

pute his passage. They had constructed a temporary barrier of palisades, which screened them from the fire of the musketry. But the water in its neighborhood was very shallow, and the cavaliers and infantry, plunging into it, soon made their way, swimming or wading, as they could, in face of a storm of missiles, to the landing near the town. Here they closed with the enemy, and hand to hand, after a sharp struggle, drove them back on the city; a few, however, taking the direction of the open country, were followed up by the cavalry. The great mass, hotly pursued by the infantry, were driven through street and lane, without much further resistance. Cortés, with a few followers, disengaging himself from the tumult, remained near the entrance of the city. He had not been there long when he was assailed by a fresh body of Indians, who suddenly poured into the place from a neighboring dike. The general, with his usual fearlessness, threw himself into the midst, in hopes to check their advance. But his own followers were too few to support him, and he was overwhelmed by the crowd of combatants. His horse lost his footing and fell; and Cortés, who received a severe blow on the head before he could rise, was seized and dragged off in triumph by the Indians. At this critical moment, a Tlascalan, who perceived the general's extremity, sprang, like one of the wild ocelots of his own forests, into the midst of the assailants, and endeavored to tear him from their grasp. Two of the general's servants also speedily came to the rescue, and Cortés, with their aid and that of the brave Tlascalan, succeeded in regaining his feet and shaking off his enemies. To vault into the saddle and

brandish his good lance was but the work of a moment. Others of his men quickly came up, and the clash of arms reaching the ears of the Spaniards, who had gone in pursuit, they returned, and, after a desperate conflict, forced the enemy from the city. Their retreat, however, was intercepted by the cavalry, returning from the country, and, thus hemmed in between the opposite columns, they were cut to pieces, or saved themselves only by plunging into the lake.¹²

This was the greatest personal danger which Cortés had yet encountered. His life was in the power of the barbarians, and, had it not been for their eagerness to take him prisoner, he must undoubtedly have lost it. To the same cause may be frequently attributed the preservation of the Spaniards in these engagements. The next day he sought, it is said, for the Tlascalan who came so boldly to his rescue, and, as he could learn nothing of him, he gave the credit of his preservation to his patron, St. Peter.¹³ He may well be excused for presuming the interposition of his good Genius to shield him from the awful doom of the cap-

¹² Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 226.—Herrera, Hist. general, dec. 3, lib. 1, cap. 8.—Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 21.—This is the general's own account of the matter. Diaz, however, says that he was indebted for his rescue to a Castilian, named Olea, supported by some Tlascalans, and that his preserver received three severe wounds himself on the occasion. (Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 145.) This was an affair, however, in which Cortés ought to be better informed than any one else, and one, moreover, not likely to slip his memory. The old soldier has probably confounded it with another and similar adventure of his commander.

¹³ "Otro Día buscó Cortés al Indio, que le socorrió, i muerto, ni vivo no pareció; i Cortés, por la devocion de San Pedro, juzgo que él le avia ayudado." Herrera, Hist. general, dec. 3, lib. 1, cap. 8.

tive,—a doom not likely to be mitigated in his case. That heart must have been a bold one, indeed, which, from any motive, could voluntarily encounter such a peril! Yet his followers did as much, and that, too, for a much inferior reward.

The period which we are reviewing was still the age of chivalry,—that stirring and adventurous age, of which we can form little conception in the present day of sober, practical reality. The Spaniard, with his nice point of honor, high romance, and proud, vain-glorious vaunt, was the true representative of that age. The Europeans generally had not yet learned to accommodate themselves to a life of literary toil, or to the drudgery of trade or the patient tillage of the soil. They left these to the hooded inmate of the cloister, the humble burgher, and the miserable serf. Arms was the only profession worthy of gentle blood,—the only career which the high-mettled cavalier could tread with honor. The New World, with its strange and mysterious perils, afforded a noble theatre for the exercise of his calling; and the Spaniard entered on it with all the enthusiasm of a paladin of romance.

Other nations entered on it also, but with different motives. The French sent forth their missionaries to take up their dwelling among the heathen, who, in the good work of winning souls to Paradise, were content to wear—nay, sometimes seemed to court—the crown of martyrdom. The Dutch, too, had their mission, but it was one of worldly lucre, and they found a recompense for toil and suffering in their gainful traffic with the natives. While our own Puritan fathers, with the true Anglo-Saxon spirit, left their pleasant homes

across the waters, and pitched their tents in the howling wilderness, that they might enjoy the sweets of civil and religious freedom. But the Spaniard came over to the New World in the true spirit of a knight-errant, courting adventure however perilous, wooing danger, as it would seem, for its own sake. With sword and lance, he was ever ready to do battle for the Faith; and, as he raised his old war-cry of “St. Jago,” he fancied himself fighting under the banner of the military apostle, and felt his single arm a match for more than a hundred infidels! It was the expiring age of chivalry; and Spain, romantic Spain, was the land where its light lingered longest above the horizon.

It was not yet dusk when Cortés and his followers re-entered the city; and the general's first act was to ascend a neighboring *teocalli* and reconnoitre the surrounding country. He there beheld a sight which might have troubled a bolder spirit than his. The surface of the salt lake was darkened with canoes, and the causeway, for many a mile, with Indian squadrons, apparently on their march towards the Christian camp. In fact, no sooner had Guatemozin been apprised of the arrival of the white men at Xochimilco than he mustered his levies in great force to relieve the city. They were now on their march, and, as the capital was but four leagues distant, would arrive soon after night-fall.⁵⁴

Cortés made active preparations for the defence of

⁵⁴ “Por el Agua á una muy grande flota de Canoas, que creo, que pasaban de dos mil; y en ellas venian mas de doce mil Hombres de Guerra; é por la Tierra llegó tanta multitud de Gente, que todos los Campos cubrian.” Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 227.

his quarters. He stationed a corps of pikemen along the landing where the Aztecs would be likely to disembark. He doubled the sentinels, and, with his principal officers, made the rounds repeatedly in the course of the night. In addition to other causes for watchfulness, the bolts of the crossbowmen were nearly exhausted, and the archers were busily employed in preparing and adjusting shafts to the copper heads, of which great store had been provided for the army. There was little sleep in the camp that night.¹⁵

It passed away, however, without molestation from the enemy. Though not stormy, it was exceedingly dark. But, although the Spaniards on duty could see nothing, they distinctly heard the sound of many oars in the water, at no great distance from the shore. Yet those on board the canoes made no attempt to land, distrusting, or advised, it may be, of the preparations made for their reception. With early dawn they were under arms, and, without waiting for the movement of the Spaniards, poured into the city and attacked them in their own quarters.

The Spaniards, who were gathered in the area round one of the *teocallis*, were taken at disadvantage in the town, where the narrow lanes and streets, many of them covered with a smooth and slippery cement, offered obvious impediments to the manoeuvres of cavalry. But Cortés hastily formed his musketeers and cross-

¹⁵ "Y acordóse que huviesse mui buena vela en todo nuestro Real, repartida á los puertos, é azequias por donde auian de venir á desembarcar, y los de acuallo mui á punto toda la noche ensillados y enfrenados, aguardando en la calçada, y tierra firme, y todos los Capitanes, y Cortés con ellos, haziendo vela y ronda toda la noche." Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 145.

bowmen, and poured such a lively, well-directed fire into the enemy's ranks as threw him into disorder and compelled him to recoil. The infantry, with their long pikes, followed up the blow; and the horse, charging at full speed as the retreating Aztecs emerged from the city, drove them several miles along the main land.

At some distance, however, they were met by a strong reinforcement of their countrymen, and, rallying, the tide of battle turned, and the cavaliers, swept along by it, gave the rein to their steeds and rode back at full gallop towards the town. They had not proceeded very far, when they came upon the main body of the army, advancing rapidly to their support. Thus strengthened, they once more returned to the charge, and the rival hosts met together in full career, with the shock of an earthquake. For a time, victory seemed to hang in the balance, as the mighty press reeled to and fro under the opposite impulse, and a confused shout rose up towards heaven, in which the war-whoop of the savage was mingled with the battle-cry of the Christian,—a still stranger sound on these sequestered shores. But, in the end, Castilian valor, or rather Castilian arms and discipline, proved triumphant. The enemy faltered, gave way, and, recoiling step by step, the retreat soon terminated in a rout, and the Spaniards, following up the flying foe, drove them from the field with such dreadful slaughter that they made no further attempt to renew the battle.

The victors were now undisputed masters of the city. It was a wealthy place, well stored with Indian fabrics, cotton, gold, feather-work, and other articles of luxury

and use, affording a rich booty to the soldiers. While engaged in the work of plunder, a party of the enemy, landing from their canoes, fell on some of the stragglers, laden with merchandise, and made four of them prisoners. It created a greater sensation among the troops than if ten times that number had fallen on the field. Indeed, it was rare that a Spaniard allowed himself to be taken alive. In the present instance the unfortunate men were taken by surprise. They were hurried to the capital, and soon after sacrificed; when their arms and legs were cut off, by the command of the ferocious young chief of the Aztecs, and sent round to the different cities, with the assurance that this should be the fate of the enemies of Mexico!¹⁶

From the prisoners taken in the late engagement, Cortés learned that the forces already sent by Guatemozin formed but a small part of his levies; that his policy was to send detachment after detachment, until the Spaniards, however victorious they might come off from the contest with each individually, would, in the end, succumb from mere exhaustion, and thus be vanquished, as it were, by their own victories.

The soldiers having now sacked the city, Cortés did

¹⁶ Diaz, who had an easy faith, states, as a fact, that the limbs of the unfortunate men were cut off *before* their sacrifice: "Manda cortar pies y brazos á los tristes nuestros compañeros, y las embia por muchos pueblos nuestros amigos de los q̄ nos auian venido de paz, y les embia á dezir, que antes que bolvamos á Tezcuco, piensa no quedará ninguno de nosotros á vida, y con los coraçones y sangre hizo sacrificio á sus ídolos." (Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 145.)—This is not very probable. The Aztecs did not, like our North American Indians, torture their enemies from mere cruelty, but in conformity to the prescribed regulations of their ritual. The captive was a religious victim.

not care to await further assaults from the enemy in his present quarters. On the fourth morning after his arrival, he mustered his forces on a neighboring plain. They came, many of them reeling under the weight of their plunder. The general saw this with uneasiness. They were to march, he said, through a populous country, all in arms to dispute their passage. To secure their safety, they should move as light and unencumbered as possible. The sight of so much spoil would sharpen the appetite of their enemies, and draw them on, like a flock of famished eagles after their prey. But his eloquence was lost on his men, who plainly told him they had a right to the fruit of their victories, and that what they had won with their swords they knew well enough how to defend with them.

Seeing them thus bent on their purpose, the general did not care to balk their inclinations. He ordered the baggage to the centre, and placed a few of the cavalry over it; dividing the remainder between the front and rear, in which latter post, as that most exposed to attack, he also stationed his arquebusiers and crossbowmen. Thus prepared, he resumed his march, but first set fire to the combustible buildings of Xochimilco, in retaliation for the resistance he had met there.¹⁷ The light of the burning city streamed high into the air, sending its ominous glare far and wide across the waters, and telling the inhabitants on their margin that the fatal strangers so long predicted by

¹⁷ "Y al cabo dejándola toda quemada y asolada nos partimos; y cierto era mucho para ver, porque tenia muchas Casas, y Torres de sus ídolos de cal y canto." Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 228.

their oracles had descended like a consuming flame upon their borders.¹⁸

Small bodies of the enemy were seen occasionally at a distance, but they did not venture to attack the army on its march, which, before noon, brought them to Cojohuacan, a large town about two leagues distant from Xochimilco. One could scarcely travel that distance in this populous quarter of the Valley without meeting with a place of considerable size, oftentimes the capital of what had formerly been an independent state. The inhabitants, members of different tribes, and speaking dialects somewhat different, belonged to the same great family of nations, who had come from the real or imaginary region of Aztlan, in the far Northwest. Gathered round the shores of their Alpine sea, these petty communities continued, after their incorporation with the Aztec monarchy, to maintain a spirit of rivalry in their intercourse with one another, which—as with the cities on the Mediterranean in the

¹⁸ For other particulars of the actions at Xochimilco, see Oviedo, *Hist. de las Ind.*, MS., lib. 23, cap. 21.—Herrera, *Hist. general*, dec. 3, lib. 1, cap. 8, 11.—Ixtlilxochitl, *Venida de los Españoles*, p. 18.—Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 4, cap. 87, 88.—Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 145.—The Conqueror's own account of these engagements has not his usual perspicuity, perhaps from its brevity. A more than ordinary confusion, indeed, prevails in the different reports of them, even those proceeding from contemporaries, making it extremely difficult to collect a probable narrative from authorities not only contradicting one another, but themselves. It is rare, at any time, that two accounts of a battle coincide in all respects; the range of observation for each individual is necessarily so limited and different, and it is so difficult to make a cool observation at all, in the hurry and heat of conflict. Any one who has conversed with the survivors will readily comprehend this, and be apt to conclude that, wherever he may look for truth, it will hardly be on the battle-ground.

feudal ages—quicken their mental energies, and raised the Mexican Valley higher in the scale of civilization than most other quarters of Anahuac.

The town at which the army had now arrived was deserted by its inhabitants; and Cortés halted two days there to restore his troops and give the needful attention to the wounded.¹⁹ He made use of the time to reconnoitre the neighboring ground, and, taking with him a strong detachment, descended on the causeway which led from Cojohuacan to the great avenue of Iztapalapan.²⁰ At the point of intersection, called Xoloc, he found a strong barrier, or fortification, behind which a Mexican force was intrenched. Their archery did some mischief to the Spaniards as they

¹⁹ This place, recommended by the exceeding beauty of its situation, became, after the Conquest, a favorite residence of Cortés, who founded a nunnery in it, and commanded in his will that his bones should be removed thither from any part of the world in which he might die: "Que mis huesos—los lleven á la mi Villa de Coyoacan, y allí les den tierra en el Monesterio de Monjas, que mando hacer y edificar en la dicha mi Villa." Testamento de Hernan Cortés, MS.

²⁰ This, says Archbishop Lorenzana, was the modern *calzada de la Piedad*. (*Rel. Terc. de Cortés*, p. 229, nota.) But it is not easy to reconcile this with the elaborate chart which M. de Humboldt has given of the Valley. A short arm, which reached from this city in the days of the Aztecs, touched obliquely the great southern avenue by which the Spaniards first entered the capital. As the waters which once entirely surrounded Mexico have shrunk into their narrow basin, the face of the country has undergone a great change, and, though the foundations of the principal causeways are still maintained, it is not always easy to discern vestiges of the ancient avenues.*

* ["La calzada de Iztapalapan," says Alaman, who has made a minute study of the topography, "es la de San Antonio Abad, que conduce á San Augustin de las Cuevas ó Tlalpam."—ED.]

came within bowshot. But the latter, marching intrepidly forward in face of the arrowy shower, stormed the works, and, after an obstinate struggle, drove the enemy from their position.²¹ Cortés then advanced some way on the great causeway of Iztapalapan; but he beheld the farther extremity darkened by a numerous array of warriors, and, as he did not care to engage in unnecessary hostilities, especially as his ammunition was nearly exhausted, he fell back and retreated to his own quarters.

The following day, the army continued its march, taking the road to Tacuba, but a few miles distant. On the way it experienced much annoyance from straggling parties of the enemy, who, furious at the sight of the booty which the invaders were bearing away, made repeated attacks on their flanks and rear. Cortés retaliated, as on the former expedition, by one of their own stratagems, but with less success than before; for, pursuing the retreating enemy too hotly, he fell with his cavalry into an ambushade which they had prepared for him in their turn. He was not yet a match for their wily tactics. The Spanish cavaliers were enveloped in a moment by their subtle foe, and separated from the rest of the army. But, spurring on their good steeds, and charging in a solid column together, they succeeded in breaking through the Indian array, and in making their escape, except two individuals,

²¹ "We came to a wall which they had built across the causeway and the foot-soldiers began to attack it; and though it was very thick and stoutly defended, and ten Spaniards were wounded, at length they gained it, killing many of the enemy, although the musketeers were without powder and the bowmen without arrows." Rel. Terc., ubi supra.

who fell into the enemy's hands. They were the general's own servants, who had followed him faithfully through the whole campaign, and he was deeply affected by their loss,—rendered the more distressing by the consideration of the dismal fate that awaited them. When the little band rejoined the army, which had halted, in some anxiety at their absence, under the walls of Tacuba, the soldiers were astonished at the dejected mien of their commander, which too visibly betrayed his emotion.²²

The sun was still high in the heavens when they entered the ancient capital of the Tepanecs. The first care of Cortés was to ascend the principal *teocalli* and survey the surrounding country. It was an admirable point of view, commanding the capital, which lay but little more than a league distant, and its immediate environs. Cortés was accompanied by Alderete, the treasurer, and some other cavaliers, who had lately joined his banner. The spectacle was still new to them; and, as they gazed on the stately city, with its broad lake covered with boats and barges hurrying to and fro, some laden with merchandise, or fruits and vegetables, for the markets of Tenochtitlan, others crowded with warriors, they could not withhold their admiration at the life and activity of the scene, declaring that nothing but the hand of Providence could have led their countrymen safe through the heart of this powerful empire.²³

²² "Y estando en esto viene Cortés, con el qual nos alegrámos, puesto que él venia muy triste y como lloroso." Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 145.

²³ "Pues quando viéron la gran ciudad de México, y la laguna, y tanta multitud de canoas, que vnas iban cargadas con bastimentos, y

In the midst of the admiring circle, the brow of Cortés alone was observed to be overcast, and a sigh, which now and then stole audibly from his bosom, showed the gloomy working of his thoughts.²⁴ "Take comfort," said one of the cavaliers, approaching his commander, and wishing to console him, in his rough way, for his recent loss; "you must not lay these things so much to heart; it is, after all, but the fortune of war." The general's answer showed the nature of his meditations. "You are my witness," said he, "how often I have endeavored to persuade yonder capital peacefully to submit. It fills me with grief when I think of the toil and the 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."²⁵

There can be no doubt that Cortés, with every other man in his army, felt he was engaged on a holy crusade, and that, independently of personal considerations, he could not serve Heaven better than by planting the Cross on the blood-stained towers of the heathen metropolis. But it was natural that he should feel

otras ivan á pescar, y otras valdías, mucho mas se espantáron, porque no las auian visto, hasta en aquella saçon: y dixéron, que nuestra venida en esta Nueva España, que no eran cosas de hombres humanos, sino que la gran misericordia de Dios era quiẽ nos sostenia." Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 145.

²⁴ "En este instante suspiró Cortés cõ vna muy grã tristeza, mui mayor q̃ la q̃ de antes traia." Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁵ "Y Cortés le dixo, que ya veia quantas vezes auia embiado á México á rogalles con la paz, y que la tristeza no la tenia por sola vna cosa, sino en pensar en los grandes trabajos en que nos auiamos de ver, hasta tornar á señorear; y que con la ayuda de Dios presto lo pornamos por la obra." Ibid., ubi supra.

some compunction as he gazed on the goodly scene, and thought of the coming tempest, and how soon the opening blossoms of civilization which there met his eye must wither under the rude breath of War. It was a striking spectacle, that of the great Conqueror thus brooding in silence over the desolation he was about to bring on the land! It seems to have made a deep impression on his soldiers, little accustomed to such proofs of his sensibility; and it forms the burden of some of those *romances*, or national ballads, with which the Castilian minstrel, in the olden time, delighted to commemorate the favorite heroes of his country, and which, coming mid-way between oral tradition and chronicle, have been found as imperishable a record as chronicle itself.²⁶

Tacuba was the point which Cortés had reached on his former expedition round the northern side of the Valley. He had now, therefore, made the entire circuit of the great lake; had reconnoitred the several approaches to the capital, and inspected with his own

²⁶ Diaz gives the opening *redondillas* of the *romance*, which I have not been able to find in any of the printed collections:

"En Tacuba está Cortés,
cõ su esquadron esforçado,
triste estaua, y muy penoso,
triste, y con gran cuidado,
la vna mano en la mexilla,
y la otra en el costado," etc.

It may be thus done into pretty literal doggerel:

In Tacuba stood Cortés,
With many a care opprest,
Thoughts of the past came o'er him,
And he bowed his haughty crest.
One hand upon his cheek he laid,
The other on his breast,
While his valiant squadrons round him, etc.

eyes the dispositions made on the opposite quarters for its defence. He had no occasion to prolong his stay in Tacuba, the vicinity of which to Mexico must soon bring on him its whole warlike population.

Early on the following morning he resumed his march, taking the route pursued in the former expedition north of the small lakes. He met with less annoyance from the enemy than on the preceding days; a circumstance owing in some degree, perhaps, to the state of the weather, which was exceedingly tempestuous. The soldiers, with their garments heavy with moisture, ploughed their way with difficulty through miry roads flooded by the torrents. On one occasion, as their military chronicler informs us, the officers neglected to go the rounds of the camp at night, and the sentinels to mount guard, trusting to the violence of the storm for their protection. Yet the fate of Narvaez might have taught them not to put their faith in the elements.

At Acolman, in the Acolhuan territory, they were met by Sandoval, with the friendly cacique of Tezcuco, and several cavaliers, among whom were some recently arrived from the Islands. They cordially greeted their countrymen, and communicated the tidings that the canal was completed, and that the brigantines, rigged and equipped, were ready to be launched on the bosom of the lake. There seemed to be no reason, therefore, for longer postponing operations against Mexico.—With this welcome intelligence, Cortés and his victorious legions made their entry for the last time into the Acolhuan capital, having consumed just three weeks in completing the circuit of the Valley.

CHAPTER IV.

CONSPIRACY IN THE ARMY.—BRIGANTINES LAUNCHED.—
MUSTER OF FORCES.—EXECUTION OF XICOTENCATL.—
MARCH OF THE ARMY.—BEGINNING OF THE SIEGE.

1521.

AT the very time when Cortés was occupied with reconnoitring the Valley, preparatory to his siege of the capital, a busy faction in Castile was laboring to subvert his authority and defeat his plans of conquest altogether. The fame of his brilliant exploits had spread not only through the Isles, but to Spain and many parts of Europe, where a general admiration was felt for the invincible energy of the man who with his single arm, as it were, could so long maintain a contest with the powerful Indian empire. The absence of the Spanish monarch from his dominions, and the troubles of the country, can alone explain the supine indifference shown by the government to the prosecution of this great enterprise. To the same causes it may be ascribed that no action was had in regard to the suits of Velasquez and Narvaez, backed as they were by so potent an advocate as Bishop Fonseca, president of the Council of the Indies. The reins of government had fallen into the hands of Adrian of Utrecht, Charles's preceptor, and afterwards Pope,—a man of learning, and not without sagacity, but slow and timid in his policy, and altogether incapable of