start out another and larger squadron armed to conquer the country. He began to look around for someone strong enough to command it and rich enough to share in the expense.

Velasquez applied at once for permission to the Commission of Friars at St. Domingo which had been sent out to look after the interests of the Indians. Then he sent over to Charles V, King of Spain, an account of Grijalvo's expedition, and the royal share of treasure, one-fifth of all the gold brought by Alvarado. He told the King how much he had done for the crown and asked that power be given him to carry on the conquest and colonization of Anahuac.

If the Governor had waited to receive permission from Charles before he went ahead making ready for his new expedition, he would have had to wait some time, for Charles, though ready for gold, took little interest in Spanish affairs. In his veins was the blood of Charles the Bold of Burgundy, of Maximilian, Emperor of Germany, and of Ferdinand and Isabella. Though his mother was a Spanish princess, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, Charles had been brought up in his father's country of Flanders. His mother was insane and not fit to rule, so when Ferdinand died in 1516, and the crown passed to his daughter, her son Charles was made regent of Spain. He heartily disliked that country, and after he was elected Emperor of Germany in 1500 spent little time in Spain. The Spaniards thought of him as a foreigner and liked him as little as he liked them. As there was thus no real king in control, Spanish business moved very slowly.

After Velasquez had thus satisfied his conscience by twice asking permission to send an expedition into Anahuac, he at once set to work. Several hidalgos in Cuba were ready to take command, for the news of the riches of Anahuac had run through the island and stirred everyone to adventure. But none of these men suited Velasquez. Finally, under the advice of his treasurer, Lares, and of his secretary, Duero, in both of whom he had great confidence, he chose Cortes commander of the fleet. Report says that Cortes was a friend of these two men and that he promised them a large share of his booty if he were chosen as leader.

But whether he was persuaded in his choice or used his own judgment, Velasquez was convinced he had chosen well. His old feud with Cortes had long since died out; he knew that Cortes' courage and vigor and capability fitted him for a leader, that his fortune would help pay expenses and that his popularity in Cuba would influence many to follow his standard. Velasquez thought, moreover, that his choice would bind Cortes more closely to him in loyalty and gratitude.

To Cortes the commission was a dazzling prospect. The romance of the age of discovery that he lived in ran strong in his veins and made him eager to follow the path marked out by the "Great Admiral" who had first discovered America. Cortes understood, too, the importance of the further discoveries of Cordova and Grijalva and what opportunities would be open to the next man to follow in their footsteps. There would be glory as well as gold waiting for the conqueror of Anahuac.

He accepted the position at once, and immediately all that was strong and fine in him seemed to leap into possession of his nature to change him from a careless, uncalculating youth to a man worthy to command a great enterprise. He gave all the money at his command to fitting out the fleet, even laying a mortgage on his estate for that purpose. Through promises of riches to be gained in Anahuac he encouraged many to join the expedition, and when they had come to his standard, he kept them there, showing already the qualities which made him a leader of men.

Everything was a bustle at once in St. Jago harbor. Six ships were fitting with stores, ammunition and guns, and everyone who could by selling or mortgaging get together enough money to pay his expenses was joining the expedition. In a few days three hundred men had enlisted under Cortes.

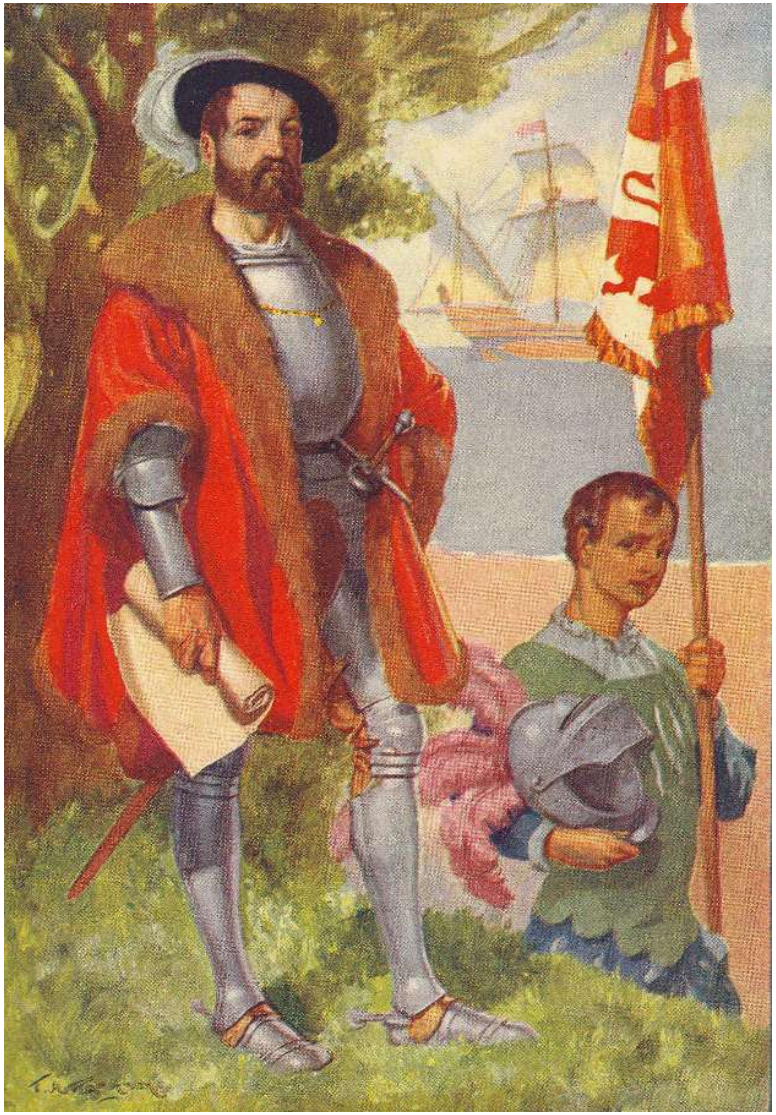
Velasquez gave instructions to the little squadron. They were first to find Grijalva and join forces with him and then the two parties together were to discover and set free six Christians whom Cordova reported as being held captive by the Indians somewhere in the interior. As they went, they were to make an accurate survey of the coast, taking soundings that could be charted for future sailing; they were to study the products of the country, the customs of the people, and the differences between the various tribes. Reports were to be sent back to the Governor, with such articles as should be received in trade.

For after all, barter with the Indians was the real object of the expedition, although along with that in the Spaniards' minds went always the sincere desire to convert the Indians to Christianity. The Governor impressed upon Cortes that the natives should be treated as fellow-beings and not as savages and enemies. But Velasquez went on to say that after Cortes had won the Indians by his kindness, he should go on so to teach them of the grandeur and goodness of the King of Spain that they would flock "to give in their allegiance to him, and to manifest it by regaling him with such comfortable presents of gold, pearls and precious stones as by showing their own goodwill, would secure his favor and protection."

Thus Cortes was given his commission. He had no authority for colonizing, for, however much Velasquez fretted at Grijalva for not leaving a colony, he had no power to give that authority to Cortes. No word had come from Spain to the Governor, and the Commission of Friars at St. Domingo could grant only the right of exploration and trading. This Commission confirmed Velasquez in his appointment of Cortes as Captain-General of the new expedition.

Cortes was thirty-three years old. His face was pale, with large, dark eyes, giving him a serious look which did not always tell the truth as to his happy, cheerful spirit. His dress though plain was rich, and set off his tall and slender figure with the deep chest and broad shoulders that gave him strength and agility in horsemanship and fencing as well as the ability to undergo any hardship and toil. He was always temperate in his eating and drinking. His manner was that of a gay comrade, but underneath the frankness was an iron resolution which nothing could turn and which controlled the men who loved him.

His position of Captain-General gave to Cortes, of course, a new importance. He began to live in the style of a man of wealth and station and to show more authority in his speech and manner. This at once made the suspicious Governor uncomfortable, and he began to wonder if, in giving Cortes so much power, he had in fact roused in him loyalty and gratitude or whether he had encouraged him to take for himself more than Velasquez had wished to give him.



HERNANDO CORTES, CAPTAIN-GENERAL OF THE EXPEDITION SENT TO CONQUER MEXICO.

These fears were made greater by his jester—who had the privilege of making jokes when he chose. As Velasquez and Cortes were walking together one day down to the harbor, the fool called out, "Have a care, Master Velasquez, or we shall have to go a-hunting, some day or other, after this same Captain of ours."

"Do you hear what the rogue says?" exclaimed the Governor.

"Do not heed him," Cortes answered; "he is a saucy knave and deserves a good whipping."

But the jester's joke stayed in the Governor's mind. There were around him a good many men who would have liked to stand in Cortes' shoes though they could not have fitted them. These jealous ones, some of them Velasquez' relatives, kept his fears and suspicions alive, until presently the Governor and Cortes were back in the old days when they feared and distrusted each other. Velasquez went so far as to resolve to take the command from Cortes and give it to someone else.

Cortes saw in the Governor's change of manner that he was out of favor, but he did not know how badly, until his friends, Lares the treasurer and Duero the secretary who had secured him the commission, came to tell him that he was to be removed from his position as Captain-General. They advised him to get off before his commission was taken from him.

Cortes was ready enough to take this advice. He did not need any time to make a decision, and once made, he was resolute in carrying it out. His men were not together; the vessels were not fully equipped; but he determined to sail that very night.

He went to work at once. Secretly he informed his officers of the change of plan. Then he went to the butcher's and took everything there was in stock, paying for it with a heavy gold chain he wore. The butcher complained there would be nothing left for the citizens on the morrow, but Cortes cared little for that.

Quietly after midnight on November 18, 1518, Cortes with his men boarded the vessels and dropped down the bay. No one knew anything about it till morning, and then the whole town was by the ears to see that the squadron was no longer at the quay. Someone lost no time in telling the Governor, and he was out of bed and down at the harbor in still less time.

Cortes, when he saw him coming, got into an armed boat and was rowed within speaking distance.

"Is it thus you part from me?" cried Velasquez bitterly. "A courteous way of taking leave surely."

"Pardon me," answered Cortes, "time presses, and there are some things that should be done before they are even thought of. Has Your Excellency any commands?"

As Velasquez said no more, Cortes waved his hand and returned to his vessel. Velasquez, mortified and angry, went home, thinking he had made two mistakes; first, in putting so much power into Cortes' hands and, second, in making an enemy of him by trying to take away the power once it was given.

As for Cortes, he was off on his great adventure. His chance had come and he had seized it. And he did not let go till it was accomplished.

CHAPTER III

CORTES COMES TO COZUMEL

FEBRUARY, 1519

When Grijalva, after six months of exploration, returned to Cuba full of his adventures, it was only to find that someone had taken his place and that his labor was unappreciated. Cortes' fleet had been fitted out to reap the results for which he had toiled, and instead of the glory and gratitude he had expected from his uncle, the Governor had only coldness and reproof for him because he had not disobeyed his orders and founded a colony. In those early days few of the men who did the great deeds—Columbus, Balboa, Grijalva—were rewarded with anything but ingratitude.

But Cortes was off, although as yet he was not far on his way. He had put in at the port of Macaca, fifteen leagues distant from St. Jago, to lay in such stores as he could get from the royal farms. He took them as "a loan from the king," to be repaid later, but he did not stop to ask the permission of Charles V. From Macaca he went on to Trinidad on the southern shore of Cuba, and set up his standard, promising great things to those who would join him. His principal standard was of black velvet embroidered with gold and on it a red cross amid flames of blue and white over this inscription, "Friends, let us follow the cross, and under this sign, if we have faith, we shall conquer."

Among those who trooped to enlist were one hundred who had returned with Grijalva, including an Indian from Yucatan named Melchorejo, whom Cortes took as interpreter, and such great men as Alvarado, Sandoval, Olid, Avila, Puertocarrero and Valesquez de Leon, a relative of the Governor. All these men not only lent weight and dignity to the expedition but were valuable because of their experience with Grijalva in Indian warfare and took a leading part in the conquest. When they came into camp at Trinidad, the whole camp turned out to welcome them with music and artillery salutes.

Cortes was spending his time in getting together supplies. He took them wherever he could find them, as he had taken meat from the St. Jago butcher. He heard that a trading vessel was off the coast and ordered out one of his caravels to bring her into port. When he had her there, he bought both the ship and the cargo of grain and induced the ship's commander to join the expedition. When he had news of another ship, he sent Ordaz with a caravel after that one, telling him to take the captured ship to St. Antonio at the western point of the island, where Cortes would meet him. Cortes sent Ordaz on this errand because he had come to him out of the Velasquez household, and while he was chasing vessels he could not be reporting to Velasquez the doings of Cortes.

Velasquez, however, did not mean that Cortes should escape him if he could help it. He sent word to the Governor of Trinidad to seize Cortes and hold him, as another man had been put in his place to command the fleet. The Governor of Trinidad shared his news with Cortes' principal officers. They all advised him to leave Cortes alone as he had already gained such a hold over his followers that if he were touched they would probably burn the town. The Governor listened to their advice.

Cortes, however, thought it wise to leave Trinidad. As he had not yet as many men as he wanted, he set sail with part of his following for Havana, sending Alvarado with a body of men to march across country and meet him there. At Havana he brought ashore all the big guns as well as the small arms and crossbows and had them all thoroughly overhauled. As there were plenty of cotton plantations near Havana, he had an armor of quilted jackets made for his soldiers to protect them from Indian arrows.

He set up his standard at Havana with his usual generous promises to those who enlisted under him. Even so early in the expedition he was Commander-in-Chief in deed as well as in name. His air of easy familiarity with his soldiers, joined to a firmness that allowed no disobedience, made him their idol from the start and most of them would willingly have died for him. He divided his men into eleven companies, each with an experienced officer as captain. Several of these men were friends and relatives of Velasquez but Cortes treated them all alike.

Before Cortes was quite ready to leave Havana, the commander there, Don Pedro Barba, also received orders from Velasquez to arrest Cortes and not to allow the fleet to sail. Velasquez also wrote a letter to Cortes, asking him to wait until Velasquez could have a personal talk with him. But Cortes had no wish to have any personal talk just then with the Governor of Cuba. One of the men who has written the life of Cortes exclaims, "Never did I see so little knowledge of affairs shown as in this letter of Diego Velasquez—that he should have imagined that a man who had so recently put such an affront on him would defer his departure at his bidding!"

Cortes did not "defer his departure" nor did Barba arrest him, for he, too, had grown fond of Cortes in his short acquaintance with him. Barba wrote the Governor of Cuba a letter in which he said that he had the greatest confidence in Cortes' loyalty, but that in any case it would be folly to try to arrest the general at the head of a large body of troops who were devoted to him. Cortes himself added a postscript to the letter, assuring Velasquez that he was bound to his interests and that he might have entire faith in him. He ended by saying that the squadron would sail the following morning.

On February 10, 1519, therefore, the fleet set sail for St. Antonio, where they were to meet Ordaz party. When the squadron thus was completed Cortes found that he had eleven vessels. The flagship was of one hundred tons, three other vessels were of seventy tons, and the other seven were only caravels or open brigantines. The fleet was under the direction of Antonio de Alaminos, an old pilot who had acted under Columbus, Cordova and Grijalva.

To man his vessels Cortes had a hundred and ten sailors, and to do his fighting he had five hundred and fifty-three soldiers, sixteen horses, ten heavy guns, four lighter guns called falconets, and plenty of ammunition. There were, besides, two hundred Indians, men and women, taken as servants. With this equipment Cortes started to conquer a country of hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, famous soldiers who, under the command of a semi-civilized, powerful Emperor, were well armed and well drilled and fighting in their own country of which they knew all the roads and bypaths and which yielded them constant food.

But Cortes was one of those who never would know he was beaten. He had determined to conquer Anahuac, and once the power had been put into his hands, no commands from the Governor, no grumbling among his men, no defeats from his enemies, not even starvation, could turn him back with his purpose unaccomplished.

Cortes stands in history with the stain of cruelty on his name. But as we follow him up his long climb from the seacoast to the City of Mexico, we must not think of him as living in our days when war is held in horror and cruel deeds are blamed by everyone. He lived in a time when war was a man's most honorable occupation. He lived in a time when the Christian nations truly believed that God had given them the New World for a possession and the savages to be converted to Christianity. They did not believe that they were either stealing or murdering when they went out to seize these new lands; they thought rather they were going on a crusade for the glory of the Holy Roman Church. We must look at their deeds, therefore, from their standpoint instead of from our own more enlightened one. And then as we go step by step with Cortes, we shall find that apart from the horrible necessities of war, he was not often guilty of deeds cruel without cause, as were so

many of the early Spaniards. There is no deed that can be laid to him that can in any way be compared to the frightful cruelties inflicted on the Low Countries by Philip II and Alva in the next century.

Before his final start from St. Antonio, Cortes made to his soldiers one of the speeches which always fired their hearts. He touched on their religion, ambition, and their love of gold.

"I hold out to you a glorious prize," he said, "but it is to be won by incessant toil. Great things are achieved only by great exertions, and glory was never the reward of sloth. If I have labored hard and staked my all on this undertaking, it is for the love of that renown, which is the noblest recompense of man. But, if any among you covet riches more, be but true to me, as I will be true to you and to the occasion, and I will make you masters of such wealth as our countrymen have never dreamed of! You are few in number, but strong in resolution; and, if this does not falter, doubt not but that the Almighty, who has never deserted the Spaniard in his contest with the infidel, will shield you, though encompassed by a cloud of enemies; for your cause is a just cause, and you are to fight under the banner of the Cross. Go forward, then, with alacrity and confidence, and carry to a glorious issue the work so auspiciously begun."

The soldiers responded with loud applause, eager to set out on so wonderful a quest led by so great a leader. Mass was celebrated; the fleet placed under Cortes' patron saint, St. Peter, and on February 18, 1519, the squadron got under way and headed for the coast of Yucatan on its mission. Grijalva had returned to Cuba and he was no longer to be sought for, but there were still the six Christians said to be held captive in the interior by the natives.

The flagship led the way with a beacon-light by night at its stern. The vessels were ordered to keep together, but the fair weather changed into a tempest which scattered the ships and drove them south of their course. They landed finally, as Grijalva had, on the island of Cozumel. Cortes had lingered to convoy a vessel disabled by the gale and reached Cozumel last of all. He had warned all his captains to use great gentleness and caution in dealing with the natives that they might keep on friendly terms. But he found on landing that already Alvarado's rash spirit had started things wrong. In the short time before his commander arrived he had entered the Indian temples, stolen their treasures and been so severe to the natives that they had fled in terror into the interior.

Cortes, very angry at this disobedience to his strict orders, reproved Alvarado in the presence of the army. Then he ordered to be brought before him two Indian captives whom Alvarado had taken. They came trembling, but Cortes, through Melchorejo—the Indian whom Grijalva had brought back and who had picked up some Spanish in Cuba—made them understand that he had only friendly feelings for them. He ordered them released, loaded them with presents, and sent them to tell their friends to come without fear back to their homes.

The Indians, convinced of Cortes' good-feeling, soon were all back, ready to begin a friendly barter. The Spaniards had knives and beads; the Indians had gold ornaments. Each was glad to give what he had for what the other would give in exchange.

From these Indians Cortes gathered a few facts about the men he had come to seek, and he sent two brigantines, under Ordaz, to the opposite coast of Yucatan, telling them to stay there eight days while some Indians in the party carried a letter to the captives telling them that their countrymen were in Cozumel with a liberal ransom for their release.

While this party was away, Cortes made excursions to different parts of the island in order to keep his restless men employed as well as to make that study of the resources of the country that he had been told to make.

He found the land poor and thinly inhabited, but like Grijalva, he was astonished at the signs of civilization he found here as compared with the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola. The houses were large and built of stone. The temples had towers of stone rising in terraces, story above story. In one temple he found a stone cross, which greatly excited the soldiers, as they thought Christianity had already reached the island. The cross, however, was erected to the Indian god of rain.

With Cortes were two priests, Diaz and Olmedo. Olmedo was gentle and loving at the same time that he showed great wisdom. More than once his gentle wisdom held back Cortes when he was determined to convert the heathen by force if they would not become Christians in any other way.

The two missionary priests began their preaching at once to persuade the natives to leave their heathen gods and worship the one God. But the Indians loved and reverenced their idols, and exclaimed that the gods of rain and sunshine would send down lightnings on the heads of any one who should interfere with their temples.

Cortes, not able to argue through an interpreter, thought he would give the Indians a chance to see what their gods would do for them. He entered the great temple and rolled their idol down the stairs. Then amid the groans and laments of the natives he set up an altar with an image of the Virgin, and mass was said by Father Olmedo. The Indians listened in awe although they could not understand. As no vengeance came from heaven on the bold Spaniards, the Indians concluded that the strangers' God was more powerful than theirs, and they all became Christians.

While Cortes was converting the natives, the band of men he had sent to look for the captives returned saying they could find no trace of them. Cortes was much disappointed at this news, but decided there was nothing now to keep him in Cozumel. The ship's stores had been replenished by the friendly Indians, so Cortes weighed anchor and sailed away toward Yucatan. The fleet had not gone far before one of the vessels sprang a leak, and back they all went to Cozumel.

Almost on their landing came a canoe full of Indians. One of the men in the canoe leaped ashore and saluted Cortes in Indian style, by touching the earth with his hand and carrying it to his head, then in broken Spanish he asked if they were Christians, and he fell on his knees and thanked God, for he himself was one of the captives that Cortes had come to seek. His name was Aguilar. Almost eight years before this, in a voyage to Hispaniola, his vessels had been wrecked on the coast of Yucatan. In the ship's boat he and a few companions had reached the shore. All except Aguilar fell into the hands of the cannibal natives and were killed. Aguilar escaped into the interior and was captured by a cacique, who spared his life and finally became fond of him. By his wise counsels to the cacique in several weighty matters, Aguilar became in time an important man among the Indians. They were so fond of him that they did not want him to leave them, but a ransom of glass beads and little bells bought his freedom and he joined the forces of Cortes. He had learned the Indian language and, with his knowledge of Spanish, he became very valuable as an interpreter.

There was nothing now to keep Cortes longer in Cozumel. The fate of the captives had been discovered, the vessels had been repaired and re-victualed, his men were eager to be forward on their great adventure. On March 4th, therefore, 1519, Cortes said good-by to the friendly Indians of Cozumel and set sail for the mainland.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT BATTLE OF TABASCO

MARCH, 1519

The little fleet kept to the shores of Yucatan until it doubled Cape Catoche, and then went sweeping down the Bay of Campeachy. The men who had sailed these waters before with Grijalva were eager to point out to their companions all the spots they remembered and to tell their adventures.

Puertocarrero, as he listened to their excited chatter, said to Cortes, "I advise you to look out for only the rich lands and the best way to govern them."

"Fear not," Cortes answered. "If fortune but favors me and I have such gallant gentlemen as you for companions, I shall understand myself very well."

Very soon the fleet reached the mouth of the Tabasco River, where Grijalva had had his friendly meeting with the Indian chief. Although Cortes' great desire was to travel through Anahuac to the Capital City of Mexico and visit the Aztec Emperor, he remembered, too, his orders to explore and report on the country as he went. He determined, therefore, to stop long enough to go up the Tabasco River and visit the great town on its banks.

He could not take his vessels up the stream because of a sand-bar at its mouth, so he left the fleet under guard of part of his force, while with the rest he embarked on the ships' boats and set out up the river.

Cortes went cautiously, for behind the screen of mangrove trees which lined the river he could see moving bodies of Indians, who did not look as if they belonged to the friendly natives who had met Grijalva on this river. When, at evening, near the city of Tabasco, Cortes wanted to land his troops for the night, he was met by a crowd of angry Indians brandishing weapons. Cortes asked, through his interpreter, permission to land, assuring them he came as a friend. But the sullen natives would not grant him leave, and Cortes withdrew to a little island to camp, determined not to land on the main shore until morning.

When morning came, things did not look hopeful. Not only were the angry bands of Indians drawn up along the shore in greater numbers than ever, but the river swarmed with canoes filled with armed warriors. Cortes was not to be daunted.' He had made up his mind to land, and land he would. He sent a hundred men under Avila downstream to get ashore in a grove of palms and march from that point to attack the town of Tabasco in the rear while he should assault it in front.

With his detachment of troops, Cortes crossed the river directly in face of the enemy. Before he opened fire, he proclaimed through his interpreter, Melchorejo, that he had come to renew the friendly relations which had before been between Indians and Spaniards and that all he asked was free passage for his troops. He said if blood were spilt, it would be because the Indians blocked his path, and that it would be a useless opposition, for, in spite of everything, he meant to camp that night within the walls of the town of Tabasco. Whether or not the Indians understood this proclamation, their only answer was a shout of defiance and a shower of arrows.

Cortes, having thus cleared his conscience, brought his boats at once alongside the Indian canoes and grappled them. Both parties were soon turned out of their boats and were fighting in the shallow water, where the Spaniards gradually pushed the natives back to shore. Here they had new foes to meet, for the Indians in front of the city flung at them arrows and blazing torches as they struggled to find a footing on the slippery, muddy banks. Cortes lost his sandal in the mud, but kept on fighting barefoot.

THE INDIANS FLUNG AT THEM ARROWS AND BLAZING TORCHES AS THEY STRUGGLED TO FIND A FOOTING ON THE SLIPPERY BANKS

Cortes was soon picked out as leader and the Indians directed against him the worst fury of their assault. He finally got his men on firm ground, where he formed them in some degree of order and opened fire on the natives. They had never seen firearms and, at the flash and roar, fell back behind a blockade of logs they had drawn up in front of the town. The Spaniards carried that defense and drove their enemies into the city.

Avila, in the meantime, had reached his position and was attacking Tabasco from the rear. Caught between the blasts of this terrifying thunder and lightning of the white men, the Indians gave up. They had already taken their families and their possessions out of the city, and now they fled themselves, leaving their town in the hands of Cortes. All that he found in the stone houses of Tabasco, however, were provisions—the gold was gone.

Cortes took possession of Tabasco for Spain. With his sword he cut three gashes in a large tree, proclaiming that he took possession in the name of the King and would defend his claim with his sword. The soldiers took the same oath, and the whole affair was recorded by the notary. In this simple way did Spain take possession of her new territories.

Cortes had made good his boast to the Tabascans, for he slept that night in the courtyard of the principal temple. He took here the precautions he observed through his whole campaign by posting sentinels and having his men sleep on their arms.

All night a threatening silence hung over Tabasco, but in the morning there was no sign of the enemy. News came to Cortes, however, that the native interpreter, Melchorejo, had left his Spanish dress hanging on a tree and had" escaped in the night to join his friends. The news troubled Cortes, for Melchorejo could carry to his friends more facts about the Spaniards than Cortes wanted known.

There was no help for it, however. As the Indians still kept out of sight, Cortes sent a body of men under Alvarado one way and a second detachment the other way. This last body fell into an Indian ambush and had to entrench themselves in a stone house, where the Indians closely besieged them. The yells of the savages reached the ears of

Alvarado and he took his men to the relief of their companions. Then both parties forced their way back to Tabasco, and Cortes, meeting them, they forced their enemy to retire for the time.

But the Indians were not conquered. Several prisoners had been taken in this fight who told Cortes that the whole nation was in arms against the Christians. Cortes asked in some surprise why they gave him treatment so different to that they had offered Grijalva. The Indians answered that on account of their kindness to Grijalva they had been objects of scorn to the other tribes ever since; that they had been called traitors and cowards, and that they could only regain their friends' confidence by resisting the white men.

Cortes probably wished that he had not stopped to explore the Tabasco River. But now that he had gone so far he must carry the matter to a finish. If he gave in now, not only would all the tribes along his route rise with greater force to oppose him, but his own men would lose their confidence in him as a successful leader, and with their confidence would go their courage. Without hesitation Cortes called his officers to council and announced his intention of giving battle the next day.

At once he set about his preparations. He sent the wounded back to the ships and ordered up more men from the ships to Tabasco. He ordered also six of the heavy guns to be brought up and all of the sixteen horses. The horses were stiff and lazy after their life on shipboard until a little exercise limbered them up.

Cortes himself was leader of the cavalry. The infantry he put under the command of Ordaz and the artillery under a soldier named Mesa, who was something of an engineer. The cavalry consisted of the flower of Cortes' command—Alvarado, Leon, Avila, Olid, Puertocarrero and Sandoval among them. Having done all he could and arranged his plan of battle, Cortes went to bed. But he could not sleep. He spent the night going the rounds to see that no sentinel slept at his post.

At the first glint of dawn Cortes roused his army to attack. He knew how much courage comes with action and how courage oozes away if men sit still and wait for danger to come to them. He ordered Ordaz to march with the foot-soldiers and artillery directly across country to the plain of Ceutla, where the Indians were encamped, while Cortes himself with the cavalry should make a circuit and fall upon the rear.

It was Lady-day, March 25, 1519, when, after listening to Father Olmedo perform mass, the Spaniards marched out of the wooden walls of Tabasco and separated horse and foot each to its appointed duty. The march led through fields of maize and cacao, cut with irrigation ditches, crossed by only one narrow causeway along which the guns could be dragged.

After a march of about three miles through the sultry day the infantry came in sight of the plains of Ceutla, with the enemy, numbering forty thousand men, drawn up on dry ground in line as far as the eye could reach. As the Spaniards came floundering through the marsh, they were met by a charge of arrows and stones and a series of frightful yells. They kept on, however, and gained ground where they could plant their guns. The fire was deadly in the close-packed ranks of Indians, but they did not fall back. They tossed dust in the air as a shield against the Spaniards and, pressing closer, shot new volleys of arrows. When they were driven off by a vigorous charge, they rolled back again in greater force, until the Spaniards were almost overwhelmed merely by weight of numbers, which gave them no room to work their guns or deploy their troops. Thus the battle swung back and forth, while the Christians, panting and fearful in their struggle, kept their ears strained for Cortes' battle-cry. Had he failed them?

Suddenly, far in the rear of their foes, they saw the sun glint on Spanish helmets and heard the comforting cry, "St. Jago and St. Pedro!"

CHAPTER V

CORTES' ENTERS INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH MONTEZUMA

APRIL, 1519

Cortes with his cavalry had found progress over the broken ground even harder than had the infantry. With his best efforts he was not able to reach his position until the infantry had been engaged for an hour. When the Spaniards heard Cortes' battle-cry they thought they could see St. Jago himself, the patron saint of Spain, leading the charge on a gray war-horse.

The sight of the cavalry gave fresh courage to Ordaz' men, while it threw the Indians into complete confusion. They had never before seen a horse, and thought that horse and rider were one—a huge creature whom no one could withstand. Seeing them waver, Ordaz ordered a new charge in front, and thus shut in between two foes, the Indians threw down their arms and fled. The battle was over.

Cortes was content with that. He had dispersed his foes and lost only two men. Instead of following up the enemy, he assembled his men under the shade of a little palm grove, where he made camp and offered thanks to God for their preservation and victory.

Two chiefs taken in battle were brought before Cortes. He gave them their freedom and sent them back to their tribes with a choice between forgiveness if they would come in at once and promise obedience, or a terrible punishment if they still held out against the Spaniards.

The Indians were ready to submit. Some inferior chiefs appeared the next day asking leave to bury their dead. Cortes granted it, but said he was waiting for a visit from their greater chiefs. They came very soon with a large following of vassals bringing many gifts—food, cotton and a few gold ornaments, for which Cortes gave them beads and trinkets in return. He asked where the gold came from. They answered, "Mexico."

Among the gifts the Indians brought were twenty women as slaves. One of them was young, beautiful and intelligent. She was a Mexican named Marina and her story was like Joseph's in the Bible. She had been the only daughter of a rich and powerful cacique on the southeastern border of the Mexican Empire. Her father had died when she was a little girl and her mother, marrying again, had a son born to her. She determined to take the inheritance that belonged to Marina and give it to Marina's half-brother, who had no right to it. So she carried out a scheme like that of Joseph's older brothers. She sold the girl to traveling merchants and said that Marina was dead. She even went through a funeral ceremony before she took Marina's riches for her son.

The merchants sold Marina to the cacique of Tabasco, who in turn gave her to Cortes. She at once proved her value. A Mexican by birth, she was thoroughly familiar with the Aztec language. By her residence in Tabasco she could speak also the Tabascan language. Aguilar, the returned captive, on the other hand, could speak Tabascan and Spanish. So Cortes was able to talk to the Aztecs by speaking Spanish to Aguilar, who spoke Tabascan to Marina, who could speak Mexican to the Aztecs. This ability to talk to the Mexicans was soon to prove very valuable to Cortes.

He had asked the Tabascan chiefs where they got their gold and they had told him Mexico. That was the place, therefore, that Cortes must reach. He was quite ready to leave Tabasco and push on.

But before he left to search for gold he lingered to convert the Tabascans to the Christian religion. He told the caciques that in paying homage to him they were swearing allegiance to the King of Spain across the water; the greatest

chief in the world. He told them, too, that to be truly obedient to their new chief they must adopt his religion, and that the priest would instruct them in the Christian faith. The Tabascans agreed and listened through the interpreter as Father Olmedo preached them a sermon. We do not know how much they understood, but they professed themselves ready to change their worship from their own good god, Quetzalcoatl, to the Christians' God, and from their cross to the god of rain to the Christians' cross.

The next day was Palm Sunday and Cortes determined on a ceremony that should make a lasting impression on the Tabascans. Each soldier carrying a palm branch, the whole army in solemn procession, with Father Olmedo at their head, took its way across the flowery plains from the camp to the principal temple of the City. Here Cortes took down the idol and put in its place an image of the Virgin. Father Olmedo said mass and the soldiers joined in the chant. The Indians who had thronged to the temple listened in awe to this worship of the God of the white man, who could use the thunder and lightning to fight with.

"These solemnities concluded, Cortes prepared to return to his ships, well satisfied with the impression made on the new converts, and with the conquests he had thus achieved for Castile and Christianity. The soldiers, taking leave of their Indian friends, entered the boats with the palm-branches in their hands, and descending the river re-embarked on board their vessels, which rode at anchor at its mouth. A favorable breeze was blowing, and the little navy, opening its sails to receive it, was soon on its way again to the golden shores of Mexico." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

The fleet, still holding its course near shore, on Holy Thursday arrived off the island named by Grijalva, San Juan de Ulua. As the Indians gathered along the shore did not look hostile, Cortes thought it a good place to anchor.

He had scarcely dropped anchor when a canoe loaded with natives put off from the mainland on the other side. They came directly to the flagship and boarded it with the perfect confidence which Grijalva's generous treatment had left in the minds of these natives. They had presents of flowers and fruit and gold ornaments. At first Cortes could speak to them only in sign-language, as they could not understand Aguilar. But then Marina appeared and proved her value.

Through his two interpreters Cortes was able to talk intelligently with the Indians. They said they were subjects of the Aztec Emperor, Montezuma, who ruled the entire country of Anahuac, and whose power had spread so far that almost every tribe in the country was now under his rule. They themselves lived eight leagues away and were governed by an Aztec noble named Teuhtlile. Cortes was much pleased with his interview, especially as they told him there was plenty of gold in the interior. He said he had come from a friendly monarch to see their emperor and that he wished to go to the city of Mexico to visit Montezuma.

The next day was Good Friday, April 21, 1519. Cortes landed his troops on the beach of the mainland on the spot where the city of Vera Cruz now stands.

It was a long level beach with its line of sand hills. On these dunes Cortes mounted his guns, while he had his men cut down trees and bushes to build huts for a camp. The friendly Indians helped them set stakes firmly in the ground to form uprights, which they roofed with boughs or with native mats and carpets.

In a couple of days the troops had good shelter from the burning sun. They were fed by the natives, who came daily in greater quantities, bringing not only the fruit, vegetables and game for food, but scraps of gold ornament which they bartered for Spanish beads, until the camp looked like a foreign fair.

On Easter Sunday the Governor himself, Teuhtlile, arrived with a long train of followers to call on Cortes. Cortes and his officers received Teuhtlile with much ceremony. The

Indians listened quietly while Father Olmedo said mass and then all joined in a banquet of Spanish food and wines. After that was over, the interpreters, Aguilar and Marina, came in and the conversation began.

"I am the subject of a potent monarch beyond the seas," said Cortes, "who rules over an immense empire and has kings and princes for his vassals. Acquainted with the greatness of the Mexican Emperor, my master has desired me to enter into communication with him, and has sent me as his envoy to wait on Montezuma with a present in token of his goodwill and a message which I must deliver in person. When may I be admitted into your sovereign's presence?"

Teuhtlile answered coldly, "How is it that you have been here only two days and demand to see the Emperor?"

Cortes told him about his own Emperor, Charles V, the "potent monarch beyond the seas." Teuhtlile answered more politely, "I am surprised to learn that there is another monarch as powerful as Montezuma, but if that is so, I have no doubt that my master will be happy to communicate with him. I will send my couriers with the royal gift you have brought, and so soon as I learn Montezuma's will, I will communicate it.

Teuhtlile then ordered his slaves to present his gifts to Cortes. There were ten loads of fine cotton stuffs, cloaks of feather-work as rich and delicate as a painting, and a wicker basket filled with ornaments of wrought gold which Montezuma had sent. Cortes in return gave to Teuhtlile for Montezuma an armchair richly carved and painted, a cap of crimson cloth ornamented with a gold medal, and a number of cut glass collars and bracelets, which were as jewels to the Indians, who did not know how to make glass.

Then Teuhtlile was struck with a soldier's gilt helmet because it was like the helmet worn by Quetzalcoatl, "The Fair God" of the Mexicans, and asked if Montezuma might see it. Cortes sent it to Montezuma with the remark that he should like it returned filled with the gold-dust of the country that he might see how near it was like Spanish gold.

While this negotiation was going on, one of Teuhtlile's attendants was busy putting on canvas a sketch of the Spaniards' dress and arms in color. The Aztecs had no written language; all their writing was this picture-writing. This canvas was to be sent to Montezuma that he might see how the white men looked and determine whether, indeed, Cortes was the Mexican Fair God, Quetzalcoatl, who had many years ago left Mexico, promising someday to return. Cortes was pleased with the man's work, and to give Montezuma a still higher idea of the Spaniards' riches and power and strength, he ordered the horses to be put through their paces on the firm, sandy beach. The Indians watched with astonishment the glancing weapons, the easy seat of the riders, the bold movements of the fiery horses. When, added to this, Cortes ordered the cannon fired, and its sound and smoke went rolling off through the woods, while the rushing balls splintered the trees into bits, the Indians were sure that the white men were more than human.

The painter added the horses and cannon to his picture, as well as the ships, whose dark hulls and white sails were reflected in the water where they swung at anchor in the bay.

The hieroglyphic letters were then sent up through the country two hundred miles to Montezuma in the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan or Mexico. There were posting stations about six miles apart all along the route. The first postman ran the first six miles, gave the message into the hands of a second, who in turn passed it on, until it finally reached the Emperor. These postmen were trained to their work from childhood and could run so fast that news was carried from one hundred to two hundred miles in twenty-four hours. The Emperor knew pretty well what his friends and his enemies were about, and as the postmen wore one color to show they were carrying good news, and another for bad, the towns they passed through could also read this running newspaper.

After all was finished Teuhtlile and his train, with great ceremony, left the Spanish quarters. He gave orders that his people should provide the troops with food until he heard from Montezuma.

And so Cortes reached the mainland, established a camp, and opened negotiations with the Emperor of Mexico. He had well begun the task he had set himself. He had left Cuba February 18. On April 23 he was in touch with Montezuma.

CHAPTER VI

THE EARLY HISTORY OF ANAHUAC

We will give Cortes time to strengthen his position while he waits his answer from Montezuma, and we will travel from the *tierra caliente* of the Mexican coast up through Anahuac to the city of Mexico. Getting ahead even of the fast postman with the picture-writing, we will find out a little about the people and the cities of Anahuac before Cortes sees them.

The famous oval valley of Mexico lay seven thousand five hundred feet above sea-level, about half-way between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. High natural walls of rock around its circumference shut in green meadows, lofty trees and five large lakes. On the largest of these lakes, Lake Tezcuco, the two most powerful tribes of Anahuac had built their capitals. The Tezcucans had built their city of Tezcuco on the east side, while the Aztecs had erected on the opposite shore their city sometimes called Tenochtitlan and sometimes Mexico. Anahuac means "near the water," and while at first it was probably used only for this land immediately around the lakes, as these tribes spread their rule farther south, the territory of Anahuac increased, until in Cortes' time it covered most of present Mexico.

The Tezcucans and the Aztecs or Mexicans were, of course, Indian tribes. Their forerunners were the Toltecs, who came into the valley in the seventh century, bringing with them the civilization which descended later to the Tezcucans and Aztecs. For four centuries the Toltecs spread their power until they ruled all Anahuac. Then, whether by famine or pestilence or wars, they disappeared from the country as silently as they had entered it.

Other tribes, speaking the same language, followed the Toltecs. Among them were the Aztecs, the Tezcucans and the Tlascalans. For a long time the Aztecs wandered about Anahuac, until one day on the lake-shore they saw a *nopal*, or prickly pear, sticking out from a crack in a rock, a huge eagle sitting with a snake in his talons and his wings spread to the rising sun. They took the eagle as a sign sent them to show the position of their future city, and built it on that very spot, although they had to sink piles in the marshes as a foundation. They called the city Tenochtitlan, which meant "nopal on a stone." Later they gave it a second name, Mexico, after a war-god, Mexitli. Owing to some quarrels among themselves, part of the Aztecs pushed a little farther off and built their homes. Finally these two towns became one city—a strange city of islands, cut by many canals, joined together and to the mainland by great causeways which ran out from the principal streets.

The Tezcucans meantime had built their city, Tezcuco, on the east shore of Lake Tezcuco, and held first place among all the tribes in the country; even the Aztecs owned their superiority.

For some time the Tezcucan power spread without opposition over all northern Anahuac. About 1418 they clashed with the tribe of Tepanecs, who invaded their territory, took Tezcuco, killed the king and carried into captivity the crown-prince, who was only fifteen and who had the long name of Nezahualcoyotl. His jailer, an old servant of the Tezcucan king, was still loyal to the prince. With his help,

Nezahualcoyotl escaped from prison and went to the city of Mexico, where an Aztec ruler sheltered him. Finally he was allowed to go back to Tezcuco and lived there eight years, studying under one of his old masters, who taught him all the duties of a king.

Meanwhile the Tepanec king died in his capital, Azcapozalco, and his son, Maxtla, succeeded him. As Maxtla was now ruler of all Anahuac, Nezahualcoyotl went to swear allegiance to him. Maxtla turned his back on the young prince, who, alarmed for his safety, left Azcapozalco and fled back to Tezcuco.

He was not safe even in his own city. Maxtla knew that the Tezcucans loved Nezahualcoyotl as much as they hated himself. He resolved to put his rival out of his way.

His first effort was to invite Nezahualcoyotl to a party, meaning to kill him when he came. The prince's tutor found out the plot and kept Nezahualcoyotl away. Then Maxtla sent men to the palace to take Nezahualcoyotl by force. Again the tutor was ready for them.

When the soldiers arrived they found Nezahualcoyotl playing ball in the palace courtyard. He received them graciously and offered them refreshment after their journey. While they were eating and drinking, Nezahualcoyotl strolled idly into the next apartment, passing through an entrance where a burning censer stood. He was still under the soldiers' eyes and they went on with their meal. Suddenly his attendants at the censer threw on such a quantity of intense that its clouds lay like a curtain between the prince and the soldiers. Nezahualcoyotl fled at once down a secret passage into a huge, forgotten drain which had once brought water into the palace.

The prince stayed in hiding till night fell and then crept out of the drain and escaped to the cottage of a vassal of Tezcuco. Maxtla at once set a price on his head and had out armed men to scour the country in all directions. The story of Nezahualcoyotl's life is like that of the Stuart princes in hiding in Scotland; no matter how high a price was offered for his head, he found always some subject faithful to defend it.

Obliged to leave the cottage, Nezahualcoyotl wandered down to the wooded mountains that lay between his country and Tlascala. Here he was hunted like a wild animal. He had no protection against cold and storm. He hid by day in thickets and caves, stealing out by night to find food and drink. He had hair-breadth escapes. Once a woman covered him with the maguey fibers she was using for making cloth; once some soldiers hid him in a huge drum around which they were dancing; once a girl concealed him while she sent his pursuers off on a false scent. Nezahualcoyotl asked one young peasant who did not know the prince, if he would deliver up the prince if he fell into his hands. "No," answered the peasant, not dreaming he was talking to the prince himself. "Not even for the price Maxtla offers?" Nezahualcoyotl asked. The young fellow laughed and shook his head.

Nezahualcoyotl finally grew weary of the hard life. He asked all his friends to go back to Maxtla and leave him to his fate. But the blackest hour is just before dawn. The whole population, Mexicans and Tezcucans alike, were tired of Maxtla's tyranny and longing for the return of the mild rule of Tezcuco. The nobles made a league, plans were laid, the hour set for a general uprising, and one fine day Nezahualcoyotl found himself a prince again at the head of his own army, marching against Maxtla. The Aztecs, under their king, Montezuma I, joined their forces to the Tezcucans, and together they were able to defeat Maxtla in his own capital and kill him. His city of Azcapozalco was razed to the ground and became only the slave market for Anahuac. An offensive and defensive league was formed between Tezcuco and Mexico, and the Tepanec territory was awarded to the Aztecs for the help they had given in the war.

Nezahualcoyotl, back on his throne, proclaimed a general pardon and went to work at once to restore his impoverished kingdom. He built up cities, encouraged

agriculture and framed laws. He built himself a magnificent palace where he held court. This is what one of the old historians tells us about it:

"In the royal palace of Tezcuco was a courtyard, on the opposite sides of which were two halls of justice. In the principal one, called the 'tribunal of God,' was a throne of pure gold, inlaid with turquoises and other precious stones. On a stool, in front, was placed a human skull, crowned with an immense emerald, of a pyramidal form, and surmounted by an aigrette of brilliant plumes and precious stones. The skull was laid on a heap of military weapons, shields, quivers, bows, and arrows. The walls were hung with tapestry, made of the hair of different wild animals, of rich and various colors, festooned by gold rings, and embroidered with figures of birds and flowers. Above the throne was a canopy of variegated plumage, from the center of which shot forth resplendent rays of gold and jewels. The other tribunal, called 'the king's,' was also surmounted by a gorgeous canopy of feathers, on which were emblazoned the royal arms. Here the sovereign gave public audience, and communicated his dispatches. But, when he decided important causes, or confirmed a capital sentence, he passed to the 'tribunal of God,' attended by the fourteen great lords of the realm, marshaled according to their rank. Then, putting on his mitered crown, incrusted with precious stones, and holding a golden arrow, by way of scepter, in his left hand, he laid his right hand upon the skull, and pronounced judgment." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

Nezahualcoyotl was not yet married. He fell desperately in love with a beautiful princess who was betrothed to one of his nobles. Like David in his desire for Bathsheba, Nezahualcoyotl did a deed unworthy of a king. He sent the noble to war and he was killed. Then Nezahualcoyotl married the princess. Except for this, Nezahualcoyotl was a wise and good king. He died in 1470, leaving one son, Nezahualpilli, to succeed him. This little prince was only eight years old when his father died.

Nezahualpilli reigned well in his early years, but as he grew older, he grew more idle and liked better to pass his time in his beautiful gardens than to carry on war or administer justice. The army grew lax in discipline and the distant provinces lost their loyalty.

As the Tezcucan power diminished, the Aztec power increased. The Mexican rulers, fierce and warlike, seized the provinces that Tezcuco was not able to hold, and ruled them harshly. Finally the title of emperor, which had always belonged to Tezcuco, was assumed by the Aztec ruler.

There was only one province—Tlascala—which was able to hold out against Mexico. It was a fertile valley, half-way between Mexico and Vera Cruz, shut in on all sides but one by the mountains in the vicinity of Popocatepetl. On the exposed side, where the valley opened to the east, the Tlascalans built a stone wall nine feet high and twenty feet broad, with a parapet on the outer side as a defense to those who manned the wall. There was only one gateway, and that was made by one end of the wall running behind the opening and the other end in front of it, while the entrance went in sidewise between the two. Thus any one going in was exposed to fire from the wall on both sides. The wall was about six miles long, and as it ran back on either side to the rocky precipices of the mountains, the little republic of Tlascala was entirely shut in.

In this impregnable fastness the Tlascalans lived their own life independent of the rest of the world. The climate and rich soil helped them to raise their own supplies, and what they could not get for themselves they went without. They learned to do without salt and cotton and cacao. They resembled the Spartans in their simplicity and severity and warlike spirit. They were governed by a council consisting of four chief nobles.

This independent little nation the Aztecs had tried, by threats and promises, to bring under their rule. The Tlascalans replied to both, "Neither we nor our ancestors have ever paid

tribute to a foreign power nor ever will pay it. And they did not. While the Aztec rule spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and all tribes trembled before it, Tlascala, from her rocky fortress, boldly and defiantly proclaimed herself a mortal enemy to the Aztec Emperor.

In 1502, while Nezahualpilli was still loitering in his Tezcucan gardens and forgetting he was a king, Montezuma II, in the city across the lake, was, at the age of thirty-two, elected Emperor of Mexico. He had been trained in his youth as a soldier, but had afterward entered the priesthood. He was sweeping down the stairs of the temple of the war-god when he was told of the honor that had been done him. Only an accomplished warrior could be king of Mexico and no monarch was allowed to be crowned until he had won a victory that gave him a large number of captives in his train as lie entered his capital. Montezuma won his victory and took his captives. The crown of wrought gold and precious stones and feathers was put on his head by Nezahualpilli. Then with all the pomp of religious ceremony the captives were sacrificed in the great temple while the people feasted.

Montezuma at once proved himself an able monarch. At home, he enlarged and beautified the city and reformed the law courts. Abroad, he carried his victorious arms until he had made himself master of all Anahuac, and his enemies, as well as some of his own vassals, trembled at his name. He taxed heavily those whom he conquered to keep up his own magnificence, and the taxes were paid from fear, not from love.

Montezuma hated Tlascala. He sent against it an army under his son. The army was crushed and his son killed. He engaged all the tribes near Tlascala to punish them, but the Tlascalans drew back into their hills until their chance came, and then poured down the mountain-side like an avalanche on their foe and destroyed them.

In 1516 Nezahualpilli died, leaving several sons. Cacama and Ixtlilzochitl were the two oldest. Montezuma favored Cacama and named him for the succession. Ixtlilzochitl and his following stirred up a civil war, which ended in Cacama holding Tezcuco and half the kingdom under Montezuma, and the rest of the kingdom remaining with Ixtlilzochitl, who from that time hated Montezuma.

While Cortes, therefore, down at Vera Cruz was waiting for Montezuma's answer, there were two points of which he was ignorant, but which were to be very helpful to him. The brave little state of Tlascala might be ready to help an enemy of Montezuma, and the conquered nations lying far from Mexico and bound to it only by fear might not exert themselves greatly to defend it.

CHAPTER VII

THE CUSTOMS OF THE AZTECS

We are not even yet quite ready to go back to join Cortes at Vera Cruz, for we want first to make more of a visit to the city of Tenochtitlan, or Mexico, to see how it is built and how its people live.

We know that Tenochtitlan, the present city of Mexico, stood on piles driven into Lake Tezcuco. In its center was a large square which contained the royal palaces and the chief temple. From this square ran four broad avenues, north, south, east and west. As Tenochtitlan was really an island, three of these avenues became causeways to join the city to the neighboring mainland. The northern causeway was called the dyke of Tepejacac; the southern, the dyke of Iztapalapan; and the western, the shortest of the three, the dyke of Tlacopan. The causeways were built of lime and stone and were wide enough for ten horsemen to ride abreast. They were cut through in places by canals, and the bridges over the canals were drawbridges which could be raised if necessary.

The center of the square and the center of the whole city was the great temple shut in by its stone wall eight feet high. The wall opened on four sides to the main avenues. Over each entrance was an arsenal filled with ammunition, and ten thousand soldiers were kept in barracks nearby. The temple itself was built in five terraces, of huge blocks of stone, on a base three hundred feet square. Each terrace was a story, and the one hundred and fourteen steps which led up outside were so arranged that to reach the top story one had to pass four times around the building. The top was a flat roof of paving-stones with two towers, before which fire burned continually on two altars. This temple in the middle of the city, with a broad street running from each of its four sides, and its big, flat roof high above all the surrounding buildings, was set like a fortress in the heart of Tenochtitlan.

Most of the other streets were narrow, for the canals were the real streets. Tenochtitlan was an Indian Venice. To the Aztecs, their canoes were their horses, and the water their avenue. Some of the canals had footpaths beside them and footbridges over them. Most of the bridges were drawbridges, like those on the great causeways, so that at a moment's notice the bridges could be raised and the city not only cut off from the mainland, but one part of the city could be divided from another.

Not content with building a firm city in the lake, some of the Mexicans lived on floating islands. The poorer people made, out of reeds tightly woven together, rafts two hundred feet long, covered three or four feet deep with rich soil taken from the lake bottom. Here they raised flowers and vegetables for the market of Tenochtitlan. Some of these islands were firm enough for trees to grow on, and sometimes their owners built huts on them and lived there. Then, with a long pole, they pushed their gardens around, like houseboats, through the shallow water on the lake edge and sold their vegetables as they grew.

Tenochtitlan was nearly nine miles in circumference. It held about sixty thousand houses and probably about three hundred thousand people. A thousand men daily watered and cleaned the streets, so that a man "could walk through them with as little danger of soiling his feet as his hands," an old Spaniard says. Water was brought into the city by a great aqueduct from the hill of Chapultepec—"the grasshoppers' hill"—where Montezuma had his summer palace. A double line of pipes was laid so that there could be always one in repair. Through this pipe a stream of water as big as a man's body ran down from the hill into all the fountains and reservoirs of Tenochtitlan. There were openings in the aqueduct where it crossed the bridges, and through these

openings water was let into cans in canoes and carried to all parts of the city.

The Aztecs not only brought into their city pure water for household purposes, but they used canal irrigation systems. There were very severe laws, too, against cutting the forests, and the trees, also, helped the moisture of the land. Agriculture was held in high esteem. Special gods looked after it, the months were named for it, and all Aztecs, except royalty, the high nobility and the merchants, were farmers in more or less degree. The men did most of the work but the women helped sow the seed and husk the corn which gave them their flour, while from the stalks they made sugar. Besides Indian corn, they raised cacao and bananas and the Mexican aloe or maguey, which was their chief stay. The root was good to eat; the juice was manufactured into a drink; its leaves were crushed into a pulp and made into paper, and what were left over were used to thatch the peasants' roofs; its fibers made cord and thread; and its thorns pins and needles. It might well be called "a Swiss Family Robinson tree."

Merchants, as well as farmers, were much respected in Anahuac. Besides the great markets, there were no shops. The merchants, with their rich goods of gold and silver, feather work and fine cotton stuffs, traveled over their own countries and even into others. As there were no horses in Mexico, porters carried the goods, each man having a load of fifty or sixty pounds. Rich merchants traveled with a large retinue, which became an army in case of attack and defended their masters' goods. The country to which the merchant belonged was always ready enough, too, to send soldiers to his support if he suffered in a foreign land, for every tribe was glad of an excuse to attack a foe and conquer it. Very often the prince employed these merchants as spies as they traveled about. They made a guild of their own and were allowed special privileges.

In the western part of Tenochtitlan was the great market of Tlateloco, whose enclosure was three times the size of the great Square of Salamanca, the largest square in Spain. It was surrounded by a portico where each tradesman had his booth. Merchants from all Anahuac met here, goldsmiths, potters, painters, stone-cutters, chair-makers, florists, fruiterers, fishermen, hunters—each eager to sell his wares. The most beautiful things were the pieces of fine cotton gorgeously dyed, the wonderfully wrought gold ornaments, and the feather work for which the Mexican Indians were famous. They wove tapestry and cloaks out of the feathers of the gay tropical birds so skillfully that the work looked like embroidery or painting.

Market day was the fifth day of every week, and the market on that day often held fifty thousand people. The trading was sometimes done by barter, and sometimes by the currency of the country which consisted of bits of tin stamped with a T, bags of cacao and quills of gold-dust. Officers were stationed in the market to see that no one cheated and that the required customs were paid.

The Aztecs had a knowledge of arithmetic to help them in their business affairs. The children were taught arithmetic, astronomy, history, mythology, and some of them were taught picture-writing. They did not need grammar as their only writing was by pictures. The temples were the schools; the priests taught the boys and the priestesses taught the girls. In arithmetic a series of dots stood for the numbers up to twenty. Twenty was a flag, and from that they went on with flags and dots to a hundred. The square of twenty was a plume and its cube was a purse. If they wanted a fraction, they drew only part of the plume. The Aztecs knew a good deal about the solar system and marked out a year for themselves, dividing it into eighteen months of twenty days each, and adding five days that belonged to no month at all and were thought to be unlucky. A month was divided into four weeks of five days each, and the last day was fair-day. The Aztecs understood eclipses, but it is not certain that they had arranged a system of constellations.

Montezuma, who had had the training of both priest and warrior, was very well educated. He began his reign humbly, remembering he had been a priest, but soon he seemed to forget that, in his increasing power as a warrior. He grew bold and fierce and harsh, both with his own subjects and the outlying nations he conquered, laying on them heavy taxes to pay for his luxury. He soon thought his father's palace—the palace of Axayacatl on the west side of the great square of Tenochtitlan—was not good enough for him and built for himself on the south side of the square, facing the temple, a new palace of red stone, ornamented with marble. Though low, like most of the Aztec houses, it covered so much ground that one of the Spaniards said he was tired out in walking through it, and another said that on its terraced roof thirty knights might have held a tournament. Its woodwork was of carved cedar put together without a nail, and the walls were hung with fine, gorgeously dyed cotton cloth, with furs and with tapestry of the wonderful feather work. Without were courtyards with fountains, beautiful gardens, aviaries and menageries. The summer palace at Chapultapec was even more luxurious.

The Emperor lived in state among all these fine surroundings. His halls were filled with his train of nobles. He was served by men of high birth. He bathed once every day and changed his dress four times. He never wore a garment twice, but gave it away. He ate alone. He had game from the forests, and fish caught twenty-four hours before in the Gulf of Mexico, two hundred miles away, and carried by the swift-footed Indian "postmen" straight to the royal table. His pastry was made of corn-flour. Hundreds of dishes were spread on the floor before the Emperor; he pointed out those that he wanted and they were kept hot in chafing-dishes. Then a screen was put around him and he was served on a low table. He drank chocolate beaten to a froth and served in a gold cup. Then a gold finger-bowl was brought and his meal was done.

Dinner finished, he smoked while jugglers amused him. Afterward came a nap, and then the Emperor was ready for his business of state; the receiving of ambassadors from foreign states or from his own vassals. So high a position had Montezuma made for himself through his victorious wars that the greatest noble could come into his presence only with downcast eyes, with no shoes and with a coarse cloak thrown over his rich clothing.

Montezuma made all the laws for Mexico and appointed judges to see that the laws were carried out. These judges held office for life and their word was final. No one could appeal from their decision even to the Emperor. If a judge took a bribe he was killed. Each chief city had its judge, and under him were less important magistrates whom the people chose for themselves.

Courts were held where cases were tried. There were no lawyers; each party stated his own case and brought in his own witnesses. The testimony was written in picture-writing by a clerk. If punishment by death was declared, a line was traced with an arrow across the portrait of the man condemned. Some of the laws were severe. Not only murder, but sometimes robbery and drunkenness were punished by death. Montezuma watched over his law courts carefully and dealt severely with any wrongdoing on the part of the judges. Sometimes he wandered about in disguise to see how they were conducting themselves.

But however much Montezuma seemed to forget his priestly training, it really at bottom never lost its influence. He was intensely religious according to the queer mingling in Aztec religion of gentle, poetic faith and ferocious fanaticism. Perhaps the Mexicans, in following the Toltecs, had found and adopted a mild religion and had fastened on it some of their own fierce beliefs, until it had become a savage religion of superstition and human sacrifice and cannibalism.

Although the Aztecs believed in a supreme God whom they addressed as "the God by whom we live; omnipresent;

that knoweth all thoughts; and giveth all gifts; without whom man is as nothing; invisible, incorporeal, one God of perfect perfection and purity; under whose wings we find repose and a sure defense," this idea of one God as Spirit was too great for their savage minds really to comprehend, and they made, for their daily and more intimate worship, thirteen other chief gods and two hundred inferior gods, to whom they consecrated special days and festivals. Like the Greeks, they made gods of the seasons and the harvests and of various occupations. They were all symbolized by images of wood or stone or metal and were usually uncouth and hideous.

Their supreme deity, invisible Spirit, who had no image or temple, stood first. Next came a mild god, Tezcatlipoca, who created the world and watched over it. He had his place in one of the two sanctuaries on the temple area. The other sanctuary was dedicated to a frightful conception whom the Aztecs called Huitzilopotchli, their war god. His altar called constantly for human sacrifices. In their wars the Mexicans tried not to kill their foes but to take them alive. The captives were fattened like beasts, and on great festivals to Huitzilopotchli they were killed by thousands on his altars, and their flesh was eaten by the Aztecs at their banquets which attended the festival.

Huitzilopotchli had many hundreds of priests, men and women, in his temples; in the great temple of Tenochtitlan there were five thousand priests, who taught or painted or sung or offered sacrifices. At their head were two high-priests, second in authority only to the Emperor, and his advisers in all public matters.

Quetzalcoatl, god of the air, was another important deity of the Aztecs. Their history said that Quetzalcoatl had once as a man lived among them. He had been a loving and generous friend; he made them beneficent laws; he instructed them in farming; he taught them the use of metals, gold and silver and the obsidian which the Aztecs used as steel. His worship was mild and loving, for he forbade human sacrifice and sought only to benefit man. But tradition said that one of the other chief gods grew jealous of Quetzalcoatl, who was obliged to leave the country. On his way to the coast he stopped at the city of Cholula and lingered some years teaching its inhabitants. A great temple was built here in Quetzalcoatl's honor when he moved on, and this temple made Cholula the Sacred City of Anahuac.

Quetzalcoatl in the meantime went down to the gulf and embarked in his mystic canoe made of snake skins and sailed away, promising sometime to come back. The people watched him go, and when his tall form—white-skinned, dark-haired—faded from sight, they called him The Fair God, and set themselves patiently to wait for his return with his followers to rule again in Anahuac.

At the end of every fifty-two years, when in December came the five unlucky days which ended the year, the Aztecs thought the end of the world was coming. They broke to pieces their furniture and utensils, as well as their little household idols; the sacred fires in the temples were allowed to go out; everything was in wild disorder. On the evening of the fifth day the priests, in their richest dress, marched in procession out of the capital to a high mountain six miles away, carrying with them materials to kindle a new fire. They reached the mountain before midnight, and waited till the Pleiades were at the zenith, when by rubbing sticks together, they attempted to start a new fire. If the fire was lighted, it was a sign that the world would last another fifty-two years, and as the flames leaped up and caught the pile above it, shouts of joy arose from all the housetops in Tenochtitlan, where the people were anxiously watching the mountain-top. Before the sun rose, fast-running couriers had carried all over the country torches started at the new fire, so their altars and hearths were once more alight.

Then the people went to work to buy new gods and furniture and to clean their houses. When that was done, dressed in their best, they all went to the temple to return

thanks. The days following were given up to feasting and dancing.

Such were the Aztecs under their Emperor, Montezuma. He himself was almost as queer a mixture of hardness and softness as was his religion. For some time now he had been looking for the return of Quetzalcoati, "the Fair God." Many omens had pointed that way. In 1510 the Lake of Tezcuco suddenly overflowed its banks and swept away part of Tenochtitlan. The next year one of the temple towers caught fire, also without any apparent reason, and could not be put out. The year following this, three comets appeared, and as late as 1518 a strange light that covered the whole eastern sky like a sparkling sea of fire had caused great terror not only to Montezuma but to all the people of Anahuac.

Montezuma had consulted the King of Tezcuco about this last omen, which happened not long before Grijalva's appearance on the coast, and Nezahualpilli had told him that it meant the downfall of the Aztec empire. When the news of Grijalva's landing came to Montezuma, he trembled. Surely this was Quetzalcoati, the Fair God, come back, but was he coming to bless or to punish?

Grijalva, however, departed without disturbing Montezuma, who again forgot he was a priest and went on with his exactions as a warrior. The omens could not mean what Nezahualpilli had said.

And then to this great king on his throne in Tenochtitlan came Teuhtlile's messengers, running from the seacoast with the picture newspaper in their hands. More white beings had arrived on huge white-winged birds. Some of the beings were half-man and half-beast with iron feet. Thunder and lightning came from their weapons.

Montezuma studied the pictures and listened to the reports, and again he trembled. Was Nezahualpilli right? Was this Quetzalcoatl? How should he meet him?

And then the two parts of Montezuma's nature began to argue. The warrior-half said, "Here is a foe; let us go down and crush him." The priestly half said, "It is the return of the god; let us go down and welcome him." And how could Montezuma tell which side was right?

The Emperor was not happy as he sat in his palace studying Teuhtlile's picture-writing.

CHAPTER VIII

CORTES' NEW COMMISSION

JULY, 1519

As Montezuma studied the picture-writing in Tenochtitlan and wondered what answer to send back to the white invader, Cortes, down in the "warm lands" of the Mexican coast, had not wasted time while he waited.

The soldiers, unused to the tropical heat, found the burning, sandy beach very trying, though the friendly natives did all they could to make their guests comfortable. The Indians had made huts for themselves near the Spanish camp where, free of charge, they prepared for Cortes and his officers meals of game, fish, corn-cakes, pineapples and bananas. The soldiers paid for their food with beads and trinkets, which they sometimes exchanged, too, for tiny bits of gold. Velasquez' friends thought that this was infringing on the rights of the Governor of Cuba, but Cortes did not interfere; he knew when to shut his eyes. He passed over always many small matters, but when he gave an order he never drew back. That made him a great leader.

There were only eight days of waiting before Teuhtlile came with the two Aztec nobles who had brought Montezuma's answer. One of the nobles had been chosen because he looked so like the picture of Cortes that Teuhtlile had sent to Tenochtitlan. The soldiers recognized the likeness to their leader and called him "the Mexican Cortes."

Montezuma, after all his argument between warrior and priest, had, in his uncertainty, chosen the worst policy of all; he was afraid to welcome Cortes boldly; he was afraid to fight him boldly; so he temporized. He sent presents to appease Cortes, and these presents showed the Spanish general how rich the Emperor was. He forbade Cortes to come to Mexico, and this showed Cortes that Montezuma was afraid of him. This is the vaguely polite message that the nobles delivered: "It gives our master great pleasure to hold this communication with so powerful a monarch as the King of Spain, for whom he feels the most profound respect. He regrets much that he cannot enjoy a personal interview with the Spaniards, but the distance of his capital is too great; since the journey is beset with difficulties, and with too many dangers from formidable enemies, to make it possible. All that can be done, therefore, is for the strangers to return to their own land, with the proofs thus afforded them of his friendly disposition."

Cortes thanked the Aztecs for the wonderful gifts, too wise to show his annoyance and disappointment at their reply.

"It makes me only the more desirous," he said, "to have a personal interview with Montezuma. I should feel it, indeed, impossible to present myself again before my own sovereign, without having accomplished this great object of my voyage; and one, who has sailed over two thousand leagues of ocean, holds lightly the perils and fatigues of so short a journey by land."

The envoys told Cortes coldly that his message would not change Montezuma's decision. They went away in not very friendly spirit, taking as presents to their Emperor some linen sheets, a Florentine goblet and other things of little value.

The huge treasure they left behind at once set the Spaniards quarreling. Some were anxious at once to possess themselves of a country rich enough to send all this wealth as a present to a foreign king. Others thought it would be folly to attack so powerful a king, and that the true wisdom would be to take what they had and sail back to Cuba for new instructions and more men from the Governor. They all spoke freely, for they were soldiers of fortune and felt themselves equal to their leader. It is not hard to tell which side Cortes would be on, though he listened and said nothing.

There were reasons for a move of some sort. The heat and the mosquitoes had so told on the Spaniards that they could scarcely endure it any longer. Thirty of their number had died. And now since the unfriendly departure of the envoys, the natives who had fed Cortes' camp, began to ask huge prices for the food.

As, added to all these things, there was no harbor for the vessels at this point, Cortes sent Alaminos, the pilot, cruising along the shore for a better place for settling.

While he was gone the envoys came back once more from Montezuma. They entered the camp with the same ceremony, and brought additional presents, but their answer was the same as before. Montezuma told the strangers—politely—that now they had what they wanted, they would better go home, and forbade them to go any nearer Tenochtitlan. Cortes received the edict courteously, but turning to an officer he said,

"This is a rich and powerful prince indeed; yet it shall go hard, but we will one day pay him a visit in his capital!"

While he was speaking, the vesper bell rang. Immediately the Spanish soldiers fell on their knees in prayer before the wooden cross which was set in the sandy beach. The Aztecs looked in interest at this strange worship, and Cortes seized the occasion to convert them to the Christian faith, for that he considered the chief object of his visit to the country. He had Father Olmedo preach them a sermon, which Aguilar translated to Marina, and she, to the Mexicans. They listened coldly and withdrew as soon as the sermon was finished. That same night the natives broke up their camp and disappeared, and Cortes found himself left in a strange land without supplies.

In a few days another band of Indians came in—five of them—looking very unlike the Mexicans. They wore in their nose and ears gold rings set with bright blue stones, and a thin leaf made of gold hung from their lower lip.

Marina could not understand their language, but fortunately two of their party understood Aztec. They said they were Totonacs from Cempoalla, which had lately been conquered by Montezuma. They hated Montezuma because of his many oppressions, and they invited Cortes to come to Cempoalla.

Cortes caught at once at the idea that Montezuma had enemies in his own kingdom. He promised to visit Cempoalla, and sent the envoys back with presents.

Then Alaminos returned from his expedition. He had found a place near the city of Chiahuitzla where the ships might harbor and where, on the adjoining shore, there were streams to supply the camp with fresh water. Cortes decided to move his settlement to this spot.

The party who were ready to go home were very much displeased with this decision. They wanted to go back to Cuba, instead of sailing to another spot where "the whole Mexican Empire" might come down on them.

Cortes did not argue; he merely told them patiently that as everything had gone on well so far, it would go even better in a better situation, and left them to their discussions.

Cortes had a good many strong personal friends in his party who were ready to argue if he was not. Alvarado, always bold, was among them. These men, eager to go forward, had such confidence in Cortes that they would follow him anywhere. They perceived that his warrant from Velasquez did not give him any more power to found a colony than Grijalva had possessed, but they had seen too much of the riches of the country to be willing to go back now with their small gains and place all the honor of the expedition in Velasquez' hands when, with a little more effort, they could establish themselves in the country and reap a rich harvest. Grijalva had obeyed Velasquez to the letter and had been punished for his obedience; Cortes might learn from Grijalva's fate not to trust the Governor of Cuba.

These friends of Cortes' set themselves to persuade the bigger part of the soldiers of the necessity of Cortes' going on up to take possession of Mexico if his followers were to get the riches of the country for themselves and for the King of Spain, instead of meekly turning it all over to Velasquez.

"To return now," they said, "is to abandon the enterprise on the threshold, which, under such a leader, must conduct to glory and incalculable riches. To return to Cuba will be to surrender to the greedy governor the little gains we have already got. The only way is to persuade the general to establish a permanent colony in the country, the government of which will take the conduct of matters into its own hands, and provide for the interests of its members. It is true, Cortes has no such authority from Velasquez. But the interests of the Sovereigns, which are paramount to every other, imperatively demand it."

Although their meetings were held very secretly at night, the friends of Velasquez heard by and by of what Cortes' friends were doing. They accused Cortes himself of stirring up the trouble, and declared it was treason. They called on him to go directly back to Cuba if he would prove his loyalty to Velasquez.

Cortes kept his temper—as he usually did. "Nothing," he said, "is further from my desire than to exceed my instructions. I, indeed, prefer to remain in the country, and continue my profitable intercourse with the natives. But, since the army thinks otherwise, I shall defer to their opinion, and give orders to return, as they desire."

At once he issued a proclamation for the troops to be ready to embark the next morning to return to Cuba. It was a bold experiment; if they obeyed, it was the end of the expedition, but if, on the other hand, they insisted on going on up to Mexico—as Cortes was sure they would—the responsibility was theirs, and they could not later complain to the leader if things went wrong.

It happened as Cortes had thought. The proclamation stirred the army tremendously. Even those who had demanded the return began to wish that they had been willing to carry the adventure further. As for Cortes' friends, they thronged around his tent and called on him to countermand his orders.

"We came here," they said, "expecting to form a settlement, if the state of the country authorized it. Now it seems you have no warrant from the governor to make one. But there are interests, higher than those of Velasquez, which demand it. These territories are not his property, but were discovered for the Sovereign; and it is necessary to plant a colony to watch over his interests, instead of wasting time in idle barter, or, still worse, of returning, in the present state of affairs, to Cuba. If you refuse, we shall protest against your conduct as disloyal to His Highness."

Cortes seemed surprised at this new idea that he was responsible to Charles V, King of Spain, instead of to Velasquez. He said he must have time to think it over.

The next day he called the soldiers together again and made them this speech. "There is no one, if I know my own heart, more deeply devoted than myself to the welfare of my sovereign, and the glory of the Spanish name. I have not only expended my all, but have incurred heavy debts, to meet the charges of this expedition, and have hoped to reimburse myself by continuing my traffic with the Mexicans. But, if the soldiers think a different course advisable, I am ready to postpone my own advantage to the good of the state."

The army responded to his appeal and demanded a new government. Cortes, on the spot, appointed two magistrates, Puertocarrero, a firm friend of his own, and Montejo, a firm friend of Velasquez, thus taking one from each party. The other officers, however, were all his own friends. They were sworn into office at once, and the city was called, "the Rich Town of the True Cross," Villa Rica de Vera Cruz, putting into its name their hopes of spiritually helping the natives while, at the same time, they made themselves materially rich.

The new government at once assembled. Cortes, hat in hand, came before them, laid his commission from Velasquez on the table, and resigned his office of Captain-General. This office Velasquez had given him, and it was no longer of any authority, since the expedition had thrown off allegiance to Velasquez and put the whole government into the hands of the Magistracy of Villa Rica de Vera Cruz.

Cortes, with a deep bow, left the room. The new government discussed the matter a little and then called him back. They told him that as there was no one so well-fitted as he to command the expedition, the government had unanimously named him, in behalf of the King, Captain-General and Chief Justice of the new state, with the right to one-fifth of all the treasure the expedition should gain.

Thus Cortes was a long step ahead. Instead of laying down his authority and returning to Velasquez, who had sent him out, the whole expedition had broken with Velasquez, and announced themselves under no one but the King of Spain. In the name of the King of Spain they had formed a new government, and put in Cortes' hands the supreme military and civil power. What could he ask more? He had authority now, not only to trade with the Indians, but to take Mexico and settle there if he could.

The government was formed and Cortes held his new commission before the friends of Velasquez had fairly opened their eyes. When they saw what had been done, they broke out in indignant reproaches of disloyalty. Cortes' party replied as violently, and the camp became a scrimmage.

Cortes exercised his new authority. He picked out from the opposition party Ordaz, Leon and his page Escobar, and sent them in irons on board the fleet. Their men he sent out to forage for provisions, under Alvarado, with a strong band of Cortes' followers.

While they were gone, Cortes used all his powers to make those of his enemies who remained in camp see things as he saw them. They yielded at last—whether convinced by reason or gold—and when the foraging party came back with food, there was only one party in camp—those in favor of Cortes. There was plenty of food and that helped to make every one good-natured. Even the haughty cavaliers in irons were glad to lose them and join the banquet on shore. It was again a united band set on the great adventure of marching up to Tenochtitlan. After this, through the whole expedition, Ordaz and Leon were among Cortes' strongest and most loyal friends.

So Cortes' plan had succeeded. He held still supreme power, and it was his now absolutely. Only Charles V was above him; if he could make the King his friend it no longer mattered what Velasquez thought or did. Cortes had changed a military community into a civil government, and had made his enemies into his friends, till all were ready to acknowledge his authority and follow him into danger. In defying Velasquez, every soldier in camp had joined his fortune to Cortes, and they must stand or fall together. Thus Cortes had fairly started to carry out his great idea—the Conquest of Mexico. That vision burned before his eyes and lured him on. Nothing was to turn him from it till he had made it a reality.

We follow him with breathless interest. We may doubt his right to seize the wealth of another country, and we may think there is trickery or cruelty in some of his methods of gaining his ends. We judge Cortes' acts by the standards of the times in which he lived, when war was a noble occupation, and scheming in politics was wisdom. But his character will stand the test of all times; his good-temper in hardships, his unfaltering courage, his constancy of purpose, his large vision, his knowledge of men, his ability to make and hold friends—all are traits so fine that, in spite of what we condemn, we must still admire the man Cortes.

CHAPTER IX

CORTES SINKS HIS SHIPS

AUGUST, 1519

The quarrel over, Cortes had the heavy guns put aboard the ships, and sent them under Alaminos' guidance north along the shore to the spot the pilot had selected for a camp. Cortes, himself, at the head of his troops set out for Cempoalla to see what friends he could make of the Totonacs, who were ready to rise against Montezuma's rule.

For a good many miles the army marched across sandy wastes, until they came to a river which they crossed on rafts. Beyond the river were grassy plains and groves of cacaos and feathery palms. The Spaniards saw deer and game, wild turkeys among the rest, though they thought them peacocks.

As they came nearer Cempoalla they were met by twelve envoys sent by the cacique, who helped the Spaniards make camp for the night, and who supplied them with food. The next morning they were on the march again through green meadows and wonderful groves of trees hung with grapevines and wild morning-glories, while the undergrowth was crowded by wild roses and honeysuckle. Among these sweet-scented things fluttered butterflies of every tint, and gay-colored, sweet-songed birds. The Spaniards thought they had found a "terrestrial paradise."

Nearer the city, they found tidy little gardens and orchards. Crowds of men and women met them and hung flower wreaths around the horses' necks. The city itself held more than twenty thousand houses of stone thatched with palm leaves so cleverly woven as to be rain-proof.

As the Spaniards marched slowly through the narrow streets of Cempoalla, it was hard to tell whether the city was more of a sight to them, or they to the city. Both parties were friendly in their curiosity. The cacique, very tall and fat, met Cortes with much ceremony in front of his house, and quartered the Spaniards in a temple nearby, whose courtyard was large enough to hold the whole army. Here he sent them a comfortable meal of meat and cornbread, as well as a large present of gold and fine cotton cloth.

In spite of all this friendliness, Cortes posted his guards, placed his artillery, and ordered his men to keep within bounds. He believed in the saying, "Eternal vigilance is the price of safety." On the march his soldiers were always in order of battle; in camp, they often slept on their arms.

The Totonacs had no thought of treachery, however. The Spaniards slept safely, and in the morning Cortes and fifty men went to visit the cacique. Cortes left his men in the courtyard, taking with him into the house itself only one officer and Marina.

"I am a subject," said Cortes, "of a great king across the seas. I have come to teach the Aztecs about the true God and to destroy the cruel worship which demands human sacrifice."

The cacique answered, "My gods who bring sunshine and rain are good enough for me. But I am vassal of the Aztec Emperor. He is a powerful monarch, whose capital stands in a lake far off across the mountains. He is a stern prince, forcing tribute from us mercilessly. If we resist, he carries off our young men and maidens to sacrifice at his altars."

Cortes told the cacique that he had come to help all the oppressed, and that he was ready to help the Totonac tribes overthrow the tyranny of Montezuma.

That impressed the cacique; he said the Totonacs numbered thousands, and not only all Totonacs, but many other tribes also, hated Montezuma. They had heard of Cortes

and his great deeds at Tabasco. But they were not yet ready to put their fortunes to the touch by defying "the great Montezuma." They had suffered too much by his former punishments. Only the Tlascalans—shut into their mountain fort by their great wall—were able to hold their own against the Mexicans.

Cortes' answer was a boast. "A single Spaniard is stronger than a host of Aztecs. I do not need help, but I must know which tribes are my friends and which are my foes in this war I have before me, that I may know whom to protect and spare."

Having thus made an impression on the cacique, and obtained the information he wanted, Cortes bade a friendly farewell and, after a promise to return later, set off for the town of Chiahuitzla, near the harbor to which he had sent his fleet. The cacique gave him, to carry his baggage, four hundred Indian porters. They were so well trained that they could carry fifty pounds twenty-five miles a day.

Cortes went with a satisfied mind. He had meant to conquer the country at whatever cost. Now he found that a good many of the tribes he had thought he would have to fight, he might turn into allies to help him against the Aztecs whom they hated.

After a few days' march, Cortes reached Chiahuitzla, perched like a fortress on the rocks above the Gulf of Mexico. The city was nearly empty, for its inhabitants had fled at the appearance of the white men. Fifteen of the principal citizens, however, were waiting to welcome Cortes, and little by little the others stole back. While Cortes was in conference with them, in came the fat cacique of Cempoalla, carried by his men on a litter. He wanted to know what was going on.

As they were gathered in the market-place, there came into the square five men of lordly look and rich dress, followed by their servants. They regarded the Spaniards coldly and did not return their greeting. The Totonac chiefs immediately left Cortes and hurried, with apologetic haste, to the newcomers. Cortes, rather puzzled, turned to Marina, and she said that these five nobles were Aztecs come to collect tribute for Montezuma.

The next moment the Totonac chiefs came back to Cortes in the greatest dismay. The Aztecs demanded twenty young men and women to sacrifice to their gods to appease them for the dishonor done them by the Indians in receiving and entertaining the white men. Cortes very coolly told the Totonacs to refuse to give up the girls and boys and, more than that, to arrest the messengers.

The Totonacs were in a hard place. Whichever one they obeyed, the other would punish them. Cortes was the one at hand and strong in his confidence and promises, so very tremblingly they obeyed him. To their own unbounded surprise the Aztec nobles were seized, bound and placed under guard.

Cortes, as he had done once before, was playing a double game. His men secretly freed two of the prisoners and brought them to Cortes, who protested his sympathy with their plight and sent them back to Montezuma with messages of his friendship, in spite of the way Montezuma had treated him.

The Totonacs in the morning were very angry at the escape of two of their captives. They wanted immediately to sacrifice the others to their gods. Cortes was horrified at the idea and sent the Aztecs, for safety, to the fleet in the harbor nearby. From the ships they, too, were allowed to escape.

While he was thus placating the Aztecs, Cortes was at the same time stirring up the Totonacs to further revolt. He induced the chiefs to send messengers to all the outlying tribes, calling on them, also, to refuse tribute to Montezuma.

The messengers found the country in great commotion. The servants of the five envoys had fled when their masters were taken, and they had carried with them frightful tales of the bold white men who had insulted Montezuma's emissaries.

The Indians from all sides poured into Chiahuitzla, eager to find their old freedom. A few of the fearful ones hesitated, but most of them took the oath of allegiance to the Spanish king and put themselves under Cortes.

Cortes then set to work to erect his city on the shore near the harbor two or three miles from Chiahuitzla. The Indians helped him. In a few weeks the new Villa Rica de Vera Cruz was built and the government transferred to it.

While the city was still building, a new embassy arrived from. Montezuma. The news of the imprisonment of his envoys had raised the Emperor's anger and made him a warrior, ready to defy Cortes. But when the envoys returned safe, saying it was Cortes who had freed them, Montezuma fell back into his old uncertainty, wondering what to do. In this state of mind he had sent to Cortes another embassy with rich gifts to thank him for his courtesy to the envoys and to protest against Cortes' friendly attitude toward Montezuma's rebellious vassals.

Cortes entertained this new embassy, giving it every chance to see his horses and guns. Then, with a few presents, he sent the Aztecs back to Tenochtitlan.

The Totonacs, seeing the Aztecs depart peaceably, were filled with awe. The Spaniards must indeed be gods if they could thus defy Montezuma and not be at once struck by his lightning. It would be well to support them. They were still more impressed when Cortes ordered one of his own men hanged because he had stolen chickens from a native. Alvarado interfered and saved the man's life, but both Spaniards and Indians had learned a lesson as to the strictness of Cortes' discipline.

The fat cacique of Cempoalla went home again, and found that in his absence an enemy had marched against his city. He sent at once for Cortes, and Cortes, going to Cempoalla, ended the quarrel without bloodshed. He became himself almost a god in Cempoalla, for the people had seen him defy Montezuma, deal out sharp justice to his own men, and arbitrate successfully between two warlike nations. In his great gratitude, the cacique offered to Cortes eight rich maidens as wives to his generals.

Cortes received them courteously, but said that it would be necessary for the girls to be baptized, as Spaniards could marry only Christians. He said further that the great object of his expedition was to convert the Indians to Christianity, and asked that he might tear down the heathen idols and erect the cross.

But the cacique declared again that his own gods suited him and that he would resist any attempt to replace them, although that would not be necessary as the gods themselves would avenge any act of dishonor offered them.

Cortes consulted with his soldiers. More than once since the Spaniards had landed they had seen the horrors of human sacrifice. The army now promised to stand behind Cortes in his effort to abolish the evil. Even gentle Father Olmedo, who so often held Cortes back from forcibly converting the natives, does not seem to have interfered this time.

So Cortes answered the cacique, "Heaven will never, smile on our enterprise, if we countenance such atrocities, and, for my own part, I am resolved the Indian idols shall be demolished this very hour, if it costs me my life."

At once the Spaniards pressed toward the chief temple in the city. The cacique called his men to arms and the Indians gathered from all sides. Their war-cries and their clashing weapons changed, in a twinkling, a peaceful camp into the appearance of a battle-ground. The ferocious priests, their dark gowns and long, matted hair flying, rushed wildly through the crowd, calling on the people to protect their gods.

Cortes did not waste time. He arrested the cacique and his chiefs, telling them that he held them responsible for any violence offered his men. Marina, too, warned the cacique that

if he lost the friendship of Cortes, he would lose his protection against Montezuma's vengeance. The cacique yielded. He covered his face with his hands, murmuring that the gods would avenge their own wrongs.

At a sign from Cortes, fifty soldiers crowded up the steep steps of the temple, and without opposition over-turned the big wooden idols and rolled them down the steps to the temple courtyard, where they were burned, the Spaniards shouting with joy and the Indians groaning with horror, while they waited to see their gods strike the white men dead.

Instead, they saw their idols burning up like any other dry wood, and immediately they were converted; they would no longer worship gods who could not protect themselves better than that; they consented to become Christians.

Cortes had the temple walls cleansed from human blood and freshly plastered before he built an altar with a cross above it. The Indian priests also cleansed themselves, changed their dark gowns for white robes and joined in the procession that marched up to the temple to hear Father Olmedo say mass. Spaniards and Indians alike were melted to tears by the ceremony.

An old soldier consented to stay on guard and teach the priests the new religion, while Cortes went to Vera Cruz to make further preparations for marching on Tenochtitlan. He found that in his absence a vessel containing twelve men and two horses had arrived. He was glad to join these recruits to his forces, but he did not like quite so well the news they brought—that Velasquez, as Governor of Cuba, had received permission from Spain to plant a colony in Mexico.

It drove Cortes to a plan he had been considering for some time. He had resigned from Velasquez' authority and held his power now from the citizens of Villa Rica. If he could put behind that the approval of King Charles himself, he would have nothing in the future to fear from the Governor of Cuba or any other authority. He determined to write a letter to the King, telling him of all he had done and of all he meant to do, and asking for the royal authority to take Mexico and plant colonies. With the letter, he meant to send so much gold that Charles should see it was worthwhile to uphold him. He gave up his own share of the treasure, and his chief officers gave up theirs, to send to the King; more than that, the common soldiers, at Cortes' request, gave up their portion.

With this wonderful present, and a letter which stated all the riches of the country and all the difficulties of the expedition, including the jealousies of Velasquez, and which assured the King that Cortes was well able to conquer this country for Spain, the general sent home his envoys, Montejo and Puertocarrero, with strict orders not to touch at Cuba or any other island on their way to Spain. They sailed away under the pilotage of Alaminos in the best vessel of the fleet.

Their sailing suggested to some of those left behind that they, too, would like to sail—not to Spain—but back to Cuba, where they could tell Velasquez all that had been so far accomplished, and bring back more men and supplies to attempt the conquest of the country. Very secretly a plot to desert Cortes was hatched and carried on up to the night of sailing. The vessel had been chosen and stocked with food and water; everything was ready, when one of the conspirators repented at the last moment and confessed the scheme.

Cortes at once arrested the men concerned and called a council. Two of the ring-leaders were condemned to death by this council and the others were punished. The plot was completely crushed.

But it had shown Cortes a danger ahead. So long as the fleet remained, there was always a chance of the men becoming discouraged and seizing the vessels to go home. He came to a resolution that would be possible only to a man of his unfaltering purpose and dauntless courage. He made up his mind to destroy the fleet, and told his plan to a few of his generals.

The captains of the vessels were easily induced to give in the report that Cortes called for. They said the ships were so racked by gales and so worm-eaten as to be worthless. Cortes immediately ordered that the cordage, sails and iron be saved and that the vessels should be sunk. Nine ships were destroyed before the army knew what was happening.

The news that out of all the fleet only one vessel remained reached the soldiers like a thunder-clap. Even brave men shivered at the thought of their small army left in a huge, warlike empire, from which there was now no escape. Astonishment turned to reproaches, which grew into mutiny. "Our general has led us out like cattle," they cried, "to be butchered in the shambles."

Cortes faced them steadily. "If I have ordered the ships to be destroyed," he said, "you should consider that mine is the greatest sacrifice, for they are my property—all, indeed, I possess in the world. You, on the other hand, will derive one great advantage from it, by the addition of a hundred able-bodied recruits, before required to man the vessels. But even if the fleet had been saved, it would have been of little service in our present expedition; since we will not need it if we succeed, while we would be too far in the interior to profit by it if we fail. To be thus calculating chances and means of escape is unworthy of brave souls. We have set our hands to the work; to look back, as we advance, will be our ruin. You have only to resume your former confidence in yourselves and your general and success is certain. As for me, I have chosen my part. I will remain here, while there is one to bear me company. If there be any so craven, as to shrink from sharing the dangers of our glorious enterprise, let them go home, in God's name. There is still one vessel left. Let them take that and return to Cuba. They can tell there how they have deserted their commander and their comrades, and patiently wait till we return loaded with the spoils of the Aztecs."

As usual, Cortes succeeded. When he finished there was not a man in the throng that had a thought of home. His eloquence was of the kind to stir men's hearts. They grew ashamed of their cowardice and saw again ahead of them the vision of adventure and glory and riches. Once more they became Crusaders, carrying the cross forward through every hazard under a leader who could not fail.

WITH ONE ACCORD THE ARMS WENT UP AND THE CRIES RANG OUT, 'TO MEXICO! TO MEXICO!'

CHAPTER X

CORTES ENTERS TLASCALA

SEPTEMBER, 1519

Montejo and Puertocarrero had set sail from Villa Rica on July 26th with Cortes' letter to the King and the present of gold. Cortes had told them on no account to touch at Cuba, but the first thing they did was to anchor off that island. A sailor escaped from the vessel and crossed to St. Jago, spreading everywhere the story of Cortes' achievements. Of course the news came finally to the ears of Velasquez. This runaway sailor did Cortes more harm than he could know.

Velasquez had heard nothing of the expedition since it had sailed, and these tidings that reached him of riches beyond belief were quite spoiled for his ears by the news of Cortes' new commission and of his appeal to the King. If those things held, they cut Velasquez out entirely from his share of the venture.

At once he sent two fast-sailing ships after Puertocarrero and Montejo, but they were by that time well across the Atlantic. Velasquez, after a vain appeal to the commission in St. Domingo which had sanctioned Cortes' venture, and another to Charles V, determined to waste no more time, but to fit out another squadron to supersede Cortes.

But to make ready such an expedition was the work of months, and in the meantime Cortes' vessel had crossed the sea and, early in October, 1519, had reached Spain. When Ferdinand and Isabella had taken possession of the land Columbus had discovered, they had appointed two tribunals to have charge of the new colonies. One was called "The Royal Council of the Indies," and the other, "The Royal India House."

Unfortunately one of the present officers of "The Royal India House" was a fast friend of Velasquez. As soon as he heard the errand of Montejo and Puertocarrero, he accused them to "The India House" of treason and rebellion, seized their vessel, sent the King's treasure to him, and confiscated all the rest of the gold, even the private property of the envoys and a sum that Cortes had sent his father.

With such a poor reception, there was nothing left for the two envoys but to find the King. He was in the north of Spain, visiting his mother before he sailed for Germany. Cortes' father, with Montejo and Puertocarrero, went to Tordesillas to lay their complaints before him and present Cortes' letter. Charles had just received the Mexican treasure when they arrived.

The gold and cotton and feather-work were proof to the King of the importance of Cortes' work. He would at once have sent to Cortes the royal approval his letter asked for, except that another enemy to Cortes interfered. He was Juan de Fonseca, Bishop of Burgos and President of the second Colonial Tribune, "The Royal Council of the Indies." A relative of his was to marry Velasquez, and he was ready to uphold Velasquez in anything.

On account of Fonseca, therefore, Charles delayed his answer and finally, not knowing how to settle the quarrel, went in May to Germany without doing anything more definite for the envoys than ordering they should be given the expenses of their voyage. Thus he left his explorers unrewarded and his colonies to settle their own quarrels.

Meanwhile, back in Anahuac, things were happening. After he had destroyed the ships, Cortes, leaving Escalante in charge of Villa Rica, went back to Cempoalla. Here he received word from Escalante that there were off the coast four strange ships who would not answer his signals. In much alarm lest this should already be Velasquez' colonizing expedition, Cortes, leaving Alvarado and Sandoval in charge

of the army at Cempoalla, posted back to Villa Rica to look after the new fleet.

When he reached Villa Rica, Escalante tried to persuade him to rest before he went to find the strange ships, but Cortes answered, "A wounded hare takes no nap," and went on with his men ten miles farther up the coast.

Before he found the ships he ran into three Spaniards who had come ashore from one of them. Very eagerly Cortes questioned them, and found out to his comfort that, instead of coming from Velasquez, they were part of a squadron fitted out by the Governor of Jamaica, who had received permission from Spain to settle in any country along the Florida coast. He had heard of Cortes' presence in this region, and had sent ashore these three men to warn Cortes not to interfere with his rights.

Cortes persuaded the three men to join his expedition, and then went to work to see if he could not add to his forces more men from the fleet. But the ships at anchor in the harbor would not pay any more attention to Cortes' signals than they had paid to Escalante's, nor would they send a boat ashore. So Cortes tried stratagem.

He marched his men away from the shore, out of sight of the ships, and made the newcomers change dress with three of his men. After dark he came back to the beach with his whole force. Before dawn he hid behind the bushes everyone except his three men whom he had dressed in the strangers' clothes. These, when it was light enough, signaled to the ships to send for them. The sailors on the ships, believing the men to be their comrades, put off a boat filled with armed men and, when it reached the beach, three or four men leaped out. Then Cortes sprang out from his ambush. He seized the men on shore, but the boat, taking alarm, pushed off back to the ship, and the fleet got under way. Cortes was disappointed not to add more to his numbers, but even six armed Spaniards were not to be despised as recruits. Cortes went back to join his army at Cempoalla, ready at last to begin his march toward Mexico.

His army of invasion counted four hundred foot, fifteen horse and seven pieces of artillery, besides thirteen hundred Totonac warriors and a thousand porters. He took also forty chiefs, who were to act as guides and counselors, as well as serve as hostages for the faith of the Cempoallans.

Escalante, chosen for his ability to keep peace with the Indians and to hold Cortes' authority against any Spaniards who might arrive in Cortes' absence, was left with the remaining men in Villa Rica.

Before the troops started, Cortes addressed them. "We are embarking at last," he said, "in earnest on the enterprise which has been the great object of my desires. Our blessed Savior will carry us victorious through every battle with our enemies. Indeed this assurance must be our stay, for every other refuge is now cut off but that afforded by the providence of God and your own stout hearts."

"We are ready to obey you," cried his soldiers. "Our fortunes, for better or worse, are cast with yours."

On August 16, 1519, Cortes and his crusaders, high in courage and hope, set out for Cempoalla. During the first day's march they were still in the tropical *tierra caliente* among the birds and flowers and butterflies. Then they began to climb the Cordilleras, and on the second night reached Xalapa, about halfway up the slope. Before them the mountains rose abruptly. On their right stood the Sierra Madre, green with pines, and on their left was the Orizaba, white with snow. Behind them lay the luxuriant *tierra caliente* through which they had come, and beyond it, the faint line of the ocean.

From this beautiful spot they pressed up to barer and colder heights. On the fourth day they reached a friendly town where they were allowed to erect a cross, while the natives listened to a sermon from Father Olmedo. Then up they went, higher and higher among the mountains, till they came to the

places of cold wind and rain, snow and hail, which soaked and chilled them. The Spaniards were glad of their armor of quilted cotton as protection against the cold.

After three days of this discomfort, the army marched through a pass into a more temperate climate, and away up seven thousand feet above sea level came upon a city larger than Cempoalla. It had thirteen temples, and a room that held, according to one of the Spaniards, a hundred thousand skulls of those who had been sacrificed.

The cacique of this town, a vassal of Montezuma, was not very cordial to Cortes.

"Do you pay tribute to Montezuma?" Cortes asked. "Who is there that is not a vassal to Montezuma?" the cacique answered haughtily.

"I am not," Cortes replied with emphasis, and told all the power and glory of his King, Charles V.

The cacique, not to be outdone, boasted about Montezuma's greatness. "The Aztec Emperor can muster thirty thousand vassals, each master of a hundred thousand men," he said. "His army is always in the field and is so successful that he sacrifices each year to his gods twenty thousand victims. His capital, Tenochtitlan, is built in a lake in a huge valley on top of the mountains, and the only approach to the city is over long causeways from the mainland. The causeways through the city are cut by canals whose bridges can be raised, thus cutting off all communication from outside. The lake itself is full of Aztec canoes."

This did not sound very encouraging to the Spaniards, but "being Spaniards," writes the historian of the expedition, "however much the stories filled them with wonder, they made them only the more earnest to prove the adventure, desperate as it might appear."

The cacique refused to give Cortes any gold until Marina told him of the presents Montezuma had sent. Then he gave them some small pieces, and what was more important, he provided them with food and shelter.

Cortes, as soon as he was warmed and fed, set Father Olmedo preaching. Cortes would have liked to convert the natives by force as he did at Cempoalla, but the gentle priest convinced him that although that method had succeeded in the lowlands, it would probably rouse great opposition from these mountaineers. The general left the natives to their own beliefs, therefore, and after two or three days of rest he was ready to start his army on again.

There were two paths to Mexico; one by Cholula, and one by Tlascala. The cacique advised Cortes to take the route through the old city of Cholula, whose inhabitants, vassals of Montezuma, the cacique said, were mild and peaceful and would welcome the Spaniards. But the Cholulans were enemies of the Totonacs, and the Totonac chiefs advised Cortes not to trust them, as they were "a false and perfidious people." They counseled Cortes to choose the other route by Tlascala, whose people, friends of the Totonacs, were free and frank and valiant and had, behind their strong wall, withstood the Aztecs for years.

Cortes started out, not certain which route he should take when he reached the dividing roads. His way at first lay along a green, wooded valley, with a river flowing through it, and Indian houses built along its banks. A little way on, the Spaniards came to another town disposed to be friendly, and Cortes halted his troops.

Here he decided to choose the Tlascalan path to Mexico, probably thinking he could make better cause with Montezuma's foes than with his friends. He selected four of the Cempoallan chiefs who were with him, whom he sent as an embassy to Tlascala, with a letter asking permission to pass through the Tlascalan republic and expressing great admiration of their long resistance to the Aztecs, whom he was marching to subdue. Marina taught the chiefs the contents of the letter

by heart, and the envoys set off on their errand, carrying with them as gifts a crimson cloth cap, a sword and a crossbow.

After the messengers had gone, Cortes stayed on in the Indian village for three days before he set out again on his route, taking with him three hundred Indian recruits, which brought the number of his allies up to almost three thousand. He marched cautiously, ready any moment for attack; the horse and light troops in front; the heavy-armed and baggage last, all in battle array. They slept on their arms.

"We are few against many, brave companions," Cortes would say to them; "be prepared, then, not as if you were going to battle, but as if actually in the midst of it."

As they proceeded, expecting each day to meet the envoys who did not appear, Cortes began to feel uneasy. On they went, however, fording the stream more than once, the country growing rougher and wilder as they climbed unfalteringly upward. And then suddenly—they came right against the wall of Tlascala.

We have heard of that wall which the Tlascalans had built, nine feet high, twenty feet broad, and six miles long, to shut out the Aztecs from their mountain country. It made the Spaniards realize the strength and power of the people who raised it, and made them, too, less sure of their own welcome. What had become of the Cempoallan envoys?

Though there was no one to greet them, neither was there any one to oppose them; the entrance was quite undefended.

Cortes did not hesitate. "Forward, soldiers!" he cried. "The holy cross is our banner and under that we shall conquer."

He led his little army through the undefended passage, and in a few moments they trod the soil of the free republic of Tlascala.

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE OF THE PASS

SEPTEMBER, 1519

The Cempoallan envoys had reached in safety the city of Tlascala, the capital of the republic of Tlascala, and had delivered their message to the four chiefs who were the heads of the government. They at once called together the heads of the great council to decide on an answer.

One of the four chiefs, Maxixca, maintained that the white conqueror was Quetzalcoatl returned, and they must bow to him. Others said that anyone who was an enemy to Montezuma was a friend to Tlascala. But there were still others, among them the aged chief Xicotencatl, also one of the four heads, who said that they never could be friends with men who, wherever they went, left broken idols and desecrated temples behind them. Besides, what proof was there that Cortes was the foe of the Aztecs when, after receiving Montezuma's presents, he was marching with Montezuma's vassals to Tenochtitlan? Xicotencatl was for sending word to his son, Xicotencatl the younger, to fall on the Spaniards with the army he was commanding on the eastern frontier, and destroy them. If he should defeat the Spaniards, all was well; if he should be defeated, the Tlascalans would say they knew nothing of the attack and could then receive the Spaniards. In the meantime they would induce the envoys to stay on a pretext of some religious ceremony.

This was what was going on when Cortes, not knowing the reception prepared for him, and finding no one guarding the entrance, dashed through the opening of the great wall and entered the Tlascala republic. At once he set out for the capital. His cavalry rode on for some miles undisturbed, the

infantry following close behind, until Cortes saw a small body of Indians armed with shield and sword. He signaled them to stop, but they fled instead. When the cavalry, spurring after them, overtook them, instead of showing the usual terror at the strange horses, the Indians turned on them furiously, and held their ground till a large body of natives came to their aid.

Cortes sent back a messenger to the infantry to advance as quickly as possible, and set himself to with-standing the attack of the enemy. It was all he could do to keep them off. After discharging their arrows, the savages closed with the Spaniards, killing one man and two horses before the infantry came up.

The Spaniards formed at once, and poured in such a close volley from musket and crossbow that the Indians, who had never heard before the report of fire-arms, fell back. They withdrew, however, in good order.

Cortes did not pursue; he was satisfied to have his road to the city of Tlascala left open for him. Before he went on, he buried the dead horses, lest the Indians should discover that they were merely mortal beasts and not something magic. Then he resumed his march.

A little further on they met two of the Cempoallan envoys along with two Tlascalans who, according to the chiefs' plan, apologized to Cortes for the unsuccessful attack, and assured him that the Tlascalan government knew nothing of it. Whether Cortes believed it or not, he answered courteously, and was allowed to go on.

He pitched camp on the bank of a stream among a few deserted cottages. There was not much to eat, but the soldiers made a supper and went to sleep. Cortes kept on guard a hundred men at a time all through the night. But no attack was made. Although Cortes did not know it yet, the Indians never attacked at night.

The next day, September 2, 1519, the troops were under arms by dawn—three thousand Indians, four hundred Spanish infantry and fourteen horse. Father Olmedo said mass, and then the march began, the troops, by the general's order, keeping very close together, so that no stragglers should be cut off. The horsemen rode three abreast. Their orders were to hold their lances so that the Indians could not snatch them, to keep together and never to attack singly.

They had gone only a little way before they met the other two Cempoallan envoys frightened almost to death. They had just escaped from the prison where the Tlascalans were fattening them for sacrifice. They said that a large body of Tlascalans was gathered to oppose the Spanish progress. Cortes saw that the polite apology had not been worth much.

There was nothing for it but to push ahead until they came in sight of the enemy, a body of a thousand in battle array. Cortes stopped long enough to explain that he had no hostile intention; all he wanted was a peaceful passage through the country. The Tlascalans' answer was a flight of stones and arrows.

The missiles struck the Spaniards into sudden anger and with their war cry, "St. Jago and at them!" they charged the foe.

The Tlascalans held their ground for a while and then suddenly gave way. The Spaniards pursued, not perceiving, until they were well entrapped, that they were being led into a narrow pass where both the horse and the guns were almost useless. When they saw what had happened, they hurried forward to get again on level ground, and turning a sharp angle of the cliffs, they saw spread out before them, filling the space in the cut and stretching far into the plain beyond, an army numbering tens of thousands.

As the Spaniards appeared, the Tlascalans set up their hideous war cry and beat upon their melancholy drums. Then, like an ocean, they came rolling forward.

The Spaniards, however, kept close together and stood the shock. The ocean of Indians rolled up, broke, retreated,

rolled up again and swayed back, only to gather force for another assault. How long could three thousand men withstand thirty thousand?

Finally the Tlascalans succeeded in pulling a Spaniard from his horse and in killing the horse. The Spaniards, knowing the horrible fate that would come to their comrade if he were taken alive, rallied to rescue him. Ten were wounded before they finally snatched him from his captors and the man himself died soon after.

"I see nothing but death for us," one of the Cempoallan chiefs said to Marina; "we shall never get through this pass alive."

"The God of the Christians is with us," Marina answered, "and He will carry us safely through."

Then amid the din of battle came the voice of Cortes, "If we fail now the cross of Christ can never be planted in the land. Forward, comrades! When was it ever known that a Spaniard turned his back on a foe?"

Roused to new effort, the white men attacked again. Borne down by the riders and trampled by the horses' hoofs, the enemy began to give ground. Cortes' Indian allies did their part bravely. Finally the troops succeeded in forcing a passage through the pass and came out on the plain beyond, where the horse soon opened a way for the artillery. The Tlascalans were in such close rank that, once the cannon got into action, they mowed them down by hundreds.

After eight of his principal chiefs had fallen, the young Xicotencatl, finding himself unable to hold out against the Spanish fire, ordered a retreat. The Tlascalans drew off in good order about sunset, and Cortes was well content to let them go.

He at once moved forward to the top of a hill and made camp. The Spaniards fared better than they had the night before, for the cottages on the hill had plenty of food. After the wounded men and horses were cared for, the troops celebrated their victory in a feast. They had come off with the loss of the one horse and very few men. The horse that the Indians had killed they cut in pieces and sent through the country to show that it was mortal and not supernatural. Thus the very thing happened that Cortes had tried to prevent.

Although Cortes encouraged his men in their singing and feasting, he himself had sober thoughts. To-day's battle was the severest he had had in Anahuac, and he knew well that he had not gained a lasting victory. To-morrow the Indians, refreshed and recruited, would be ready for another attack, and all the work would have to be done over again. It was a dark outlook.

As the songs died away and the men slept, Cortes still sat gazing into the future and thinking how far he would be on his way to conquer Mexico if, instead of having the Tlascalans for his enemies, he could gain them as allies.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEFEAT OF XICOTENCATL

SEPTEMBER, 1519

All the next day the Spaniards stayed in camp, resting and getting into shape their armor and fighting apparatus. On the second day, however, as Cortes heard nothing of the enemy, he determined to send as envoys to Xicotencatl two of the Tlascalan chiefs he had captured in the late battle.

While they were gone, thinking his men had been idle long enough, he put himself at their head to explore and forage the country. If the people welcomed him, he treated them gently; if they were hostile, he burned their villages and took the inhabitants captive. The Spaniards came back to camp finally with several hundred captives and plenty of provisions.

On his arrival, Cortes found his two envoys had returned. They had come upon Xicotencatl encamped with an immense force about six miles beyond them; he had returned to the message this answer:

"The Spaniards may pass on as soon as they choose to the city of Tlascala; and when they reach it, their flesh will be hewn from their bodies, for sacrifice to the gods! If they prefer to remain in their own quarters, I will pay them a visit there the next day."

This ultimatum had behind it the authority of the great council, who were resolved to risk their fortunes in a pitched battle.

Although Cortes had hoped for a more peaceful reply, he was not daunted. His men shared his courage. They knew by the battle in the pass what fierceness and strength they had to encounter, and they knew what horror awaited any one taken captive. But firm in their crusaders' faith in the cross, they confessed and heard mass, and then lay down quietly to rest, confident that God would protect them in the coming danger. Father Olmedo spent the whole night in granting absolution and administering the offices of the church.

Cortes never believed in sitting still to wait for danger. If it were near, he went to meet it, knowing that strength is more often with the attacking party than with the attacked.

The 5th of September was a clear, bright day. Cortes reviewed his army, gave them advice and encouragement, and in close and unbroken ranks led them out of camp against the foe.

They had gone scarcely a mile when they came upon Xicotencatl's army spread six miles square before them, with the sun glinting on the soldiers' spear-tips of copper and obsidian and on the shields and helmets of the chiefs, while the wind tossed their gay plumes and lifted the banners that thronged the field. Xicotencatl's ensign was there—a white heron on a rock—and the golden eagle with outspread wings which was the standard of the republic of Tlascala.

All the great chiefs of the republic were armed to oppose Cortes. Besides their shields and helmets, they had arrow-proof cotton tunics quilted two inches thick to protect the thighs and shoulders. Over this they wore brilliant cloaks of feather work. Leather boots ornamented with gold covered their legs. Their helmets, made of wood and leather and ornamented with gold and precious stones, were in the shape of animals' heads with ferocious, grinning teeth. From the top of each helmet floated a gorgeous plume made from the feathers of the gay-colored tropical birds, its shape and color showing the family of the chief. Feather work also fringed their shields, which were made sometimes of wood covered with leather and sometimes of closely woven wicker work.

The common soldier had no armor; his naked body was painted in the colors of the chief under whom he served, so

one could tell his tribe at a glance, as one can tell a Highlander's clan by his tartan. The soldiers' weapons were slings, bows and arrows, javelins, and thick clubs set with sharp knives of obsidian. Their arrows were tipped with obsidian and copper and they could shoot them three at a time. With the javelin, too, they had special skill. It had sometimes fastened to it a leather strap which could draw the victim as well as the javelin back to the soldier who threw it.

It was such a field of brandished, gleaming spears and tossing plumes and banners that met the eyes of the Spaniards. At the same moment the frightful war cry rose so loud that it quite drowned the barbaric music that the savages were playing in anticipation of victory. Then the immense body of men shot such a forest of arrows that, as they passed, they darkened the sun like a cloud.

Cortes' men held their fire until they were near enough to have it effective. Then, drawn out in hastily formed lines, the Spaniards poured in their bullets, which mowed through the unprotected ranks of the savages as a scythe cuts through a field of grain. For a moment the Indians were horror-struck, but, recovering, with their fiercest war cry they poured down on the white men like an irresistible avalanche.

No mortal power could withstand that rush. The Spaniards' close order was broken, their lines were twisted, thrown into confusion and pushed back. Cortes called on them to close up and reform, but his voice was swallowed up in the clamor of the Indians. For a moment it looked as if the Christians' cause was lost.

But though the Spaniards could not hear their general's voice, they responded to his courage. The infantry finally stemmed the torrent of dark, rushing bodies, the guns got into action, Cortes and his horses charged again, and victory suddenly wheeled over to the banners of the Christians. In complete disorder once more the Indians fell back.

The Tlascalans formed to charge again and again, but each time with less energy. As they lost spirit, the very greatness of their numbers hampered them. Only those in front could fight; the vast number, pressing in the rear, added confusion and tumult and panic. While things were at their worst for the Tlascalans, a quarrel arose between Xicotencatl and a chief jealous of his power. The cacique drew all his men out of the battle; another chief followed, and another, until Xicotencatl was left with only half of his original force. Thus deserted, he drew off his remaining men and ended the battle. The Spaniards, too exhausted to follow, returned to their camp on the hill, grateful even in the face of discomfort and anxiety. They had escaped with little real loss from an encounter in which their enemies had outnumbered them fifteen to one, proving that skill and science in a few could overcome mere physical force and the weight of numbers.

The great council of Tlascala heard with dismay of Xicotencatl's defeat. They scarcely knew what to do next or what word to send to Cortes by the envoys. They did not want to grant him free passage through the country and they did not care to declare themselves his open enemy. In their uncertainty they called on their priests for advice.

The priests, like many other oracles, gave rather vague counsel. They said that the Spaniards, though not gods, were children of the sun, and that the sun blessed them. The Tlascalans could not prevail against them while the sun shone.

The younger Xicotencatl, his courage hot as ever, was burning once more to be at Cortes. He seized eagerly on the priests' oracle and interpreted it as meaning that a night attack on the white man would be successful. This was quite contrary to the usual Indian custom, but finally the council gave its doubtful permission to the plan, and set Xicotencatl at the head of ten thousand warriors.

The night chosen was a night of full moon. The sentinel whom Cortes had appointed was walking his rounds in the Spanish camp, looking off from his hilltop across the

maize fields which surrounded the camp. Through the lines of corn he saw something dark and shadowy moving.

Silently and quickly he alarmed the garrison, and as quickly and silently the troops sprang to arms, for they slept with their weapons beside them, and the horses were always saddled with the bridle hanging on the saddle bow.

Cortes as usual determined to attack before he was attacked and drew up his men ready for a sally when the enemy had reached the bottom of the hill on which the camp stood.

Stealthily the Indians crept up through the corn field toward the quiet camp. As soon as they began to climb the slope of the hill out rang the Spanish battle-cry, "St. Jago and at them," and down the slope poured the whole Spanish army. In the moonlight they looked to the Tlascalans like ogres and ghosts coming down upon them, and, without waiting to cross weapons, the Indians turned and fled. The Spaniards, pursuing, cut the foe to pieces.

The next day Cortes sent a new embassy to the council, taking advantage of their discomfiture over the new defeat. Marina instructed the Tlascalan envoys very carefully in their message. It was the same as before—a request to march peaceably through the Tlascalan country and a promise of friendship if they were undisturbed. But this time Cortes added the stern threat that if Tlascala went on acting as an enemy instead of a friend, he would destroy its cities and kill all its inhabitants. He sent the envoys away with a letter in one hand and an arrow in the other. Tlascala must choose peace or war.

When the embassy reached the capital and gave its message to the great council, Tlascala was quite ready for peace. Its armies had been defeated in the open field and in its secret maneuvers. There was nothing more to do against a general who had never been beaten. The council sent back word to Cortes that he might freely march through the country, for the Tlascalans were his friends. The envoys on their way back to Cortes were to stop at Xicotencatl's camp to tell him that, as peace was made, he must now disband his army and must supply the white men with provisions.

The envoys went to Xicotencatl's camp and gave him the message. He scorned it. He was too brave to fear the Spaniards and too loyal to his country to wish to be friends with strangers. Cortes had beaten him so far, but he would not give in without another attempt. Neither would he feed the white men. He coaxed the envoys to stay with him instead of taking to Cortes the council's message.

While Cortes was waiting for his envoys to come back, as usual he kept his men in motion. He was himself so ill that he could scarcely sit his horse, but that did not keep him from exploring at the head of his troops the rough country around his camp, although the air on this mountain top was cold and piercing. The men grumbled and some of the horses gave out. He sent those back to camp, but would not go home himself.

"We fight under the banner of the cross," he said. "God is stronger than nature."

Not Richard the Lion Hearted, leading his crusade to the Holy Land, was more sure he was fighting for God than was Cortes in Mexico.

Cortes carried back provisions, leaving behind him burned villages where the Indians had resisted him, and kindness where they had helped him. When he came back to camp, instead of rest he found new troubles. Some of the men, friends of Velasquez, remembering the safety and comfort of Cuba, tired of hardships and stirred by a few loud talkers, came to him demanding to be taken back to Villa Rica.

"Our sufferings," they said, "are too great to be endured. All have received one, most of us two or three wounds. More than fifty have perished in one way or another since leaving Vera Cruz. There is no beast of burden but leads a life preferable to ours. When the night comes, the former can rest from his labors; but we, fighting or watching, have no rest,

day nor night. As to conquering Mexico, the very thought of it is madness. If we have encountered such opposition from the petty republic of Tlascala, what may we not expect from the great Mexican empire? There is now a temporary suspension of hostilities. We should avail ourselves of it, to retrace our steps to Vera Cruz. It is true, the fleet there is destroyed; and by this act, unparalleled for rashness even in Roman annals, you have become responsible for the fate of the whole army. Still there is one vessel left. That could be dispatched to Cuba for re-enforcements and supplies; and when these arrive, we shall be enabled to resume operations with some prospect of success."

Cortes showed no disapproval or reproach at this speech. He listened to it and then frankly answered them.

"There is much truth in what you say," he replied. "The sufferings of the Spaniards have been great; greater than those recorded of any heroes in Greek or Roman story. So much the greater will be their glory. I have often been filled with admiration as I have seen my little host encircled by myriads of barbarians, and have felt that no people but Spaniards could have triumphed over such formidable odds. Nor could we, unless the arm of the Almighty had been over us. And we may reasonably look for His protection hereafter; for is it not in His cause we are fighting? We have encountered dangers and difficulties, it is true. But we did not come here expecting a life of idle dalliance and pleasure. Glory, as I told you at the outset, is to be won only by toil and danger. You should do me the justice to acknowledge that I have never shrunk from my share of both. If we have met with hardships, we have been everywhere victorious. Even now we are enjoying the fruits of this in the plenty which reigns in the camp. We shall soon see the Tlascalans, humbled by their late reverses, suing for peace on any terms. To go back now is impossible; the very stones would rise up against us; the Tlascalans would hunt us in triumph down to the water's edge. And how would the Mexicans exult at this miserable issue of our vainglorious vaunts! Our former friends would become our enemies; and the Totonacs, to avert the vengeance of the Aztecs, from which the Spaniards could no longer shield them, would join in the general cry. There is no alternative, then, but to go forward in our career. Silence your pusillanimous scruples! Instead of turning your eyes toward Cuba, fix them on Mexico, the great object of our enterprise."

The soldiers listened, but the cowardly ones still grumbled, till Cortes cut in with an old proverb, "It is better to die with honor than to live disgraced." The braver ones applauded this and their general. They declared they were ready to follow him anywhere he led. So, finding they had no support, the discontented soldiers slunk back to their quarters, grumbling at Cortes and Xicotencatl and their own companions.

Cortes let them go and sat down with his own thoughts for a while. There was enough to discourage any but a brave man; illness for himself; a hard climate; half-hearted followers; scarcity of provisions; uncertainty as to how the King of Spain would regard his conduct; a fierce foe around him, and Mexico still far away. But Cortes accepted it all with his head held high. He had come to conquer Mexico, and only as the conqueror of Mexico would he go home.

The next day a body of Tlascalans, under flags of truce, came to camp, bringing provisions and some small presents. They said Xicotencatl sent the gifts as a proof that he was tired of war and that he would soon come himself to arrange peace.

Everyone but Marina greeted these messengers with joy. She suspected them and, after watching them, told Cortes she was sure they were spies. Cortes at once had them examined one by one, and found out that Xicotencatl had sent them to keep the Christians unsuspicious and to find out about their camp, while he raised another army of attack.

Cortes, indignant at this act of treachery on the part of Xicotencatl, determined to make an example of the spies. He cut off their hands and sent them back to Xicotencatl with the message, "The Tlascalans may come by day or by night, but they will find the Spaniards ready for them."

Mr. Prescott says of this act of Cortes, "The punishment inflicted by Cortes may well shock the reader by its brutality. A higher civilization rejects such punishments as degrading to humanity." We must again, therefore, judge Cortes by sixteenth century standards and not by those of the twentieth, when mankind would indeed rise in indignation against such barbarity.

The return of the mutilated spies convinced Xicotencatl that it was useless to stand against the white men longer. His soldiers refused to fight against an enemy who could understand their plans before they were worked out. Xicotencatl sent on to Cortes the four Tlascalan envoys whom he had stopped on their way from the great council, and soon after appeared himself with a large body of followers painted in his livery of white and yellow. The Spaniards were beside themselves with joy at the sight and Cortes had hard work to calm them down to the cool indifference it was politic to show to the Tlascalans.

Xicotencatl, attended by an incense bearer, came with a firm, fearless step into Cortes' presence. He was tall and muscular, and though only thirty-five, he had gone through so many hardships that he looked like a man of greater age.

He made no attempt to excuse himself or to throw blame on the council.

"The responsibility of the war is mine alone," he said. "I have considered the white men as allies of Mexico and enemies of Tlascala, and as such I have faced them. Now I am beaten. I come to make friends with the Spaniards, and you will find the Tlascalans as faithful in peace as they have been fierce in war. We are your friends. Respect the liberties of the republic."

Cortes admired the courage and firmness of Xicotencatl while he rebuked his persistence in hostility.

"I am willing to forget the past and receive the Tlascalans as vassals to my King, Charles V," he said, "so long as you remain true."

Joy was in his heart as he spoke, for now that the Tlascalans were no longer his enemies, there was nothing to prevent their becoming his allies.

Xicotencatl ordered his slaves to present the gifts they had in their keeping.

"They are of little value," he said with a smile, "for the Tlascalans are poor. We have little gold, no cotton, no salt. The Aztec Emperor has left us nothing but our freedom and our arms. I offer this gift only as a token of my goodwill."

"And as such I receive it," answered Cortes, "and, coming from the Tlascalans, set more value on it than I should from any other source though it were a house full of gold."

Thus peace was made between Tlascala and the Spaniards, and it was faithfully kept. But Xicotencatl in his heart loved the white men no better than be had before.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MASSACRE OF CHOLULA

OCTOBER, 1519

While the Tlascalans were still in the Spanish camp, five Aztec nobles, accompanied by two hundred slaves, came as envoys from Montezuma to Cortes. The Emperor had watched eagerly every step of the white men from Villa Rica, up the Cordilleras, and over the broad tableland on the mountain's summit. He had rejoiced, with his warrior fierceness, when he saw Cortes choose the way to Tlascala, for he was sure no human beings could cross alive a territory he had been unable to subdue. But when tidings came that Cortes had conquered Xicotencatl and put Tlascala under his feet, Montezuma, overwhelmed by his priestly superstition, sure once more that the newcomers were gods and not mortals, went back to his temporizing policy of beckoning the Spaniards with one hand by rich gifts while, with the other hand, he held them back from his country.

The new embassy brought to Cortes three thousand ounces of gold, hundreds of feather work mantles and embroidered cotton dresses, along with Montezuma's polite congratulations on the Spaniards' victory and his polite regret that he could not receive the general in Tenochtitlan.

Cortes, also, was courteous, but he would not give up his thought of visiting Montezuma. The envoys then went a step further and offered to pay tribute to the King of Spain if Cortes would give up his visit to Mexico.

Elated by the thought that he could inspire terror in a monarch whom every nation in Anahuac regarded with awe, Cortes was more than ever resolved to press on to the capital.

"I should offend my own king," he said, "if I should return to Spain without visiting so powerful a monarch as Montezuma."

Two of the envoys went back to Tenochtitlan with Cortes' message; the others Cortes kept with him in camp that they might see how high he stood with the Tlascalans. He had had an urgent invitation to take up his quarters in the city of Tlascala, but until his own health was restored and his soldiers rested, Cortes did not care to establish himself in the capital of a nation who had so lately been his enemies.

The Tlascalans now, however, were as eager to help Cortes as they had been before to hinder him. They were more than ready to be his allies in an expedition that was to humble in the dust their bitterest foe. Finally some of the aged rulers of the republic grew so impatient at Cortes' long delay that they arrived at the Spanish camp with five hundred porters ready to drag the cannon and carry the baggage of the white men to the city of Tlascala.

At that, Cortes saw that he must move his quarters into the city. Father Olmedo said mass, camp was struck, and Cortes and his army set out to march the twenty miles that separated their camp from the capital. It was a triumphal procession; all the towns on the way entertained them, and as they came near the capital men and women came out to meet them with wreaths and bunches of flowers, which they hung about the Spaniards and their horses. Indian priests were there, too, in white robes and long, matted hair, burning incense as they came. With this escort the Spaniards entered the city of Tlascala on the 23rd of September, 1519.

Once inside, the crowd was so great that the police could scarcely make a passage for the strangers. Many of the inhabitants went up to their low, flat housetops and from there looked down on the streets festooned with roses and honeysuckle and arched with green boughs. The native bands played and the crowd shrieked its welcome in a way that

would have terrified the Spaniards if Marina had not assured them that it all meant peace.

The old chief, Xicotencatl, father of the warrior Xicotencatl, and one of the four rulers of the republic, received Cortes at his palace and, as he was nearly blind, passed his hand over Cortes' face to discover what he looked like. In a large hall in the palace a banquet was served, and afterward the Spaniards were assigned their quarters in the square of the chief temple. The Aztec envoys had rooms next to Cortes so that they might be safe.

For the next days the four rulers of Tlascala gave themselves up to entertaining their guests. Each one, in his own section of the city, banqueted Cortes and his captains. Through all the festivities the general kept up the strict discipline of the camp and such a constant watchfulness that the Tlascalan officers were almost offended.

To show their desire for a close alliance, the Tlascalans offered some of their women as wives for the Spaniards, in the same way that the Cempoallans had done. Cortes replied, as he had at Cempoalla, that Spaniards could marry only Christians, and urged them to worship the true God. But, though they were willing to worship the white men's God, they refused to give up their own. When Cortes would have pressed the matter, Father Olmedo once more warned Cortes not to stir up in Tlascala the same tempest that he had made in Cempoalla, but to leave the Tlascalans in possession of their own religion. Cortes reluctantly followed his advice and contented himself with setting free the captives that the Tlascalans were keeping for sacrifice.

The Tlascalan chiefs allowed the Spaniards to set up a cross in their quarters and to celebrate mass. The Indians as well as the white men came daily to hear it. With this compromise the religious difficulties were settled, and the Spaniards married the Tlascalan women. Alvarado married the daughter of Xicotencatl, a princess of high rank, and became a great favorite with the Tlascalans. They liked his yellow hair and fair skin and called him "Tonatiuh," the Sun. Marina they called "Malinche," and as she was always with Cortes on public occasions they called him also "Malinche." So both Cortes and Alvarado received in Tlascala nicknames which stuck to them through all the expedition.

While the Spaniards were feasting in Tlascala, the two Aztec envoys returned. Montezuma this time invited the Spaniards to come to Tenochtitlan but, at the same time, asked them to break with Tlascala, Mexico's mortal enemy, and to go to Cholula, which was a vassal to Montezuma, where the white men would be properly received and entertained.

The Tlascalans warned Cortes not to trust Montezuma nor the Cholulans, who, cowards in fight, were in peace treacherous and crafty. They said that Cholula, but twenty miles distant, was almost the only nation who had not sent an embassy to Cortes. They warned him, too, against Montezuma's smooth words.

"Better to march against him as foe than to enter his capital as friend," they asserted. "His power is boundless. Once shut up in Tenochtitlan with no communication with the coast, you will be at the mercy of the Aztecs."

While Cortes was considering the matter one of the Tezcucan princes arrived. Nezahualpilli had left five sons. Cacama, the oldest, had been given his father's throne by Montezuma. The second son, Ixtlilzochitl, had received only a small share of Tezcuco. It was Ixtlilzochitl, angry at Montezuma and at Cacama, who now arrived to offer his services to Cortes and to ask help in gaining Tezcuco. Cortes gave him a place among his company, but would not promise to put him on the throne.

And then came an embassy from Cholula, full of professions of goodwill, and inviting the Spaniards to their city. The Tlascalans pointed out that the ambassadors were not nobles, and that in sending men of inferior rank, Cholula was insulting Spain. Cortes at once informed Cholula that he

would listen to no words of peace unless they came through Cholula's chief men.

The Cholulans, not eager to waken Cortes' anger, sent a new embassy of nobles, who, after excusing their late-coming on the ground that they had been afraid of Tlascala, humbly asked Cortes to visit their city. Cortes agreed.

The Tlascalans more than ever tried to persuade him not to go to Cholula. They assured him again of the falseness of the people and told him that not only was the city putting itself into a position of defense, but that a large Aztec force was camped near it, and that Montezuma was only asking the Spaniards to Cholula that he might there trap and kill them.

The news disturbed Cortes, but he had made up his mind to go and nothing could stop him. He knew that if he showed any signs of fear, it would at once encourage his enemies at the same time that it discouraged his allies and his own men. He consulted with his chief officers and decided on an immediate march to Cholula.

The Spaniards had been six weeks in Tlascala; during the last three, entertained as honored guests in the capital city. When the time came for their departure, thousands of Tlascalans were ready to march with the army brave enough to force Montezuma in his own stronghold. Cortes, however, not wishing a body of men so large as to prove cumbersome, chose only six thousand warriors to accompany him.

The day came when the Spaniards and their new allies, with many Godspeeds, set out for Cholula. Tradition says that they had scarcely left the city of Tlascala when a thin, transparent cloud settled down over the cross the Christians had erected in the temple courtyard and wrapped the cross in soft folds, which shone all through the night with a clear light, thus proving to the Indians the truth of the white men's religion.

It did not take the Spaniards long to cover the distance between Tlascala and Cholula. As they approached the city, the caciques came out to welcome the white men, but they refused to receive their enemies, the Tlascalans, within their walls. The allies, therefore, after many warnings to Cortes, encamped outside. Cortes marched into Cholula with only his Spaniards and the Cempoallan Indians.

Cholula, we remember, was one of the oldest cities of Anahuac and the place, according to tradition, where the god, Quetzalcoatl, had passed twenty years of teaching on his way to the coast to leave Anahuac. In his honor a wonderful temple had been built. Its base covered forty-four acres and its height was a hundred and twenty-seven feet. It held a marvelous idol adorned with gold and jewels and feathers. The Cholulans believed that if a foe attacked the temple and pulled down the walls, the god would pour forth a flood of water to overwhelm them. The temple was the Mecca of Anahuac.

The Spaniards were hospitably received in the city, and were struck with the wide, clean streets and solid houses. As in Tlascala, the guests were feasted before they were assigned quarters.

For a few days the friendly intercourse went on. Then an embassy from Montezuma changed it all. The envoys told Cortes that his approach to Tenochtitlan was very displeasing to Montezuma, and departed. At once the Cholulans lost their friendliness.

Cortes knew this meant danger. The Cempoallans, who had been wandering through the city, told him, moreover, that many of the streets were barricaded and that the flat housetops were piled with heaps of stones ready for an assault. He heard, too, that a large sacrifice had been ordered to induce the god to bless the Cholulans in their coming plans, and that many of the citizens had sent their wives and children out of the city.

These rumors of danger were turned by Marina into certainties. The wife of a Cholulan cacique had become very fond of Marina and had seen a good deal of her. She urged Marina to come to her house in order to be safe from the

danger that threatened the Spaniards. Montezuma had twenty thousand men in the neighborhood, she said, and all Cholula was in arms, ready to murder the Spaniards as they marched out of the city. The streets had been barricaded and pits dug to throw the Spanish troops into confusion and make them an easy prey to their murderers. Some of the captured Spaniards were to be sacrificed in Cholula and the rest led in fetters to Montezuma.

Marina listened to the story, and at the first possible chance told Cortes. He saw in what a dangerous situation he was. To fight or to fly seemed equally hopeless in a city of enemies, with barricaded streets and fortified houses on every side.

His first step was to induce two priests to visit him. From them, by means of gifts—the gold sent him by Montezuma thus buying Montezuma's secrets—he learned that all Marina had said was true. The superstitious Emperor, when he thought the Spaniards were gods, had told Cholula to treat them kindly. Later, when another oracle had declared that Cholula would be the white men's grave, Montezuma had changed his policy, and sent word to Cholula that the Spaniards must not live. The leather straps to bind the captives were ready at hand, so sure were the Indians that the Spaniards could not escape them.

Cortes told the priests that he meant to leave the city the following morning, and asked to have the chief caciques visit him, and also that two thousand Cholulans might be sent him to carry his goods. Then he dismissed them.

At once he sent word to the Tlascalans outside the city to be ready to come to his aid at the first musket shot. He warned them to bind green wreaths on their heads to mark them from the Cholulans.

When night came, the Spaniards slept on their arms. Cortes, after posting many sentinels, listened anxiously hour after hour for any noise that should be a warning of danger, but the only sounds that came were the trumpets of the Indian priests proclaiming from the temple the watches of the night.

At the earliest dawn Cortes drew his men up against the walls of the courtyard, leaving the center clear, and trained his guns on the entrances to the court. His arrangements were scarcely made when the chiefs arrived with the porters for which Cortes had asked. Cortes received them all in the center of the courtyard. Bluntly he told the chiefs that he had discovered their treachery and was about to punish it.

The Cholulans were thunderstruck at this wonderful man who could even read their thoughts. They did not deny their guilt, but they threw the blame on Montezuma.

"That," Cortes said, "is no excuse for treachery."

He stepped back and gave his signal. The Spanish infantry under the walls leveled their guns at the host of Cholulans in the courtyard. Unarmed and taken by surprise, they were helpless and perished miserably.

The Cholulans from the city tried to force their way in to help their comrades, but the Spanish guns protected the avenues of approach. In the meantime the Tlascalans outside the walls, hearing the artillery, had rushed into the city, and had fallen on the rear of the enemy, putting them to utter rout. The Cholulans, running wildly to and fro, tried to invoke the help of their god by pulling down the temple wall, but instead of the flood of water they looked for to drown their foes, they brought down on themselves only a cloud of dust.

Then they gave up. When even their gods failed them, of what use was it to stand against the wonderful fair-skinned men who came from a far country to destroy them!

CHAPTER XIV

THE MARCH TO MEXICO

NOVEMBER, 1519

While most of the Cholulans fled, the Spaniards burned the temple with the faithless god within it, and fired and sacked the town. The destruction lasted till Cortes was moved by the entreaties of the Cholulan chiefs and the Aztec envoys to put a stop to it. By that time the riches of the city were largely in the hands of Cortes' men.

Cortes sent two of the caciques to their countrymen with promises of pardon if the Cholulans were ready to swear allegiance to the King of Spain and to hold to it.

Gradually in the days that followed the Cholulans regained confidence and returned to their homes, which Cortes helped them rebuild. He also opened the market again. People from the country came into the city to take the places of the men who were slain, and the Massacre of Cholula was at an end.

It was a cruel deed, but when we judge it, we must judge it by the ideas of the age in which it was committed. We know now that no nation has the right to conquer another nation and seize its lands and riches. In Cortes' time, as we have seen, they believed that God had given them these heathen lands to conquer. Once started on that conquest with all its dangers, they must preserve their own lives and achieve their purpose. The cruel deeds that stood in their way seemed to them only part of their work. In this case it was to Cortes either the lives of his enemies or of his own men, and he chose the former. The treachery that the Cholulans had meant to use with Cortes came back on their own head.

The effect on Anahuac of this terrible deed was tremendous. The "fair gods," who had landed from their white-winged boats, with their strange, plunging beasts and their weapons that breathed fire, had conquered the Tabascans, the Cempoallans, and even the unconquerable Tlascalans. They had proved how they could meet an honest foe, now they showed how they could punish a false friend. All Anahuac trembled as they wondered whose turn would come next.

Especially did fear come to Montezuma in his palace in Tenochtitlan. He had in his heart believed all the time that the gods had sent "Malinche," as they called Cortes, to overthrow the Aztec Empire. Every once in a while his warrior spirit, as we have seen, had risen to overthrow this superstitious fear, but back it had always come. Now when he saw Tlascala, his only strong enemy, joined in friendship with Malinche, and Cholula, one of his strongest vassals, thrown to the ground by the same hand, he felt that all hope was over. His despair grew as every day his fast-running postmen, with their picture-newspapers, brought word to Tenochtitlan that some new tribe had sworn allegiance to the white men and were taking to them in Cholula rich presents of gold and slaves.

Montezuma made great sacrifices to his gods and implored their aid, but, when they gave him no hope, there was nothing left but to send another embassy and more rich presents to Cortes.

The envoys assured Cortes that Montezuma knew nothing of the Cholulan uprising, and that it was merely by accident that an Aztec force had been at Cholula at that time. Cortes accepted the presents, but took the Indian Emperor's statements with a grain of salt.

Before Cortes left Cholula, he tried to make the natives Christians. But Cholula had been too long the sacred city of Anahuac to be willing now to change her religion. Cortes again was ready to press the point, but was prevented by the wise and kindly priest, Father Olmedo. All that the general could do was to persuade the Indian priests to break open the

wicker cages and free the captives who were confined in them waiting to be sacrificed, and to set up in that part of the great temple which had escaped fire a huge stone cross, which spread its arms above the city. One good deed Cortes accomplished before he left Cholula; he reconciled that city with Tlascala. They had been foes for centuries; from this time on they were friends. Cortes felt that when he marched out of the city, instead of leaving an enemy in his rear, he should have behind him a depot on which he could depend.

As he was ready to resume his march, his Cempoallan allies asked leave to return home. They could not easily get over their ancient fear of Aztec greatness, and were afraid to put themselves into Montezuma's power by entering the city of Tenochtitlan, even in the company of Malinche. Cortes was sorry to lose them, for they had been faithful helpers, but he had no reason for denying their request. He gave them their share of treasure, and a letter to Escalante in Villa Rica, and let them go. In his letter to Escalante he told of his own successes; instructed him to be good to the Totonacs, whose friendship to the Spaniards had exposed them to Montezuma's revenge; and warned him always to be on the outlook for interference from Cuba. Among all the dangers that were around him, Cortes felt that until he was sure of the approval of Charles V, the greatest was that which threatened from Velasquez. And events proved that he was right.

It was November when Cortes with his forces, white and red, started on his final march to the Valley of Mexico and Mexico City. As he went he was met continually by envoys bearing presents from different tribes, all anxious for help against the oppression of Montezuma.

They cautioned Cortes against entering the city of Tenochtitlan and putting himself into Montezuma's power. They said the Emperor had blocked the main road so as to catch the white men in the narrow mountain passes through which they would be forced to travel.

Cortes paid good heed to all warnings, but continued his march. He was the inspiration of the entire army; always gay, fearing nothing, he rode sometimes in the van and sometimes in the rear, cheering his men and rousing them when they grew despondent. By day he kept their courage up and at night he watched over them. He never slept till he had made the rounds of the camp to see that every sentinel was at his post. One night he came so near a sentinel without speaking that the man leveled his cross-bow, and if Cortes had not hastily called out the password he would have been shot.

When the Spaniards reached the fork of the road, they found the main road blocked with huge stones and trees, as the Indians had said.

"Why is this road cut off?" Cortes asked the Aztec envoys sternly.

"It is done by the Emperor's orders," the envoys answered glibly, "to prevent Malinche taking a path which further on he would find impassable for his horse."

"Is it the most direct road to Tenochtitlan?" Cortes inquired.

"It is," replied the envoys.

"That is enough for a Spaniard," Cortes said, and commanded his Indian allies to clear away the trees and the boulders.

Cortes, in his own mind, added this incident to the long list of happenings which convinced him of Montezuma's treachery. But still, when the road was cleared, he went on over the mountains to Tenochtitlan. As the army climbed out of the temperate region into the higher hills, the piercing winds from the frozen peaks cut through even the soldiers' quilted doublets and made the men shiver as they marched. They camped for the night in the stone buildings which were the resting places for Montezuma's postmen on their runs from the

coast to Tenochtitlan. Thus unknowingly the Emperor had provided refuge for his enemies.

The next day the path of the army lay between the two biggest mountains in North America. Popocatepetl towered seventeen thousand eight hundred and fifty-two feet above sea level on their left hand, and on their right was Iztaccihuatl—the White Woman—almost as high. To the Indians the volcano of Popocatepetl was a god and the White Woman was his wife. They held the mountains in great awe and were sure no one could climb Popocatepetl and live. But the Spaniards proved otherwise. While the army halted for rest, Ordaz and nine men forced their way through the dense forests at the foot of the volcano, climbed up thirteen hundred feet to the line of black lava, over the plains of perpetual snow where the air was so rare they could scarcely breathe, and on to the crater itself, where the cinders and smoke and sparks pouring out on them finally drove them back. The Indians looked with awe at these wonderful beings who, for a pastime, undertook such difficult and dangerous feats.

Refreshed by its rest, the army set out early the next day and, leaving the piercing cold of the peaks behind them, dropped down into the fertile Valley of Mexico.

They came on the sight of it suddenly; lakes, hills, woods, green meadows, yellow fields of corn, shining cities, spread out before them like a panorama, and in the midst, rising out of the largest lake, lay the city of Tenochtitlan—with its gleaming canals, its white buildings, and its huge temple—the "Venice of the Aztecs." Beyond, across the water, a bright speck, shone the city of Tezcuco. The sight was to the Spaniards, Mr. Prescott says, "like the, spectacle which greeted the eyes of Moses from the summit of Pisgah, and in the warm glow of their feelings, they cried out, 'It is the promised land!'"

All this beauty and civilization brought fear to the more cowardly among Cortes' men, as they thought of the hard fighting that lay ahead before they could take possession of Mexico. To Cortes, however, with the wonderful sight came only inspiration and fresh courage. He was able to give some of his own energy and confidence to his faltering troops until, with their usual even stride, the veterans once more took up their march down the mountainside toward the City of Mexico, ready to dare again the great deeds they had done at Tabasco and Tlascala.

Here, too, even at Mexico's gates, Cortes heard from the natives that thronged out from the villages to greet the white men only complaints of Montezuma's oppression. He met, a little further on, one of Montezuma's frequent embassies bearing not only gifts but Montezuma's promise that he would give fifty pounds of gold to each Spanish captain, two hundred pounds to Malinche himself, and pay a yearly tribute to the King of Spain, if the white men would not come to Mexico.

Cortes, ever courteous, sent back word that it would be much easier to arrange these matters in a personal interview—and kept on with his march.

CHAPTER XV

CORTES MEETS MONTEZUMA

NOVEMBER, 1519

When the Aztec ambassadors brought to Tenochtitlan the news that Cortes, heedless of Montezuma's wishes, was already over the mountains, and moving across the plains to Mexico, the Emperor, beside himself with terror and anxiety, shut himself up and refused to eat, finally convinced that the Spaniards were indeed sent by the gods to overturn the might of his mountain empire, which had been so secure until these strange white beings had invaded his land.

Despondently Montezuma summoned his nobles in council. Cacama, the King of Tezcuco, not knowing how he was to hate the white men later, advised the Emperor to receive Cortes courteously as ambassador of a foreign prince. Cuitlahua, the Emperor's brother, urged him to gather his forces and drive back the white men before they set foot in the kingdom. Hopelessly Montezuma disregarded both suggestions.

"Of what avail is resistance when the gods have declared against us?" he answered, and prepared to send one more embassy to Cortes almost at his gates.

Cacama himself headed this embassy which was to invite Cortes to Tenochtitlan. He was a young fellow, only twenty-five, strong and straight. He traveled in a litter decorated with gold and gems and covered with green plumes.

Cacama found Cortes in the town of Ajotzinco on Lake Chalco, where the natives were entertaining the Spaniards most hospitably. He told Cortes that he came from Montezuma to bid him welcome to Tenochtitlan, and, as proof of Montezuma's friendship, Cacama gave Cortes three large pearls. Cortes in return gave the Indian prince a chain of cut glass, which was as valuable to him as were the pearls to the Spanish general. Then with many assurances of friendship, Cacama went back to Tenochtitlan and Cortes resumed his march.

The way lay along the southern shore of Lake Chalco, through beautiful woods, cultivated fields and orchards of fruit trees unknown to the white men. Finally they came to a great stone dyke five miles long, which separated the fresh water of Lake Chalco from an arm of the salt lake of Tezcuco. In its narrowest part, the dyke was only a lance's length in breadth, but in its widest, eight horsemen could ride abreast. The white men crossed it with eyes open for all the strange sights about them: the floating gardens, rising and falling with the swell of the lake; the canoes filled with Indians, darting hither and thither like swallows; the many small towns built out on piles far into the lake and looking, at a distance, "like companies of wild swans riding quietly on the waves." Halfway across the dyke, they found a good-sized town, with buildings which stirred great admiration in the Spaniards. They stopped for refreshment and here, so near to the imperial city, Cortes heard no more of Montezuma's cruelty and oppression, only of his power and riches.

After this brief rest, the white men went on. Their march was made difficult by the swarms of curious Indians who, finding the canoes too far away for a complete view of the strangers, climbed up on the causeway to gaze at them. Cortes had to clear a way through the crowd for his troops before they could leave the causeway and reach Iztapalapan, the city of Montezuma's brother, Cuitlahua, on the shores of Lake Tezcuco.

Cuitlahua had invited many neighboring caciques to help him receive Cortes with proper ceremony. The Spaniards were welcomed with gifts and then invited to a banquet in Cuitlahua's palace, before they were assigned their quarters.

Cortes greatly admired Cuitlahua's city, especially the prince's big garden. It was laid out regularly and watered in every corner by canals which connected it with Lake Tezcuco. The garden was filled with shrubs and vines and flowers delightful to smell and see. It had fruit trees, too; in one corner was an aviary of brilliant song birds; in another a huge stone reservoir stocked with fish. The reservoir was almost five thousand feet in circumference and the stone walk around it was broad enough for four persons to walk abreast.

"In the city of Iztapalapan, Cortes took up his quarters for the night. We may imagine what a crowd of ideas must have pressed on the mind of the conqueror, as, surrounded by these evidences of civilization, he prepared with his handful of followers to enter the capital of a monarch, who, as he had abundant reason to know, regarded him with distrust and aversion. This capital was now but a few miles distant, distinctly visible from Iztapalapan. And as its long lines of glittering edifices, struck by the rays of the evening sun, trembled on the dark-blue waters of the lake, it looked like a thing of fairy creation, rather than the work of mortal hands. Into this city of enchantment Cortes prepared to make his entry on the following morning." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

It was on the 8th day of November, 1519, that Cortes started on the march that was to take him into the City of Mexico. The general with his cavalry was in the van; behind him came his few hundreds of infantry—weather-beaten and disciplined by the summer's campaign; next, was the baggage; while the six thousand Tlascalans closed the rear. The little army marched back along the southern shore of Lake Tezcuco until it reached the great causeway of Iztapalapan, which ran across the lake straight north to the very heart of the City of Mexico. The dyke was broad enough for ten horsemen to ride abreast; Cortes and his army, as they advanced, still wondered at the strange, beautiful sights about them. Less than two miles from the capital the dyke was cut by a shorter dyke running in from the southwest, and at the point where this dyke joined the main causeway of Iztapalapan there was built across the causeway a stone fortification twelve feet high, which could be entered only by a battlemented gateway. It was called the Fort of Xoloc.

At Xoloc Cortes was met by a body of Aztec nobles who, in their holiday dress, came to welcome him. As each noble separately had to greet Cortes, and as there were several hundred of them, the troops had time to get acquainted with the Fort of Xoloc. Later they grew to know it even better.

After the ceremony was over, the army went on along the dyke of Iztapalapan, and presently came to a canal cut through the causeway and spanned by a wooden drawbridge. To Cortes, as he walked over it, must have come the question whether getting out of Mexico would be as easy as getting in.

There was not much time to wonder about the future, however, for now Montezuma, the great Emperor, lord of Anahuac, was coming forth to meet Cortes. In the midst of a throng of great men, preceded by three officers of state bearing golden wands, came Montezuma's royal litter shining with gold, shaded by a canopy of brilliant feather work, adorned with jewels and fringed with silver, and borne on the shoulders of his nobles who, barefooted, walked with humble, downcast eyes.

The royal train halted and Montezuma descended. His attendants spread down a cotton carpet, that his royal feet might not touch the earth, and over this, supported on one side by Cuitlahua and on the other by Cacama, Montezuma came to greet Cortes.

He was about forty years old—six years older than Cortes. His dark, melancholy eyes gave a serious expression to his copper-colored face, with its straight hair and thin beard. He moved with the dignity of a great prince, and as he passed through the lines of his own subjects, they cast their eyes to the ground in humility.

As Montezuma approached, Cortes threw his reins to a page and dismounted, and with a few of his chief men went forward to meet the Emperor. The two great men looked at each other with a keen interest.

Montezuma very graciously welcomed Cortes to his city, and Cortes answered with great respect, adding many thanks for all the Mexican's gifts. He hung on Montezuma's neck a cut glass chain and, except for the interference of two shocked nobles, he would have embraced him.

Montezuma appointed Cuitlahua to escort the Spaniards to their quarters in the city, while he himself entered his litter and was carried back to his palace, followed by the Spaniards with colors flying and music playing. Thus Cortes triumphantly entered Tenochtitlan.

The Spaniards looked around them with the keen interest of people in a place of which they have heard much and see now for the first time. As they had entered by the southern causeway, they were marching through the broad avenue which led from the Iztapalapan dyke straight to the great temple in the center of the city. The houses on this street belonged to the nobles and were built of red stone with broad, flat roofs defended by the parapet which turned every housetop into a fort. Wonderful gardens surrounded the houses and sometimes were laid out on the roofs.

The streets were crowded with people, as eager to see the Christians as the Christians were to see them. The Indians were awed by the white faces and the glittering armor and the horses, but they had only anger for the Tlascalans. The white men might be gods, but the Tlascalans were the Aztecs' bitterest enemies, and it was not pleasant to Aztec eyes to see their foes walking confidently through the Mexican city.

The procession, crossing many bridges where the canals cut the avenue at various places, came at length to the heart of the City of Mexico, the great square, from which ran the four broad avenues. North, south and west these avenues ran to the three causeways that joined the city to the neighboring mainland. The avenue running east stopped at the lake front. In the center of the square stood the great temple in its courtyard surrounded by a high wall cut by a gate opposite each avenue. The temple itself was, excepting the sacred temple of Cholula, the largest and most important of the land.

Opposite the temple, on the southwest corner of the great square, was the royal palace which Montezuma had erected. On the west side was the old royal palace built fifty years before by Montezuma's father, Axayacatl. This palace was given to the Spanish army for their quarters.

Montezuma was in the courtyard of the palace of Axayacatl waiting to receive Cortes and his train. He took from a vase of flowers a chain made of shells ornamented with gold and joined by links of gold, and as he threw it over Cortes' head, he said, "This palace belongs to you, Malinche, and to your brethren. Rest after your fatigue, for you have much need to do so, and in a little while I will visit you again."'

Then he and his followers withdrew, and the white men were left with their allies in their palace in Tenochtitlan. Through much danger and untold hardships, in the face of Montezuma's commands, they had reached his city, and he had housed them in a royal palace. The Spaniards must have wondered that night if the thing were real or if they were in a dream.

CHAPTER XVI

MALINCHE IN MEXICO

NOVEMBER, 1519

As soon as Cortes was left alone, he went to work with his usual care to examine his quarters. The palace, like most of the Mexican houses, except for a tower in the center, had only one story, but it spread over enough ground to shelter all the Spaniards, and there was room for the Indian allies in the courtyard enclosed by a thick stone wall. The rooms were hung with gay-colored cotton draperies and the floors covered with rush mats. To sit on, there were low carved stools; and to lie on, there were mats woven thickly from palm leaves. The bedcovers were made of cotton.

After Cortes had inspected his quarters, he assigned his soldiers their places, and enforced strict military discipline. The wall around the courtyard was turreted at intervals, and in each tower he posted sentinels, while he mounted his guns to command the approaches from the square into the courtyard. No soldier was allowed to leave the palace grounds without permission, for Cortes knew how easily there might start between a Mexican and a Spaniard a brawl that would in a minute undo all the efforts he had made to reach Tenochtitlan as a friend.

The camp placed, the soldiers sat down to the dinner that Montezuma's servants had prepared for them. After they had finished dinner and their afternoon nap, Montezuma was again announced. Cortes received him with great respect. He and the Emperor sat, while their trains stood by, and Marina acted as interpreter between the Spanish general and the Mexican Emperor.

"Why did Malinche come to Mexico?" Montezuma asked.

"To see a monarch so distinguished as Montezuma," Cortes answered, "and to declare to him the Christian faith."

"Are you kinsman of your Emperor?" asked Montezuma.

"We Spaniards are kin to one another," Cortes answered, "and subjects of one great monarch, who, indeed, holds us in peculiar estimation."

The two talked for a long time, and Montezuma showed that he knew all that Malinche had done from the day he set foot in Anahuac. Nothing had been left out of the picture newspapers. When the interview was over, Montezuma was presented to the chief Spanish generals and learned their names. Then he ordered his slaves to bring forward the presents he had ready for his guests: a cotton suit for every man, including the Indian allies; and gold chains for the generals. Then, with great ceremony, the Emperor withdrew.

After dark that night the Spaniards celebrated their arrival in Tenochtitlan by firing salutes of artillery, which added the last touch of awe to Aztec hearts. The thunder of the gods and the belching sulphurous smoke of their feared Popocatepetl seemed to be at the command of the white men.

The next day Cortes asked and received permission to return Montezuma's visit. The Emperor even sent his own servants as a personal escort to Malinche. Cortes dressed in his most striking clothes, and took with him Alvarado, Sandoval and Ordaz and a few common soldiers.

Montezuma's palace was a huge wandering structure of red brick, much like the palace of Axayacatl, though it was ornamented with marble, and over the main entrance were carved Montezuma's arms—an eagle with an ocelot in his talons.

As the Spaniards passed in through the entrance, they came first into the court, where fountains were playing and Aztec nobles loitering about, and then through the apartments to the hall of audience. At the door of this room the Mexicans took off their sandals and covered their rich clothes with coarse, gray cloaks before they could usher in Cortes.

Montezuma was sitting at the far end of the long room with a few favorite caciques. He received Cortes kindly, and the two talked together of unimportant matters, until Cortes suddenly plunged into the subject nearest to his heart—the conversion of the Aztecs to the Christian religion.

Very earnestly he preached the power of his God, and tried to show Montezuma that, in offering their cruel human sacrifices, the Mexicans were only worshiping Satan by another name. Montezuma listened politely and probably understood but little of what Malinche said. The little he understood, he did not care about. Educated as a priest of the Mexican war god, to him there was nothing repulsive in offering to Huitzilopotchli his fellow-creatures as sacrifices and afterwards eating their flesh. Montezuma, as Emperor, was head of both church and state in Anahuac, and he was not ready to change either policy to suit the white men.

"I know," he said when Cortes had finished, "that you hold this discourse wherever you go. I doubt not that your God is, as you say, a good being. My gods, also, are good to me. Yet what you say of the creation of the world is like what I have been taught to believe. It is not worthwhile to discourse further of the matter. My ancestors were not the original proprietors of the land. They have occupied it but a few ages, and were led here by a great Being, who, after giving them laws and ruling over the nation for a time, withdrew to the region where the sun rises. He declared, on his departure, that he or his descendants would again visit them and resume his empire. Your wonderful deeds, your fair complexions, and the quarter whence you come, all show that you are his descendants. If I have resisted your visit to my capital, it is because I have heard such accounts of your cruelties—that you sent the lightning to consume my people or crushed them to pieces under the hard feet of the ferocious animals on which you ride. I am now convinced that these were idle tales; that the Spaniards are kind and generous in their natures; you are mortals of a different race, indeed, from the Aztecs, wiser and more valiant—and for this I honor you. You, too," he added with a smile, "have been told, perhaps, that I am a god and dwell in palaces of gold and silver. But you see it is false. My houses, though large, are of stone and wood like those of others; and as to my body, you see it is flesh and bone like yours. It is true, I have a great empire inherited from my ancestors; lands, and gold, and silver. But your sovereign beyond the water is, I know, the rightful lord of all. I rule in his name. You, Malinche, are his ambassador; you and your brethren shall share these things with me. Rest now from your labors. You are here in your own dwellings, and everything shall be provided for your subsistence. I will see that your wishes shall be obeyed in the same way as my own."

"It is true," Cortes answered, "that my sovereign is the great being you call him, but, be assured, he has no desire to interfere with your authority; only out of pure concern for your welfare, to effect your conversion and your people's to Christianity." That ended the interview. Cortes and his party took leave, loaded as usual with rich gifts. Even the common soldiers received each two gold collars apiece, and they were moved to such gratitude by this generosity that all the Spaniards, as they passed the Emperor hats in hand, made him a deep bow. Cortes, besides his presents, took with him permission to visit the city and its principal buildings. Shut up as he was in a strange country, it behooved him to be well acquainted with it.

Montezuma was ready, not only to have Cortes see the city, but to accompany him personally in the sight-seeing. Perhaps he thought that from what he knew of the doings of Malinche in the temples of Anahuac, it would be safer to be

close by when Malinche inspected the temple of Tenochtitlan. He appointed his chief caciques to guide Cortes and his men through the great market on the way to the temple where Montezuma would wait to receive his visitors.

Cortes, at the head of his Spanish troops, horse and foot, set out one morning four days after his arrival to visit Montezuma in the great temple. As it was market day, the city was thronged with people, both men and women. The weather was growing wintry, so instead of cotton cloaks, the people wore cloaks of fur or feather work or of a cloth spun from rabbit's hairs and dyed as marvelously as their cotton. The women wore a series of gay, embroidered cotton petticoats, one showing above another. The Spaniards did not tire, as they walked through the streets, of watching these dark-faced Mexicans, who were in some ways as civilized as the white men.

But if they thought the streets crowded, when they reached the great market they were overwhelmed. Forty thousand people from all Anahuac were in the huge place, gossiping and looking and buying, much as we do in a market nowadays, except that instead of paper and gold and silver coins, they had for money bits of tin, bags of cacao and quills filled with gold-dust. The sellers had each his own stall, and there was for sale everything that Mexicans could want. There was cotton in bales; cotton woven into cloth; cotton cloth made into dresses or curtains or coverlets, as fine and soft and rich in color as the silks in Europe. There were shields made of leather, and cloaks made of feather work. There was gold fashioned by the skillful gold-smiths of Anahuac into all sorts of curious toys and ornaments. There were weapons of all kinds,—hatchets, arrows, lances and swords. There were drug shops, and barber shops, and stationery shops where one could buy for the picture writing blank books made of parchment or cotton and folded together like a fan or the paper made from the fibers of the "Swiss Family Robinson Tree." One could buy provisions—poultry, game birds, fruit, vegetables and corn. Some of the food was even cooked, ready for eating—pastry and cakes and confectionery offering themselves to the hungry; while on a booth nearby one could drink chocolate beaten to a solid froth and flavored with vanilla. And everywhere were flowers; the stalls were smothered in them, for the Indians of Anahuac loved flowers as part of their life.

Through all this crowd of thousands of men and women there was no disorder. Policemen patrolled the market, and if any one transgressed the laws, he was at once arrested and taken before a court that sat in one corner of the great market. We can imagine Cortes watching the scene with brooding eyes, as he realized the civilization and wealth, the strength and numbers of the people in whose power he had put himself and his followers.

From the market the Spaniards went back to the square where stood the great terraced temple, on the summit of which Montezuma was waiting them. He had left two priests and several nobles at the entrance to the temple court to carry Cortes up and save him the trouble of climbing the steps from one terrace to another. Montezuma himself was always carried up, and wished to show the same honor to Malinche. But the general, with thanks, declined, and at the head of his men marched up the hundred and fourteen winding steps which took them to the top, passing four times around the temple as they mounted from one terrace to another.

Montezuma and the high priest came forward to greet Cortes as he reached the top and came out on the broad, flat, stone-paved area.

"You are weary, Malinche, with climbing up our great temple," Montezuma said.

"The Spaniards are never weary," Cortes answered. He was willing that the Mexicans should think him supernatural.

Immediately before them the Spaniards saw the big stone on which the victims were sacrificed. At the end of the court were the two holy towers, each with a fire before it—the

sacred fire that was never allowed to go out. Each tower had three stories, the lower one of stone, the two upper of wood. The lower stories held the images of their war gods—one of Huitzilopotchli, and the other of Tezcatlipoca, the god who had created the world; the upper stories held the necessaries for their worship. Nearby was the huge round drum of snake skin which could be heard for miles. When the drum was beaten, every inhabitant listened, for it was never struck unless some great event was pending. The Spaniards looked at it now with curiosity. Later they were to hear it with horror.

Montezuma pointed out to the Spanish general the wonderful view from the temple top. They could see beneath them Montezuma's palace and the palace of Axayacatl where the Spaniards were quartered; the market place they had just left; the broad avenues leading from the heart of the city to the long causeways; the many canals in the city crowded with canoes, as the streets were crowded with people in gay, picturesque dress. Beyond were the blue waters of Lake Tezcuco, and further still the woods and hills of the mainland and the peak of Popocatepetl which some of them had climbed with such exertion.

Cortes gazed with wonder, but presently his delight in the beauty around him changed to his intense desire to convert all this wonderful country to Christianity. He turned to Father Olmedo.

"What a conspicuous place to plant the Christian cross would be this temple area," he said, "if Montezuma would but allow it."

Father Olmedo quickly advised him not to ask such a concession from Montezuma just yet, and Cortes contented himself with asking permission to enter the sanctuaries. The priests consented, and Montezuma led the Spaniards first into the shrine of the war god.

"They found themselves in a spacious apartment incrusted on the sides with stucco, on which various figures were sculptured, representing the Mexican calendar, perhaps, or the priestly ritual. At one end of the saloon was a recess with a roof of timber richly carved and gilt. Before the altar in this sanctuary, stood the colossal image of Huitzilopotchli, the tutelary deity and war god of the Aztecs. His countenance was distorted into hideous lineaments of symbolic import. In his right hand he wielded a bow, and in his left a bunch of golden arrows, which a mystic legend had connected with the victories of his people. The huge folds of a serpent, consisting of pearls and precious stones, were coiled round his waist, and the same rich materials were profusely sprinkled over his person. On his left foot were the delicate feathers of the humming-bird, which, singularly enough, gave its name to the dread deity. The most conspicuous ornament was a chain of gold and silver hearts alternate, suspended round his neck, emblematical of the sacrifice in which he most delighted.

"The adjoining sanctuary was dedicated to a milder deity. This was Tezcatlipoca, next in honor to the invisible Being, the Supreme God, who was represented by no image, and confined by no temple. It was Tezcatlipoca who created the world, and watched over it with providential care. He was represented as a young man, and his image, of polished black stone, was richly garnished with gold plates and ornaments; among which a shield, burnished like a mirror, was the most characteristic emblem, as in it he saw reflected all the doings of the world." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

The walls of both these sanctuaries were stained with human blood, and their dark-robed priests flitted through the rooms like bats. Cortes and his men were glad to come out again into the fresh air of the temple area.

Cortes turned to Montezuma. "I do not comprehend," he said with a smile, "how a great and wise prince, like you, can put faith in such evil spirits as these idols, the representatives of the Devil! If you will but permit us to erect here the true cross, and place the images of the blessed Virgin

and her Son in your sanctuaries, you will soon see how your false gods will shrink before them!"

"These are the gods," Montezuma answered, "who have led the Aztecs on to victory since they were a nation, and who send the seed-time and harvest in their seasons. Had I thought you would have offered them this outrage, I would not have admitted you into their presence."

Possibly Father Olmedo was pulling at Cortes' sleeve to warn him that this was not the time to change Montezuma's religion. In any ease, Cortes apologized to Montezuma for having wounded him, and with his men withdrew.

Montezuma stayed behind, his superstitious mind deeply stirred. He had admitted heretics into his holy places and they had profaned the altars. He must expiate by sacrifice this crime to his gods. The Spaniards wound down from the summit of the great temple to the courtyard below, which was so smoothly paved that the horses slipped as they would on ice. There were other smaller temples in this courtyard dedicated to different Aztec gods. One, dedicated to Quetzalcoatl, was round, with an entrance built like a dragon's mouth bristling with fangs. The Spaniards shudderingly glanced in as they passed it, and left the temple courtyard glad to be free from the place they called "The hell."

The rites of the heathen religion had stirred the Spaniards to new zeal for the performance of their own. The very next day they asked from Montezuma permission to turn one of the halls of Axayacatl's palace into a chapel. Montezuma was generous enough to forget the affront to his gods and to grant the white men the privilege they asked.

As the Spaniards worked, they came upon a door which had been recently sealed up. Through the camp ran the rumor that Montezuma's treasure was concealed in this old palace of his father's. At once the Spaniards were a-tiptoe in their eagerness to see what lay behind that freshly plastered entrance.

With excited hands they tore away the plaster and uncovered a locked door. Through this they forced their way to the chamber beyond and thought they had reached fairyland.

They were in a large room filled with the wealth of which they had dreamed, rich stuffs, jewels, bags of gold and silver, and gold and silver worked into beautiful and delicate ornaments. The men stood dazzled. Finally they withdrew, awestruck, and plastered again the doorway. Cortes ordered that the treasure-room should never be mentioned, but no man that saw it ever forgot that he was living in a palace which contained the treasure of an empire.

CHAPTER XVII

CORTES' COUP D'ETAT

DECEMBER, 1519

While Cortes with his army had been marching from the seacoast to Cholula on his way to Tenochtitlan, the little colony he had left under Escalante in Villa Rica de Vera Cruz had been having its own troubles.

The country north of Vera Cruz had for its governor an Aztec chief named Quauhpopoca, who was of course a vassal of Montezuma. This chief declared his wish to come to Vera Cruz to swear his allegiance to the Spanish authority. He asked that four white men should come to escort him through the unfriendly tribes that lay between him and Villa Rica.

This was a common request among the natives, and Escalante sent four soldiers to act as Quauhpopoca's escort. When the Spaniards reached his camp, Quauhpopoca seized them and killed two of them. The other two escaped and fled back to Escalante.

At once Escalante called his men to arms. At the head of fifty white men and several thousand Indian allies, he marched against Quauhpopoca. In the pitched battle that followed, only the Spaniards stood firm; the allies scattered in every direction at the first shock. The Spaniards, however, clearly saw an image of the Virgin hovering above them to cheer them on, and with the help of this vision, their fire-arms and their own good courage, they won the victory. One of the captives taken in battle told the Spaniards that the revolt was stirred up by Montezuma.

It was a costly victory for the Spaniards, for they lost eight of their men, and one of the eight was Escalante himself. Word sent at once to Cortes reached him before he had left Cholula, but he had concealed it from all but his most trusted friends, for he feared to lessen the courage of his soldiers on their forward march. He had sent Alonzo de Grado to take Escalante's place, and had gone on over the mountains to the City of Mexico to meet Montezuma.

Montezuma also, in ghastly fashion, had heard the news of Quauhpopoca's revolt and defeat. His postmen had carried to him the head of one of the Spaniards killed in the battle. Montezuma looked at it with horror and fear and, instead of sacrificing it in the temple, ordered it sent out of the city. It seemed to speak to his superstitious mind a prophecy of his own downfall.

All this had happened, of course, before Montezuma and Cortes had ever met; it was in the minds of both, along with other treacheries, while they talked together, though neither of them mentioned it. Cortes had been a week in Montezuma's city before the subject came up.

It had been an anxious week for Cortes. In spite of the comfort and luxury in which the Spaniards were living, Cortes could not forget that he, with a handful of followers, was in the heart of an enemy's country in a city which, like a trap, was easy to get into but could be all prongs if one wanted to get out without the ruler's permission. And that ruler, kind and friendly as he was at present, might at any time, by a new act of treachery, show them quite a different face. He might tire of giving presents to the Spaniards; there might at any moment arise a quarrel between an Aztec subject and a Spanish soldier that would turn all Aztec hearts against the white men. Cortes had heard more than once that the Mexicans resented having an army quartered on them. They had only to raise the bridge, and there were the Spaniards, rats in a trap indeed.

And even if no real evil befell, how much nearer was Cortes to his conquest of the country? And he had no time to waste in making that conquest. He had never received an answer to the letter he had sent to Charles V by Montejo and

Puertocarrero; the King might any day send a governor to supersede Cortes, or even, if that did not happen, Velasquez in Cuba was sure to send out another expedition to oppose itself to Cortes' plans. Cortes must succeed before the King could depose him, or before Velasquez could send a force against him, or Montezuma turn into an open enemy. He resolved on a coup d'etat as bold as that by which he sunk his ships and so forced his men to follow him whether they would or not.

With his own mind quite made up as to what he should do, Cortes called a council of his officers and set before them the necessity of making some decisive move. All agreed that they could not go on living in Tenochtitlan in idle ease as they were doing now, but opinion was divided as to what the next step should be. Some thought they should withdraw secretly and get over the causeways to the mainland before the Mexicans knew they had stirred; others thought it time to go, but advised that they should say good-by to Montezuma and depart openly. To the first plan Cortes objected that it would look like a flight prompted by fear and would bring the enemy upon their track; to the second, he asked what reliance could be placed on Montezuma's friendship, since they all knew that it was only his frightened superstition that made him entertain the Spaniards at all.

Cortes, in short, was against leaving Tenochtitlan before they had conquered and converted it. As their expedition had broken with Velasquez, and had not yet received authority from the King, the only way to win the King's blessing was by success. If they should leave Mexico for some braver spirits to conquer, this expedition would get only punishment, added to all they had already suffered, while the newcomers would reap the glory and wealth lying ready for the hand bold enough to seize it.

With this preface, Cortes proposed his scheme, and his men, as they heard it, held their breath at its daring. It was for the Spaniards to march to the royal palace and to bring back the Emperor to residence in the palace of Axayacatl. If they could persuade him to come peaceably, it would be better; but even if they had to use force, he must come. Held in the Spanish camp, he would be a hostage for the good behavior of his people, and while Cortes would leave in Montezuma's hands the show of power, it would be Cortes himself who would be at the head of the government.

Cortes knew well how to cajole those around him to his own way of thinking; before the council was dismissed, all his officers were pledged to stand by him in his rash adventure.

Cortes did not sleep that night; he paced his apartment from dark to dawn, trying to look into the future to discover the results of his act.

In the morning Father Olmedo said mass as usual in the new chapel. The officers listened solemnly, for they knew that when they heard another mass success would have crowned their deed or all their plans would be in a state of ruin and confusion.

Cortes asked for an interview with Montezuma and, as it was granted, he marched with his troops to the palace. He left some men in the avenues outside and drew up the rest in order outside the courtyard. He took with him Marina and five cavaliers whom he thoroughly trusted—Alvarado, Sandoval, Lujo, Leon and Avila—all dressed, as he was, in complete armor. He gave orders that thirty of his soldiers should wander into the palace as if by chance in groups of three or four while the conference was going on. Then with his five knights at his back, fearless and alert, he went into the Emperor's presence.

Montezuma received him kindly, even joking with Cortes as the conversation went on. He gave the general many presents and offered him one of the royal princesses as his wife. Cortes declined this honor, as he already had a wife in Cuba. He kept up the light conversation until he saw that his thirty soldiers were assembled in the hall. Then suddenly, dropping his jesting tone, very seriously he told Montezuma

the story of Escalante and Quauhpopoca, adding that Quauhpopoca had accused Montezuma of ordering the revolt. Cortes asked the Emperor what he had to answer to such a' charge.

"Such an act could only be imputed to me by my enemies," Montezuma declared proudly.

"I believe that," Cortes answered, "but to prove it to my people, it is necessary that you send for Quauhpopoca and his accomplices that they may be examined and dealt with according to their deserts."

"That I am ready to do," replied Montezuma, and took from his wrist his signet—a precious stone engraved with the image of the war god. He gave the signet to a noble and told him to hasten to Quauhpopoca, show him the signet and command at once at Tenochtitlan his presence and that of all concerned in the murder of the Spaniards.

When the noble had gone, Cortes pushed a step further. "I am now perfectly convinced of your innocence," he said politely to the Emperor, "but it is important that my sovereign shall be equally convinced. Nothing will promote this so much as for you to transfer your residence to our palace till the arrival of Quauhpopoca. Such an act of condescension will of itself show a personal regard for the Spaniards that will fully absolve you from all suspicion."

As Montezuma in astonishment listened to this speech he became first pale and then flushed with resentment.

"When was it ever heard," he exclaimed, "that a great prince like myself voluntarily left his own palace to become a prisoner in the hands of strangers?"

"It will not be as a prisoner that you will go," Cortes answered; "it will be but a change of residence from one of your palaces to another—a thing you do frequently. You will be surrounded by your own household and will hold intercourse with your people. And you may count on nothing but respectful treatment from the Spaniards."

"I will not go," insisted Montezuma. "If I should consent to such degradation, my subjects never would." Two hours passed while Cortes urged and Montezuma refused. He offered to give up a son and daughter as hostages to the Spaniards, but go himself he would not.

Finally, Leon, high-mettled and impatient, lost his self-control. They all knew now that if Montezuma did not go with them as their friend after this interview, he would stay behind as their enemy. The Spaniards had shown their hand and must play it out.

"Why do we waste words on this barbarian?" Leon exclaimed roughly. "We have gone too far to recede now. Let us seize him, and if he resists, plunge our swords into his body."

Montezuma could not understand the words, but the fierce tone and threatening gestures frightened him. "What did he say?" he asked Marina.

Marina translated the words as gently as she could. "Go with them," she implored. "If you do, you will be treated with all respect and kindness; if you refuse, you expose yourself to violence, perhaps to death."

Montezuma, between fear and anger, looked around the circle of white faces. Everywhere, instead of sympathy, he saw stern eyes and mouths that spoke iron resolution. His superstitious fears overcame him, as he felt that his gods supported him no longer.

"I will go," he whispered in a voice that could scarcely be heard.

CHAPTER XVIII

CACAMA SENDS A CHALLENGE

JANUARY, 1520

As soon as Cortes heard Montezuma's whispered words, he gave orders for the royal litter to be brought. The nobles who bore it could scarcely believe their ears when the order came. But Montezuma, covering his humiliation with his pride, told his nobles that he wished to take up his residence for a while with his friend who had crossed the water to see him.

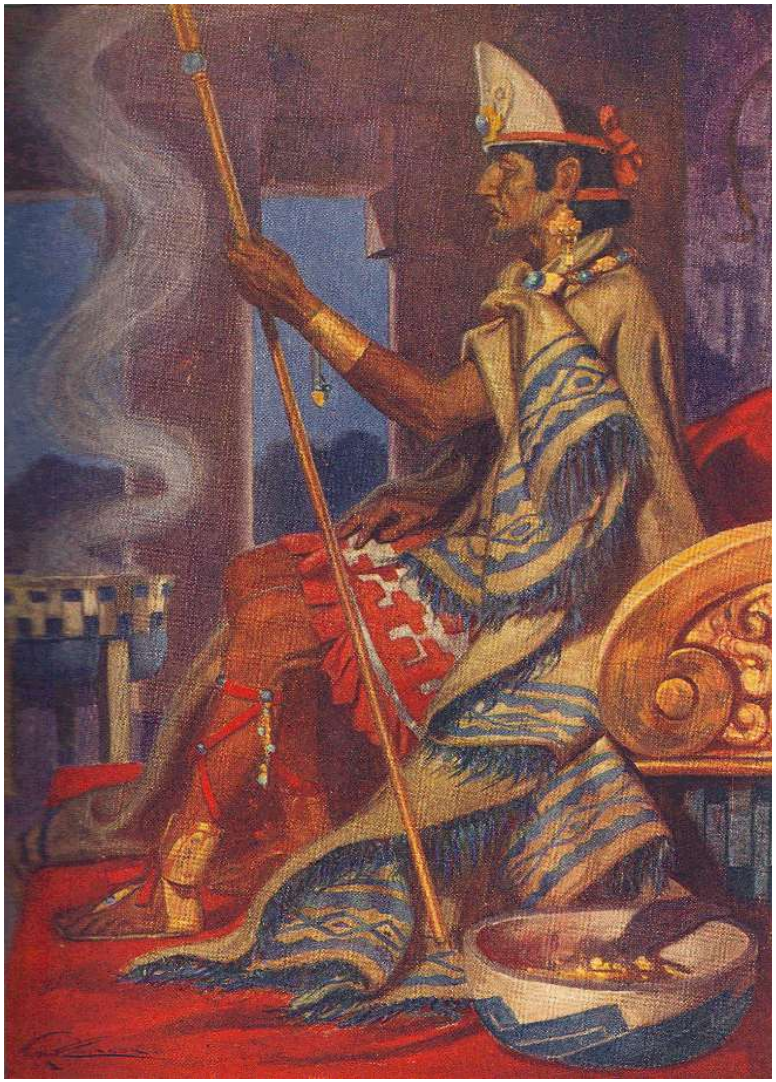
As the Emperor's train passed through the streets a rumor ran ahead of it that the white men were carrying off Montezuma by force. The crowd that gathered was seething for a tumult. One sign from the Emperor would have freed Tenochtitlan from the white invaders. But in his superstition he spoke the words that fastened his fetters.

"Disperse!" he ordered. "I am visiting my friends of my own accord."

The mob dispersed. The Aztecs had no excuse for attacking the Emperor's friends.

The nobles, however, were not content. Montezuma's brother, Cuitlahua, lord of Iztapalapan, Cacama, king of Tezcuco, and Guatemozin, Montezuma's nephew, all thought that Montezuma was not playing his part as a great prince. All were young and strong and warlike, and all had grown to hate the Spaniards. Guatemozin, indeed, had always hated them. As Hannibal, in old times, had sworn undying enmity to the Romans, so had Guatemozin to the Spaniards.

When Montezuma reached the palace of Axayacatl he was given his choice of rooms, which were furnished with all elegance. His wives and pages were with him, and his life went on in its usual routine. The Spaniards treated him with the greatest respect; no one sat in his presence, and even Cortes took off his helmet when he spoke to the Emperor.



BUT ALTHOUGH MONTEZUMA WAS STILL AN EMPEROR, IN HIS HEART HE KNEW HE WAS A PRISONER

But although in these ways Montezuma was still an Emperor, in his heart he knew he was a prisoner. In the front of the palace and in the rear of the palace there was a constant patrol of twenty men, changed three times in twenty-four hours. Another guard was stationed in the ante-chamber of the Emperor's apartment, for Cortes knew that if Montezuma should now escape, the Spaniards would be much worse off than before this bold stroke had been made. Leon was in charge of this guard. Although Cortes had put him in irons in Vera Cruz, he was now one of Cortes' most trusted friends. The constant guard of forty men gave the soldiers much more work and they soon tired of it.

"Better this dog of a king should die than that we should wear out our lives in this manner," cried a rude soldier one day in Montezuma's presence.

The Emperor felt the insult though he could not understand the words. By Cortes' order the soldier was severely punished.

Montezuma had not been long in Axayacatl's palace when the messenger returned from the coast with Quauhpopoca, his son and fifteen chiefs. Although Quauhpopoca was a man of high rank and had traveled all the way carried by slaves in his litter, he entered Montezuma's presence in a coarse robe and with downcast eyes. Montezuma, received Quauhpopoca very coldly and referred his examination to Cortes. The trial was not long.

"Are you a vassal of Montezuma?" Cortes asked. "What other sovereign could I serve?" answered Quauhpopoca.

He acknowledged the murder of the Spaniards and Cortes condemned him to be burned to death. Then Quauhpopoca threw the blame of the deed on Montezuma.

It did not save him, however. The funeral piles were built in the palace courtyard out of the javelins, arrows and spears taken, with Montezuma's permission, from the arsenals in the courtyard of the great temple. Cortes in this way got rid of great quantities of ammunition which might otherwise be used against him in case of hostilities.

While these preparations were going on, Cortes entered Montezuma's apartment without his usual respect. With him was a soldier carrying iron fetters.

"It is proved by the declaration of your own subject," Cortes said sternly, "that you were the original contriver of the violence offered the Spaniards. Such a crime, which is punished by death to the subject, must also be atoned for by the sovereign."

He then ordered the fetters to be placed on Montezuma's ankles and, after it was done, left the room to carry out the execution of Quauhpopoca. This insult to a broken enemy is one of Cortes' deeds hardest to forgive. Even according to the code of his day it was ungenerous.

"Montezuma was speechless under the infliction of this last insult. He was like one struck down by a heavy blow, that deprives him of all his faculties. He offered no resistance. But, though he spoke not a word, ill-suppressed moans, from time to time, intimated the anguish of his spirit. His attendants, bathed in tears, offered him their consolations. They tenderly held his feet in their arms, and endeavored, by inserting their shawls and mantles, to relieve them from the pressure of the iron. But they could not reach the iron which had penetrated into his soul. He felt that he was no more a king." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

In the courtyard outside the whole Spanish force was under arms, ready to repel any Aztec insurrection. No tumult was raised, however. The criminals took their punishment with the silent endurance of the Indian races, and the Indians looking on watched also in silence. They were used to the burning of captives and supposed the execution to be by Montezuma's order.

When Cortes went back to remove Montezuma's fetters, he found the Emperor's spirit entirely broken. But a few days before, all Anahuac had feared and obeyed him; now he was only a crushed child in the hands of a hard master. He thanked Cortes for taking off the fetters.

Cortes, thinking his power over the Emperor firmly established, gave him leave to go back, if he wished, to his own palace. Montezuma refused, saying that if he were free, his nobles would never rest till they had pushed him to rebellion against Malinche. There was doubtless truth in this, but probably, too, Montezuma was as afraid of Cuitlahua and Cacama and Guatemozin as he was of Malinche. Whether his reason for refusing to leave Cortes came from fear or from generosity, Cortes received it with pleasure.

"I love you as a brother," he exclaimed, embracing Montezuma—and this time there were no nobles to stop him. "Every Spaniard among us will be as zealously devoted to your interests as you have shown yourself mindful of theirs."

Thus Cortes had ventured his coup d'etat and won. It would have been impossible to a man less sure of himself and of his power over others. Cortes was able not only to accomplish the bold deed, but to govern the situation with wisdom afterward. It needed surely a man almost superhuman to enter the capital of an absolute monarch, whose nod controlled the fate of thousands, and, in the midst of tens of thousands of devoted subjects, carry the prince a captive out of his own palace and hold him for weeks in captivity.

While Cortes thus guarded Montezuma in Tenochtitlan, news came from the little city of Villa Rica that Grado, the new governor, had not the force to keep order there. Villa Rica was too important to take any chances with, and Cortes determined to send as its governor one of his best men to supersede Grado. He chose for the office Sandoval, a young fellow, brave, just and wise, loved by the soldiers for his unselfishness and good temper. Sandoval set out with instructions as to his government, and with orders to send back to Tenochtitlan some of the cordage, sails and iron saved from the dismantled ships.

After Sandoval was gone, Cortes, with his usual foresight, started Martin Lopez, an experienced ship-builder, at building two brigantines. This work not only kept his men employed, but the vessels would give the Spaniards a chance to get out of the city and across the lake if the Mexicans should raise the drawbridges in the causeways and cut the visitors off from the mainland. The timber Montezuma allowed the Spaniards to take from the royal forests. He himself was much interested in the enterprise.

Except for knowing he was a prisoner, Montezuma's days went on as if he were in his own palace. Cortes waited on him every morning to receive his orders, and after that the Emperor gave audience, as he always had, to envoys from all parts of Anahuac, keeping up the careful etiquette that his court had always known. When his business for the day was over, Montezuma amused himself by hunting or by playing Mexican games or by watching the Spaniards drill or Martin Lopez build his "water houses." When the Emperor played games with the Spaniards he set up some gold or precious stones for a prize; if he lost, he took it good-naturedly; if he won, he gave the prize to those around him. He had a present always ready for anyone who did him the smallest service. His feelings were very sensitive. One day a soldier spoke to him angrily, and tears came into Montezuma's eyes. Cortes at once condemned the soldier to be hanged, but the Emperor begged for his life and the soldier got off with a flogging. Montezuma thought this punishment deserved.

"If a similar insult had been offered by a subject of mine to Malinche, I should resent it in like manner," he said.

It was very seldom that any one was rude to Montezuma, for his gentleness and generosity made him beloved by both captain and soldier. He knew the name and rank of every officer in the Spanish army, and had detailed for his own service a little Spanish page named Orteguilla, of

whom he was very fond and whom he always kept with him. "Malinche" was the Emperor's greatest favorite; next came Leon and "Tonatiuh," as he called Alvarado.

Thus in the palace of Axayacatl the winter days ran quietly away, while Cortes increased his power in every direction and Montezuma amused himself. Outside the palace there was less calm; Cacama, Cuitlahua and Guatemozin took good care that the Aztecs should not accommodate themselves too easily to the new order of things.

Cacama had tried many times, always in vain, to rouse Montezuma to assert his power and escape from his prison. When he found no success there, Cacama turned to Montezuma's brother, Cuitlahua, lord of Iztapalapan. Cuitlahua and many other caciques were ready enough to enter into a league with Cacama against the Spaniards, though there were some of the Aztec nobles who refused to consider any scheme not authorized by Montezuma.

The news of their intended uprising came to Cortes in the palace of Axayacatl. With his usual quickness of enterprise he made ready to stamp out the flame of rebellion—before it should begin to run through the country—by marching on Tezcuco.

Montezuma, however, restrained him. Cacama was strong and fearless and, in his own country, would have thousands behind him; he could not be conquered. Montezuma advised Cortes to follow his own policy and send ambassadors to Cacama.

Cortes reluctantly agreed with this milder method. He sent his envoys, but Cacama refused to treat with them. Cortes, enraged, sent a more threatening message in the name of the King of Spain.

"I acknowledge no such authority," Cacama replied proudly to the second embassy. "I know nothing of the Spanish sovereign nor of his people, nor do I wish to."

Montezuma interfered then and sent for Cacama to come to Mexico that he might mediate between Cacama and Malinche.

Cacama's smile was grim when he received Montezuma's message. Was he, like his uncle, to walk into the Spanish trap?

"Go back," he said to the envoy, "and say to Montezuma that when Cacama visits his capital, it will be to rescue the city and Montezuma and their common gods from bondage. I will come with my hand not in my bosom, but on my sword; to drive out the detested strangers which have brought such dishonor on our country."

Cacama's opinion had changed since he had advised Montezuma to receive the Spaniards politely.

CHAPTER XIX

CORTES PLANTS THE CROSS IN MEXICO

SPRING, 1520

Stirred by Cacama's answer, Cortes again made ready to march against the bold young prince, but once more he was dissuaded by Montezuma.

"Many of the Tezcucan nobles are in my pay," he said. "Through their means it will be easy to secure Cacama's person, and thus break up the confederacy at once without bloodshed."

So it seemed that even the savages were refined and civilized enough to keep paid spies in a nation with whom they were at peace.

Through Montezuma's spies, Cacama was induced to hold one of his rebel councils in a villa built over the lake in such a way that boats could pass beneath it. While the council was going on, the spies seized Cacama and put him into the boat waiting under the house, and carried him to Mexico.

It was a strange meeting between the Emperor of Mexico, supposedly free, and the King of Tezcuco, who, though indeed a captive, held his high, defiant bearing and his hatred for his captors. He reproached Montezuma for his treachery in helping bring into bondage the one who was ready to give all to free Anahuac from its invaders. He reproached him, too, with cowardice so unworthy of the royal Aztec race. Montezuma had nothing to answer in his own defense. He turned Cacama over to Cortes.

Cortes, though he admired always a brave man, had little mercy on his enemies. He put Cacama in fetters, and looked about for a puppet to fill the Tezcucan throne, as Montezuma filled the throne of Mexico. Cacama had three younger brothers, Ixtlilzochitl, who had already offered Cortes his friendship before the Spaniards entered Tenochtitlan, Coanaco, a strong friend to the Aztec power, and Cuicuitzca, who was still a lad without much will of his own. Cortes found the boy best suited to his purpose.

The Aztec Emperor had the right of choice in the question of succession to the Tezcucan throne. When Montezuma, therefore, issued an edict deposing Cacama on account of his "rebellion," and naming Cuicuitzca as king, the Tezcucans submitted at once, either from fear of the Spaniards or from their desire to please Montezuma. Cuicuitzca was welcomed in Tezcuco as the new king.

Soon after Cacama's arrest, Cuitlahua, Montezuma's brother, was also taken. Thus with most of the royal family of both Mexico and Tezcuco in his keeping, Cortes became the real ruler of Anahuac. He dictated his policy to Montezuma and to Cuicuitzca, and they made it law to their obedient followers.

As the spring advanced he set himself to discover the riches of his kingdom. He obtained from Montezuma a large, fertile tract of land, which he stocked with animals, trees and plants, as an estate for the King of Spain; he dispatched parties of Spaniards under Indian guides to explore the rivers where gold was to be found; he sent along the seacoast a detachment of < Page (164) ?> a hundred and fifty men under Leon to find a harbor where he could establish a permanent seaport.

Cortes now asked that Montezuma should swear allegiance to the King of Spain. Montezuma was willing to acknowledge the sovereignty of the king of these wonderful beings, descendants of Quetzalcoatl, and called together his nobles.

"You all know," he said, "the tradition that the great Being who once ruled this land declared, on his departure, that he would some time return and resume his sway. That time has

arrived. The white men come from the quarter where the sun rises, beyond the ocean, where Quetzalcoatl withdrew. They are sent by their master to reclaim the obedience of his ancient subjects. I am ready to acknowledge his authority. You have been faithful vassals of mine during many years. I now expect that you will show me this last act of obedience by acknowledging the great King beyond the waters to be your lord, also, and that you will pay him tribute in the same manner that you have hitherto done to me."

He ended in tears. His nobles, astonished at his humiliation and his grief, assured him of their love and ready obedience. The oaths of allegiance were then administered by Cortes. "There was not a Spaniard who could look on the spectacle with a dry eye," one of the old chroniclers tells us.

As he had made Montezuma a vassal of Charles V, Cortes next suggested that Montezuma should pay tribute to his new sovereign. Again the Emperor obeyed. The tax collectors were sent through the country and in a few weeks came back with large quantities of gold and silver and rich stuffs.

Then, by Montezuma's orders, the sealed door in the palace of Axayacatl was broken open, and all his treasure brought forth, to be added to the tribute collected through the country. Some of the Spaniards had seen the treasure, but to those to whom it was new, it seemed incredible. In their wildest dreams they had not expected anything like this.

Cortes accepted the wealth for the King of Spain, and set to work to make it into portable shape. The goldsmiths were summoned to break up the large ornaments and to melt the gold into bars. It took the workmen three days to do it. When Cortes wanted to weigh it, he had to make his own scales, for the Aztecs did not know the use of weights.

When the treasure was weighed and counted, it was found that its value amounted to six million, three hundred thousand dollars. If the army had divided this sum equally, each man would have had fifteen thousand dollars. But first one-fifth of the whole sum must be taken for the King; then another fifth for Cortes; out of the three-fifths left, there must be paid to Cortes and Velasquez the cost of the expedition, a proper sum to each of Cortes' captains, a bonus to the cavalry, arquebusiers and crossbow-men, and a portion to the colony at Villa Rica. When the remainder was divided among the common soldiers, there was for each one something over a thousand dollars instead of fifteen thousand. Then of course the fretting began again.

"Was it for this," the soldiers grumbled, "that we left our homes and families, periled our lives, submitted to fatigue and famine, and all for so contemptible a pittance! Better to have stayed in Cuba, and contented ourselves with the gains of a safe and easy traffic. When we gave up our share of the gold at Vera Cruz, it was on the assurance that we should be amply requited in Mexico. We have, indeed, found the riches we expected; but no sooner seen, than they are snatched from us by the very men who pledged us their faith!"

Cortes gave his whole attention to calming his men. "I am sorry," he said, "to see you so unmindful of the duty of loyal soldiers, and cavaliers of the Cross, as to brawl like common banditti over your booty. The division has been made on perfectly fair and equitable principles. As to my own share, it is no more than is warranted by my commission. Yet, if you think it too much, I am willing to forgo my just claims, and divide with the poorest soldier. Gold, however welcome, is not the chief object of my ambition. If it is yours, you should still reflect that the present treasure is little in comparison with what awaits you hereafter, for is not the whole country with its mines at your disposal? It is only necessary that you should not give an opening to the enemy by your discord, to circumvent and crush you."

The soldiers listened. All, except the few who still cherished their grudge, acknowledged the justice of his words, and took the share of treasure allotted them. Most of them did

not hold it long, for with cards made of old drumheads they fell at once to gambling, and many of the soldiers, unlucky in their play, were in a few days as poor as they had been before. The wise men, like their officers, had their share of gold made into chains and other articles easy to carry and protect.

With Montezuma an acknowledged vassal of Charles V, and the business of the kingdom all in Cortes' hands, the general congratulated himself that his conquest was really accomplished. The Emperor seemed quite contented to stay in the palace of Axayacatl. When he wanted to hunt in the royal preserves on the other side of the lake, he sailed across in the larger of Martin Lopez' new brigantines, which carried a gun.

"On board of this vessel, Montezuma, delighted with the opportunity of witnessing the nautical skill of the white men, embarked with a train of Aztec nobles and a numerous guard of Spaniards. A fresh breeze played on the waters, and the vessel soon left behind it the swarms of light pirogues which darkened their surface. She seemed like a thing of life in the eyes of the astonished natives, who saw her, as if disdaining human agency, sweeping by with snowy pinions as if on the wings of the wind, while the thunders from her sides, now for the first time breaking on the silence of this 'inland sea,' showed that the beautiful phantom was clothed in terror." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

Montezuma went to the great temple to worship, too, though Cortes took care to send with him as an escort a hundred and fifty of the men who helped in his capture. The Emperor was received at the temple with great ceremony, but after the service was over, came willingly back to the palace of Axayacatl.

But until Montezuma should be converted from his worship of Huitzilopotchli with its horrible sacrifices, Cortes felt that his material successes counted for little. Every day Father Olmedo argued with the Emperor, who listened with courtesy and interest but made always the same reply.

"The God of the Christians is good, but the gods of my own country are the true gods for me."

Finally Cortes, secure in his position, decided that the heathen worship must stop whether the Emperor was convinced or not. He told Montezuma that he would like the great temple made ready for the Christian worship.

Montezuma received the request with the greatest consternation. He had yielded to all Cortes' demands so far because he believed Malinche to be descended from Quetzalcoatl and so ranking even higher than the Emperor of all Anahuac. But a descendant of Quetzalcoatl would never counsel that the temple be given over to the worship of strange gods!

"Why," asked Montezuma, "why, Malinche, will you urge matters to an extremity that must surely bring down the vengeance of our gods, and stir up an insurrection among my people, who will never endure this profanation of their temples?"

"I will endeavor," Cortes answered, "to moderate the zeal of my followers and persuade them to be contented with one of the two towers on the temple area. But that you must grant. If you do not, we shall be obliged to take it by force, and to roll down the images of your false gods in the face of the city. We fear not for our lives, for though our numbers are few, the arm of the true God is over us."

Montezuma, still in great distress, took counsel of his priests, and finally allowed the Christians the right to worship in one of the two tower sanctuaries, while the Aztecs kept the other sacred to their war god.

Great was the joy in the Spanish camp when the permission was received. At once the soldiers swarmed up to the sanctuary allotted them. They cleansed it from its impurities, put an image of the Virgin in place of the idol, and hung a crucifix above the altar, which they decorated with fresh flowers.

When the chapel was ready for worship, the whole Spanish army prepared to go to church. In holiday dress they moved in solemn procession up the steps and around the terraces of the great temple until they reached the paved area high above the city roofs. There, with Father Olmedo at the altar, the soldiers, on their knees near the door of the chapel, listened to the good Father as he said mass. As the *Te Deum* swelled from this heathen temple toward heaven, tears of gratitude filled Cortes' eyes. His last wish was fulfilled. He had planted the cross in Mexico.

CHAPTER XX

THE NEW EXPEDITION OF VELASQUEZ

APRIL, 1520

While Cortes on the temple area was thinking he had now gained everything for which he had come to Anahuac, circumstances were at work which were to show him that he was still far from the conquest of Mexico. One event following another in quick succession brought him from the planting of the cross to "the melancholy night."

The Aztecs had so far shown Cortes their milder side; they had allowed him to hold their Emperor prisoner, and had obeyed the Spanish general's orders issued through Montezuma; they had even given their wealth to support the white men. But when sacrilegious hands were laid on their religion, stirred by their priests—and doubtless by Guatemozin also, the Aztecs began to question how much they must endure.

Montezuma himself showed the change. He lost his cheerful manner and became moody and grave. Instead of amusing himself with the Spaniards, he kept to his own apartments, where his nobles came often to see him; and Montezuma's little Spanish page, Orteguilla, who had learned from his master much of the Aztec language, was now always sent out of the room when the nobles appeared.

While Cortes was wondering with some anxiety at the reason for this alteration, Montezuma sent him a summons. Cortes went to the Emperor's apartments, taking with him as usual two or three cavaliers.

Montezuma, though polite, was cold. He turned directly to Cortes.

"All my predictions have come to pass," he said. "The gods of my country have been offended by the violation of their temples. They have threatened the priests that they will forsake the city if the sacrilegious strangers are not either driven from it or sacrificed on the altars in expiation of their crimes. It is from a regard for your safety that I tell you this. If you have any concern for it yourself, you will leave the country without delay. I have only to raise my finger, and every Aztec in the land will rise in arms against you."

Cortes listened, calm outwardly, but much disturbed inwardly. He respected Montezuma's warning as an act of friendship to men of whom he was really fond, and he did not doubt its necessity. The Spaniards were in the greatest danger.

Very coolly, however, he thanked Montezuma for his warning. "I am ready now to leave," he said, "but I should dislike to go in such haste, when I have no vessels ready on the coast to take me home; that is the only obstacle to my leaving at once. There is another thing I should regret, too—if I have to be pushed out like this, I shall have to take the Emperor with me."

That remark startled Montezuma as much as his news had moved Cortes.

"How long will it take to build the vessels?" he asked, and pondered Cortes' answer.

"I will do this," he concluded. "I will send a sufficient number of workmen to the coast to build the ships under the Spaniards' orders. In the meantime, I will use my authority to restrain the impatience of my people with the knowledge that the Spaniards will leave the land as soon as means are provided."

At once a large body of Aztecs, under the most experienced Spanish ship-builders, left Mexico for Vera Cruz. There was a large enough force to cut the trees and build the ships in short time, if the head of the expedition had not carried with him the command of Cortes' that every effort was to be used to delay the work.

After the ship-builders had left, gloom fell on the palace of Axayacatl. Everyone felt it, whether or not they knew the reason why Montezuma was no longer their friendly companion. Cortes realized fully the danger. Every soldier ate, drank and slept in his armor, with his sword by his side. The horses were caparisoned day and night, with the bridles hanging at the saddle bows. The sentinels were doubled, and the guns planted to sweep the great avenues. And then up from Villa Rica came news of the next event that was to be the Spaniards' undoing; and for this one Montejo was responsible. If he had not, in disobedience to Cortes' commands, anchored off the island of Cuba overnight on his way to Spain, Velasquez would have known nothing of Cortes' doings.

It was May now, 1520, more than a year since Cortes had sailed away from Cuba in February, 1519, leaving Cuba's governor, Velasquez, black with fury at the trick played upon him. It was in October of that same year that Montejo's runaway sailor had brought to Velasquez his first news of Cortes' success. After that, Velasquez did not rest till he had fitted out another expedition, strong enough to overcome any opposition Cortes might offer. He asked permission from the King of Spain, and then went ahead, without waiting to know whether he said yes or no. Velasquez meant at first to take command himself, but as he was pretty big and fat and not anxious to go through the hardships ahead, he finally chose as leader a Castilian hidalgo named Panfilo Narvaez.

Narvaez had been with Velasquez when he had conquered Cuba. From that time on he had been a favorite of Velasquez, who had given him different government posts. He was brave and a good soldier, but he had no power to hold his soldiers, as Cortes held his, by his own personality, while his conceit and arrogance made him deaf to any suggestions. He had no doubt as to his own ability to supersede Cortes.

From October, 1519, to March, 1520, Velasquez and Narvaez went through the island of Cuba, fitting out vessels, laying in supplies, and enlisting recruits. The stories of Mexico's riches had spread so fast that Cuba was full of men, old and young, almost tumbling over each other in their effort to get a place in the new expedition. Cortes had sailed to find gold, but with him had gone, too, the spirit of discovery and adventure. Narvaez' party wanted only gold.

The tidings of these big preparations swept through all the islands of the West Indian group, and came to the ears of the Friars' Commission in St. Domingo, which had given Velasquez and Cortes their right to explore Mexico. The commission objected seriously to another large private expedition setting out for Mexico, and sent one of their number, a clever and resolute man named Ayllon, to Velasquez to remonstrate.

When Ayllon came to Cuba, Velasquez was off in the far corner of the island looking up his ships, and Ayllon had to go after him. He stated clearly the commission's views.

"The conquest of a powerful country like Mexico," he said, "requires the whole force of the Spaniards, and if one half is employed against the other, nothing but ruin can come of it. It is the governor's duty, as a good subject, to forego all private animosities, and to sustain those now engaged in the great work by sending them the necessary supplies. You may, indeed, proclaim your own powers and demand obedience to

them. But, if this is refused, it will be better to leave the determination of the dispute to the authorized tribunals and to employ your resources in prosecuting discovery in another direction instead of hazarding all by hostilities with your rival."

This charge was most displeasing to Velasquez. "I have no intention," he said, "of coming to hostilities with Cortes. I mean only to assert my lawful jurisdiction over territories discovered under my own auspices. At the same time, I deny your right, or that of the commission, to interfere in the matter."

Narvaez was even more stiff-necked than Velasquez. He said the fleet was ready and he was going to sail. As Ayllon could not hold back the expedition, he decided to go along with it to prevent, if possible, fighting between Cortes and Narvaez.

The squadron consisting of eighteen vessels carried a thousand Indians and nine hundred Spaniards; eighty cavalry, eighty arquebusiers and one hundred and fifty crossbow-men among the number. It had also large quantities of stores and ammunition and several heavy guns.

The fleet sailed early in March, and Narvaez, holding much the same course that Cortes had taken, anchored on April 23rd off San Juan de Ulua, Cortes' first landing-place, near the modern Vera Cruz. From there he went to Cempoalla.

Soon after his landing, Narvaez met one of the men sent by Cortes to explore the mining facilities of the country. He, as ready to talk as Narvaez was to listen, told the whole long story of Cortes' exploits, ending with the occupation of Mexico and Cortes' supreme power there. "Cortes rules over the country like its own sovereign," he finished, "so that a Spaniard may travel unarmed from one end of the country to the other without insult or injury."

The newcomers listened open-mouthed to this wonderful tale. It made Narvaez more than ever determined to snatch from Cortes the rich prize he had won.

Narvaez announced at once that he was going to march against Cortes. This proclamation greatly astonished the Indians, who thought all white men were brothers. Before, however, Narvaez started on his march to Mexico, he decided to send messengers to the colony at Villa Rica to demand the surrender to himself of that town.

Ayllon saw how incapable he was after all to prevent hostilities between Cortes and Narvaez. He implored and rebuked and threatened, but he could not change the plans of Narvaez, who, indeed, grew so tired in time of his protests that he put Ayllon on a ship and sent him back to Cuba. Ayllon persuaded the captain of the vessel to land him at St. Domingo, where he hastened to the Commission with his story. They were not long in getting off to Spain news of the disobedient conduct of Velasquez and Narvaez.

As soon as Narvaez' fleet had neared the coast, Sandoval, commander of Vera Cruz, had sighted it with distrust. He at once sent the wounded men under his care back into the country to a place of safety and put the city into a state of defense against any invader. His men promised to stand by him, and to hold them to their promise, he erected a gallows in the middle of the town and said he would hang on it any man who failed him.

Instead of bringing his army to Vera Cruz, however, Narvaez, as we have seen, quartered at Cempoalla and sent to Sandoval five envoys to demand the city's surrender. One of the five was a priest named Guevara.

Guevara came before Sandoval with a pompous speech which began with the virtues and rights of Velasquez; went on to the wickedness and rebellion of Cortes; and ended with a formal demand to Sandoval to submit to Narvaez, who had

come with all legal powers—and plenty of soldiers—to take Cortes' place.

This speech roused in Sandoval nothing but anger. "If you were not a priest," he told Guevara, "you should be soundly flogged."

At that, Guevara, as angry as Sandoval, called on the notary in the party to read the proclamation of Narvaez' rights.

"If you read it," Sandoval repeated, "you will get the flogging the priest escaped."

Guevara, too angry to speak for a moment, stamped on the ground. Then he ordered the notary to go on.

Sandoval was a man of deeds rather than of words. "If the proclamation must be read, Cortes is the man to hear it," he said shortly, and immediately told off a guard of twenty of his men, summoned five stout Indian porters, and without ceremony bound the five envoys like bales of cotton to the porters' backs.

"Now," he said, "to Mexico! Let the proclamation be read to Cortes. Do not stop till you reach the general."

CHAPTER XXI

CORTES GOES BACK TO CEMPOALLA

MAY, 1520

The the five envoys were being rushed in this strange manner through the country, stopping only long enough to change porters at the relay stations, Cortes was awaiting them in much anxiety.

He knew of Narvaez' arrival almost as soon as it occurred, for Montezuma's postmen had brought to the Emperor the picture letters of the white ships, and he had sent for Cortes.

"There is no longer any obstacle," he said, "to your leaving the country, as a fleet is now ready for you," and he showed to Malinche the picture-writing newspaper which told the story of the fleet and its mariners.

In spite of his anxiety, Cortes hid his feelings. "Thank heaven for its mercies!" he exclaimed, and hurried back to his men.

They were in commotion at once at the thought of comrades come to help them; they shouted and fired the cannon in their joy. But Cortes called his officers to consultation and shared with them his fears that the newcomers, instead of being friends, were sent from Velasquez to oust them from the position they had won. Joy turned to consternation as these ideas finally began to find their way through the quarters. If, in addition to dealing with the restive Aztecs, they must also fight a body of their own countrymen, it would give them plenty to do. But in spite of the dark outlook, the men swore to stand true to Cortes and the

cause he represented; their year in Anahuac had turned them into seasoned veterans.

After four days' travel on the porters' backs up the mountains to Mexico, the dazed envoys, not knowing whether they were sleeping or waking, arrived outside the City of Mexico. One of Sandoval's guards left the men there to recover their senses and carried in to Cortes the letter from Sandoval.

At once Cortes sent five horses to the envoys that they might enter the city in a manner more dignified than that in which they had ascended the mountains. He met them when they arrived with great courtesy, apologized for the discomfort they had endured, and with his usual tact soothed their indignation. Then he made so many presents to Guevara and his companions that they began to wonder if Cortes might not make a better master than Narvaez.

When they were in this amiable frame of mind, Cortes began to draw from them the designs of Narvaez and the feeling of his soldiers. Guevara frankly said that the newcomers had no desire to fight Cortes' men; it was only Narvaez who had hard feelings toward Cortes; what the men wanted was gold and the leader who could give them most of it. Narvaez was stingy and arrogant; none of his men had for him any personal affection.

Cortes left the envoys to rest themselves after their hard journey while he wrote a conciliatory answer to Narvaez' letter.

"Do not," he begged, "proclaim our animosity to the world and, by kindling a spirit of insubordination in the natives, unsettle all that has been so far secured. A violent collision would be prejudicial even to the victor, and might be fatal to both. It is only in union that we can look for success. I am ready to greet you as a brother in arms, to share with you the fruits of conquest, and, if you can produce a royal commission, to submit to your authority." Cortes was pretty sure that Narvaez had no royal commission in his charge.

After Guevara and the other four envoys had started back to the coast in a more comfortable fashion and a much better humor than they had come up, Cortes determined to send to Narvaez Father Olmedo as a special messenger of his own with a second letter much like the first. He sent also a letter to Ayllon—not knowing that he had been sent home—and still another letter to Duero, who had, we remember, in 1518 induced Velasquez to choose Cortes to lead the first expedition and had himself invested some money in it. He had come now with Narvaez on this second voyage. Father Olmedo was told to talk privately to all these persons, as well as to Narvaez' officers and men in general, to see if some way could not be found to come to a peaceable settlement. To help on his work, the father was given a quantity of gold.

While Olmedo was still journeying, Guevara reached Cempoalla and gave Cortes' letter to Narvaez. He took it with a look of contempt, which changed to anger as he read. He grew only more angry as Guevara praised Cortes and told of his power and wealth, urging Narvaez to join the two parties under the one leader, instead of trying to depose a leader who was invincible.

Narvaez' soldiers listened eagerly to all that the five envoys had to say. They wanted gold, and Cortes had it in his keeping. He was free, too, in scattering it.

"See how Narvaez keeps all he gets tight in his own clutches," grumbled the men. "How much better a leader Cortes would be than Narvaez!"

To this divided camp Olmedo, a little later, came with his wise tongue, his gold-lined pockets, and his general's letter. Narvaez received this letter with even greater anger than the first, and one of the chief officers threatened to cut off the priest's ears. But the stout-hearted father went on his way, talking to captains and soldiers and lightening his pockets of

their gold, until a party formed who did not see where they would find much advantage to themselves in upholding Narvaez against Cortes.

When Narvaez found out what was going on, he was for clapping Father Olmedo into irons, but Duero restrained him. Narvaez, however, sent the father back to Mexico, thinking thus to be rid of him. But though the priest went, his words and his gold stayed behind to preach after he was gone.

Then Narvaez tried to join to his party Leon, who was in the neighborhood with the hundred and fifty men whom Cortes had sent out to find a colonizing spot on the seacoast. Leon was a relative of Velasquez and had once been so opposed to Cortes that, while the general was receiving his new commission at Villa Rica, Leon had been imprisoned in the fleet. He had long since forgiven Cortes that act and was his fast friend. Nor did he waver now in his fidelity to his general. To Narvaez' reminder of Leon's relationship to Velasquez, which made it Leon's duty to join, with his hundred and fifty men, this latest expedition that Velasquez had sent out, Leon's answer was to turn his face toward Mexico to go back for Cortes' orders. Cortes sent him word to wait at Cholula for his coming, and Leon obeyed. The power Cortes had to make people love him and hold to him did for him what force could not have done.

Cortes, when he sent word for Leon to wait at Cholula, sent also for a re-enforcement of two thousand Indians from a tribe in that vicinity who used in battle, with deadly results, a long double-headed spear. Cortes ordered for his own troops three hundred of these lances, tipped with copper, for he knew they would carry more fear to his Spanish enemies than would the firearms to which they were accustomed.

Sandoval at Vera Cruz, in the meantime, through deserters from Narvaez' camp and through the Indian spies whom he kept there, knew all that Narvaez did. He was told that Narvaez meant to march to Mexico to free Montezuma and seize Cortes; that the Cempoallans were befriending the newcomers, and that Montezuma was sending them gifts. As fast as these facts came to Sandoval, he sent them on to Cortes, imploring him to come to the defense of Vera Cruz before it fell into Narvaez' hands.

Cortes in Mexico weighed the tidings with his usual clear judgment. There were three courses to choose from; he might stay where he was until Narvaez attacked him; he might abandon Mexico entirely and go down to Vera Cruz to fight it out with Narvaez; or he might try to do both things—hold Mexico with half his army, while he took the other half down to oppose the new Spanish force.

Those who knew Cortes would be sure that this last would be his course, and it was. Although he had a few days before considered his whole force scarcely large enough to hold the city against the growing unfriendliness of the Aztecs, deliberately he now cut that force in two, and prepared to leave half of it in Alvarado's charge to hold Mexico, while with the other half he himself marched against Narvaez to take him by surprise.

Cortes did not usually make a mistake in his men, but when he chose Alvarado to take his place in Tenochtitlan at this disturbed moment, he made ready the third event which helped to bring the melancholy night. The Christian chapel on the temple area, the runaway sailor, Alvarado—all had a share in over-throwing the power Cortes had so carefully built up in Mexico.

Cortes gave Alvarado strict commands. He was to be moderate and forbearing; to pay all respect to the customs and prejudices of the Aztecs; and, while he treated Montezuma with all deference, to guard him carefully. From Montezuma, Cortes extracted a promise to behave in the general's absence as he did when he was in Mexico; and Cortes with his little band started down to meet Narvaez.

He had left behind him with Alvarado two-thirds of the Spanish army, all the artillery, most of the horse and the larger

part of the arquebusiers. He took with him only seventy men, but they were all his devoted adherents and the bravest of the whole force. They carried little baggage and light arms, for Cortes wished to fall with the swiftness of a thunderbolt upon the unsuspecting Narvaez.

Escorted as far as the causeway by Alvarado's force and by Montezuma—somewhat bewildered as to why white men should fight white men—Cortes marched out of the city about the middle of May, 1520. The soldiers had been six months in Mexico and felt as if they were leaving home. They went out by the southern causeway, the dyke of Iztapalapan by which they had entered in November, then on across the fertile valley of Mexico, over the mountains, between the two huge volcanoes—Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl—and on down the bleak mountain sides to the fruitful plain of Cholula. They did not stop this time to consider cold or heat or any other hardship. They had their work ahead and were anxious to accomplish it.

At Cholula Cortes found Leon and his men waiting as he had directed. The general was glad, indeed, to add this force to his small army and to count Leon among the number.

They did not linger in Cholula to tell each other stories of their adventures since they had been separated. Quickly they marched through the streets, still blackened by the fires of the massacre, and took the road to Tlascala. Before they reached Tlascala they met Father Olmedo and his party coming back from their expedition to Narvaez.

Father Olmedo gave to Cortes Narvaez' letter, which announced that he was captain-general of the country and called upon Cortes to appear at once before him to recognize his authority. Father Olmedo told Cortes that most of the soldiers were unwilling to come to blows with Cortes' men, and that they considered Cortes, with his many presents, a better leader than their own general. Narvaez himself, the father said, was so puffed up with vanity as to his own strength that he was taking no care whatever to guard against an attack from Cortes.

Cheered by this news, Cortes, taking the priest's party with him, went on to Tlascala. He was received there in friendly fashion, though he lingered only long enough to add to his party six hundred recruits and put the treasure Leon had gathered into the charge of some wounded soldiers, who were to guard it in Tlascala till they were well enough to carry it to Mexico. The Tlascalan recruits did not stay with Cortes long. The march had scarcely begun before, one by one, they dropped away and returned home, until so few were left that Cortes sent them back too, saying good-naturedly that he would rather part with them there than in the hour of trial. The Tlascalans were ready enough to fight the Aztecs, but they did not care to face white men and their fire-arms again.

Soon after he left Tlascala Cortes met Sandoval with sixty of his men and several deserters from Narvaez' army. Sandoval had been obliged to make a long circuit, through thick forests and over wild mountains, in order not to meet Narvaez before joining forces with Cortes. Besides Sandoval, Cortes met here the Spaniards who had been sent for the copper-tipped lances; he distributed them at once among the men and taught them how to use them.

Cortes now reviewed his army. It consisted of two hundred and sixty-one foot and five horse. Muskets and crossbows were scarce, the armor of quilted cotton showed its long service in the many holes and rents. But every soldier carried a stout heart beneath his tunic, and that counts for more than either armor or weapons. They knew the country and the methods of savage warfare, and, better still, they knew that their leader had carried them always to victory and never to defeat. With gay hearts the little army went on down the mountain-side till it came to the warm lands of the seacoast.

About fifty miles from Cempoalla, where Narvaez was camped, they met Guevara and Duero, who were bringing

another letter from Narvaez. Cortes was glad to see Duero again, and the two men greeted each other warmly.

This second letter from Narvaez was a little less severe than the first. He still demanded that Cortes should acknowledge his supreme authority, but he offered the use of his ships to carry back to Cuba any of Cortes' men who wished to go.

"You are in a desperate condition," Duero said. "Your only chance of safety lies in accepting these terms. For however valiant your men may be, how can they expect to face a force so superior in numbers and equipment?"

But Cortes was not to be turned from his purpose even by the advice of a friend.

"If Narvaez bears a royal commission," he answered, "I will readily submit to him. But he has produced none. He is a deputy of my rival, Velasquez. For myself, I am a servant of the King; I have conquered the country for him; and for him, I and my brave fellows will defend it, be assured, to the last drop of our blood. If we fail, it will be glory enough to have perished in the discharge of our duty."

Then he went on to show Duero that the money Duero had put into the first expedition could only be returned to him with interest if Cortes succeeded in his undertaking. Cortes told his friend that he no longer held his commission from Velasquez, as he had resigned that months before and had received a new appointment as captain-general from the city council of Vera Cruz, which acted in the interests of the King. He was therefore not compelled to recognize Velasquez' authority or any one sent by Velasquez.

Cortes sent back to Narvaez a letter in which Cortes in his turn commanded Narvaez to appear before him as captain-general of the country. He knew that all these negotiations were useless, but they would keep Narvaez occupied till Cortes should have time to strike.

Duero went back to camp rather shaken in his views. He had come to help Narvaez, but it looked now much more to his interest to help Cortes. He gave to Narvaez in Cempoalla Cortes' letter, but while Narvaez was reading it, the envoys were pouring into the eager ears of their comrades their admiration for Cortes and the riches of his men, who wore over their ragged, quilted doublets heavy collars of gold and golden chains long enough to wind several times around their body. The soldiers listened with keen ears. Cortes was certainly the general for a soldier to serve under.

And so, before Cortes ever met his foes, they were already half-conquered.

CHAPTER XXII

CORTES CRUSHES NARVAEZ

MAY, 1520

When the envoys had gone back to Narvaez, Cortes' army followed them down over the plains of the warm lands, with the gay, sweet flowers and towering trees, until they came to a little river called "The River of Canoes," about three miles from Cempoalla. This was usually a small stream, but was now so swollen by the rain that had fallen all day that it was hard to fund a ford. It was almost dusk, and Cortes allowed his men a little rest before they searched out a way to cross the river.

The rain had stopped for the time, but the moon shone interruptedly through such thick clouds that it was certain the storm was not yet over. Cortes was not sorry. He meant to attack Narvaez that very night, and the rush and roar of a thunder-storm would be a good cover for his movements.

When the soldiers were rested, Cortes roused them to listen to what he had to say to them. He went over all the difficulties they had faced since they had entered the country, the victories they had won and the riches they had gained.

"And of all this," he said, "you are now to be defrauded; not by men holding a legal warrant from the crown, but by adventurers, with no better title than that of superior force. You have established a claim on the gratitude of your country and your sovereign. This claim is now to be dishonored, your very services are to be converted into crimes, and your names branded with infamy as those of traitors. But the time has at last come for vengeance. God will not desert the soldier of the Cross. Those whom He has carried victorious through greater dangers, will not be left to fail now. And, if we should fail, better to die like brave men on the field of battle than, with fame and fortune cast away, to perish ignominiously like slaves on the gibbet."

The hint about Narvaez and his gallows was not lost on any of the soldiers, though they did not need fear to stir them to loyalty.

"If we fail," Leon cried, "it shall not be our fault, for where you lead, we will follow."

Cortes received their promise with his usual good comradeship. He did not say anything to them about the likelihood of Narvaez' men coming over to his banners, for he wanted his soldiers to rely only on their own courage.

"To-night," he said, "we attack Narvaez."

The soldiers, tired as they were with their long march, received the news with joy and listened eagerly to Cortes' orders. He gave to Sandoval, as governor of Vera Cruz, the task of capturing Narvaez, and detailed sixty picked men to Sandoval's command. Christoval de Olid's force were to seize the artillery and thus draw off attention from Sandoval's efforts. Cortes himself headed twenty men who were to be ready for anything that offered. As it was Whit-Sunday, Cortes chose "Espiritu Santo" for the watchword.

In the meantime Narvaez had been spending idle days in Cempoalla, until finally an old chief roused him.

"Why are you so heedless?" he asked. "Do you think Malinche is so? Depend on it, he knows your situation exactly, and when you least dream of it he will be upon you."

That stirred Narvaez. On the very day that Cortes and his men were marching down through the rain to the River of Canoes on one side, Narvaez was marching toward it through the rain on the other side. When Narvaez reached the River of Canoes the rain was pouring in bucketsful. There was no sign anywhere of an enemy, and the soldiers grumbled at their soaked, uncomfortable condition.

"Of what use is it," they murmured, "to remain here fighting with the elements, when there is little reason to apprehend the approach of an enemy in such tempestuous weather. It will be wiser to return to Cempoalla, and in the morning we shall all be fresh for action, should Cortes make his appearance."

Narvaez himself was wet enough to listen to the men. He stationed two sentinels near the river, and sent a body of forty horse along the river bank in the direction that he thought Cortes might come. Then with his army he went thankfully back to Cempoalla and to his dry quarters in one of the sanctuaries on top of the main temple of Cempoalla, where he fortified himself with arquebusiers and crossbow-men. His artillery was in the court below, protected by his cavalry. Other smaller temples were also fortified with infantry. After Narvaez had looked to see that all was in order, he went to bed and to sleep as calmly as if he had never heard of Cortes.

Cortes, however, was not far away. Although the storm had turned the little river by this time into a fierce torrent, still, using their long copper-tipped spears as staffs, the little force managed to get across. Here they met new difficulties, for the storm and darkness made it almost impossible to keep the road, which, poor at its best, was now only a miry pit.

Suddenly, as they struggled through the mud and briars, they came upon a cross which they themselves had raised before they went to Mexico. They greeted it as a blessing from heaven. In spite of the storm, the whole army went down on their knees while good Father Olmedo pronounced absolution and prayed for help for "the warriors who had consecrated their swords to the glory of the cross."

Inspirited, they arose, ready for what lay ahead. Cortes ordered that the horses should be fastened under some trees which would shelter them from the rain and the baggage left beside them. Then he spoke words of encouragement.

"Everything," he said, "depends on obedience. Let no man, from desire of distinguishing himself, break his ranks. On silence, dispatch, and, above all, obedience to your officers, the success of our enterprise depends."

Strictly obedient, with no sound of drum or trumpet, the little army went on its way, till it came, without warning, on Narvaez' two sentinels. One they seized, but the other escaped and fled back to Cempoalla.

Annoyed that he could not now take his enemy by surprise, Cortes lingered a few moments to try and get information from the sentinel he had captured. As he found the man would not speak, even with a noose around his neck, Cortes wasted no more time, but at a rapid pace followed the sentinel who had escaped into Cempoalla.

The sentinel had burst into camp, crying, "The enemy is upon us!" The sleepy soldiers, wakened against their will, looked and listened. As they heard and saw nothing, they went to sleep again. Even Narvaez, when he roused, could not believe the sentinel.

"You have been deceived by your fears," he said, and mistaken the noise of the storm and the waving of the bushes for the enemy. Cortes and his men are far enough on the other side of the river, which they will be slow to cross in such a night."

"You'll be sorry," answered the sentinel surlily to his mates, and went to his own bed.

A few minutes later Cortes approached Cempoalla. The first thing he saw through the blackness of the night was the light burning high in the air in the temple sanctuary, which Duero had told him Narvaez used as his headquarters.

"That light must be your beacon," Cortes said to Sandoval. "It is the quarters of Narvaez."

The Spaniards, knowing the sentinel had been before them, entered the city with the greatest caution, listening each

instant for the alarm. They heard only their own footsteps, however, and even that sound was almost smothered by the crashing rain and howling wind.

They had reached the center of the city before Narvaez' men perceived them. Instantly all was action in camp. The trumpets, sounding to arms, sent the dragoons to their horses and the artillery men to their guns. Narvaez, in his high tower, hastily buckled on his armor and put himself at the head of his men on the flat temple area.

Cortes' army advanced along the avenue that led to the temple, stealing close to the buildings on each side to escape the cannon balls that raked the avenue. Then, before the gunners could reload, "Espiritu Santo! Upon them!" Cortes cried, and his men made their final rush.

In an instant Olid and part of his men had engaged the artillery and got possession of the guns, while another division attacked the cavalry. Under cover of this confusion Sandoval, with his brave little band, stormed the staircase of the temple terraces.

He was met by a shower of arrows and musket balls from above, but in the darkness they went wild and wounded no one. Through these flying missiles Sandoval's men sprang up the steps and in a moment were on the flat area. Narvaez was wide awake now, ready to receive them. He fought bravely, but his short sword counted little against Sandoval's long pikes and he received wound after wound. At last one of the pikes struck his eye.

"I am slain!" he cried, and Sandoval's men, catching the words, shouted "Victory!"

But Narvaez was not taken yet. His men carried him into the sanctuary and beat back every attempt to break through the door, until finally a soldier, by throwing a torch up to the thatched roof, set it ablaze. The fire sent out so much smoke that Narvaez was driven out again to the temple area, where he was speedily captured by one of Sandoval's men. When his army heard that he was taken, they surrendered.

While this had been occurring on the temple heights, Cortes and Olid, struggling against the cavalry in the courtyard below, had done as effectual work. The cavalry, unable to break through the hedge of long spears, had soon yielded. As the garrisons of the smaller temples in the courtyard refused to lay down their arms, Cortes had turned against them their own guns which Olid had captured. After one volley all the garrisons capitulated. Doubtless Father Olmedo's gold had something to do with this easy victory, though the soldiers' own fears were largely responsible. The air was full that night of big, tropical fireflies, which the excited soldiers of Narvaez took for a whole army of matchlocks.

When the last fort had yielded and Narvaez had been captured, back came the body of cavalry which Narvaez had sent up the river to intercept Cortes. They also surrendered. Each soldier was obliged to give up his arms and to swear allegiance to Cortes as captain-general of the colony.

Thus in a few hours Cortes, with a little band of ragged men, hungry and wearied out by forced marches, having few weapons and military stores, had attacked in its own camp a force well-armed and equipped, three times the size of his own, and had come off completely victorious. His soldiers went wild over their achievement.

"While the air rung with the acclamations of the soldiery, the victorious general, assuming a deportment corresponding with his change of fortune, took his seat in a chair of state, and, with a rich, embroidered mantle thrown over his shoulders, received, one by one, the officers and soldiers, as they came to tender their congratulations. The privates were graciously permitted to kiss his hand. The officers he noticed with words of compliment or courtesy; and, when Duero, Bermudez, the treasurer, and some others of the vanquished party, his old friends, presented themselves, he cordially embraced them." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

When this ceremony of congratulation from his own officers was over, Narvaez and some of his generals were led before Cortes.

"You have great reason, Senor Cortes," Narvaez said, "to thank fortune for having given you the day so easily and put me in your power."

"I have much to be thankful for," Cortes answered grandly, "but for my victory over you, I esteem it as one of the least of my achievements since coming into the country."

IN SPITE OF THE STORM, THE WHOLE ARMY WENT DOWN ON THEIR KNEES.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT ALVARADO DID IN TENOCHTITLAN

MAY, 1520

The sun rose next morning on an earth swept clean. The storm of the heavens and the storm of battle were over; only their havoc remained. Narvaez and his chief generals were sent at once under a strong guard to Vera Cruz, where they were held as prisoners through the months that followed. Cortes set to work to win to his standard Narvaez' men, who were a little inclined to be sullen when the morning light showed them that they had been frightened into yielding their guns and horses and accouterments to such a handful of gaunt, worn men. To gain these strangers, Cortes risked the displeasure of his own veterans, who were proudly displaying this morning the horses and arms they had won in their night attack. Cortes distributed among Narvaez' men the gold found in Narvaez' quarters, and commanded that every horse and every weapon taken by his own men should be given back to its rightful owner.

"They are now embarked in our cause," he said, "and we must share with one another equally."

His troops heard these orders with surprise and disgust. Should not the spoil be theirs? And should they, who had made long marches with weary legs, now, just as they had acquired horses to bestride, be obliged to give them up again? They flocked to Father Olmedo with their complaints.

"Our commander," they cried, "has forsaken his friends for his foes. We stood by him in his hour of distress, and are rewarded with blows and wounds, while the spoil goes to our enemies."

Father Olmedo carried the remonstrance to Cortes, who listened with a sigh. Whichever way he turned there were perplexities to be straightened out. Once more he called the soldiers together.

"Our new comrades," he said, "are formidable from their numbers, so much so, that we are even now much more in their power than they are in ours. Our only security is to make them not only confederates, but friends. On any cause of disgust, we shall have the whole battle to fight over again, and, if they are united, under a much greater disadvantage than before. I have considered your interests as much as my own. All that I have is yours. But why should there be any ground for discontent, when the whole country, with its riches, is before us? And our augmented strength must henceforth secure the undisturbed control of it."

The soldiers obeyed, though with some grumbling. In a few days even that was forgotten, for the news that came from Mexico made every one bury personal grievances.

Cortes had had proof of Alvarado's cruelty and rashness when, in the island of Cozumel, on the first landing of the Spaniards, Alvarado—left a little while in charge of camp—had gone into the native temples and stolen their treasures, stirring the island at once against the white men. Cortes had had little patience with Alvarado then, but perhaps he thought that in the months between that time and this he had learned more calm wisdom. At any rate, relying on Alvarado's courage and on his personal friendship, he had left him in supreme control in Mexico with a garrison of a hundred and forty men.

It was May, the month that the Aztecs each year had, in honor of their war god, a festival called *The incensing of Huitzilopotchli*, in which they sacrificed and danced and sang. After Cortes had left Tenochtitlan, and the time came for this May festival, the Aztec nobles asked of Alvarado permission to hold it in the temple court as usual. They asked, too, that Montezuma might come to it. Alvarado denied that request, but allowed them to hold the festival in the courtyard on condition that there should be no human sacrifices.

The Aztec nobles—six hundred of them—assembled on the appointed day, dressed in their holiday clothes—gay cotton tunics, feather cloaks sprinkled with precious stones, and bracelets and collars of gold. They danced to their wild, uncivilized musical instruments and they sang their religious war chants. Alvarado and his soldiers, fully armed, were standing as onlookers by the temple gate or mixing with the throng itself.

And then, without warning, happened one of the most cruel and bloodthirsty and impolitic acts of history. As the Aztec nobles danced through their celebration, Alvarado and his men drew their weapons and rushed on them. The Indians, unarmed, taken by surprise, shut in the courtyard like beasts in a pen, had not the slightest chance to fight for their lives or even to escape. They tried to climb the walls, and they were shot; they tried to run out at the gateways, but they ran against the long pikes of the Spanish soldiers. Not one merry-maker was left alive, and there was scarcely a noble house in all Tenochtitlan that had not someone to mourn for that night. While the natives mourned their slain, the Spaniards were stealing from the murdered men their bracelets and jewels.

Though it was a quick, short deed, its consequences were long and terrible. When the news ran through the city that six hundred of the young, valiant nobles had been massacred by the Spaniards, men at first could not believe it. Then, as the deed was proved, all the enmity and resentment which their loyalty to Montezuma had kept in check swelled up to expression and cried for vengeance. We may be sure that Guatemozin felt that his time had come. He did not waste the opportunity.

Before the Spaniards could fortify themselves in their palace courtyard, the Aztecs, armed to a man, were upon them, undermining the walls, throwing firebrands in on the roofs,

until the Spaniards, alarmed, asked Montezuma to intercede for them.

It was a singular request from men who had just murdered the flower of Montezuma's nobility, but the monarch, true to Malinche, came out upon the battlements. With dignified words he urged the mad crowd without to stay their assault or he, too, might be injured in the fighting.

They listened to him, and for his safety's sake gave up the attack, but not their desire for vengeance on the Spaniards. They drew back into the square, threw up earthworks around the palace, stopped the market so that the Spaniards could obtain no supplies, burned the two brigantines, and sat down to a regular siege.

The Spaniards inside the Spanish fortifications were in an exceedingly uncomfortable position. A hundred and forty men, far from their friends, with scant provisions and no means of getting more, shut up in an inland Venice, which they could leave only by permission of their enemies, and surrounded by thousands and thousands of savages who never meant them to leave alive—it was not a reassuring situation. Alvarado got out a messenger to tell Cortes of their plight and then sat sullenly down to wait. He must have had many hours in which to consider his mad, cruel act and the terrible consequences.

This was the news that came like a thunderbolt to Cortes as he was trying to prevent quarrels between his new recruits and his veterans in Cempoalla. At once he called the army together and told them that Alvarado was shut up, without food, in Tenochtitlan; that the brigantines were burned, and if the Aztecs took up the causeway bridges and the bridges over the city canals, there was no escape. Without hesitation the army demanded to be led back to Tenochtitlan to rescue their comrades.

Cortes at once started two bodies of Narvaez' troops under Olid and Ordaz for Tlascala, adding to each corps of raw recruits twenty of his veterans. He sent a hundred men under Rodrigo Rangre to garrison Vera Cruz, and took Sandoval with him, leaving the sick and wounded at Cempoalla to follow when they should be able. The cacique of Cempoalla, who had helped Cortes and then had helped Narvaez and now was ready to lend a hard again to Cortes, supplied him with provisions and started him on his journey.

Back again over the familiar road to Tlascala Cortes led his army, greater in numbers but less strong in spirit than when it was only his own little band of intrepid veterans. The newcomers were not yet seasoned to climate or hardship, and when the army reached the country around Tlascala, where there were few people and scanty provision, many of the men gave out. Unable to stand the forced marches under the hot sun, they threw themselves by the roadside, ready to die in their tracks.

Cortes, in this dilemma, sent a party of horse ahead to Tlascala for supplies. While he waited, like Alvarado, he had plenty of time to think, and all his thoughts were questions as to how he could win back his lost position. Although in so short a time he had been cast from the heights of attainment down to this valley of despair, he had no idea of giving up.

The Tlascalans, still Cortes' good friends, sent back the needed supplies. Refreshed by the food and rest, the weary army once more gathered its courage for the forward march.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FURY OF THE MEXICANS

JUNE, 1520

In pretty good shape Cortes and his army entered Tlascala. Maxixca, one of the four ruling chiefs, always friendly to the Spaniards, gave Cortes quarters in his own palace.

So long as the war was now against the Aztecs and not against the Spaniards, Tlascala offered plenty of men. Cortes accepted two thousand recruits, which, added to one thousand foot and one hundred horse, gave him a fair army. Among his foot soldiers one hundred were arquebusiers and one hundred crossbow-men.

The Spaniards left Tlascala this time by the more northerly route that led straight to the city of Tezcuco. Like the road they had taken on their first entrance into Mexico, it went over the Cordilleras and between the two big volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl. They marched through forests of evergreen and up to the barren mountain peaks where, looking back, they saw the green, fertile valley stretching as far as Cholula, and looking forward, they saw again the Mexican valley, this time from the north, for the city of Tezcuco lay, in her cypress groves, directly below them. Tenochtitlan they could see across the lake with its shining waters and fire-topped temples.

The Spaniards came down into the Mexican valley to a cold reception. When they had come at Montezuma's bidding they had been met by throngs of curious, happy, welcoming people, hanging flowers around the horses' necks and showering presents on the Spaniards. Now there were no flowers and no presents, and when the Spaniards asked for food it was given with a grudging coldness.

Tezcuco was almost empty; even Cuicuitzca whom Cortes himself had made King of Tezcuco when he had seized Cacama, was absent from his capital and not on hand to welcome Cortes. Cortes' veterans were much annoyed at these doings; they had boasted to the newcomers of their high position in Mexico, and now were unable to prove it.

Cortes suffered more than wounded vanity. He was growing keenly anxious as to the fate of his garrison in Tenochtitlan, in a country as unhospitable as Mexico was now showing itself, when there came a messenger who had escaped in a canoe from Tenochtitlan and had crossed the lake to Tezcuco.

The man brought a letter from Alvarado to Cortes, telling him what we know already, that the Aztecs at Montezuma's request had stopped their assault on the palace of Axayacatl, but that they had surrounded the palace with earthworks and had sat down to besiege it, so that, when their supplies gave out, the Spanish garrison would be in a bad way. Alvarado begged Cortes to come quickly to Tenochtitlan, for he knew that as soon as Cortes arrived everything would be as peaceful as it had been before. But Alvarado was to find out that though it is easy to raise a tumult, it is a harder matter to quiet it. Montezuma also sent a message to Cortes urging him to come back. He protested that he had had nothing to do with the revolt and that it had been raised without his knowledge.

Cortes allowed his men time for rest in Tezcuco and then on the 24th of June, 1520, led them down the west side of the lake to the southern shore where the dyke of Iztapalapan crossed to the City of Mexico. Here, too, everything was unlike their first entrance. Then the causeway had been crowded with people and the lake gay with canoes. Now there was emptiness and silence, the only sign of life an occasional distant canoe which seemed to spy upon their movements and to glide away the moment it was seen.

Moodily Cortes rode on across the causeway at the head of his troops, wondering doubtless at the fool-hardy and unwise act by which Alvarado had made all this mischief. But he did not let his own low spirits affect his men. He had the trumpets sounded, and their clear notes carried comfort across the water to the Spaniards shut up in the palace of Axayacatl. They answered with a salute of artillery, and Cortes' men, breaking into quicker time, were across the drawbridge and once more in Tenochtitlan.

Tenochtitlan was even more deserted than Tezcuco had been; the horses' hoofs echoed hollowly from the empty streets; in some places the small bridges had been removed from the canals. Cortes realized anew that now that his brigantines were burned, if the Aztecs were to raise their drawbridges in the causeway and destroy the small bridges that led across the canals in the city itself, it would not be easy to leave Tenochtitlan.

Marking quick time, the army traversed the avenue, entered the square and reached the palace of Axayacatl. The gates were thrown open and Cortes' troop passed into the courtyard to meet the eager welcome of Alvarado's men.

The general at once demanded from Alvarado the story of the tumult and listened with outward calm to Alvarado's explanations and excuses. He had heard rumors, he said, of an uprising among the natives and thought to act as quickly and efficiently as Cortes had acted at Cholula.

Inwardly Cortes was far from calm. Angry as he was at Alvarado, he was angrier at himself for the mistake he had made in leaving Alvarado in charge of so delicate a situation. No one had known better than Cortes the temper of the Aztecs and the eternal vigilance and patience necessary to hold them under Spanish authority, and no one had known better than he that, in attempting an act like the Massacre of Cholula, one must be strong enough to deal with the consequences. Alvarado had had neither the patience nor the strength, and Cortes reproached himself that he had let his own friendship for his captain and Alvarado's courage and gay manner and handsome face blind him to Alvarado's greed and cruelty and lack of judgment. He could scarcely have chosen a worse commander for a weak army in the heart of a not too friendly nation. By one turn of his hand, Alvarado had thrown down the entire edifice that Cortes had so painstakingly built up.

When Alvarado had finished his story, Cortes' anger burst its bonds of self-control.

"You have done badly," he exclaimed. "You have been false to your trust. Your conduct has been that of a madman." Then he turned and abruptly left the room.

For the time being Cortes was a changed man. Instead of his usual calm courage and gay comradeship, he was silent and irritable.

The Emperor came at once to Cortes' quarters to welcome Malinche back. But Cortes was bad-tempered even with him. He chose to suspect Montezuma of stirring up the tempest and closing the market, and treated him so coldly that Montezuma went mournfully back to his own apartments. A little later he sent some of his nobles to ask an interview. Cortes' anger had grown when he saw that even his coming had not raised the blockade and opened the market. He turned angrily from the Aztec nobles to his own officers.

"What have I to do with this dog of a king who suffers us to starve before his eyes?" he asked brutally.

Olid, Avila and Leon protested respectfully.

"If it had not been for the Emperor," one of them ventured, "the garrison might even now be overwhelmed by the enemy."

The protest made Cortes only more angry. "Did not this dog," he cried again, "betray us in his communications with Narvaez? And does he not now suffer his markets to be closed and leave us to die of famine?"

He turned fiercely again to the nobles. "Go," he commanded, "tell your master and his people to open the markets, or we will do it for them at their cost."

The Aztec chiefs understood too well Cortes' harsh, contemptuous speech even if they had not much knowledge of Spanish. They went back to Montezuma, swelling with resentment, and they did not soften, in repeating them, Cortes' insults.

Gradually Cortes got more control of himself. He saw that he must bury his disapproval of Alvarado and his suspicion of Montezuma, for with all Mexico against them outside, they must at least keep unity within. He was fully convinced, too, that with his present army at his back, the Aztecs must finally yield to his authority and come back to their old friendship.

But his new forces, which swelled his army to one thousand two hundred and fifty Spaniards and eight thousand Tlascalans, meant new hardship as well as new help. Cortes must fill the nine thousand two hundred and fifty mouths and, with the markets closed, how was he to do it? He determined to adopt Montezuma's methods and send an embassy to the assaulting Aztecs.

By Montezuma's advice Cortes chose for his messenger the Emperor's brother, Cuitlahua, whom he had held a prisoner since he had seized him at the time of Cacama's capture. Cortes sent a messenger to Vera Cruz with an account of his safe arrival in Tenochtitlan and the assurance of his ability to rule even the frenzied Aztecs. Then he sent Cuitlahua on his errand of peace—to quiet his countrymen and bring them back to their Spanish allegiance. But Cuitlahua, free, had other business than urging the Mexicans to return to the Spanish yoke. Guatemozin was there to welcome him, and they gathered to their banners thousands and thousands of Aztecs stirred to their depths and thirsting for revenge. They did not even think of peace. Instead, they chose Cuitlahua as their Emperor to act in Montezuma's place as long as Montezuma was a prisoner. Cuitlahua, a brave and skilled soldier and a patriotic Aztec, accepted the position of honor and danger, and soon had his levies under command.

Cortes had gone about his own business after he had sent his messenger to Vera Cruz and Cuitlahua to the Aztecs. An hour passed. Then stumbling back across the square, almost dead of wounds and exhaustion and terror, came the man he had sent to Vera Cruz.

"The city is in arms," he cried hoarsely. "The drawbridges are raised. The enemy is upon us."

With hushed breath the Spaniards listened. In the distance was a muffled roar that sounded like a flood broken loose pouring toward them. Cortes dashed up to the wall and, looking from the parapet that surrounded the palace courtyard, he saw the square, and every street leading to it, dark with the confused masses of Aztecs, while all the flat housetops around suddenly, as if by magic, were filled with warriors waving their weapons. Through the breach Alvarado had made, the flood of Aztec vengeance, in all its fury, was pouring upon the Christians.

CHAPTER XXV

CORTES IS BESIEGED IN THE PALACE OF AXAYACATL

JUNE, 1520

If the savages were a sight to terrify the veterans, much more were they appalling to Cortes' new recruits.

"On they came, with the companies, or irregular masses, into which the multitude was divided, rushing forward each in its own dense column, with many a gay banner displayed, and many a bright gleam of light reflected from helmet, arrow and spearhead, as they tossed about in their disorderly array. As they drew near the enclosure, the Aztecs set up a hideous yell, or rather that shrill whistle used in fight by the nations of Anahuac, which rose far above the sound of shell and atabal, and their other rude instruments of warlike melody. They followed this by a tempest of missiles—stones, darts and arrows—which fell thick as rain on the besieged, while volleys of the same kind descended from the crowded terraces in the neighborhood." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

It was impossible to take the Spaniards by surprise. The palace of Axayacatl was surrounded by a stone wall with openings at intervals for the guns and smaller holes for the arquebuses. The whole army, white men and Tlascalans, had each his assigned place and was drilled in strictest discipline. As soon as the trumpet called to arms, therefore, every man sprang to his post, the guns were manned, the cavalry mounted and the bowmen and arquebusiers ready with their missiles.

Cortes waited till the first column of Indians was within range and then opened fire. The Aztecs, grown used to the sound of fire-arms in peace, now saw what the cannon could do in war. The balls mowing through their ranks for a moment threw them into confusion but then, with their war-cry, they recovered and rushed forward over the bodies of their own men.

They were halted again by a second volley and a third, but after each they rallied and pressed forward, shrieking their horrible cry and letting go showers of arrows. These did not all hit the mark, but the savages on the flat housetops surrounding the palace courtyard were wonderfully placed for their murderous work. The stones from their slings and the arrows from their bows found true aim in the throng fighting in the courtyard beneath them.

The Aztecs below, seeing that their fire accomplished nothing, pressed close to the wall and even tried to scale it. But the moment an Aztec head showed above the wall, it was met from inside by a bullet or an arrow or a blow from a sharp-bladed Tlascalan club. Mounting on the heaped bodies of their own wounded and dead, the Aztecs tried again and again to climb the wall, but always in vain.

Failing in this, they attempted to batter a breach in it. Against this, the Spaniards had no defense, as they could not train their guns downward and any men shooting from the parapet would be themselves marks for Aztec slings and arrows. Fortunately the walls were too thick for the Indian battering-rams, and they gave up that attempt also.

Then they tried another plan. They swarmed up the outside wall as high as the gun holes, and through them shot into the courtyard blazing arrows that fell on the wooden huts of the Tlascalan allies and set them on fire.

The Spaniards had scarcely enough water to drink, in the enclosure; there was none to spare for putting out flames. They heaped earth on the burning piles, but could not extinguish them. Finally Cortes was obliged to throw down a part of the wall to stop the fire, opening the very breach the Aztecs had tried to make with their battering-rams. Cortes at

once mounted his heavy guns in the breach and set the arquebusiers shooting through their openings. The walls belched forth unceasing fire and smoke; the ground shook with the thunder of the artillery; muskets rattled; arrows hissed; the Indians yelled their war cry. The peaceful palace had become Pandemonium.

Finally darkness put a stop to the battle. The Indians, true to their custom of not fighting at night, withdrew. There was no rest, however, for the Spaniards. In hourly dread of attack, they had to work all night to fill up the breach and mend their battered armor. Every once in a while an Aztec stone or an arrow came over the wall or a war cry shrilled from outside.

Cortes, as he paced his apartment that night, was not thinking so much about Alvarado as about the Mexicans whom he had found so gentle and patient. Now he saw that their submission had been only repressed anger, and the more they had hidden it, the deeper it had gone. The Tlascalans had been fierce without injuries to avenge. The Aztecs, as ferocious at heart, had in their memory insult after insult to their Emperor and their religion. Once they had burst through their restraint, every last man was willing to die if only he might have revenge on the Spaniard.

Determined to be the first to attack, at daylight Cortes had his forces under arms for a sally which should show the Indians that Cortes still ruled Mexico. The hours had but added to the number of Aztecs under arms. The great square itself and the entrances of all the large avenues leading into it were crowded with dark warriors, armed with slings and bows and spears and the terrible, heavy club set with metal knives. The priests ran to and fro among the companies, gesticulating and urging the Aztecs to avenge the insults to their gods. Instead of being a confused rabble, the Indians had now the dignity of regular troops massed in battalions, each with its own officer. Banners were there from every principal city in the valley of Mexico, showing that from all over the kingdom simple and noble and priest had gathered in a great religious war. High above the other standards was the royal banner of feather-work, bearing the same device that Montezuma had carved over the doorway of his palace—an eagle pouncing on an ocelot.

As the palace gates opened for the Spaniards to pour out, the Indians were in motion. Cortes ordered a raking fire from the artillery and, under cover of the Indians' confusion, dashed through the open gate into the square at the head of his cavalry, followed by Spanish and Tlascalan foot.

The Aztecs, preparing to attack, not to be attacked, were too surprised to resist. For a moment they were helpless, crushed down by the horses' feet or caught by the Spanish lances. Then they fell back a little down the avenue to a barricade of earth and timber, from whose shelter they poured on the Spaniards a volley of arrows.

Cortes was not to be held back by so flimsy a barrier. At once he ordered up the heavy guns and swept the street clear. Then he ordered another cavalry charge.

But this little stoppage had given the Aztecs time to rally again. Fresh troops poured into the avenue from all the side streets, and the canals were swarming with warriors in canoes. Worst of all, the slingers on the housetops poured down a deadly fire.

By repeated charges the Spaniards drove back the Indians, who were clinging to the horses' legs and trying to pull down their riders. To stop the galling fire from the housetops, Cortes ordered the Tlascalans to burn all the houses bordering on the great avenue, while he pressed on after the foe. As the canals cut the street into small sections and prevented the fire from spreading, it was late in the afternoon before the work was accomplished.

The Aztecs, after all day being driven back, to rally only to be defeated again, by their force of numbers still held the field. They had lost ten men to every one of the Spaniards,

but they could have lost one hundred to one and still had men left to withstand the white men, for all day long recruits had been pouring in from the countryside to fill up the vacant places. Cortes, however, had interrupted their assault on the palace and had shown them again the power of Spanish firearms. Now he sounded the retreat and led his tired, hungry men back to their quarters.

As they went, Cortes saw in a side street his friend Duero unhorsed and desperately defending himself with his dagger against a number of Aztecs. The Spaniards were brave in facing death, but shuddered before what they knew would befall them if they were captured by the Indians. Cortes, shouting his war cry, dashed against the group of Aztecs. They fled at his coming, and Cortes recaptured Duero's horse and helped him to mount, and then the two galloped through the Indian forces and joined their own men in the palace courtyard.

The Indians followed up to the gates with their flights of stones and arrows and, when the Christians were safely inside, settled down outside as they had the night before, and all night long by turns they begged to have Montezuma delivered to them or threw taunts and threats over the wall at their foes.

"The gods have delivered you at last into our hands," they cried; "Huitzilopotchli has long cried for his victims. The stone of sacrifice is ready. The knives are sharpened. The wild beasts in the palace are roaring for their offal. And the cages," they added, taunting the Tlascalans with their leanness, "are waiting for the false sons of Anahuac, who are to be fattened for the festival."

Again Cortes did not sleep. He acknowledged now to himself that this was no mere tumult, but an actual revolution, with his few men set against tens of thousands of keen, determined savages, with capable leaders who, despairing of rescuing Montezuma, were now ready to act without him to free Mexico.

At the earliest hour of light on the second morning, the Aztecs were in motion again. They hurled themselves with such ferocity against the wall that several warriors succeeded in getting into the courtyard. For a moment it looked as if they would carry the place by storm, but the Spaniards killed those who had entered and drove back the others.

It was a desperate moment for Cortes. He had completely lost his power over the Aztecs; he could no more cajole them, and he knew he could not long withstand them. There was only one resource left him; he must get Montezuma to intercede once more with his people. Swallowing his pride, Cortes sent Olid and Father Olmedo to Montezuma.

The Emperor had been brooding over Cortes' insults and was not cordial. "What have I to do with Malinche?" he answered haughtily. "I do not wish to hear from him. I desire only to die. To what a state has my willingness to serve him reduced me!"

Father Olmedo used his softest words to win Montezuma back to his former friendly views.

"It is of no use," Montezuma answered. "My people will neither believe me, nor the false words and promises of Malinche. You will never leave these walls alive."

Then Olid interposed and begged only that he should persuade the people to let the Spaniards leave Mexico in safety. "We are ready to depart and we will go at once," he ended.

Finally Montezuma consented. In his gala dress—his mantle of blue and white fastened on his shoulders with an emerald, his gold sandals bound on his feet, a gold crown on his head, a noble carrying the scepter before him, Montezuma went once more to speak to his people. The palace was a huge one story building, long and low, except that in the center a tower ran up another story. To this tower above the roof of the main building Montezuma ascended with his own suite and a Spanish guard. As soon as he appeared on the battlements he

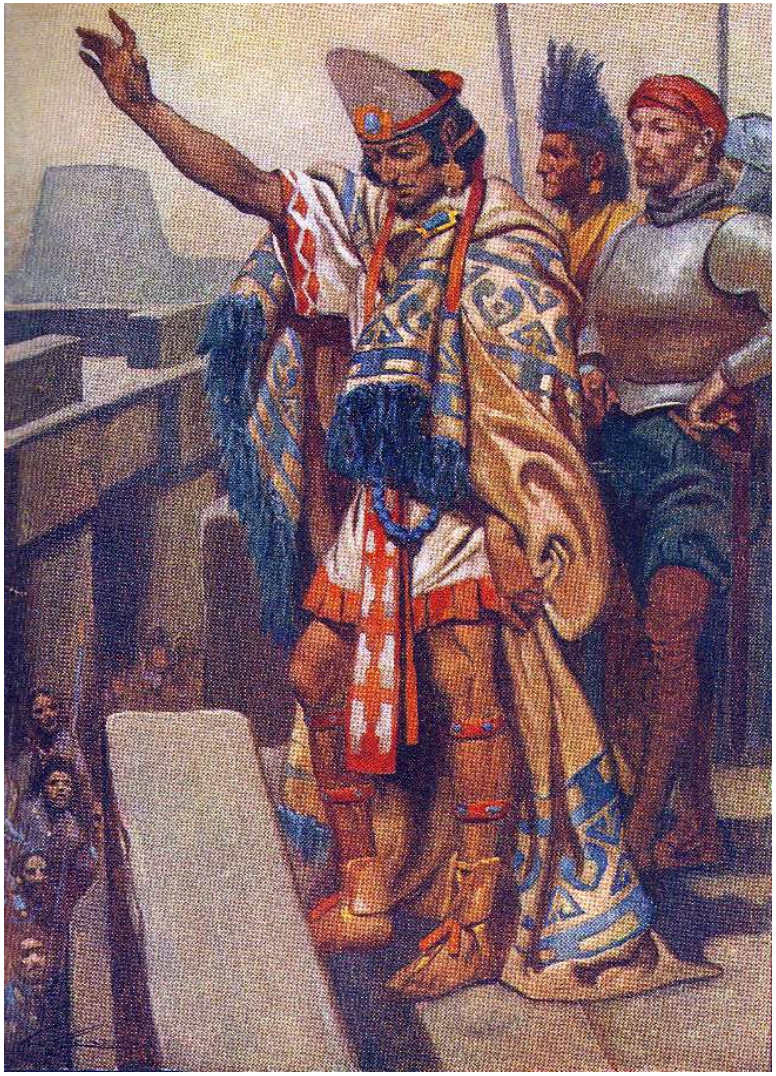
was recognized by the thronging Aztecs in the great square below.

At once the fierce cries and the wild clanging of their musical instruments dropped away and a tense silence fell over the thousands of Mexicans who stood in the presence of their lawful Emperor. They forgot for a moment that now they called Cuitlahua instead of Montezuma their monarch, and while many fell on their knees before Montezuma, all the dense throng gazed eagerly at the man whom they had worshiped as a god and whose face they had always been forbidden to look at.

Montezuma seized the moment of quiet expectation to address them. He, too, forgot that he was a prisoner instead of a king, and spoke with all his old authority, calmly but in a voice easily heard by all his waiting subjects.

"Why," he began, "do I see my people here in arms against the palace of my fathers? Is it that you think your sovereign a prisoner, and wish to release him? If so, you have acted rightly. But you are mistaken. I am no prisoner. The strangers are my guests. I remain with them only from choice, and can leave them when I list. Have you come to drive them from the city? That is unnecessary. They will depart of their own accord, if you will open a way for them. Return to your homes, then. Lay down your arms. Show your obedience to me who have a right to it. The white men shall go back to their own land; and all shall be well again within the walls of Tenochtitlan."

The Aztecs listened till the end, although a murmur of contempt ran through the throng when Montezuma called himself the friend of the Christians. When he had finished, their anger against the white men swept away their last remnant of reverence for a prince who could call his friends those who had insulted their religion and their customs. Surely now he was their prince no longer.



'RETURN TO YOUR HOMES. LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS'

"Base Aztec!" they cried. "Woman! Coward! The white men have made you a woman—fit only to weave and spin!"

In his excitement a chief brandished his spear, and instantly the excited mob, leaping to their feet, passed from taunting speech to deadly action. They discharged a volley of stones and arrows against the royal party.

The Spanish guard had seen the respectful kneeling of the crowd and had expected a quiet answer to Montezuma's harangue. Although taken utterly by surprise at this sudden attack, they sprang forward to cover the Emperor with their shields. It was too late. Two arrows pierced him and a stone struck him with such force on his temple that he fell insensible.

Then again the Mexicans were overcome with their superstitious reverence for their King. With their own hands they had struck down their Emperor. A dismal howl arose from the mob. Filled with horror at their deed, and fearful of the punishment the gods would send upon them, they scattered, panic-stricken, in every direction. The great square, a few moments before swaying with savage passion, was left utterly empty and silent.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE STORMING OF THE GREAT TEMPLE

JUNE, 1520

His attendants carried Montezuma to his apartments. As he recovered consciousness there came back to his mind his utter wretchedness; one year, the proud ruler of Anahuac, whose most distant tribes paid him homage, and the next, a prisoner in the hands of his enemies; no longer reverenced by, his subjects or feared by his foes; struck down by an Aztec hand. He did not wish to live.

Cortes and his generals tried to comfort him in the old way, but now they could make no impression. Montezuma would not answer; he did not even seem to hear them; he sat with his eyes on the ground, mourning over his loss of honor.

His wounds, though dangerous, were not necessarily fatal. Cortes gave him the best of care, but Montezuma would do nothing to help toward his recovery. Without a word he tore of the bandages every time they were put on. He had lost all. Nothing now but death could satisfy his savage ideas of honor.

Cortes, in his attendance on Montezuma, was interrupted by a call from his sentinels.

"The Aztecs have possession of the great temple," came the word, "and are assaulting us from that high position."

We can make a clear picture of things as they were. First the great square of the City of Mexico, or Tenochtitlan, with the four great avenues running out of it, north, west, south and east, and in its center the huge temple, a pyramid whose each side at its base measured three hundred feet and which rose in the air in terraces one hundred feet before it ended in the broad, flat, paved roof, on which stood the two tower-like sanctuaries. Around the courtyard of this great temple lay the Wall of Serpents, which had an exit on each of the four great avenues. Opposite the Wall of Serpents, across the square, was the wall which enclosed the courtyard of the palace of Axayacatl—a space large enough to contain not only the palace that sheltered the Spaniards, but also the barracks of the thousands of Tlascalan allies. Around the square were other palaces and buildings whose flat roofs commanded the palace courtyard. The picture is clear before our eyes.

Cortes had destroyed some of the houses which threatened his troops, but events had moved so fast that he had had little time to think of the menace of the great temple area which towered above him. It was in the possession now of a body of six hundred Aztec nobles, who had recovered from the shock of seeing Montezuma fall, and were showering arrows

down into the palace courtyard, while they sheltered themselves from return fire behind the sanctuaries.

Cortes saw at once that he must either vacate his quarters or drive the Aztecs from the temple area. To Escobar, his chamberlain, he gave one hundred men and orders to storm the temple area and fire the sanctuaries on top. Three times the little band tried to mount the terrace, and three times they were driven back.

Then Cortes himself headed the party. He had been wounded in the left hand the day before and was suffering greatly, but instead of nursing his wound, he had his shield buckled to his useless arm, and with his sword in his right hand, sallied out with three hundred picked Spanish troops and several thousand of his Indian allies to disperse the Aztecs massed in the temple courtyard.

He charged with the cavalry across the paved courtyard, but it was so slippery that the horses could not keep their feet. Cortes had to let the cavalry return to the palace, while he pushed back the Aztecs by means of his foot-soldiers. He soon got command of the temple courtyard, but the place he wanted was a hundred feet above him, up one hundred and fourteen steps, which could not be rushed all at once, but must be taken in five sorties. The first flight led only to the first terrace, and he must go on that terrace around the four sides of the pyramid before he came to the flight—just above the first—which led to the second terrace; passing around the temple four times before he could reach the flat, paved area at the top, where stood the two towers that Cortes wished to burn.

Cortes left a guard of Spanish arquebusiers and Indian allies to hold the foot of the staircase in the courtyard he had just cleared and, followed by Alvarado, Sandoval, Ordaz and others of his officers, sprang up the first flight of steps in face of the Aztec warriors who were drawn up on the terrace above to oppose him.

It took courage of the strongest to face that opposition. The Mexicans, from their higher place, showered down not only stones and arrows from their slings and bows, but thundered down the stairway heavy stones and beams and burning rafters, against which it was almost impossible to stand. The greater part of the invaders, however, got out of the way or sprang over these obstacles and reached the first terrace.

Once on level ground, it was not hard to push back the Mexicans and gain the next staircase. They had less trouble in taking this, for the Spanish arquebusiers below in the temple courtyard poured up a steady musket fire at the Indians in their exposed position, until finally they abandoned the stairways entirely and fled up to the flat area of the temple.

"The Spaniards mounted the last staircase close upon their rear, and the two parties soon found themselves face to face on this aerial battlefield, engaged in mortal combat, in presence of the whole city, as well as of the troops in the courtyard, who paused, as if by mutual consent, from their own hostilities, gazing in silent expectation on the issue of those above. The area, though somewhat smaller than the base of the temple, was large enough to afford a fair field of fight for a thousand combatants. It was paved with broad, flat stones. No impediment occurred over its surface, except the huge sacrificial block, and the temples of stone which rose to the height of forty feet, at the further extremity of the arena. One of these had been consecrated to the Cross. The other was still occupied by the Mexican war god. The Christian and the Aztec contended for their religions under the very shadow of their respective shrines; while the Indian priests, running to and fro, with their hair wildly streaming over the sable mantles, seemed hovering in mid-air, like so many demons of darkness urging on the work of slaughter." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

It was indeed mortal combat, for no quarter was asked or given, and no one could escape. At the end, either Mexicans

or Spaniards would be alone on the temple area without a surviving enemy. There was no wall to protect the edge of the area, and any man's misstep on the slippery pavement would send him hurtling down a hundred feet to the paved courtyard below. In the three hours' struggle that followed each party tried to throw his enemy from the height; sometimes two men in close embrace went over together. Two Aztecs seized Cortes, but he was too strong for them, and, instead of falling himself, sent one of the Indians to his own death.

The Mexicans outnumbered the Spaniards two to one, and in such a hand-to-hand conflict it seemed as if numbers and not skill would tell. But Cortes' veterans added to their courage and coolness and skill, matchless weapons and defensive armor, which counted for more than the numbers of the Aztecs. Fainter and fainter grew their resistance and fewer their numbers, until at last the only living Aztecs on the area were the two or three priests who had been taken alive.

Every Spaniard was covered with wounds, but nothing could stay them now in their rush to accomplish the destruction of the war god. They found, too, that the tower that had been given to them for a chapel had been restored to its savage uses; the cross and the image of the Virgin were gone, and the heathen symbols had been put back in their place. In the other tower before the awful figure of Huitzilopotchli a sacrifice was smoking on the altar.

With their war cry of victory the Spaniards fell upon the image of the war god and rolled him down the temple steps into the midst of the gasping crowd of Indians. Then they set fire to his tower, and the flames told abroad, as far as they could be seen, that Huitzilopotchli had been cast down from his high place.

The Spaniards marched proudly down from the temple top back to their own barracks through the files of Indians too awestruck by the overthrow of their gods to attempt opposition. That same night Cortes, flushed with victory, burned three hundred houses in the city.

The next day, thinking he had taught the Aztecs their lesson, he demanded a parley. He went up into the turret on the castle top with Marina, while the great chiefs gathered in the huge square below. They gazed with curiosity at Marina as she, in her soft Indian voice, translated Cortes' words.

"You must now be convinced," Cortes said to the Aztec chiefs, "that you have nothing further to hope from opposition to the Spaniards. You have seen your gods trampled in the dust, your altars broken, your buildings burned, your warriors falling on all sides. All this you have brought on yourselves by rebellion. Yet for the affection the sovereign, whom you have so unworthily treated, still bears you, I would willingly stay my hand, if you will lay down your arms, and return once more to your obedience. But if you do not, I will make your city a heap of ruins, and leave not a soul alive to mourn over it."

The Indians listened in silence, but they were not impressed.

"It is true," they answered, "that you have destroyed our temples, broken in pieces our gods, massacred our countrymen. Many more, doubtless, will yet fall under your terrible swords. But we are content so long as for every thousand Mexicans we can shed the blood of a single white man. Look out on our terraces and streets, see them still thronged with warriors as far as your eyes can reach. Our numbers are scarcely diminished by our losses. Yours, on the contrary, are lessening every hour. You are perishing from hunger and sickness. Your provisions and water are failing. You must soon fall into our hands. The bridges are broken down and you cannot escape. There will be too few of you left to glut the vengeance of our gods."

They ended this conference as they had that with Montezuma, by sending a shower of arrows at the Spaniards on the turret. Cortes and his men went moodily to their quarters.

Gloom settled dark over the palace of Axayacatl. The news ran through camp that the Aztecs were not to be appeased and that the white men no longer ruled or terrified them. Every word of their speech had been true. The Christians were short of provisions and water; they had lost men they could ill afford to spare, while the Aztec ranks were swelling hourly. And to Cortes, who realized what it meant, the taunt that the bridges were down was the worst word of all. He had known all along that Mexico could be a trap, and now he had shut his men up in it.

At once the Narvaez men broke into open mutiny. They had left a comfortable life in Cuba to fill their pockets with Mexican gold. Instead, they had filled their days with hardship and suffering, for which their reward was to be death or, at best, a return home poorer than they had set out. They wished they had never heard of Velasquez and they wished they had never seen Cortes.

Deaf to the veterans' arguments that Cortes always found victory in the end, and that, in the worst, their only chance of safety lay in keeping together and following their leader with implicit obedience, they demanded angrily that he should at once take them back to Vera Cruz, before they were sacrificed alive to the Mexican war god.

Cortes could not take his army back to Cuba just then, so he set them to work in the Tenochtitlan palace to build a bridge that could be carried with them as they marched and laid down over any gap in the causeway. When this was done, he started them at three movable forts.

We all remember in our Cesar the little moving forts Caesar used in his wars against the Gauls. Cortes had been planning something of the same sort since his first sally along the streets, when the Mexicans had assaulted the Spaniards from their flat roof-tops. He made of planks three of these little forts, called mantas, two-storied, with loop-holes cut in the side for the musketeers. They were mounted on wheels and were to be dragged through the streets by the Tlascalan allies.

Cortes, while he busied his men, was himself squarely facing the situation. He was one of those rare people who have the romance and poetry to glimpse the high vision, and who possess, at the same time, the patience and courage and constancy to carry the vision step by step into actual experience. It was his sureness of his own ability to accomplish his purpose unfalteringly that made his men as eager to follow as he was to lead.

Cortes did not for a moment consider that his cause was lost, but he saw that for the present he must leave Mexico. To stay was impossible; each day the breaches in the wall increased, and the numbers of his men diminished; yet even for those who were left, there was only a small daily ration of bread; they could not long on that endure the strain of hard fighting and constant watching; none but. Spaniards could have endured it so long. Cortes knew that to every mind but his, going out of Mexico now would mean the giving up of the conquest. He did not speak even to his friends about his own certainty of eventual success.

His mind made up to evacuate Tenochtitlan, he went to work to find the best way out, and decided that the safest route would be across the dyke of Tlacopan, which led from the great square west to the mainland; this causeway was two miles in length, but was the shortest of the three dykes.

He had come and gone before always by the southern causeway of Iztapalapan. In order to get acquainted with the Tlacopan dyke, he determined to make in that direction a sally which would not only serve the purpose of exploration but would give his men employment and blind the Mexicans to the fact that he meant to leave Tenochtitlan.

For this sortie he called into use his new moving forts, filling them with musketeers. As they rolled out of the palace courtyard and down the Tlacopan avenue, the Aztecs gazed with astonishment and dismay at this latest device of their enemies; a rolling house that belched fire and smoke from both sides against the Mexicans stationed on the low, flat

roofs, and which occasionally opened at the top to let Spanish soldiers leap out upon the housetops to engage in hand to hand fight with the occupants.

The Aztecs had their chance too. From the higher buildings they threw down huge stones and timbers on the forts and threatened to wreck them. The machines went along fairly well, however, until they reached the first canal. There the bridge had been destroyed and the farther side was guarded by Aztec troops. Although the canal was not deep, as the portable bridge had been left at home, neither the machines nor the cavalry could get across the opening. Cortes gave order to break up the clumsy, moving forts and to use their timbers to fill up the gap. The bridge was mended under a heavy Aztec fire. The cavalry charged across and swept the enemy before them as far as the next canal, where the Indians made another determined stand, and so on to the next, till all the seven breaches in the Tlacopan avenue had been carried by the Spaniards and filled in. The work took two days. Cortes, with a straight road now before him to the Tlacopan dyke, left Alvarado in charge of the avenue and went himself back to the palace of Axayacatl.

The Spanish successes seemed to discourage the Aztecs. They begged for a truce and asked that their captured priests might be sent as Cortes' envoys. Cortes sent them, hoping the worst was over. While he waited for his reply, he allowed his soldiers a little rest.

It was a very short respite. Instead of offers of peace, there came the news that the whole city was under arms again in a wilder tumult than ever; that they had overpowered Alvarado, and were again destroying the bridges. The desire for a truce was only an Aztec plot to get back their high-priest from captivity. Angry that the Aztecs had so easily duped him, Cortes threw himself on his horse and, with his guard, was off full speed to Alvarado's help.

The first body of Indians yielded at once to his wild charge. Cortes restored the bridge and, leaving his infantry, galloped on down the long avenue with his cavalry, driving the Aztecs at spears' point. But while he raced ahead, behind him, through the side streets, great bodies of Indians poured into the avenue of Tlacopan and attacked the Spanish foot, too faint and weary after its days of hard fighting to offer much resistance. The Indians again demolished the bridge Cortes had just restored, thus cutting off from their quarters all the Spaniards on the far side of the canal. Hearing the conflict, the cavalry charged back to this breach, where they found tremendous confusion. Cortes dashed this way and that, terrifying his enemies and cheering his own men by his well-known battle-cry. Finally the bridge was again repaired and the Spaniards passed over.

Cortes was the last. As his turn came, some boards gave way opening a hole six feet wide in the bridge. Amid a whirl of Indian arrows, he put spurs to his horse, leaped the chasm, and escaped with only a few slight wounds. Cortes' soldiers saw, leading on the charge in the thickest of the battle, their patron saint—St. James—riding a milk-white steed, his sword flashing lightning. He, they said, had taken care of Cortes.

As night fell the Indians dropped away and left the Spaniards in possession of the bridge. Cortes led his victorious troops back to the palace, but they went without joy, drooping with weariness and hunger, knowing that to-morrow it must all be done again.

As they passed in through the palace entrance, a messenger stood waiting for Cortes. He had still another thing to face.

Montezuma was dying.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MELANCHOLY NIGHT

JULY, 1520

Montezuma died as he had lived, a pagan. Father Olmedo, in his great earnestness, had used his best efforts to bring him into the Christian church, but the Emperor held without faltering to his own gods. They had betrayed him, but he clung to them. The good father, kneeling at his side, held the cross before his dying eyes.

Montezuma pushed it away. "I have but a few moments to live," he said, "and will not at this hour desert the faith of my fathers."

He sent for Cortes and begged him to care for his three daughters and to implore the Spanish King to see that they had their rightful inheritance. "Your lord will do this," he concluded, "if it were only for the friendly offices I have rendered the Spaniards, and for the love I have shown them—though it has brought me to this condition. But for this I bear them no ill-will."

Cortes promised this, and he kept his word. Then, in the arms of his faithful nobles, on the 30th of June, 1520, Montezuma, the great Emperor of the Aztecs, died.

"The tidings of his death," says an old historian, "were received with real grief by every cavalier and soldier in the army who had had access to his person; for we all loved him as a father—and no wonder, seeing how good he was."

Cortes was greatly affected by the death of Montezuma. There had been friendship between them, and Cortes must have reflected that he had caused all the Emperor's misfortunes. When the Spaniards had come into the country, Montezuma had been the bold and war-like king of all Anahuac; for their friendship's sake, he had become the enemy of his own people, and his constancy to the Spaniards had been his own undoing. At the age of twenty-three he had ascended the throne as the greatest prince the Aztecs had ever known; at forty, a prisoner, he died from a wound inflicted by one of his own subjects.

Cortes, sad for the loss of his friend, and heavy-hearted because in Montezuma's death there was broken the last shield that stood between the white men and the Aztec vengeance, paid the Emperor all possible honor. He sent the body, dressed in its royal robes, on a litter to the Aztecs in the city. With the sound of their wails in his ears he called his officers to council to determine how they might get out of Tenochtitlan with all possible speed.

It was decided to retreat to Tlascala by the short Tlacopan dyke, which was less likely to be guarded than the dyke of Iztapalapan. Cortes counseled that they should go that very night while the Aztecs were occupied with Montezuma's funeral ceremonies and before they could imagine that the Spaniards thought of going. This decision was strengthened by an astrologer, who had already predicted that Cortes, after great misfortune, would rise again to wealth and power, and who now declared that this night was the time for the Spaniards to leave Tenochtitlan.

All was in motion at once, as the men hastened preparations for departure and took their orders. The portable bridge was given to Magarino and forty men instructed in its use. The van of two hundred Spanish foot were to march under Sandoval and Ordaz. Alvarado, with Leon, commanded the rear composed of the strongest foot-soldiers. The center was under the charge of Cortes with a picked guard of one hundred of his veterans; here were the cavalry, the guns, the baggage, the treasure and the prisoners—Cacama and Cuicuitzca among them. The Tlascalans were distributed between the three bodies.

The royal fifth of the treasure cast in gold bars Cortes delivered to the royal officers, giving them the strongest horses and a Spanish guard. His own he also put under guard. The captains and soldiers carried their wealth around their necks in thick gold chains. When the public and private treasure had thus been disposed of, Cortes turned to the soldiers who were looking greedily at the shining heaps of gold still left on the floor.

"Take what you will of it," he said to the men. "Better you should have it than these Mexican hounds. But be careful not to overload yourselves. He travels safest in the dark night who travels lightest."

The veterans followed his advice and took only what could be easily managed, but Narvaez' men, greedy for gold, loaded themselves down with all they could carry.

The night was pitch black and cold, drizzling rain was falling. At midnight, June 30th, the entire force was under arms, listening to Father Olmedo perform mass for the last time in their palace chapel. He asked God's protection through all the terrible hours of peril ahead. Then the gates were noiselessly thrown open and, with fast-beating hearts, the Spanish army went out of the palace courtyard into the great square.

The square was deserted and silent as the troops marched across it and struck into the wide avenue of Tlacopan which led to the Tlacopan dyke. Every nerve was tense as the soldiers peered into the thick darkness that enveloped them or down upon the inky canals as they passed over the bridges, expecting in every shadow to find a lurking foe.

But none disturbed them, the seven bridges were all in place and their hearts grew steadier and their feet lighter as they went, until the broad skyline ahead showed that they had left the city behind and were on the edge of the causeway of Tlacopan.

Here was the drawbridge—the first of the three cuts in the causeway, which Magarino's portable bridge must cover for them. The troops halted. Suddenly from the shadow a lithe form sprang up and ran toward the city, yelling as he went.

The Spaniards shivered at the sound. Magarino, undisturbed, quickly got his bridge into place, and Sandoval dashed across to test its strength. As his company followed him over, from the great temple in the city came the wail of the priests' shells shrilling alarm, and high above those notes, the dismal, terrifying booming of the huge drum, sounded only in times of great peril, struck its fear into the hearts of those in flight.

Without disorder, however, Cortes' contingent followed Sandoval's across the bridge. And then there came another sound—like the rushing of a torrent or a mighty wind. Nearer and nearer it came; the sweep of thousands of paddles over the dark lake, and finally shower upon shower of arrows on the hurrying army; while from all sides echoed the Aztecs' awful war-cry.

With unwavering step the Spaniards pushed on. They pursued no foes, but struck at what opposed them. Upon each side of the causeway Indians sprang from the water to block their progress, and the white men struck them down with their swords or rode over them with their horses, and marched on.

The van reached the next break in the causeway before the rear had crossed Magarino's bridge. Crowded from behind, as more and more of the troops came onto the causeway, the van was in danger of being pushed into the water unless a bridge could be quickly provided. Sandoval sent messenger after messenger to the rear with orders to hurry forward with the bridge. His army in the meanwhile, with no means of going ahead and no means of assaulting the thousands of savages who were as thick here as at the last gap, did its best to keep cool and hold its ground.

After the last of the Spanish troops had passed over Magarino's bridge and the whole army was massed on the long, narrow island made by the causeway with a breach at each end, Magarino tried to raise his bridge. It was jammed tight by the great weight of horses and artillery which had passed over it. Work as he might, he could not get it free.

When the troops understood what had happened, a great cry of anguish arose. In black darkness, in streaming rain, massed together on a strip of land wide enough only for fifteen men to ride abreast, foes pushing behind and the gloomy waters on each side alive with their enemies, where could they find help?

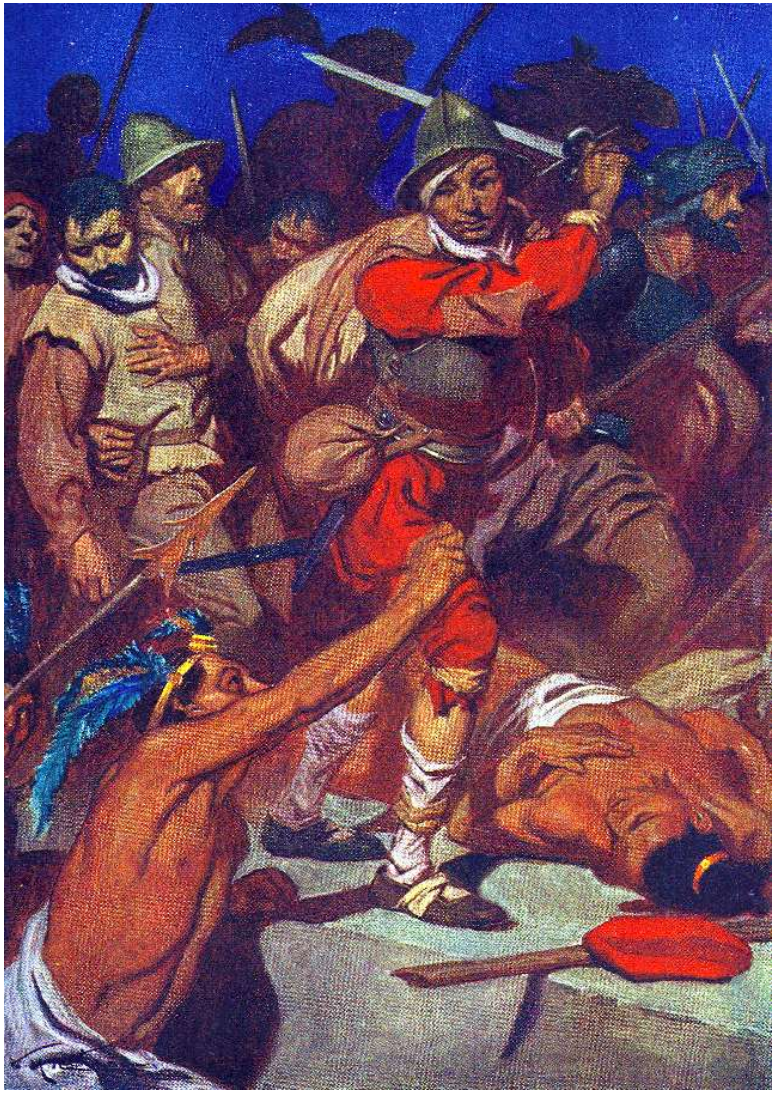
At once all order was gone. Each man forgot he was part of an army and tried only to save his own life. In panic and confusion they pressed this way and that, not caring now whether it was friend or foe they trampled. As they pushed on from behind they crowded Sandoval and his men in front to the very brink of the water.

Sandoval saw that someone must give way. He plunged on horseback into the water, followed by Ordaz and many other cavaliers. Sandoval and Ordaz swam their horses across the gap and scrambled up the slippery side of the second stretch of causeway ahead. Some of his men were with him, some were swept away into the darkness, others were seized and dragged into the Indian canoes.

The infantry came next, swimming or clinging to whatever offered support. All up and down the causeway the battle raged, a hand to hand conflict in the dark, where a misstep meant death.

Gradually, crowded irresistibly from behind, the wagons and guns and heavy baggage were thrust forward into the second breach in the causeway until the wreckage made of itself a bridge over which the rear could pass.

Cortes, in the meantime, had found a ford, and sitting stirrup-high on his horse in the water he tried to make his men recognize his voice and follow. But they could hear nothing through the wild uproar, and finally he rode on with a chosen few to join Sandoval on the causeway.



AT ONCE ALL ORDER WAS GONE. EACH MAN TRIED ONLY TO SAVE HIS OWN LIFE.

He found him advanced to the third breach, trying to cheer on his men to the last plunge, which would mean safety if they reached the far shore. But the water was wide and deep here, though not so closely guarded as at the other two cuts. Sandoval, as before, dashed into the lake and the bravest of his men followed, some swimming and others clinging to the horses' tails. Cortes and his corps followed—his veterans proving their wisdom in traveling light, as he had advised. Many of Narvaez' men, weighed down with gold, sank in the water and did not rise again.

Cortes and Sandoval scrambled up the far side of the slippery dyke and led their men along the last bit of causeway to the mainland beyond.

"The first gray of the morning was now coming over the waters. It showed the hideous confusion of the scene which had been shrouded in the obscurity of the night. The dark masses of combatants, stretching along the dyke, were seen struggling for mastery, until the very causeway on which they stood appeared to tremble, and reel to and fro, as if shaken by an earthquake; while the bosom of the lake, as far as the eye could reach, was darkened by canoes crowded with warriors, whose spears and bludgeons, armed with blades of 'volcanic glass,' gleamed in the morning light." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

And then along the dyke there came a breathless messenger.

"Alvarado and his corps are overwhelmed in the rear."

Just freed as they were from the jaws of hell, neither Cortes nor Sandoval hesitated. They turned their horses, swam the breach once more, and dashed into the very heart of the fighting to save their comrade.

Alvarado was unhorsed, defending himself desperately against the savages, and trying to rally his men, who were pushed to the very edge of the causeway by the enemy who shut them in on every side. Cortes' charge checked the Indians only for a moment; the next, the torrent of warriors swept forward again, driving Cortes and his cavaliers into the water. Alvarado, with no horse, would not follow, fearing that he would be seized at once by the canoes. After a quick glance, he did the impossible. He set his long lance in the rubbish in the chasm and, with one spring of his powerful body, threw himself across the gap.

"This is truly Tonatiuh—the Sun," gasped the Aztecs. They did not pursue.

Cortes, Sandoval, Alvarado and as many others as had saved themselves rode forward once more to join the broken remnant of the Spanish army marching off the causeway, while the Indians gathered up the treasure the white men had scattered in their flight.

Popotla was the first village the refugees reached on the mainland. Cortes got down from his horse and sat on the steps of an Indian temple to watch his shattered army pass before him—dismounted cavalry, shivering, dripping infantry, wounded allies. Guns, banners, baggage were all left on the fatal causeway, with many of those who had borne arms. The captain-general, as he missed one familiar face after another, lost for the time his indomitable courage. He covered his face with his hands and the tears trickled through his fingers. In the bitterness of his soul he could understand how these midnight hours would go down in history under the name of "The Melancholy Night."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON THE PLAINS OF OTUMBA

JULY, 1520

Cortes did not long yield to discouragement. Instead of counting those who were gone, he began to count gratefully those who were still with him. Marina was there and Father Olmedo—the two who had been to Cortes like a right hand and a left through all the expedition. Marina had been in Sandoval's division and had been carefully guarded during the wild hours of the night. Sandoval himself was safe, so were Alvarado and Olid and Ordaz and Avila and Aguilar. And so was Martin Lopez, the ship-builder.

When Cortes saw Lopez, he rose from the temple step and slung his leg once more across his good horse, while his thoughts went racing eagerly ahead to future achievement. Even in this moment of retreat he turned mentally back to Mexico. Lopez could build new brigantines; Sandoval and Alvarado could lead new attacks; the army, refreshed, could march back to Tenochtitlan; he should still accomplish his purpose.

For the moment, however, his army was stunned. When Cortes put himself at their head and led them on to the city of Tlacopan, they followed without hope or courage. In the main street of Tlacopan they halted; it did not seem to matter much now where they went or what they did. Cortes could not let them stay in an enemy's city, exposed to fire from housetops; he led them through the city and out into the country beyond where, in the neighborhood of a temple set on a hill, he reorganized his broken forces. Leon, alone, of his chief captains was missing; he had been killed early in the fight; only Sandoval or Alvarado could have been a severer loss to Cortes. Cacama, the king of Tezcuco, had also been slain. Of the army, there were left about one-third of the Spanish, one-fourth of the Tlascalans and twenty-three horses. The baggage and most of the treasure had been lost; the cannon were gone; even their muskets the men had thrown away in their eagerness to escape.

When Cortes had reformed his army, he set it, weary as it was, in an attack against the temple on the hill. The Indian garrison fled at the first charge, and the Spaniards took possession of the temple with its food and fuel. They built fires to dry their clothes, while they satisfied their famishing hunger, and then, like tired dogs, they dropped down and went to sleep.

Cortes watched them while they slept and dreamed his own dreams. He was the commander-in-chief of a discouraged army of little more than two hundred unarmed men; a powerful foe was behind, and doubtful allies before—for how would Tlascala receive a beaten general responsible for the death of thousands of Tlascalans? Beyond Tlascala was Velasquez in Cuba, who must be reckoned with if Cortes' expedition failed; and beyond Velasquez was the King, whom success only could make Cortes' friend. But in the face of all this, Cortes was planning another invasion of Mexico.

He must go back to Tlascala first, hoping for a friendly reception and the chance to rest and newly equip his army. He had never been to Tlascala from the Tlacopan dyke, so he would be picking his way over a new road, and at the same time looking out for all possible perils. When he reached Tlascala he must be prepared for a doubtful reception.

Cortes gave his men all that day to rest, sure that it would take the Aztecs a day to secure their prisoners and bury their dead before they could start in pursuit.

At midnight Cortes roused his men, refreshed by sleep and food, and put them again into marching order. Without sound of drum or trumpet, leaving the camp fires burning to

deceive the enemy, the little army, its rear, front and flanks well-guarded, the wounded carried in litters, under the guidance of the allies, set its feet on the road to Tlascala.

As the Tlascalans chose the rough, twisting mountain paths that they might escape the Aztec cities, the troops had to depend for provisions on whatever they could find along the road. It was not much, and as day after day passed the men, weakened by hunger and weariness, dropped little by little what remained of baggage and treasure. They would have thrown themselves down by the roadside to die if it had not been for Cortes' unfaltering courage and gay good-humor. He chose for himself always the most meager fare, the most dangerous post, the hardest work. When their general was faring so ill, and keeping so cheerful, how could the soldiers grumble? Only the Narvaez men fretted. Cortes' veterans stood steadily at his back and his cavaliers at his side as they marched on, too tired even to notice the taunts of the small bodies of Indians who hung on their rear.

"Hasten on!" they cried. "You will soon find yourselves where you cannot escape."

On the morning of July 7th, the army were about twenty-five miles from Tlascala, climbing the mountain steeps which lay between them and the plain of Otumba. As they stumbled on, wondering how much longer they could endure it, two scouts came dashing back up the path.

"An army of thousands is waiting for us down there," they cried.

The soldiers dropped their apathy. Cautiously they passed on over the mountain top and looked down into the plain, so crowded with Indian warriors in their white quilted cotton doublets that the valley looked as if it were filled with snow. As far as the eye could reach, the Spaniards saw, as they had seen in the Tlascalan pass once before, a sea of banners and plumes and spear-tips tossing in wild confusion. Cuitlahua had called on his vassals around the region of Tlascala to arm, and every great chief had responded with thousands of men.

Even to Cortes, for a moment, came the thought that this would end it. How could his exhausted troops, scarcely able to drag themselves along, oppose a force like this? They knew, as well as he, that if they could not cut their way through the tumultuous mass below, they would die to a man. There was no retreat. Tenochtitlan lay behind them.

Coolly, without delay, Cortes formed for a charge. He made his front of foot soldiers as broad as possible, and protected its flanks with his twenty horse. He spoke his few words of encouragement, reminding them of past victories and assuring them that God, who had brought them this far, would carry them through.

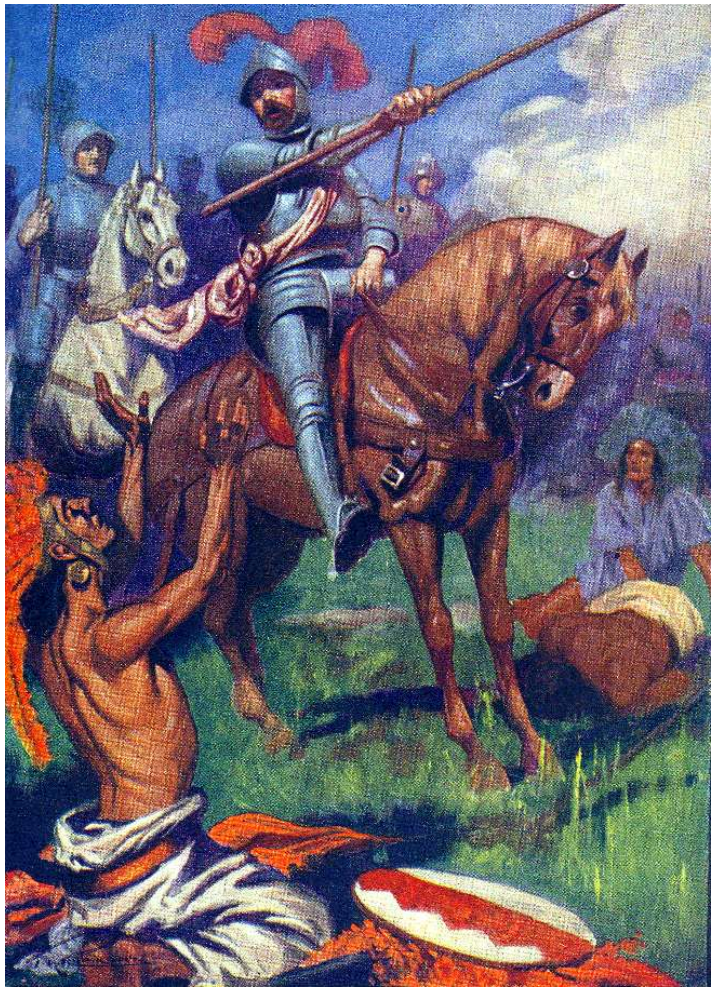
The soldiers listened and responded. With firm step and unmoved faces they went on down the mountain to throw themselves on the Indians. It seemed like tossing pebbles into a lake.

The Indians rushed to meet them with their war-cry and a cloud of arrows so thick that it shut out the sun. The Spaniards pressed on valiantly, the cavalry cutting themselves a road through the enemy, where the intrepid little body of foot followed them. For a moment the mass of savages rolled back on each side, like the Red Sea, and allowed the army to pass. But the next instant it billowed forth again to overwhelm the white men.

The Tlascalans, almost at their own doors, fought furiously against the Aztec host. The Spanish infantry, with bristling spears, stood like a rocky island in the surf, while small bodies of horse dashed this way and that against the thousands of savages. Sandoval did wonderful acts, managing his horse as if he were part of himself, as he plunged fearlessly wherever the fight was thickest.

The sun climbed high in the heavens and turned the valley into an oven. The host of Aztecs seemed to increase

with each moment, for, for every one killed ten took his place. The weary Spaniards, worn still more by the heat, began to despair, as the hours passed, of ever getting through the solid mass of men who opposed them.



'THERE IS OUR MARK. FOLLOW ME!' HE CRIED.

Cortes early in the action had received a severe wound in the head. Now he lost his horse. Without a pause he caught a pack-horse, threw himself on its back and was away again into the thick of the fight. His aim from the first had been to kill the Aztec chiefs, for he knew that a horde without leaders would be harmless. As he swung back now into the melee, he saw in the middle of the throng a chief who, by every mark, was high in command; his handsome feather-work cloak, the plumes on his helmet, the gold banner that rose from his shoulders, and the number of his followers, all showed his rank. Cortes turned to Sandoval, who was by his side.

"There is our mark. Follow me!" he cried, and was off. Sandoval, Alvarado, Olid and Avila followed him.

The tired horses answered to the spur and plunged fiercely once more into the host of Aztecs, who fell back in surprise at such a wild charge from men they had thought conquered.

"St. Jago, and at them!" cried the Spaniards, and cut their way through the mass of warriors to the chief. One blow from Cortes' spear brought him to the ground, and his guard, struck with terror, turned and fled.

A very young knight riding close to Cortes killed the chief and gave to Cortes the gold banner the cacique had worn on his shoulder. The deed was seen all over the field, and the Indians, filled with panic, turned to run, trampling one another in their eagerness to escape.

The Spaniards and Tlascalans forgot how tired they were and started in pursuit, driving the foe before them like sheep until Cortes recalled them. The battle field was strewn with the riches of the chiefs who had been slain; with gold ornaments, gems and feather-work mantles. Cortes let his men repay themselves for the treasure they had lost in coming out of Mexico before he called them again back to their companies, where Father Olmedo offered thanks to God for their wonderful protection.

Then, as the sun was dropping in the west, the victorious little army set out once more on its march to Tlascala.

CHAPTER XXIX

MAXIXCA SAVES CORTES

AUGUST, 1520

Fortunately the army had only a short way to go before they found an Indian temple which gave them safe camp and undisturbed rest for the night. At dawn Cortes started them off again, for they must not stay too long in the enemy's country.

Small bodies of Indians followed them as they marched, but they were not attacked. They found a spring before they had gone far, and the whole army shouted for joy, for plenty of cool water was hard to find in that dry region. Thus refreshed, they went steadily on until suddenly they came, as they had before, right against the Tlascalan wall.

The Tlascalans let out a ringing shout as they saw their home once more, and the Spaniards shouted with them, for were they not all brothers-in-arms? The Tlascalans, since their common misfortunes, had shown more friendliness than ever for their white brothers. Cortes, however, wondered. He was bringing back about half the allies he had taken out. If Tlascala wished to punish the Spaniards for leading its people to death and disaster, how could Cortes, with his feeble little army, resist them?

"Thoughts like these," said Cortes afterward, "weighed as heavily on my spirits as any which I ever experienced in going to battle with the Aztecs."

Instead of showing his depression, he called his men together and gave them some advice.

"Show all confidence in our allies," he said, "for their past conduct has afforded every ground for trusting their fidelity in the future. But, at the same time, take great care, now that our strength is so much impaired, that we give our high-spirited allies no ground for jealousy or hard feeling. Be but on your guard, and we have still stout hearts and strong hands to carry us through the midst of them."

Then, with every show of serenity and courage, the army once more stepped from Aztec ground on to the soil of the Tlascalan Republic.

At once they met kindness. The natives welcomed them with food and lodging. For two or three days they rested, until the old chief, Maxixca, heard of their arrival and came, with the young Xicotencatl and a large retinue, to welcome them.

"We have made common cause together," Maxixca said as he embraced Cortes, "and we have common injuries to avenge; come weal or woe, be assured we will prove true and loyal friends and stand by you to the death. That you could so long withstand the confederated power of the Aztecs is proof of your marvelous prowess."

Cortes gratefully accepted Maxixca's invitation to the capital, and went on under Maxixca's escort, the wounded carried in hammocks by Indian porters. Cortes and his guard were lodged in Maxixca's own palace; the other Spaniards were given quarters in his district of the city.

For a good many weeks the Spaniards rested in Tlascala and nursed their wounds. The blow Cortes had received on his head at Otumba sent him to bed with an alarming fever. But his sound constitution and unfaltering courage put him on his feet again. While he lay in bed he was making plans for his return to Mexico.

Cortes found, on his recovery, that Leon's treasure, which he had left in Tlascala, was gone. The soldiers had tried to carry it to Mexico and had been killed by the Aztecs. All that the army had now was what had been taken at Otumba. With this the soldiers repaid Tlascalan kindness. Cortes especially made Maxixca happy by giving him the gold banner

taken from the chief overthrown in the battle. Such an Aztec trophy was dear to the heart of a Tlascalan.

While the Spaniards were resting in Tlascala, Cuitlahua, lawful Emperor of the Aztecs since Montezuma's death, was busily employed in restoring Mexico, rebuilding the houses and making new bridges. He was putting the city into a state of defense, and training his men into better discipline against the time when they should again meet the Spaniards. Cuitlahua called on his vassals far and near to rally to his standard. Those near Tenochtitlan obeyed him, for they were afraid not to; but those at a distance, hating the Mexican yoke, took this time to throw over their allegiance.

When Cuitlahua saw that all his subjects were not going to stand by him, he determined to try and win over the Tlascalans. To the four rulers of the republic he sent an embassy of Aztec nobles, with presents of cotton-cloth and salt which the Tlascalans had not been able to get for many years—and asking help against the Spaniards.

Cortes heard with anxiety of their coming, for in all his plans the Tlascalans were his surest reliance. He wanted to punish the Indians who had killed the five soldiers with Leon's treasure; he wanted to punish the Tepeacans who had just murdered a body of twelve Spaniards; he wanted to go back to Mexico. He had heard nothing from his letter sent to the King of Spain; he had not heard from the messenger he had sent out, whether Vera Cruz had been taken by the enemy. He had no one to depend on but Tlascala. If the republic bought an easy peace with Mexico, it would mean the extermination of the Spaniards. Cortes knew that the younger Xicotencatl still hated the Spaniards, and that the young chiefs, who were Xicotencatl's friends, were of his mind.

"After all the calamities that these strangers have brought upon us, are we now to be burdened with their maintenance?" they were asking.

The young Tlascalans were not the only ones who fretted. The Narvaez men, recovered from their wounds, began to clamor for a return to Cuba to those peaceful farms they had left for this uneasy life of adventure, which so far had brought them neither gain nor glory. Their grumbling broke out into open mutiny when Cortes' messenger came back saying Vera Cruz was safe, and Cortes at once sent him back with an order to the Governor of the city to send reinforcements to Tlascala. They prepared a formal paper which they sent to Cortes.

"How foolish," they said, "to think of going forward with our thin ranks against a nation like the Aztecs, who even now are sending envoys to Tlascala to make this country their ally. The Aztecs will accomplish their purpose doubtless, for do we not hear every day how tired Tlascala is getting of feeding us? It is useless to wait for reinforcements from Vera Cruz, when that city may at any moment be overwhelmed and taken. Let us return to Vera Cruz and strengthen that garrison and wait there for help from home. If it does not come, we can go back from Vera Cruz to Cuba."

Cortes read this paper, very sorry to see that Duero's name headed it. But it did not in any way turn him. He knew that if he took his army back to the coast, it would be only a question of time before it would find some way of getting back to Cuba, leaving him a ruined man. For him there was no going back. If he succeeded in taking Mexico, Charles V might forgive the way he had taken things into his own hands; if he failed, he had both the King and Velasquez to reckon with.

He met the protest in his usual calm fashion.

"Can we with honor," he asked, "desert our allies whom we have involved in war and leave them unprotected to the vengeance of the Aztecs? Remember, too, that if we have recently met with reverses, up to this point I have accomplished all and more than all I have promised. It will be easy to retrieve our losses, if we have patience, and abide in this friendly land until the reinforcements, which will be ready

to come in at my call, shall enable us to act on the offensive. If, however, there are any so insensible to the motives which touch a brave man's heart, as to prefer ease at home, to the glory of this great achievement, I would not stand in their way. Go in God's name. Leave your general in his extremity. I shall feel stronger in the service of a few brave spirits than if surrounded by a host of the false or the faint-hearted."

Cortes' veterans answered him with enthusiasm, pledging themselves to stand by him to the last. Their indignation shamed the Narvaez men into giving their promise, also, to remain for the present if they might be allowed to go when they wished.

This trouble over for the time, Cortes waited to hear what the Tlascalans would answer to the Aztec envoys. The Mexicans presented their cause to the council.

"Let us bury past grievances," they said, "and enter into a treaty. Let all the nations of Anahuac make common cause in defense of their country against the white men. You will bring down on your own heads the wrath of the gods if you longer harbor the strangers who have violated and destroyed our temples. If you count on the support and friendship of your guests, take warning from the fate of Mexico, which received them kindly within its walls, and which, in return, they filled with blood and ashes. We conjure you, by your reverence for our common religion, not to suffer the white men, disabled as they now are, to escape from your hands, but to sacrifice them at once to the gods, whose temples they have profaned."

The councilors listened judicially to the harangue and weighed the promises of friendship offered by the Aztecs in return for the Tlascalan help in destroying the white men. Then sending the envoys out from the council, they debated the matter.

There were two parties in the assembly. The older and more thoughtful men were headed by Maxixca; the young chiefs, ready for any rash action, followed the younger Xicotencatl.

"Shall we trust the Aztecs?" Maxixca asked. "They are only playing their old part—fair in speech, false in heart. Fear drives them now to seek our friendship. When the fear is gone, they will crush Tlascala as they have always done. The white men have showed themselves always friendly; they have fought the enemies of Tlascala. Shall we now betray them to the Aztecs?"

All the older chiefs agreed with Maxixca—even Xicotencatl's blind father. But the words provoked the younger Xicotencatl to anger. We can imagine what he would answer.

"The white men will destroy our religion and our country. So sacrilegious an alliance can bring no good to Tlascala."

His friends applauded him. Maxixca answered, and Xicotencatl replied even more sharply than before.

The old chief did not waste more time in argument. He rose and thrust Xicotencatl from the room, and no one reproved him for the act.

No one dared stand by Xicotencatl who had been so openly disgraced. When the matter was put to vote, even Xicotencatl's friends voted to reject the proposals of the Aztecs and to stand by the Spaniards.

So once more Cortes, by his power of making friends, had come safely through a great peril.

CHAPTER XXX

CORTES TAKES TEZCUCO

DECEMBER, 1520

When the Aztec envoys had departed, Cortes drew a long breath and set Martin Lopez to work at new ships. There were to be thirteen brigantines this time. Lopez was to build them in Tlascala, test them, take them apart in sections, and send the ship thus on the backs of Indian porters to Tezcuco. The iron work, sails and rigging were to come from Narvaez' ships at Vera Cruz. Cortes would not again trust himself in the causeway-city of Tenochtitlan without some means of getting out.

With a thought of keeping his men employed until he was ready for a second march to Mexico, Cortes set a force in order to punish the Tepeacan Indians who had killed the twelve Spaniards. The Tepeacans had sworn allegiance to Spain when Cortes first came into the country, so in this unprovoked attack they were guilty of rebellion as well as murder.

The general issued a proclamation before he started out, promising pardon to all tribes ready to return to the Spanish rule. The Tepeacans sneered at it.

"Come out and meet us in open fight," they answered. "We need victims for our sacrifices."

After that, Cortes did not hesitate. At the head of a small body of Spaniards and a large body of Tlascalans, he took the field. Xicotencatl went with him, perhaps to take a lesson in tactics from one of the few men who had ever beaten him. He had chosen a good master. Cortes in one battle crushed the Tepeacans, and quartered his army at their capital, Tepeaca, as it was rich and was close to the Aztec frontier, against which Cortes knew he must protect himself.

Cuitlahua had already garrisoned all the towns along his border with large bodies of Aztec troops, who, as usual, were making themselves very unpopular by their arrogance. One city in particular, Quauhquechollan, sent word to Cortes that the people so hated the Aztecs, that if the Spaniards would attack the city from without, the inhabitants would rise within, and between them they would crush the Aztec garrison.

Quauhquechollan lay at the end of a deep valley, with a river on each side, mountains behind and a strong wall in front. Cortes sent Olid across the border with two hundred Spaniards and a large Tlascalan force to help the cacique of Quauhquechollan.

As Olid marched, one Cholulan chief after another joined his ranks. He remembered their earlier treachery and, suspecting them again, not only refused their help, but sent them as prisoners to Cortes.

Cortes made a careful investigation and found that Olid had been wrong. After apologizing for the occurrence, and sending the chiefs home with many presents, Cortes, unwilling to risk another mistake like that, put himself at the head of the expedition against the Mexican garrison at Quauhquechollan.

The cacique was on the watch. As soon as the Spaniards entered the plain before the town, he roused the citizens, who pushed the garrison so hard that they fled to the temple and entrenched themselves there. Cortes, admitted into the city, assaulted the temple and killed every Aztec of the garrison.

When the Aztec troops quartered in neighboring cities saw what had happened to their comrades in Quauhquechollan, they gathered in force on the plain to attack the Tlascalans whom Cortes had left outside the city. The Aztecs were thirty thousand strong, gay in their gold and jewels, their plumes and feather cloaks. The Tlascalans were

having a hard time to hold their ground, until Cortes rushed from the city and with his cavalry pressed the Aztecs back into a narrow mountain gorge. The light Spanish troops then ran up the mountain on each side and poured down their fire from above while the Tlascalans attacked in front. Only a few of the Mexicans escaped up the steep mountain side and fled back to their camp, where the Spaniards followed them, and loaded themselves with the booty of the vanquished chiefs.

Still another city Cortes stormed and took, bringing away loads of plunder. Sandoval, too, made many successful excursions. The result was that most of the tribes of that region fell away from the Aztec Emperor and acknowledged the authority of the white captain, who led always to victory and plunder, and who distributed justice instead of punishment to his vassals. One cacique after another came to him for help and advice, until Cortes was as much the real ruler of this whole district as he had been for a little while in Mexico.

This power became in Cortes' hands a new weapon against the Aztecs. He was sure now not only of thousands of Tlascalan recruits, but he could count also on these other tribes as allies against their Mexican oppressors. He busied himself in teaching them something of his tactics and implicit obedience to his word.

Just at this time Maxixca died of smallpox, which a negro in Narvaez' company had brought into Cempoalla, whence it had spread through the country. The disease went even up to Tenochtitlan and killed the Emperor, Cuitlahua, after a reign of four months. Guatemozin was made Emperor in Cuitlahua's place. Though Guatemozin was but twenty-five years old, he was an experienced warrior, and had been active through all the overthrow of Spanish power. He had married Montezuma's daughter. He carried steadily forward the plans for strengthening and protecting Mexico.

Maxixca's death was a great loss to the Spaniards, for he had been their true friend. They all appeared at his funeral in deep mourning, and this token of respect bound the Tlascalans more firmly to the Spaniards. It was a comfort to the Christians that Maxixca had received baptism from Father Olmedo and had died with the cross before his eyes, commending to his son the white men whom he had loved. The boy was but twelve years old, but Cortes confirmed him as successor to his father's position. He also was baptized into the Christian faith and received knighthood from Cortes' hand.

Although Cortes was carrying forward his plans so successfully with his allies, the grumblers among his soldiers—Duero was of the number—still demanded to go back to Cuba. Cortes let them go, for with his own veterans and his thousands of staunch Indian allies, he felt ready for his new expedition. He sent Alvarado to guard the weak-hearted ones to Vera Cruz, and ordered a vessel to be provisioned and fitted out there and placed at their disposal.

As these men went, others took their places. Two vessels sent out by Velasquez, with letters for Narvaez, as well as a ship from the Governor of Jamaica, sailed confidently into Vera Cruz. The Governor of Vera Cruz let the men land and then told them that Cortes and not Narvaez was in command. As what they wanted was gold, they were quite willing to take Cortes for their leader and to go up to Tlascala to enlist.

And even this was not all, for the captain of a ship full of military stores, hearing of Cortes' success, instead of selling his wares in Cuba as he had intended, brought them to Vera Cruz. Cortes bought ship and cargo and induced the crew to add themselves to his army. Thus he added to his forces a hundred and fifty well-equipped men, twenty horses and a fresh supply of ammunition.

To add to these stores, Cortes set his men to work making new firearms and repairing the old. He wanted more gunpowder, too, and lacked sulphur for it. So he sent four men, under Montano, back to Popocatepetl. They climbed the mountain to the edge of the crater—an ellipse three miles long—and looked down almost a thousand feet at the lurid flames at the bottom. The steam rising from this flame had

formed sulphur crystals on the side of the crater, and those were what the men wanted. They cast lots as to who should go down. Montano drew the lot, and was let down in a basket four hundred feet into the crater and drawn up again several times before the party had all the sulphur they needed to carry back to Tlascala.

In a second letter that Cortes wrote to the King of Spain he spoke of getting the sulphur from the volcano and suggested that it would be a little more convenient to receive his sulphur from home. He made light of all his adventures, however, saying he did not count danger and fatigue against the conquering of Mexico, of which he was sure. He ended with a request for a commission to be sent out to establish his right to what he had gained.

With Cortes' letter went another, signed by nearly every officer and soldier in camp, saying that Velazquez had interfered from the start with Cortes' efforts for the King, and begging that Cortes' authority might be confirmed by the crown, for he, by his knowledge of Mexico, his own character and the love he inspired in his soldiers, was the man who could conquer Mexico. But it was not until many months later, when Cortes had really conquered Mexico, that he had an answer to his letters. Then Charles V sent him the commission he asked for.

It had been on the first day of July, 1520, that the Spaniards had left Tenochtitlan in their attempt to escape over the causeway. By Christmas of that year Cortes, after six months of drilling and preparation, was ready to go back to Mexico with a better army than his first. He had six hundred Spaniards, forty cavalry, eighty foot-soldiers armed with crossbows and arquebuses, and four hundred and eighty carrying swords or the long copper-headed pikes. His artillery consisted of nine guns. His allies from Tlascala, Tepeaca and other places counted a hundred thousand, armed with bows and arrows, pikes and their barbed clubs. Cortes was not ready to take all the Indians with him now, as he did not wish to feed so great a multitude until the arrival of the brigantines should make it possible for him to move finally against Tenochtitlan.

Cortes reviewed his troops and made one of his stirring speeches.

"You march against rebels," he said, "against the enemies of your King and your religion. And you go to fight not only the battles of the crown and of the cross, but your own as well; to wipe away the stain from your arms; to avenge your dear companions butchered on the field or on the accursed altar of sacrifice; to gain riches and renown in this life and imperishable glory in that to come."

The soldiers with shouts promised that they would this time conquer or leave their bones with those of their companions in the waters of Lake Tezcuco, and with colors flying and music playing, on the 28th of December, the army marched out of Tlascala and took its way to Tezcuco, which, on account of its easy access from Tlascala, Cortes meant to occupy as his headquarters.

Up the steep, rough trail over the mountains, the army toiled as they had before, through the cold and the storm, then down an even rougher path on the opposite slope, till they came into milder climate and softer country, and at last out on the plain that commanded the whole valley of Mexico, lying quiet and sunlit in the hills which surrounded it. But on every hilltop there was a beacon fire.

With his usual care against surprise, Cortes led his troops around the turns of the hills and through the forests, for the beacon fires showed him that Mexico knew of his approach, and that at any moment he might come upon an ambush. When he got down the mountain safely, he expected to see the plain covered with warriors as it had been at Otumba. But no one opposed the Spaniards. On they went, until about ten miles from Tezcuco, they reached a small town where they camped for the night. Cortes did not close his eyes. He was wondering what was waiting for him in Tezcuco.

Cacama and Cuicuitzca, who had each in turn been King of Tezcuco, Cortes had carried with him out of Tenochtitlan on "The Melancholy Night." Cacama had been killed on the causeway. Cuicuitzca, who got through alive, had soon grown homesick in the Spanish camp and had run away back to Tezcuco, where his brother, Coanaco, had been made King of Tezcuco by the Aztec Emperor. Coanaco had not been glad to see his brother, Cuicuitzca, but had immediately put him to death. There was still a fourth son of Nezahualpilli, named Ixtlilzochitl, who had offered his services to Cortes when the Spaniards first came into Tlascala and who had ever since remained with Cortes. As Coanaco, the present King, was a strong ally of Guatemozin, he was not likely to welcome the Spaniards very cordially to his city.

However, when morning came, instead of an attack, there came a party of nobles with a golden flag of truce to invite Cortes to take up his quarters in Tezcuco and to promise that, if Cortes would spare the province, Coanaco would swear allegiance to the King of Spain. The nobles asked Cortes to stay where he was until the next day that Coanaco might have time to prepare a fitting reception for the white men.

Cortes accepted the invitation to visit the capital, but instead of waiting until the next day, he put his army at once into marching order and at noon on the last day of December, 1520, he entered the city of Tezcuco.

Once before—at the time when he had answered Alvarado's plea for help—Cortes had marched through Tezcuco and found it silent and empty. Now it was even worse. Cortes was quartered in the old palace of Nezahualpilli, but no nobles came to meet him and the King was not to be seen. The general at once sent some soldiers up to the top of the temple to see what was going on. They brought back the report that everyone was fleeing from the city, either to the mountains or across the lake. Cortes placed guards in the principal streets to capture Coanaco. But it was too late; he was gone.

As Coanaco had slipped through his hands, Cortes proclaimed that Coanaco was no longer King of Tezcuco, and put in his place Ixtlilzochitl, who was indeed the rightful heir as he stood next to Cacama in age. Under his friendly authority, Cortes set about making himself master of Tezcuco.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BRINGING OF THE BRIGANTINES

SPRING, 1521

The Tezcucans swore allegiance to their new King, Ixtlilzochitl, and acknowledged Cortes' authority. He did not wholly trust, however, a nation so closely connected with Mexico, and began at once to put his quarters into a state of defense against attack. That done, as Tezcuco was about a mile back from the shore, he set the allies at digging a canal from the town to the lake, so that he should have a waterway for the brigantines when they were brought up to Tezcuco.

Then, made safe at home, Cortes, while he waited for his ships, started out to crush the neighboring tribes, that they might not threaten his rear when he was ready to attack Tenochtitlan.

His first move was against Iztapalapan on the narrow isthmus that divided an arm of the salt lake of Tezcuco from the fresh water of Lake Chalco lying to the west of it. This city had belonged to Montezuma's brother, Cuitlahua, who had welcomed Cortes there on his first visit to Mexico, before he had learned to hate the white men. Now, although Cuitlahua was dead, the city was most unfriendly to the Spaniards. Cortes, leaving Sandoval in charge at Tezcuco, marched against Iztapalapan at the head of two hundred Spanish foot, eighteen horse and four thousand Tlascalans.

Within a few miles of Iztapalapan the army met a body of opposing Aztecs, who were easily pushed back, and Cortes pursued them as far as Iztapalapan. On the causeway just outside the city he met great numbers of Aztecs with their canoes, whom, as they offered no resistance, the Spaniards passed without notice as they swept pell-mell into the city after their flying foe.

Once in their own town, the Aztecs turned, but in the hand to hand fight which followed they proved no match for their enemy. The Spaniards killed them by hundreds, set fire to the houses, and by the glare of the flames plundered the town, until they were loaded with treasure.

It was while they were loading themselves with treasure that someone heard a queer sound and stopped to listen. The Indians knew at once what it was.

"The dykes are broken through," they cried.

Then Cortes understood. The Indians in canoes whom he had seen at the causeway had been busy making a hole in the dyke so that all the salt waters of Lake Tezcuco could pour in on the city of Iztapalapan. And now the flood was upon them.

Cortes sounded a retreat. It was night by this time, and the men must have had their minds filled with thoughts of the "melancholy night" on the dyke of Tlacopan. This night was as dark and looked as hopeless. When the Spaniards left behind the light of the burning houses, they had nothing to guide their steps. They stumbled along up to their belts in water, dropping as they went the treasure they had gathered. When they reached the breach in the dyke through which the water was sweeping like a river, there was no escape but by swimming. Those who could swim reached the farther side of the causeway, cold and exhausted, powder wet and treasure gone.

They dragged themselves wearily along till down, when they saw the lake swarming with Aztec canoes filled with warriors, who showered them with stones and arrows. The Spanish army kept on its march without returning fire, anxious only to get back to their warm, dry quarters at Tezcuco. It was night before they arrived.

Although the attack on Iztapalapan had seemingly ended so disastrously, it had actually accomplished much for Cortes. The neighboring tribes saw one of the finest cities of the region laid in ruins, and hastily sent envoys to Cortes offering him their allegiance. Even the people of Otumba who had opposed him in the great fight, and the city of Chalco lying on the east shore of the lake of Chalco, one of the most important towns of the region, begged for his friendship.

Guatemozin had put an Aztec garrison into Chalco, and the cacique of the place offered his submission to Cortes if he would drive out the garrison. Cortes sent Sandoval to their help. He routed a large body of Mexicans drawn up in a cornfield to oppose his entrance into the city, and once in Chalco, found that the cacique was dead and the Aztec garrison had run away. Sandoval, glad of such an easy victory, took back with him to Tezcuco two young sons of the cacique who had died lamenting that he had never seen Malinche and urging his sons to pay their tribute to the white captain.

The young nobles were ready to acknowledge the Spanish rule, but they said, very justly, that they should need in return Spanish protection against Aztec vengeance.

To Cortes' ever active mind there came the thought of joining the tribes of this region in a defensive league. Some asked his help, others offered him recruits that he did not need. He could not well spare his men to guard Chalco and other weak cities, but the offered allies might well help the cities who needed protection. As each tribe was at odds with every other tribe and hated it only less than it hated the Aztecs, it took much tact and argument to make them forget their grievances and unite in a common league.

"You are now vassals of the same sovereign," Cortes said, "engaged in a common enterprise against the formidable

foe who has so long trodden you in the dust. You must forget your quarrels with one another, for, singly, you can do little against the Aztecs, but, united, you can protect each other's weakness and hold the enemy at bay till the Spaniards can come to your assistance."

Cortes' wisdom prevailed. Feuds ceased and old-time enemies became warm friends, as one tribe after another fell away from Aztec rule and, under Cortes' protection, joined the new Chalcan league.

Cortes tried, too, his powers of persuasion with Guatemozin. From his first embassy he heard nothing. He sent a second, promising to respect the rights of all Aztecs and to uphold Guatemozin's authority as King, if Guatemozin would swear allegiance to Charles V of Spain. Again the Emperor sent Cortes no direct answer. He showed his contempt by publishing an edict that every Christian taken in Mexico should be sent to the capital to be sacrificed.

And then came news to Cortes that Lopez had made the brigantines, proved them sea-worthy, and had then taken them apart ready to send to Tezcuco.

It was Sandoval whom Cortes chose to go back to Tlascala for the ships, for young as he was, he had already proved his courage, coolness and good judgment.

Sandoval made the march in quick time, and as he crossed the borders of Tlascala he saw approaching the gay banners of a body of Tlascalan warriors who, tired of waiting for him, were coming with the vessels to meet him, under the leadership of a noble named Chichemecatl. Sandoval received the ships, and then dismissed some of the convoy, keeping twenty thousand men, whom he divided into two parties as guards, one to go before the ships and one behind. Chichemecatl he placed first in the van, but later changed him to the rear where Sandoval thought he would be more useful. The Indian warrior was rather insulted by the change, for he thought his place was in front, even though Sandoval explained that the rear was the post of danger and that he himself should march there. But his hurt feelings did not touch his loyalty.

With the heavy ships in sections on the backs of the Indian porters, Sandoval with his army traveled slowly up the mountains from Tlascala and down again on the other side to the valley of Mexico until, in four days, the party reached Tezcuco. The enemy hovered in their rear all through the march but did not attack them.

Cortes' joy knew no bounds when he heard that his ships were approaching Tezcuco. He might well rejoice that his plans had come out so well, for it was no light task to build thirteen ships in one place, take them apart, and send them on men's backs, through untrodden forests and over steep mountains, to a city sixty miles away.

Dressed in his best clothes, Cortes with all his officers went to meet the convoy, which stretched out for six miles along the road. The Tlascalan chiefs in their holiday attire were as brilliant as the Spanish cavaliers. It took six hours for the whole train to enter the city, marching with banners flying and music playing, while the whole host, Indians and white men, set up the ringing shout "Castile and Tlascala! Long live our sovereign the King!"

The twenty thousand Tlascalans were eager to push immediately against Mexico. "We come," they said, "to fight under your banners; to avenge our common quarrel or to fall by your side. Lead us at once against the enemy."

"Wait till you are rested," promised the general, "and you shall have your hands full."

For with his ships in the city, and so many friendly tribes outside, with Spanish cavalier and Tlascalan ally at his back, Cortes was ready at last to advance against Mexico.

CHAPTER XXXII

CORTES PICKS OUT HIS POSITIONS

APRIL, 1521

It was spring by this time, and still Cortes had had no response to either of the letters he had written to the King of Spain. The second letter was, indeed, still on the way, and the carriers of the first letter—Montejo and Puertocarrero—were at this time in Spain, pouring into one ear of Charles V their praises of Cortes, while into the other ear Fonseca, the Bishop of Burgos, poured his complaints of the general. Charles, confused between the two, was doing nothing either way.

Cortes, however, did not sit still and wait. He had a very definite plan in mind, and after he had given the convoy a few days of rest, he started to carry it out. His brigantines now made it possible for him to assault Tenochtitlan from the water side, but he must know, too, all about the approaches to the city from the land side. His plan was to march around the northern end of Lake Tezcuco and down the west shore till he came to the city of Tlacopan at the end of the Tlacopan dyke. He must take that city, for it would be an important place for him. From Tlacopan he meant to come back to Tezcuco. Then, making a fresh start, he would march around the southern end of the lake and up on the west shore to Tlacopan again. In this way he would circle the entire lake and find out what places he must choose as his bases when he began his blockade of Tenochtitlan. And as he marched, he meant to punish the tribes who had been unfriendly to him.

He left Sandoval in charge of Tezcuco and took Alvarado with him. He marched with the greatest caution around the northern end of the lake, camping by night in the open fields where he could not be taken by surprise. Everywhere beacons on the hilltops heralded his coming.

But although the whole country was in arms against the white men, Cortes found little opposition until he reached Tlacopan, where a large force of Indians were drawn up to dispute his passage. However, one cavalry charge routed them, and Cortes entered the city and took possession. It was the same place the Spaniards had passed through on the "melancholy night," afraid then to stop. Now they tranquilly made camp, sure of their ability to hold Tlacopan. In the morning they were again attacked by the Aztecs, and once more beat them off.

A day or two later the Indians attacked again. Made confident by their former easy victories, the white men advanced in force, and pursued their flying foe along the Tlacopan dyke that led into Tenochtitlan. After they had passed the first bridge, the Aztecs, reinforced by troops from the city, suddenly turned on their pursuers. They were aided by warriors in canoes which swarmed on both sides of the causeway. It was with great difficulty that Cortes fought his way back along the unlucky dyke to the camp at Tlacopan.

Before he left Tlacopan, Cortes tried his best to have an interview with Guatemozin, but the haughty young Emperor paid no attention to the general's invitation. Cortes approached a body of warriors one day with a flag of truce, asking if there were any great chief in the party who would confer with him.

"We are all chiefs," they sneered. "Why does not Malinche make another visit to Tenochtitlan? Perhaps he does not expect to find there another Montezuma as obedient to his commands as the former Montezuma."

With a final taunt to the Tlascalans as "women" who were afraid to come to Tenochtitlan unprotected, they withdrew.

Cortes stayed six days in Tlacopan, gathering news of the capital and then, laden with booty, went back to Tezcuco by the same northern route over which he had come, skirmishing as he went. Once back in Tezcuco, the Tlascalans wanted to carry their share of treasure home to Tlascala and Cortes had to let them go.

He had been back in Tezcuco only a day or two when a message came from Chalco, asking the Spanish help against several Aztec strongholds, which, perched high on the mountains, sent out men like swarms of hornets to sting and fly back to their nest. The Spaniards were too tired with their march to undertake another expedition at once, and Cortes sent messengers around through the tribes who had leagued together for defense telling them that now was the time to take a stand for Chalco.

But, though the league did its best, Chalco, not satisfied with Indian help, sent another petition to Cortes. His men were rested by this time, and he sent Sandoval with three hundred foot and twenty horse to Chalco's help. Chalco was almost as necessary as Tlacopan to Cortes, for it lay on the great thoroughfare to Tlascala and Vera Cruz, and he could not afford to let it fall into Aztec hands again. Sandoval went to Chalco for recruits, and then attacked and captured Huaxtepec, which he occupied, taking up his own quarters in the magnificent palace of the cacique built in the midst of wonderful gardens.

After a day or two here for rest, Sandoval led his forces against one of the "hornets' nests." It was a little fort perched so high on a mountain crag as to be almost inaccessible. The Spaniards pushed up the side of the mountain, to be met by huge rocks rolled down on them by the Aztec garrison above. The Indian allies, unable to stand the shock, fell back.

"We do not need them," Sandoval shouted to his own gallant little band, as he swung himself from his horse. "Nothing is too difficult for a Spaniard. We will carry the place or die in the attempt. St. Jago and at them!"

His cavaliers followed him. Up they went, ignoring wounds and blows, pulling themselves up by bushes and sheltering, when possible, behind the rocks, until, breathless, they gained the top and stood face to face with the astonished garrison.

The struggle then was short, for everything went down before the Spanish swords, which could only be escaped by leaping over the parapets to the rocks below. Sandoval's victory was complete. He had done what Cortes had ordered, so he sent the Chalcan warriors home and took his own men back to Tezcuco.

But Guatemozin knew that Chalco had sent its warriors to attack the mountain fortress, and thought it a good time to march against Chalco. Fortunately the squadron of canoes he sent across the lake against Chalco did not arrive until the Chalcan warriors got home again. They were so dismayed, however, to see the Aztec fleet ready for assault, that they sent hot-foot again to Cortes for help.

So it happened that when Sandoval came back with his story of victory, there came also the Chalcan messengers asking for more aid. Cortes, thinking Sandoval had not done all his duty, sharply ordered him back to Chalco, and Sandoval, hurt at his general's injustice, went without a word of explanation.

Before he reached Chalco again, however, the Indians of the league had met and defeated the Aztec army. Sandoval took several Aztec chiefs as prisoners and marched back to Tezcuco, where he went to his quarters without seeing Cortes.

Cortes had had time in Sandoval's absence to find out how unjust he had been. There was none of his captains on whom he really relied so much or whom he loved better, and when Sandoval came back, Cortes sent for him and told him so, apologizing for his rough words. Sandoval was frank and generous. He forgave Cortes at once and the perfect friendship was restored.

About this time Cortes had the good fortune to add to his army two hundred well-armed men and seventy horses who had just landed at Vera Cruz. In the party was Julian de Alderete, the King's treasurer.

Cortes now set out on his second excursion to Tlacopan by the southern route. Again he left Sandoval in charge, with orders to push on as fast as possible the eight thousand men who were building the canal and locks; and to guard as his life the brigantines in the stocks, for already two attempts had been made by Aztec spies to burn them.

Cortes started April 5th, taking with him three hundred foot and thirty horse besides a large body of Tlascalan and Tezcucan troops. After one day's march he arrived in Chalco, where he held a council, telling the Indians of the league, through Marina and Aguilar, that he would soon be ready to begin his blockade of Mexico. Every tribe gladly promised its help.

From Chalco he made a detour from his straight road to Tlacopan and went south into the mountains to see if he could destroy more "hornets' nests." He was not long in finding one hanging to the mountain side, and like Sandoval, he charged it.

He met the same reception that Sandoval had, but the rocks that came down now on the scaling party were so huge that not even a Spaniard could stand against them. Corral, the ensign, who led the advance, had his banner torn to shreds, and finally Cortes had to call off his men.

On the level plain below as they descended they found a huge force of Aztecs drawn up to oppose them. Cortes did not wait for an attack but with his cavalry spurred so fiercely at the enemy that they broke and scattered over the plain. The Spaniards did not pursue, for the day was hot and both men and horses were suffering for water. They went on a little way till they came to a grove of mulberry trees with a spring, and there they stopped to rest.

Above them here also hung two craggy fortresses, which immediately began to pour down fire upon them. As soon as his men were rested, Cortes charged the larger of the two, thinking to retrieve his defeat of the morning. But once more he was driven back into his mulberry grove, leaving the enemy in possession of the heights.

Cortes was awake at earliest dawn the next day. His first glance was toward the two fortresses and he saw, to his surprise, that in the night all the Indians in the smaller fortress had gone across to strengthen the forces in the larger one against renewed attack, and that the little fort was empty. Cortes was not the man to lose such a chance. Immediately he filled with his own musketeers and crossbowmen the position the Aztecs had deserted, and as soon as he saw the banner of Spain floating from the rock, he led the remainder of the army once more against the big fort that had yesterday repulsed him.

This time he had his muskets on the neighboring crag to help him, and it was not long before the Spanish colors were flying, too, from the second pinnacle. He was so humane in his treatment of his prisoners that the first fort he had attacked the day before also sent in its submission.

With so much accomplished, Cortes went on till he came to Huaxtepec which Sandoval had subdued. The cacique received the Spaniards kindly and lodged them in his own palace. After a few days' rest Cortes crossed the Cordilleras and went on for nine days exploring the country.

On the ninth day they came to a city lying on the far side of a steep ravine. There had been bridges across, but the inhabitants of Quauhnahuac, hearing of the white men's coming, had broken them down. Far each way to the right and the left the Spaniards searched for a way across and found none.

Presently a Tlascalan spied a huge tree on the other side of the ravine and just opposite it on their side another tree

as big; as the two arched over the chasm some of their branches met.

"I can cross by those trees," the Tlascalan said.

To Cortes it looked as if only a squirrel could find a passage over, but he let the Indian try. Like a monkey he climbed out on one tree, reached a branch of the other swaying in the wind, and swung himself across. Several other Tlascalans followed.

Then the Spaniards, thirty of them, heavy-armed as they were, attempted the same feat. Only three slipped. The rest, white men and red, drew up in order on the opposite bank and marched against the city, while the remaining army set actively to work to mend one of the bridges.

Quauhnahuac, not expecting foes to drop from the skies, was taken wholly unawares. It made a brave defense against the first force, but when the cavalry under Olid and Tapia charged across the restored bridge, and Cortes followed with the rest of the army, the citizens gave up and fled to the mountains. Cortes did not pursue, nor did he go further out of his way. He led his army, loaded with treasure, back across the Cordilleras and once more took the road to Tlacopan.

As they came again into the fertile, beautiful Mexican valley the city of Xochimilco, on an arm of the Tezcucan lake, lay directly in their path. Like Tenochtitlan, it was a water city with canals and causeways. As the Spaniards approached they were harassed by Indians, who gradually withdrew in the direction of the city.

Cortes followed and reached the causeway which led into Xochimilco. Here he found before him a broken bridge and beyond it a barricade which sheltered a large body of Indian troops. The water was shallow, however, and both cavalry and infantry got across the breach and stormed the barricade on the opposite side. The Indians fell back into the city and the Spaniards followed them pell-mell, leaving Cortes with a small force to guard the entrance.

Suddenly from an unexpected quarter the Aztecs attacked Cortes and overwhelmed his little force. Cortes, unhorsed, received a blow on the head which for a moment stunned him. In that moment an Aztec seized him and dragged him away. But the Tlascalans who could cross chasms on tree tops were quick at other things too. One of them sprang at Cortes' captor and engaged him till two of Cortes' servants came to his help, and finally the troops in the city heard the clamor and came dashing back to support their general. Cortes was rescued and the city taken. As Cortes could not find the Tlascalan who had saved him, he thought his patron saint, St. Peter, had come in disguise to his aid.

It was still light when the Spaniards entered Xochimilco. Cortes went at once to the top of the chief temple to look out across the country. It was not a comforting sight that met his eyes. The causeway was packed with Indian warriors and the lake dark with their canoes. Guatemozin, thinking he had the Spaniards trapped, was sending strong forces against them.

Cortes spent the night without sleep, going the rounds of his doubled sentinels and looking after the armorers who were putting copper heads to the arrow shafts. The night passed without disturbance, but at the first dawn the Indians poured into the town and attacked the Spaniards in the narrow streets.

The musketeers and the crossbow-men with their new copper-tipped arrows stood like a rock, pouring their fire into the enemy's ranks, until the cavalry came to their aid and by a fierce charge routed the foe.

Far across the plain the Aztecs fled and the Spanish horse pursued, until from somewhere a new Aztec force sprang up, and heartened by these reinforcements, the Indians turned on their pursuers and swept them back toward Xochimilco.

Before they reached the city the fleeing Spaniards met the whole Spanish army coming to their aid. With that support at its back, once more the Spaniards turned on the Aztecs and the two armies met with the shock of a thunderbolt. Back and forth they swayed, the war whoop of the savages mingling with the battle cry of the Spaniards, until finally the Indian army wavered, recoiled and then scattered. The white men turned the flight into a complete rout, before they returned to take up their quarters for the night in Xochimilco.

It was one of the richest cities of Mexico. When the Spaniards left it four days later they were as heavily laden with spoil as on the night they had tried to carry their booty out of Tenochtitlan. Cortes wanted to have the treasure left behind as he knew it would expose the army to attack on the march. Finally, however, he yielded to the soldiers' grumbling.

On they went, Cortes carefully examining the route. They passed the point where the dyke of Iztapalapan struck the mainland and went on to Cojohuacan, which was the southwestern terminus of the dyke that cut the causeway of Iztapalapan at Fort Xoloc. As Cojohuacan was deserted, Cortes rested his troops there for a day or two while he reconnoitered the neighborhood. He even ventured on the causeway as far as Xoloc. He found the fort garrisoned by Aztecs, whom he drove out. As the causeway of Iztapalapan was dark with massed warriors, Cortes pushed no further toward the city, but he had found the spot he meant to occupy. The next day the army left Cojohuacan and went on to Tlacopan. They had to fight for every inch they marched over, for they were harassed by bodies of Aztecs trying to recover the booty. In one skirmish Cortes was made sad by the loss of two of his own servants who had followed him from Cuba.

It was not yet night when they reached Tlacopan. Cortes went as usual to the temple top to survey the country. As he looked abroad over the wonderful valley, with Tenochtitlan shining in its midst as a jewel, he sighed deeply. One of his soldiers, thinking he was still grieving for his servants, tried to soothe him.

"Take comfort," he said, "it is after all but the fortune of war."

But Cortes' sorrow was deeper than could be brought about by his servants' death. He was looking back to the suffering and bloodshed which had already been and, as his thoughts went forward, he saw even worse things before his purpose could be accomplished and Mexico subjugated.

"You are my witness," Cortes said to the soldier, "how often I have endeavored to persuade yonder capital peacefully to submit. It fills me with grief, when I think of the toil and dangers my brave followers have yet to encounter before we can call it ours. But the time is come when we must put our hands to the work."

Early the next morning Cortes started over the northern road back to Tezcuco. Just outside of Tezeuco's gates they met Sandoval and Ixtlilzochitl bearing the eager news that the canal was ready, the ships finished and that there was nothing now to prevent Cortes from beginning the storming of Mexico.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CORTES PLANS HIS BLOCKADE

APRIL, 1521

Although such good news met Cortes on his way back to Tezcuco, once in the city he fell upon a plot which, if it had succeeded, would have stopped his plans entirely.

There was a soldier—one of Narvaez' men—named Antonio Villafana, who was tired of life in Mexico and wanted to go back to Cuba. As soon as he began to grumble, he found others with grievances, until finally quite a party was formed against Cortes. They knew that they could not leave without his permission and as they were pretty sure that he would not grant it, they began to plan not only his assassination but the assassination of his chief officers as well, so that no one might be left to punish the offenders. After the murder, a relative of Velasquez' was to be put in Cortes' place so that Velasquez should overlook their offense.

They made up a false package supposed to contain dispatches which were to be presented to Cortes while he was at the table. While he was interested in opening the package the murderers were to fall on him, and, after he was killed, dispatch Sandoval and Alvarado and Olid. They fixed the day for their plot soon after Cortes' return from Tlacopan.

But, as at Vera Cruz, just as everything was ready one of the plotters repented and went to Cortes with the whole plan, saying that there would be found in Villafana's keeping a paper with the names of all concerned in the plot.

Cortes called for Sandoval and Alvarado and went directly to Villafana's quarters. Villafana was there with three or four conspirators, who were instantly arrested. He himself as soon as he saw Cortes tried to swallow the paper with the list of names, but Cortes seized it before it reached the man's mouth.

The general ran his eye over the list and read with grief the names of many whom he had thought his friends. Then he destroyed the paper utterly. Villafana was at once court-martialed, condemned and hanged from the window of his own quarters. Cortes then called his troops together and told them of Villafana's plot and of its detection.

"Villafana made no confession," Cortes ended. "His guilty secret perished with him. No one else is implicated. I am cut to the heart that there should be any one in our ranks capable of so base an act, for I know not what cause I have given for it. I am not conscious of having wronged any individual among you, but if I have, frankly declare your wrongs now, for I am anxious to afford you all the redress in my power."

There was not one who had a complaint to make; Cortes' friends were indignant at the plot, and those concerned in it were so relieved not to be discovered that their protestations of loyalty were loudest of all. That was the end of the affair, for Cortes never mentioned it again, though he kept a strict eye on those who had been involved. They, in their desire to prove how friendly they were, became for the time the best soldiers in camp.

Cortes' captains insisted that he should hereafter have a bodyguard and Antonio Quinones was appointed its captain. This guard watched over Cortes day and night to protect him from both secret and open enemies.

Cortes immediately turned his attention to his new fleet and to the canal that was to carry the ships from Tezcuco to the lake. It was a mile and a half long and twelve feet broad and its sides were made strong with stones and cement. It had taken the eight thousand Indians two months to build it.

The opening of the canal Cortes made into a great event. On April 28, 1521, the troops under arms and all the population of Tezcuco assembled to witness the ceremony. Father Olmedo said mass and asked God's blessing on the little navy about to be launched. Then, midst martial music, a cannon was fired, and the first vessel with the flag of Spain floating from its mast slid down into the water, followed by the next and the next, till the thirteen ships were afloat. The music rose louder, the artillery on the shore fired salutes and the ships answered, while from all the spectators rang shouts of joy, which suddenly, by common consent, changed into the swelling notes of the *Te Deum*.

His fleet ready, Cortes reviewed his army. It was larger and better equipped than ever before. There were eighty-seven horse, eight hundred and eighteen foot—of which a hundred and eighteen were arquebusiers and crossbow-men—three large iron guns and fifteen smaller brass guns, and a good supply of powder, balls, shot and copper-headed arrows.

Cortes was ready now for his Indian allies. He sent word for the Indians of the Chalcan league to assemble at Chalco and for the Tlascalans to come to Tezcuco. There came at once, under Xicotencatl and Chichemecatl, five hundred thousand Tlascalans, banners flying and music playing as they marched into Tezcuco with as even and steady a step as if they were already going to battle, while the city rang with the cry "Castile and Tlascala!"

Unfortunately the harmony was soon disturbed. A Spanish soldier got into a brawl with a Tlascalan chief and the chief was badly hurt. He was a relative of Xicotencatl who, in spite of fighting on their side, still hated the white men. He at once assembled his followers and, deserting his post, set out for Tlascala.

Chichemecatl told Cortes that Xicotencatl was gone, and Cortes sent after him a party of Spaniards and Tlascalans to urge the chief to come back to his post. They overtook him before he had gone far.

"Return to your duty," urged the messengers. "The Tlascalans are steady friends of the white men. Your own father is their friend."

"So much the worse," Xicotencatl answered. "If Tlascala had taken my counsel, it would never have been the dupe of perfidious strangers."

Every plea Xicotencatl answered with taunts, and finally the envoys went back to Cortes.

"Xicotencatl," Cortes said when he heard the journey had been in vain, "has always been an enemy of the Spaniards, first in the field, and since in the council-chamber; openly or in secret, still the same—their implacable enemy. There is no use in parleying with the false-hearted Indian."

The general sent another body of men after Xicotencatl to arrest him wherever he was found—even in the streets of Tlascala—and to bring him back to Tezcuco.

Cortes sent also to the council of Tlascala the stern message that the Spaniards punished desertion with death. Xicotencatl was arrested, brought back to Tezcuco, and hanged on a gallows erected in the central square. His property was confiscated to the Spanish crown. His countrymen mourned him, but they did not deny the justice of his punishment.

After this lesson in constancy to his allies, Cortes was finally ready to carry out the plans which he had formed in his journey round Tezcuco Lake, when he had seen that the mainland ends of the great causeways were the points to hold if he wished to blockade the City, of Mexico, for holding those, he could, with the help of his fleet, entirely cut off supplies from the city. Moreover, when he wanted to enter Tenochtitlan, his rear would be secure, while three bodies of troops could, by the great avenues, advance simultaneously to the center of the city.

Alvarado with thirty horse, a hundred and sixty-eight foot and twenty-five thousand Tlascalans was sent to command the causeway of Tlacopan. Olid, with an army of the same size, was to hold the town of Cojohuacan, the base of the short dyke which joined the causeway of Iztapalapan at Fort Xoloc. When they had secured their positions they were to take Chapoltepec and destroy the reservoir that supplied Tenochtitlan with water. Sandoval, with a like army and the addition of levies from the Chalcan league, was first to destroy the city of Iztapalapan—that it should not be left to harass their rear—and then to take up his position at the head of the north causeway. With their duties thus assigned, they set out. Sandoval took the southern route and Alvarado and Olid went by the northern.

Except for a quarrel as to their quarters between Alvarado and Olid, nothing occurred on the march around the north side of the lake. The cities were deserted as they had sent all their inhabitants to protect the capital. Alvarado took up his quarters in Tlacopan, while Olid occupied Cojohuacan, six miles away. As soon as they were settled, they joined forces to attack the water supply of Chapoltepec.

There was a large body of Aztecs guarding the aqueduct and it cost the Spaniards a tremendous struggle to drive the Indians off. They did rout them, however, finally, and broke up the brick and stone work of the aqueduct so that no water could flow through it into Mexico.

Sandoval with his men struck off, in the meantime, to the south to Chalco. Here his allies joined him and the army went on undisturbed to Iztapalapan. Before the city there was drawn up a large troop of Aztecs to whom Sandoval gave battle. After a fierce conflict, the Aztecs gave way and, jumping into the canal and the lake, escaped. This task accomplished, Sandoval went on to occupy his position at Tepejacac.

In the meantime Alvarado in Tlacopan called on Olid to join him in an attempt to seize the first bridge on the Tlacopan causeway. Olid objected. In his quarrel with Alvarado he had yielded to Cortes' arguments—that in such a strait as the Spaniards were in, for their general's sake and for the cause's sake, he and Alvarado must make up any difference between them. But though he had outwardly reconciled himself to Alvarado, he had not forgiven him, and the two did not work well together.

He obeyed Alvarado's call grudgingly, and brought his troops to the Tlacopan dyke, which was swarming with Aztec warriors as thickly as on the "melancholy night." The Christians made slow progress against so strong a foe, protected by barricades and aided by companions in canoes. The savages in canoes had built bulwarks on the sides to protect themselves from the white men's fire, and the savages on the dyke when they were hard pushed leaped into the water, swam a few yards and then climbed back on the causeway, ready for another assault. After a long, ineffectual struggle the Spaniards gave up and fell back on Tlacopan.

Olid in disgust, laying all the blame of the failure on Alvarado, took up his quarters in Cojohuacan.

And this is the last we hear of Olid's accomplishments. He does not enter the story of the siege of Mexico. In Cojohuacan he sulked and cherished his grudge against Alvarado, until finally it grew into a grudge against Cortes as well, which ended four years later in open revolt against his general.

When a man begins to think more of his own hurt feelings than of the cause he serves, he is apt to stain his reputation. Loyalty to a cause means forgetfulness of self.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CORTES BESIEGES TENOCHTITLAN

MAY, 1521

When Cortes had sent off the three divisions of his army who were to blockade the City of Mexico, he followed across the lake as admiral of the fleet which he called "the key of the war." There were twelve vessels—one of the thirteen had been found a bad sailer—each carrying a heavy gun. Their crews numbered three hundred Spaniards, half sailors and half marines. Cortes had picked out for this service men who had been brought up on the seacoast in Spain, although some of them were nobles and did not much relish what they considered menial occupation.

As the fleet approached the southern shore of the lake, it passed under a high precipice held by the Aztecs, who rained down such a shower of stones and arrows on the vessels that Cortes ordered his marines ashore to storm the place. With their admiral at their head, they drove all before them and utterly destroyed the Aztec garrison.

But in the meantime the beacon blazing on top of the hill already told the Mexicans that the Spanish fleet was afloat. As the men regained their vessels, they saw the water before them dark with hundreds of Indian canoes paddling from the City of Mexico across the lake to attack the brigantines.

Just then the wind dropped. To Cortes it meant calamity, for he knew that if he lost his first sea fight, the Indians would lose their awe of his "water-houses."

There was nothing to do, however, but to await calmly the attack of the savages.

The canoes came on until, just out of range, they halted and lay on their oars as if debating what to do next. While they waited, the surface of the lake rippled again and Cortes' heart leaped with joy.

"The wind!" he cried. "The saints are helping us."

He drew his ships out in line of battle. The rising breeze caught the sails and carried the squadron swiftly across the lake to the fleet of Indian canoes. It rammed them, tossed them, overturned them, while the big guns volleyed right and left. The canoes which were unhurt paddled in terror back to the city to escape the fearful white-winged birds of the Spaniards, who made the wind their servant and the thunder and lightning their executioners.

Elated with his victory, Cortes went on his way and arrived at Fort Xoloc, where he knew the dyke from Olid's position at Cojohuacan joined the main causeway of Iztapalapan. The fort, consisting of two stone towers surrounded by stone walls, was garrisoned by Aztecs. The marines easily dislodged them and Cortes, bringing ashore some of the guns, occupied the place. Here he not only held the causeway but was in touch with his fleet and through Olid could be well supplied with provisions.

Thus, before they knew it, the Aztecs were in a state of siege. Cortes' fleet commanded the lake east of the great causeway, and his armies held the entrances to the three causeways. When Guatemozin saw the Spaniards entrenched in the places he should have had the foresight to occupy, he made frantic endeavors to drive them out, making his attacks on land and sea even by night, contrary to Indian practice.

The brigantines successfully protected the eastern side of the dyke, but the western side was unmercifully harassed by the Indian attacks, until the Spaniards made a breach in the causeway and took two of the smaller ships into the basin on the west side in the very face of the savages, who yelled and shot arrows so thickly that they hid the ground where they lay.

And so the siege of Tenochtitlan was fairly on, and Cortes was ready to push it closer. He sent word to Alvarado and Sandoval in their positions that they should, on the day Cortes named, try to enter the capital over their causeways while Cortes advanced along the dyke of Iztapalapan.

The day came. At early dawn Cortes' soldiers gathered to hear mass and then, with their general at their head, they advanced along the dyke of Iztapalapan from Xoloc toward the city. Before they had gone far they came upon a broken bridge and, on the far side of the gap in the causeway, a solid barricade of masonry, which protected the Aztecs drawn up behind it.

The musketeers and crossbow-men tried in vain to drive the Indians back. Finally Cortes gave up that attempt and ordered two ships, one on each side of the causeway, to anchor opposite the Indian barricade and open fire. That drove the enemy from their stand and they fell back to the next breach in the dyke, which they held until the ships again drove them out. The Spanish van swam the gaps in the causeway and pursued the Aztecs as they fled. The rear stayed behind to fill up the breaches with the stones of the barricades.

Finally, when Cortes had pushed the Indians back into the city along the great avenue which led to the central square, he halted for his rear to come up, that they might destroy the houses along the avenue and secure the Spaniards a safe line of retreat. When that was done, Cortes pressed on, and the Indians fell back before him. One more broken bridge and stone barricade the Spaniards cleared with their cannon, swam the shallow water of the canal, and found themselves in the great square of Tenochtitlan.

For a moment they halted, dazed at their recollections. There was the huge temple in the center and, facing it, Axayacatl's palace, which they had entered with pride, lived in in peace and comfort, and from which they had fled in terror. The past seemed almost a dream.

"St. Jago and at them!" Cortes cried, and charged the enemy across the square.

The Aztecs, also remembering the past, and overwhelmed at the return of the white men whom they had once so triumphantly driven out, fell back without resistance into the temple courtyard. From the terraces the chanting Indian priests urged the warriors to courage.

The Spaniards rushed into the temple courtyard and some were bold enough to ascend the steps to the temple area where, in his sanctuary, they found a new image of the war god. They hurled over the side of the temple the priests who would have defended it and tore away the gold and jewels that adorned Huitzilopotchli.

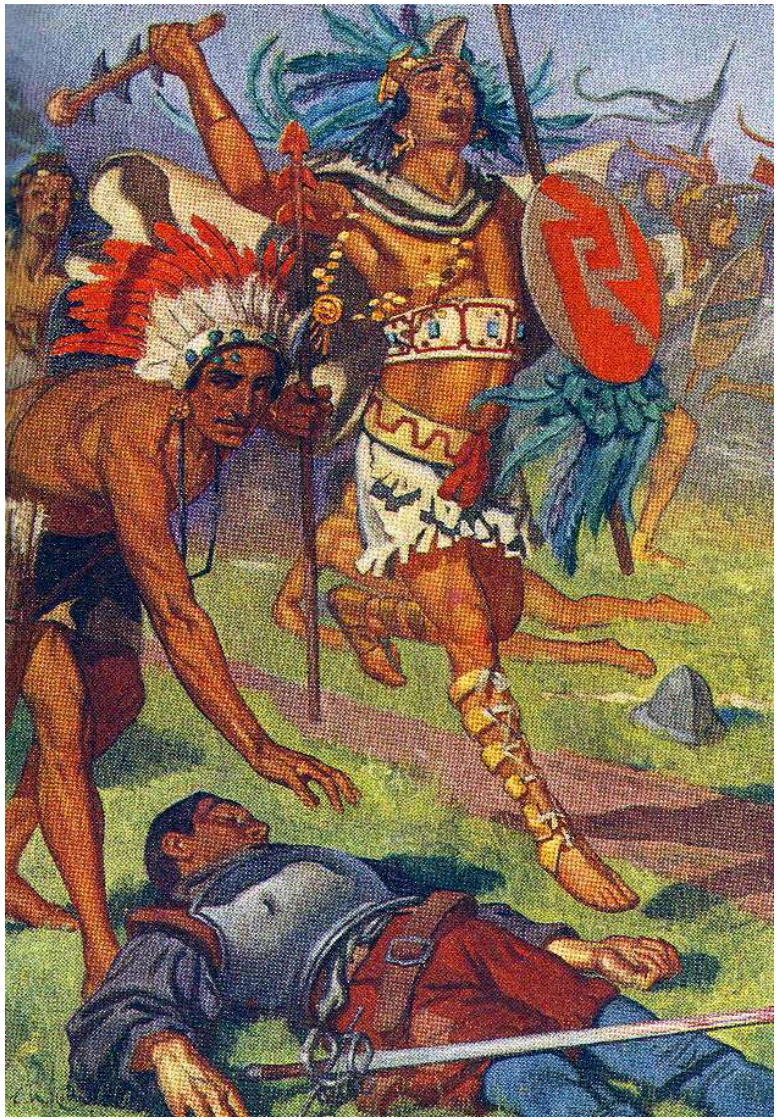
Hundreds of Aztec eyes had watched this new insult to their god, and as the rash Spaniards came down again into the courtyard, there were hundreds of fierce Aztec arms eager for revenge. In a mass they threw themselves on the Spaniards and drove them into the square, where they were caught by new bodies of Indians pouring in from the side streets.

Utterly losing their coolness and courage, the Spaniards left their cannon in the square and fled back towards the causeway. Cortes' efforts to rally them were in vain; they met their advancing allies and communicated their terror to them, till the retreat became nothing but a panic-stricken stampede.

When it seemed as if all was lost, help came. A body of cavalry dashed through a side street and boldly charging the enemy, turned it once more. Cortes made his voice heard finally to reassure his frightened troops who, ashamed of their wild flight, returned to order and drove the Aztecs once more into the temple courtyard.

As it was growing dark, Cortes attempted nothing more. He recovered the cannon from the square and then sounded a retreat, the allies in the van, the infantry in the center and the cavalry in the rear. The army was pursued all

the way by howling Aztecs disappointed of their revenge, but late at night the Spaniards reached Xoloc.



THE ARMY WAS PURSUED ALL THE WAY BY HOWLING AZTECS.

Alvarado and Sandoval had made their attempt to enter the city over their causeways, but, having no ships to help them, they had not been able to pass the barricades at the breaches. Cortes now sent half the fleet to his two generals along with one-third of the fifty thousand Tlascalans whom Ixtlilzochitl had led into camp.

Cortes' attack on Tenochtitlan had not only caused terror to the Aztecs, but had also convinced several out-lying tribes that Cortes would prove a better friend than Guatemozin. They all offered him recruits. Cortes did not need more fighting men for his ranks were full, but it was most reassuring to have behind him, instead of enemies, friends whom he could use to keep peace in the outlying country and to send food into camp.

Before the Mexicans could recover from that attack, Cortes made a second, thinking that, as he had filled up all the breaches in the causeway, he should have easy entrance into the city. But he found that each breach had been opened again. However, with the help of cannon and ships, he once more pushed his way across and entered the city. This time he burned the palace of Axayacatl which had so long been the Spaniard's home.

On the following days, time after time, Cortes forced his way into the city, always finding the gaps he filled up one day broken open the next. He even got a little way down the dyke of Tlacopan once, hoping to get into communication with Alvarado. But there were too many broken bridges in his way and he did not get far.

Guatemozin, in the meantime, was not idle. His beacon fires burned and the melancholy drum in the great temple boomed to call to attack, not only his subjects in the city, but those tribes outside who were still his friends. While Guatemozin had friends outside, their canoes managed to run the blockade of the brigantines and bring in provisions by night. But as the out-lying tribes fell away, Tenochtitlan began to suffer. Guatemozin made many fierce attacks on the three

Christian camps at the ends of the causeways, but he was always driven back.

Cortes' sent many messages of peace to Guatemozin, hoping against hope that the young Emperor would capitulate and so save his city from destruction. But Guatemozin did not falter. He saw his enemies encompassing him, his vassals falling away, his city destroyed by fire, famine coming near, but he sent no word of yielding to Cortes. To all Cortes' offers of peace there came no answer except scornful silence. Guatemozin had sworn an oath of undying hatred to the Spaniards. Come what might, he would ask no mercy at their hands.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE LAST ASSAULT

SUMMER, 1521

The rainy season had set in and Cortes found it necessary to provide better shelter for his troops. The brigantines brought to Xoloc timber and stone from the houses destroyed in Tenochtitlan, and the Indian allies built two rows of huts facing each other on opposite sides of the dyke behind the ramparts of the fort. The causeway was so wide here that, after the barracks were finished, there was plenty of room for the army to march between them.

The soldiers grumbled at the cold, rainy weather, especially Alvarado's men, who were obliged to mount guard over each new breach he filled in the causeway, lest the Aztecs should tear it open again. Cortes' new arrivals had little more patience; they were eager for immediate action of some kind. Alderete, the royal treasurer, who had lately joined Cortes, thought it was time to press further into the city and take up a position there.

Several of Cortes' captains backed Alderete in this opinion. Cortes finally yielded to their eagerness, although to his mind they were not yet ready for the step. The place chosen for their new camp was the market of Tlatelolco.

Cortes sent word to Sandoval to leave only enough men at Tepejacac to hold the place, to send seventy picked men to Xoloc and, with the remainder of his force, to join Alvarado at Tlacopan on the appointed day and from there, protected by the brigantines, to advance along the Tlacopan dyke to the market of Tlatelolco, while his own troops took the road over the causeway of Iztapalapan. Cortes' forces were to be escorted not only by the brigantines, but by a fleet of native canoes, which could enter canals too shallow for the ships and so penetrate into the city.

On the day appointed Cortes gave his troops their directions. In the outskirts of Tenochtitlan there were three streets which led from the causeway of Iztapalapan to the market-place of Tlatelolco—one main avenue with a narrower street each side. Cortes divided his army into three divisions; one, under Alderete, was to march through the chief avenue, which the canals on each side of it made really into a causeway; the second division, under Tapia and a younger brother of Alvarado, was to march through one of the smaller parallel streets; while Cortes' own division would take the third street. Where the avenue of Tlacopan came into the market-place, there were to be stationed a small body of men with three guns. This was to be the rendezvous in case of disaster.

Cortes' last word to his officers was a warning to cover their line of retreat. He reminded them of the many calamities which had come to them through the breaches in the dykes and commanded them not to leave behind them one unfilled gap to be their destruction in case of sudden falling back.

Cortes' army started off gaily from Xoloc. Each division, eager to be first in the market-place and to distinguish itself in the day's work, passed without much

trouble along the causeway and into the outskirts of the city. Alderete marched confidently down the main avenue while Cortes and Tapia took the parallel streets.

Cortes went slowly, looking out for ambush and filling up the breaches in the canals, while the Tlascalans clambered to the fiat roofs of the houses that lined the street and engaged in hand to hand conflict the warriors stationed there. From the other streets Cortes, as he listened, heard the victorious shouts of the Spaniards and began to think their quick victory suspicious. Were the enemy drawing the white men into the heart of the city to surround them?

Alderete sent to Cortes one messenger after another to say he was almost at the market-place. Halting his own men, with a small body to accompany him Cortes went through to the main street to see what Alderete was about and make sure that he had left a clear line of retreat.

The little company had not gone far along the causeway-avenue when they came to a strip of water thirty-five feet wide. A few stones had been tumbled into the hole, but it still yawned like a trap across the line of march. Every, man in Alderete's command had been more anxious to win glory by being first at the goal than to provide means of escape. Each cavalier had said to his neighbor, "You stay and fill up the hole," and all had rushed ahead and left the breach to take care of itself. Cortes saw, too, that the sides of the dyke had been recently sloped off to make them slippery and dangerous.

Filled with alarm, he at once set his men to filling up the gap. They had scarcely got to work when, from the city beyond, there came the first long, piercing note of Guatemozin's sacred horn—blown only on great occasions—and then a horrible mingling of yells and war whoops from thousands of throats. Next came the rush of countless feet as the tide of battle rolled back along the avenue.

Cortes on one side of the breach saw the Spaniards flying toward him along the causeway-avenue on the other side, pursued by thousands of Aztecs who, at the sound of Guatemozin's horn, had ended their pretended flight and turned on their pursuers, while countless others had poured in on their flanks from side streets. They came on now in an indistinguishable mass of friend and foe, dealing blows at random as they ran, staggering, slipping, treading down each other, struck by the arrows from the housetops, and all the time in their blind terror coming nearer to the wide gap which they had not stayed to fill.

Cortes watched them helplessly as they came to the edge of the gulf and plunged over; those in front pushed by the mad fright of those behind. Of those who swam across, some Cortes' company pulled up as they tried to climb the slippery bank of the dyke, others were drowned, and still others were seized by the warriors and carried off captives. Those who were saved were still too distracted to listen to orders.

Finally the Aztecs, growing bolder, with a cry of "Malinche," sprang from their canoes to seize the general himself. Six sinewy Aztecs grasped him and hurried him to their boat. Christoval de Olea gave up his life to save his general, but he killed two Aztecs first. Another Spaniard and a Tlascalan, fighting across Cortes' prostrate body, flung themselves on the Aztecs and held them off till Quinones, the captain of the bodyguard, came to the rescue and freed Cortes. Guzman, Cortes' servant, brought his horse and just as his master mounted it, Guzman himself was snatched away and thrown into a canoe.

Cortes could not be persuaded to leave the spot until Quinones seized his bridle and led him away by force, saying, "My master's life is too important to the army to be thrown away here."

CORTES WATCHED THEM HELPLESSLY

The causeway had been so cut up by the confused struggle that it was now knee-deep in mud and its edges slippery as ice. Many of those who had swum the breach were now pushed back into the water over the sides of the dyke by their crazed comrades in their efforts to escape. Corral, the ensign, who had lost his banner in the Cordilleras, slipped into the canal, but just as the enemy was about to pounce upon him, he scrambled again up the dyke with the Spanish banner still flying.

Cortes finally got the men who were left off the slippery causeway and into the open place in the Tlacopan avenue where the guns had been placed. Here, in spite of the enemy's fire, he brought some order into his ranks, and by a cavalry charge beat back the Aztecs. Then he sounded the retreat for the other two divisions, which fought their way to the rendezvous. Sending the allies first, the infantry next and guarding the rear with the cavalry, Cortes got his broken army back to Xoloc. At once he sent Tapia to assure Alvarado of his safety.

Alvarado and Sandoval, along the Tlacopan dyke, had almost reached the market when they heard the dreaded sound of Guatemozin's horn and the Aztec war whoop. They paused, knowing that their comrades had not prospered, and while they waited, the Aztecs, driven back by Cortes' cavalry charge, turned against Alvarado's command, shouting as they came "Malinche! Malinche!"

Alvarado, deeply anxious as to Cortes' fate, sounded a retreat. The Indians followed the Spaniards back across the Tlacopan causeway until they reached the brigantines, whose guns drove them back once more into the city.

Tapia had been delayed by Indian bands on his way to Tlacopan, and both Alvarado and Sandoval grew worried and anxious at not hearing from Cortes. At last Sandoval could stand it no longer. He remounted his tired horse and galloped off to Xoloc.

He found the camp very sad. Besides the loss of two guns and seven horses, the many killed and the more wounded, sixty-two Spaniards had fallen alive into the Aztec's hands, and all the white men knew what horror that meant.

Cortes did his best to keep up his men's spirits, but in spite of his outer cheerfulness the affair of "the sorrowful bridge," as he called it, lay heavily at his heart.

"It is for my sins, Son Sandoval," Cortes said. "For a few days I must rest and you must take my place, as I am too crippled at present to discharge my duties. You must watch over the safety of the camps. Give special heed to Alvarado's. He is a gallant soldier; I know it well; but I doubt the Mexican hounds may sometime take him at disadvantage."

And these few words show that although Cortes relied on Alvarado's courage as much as on Sandoval's, it was on Sandoval he depended for coolness and wisdom.

Sandoval received his instructions and set out on his way back to Tlacopan. It was late afternoon when he reached camp; the warm sun flooded the fertile valley of Mexico and glittered on the towers of Tenochtitlan. Suddenly, through the quiet Spring afternoon, there came to the soldiers' ears a sound that struck terror to their souls, as it had on "the melancholy night." The great drum boomed forth from the temple.

The camp was only a mile now from the city, and the soldiers could plainly see the huge temple and the procession wind up its sides along the terraces. It was a procession of Indian priests leading their victims to sacrifice, and some of the captives were white.

The next few days were sad and quiet in the Spanish camps, but times of feasting and rejoicing and sacrificing for the Aztecs. The Indian priests extolled Guatemozin as the hero of his country, and once more Guatemozin's vassals around the valley began to think of him as their Emperor.

Then he sent his messengers through the country calling the tribes back to their allegiance. They listened and hesitated, for it was not Guatemozin alone who called, but the priests as well, and the Aztecs reverenced their priests almost as much as the Emperor.

And then the priests published their great proclamation which stirred to the depths the hearts of Guatemozin's vassals. This was the proclamation:

"Huitzilopotchli, your deity, insulted by the white men, is now appeased by the sacrifice of Malinche's followers upon his altars. He has again taken the Aztecs under his protection. Before eight days are gone he will deliver your enemies into your hands."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO

AUGUST, 1521

The Aztecs thundered this proclamation far and wide. The Christians laughed at it, but more and more the Indians trembled. Suppose it were true; suppose they had offended the war god by helping the white men; was Xicotencatl right when he had said that only evil could come to Anahuac from these strangers? Emperor and priests and war gods were willing now to overlook the past, if their vassals returned to their duty. Should they lose their chance of pardon by still helping the invaders?

Cortes soon saw the result of such reasoning. Every night some of his allies deserted and stole away in the darkness to their own homes. First those who lived nearest went; the Tepeacans followed, and the Cholulans, and finally—though Ixtlilzochitl, lord of Tezcuco, and Chichemecatl, leader of the Tlascalan levies, remained loyal to Cortes—even the Tezcucans and Tlascalans stole away. With dismay the Spaniards saw their huge army of allies melt like snow in April, leaving the white men almost alone to blockade Mexico.

Cortes did not lose his cheerful courage. He laughed at the proclamation and sent messengers after the withdrawing allies to advise them to camp on their way until the eight days were over and the prediction should be proved false. Some were wise enough to take this advice and to halt where they were, but the rest kept on home.

Of course this defection stopped the supply which had been coming in so plentifully from the surrounding country. The Spaniards must now not only do their own foraging for provisions, but at the same time keep untiring watch against an unfriendly country behind them and a deadly foe in front. Their guns commanded each of the three causeways leading into the City of Mexico and their brigantines still controlled the lake, so their position was strong as long as they could hold it. Lack of food and lack of ammunition alone could drive them out. Unfortunately their ammunition was getting low.

The Spaniards waited with what patience they might through the eight days. On the ninth day the sun rose, passed across the heavens and set in the west, while all Mexico, hour after hour, looked eagerly for the prophecy to be fulfilled. Nothing happened.

The priests would have been wiser to set their time at eight weeks instead of eight days. In that interval the allies might have returned definitely to Aztec rule, and the Spaniards would surely have run short of food and ammunition of which they had only a small supply. As it was, they had easily maintained themselves a week, and at the end of it, a ship sailing into Vera Cruz brought more ammunition and military stores, which were at once sent to Xoloc. The deserting allies, too, had loitered on the road to see what would happen, and when Ixtlilzochitl and Chichemecatl sent after them, they came back with all speed to the Christians' camp, ashamed to have been deceived by the priests and glad enough to be so easily forgiven by Cortes for their desertion. Gradually all the other tribes came back to beg Cortes' forgiveness and to return to their loyalty. Guatemozin's power over them was gone forever. Instead of hurting Cortes by his scheme, he had increased Cortes' power.

Cortes knew that now the time had come to push his way into Tenochtitlan, although sadly he was aware that that meant the city's ruin; the fortress-houses must come down and the canals be filled up; on this advance there was to be left absolutely no danger of obstacle between himself and the mainland.

"Every breach in the causeway, every canal in the streets was to be filled up in so solid a manner, that the work should not again be disturbed. The materials for this were to be furnished by the buildings, every one of which, as the army advanced, whether public or private, hut, temple or palace, was to be demolished. Not a building in their path was to be spared. They were all indiscriminately to be leveled, until, in the Conqueror's own language, 'the water should be converted into dry land,' and a smooth and open ground be afforded for the maneuvers of the cavalry and artillery." [Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*]

Cortes had tried over and over, with no success, to arrange with Guatemozin for a capitulation. Nothing was left him now but to destroy the city that was to Cortes "the most beautiful thing in the world." The Indian allies, glad to prove their goodwill after their disloyalty, brought their hoes and other tools and fell to work filling up the gaps in the causeways, while others pushed on into the outskirts of the city and, in spite of Aztec arrows, pulled down the houses and with the debris filled in the city canals, until Tenochtitlan was no longer an Indian Venice but only a bare, flat plain over which the Spanish cavalry could sweep at will.

Before the work was accomplished, Cortes sent three Aztec nobles as another embassy to Guatemozin.

"All has now been done," he said, "that brave men could do in defense of their country. There remains no hope, no chance of escape, for the Mexicans. Your provisions are

exhausted; your communications are cut off; your vassals have deserted you; even your gods have betrayed you. You stand alone, with the nations of Anahuac banded against you. There is no hope but in immediate surrender. I beseech you to take compassion on your brave subjects, who are daily perishing before your eyes; and on the fair city, whose stately buildings are fast crumbling into ruins. Return to the allegiance that you once proffered to the sovereign of Castile. The past shall be forgotten. The persons and property, in short all the rights of the Aztecs shall be respected. You shall be confirmed in your authority, and Spain will once more take your city under her protection."

Guatemozin heard the messengers with anger, but nevertheless he called a council of priests' and warriors to debate it. The priests were against peace, for they knew that the establishment of Christianity meant their downfall.

"Better," they said, "to trust in the promises of our own gods, who have so long watched over the nation. Better, if need be, give up our lives at once for our country, than drag them out in slavery and suffering among the false strangers."

"Since it is so," Guatemozin answered proudly, "let us think only of supplying the wants of the people. Let no man, henceforth, who values his life, talk of surrender. We can at least die like warriors."

For two days Cortes waited for an answer to his words of peace. It came finally, not by the envoys, but in a simultaneous assault on all the Christian camps over the causeways. Much as the numbers of Aztecs had been reduced by famine, and weak as were the warriors who remained, they came with tremendous fury. But, raked by the Spanish guns from the forts and from the vessels, the Indian hordes rolled suddenly back to their capital, having accomplished nothing.

After this fruitless effort for peace, Cortes pushed on his work of destruction, until the clearing in the city extended to the point where the Avenue of Tlacopan entered the central square. Montezuma's palace—now occupied by Guatemozin—was destroyed, and the Mexicans, driven out of the heart of Tenochtitlan, fell back to Tlatelolco, the market-place, which they occupied. They had left to them now only about one-eighth of their city, and as they were cut off from supplies, they might as well have been on a desert island. There was nothing before them but surrender or starvation.

The weeks went on, each one seeing the Aztecs a little weaker, and Cortes on his side, and Alvarado on his, a little nearer the market-place. At last only one broad canal lay between Cortes and Tlatelolco; he had no way of finding out how far Alvarado had come.

All the strength left to the Aztecs was gathered in the market-place to guard the canal which was their last defense. The Spaniards, on the other side, made camp for the night.

Suddenly through the darkness flames leaped up from a temple in the northern part of Tlatelolco. The Christians, watching, shuddered, thinking it meant human sacrifice and the suffering of some of their unfortunate comrades. But as the flames leaped higher, someone caught at the truth, for it was the temple itself that was burning.

"Alvarado has taken the temple; he is in the city," he shouted.

It was true. Alvarado, pushing along the Tlacopan dyke, and filling up the breaches as he came with the stones from the houses he destroyed, had at last reached the temple in the market-place. It was defended by a band of fierce priests and warriors, who rushed down she steps on the Christians and almost overwhelmed them. The Spaniards pushed them back and drove them up the stairs again to the temple area where, in mid-air, a battle was fought like that which had been carried on in the storming of the great temple. Here again the white men were victorious.

In the sanctuaries before the grinning idols the Spaniards found the heads of some of their companions taken

by the Aztecs in battle. They were removed for Christian burial and the Spaniards, maddened at the sight, set fire to the sanctuaries with all their abominations. The flames rose as a beacon to the whole valley, telling both friend and foe of the progress of the Christian arms.

Cortes, seeing that Alvarado had come so far, determined to push across the canal to join him in the market-place. At once, in spite of Indian arrows from the other side, Cortes set his allies vigorously at work filling up the canal. When it was done, the cavalry charged across, swept the enemy out of their path, and pressed on to meet Alvarado's men.

It was the first time the two divisions had come together since the siege began. When the first glad welcomes were over, Cortes, with a small band, rode into the market-place which he had seen with such interest on his first visit to Mexico. Then it was filled with throngs of prosperous traffickers; now the stalls were empty and the few people on the housetops were too weak with hunger to offer resistance. After a sad survey, Cortes sent the Spaniards back to their camps on the causeways.

For several days he kept the Spaniards in camp and suspended hostilities, hoping that one of his embassies would come back with Guatemozin's submission. Cortes, while he waited, went often into the city. One day he met several chiefs, who stretched out their arms imploringly.

"You are children of the Sun," they said. "But the Sun is swift in his course. Why are you, then, so tardy? Why do you delay so long to put an end to our miseries? Rather kill us at once, that we may go to our god Huitzilopochtli, who waits for us in heaven to give us rest from our sufferings."

"I desire not your death, only your submission," answered Cortes pityingly. "Why does your master refuse to treat with me when a single hour will suffice for me to crush him and all his people? Implore your Emperor to confer with me. I promise you he shall be safe."

The nobles carried the message to Guatemozin, and at last he consented to a meeting the next day in the market-place.

Cortes arranged a banquet to do honor to the monarch, and was at the market-place at the time named. But, in place of Guatemozin, came some of his nobles, saying their master was ill. Cortes covered his disappointment, fed the nobles, sent some provisions to their friends, and dismissed them, telling them to beg Guatemozin to meet him.

"He will surely come," he said to the envoys, "when he sees that I suffer you to go and come unharmed, you who have been my steady enemies, no less than himself, throughout the war. He has nothing to fear from me."

Guatemozin set the time for his coming at noon the following day. Again Cortes was at the place, but Guatemozin did not appear. Cortes waited in vain three hours, and then he heard that the Aztecs were taking the time to prepare to defend Tlatelolco. At that Cortes lost patience.

He gave immediate orders for a general attack on the Aztec position. Alvarado was to advance along the Tlacopan dyke from the west; Sandoval was to come down from the north over the causeway of Tepejacac, while Cortes himself would march from Xoloc. He ordered that quarter should be given to the Aztecs whenever asked.

The Aztecs had no strength to withstand such a general attack, although they met it bravely with showers of arrows. The Spaniards were merciful, but the Tlascalans thought only of revenge on a hated foe. Everyone who came within their reach was killed, until even they finally grew weary of their own cruelty, and darkness ended the carnage.

Perfect silence fell over Tlatelolco. Alvarado on his side, and Cortes on his, held their positions, while in the

market-place those Aztecs who were left sat hopelessly waiting for what morning might bring them. They had lost home and wealth and friends. Life—all that remained to them—they would sell dearly.

Morning dawned on the 13th of August, 1521; two years almost to a day since Cortes had marched from Cempoalla with his first army of invasion, and a year since he had fled from Tenochtitlan on "the melancholy night."

Cortes had made his plans. To Sandoval and his captains was given the task of preventing the escape of Guatemozin by land or by sea, while Cortes and Alvarado, from opposite sides, swept clear the market-place. Their signal was to be the discharge of a gun.

Then for the last time Cortes sent envoys to Guatemozin to promise pardon if he would yield.

"Guatemozin is ready to die where he is," was the reply that the envoy brought back, "but he will hold no interview with the Spanish general. It is for you to work your pleasure."

"Go, then," Cortes answered sternly. "Prepare your countrymen for death. Their hour is come."

Still he did not give the sign for attack—for he hoped against hope that Guatemozin would surrender. Finally word came to him that Guatemozin was making his preparations to escape. Cortes could wait no longer; if Guatemozin got away, the war might last for months.

The musket was fired. Cortes and Alvarado charged, each from his side of the square.

At the same moment the brigantines engaged the fleet of Aztec canoes on the lake. Their canvas out-sailed the canoes and their guns shattered them; only a few got away and under the smoke from the guns made for shore.

Garci Holguin, one of Sandoval's captains, commanded the fastest brigantine in the fleet. As he peered through the smoke at the fleeing canoes he decided that Guatemozin was in one of them, racing for the mainland. Immediately he gave chase.

'FEAR NOT,' CORTES ANSWERED. 'A SPANIARD KNOWS HOW TO RESPECT VALOR EVEN IN AN ENEMY'

There was plenty of wind and Holguin soon overhauled the canoe, whose men were pulling with the wildness of despair. At the first shot from the brigantine the rowers threw up their hands.

"We carry the Emperor," they cried. As they spoke, Guatemozin, armed, his head proudly erect, rose in the canoe. "I am Guatemozin," he exclaimed. "Lead me to Malinche. I am his prisoner; but let no harm come to my wife and my followers."

They took him aboard the brigantine with his wife, who was the daughter of Montezuma. Holguin delivered his prisoners to Sandoval, who prepared to escort them to Cortes. As soon as the news spread that the Emperor was taken, all resistance ceased on both sea and land.

Cortes made ready properly to receive his royal prisoner. He covered with crimson cloth a terrace in the market-place and ordered a banquet prepared. The Emperor was escorted to the spot by a company of Spanish infantry, and Cortes received him with great ceremony.

Guatemozin spoke. "I have done all I could do to defend myself and my people. I am now reduced to this state. You will deal with me, Malinche, as you list." He touched Cortes' dagger. "Better dispatch me with this and rid me of life at once."

"Fear not," Cortes answered, filled with admiration of Guatemozin's bravery. "You shall be treated with all honor. You have defended your, capital like a brave warrior. A Spaniard knows how to respect valor even in an enemy."

It was sunset when Guatemozin surrendered. Before the banquet was finished it was night and the rain began to fall. After the ceremonies were ended Cortes sent Guatemozin and the princess, his wife, to Cojohuacan to be under Olid's care.

The escort moved away. The Spaniards obeyed their orders that each division should fall back to its former camp on the causeways. Tenochtitlan was left to its ghastly quiet.

We may be sure that Cortes did not sleep. His thoughts, doubtless, went back a year when, in the rain, at midnight, he had led his beaten army out of Tenochtitlan; they probably went forward, too, to the time ahead when his quarrel with Velasquez should be over and Charles V should reward his achievement with princely rights in Anahauc; when he should rebuild the city he had laid in ruins and make it again "the most beautiful thing in the world."

And then, as he paced back and forth in his apartment, from the past and the future, his mind would come back to the present. Sad as he was for all the misery he had caused, his heart yet swelled in triumph for what he had accomplished. Years ago he had seen his vision and without faltering had followed it, through evil report and good report, through joy and through sorrow, for three long years. And now it was no longer a dream but a reality. Tenochtitlan had fallen. Guatemozin had surrendered. Cortes had conquered Mexico.

THE END