

BERNAL DÍAZ

THE CONQUEST OF NEW SPAIN

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

J. M. COHEN

PENGUIN BOOKS

The Stay at Cempoala

WE slept at the village where these twelve Indians had prepared quarters for us, and after getting good information about the road we must take to the town on the hill, we sent word to the *Caciques* of Cempoala, very early in the morning, that we were coming to their town and hoped they would be pleased. We sent six of the Indians to carry this message, and kept the other six as guides. Cortes also ordered the guns, muskets, and crossbows to be kept ready for use, and scouts to be sent ahead. The horsemen and all the rest of us kept on the alert, and thus we advanced to within three miles of the town. When we came to this point twenty Indian dignitaries came out to welcome us in the name of the *Cacique*, and brought us some cakes of their very finely scented rose-petals. These they presented to Cortes and the horsemen with every sign of friendliness, saying that their lord was awaiting us at our lodgings, since he was too fat and heavy to come out and receive us. Cortes thanked them, and we continued our march; and as we came among the houses we saw how large a town it was, larger than any we had yet seen, and were full of admiration. It was so green with vegetation that it looked like a garden; and its streets were so full of men and women who had come out to see us that we gave thanks to God for the discovery of such a country.

Our mounted scouts had come to a great square with courtyards where they had prepared our lodgings, which appeared to have been lime-coated and burnished during the last few days. The Indians are so skilful at these arts that one of the horsemen took the shining whiteness for silver, and came galloping back to tell Cortes that our quarters had silver walls. Doña Marina and Aguilar said that it must be plaster, and we laughed at his excitement. Indeed we reminded him ever afterwards that anything white looked to him like silver. But enough of this. When we came to the buildings, this fat *Cacique* came out to receive us in the courtyard. He was so fat that I must call him

the fat *Cacique*. He made a deep bow to Cortes and perfumed him as is their custom, and Cortes embraced him. After leading us into our fine, large quarters, which held us all, they gave us food and brought us some baskets of plums, which were very plentiful at that season, also some of their maize-cakes. As we were hungry, and had not seen so much food for a long time, we called the town Villa Viciosa.¹ Others named it Seville.

Cortes gave orders that none of the soldiers should leave the square or annoy the inhabitants; and when the fat *Cacique* learnt that we had finished eating, he sent to tell Cortes that he wished to pay him a visit. He came with a great number of Indian dignitaries, all wearing large gold lip-rings and rich cloaks. Cortes also left his quarters to receive him, and greeted him with a great show of affection and flattery. Then the fat *Cacique* ordered a present to be brought of golden jewellery and cloth; and although it was small and of no great value, he said to Cortes: '*Lope luzio lope luzio!* Please accept this; if I had more I would give it to you.' I have already explained that in the Totonac language *lope luzio* means lord of great lords.

Cortes replied through our interpreters that he would repay this gift in services, and that if the *Cacique* would tell him what he wanted it should be done for him, since we were vassals of the Emperor Charles, a very great prince who ruled over many kingdoms and countries and had sent us to redress grievances, to punish evildoers, and to command that human sacrifices should cease. And he explained many things concerning our holy religion. On hearing all this, the fat *Cacique* heaved a deep sigh and broke into bitter complaints against the great Montezuma and his governors, saying that the Mexican prince had recently brought him into subjection, had taken away all his golden jewellery, and so grievously oppressed him and his people that they could do nothing except obey him, since he was lord over many cities and countries, and ruler over countless vassals and armies of warriors.

As Cortes knew that he could not then attend to their complaint, he answered that he would see their wrongs set right, but that he was now on the way to visit his *acales* – which is

1. The city of abundance.

the Indian word for ships – and to take up residence in the town of Quiahuitzlan, and that as soon as he was settled there he would give the matter greater consideration. To this the fat *Cacique* replied that he was quite satisfied.

Next morning we left Cempoala, and over four hundred Indian porters, here called *tamemes*, were awaiting our orders. Each can carry fifty pounds on his back and march fifteen miles with it. We rejoiced at the sight of so many porters, since hitherto those of us who had not brought servants from Cuba had had to carry our knapsacks on our backs. And only six or seven Cubans had come with the fleet, not the great number that Gomara states. Doña Marina and Aguilar told us that in time of peace the chiefs in these parts are compelled to provide *tamemes* to carry baggage as a matter of course, and from this time on, wherever we went we asked for Indians to carry our loads.

Cortes took leave of the fat *Cacique*, and next day we set out on our march, sleeping the night at a deserted village near Quiahuitzlan, where the people of Cempoala brought us supper.

On the following day, at ten o'clock, we reached the fortified town of Quiahuitzlan, which stands among great rocks and very high cliffs. If there had been any resistance it would have been very hard to capture. Expecting that there would be fighting, we moved in good formation, with the artillery in front, and marched up to the fortress prepared to do what was necessary should anything occur.

Alonso de Avila, who was then Acting Captain, was an overbearing and bad-tempered man; and when Hernando Alonso de Villanueva happened to lose his place in the ranks, he dealt him a lance thrust in the arm which maimed him, so that he was ever afterwards called Hernando Alonso de Villanueva 'El manquillo'. It will be said that I am digressing into old stories, so I must break off and go on to say that we went halfway through the town before we found a single Indian to speak to, which greatly surprised us. They had, however, fled in fear that very day, as they saw us climbing up to their houses. When we got to the top of the fortress, to the square on which their temples and great idol-houses stood, we found fifteen Indians waiting, all dressed in fine cloaks and each bearing a clay brazier full of

incense. These Indians came up to Cortes, and perfumed him and all the soldiers near him. Then with deep bows they asked our pardon for not having come out to meet us, assured us that we were welcome, and asked us to rest. They said that they had kept away out of fear, until they saw what sort of creatures we were, for they had been afraid of us and our horses. They promised to recall all the inhabitants of the city that night. Cortes treated them very kindly and told them many things about our holy religion, as it was our habit to do wherever we went. He told them also that we were vassals of our Emperor Charles, and gave them some green beads and other small objects from Spain, in exchange for which they brought us poultry and maize-cakes. While we were talking someone came to tell Cortes that the fat *Cacique* was arriving in a litter borne on the shoulders of many Indian dignitaries. When he arrived he joined the *Cacique* and the principal men of that town in their complaints against Montezuma. In speaking of his great strength, they gave vent to such tears and sighs that Cortes and the rest of us were moved to pity. Before describing the way they had been brought into subjection, they told us that every year many of their sons and daughters were demanded of them for sacrifices, and others for service in the houses and plantations of their conquerors. And they made other complaints; so many that I no longer remember them. They said that if their wives and daughters were handsome, Montezuma's tax-gatherers took them away and raped them, and that they did this in all the thirty villages in which the Totonac language was spoken.

With the help of our interpreters Cortes gave them such comfort as he could. He promised to help in any way that was possible, and to prevent these thefts and crimes, since it was for this purpose that our lord the Emperor had sent us to these parts. He told them to stop being anxious, and to see what we would do. His speech seemed to give them some consolation. But their hearts were not relieved, for they were too much afraid of the Mexicans.

While these conversations were going on five Indians came in great haste from the town to tell the *Caciques* who were talking to Cortes that five of Montezuma's Mexican tax-gatherers had

just arrived. The *Caciques* turned pale at the news. Trembling with fear, they left Cortes and went off to receive the Mexicans. Very quickly they decorated a room with flowers, cooked them some food, and made them quantities of chocolate, which is the best of their drinks.

When the five Mexicans entered the town, they came to the square where the *Caciques'* houses and our quarters were, and passed us by with cocksure pride, speaking not a word to Cortes or anyone else they saw. They wore richly embroidered cloaks and loincloths – for they wore loincloths at that time – and shining hair that was gathered up and seemed tied to their heads. Each one was smelling the roses he carried, and each had a crooked staff in his hand. Their Indian servants carried fly-whisks, and they were accompanied by the *Caciques* of the other Totonac towns, who did not leave them until they had shown them to their lodgings and given them a meal.

As soon as they had dined, the tax-gatherers sent for the fat *Cacique* and the other chiefs and scolded them for having entertained us in their villages, since now they would have to meet and deal with us, which would not please their lord Montezuma. For without his permission and instructions they should neither have received us nor given us golden jewels. They continued to reproach the fat *Cacique* and his nobles for their actions, and ordered them to provide twenty Indians, male and female, as a peace-offering to their gods for the wrong that had been done.

At this point Cortes asked our interpreters why the arrival of these Indians had so agitated the *Caciques*, and who they were; and Doña Marina, who understood perfectly, explained what was happening. As soon as Cortes understood what the *Caciques* were saying, he reminded them that, as he had already explained, our lord the King had sent him to chastise evil-doers and prevent sacrifices and robbery. He ordered them therefore to arrest the tax-gatherers for having made such a demand, and to hold them prisoners until their lord Montezuma was informed of the reason: namely that they had come to rob the Totonacs, to enslave their wives and children, and to do other violence.

When the *Caciques* heard this they were appalled at his

The Conquest of New Spain

daring. To order them to manhandle Montezuma's messengers! They were far too frightened. They dared not do it. But Cortes insisted that they must arrest them at once; and they obeyed him. They secured them with long poles and collars, as is their custom, so that they could not escape, and they beat one of them who refused to be bound. Furthermore, Cortes ordered all the *Caciques* to cease paying tribute and obedience to Montezuma, and to proclaim their refusal in all the towns of their friends and allies, also to announce that if tax-gatherers came to any other towns he must be informed, and would send for them. So the news spread throughout the province. For the fat *Cacique* immediately sent messengers to proclaim it, and the chiefs who had accompanied the tax-gatherers scattered immediately after the arrest, each to his town, to convey the order and give an account of what had happened.

The act they had witnessed was so astonishing and of such importance to them that they said no human beings dared to do such a thing, and it must be the work of *Teules*. Therefore from that moment they called us *Teules*, which means gods or demons.

To return to the prisoners, all the *Caciques* were of the opinion that they ought to be sacrificed, so that none could return to Mexico to tell the tale. But Cortes said that they should not be killed, and that he would take charge of them. He set a guard over them, and at midnight summoned the soldiers of this guard to instruct them: 'Choose the two prisoners that seem to you the most intelligent, and loose them. Then bring them to my quarters. But do not let any of the village Indians see what you are doing.' When the prisoners were brought before him, he asked them, through our interpreters, why they were prisoners and from what country they came, as if he knew nothing of the matter. They answered that the *Caciques* of Cempoala had arrested them, with the aid of their followers and ours, and had held them prisoner. Cortes replied that he knew nothing about this and was very sorry. He ordered food to be brought them, and talked to them in a friendly way. He then told them to return at once to their lord Montezuma and tell him that we were all his good friends and entirely at his service. They were to explain also that he had released them for

The Stay at Cempoala

fear that harm should befall them, and had quarrelled with the *Caciques* who had arrested them; furthermore that he would do all he could to help them, and would see that their three companions were released and protected. He then told them to go off quickly and not come back to be captured and killed.

The two prisoners thanked him for his kindness, but said they were still afraid of falling into the hands of their enemies, since they could not help passing through their country. So Cortes ordered six sailors to take them in a boat during the night and put them ashore some twelve miles away on friendly territory outside the boundaries of Cempoala. When next morning the fat *Cacique* and the village chiefs saw that two prisoners were missing they were even more anxious to sacrifice the remaining three. But Cortes got these three out of their clutches. Pretending to be furious at the escape of the other two, he had a chain brought from the ships and bound them with it. Then he had them transported aboard, saying that as such a bad watch had been kept over the others he would look after them himself. Once they were aboard, he had their chains taken off and told them in a very friendly way that he would soon send them back to Montezuma.

After these events the *Caciques* of this village and of Cempoala, and all the Totonac dignitaries who had assembled, asked Cortes what was to be done, for all the forces of Mexico and of the great Montezuma would descend upon them, and they could not possibly escape death and destruction.

Cortes replied with a most cheerful smile that he and his brothers who were with him would defend them and kill anyone who tried to harm them; and the *Caciques* and their villagers one and all promised to stand by us, to obey any orders we might give them, and to join their forces with ours against Montezuma and all his allies. Then in the presence of Diego de Godoy the Notary they took the oath of obedience to His Majesty, and sent messengers to all the other towns in the province to relate what had happened. As they now paid no more tribute and the tax-gatherers had disappeared, they could not contain their delight at having thrown off the tyranny of the Mexicans.

The March to Cingapacinga and Return to Cempoala

ONCE we had pacified the seven men who wanted to return to Cuba, we set out with the forces I have enumerated, and slept that night at Cempoala. Two thousand Indian warriors, divided into four companies, were ready to accompany us, and on the first day we marched fifteen miles in good order. The next day, shortly after dusk, we arrived at some farms close to Cingapacinga. The town's inhabitants now had news of our approach. As we were climbing towards the houses and fortress, which stood among great craggy cliffs, eight Indian chieftains and *papas* came peacefully to meet us, and to ask Cortes why, in view of our reputation for doing good to all and avenging robberies, and after our arrest of Montezuma's tax-collectors, we now wanted to kill them who had done nothing to deserve it. They said that the Cempoalan Indians who accompanied us were their enemies on account of old feuds concerning lands and boundaries, and that now, under our protection, they had come to rob and kill them. They admitted that there had been a Mexican garrison in their town, but the Mexicans had left for their own country a few days previously, on hearing that we had arrested their tax-gatherers. They begged us therefore to pursue the matter no further, and to grant them our protection.

When our interpreters had explained to Cortes what they said, he immediately ordered Captain Pedro de Alvarado, Cristobal de Olid the quartermaster, and the rest of us to prevent the Cempoalans from advancing any further; which we did. But though we acted very quickly, they had already begun to loot the farms. Then Cortes, in a fury, sent for the commanders of the Cempoalans and ordered them with angry threats to bring him the Indians, the cloth, and the poultry they had stolen from those farms. He also forbade any Cempoalan to enter the town, and said that for their lies, and for coming under our protection simply to rob and sacrifice their neighbours, they deserved execution. He repeated that our King and lord whose

servants we were had sent us to prevent such enormities, and that they must be very careful that nothing of the sort happened again, or not a man of them would be left alive. The Cempoalan *Caciques* and captains surrendered everything they had seized, men, women, and poultry, and Cortes returned it all to the owners. Then he turned furiously on the Cempoalans and ordered them to retire and sleep in the fields, which they did.

On observing the justice of our behaviour and hearing the kind words that Cortes addressed to them through our interpreters, the *Caciques* and *papas* of Cingapacinga became well disposed towards us. After hearing Cortes' customary exposition of our holy faith, and his injunctions to give up human sacrifice and robbery and the foul practice of sodomy, and to cease worshipping their accursed idols, also much other good advice that he gave them, they at once called together the people of the neighbouring towns. These people then swore obedience to His Majesty, and very soon began to make the same grievous complaints against Montezuma that the Cempoalans had made when we were at Quiahuitzlan.

Next morning Cortes sent for the Cempoalan captains, who were waiting in the fields for our orders and were still very frightened of him because of the lies they had told him. When they appeared before him, he made them make friends with the people of that town, and the pact was never broken by either party. We then left for Cempoala by another road, which passed through two towns which were allied to Cingapacinga, and took a rest, for the sun was fierce and the weight of our arms made us tired. In one of these towns Cortes happened to see a soldier called de Mora from Ciudad Rodrigo take two fowls from an Indian's house. Enraged that any soldier should do such a thing in a friendly town and before his very eyes, he immediately ordered a halter to be thrown round his neck, and de Mora would have been hanged if Pedro de Alvarado, who was standing beside Cortes, had not cut the halter with his sword when the poor man was already half throttled. I record this story for the benefit not only of my interested readers, but also of those priests whose duty it is to administer the sacraments and teach the doctrine to the natives of this country.

When they see that the theft of two fowls in a friendly town almost cost a poor soldier his life, they will realize how they should behave towards the Indians today. This soldier was afterwards killed in a battle fought on a rocky height in the province of Guatemala.

But to return to our story. Having left these towns in peace and resumed our march to Cempoala, we found the fat *Cacique* and other dignitaries awaiting us at some huts with food. For although they were Indians, they saw that justice is good and sacred, and that Cortes' statement that we had come to right wrongs and abolish tyrannies was proved true by the events of that expedition. They were therefore much better disposed towards us than ever before.

We slept the night in these huts, and all the *Caciques* accompanied us to our quarters in their town. Really anxious that we should not leave their country, for they were afraid Montezuma would then send his warriors against them, they told Cortes that as we were now their friends they would like to have us for brothers and to give us their daughters to bear us children. So, to cement our friendship, they brought eight Indian girls, all the daughters of chiefs, and gave one of them, who was the niece of the fat *Cacique*, to Cortes. Another, who was the daughter of another great chief called Cuesco, was given to Alonso Hernandez Puertocarrero. All eight of them were dressed in the rich shirts that they wear, and finely adorned as is their custom. Each one of them had a gold collar round her neck and golden earrings in her ears, and with them came other girls to be their maids. As he presented them, the fat *Cacique* said to Cortes: '*Teclé*' (which in their language means lord) 'these seven women are for your captains, and this one, who is my niece, is for you. She is the mistress of towns and vassals.' Cortes received them with a gracious smile, and thanked the chiefs for their gift. He said, however, that before we could accept the ladies and become their brothers, they would have to abandon their idols which they mistakenly believed in and worshipped, and sacrifice no more souls to them; and that when he saw those cursed things thrown down and the sacrifices at an end, our bonds of brotherhood would be very much firmer.

The girls, he added, must become Christians before we could receive them, and the people must give up sodomy, for they had boys dressed as women who practised that accursed vice for profit. Moreover every day they sacrificed before our eyes three, four, or five Indians, whose hearts were offered to those idols and whose blood was plastered on the walls. The feet, arms, and legs of their victims were cut off and eaten, just as we eat beef from the butcher's in our country. I even believe that they sold it in the *tianguetz* or markets. Cortes told them that if they gave up these wicked practices, not only would we be their friends, but we would give them other provinces to rule. The *Caciques*, *papas*, and dignitaries all replied that it would be wrong for them to give up their idols and sacrifices, for these gods of theirs brought them health and good harvests and all that they needed; but as for sodomy, measures would be taken to see that the practice was stopped.

This insolent reply was more than Cortes or any of us who had seen all their cruelties and obscenities could stand. Reminding us of the doctrines of our holy faith, Cortes asked us: 'If we do not pay God so much honour as to stop them from making sacrifices to their idols, how can we ever accomplish anything worth doing?' He told us we must overthrow the idols that very day, and be absolutely prepared to fight if they tried to prevent us. Since we, as usual, were all armed and ready, Cortes at once told the *Caciques* that the idols must come down. Thereupon the fat *Cacique* and his captains ordered their warriors to assemble and defend them; and when they saw us preparing to ascend the many steps – I do not remember how many there were – of their *cue* or temple, which was very high, the fat *Cacique* and the rest shouted to Cortes in a great fury, inquiring why he wanted to destroy their gods, since if we desecrated and overthrew them their whole people would perish, and we with them. Cortes replied in a fierce voice that he had already told them to stop their sacrifices to these evil images and that we were going to get rid of them in order to save them from their false beliefs. He warned them that if they did not themselves remove their idols at once we would ourselves send them rolling down the steps. He said that we could

no longer consider them our friends, but our mortal enemies, since we had given them good advice which they would not trust, and since he now saw their companies coming armed for battle. He added that he was angry with them, and that they would pay for their stubbornness with their lives.]

When the Indians heard these threats – and Doña Marina was not only quite capable of explaining them in their language, but also threatened them with the power of Montezuma, who might fall on them any day – they replied in fear that they were unworthy to approach their gods, and that if we were to overthrow them it would not be with their consent, but that we could overthrow them or do whatever else we liked.

No sooner were the words out of their mouths than some fifty of us soldiers clambered up and overturned the idols, which rolled down the steps and were smashed to pieces. Some of them were in the form of fearsome dragons as big as calves, and others half-man half-dog and hideously ugly. When they saw their idols shattered the *Caciques* and the *papas* who were with them wept and covered their eyes; and they prayed to their gods for pardon in the Totonac language, saying that they had been overborne and were not to blame, that it was these *Teules* who had overthrown them, and that they dared not attack us for fear of the Mexicans.

After the destruction of the idols, the warriors who, as I have said, had come ready to attack us prepared to shoot their arrows. But when we saw this we seized the fat *Cacique*, six *papas*, and some other dignitaries, and Cortes shouted a warning that in case of any warlike action all these men would be killed. The fat *Cacique* commanded his men not to attack, but to retire from in front of us.

Once the *Caciques*, *papas*, and dignitaries had calmed down, Cortes ordered that the idols we had overthrown and shattered should be taken out of sight and burnt. Then the eight *papas* who were in charge of them came out of a room and carried them back to the house from which they had come, where they burnt them. These *papas* wore black cloaks like those of canons, and others smaller hoods like Dominicans. They wore their hair very long, down to their waists, and some even down to their

feet; and it was all so clotted and matted with blood that it could not be pulled apart. Their ears were cut to pieces as a sacrifice, and they smelt of sulphur. But they also smelt of something worse: of decaying flesh. As they told us, and we afterwards found out for ourselves, these *papas* were the sons of chiefs and had no wives, but indulged in the foul practice of sodomy. On certain days they fasted, and what I saw them eat was the pith or seed of cotton when it was being cleaned. But they may have eaten other things that I did not see.

Cortes then spoke eloquently to the Indians through our interpreters, telling them that now we would treat them as brothers and give them all possible help against Montezuma and his Mexicans, to whom we had already sent word that they must not attack them or demand tribute of them. He said that as they would now have no more idols in their high temples he would leave them a great lady who was the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we believe in and worship, and that they too should treat her as their lady and intercessor. On this matter and others he made them an excellent discourse, so deftly reasoned, considering the time at his disposal, that there was nothing left to say. Indeed, when he spoke of our holy faith, his explanations were as good as any priest can make today, and were listened to with good will. Then he ordered them to summon all the masons in the town, and to make them bring large quantities of lime with which to clean the *cues* and clear away the blood that encrusted them. Then next day, when the walls were cleaned and whitewashed, an altar was set up with fine altar-cloths, and some roses were sent for, of the sweet-scented kind that grow in their country, also some branches of flowers. Then Cortes picked four *papas* to look after the place, and ordered them to have their long hair cut, and to take off the clothes they wore and put on white robes. Instructing them further always to keep themselves clean, he placed them in charge of the holy image of Our Lady, with orders to keep the place swept and decorated with flowers. To see that the *papas* carried out his orders every day he left one of our soldiers, Juan de Torres of Cordoba, who was old and lame, to remain there as a hermit, and ordered our carpenters

to make a cross and place it on a stone base which we had already shaped and whitewashed.

Next morning, mass was said at the altar by Fray Bartolome de Olmedo, and an order was given that the incense of their country should be burnt before the holy image and the blessed cross. They were also shown how to make candles from the local wax, and were ordered to keep them always burning on the altar. For up to that time they had not known the use of wax.

The mass was attended by the most important *Caciques* of the town and others who had gathered there. At the same time the eight Indian girls, who were still in the charge of their fathers and uncles, were brought to be made Christians. It was explained to them that they must offer no more sacrifices and no longer worship idols, but believe in our lord God. They were then instructed in our holy faith and baptized. The fat *Cacique's* niece, who was very ugly, received the name of Doña Catalina and was led up to Cortes, who received her with a show of pleasure. The daughter of the great chief Cuesco received the name of Doña Francisca; she was very beautiful, for an Indian, and Cortes gave her to Alonso Hernandez Puertocarrero. I do not remember the names of the other six, but Cortes gave them to different soldiers. After this we took leave of all the *Caciques* and dignitaries, who were very well disposed towards us from that time forward, and particularly so when they saw that Cortes accepted their daughters, whom we took away with us. So after repeating our promises of assistance, we set out for our town of Villa Rica.

The Tlascalan Campaign

So we set out from Castilblanco and began our march, with our scouts always ahead and constantly on the alert, and our musketeers and crossbowmen in regular order, and our horsemen even better placed. Each man carried his own arms, as was always our custom. But enough of this. It is a waste of words, for we were always so much on the alert both night and day that if the alarm had been given ten times we should have been found ready on each occasion.

In this order we arrived at the little town of Xalacingo, where they gave us a gold necklace and some cloth and two Indian women. And from that town we sent two Cempoalan chiefs, picking those who had most praised the Tlascalans and claimed to be their friends, as messengers to Tlascala. We gave them a letter, and a long-piled Flemish hat of the kind that was fashionable. We knew that the Tlascalans would not be able to read the letter, but we thought that when they saw paper different from their own, they would understand that it contained a message. The message that we sent them was that we were coming to their town and hoped that they would welcome us, since we did not come to harm them but to make friends. We did this because they told us in Xalacingo that the whole of Tlascala was up in arms against us. For it appears that they had already received news of our approach, and of the number of allies from Cempoala and Xocotlan and the other towns through which we had passed, who were marching with us. As all these towns habitually paid tribute to Montezuma, the Tlascalans were certain that we had come to attack them. For their territory had often been invaded by craft and cunning and then laid waste, and they thought that we were attempting a similar invasion. So as soon as our two messengers arrived with the letter and the hat and began to explain their mission, they were brusquely interrupted and made prisoner. All that day and the next we waited for an answer, and none arrived.

The Tlascalan Campaign

Cortes then addressed the chiefs of Xalacingo, repeating his usual exposition of our holy religion, and saying that we were vassals of our lord the King who had sent us to these parts to put an end to human sacrifices and the eating of human flesh, and the other beastlinesses that it was their custom to practise. He told them the many other things that we generally said in the towns through which we passed, and after making them many promises of assistance, asked for twenty good warriors to accompany us on our march. They gave them to us most willingly.

Next day, after commending ourselves to God, we set out in great confidence for Tlascala, and on our way met our two messengers who had been taken prisoner. It appears that in the turmoil of war preparations their guards had carelessly allowed them to escape; and they arrived in such a state of terror at what they had seen and heard that they could hardly manage to speak. According to their story, when they were in prison the Tlascalans had threatened them, saying: 'Now we are going to kill those whom you call *Teules* and eat their flesh. Then we shall see whether they are as brave as you proclaim. And we shall eat your flesh too, since you come here with treasons and lies from that traitor Montezuma.' For although the messengers repeatedly said that we were against the Mexicans and wanted the Tlascalans to be our brothers, they could not convince the Tlascalans that they were speaking the truth.

When we heard the Tlascalans' proud boast, and that they were preparing to fight, although it gave us matter for thought we all cried: 'If it's like that, then forward, and may fortune be on our side!' Then, commending ourselves to God, we unfurled our banner, which the ensign Corral carried before us, and marched on. For both the Cempoalans and the people of the little town where we had slept assured us that the Tlascalans would come out to meet us and resist our entry into their country.

As we marched along, we decided that the horsemen, in groups of three for mutual assistance, should charge and return at a trot, and should hold their lances rather short; and that when they broke through the Tlascalans' ranks they should aim

at the enemies' faces, and give repeated thrusts, so as to prevent them from seizing their lances. If, however, a lance should be seized, the horseman must use all his strength and put spurs to his horse. Then the leverage of the lance beneath his arm and the headlong rush of the horse would either enable the rider to tear it away or drag the Indian along with him. Today one might ask why all these preparations were necessary when there was no enemy in sight to attack us? I answer in Cortes' words: 'Comrades, since we are few, we must always be as ready and as much on the alert as if we already saw our enemy coming to attack us. And we must not only act as if we saw them approaching, but as if we were already fighting them. As they frequently seize our lances with their hands, we have to be prepared for this emergency as well as for any other that may occur in battle. I know very well that in the fight you have no need of orders. I know and willingly acknowledge that you display far greater bravery without them.'

In this way we advanced about six miles till we came to a very strong fortress built of stone and mortar and some other cement so hard that it was difficult to demolish it with iron pickaxes. Indeed it was so well constructed for offence and defence that it would have been very difficult to capture. We halted to examine it, and Cortes asked the men of Xocotlan for what purpose it had been built in this way. They answered that since there was continuous war between their Lord Montezuma and the Tlascalans, the latter had built this fortress to defend their towns, this being their territory. We rested awhile, and this information gave us plenty to think about. Then Cortes said: 'Let us follow our banner, which bears the sign of the holy cross, and through it we shall conquer!' And we answered him as one man: 'May good fortune attend us, for in God lies our true strength!' So we resumed our march in the order I have described.

We had not gone far when our scouts observed about thirty Indians on the look-out. They carried two-handed swords, shields, lances, and feather plumes. Their swords, which were as long as broadswords, were made of flint which cut worse than a knife, and the blades were so set that one could neither

break them nor pull them out. These spies, as I have said, wore badges and feather plumes, and when our scouts saw them they returned to give us warning, whereupon Cortes ordered them to pursue the Indians and if possible take one unwounded, and sent forward another five horsemen to help them if there was an ambush. Then our whole army hurried on in good order and in greater haste, for our allies who were with us said that there was certain to be a large number of warriors concealed in an ambush.

When the thirty Indian spies saw the horsemen approaching and beckoning to them, they would not wait for our men to catch them up and take a prisoner. Indeed they put up so good a defence that they wounded some of our horses with their swords and lances.

When our men saw them fighting so bravely and even wounding their horses, they were compelled to kill five of them. And at this moment a company of Tlascalans,¹ more than three thousand strong, who were lying in ambush, began to shower arrows on our horsemen who were now bunched together. These Indians put up a good fight with their arrows and fire-hardened darts, and did wonders with their two-handed swords. But at this moment we came up with our artillery, muskets, and crossbows, and gradually they began to give way. But they had kept their ranks and fought well for a considerable time. In this skirmish four of our men were wounded, and I think one of them died of his wounds a few days later.

As it was now late the enemy retired, and we did not pursue them. They left about seventeen dead on the field, not counting many wounded. This skirmish was fought on level ground where there were many houses and plantations of maize and *maguey* – the plant from which they make their wine.

We slept near a stream, and we dressed our wounds with the fat from a stout Indian whom we had killed and cut open, for we had no oil. We supped very well on some small dogs, which the Indians breed for food. For all the houses were deserted and the provisions had been carried away. They had even taken

1. They were probably not Tlascalans but Otomis from the town of Tecuac.

The Conquest of New Spain

their dogs with them, but these had returned home at night, and we captured them. They proved good enough food.

We kept on the alert all night, with sentries, patrols, and scouts on the watch and our horses bitted and saddled, for fear the enemy might attack.

Next day, after commending ourselves to God, we set off with all our ranks in good order. Our cavalry had been thoroughly instructed in the art of charging, and also told to prevent the enemy from breaking our line or driving us apart. As we marched on, two armies of warriors, about six thousand strong, came to meet us with loud shouts and the noise of drums and trumpets, shooting their arrows, hurling their darts, and acting with the utmost bravery. Cortes ordered us to halt, and sent forward the three prisoners whom we had captured on the previous day to ask them not to attack for we wished to treat them as brothers. He told one of our soldiers, Diego de Godoy, the royal notary, to watch what happened so that he could bear witness if it should be necessary, in order that we should not be made responsible at some future time for the deaths and destruction that might occur, for we had begged them to keep the peace.

On being addressed by the three prisoners, the Indians became much more savage and attacked us so violently that we could not endure it. Cortes shouted: 'Saint James and at them!' And we rushed at them with such impetuosity that we killed and wounded many, including three captains. Then they began to retire towards some woods where more than forty thousand warriors under the supreme commander, Xicotenga, were lying in ambush, all wearing the red-and-white devices that were his badge and livery.

As the ground was somewhat broken we could make no use of the horses, though by careful manoeuvring we got them over it. But the passage was very difficult, for the Indians' shooting was extremely good, and they did us great damage with their spears and broadswords, also with the hail of stones from their slings. But once we had brought our horsemen and artillery on to the level ground we paid them back. We did not dare break our formations, however, for any of our soldiers who was

The Tlascalcan Campaign

bold enough to break ranks and pursue their swordsmen or captains was immediately wounded and in great danger. As the battle continued they surrounded us on every side, and there was little or nothing that we could do. We dared not charge them except all together for fear they might break our ranks, and when we did charge them there were more than twenty companies ready to resist us, and our lives were in great danger. For they were so numerous that they could have blinded us with clods of earth if God, of His great mercy, had not aided and protected us.

While we were at grips with this great army and their dreadful broadswords, many of the most powerful among the enemy seem to have decided to capture a horse. They began with a furious attack, and laid hands on a good mare well trained both for sport and battle. Her rider, Pedro de Moron, was a fine horseman; and as he charged with three other horsemen into the enemy ranks – they had been instructed to charge together for mutual support – some of them seized his lance so that he could not use it, and others slashed at him with their broadswords, wounding him severely. Then they slashed at his mare, cutting her head at the neck so that it only hung by the skin. The mare fell dead, and if his mounted comrades had not come to Moron's rescue, he would probably have been killed also. We might perhaps have rescued him with our whole company, but – I repeat – we hardly dared move from one place to another for fear they would finally rout us. It was all we could do to hold our own and save ourselves from defeat, for we were in great danger. However, we rushed to the battle around the mare and managed to save Moron from the enemy, who were dragging him away half-dead. We cut the mare's girths so as not to leave the saddle behind. In this act of rescue ten of our men were wounded, and I believe we killed four captains, for we advanced together in close formation, and did them great damage with our swords. After this they began to retire, taking the mare with them, and they cut her in pieces to show in all the towns of Tlascala. We learnt afterwards that they made an offering to their idols of her shoes, the red Flemish hat, and the two letters we had sent them asking for peace. The mare they

The Conquest of New Spain

killed belonged to Juan Sedeño, who had lent it to Moron, being himself incapacitated by three wounds that he had received on the previous day. As for Moron, I do not think I saw him again. He died of his wounds two days later.

The battle went on for a full hour, during which time our shots must have hit many of the enemy, for they were very numerous and in close formation. All our men fought like heroes to save their lives and do their duty. This was certainly the greatest danger we had yet faced and, as we afterwards learnt, many Indians were killed in the fighting, among them eight of their leading captains, sons of the old *Caciques* who lived in their principal town. This is why they retired, still in good order. We were not sorry, and made no attempt to follow them. Being so tired that we could hardly stand, we stayed where we were, in that little town. All the country round was thickly populated, and they even had some underground houses like caves in which many of them lived.

The site of this battle is called Tehuacingo or Tehuacacingo,¹ and it was fought on 2 September 1519. When we saw that the victory was ours we thanked God for delivering us from great danger.

We withdrew our whole force from the battlefield to some *cues* which were as strong and high as a fortress, and dressed our wounded, who numbered fifteen, with the grease of the Indian. One of them died of his wounds. We also doctored four horses that had been hurt. We rested and supped very well that night, for we found a good supply of fowls and little dogs in the houses and, having taken the precaution of posting sentries and sending out patrols, we slept well till next morning.

There was one peculiarity about the Tlascalans in this battle and all others: they carried away any of their men who were hit, and we never saw their dead.

Exhausted by the battle and by our wounds, and having to repair our crossbows and replenish our stock of arrows, we did nothing notable next day. On the following morning, however, Cortes decided to send all our fit horsemen to scour the country, so that the Tlascalans should not think that the recent

1. Probably the present-day village of San Salvador de los Comales.

The Tlascalan Campaign

battle had put an end to our fighting powers, and to show them that although a day had passed without our coming out to pursue them we still intended to follow them up. It was better for us to attack them than to wait for them to come to attack us and thus discover our weakness. As the country was flat and thickly populated, we set out with seven horsemen, a few musketeers and crossbowmen, about two hundred soldiers, and our Indian allies, leaving the camp as well guarded as we could. In the houses and towns through which we passed we captured about twenty men and women, whom we did not harm. But our cruel allies burnt many houses and carried off fowls and dogs, and much other food. We soon returned to the camp, from which we had not gone far, and Cortes set the prisoners free. But first they were given something to eat, and Doña Marina and Aguilar spoke kindly to them, presenting them with some beads and telling them not to be foolish but to make peace with us, for we wished to help them and treat them as brothers. At the same time we released the two chieftains we had captured earlier, and gave them a letter. We told them to inform the *Caciques* of that town, which was the capital of the whole country, that we had not come to harm or annoy them, but wished to pass through their territory on our way to Mexico to speak with Montezuma. These two messengers went to Xicotenga's camp, which was about six miles away among some towns and houses that I think they call Tecuacinpacingo,¹ and when they gave him the letter and our message Xicotenga replied that we could go to the town where his father was, and they would make peace with us by filling themselves with our flesh and honouring their gods with our hearts and blood. But as for his answer, we should receive that early next day.

Still tired from the battles we had fought, we did not find this haughty message encouraging. Cortes, therefore, flattered the messengers with mild words, for they seemed to have lost all fear. He ordered that they should be given some strings of beads, since he wanted to send them back as envoys of peace.

Cortes learnt more from them about their captain Xicotenga and the forces he commanded. They told him that he had more

1. The modern name for this place in Tzompantzinco.

The Conquest of New Spain

men than when he had first attacked, having now five captains under him, each with ten thousand warriors; also that the Tlascalan banner and standard had now been brought out, a white bird like an ostrich with wings outstretched as if about to fly, and that each company could be recognized by its device and uniform, for each chief had a different one, like our own counts and dukes at home.

We knew that they were telling the truth, for some of the Indians whom we had captured and released that day had told the same story very clearly, although we had not believed them at the time. When this story was confirmed, being but men and fearful of death, many of us – indeed the majority – confessed to the Mercedarian friar and the priest Juan Diaz, who spent the whole night hearing confessions – for those who were not afraid confessed also and prayed to God that he would save us from defeat. Thus the time passed until the next day.

Next morning, 5 September 1519, we mustered the horses, and every one of the wounded joined the ranks, to give us what help he could. The crossbowmen were warned to use their supply of arrows very carefully, some of them loading while the others were shooting. The musketeers were to act in the same way, and the men with sword and shield to aim their cuts and thrusts at the enemy's bowels, so as to prevent their coming as close to us as they had done before. The artillery was ready for action and the horsemen had already been instructed to help one another, to hold their lances short, and not to stop and spear an enemy but to aim at his face and eyes, charging and returning at a trot and no man breaking away from the squadron. We left the camp with our banner unfurled and four of our company guarding its bearer, and before we had gone half a mile we saw the fields crowded with warriors, with their tall plumes and badges, and heard the blare of horns and trumpets.

What an opportunity for fine writing the events of this most perilous and uncertain battle present! We were four hundred, of whom many were sick and wounded, and we stood in the middle of a plain six miles long, and perhaps as broad, swarming with Indian warriors. Moreover we knew that they had come determined to leave none of us alive except those who

The Tlascalan Campaign

were to be sacrificed to their idols. When they began to charge the stones sped like hail from their slings, and their barbed and fire-hardened darts fell like corn on the threshing-floor, each one capable of piercing any armour or penetrating the unprotected vitals. Their swordsmen and spearmen pressed us hard, and closed with us bravely, shouting and yelling as they came. The steadfastness of our artillery, musketeers, and bowmen did much to save us, and we inflicted great casualties on them. Their charging swordsmen were repelled by stout thrusts from our swords, and did not close in on us so often as in the previous battle. Our horsemen were skilful and fought so valiantly that, after God who protected us, they were our chief bulwark. Once I saw our company in such confusion that despite the shouts of Cortes and the other captains they could not hold together. The Indians were charging us in such numbers that only by a miracle of sword-play were we able to drive them back and re-form our ranks. One thing alone saved our lives: the enemy were so massed and so numerous that every shot wrought havoc among them. What is more, they were so badly led that some of their captains could not bring their men into battle.

Since the last battle, as we afterwards learnt, there had been disputes between Xicotenga and another captain, the son of the chief Chichimecatecle. The former had accused the latter of having fought badly on the first occasion, and the latter had replied that he had fought better than his accuser, as he would prove in personal combat. As a result Chichimecatecle's son had refused to bring his men to Xicotenga's aid, and had also called on the Huexotzinco men to hold back. What is more, they were now afraid of our horses and our brave fighting with musket, sword, and crossbow; and God's mercy gave us strength to hold out. So Xicotenga was refused help by two of his captains, and we inflicted great casualties on them. They endeavoured to conceal their losses, however, for whenever one of their men was wounded they bound him up and took him off on their backs. So in this battle, as in the last, we did not see any dead.

The enemy were already losing heart, and when they saw that the other two companies were not coming to their assistance, they began to give way. It seems also that at least one of

The Conquest of New Spain

their principal captains had been killed in the battle. They retired in good order, however, and our horsemen were only able to follow them for a short distance, being too weary to ride far. And when we saw we were delivered from that host we gave thanks to God.

One of our men was killed in the fighting, and sixty were wounded. All our horses were wounded also. I too was hit twice, once on the head by a stone, and once in the thigh by an arrow. But this did not prevent me from fighting, performing my watch, and helping our men. And all our wounded did the same. For unless our wounds were very dangerous, we had to fight and watch despite them, for the unwounded would not have been able to perform these duties alone.

Having returned to our camp, well contented and giving thanks to God, we buried the dead in one of the Indians' underground houses, so that they should not see we were mortal but believe that we were indeed *Teules*, as they called us. We piled a great deal of earth over this house so that they should not smell the corpses, and all our wounded were dressed with the grease of that Indian of whom I have spoken. It was a poor comfort to be without even oil and salt to dress our wounds. And there was another thing we lacked – a severe hardship. We had no clothes to protect us from the cold wind that blew off the snowy mountains and made us shiver. Our lances, muskets, and crossbows made a poor covering. Still, we slept more peacefully than on the previous night, when so many of us had been on guard or patrol.

After the battle, Cortes sent the three Indian chieftains we had captured, with the two who were already in our camp and had served as messengers before, to beg the Tlascalcan *Caciques* to make peace and grant us a passage through their country on our way to Mexico. The burden of this message was that we had made this request before, and would kill all their people if they did not now come to terms, and that being well disposed towards them and wishing to treat them as brothers, we should never have attempted to harm them if they had not given us cause. Cortes added other kindly assurances of a similar nature in an endeavour to gain their friendship.

The Tlascalcan Campaign

The messengers willingly set out for the Tlascalcan capital, and delivered their message to all the *Caciques* there, whom they found assembled with many other elders and *papas*. This whole assembly was most depressed by the outcome of the battle and the loss of those captains who were their sons and relatives. It seems therefore that they were ill-disposed to listen to the envoys, and that their decision was to summon all the soothsayers, *papas*, and those others whom they call *tacalnaguas*, who are like wizards and foretell the future, and ask them to discover by their witchcraft, charms, and lots what sort of people we were and whether if they fought us continuously by day and night we could be conquered. They also inquired of their wizards whether we were *Teules* as the Cempoalans asserted, and what things we ate; and they told them to look into these matters with the greatest care.

When the soothsayers and wizards and *papas* had got together and made their prophecies, cast their lots, and performed their usual rites, they seem to have said that they had learnt we were men of flesh and blood, and ate poultry, dogs, bread, and fruit when we had them, but did not eat the flesh or hearts of the men we killed. Apparently our Indian allies whom we had brought from Cempoala had convinced them that we were *Teules* and ate Indians' hearts, that our cannon shot lightning such as falls from heaven, that our greyhound was a tiger or lion, and that our horses were used to catch Indians when we wanted to kill them, and other nonsense of this sort.

Unfortunately their *papas* and wizards told them that we could not be conquered by day but only at night, since though we were valiant our virtues left us at sunset and in the night we had no strength at all. Believing this story, the *Caciques* sent their commander Xicotenga instructions that as soon as possible he should make a strong attack on us in the night. On receiving this command he assembled ten thousand of his bravest warriors and came to our camp,¹ which he assailed from three sides with a hail of arrows and single-pointed javelins hurled from spear-throwers. Then their swordsmen made a

1. Bernal Díaz has left out Xicotenga's earlier reconnaissance of the Spaniards' camp, described by other chroniclers.

The Conquest of New Spain

sudden attack on the fourth side, in the positive certainty that they would be able to carry off some of our men for sacrifice. But God provided otherwise. For though they approached secretly they found us entirely prepared. As soon as our outposts and watchmen heard the noise of their movements, they rushed headlong to give the alarm. As we were all accustomed to sleep in our armour and sandals, and to keep our horses bitted and saddled, and as we kept all our arms at hand, we defended ourselves with guns, crossbows, and swords, and they quickly fled. As the ground was flat and the moon was up, our horsemen followed them a little, and in the morning we found about twenty of their dead and wounded lying on the plain. So they retired with heavy losses, and greatly regretting their night attack; and I have heard that they sacrificed two of their *papas* and wizards for offering bad advice.

One of our Cempoalan allies was killed that night, two men and a horse were seriously wounded, and we took four of the enemy. After thanking God for delivering us, and burying our dead friend and tending our wounded, we set our guard and slept for the rest of the night. But on waking next morning we realized our sad plight. We were all weary and wounded, some with two or three wounds, many of us were ragged and sick, and Xicotenga was still on our heels. We had lost forty-five men in all, in battle or from disease and chills, while another dozen were sick from fever, among them Cortes and the Mercedarian friar. What with our labours and the weight of our arms which we carried on our backs, and our sufferings from cold and lack of salt – for we could never find enough to spice our food – it is not surprising that we wondered how these battles would end, and what we should do and where we should go when they were done. We thought it would be a tough business to march into Mexico, which had great armies, and wondered what would happen to us when we had to fight Montezuma if we were reduced to such straits by the Tlascalans, whom our Cempoalan allies described as a peaceful people. Furthermore, we had heard nothing from the settlers at Villa Rica, nor had they received any news of us.

As there were several excellent and valiant gentlemen among

The Tlascalan Campaign

us who were capable of offering good advice, Cortes never acted without first consulting his soldiers. Indeed, he always bore himself like a good commander, and our Lord's crowning mercy, after our late victories, was perhaps that he gave us soldiers grace and good counsel to advise our Captain correctly. And let me say that every one of us put heart into Cortes, telling him that he must get well again, that he could count upon us, and that as with God's help we had survived these perilous battles, Our Lord Jesus Christ must be preserving us for some good purpose. We suggested that he should immediately set the prisoners free and send them to the great *Caciques* with overtures of peace and a promise to forgive everything, including the death of the mare.

But let me say that Doña Marina, although a native woman, possessed such manly valour that though she heard every day that the Indians were going to kill us and eat our flesh with *chillis*, and though she had seen us surrounded in recent battles and knew that we were all wounded and sick, yet she betrayed no weakness but a courage greater than that of a woman. She and Jeronimo de Aguilar spoke to the messengers we were now sending, telling them that the Tlascalans must make peace at once, and that if they did not come to us within two days we would go and kill them in their own city and destroy their country. With these brave words the prisoners were dispatched to the capital where Xicotenga the Elder and Mase Escasi resided.

When the messengers arrived at Tlascala they found these two principal *Caciques* in consultation. On receiving the message, they were undecided and said nothing for a few moments. Then it pleased God to inspire them with the thought of making peace with us. They sent at once to summon all the other *Caciques* and captains from their towns and those of a neighbouring province called Huexotzinco, who were their friends and allies. And when they had all gathered together in the capital, these two *Caciques*, who were wise men, made them a speech more or less to this effect, as I afterwards heard, though these are not the actual words:

'Friends and brothers, you have seen how often these *Teules*

The Conquest of New Spain

who are in our country expecting to be attacked have sent us messengers asking us to make peace, and saying that they have come to help us and adopt us as brothers. You have also seen how many of our vassals who have attacked them have been captured by them and released immediately. You well know that we have attacked them three times with all our strength both by day and night, and have failed to conquer them, and that during these attacks they have killed many of our people, our kinsmen, sons, and captains. Now they are asking us for peace once more, and the Cempoalans who have come in their company say that they are the enemies of Montezuma and his Mexicans, and have commanded the towns of the Totonac hills and Cempoala itself to pay him no more tribute. You cannot forget that the Mexicans make war on us every year, and you know that our country is so beleaguered that we dare not leave it to find salt, and therefore eat none. Nor can we look for cotton, and so we have little cotton cloth. If our people even go out to seek it, few return alive. These treacherous Mexicans and their allies kill them or make them slaves. Now our wizards and soothsayers and *papas* have told us their opinion about the nature of these *Teules*, and have spoken of their bravery. It seems to me that we should seek to be friends with them, and that whether they are men or *Teules* we should make them welcome. Therefore four of our chiefs must set out at once, taking them plenty of food, and we must offer them friendship and peace, so that they may aid us and defend us from our enemies. Let us bring them here and give them women, so that we may have kinship with their children, for, as these ambassadors of peace tell us, they have brought some women with them.'

When they had listened to this speech all the *Caciques* and principal men approved, saying that this was a wise proposal and that peace should be concluded at once. They asked that a message should be sent to young Xicotenga and his fellow captains telling them to break off hostilities and return at once, the war being now over; and messengers were immediately sent off to him. However, Xicotenga would not listen to the four chiefs, but got very angry and abusive, saying that he was against

The Tlascalan Campaign

peace, for he had already killed many *Teules* and a mare, and wished to attack us once more by night and conquer and kill us all.

When his father Mase Escasi and the other *Caciques* heard his answer they were enraged, and sent immediate orders to the captains and the whole army not to join Xicotenga in an attack or accept his orders if he did not make peace. Even so Xicotenga refused to obey. Taking note of their captain's stubbornness, the *Caciques* sent the same four chieftains to our camp to carry us provisions and negotiate peace in the name of all Tlascala and Huexotzinco. But for fear of Xicotenga the Younger these four old men did not come.

As two days had passed without any happenings of note, we suggested to Cortes, who agreed to our proposal, that we should march against a town about three miles from our camp which had sent no reply when summoned to make peace, and take it by surprise. We did not intend to do it any harm – I mean to kill or wound its inhabitants or take them prisoner – but only to carry off food and frighten or talk them into making peace, according to the way they behaved. This town was called Tzompantzinco,¹ and it had several smaller towns tributary to it, among them Tecoadzumpancingo, the place where we were then encamped, and the territory all around it was thickly populated.

So one night, in the watch before the dawn, we rose up and set out for that town, leaving our camp as well guarded as we could. With us came six of our best horsemen, the soundest of our soldiers, ten crossbowmen, and eight musketeers, and Cortes led the expedition, though he was still suffering from tertian fever. We started our march two hours before dawn, with a cold wind blowing off the snowy mountains, which made us shiver and shake. The horses felt it keenly too, for two of them began to tremble and were seized by colic; which worried us a great deal, for we were afraid that they would die. So Cortes ordered their riders to lead them back to camp and doctor them.

As the town was not far off, we arrived there before day-break; and when the inhabitants saw us they fled from their

¹ See note on p. 147.

The Conquest of New Spain

houses, shouting to one another to look out, for the *Teules* were coming to kill them. Such was their panic indeed that fathers did not stay to look after their children. On observing this, we halted in a court until daylight, to avoid doing them any harm.

On seeing us standing quietly there, some *papas*, who were in the *cues*, and a number of old chiefs came up to Cortes and asked him to pardon them for not having come to our camp and brought us food when we asked them to do so. They gave the excuse that Captain Xicotenga, who was in the neighbourhood, had sent to tell them they must not, since his camp drew some of its supplies from their town, and he had warriors in his army from there as well as from all the rest of Tlascala. Cortes told them through our interpreters, who accompanied us on every expedition, even a night foray, that they need have no fear, but must go at once to the *Caciques* in the capital and tell them to come and make peace, since the war was disastrous for them. Cortes sent these *papas* because so far he had received no reply at all by the other messengers we had sent, and the four chiefs whom the Tlascalans had dispatched to our camp to negotiate peace had not yet arrived.

These local *papas* quickly found us forty or more cocks and hens, and two women to make us maize-cakes. Cortes thanked them for their kindness, and ordered them to send twenty men of their town to the camp at once, who brought us this food without any fear and stayed in the camp till evening. They were then given beads with which they returned home well contented, and they told all the neighbouring villages that we were good men, for we had done them no harm. But when these *papas* and elders informed Captain Xicotenga that they had given us food and women, he scolded them bitterly, whereupon they went to the capital to tell their news to the old *Caciques*, who were very pleased to learn that we were not harming their people, although we might have killed many of them that night, and that we were sending men to negotiate. They therefore ordered that we should be supplied every day with what we needed, and commanded the four chiefs whom they had originally entrusted with the negotiations to leave instantly for our camp and bring us all the food that had been prepared. We then

The Tlascalan Campaign

returned to our camp with these supplies and the Indian women, in a cheerful frame of mind.

On returning from Tzompantzinco with our supplies, very glad that we had left the place at peace, we found meetings and discussions going on in the camp about the great danger we were running every day in this war. On our arrival these conversations became even livelier, and the most active of the debaters were those who had houses and grants of Indians in Cuba. Seven of them – whom for their reputations' sake I will not name – met together and went to Cortes' hut; and the most eloquent of them, who spoke for the rest and was well conversant with their views, said, as though by way of advice, that Cortes ought to consider the condition we were in, wounded, thin, and harassed, and the great hardships we endured by night, as sentinels, watchmen, patrols, and scouts, and in continuous fighting both by day and night. According to their argument, we had lost more than fifty-five of our company since leaving Cuba, and we knew nothing of the settlers we had left at Villa Rica. It was true that God had given us victory in each battle, great and small, since we had left Cuba, and of His great mercy had supported us while we had been in this province, but we ought not to tempt Him so often, or our fate might be worse than that of Pedro Carbonero.¹ They said that Cortes had got us into an unexpected situation, and that one day or another, though God forbid it should happen, we should be sacrificed to the idols. They therefore advised him to lead us back to the fortified town of Villa Real, and to keep us there among our Totonac allies until we could build a ship which we could dispatch to Diego Velazquez in Cuba, and to other places and islands, to ask for assistance. They observed that the ships we had scuttled would now have been useful, and that we ought to have saved at least two of them against necessity. They protested that they had not been consulted about the scuttling or anything else, and that Cortes had listened to men who did not know how to provide for changes of fortune. They prayed God that neither he nor his advisers would have reason to

1. A proverbial figure who led his men into the land of the Moors, where they all perished.

The Conquest of New Spain

repent of it. Now, they said, in many cases we could not carry the extra burdens we were bearing, and we were worse off than pack-horses. For when a beast had finished its day's work, its saddle was taken off and it was given food and rest, but we carried our arms and wore our sandals by both night and day. They went on to cite history, reminding Cortes that neither the Romans nor Alexander nor any other famous Captain had dared destroy their ships and attack vast populations and huge armies with a small force, as he had done. They accused him of preparing his own death and that of all his followers, and begged him to preserve us all by leading us back to Villa Rica, where the land was at peace. The reason they gave for not having said all this before was that the large armies which had attacked us every day from every side had left them no time. Although the enemy had not returned to the attack, these seven soldiers believed that they soon would, and that since Xicotenga with his great army had not come to seek us for the last three days, he must be collecting his forces for another battle like the last, for which we must not stay; and they said much more to the same effect.

Observing that they spoke somewhat haughtily for men proffering unasked advice, Cortes gave them a mild answer in which he said that he was well aware of many of the facts they had mentioned, and that to his knowledge and belief there was not another company of Spaniards in the whole world who had fought more bravely or more courageously endured excessive hardships than ours, but that if we had not marched with our arms continually on our shoulders, and watched and patrolled and suffered the cold we should have perished already, for it was to save our lives that we had endured all this and worse. *Why gentlemen, should we talk of valorous deeds when truly Our Lord is pleased to help us?* When I remember seeing us surrounded by so many companies of the enemy, and watching the play of their broadswords at such close quarters, even now I am terrified. When they killed the mare with a single sword-stroke we were defeated and lost, and at that same moment I was more aware of your matchless courage than ever before. Since God saved us from this great peril, I have every

The Tlascalan Campaign

hope that He will do so again in the future. And I will say more, that in all these dangers you will find no negligence on my part; I shared every one of them with you.' And he had the right to say so, for he was indeed in the front rank in every battle.

'I wish to remind you, gentlemen,' he continued, 'that since Our Lord has been pleased to help us in the past we have hope that He may do so in the future. For ever since we entered this country we have preached the holy doctrine to the best of our ability in every town through which we have passed, and have induced the natives to destroy their idols. Now since neither Xicotenga nor his captains have returned, and we know they are afraid to do so, for we must have inflicted great losses on them in the last battles, and since they cannot reassemble their followers after their three defeats, I trust in God and our advocate St Peter that the war in this province is over. Now, as you see, the people of Tzompantzinco are bringing food and have made peace, and so have our neighbours here who have returned to live in their houses. As for scuttling the ships it was a good plan, and if some of you were not consulted about it, as other gentlemen were, it was on account of my resentment at certain events on the beach, which I do not now wish to recall. The concerted counsel which you offer me today is no more valuable than the advice which you gave me on that occasion. You will find that there are many gentlemen in the camp who will be strongly opposed to the course you advocate, and that it will be better to trust all things to God and carry on in His holy service. As for your observation, gentlemen, that the most famous Roman captains never performed deeds equal to ours, you are quite right. If God helps us, far more will be said in future history books about our exploits than has ever been said about those of the past. For, I repeat, all our labours are devoted to the service of God and our great Emperor Charles. Under his true justice and the Christian law, God in His mercy is aiding us and will turn our good fortune to better. So, gentlemen, it would clearly be wrong to take a single step backwards, for if these people we leave behind in peace were to see us retreat, the very stones would rise up against us. They who at

The Conquest of New Spain

present hold us to be gods and idols and call us so would consider us cowards and weaklings. As for what you say about our staying among our friendly allies the Totonacs, if they saw us return without visiting Mexico, they would rise up against us too. Since we told them to pay no more tribute to Montezuma, they would expect him to send his Mexican armies not only to extort the tribute and make war on them, but also to compel them to attack us; which, in order to avoid destruction and out of their great fear of the Mexicans, they would certainly do. So where we expected friends we should find enemies. And what would the great Montezuma say on hearing that we had retreated? That the whole expedition was a childish joke. What would he think of our speeches and our messages to him? So, gentlemen, if one course is bad the other is worse, and it is better to stay where we are, where the ground is level and thickly inhabited, and our camp is kept well supplied with poultry and dogs. For thank God there is now no shortage of food. But I wish we had some salt, which is our greatest lack at present, and some clothes to protect us from the cold. As for your statement, gentlemen, that we have lost fifty-five soldiers since we left the island of Cuba, from wounds, starvation, cold, sickness, and hardship, and that we are now few in number and all wounded and sick, God gives us the strength of many. It is clearly true that wars destroy men and horses and that we only sometimes eat well. We did not come here to take our ease, however, but to fight when the opportunity offered. Therefore I pray you, gentlemen, kindly to behave like gentlemen, I mean those whose habit is to encourage others whom they see displaying weakness. From now on, keep the island of Cuba and what you have left there out of your thoughts, and try to act, as you have done hitherto, like brave soldiers. For after God, who is our aid and support, we must rely on our own strong arms.'

When Cortes had delivered his reply the soldiers renewed their argument. They admitted that he had spoken well, but urged that ever since we had left Villa Rica our intention had been to go to Mexico on account of its fame as a strong city possessing a great number of warriors. The people of Cempoala

The Tlascalcan Campaign

said that the Tlascalans were a peaceful people, and they had no such reputation as the Mexicans. Yet we had been in great danger of our lives, and if they were to attack us on the morrow in another battle like those of the past, we should be too weary to hold our own. But even if they did not attack us again the march to Mexico seemed to them a very terrible undertaking, and they warned Cortes to reconsider his commands.

Cortes replied rather angrily that it was better, as the psalm said, to die in a good cause than to live dishonoured. And in support of these words the majority of us soldiers who had elected him Captain and advised him to scuttle the ships, cried out that he should not trouble about this chatter or listen to their tales, for with God's help we were ready to act together and do what was right. And so all the talk ended. It is true that they grumbled at Cortes and cursed him, and grumbled at us for our support of him, and at the Cempoalans for bringing us by that road. And they made other unjust accusations. But at such a time they were overlooked, and in the end everyone obeyed perfectly.

I will now go on to tell how the old chiefs of the capital of Tlascala once more sent messengers to their commander-in-chief Xicotenga, telling him without fail to pay us a peaceful visit and bring us food. This was the decree of all the *Caciques* and principal men of that country and of Huexotzinco. They also sent an order to the captains in Xicotenga's company that they must refuse him obedience if he did not go and make peace with us. They sent this order three times, because they knew for certain that Xicotenga did not intend to obey them, but was determined to make another night attack on our camp. For this purpose he had assembled twenty thousand men and, being both proud and very stubborn, now as before he refused to give in. He decided therefore to send forty men with supplies of fowls, bread, and fruit, four miserable-looking old women, much copal, and many parrot feathers; and from their appearance we supposed that these Indians came with peaceful intentions. On reaching our camp they burnt incense before Cortes, though without paying him their customary reverence. 'All this is sent to you by the Captain Xicotenga,' they said, 'so that you

The Conquest of New Spain

may eat. If you are savage *Teules*, as the Cempoalans say, and wish for a sacrifice, take these four women, sacrifice them and consume their flesh and hearts. But as we do not know in what way you do this we have not sacrificed them here before you. If you are men, however, eat these fowls and bread and fruit, and if you are gentle *Teules* here are copal' (which, as I have said, is a kind of incense) 'and parrots' feathers. Make your sacrifice with them.'

Cortes answered through our interpreters that he had already sent to tell them he desired peace and had not come to make war, and that he had come in the name of our lord Jesus Christ, and the Emperor Charles, to explain to them why they should give up their custom of killing and sacrificing, and to beg them to do so. He assured them that we were men of flesh and blood like themselves, and not *Teules* but Christians, also that it was not our custom to kill anyone, that if we had wanted to kill people, their many attacks on us by night and day had given us plenty of opportunities for cruelty. He thanked them for the food they had brought, and warned them not to repeat their foolishness, but to make peace.

It seems that these Indians whom Xicotenga sent with the food were spies sent to examine our huts and shelters, horses and artillery, and to find out how many of us were in each hut, the ways in and out, and all the other details of our camp. They stayed with us that day and the following night, and some went with messages to Xicotenga and others arrived. But our Cempoalan allies, who were watching them, observed that since it was unusual for enemies to stay in a camp all day and night for no purpose, they must be spies. Their suspicions were increased by the fact that when we had visited the little town of Tzompantzinco two old men of that place had informed them that Xicotenga was preparing to make a night attack on our camp in such a way that their approach would not be detected. At that time, the Cempoalans had taken it as a joke or boast and, not believing it, had said nothing to Cortes. As soon as Doña Marina heard this story she reported it to Cortes.

To discover the truth our Captain had two of the most honest looking of the Tlascalans taken aside, whereupon they confessed

The Tlascalan Campaign

that they were spies. He then took two others, who also confessed the purpose for which Xicotenga had sent them. Cortes then ordered yet another two to be taken, and they admitted that Xicotenga was awaiting their report before attacking us that night with all his companies. On hearing this, Cortes sent instructions throughout the camp putting everyone on the alert, for he believed that they would make the assault they had planned. He then had seventeen of the spies arrested and cut off the hands of some and the thumbs of others, which he sent to Xicotenga with the message that this was a punishment for their audacity in coming to our camp to spy. He said also that Xicotenga could come by day or night, whenever he chose, during the next two days, and that if he did not do so we should give him no more time, but go and seek him in his camp. He added that we should have gone to attack and kill them already, had we not liked them, and that now they must cease their foolishness and make peace.

I have heard that these spies arrived at the very moment when Xicotenga intended to set out from his camp to deliver the night attack he had planned. But when he saw his men returning so mutilated and, having asked the reason, was informed of what had happened, he lost his courage and pride. But this was not the only cause of his discomfiture. Already one of his captains with whom he had wrangled and disagreed during the fighting had left the camp with all his men.¹

While we were in camp, not knowing whether they would come in peace as we hoped, and busy polishing our arms, cutting arrows, and doing all that was necessary for battle, one of our scouts ran in to say that a crowd of men and women were bringing loads along the main road from Tlascala and advancing towards our camp. He said that his fellow scout, who was on horseback, was watching to see which way they went. But even as he spoke the other scout galloped in to say that they were very near and coming straight towards us, though they were

1. The actual order of events in the Tlascalan campaign is uncertain; it is very probable that Bernal Díaz places the original night attack too early, and that it actually took place after Xicotenga had sent his spies to the Spanish camp.

The Conquest of New Spain

making short stops from time to time. We were all delighted by this news, for we believed that it meant peace, as indeed it did, and Cortes ordered us to make no display of alarm or concern but to stay hidden in our huts. Then there emerged from the crowd four important men whom the old *Caciques* had entrusted with the task of negotiation. Making their sign of peace, which was to bow the head, they came straight to the hut in which Cortes lived, and with one hand on the ground, kissed the earth, prostrating themselves three times and burning copal. They said that all the chiefs of Tlascala and their vassals, allies and friends, and confederates had come to conclude friendship and peace with Cortes, his companions and fellow *Teules*. Begging his forgiveness for their hostile actions and for the war they had fought against us, they said they had certainly believed us to be friends of Montezuma and his Mexicans, who had been their mortal enemies from very ancient times. For they had seen many of his vassals who paid him tribute, among our companions, and had believed that they were trying to enter their country with their customary guile and treachery in order to steal their women and children. They gave this as their reason for having distrusted the messengers we sent them. But they also said that the Indians who had first come out to fight us as we entered their land had not done so by their command or on their advice. They placed the blame on the Chuntales and Estomies,¹ who were savages and very stupid. As for themselves, however, when they had seen that we were few in number they had planned to capture us and carry us off as prisoners to their lords, in order to gain their gratitude, but they now came to beg our pardon for their temerity. They pointed to the food they had brought and said that they would bring more every day, and that they hoped we would accept it in the friendly spirit in which it was sent, also that within two days Captain Xicotenga would come with other *Caciques* and explain more fully how all Tlascala wished for our friendship.

When they had finished their speech, they bowed their heads, placed their hands on the ground and kissed the earth. Then

1. These were the Otomis; the descendants of earlier inhabitants of Central Mexico. The word *Chuntal* means barbarian.

The Tlascalan Campaign

Cortes addressed them gravely through our interpreters. Making a show of anger, he said that there were reasons why we should neither listen to them nor accept their friendship. For immediately on entering their country we had sent them offers of peace, and of aid against their enemies the Mexicans, but they had refused to trust us and tried to kill our ambassadors. Not content with that, they had attacked us three times, by night and day, and had spied on us and laid ambushes against us. In the attacks they had made on us, said Cortes, we might have killed many of their vassals, but had not wished to do so and we grieved for those who had died though they alone were to blame. Indeed he had made up his mind to go to the place where the old *Caciques* were and attack them. But as they had now offered peace on behalf of the whole province, he would accept it in the name of our King and lord. He thanked them for the food they had brought, and sent them back to their lords with the message that they must either come or send men with fuller powers to negotiate, and that if they did not we would go to their town and attack them. He also ordered some green beads to be given to these men which they were to hand to their *Caciques* in sign of peace, and warned them that when they came to our camp it must be by day and not by night, or we might kill them.

Then these four messengers departed, leaving the women they had brought to make our bread in some Indian huts a little way from our camp, also some fowls and everything else we needed, including twenty Indians to draw water and chop wood. From that time they brought us plenty to eat. And when we saw this and knew that they really meant peace we gave great thanks to God. For at that moment we were lean, weary, and unhappy about this war, of which we could neither see nor forecast the end.

Peace with Tlascala: Embassies from Mexico

As a result of the victories which God granted us in our battles with the Tlascalans, our fame spread through the surrounding country and reached the ears of the great Montezuma in the city of Mexico. If hitherto they had taken us for *Teules*, henceforth they respected us even more highly as valiant warriors. When the news came that so few of us had conquered such a huge force of Tlascalans and made them sue for peace, terror spread through the whole land. Now Montezuma, the great and powerful prince of Mexico, in dread that we might come to his city, sent five chieftains of the highest rank to our camp in Tlascala, to bid us welcome and congratulate us on our great victory over so many hostile bands. He sent a present of very richly worked gold and jewel ornaments worth quite a thousand pesos, and twenty loads of fine cotton, with the message that he wished to become the vassal of our great Emperor, and that he was glad we were near his city, since he felt great affection for Cortes and his brother *Teules*, who were with him. Moreover, he asked Cortes to tell him how much yearly tribute our great Emperor required, and promised to give it in gold and silver, cloth and *chalchihuites*, provided that we did not come to Mexico. This, he said, was not because he would not be very pleased to receive us, but because the land was rough and sterile, and he would not like to see us suffering hardships, which he might perhaps not be able to relieve as well as he could wish.

Cortes answered that he was most grateful to Montezuma for his good will and present, and his offer to pay tribute to His Majesty; and he begged the messengers not to depart until he had visited the Tlascalan capital, for they would then see the conclusion of the war, and he would dispatch them from there. His reason for not wishing to give them an immediate reply, however, was that, being feverish, he had purged himself the day before with some of those camomiles that grow in Cuba and are very good for anyone who knows how to take them.

Peace with Tlascala

While Cortes was talking to these ambassadors of Montezuma, he received a message that Captain Xicotenga was arriving with many other *Caciques* and captains, all clothed in red-and-white cloaks, a cloak half red and half white being the badge of Xicotenga's followers. They said that he was approaching in a very peaceful manner, accompanied by about fifty important men.

When Xicotenga reached Cortes' quarters he made him the most respectful obeisance, and ordered much copal to be burnt. Then Cortes seated him by his side with a great show of kindness, and Xicotenga said that he had come on behalf of his father, Mase Escasi, and all the *Caciques* and the commonwealth of Tlascala to pray Cortes to admit them to our friendship, and to ask pardon for having taken up arms against us. He said that they had only done so because they did not know who we were, and had been quite certain that we had come in the interests of their enemy Montezuma. For the Mexicans frequently used craft and cunning as a means of entering their country to rob and pillage, and they had supposed that they were doing so once more. Therefore they had endeavoured to defend themselves and their land, and had been forced to fight. He said that they were a very poor people who possessed neither gold nor silver nor precious stones, nor cotton cloth nor even salt for their food, because Montezuma never allowed them to go out to search for it; and that although their ancestors had possessed some gold and precious stones, they had long ago surrendered them to Montezuma on the various occasions when they had been forced to make peace or a truce, to save themselves from destruction. So he begged us to pardon him for having nothing left to give, pleading poverty, not lack of good will, as the reason.

Xicotenga made many complaints about Montezuma and his allies, for they were all enemies of the Tlascalans and made war on them. However, they had defended themselves very well, and had meant to do the same against us. But although they had gathered against us with all their warriors three times, this had not been possible, for we were invincible. Having discovered this, they wished to become friends with us and vassals of our lord the Emperor, for they felt certain that in our

company they, their wives, and their children would be guarded and protected, and freed from the danger of surprise attacks by the treacherous Mexicans. Xicotenga said much else besides, and placed his people and his city at our disposal.

Xicotenga was tall, broad-shouldered, and well built; his face was long, pock-marked, and coarse; he was about thirty-five years old, and he carried himself with dignity.

Cortes thanked him very courteously and flatteringly, and agreed to accept the Tlascalans as friends and as vassals of our king and lord. Then Xicotenga begged us to come to his city, where all the *Caciques*, elders, and *papas* were waiting to give us a cordial welcome. Cortes promised to go there soon, saying that he would have done so at once were it not for the negotiations he was carrying on with the great Montezuma, which would delay him until the messengers were dispatched. He then spoke rather more harshly and gravely about their attacks upon us, adding however that since these could not now be remedied, he would forgive them, but that they must see the peace we were granting was firm and enduring. Otherwise he would kill them and destroy their city, and Xicotenga could expect no further talk of peace but only war.

On hearing these words Xicotenga and his companions answered as one man that peace would be firm and genuine, and that they would all stay as hostages for it.

There were then further conversations between Cortes and Xicotenga and his companions, at the end of which the visitors were given presents of blue and green beads for Xicotenga's father, for Xicotenga himself, and for the other *Caciques*, and they were sent back with the message that Cortes would very soon visit their city.

The Mexican ambassadors, who were present during all these discussions, heard all the offers that were made and were greatly depressed by the conclusion of the peace, for they realized that no good would come of it for them. So when Xicotenga had taken his leave these ambassadors of Montezuma asked Cortes half laughingly whether he believed any of the promises that had been made on behalf of Tlascala, for they were all a trick which deserved no credence, the promises of great traitors

and liars who intended to attack and kill us as soon as they had us inside their city and could do so in safety. They reminded us how often the Tlascalans had tried with all their might to destroy us but had failed to do so, losing many dead and wounded in the attempt, whom they now meant to avenge by offers of a sham peace. Cortes replied with a very bold face that this idea of theirs did not trouble him in the least, for supposing it were true he would be delighted of an opportunity to punish the Tlascalans by killing them all. It did not matter to him, he said, whether they attacked him by day or night, in the fields or in the city. But he was determined to go to Tlascala to see whether their offer was genuine.

Seeing that Cortes' mind was made up, the ambassadors asked us to wait six days in our camp, as they wished to send two of their companions with a message to their lord Montezuma, who would return with a reply within that time. To this Cortes agreed, in the first place because he was, as I have said, suffering from fever, and in the second because although when the ambassadors had made their statements he had pretended to attach no importance to them, he thought that there was a chance of their being right and that until he saw a greater certainty of peace he would have to take their views into consideration.

Trusting that the peace negotiations were genuine, and seeing that all along the road we had travelled from Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz the towns were our friendly allies, Cortes wrote a dispatch to Juan de Escalante who, as I have said, had remained behind, with sixty old and sick soldiers under his command, to finish building the fort. In this dispatch Cortes spoke of our lord Jesus Christ's mercy in granting us victory in all the battles we had fought since entering the province of Tlascala, which had now sued for peace, and asked them all to thank God for it. He told them to be careful always to keep on good terms with our friends in the Totonac towns, and asked Escalante to send him immediately two jars of wine that he had left buried in a certain marked spot in his lodgings, also some wafers for mass which had been brought from Cuba, since our supplies were exhausted.

The Conquest of New Spain

This dispatch was most welcome to Escalante, who replied with news of events at Villa Rica; and the things that Cortes asked for arrived very quickly.

About this time we set up a tall cross in our camp; and Cortes ordered the Indians of Tzompantzinco and the near-by farms to whitewash it. It was a beautifully finished work.

To return, however, to our new friends the *Caciques* of Tlascalala: when they saw that we were not going to their city they came to our camp with fowls and prickly pears, which were in season. Each one brought some provisions from his own house, and gave them to us with the greatest good will, asking for nothing in return, but always begging Cortes to accompany them to their city soon. But as we had promised to wait six days for the return of the Mexicans, he put them off with fair speeches. At the end of the prescribed time, six chieftains, all men of importance, came from Mexico, bearing a rich present from the great Montezuma consisting of jewels to the value of three thousand gold pesos, wrought in various shapes, and two hundred pieces of cloth richly worked with feathers and other embellishments. On presenting these to Cortes, the chieftains said that their lord Montezuma was delighted at our great success, but that he begged Cortes most earnestly on no account to accompany the people of Tlascalala to their town, or put any trust in them. For they wished to take him there in order to rob him of his gold and cloth, being themselves so poor that they did not possess a good cotton cloak among them. Moreover, the knowledge that he, Montezuma, regarded us as friends and had sent us gold, jewels, and cloth would make the Tlascalans even more eager to rob us.

Cortes accepted the present joyfully, saying that he thanked them for it, and would repay their lord Montezuma with services, and that if he found the Tlascalans planning the trick he had been warned of, they would all pay for it with their lives. He was however quite certain that they intended no such crime, and he still meant to go to see what they would do.

While these discussions were going on, many more messengers came from Tlascalala to tell Cortes that all the old *Caciques* from the capital and the whole province were now coming

Peace with Tlascalala

to our huts to visit us, and take us to their city. When Cortes heard this he begged the Mexican ambassadors to wait three days for his reply to their prince, as he had now to come to a decision about the past war and the peace he was being offered. They promised to do so.

When the old *Caciques* from all Tlascalala saw that we did not visit their city, they decided to come to us, some in litters, some in hammocks, some carried on men's backs, and others on foot. So they arrived at our camp with a great company of chieftains, and after making three most respectful obeisances before us they burnt copal, touched the ground with their hands, and kissed the earth. Then Xicotenga the Elder began to address Cortes in these words:

'Malinche, Malinche, we have sent many times to beg your pardon for our attack, and to offer you the excuse that it was to protect ourselves from the malice of Montezuma and his powerful forces. For we believed that you were of his party and allied to him. But if we had known what we know now, we should not only have gone out to receive you with supplies of food, but would have had the roads swept for you, and would even have gone to meet you at the sea where you keep your *acales*' (that is our ships). 'Now that you have pardoned us, I and all these *Caciques* have come to ask you to accompany us at once to our city, where we will give you of all that we possess and serve you with our persons and goods. And see, Malinche, that you do not refuse us, or we will depart at once, for we are afraid these Mexicans may have told you some of their usual wicked lies about us. Do not believe them or listen to them, for they are false in everything, and we well know that it is their fault you have not come to our city.'

Cortes answered with a cheerful smile that he had known for years, and long before we came to their country, that they were a good people, and that that was why their attack had so astonished him. As for the Mexicans, they were only awaiting a reply that he was to send to their lord Montezuma. He thanked them heartily for their invitation and for the food they were continually bringing, and for their other kindnesses, and promised to repay them by good deeds. He said that he would

already have set out for their city if he had had porters to carry the *tepuzques* (that is the cannon). These words so delighted the Tlascalans that we could read the joy in their faces. 'So that is why you have delayed,' they said, 'and you have never mentioned it?' And in less than half an hour they had provided more than five hundred Indian porters.

Early next morning we began our march along the road to the Tlascalan capital, with our artillery, horsemen, musketeers, crossbowmen, and all in our customary good formation. Montezuma's messengers had already begged Cortes that they might accompany us, to see how affairs were settled at Tlascala and to be dispatched from there. They asked to be quartered in his own lodgings, however, so that they might not be insulted, for they were afraid that the Tlascalans might abuse them.

Before I proceed any further, I should like to say that in every town we passed through and in others that had only heard of us, they called Cortes Malinche, and I shall call him by this name henceforth in recording any conversations he had with Indians, both in this province and in the city of Mexico, and I shall only call him Cortes in such places as it may be proper. The reason why he received this name was that Doña Marina was always with him, especially when he was visited by ambassadors or *Caciques*, and she always spoke to them in the Mexican language. So they gave Cortes the name of 'Marina's Captain', which was shortened to Malinche.

This name was also given to a certain Juan Perez de Artiaga, a settler at Puebla, because he always went about with Doña Marina and Jeronimo de Aguilar, in order to learn the language. He was known as Juan Perez Malinche de Artiaga, as we discovered some two years later.

From the time when we entered Tlascalan territory to that of our setting out for the city was a matter of twenty-four days. We marched into Tlascala on 23 September 1519.

When the *Caciques* saw our baggage on the road to their city, they at once went ahead to have things prepared for our reception and hang our lodgings with flowers. And when we came within a mile of Tlascala these same *Caciques* who had gone ahead came out to meet us, bringing with them their sons and

nephews and many of the leading inhabitants, each clan or family or party forming a separate group. There were four parties in Tlascala (not counting that of Tecapaneca, lord of Topeyanco, which made a fifth), and their subjects came from all parts of the country, wearing their different costumes which, although made of sisal, there being no cotton to be had, were very lordly, and beautifully embroidered and decorated. Then came the *papas* from all parts of the province, who were very numerous, since these peoples have large *cues* or temples. The *papas* carried braziers with live coals, and incense which they burnt over us all. Some of them wore long white cloaks in the form of surplices with hoods over them, which were, as I have said before, like those of our canons. Their hair was very long and so tangled that it could not have been parted unless they had cut it first. Moreover, it was all clotted with the blood which oozed from their ears, for they had offered them as a sacrifice that day. These *papas* lowered their heads as a sign of humility when they saw us. They wore their fingernails very long, and we were told that these were considered to be pious men who lived good lives.

Many of the chieftains drew close to Cortes and accompanied him, and when we entered the town there was no room in the streets or on the roofs, so many men and women having come out with happy faces to see us. They brought us some twenty cones made of sweet-scented native roses of various colours, which they gave to Cortes and to such other soldiers as they thought were captains, especially to the horsemen. When we arrived at some fine courts where our quarters were, Xicotenga the Elder and Mase Escasi took Cortes by the hand and led him to his lodging. For each one of us they had prepared a bed of matting such as they use for themselves, and sisal cloth sheets. They had found lodgings near us for our allies from Cempoala and Xocotlan, and Cortes asked that the great Montezuma's messengers should also be given quarters close to his own.

Although we clearly saw that we were among a people who were well and peacefully disposed towards us, we did not abandon our customary practice of vigilance. I was told that one captain whose duty it was to post scouts and sentries said

to Cortes: 'They seem very peaceful, sir. We shan't need to have as many guards or be as vigilant as usual.' And Cortes answered: 'That is true enough, gentlemen, as I can see for myself. But it is a good custom always to be prepared. Though they may be a friendly people, we must not trust their peacefulness. We must be as alert as if they were going to fight us and we saw them moving up to the attack. Many captains have been defeated through over-confidence and carelessness, and it is especially needful for us to be on the alert, since we are so few. We must remember, too, that whether in good faith or bad, the great Montezuma has warned us against them.'

The great *Caciques* Xicotenga the Elder and Mase Escasi protested against our vigilance, saying to Cortes angrily: 'Malinche, either you take us for enemies or your actions do not express the confidence you feel in us or in the peace which we have concluded between us. We say this because we see that you keep watch, and because on your way here you marched ready for action, as if your companies were coming to attack us. We think we know the reason for this. It is the wicked accusations that the Mexicans have made in secret in order to turn you against us. But you must not believe them. See, you are here, and we will give you all that you want, even ourselves and our children, and we are ready to die for you. Ask for any hostages you wish.'

We were all astonished at the courtesy and mildness with which they spoke. Cortes answered that he trusted them and that there was no need of hostages; it was enough to see their good will. As to our being on the alert, he said, this was our usual custom, and they must not take it badly. He thanked them for all they had offered us, and promised to repay them in time to come.

When these conversations were over, other chiefs arrived with a great supply of poultry and maize-cakes and prickly pears and the vegetables that grew in their country. The camp was now very liberally supplied, and in the twenty days that we stayed there we always had more than enough to eat.

Early next day Cortes ordered an altar to be put up so that mass could be celebrated, for we now had wine and wafers.

This mass was said by the priest Juan Diaz, for the Mercedarian friar was sick with fever and very weak. Mase Escasi, Xicotenga the Elder, and some other *Caciques* were present, and when it was over Cortes went into his lodging, with those of us soldiers who usually accompanied him and the two old *Caciques*. Xicotenga the Elder then said that they wished to bring him a present, and Cortes answered very warmly that they could bring it whenever they wished. So, many mats were then spread and a cloth laid over them; and they brought six or seven small gold objects, some jewels of small value, and a few loads of sisal cloth. It was all very poor, not worth even twenty pesos, and as they were giving it the *Caciques* said with a laugh: 'Malinche, we know that we have too little to give for you to be grateful. Long ago we sent to tell you that we are poor, and have neither gold nor riches, and the reason is that those wicked traitors the Mexicans, and Montezuma who is now their lord, robbed us of all we used to own, on the occasions when we have had to sue for peace or a truce, in order to stave off an attack. But do not consider the small value of the gift. Accept it with a good grace, as given you by the friends and servants we shall be to you.' Then they brought separately a large supply of food.

Cortes accepted it most gladly, telling them that he valued it more as coming from their hands and being given with such good will than he would a house full of gold-dust brought by others, and that it was in this spirit he received it. He displayed much affection towards them.

It appeared that it had been decided among the *Caciques* that they would give us the most beautiful of their daughters and nieces who were ready for marriage. Therefore Xicotenga the Elder said: 'Malinche, to prove still more clearly how much we love you and wish to please you in all things, we want to give you our daughters for wives to bear you children. For you are so good and brave that we wish to be your brothers. I have one most beautiful daughter who is as yet unmarried, and I should like to give her to you.' At the same time Mase Escasi and all the other *Caciques* said they would bring their daughters and asked us to accept them as wives; and they said much else

and made many other offers. Throughout the day the two old *Caciques* remained by Cortes' side; and as Xicotenga the Elder was blind from old age, he felt Cortes all over his head and face and beard, and touched his body. As for the gift of the women, Cortes answered that he and all of us were very grateful, and that we would repay them by good deeds in course of time. The Mercedarian friar was standing near, and Cortes said to him: 'Father, I think this would be a good time to try to induce these chiefs to give up their idols and stop their sacrifices, for they will do anything we tell them, because of their great fear of the Mexicans.' And the friar replied: 'Sir, that is true. But let us leave the matter until they bring their daughters. Then we shall have a pretext, for your lordship can say that you will not accept the maidens until they give up sacrifices. If that succeeds, good. If not, we shall have done our duty.' So thus the matter rested until next day.

Next day the same old *Caciques* came, bringing with them five beautiful Indian maidens, all virgins. They were very handsome for Indian women, and very richly adorned, and each one being the daughter of a chief brought a maid to serve her.

Then Xicotenga said to Cortes: 'This is my daughter. She is unmarried and a virgin. Take her for yourself' – he put the girl's hand in his – 'and give the others to your captains.'

Cortes expressed his thanks, and with a cheerful expression answered that he accepted the maidens and took them for his and ours, but that for the present they must remain in their fathers' care. The old *Caciques* then asked why he did not take them now, and Cortes replied that he wished first to do the will of our lord God, in whom we believe and whom we worship, and to perform the task for which our lord and King had sent us; which was to make them give up their idols and cease to kill and sacrifice human beings, also cease the other abominations which they practised, and believe as we believed in the one true God. He told them much more about our holy faith, and in truth he expounded it very well, for Doña Marina and Aguilar were so practised that they could explain it very clearly. Cortes showed them an image of Our Lady with her precious child in her arms, and explained to them that this image was

a likeness of the Blessed Mary, who dwells in the high heavens and is the mother of Our Lord, the Child Jesus, whom she holds in her arms and whom she conceived by grace of the Holy Spirit, being a virgin before, during, and after His birth. He told them how this great Lady prays for us to her precious Son who is our Lord and God, and said other fitting things about our holy faith. He then went on to state that if they wished to be our brothers and live on terms of true friendship with us, and if they really wanted us to take their daughters for our wives, as they proposed, they must immediately give up their wicked idols and accept and worship Our Lord God, as we did. They would then see, he told them, how things would prosper for them, and when they died their souls would go to heaven to enjoy everlasting glory. But if they went on making their customary sacrifices to their idols, which were devils, they would be taken to hell, where they would burn for ever in living flames. He said no more about their forsaking their idols, since he had stressed the matter sufficiently in his previous addresses.

Their reply to his statement was as follows: 'Malinche, we have heard from you before, and certainly believe that your God and this great Lady are very good. But remember that you have only just come to our land. In the course of time we shall do what is right. But can you ask us to give up our *Teules*, whom our ancestors have held to be gods for many years, worshipping them and paying them sacrifices? Even if we old men were to do so in order to please you, would not all our *papas* and our neighbours, our youths and children throughout the province, rise against us? Especially since the *papas* have already consulted the greatest of our *Teules*, who has told them that if they omit to make human sacrifices and to perform all the customary rites, he will destroy the whole province with famine, plague, and war.' They concluded their reply by asking us to spare ourselves the trouble of making such a request again, since they would not give up sacrifices, even at the cost of their lives.

When we heard this honest and fearless reply, the Mercedarian friar, who was an intelligent man and a theologian,

remarked: 'Don't attempt to press them any further on this point, sir. It would not be right to make them Christians by force. Please do not overthrow their idols, as we did in Cempoala, at least until they have some knowledge of our holy faith. And what good would it be to clear their idols from one *cue* now, if they were merely to remove them immediately to another? It will be better for them to feel the weight of our good and holy admonitions gradually, so that in future they may recognize the goodness of the advice we give them.'

Three other gentlemen, Juan Velazquez de Leon, Francisco de Lugo, and another, spoke to Cortes to the same effect: 'The father is quite right. You have fulfilled your duty by doing what you have done. Don't refer to the matter again when speaking to these *Caciques*.' And so the subject was dropped. All that our entreaties did was to persuade the chiefs to clear one *cue*, which was close by and had been newly built and, after removing the idols, to clean and whitewash it, so that we could put a cross and an image of Our Lady in it, which we promptly did. Here mass was said, and the princesses were baptized. The blind Xicotenga's daughter was named Doña Luisa. Cortes led her by the hand and gave her to Pedro de Alvarado, telling the old *Cacique* that he was giving her to his brother and Captain, and that he must be glad, since she would receive good treatment. And Xicotenga was satisfied. The beautiful daughter or niece of Mase Escasi was named Doña Elvira, and I think she was given to Juan Velazquez de Leon. The others received baptismal names too, all with the title of nobility (*Doña*), and Cortes gave them to Gonzalo de Sandoval, Cristobal de Olid, and Alonso de Avila. After this he explained to the Indians his reasons for erecting two crosses, which was to frighten off their idols. He said that wherever we camped or slept we placed them on the roads; and with all this they were quite content.

Before I go on I should like to say that when Xicotenga's daughter Doña Luisa was given to Pedro de Alvarado, the greater part of Tlascala paid her reverence, gave her presents, and looked on her as their mistress. Pedro de Alvarado, who was then a bachelor, had a son by her named Don Pedro, and a daughter, Doña Leonor, who is now the wife of Francisco de la

Cueva, a nobleman and the cousin of the Duke of Albuquerque, who has had four or five sons by her, all splendid gentlemen. I should like to add that Doña Leonor is in every way worthy of her excellent father.

Cortes took the *Caciques* aside and asked them very detailed questions about the state of Mexico. Xicotenga, being an important lord and very well-informed, took the main part in the conversations, but he was helped at times by Mase Escasi, who was a great lord also.

Xicotenga said that Montezuma had a vast host of warriors, and that if he wanted to take a great city or attack a province he could put a hundred and fifty thousand men in the field, as they knew from the experience of more than a hundred years of war.

'How is it, then,' asked Cortes, 'that with so large an army they have never entirely conquered you?'

The *Caciques* replied that although the Mexicans had several times defeated them, killing many of their subjects and taking away others to be sacrificed, they had also left many dead and prisoners on the field. Besides, the Mexicans never came so secretly that they did not get some warning; and when the Tlascalans knew that an attack was impending, they would muster their whole army, and with the aid of the Huexotzincans would both defend themselves and counter-attack. Moreover, all the towns and provinces that Montezuma had raided and subdued were very hostile to the Mexicans, and their people were forced into battle and fought against their will. Indeed, it was from them that the Tlascalans received warnings of an approaching attack, which enabled them to put up the best possible defence of their country.

The place from which the most continuous trouble had come to them, said Xicotenga, was a very large city called Cholula, which was a day's march away, and whose inhabitants were very treacherous. It was there that Montezuma secretly assembled his companies, and it was in that neighbourhood that they made their attacks by night. Mase Escasi added that in addition to the forces he brought from Mexico, Montezuma kept strong garrisons in every province, and that all the

provinces paid tribute of gold and silver, feathers, precious stones, cloth, and cotton, also men and women for sacrifice and for servants. He added that Montezuma was such a great prince that he had everything he desired, and the houses in which he lived were full of riches and precious stones and *chalchihuites*, which he had taken by force from those who refused to give them to him willingly. He added that all the wealth of the country was in Montezuma's hands.

The *Caciques* then gave an account of all the servants in Montezuma's palace, which is too long for me to repeat, also of all the women he possessed, and how he married some of them off. In fact they described everything.

They then spoke of the great fortifications of the city, describing the lake, the depth of the water, and the causeways that led into the city, and the wooden bridges on each causeway, and how you could go in and out by boat through the openings in each bridge, and how when any of the bridges were raised you could be caught between them and so be unable to reach the city, and how the greater part of this city was built in the lake, and you could not get from house to house except by drawbridge or in canoes, which the Mexicans kept in readiness. They also said that all their houses were flat-roofed and all the roofs provided with parapets, so that the Mexicans could fight from them.

The *Caciques* also told us how the city was provided with water from a spring called Chapultepec, about a mile and a half from the city, and how it came by an aqueduct to a place from which they fetched it in canoes to sell in the streets. Then they described the weapons which the Mexicans used: their two-pronged javelins which they hurled with a spear-thrower and which would pierce any armour; their many good bowmen, and those who carried lances five or six feet long with flint cutting-edges, so well made that they cut better than knives; their shields and their cotton armour; their many slingers with rounded stones; their other good long lances and flint-edged two-handed swords. They brought us pictures painted on large sisal cloths showing the battles they had fought against the Mexicans, and their way of fighting.

As we had already heard all that the chiefs were telling us, Cortes stopped the conversation and, embarking on a more profound subject, asked them how they had come to inhabit this country, where they had come from, and how it was they differed so much from the Mexicans and were so hostile to them, seeing that their countries were so close together.

They said their ancestors had told them that very tall men and women with huge bones had once dwelt among them, but because they were a very bad people with wicked customs they had fought against them and killed them, and those of them who remained had died off. And to show us how big these giants had been they brought us the leg-bone of one, which was very thick and the height of an ordinary-sized man, and that was a leg-bone from the hip to the knee. I measured myself against it, and it was as tall as I am, though I am of a reasonable height. They brought other pieces of bone of the same kind, but they were all rotten and eaten away by the soil. We were all astonished by the sight of these bones and felt certain there must have been giants in that land. And Cortes said that we ought to send the leg-bone to Castile so that His Majesty might see it, which we did by the first agents who went there.

These *Caciques* also told us of a tradition they had heard from their ancestors, that one of the idols which they particularly worshipped had prophesied the coming of men from distant lands in the direction of the sunrise, who would conquer them and rule them. If we were they, said the *Caciques*, they rejoiced, since we were so brave and good. When they had made peace with us, they went on, they had remembered what their idols had said, and so had given us their daughters in order to have kinsmen to defend them against the Mexicans.

When they had concluded their speech we wondered in amazement whether what they had just said could be true. Then our Captain Cortes answered them, saying that we certainly came from the direction of the sunrise, and that our lord and King had sent us so that we might become brothers to them, for he had heard about them and prayed God to give us grace, so that by our hands and through our intercession they might be saved. And we all said Amen.

My worthy readers will be tired of listening to our discussions and conversations with the Tlascalans. But before I stop, I must mention one other thing about which they told us, and that was the volcano near Huexotzinco, which was throwing out more fire than usual while we were at Tlascala. All of us, including our Captain, were greatly astonished at this, since we had never seen a volcano before. One of our captains, Diego de Ordaz, wishing to go to see what it was, asked the general's permission to climb it. Permission was granted, and Cortes even expressly ordered him to make the ascent.¹ Diego took two of our soldiers and certain Indian chiefs from Huexotzinco, who frightened him with the information that halfway up Popocatepetl – for this was the volcano's name – the earth-tremors and the flames, stones, and ashes that were thrown out of the mountain were more than a man could bear. They said the guides would not dare to climb further than the *cues* of those idols that are called the *Teules* of Popocatepetl. Nevertheless, Diego de Ordaz and his two companions climbed on till they came to the top, leaving the Indians below too scared to make the ascent.

From what Ordaz and the two soldiers said afterwards it appears that, as they climbed, the volcano began to throw out great tongues of flame, and half-burnt stones of no great weight, and a great deal of ash, and that the whole mountain range in which it stands was so shaken that they stopped still, not daring to go forward for quite an hour, until they saw that the eruption was over and the smoke and ashes were getting less. They then climbed up to the crater, which was very round and wide and about a mile and a half across. From the summit they could see the city of Mexico and the whole lake, and all the towns on its shores. The volcano is about eighteen or twenty miles from Mexico.

Ordaz was delighted and astonished with the view of Mexico and its cities. After gazing at them for some time he went back to Tlascala with his companions, and the Indians of Huexotzinco and Tlascala regarded his climb as a very brave deed.

1. This account of the ascent of Popocatepetl seems to have been put in the wrong place. Cortes himself, in his second letter, says that it was climbed when the Spaniards left Cholula.

When he told his story to Captain Cortes and the rest of us, we were greatly astonished. For we had never seen or heard of Popocatepetl as we have today, when many Spaniards, including some Franciscans, have climbed to the crater.

When Diego de Ordaz went to Castile he asked His Majesty to grant him the volcano as his coat-of-arms, which his nephew, who lives at Puebla, now bears.

Since settling in this country we have never seen the volcano belch so much fire as on that first occasion, nor heard it make so much noise. Indeed it did not erupt for some years until, in 1539, it threw out great flames, stones, and ashes.

I must now tell how in this town of Tlascala we found wooden cages made of lattice-work in which men and women were imprisoned and fed until they were fat enough to be sacrificed and eaten. We broke open and destroyed these prisons, and set free the Indians who were in them. But the poor creatures did not dare to run away. However, they kept close to us and so escaped with their lives. From now on, whenever we entered a town our captain's first order was to break down the cages and release the prisoners, for these prison cages existed throughout the country. When Cortes saw such great cruelty he showed the *Caciques* of Tlascala how indignant he was and scolded them so furiously that they promised not to kill and eat any more Indians in that way. But I wondered what use all these promises were, for as soon as we turned our heads they would resume their old cruelties.

When our Captain remembered that we had been resting in Tlascala for seventeen days, and after all we had heard about Montezuma's great wealth and flourishing city, we decided to consult all our captains and soldiers whom he felt to be willing to go forward; and it was decided that we should set out without delay. But a good deal of criticism of this decision was expressed in the camp. Some soldiers said that it was very rash to start attacking this strong city when our numbers were so small, and harped on Montezuma's very great strength. But our Captain replied that we had no alternative. We had so constantly asserted and proclaimed that we were going to see Montezuma that any other course was useless.

When his opponents heard Cortes speaking with such determination, and realized from our shouts of: 'Forward, and good luck to us!' that many of us were ready to support him, there was no more opposition. The men who opposed Cortes in this debate were those who owned property in Cuba. As for me and the rest of us soldiers, we had always devoted our souls to God our Creator, and our bodies to wounds, hardships, and even death in the Lord's service and His Majesty's.

When Xicotenga and Mase Escasi saw that we were determined to go to Mexico they were sad at heart. Remaining constantly in Cortes' company, they advised him neither to embark on the expedition nor to put the least trust in Montezuma or any Mexican. He must not, they said, believe in the homage Montezuma had offered, or in his very humble and courteous words, or in all the presents he had sent, or in any of his promises, for all was treachery. They warned him that in a single hour the Mexicans would take back everything they had given him, and that he must keep careful watch by night and day, since they would most certainly attack us when we were off our guard. In fighting the Mexicans, they said, we should leave no one alive whom we were able to kill: neither the young, lest they should bear arms again, nor the old, lest they should give counsel; and they offered us a great deal more advice of this kind.

Our Captain told these counsellors that he was grateful for their warning, and treated them affectionately. He made them some promises, and gave a great part of the fine cloth which Montezuma had sent him as presents to Xicotenga the Elder and Mase Escasi and the rest. He told them also that it would be a good thing if they could make peace with the Mexicans, for once they were friends the Mexicans might bring them salt and cotton and other merchandise. But Xicotenga answered that a treaty was useless, since enmity was always deeply rooted in their hearts, and such was the Mexican character that under cover of peace they would only practise greater treachery, for they never kept their word, whatever they promised. He begged Cortes to say no more about a treaty, and implored him once more to be on his guard against falling into the hands of this wicked race.

There was some discussion about the road we should take to go to Mexico. Montezuma's ambassadors, who had stayed with us and were to be our guides, said that the best and smoothest way was through the town of Cholula, since its people were vassals of the great Montezuma and we should be well looked after. We all agreed, therefore, that we should go through Cholula. But when the Tlascalan chiefs heard that we intended to follow the way the Mexicans recommended they grew very gloomy and said once more that at all costs we ought to go by Huexotzinco, where the people were their relations and our friends, rather than by way of Cholula, where Montezuma always kept concealed ambushes.

Despite all their talk and advice not to enter Cholula, our captain, in accordance with our decision which had been well debated, still determined to take the Cholula road, in the first place because everyone agreed that it was a large town with many towers and great, high *cues* and was situated on a fine plain – indeed at that time it looked from the distance like our own city of Valladolid in Old Castile – and secondly because it had other large towns all round it and could provide ample supplies, and our friends the Tlascalans were near at hand. So we decided to stay at Cholula until we could see how to get to Mexico without having to fight, for the great Mexican army was something to be feared, and unless the Lord God by His divine mercy were to interfere on our behalf, we had no other way of entering the city of Mexico.

So after much discussion it was settled that we should take the Cholula road. Then Cortes gave orders that messengers should be sent to the town to inquire why, being so near to us, they had not come to visit us and pay us that respect which was our due as envoys of our great lord the King who had sent us to tell them of their salvation. He requested all the *Caciques* and *papas* of Cholula to come immediately to see us and offer their obedience to our lord and King; in default of which he would consider them ill-disposed towards us. While he was giving this message and talking to us and the Tlascalan *Caciques* about our departure and matters of war, news was brought to him that four ambassadors, all men of importance, had just

arrived, bearing presents from Montezuma. He ordered them to be summoned; and when they came before him, after paying great reverence to him and to us who were with him, they presented their gift of rich gold jewels of varied workmanship, worth a good two thousand pesos, and ten loads of cloth finely decorated with feathers, which Cortes received most graciously.

The ambassadors then said on behalf of their lord Montezuma that he was very much surprised that we should have stayed so many days among a poor and ill-bred people, who were so wicked, so treacherous, and such thieves that they were not even fit to be slaves. He warned us that some day or night when we were off our guard they would kill us in order to rob us. He then begged us to come at once to his city, where he would give us a share of what he had, though it would not be as good as we deserved and as he would like to give us. Still, though all supplies had to be carried into the city, he would provide for us as well as he could.

Montezuma did this in order to get us out of Tlascala, for he knew that we had made friends with the people, who had clinched the friendship by giving their daughters to Malinche. The Mexicans thoroughly understood that this alliance could do them no good. Therefore they plied us with gold and presents in the hope of inducing us to come to their country, or at least to leave Tlascala. As for the ambassadors themselves, the Tlascalans knew them well, and told our captain that they were all lords over towns and vassals, and men whom Montezuma employed to negotiate matters of great importance.

Cortes thanked the ambassadors warmly, in flattering tones and with demonstrations of friendship. He answered that he would very soon visit their lord Montezuma and begged them to remain a few days with us. At that time Cortes decided that two of our captains, specially chosen for the task, should visit the great Montezuma and talk with him, and view the great city of Mexico, its large armies, and fortifications. Pedro de Alvarado and Bernardino Vazquez de Tapia therefore set out on the journey, while four of the ambassadors who had brought Montezuma's present remained behind as hostages. Some others, who had grown used to us, accompanied the two captains on

their way. Because Cortes was merely trusting to luck when he sent these two gentlemen, we objected to his decision. We said that we thought it a bad plan that they should go to Mexico only to see the city¹ and its strength, and asked him to send after them and stop them. He therefore wrote, summoning them to return at once, which they did.

The ambassadors who had been escorting them gave an account of all this to Montezuma, who asked them to describe the faces and general appearance of the two *Teules* who had been travelling to Mexico, and to say whether they were captains. They seem to have told him that Pedro de Alvarado was very handsome both in his face and person, that he looked like the sun and was a captain, and in addition they brought a picture of him, with his features sketched very naturally. So they gave him the name of Tonatio, which means the Sun, or Son of the Sun, and called him by it ever afterwards. They told Montezuma also that Bernardino Vazquez de Tapia was a stout man and very friendly, and a captain as well, and Montezuma was very sorry they had turned back.

We chaffed these captains when they returned to camp, saying that it was not a very successful mission on which Cortes had sent them. But let us leave this subject, for it has not much to do with our story, and tell about the messengers whom Cortes sent to Cholula, and the reply they brought.

On receiving Cortes' summons the *Caciques* of Cholula decided to send four Indians of minor rank to present their excuses, and say that they had not come because they were ill. These messengers brought neither food nor anything else, but merely gave this curt reply. The Tlascalan chiefs, who were present when they arrived, told our Captain that the Cholulans had sent these men to make a mock of him, for they were common Indians of no importance. So Cortes sent them back

1. In a note in the original m.s. Bernal Díaz says that he knows of this last incident only at second hand, since he was badly wounded at the time and was fully occupied in getting well. He also cites a different reason for the return of the two captains, saying that Bernardino Vazquez was lying ill in a Mexican city, and that it was Montezuma who sent them back, for fear they would see everything in the city.

The Conquest of New Spain

at once with four Cempoalans to tell the men of Cholula they must send some chiefs, who must arrive within three days, the distance being only fifteen miles. Otherwise he would consider them rebels. He said that when they came he would tell them some things that were necessary for the salvation of their souls and their well-being, and receive them as friends and brothers, as he had received their neighbours the Tlascalans. But if they decided otherwise and did not want our friendship we would take measures that would both displease and anger them.

When the Cholulan chiefs had listened to this message they answered that they were not coming to Tlascala because the Tlascalans were their enemies, and they knew the latter had maligned them and their lord Montezuma. They said that it was for us to leave the territory of the Tlascalans and come to their city, and that if they then acted wrongly we could treat them as we had threatened.

Realizing that their excuse was very just, we decided to go to Cholula; and when the Tlascalan *Caciques* were informed of our decision they said to Cortes: 'So you are going to trust the Mexicans rather than us, who are your friends. We have warned you many times to beware of the Cholulans and of the might of Mexico, and to give you all possible support we have ten thousand warriors ready to accompany you.'

Cortes thanked them very warmly for their offer, but after some debate it was agreed that it would be wrong to take so many warriors into a land where we had to seek friends, and that it would be better to take only a thousand. So we asked the Tlascalans for this number, and said that the rest should remain at home.