

which could prolong a defence of his city while one stone was left upon another; and our sympathies, for the time, are inevitably thrown more into the scale of the rude chieftain, thus battling for his country's freedom, than into that of his civilized and successful antagonist.¹⁵

In reviewing the circumstances of Guatemozin's death, one cannot attach much weight to the charge of conspiracy brought against him. That the Indians, brooding over their wrongs and present sufferings, should have sometimes talked of revenge, would not be surprising. But that any chimerical scheme of an insurrection, like that above mentioned, should have been set on foot, or even sanctioned, by Guatemozin, is altogether improbable. That prince's explanation of the affair, as given by Diaz, is, to say the least, quite as deserving of credit as the accusation of the Indian informer.¹⁶ The defect of testimony and the

¹⁵ Guatemozin's beautiful wife, the princess Tecuichpo, the daughter of Montezuma, lived long enough after his death to give her hand to four Castilians, all of noble descent. (See *ante*, vol. ii. p. 339, note 36.) She is described as having been as well instructed in the Catholic faith as any woman in Castile, as most gracious and winning in her deportment, and as having contributed greatly, by her example, and the deference with which she inspired the Aztecs, to the tranquillity of the conquered country. This pleasing portrait, it may be well enough to mention, is by the hand of her husband, Don Thoan Cano. See Appendix, Part 2, No. 11.

¹⁶ The Indian chroniclers regard the pretended conspiracy of Guatemozin as an invention of Cortés. The informer himself, when afterwards put to the torture by the cacique of Tezcuco, declared that he had made no revelation of this nature to the Spanish commander. Ixtlilxochitl vouches for the truth of this story. (Venida de los Españoles, pp. 83-93.) But who will vouch for Ixtlilxochitl?

distance of time make it difficult for us, at the present day, to decide the question. We have a surer criterion of the truth in the opinion of those who were eye-witnesses of the transaction. It is given in the words of the old chronicler so often quoted. "The execution of Guatemozin," says Diaz, "was most unjust, and was thought wrong by all of us."¹⁷

The most probable explanation of the affair seems to be that Guatemozin was a troublesome and, indeed, formidable captive. Thus much is intimated by Cortés himself, in his Letter to the emperor.¹⁸ The fallen sovereign of Mexico, by the ascendancy of his character, as well as by his previous station, maintained an influence over his countrymen which would have enabled him with a breath, as it were, to rouse their smothered, not extinguished, animosity into rebellion. The Spaniards, during the first years after the Conquest, lived in constant apprehension of a rising of the Aztecs. This is evident from numerous passages in the writings of the time. It was under the same apprehension that Cortés consented to embarrass himself with his royal captive on this dreary expedition. And in such distrust did he hold him that, even while in Mexico, he neither rode abroad, nor walked to any great distance, according to Gomara, without being attended by Guatemozin.¹⁹

¹⁷ "Y fué esta muerte que les diéron muy injustamente dada, y pareció mal á todos los que ibamos aquella jornada." Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 177.

¹⁸ "Guatemozin, Señor que fué de esta Ciudad de Temixtitan, á quien yo despues que la gané he tenido siempre preso, teniéndole por hombre bullicioso, y le llevé conmigo." Carta Quinta, MS.

¹⁹ "Y le hacian aquella mesma reverencia, i ceremonias, que á

Parties standing in such relations to each other could have been the objects only of mutual distrust and aversion. The forlorn condition of the Spaniards on the present march, which exposed them in a peculiar degree to any sudden assault from their wily Indian vassals, increased the suspicions of Cortés. Thus predisposed to think ill of Guatemozin, the general lent a ready ear to the first accusation against him. Charges were converted into proofs, and condemnation followed close upon the charges. By a single blow he proposed to rid himself and the state forever of a dangerous enemy,—the more dangerous, that he was an enemy in disguise. Had he but consulted his own honor and his good name, Guatemozin's head was the last on which he should have suffered an injury to fall. "He should have cherished him," to borrow the homely simile of his encomiast, Gomara, "like gold in a napkin, as the best trophy of his victories."²⁰

Whatever may have been the real motives of his conduct in this affair, it seems to have left the mind of Cortés but ill at ease. For a long time he was moody and irritable, and found it difficult to sleep at night. On one occasion, as he was pacing an upper chamber of a *teocalli* in which he was quartered, he missed his footing in the dark, and was precipitated from a height of some twelve feet to the ground, which occasioned him a severe contusion on the head,—a

Moteçuma, i creo que por eso le llevaba siempre consigo por la Ciudad á Caballo si cavalgaba, i sino á pie como él iba." Crónica, cap. 170.

²⁰ "I Cortés debiera guardarlo vivo, como Oro en paño, que era el triunfo, i gloria de sus Victorias." Crónica, cap. 170.

thing too palpable to be concealed, though he endeavored, says the gossiping Diaz, to hide the knowledge of it, as well as he could, from the soldiers.²¹

It was not long after the sad scene of Guatemozin's execution that the wearied troops entered the head town of the great province of Aculan; a thriving community of traders, who carried on a profitable traffic with the farthest quarters of Central America. Cortés notices in general terms the excellence and beauty of the buildings, and the hospitable reception which he experienced from the inhabitants.

After renewing their strength in these comfortable quarters, the Spaniards left the capital of Aculan, the name of which is to be found on no map, and held on their toilsome way in the direction of what is now called the Lake of Peten. It was then the property of an emigrant tribe of the hardy Maya family, and their capital stood on an island in the lake, "with its houses and lofty *teocallis* glistening in the sun," says Bernal Diaz, "so that it might be seen for the distance of two leagues."²² These edifices, built by one of the races of Yucatan, displayed, doubtless, the same peculiarities of construction as the remains still to be seen in that remarkable peninsula. But, whatever may have been their architectural merits, they are disposed of in a brief sentence by the Conquerors.

The inhabitants of the island showed a friendly spirit, and a docility unlike the warlike temper of their countrymen of Yucatan. They willingly listened to the Spanish missionaries who accompanied the expedi-

²¹ Hist. de la Conquista, ubi supra.

²² Ibid., cap. 178.

tion, as they expounded the Christian doctrines through the intervention of Marina. The Indian interpreter was present throughout this long march, the last in which she remained at the side of Cortés. As this, too, is the last occasion on which she will appear in these pages, I will mention, before parting with her, an interesting circumstance that occurred when the army was traversing the province of Coatzacoalco. This, it may be remembered, was the native country of Marina, where her infamous mother sold her, when a child, to some foreign traders, in order to secure her inheritance to a younger brother. Cortés halted for some days at this place, to hold a conference with the surrounding caciques on matters of government and religion. Among those summoned to this meeting was Marina's mother, who came, attended by her son. No sooner did they make their appearance than all were struck with the great resemblance of the cacique to her daughter. The two parties recognized each other, though they had not met since their separation. The mother, greatly terrified, fancied that she had been decoyed into a snare in order to punish her inhuman conduct. But Marina instantly ran up to her, and endeavored to allay her fears, assuring her that she should receive no harm, and, addressing the by-standers, said "that she was sure her mother knew not what she did when she sold her to the traders, and that she forgave her." Then, tenderly embracing her unnatural parent, she gave her such jewels and other little ornaments as she wore about her own person, to win back, as it would seem, her lost affection. Marina added that "she felt much happier than before, now that she had been in-

structed in the Christian faith and given up the bloody worship of the Aztecs."²³

In the course of the expedition to Honduras, Cortés gave Marina away to a Castilian knight, Don Juan Xaramillo,²⁴ to whom she was wedded as his lawful wife. She had estates assigned to her in her native province, where she probably passed the remainder of her days.²⁵ From this time the name of Marina disappears from the page of history. But it has been always held in grateful remembrance by the Spaniards, for the important aid which she gave them in effecting the Conquest, and by the natives, for the kindness and sympathy which she showed them in their misfortunes. Many an Indian ballad commemorates the gentle virtues of Malinche,—her Aztec epithet. Even now her spirit, if report be true, watches over the capital which

²³ Diaz, who was present, attests the truth of this account by the most solemn adjuration: "Y todo esto que digo, se lo of muy certifiadamente y se lo juro, amen." *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 37.

²⁴ [Alaman, from an examination of the municipal archives of Mexico, finds that Juan de Jaramillo was commander of one of the brigantines in the siege of Mexico. He subsequently filled the office of royal standard-bearer of the city, and was several times chosen to represent it in the assemblies of the cities of New Spain. *Conquista de Méjico* (trad. de Vega), tom. ii. p. 269.]

²⁵ [The Spanish government showed its sense of the services of Marina by the grant of several estates both in the town and country. The house in which she usually resided in Mexico was in the street of Medinas, as it is now called, which then bore the name of her husband, Jaramillo. She had a pleasure-house at Chapultepec, and in Cuyoacan a garden that had belonged to Montezuma. She lived in the enjoyment of wealth and much consideration from her countrymen; and, as we see mention made of her grandchild during her lifetime, we may presume she reached a good old age. *Conquista de Méjico* (trad. de Vega), tom. ii. p. 269.—Alaman, *Disertaciones históricas*, tom. ii. p. 293.]

she helped to win; and the peasant is occasionally startled by the apparition of an Indian princess, dimly seen through the evening shadows, as it flits among the groves and grottos of the royal Hill of Chapultepec.²⁶

By the Conqueror, Marina left one son, Don Martin Cortés. He rose to high consideration, and was made a *comendador* of the order of St. Jago. He was subsequently suspected of treasonable designs against the government; and neither his parents' extraordinary services, nor his own deserts, could protect him from a cruel persecution; and in 1568 the son of Hernando Cortés was shamefully subjected to the torture in the very capital which his father had acquired for the Castilian crown!

The inhabitants of the isles of Peten—to return from our digression—listened attentively to the preaching of the Franciscan friars, and consented to the instant demolition of their idols, and the erection of the Cross upon their ruins.²⁷ A singular circumstance showed the value of these hurried conversions. Cortés, on his departure, left among this friendly people one of his horses, which had been disabled by an injury in the foot. The Indians felt a reverence for the animal, as in some way connected with the mysterious power of

²⁶ Life in Mexico, let. 8.—The fair author does not pretend to have been favored with a sight of the apparition.

²⁷ Villagutierre says that the Iztacs, by which name the inhabitants of these islands were called, did not destroy their idols while the Spaniards remained there. (*Historia de la Conquista de la Provincia de el Itza* (Madrid, 1701), pp. 49, 50.) The historian is wrong, since Cortés expressly asserts that the images were broken and burnt in his presence. Carta Quinta, MS.

the white men. When their visitors had gone, they offered flowers to the horse, and, as it is said, prepared for him many savory messes of poultry, such as they would have administered to their own sick. Under this extraordinary diet the poor animal pined away and died. The affrighted Indians raised his effigy in stone, and, placing it in one of their *teocallis*, did homage to it, as to a deity. In 1618, when two Franciscan friars came to preach the gospel in these regions, then scarcely better known to the Spaniards than before the time of Cortés, one of the most remarkable objects which they found was this statue of a horse, receiving the homage of the Indian worshippers, as the god of thunder and lightning!²⁸

It would be wearisome to recount all the perils and hardships endured by the Spaniards in the remainder of their journey. It would be repeating only the incidents of the preceding narrative, the same obstacles in their path, the same extremities of famine and fatigue,—hardships more wearing on the spirits than encounters with an enemy, which, if more hazardous, are also more exciting. It is easier to contend with man than with Nature. Yet I must not omit to mention the passage of the *Sierra de los Pedernales*, "the Mountain of Flints," which, though only twenty-four miles in extent, consumed no less than twelve days in crossing it! The sharp stones cut the horses' feet to pieces, while many were lost down the precipices and ravines; so that when they had reached the opposite side sixty-eight of these valuable animals had perished, and the

²⁸ The fact is recorded by Villagutierre, *Conquista de el Itza*, pp. 100-102, and Cojullado, *Hist. de Yucathan*, lib. 1, cap. 16.

remainder were, for the most part, in an unserviceable condition!²⁹

The rainy season had now set in, and torrents of water, falling day and night, drenched the adventurers to the skin, and added greatly to their distresses. The rivers, swollen beyond their usual volume, poured along with a terrible impetuosity that defied the construction of bridges; and it was with the greatest difficulty that, by laying trunks of trees from one huge rock to another, with which these streams were studded, they effected a perilous passage to the opposite banks.³⁰

At length the shattered train drew near the Golfo Dolce, at the head of the Bay of Honduras. Their route could not have been far from the site of Copan, the celebrated city whose architectural ruins have furnished such noble illustrations for the pencil of Catherwood. But the Spaniards passed on in silence. Nor, indeed, can we wonder that at this stage of the enterprise they should have passed on without heeding the vicinity of a city in the wilderness, though it were as glorious as the capital of Zenobia; for they were arrived almost within view of the Spanish settlements, the object of their long and wearisome pilgrimage.

²⁹ "Y querer dezir la aspereza y fragosidad de este Puerto y sierras, ni quien lo dixese lo sabria significar, ni quien lo oyese podria entender, sino que sepa V. M. que en ocho leguas que duró hasta este puerto estuvimos en las andar doze dias, digo los postreros en llegar al cabo de él, en que murieron sesenta y ocho cavallos despeñados y desxaretados, y todos los demas viniéron heridos y tan lastimados que no pensámos aprovecharnos de ninguno." Carta Quinta de Cortés, MS.

³⁰ "If any unhappy wretch had become giddy in this transit," says Cortés, "he must inevitably have been precipitated into the gulf and perished. There were upwards of twenty of these frightful passes." Carta Quinta, MS.

The place which they were now approaching was Naco, or San Gil de Buena Vista, a Spanish settlement on the Golfo Dolce. Cortés advanced cautiously, prepared to fall on the town by surprise. He had held on his way with the undeviating step of the North American Indian, who, traversing morass and mountain and the most intricate forests, guided by the instinct of revenge, presses straight towards the mark, and, when he has reached it, springs at once on his unsuspecting victim. Before Cortés made his assault, his scouts fortunately fell in with some of the inhabitants of the place, from whom they received tidings of the death of Olid, and of the re-establishment of his own authority. Cortés, therefore, entered the place like a friend, and was cordially welcomed by his countrymen, greatly astonished, says Diaz, "by the presence among them of the general so renowned throughout these countries."³¹

The colony was at this time sorely suffering from famine; and to such extremity was it soon reduced that the troops would probably have found a grave in the very spot to which they had looked forward as the goal of their labors, but for the seasonable arrival of a vessel with supplies from Cuba. With a perseverance which nothing could daunt, Cortés made an examination of the surrounding country, and occupied a month more in exploring dismal swamps, steaming with unwholesome exhalations, and infected with bilious fevers and with swarms of venomous insects which left peace

³¹ "Espantáronse en gran manera, y como supieron que era Cortés q̄ tan nombrado era en todas estas partes de las Indias, y en Castilla, no sabiã que se hazer de placer." Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 179.

neither by day nor night. At length he embarked with a part of his forces on board of two brigantines, and, after touching at one or two ports in the bay, anchored off Truxillo, the principal Spanish settlement on that coast. The surf was too high for him easily to effect a landing; but the inhabitants, overjoyed at his arrival, rushed into the shallow water and eagerly bore back the general in their arms to the shore.³²

After he had restored the strength and spirits of his men, the indefatigable commander prepared for a new expedition, the object of which was to explore and to reduce the extensive province of Nicaragua. One may well feel astonished at the adventurous spirit of the man who, unsubdued by the terrible sufferings of his recent march, should so soon be prepared for another enterprise equally appalling. It is difficult, in this age of sober sense, to conceive the character of a Castilian cavalier of the sixteenth century, a true counterpart of which it would not have been easy to find in any other nation, even at that time,—or anywhere, indeed, save in those tales of chivalry, which, however wild and extravagant they may seem, were much more true to character than to situation. The mere excitement of exploring the strange and the unknown was a sufficient compensation to the Spanish adventurer for all his toils and trials. It seems to have been ordered by Providence that such a race of men should exist contemporaneously with the discovery of the New World, that those regions should be brought to light which were beset with dangers and difficulties so appalling as might

³² Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 179, et seq.—Herrera, *Hist. general*, dec. 3, lib. 8, cap. 3, 4.—*Carta Quinta de Cortés*, MS.

have tended to overawe and to discourage the ordinary spirit of adventure. Yet Cortés, though filled with this spirit, proposed nobler ends to himself than those of the mere vulgar adventurer. In the expedition to Nicaragua he designed, as he had done in that to Honduras, to ascertain the resources of the country in general, and, above all, the existence of any means of communication between the great oceans on its borders. If none such existed, it would at least establish this fact, the knowledge of which, to borrow his own language, was scarcely less important.

The general proposed to himself the further object of enlarging the colonial empire of Castile. The conquest of Mexico was but the commencement of a series of conquests. To the warrior who had achieved this, nothing seemed impracticable; and scarcely would any thing have been so, had he been properly sustained. It is no great stretch of imagination to see the Conqueror of Mexico advancing along the provinces of the vast Isthmus,—Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Darien,—until he had planted his victorious banner on the shores of the Gulf of Panamá; and, while it was there fanned by the breezes from the golden South, the land of the Incas, to see him gathering such intelligence of this land as would stimulate him to carry his arms still farther, and to anticipate, it might be, the splendid career of Pizarro!

But from these dreams of ambition Cortés was suddenly aroused by such tidings as convinced him that his absence from Mexico was already too far prolonged, and that he must return without delay, if he would save the capital or the country.