

each time with less spirit, and greater loss. They were too deficient in military science to profit by their vast superiority in numbers. They were distributed into companies, it is true, each serving under its own chieftain and banner. But they were not arranged by rank and file, and moved in a confused mass, promiscuously heaped together. They knew not how to concentrate numbers on a given point, or even how to sustain an assault, by employing successive detachments to support and relieve one another. A very small part only of their array could be brought into contact with an enemy inferior to them in amount of forces. The remainder of the army, inactive and worse than useless, in the rear, served only to press tumultuously on the advance, and embarrass its movements by mere weight of numbers, while, on the least alarm, they were seized with a panic and threw the whole body into inextricable confusion. It was, in short, the combat of the ancient Greeks and Persians over again.

Still, the great numerical superiority of the Indians might have enabled them, at a severe cost of their own lives, indeed, to wear out, in time, the constancy of the Spaniards, disabled by wounds and incessant fatigue. But, fortunately for the latter, dissensions arose among their enemies. A Tlascalan chieftain, commanding one of the great divisions, had taken umbrage at the haughty demeanour of Xicotencatl, who had charged him with misconduct or cowardice in the late action. The injured cacique challenged his rival to single combat. This

did not take place. But, burning with resentment, he chose the present occasion to indulge it, by drawing off his forces, amounting to ten thousand men, from the field. He also persuaded another of the commanders to follow his example.

Thus reduced to about half his original strength, and that greatly crippled by the losses of the day, Xicotencatl could no longer maintain his ground against the Spaniards. After disputing the field with admirable courage for four hours, he retreated and resigned it to the enemy. The Spaniards were too much jaded, and too many were disabled by wounds, to allow them to pursue; and Cortés, satisfied with the decisive victory he had gained, returned in triumph to his position on the hill of Tzompach.

The number of killed in his own ranks had been very small, notwithstanding the severe loss inflicted on the enemy. These few he was careful to bury where they could not be discovered, anxious to conceal not only the amount of the slain, but the fact that the whites were mortal.<sup>14</sup> But very many of the men were wounded, and all the horses. The trouble of the Spaniards was much enhanced by the want of many articles important to them in their present exigency. They had neither oil, nor salt, which, as before noticed, was not to be obtained in Tlascala. Their clothing, accommodated to a softer

<sup>14</sup> So says Bernal Diaz; who, at the same time, by the epithets, *los muertos*, *los cuerpos*, plainly contradicts his previous boast that only one Christian fell in the fight. (Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 65.) Cortés has not the grace to acknowledge that one.

climate, was ill adapted to the rude air of the mountains; and bows and arrows, as Bernal Diaz sarcastically remarks, formed an indifferent protection against the inclemency of the weather.<sup>15</sup>

Still, they had much to cheer them in the events of the day; and they might draw from them a reasonable ground for confidence in their own resources, such as no other experience could have supplied. Not that the results could authorize any thing like contempt for their Indian foe. Singly and with the same weapons, he might have stood his ground against the Spaniard.<sup>16</sup> But the success of the day established the superiority of science and discipline over mere physical courage and numbers. It was fighting over again, as we have said, the old battle of the European and the Asiatic. But the handful of Greeks who routed the hosts of Xerxes

<sup>15</sup> Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 3. — Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 52. — Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 6, cap. 6. — Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 83. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 46. — Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 4, cap. 32. — Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 65, 66.

The warm, chivalrous glow of feeling, which colors the rude composition of the last chronicler, makes him a better painter than his more correct and classical rivals. And, if there is somewhat too much of the self-complacent tone of the *quorum pars magna fui* in his writing,

it may be pardoned in the hero of more than a hundred battles, and almost as many wounds.

<sup>16</sup> The Anonymous Conqueror bears emphatic testimony to the valor of the Indians, specifying instances in which he had seen a single warrior defend himself for a long time against two, three, and even four Spaniards! "Sono fra loro di valëtissimi huomini et che ossano morir ostinatissimamète. Et io ho veduto un d' essi difendersi valêtemente da duoi caualli leggieri, et un altro da tre, et quattro." Rel. d' un gent., ap. Ramusio, tom. III. fol. 305.

and Darius, it must be remembered, had not so obvious an advantage on the score of weapons, as was enjoyed by the Spaniards in these wars. The use of fire-arms gave an ascendancy which cannot easily be estimated; one so great, that a contest between nations equally civilized, which should be similar in all other respects to that between the Spaniards and the Tlascalans, would probably be attended with a similar issue. To all this must be added the effect produced by the cavalry. The nations of Anahuac had no large domesticated animals, and were unacquainted with any beast of burden. Their imaginations were bewildered, when they beheld the strange apparition of the horse and his rider moving in unison and obedient to one impulse, as if possessed of a common nature; and as they saw the terrible animal, with his "neck clothed in thunder," bearing down their squadrons and trampling them in the dust, no wonder they should have regarded him with the mysterious terror felt for a supernatural being. A very little reflection on the manifold grounds of superiority, both moral and physical, possessed by the Spaniards in this contest, will surely explain the issue, without any disparagement to the courage or capacity of their opponents.<sup>17</sup>

Cortés, thinking the occasion favorable, followed up the important blow he had struck by a new mis-

<sup>17</sup> The appalling effect of the strange appearance of the elephants cavalry on the natives reminds one in their first engagements with of the confusion into which the Roman legions were thrown by the Pyrrhus, as told by Plutarch in his life of that prince.



sion to the capital, bearing a message of similar import with that recently sent to the camp. But the senate was not yet sufficiently humbled. The late defeat caused, indeed, general consternation. Maxixcatzin, one of the four great lords who presided over the republic, reiterated with greater force the arguments before urged by him for embracing the proffered alliance of the strangers. The armies of the state had been beaten too often to allow any reasonable hope of successful resistance; and he enlarged on the generosity shown by the politic Conqueror to his prisoners, — so unusual in Anahuac, — as an additional motive for an alliance with men who knew how to be friends as well as foes.

But in these views he was overruled by the war-party, whose animosity was sharpened, rather than subdued, by the late discomfiture. Their hostile feelings were further exasperated by the younger Xicotencatl, who burned for an opportunity to retrieve his disgrace, and to wipe away the stain which had fallen for the first time on the arms of the republic.

In their perplexity, they called in the assistance of the priests, whose authority was frequently invoked in the deliberations of the American chiefs. The latter inquired, with some simplicity, of these interpreters of fate, whether the strangers were supernatural beings, or men of flesh and blood like themselves. The priests, after some consultation, are said to have made the strange answer, that the Spaniards, though not gods, were children of the

Sun; that they derived their strength from that luminary, and, when his beams were withdrawn, their powers would also fail. They recommended a night attack, therefore, as one which afforded the best chance of success. This apparently childish response may have had in it more of cunning than credulity. It was not improbably suggested by Xicotencatl himself, or by the caciques in his interest, to reconcile the people to a measure, which was contrary to the military usages,—indeed, it may be said, to the public law of Anahuac. Whether the fruit of artifice or superstition, it prevailed; and the Tlascalan general was empowered, at the head of a detachment of ten thousand warriors, to try the effect of an assault by night on the Christian camp.

The affair was conducted with such secrecy, that it did not reach the ears of the Spaniards. But their general was not one who allowed himself, sleeping or waking, to be surprised on his post. Fortunately, the night appointed was illumined by the full beams of an autumnal moon; and one of the videttes perceived by its light, at a considerable distance, a large body of Indians moving towards the Christian lines. He was not slow in giving the alarm to the garrison.

The Spaniards slept, as has been said, with their arms by their side; while their horses, picketed near them, stood ready saddled, with the bridle hanging at the bow. In five minutes, the whole camp was under arms; when they beheld the dusky columns

of the Indians cautiously advancing over the plain, their heads just peering above the tall maize with which the land was partially covered. Cortés determined not to abide the assault in his intrenchments, but to sally out and pounce on the enemy when he had reached the bottom of the hill.

Slowly and stealthily the Indians advanced, while the Christian camp, hushed in profound silence, seemed to them buried in slumber. But no sooner had they reached the slope of the rising ground, than they were astounded by the deep battle-cry of the Spaniards, followed by the instantaneous apparition of the whole army, as they sallied forth from the works, and poured down the sides of the hill. Brandishing aloft their weapons, they seemed to the troubled fancies of the Tlascalans, like so many spectres or demons hurrying to and fro in mid air, while the uncertain light magnified their numbers, and expanded the horse and his rider into gigantic and unearthly dimensions.

Scarcely waiting the shock of their enemy, the panic-struck barbarians let off a feeble volley of arrows, and, offering no other resistance, fled rapidly and tumultuously across the plain. The horse easily overtook the fugitives, riding them down and cutting them to pieces without mercy, until Cortés, weary with slaughter, called off his men, leaving the field loaded with the bloody trophies of victory.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. cap. 3. — P. Martyr, De Orbe Lorenzana, pp. 53, 54. — Oviedo, Novo, dec. 2, cap. 2. — Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 4, cap.

The next day, the Spanish commander, with his usual policy after a decisive blow had been struck, sent a new embassy to the Tlascalan capital. The envoys received their instructions through the interpreter, Marina. That remarkable woman had attracted general admiration by the constancy and cheerfulness with which she endured all the privations of the camp. Far from betraying the natural weakness and timidity of her sex, she had shrunk from no hardship herself, and had done much to fortify the drooping spirits of the soldiers; while her sympathies, whenever occasion offered, had been actively exerted in mitigating the calamities of her Indian countrymen.<sup>19</sup>

Through his faithful interpreter, Cortés communicated the terms of his message to the Tlascalan envoys. He made the same professions of amity as before, promising oblivion of all past injuries; but, if this proffer were rejected, he would visit their capital as a conqueror, raze every house in it to the ground, and put every inhabitant to the sword! He then dismissed the ambassadors with the symbolical presents of a letter in one hand, and an arrow in the other.

32. —Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 6, cap. 8. —Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 66.

<sup>19</sup> "Digamos como Doña Marina, con ser muger de la tierra, que esfuerço tan varonil tenia, que con oir cada día que nos auian de matar, y comer nuestras carnes, y

auernos visto cercados en las batallas passadas, y que aora todos estauamos heridos, y dolientes, jamas vímos flaqueza en ella, sino muy mayor esfuerço que de muger." Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 66.

The envoys obtained respectful audience from the council of Tlascala, whom they found plunged in deep dejection by their recent reverses. The failure of the night attack had extinguished every spark of hope in their bosoms. Their armies had been beaten again and again, in the open field and in secret ambush. Stratagem and courage, all their resources, had alike proved ineffectual against a foe whose hand was never weary, and whose eye was never closed. Nothing remained but to submit. They selected four principal caciques, whom they intrusted with a mission to the Christian camp. They were to assure the strangers of a free passage through the country, and a friendly reception in the capital. The proffered friendship of the Spaniards was cordially embraced, with many awkward excuses for the past. The envoys were to touch at the Tlascalan camp on their way, and inform Xicotencatl of their proceedings. They were to require him, at the same time, to abstain from all further hostilities, and to furnish the white men with an ample supply of provisions.

But the Tlascalan deputies, on arriving at the quarters of that chief, did not find him in the humor to comply with these instructions. His repeated collisions with the Spaniards, or, it may be, his constitutional courage, left him inaccessible to the vulgar terrors of his countrymen. He regarded the strangers not as supernatural beings, but as men like himself. The animosity of a warrior had rankled into a deadly hatred from the mortifications he had endured



at their hands, and his head teemed with plans for recovering his fallen honors, and for taking vengeance on the invaders of his country. He refused to disband any of the force, still formidable, under his command; or to send supplies to the enemy's camp. He further induced the ambassadors to remain in his quarters, and relinquish their visit to the Spaniards. The latter, in consequence, were kept in ignorance of the movements in their favor, which had taken place in the Tlascalan capital.<sup>20</sup>

The conduct of Xicotencatl is condemned by Castilian writers, as that of a ferocious and sanguinary barbarian. It is natural they should so regard it. But those, who have no national prejudice to warp their judgments, may come to a different conclusion. They may find much to admire in that high, unconquerable spirit, like some proud column, standing alone in its majesty amidst the fragments and ruins around it. They may see evidences of a clear-sighted sagacity, which, piercing the thin veil of insidious friendship proffered by the Spaniards, and penetrating the future, discerned the coming miseries of his country; the noble patriotism of one who would rescue that country at any cost, and, amidst the gathering darkness, would infuse his own intrepid spirit into the hearts of his nation, to animate them to a last struggle for independence.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., cap. 67. — Camargo, Hist. de Tlascala, MS. — Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 83.

## CHAPTER IV.

DISCONTENTS IN THE ARMY. — TLASCALAN SPIES. — PEACE WITH THE  
REPUBLIC. — EMBASSY FROM MONTEZUMA.

1519.

DESIROUS to keep up the terror of the Castilian name, by leaving the enemy no respite, Cortés, on the same day that he despatched the embassy to Tlascala, put himself at the head of a small corps of cavalry and light troops to scour the neighbouring country. He was at that time so ill from fever, aided by medical treatment,<sup>1</sup> that he could hardly keep his seat in the saddle. It was a rough country, and the sharp winds from the frosty summits of the mountains pierced the scanty covering of the troops, and chilled both men and horses. Four or five of the animals gave out, and the general, alarmed for their safety, sent them back to the camp. The soldiers, discouraged by this ill omen, would have

<sup>1</sup> The effect of the medicine — Sandoval does. (Hist. de Carlos though rather a severe dose, according to the precise Diaz — was suspended during the general's active exertions. Gomara, however, does not consider this a miracle. (Crónica, cap. 49.) Father Quinto, tom. I. p. 127.) Solís, after a conscientious inquiry into this perplexing matter, decides — strange as it may seem — against the father! Conquista, lib. 2, cap. 20.

persuaded him to return. But he made answer, "We fight under the banner of the Cross; God is stronger than nature,"<sup>2</sup> and continued his march.

It led through the same kind of chequered scenery of rugged hill and cultivated plain as that already described, well covered with towns and villages, some of them the frontier posts occupied by the Otomies. Practising the Roman maxim of lenity to the submissive foe, he took full vengeance on those who resisted, and, as resistance too often occurred, marked his path with fire and desolation. After a short absence, he returned in safety, laden with the plunder of a successful foray. It would have been more honorable to him, had it been conducted with less rigor. The excesses are imputed by Bernal Diaz to the Indian allies, whom in the heat of victory it was found impossible to restrain.<sup>3</sup> On whose head soever they fall, they seem to have given little uneasiness to the general, who declares in his letter to the Emperor Charles the Fifth, "As we fought under the standard of the Cross,<sup>4</sup> for the true Faith, and the service of your Highness, Heaven crowned our arms with such success, that, while multitudes of the infidel were slain, little loss was suffered by the Castili-

<sup>2</sup> "Dios es sobre natura." Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 64. Not so Cortés, who says boldly, "Quemé mas de diez pueblos." (Ibid., p. 52.) His reverend commentator specifies the localities of

the Indian towns destroyed by him, in his forays. Viaje, ap. Lorenzana, pp. ix. — xi.

<sup>4</sup> The famous banner of the Conqueror, with the Cross emblazoned on it, has been preserved in Mexico to our day.

ans.”<sup>5</sup> The Spanish Conquerors, to judge from their writings, unconscious of any worldly motive lurking in the bottom of their hearts, regarded themselves as soldiers of the Church, fighting the great battle of Christianity; and in the same edifying and comfortable light are regarded by most of the national historians of a later day.<sup>6</sup>

On his return to the camp, Cortés found a new cause of disquietude in discontents which had broken out among the soldiery. Their patience was exhausted by a life of fatigue and peril to which there seemed to be no end. The battles they had won against such tremendous odds had not advanced them a jot. The idea of their reaching Mexico, says the old soldier so often quoted, “was treated as a jest by the whole army”;<sup>7</sup> and the indefinite prospect of hostilities with the ferocious people among whom they were now cast, threw a deep gloom over their spirits.

Among the malecontents were a number of noisy, vamping persons, such as are found in every camp, who, like empty bubbles, are sure to rise to the surface and make themselves seen in seasons of

<sup>5</sup> “É como trayamos la Bandera de la Cruz, y puñabamos por nuestra Fe, y por servicio de Vuestra Sacra Magestad, en su muy Real ventura nos dió Dios tanta victoria, que les matámos mucha gente, sin que los nuestros recibiesen daño.” Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> “Y fué cosa notable,” ex-

claims Herrera, “con quanta humildad, i devocion, bolvian todos alabando á Dios, que tan milagrosas victorias les daba; de donde se conocia claro, que los favorecia con su Divina asistencia.”

<sup>7</sup> “Porque entrar en México, teníamoslo por cosa de risa, á causa de sus grandes fuerzas.” Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 66.

agitation. They were, for the most part, of the old faction of Velasquez, and had estates in Cuba, to which they turned many a wistful glance as they receded more and more from the coast. They now waited on the general, not in a mutinous spirit of resistance, (for they remembered the lesson in Villa Rica,) but with the design of frank expostulation, as with a brother adventurer in a common cause.<sup>8</sup> The tone of familiarity thus assumed was eminently characteristic of the footing of equality on which the parties in the expedition stood with one another.

Their sufferings, they told him, were too great to be endured. All the men had received one, most of them, two or three wounds. More than fifty had perished, in one way or another, since leaving Vera Cruz. There was no beast of burden but led a life preferable to theirs. For, when the night came, the former could rest from his labors; but they, fighting or watching, had no rest, day nor night. As to conquering Mexico, the very thought of it was madness. If they had encountered such opposition from the petty republic of Tlascala, what might they not expect from the great Mexican empire? There was now a temporary suspension of hostilities. They should avail themselves of it, to retrace their steps

<sup>8</sup> Diaz indignantly disclaims the idea of mutiny, which Gomara attached to this proceeding. "Las palabras que le dezian era por via de acôsejarle, y porque les parecia que eran bien dichas, y no por otra via, porque siempre le siguiéron

muy bien, y lealméte; y no es mucho que en los exércitos algunos buenos soldados aconsejen á su Capitan, y mas si se ven tan trabajados como nosotros andauamos." Ibid., cap. 71.



to Vera Cruz. It is true, the fleet there was destroyed ; and by this act, unparalleled for rashness even in Roman annals, the general had become responsible for the fate of the whole army. Still there was one vessel left. That might be despatched to Cuba, for reinforcements and supplies ; and, when these arrived, they would be enabled to resume operations with some prospect of success.

Cortés listened to this singular expostulation with perfect composure. He knew his men, and, instead of rebuke or harsher measures, replied in the same frank and soldier-like vein which they had affected.

There was much truth, he allowed, in what they said. The sufferings of the Spaniards had been great ; greater than those recorded of any heroes in Greek or Roman story. So much the greater would be their glory. He had often been filled with admiration as he had seen his little host encircled by myriads of barbarians, and felt that no people but Spaniards could have triumphed over such formidable odds. Nor could they, unless the arm of the Almighty had been over them. And they might reasonably look for his protection hereafter ; for was it not in his cause they were fighting ? They had encountered dangers and difficulties, it was true. But they had not come here expecting a life of idle dalliance and pleasure. Glory, as he had told them at the outset, was to be won only by toil and danger. They would do him the justice to acknowledge, that he had never shrunk from his share of both. — This was a truth, adds the honest chronicler

who heard and reports the dialogue, which no one could deny.—But, if they had met with hardships, he continued, they had been everywhere victorious. Even now, they were enjoying the fruits of this, in the plenty which reigned in the camp. And they would soon see the Tlascalans, humbled by their late reverses, suing for peace on any terms. To go back now was impossible. The very stones would rise up against them. The Tlascalans would hunt them in triumph down to the water's edge. And how would the Mexicans exult at this miserable issue of their vainglorious vaunts! Their former friends would become their enemies; and the Totonacs, to avert the vengeance of the Aztecs, from which the Spaniards could no longer shield them, would join in the general cry. There was no alternative, then, but to go forward in their career. And he besought them to silence their pusillanimous scruples, and, instead of turning their eyes toward Cuba, to fix them on Mexico, the great object of their enterprise.

While this singular conference was going on, many other soldiers had gathered round the spot; and the discontented party, emboldened by the presence of their comrades, as well as by the general's forbearance, replied, that they were far from being convinced. Another such victory as the last would be their ruin. They were going to Mexico only to be slaughtered. Until, at length, the general's patience being exhausted, he cut the argument short, by quoting a verse from an old song, implying that it was better to die with honor, than to live dis-

graced ; a sentiment which was loudly echoed by the greater part of his audience, who, notwithstanding their occasional murmurs, had no design to abandon the expedition, still less the commander, to whom they were passionately devoted. The malecontents, disconcerted by this rebuke, slunk back to their own quarters, muttering half-smothered execrations on the leader who had projected the enterprise, the Indians who had guided him, and their own countrymen who supported him in it.<sup>9</sup>

Such were the difficulties that lay in the path of Cortés : a wily and ferocious enemy ; a climate uncertain, often unhealthy ; illness in his own person, much aggravated by anxiety as to the manner in which his conduct would be received by his sovereign ; last, not least, disaffection among his soldiers, on whose constancy and union he rested for the basis of his operations, — the great lever by which he was to overturn the empire of Montezuma.

On the morning following this event, the camp was surprised by the appearance of a small body of Tlascalans, decorated with badges, the white color of which intimated peace. They brought a quantity of provisions, and some trifling ornaments, which,

<sup>9</sup> This conference is reported, with some variety, indeed, by nearly every historian. (Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 55. — Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 3. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 51, 52. — Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 80. — Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 6, cap. 9. — P. Martyr, De Orbe Novo, dec. 5, cap. 2.) I have abridged the account given by Bernal Diaz, one of the audience, though not one of the parties to the dialogue, — for that reason, the better authority.

they said, were sent by the Tlascalan general, who was weary of the war, and desired an accommodation with the Spaniards. He would soon present himself to arrange this in person. The intelligence diffused general joy, and the emissaries received a friendly welcome.

A day or two elapsed, and while a few of the party left the Spanish quarters, the others, about fifty in number, who remained, excited some distrust in the bosom of Marina. She communicated her suspicions to Cortés that they were spies. He caused several of them, in consequence, to be arrested, examined them separately, and ascertained that they were employed by Xicotencatl to inform him of the state of the Christian camp, preparatory to a meditated assault, for which he was mustering his forces. Cortés, satisfied of the truth of this, determined to make such an example of the delinquents, as should intimidate his enemy from repeating the attempt. He ordered their hands to be cut off, and in that condition sent them back to their countrymen, with the message, "that the Tlascalans might come by day or night; they would find the Spaniards ready for them."<sup>10</sup>

The doleful spectacle of their comrades returning in this mutilated state filled the Indian camp with horror and consternation. The haughty crest of

<sup>10</sup> Diaz says only seventeen lost their hands, the rest their thumbs. (Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 70.) Cortés does not flinch from confessing, the hands of the whole fifty. "Los mandé tomar á todos cincuenta, y cortarles las manos, y los embié, que dixessen á su Señor, que de noche, y de dia, y cada, y quando él viniesse, verian quien eramos." Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 53.

their chief was humbled. From that moment, he lost his wonted buoyancy and confidence. His soldiers, filled with superstitious fear, refused to serve longer against a foe who could read their very thoughts, and divine their plans before they were ripe for execution.<sup>11</sup>

The punishment inflicted by Cortés may well shock the reader by its brutality. But it should be considered in mitigation, that the victims of it were spies, and, as such, by the laws of war, whether among civilized or savage nations, had incurred the penalty of death. The amputation of the limbs was a milder punishment, and reserved for inferior offences. If we revolt at the barbarous nature of the sentence, we should reflect that it was no uncommon one at that day; not more uncommon, indeed, than whipping and branding with a hot iron were in our own country, at the beginning of the present century, or than cropping the ears was in the preceding one. A higher civilization, indeed, rejects such punishments, as pernicious in themselves, and degrading to humanity. But in the sixteenth century, they were openly recognised by the laws of the most polished nations in Europe. And it is too much to ask of any man, still less one bred to the iron trade of war, to be in advance of the refinement of his age. We may be content, if, in circumstances so unfavorable to humanity, he does not fall below it.

<sup>11</sup> "De que los Tlascaltecas se admiraron, entendiendo que Cortés les entendia sus pensamientos." Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 83.



All thoughts of further resistance being abandoned, the four delegates of the Tlascalcan republic were now allowed to proceed on their mission. They were speedily followed by Xicotencatl himself, attended by a numerous train of military retainers. As they drew near the Spanish lines, they were easily recognised by the white and yellow colors of their uniforms, the livery of the house of Titcala. The joy of the army was great at this sure intimation of the close of hostilities; and it was with difficulty that Cortés was enabled to restore the men to tranquillity, and the assumed indifference which it was proper to maintain in presence of an enemy.

The Spaniards gazed with curious eye on the valiant chief who had so long kept his enemies at bay, and who now advanced with the firm and fearless step of one who was coming rather to bid defiance than to sue for peace. He was rather above the middle size, with broad shoulders, and a muscular frame intimating great activity and strength. His head was large, and his countenance marked with the lines of hard service rather than of age, for he was but thirty-five. When he entered the presence of Cortés, he made the usual salutation, by touching the ground with his hand, and carrying it to his head; while the sweet incense of aromatic gums rolled up in clouds from the censers carried by his slaves.

Far from a pusillanimous attempt to throw the blame on the senate, he assumed the whole responsibility of the war. He had considered the white

men, he said, as enemies, for they came with the allies and vassals of Montezuma. He loved his country, and wished to preserve the independence which she had maintained through her long wars with the Aztecs. He had been beaten. They might be the strangers, who, it had been so long predicted, would come from the east, to take possession of the country. He hoped they would use their victory with moderation, and not trample on the liberties of the republic. He came now in the name of his nation, to tender their obedience to the Spaniards, assuring them they would find his countrymen as faithful in peace as they had been firm in war.

Cortés, far from taking umbrage, was filled with admiration at the lofty spirit which thus disdained to stoop beneath misfortunes. The brave man knows how to respect bravery in another. He assumed, however, a severe aspect, as he rebuked the chief for having so long persisted in hostilities. Had Xicotencatl believed the word of the Spaniards, and accepted their proffered friendship sooner, he would have spared his people much suffering, which they well merited by their obstinacy. But it was impossible, continued the general, to retrieve the past. He was willing to bury it in oblivion, and to receive the Tlascalans as vassals to the emperor, his master. If they proved true, they should find him a sure column of support; if false, he would take such vengeance on them as he had intended to take on their capital, had they not speedily given in their submis-

sion. — It proved an ominous menace for the chief to whom it was addressed.

The cacique then ordered his slaves to bring forward some trifling ornaments of gold and feather-embroidery, designed as presents. They were of little value, he said, with a smile, for the Tlascalans were poor. They had little gold, not even cotton, nor salt. The Aztec emperor had left them nothing but their freedom and their arms. He offered this gift only as a token of his good-will. "As such I receive it," answered Cortés, "and, coming from the Tlascalans, set more value on it, than I should from any other source, though it were a house full of gold"; — a politic, as well as magnanimous reply, for it was by the aid of this good-will, that he was to win the gold of Mexico.<sup>12</sup>

Thus ended the bloody war with the fierce republic of Tlascala, during the course of which, the fortunes of the Spaniards, more than once, had trembled in the balance. Had it been persevered in but a little longer, it must have ended in their confusion and ruin, exhausted as they were by wounds, watching, and fatigues, with the seeds of disaffection rankling among themselves. As it was, they came out of the fearful contest with untarnished glory. To the enemy, they seemed invulnerable, bearing charmed lives, proof alike against the accidents of

<sup>12</sup> Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, pp. 56, 57. — Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 3. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 53. — Ber-  
nal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 71, et seq. — Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, MS., lib. 12, cap. 11.

fortune and the assaults of man. No wonder that they indulged a similar conceit in their own bosoms, and that the humblest Spaniard should have fancied himself the subject of a special interposition of Providence, which shielded him in the hour of battle, and reserved him for a higher destiny.

While the Tlascalans were still in the camp, an embassy was announced from Montezuma. Tidings of the exploits of the Spaniards had spread far and wide over the plateau. The emperor, in particular, had watched every step of their progress, as they climbed the steeps of the Cordilleras, and advanced over the broad table-land, on their summit. He had seen them, with great satisfaction, take the road to Tlascala, trusting, that, if they were mortal men, they would find their graves there. Great was his dismay, when courier after courier brought him intelligence of their successes, and that the most redoubtable warriors on the plateau had been scattered like chaff, by the swords of this handful of strangers.

His superstitious fears returned in full force. He saw in the Spaniards "the men of destiny," who were to take possession of his sceptre. In his alarm and uncertainty, he sent a new embassy to the Christian camp. It consisted of five great nobles of his court, attended by a train of two hundred slaves. They brought with them a present, as usual, dictated partly by fear, and, in part, by the natural munificence of his disposition. It consisted of three thousand ounces of gold, in grains, or in various manufactured articles, with several hundred mantles and

dresses of embroidered cotton, and the picturesque feather-work. As they laid these at the feet of Cortés, they told him, they had come to offer the congratulations of their master on the late victories of the white men. The emperor only regretted that it would not be in his power to receive them in his capital, where the numerous population was so unruly, that their safety would be placed in jeopardy. The mere intimation of the Aztec emperor's wishes, in the most distant way, would have sufficed with the Indian nations. It had very little weight with the Spaniards; and the envoys, finding this puerile expression of them ineffectual, resorted to another argument, offering a tribute in their master's name to the Castilian sovereign, provided the Spaniards would relinquish their visit to his capital. This was a greater error; it was displaying the rich casket with one hand, which he was unable to defend with the other. Yet the author of this pusillanimous policy, the unhappy victim of superstition, was a monarch renowned among the Indian nations for his intrepidity and enterprise, — the terror of Anahuac!

Cortés, while he urged his own sovereign's commands as a reason for disregarding the wishes of Montezuma, uttered expressions of the most profound respect for the Aztec prince, and declared that if he had not the means of requiting his munificence, as he could wish, at present, he trusted *to repay him, at some future day, with good works!*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "Cortés recibió con alegría aquel presente, y dixo que se lo tenia en merced, y que él lo pagaría al señor Montezuma en buenas obras." Bernal Díaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 73.



The Mexican ambassadors were not much gratified with finding the war at an end, and a reconciliation established between their mortal enemies and the Spaniards. The mutual disgust of the two parties with each other was too strong to be repressed even in the presence of the general, who saw with satisfaction the evidences of a jealousy, which, undermining the strength of the Indian emperor, was to prove the surest source of his own success.<sup>14</sup>

Two of the Aztec mission returned to Mexico, to acquaint their sovereign with the state of affairs in the Spanish camp. The others remained with the army, Cortés being willing that they should be personal spectators of the deference shown him by the Tlascalans. Still he did not hasten his departure for their capital. Not that he placed reliance on the injurious intimations of the Mexicans respecting their good faith. Yet he was willing to put this to some longer trial, and, at the same time, to reestablish his own health more thoroughly, before his visit. Meanwhile, messengers daily arrived from the city, pressing his journey, and were finally followed by some of the aged rulers of the republic, attended by a numerous retinue, impatient of his long delay.

<sup>14</sup> He dwells on it in his letter to the Emperor. "Vista la discordia y desconformidad de los unos y de los otros, no huve poco placer, porque me pareció hacer mucho á mi propósito, y que podría tener manera de mas áyna sojuzgarlos, é aun acordéme de una autoridad

Evangélica, que dice: *Omne Regnum in seipsum divisum desolabitur*: y con los unos y con los otros maneaba, y á cada uno en secreto le agradecia el aviso, que me daba, y le daba crédito de mas amistad que al otro." Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 61.

They brought with them a body of five hundred *tamanes*, or *men of burden*, to drag his cannon, and relieve his own forces from this fatiguing part of their duty. It was impossible to defer his departure longer; and after mass, and a solemn thanksgiving to the great Being who had crowned their arms with triumph, the Spaniards bade adieu to the quarters which they had occupied for nearly three weeks on the hill of Tzompach. The strong tower, or *teocalli*, which commanded it, was called, in commemoration of their residence, "the tower of victory"; and the few stones, which still survive of its ruins, point out to the eye of the traveller a spot ever memorable in history for the courage and constancy of the early Conquerors.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 6, cap. 10. — Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 4. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 54. — Martyn, De Orbe Novo, dec. 5, cap. 2. — Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 72-74. — Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 83.

## CHAPTER V.

SPANIARDS ENTER TLASCALA.—DESCRIPTION OF THE CAPITAL.—  
ATTEMPTED CONVERSION.—AZTEC EMBASSY.—INVITED TO CHOLULA.

1519.

THE city of Tlascala, the capital of the republic of the same name, lay at the distance of about six leagues from the Spanish camp. The road led into a hilly region, exhibiting in every arable patch of ground the evidence of laborious cultivation. Over a deep *barranca*, or ravine, they crossed on a bridge of stone, which, according to tradition, — a slippery authority, — is the same still standing, and was constructed originally for the passage of the army.<sup>1</sup> They passed some considerable towns on their route, where they experienced a full measure of Indian hospitality. As they advanced, the approach to a populous city was intimated by the crowds who flocked out to

<sup>1</sup> “ Á distancia de un quarto de legua caminando á esta dicha ciudad se encuentra una barranca honda, que tiene para pasar un *Puente de cal y canto de bóveda*, y es tradicion en el pueblo de San Salvador, que se hizo en aquellos dias, que estubo allí Cortés paraque pasasse.” (Viaje, ap. Lorenzana, p. xi.) If the antiquity of this *arched* stone bridge could be established, it would settle a point much mooted in respect to Indian architecture. But the construction of so solid a work in so short a time is a fact requiring a better voucher than the villagers of San Salvador.

see and welcome the strangers; men and women in their picturesque dresses, with bunches and wreaths of roses, which they gave to the Spaniards, or fastened to the necks and caparisons of their horses, in the same manner as at Cempoalla. Priests, with their white robes, and long matted tresses floating over them, mingled in the crowd, scattering volumes of incense from their burning censers. In this way, the multitudinous and motley procession defiled through the gates of the ancient capital of Tlascala. It was the twenty-third of September, 1519, the anniversary of which is still celebrated by the inhabitants, as a day of jubilee.<sup>2</sup>

The press was now so great, that it was with difficulty the police of the city could clear a passage for the army; while the *azoteas*, or flat terraced roofs of the buildings, were covered with spectators, eager to catch a glimpse of the wonderful strangers. The houses were hung with festoons of flowers, and arches of verdant boughs, intertwined with roses and honeysuckle, were thrown across the streets. The whole population abandoned itself to rejoicing; and the air was rent with songs and shouts of triumph mingled with the wild music of the national instruments, that might have excited apprehensions in the breasts of the soldiery, had they not gathered their

<sup>2</sup> Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. III. p. 53.

"Recibimiento el mas solene y famoso que en el mundo se ha visto," exclaims the enthusiastic historian of the republic. He adds,

that "more than a hundred thousand men flocked out to receive the Spaniards; a thing that appears impossible," *que parece cosa imposible!* It does indeed. Caramargo, Hist. de Tlascala, MS.

peaceful import from the assurance of Marina, and the joyous countenances of the natives.

With these accompaniments, the procession moved along the principal streets to the mansion of Xicotencatl, the aged father of the Tlascalan general, and one of the four rulers of the republic. Cortés dismounted from his horse, to receive the old chieftain's embrace. He was nearly blind; and satisfied, as far as he could, a natural curiosity respecting the person of the Spanish general, by passing his hand over his features. He then led the way to a spacious hall in his palace, where a banquet was served to the army. In the evening, they were shown to their quarters, in the buildings and open ground surrounding one of the principal *teocallis*; while the Mexican ambassadors, at the desire of Cortés, had apartments assigned them next to his own, that he might the better watch over their safety, in this city of their enemies.<sup>3</sup>

Tlascala was one of the most important and populous towns on the table-land. Cortés, in his letter to the Emperor, compares it to Granada, affirming, that it was larger, stronger, and more populous than the Moorish capital, at the time of the conquest, and quite as well built.<sup>4</sup> But, notwithstanding we are

<sup>3</sup> Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, MS., lib. 12, cap. 11. — Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 59. — Camargo, Hist. de Tlascala, MS. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 54. — Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 6, cap. 11.

<sup>4</sup> “La qual ciudad es tan grande, y de tanta admiracion, que aunque mucho de lo, que de ella podria decir, dexe, lo poco que diré creo es casi increíble, porque es muy mayor que Granada, y muy mas fuerte, y de tan buenos Edificios,



assured by a most respectable writer at the close of the last century, that its remains justify the assertion,<sup>5</sup> we shall be slow to believe that its edifices could have rivalled those monuments of Oriental magnificence, whose light, ærial forms still survive after the lapse of ages, the admiration of every traveller of sensibility and taste. The truth is, that Cortés, like Columbus, saw objects through the warm medium of his own fond imagination, giving them a higher tone of coloring and larger dimensions than were strictly warranted by the fact. It was natural that the man who had made such rare discoveries should unconsciously magnify their merits to his own eyes, and to those of others.

The houses were built, for the most part, of mud or earth; the better sort of stone and lime, or bricks dried in the sun. They were unprovided with doors or windows, but in the apertures for the former hung mats fringed with pieces of copper or something which, by its tinkling sound, would give notice of any one's entrance. The streets were narrow and dark. The population must have been considerable, if, as Cortés asserts, thirty thousand souls were often gathered in the market on a public day. These meetings were a sort of fairs, held, as usual in all the great towns, every fifth day, and attended by the inhabitants of the adjacent country, who

y de muy mucha mas gente, que Granada tenia al tiempo que se ganó." Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> "En las Ruinas, que aun hoy se vén en Tlaxcala, se conoce, que no es ponderacion." Ibid., p. 58. Nota del editor, Lorenzana.