

added, turning to Cortés, "to look out only for the rich lands, and the best way to govern them." "Fear not," replied his commander, "if Fortune but favors me as she did Orlando, and I have such gallant gentlemen as you for my companions, I shall understand myself very well."<sup>2</sup>

The fleet had now arrived off San Juan de Ulua, the island so named by Grijalva. The weather was temperate and serene, and crowds of natives were gathered on the shore of the main land, gazing at the strange phenomenon, as the vessels glided along under easy sail on the smooth bosom of the waters. It was the evening of Thursday in Passion Week. The air came pleasantly off the shore, and Cortés, liking the spot, thought he might safely anchor under the lee of the island, which would shelter him from the *nortes* that sweep over these seas with fatal violence in the winter, sometimes even late in the spring.

The ships had not been long at anchor, when a light pirogue, filled with natives, shot off from the neighbouring continent, and steered for the general's vessel, distinguished by the royal ensign of Castile floating from the mast. The Indians came on board with a frank confidence, inspired by the accounts of the Spaniards spread by their countrymen who had traded with Grijalva. They brought presents of fruits and flowers and little ornaments of gold, which they gladly exchanged for the usual trinkets. Cortés

<sup>2</sup> Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 37.

was baffled in his attempts to hold a conversation with his visitors by means of the interpreter, Aguilar, who was ignorant of the language; the Mayan dialects, with which he was conversant, bearing too little resemblance to the Aztec. The natives supplied the deficiency, as far as possible, by the uncommon vivacity and significance of their gestures, — the hieroglyphics of speech, — but the Spanish commander saw with chagrin the embarrassments he must encounter in future for want of a more perfect medium of communication.<sup>3</sup> In this dilemma, he was informed that one of the female slaves given to him by the Tabascan chiefs was a native Mexican, and understood the language. Her name — that given to her by the Spaniards — was Marina; and, as she was to exercise a most important influence on their fortunes, it is necessary to acquaint the reader with something of her character and history.

She was born at Painalla, in the province of Coatzacualco, on the south-eastern borders of the Mexican empire. Her father, a rich and powerful cacique, died when she was very young. Her mother married again, and, having a son, she conceived the infamous idea of securing to this offspring of her second union Marina's rightful inheritance.

<sup>3</sup> Las Casas notices the significance of the Indian gestures as implying a most active imagination. "Señas é meneos con que los Yndios mucho mas que otras generaciones entienden y se dan á

entender, por tener muy bivos los sentidos exteriores y tambien los interiores, mayormente ques admirable su imaginacion." Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 120.

She accordingly feigned that the latter was dead, but secretly delivered her into the hands of some itinerant traders of Xicallanco. She availed herself, at the same time, of the death of a child of one of her slaves, to substitute the corpse for that of her own daughter, and celebrated the obsequies with mock solemnity. These particulars are related by the honest old soldier, Bernal Diaz, who knew the mother, and witnessed the generous treatment of her afterwards by Marina. By the merchants the Indian maiden was again sold to the cacique of Tabasco, who delivered her, as we have seen, to the Spaniards.

From the place of her birth she was well acquainted with the Mexican tongue, which, indeed, she is said to have spoken with great elegance. Her residence in Tabasco familiarized her with the dialects of that country, so that she could carry on a conversation with Aguilar, which he in turn rendered into the Castilian. Thus a certain, though somewhat circuitous channel was opened to Cortés for communicating with the Aztecs; a circumstance of the last importance to the success of his enterprise. It was not very long, however, before Marina, who had a lively genius, made herself so far mistress of the Castilian as to supersede the necessity of any other linguist. She learned it the more readily, as it was to her the language of love.

Cortés, who appreciated the value of her services from the first, made her his interpreter, then his secretary, and, won by her charms, his mistress. She

had a son by him, Don Martin Cortés, *comendador* of the Military Order of St. James, less distinguished by his birth than his unmerited persecutions.

Marina was at this time in the morning of life. She is said to have possessed uncommon personal attractions,<sup>4</sup> and her open, expressive features indicated her generous temper. She always remained faithful to the countrymen of her adoption; and her knowledge of the language and customs of the Mexicans, and often of their designs, enabled her to extricate the Spaniards, more than once, from the most embarrassing and perilous situations. She had her errors, as we have seen. But they should be rather charged to the defects of early education, and to the evil influence of him to whom in the darkness of her spirit she looked with simple confidence for the light to guide her. All agree that she was full of excellent qualities, and the important services which she rendered the Spaniards have made her memory deservedly dear to them; while the name of Malinche — the name by which she is still known in Mexico — was pronounced with kindness

<sup>4</sup> "Hermosa como Diosa," *beautiful as a goddess*, says Camargo of her. (Hist. de Tlascala, MS.) A modern poet pays her charms the following not inelegant tribute;

"Admira tan lúcida cabalgada  
Y espectáculo tal Doña Marina,  
India noble al caudillo presentada,  
De fortuna y belleza peregrina.

\* \* \* \* \*

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Con despejado espíritu y viveza  
Gira la vista en el concurso mudo;  
Rico manto de extrema sutileza  
Con chapas de oro autorizarla pudo,  
Prendido con bizarra gentileza  
Sobre los pechos en ayroso nudo;  
Reyna parece de la Indiana Zona,  
Varonil y hermosísima Amazona."

MORATIN, Las Naves de Cortés  
Destruídas.



by the conquered races, with whose misfortunes she showed an invariable sympathy.<sup>5</sup>

With the aid of his two intelligent interpreters, Cortés entered into conversation with his Indian visitors. He learned that they were Mexicans, or rather subjects of the great Mexican empire, of which their own province formed one of the comparatively recent conquests. The country was ruled by a powerful monarch, called Mochtezuma, or by Europeans more commonly Montezuma,<sup>6</sup> who dwelt on the mountain plains of the interior, nearly seventy leagues from the coast; their own province was governed by one of his nobles, named Teuhtlile, whose residence was eight leagues distant. Cortés acquainted them in turn with his own friendly views in visiting their country, and with his desire of an interview with the Aztec governor. He then dismissed them loaded with presents, having first ascer-

<sup>5</sup> Las Casas, *Hist. de las Indias*, MS., lib. 3, cap. 120. — Gomara, *Crónica*, cap. 25, 26. — Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. III. pp. 12–14. — Oviedo, *Hist. de las Ind.*, MS., lib. 33, cap. 1. — Ixtlilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 79. — Camargo, *Hist. de Tlascala*, MS. — Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 37, 38.

There is some discordance in the notices of the early life of Marina. I have followed Bernal Diaz, — from his means of observation, the best authority. There is happily

no difference in the estimate of her singular merits and services.

<sup>6</sup> The name of the Aztec monarch, like those of most persons and places in New Spain, has been twisted into all possible varieties of orthography. Modern Spanish historians usually call him Motezuma. But as there is no reason to suppose that this is correct, I have preferred to conform to the name by which he is usually known to English readers. It is the one adopted by Bernal Diaz, and by no other contemporary, as far as I know.

tained that there was abundance of gold in the interior, like the specimens they had brought.

Cortés, pleased with the manners of the people, and the goodly reports of the land, resolved to take up his quarters here for the present. The next morning, April 21, being Good Friday, he landed, with all his force, on the very spot where now stands the modern city of Vera Cruz. Little did the Conqueror imagine that the desolate beach, on which he first planted his foot, was one day to be covered by a flourishing city, the great mart of European and Oriental trade, the commercial capital of New Spain.<sup>7</sup>

It was a wide and level plain, except where the sand had been drifted into hillocks by the perpetual blowing of the *norte*. On these sand-hills he mounted his little battery of guns, so as to give him the command of the country. He then employed the troops in cutting down small trees and bushes which grew near, in order to provide a shelter from the weather. In this he was aided by the people of the country, sent, as it appeared, by the governor of the district to assist the Spaniards. With their help stakes were firmly set in the earth, and covered with boughs, and with mats and cotton carpets, which the friendly natives brought with them. In this way

<sup>7</sup> Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., founded till the close of the sixteenth century, by the Conde de Monterey, viceroy of Mexico. It received its privileges as a city from Philip III. in 1615. Ibid., tom. III. p. 30, nota.

New Vera Cruz, as the present town is called, is distinct, as we shall see hereafter, from that established by Cortés, and was not

they secured, in a couple of days, a good defence against the scorching rays of the sun, which beat with intolerable fierceness on the sands. The place was surrounded by stagnant marshes, the exhalations from which, quickened by the heat into the pestilent malaria, have occasioned in later times wider mortality to Europeans than all the hurricanes on the coast. The bilious disorders, now the terrible scourge of the *tierra caliente*, were little known before the Conquest. The seeds of the poison seem to have been scattered by the hand of civilization; for it is only necessary to settle a town, and draw together a busy European population, in order to call out the malignity of the venom which had before lurked innoxious in the atmosphere.<sup>8</sup>

While these arrangements were in progress, the natives flocked in from the adjacent district, which was tolerably populous in the interior, drawn by a natural curiosity to see the wonderful strangers. They brought with them fruits, vegetables, flowers in abundance, game, and many dishes cooked after

<sup>8</sup> The epidemic of the *matlazahuatl*, so fatal to the Aztecs, is shown by M. de Humboldt to be essentially different from the *vómito*, or bilious fever of our day. Indeed, this disease is not noticed by the early conquerors and colonists; and, Clavigero asserts, was not known in Mexico, till 1725. (Stor. del Messico, tom. I. p. 117, nota.) Humboldt, however, arguing that the same physical causes must have produced similar re-

sults, carries the disease back to a much higher antiquity, of which he discerns some traditional and historic vestiges. "Il ne faut pas confondre l'époque," he remarks with his usual penetration, "à laquelle une maladie a été décrite pour la première fois, parce qu'elle a fait de grands ravages dans un court espace de temps, avec l'époque de sa première apparition." Essai Politique, tom. IV. p. 161 et seq., and 179.

the fashion of the country, with little articles of gold and other ornaments. They gave away some as presents, and bartered others for the wares of the Spaniards; so that the camp, crowded with a motley throng of every age and sex, wore the appearance of a fair. From some of the visitors Cortés learned the intention of the governor to wait on him the following day.

This was Easter. Teuhtlile arrived, as he had announced, before noon. He was attended by a numerous train, and was met by Cortés, who conducted him with much ceremony to his tent, where his principal officers were assembled. The Aztec chief returned their salutations with polite, though formal courtesy. Mass was first said by father Olmedo, and the service was listened to by Teuhtlile and his attendants with decent reverence. A collation was afterwards served, at which the general entertained his guest with Spanish wines and confections. The interpreters were then introduced, and a conversation commenced between the parties.

The first inquiries of Teuhtlile were respecting the country of the strangers, and the purport of their visit. Cortés told him, that "he was the subject of a potent monarch beyond the seas, who ruled over an immense empire, and had kings and princes for his vassals; that, acquainted with the greatness of the Mexican emperor, his master had desired to enter into a communication with him, and had sent him as his envoy to wait on Montezuma with a present in token of his good-will, and a message

which he must deliver in person." He concluded by inquiring of Teuhtlile when he could be admitted to his sovereign's presence.

To this the Aztec noble somewhat haughtily replied, "How is it, that you have been here only two days, and demand to see the emperor?" He then added, with more courtesy, that "he was surprised to learn there was another monarch as powerful as Montezuma; but that, if it were so, he had no doubt his master would be happy to communicate with him. He would send his couriers with the royal gift brought by the Spanish commander, and, so soon as he had learned Montezuma's will, would communicate it."

Teuhtlile then commanded his slaves to bring forward the present intended for the Spanish general. It consisted of ten loads of fine cottons, several mantles of that curious feather-work whose rich and delicate dyes might vie with the most beautiful painting, and a wicker basket filled with ornaments of wrought gold, all calculated to inspire the Spaniards with high ideas of the wealth and mechanical ingenuity of the Mexicans.

Cortés received these presents with suitable acknowledgments, and ordered his own attendants to lay before the chief the articles designed for Montezuma. These were an arm-chair richly carved and painted, a crimson cap of cloth, having a gold medal emblazoned with St. George and the dragon, and a quantity of collars, bracelets, and other ornaments of cut glass, which, in a country where glass was



not to be had, might claim to have the value of real gems, and no doubt passed for such with the inexperienced Mexican. Teuhtlile observed a soldier in the camp with a shining gilt helmet on his head, which he said reminded him of one worn by the god Quetzalcoatl in Mexico; and he showed a desire that Montezuma should see it. The coming of the Spaniards, as the reader will soon see, was associated with some traditions of this same deity. Cortés expressed his willingness that the casque should be sent to the emperor, intimating a hope that it would be returned filled with the gold dust of the country, that he might be able to compare its quality with that in his own! He further told the governor, as we are informed by his chaplain, "that the Spaniards were troubled with a disease of the heart, for which gold was a specific remedy"!<sup>9</sup> "In short," says Las Casas, "he contrived to make his want of gold very clear to the governor."<sup>10</sup>

While these things were passing, Cortés observed one of Teuhtlile's attendants busy with a pencil, apparently delineating some object. On looking at his work, he found that it was a sketch on canvass of the Spaniards, their costumes, arms, and, in short, different objects of interest, giving to each its appropriate form and color. This was the celebrated picture-writing of the Aztecs, and, as Teuhtlile informed him, this man was employed in portraying the various objects for the eye of Montezuma, who

<sup>9</sup> Gomara, Crónica, cap. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 119.

would thus gather a more vivid notion of their appearance than from any description by words. Cortés was pleased with the idea; and, as he knew how much the effect would be heightened by converting still life into action, he ordered out the cavalry on the beach, the wet sands of which afforded a firm footing for the horses. The bold and rapid movements of the troops, as they went through their military exercises; the apparent ease with which they managed the fiery animals on which they were mounted; the glancing of their weapons, and the shrill cry of the trumpet, all filled the spectators with astonishment; but when they heard the thunders of the cannon, which Cortés ordered to be fired at the same time, and witnessed the volumes of smoke and flame issuing from these terrible engines, and the rushing sound of the balls, as they dashed through the trees of the neighbouring forest, shivering their branches into fragments, they were filled with consternation, from which the Aztec chief himself was not wholly free.

Nothing of all this was lost on the painters, who faithfully recorded, after their fashion, every particular; not omitting the ships, "the water-houses," — as they called them, — of the strangers, which, with their dark hulls and snow-white sails reflected from the water, were swinging lazily at anchor on the calm bosom of the bay. All was depicted with a fidelity, that excited in their turn the admiration of the Spaniards, who, doubtless unprepared for this exhibition of skill, greatly overestimated the merits of the execution.

These various matters completed, Teuhtlile with his attendants withdrew from the Spanish quarters, with the same ceremony with which he had entered them; leaving orders that his people should supply the troops with provisions and other articles requisite for their accommodation, till further instructions from the capital.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ixtlilxochitl, Relaciones, MS., No. 13. — Idem, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 79. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 25, 26. — Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 38. — Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 5, cap. 4. — Carta de Vera Cruz, MS. — Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 4, cap. 13-15. — Tezozomoc, Crón. Mexicana, MS., cap. 107.



JUNTA DE ANDALUCIA

P.C. Monumental de la Alhambra y Generalife  
CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA

## CHAPTER VI.

ACCOUNT OF MONTEZUMA.—STATE OF HIS EMPIRE.—STRANGE PROGNOSTICS.—EMBASSY AND PRESENTS.—SPANISH ENCAMPMENT.

1519.

WE must now take leave of the Spanish camp in the *tierra caliente*, and transport ourselves to the distant capital of Mexico, where no little sensation was excited by the arrival of the wonderful strangers on the coast. The Aztec throne was filled at that time by Montezuma the Second, nephew of the last, and grandson of a preceding monarch. He had been elected to the regal dignity in 1502, in preference to his brothers, for his superior qualifications, both as a soldier and a priest,—a combination of offices sometimes found in the Mexican candidates, as it was, more frequently, in the Egyptian. In early youth, he had taken an active part in the wars of the empire, though of late he had devoted himself more exclusively to the services of the temple; and he was scrupulous in his attentions to all the burdensome ceremonial of the Aztec worship. He maintained a grave and reserved demeanour, speaking little and with prudent deliberation. His deportment was well calculated to inspire ideas of superior sanctity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> His name suited his nature; Montezuma, according to Las Ca-

When his election was announced to him, he was found sweeping down the stairs in the great temple of the national war-god. He received the messengers with a becoming humility, professing his unfitness for so responsible a station. The address delivered as usual on the occasion was made by his relative Nezahualpilli, the wise king of Tezcucó.<sup>2</sup> It has fortunately been preserved, and presents a favorable specimen of Indian eloquence. Towards the conclusion, the orator exclaims, "Who can doubt that the Aztec empire has reached the zenith of its greatness, since the Almighty has placed over it one whose very presence fills every beholder with reverence? Rejoice, happy people, that you have now a sovereign who will be to you a steady column of support; a father in distress, a more than brother in tenderness and sympathy; one whose aspiring soul will disdain all the profligate pleasures of the senses, and the wasting indulgence of sloth. And thou, illustrious youth, doubt not that the Creator, who has laid on thee so weighty a charge, will also give strength to sustain it; that He, who has been so liberal in times past, will shower yet more abundant blessings on thy head, and keep thee firm in thy royal seat through many long and glorious years." — These golden prognostics, which melted

sas, signifying, in the Mexican, Col. de Mendoza, pp. 13-16; Co  
"sad or severe man." Hist. de las dex Tel.-Rem., p. 143, ap. Antiq  
Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 120. — Ix of Mexico, vol. VI.  
tlixochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. <sup>2</sup> For a full account of thi  
70. — Acosta, lib. 7, cap. 20. — prince, see Book I., chap. 6.



the royal auditor into tears, were not destined to be realized.<sup>3</sup>

Montezuma displayed all the energy and enterprise in the commencement of his reign, which had been anticipated from him. His first expedition against a rebel province in the neighbourhood was crowned with success, and he led back in triumph a throng of captives for the bloody sacrifice that was to grace his coronation. This was celebrated with uncommon pomp. Games and religious ceremonies continued for several days, and among the spectators who flocked from distant quarters were some noble Tlascalans, the hereditary enemies of Mexico. They were in disguise, hoping thus to elude detection. They were recognised, however, and reported to the monarch. But he only availed himself of the information to provide them with honorable entertainment, and a good place for witnessing the games. This was a magnanimous act, considering the long cherished hostility between the nations.

In his first years, Montezuma was constantly engaged in war, and frequently led his armies in person. The Aztec banners were seen in the furthest provinces on the Gulf of Mexico, and the distant regions of Nicaragua and Honduras. The expeditions were generally successful; and the limits of

<sup>3</sup> The address is fully reported by Torquemada, (*Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 3, cap. 68,) who came into the country little more than half a cen-

tury after its delivery. It has been recently republished by Bustamante. *Tezcuco en los Últimos Tiempos*, (México, 1826,) pp. 256-258.

the empire were more widely extended than at any preceding period.

Meanwhile the monarch was not inattentive to the interior concerns of the kingdom. He made some important changes in the courts of justice; and carefully watched over the execution of the laws, which he enforced with stern severity. He was in the habit of patrolling the streets of his capital in disguise, to make himself personally acquainted with the abuses in it. And with more questionable policy, it is said, he would sometimes try the integrity of his judges by tempting them with large bribes to swerve from their duty, and then call the delinquent to strict account for yielding to the temptation.

He liberally recompensed all who served him. He showed a similar munificent spirit in his public works, constructing and embellishing the temples, bringing water into the capital by a new channel, and establishing a hospital, or retreat for invalid soldiers, in the city of Colhuacan.<sup>4</sup>

These acts, so worthy of a great prince, were counterbalanced by others of an opposite complexion. The humility, displayed so ostentatiously before his elevation, gave way to an intolerable arrogance. In his pleasure-houses, domestic establishment, and way of living, he assumed a pomp unknown to his

<sup>4</sup> Acosta, lib. 7, cap. 22. — cap. 73, 74, 81. — Col. de Mendoza, Hist. de Nueva España, pp. 14, 85, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vol. VI. — Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 3,

predecessors. He secluded himself from public observation, or, when he went abroad, exacted the most slavish homage; while in the palace he would be served only, even in the most menial offices, by persons of rank. He, further, dismissed several plebeians, chiefly poor soldiers of merit, from the places they had occupied near the person of his predecessor, considering their attendance a dishonor to royalty. It was in vain that his oldest and sagest counsellors remonstrated on a conduct so impolitic.

While he thus disgusted his subjects by his haughty deportment, he alienated their affections by the imposition of grievous taxes. These were demanded by the lavish expenditure of his court. They fell with peculiar heaviness on the conquered cities. This oppression led to frequent insurrection and resistance; and the latter years of his reign present a scene of unintermitting hostility, in which the forces of one half of the empire were employed in suppressing the commotions of the other. Unfortunately there was no principle of amalgamation by which the new acquisitions could be incorporated into the ancient monarchy, as parts of one whole. Their interests, as well as sympathies, were different. Thus the more widely the Aztec empire was extended, the weaker it became; resembling some vast and ill-proportioned edifice, whose disjointed materials, having no principle of cohesion, and tottering under their own weight, seem ready to fall before the first blast of the tempest.

In 1516, died the Tezcucan king, Nezahualpilli;

in whom Montezuma lost his most sagacious counsellor. The succession was contested by his two sons, Cacama and Ixtlilxochitl. The former was supported by Montezuma. The latter, the younger of the princes, a bold, aspiring youth, appealing to the patriotic sentiment of his nation, would have persuaded them that his brother was too much in the Mexican interests to be true to his own country. A civil war ensued, and ended by a compromise, by which one half of the kingdom, with the capital, remained to Cacama, and the northern portion to his ambitious rival. Ixtlilxochitl became from that time the mortal foe of Montezuma.<sup>5</sup>

A more formidable enemy still was the little republic of Tlascala, lying midway between the Mexican Valley and the coast. It had maintained its independence for more than two centuries against the allied forces of the empire. Its resources were unimpaired, its civilization scarcely below that of its great rival states, and for courage and military prowess it had established a name inferior to none other of the nations of Anahuac.

Such was the condition of the Aztec monarchy, on the arrival of Cortés;—the people disgusted with the arrogance of the sovereign; the provinces and distant cities outraged by fiscal exactions; while potent enemies in the neighbourhood lay watching the hour when they might assail their formida-

<sup>5</sup> Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. tom. I. pp. 267, 274, 275. — Ix- 70-76. — Acosta, lib. 7, cap. 21.

ble rival with advantage. Still the kingdom was strong in its internal resources, in the will of its monarch, in the long habitual deference to his authority,—in short, in the terror of his name, and in the valor and discipline of his armies, grown grey in active service, and well drilled in all the tactics of Indian warfare. The time had now come, when these imperfect tactics and rude weapons of the barbarian were to be brought into collision with the science and enginery of the most civilized nations of the globe.

During the latter years of his reign, Montezuma had rarely taken part in his military expeditions, which he left to his captains, occupying himself chiefly with his sacerdotal functions. Under no prince had the priesthood enjoyed greater consideration and immunities. The religious festivals and rites were celebrated with unprecedented pomp. The oracles were consulted on the most trivial occasions; and the sanguinary deities were propitiated by hecatombs of victims dragged in triumph to the capital from the conquered or rebellious provinces. The religion, or, to speak correctly, the superstition of Montezuma proved a principal cause of his calamities.

In a preceding chapter I have noticed the popular traditions respecting Quetzalcoatl, that deity with a fair complexion and flowing beard, so unlike the Indian physiognomy, who, after fulfilling his mission of benevolence among the Aztecs, embarked on the



Atlantic Sea for the mysterious shores of Tlapallan.<sup>6</sup> He promised, on his departure, to return at some future day with his posterity, and resume the possession of his empire. That day was looked forward to with hope or with apprehension, according to the interest of the believer, but with general confidence throughout the wide borders of Anahuac. Even after the Conquest, it still lingered among the Indian races, by whom it was as fondly cherished, as the advent of their king Sebastian continued to be by the Portuguese, or that of the Messiah by the Jews.<sup>7</sup>

A general feeling seems to have prevailed in the time of Montezuma, that the period for the return of the deity, and the full accomplishment of his promise, was near at hand. This conviction is said to have gained ground from various preternatural occurrences, reported with more or less detail by all the most ancient historians.<sup>8</sup> In 1510, the great lake of Tezcucó, without the occurrence of a tempest, or earthquake, or any other visible cause, became violently agitated, overflowed its banks, and,

<sup>6</sup> Ante, Book I., chap. 3, pp. 59, 60, and note 6.

<sup>7</sup> Tezozomoc, Crón. Mexicana, MS., cap. 107. — Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 1. — Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 4, cap. 14 ; lib. 6, cap. 24. — Codex Vaticanus, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vol. VI. — Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 8, cap. 7. — Ibid., MS., lib. 12, cap. 3, 4.

<sup>8</sup> "Tenia por cierto," says Las Casas of Montezuma, "segun sus prophetas ó agoreros le avian certificado, que su estado é rriquezas y prosperidad avia de perezzer dentro de pocos años por ciertas gentes que avian de venir en sus dias, que de su felicidad lo derrocasse, y por esto vivia siempre con temor y en tristeza y sobresaltado." Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 120.

pouring into the streets of Mexico, swept off many of the buildings by the fury of the waters. In 1511, one of the turrets of the great temple took fire, equally without any apparent cause, and continued to burn in defiance of all attempts to extinguish it. In the following years, three comets were seen; and not long before the coming of the Spaniards a strange light broke forth in the east. It spread broad at its base on the horizon, and rising in a pyramidal form tapered off as it approached the zenith. It resembled a vast sheet or flood of fire, emitting sparkles, or, as an old writer expresses it, "seemed thickly powdered with stars."<sup>9</sup> At the same time, low voices were heard in the air, and doleful wailings, as if to announce some strange, mysterious calamity! The Aztec monarch, terrified at the apparitions in the heavens, took counsel of Nezahualpilli, who was a great proficient in the subtle science of astrology. But the royal sage cast a deeper cloud over his spirit, by reading in these prodigies the speedy downfall of the empire.<sup>10</sup>

Such are the strange stories reported by the chroniclers, in which it is not impossible to detect the glimmerings of truth.<sup>11</sup> Nearly thirty years had

<sup>9</sup> Camargo, *Hist. de Tlascala*, MS. — The Interpreter of the *Codex Tel.-Rem.* intimates that this scintillating phenomenon was probably nothing more than an eruption of one of the great volcanoes of Mexico. *Antiq. of Mexico*, vol. VI. p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva Es-*

*paña*, MS., lib. 12, cap. 1. — Camargo, *Hist. de Tlascala*, MS. — Acosta, lib. 7, cap. 23. — Herrera, *Hist. General*, dec. 2, lib. 5, cap. 5. — Ixtlilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 74.

<sup>11</sup> I omit the most extraordinary miracle of all, — though legal attestations of its truth were fur

elapsed since the discovery of the Islands by Columbus, and more than twenty since his visit to the American continent. Rumors, more or less distinct, of this wonderful appearance of the white men, bearing in their hands the thunder and the lightning, so like in many respects to the traditions of Quetzalcoatl, would naturally spread far and wide among the Indian nations. Such rumors, doubtless, long before the landing of the Spaniards in Mexico, found their way up the grand plateau, filling the minds of men with anticipations of the near coming of the period when the great deity was to return and receive his own again.

In the excited state of their imaginations, prodigies became a familiar occurrence. Or rather, events not very uncommon in themselves, seen through the discolored medium of fear, were easily magnified into prodigies; and the accidental swell of the lake, the appearance of a comet, and the conflagration of a building were all interpreted as the special annunciations of Heaven.<sup>12</sup> Thus it happens in those great

nished the Court of Rome, (see Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. I. p. 289,)—namely, the resurrection of Montezuma's sister, Papantzin, four days after her burial, to warn the monarch of the approaching ruin of his empire. It finds credit with one writer, at least, in the nineteenth century! See the note of Sahagun's Mexican editor, Bustamante, Hist. de Nueva España, tom. II. p. 270.

<sup>12</sup> Lucan gives a fine enumeration of such prodigies witnessed

in the Roman capital in a similar excitement. (Pharsalia, lib. 1, v. 523, et seq.) Poor human nature is much the same everywhere. Machiavelli has thought the subject worthy of a separate chapter in his Discourses. The philosopher intimates a belief even in the existence of beneficent intelligences who send these portents as a sort of *premonitories*, to warn mankind of the coming tempest. Discorsi sopra 'Tito Livio, lib. 1, cap. 56.

political convulsions which shake the foundations of society, — the mighty events that cast their shadows before them in their coming. Then it is that the atmosphere is agitated with the low, prophetic murmurs, with which Nature, in the moral as in the physical world, announces the march of the hurricane ;

“ When from the shores  
And forest-rustling mountains comes a voice,  
That, solemn sounding, bids the world prepare ! ”

When tidings were brought to the capital, of the landing of Grijalva on the coast, in the preceding year, the heart of Montezuma was filled with dismay. He felt as if the destinies which had so long brooded over the royal line of Mexico were to be accomplished, and the sceptre was to pass away from his house for ever. Though somewhat relieved by the departure of the Spaniards, he caused sentinels to be stationed on the heights ; and, when the Europeans returned under Cortés, he doubtless received the earliest notice of the unwelcome event. It was by his orders, however, that the provincial governor had prepared so hospitable a reception for them. The hieroglyphical report of these strange visitors, now forwarded to the capital, revived all his apprehensions. He called, without delay, a meeting of his principal counsellors, including the kings of Tezcuco and Tlacopan, and laid the matter before them.<sup>13</sup>

There seems to have been much division of opin-

<sup>13</sup> Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 120. — Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 80. — Idem, Relaciones, MS. — Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, MS., lib. 12, cap. 3, 4. — Tezozomoc, Crón. Mexicana, MS., cap. 108.

ion in that body. Some were for resisting the strangers, at once, whether by fraud, or by open force. Others contended, that, if they were supernatural beings, fraud and force would be alike useless. If they were, as they pretended, ambassadors from a foreign prince, such a policy would be cowardly and unjust. That they were not of the family of Quetzalcoatl was argued from the fact, that they had shown themselves hostile to his religion; for tidings of the proceedings of the Spaniards in Tabasco, it seems, had already reached the capital. Among those in favor of giving them a friendly and honorable reception was the Tezcucan king, Cacama.

But Montezuma, taking counsel of his own ill-defined apprehensions, preferred a half-way course, — as usual, the most impolitic. He resolved to send an embassy, with such a magnificent present to the strangers, as should impress them with high ideas of his grandeur and resources; while, at the same time, he would forbid their approach to the capital. This was to reveal, at once, both his wealth and his weakness.<sup>14</sup>

While the Aztec court was thus agitated by the arrival of the Spaniards, they were passing their time in the *tierra caliente*, not a little annoyed by the excessive heats and suffocating atmosphere of the sandy waste on which they were encamped. They experienced every alleviation that could be

<sup>14</sup> Tezozomoc, Crón. Mexicana, de Tlascala, MS. — Ixtlilxochitl, MS., loc. cit. — Camargo, Hist. Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 80.



derived from the attentions of the friendly natives. These, by the governor's command, had constructed more than a thousand huts or booths of branches and matting, which they occupied in the neighbourhood of the camp. Here they prepared various articles of food for the tables of Cortés and his officers, without any recompense; while the common soldiers easily obtained a supply for themselves, in exchange for such trifles as they brought with them for barter. Thus the camp was liberally provided with meat and fish dressed in many savory ways, with cakes of corn, bananas, pine-apples, and divers luscious vegetables of the tropics, hitherto unknown to the Spaniards. The soldiers contrived, moreover, to obtain many little bits of gold, of no great value, indeed, from the natives; a traffic very displeasing to the partisans of Velasquez, who considered it an invasion of his rights. Cortés, however, did not think it prudent, in this matter, to balk the inclinations of his followers.<sup>15</sup>

At the expiration of seven, or eight days at most, the Mexican embassy presented itself before the camp. It may seem an incredibly short space of time, considering the distance of the capital was near seventy leagues. But it may be remembered that tidings were carried there by means of posts, as already noticed, in the brief space of four and twenty hours;<sup>16</sup> and four or five days would suffice for the descent of the envoys to the coast, accustom-

<sup>15</sup> Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 39. — Gomara, *Crónica*, cap. 27, ap. Barcia, tom. II.

<sup>16</sup> Ante, Book 1, Chap. 2, p. 42.

ed as the Mexicans were to long and rapid traveling. At all events, no writer states the period, occupied by the Indian emissaries on this occasion, as longer than that mentioned.

The embassy, consisting of two Aztec nobles, was accompanied by the governor, Teuhtlile, and by a hundred slaves, bearing the princely gifts of Montezuma. One of the envoys had been selected on account of the great resemblance which, as appeared from the painting representing the camp, he bore to the Spanish commander. And it is a proof of the fidelity of the painting, that the soldiers recognised the resemblance, and always distinguished the chief by the name of the "Mexican Cortés."

On entering the general's pavilion, the ambassadors saluted him and his officers with the usual signs of reverence to persons of great consideration, touching the ground with their hands and then carrying them to their heads, while the air was filled with clouds of incense, which rose up from the censers borne by their attendants. Some delicately wrought mats of the country (*petates*) were then unrolled, and on them the slaves displayed the various articles they had brought. They were of the most miscellaneous kind; shields, helmets, cuirasses, embossed with plates and ornaments of pure gold; collars and bracelets of the same metal, sandals, fans, *panaches* and crests of variegated feathers, intermingled with gold and silver thread, and sprinkled with pearls and precious stones; imitations of birds and animals in wrought and cast gold and silver, of exquisite work-

manship; curtains, coverlets, and robes of cotton, fine as silk, of rich and various dyes, interwoven with feather-work that rivalled the delicacy of painting.<sup>17</sup> There were more than thirty loads of cotton cloth in addition. Among the articles was the Spanish helmet sent to the capital, and now returned filled to the brim with grains of gold. But the things which excited the most admiration were two circular plates of gold and silver, "as large as carriage-wheels." One, representing the sun, was richly carved with plants and animals, — no doubt, denoting the Aztec century. It was thirty palms in circumference, and was valued at twenty thousand *pesos de oro*. The silver wheel, of the same size, weighed fifty marks.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> From the chequered figure of some of these colored cottons, Peter Martyr infers, the Indians were acquainted with chess! He notices a curious fabric made of the hair of animals, feathers, and cotton thread, interwoven together. "Plumas illas et concinnant inter cuniculorum villos interque gosampij stamina ordiuntur, et intexunt operose adeo, ut quo pacto id faciant non bene intellexerimus." De Orbe Novo, (Parisiis, 1587,) dec. 5, cap. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 39. — Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 1. — Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 120. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 27, ap. Barcia, tom. II. — Carta de Vera Cruz, MS. — Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 5, cap. 5.

Robertson cites Bernal Diaz as reckoning the value of the silver plate at 20,000 *pesos*, or about £5,000. (History of America, Vol. II. note 75.) But Bernal Diaz speaks only of the value of the gold plate, which he estimates at 20,000 *pesos de oro*, a different affair from the *pesos*, dollars, or ounces of silver, with which the historian confounds them. As the mention of the *peso de oro* will often recur in these pages, it will be well to make the reader acquainted with its probable value.

Nothing is more difficult than to ascertain the actual value of the currency of a distant age; so many circumstances occur to embarrass the calculation, besides the general depreciation of the precious metals, such as the adulteration of specific coins, and the like.

The Spaniards could not conceal their rapture at the exhibition of treasures which so far surpassed all the dreams in which they had indulged. For, rich as were the materials, they were exceeded—according to the testimony of those who saw these articles afterwards in Seville, where they could coolly examine them—by the beauty and richness of the workmanship.<sup>19</sup>

Señor Clemencin, the Secretary of the Royal Academy of History, in the sixth volume of its *Memorias*, has computed with great accuracy the value of the different denominations of the Spanish currency at the close of the fifteenth century, the period just preceding that of the conquest of Mexico. He makes no mention of the *peso de oro* in his tables. But he ascertains the precise value of the gold ducat, which will answer our purpose as well. (*Memorias de la Real Academia de Historia*, (Madrid, 1821,) tom. VI. Ilust. 20.) Oviedo, a contemporary of the Conquerors, informs us that the *peso de oro* and the *castellano* were of the same value, and that was precisely one third greater than the value of the ducat. (*Hist. del Ind.*, lib. 6, cap. 8, ap. Ramusio, *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, (Venetia, 1565,) tom. III.) Now the ducat, as appears from Clemencin, reduced to our own currency, would be equal to eight dollars and seventy-five cents. *The peso de oro, therefore, was equal to eleven dollars and sixty-seven cents, or two*

*pounds, twelve shillings, and six-pence sterling.* Keeping this in mind, it will be easy for the reader to determine the actual value, in *pesos de oro*, of any sum that may be hereafter mentioned.

<sup>19</sup> “Cierta cosas de ver!” exclaims Las Casas, who saw them with the Emperor Charles V. in Seville, in 1520. “Quedaron todos los que vieron aquestas cosas tan ricas y tan bien artifiçadas y hermosísimas como de cosas nunca vistas,” &c. (*Hist. de las Indias*, MS., lib. 3, cap. 120.) “Muy hermosas”; says Oviedo, who saw them in Valladolid, and describes the great wheels more minutely; “todo era mucho de ver!” (*Hist. de las Indias*, MS., loc. cit.) The inquisitive Martyr, who examined them carefully, remarks, yet more emphatically, “Si quid unquam honoris humana ingenia in huiuscemodi artibus sunt adepta, principatum iure merito ista consequentur. Aurum, gemmasque non admiror quidem, quâ industriâ, quôve studio superet opus materiam, stупeo. Mille figuras et facies mille prospexi quæ scribere nequeo

When Cortés and his officers had completed their survey, the ambassadors courteously delivered the message of Montezuma. "It gave their master great pleasure," they said, "to hold this communication with so powerful a monarch as the King of Spain, for whom he felt the most profound respect. He regretted much that he could not enjoy a personal interview with the Spaniards, but the distance of his capital was too great; since the journey was beset with difficulties, and with too many dangers from formidable enemies, to make it possible. All that could be done, therefore, was for the strangers to return to their own land, with the proofs thus afforded them of his friendly disposition."

Cortés, though much chagrined at this decided refusal of Montezuma to admit his visit, concealed his mortification as he best might, and politely expressed his sense of the emperor's munificence. "It made him only the more desirous," he said, "to have a personal interview with him. He should feel it, indeed, impossible to present himself again before his own sovereign, without having accomplished this great object of his voyage; and one, who had sailed over two thousand leagues of ocean, held lightly the perils and fatigues of so short a journey by land." He once more requested them to become the bearers of his message to their master, together with a slight additional token of his respect.

*Quid oculos hominum suâ pulchritudine æque possit allicere meo iudicio vidi nunquam." De Orbe Novo, dec. 4, cap. 9.*



This consisted of a few fine Holland shirts, a Florentine goblet, gilt and somewhat curiously enamelled, with some toys of little value,—a sorry return for the solid magnificence of the royal present. The ambassadors may have thought as much. At least, they showed no alacrity in charging themselves either with the present or the message; and, on quitting the Castilian quarters, repeated their assurance that the general's application would be unavailing.<sup>20</sup>

The splendid treasure, which now lay dazzling the eyes of the Spaniards, raised in their bosoms very different emotions, according to the difference of their characters. Some it stimulated with the ardent desire to strike at once into the interior, and possess themselves of a country which teemed with such boundless stores of wealth. Others looked on it as the evidence of a power altogether too formidable to be encountered with their present insignificant force. They thought, therefore, it would be most prudent to return and report their proceedings to the governor of Cuba, where preparations could be made commensurate with so vast an undertaking. There can be little doubt as to the impression made on the bold spirit of Cortés, on which difficulties ever operated as incentives, rather than discouragements, to enterprise. But he prudently said nothing,—at least in public,—preferring that so important a movement should flow from the deter

<sup>20</sup> Las Casas, *Hist. de las Indias*, MS., lib. 3, cap. 121.—Bernal Díaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 39. — Ixtlilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 80.—Gomara, *Crónica*, cap. 27, ap. Barcia, tom. II.