



## CONQUEST OF MEXICO.

### BOOK VI.

#### SIEGE AND SURRENDER OF MEXICO.

#### CHAPTER I.

ARRANGEMENTS AT TEZCUCO.—SACK OF IZTAPALAPAN.  
—ADVANTAGES OF THE SPANIARDS.—WISE POLICY OF  
CORTÉS.—TRANSPORTATION OF THE BRIGANTINES.

1521.

THE city of Tezcuco was the best position, probably, which Cortés could have chosen for the headquarters of the army. It supplied all the accommodations for lodging a numerous body of troops, and all the facilities for subsistence, incident to a large and populous town.\* It furnished, moreover, a multitude of artisans and laborers for the uses of the army. Its territories, bordering on the Tlascalan, afforded a ready means of intercourse with the country of his

\* "Así mismo hizo juntar todos los bastimentos que fueron necesarios para sustentar el Ejército y Guarniciones de Gente que andaban en favor de Cortés, y así hizo traer á la Ciudad de Tezcuco el Maiz que habia en las Troxes y Graneros de las Provincias sugetas al Reyno de Tezcuco." Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 91.



allies; while its vicinity to Mexico enabled the general, without much difficulty, to ascertain the movements in that capital. Its central situation, in short, opened facilities for communication with all parts of the Valley, and made it an excellent *point d'appui* for his future operations.

The first care of Cortés was to strengthen himself in the palace assigned to him, and to place his quarters in a state of defence which might secure them against surprise not only from the Mexicans, but from the Tezcucans themselves. Since the election of their new ruler, a large part of the population had returned to their homes, assured of protection in person and property. But the Spanish general, notwithstanding their show of submission, very much distrusted its sincerity; for he knew that many of them were united too intimately with the Aztecs, by marriage and other social relations, not to have their sympathies engaged in their behalf.<sup>2</sup> The young monarch, however, seemed wholly in his interests; and, to secure him more effectually, Cortés placed several Spaniards near his person, whose ostensible province it was to instruct him in their language and religion, but who were in reality to watch over his conduct and prevent his correspondence with those who might be unfriendly to the Spanish interests.<sup>3</sup>

Tezcuco stood about half a league from the lake. It would be necessary to open a communication with

<sup>2</sup> "No era de espantar que tuviese este recelo, porque sus Enemigos, y los de esta Ciudad eran todos Deudos y Parientes mas cercanos, mas despues el tiempo lo desengañó, y vido la gran lealtad de Ixtlilxochitl, y de todos." Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 137.

it, so that the brigantines, when put together in the capital, might be launched upon its waters. It was proposed, therefore, to dig a canal, reaching from the gardens of Nezahualcoyotl, as they were called, from the old monarch who planned them, to the edge of the basin. A little stream, or rivulet, which flowed in that direction, was to be deepened sufficiently for the purpose; and eight thousand Indian laborers were forthwith employed on this great work, under the direction of the young Ixtlilxochitl.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, Cortés received messages from several places in the neighborhood, intimating their desire to become the vassals of his sovereign and to be taken under his protection. The Spanish commander required, in return, that they should deliver up every Mexican who should set foot in their territories. Some noble Aztecs, who had been sent on a mission to these towns, were consequently delivered into his hands. He availed himself of it to employ them as bearers of a message to their master the emperor. In it he deprecated the necessity of the present hostilities. Those who had most injured him, he said, were no longer among the living. He was willing to forget the past, and invited the Mexicans, by a timely submission, to save their capital from the horrors of a siege.<sup>5</sup> Cortés had no expectation of producing any immediate result by this appeal. But he thought it might lie in the

<sup>4</sup> Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, ubi supra.—Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 91.

<sup>5</sup> "Los principales, que habian sido en hacerme la Guerra pasada, eran ya muertos; y que lo pasado fuesse pasado, y que no quisiessen dar causa á que destruyesse sus Tierras, y Ciudades, porque me pesaba mucho de ello." Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 193.



minds of the Mexicans, and that, if there was a party among them disposed to treat with him, it might afford them encouragement, as showing his own willingness to co-operate with their views. At this time, however, there was no division of opinion in the capital. The whole population seemed animated by a spirit of resistance, as one man.

In a former page I have mentioned that it was the plan of Cortés, on entering the Valley, to commence operations by reducing the subordinate cities before striking at the capital itself, which, like some goodly tree whose roots had been severed one after another, would be thus left without support against the fury of the tempest. The first point of attack which he selected was the ancient city of Iztapalapan; a place containing fifty thousand inhabitants, according to his own account, and situated about six leagues distant, on the narrow tongue of land which divides the waters of the great salt lake from those of the fresh. It was the private domain of the last sovereign of Mexico; where, as the reader may remember, he entertained the white men the night before their entrance into the capital, and astonished them by the display of his princely gardens. To this monarch they owed no good will, for he had conducted the operations on the *noche triste*. He was, indeed, no more; but the people of his city entered heartily into his hatred of the strangers, and were now the most loyal vassals of the Mexican crown.

In a week after his arrival at his new quarters, Cortés, leaving the command of the garrison to Sandoval, marched against this Indian city, at the head of two hundred Spanish foot, eighteen horse, and between

three and four thousand Tlascalans. Their route lay along the eastern border of the lake, gemmed with many a bright town and hamlet, or, unlike its condition at the present day, darkened with overhanging groves of cypress and cedar, and occasionally opening a broad expanse to their view, with the Queen of the Valley rising gloriously from the waters, as if proudly conscious of her supremacy over the fair cities around her. Farther on, the eye ranged along the dark line of causeway connecting Mexico with the main land, and suggesting many a bitter recollection to the Spaniards.

They quickened their step, and had advanced within two leagues of their point of destination, when they were encountered by a strong Aztec force drawn up to dispute their progress. Cortés instantly gave them battle. The barbarians showed their usual courage, but, after some hard fighting, were compelled to give way before the steady valor of the Spanish infantry, backed by the desperate fury of the Tlascalans, whom the sight of an Aztec seemed to inflame almost to madness. The enemy retreated in disorder, closely followed by the Spaniards. When they had arrived within half a league of Iztapalapan, they observed a number of canoes filled with Indians, who appeared to be laboring on the mole which hemmed in the waters of the salt lake. Swept along in the tide of pursuit, they gave little heed to it, but, following up the chase, entered pell-mell with the fugitives into the city.

The houses stood some of them on dry ground, some on piles in the water. The former were deserted by the inhabitants, most of whom had escaped in canoes



across the lake, leaving, in their haste, their effects behind them. The Tlascalans poured at once into the vacant dwellings and loaded themselves with booty; while the enemy, making the best of their way through this part of the town, sought shelter in the buildings erected over the water, or among the reeds which sprung from its shallow bottom. In the houses were many of the citizens also, who still lingered with their wives and children, unable to find the means of transporting themselves from the scene of danger.

Cortés, supported by his own men, and by such of the allies as could be brought to obey his orders, attacked the enemy in this last place of their retreat. Both parties fought up to their girdles in the water. A desperate struggle ensued; as the Aztec fought with the fury of a tiger driven to bay by the huntsmen. It was all in vain. The enemy was overpowered in every quarter. The citizen shared the fate of the soldier, and a pitiless massacre succeeded, without regard to sex or age. Cortés endeavored to stop it. But it would have been as easy to call away the starving wolf from the carcass he was devouring, as the Tlascalan who had once tasted the blood of an enemy. More than six thousand, including women and children, according to the Conqueror's own statement, perished in the conflict.<sup>6</sup>

Darkness meanwhile had set in; but it was dispelled in some measure by the light of the burning houses,

<sup>6</sup> "Muriéron de ellos mas de seis mil ánimas, entre Hombres, y Mugerés, y Niños; porque los Indios nuestros Amigos, vista la Victoria, que Dios nos daba, no entendian en otra cosa, sino en matar á diestro y á siniestro." Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 195.

which the troops had set on fire in different parts of the town. Their insulated position, it is true, prevented the flames from spreading from one building to another, but the solitary masses threw a strong and lurid glare over their own neighborhood, which gave additional horror to the scene. As resistance was now at an end, the soldiers abandoned themselves to pillage, and soon stripped the dwellings of every portable article of any value.

While engaged in this work of devastation, a murmuring sound was heard as of the hoarse rippling of waters, and a cry soon arose among the Indians that the dikes were broken! Cortés now comprehended the business of the men whom he had seen in the canoes at work on the mole which fenced in the great basin of Lake Tezcuco.<sup>7</sup> It had been pierced by the desperate Indians, who thus laid the country under an inundation, by suffering the waters of the salt lake to spread themselves over the lower level, through the opening. Greatly alarmed, the general called his men together, and made all haste to evacuate the city. Had they remained three hours longer, he says, not a soul could have escaped.<sup>8</sup> They came staggering under the weight of booty, wading with difficulty through the water, which was fast gaining upon them. For

<sup>7</sup> "Estándolas quemando, pareció que Nuestro Señor me inspiró, y trujo á la memoria la Calzada, ó Presa, que había visto rota en el Camino, y representóseme el gran daño, que era." Rel. Terc. de Cortés, loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> "Y certifico á Vuestra Magestad, que si aquella noche no pasáramos el Agua, ó aguardáramos tres horas mas, que ninguno de nosotros escapara, porque quedábamos cercados de Agua, sin tener paso por parte ninguna." Ibid., ubi supra.



some distance their path was illumined by the glare of the burning buildings. But, as the light faded away in the distance, they wandered with uncertain steps, sometimes up to their knees, at others up to their waists, in the water, through which they floundered on with the greatest difficulty. As they reached the opening in the dike, the stream became deeper, and flowed out with such a current that the men were unable to maintain their footing. The Spaniards, breasting the flood, forced their way through; but many of the Indians, unable to swim, were borne down by the waters. All the plunder was lost. The powder was spoiled; the arms and clothes of the soldiers were saturated with the brine, and the cold night-wind, as it blew over them, benumbed their weary limbs till they could scarcely drag them along. At dawn they beheld the lake swarming with canoes, full of Indians, who had anticipated their disaster, and who now saluted them with showers of stones, arrows, and other deadly missiles. Bodies of light troops, hovering in the distance, disquieted the flanks of the army in like manner. The Spaniards had no desire to close with the enemy. They only wished to regain their comfortable quarters in Tezcuco, where they arrived on the same day, more disconsolate and fatigued than after many a long march and hard-fought battle.<sup>9</sup>

The close of the expedition, so different from its brilliant commencement, greatly disappointed Cortés.

<sup>9</sup> The general's own Letter to the emperor is so full and precise that it is the very best authority for this event. The story is told also by Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 138.—Oviedo, *Hist. de las Ind.*, MS., lib. 33, cap. 18.—Ixtlilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 92.—Herrera, *Hist. general*, dec. 3, lib. 1, cap. 2, et auct. aliis.

His numerical loss had, indeed, not been great; but this affair convinced him how much he had to apprehend from the resolution of a people who, with a spirit worthy of the ancient Hollanders, were prepared to bury their country under water rather than to submit. Still, the enemy had little cause for congratulation; since, independently of the number of slain, they had seen one of their most flourishing cities sacked, and in part, at least, laid in ruins,—one of those, too, which in its public works displayed the nearest approach to civilization. Such are the triumphs of war!

The expedition of Cortés, notwithstanding the disasters which checkered it, was favorable to the Spanish cause. The fate of Iztapalapan struck a terror throughout the Valley. The consequences were soon apparent in the deputations sent by the different places eager to offer their submission. Its influence was visible, indeed, beyond the mountains. Among others, the people of Otumba, the town near which the Spaniards had gained their famous victory, sent to tender their allegiance and to request the protection of the powerful strangers. They excused themselves, as usual, for the part they had taken in the late hostilities, by throwing the blame on the Aztecs.

But the place of most importance which thus claimed their protection was Chalco, situated on the eastern extremity of the lake of that name. It was an ancient city, peopled by a kindred tribe of the Aztecs, and once their formidable rival. The Mexican emperor, distrusting their loyalty, had placed a garrison within their walls to hold them in check. The rulers of the city now sent a message secretly to Cortés, pro-



posing to put themselves under his protection, if he would enable them to expel the garrison.

The Spanish commander did not hesitate, but instantly detached a considerable force under Sandoval for this object. On the march, his rear-guard, composed of Tlascalans, was roughly handled by some light troops of the Mexicans. But he took his revenge in a pitched battle which took place with the main body of the enemy at no great distance from Chalco. They were drawn up on a level ground, covered with green crops of maize and maguey. The field is traversed by the road which at this day leads from the last-mentioned city to Tezcuco.<sup>10</sup> Sandoval, charging the enemy at the head of his cavalry, threw them into disorder. But they quickly rallied, formed again, and renewed the battle with greater spirit than ever. In a second attempt he was more fortunate; and, breaking through their lines by a desperate onset, the brave cavalier succeeded, after a warm but ineffectual struggle on their part, in completely routing and driving them from the field. The conquering army continued its march to Chalco, which the Mexican garrison had already evacuated, and was received in triumph by the assembled citizens, who seemed eager to testify their gratitude for their deliverance from the Aztec yoke. After taking such measures as he could for the permanent security of the place, Sandoval returned to Tezcuco, accompanied by the two young lords of the city, sons of the late cacique.

They were courteously received by Cortés; and they informed him that their father had died, full of years,

<sup>10</sup> Lorenzana, p. 199, nota.

a short time before. With his last breath he had expressed his regret that he should not have lived to see Malinche. He believed that the white men were the beings predicted by the oracles as one day to come from the East and take possession of the land; and he enjoined it on his children, should the strangers return to the Valley, to render them their homage and allegiance. The young caciques expressed their readiness to do so; but, as this must bring on them the vengeance of the Aztecs, they implored the general to furnish a sufficient force for their protection.<sup>11</sup>

Cortés received a similar application from various other towns, which were disposed, could they do so with safety, to throw off the Mexican yoke. But he was in no situation to comply with their request. He now felt more sensibly than ever the incompetency of his means to his undertaking. "I assure your Majesty," he writes in his letter to the emperor, "the greatest uneasiness which I feel, after all my labors and fatigues, is from my inability to succor and support our Indian friends, your Majesty's loyal vassals."<sup>12</sup> Far from having a force competent to this, he had scarcely enough for his own protection. His vigilant

<sup>11</sup> "Porque ciertamente sus antepassados les auian dicho, que auian de señorear aquellas tierras hombres que vernian con barbas de hazia donde sale el Sol, y que por las cosas que han visto, eramos nosotros." Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 139.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., ubi supra.—Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 200.—Gomara, Crónica, cap. 122.—Venida de los Españoles, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> "Y certifico á Vuestra Magestad, allende de nuestro trabajo y necesidad, la mayor fatiga, que tenia, era no poder ayudar, y socorrer á los Indios nuestros Amigos, que por ser Vasallos de Vuestra Magestad, eran molestados y trabajados de los de Culúa." Rel. Terc., ap. Lorenzana, p. 204.