

BERNAL DÍAZ

THE CONQUEST OF NEW SPAIN

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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PENGUIN BOOKS

The March to Mexico

WE started one morning on our march to Cholula, taking every possible precaution because, as I have said before, we kept much more on the alert when we expected trouble or attack, and that night we slept beside a river less than three miles from that city, where the Indians made us huts and shelters. A stone bridge has now been built at this place. That same night the *Caciques* of Cholula sent us some men of importance as messengers to welcome us to their country and bring us supplies of poultry and maize-cakes. They told us that all the *Caciques* and *papas* would come out to receive us in the morning, and asked us to forgive them for not having come immediately. Cortes told them through our interpreters that he was grateful for the food they had brought and the good will they showed.

We slept there that night after posting sentries and scouts, and as soon as dawn broke we set out towards the city. When we were on our way and already close to the town, the *Caciques* and *papas* and many other Indians came out to receive us. Most of them wore cotton garments cut like smocks, of the kind worn by the Zapotec Indians – I say this for the benefit of those who have visited that province and seen them – for this is what they wore at Cholula. They came very peaceably and willingly, and the *papas* carried braziers with which they perfumed our Captain and such of us soldiers as were near him. It seems that when these *papas* and *Caciques* saw the Tlascalans who accompanied us, they asked Doña Marina to tell the General it was wrong that their enemies should enter their city like this, with arms in their hands. When this message had been translated to Cortes, he ordered the Captains, soldiers, and baggage to halt, and having done so he addressed us: 'It seems to me, gentlemen, that before we enter Cholula we should put these *Caciques* and *papas* to the test with a friendly speech and see what it is they want. They are complaining about our friends the Tlascalans; and they have good reason for what they say.'

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I should like to explain to them in fair words why we have come to their city. As you gentlemen already know, the Tlascalans have told us the Cholulans are a turbulent people. It would be a good thing, therefore, if they could be brought into obedience to His Majesty in a peaceful way, which is what I think we should do.'

Cortes told Doña Marina to summon the *Caciques* and *papas* to the place where he was on his horse. We were grouped around him. The three chiefs and two priests then came forward and said: 'Malinche, forgive us for not having come to Tlascala to see you and bring you food. It was not for lack of good will but because of our enemies, Xicotenga and Mase Escasi and the rest of the Tlascalans, who have spoken a great deal of evil of us and our lord Montezuma. And not satisfied with abusing us, they now have the temerity, under your protection, to come to our city armed. We beg you as a favour to send them back to their country, or at least to tell them to stay outside in the fields and not to enter our city like this. But as for yourselves, you are very welcome.'

When our Captain saw the justice of their complaint, he at once ordered Pedro de Alvarado and the quartermaster Cristobal de Olid to ask the Tlascalans to put up their huts and shelters in the fields and not to enter the city with us, excepting those who were carrying the cannon and our friends from Cempoala. He asked them to explain to the Tlascalans that our reason for this order was that all these *Caciques* and *papas* were afraid of them, and that when we left Cholula on our way to Mexico we would send for them, and they must not be annoyed by our action. And when the Cholulans saw what Cortes had done they appeared to be much more at ease.

Then Cortes began to make them a speech, saying that our lord and King, whose vassals we were, had very great power and ruled over many great princes and chiefs, and that he had sent us to these lands to warn and command them not to worship idols, or sacrifice human beings and eat their flesh, or commit sodomy or other bestialities; and that as the road to Mexico, where we were going to speak to the great Montezuma, passed through their territory and there was no shorter way, we had come to

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visit their city and would treat them as brothers. Since other great *Caciques* had given their obedience to His Majesty, he concluded, it would be as well if they were to do so too.

They answered that we had hardly entered their country, yet we were already ordering them to forsake their *Teules*, which they could not do. But as for giving obedience to this King we spoke of, this they would do. And they pledged their word to it; but not before a notary. After this we at once began our march into the city, and such was the crowd that came out to see us that the streets and rooftops were full, which does not surprise me, for they had never seen men like us or horses before.

They lodged us in some large rooms, which we shared with our friends the Cempoalans and the Tlascalans who carried the baggage, and brought us food that day and the next; very good food and plenty of it.

After the Cholulans had given us this ceremonious reception, with what certainly looked like good will, Montezuma, as afterwards transpired, sent orders to his ambassadors who were still in our company to arrange with the people of the city that they should combine with an army of twenty thousand men, which he had sent and which was ready to enter Cholula, to make an attack on us by night or day. Then, when we were driven into a corner, they were to bring as many of us as they could to Mexico in bonds. He made them great promises and sent them many jewels and much cloth, also a golden drum, and he told the *papas* of the city that they could retain twenty of us to be sacrificed to their idols.

All was now prepared. The soldiers whom Montezuma had sent with such speed were hidden in shelters and thickets about a mile and a half from Cholula, while others were posted in the houses, and all had their arms ready. Breastworks had been built on the roofs, holes had been dug in the streets, barricades had been erected to impede the movements of our horses, and in some of the houses they had collected the long poles, leather collars, and ropes with which they were to secure us when they led us to Mexico.

So after taking us to our quarters they gave us food for the

first two days, and appeared to be most peaceable in their conduct. Nevertheless we did not relax our usual precautions. On the third day the supplies of food stopped, and no *Cacique* or *papa* came to see us. Such Indians as we saw did not approach but stayed some way off, laughing at us as if in mockery. In view of this our Captain asked the interpreters to tell the ambassadors of the great Montezuma, who were still with us, that they must order the *Caciques* to bring us food. But all they brought was water and firewood, and the old men who brought it said they had no maize.

This same day these ambassadors were joined by others from Montezuma, who told Cortes quite shamelessly that their prince had sent them to say we must not go to his city, for he had no food to give us, and that they wished to return immediately with our reply.

When Cortes understood the unfriendliness of their speech he replied most blandly that he was surprised so great a prince as Montezuma should be of so many minds. He begged them, however, not to return to Mexico, since he intended to set out himself next day to see their prince and put himself at his service. I think he gave them some strings of beads, and the ambassadors agreed to stay.

After this our Captain called us together and said: 'I see that these people are greatly disturbed. We must keep very much on the alert, for they are up to some mischief.' He then sent for the chief *Cacique*, whose name I now forget, asking him to come himself or send some important persons. The *Cacique* replied that he was ill and could not come.

When our Captain heard this he told us to persuade two of the many *papas* who lived in the *cue* close to our lodging to come to him. We brought two of them, without doing them any disrespect, and Cortes ordered that each of them should be given a *chalchihuite*. He then asked them in the most friendly way why it was that the *Cacique* and the other chieftains and nearly all the *papas* were frightened of us, for we had sent to summon them and they had refused to come. It seems that one of these *papas* was a very important personage who had charge or command of all the *cues* in the city, like a bishop among

them, and was held in great respect. He answered that the *papas* were not afraid of us, and that if the *Cacique* and the other dignitaries had refused to come he would go to summon them, for he believed they would do what he asked them.

Cortes immediately told him to go and to leave his companion with us to await his return. The *papa* went and summoned the *Cacique* and dignitaries, who returned with him immediately to Cortes' lodging. Cortes asked them through our interpreters what it was they were afraid of, and why they did not bring us anything to eat; he said that our presence in the city might inconvenience them, but we intended to leave next day to see and speak with the lord Montezuma, and he asked them to find porters to carry our baggage and the *tepuzques*, also to bring us food at once.

The *Cacique* was so confused that he could hardly speak. He said that they would search for the food, but their lord Montezuma had sent them orders not to give us any and did not want us to advance any further.

While this conversation was going on, three of our friends the Cempoalans came in, and secretly told Cortes that they had observed close to our lodgings some holes dug in the streets and covered over with wood and earth in such a way that they could not be seen without close examination. They had removed the earth from above one of these holes, however, and had found that it was full of sharp stakes to kill the horses when they charged. They also said that the roofs had breastworks of dried clay and were piled with stones, and this could be for no friendly purpose, since they had also found barricades of stout timbers in another street. At that moment eight of the Tlascalans whom we had left in the fields outside Cholula arrived and said to Cortes: 'Be careful, Malinche, for this city is hostile. We know that they sacrificed last night to their god of war. They offered him seven persons, five of them children, so that he should give them victory over you. And we have seen them moving all their baggage and women out of the city.'

When Cortes heard this he immediately sent the Tlascalans back to their captains with instructions to be fully prepared in case we sent to summon them. Then he resumed his

conversation with the *Cacique* and the *papas* and dignitaries of Cholula, telling them not to be frightened or alarmed, but to remember the obedience they had sworn to him, and not violate it, or he would punish them. He reminded them that we intended to depart next morning, and that, like the Tlascalans, they must provide us with an escort of two thousand warriors from their city, for we should need them on the road. They answered that they would provide the escort, and asked his permission to go at once to prepare it.

They departed well pleased, for they thought that, trapped between the warriors they were to supply and Montezuma's companies which were hidden in the thickets and ravines, we could not escape death or capture. For the horses would be prevented from charging by the breastworks and barricades which they now instructed their garrison to build in such a way that only a narrow lane would be left, through which it would be impossible for us to pass. They also advised the Mexicans to be fully prepared, since we were setting out next day and they were providing us with an escort of two thousand men. So between the two forces our capture seemed certain. For they could catch us and bind us when we were marching off our guard, and they could be certain of this since they had sacrificed to their war-gods, who had promised them victory.

But let us leave this matter, which they looked on as a certainty, and return to our Captain. Wanting further information about this whole plot and what was going on, Cortes told Doña Marina to take more *chalchihuites* to the two *papas* who had been the first to speak, since they were not afraid, and to ask them in the friendliest way to come back with her, for Malinche wanted to speak to them again. Doña Marina returned to the *papas* and talked to them as she well knew how; and, persuaded by the presents, they came back with her at once. Cortes then asked them to tell the truth about what they knew, for they were priests of idols and chieftains, and ought not to lie. He promised them that what they said would not be revealed in any way, for we were going to depart next morning, and he offered them a large quantity of cloth. They said that their lord Montezuma had known we were coming to Cholula, and that every day he

was of many minds, unable to decide what to do about it. Sometimes he sent them instructions that if we arrived they were to pay us great honour and guide us on to Mexico; and at other times he said that he did not want us to come to his city; and now recently the gods Tezcatlipoca and Huichilobos, for whom they had great devotion, had proposed to him that we should be killed at Cholula or brought bound to Mexico. The *papas* told Cortes that Montezuma had sent twenty thousand warriors on the previous day, half of whom were already inside the city walls, while the other half were hidden in some ravines near by, and that these men had already been informed that we were going to set out next day. They spoke also about the barricades that had been put up, and the escort of two thousand men that we had demanded. He said the Mexicans had agreed that twenty of us were to be left to be sacrificed to the idols of Cholula.

Cortes ordered these *papas* to be given a present of richly embroidered cloth, and told them to say nothing about their conversation with us, for if they disclosed the secret we would certainly kill them when we returned from Mexico. He said that we still intended to leave next morning, and told them to summon all the *Caciques* so that he could speak with them then.

That night Cortes discussed with us what should be done, for he had very able men who could give good advice. And as usually happens in such cases, some said that it would be better to change our route and go through Huexotzinco, and some that we must preserve the peace at all costs and return to Tlascala. Others of us, however, stated our opinion that if we let this treachery pass unpunished we should meet with worse in other places, and that since we were in this town and amply stocked with provisions, we should fight them there, for they would feel the effect of it more in their homes than in the open fields. We said that the Tlascalans should be warned at once to join us, and everyone approved this last plan.

These are the details. As Cortes had already advised them that we were leaving next day, we should make a show of tying up our baggage, which was little enough. Then, in the

large courts in which we were lodged, which were surrounded by high walls, we should give the Indian warriors the beating they deserved. As for Montezuma's ambassadors, we should conceal our feelings from them, telling them that the wicked Cholulans had planned a treacherous attack and intended to throw the blame on their lord Montezuma and themselves, his ambassadors, but that we did not believe Montezuma had given any such orders, and therefore begged them to stay in their apartments and have no more communication with the people of that city, so that we should have no reason to think that they had any part in this treachery. We would then ask them to go with us as our guides to Mexico.

As things turned out, the ambassadors answered that neither they nor their lord Montezuma knew anything about what we were telling them and, little though they liked it, we put a guard on them so that they should not go away without our permission and Montezuma should not find out that we knew it was he who ordered the whole matter.

That night we were on the alert and under arms, with our horses saddled and bridled. Though it was always our custom to keep a good watch, we had more sentinels and patrols than usual, for we felt certain that all the companies, Mexican and Cholulan, would attack us that night.

Now a certain old Indian woman, a *Cacique's* wife who knew all about the plot and the trap that had been prepared, came secretly to Doña Marina, having noticed that she was a young woman and handsome and rich, and advised her to come to her house if she wanted to escape with her life, because that night or next day we should all be killed, by command of the great Montezuma. The plan was, she said, that the Cholulans and Mexicans should join forces, and that none of us should be left alive except those who were to be taken bound to Mexico. But knowing of this, and feeling some commiseration for Doña Marina, the old woman had come to tell her she had better collect her possessions and come to her house, where she would marry her to her son, the brother of another youth who accompanied her.

When Doña Marina heard her story, she said to the old

woman, with her usual quickwittedness: 'Oh, mother, I am indeed grateful to you for telling me this! I would come with you at once, but I have no one here whom I can trust to carry my clothes and golden jewels, of which I have plenty. Wait here a little, mother, I implore you, you and your son, and we will set out tonight. For now, as you see, these *Teules* are on the watch, and would hear us.'

The old woman believed what she had said and remained chatting with her. Doña Marina asked her how they were going to kill us all, and how, when, and where the plot had been made. And the old woman told her exactly what the *papas* had told us. Then Doña Marina asked her: 'Seeing that the business is so secret, how did you come to know about it?' She answered that her husband had told her, for he was captain of one of the clans in the city, and as captain he was now out with the warriors under his command, giving them orders to join up with the great Montezuma's companies in the ravines, where she thought they were already assembling in expectation of our departure, with the intention of killing us there. As for the plot, she had known about it for three days, since they had sent her husband a gilded drum from Mexico, and rich cloaks and golden jewels to three other captains, as an inducement to bring us bound to their lord Montezuma. When Doña Marina heard this, she concealed her feelings from the old woman and said: 'I am indeed glad that this son of yours to whom you want to marry me is an important person - we have been talking a long while, and I do not want them to notice us; so wait here, mother, and I will begin to bring my possessions, because I cannot carry everything out at once. You and your son, my brother, must look after them, and then we shall be able to go.' The old woman believed all she said, and she and her son sat down to rest.

Doña Marina burst into the room where Cortes was and told him all about her conversation with the Indian woman. Our Captain ordered the old woman to be brought before him, and questioned her about these treasons and plots; and she told him exactly the same story as he had heard from the *papas*. He then put a guard on her so that she should not escape.

When dawn broke it was marvellous to see the haste with which the *Caciques* and *papas* brought in the Indian warriors. Laughing with joy, as if they had already caught us in their nets and snares, they brought us more warriors than we had asked for, and large as the courtyards are – for they still stand undemolished as a memorial of the past – they would not hold them all. Though it was early when the Cholulan warriors arrived, we were already quite prepared for what had to be done. Soldiers with swords and shields were stationed at the gate of the great court so as not to let a single armed Indian escape.

When our Captain, mounted on his horse, with many soldiers round him for a guard, saw that the *Caciques*, *papas*, and warriors had assembled, he said: 'How anxious these traitors are to see us among the ravines so that they can gorge themselves on our flesh. But Our Lord will prevent it.' He then asked for the two *papas* who had revealed the plot, and was told that they were at the gate of the courtyard with some other *Caciques* who were about to enter; and he sent the interpreter Aguilar to tell them to go home, since we had no need of their presence now. For they had done us a good turn and he did not want to repay it by killing them. Still on his horse, with Doña Marina beside him, Cortes then asked the *Caciques* why they had turned traitors and decided the night before that they would kill us, seeing that we had done them no harm but had merely warned them against certain things as we had warned every town through which we had passed: against wickedness and human sacrifice, and the worship of idols, and eating their neighbours' flesh, and sodomy. All we had done was to tell them to lead good lives and inform them of certain matters concerning our holy faith, and this without compulsion of any kind. For what purpose, he asked, had they recently prepared long, stout poles, with collars and many ropes, and stored them in a house near their large *cue*? And why three days ago had they raised barricades and dug holes in the streets, and built breastworks on the roofs of their houses? And why had they sent their wives and children and goods out of the city? Their hostility was plain to see, and their treachery also, which they could not conceal, for

they had not even brought us food, but only water and firewood as a mockery, and had said they had no maize. He was well aware, he said, that they had many companies of warriors lying in wait for us in some ravines near by ready to carry out the treacherous attack they had planned, with many other bands of warriors who had joined them the night before in the belief that we should be passing that way on our march to Mexico. So in return for our coming to treat them like brothers, and tell them the commands of our lord God and the King, they were planning to kill us and eat our flesh, and had already prepared the pots with salt and peppers and tomatoes. If this was what they wanted, he said, it would have been better if they had made war on us in the field like good, brave warriors, as their neighbours the Tlascalans had done. He knew very well all that they had planned in the city, and even that they had promised their god, the god of war, to sacrifice twenty of us before his idol, also that three nights ago they had sacrificed seven Indians to him so that he might give them victory, which he had promised them. But being both wicked and false, he neither had nor would have any power over us, and all the crimes and treacheries they had planned and carried out were about to recoil on themselves.

Doña Marina translated this speech and made it perfectly clear to them. When they heard it the *Caciques* and *papas* and captains said that what she stated was true but it was not their fault, since Montezuma's ambassadors had commanded them to do it, by order of their master.

Then Cortes told them that the King's laws decreed such treachery should not go unpunished, and that they must die for their crime. Then he ordered a musket to be fired, which was the signal we had agreed on; and they received a blow they will remember for ever, for we killed many of them, and the promises of their false idols were of no avail.

In less than two hours our Tlascalan allies, who as I have said had remained in the fields, arrived after fighting a tough battle in the streets, where the Cholulans had posted other companies to defend the town and prevent their entrance, which had been quickly defeated however. The Tlascalans went about

the place plundering and taking prisoners, and we could not stop them. Next day more bands arrived from the Tlascalans towns, and did great damage too, for they hated the Cholulans. The sight of this destruction aroused compassion in Cortes and his soldiers, and we stopped the Tlascalans from doing any more harm. Cortes ordered Cristobal de Olid to summon all their captains so that he could talk to them, and they very promptly came. He told them to collect their people together and camp in the fields, which they did and only the Cempoalans remained with us.

Just then certain *Caciques* and *papas* of Cholula who belonged to other districts and claimed to have taken no part in the plot – for it is a large city and they were a separate party or faction – came and asked Cortes to pardon the treachery that had been plotted against us now that the traitors had paid for it with their lives. Then the two friendly *papas* who had revealed the plot and the old captain's wife who had wanted Doña Marina for her daughter-in-law, also came; and they all begged Cortes to pardon the people.

When they spoke to him Cortes made a great display of anger, and ordered Montezuma's ambassadors, who had been kept with us, to be summoned. He said that the whole city deserved destruction, but that out of respect for the lord Montezuma, whose vassals they were, he would pardon them. Thenceforth, however, they must be of good behaviour, for if there were any repetition of the recent happenings they would pay for it with their lives.

Then he summoned the Tlascalans from the fields and told them to return the men and women they had taken prisoner, since the damage they had done was enough. The Tlascalans, however, protested, saying that the Cholulans deserved far worse punishment for the many treacherous attacks they had made on them. Nevertheless, on Cortes' instructions they surrendered many persons, but they kept a rich store of gold and robes, cotton, salt, and slaves. Cortes went further, however. He persuaded the two peoples to make friends; and from what I have heard I believe their friendship remains unbroken.

Furthermore, Cortes ordered the *papas* and *Caciques* of Cholula to bring the people back to the city, to hold their

markets and fairs, and have no fear, for no harm would be done them. They answered that the city would be entirely peopled again within five days, since most of the inhabitants were at present hiding in the hills. They said that Cortes would have to choose a *Cacique* for them since their former *Cacique* was among those who had been killed in the courtyard. He asked them who should succeed to the office, and they said the brother of the old *Cacique*. So Cortes at once appointed him governor till further orders.

Afterwards, when he saw that the inhabitants had returned confidently and were holding their markets, he summoned the *papas* and captains and other dignitaries of the town and gave them a clear exposition of the principles of our holy faith. He told them to give up worshipping their idols, to stop sacrificing and eating human flesh, to give up robbery and their customary bestialities. He pointed out that their idols were wicked and had deceived them, and reminded them of the lying promises of victory they had made five days before, when seven persons had been sacrificed. All that they told the *papas* and the people being evil, he begged the Cholulans to throw them down and smash them to pieces. But if they were unwilling, he said we would do it for them. He also ordered them to whitewash a place rather like a shrine, so that we could put up a cross there.

In the matter of the cross, they immediately did what we asked, and they promised to pull down the idols. But although we told them to do so many times they put it off. Then the Mercedarian friar said that it was too much to expect the chiefs to destroy their idols until they had a better understanding of our faith, and until they saw the outcome of our visit to Mexico. He added that time would show what we ought to do, and that our exhortations and the setting up of the cross were enough.

Cholula is situated on a plain with many other towns around it; Tepeaca, Tlascala, Chalco, Tecamachalco, Huexotzinco, and a great many more. It is a land rich in maize and other vegetables, and in peppers, and in the *maguery* from which they brew their wine. They make very good pottery in this district, of red and black and white clay painted in various designs, and

they supply Mexico and all the neighbouring provinces with it, as Talavera or Placencia do in Castile. At that time the city had many lofty towers, which were the temples and shrines in which they kept their idols, in particular the great *cue* which was higher than that of Mexico, although the *cue* at Mexico was very grand and tall. They had courts also for the service of the *cues*. We heard that they had a very great idol, the name of which I forget, but they were very devoted to it and came from many places to sacrifice to it and hold services like *novenas*. They gave it offerings of part of their property.

Let us now turn to those companies sent by the great Montezuma which were posted in the ravines beside Cholula and in pursuance of the plot had constructed barricades and narrow lanes to prevent our horses from charging. When they heard what had happened they returned to Mexico at a quick pace and gave Montezuma an account of the way things had gone. But though they went fast the news had already reached him through the *Caciques* who had been with us and who ran to him post-haste. We learnt on trustworthy authority that when the prince heard the news he was deeply grieved and angry, and that he immediately sacrificed some Indians to his idol Huichilobos, the god of war, in order that the god might tell them what would be the outcome of our journey to Mexico and whether he should admit us into the city. We even heard that for two days he remained shut in at his devotions and sacrifices with his ten principal priests, and that the idol advised him to send messengers to us disclaiming all responsibility for the Cholula affair, and to admit us to Mexico with demonstrations of friendship. For once we were inside he could either cut off our food and water or raise one of the bridges and then kill us. If he were to attack us, he would put an end to us all in a single day, and he could then offer his sacrifices to Huichilobos, who had made this reply, and to Tezcatlipoca, the god of hell; and they could feast on our thighs, legs, and arms, and the snakes, serpents, and tigers that they kept in wooden cages, as I shall relate in due course, could gorge on our entrails and bodies and all that was left.

The news of the plot and of the Cholulans' punishment

spread through all the provinces of New Spain. If we had a reputation for bravery before – for they had heard of the battles of Champoton and Tabasco, and of Cingapacinga and the affair of Tlascala, and called us *Teules* after their gods or evil things – from now on they took us for magicians and said that no plot against us could be so secret as to escape discovery. On this account they showed good will towards us.

I think that my readers must have heard enough of this tale of Cholula, and I wish that I were finished with it. But I cannot omit to mention the cages of stout wooden bars that we found in the city, full of men and boys who were being fattened for the sacrifice at which their flesh would be eaten. We destroyed these cages, and Cortes ordered the prisoners who were confined in them to return to their native districts. Then, with threats, he ordered the *Caciques* and captains and *papas* of the city to imprison no more Indians in that way and to eat no more human flesh. They promised to obey him. But since they were not kept, of what use were their promises?

Let us anticipate a little and say that these were the great cruelties about which the bishop of Chiapas, Fray Bartolome de las Casas, wrote, and was never tired of talking. He insisted that we punished the Cholulans for no reason at all, or just to amuse ourselves and because we had a fancy to. He writes so persuasively that he would convince anyone who had not witnessed the event, or had no knowledge of it, that these and the other cruelties of which he writes took place as he says, whereas the reverse is true. Let the Dominicans beware of this book of his, because they will find it contradicts the facts. I should like to say also that some good Franciscans, who were the first friars His Majesty sent to New Spain after the capture of Mexico, went to Cholula to inquire into the details of this punishment and the reason for it, and examined the actual *papas* and elders of the city. After questioning them thoroughly they found the facts to conform exactly with the account I have written, and not with the bishop's. If we had not inflicted that punishment, our lives would have been in great danger from the companies of Mexican warriors and Cholulans, and their barricades and breastworks. And if we had been so

unfortunate as to be killed, this New Spain of ours would not have been conquered so rapidly, nor would another *armada* have dared to set out, or if it had done so it would have met with greater difficulties, because the Mexicans would have defended the ports. And they would still have remained in a state of idolatry.

We had been at Cholula for fourteen days and there was nothing more for us to do. We saw the city full of people again and the markets being held; we had made peace between the Cholulans and the Tlascalans, we had erected a cross, and we had instructed them in the tenets of our holy faith. But realizing that the great Montezuma was sending spies into our camp to inquire secretly into our plans and learn whether we intended to press on to his capital – for he succeeded in getting a very thorough knowledge of everything from the two ambassadors who were with us – Cortes decided to consult certain captains and soldiers whom he knew to be favourably disposed towards him – and who were not only brave but sound advisers – for he never did anything without first inquiring our opinion.

It was agreed that we should send a mild and friendly message to the great Montezuma, saying that in order to fulfil the purpose for which our lord the King had sent us we had crossed many seas and distant lands, and all this for the sole purpose of visiting him and telling him certain things which would be very profitable to him when he understood them. Furthermore, that on our way to his city his ambassadors had guided us to Cholula, which they said was tributary to him, and that for the first two days we spent there the inhabitants had treated us well, but that on the third day they had treacherously plotted to kill us. But since we were men against whom no trickery or double-dealing or wickedness could be plotted without our immediately discovering it, we had punished some of them who had hatched this design against us; and since our Captain knew they were his subjects, out of respect for his person and because of our great friendship for him, we had refrained from destroying and killing all those who had shared in the planning of this treachery. However, the worst of it was that the *papas* and *Caciques* said it was by his advice and at his command and his ambassa-

dors' that the Cholulans had decided on this action. We had refused to believe that so great a prince would give such commands, especially as he had declared himself our friend; and we had inferred from his character that if his idols had put such an evil thought into his head as to make war on us he would do it in the open field. However, we did not care whether we were attacked in the open country or in the town, by day or by night, for we would kill anyone who ventured to do so. But as we felt quite certain that he was our great friend, and wished to see and speak with him, we would set out for his city immediately, to give him a very complete account of what our lord the King had commanded us to do.

When Montezuma received this message and learnt that we did not blame him alone for the affair at Cholula, he and his *papas* resumed, as we heard, the fasts and sacrifices to see whether their gods would now give him different advice about allowing us to enter the city or would repeat their previous commands. The gods gave them the same advice as before, that he should certainly let us in and then he could kill us when he chose. Montezuma's captains and *papas* also advised him that if he tried to prevent our entry we would fight him in his subject towns, seeing that we had the Tlascalans and all the Totonacs of the hills as our friends and other towns also had accepted our alliance. The best way to avoid these evils, they said, was to follow the advice which his god Huichilobos had given.

When the great Montezuma had once more taken counsel with his god and his *papas* and captains and they had all advised him to let us enter the city where he could safely kill us; and when he had received our protestations of friendship and our boast that we were not the sort of men against whom plots could be hatched in secret, and that we did not care whether we were attacked in town or country, by night or day, or by any sort of craft; and when, in addition, he had reflected on our wars with Tlascala and the affairs of Champoton, Tabasco, and Tzompantzinco and the recent events in Cholula, he was not only dazed, but he was also afraid. After much deliberation, therefore, he sent six chieftains with a present of gold and

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jewels of various sorts which were estimated to be worth more than two thousand pesos, and also some loads of very rich cloaks, beautifully worked.

When these chiefs came before Cortes with the present they touched the ground with their hands, and addressed him after the usual prostrations: 'Malinche, our lord the great Montezuma sends you this present, and begs you to accept it with the great love he has for you and all your brothers. He says that the wrong which the people of Cholula did you grieves him greatly, and that he wishes to visit further punishment upon them, for they are a wicked and lying people, in that they tried to lay the blame on him and his ambassadors for the crime they attempted to commit.' Montezuma then assured us that he was truly our friend, and that we could come to his city whenever we liked, for he wished to do us great honour as very valiant men and messengers of one whom we proclaimed to be so great a king. But because he had no food to give us, everything having to be brought into the city by porters since it was built on a lake, he could not give us a very adequate reception. Still, he would endeavour to do us all the honour he could, and had ordered the towns through which we had to pass to give us everything we might need.

When this speech was explained to Cortes he received the present very graciously and, embracing the messengers, ordered them to be given some twisted glass beads. We captains and soldiers were all delighted with the good news that Montezuma had invited us to the city, for most of us had been fervently desiring this every day, especially those who had left no estates behind us in Cuba, and had come on two voyages of exploration before joining Cortes.

Let us leave this subject and say that the Captain gave the ambassadors a good and cordial reply, and ordered three of those who had come with the present to remain behind and act as our guides, while the other three returned to their lord with our answer and the news that we were already on the way.

When the Tlascalan *Caciques*, Xicotenga the Elder and Mase Escasi, heard that we were going they were sad at heart. Reminding Cortes of their frequent warnings, they begged him

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once more to be cautious, and not to enter this strong city in which the Mexicans had so many warriors. For one day or another, we would be attacked, and they were afraid that we could not escape with our lives. However, out of their good will for us, they offered to send ten thousand men under valiant captains to accompany us and carry the provisions for our journey.

Cortes thanked them warmly for their friendly offer, but answered that it would be wrong to enter Mexico with such a host of warriors, especially as they and the Mexicans were on such bad terms. He said that he only needed a thousand men, to carry the *tepuzques* and the baggage and clear some of the roads, and they immediately sent the thousand Indians, very well equipped.

Just as we were about to set out, the *Caciques* and all the principal warriors whom we had brought from Cempoala, who had marched with us and served us very well and faithfully, came to Cortes and said that they wished to go no nearer to Mexico than Cholula, but to return since they felt sure that to go to that city would mean certain death both for them and for us. For the great Montezuma would order them to be killed, since they were the leading men of Cempoala and had violated their obedience to him by refusing to pay tribute and imprisoning his tax-collectors.

When Cortes saw their determination, he replied through our interpreters that they need have no fear of coming to any harm. For as they would march in our company, who would dare to molest either them or us? He asked them to change their minds and stay with us, and promised to make them rich. But although Cortes urged them, and Doña Marina addressed them in the most warm-hearted manner, they still insisted on returning. Seeing that they were resolved, Cortes observed: 'God forbid that we should take these Indians by force, who have served us so well!' And he called for many loads of rich cloaks, which he divided among them, setting aside two loads each for our friend the fat *Cacique* who was lord of Cempoala and the other great *Cacique*, his nephew. He also wrote to Juan de Escalante whom we had left behind as Captain, giving him news of all that

had happened to us and saying that we were on our way to Mexico. He told him to look after the settlers well and keep a good watch and be alert by day and night, also to finish building the fortress and to support the natives of those parts against the Mexicans and see that none of the soldiers under his command molested them.

When he had written this letter and the Cempoalans had departed we set out on our journey, keeping well on the alert.

We left Cholula in our usual strict formation, with our mounted scouts and most active foot-soldiers prospecting the country ahead, and arrived that same day at some huts which stand on a sort of hill six miles from Cholula. I think the place is called Iscalpan; and it is a settlement from Huexotzinco. Here we were soon visited by the *Caciques* and *papas* of the near-by towns of Huexotzinco, who were friends and allies of the Tlascalans, also by men from other small places on the slopes of the volcano near the border. These dignitaries brought us food and a present of gold jewellery of little value, which they asked Cortes to accept, considering not the paltriness of the gift but the good will with which it was given. Then they advised him not to go to Mexico, since it was a very strong city and full of warriors, and we should be running a great risk. But if we decided to go, they said, we must look out when we had climbed the pass, for we should find two wide roads, one leading to a town called Chalco and the second to another called Tlamanalco,¹ both subject to Mexico. One of the roads had been swept and cleared so that we might be tempted to take it, and the other was blocked by great pines and other stout trees to make it impassable for horses. They said that a little way down the mountain, along the road which had been cleared, and which the Mexicans thought we must choose, they had cut away a piece of the hillside and made ditches and barricades, and that some bands of Mexicans were waiting there to kill us. They advised us, therefore, not to take the swept road

1. Bernal Díaz' memory is inaccurate. The right-hand road led by way of Tlamanalco to Chalco, and the other, which was more direct, went to Amecameca. According to Cortes' second letter, it was this road that the expedition took.

but the one which had been blocked by trees, and promised to send us plenty of men who, together with the Tlascalans, would find it quite easy to remove these obstacles and clear the way which would take us to Tlamanalco.

Cortes accepted their present very graciously, and thanked them for their counsel. With God's aid, he said, he intended to go on; and he would take the road they advised. Early next morning we began our march, and it was nearly midday when we reached the ridge of the mountain, where we found the roads exactly as the people from Huexotzinco had described them. Here we rested a little and began to think of the Mexican bands and the cut in the hillside and those barricades about which we had been warned.

Then Cortes summoned the ambassadors of the great Montezuma who accompanied us, and asked them how it was that those two roads were in that condition, one very clean and swept and the other blocked by newly felled trees. They answered that this was in order that we should go by the cleared road, which led to a town called Chalco, where we would be well received since it belonged to their lord Montezuma, and that they had felled the trees and blocked the other road so that we should not use it, for there were bad places on it and it took a rather roundabout way to Mexico by way of another town which was not so big as Chalco. Cortes then said that he wished to go by the blocked road, and we began to climb the mountain with the greatest caution, our allies shifting the stout tree trunks with great efforts to let us pass; some of them still lie by the roadside to this day. As we came to the top it began to snow, and the snow caked on the ground. We then marched down the pass. We slept the night in some shacks that are used as a sort of inn or lodging for Indian traders. We supped well, but the cold was intense. Then we posted our sentries, organized our patrols, manned some listening-posts, and sent out scouting parties. Next day we started on our march, and at about the hour of high mass we reached a town which, as I have already said, was called Tlamanalco.¹ Here we were well received and there was no scarcity of food.

1. According to Cortes this must have been Amecameca.

When the other towns heard of our arrival people quickly came from Chalco and joined those of Tlamanalco. Some came also from Chimaluacan and Amecameca and Ayotzingo, which is their harbour where they keep the canoes, also from some other little towns whose names I cannot now remember. All of them together brought us a present of gold, two loads of mantles, and eight Indian women. The gold was worth more than a hundred and fifty pesos. 'Malinche,' they said, 'accept these presents and think of us henceforth as your friends!' Cortes accepted them with great good will, offered to assist the givers in every way and, seeing them all collected together, told the Mercedarian friar to speak to them about our holy faith and counsel them to give up their idols. The friar spoke to them in the same way as we had spoken to the people in every town through which we had passed, and they replied that what he said was good and they would remember it. He also spoke to them of the great power of our lord the Emperor, and of his purpose in sending us to the country, which was that we should right wrongs and put an end to robbery.

On hearing this, all these towns complained about Montezuma and his tax-collectors, speaking in private so that the Mexican ambassadors should not hear them, however. They said these officials robbed them of all they possessed, and that if their wives and daughters were pretty they would violate them in front of their fathers and husbands and carry them away. They also said that the Mexicans made the men work like slaves, compelling them to carry pine-trunks and stone and firewood and maize overland and in canoes, and to perform other tasks, such as planting maize-fields, and that they took away the people's lands as well for the service of their idols. They complained of many other things too, which with the passage of time I have forgotten.

Cortes comforted them with kind words, which he did not find difficult, but added that at present he had not time to see justice done. If they would be patient for a while, however, he said he would free them from Mexican rule. He then secretly asked two of their chiefs to go with four of our Tlascalcan allies and inspect the cleared road which the people of Huexotzinco

had told us not to follow, and see what breastworks and barricades there were, and whether there were any armed bands. The chiefs answered: 'Malinche, there is no point in going to see, because they are all cleared away and levelled now. But you should know they cut away the hillside at a narrow place, and posted so many warriors there that you would not have got by. But we have been told that Huichilobos, their god of war, has now counselled them to let you pass, and kill you when you enter the city of Mexico. Therefore we think you should stay here with us, and accept a share of what we have, and that you should give up your journey to Mexico, which is so strong and so full of warriors that you will certainly not escape with your lives.'

Cortes answered with a cheerful smile that neither the Mexicans nor any other nation had the power to kill us, only God in whom we believed, and that we were going to explain to Montezuma himself and all his *Caciques* and *papas* what God had commanded. As he wished to set out immediately, he asked them to give him twenty of their leading men to accompany him, and he promised that as soon as we arrived in Mexico he would do them great service and see that they received justice. Montezuma and his tax-collectors would then cease to perpetrate the violent abuses of which they complained. The townspeople smilingly accepted his promise, and brought him the twenty men he asked for.

Just as we were starting on our march four Mexicans arrived, bringing a present of gold and cloaks from the great Montezuma. After making their customary prostrations they addressed Cortes to this effect: 'Malinche, this present is sent to you by our lord the great Montezuma, who says that he is sorry you have endured so many hardships in travelling from far distant lands to see him, and that he has already sent to tell you that he will give you much gold and silver and many *chalchihuites*, as a tribute for your Emperor and yourself and the *Teules* of your company, provided you do not come to Mexico. Now he begs you once more kindly not to advance any further, but to return whence you came, and he will send to the port a great quantity of gold and silver and precious stones for your

king, and to you he will give four loads of gold, and to each of your brothers one load. Your entry into Mexico, however, is forbidden. All his vassals are in arms to prevent it. What is more, there is only the narrowest of roads, and no food there for you to eat.' And he cited many other difficulties in this message, in the hope that we should advance no further.

Although their message grieved him, Cortes most graciously embraced each of the messengers and accepted the present. I do not know how much it was worth, but in my experience, as I have said before, Montezuma unfailingly sent some gold whenever he sent messengers. But to return to our story, Cortes expressed his amazement that the lord Montezuma, who had proclaimed himself our friend and was such a great prince, should be so changeable that he said one thing at one time and sent contrary orders at another. As for his promise to send gold for our lord the Emperor and ourselves, Cortes thanked him for it, saying that any he sent now would be paid for in good deeds in course of time. Yet how could Montezuma think it right that being so near the city, we should turn back without fulfilling our prince's commands? If Montezuma had sent his messengers and ambassadors to some great lord like himself, and if after nearly reaching his house these messengers should turn back without delivering the message they carried, what sort of reception would he give them when they returned into his presence with such a tale? He would consider them a pack of worthless cowards, and our lord the Emperor would undoubtedly think the same of us. So we were determined at all costs to visit his city, and he must make no more attempts to put us off, since Cortes intended to see and speak with him, and to explain the whole purpose for which we had come; which he could do only in person. Once Montezuma had heard him we would return whence we came, if our presence displeased him. As for his excuse that he had not enough food to feed us, we were men who could exist on very little, and we were already on our way to Mexico. Therefore we expected him to welcome us.

After dispatching the messengers we set out. But having been told that Montezuma had consulted his *papas* and idols as to

whether he should allow us to enter or attack us on the road, and that Huichilobos' reply had been that he must let us in and kill us afterwards, we could not get this prospect out of our thoughts, being men who feared death. Since the country is thickly populated we made very short marches. Commending ourselves to God and Our Lady, we discussed ways and means of entering the city, and it put courage into our hearts to think that since our lord Jesus Christ had vouchsafed to guard us in past perils, He would also protect us from the power of Mexico.

We spent the night at a town called Itzapalatengo,¹ where half the houses are in the water and half on dry land, and where there is a low mountain – there is an inn there now – and there we had a good supper.

Let us leave this and return to the great Montezuma. When his messengers returned with Cortes' reply, he immediately decided to send one of his nephews, Cacamatzin, the lord of Texcoco, with great pomp to welcome us. So, it being our usual custom to post sentinels and scouts, one of our scouts came to tell us that a large crowd of friendly Mexicans was advancing along the road, and that they appeared to be dressed in rich cloaks. It was very early in the morning when this occurred, and we were just ready to start. But Cortes ordered us to remain in our quarters until we saw what this was about. At that moment four dignitaries arrived, bowed deeply to Cortes, and announced the imminent approach of Cacamatzin, the great lord of Texcoco, a nephew of the mighty Montezuma, who begged us kindly to await his visit.

We had not long to wait. Cacamatzin soon arrived, with greater pomp and splendour than we had ever beheld in any Mexican prince. He came borne on a litter, most richly worked in green feathers with much silver decoration and precious stones set in tree designs that were worked in the finest gold. His litter was carried by chieftains, each of whom, as they told us, was ruler of a town. When they came near the house where Cortes was lodged, they helped the prince out of his litter, swept the ground, and removed the straws from his way. Then, as they came before our Captain they made a deep bow, and

1. A mistake for Ayotzingo.

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Cacamatzin said: 'Malinche, we have come here, I and these chieftains, to place ourselves at your service, and to see that you receive everything you require for yourself and your companions, and to install you in your home, which is our city. For so we have been commanded by our lord the great Montezuma, who asks you to pardon him for not coming with us himself. It is on account of ill-health and not from lack of very good will towards you that he has not done so.'

When we beheld such pomp and majesty in these chiefs, and even more in Montezuma's nephew, we were greatly impressed. If this *Cacique* is so magnificent, we said to one another, how grand will the great Montezuma himself be?

When Cacamatzin had made his speech, Cortes embraced him, and was very attentive to him and the other chieftains. He gave them three beads called *margaritas*, which are streaked with different coloured veins, and to the rest of the chiefs he gave blue glass beads; and he expressed his thanks to them, saying that when he was able he would repay the lord Montezuma for his daily favours to us.

When this conversation was over we immediately set out; and as these chiefs had brought many followers with them, and people had come out to see us from the many towns in the district, all the roads were full.

Next morning, we came to a broad causeway¹ and continued our march towards Iztapalapa. And when we saw all those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded. These great towns and *cues* and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream. It is not surprising therefore that I should write in this vein. It was all so wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen or dreamed of before.

When we arrived near Iztapalapa we beheld the splendour of the other *Caciques* who came out to meet us, the lord of that

1. The causeway of Cuitlahuac, which separated the lakes of Chalco and Xochimilco.

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city whose name was Cuitlahuac, and the lord of Culucan, both of them close relations of Montezuma. And when we entered the city of Iztapalapa, the sight of the palaces in which they lodged us! They were very spacious and well built, of magnificent stone, cedar wood, and the wood of other sweet-smelling trees, with great rooms and courts, which were a wonderful sight, and all covered with awnings of woven cotton.

When we had taken a good look at all this, we went to the orchard and garden, which was a marvellous place both to see and walk in. I was never tired of noticing the diversity of trees and the various scents given off by each, and the paths choked with roses and other flowers, and the many local fruit-trees and rose-bushes, and the pond of fresh water. Another remarkable thing was that large canoes could come into the garden from the lake through a channel they had cut, and their crews did not have to disembark. Everything was shining with lime and decorated with different kinds of stonework and paintings which were a marvel to gaze on. Then there were birds of many breeds and varieties which came to the pond. I say again that I stood looking at it, and thought that no land like it would ever be discovered in the whole world, because at that time Peru was neither known nor thought of. But today all that I then saw is overthrown and destroyed; nothing is left standing.

The *Caciques* of that town and of Coyoacan brought us a present of gold worth more than two thousand pesos; and Cortes thanked them heartily for it, and he showed them great kindness, telling them through our interpreters something about our holy faith, and declaring to them the great power of our lord the Emperor. But there were too many conversations for me to describe them all.

The Entrance into Mexico

EARLY next day we left Iztapalapa with a large escort of these great *Caciques*, and followed the causeway, which is eight yards wide and goes so straight to the city of Mexico that I do not think it curves at all. Wide though it was, it was so crowded with people that there was hardly room for them all. Some were going to Mexico and others coming away, besides those who had come out to see us, and we could hardly get through the crowds that were there. For the towers and the *cues* were full, and they came in canoes from all parts of the lake. No wonder, since they had never seen horses or men like us before!

With such wonderful sights to gaze on we did not know what to say, or if this was real that we saw before our eyes. On the land side there were great cities, and on the lake many more. The lake was crowded with canoes. At intervals along the causeway there were many bridges, and before us was the great city of Mexico. As for us, we were scarcely four hundred strong, and we well remembered the words and warnings of the people of Huexotzinco and Tlascala and Tlamanalco, and the many other warnings we had received to beware of entering the city of Mexico, since they would kill us as soon as they had us inside. Let the interested reader consider whether there is not much to ponder in this narrative of mine. What men in all the world have shown such daring? But let us go on.

We marched along our causeway to a point where another small causeway branches off to another city called Coyoacan, and there, beside some towerlike buildings, which were their shrines, we were met by many more *Caciques* and dignitaries in very rich cloaks. The different chieftains wore different brilliant liveries, and the causeways were full of them. Montezuma had sent these great *Caciques* in advance to receive us, and as soon as they came before Cortes they told him in their language that we were welcome, and as a sign of peace they touched the ground with their hands and kissed it.

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There we halted for some time while Cacamatzin, the lord of Texcoco, and the lords of Iztapalapa, Tacuba, and Coyoacan went ahead to meet the great Montezuma, who approached in a rich litter, accompanied by other great lords and feudal *Caciques* who owned vassals. When we came near to Mexico, at a place where there were some other small towers, the great Montezuma descended from his litter, and these other great *Caciques* supported him beneath a marvellously rich canopy of green feathers, decorated with gold work, silver, pearls, and *chalchihuites*, which hung from a sort of border. It was a marvellous sight. The great Montezuma was magnificently clad, in their fashion, and wore sandals of a kind for which their name is *cotaras*,¹ the soles of which are of gold and the upper parts ornamented with precious stones. And the four lords who supported him were richly clad also in garments that seem to have been kept ready for them on the road so that they could accompany their master. For they had not worn clothes like this when they came out to receive us. There were four other great *Caciques* who carried the canopy above their heads, and many more lords who walked before the great Montezuma, sweeping the ground on which he was to tread, and laying down cloaks so that his feet should not touch the earth. Not one of these chieftains dared to look him in the face. All kept their eyes lowered most reverently except those four lords, his nephews, who were supporting him.

When Cortes saw, heard, and was told that the great Montezuma was approaching, he dismounted from his horse, and when he came near to Montezuma each bowed deeply to the other. Montezuma welcomed our Captain, and Cortes, speaking through Doña Marina, answered by wishing him very good health. Cortes, I think, offered Montezuma his right hand, but Montezuma refused it and extended his own. Then Cortes brought out a necklace which he had been holding. It was made of those elaborately worked and coloured glass beads called *margaritas*, of which I have spoken, and was strung on a gold cord and dipped in musk to give it a good odour. This he hung round the great Montezuma's neck, and as he did so attempted

1. Actually a Cuban word; the Mexican word was *cactli*.

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to embrace him. But the great princes who stood round Montezuma grasped Cortes' arm to prevent him, for they considered this an indignity.

Then Cortes told Montezuma that it rejoiced his heart to have seen such a great prince, and that he took his coming in person to receive him and the repeated favours he had done him as a high honour. After this Montezuma made him another complimentary speech, and ordered two of his nephews who were supporting him, the lords of Texcoco and Coyoacan, to go with us and show us our quarters. Montezuma returned to the city with the other two kinsmen of his escort, the lords of Cuiclahuac and Tacuba; and all those grand companies of *Caciques* and dignitaries who had come with him returned also in his train. And as they accompanied their lord we observed them marching with their eyes downcast so that they should not see him, and keeping close to the wall as they followed him with great reverence. Thus space was made for us to enter the streets of Mexico without being pressed by the crowd.

Who could now count the multitude of men, women, and boys in the streets, on the roof-tops and in canoes on the waterways, who had come out to see us? It was a wonderful sight and, as I write, it all comes before my eyes as if it had happened only yesterday.

They led us to our quarters, which were in some large houses capable of accommodating us all and had formerly belonged to the great Montezuma's father, who was called Axayacatl. Here Montezuma now kept the great shrines of his gods, and a secret chamber containing gold bars and jewels. This was the treasure he had inherited from his father, which he never touched. Perhaps their reason for lodging us here was that, since they called us *Teules* and considered us as such, they wished to have us near their idols. In any case they took us to this place, where there were many great halls, and a dais hung with the cloth of their country for our Captain, and matting beds with canopies over them for each of us.

On our arrival we entered the large court, where the great Montezuma was awaiting our Captain. Taking him by the hand, the prince led him to his apartment in the hall where he was to

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lodge, which was very richly furnished in their manner. Montezuma had ready for him a very rich necklace, made of golden crabs, a marvellous piece of work, which he hung round Cortes' neck. His captains were greatly astonished at this sign of honour.

After this ceremony, for which Cortes thanked him through our interpreters, Montezuma said: 'Malinche, you and your brothers are in your own house. Rest awhile.' He then returned to his palace, which was not far off.

We divided our lodgings by companies, and placed our artillery in a convenient spot. Then the order we were to keep was clearly explained to us, and we were warned to be very much on the alert, both the horsemen and the rest of us soldiers. We then ate a sumptuous dinner which they had prepared for us in their native style.

So, with luck on our side, we boldly entered the city of Tenochtitlan or Mexico on 8 November in the year of our Lord 1519.

The Stay in Mexico

WHEN the great Montezuma had dined and was told that our Captain and all of us had finished our meal some time ago, he came to our quarters in the grandest state with a great number of princes, all of them his kinsmen. On being told of his approach, Cortes came into the middle of the hall to receive him. Montezuma then took him by the hand, and they brought chairs made in their fashion and very richly decorated in various ways with gold. Montezuma requested our Captain to sit down, and both of them sat, each on his own chair.

Then Montezuma began a very good speech, saying that he was delighted to have such valiant gentlemen as Cortes and the rest of us in his house and his kingdom. That two years ago he had received news of a Captain who had come to Champoton, and that last year also he had received a report of another Captain who had come with four ships. Each time he had wished to see them, and now that he had us with him he was not only at our service but would share all that he possessed with us. He ended by saying that we must truly be the men about whom his ancestors had long ago prophesied, saying that they would come from the direction of the sunrise to rule over these lands, and that he was confirmed in this belief by the valour with which we had fought at Champoton and Tabasco and against the Tlascalans, for lifelike pictures of these battles had been brought to him.

Cortes replied through our interpreters that we did not know how to repay the daily favours we received from him, and that indeed we did come from the direction of the sunrise, and were vassals and servants of a great king called the Emperor Charles, who was ruler over many great princes. Having heard news of Montezuma and what a great prince he was, the Emperor, he said, had sent us to this country to visit him, and to beg them to become Christians, like our Emperor and all of us, so that his soul and those of all his vassals might be saved. Cortes promised

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to explain to him later how this could be, and how we worship the one true God and who He is, also many other good things which he had already communicated to his ambassadors Tendile, Pitalpitoque, and Quintalbor.

The great Montezuma had some fine gold jewels of various shapes in readiness which he gave to Cortes after this conversation. And to each of our captains he presented small gold objects and three loads of cloaks of rich feather work; and to us soldiers he gave two loads of cloaks each, all with a princely air. For in every way he was like a great prince. After the distribution of presents, he asked Cortes if we were all brothers and vassals of our great Emperor; and Cortes answered that we were brothers in love and friendship, persons of great distinction, and servants of our great king and lord. Further polite speeches passed between Montezuma and Cortes, but as this was the first time he had visited us and we did not want to tire him, the conversation ended.

Montezuma had ordered his stewards to provide us with everything we needed for our way of living: maize, grindstones, women to make our bread, fowls, fruit, and plenty of fodder for the horses. He then took leave of us all with the greatest courtesy, and we accompanied him to the street. However, Cortes ordered us not to go far from our quarters for the present until we knew better what conduct to observe.

Next day Cortes decided to go to Montezuma's palace. But first he sent to know whether the prince was busy and to inform him of our coming. He took four captains with him: Pedro de Alvarado, Juan Velazquez de Leon, Diego de Ordaz, and Gonzalo de Sandoval, and five of us soldiers.

When Montezuma was informed of our coming, he advanced into the middle of the hall to receive us, closely surrounded by his nephews, for no other chiefs were allowed to enter his palace or communicate with him except upon important business. Cortes and Montezuma exchanged bows, and clasped hands. Then Montezuma led Cortes to his own dais, and setting him down on his right, called for more seats, on which he ordered us all to sit also.

Cortes began to make a speech through our interpreters,

saying that we were all now rested, and that in coming to see and speak with such a great prince we had fulfilled the purpose of our voyage and the orders of our lord the King. The principal things he had come to say on behalf of our Lord God had already been communicated to Montezuma through his three ambassadors, on that occasion in the sandhills when he did us the favour of sending us the golden moon and sun. We had then told him that we were Christians and worshipped one God alone, named Jesus Christ, who had suffered His passion and death to save us; and that what they worshipped as gods were not gods but devils, which were evil things, and if they were ugly to look at, their deeds were uglier. But he had proved to them how evil and ineffectual their gods were, as both the prince and his people would observe in the course of time, since, where we had put up crosses such as their ambassadors had seen, they had been too frightened to appear before them.

The favour he now begged of the great Montezuma was that he should listen to the words he now wished to speak. Then he very carefully expounded the creation of the world, how we are all brothers, the children of one mother and father called Adam and Eve; and how such a brother as our great Emperor, grieving for the perdition of so many souls as their idols were leading to hell, where they burnt in living flame, had sent us to tell him this, so that he might put a stop to it, and so that they might give up the worship of idols and make no more human sacrifices – for all men are brothers – and commit no more robbery or sodomy. He also promised that in the course of time the King would send some men who lead holy lives among us, much better than our own, to explain this more fully, for we had only come to give them warning. Therefore he begged Montezuma to do as he was asked.

As Montezuma seemed about to reply, Cortes broke off his speech, saying to those of us who were with him: 'Since this is only the first attempt, we have now done our duty.'

'My lord Malinche,' Montezuma replied, 'these arguments of yours have been familiar to me for some time. I understand what you said to my ambassadors on the sandhills about the three gods and the cross, also what you preached in the various

towns through which you passed. We have given you no answer, since we have worshipped our own gods here from the beginning and know them to be good. No doubt yours are good also, but do not trouble to tell us any more about them at present. Regarding the creation of the world, we have held the same belief for many ages, and for this reason are certain that you are those who our ancestors predicted would come from the direction of the sunrise. As for your great King, I am in his debt and will give him of what I possess. For, as I have already said, two years ago I had news of the Captains who came in ships, by the road that you came, and said they were servants of this great king of yours. I should like to know if you are all the same people.'

Cortes answered that we were all brothers and servants of the Emperor, and that they had come to discover a route and explore the seas and ports, so that when they knew them well we could follow, as we had done. Montezuma was referring to the expeditions of Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba and of Grijalva, the first voyages of discovery. He said that ever since that time he had wanted to invite some of these men to visit the cities of his kingdom, where he would receive them and do them honour, and that now his gods had fulfilled his desire, for we were in his house, which we might call our own. Here we might rest and enjoy ourselves, for we should receive good treatment. If on other occasions he had sent to forbid our entrance into his city, it was not of his own free will, but because his vassals were afraid. For they told him we shot out flashes of lightning, and killed many Indians with our horses, and that we were angry *Teules*, and other such childish stories. But now that he had seen us, he knew that we were of flesh and blood and very intelligent, also very brave. Therefore he had a far greater esteem for us than these reports had given him, and would share with us what he had.

We all thanked him heartily for his signal good will, and Montezuma replied with a laugh, because in his princely manner he spoke very gaily: 'Malinche, I know that these people of Tlascala with whom you are so friendly have told you that I am a sort of god or *Teule*, and keep nothing in any of my houses

that is not made of silver and gold and precious stones. But I know very well that you are too intelligent to believe this and will take it as a joke. See now, Malinche, my body is made of flesh and blood like yours, and my houses and palaces are of stone, wood, and plaster. It is true that I am a great king, and have inherited the riches of my ancestors, but the lies and nonsense you have heard of us are not true. You must take them as a joke, as I take the story of your thunders and lightnings.'

Cortes answered also with a laugh that enemies always speak evil and tell lies about the people they hate, but he knew he could not hope to find a more magnificent prince in that land, and there was good reason why his fame should have reached our Emperor.

While this conversation was going on, Montezuma quietly sent one of his nephews, a great *Cacique*, to order his stewards to bring certain pieces of gold, which had apparently been set aside as a gift for Cortes, and ten loads of fine cloaks which he divided: the gold and cloaks between Cortes and the four captains, and for each of us soldiers two gold necklaces, each worth ten pesos, and two loads of cloaks. The gold that he then gave us was worth in all more than a thousand pesos, and he gave it all cheerfully, like a great and valiant prince.

As it was now past midday and he did not wish to be importunate, Cortes said to Montezuma: 'My lord, the favours you do us increase, load by load, every day, and it is now the hour of your dinner.' Montezuma answered that he thanked us for visiting him. We then took our leave with the greatest courtesy, and returned to our quarters, talking as we went of the prince's fine breeding and manners and deciding to show him the greatest respect in every way, and to remove our quilted caps in his presence, which we always did.

The great Montezuma was about forty years old, of good height, well proportioned, spare and slight, and not very dark, though of the usual Indian complexion. He did not wear his hair long but just over his ears, and he had a short black beard, well-shaped and thin. His face was rather long and cheerful, he had fine eyes, and in his appearance and manner could express geniality or, when necessary, a serious composure. He was very

neat and clean, and took a bath every afternoon. He had many women as his mistresses, the daughters of chieftains, but two legitimate wives who were *Caciques* in their own right, and when he had intercourse with any of them it was so secret that only some of his servants knew of it. He was quite free from sodomy. The clothes he wore one day he did not wear again till three or four days later. He had a guard of two hundred chieftains lodged in rooms beside his own, only some of whom were permitted to speak to him. When they entered his presence they were compelled to take off their rich cloaks and put on others of little value. They had to be clean and walk barefoot, with their eyes downcast, for they were not allowed to look him in the face, and as they approached they had to make three obeisances, saying as they did so, 'Lord, my lord, my great lord!' Then, when they had said what they had come to say, he would dismiss them with a few words. They did not turn their backs on him as they went out, but kept their faces towards him and their eyes downcast, only turning round when they had left the room. Another thing I noticed was that when other great chiefs came from distant lands about disputes or on business, they too had to take off their shoes and put on poor cloaks before entering Montezuma's apartments; and they were not allowed to enter the palace immediately but had to linger for a while near the door, since to enter hurriedly was considered disrespectful.

For each meal his servants prepared him more than thirty dishes cooked in their native style, which they put over small earthenware braziers to prevent them from getting cold. They cooked more than three hundred plates of the food the great Montezuma was going to eat, and more than a thousand more for the guard. I have heard that they used to cook him the flesh of young boys. But as he had such a variety of dishes, made of so many different ingredients, we could not tell whether a dish was of human flesh or anything else, since every day they cooked fowls, turkeys, pheasants, local partridges, quail, tame and wild duck, venison, wild boar, marsh birds, pigeons, hares and rabbits, also many other kinds of birds and beasts native to their country, so numerous that I cannot quickly name them

all. I know for certain, however, that after our Captain spoke against the sacrifice of human beings and the eating of their flesh, Montezuma ordered that it should no longer be served to him.

Let us now turn to the way his meals were served, which was like this. If it was cold, they built a large fire of live coals made by burning the bark of a tree which gave off no smoke. The smell of the bark from which they made these coals was very sweet. In order that he should get no more heat than he wanted, they placed a sort of screen in front of it adorned with the figures of idols worked in gold. He would sit on a soft low stool, which was richly worked. His table, which was also low and decorated in the same way, was covered with white tablecloths and rather long napkins of the same material. Then four very clean and beautiful girls brought water for his hands in one of those deep basins that they call *xicales*.¹ They held others like plates beneath it to catch the water, and brought him towels. Two other women brought him maize-cakes.

When he began his meal they placed in front of him a sort of wooden screen, richly decorated with gold, so that no one should see him eat. Then the four women retired, and four great chieftains, all old men, stood beside him. He talked with them every now and then and asked them questions, and as a great favour he would sometimes offer one of them a dish of whatever tasted best. They say that these were his closest relations and advisers and judges of lawsuits, and if he gave them anything to eat they ate it standing, with deep reverence and without looking in his face.

Montezuma's food was served on Cholula ware, some red and some black. While he was dining, the guards in the adjoining rooms did not dare to speak or make a noise above a whisper. His servants brought him some of every kind of fruit that grew in the country, but he ate very little of it. Sometimes they brought him in cups of pure gold a drink made from the cocoa-plant, which they said he took before visiting his wives. We did not take much notice of this at the time, though I saw them bring in a good fifty large jugs of this chocolate, all frothed up, of

1. Gourds.

which he would drink a little. They always served it with great reverence. Sometimes some little humpbacked dwarfs would be present at his meals, whose bodies seemed almost to be broken in the middle. These were his jesters. There were other Indians who told him jokes and must have been his clowns, and others who sang and danced, for Montezuma was very fond of music and entertainment and would reward his entertainers with the leavings of the food and chocolate. The same four women removed the tablecloths and again most reverently brought him water for his hands. Then Montezuma would talk to these four old chieftains about matters that interested him, and they would take their leave with great ceremony. He stayed behind to rest.

As soon as the great Montezuma had dined, all the guards and many more of his household servants ate in their turn. I think more than a thousand plates of food must have been brought in for them, and more than two thousand jugs of chocolate frothed up in the Mexican style, and infinite quantities of fruit, so that with his women and serving-maids and bread-makers and chocolate-makers his expenses must have been considerable.

One thing I had forgotten to say is that two more very handsome women served Montezuma when he was at table with maize-cakes kneaded with eggs and other nourishing ingredients. These maize-cakes were very white, and were brought in on plates covered with clean napkins. They brought him a different kind of bread also, in a long ball kneaded with other kinds of nourishing food, and *pachol* cake, as they call it in that country, which is a kind of wafer. They also placed on the table three tubes, much painted and gilded, in which they put liquidamber¹ mixed with some herbs which are called tobacco. When Montezuma had finished his dinner, and the singing and dancing were over and the cloths had been removed, he would inhale the smoke from one of these tubes. He took very little of it, and then fell asleep.

I remember that at that time his steward was a great *Cacique* whom we nicknamed *Tapia*, and he kept an account of all the revenue that was brought to Montezuma in his books, which

1. The gum of a native tree.

were made of paper – their name for which is *amal* – and he had a great house full of these books. But they have nothing to do with our story.

Montezuma had two houses stocked with every sort of weapon; many of them were richly adorned with gold and precious stones. There were shields large and small, and a sort of broadsword, and two-handed swords set with flint blades that cut much better than our swords, and lances longer than ours, with five-foot blades consisting of many knives. Even when these are driven at a buckler or a shield they are not deflected. In fact they cut like razors, and the Indians can shave their heads with them. They had very good bows and arrows, and double and single-pointed javelins as well as their throwing-sticks and many slings and round stones shaped by hand, and another sort of shield that can be rolled up when they are not fighting, so that it does not get in the way, but which can be opened when they need it in battle and covers their bodies from head to foot. There was also a great deal of cotton armour richly worked on the outside with different coloured feathers, which they used as devices and distinguishing marks, and they had casques and helmets made of wood and bone which were also highly decorated with feathers on the outside. They had other arms of different kinds which I will not mention through fear of prolixity, and workmen skilled in the manufacture of such things, and stewards who were in charge of these arms.

Let us pass on to the aviary. I cannot possibly enumerate every kind of bird that was in it or describe its characteristics. There was everything from the royal eagle, smaller kinds of eagles, and other large birds, down to multi-coloured little birds, and those from which they take the fine green feathers they use in their feather-work. These last birds are about the size of our magpies, and here they are called *quetzals*. There were other birds too which have feathers of five colours: green, red, white, yellow, and blue, but I do not know what they are called. Then there were parrots with different coloured plumage, so many of them that I have forgotten their names. There were also beautifully marked ducks, and bigger ones like them. At the proper season they plucked the feathers of all these birds, which

then grew again. All of them were bred in this aviary, and at hatching time the men and women who looked after them would place them on their eggs and clean their nests and feed them, giving each breed of birds its proper food.

In the aviary there was a large tank of fresh water, and in it was another type of bird on long stilt-like legs with a red body, wings, and tail. I do not know its name, but in Cuba birds rather like them are called *ypiris*. Also in this tank there were many other kinds of water birds.

Let us go on to another large house where they kept many idols whom they called their fierce gods, and with them all kinds of beasts of prey, tigers and two sorts of lion, and beasts rather like wolves which they call *adives*,¹ and foxes and other small animals, all of them carnivores, and most of them bred there. They were fed on deer, fowls, little dogs, and other creatures which they hunt and also on the bodies of the Indians they sacrificed, as I was told.

I have already described the manner of their sacrifices. They strike open the wretched Indian's chest with flint knives and hastily tear out the palpitating heart which, with the blood, they present to the idols in whose name they have performed the sacrifice. Then they cut off the arms, thighs, and head, eating the arms and thighs at their ceremonial banquets. The head they hang up on a beam, and the body of the sacrificed man is not eaten but given to the beasts of prey. They also had many vipers in this accursed house, and poisonous snakes which have something that sounds like a bell in their tails. These, which are the deadliest snakes of all, they kept in jars and great pottery vessels full of feathers, in which they laid their eggs and reared their young. They were fed on the bodies of sacrificed Indians and the flesh of the dogs that they bred. We know for certain, too, that when they drove us out of Mexico and killed over eight hundred and fifty of our soldiers, they fed those beasts and snakes on their bodies for many days, as I shall relate in due course. These snakes and wild beasts were dedicated to their fierce idols, and kept them company. As for the horrible

1. Bernal Díaz is mistaken here. This is an Arabic word for jackal, quite commonly used in Spain.

noise when the lions and tigers roared, and the jackals and foxes howled, and the serpents hissed, it was so appalling that one seemed to be in hell.

I must now speak of the skilled workmen whom Montezuma employed in all the crafts they practised, beginning with the jewellers and workers in silver and gold and various kinds of hollowed objects, which excited the admiration of our great silversmiths at home. Many of the best of them lived in a town called Atzacapotzalco, three miles from Mexico. There were other skilled craftsmen who worked with precious stones and *chalcihuites*, and specialists in feather-work, and very fine painters and carvers. We can form some judgement of what they did then from what we can see of their work today. There are three Indians now living in the city of Mexico, named Marcos de Aquino, Juan de la Cruz, and El Crespillo, who are such magnificent painters and carvers that, had they lived in the age of the Apelles of old, or of Michael Angelo, or Berruguete in our own day, they would be counted in the same rank.

Let us go on to the women, the weavers and sempstresses, who made such a huge quantity of fine robes with very elaborate feather designs. These things were generally brought from some towns in the province of Cotaxtla, which is on the north coast, quite near San Juan de Ulua. In Montezuma's own palaces very fine cloths were woven by those chieftains' daughters whom he kept as mistresses; and the daughters of other dignitaries, who lived in a kind of retirement like nuns in some houses close to the great *cue* of Huichilobos, wore robes entirely of feather-work. Out of devotion for that god and a female deity who was said to preside over marriage, their fathers would place them in religious retirement until they found husbands. They would then take them out to be married.

Now to speak of the great number of performers whom Montezuma kept to entertain him. There were dancers and stilt-walkers, and some who seemed to fly as they leapt through the air, and men rather like clowns to make him laugh. There was a whole quarter full of these people who had no other occupation. He had as many workmen as he needed, too, stone-cutters, masons, and carpenters, to keep his houses in repair.

We must not forget the gardens with their many varieties of flowers and sweet-scented trees planted in order, and their ponds and tanks of fresh water into which a stream flowed at one end and out of which it flowed at the other, and the baths he had there, and the variety of small birds that nested in the branches, and the medicinal and useful herbs that grew there. His gardens were a wonderful sight, and required many gardeners to take care of them. Everything was built of stone and plastered; baths and walks and closets and rooms like summerhouses where they danced and sang. There was so much to see in these gardens, as everywhere else, that we could not tire of contemplating his great riches and the large number of skilled Indians employed in the many crafts they practised.

When we had already been in Mexico for four days, and neither our Captain nor anyone else had left our quarters except to visit these houses and gardens, Cortes said it would be a good thing to visit the large square of Tlatelolco and see the great *cue* of Huichilobos. So he sent Aguilar, Doña Marina, and his own young page Orteguilla, who by now knew something of the language, to ask for Montezuma's approval of this plan. On receiving his request, the prince replied that we were welcome to go, but for fear that we might offer some offence to his idols he would himself accompany us with many of his chieftains. Leaving the palace in his fine litter, when he had gone about half way, he dismounted beside some shrines, since he considered it an insult to his gods to visit their dwelling in a litter. Some of the great chieftains then supported him by the arms, and his principal vassals walked before him, carrying two staves, like sceptres raised on high as a sign that the great Montezuma was approaching. When riding in his litter he had carried a rod, partly of gold and partly of wood, held up like a wand of justice. The prince now climbed the steps of the great *cue*, escorted by many *papas*, and began to burn incense and perform other ceremonies for Huichilobos.

Let us leave Montezuma, who had gone ahead as I have said, and return to Cortes and our soldiers. We carried our weapons, as was our custom, both by night and day. Indeed, Montezuma was so used to our visiting him armed that he did not think it

strange. I say this because our Captain and those of us who had horses went to Tlatelolco mounted, and the majority of our men were fully equipped. On reaching the market-place, escorted by the many *Caciques* whom Montezuma had assigned to us, we were astounded at the great number of people and the quantities of merchandise, and at the orderliness and good arrangements that prevailed, for we had never seen such a thing before. The chieftains who accompanied us pointed everything out. Every kind of merchandise was kept separate and had its fixed place marked for it.

Let us begin with the dealers in gold, silver, and precious stones, feathers, cloaks, and embroidered goods, and male and female slaves who are also sold there. They bring as many slaves to be sold in that market as the Portuguese bring Negroes from Guinea. Some are brought there attached to long poles by means of collars round their necks to prevent them from escaping, but others are left loose. Next there were those who sold coarser cloth, and cotton goods and fabrics made of twisted thread, and there were chocolate merchants with their chocolate. In this way you could see every kind of merchandise to be found anywhere in New Spain, laid out in the same way as goods are laid out in my own district of Medina del Campo, a centre for fairs, where each line of stalls has its own particular sort. So it was in this great market. There were those who sold sisal cloth and ropes and the sandals they wear on their feet, which are made from the same plant. All these were kept in one part of the market, in the place assigned to them, and in another part were skins of tigers and lions, otters, jackals, and deer, badgers, mountain cats, and other wild animals, some tanned and some untanned, and other classes of merchandise.

There were sellers of kidney-beans and sage and other vegetables and herbs in another place, and in yet another they were selling fowls, and birds with great dewlaps,¹ also rabbits, hares, deer, young ducks, little dogs, and other such creatures. Then there were the fruiterers; and the women who sold cooked food, flour and honey cake, and tripe, had their part of the market. Then came pottery of all kinds, from big water-jars to little

1. Turkeys.

jugs, displayed in its own place, also honey, honey-paste, and other sweets like nougat. Elsewhere they sold timber too, boards, cradles, beams, blocks, and benches, all in a quarter of their own.

Then there were the sellers of pitch-pine for torches, and other things of that kind, and I must also mention, with all apologies, that they sold many canoe-loads of human excrement, which they kept in the creeks near the market. This was for the manufacture of salt and the curing of skins, which they say cannot be done without it. I know that many gentlemen will laugh at this, but I assure them it is true. I may add that on all the roads they have shelters made of reeds or straw or grass so that they can retire when they wish to do so, and purge their bowels unseen by passers-by, and also in order that their excrement shall not be lost.

But why waste so many words on the goods in their great market? If I describe everything in detail I shall never be done. Paper, which in Mexico they call *amal*, and some reeds that smell of liquidamber, and are full of tobacco, and yellow ointments and other such things, are sold in a separate part. Much cochineal is for sale too, under the arcades of that market, and there are many sellers of herbs and other such things. They have a building there also in which three judges sit, and there are officials like constables who examine the merchandise. I am forgetting the sellers of salt and the makers of flint knives, and how they split them off the stone itself, and the fisherwomen and the men who sell small cakes made from a sort of weed which they get out of the great lake, which curdles and forms a kind of bread which tastes rather like cheese. They sell axes too, made of bronze and copper and tin, and gourds and brightly painted wooden jars.

We went on to the great *cue*, and as we approached its wide courts, before leaving the market-place itself, we saw many more merchants who, so I was told, brought gold to sell in grains, just as they extract it from the mines. This gold is placed in the thin quills of the large geese of that country, which are so white as to be transparent. They used to reckon their accounts with one another by the length and thickness of these little

quills, how much so many cloaks or so many gourds of chocolate or so many slaves were worth, or anything else they were bartering.

Now let us leave the market, having given it a final glance, and come to the courts and enclosures in which their great *cue* stood. Before reaching it you passed through a series of large courts, bigger I think than the Plaza at Salamanca. These courts were surrounded by a double masonry wall and paved, like the whole place, with very large smooth white flagstones. Where these stones were absent everything was whitened and polished, indeed the whole place was so clean that there was not a straw or a grain of dust to be found there.

When we arrived near the great temple and before we had climbed a single step, the great Montezuma sent six *papas* and two chieftains down from the top, where he was making his sacrifices, to escort our Captain; and as he climbed the steps, of which there were one hundred and fourteen, they tried to take him by the arms to help him up in the same way as they helped Montezuma, thinking he might be tired, but he would not let them near him.

The top of the *cue* formed an open square on which stood something like a platform, and it was here that the great stones stood on which they placed the poor Indians for sacrifice. Here also was a massive image like a dragon, and other hideous figures, and a great deal of blood that had been spilled that day. Emerging in the company of two *papas* from the shrine which houses his accursed images, Montezuma made a deep bow to us all and said: 'My lord Malinche, you must be tired after climbing this great *cue* of ours.' And Cortes replied that none of us was ever exhausted by anything. Then Montezuma took him by the hand, and told him to look at his great city and all the other cities standing in the water, and the many others on the land round the lake; and he said that if Cortes had not had a good view of the great market-place he could see it better from where he now was. So we stood there looking, because that huge accursed *cue* stood so high that it dominated everything. We saw the three causeways that led into Mexico: the causeway of Iztapalapa by which we had entered four days

before, and that of Tacuba along which we were afterwards to flee on the night of our great defeat, when the new prince Cuitlahuac drove us out of the city (as I shall tell in due course), and that of Tepeaquilla.¹ We saw the fresh water which came from Chapultepec to supply the city, and the bridges that were constructed at intervals on the causeways so that the water could flow in and out from one part of the lake to another. We saw a great number of canoes, some coming with provisions and others returning with cargo and merchandise; and we saw too that one could not pass from one house to another of that great city and the other cities that were built on the water except over wooden drawbridges or by canoe. We saw *cues* and shrines in these cities that looked like gleaming white towers and castles: a marvellous sight. All the houses had flat roofs, and on the causeways were other small towers and shrines built like fortresses.

Having examined and considered all that we had seen, we turned back to the great market and the swarm of people buying and selling. The mere murmur of their voices talking was loud enough to be heard more than three miles away. Some of our soldiers who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, in Rome, and all over Italy, said that they had never seen a market so well laid out, so large, so orderly, and so full of people.

But to return to our Captain, he observed to Father Bartolome de Olmedo, whom I have often mentioned and who happened to be standing near him: 'It would be a good thing, I think, Father, if we were to sound Montezuma as to whether he would let us build our church here.' Father Bartolome answered that it would be a good thing if it were successful, but he did not think this a proper time to speak of it, for Montezuma did not look as if he would allow such a thing.

Cortes, however, addressed Montezuma through Doña Marina: 'Your lordship is a great prince and worthy of even greater things. We have enjoyed the sight of your cities, and since we are now here in your temple, I beg of you to show us your gods and *Teules*.' Montezuma answered that first he

1. Guadalupe.

would consult his chief *papas*; and when he had spoken to them he said that we might enter a small tower, an apartment like a sort of hall, in which there were two altars with very rich wooden carvings over the roof. On each altar was a giant figure, very tall and very fat. They said that the one on the right was Huichilobos, their war-god. He had a very broad face and huge terrible eyes. And there were so many precious stones, so much gold, so many pearls and seed-pearls stuck to him with a paste which the natives made from a sort of root, that his whole body and head were covered with them. He was girdled with huge snakes made of gold and precious stones, and in one hand he held a bow, in the other some arrows. Another smaller idol beside him, which they said was his page, carried a short lance and a very rich shield of gold and precious stones. Around Huichilobos' neck hung some Indian faces and other objects in the shape of hearts, the former made of gold and the latter of silver, with many precious blue stones.

There were some smoking braziers of their incense, which they call *copal*, in which they were burning the hearts of three Indians whom they had sacrificed that day; and all the walls of that shrine were so splashed and caked with blood that they and the floor too were black. Indeed, the whole place stank abominably. We then looked to the left and saw another great image of the same height as Huichilobos, with a face like a bear and eyes that glittered, being made of their mirror-glass, which they call *tezcat*. Its body, like that of Huichilobos, was encrusted with precious stones, for they said that the two were brothers. This Tezcatlipoca, the god of hell, had charge of the Mexicans' souls, and his body was surrounded by figures of little devils with snakes' tails. The walls of this shrine also were so caked with blood and the floor so bathed in it that the stench was worse than that of any slaughter-house in Spain. They had offered that idol five hearts from the day's sacrifices.

At the very top of the *cue* there was another alcove, the woodwork of which was very finely carved, and here there was another image, half man and half lizard, encrusted with precious stones, with half its body covered in a cloak. They said that the body of this creature contained all the seeds in the world, and

that he was the god of seedtime and harvest. I do not remember his name.¹ Here too all was covered with blood, both walls and altar, and the stench was such that we could hardly wait to get out. They kept a very large drum there, and when they beat it the sound was most dismal, like some music from the infernal regions, as you might say, and it could be heard six miles away. This drum was said to be covered with the skins of huge serpents. In that small platform were many more diabolical objects, trumpets great and small, and large knives, and many hearts that had been burnt with incense before their idols; and everything was caked with blood. The stench here too was like a slaughter-house, and we could scarcely stay in the place.

Our Captain said to Montezuma, through our interpreters, with something like a laugh: 'Lord Montezuma, I cannot imagine how a prince as great and wise as your Majesty can have failed to realize that these idols of yours are not gods but evil things, the proper name for which is devils. But so that I may prove this to you, and make it clear to all your *papas*, grant me one favour. Allow us to erect a cross here on the top of this tower, and let us divide off a part of this sanctuary where your Huichilobos and Tezcatlipoca stand, as a place where we can put an image of Our Lady' – which image Montezuma had already seen – 'and then you will see, by the fear that your idols have of her, how grievously they have deceived you.'

Montezuma, however, replied in some temper (and the two *papas* beside him showed real anger): 'Lord Malinche, if I had known that you were going to utter these insults I should not have shown you my gods. We hold them to be very good. They give us health and rain and crops and weather, and all the victories we desire. So we are bound to worship them and sacrifice to them, and I beg you to say nothing more against them.'

On hearing this and seeing Montezuma's fury, our Captain said no more on the subject but observed cheerfully: 'It is time for your Majesty and ourselves to depart.' Montezuma replied that this was so, but that he had to pray and offer certain sacrifices on account of the great *tatacul* – that is to say sin – which he had committed in allowing us to climb his great *cue*

1. This was probably Tlaltecuhli.

and in being instrumental in letting us see his gods and in the dishonour we had done them by our abuse. Therefore before he left he must pray and worship.

'If that is so, my lord,' Cortes answered, 'I ask your pardon.' And we went down the steps, of which there were a hundred and fourteen, as I said. As some of our soldiers were suffering from pustules or running sores, their thighs pained them as they went down.

I will now give my impression of the *cue*'s surroundings. Do not be surprised, however, if I do not describe them as accurately as I might, for I had other thoughts in my head at the time than that of telling a story. I was more concerned with my military duties and the orders my Captain had given me. But to come to the facts, I think the site of the great *cue* was equal to the plots of six large town houses at home. It tapered from the base to the top of the small tower where they kept their idols. Between the middle of this tall *cue* and its highest point there were five holes like loopholes for cannon, but open and unprotected. But as there are many *cues* painted on the banners of the conquerors, including my own, anyone who has seen them can gather what a *cue* looked like from the outside. I heard a report that, at the time when this great *cue* was built, all the inhabitants of that mighty city placed offerings of gold and silver and pearls and precious stones in the foundations, and bathed them in the blood of prisoners of war whom they had sacrificed. They also put there every kind of seed that grew in their country, so that their idols should give them victories and riches and great crops. Some curious readers may ask how we came to know that they had thrown gold and silver and precious *chalchihuites* and seeds into the foundation of the *cue*, and watered them with the blood of Indian victims, seeing that the building was erected a thousand years ago. My answer is that after we conquered that great and strong city and divided the ground we decided to build a church to our patron and guide St James in place of Huichilobos' *cue*, and a great part of the site was taken for the purpose. When the ground was excavated to lay a foundation, gold and silver and *chalchihuites*, and pearls, seed-pearls, and other precious stones were found

in great quantities; and a settler in Mexico who built on another part of the site found the same. The officers of His Majesty's Treasury demanded this find as rightfully belonging to the King, and there was a lawsuit about it. I do not remember what the outcome was, only that they asked for information from the *Caciques* and dignitaries of Mexico, and from Guatemoc who was then alive, and they affirmed that all the inhabitants of Mexico had thrown jewels and other things into the foundations, as was recorded in their pictures and records of ancient times. The treasure was therefore preserved for the building of St James's church.

Let me go on to describe the great and splendid courts in front of Huichilobos, on the site where that church now stands, which was called at that time Tlatelolco. I have already said that there were two masonry walls before the entrance to the *cue*, and the court was paved with white stones like flagstones, and all was whitened, burnished and clean. A little apart from the *cue* stood another small tower which was also an idol-house or true hell, for one of its doors was in the shape of a terrible mouth, such as they paint to depict the jaws of hell. This mouth was open and contained great fangs to devour souls. Beside this door were groups of devils and the shapes of serpents, and a little way off was a place of sacrifice, all blood-stained and black with smoke. There were many great pots and jars and pitchers in this house, full of water. For it was here that they cooked the flesh of the wretched Indians who were sacrificed and eaten by the *papas*. Near this place of sacrifice there were many large knives and chopping-blocks like those on which men cut up meat in slaughter-houses; and behind that dreadful house, some distance away, were great piles of brush-wood, beside which was a tank of water that was filled and emptied through a pipe from the covered channel that comes into the city from Chapultepec. I always called that building Hell.

Crossing the court you came to another *cue*, where the great Mexican princes were buried. This also contained many idols and was full of blood and smoke. It too had doorways with hellish figures; and beside it was another *cue*, full of skulls and

large bones arranged in an orderly pattern, and so numerous that you could not count them however long you looked. The skulls were in one place and the bones in separate piles. Here there were more idols, and in every building or *cue* or shrine were *papas* in long black cloth robes and long hoods.

To proceed, there were other *cues*, a short distance away from that of the skulls, which contained other idols and sacrificial altars decorated with horrible paintings. These idols were said to preside over the marriages of men. But I will waste no more time on the subject of idols. I will only say that all round that great court there were many low houses, used and occupied by the *papas* and other Indians who were in charge of them. On one side of the great *cue* there was another, much bigger pond or tank of very clean water which was solely devoted to the service of Huichilobos and Tezcatlipoca, and the water for this tank was also supplied by covered pipes that came from Chapultepec. Near by were the large buildings of a kind of nunnery where many of the daughters of the inhabitants of Mexico dwelt in retirement until the time of their marriage. Here there were two massive female idols who presided over the marriages of women, and to which they offered sacrifices and feasts in order that they should get good husbands.

I have spent a long time talking about the great *cue* of Tlatelolco and its courts. I will conclude by saying that it was the biggest temple in Mexico, though there were many other fine ones, for every four or five parishes or districts supported a shrine with idols; and since there were many districts I cannot keep a count of them all. I must say, however, that the great *cue* in Cholula was higher than that in Mexico, for it had a hundred and twenty steps. The idol at Cholula, as I heard, had a great reputation, and people made pilgrimages to it from all over New Spain to obtain pardons. This was the reason why they had built it such a magnificent *cue*. It was differently planned from that of Mexico, but also had great courts and a double wall. The *cue* of the city of Texcoco was very high too, having a hundred and seventeen steps, and fine wide court-yards, again of a different shape from the others. Absurd though it was, every province had its own idols, and those of one

province or city were of no help in another. Therefore they had infinite numbers of idols and sacrificed to them all.

When we were all tired of walking about and seeing such a diversity of idols and sacrifices, we returned to our quarters, still accompanied by the many *Caciques* and dignitaries whom Montezuma had sent with us.

When our Captain and the Mercedarian friar realized that Montezuma would not allow us to set up a cross at Huichilobos' *cue* or build a church there, it was decided that we should ask his stewards for masons so that we could put up a church in our own quarters. For every time we had said mass since entering the city of Mexico we had had to erect an altar on tables and dismantle it again.

The stewards promised to tell Montezuma of our wishes, and Cortes also sent our interpreters to ask him in person. Montezuma granted our request and ordered that we should be supplied with all the necessary material. We had our church finished in two days, and a cross erected in front of our lodgings, and mass was said there each day until the wine gave out. For as Cortes and some other captains and a friar had been ill during the Tlascalcan campaign, there had been a run on the wine that we kept for mass. Still, though it was finished, we still went to church every day and prayed on our knees before the altar and images, firstly because it was our obligation as Christians and a good habit, and secondly so that Montezuma and all his captains should observe us and, seeing us worshipping on our knees before the cross – especially when we intoned the Ave Maria – might be inclined to imitate us.

It being our habit to examine and inquire into everything, when we were all assembled in our lodging and considering which was the best place for an altar, two of our men, one of whom was the carpenter Alonso Yañez, called attention to some marks on one of the walls which showed that there had once been a door, though it had been well plastered up and painted. Now as we had heard that Montezuma kept his father's treasure in this building, we immediately suspected that it must be in this room, which had been closed up only a few days before. Yañez made the suggestion to Juan Velazquez de Leon and

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Francisco de Lugo, both relatives of mine, to whom he had attached himself as a servant; and they mentioned the matter to Cortes. So the door was secretly opened, and Cortes went in first with certain captains. When they saw the quantity of golden objects – jewels and plates and ingots – which lay in that chamber they were quite transported. They did not know what to think of such riches. The news soon spread to the other captains and soldiers, and very secretly we all went in to see. The sight of all that wealth dumbfounded me. Being only a youth at the time and never having seen such riches before, I felt certain that there could not be a store like it in the whole world. We unanimously decided that we could not think of touching a particle of it, and that the stones should immediately be replaced in the doorway, which should be blocked again and cemented just as we had found it. We resolved also that not a word should be said about this until times changed, for fear Montezuma might hear of our discovery.

Let us leave this subject of the treasure and tell how four of our most valiant captains took Cortes aside in the church, with a dozen soldiers who were in his trust and confidence, myself among them, and asked him to consider the net or trap in which we were caught, to look at the great strength of the city and observe the causeways and bridges, and remember the warnings we had received in every town we had passed through that Huichilobos had counselled Montezuma to let us into the city and kill us there. We reminded him that the hearts of men are very fickle, especially among the Indians, and begged him not to trust the good will and affection that Montezuma was showing us, because from one hour to another it might change. If he should take it into his head to attack us, we said, the stoppage of our supplies of food and water, or the raising of any of the bridges, would render us helpless. Then, considering the vast army of warriors he possessed, we should be incapable of attacking or defending ourselves. And since all the houses stood in the water, how could our Tlascalcan allies come in to help us? We asked him to think over all that we had said, for if we wanted to preserve our lives we must seize Montezuma immediately, without even a day's delay. We pointed

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out that all the gold Montezuma had given us, and all that we had seen in the treasury of his father Axayacatl, and all the food we ate was turning to poison in our bodies, for we could not sleep by night or day or take any rest while these thoughts were in our minds. If any of our soldiers gave him less drastic advice, we concluded, they would be senseless beasts charmed by the gold and incapable of looking death in the eye.

When he had heard our opinion, Cortes answered: 'Do not imagine, gentlemen, that I am asleep or that I do not share your anxiety. You must have seen that I do. But what strength have we got for so bold a course as to take this great lord in his own palace, surrounded as he is by warriors and guards? What scheme or trick can we devise to prevent him from summoning his soldiers to attack us at once?'

Our captains (Juan Velazquez de Leon, Diego de Ordaz, Gonzalo de Sandoval, and Pedro de Alvarado) replied that Montezuma must be got out of his palace by smooth words and brought to our quarters. Once there, he must be told that he must remain as a prisoner, and that if he called out or made any disturbance he would pay for it with his life. If Cortes was unwilling to take this course at once, they begged him for permission to do it themselves. With two very dangerous alternatives before us, the better and more profitable thing, they said, would be to seize Montezuma rather than wait for him to attack us. Once he did so, what chance would we have? Some of us soldiers also remarked that Montezuma's stewards who brought us our food seemed to be growing insolent, and did not serve us as politely as they had at first. Two of our Tlascalcan allies had, moreover, secretly observed to Jeronimo de Aguilar that for the last two days the Mexicans had appeared less well disposed to us. We spent a good hour discussing whether or not to take Montezuma prisoner, and how it should be done. But our final advice, that at all costs we should take him prisoner, was approved by our Captain, and we then left the matter till next day. All night we prayed God to direct events in the interests of His holy service.

Next morning two Tlascalcan Indians arrived very secretly with letters from Villa Rica containing the news of an attack

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by the Mexicans at a place called Almeria, in which one of our men and the Constable's horse had been killed, as well as many Totonacs. Moreover the Constable Escalante himself and six more men had died of their wounds after returning to Villa Rica. Now all the hill towns and Cempoala and its dependencies were in revolt. They refused to bring food or serve in the fort; whereas hitherto our men had been respected as *Teules*, now after this disaster Mexicans and Totonacs alike were behaving like wild beasts. They could not control the Indians in any way, and did not know what measures to take.

God knows the distress this news caused us. It was the first defeat we had suffered in New Spain, and misfortunes, as the reader will see, were now descending upon us.