

Cortés had been well supported by Alvarado and Sandoval in this assault on the city; though neither of these commanders had penetrated the suburbs, deterred, perhaps, by the difficulties of the passage, which in Alvarado's case were greater than those presented to Cortés, from the greater number of breaches with which the dike in his quarter was intersected. Something was owing, too, to the want of brigantines, until Cortés supplied the deficiency by detaching half of his little navy to the support of his officers. Without their co-operation, however, the general himself could not have advanced so far, nor, perhaps, have succeeded at all in setting foot within the city. The success of this assault spread consternation not only among the Mexicans, but their vassals, as they saw that the formidable preparations for defence were to avail little against the white man, who had so soon, in spite of them, forced his way into the very heart of the capital. Several of the neighboring places, in consequence, now showed a willingness to shake off their allegiance, and claimed the protection of the Spaniards. Among these were the territory of Xochimilco, so roughly treated by the invaders, and some tribes of Otomies, a rude but valiant people, who dwelt on the western confines of the Valley.<sup>19</sup> Their support was

que recibian daño, venian los Perros tan rabiosos, que en ninguna manera los podiamos detener, ni que nos dejassen de seguir." Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 250.—Herrera, Hist. general, dec. 3, lib. 1, cap. 18.—Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, MS., lib. 12, cap. 32.—Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 23.

<sup>19</sup> The great mass of the Otomies were an untamed race, who roamed over the broad tracks of the plateau, far away to the north. But many of them, who found their way into the Valley, became blended

valuable, not so much from the additional reinforcements which it brought, as from the greater security it gave to the army, whose outposts were perpetually menaced by these warlike barbarians.<sup>20</sup>

The most important aid which the Spaniards received at this time was from Tezcuco, whose prince, Ixtlilxochitl, gathered the whole strength of his levies, to the number of fifty thousand, if we are to credit Cortés, and led them in person to the Christian camp. By the general's orders, they were distributed among the three divisions of the besiegers.<sup>21</sup>

Thus strengthened, Cortés prepared to make another attack upon the capital, and that before it should have time to recover from the former. Orders were given to his lieutenants on the other causeways to march at the same time, and co-operate with him, as before, in the assault. It was conducted in precisely the same

with the Tezcucan, and even with the Tlascalcan nation, making some of the best soldiers in their armies.

<sup>20</sup> [The Otomies inhabited all the country of Tula on the west, where their language is well preserved. Conquista de Méjico (trad. de Vega), tom. ii. p. 161.]

<sup>21</sup> "Istrisuchil [Ixtlilxochitl], que es de edad de veinte y tres, 6 veinte y quatro años, muy esforzado, amado, y temido de todos." (Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 251.) The greatest obscurity prevails among historians in respect to this prince, whom they seem to have confounded very often with his brother and predecessor on the throne of Tezcuco. It is rare that either of them is mentioned by any other than his baptismal name of Hernando; and, if Herrera is correct in the assertion that this name was assumed by both, it may explain in some degree the confusion. (Hist. general, dec. 3, lib. 1, cap. 18.) I have conformed in the main to the old Tezcucan chronicler, who gathered his account of his kinsman, as he tells us, from the records of his nation, and from the oral testimony of the contemporaries of the prince himself. Venida de los Españoles, pp. 30, 31.

manner as on the previous entry, the infantry taking the van, and the allies and cavalry following. But, to the great dismay of the Spaniards, they found two-thirds of the breaches restored to their former state, and the stones and other materials, with which they had been stopped, removed by the indefatigable enemy. They were again obliged to bring up the cannon, the brigantines ran alongside, and the enemy was dislodged, and driven from post to post, in the same manner as on the preceding attack. In short, the whole work was to be done over again. It was not till an hour after noon, that the army had won a footing in the suburbs.

Here their progress was not so difficult as before; for the buildings, from the terraces of which they had experienced the most annoyance, had been swept away. Still, it was only step by step that they forced a passage in face of the Mexican militia, who disputed their advance with the same spirit as before. Cortés, who would willingly have spared the inhabitants, if he could have brought them to terms, saw them with regret, as he says, thus desperately bent on a war of extermination. He conceived that there would be no way more likely to affect their minds than by destroying at once some of the principal edifices, which they were accustomed to venerate as the pride and ornament of the city.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "Daban ocasion, y nos forzaban á que totalmente les destruyesemos. É de esta postrera tenia mas sentimiento, y me pesaba en el alma, y pensaba que forma ternia para los atemorizar, de manera, que viniessen en conocimiento de su yerro, y de el daño, que podian recibir de nosotros, y no hacia sino quemalles, y derrocalles las Torres de sus Ídolos, y sus Casas." Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 254.

Marching into the great square, he selected, as the first to be destroyed, the old palace of Axayacatl, his former barracks. The ample range of low buildings was, it is true, constructed of stone; but the interior, as well as the outworks, the turrets, and roofs, was of wood. The Spaniards, whose associations with the pile were of so gloomy a character, sprang to the work of destruction with a satisfaction like that which the French mob may have felt in the demolition of the Bastille. Torches and firebrands were thrown about in all directions; the lower parts of the building were speedily on fire, which, running along the inflammable hangings and wood-work of the interior, rapidly spread to the second floor. There the element took freer range, and, before it was visible from without, sent up from every aperture and crevice a dense column of vapor, that hung like a funereal pall over the city. This was dissipated by a bright sheet of flame, which enveloped all the upper regions of the vast pile, till, the supporters giving way, the wide range of turreted chambers fell, amidst clouds of dust and ashes, with an appalling crash, that for a moment stayed the Spaniards in the work of devastation.<sup>23</sup>

It was but for a moment. On the other side of the square, adjoining Montezuma's residence, were several buildings, as the reader is aware, appropriated to animals. One of these was now marked for destruction,

<sup>23</sup> [The ruins of this building were brought to light in the process of laying the foundations of the houses recently constructed on the southern side of the street of Santa Teresa, adjoining the convent of the Conception. Conquista de Méjico (trad. de Vega), tom. ii. p. 162.]

—the House of Birds, filled with specimens of all the painted varieties which swarmed over the wide forests of Mexico. It was an airy and elegant building, after the Indian fashion, and, viewed in connection with its object, was undoubtedly a remarkable proof of refinement and intellectual taste in a barbarous monarch. Its light, combustible materials, of wood and bamboo, formed a striking contrast to the heavy stone edifices around it, and made it obviously convenient for the present purpose of the invaders. The torches were applied, and the fanciful structure was soon wrapped in flames, that sent their baleful splendors far and wide over city and lake. Its feathered inhabitants either perished in the fire, or those of stronger wing, bursting the burning lattice-work of the aviary, soared high into the air, and, fluttering for a while over the devoted city, fled with loud screams to their native forests beyond the mountains.

The Aztecs gazed with inexpressible horror on this destruction of the venerable abode of their monarchs and of the monuments of their luxury and splendor. Their rage was exasperated almost to madness as they beheld their hated foes the Tlascalans busy in the work of desolation, and aided by the Tezcucans, their own allies, and not unfrequently their kinsmen. They vented their fury in bitter execrations, especially on the young prince Ixtlilxochitl, who, marching side by side with Cortés, took his full share in the dangers of the day. The warriors from the house-tops poured the most opprobrious epithets on him as he passed, denouncing him as a false-hearted traitor; false to his country and his blood,—reproaches not altogether

unmerited, as his kinsman, who chronicles the circumstance, candidly confesses.<sup>24</sup> He gave little heed to their taunts, however, holding on his way with the dogged resolution of one true to the cause in which he was embarked; and, when he entered the great square, he grappled with the leader of the Aztec forces, wrenched a lance from his grasp, won by the latter from the Christians, and dealt him a blow with his mace, or *maquahuitl*, which brought him lifeless to the ground.<sup>25</sup>

The Spanish commander, having accomplished the work of destruction, sounded a retreat, sending on the Indian allies, who blocked up the way before him. The Mexicans, maddened by their losses, in wild transports of fury hung close on his rear, and, though driven back by the cavalry, still returned, throwing themselves desperately under the horses, striving to tear the riders from their saddles, and content to throw away their own lives for one blow at their enemy. Fortunately, the greater part of their militia was engaged with the assailants on the opposite quarters of the city, but, thus crippled, they pushed the Spaniards under Cortés so vigorously that few reached the camp that night without bearing on their bodies some token of the desperate conflict.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "Y desde las azoteas deshonrarle llamándole de traidor contra su patria y deudos, y otras razones pesadas, que á la verdad á ellos les sobraba la razon; mas Ixtlilxochitl callaba y peleaba, que mas estimaba la amistad y salud de los Cristianos que todo esto." Venida de los Españoles, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> For the preceding pages relating to this second assault, see Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, pp. 254-256,—Sahagun, Hist. de

On the following day, and, indeed, on several days following, the general repeated his assaults with as little care for repose as if he and his men had been made of iron. On one occasion he advanced some way down the street of Tacuba, in which he carried three of the bridges, desirous, if possible, to open a communication with Alvarado, posted on the contiguous causeway. But the Spaniards in that quarter had not penetrated beyond the suburbs, still impeded by the severe character of the ground, and wanting, it may be, somewhat of that fiery impetuosity which the soldier feels who fights under the eye of his chief.

In each of these assaults the breaches were found more or less restored to their original state by the pertinacious Mexicans, and the materials, which had been deposited in them with so much labor, again removed. It may seem strange that Cortés did not take measures to guard against the repetition of an act which caused so much delay and embarrassment to his operations. He notices this in his Letter to the Emperor, in which he says that to do so would have required either that he should have established his quarters in the city itself, which would have surrounded him with enemies and cut off his communications with the country, or that he should have posted a sufficient guard of Spaniards—for the natives were out of the question—to protect the breaches by night, a duty altogether beyond the strength of men engaged in so arduous service through the day.<sup>27</sup>

Nueva-España, MS., lib. 12, cap. 33.—Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 24.—Defensa, MS., cap. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Rel. Terc., ap. Lorenzana, p. 259.

Yet this was the course adopted by Alvarado; who stationed at night a guard of forty soldiers for the defence of the opening nearest to the enemy. This was relieved by a similar detachment, in a few hours, and this again by a third, the two former still lying on their post; so that on an alarm a body of one hundred and twenty soldiers was ready on the spot to repel an attack. Sometimes, indeed, the whole division took up their bivouac in the neighborhood of the breach, resting on their arms, and ready for instant action.<sup>28</sup>

But a life of such incessant toil and vigilance was almost too severe even for the stubborn constitutions of the Spaniards. "Through the long night," exclaims Diaz, who served in Alvarado's division, "we kept our dreary watch; neither wind, nor wet, nor cold availing anything. There we stood, smarting as we were from the wounds we had received in the fight of the preceding day."<sup>29</sup> It was the rainy season, which continues in that country from July to September;<sup>30</sup> and the surface of the causeways, flooded by the storms,

<sup>28</sup> Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 151.—According to Herrera, Alvarado and Sandoval did not conceal their disapprobation of the course pursued by their commander in respect to the breaches: "I Alvarado, i Sandoval, por su parte, tambien lo hicieron mui bien, culpando á Hernando Cortes por estas retiradas, queriendo muchos que se quedara en lo ganado, por no bolver tantas veces á ello." Hist. general, dec. 3, lib. 1, cap. 19.

<sup>29</sup> "Porque como era de noche, no aguardauan mucho, y desta manera que he dicho velauamos, que ni porque llouiesse, ni vientos, ni frios, y aunque estauamos metidos en medio de grandes lodos, y heridos, allí auamos de estar." Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 151.

<sup>30</sup> [That is to say, the more violent part of the rainy season, which lasts, in fact, from May or June to October. Conquista de Méjico (trad. de Vega), tom. ii. p. 165.]

and broken up by the constant movement of such large bodies of men, was converted into a marsh, or rather quagmire, which added inconceivably to the distresses of the army.

The troops under Cortés were scarcely in a better situation. But few of them could find shelter in the rude towers that garnished the works of Xoloc. The greater part were compelled to bivouac in the open air, exposed to all the inclemency of the weather. Every man, unless his wounds prevented it, was required by the camp regulations to sleep on his arms; and they were often roused from their hasty slumbers by the midnight call to battle. For Guatemozin, contrary to the usual practice of his countrymen, frequently selected the hours of darkness to aim a blow at the enemy. "In short," exclaims the veteran soldier above quoted, "so unintermitting were our engagements, by day and by night, during the three months in which we lay before the capital, that to recount them all would but exhaust the reader's patience, and make him fancy he was perusing the incredible feats of a knight-errant of romance."<sup>31</sup>

The Aztec emperor conducted his operations on a systematic plan, which showed some approach to military science. He not unfrequently made simultaneous attacks on the three several divisions of the Spaniards established on the causeways, and on the garrisons at

<sup>31</sup> "Porque nouenta y tres dias estuimos sobre esta tan fuerte ciudad, cada dia é de noche teniamos guerras, y combates; é no lo pongo aquí por capítulos lo que cada dia haziamos, porque me parece que seria gran proligidad, é seria cosa para nunca acabar, y pareceria a los libros de Amadis, é de otros corros de caualleros." Hist. de la Conquista, ubi supra.

their extremities. To accomplish this, he enforced the service not merely of his own militia of the capital, but of the great towns in the neighborhood, who all moved in concert, at the well-known signal of the beacon-fire, or of the huge drum struck by the priests on the summit of the temple. One of these general attacks, it was observed, whether from accident or design, took place on the eve of St. John the Baptist, the anniversary of the day on which the Spaniards made their second entry into the Mexican capital.<sup>32</sup>

Notwithstanding the severe drain on his forces by this incessant warfare, the young monarch contrived to relieve them in some degree by different detachments, which took the place of one another. This was apparent from the different uniforms and military badges of the Indian battalions that successively came and disappeared from the field. At night a strict guard was maintained in the Aztec quarters, a thing not common with the nations of the plateau. The outposts of the hostile armies were stationed within sight of each other. That of the Mexicans was usually placed in the neighborhood of some wide breach, and its position was marked by a large fire in front. The hours for relieving guard were intimated by the shrill Aztec whistle, while bodies of men might be seen moving behind the flame, which threw a still ruddier glow over the cinnamon-colored skins of the warriors.

While thus active on land, Guatemozin was not idle on the water. He was too wise, indeed, to cope with

<sup>32</sup> Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, ubi supra.—Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, MS., lib. 12, cap. 33.

the Spanish navy again in open battle; but he resorted to stratagem, so much more congenial to Indian warfare. He placed a large number of canoes in ambuscade among the tall reeds which fringed the southern shores of the lake, and caused piles, at the same time, to be driven into the neighboring shallows. Several *piraguas*, or boats of a larger size, then issued forth, and rowed near the spot where the Spanish brigantines were moored. Two of the smallest vessels, supposing the Indian barks were conveying provisions to the besieged, instantly stood after them, as had been foreseen. The Aztec boats fled for shelter to the reedy thicket where their companions lay in ambush. The Spaniards, following, were soon entangled among the palisades under the water. They were instantly surrounded by the whole swarm of Indian canoes, most of the men were wounded, several, including the two commanders, slain, and one of the brigantines fell—a useless prize—into the hands of the victors. Among the slain was Pedro Barba, captain of the crossbowmen, a gallant officer, who had highly distinguished himself in the Conquest. This disaster occasioned much mortification to Cortés. It was a salutary lesson, that stood him in good stead during the remainder of the war.<sup>33</sup>

Thus the contest was waged by land and by water,—on the causeway, the city, and the lake. Whatever else might fail, the capital of the Aztec empire was true to itself, and, mindful of its ancient renown, opposed a bold front to its enemies in every direction.

<sup>33</sup> Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 151.—Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, MS., lib. 12, cap. 34.

As in a body whose extremities have been struck with death, life still rallied in the heart, and seemed to beat there, for the time, with even a more vigorous pulsation than ever.

It may appear extraordinary that Guatemozin should have been able to provide for the maintenance of the crowded population now gathered in the metropolis, especially as the avenues were all in the possession of the besieging army.<sup>34</sup> But, independently of the preparations made with this view before the siege, and of the loathsome sustenance daily furnished by the victims for sacrifice, supplies were constantly obtained from the surrounding country across the lake. This was so conducted, for a time, as in a great measure to escape observation; and even when the brigantines were commanded to cruise day and night, and sweep the waters of the boats employed in this service, many still contrived, under cover of the darkness, to elude the vigilance of the cruisers, and brought their cargoes into port. It was not till the great towns in the neighborhood cast off their allegiance that the supply began to fail, from the failure of its sources. This defection was more frequent, as the inhabitants became convinced that the government, incompetent to its own defence, must be still more so to theirs; and the Aztec metropolis saw its great vassals fall off one after another, as the tree over which decay is stealing parts with its leaves at the first blast of the tempest.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> I recollect meeting with no estimate of their numbers; nor, in the loose arithmetic of the Conquerors, would it be worth much. They must, however, have been very great, to enable them to meet the assailants so promptly and efficiently on every point.

<sup>35</sup> Defensa, MS., cap. 28.—Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva-España, MS., VOL. III.—F

The cities which now claimed the Spanish general's protection supplied the camp with an incredible number of warriors; a number which, if we admit Cortés' own estimate, one hundred and fifty thousand,<sup>36</sup> could have only served to embarrass his operations on the long extended causeways. Yet it is true that the Valley, teeming with towns and villages, swarmed with a population—and one, too, in which every man was a warrior—greatly exceeding that of the present day. These levies were distributed among the three garrisons at the terminations of the causeways; and many found active employment in foraging the country for provisions, and yet more in carrying on hostilities against the places still unfriendly to the Spaniards.

Cortés found further occupation for them in the construction of barracks for his troops, who suffered greatly from exposure to the incessant rains of the season, which were observed to fall more heavily by night than by day. Quantities of stone and timber were obtained from the buildings that had been demolished in the city. They were transported in the brigantines to the causeway, and from these materials a row of huts or barracks was constructed, extending on either side of the works of Xoloc. It may give some idea of the great breadth of the causeway at this place, one of the deepest parts of the lake, to add that, although the barracks were erected in parallel lines on the opposite

lib. 12, cap. 34.—The principal cities were Mexicaltzinco, Cuitlahuac, Iztapalapan, Mizquiz, Huitzilopochco, Colhuacan.

<sup>36</sup> "Y como aquel día llevabamos mas de ciento y cincuenta mil Hombres de Guerra." Rel. Terc., ap. Lorenzana, p. 280.

sides of it, there still remained space enough for the army to defile between.<sup>37</sup>

By this arrangement, ample accommodations were furnished for the Spanish troops and their Indian attendants, amounting in all to about two thousand. The great body of the allies, with a small detachment of horse and infantry, were quartered at the neighboring post of Cojohuacan, which served to protect the rear of the encampment and to maintain its communications with the country. A similar disposition of forces took place in the other divisions of the army, under Alvarado and Sandoval, though the accommodations provided for the shelter of the troops on their causeways were not so substantial as those for the division of Cortés.

The Spanish camp was supplied with provisions from the friendly towns in the neighborhood, and especially from Tezcuco.<sup>38</sup> They consisted of fish, the fruits of the country, particularly a sort of fig borne by the *tuna* (*cactus opuntia*), and a species of cherry, or something much resembling it, which grew abundantly at this

<sup>37</sup> "Y vea Vuestra Magestad," says Cortés to the emperor, "que tan ancha puede ser la Calzada, que va por lo mas hondo de la Laguna, que de la una parte, y de la otra iban estas Casas, y quedaba en medio hecha Calle, que muy á placer á pie, y á caballo ibamos, y veniamos por ella." Rel. Terc., ap. Lorenzana, p. 260.

<sup>38</sup> The greatest difficulty under which the troops labored, according to Diaz, was that of obtaining the requisite medicaments for their wounds. But this was in a great degree obviated by a Catalan soldier, who by virtue of his prayers and incantations wrought wonderful cures both on the Spaniards and their allies. The latter, as the more ignorant, flocked in crowds to the tent of this military Æsculapius, whose success was doubtless in a direct ratio to the faith of his patients. Hist. de la Conquista, ubi supra.

season. But their principal food was the *tortillas*, cakes of Indian meal, still common in Mexico, for which bake-houses were established, under the care of the natives, in the garrison towns commanding the causeways.<sup>39</sup> The allies, as appears too probable, reinforced their frugal fare with an occasional banquet on human flesh, for which the battle-field unhappily afforded them too much facility, and which, however shocking to the feelings of Cortés, he did not consider himself in a situation, at that moment, to prevent.<sup>40</sup>

Thus the tempest, which had been so long mustering,

<sup>39</sup> Diaz mourns over this unsavory diet. (Hist. de la Conquista, loc. cit.) Yet the Indian fig is an agreeable, nutritious fruit; and the *tortilla*, made of maize flour, with a slight infusion of lime, though not precisely a *morceau friand*, might pass for very tolerable camp fare. According to the lively Author of "Life in Mexico," it is made now precisely as it was in the days of the Aztecs. If so, a cooking receipt is almost the only thing that has not changed in this country of revolutions.

<sup>40</sup> "Quo strages," says Martyr, "erat crudelior, eo magis copiose ac opipare cœnabant Guazuzingui & Tascaltecani, cœterique prouinciales auxiliarii, qui soliti sunt hostes in prælio cadentes intra suos ventres sepelire; nec vetare ausus fuisset Cortesius." (De Orbe Novo, dec. 5, cap. 8.) "Y los otros les mostraban los de su Ciudad hechos pedazos, diciéndoles, que los habian de cenar aquella noche, y almorzar otro dia, como de hecho lo hacian." (Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 256.) Yet one may well be startled by the assertion of Oviedo, that the carnivorous monsters fished up the bloated bodies of those drowned in the lake to swell their repast! "Ni podian ver los ojos de los Christianos, é Cathólicos, mas espantable é aborrecida cosa, que ver en el Real de los Amigos confederados el continuo exercicio de comer carne asada, ó cocida de los Indios enemigos, é aun de los que mataban en las canoas, ó se ahogaban, é despues el agua los echaba en la superficie de la laguna, ó en la costa, no los dexaban de pescar, é aposentar en sus vientres." Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 24.

broke at length, in all its fury, on the Aztec capital. Its unhappy inmates beheld the hostile regions encompassing them about, with their glittering files stretching as far as the eye could reach. They saw themselves deserted by their allies and vassals in their utmost need; the fierce stranger penetrating into their secret places, violating their temples, plundering their palaces, wasting the fair city by day, firing its suburbs by night, and intrenching himself in solid edifices under their walls, as if determined never to withdraw his foot while one stone remained upon another. All this they saw; yet their spirits were unbroken; and, though famine and pestilence were beginning to creep over them, they still showed the same determined front to their enemies. Cortés, who would gladly have spared the town and its inhabitants, beheld this resolution with astonishment. He intimated more than once, by means of the prisoners whom he released, his willingness to grant them fair terms of capitulation. Day after day he fully expected his proffers would be accepted. But day after day he was disappointed.<sup>41</sup> He had yet to learn how tenacious was the memory of the Aztecs, and that, whatever might be the horrors of their present situation, and their fears for the future, they were all forgotten in their hatred of the white man.

<sup>41</sup> "I confidently expected both on that and the preceding day that they would come with proposals of peace, as I had myself, whether victorious or otherwise, constantly made overtures to that end. But on their part we never perceived a sign of such intention." Rel. Terc. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 261.