

CHAPTER CLXIV.

How Cortés sent Pedro de Alvarado to the province of Guatemala to found a city and bring the people to peace, and what was done about it.

CORTÉS always had lofty thoughts and in his ambition to command and rule wished in everything to copy Alexander of Macedon, and as he always had excellent Captains and accomplished soldiers about him, after he had established the great cities of Mexico, Oaxaca, Zacatula, Colima, la Vera Cruz, Panuco and Coatzacoalcos, as he had received news that in the Province of Guatemala there were strong towns with large populations, and that there were mines there, he determined to send Pedro de Alvarado to conquer and settle it ; for although Cortés himself had already sent to that province to beg the people to come in peaceably, they would not come. So he gave to Alvarado for that expedition over three hundred soldiers and among them one hundred and twenty musketeers and crossbowmen. Moreover, he gave him one hundred and thirty five horsemen and four cannon and much powder, and a gunner named something de Usagre and over two hundred Tlaxcalans and Cholulans, who went as auxiliaries. Then he gave him [Alvarado] his instructions, charging him to endeavour with the greatest care to bring the people to peace without making war on them, and to preach matters concerning our holy faith by means of certain interpreters and ecclesiastics whom he took with him, and not to permit sacrifices nor sodomy nor the robbing of one another ; and that when he met with prisons and cages in which it was the custom to keep Indians confined in order to fatten them up for food, he should break them down, and liberate the captives from the prisons, and with kindness and good-will he should

bring the people to render obedience to His Majesty, and in all respects should treat them well.

Then after Pedro de Alvarado had said good-bye to Cortés and all the gentlemen who were his friends in Mexico, they took leave of one another and he set out from that city on the thirteenth day of the month of November in the year fifteen hundred and twenty three.

Cortés ordered him to go by certain rocky hills in the province of Tehuantepec, which were near his road, where the people were in revolt. He brought [the inhabitants of] these rocky hills to peace. The hill was known as the Peñol de Guelamo because it was then in the encomienda of a soldier named Guelamo.

From thence he went to Tehuantepec, a large pueblo of the Zapotecs, where they received him very well for they were at peace, and they had already gone from that town (as I have stated in a former chapter which tells about it) to Mexico and given their fealty to His Majesty and had seen Cortés and moreover had taken him a good present of gold.

From Tehuantepec he [Alvarado] went to the province of Soconusco, which at that time was thickly peopled by more than fifteen thousand inhabitants¹; they also received him peaceably and gave him a present of gold and surrendered themselves as vassals to His Majesty. From Soconusco he arrived near to another group of villages named Zapotitlan,² and on the road at a bridge over a river where there was a bad pass, he came across many squadrons of warriors who were waiting for him to prevent his passage, and he fought a battle with them in which they killed a horse and wounded many soldiers and two of them

¹ The word is *vecinos*, which here applied to natives probably means households, not individuals.

² Capotitan in the text. (Zapote in the District of Soconusco, State of Chiapas?)

died of their wounds. So numerous were the Indians who had joined together against Alvarado, not only from Zapotitlan but from other towns in the neighbourhood, that in spite of the number that they [the Spaniards] wounded they were not able to drive them off. Three times they attacked Alvarado and it pleased Our Lord that he conquered them and they made peace.

From Zapotitlan the road led to a strong pueblo named Quetzaltenango, and before reaching it he had other encounters with the natives of that pueblo and with others from a neighbouring pueblo called Utatlan¹ which was the capital of certain pueblos which in their turn are in the neighbourhood of Quetzaltenango, and they wounded some soldiers and killed three horses, although Pedro de Alvarado and his people killed and wounded many of the Indians. Then there was a bad ascent for more than a league and a half through a defile. With the musketeers and crossbowmen and all his soldiers in good order he began the ascent, and at the top of the pass he found a fat Indian woman who was a witch, and a dog (one of those they breed because they are good to eat and do not know how to bark) sacrificed. Further on he came upon a vast number of warriors who were laying in wait for him, and they began to surround him ; as the track was bad and among mountains the horsemen were not able to gallop or turn swiftly nor to make use of their mounts, but the musketeers and crossbowmen and soldiers with sword and shield fought stoutly with them hand to hand, and they went on fighting from the hill and pass downwards until they reached some barrancas where they had another but not very severe skirmish with other squadrons of warriors which were waiting for them in those barrancas. This was owing to a stratagem which

¹ Utlatan in the text.

they had arranged among themselves in this manner: that as Pedro de Alvarado advanced fighting, they should pretend to retreat, and as he would go on pursuing them to where over six thousand warriors, men from Utatlan and other pueblos subject to them were laying in wait there they intended to kill them (the Spaniards). Pedro de Alvarado and all his soldiers fought with them with the highest courage, and the Indians wounded twenty-six or twenty seven soldiers and two horses; nevertheless he [Alvarado] put them to flight, but they had not gone far before they rallied with other squadrons and turned to fight again, thinking to defeat Pedro de Alvarado. It was near a spring that they awaited them so as again to come hand to hand, and many of the Indians would lay in wait by twos and threes near to a horse and try by force to pull it down, and others caught them by the tail. And here Pedro de Alvarado found himself in great straits, for the enemy were so numerous they were not able to bear up against the squadrons who attacked them from so many directions. Then he and all his men, as soon as they saw that they had either to conquer or die, fearing that they might not defeat the enemy, on account of the cramped position in which they found themselves, made a bold attack with the muskets and crossbows and with sturdy sword cuts, and obliged them to draw back somewhat. Then the horsemen were not slow in spearing the enemy and trampling them down and passing through them until they had them routed, so that they did not assemble again for three days. When he [Alvarado] saw that there was no longer any enemy with whom to fight, he remained in the open country foraging and seeking for food, without going to any settlement for two days. Then he went with all his army to the pueblo of Quetzaltenango, and there he learnt that in the past battles they had killed two Captains who were Lords of Utatlan. While he was resting and

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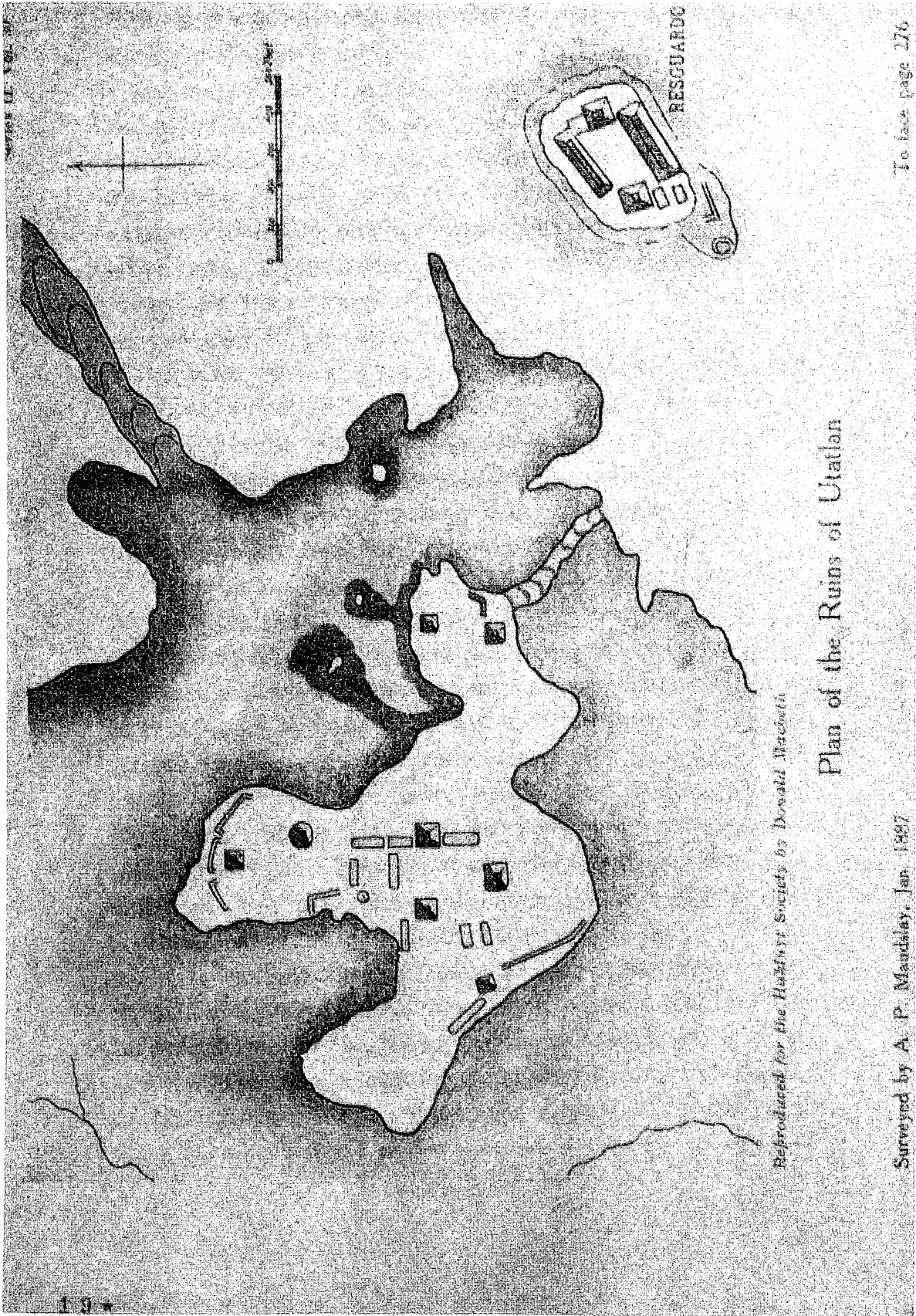
tending the wounded he received the news that all the forces of those neighbouring pueblos were again marching against him ; that a great number had assembled together,¹ and they were coming with the determination to die to the last man or to conquer.

When Pedro de Alvarado knew this he sallied out with his army to a plain, and as the enemy came on with such determination and began to surround the army and to shoot javelins, arrows and stones and [to attack] with lances, and as the ground was level, and the horses were able to gallop in all directions, he charged on the squadrons of the enemy in a way that soon made them turn their backs. Here many soldiers were wounded as well as a horse, and it seems that some Indian Chieftains from that pueblo itself were killed as well as from all that country, so that after the victory those pueblos had a great fear of Alvarado, and the whole of the district agreed to send to him and beg for peace, and they sent him a present of gold of little value to induce him to make peace.

It was fully agreed between all the Caciques of all the pueblos in the province that they should again collect a far greater number of warriors than before, and they ordered their warriors to assemble secretly among the barrancas of that town of Utatlan.

If they sent to ask for peace it was because Pedro de Alvarado and his army were in Quetzaltenango making expeditions and raids and continually bringing in Indian men and women as prisoners, and so as to induce him to go to another pueblo named Utatlan which was stronger and surrounded by barrancas, in order that when they had him inside, in a place where they thought they could get

¹ Blotted out in the original, "more than two Xiquipiles, that is sixteen thousand Indians, for each Xiquipil numbers eight thousand warriors.



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Plan of the Ruins of Utatlan

Surveyed by A. P. Maudslayi, Jan. 1897

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the better of him and his soldiers, they might attack them with their warriors who were already prepared and hidden away for that purpose.

Let us go back to say that when the numerous chieftains came before Pedro de Alvarado with the present, after making obeisance according to their custom, they asked his pardon for the past wars and offered themselves as vassals of His Majesty, and said that as their pueblo was large and in a pleasanter position and was nearer to other townships where they could attend to him better, they begged him to go there with them.

Pedro de Alvarado received it [the present] with great [show of] affection, and did not understand the cunning they were employing, and after alluding again to the evil they had done in making war, he accepted their overture of peace. The next day early he accompanied them with his army to Utatlan¹ for so the pueblo was called.

When he had made his entry, he saw what a stronghold it was, for it had two gateways, and one of them had twenty-five steps before entering the town, and the other entrance was by a causeway that was very bad and broken in two places, and the houses were close together and the streets narrow, and there were neither women nor children in any part of the town, which was surrounded by barrancas, and no food had been provided except what was bad and [that came] late and the chieftains were very shifty in their speeches. [Moreover] some Indians from Quetzaltenango warned Pedro de Alvarado that that very night it was intended to burn them all in the town if they remained there and that many squadrons of warriors had been stationed in the barrancas so that as soon as they saw the houses were burning they should join the people of Utatlan and attack them [the Spaniards] some from

¹ Vtlatan, in the text.

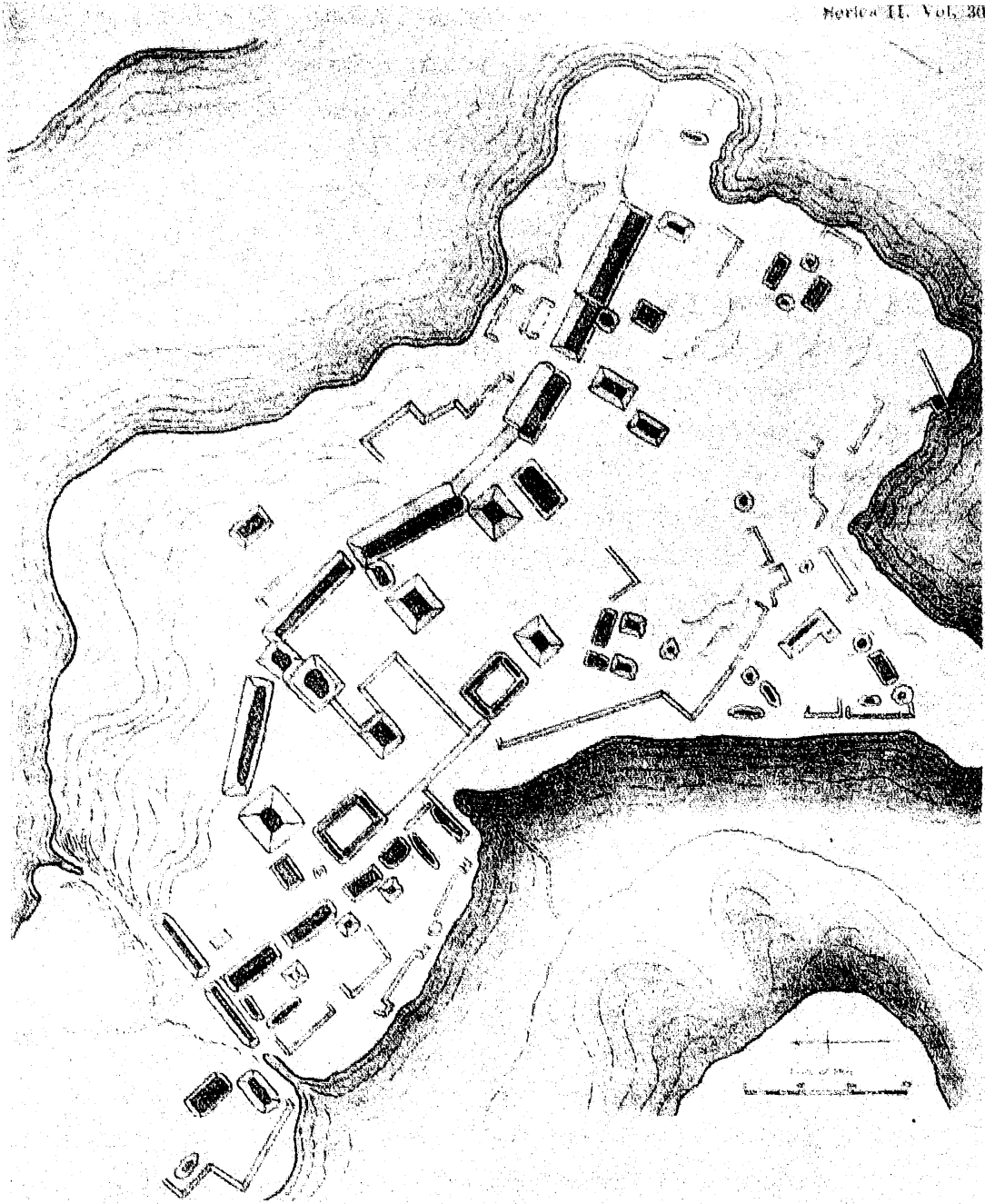
one side and some from the other and that with the fire and the smoke they would be helpless and would be burned alive.

When Pedro de Alvarado understood the grave danger in which they stood, he quickly ordered his Captains and all his army without delay to get out into the open, and he told them the danger they were in, and when they understood it there was no delay in getting out on to the level part close to some barrancas, for just then they had not time to get [right] out into the open plain from the midst of such dangerous passes.

Throughout this Pedro de Alvarado displayed good will towards the Caciques and chieftains of that town and of the other towns in the neighbourhood and told them that as the horses were accustomed to go about grazing in the fields for a part of the day, that was the cause of his having come out of the town, as the houses and streets were so crowded. The Caciques were very sorrowful at seeing them depart in this way, and Pedro de Alvarado could no longer tolerate the treason which they had planned in concert with the squadrons that they had assembled, so he ordered the Cacique of the town to be seized and as justly ordered him to be burned, and he gave the lordship to his son. Then he promptly got out on to the level land away from the barrancas and fought the squadrons which had been got ready for the purpose I have mentioned, and after having thus provoked his strength and ill will, they were defeated.

Let us cease talking about this and say how at that time news had reached a large pueblo called Guatemala¹ of the battles that Pedro de Alvarado had fought since he entered the Province, in all of which he had been victorious, and

¹ Guatimala in the text. This is Tecpan-Guatemala, or Iximché, about 23 miles N.E. of the Lake of Atitlan.



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Plan of the Ruins of Iximché (Guatemala)

Surveyed by A. P. Maudslay, 1887

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that at present he was in the land of Utatlan whence he was making expeditions and attacking many pueblos. As the people of Utatlan and their dependent pueblos were enemies of the people of Guatemala,¹ the latter determined to send messengers with a present of gold to Pedro de Alvarado and offer themselves as Vassals to His Majesty and they sent word that if he had any need of their personal services for that war they would come.

Pedro de Alvarado received them with good will and gave them many thanks for their offer, and in order to see if what they had told him was true, and because he knew nothing of the country, he sent to ask for two thousand warriors to show him the way, and he did so on account of the many barrancas and bad passes that had been intentionally made in order to impede their passage, so that if it were necessary they [the native warriors] should put them in order, and they could carry the baggage. The people of Guatemala sent them (the warriors) to him with their captains.

Pedro de Alvarado remained in the province of Utatlan seven or eight days, making raids against the rebel pueblos which had given their fealty to His Majesty and after giving it had risen in revolt. They branded many slaves and Indian women, and after the royal fifth was paid the rest were divided among the soldiers. Then he went to the City of Guatemala and was received and entertained by the Caciques of that city, who told him that near by there were some pueblos on the borders of a lake who were their enemies and made war on them and they held possession of a very strong rocky hill, and that the people of that pueblo although they knew well that they [the Spaniards] were not far off, and that Pedro de Alvarado

¹ Utatlan was the Capital of the Quichés, Guatemala the Capital of the Cachiouels.

was with them, did not come to tender their fealty as the other pueblos had done, and they were bad people and of worse habits. The said pueblo was called Atitlan¹ and Pedro de Alvarado sent to summon them to come and make peace, and told them that he would treat them well and sent them other smooth messages.

The reply they made was to ill-treat his messengers. Seeing that this availed nothing, he sent other messengers to induce them to make peace, and because he sent three times to ask for peace, and each time they used abusive words [to his messengers], Pedro de Alvarado went in person to them, and he took with him over one hundred and forty soldiers and among them twenty musketeers and crossbowmen and forty horsemen and two thousand Guatemalans. When he arrived near the pueblo he again requested them to make peace, and they only replied to him with bows and arrows and began to shoot.

When he saw this and that not far off there was a rocky hill in the water crowded with warriors, he went to the margin of the lake and two fine squadrons of Indian warriors came out to meet him with great lances and good bows and arrows and many other arms and corselets, sounding their drums, and with ensigns and plumes, and he fought with them for a good while and many of the soldiers were wounded, but the enemy did not remain long on the field but went fleeing for protection to the rocky hill, with Pedro de Alvarado and his soldiers after them.

They soon gained possession of the Peñol and many [of the enemy] were killed and wounded, and there would have been more if they had not all thrown themselves into the water and crossed to an island.

Then they [the Spaniards] looted the houses which were near the lake and went to a plain where there were many

¹ Atitan in the text.

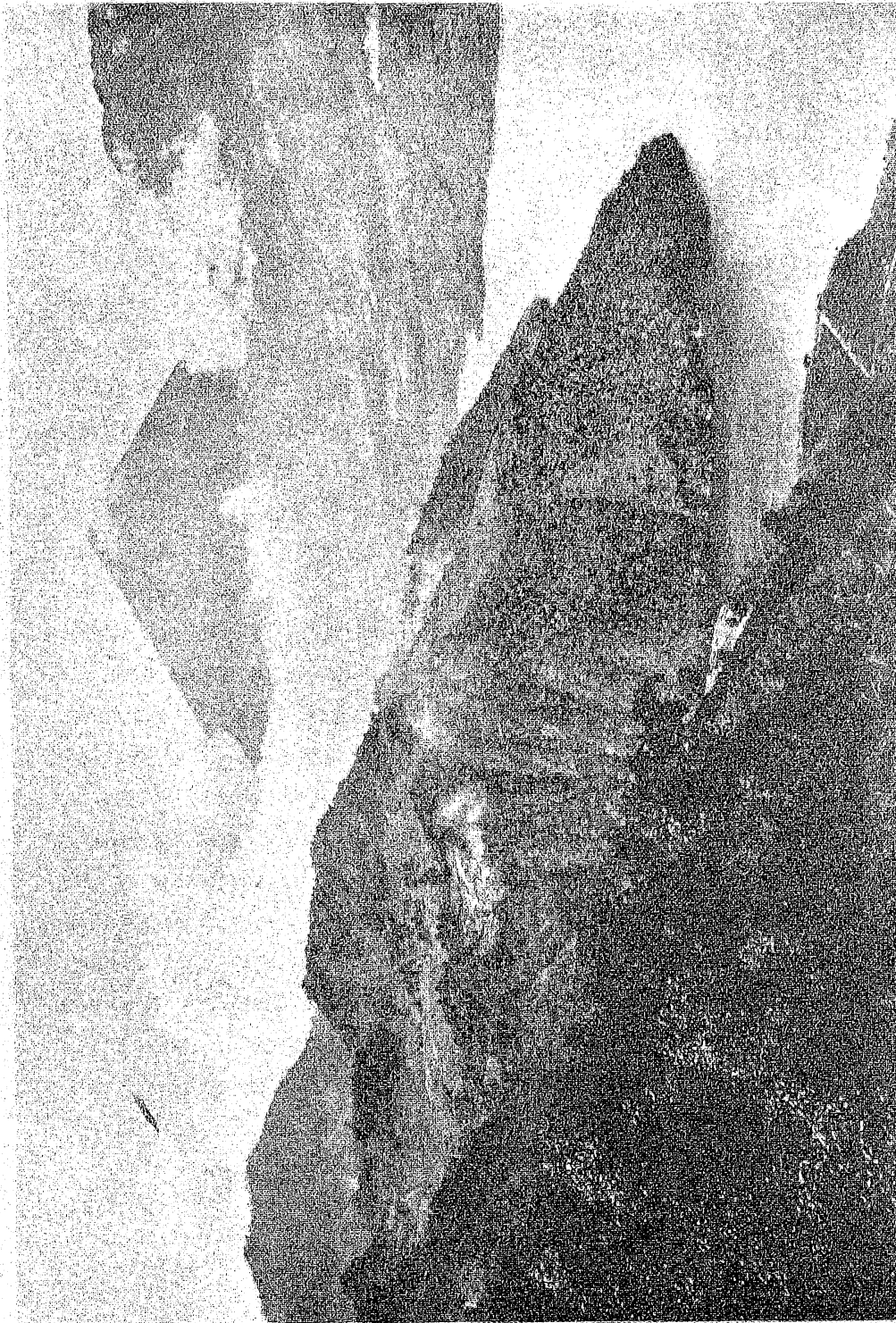


Photo by A. P. Maudslayi.

THE LAKE OF ATITLAN.
SMOKE and CLOUD.

maize fields and they slept there that night. The next day early in the morning they went to the pueblo of Atitlan, for so I have already said it was called, and found it deserted. Then he ordered his men to scour the country and the orchards of Cacao trees¹ of which there were many, and they brought in two chieftains of that pueblo as prisoners.

Pedro de Alvarado promptly sent these two chieftains, together with those who had been captured the day before, to beg the other Caciques to make peace, saying that he would give up all the prisoners to them and would receive them and pay them honour, but if they did not come he would wage war on them as he had on the people of Quetzaltenango and Utatlan and would cut down the trees in their Cacao plantations and do all the damage he could.

At the end of more arguments with these promises and threats they soon came to make peace and brought a present of gold and offered themselves as vassals to His Majesty.

Then Pedro de Alvarado and his army returned to Guatemala and were there some days without doing anything worthy of record, but all the pueblos of the neighbourhood made peace as well as others on the south coast named the Pipiles. Many of these pueblos which came to make peace complained that on the road by which they came there was a town called Escuintepeque² where there were bad people who would not allow them to pass through their country, but came to rob their pueblos and

¹ Alvarado, in his letter to Cortés describing this expedition, says nothing about cacao plantations, certainly there are no cacao plantations at the level of the lake, 5000 ft. above the sea. The Spaniards must have gone over the pass and down the Pacific slope to find them.

² Escuintla or Mataquesuintla ?

they made many other complaints against them, and they were not true, for persons whose words are worthy of credit say that they [the complaints] were made up, and he [Alvarado] went there to rob them of very beautiful Indian women and did not summon them to make peace.

Pedro de Alvarado determined to go to them with his entire force of horsemen, musketeers and crossbowmen and many allies from Guatemala, and he fell upon them one morning by surprise and did them great damage and made many captures, and it would have been better had he not done so, for, as in justice must be admitted it was an ill deed and not in accordance with His Majesty's commands.

Now we have told the story of the Conquest and pacification of Guatemala and its provinces, and it is told more completely in a history which has been compiled of it by a settler in Guatemala a relation of the Alvarados, named Gonzalo de Alvarado, where it can be seen more fully, in case I have here made any mistakes.

I say this because I was not present at these conquests [and did not enter this country] until the time that we passed through these provinces when they were all at war in the year 1524, and that was when we came from Higueras and Honduras with Captain Luis Marin, and we found ourselves there at the time that we were returning to Mexico, and moreover I state that we had at that time some warlike encounters with the natives of Guatemala and they had made many pits and impediments in bad passes among the mountains so that we should not pass on account of the great barrancas, and even between a town named Cuajiniquilapa¹ and Petapa in some deep ravines we were detained fighting with the natives of that land for two days for we could not cross a bad pass, and

¹ Juanagaçapa in the text.

then they wounded me with an arrow shot, but it was a small matter, and we got through with great difficulty although many warriors from Guatemala and other towns, were stationed in the pass.

As there is much to tell about this and I am obliged to recall to mind some things which should come in their proper time and place, (and all this happened at the time when there was a report that Cortés and all of us who had gone with him to Higuera were dead) I will leave it now and tell about the expedition that Cortés sent to Higuera and Honduras; I will also state that in this province of Guatemala the Indians were not fighters for they only lay in wait for us in the barrancas, and with their arrows they did nothing.

CHAPTER CLXV.

How Cortés sent a fleet to pacify and conquer the provinces of Higuera and Honduras, and sent Cristóbal de Olid as Captain, and what happened I will go on to relate.

NOW Cortés heard news that there were rich lands and good mines in the country of Higuera and Honduras, and some pilots who had been in those parts, or very near to them, gave him to understand that they had met with some Indians fishing in the sea, whose nets they had seized, and the sinkers attached to them for the fishing were made of a mixture of gold and copper, and they also told him that in those parts they believed that there was a strait by which one could pass from the north to the south coast. Moreover, as we understood that His Majesty had instructed and ordered Cortés during all his discoveries to be on the look-out, and use the greatest diligence and perseverance in searching for a strait, pass or passage to the Spice Islands, so at this time, whether it was on account of the