

CONQUEST

Pedro de Alvarado y Contreras (1495–1541)

to Hernán Cortés (1485–1547)

Santiago, 28 July 1524

Of the things that had happened to me up to Utlatan, as well in the war as otherwise, I gave a long account to Your Grace; and now I wish to give you an account of all the lands that I have traveled and conquered and of all other things that have happened to me, and that is that I, Sir, left the city of Utlatan and came in two days to this city of Guatemala where I was very well received by its chiefs, that I could not have been better off in our parents' house, and we were so well provided with everything necessary that nothing was lacking. And at the end of eight days that I was in this city, I knew from the chiefs of it that seven leagues from here was another city on a very large lake, and that it made war against this city, and against Utlatan and against all others in their neighborhood, and that they were very strong on account of the lake and their canoes, and that from there they came out to make night raids on this land; and as the people of this city saw the damage that they received from them, they told me they were good people and in the service of His Majesty and that they did not wish to make war or go against them without my permission, praying me that I should help them. And I told them that I would send to call them on the part of our lord the Emperor and that if they should come I would command them not to make war nor do anything wrong in this land, as they had heretofore done, and if they did not come, I would go with them to make war and punish them. I therefore sent them two messengers, natives of this city, whom they killed without any fear.

When I was informed and seeing their wickedness, I left this city to go against them with sixty horsemen and a hundred and fifty foot, in company with the chieftains and people of this land, and we marched so quickly that we arrived in the enemy's land on the same day. And no one came out to receive me in peace or otherwise, and when I was aware of this I started with thirty horsemen through the country to the shores of the lake, and when we came to an inhabited rock, which stood out in the water, we saw a company of men very near us, and I attacked them with the horsemen that were with me, and as we followed in pursuit they got on to a very narrow causeway which led to the rock, where we could not follow on horseback, so I and my companions dismounted, and on foot, together, and at the heels of the Indians, we reached the rock, so that they had no time to break down the bridges, for had they done so we could not have reached them. In the meantime many of my men who had been marching behind me came up to us, and we gained possession of the rock, which was thickly inhabited, but all the people threw themselves into the water to swim to another island. And many of them escaped, because my allies, who were bringing three hundred canoes across the lake, did not arrive soon enough. And that afternoon I left the rock with all my men and we camped in a maize field where we passed the night.

And the next day we commended ourselves to God and set out for the town on ahead of us, which was very strong on account of the many rocks and palisades about it, and we found it deserted. And as they had lost the fortress which they had in the lake, they did not dare to face us on land, although a few of them waited for us at the end of the town; but owing to the roughness of the ground, which I have already mentioned, no more people were killed. We encamped there about mid-day, and commenced to reconnoiter the country, and we captured some of the native Indians, and I sent off three of them as messengers to their chiefs, advising them that they should come and render obedience to His Majesty and submit themselves to the Imperial crown and to me in His Majesty's name, or otherwise I should still carry on the war and follow them and seek them in the mountains. These chiefs replied to me that hitherto their land had never been broken into nor entered by force of arms, and that since I had forced an entrance they would be glad to serve His Majesty in any way I might direct them, and soon afterwards they came to place themselves at my orders, and I gave them to understand the greatness and power of our lord the Emperor, and that they should appreciate that for all that had passed, I,

in His Royal name, would pardon them, and that from now on they should behave themselves and not make war against anybody in the neighborhood, as all were now vassals of His Majesty; so I dismissed them, leaving them safe and peaceful, and returned to this city. At the end of three days after my arrival there, all the chiefs, principal people, and captains of the said lake came to me with presents and told me that now they were our friends and considered themselves fortunate to be vassals of His Majesty and relieved of hardships, wars, and differences that they had amongst themselves. And I received them very well and gave them some of my jewels and sent them back to their country with much affection, and they are the most pacific that are in this land.

While I was in this city, many chiefs of other provinces of the south coast came to give obedience to Their Majesties, saying that they wished to be their vassals and did not wish to war with anybody, and that therefore I should receive them as such and favor them and maintain them in justice. And I received them very well, as was proper, and told them that they would be favored and helped by me in the name of His Majesty.

And they told me of another province that is called Yscuintepeque that is somewhat more inland, that would not allow them to come to give obedience to His Majesty, and not only this, but that other provinces of that part of the land were well disposed and wished to come in peace, and that those people would not allow them to pass, asking them where they were going, and saying they were crazy and that they should allow me to go there and then all would make war on me. And as I was assured that this was so, as well by those provinces as by the chiefs of this city of Guatemala, I left with all my people, both foot and horse, and remained encamped for three days in a desert. Next morning when we entered the outskirts of the said town, that is very heavily wooded, we found all the roads closed and very narrow—really only pathways—because they did not trade with anybody and had no open road. And I sent the cross-bow-men ahead because the horsemen could not fight there on account of the many marshes and wooded thickets. And it rained so much that on this account their watchmen and spies had returned to the town; and as they did not think I would arrive amongst them that day, they were somewhat careless and did not know of my sally until I was in the town amongst them; and when I entered, all the warriors were huddled together in houses because it rained so much, and when they wanted to form they had no time, although some of them still waited and wounded some Spaniards and many of the friendly Indians that were with me, and because of the thick woods and rain, they escaped into the forest, so I had no opportunity to do them any damage except to burn their town. And then I sent messengers to the chiefs, telling them that they should come to give obedience to Their Majesties and to me in their name, and if not, I would do great damage to their land and lay waste their maize fields. They came and gave themselves as vassals of His Majesty, and I received them and ordered them to be good in the future; and I remained eight days in this town. And to this place there came many other towns and provinces in peace, who offered themselves as vassals of our lord the Emperor.

And wishing to explore the country and know its secrets so that His Majesty may be better served and possess and rule more lands, I determined to leave here, and went to a town called Atiepar, where I was received by the chiefs and natives who are of a different language and race; and at sunset without any reason it was suddenly depopulated and cleared out, and one could not find a man in all the town. And in order to prevent the rigor of winter catching me there and impeding my journey, I left them, and passed on without stopping, taking all provisions and equipment with my army because my wish was to explore a hundred leagues further, and on the way accomplish whatever might happen until I had explored them fully, and on the return fight them and pacify them. And the following day I left and went to another town called Tacuylula and here they did the same as the people of Atiepar, receiving me in peace and hiding an hour afterward. And I left here and went to another town which is called Taxisco, which is very strong and has many people, and was received as by the previous ones; and I slept there that night. And next day I left for another very large town that is called Nacendelan, and fearing those people as I did not understand them, I left ten horsemen as a rear-guard and ten more with the baggage, and continued my march. And I might have gone two or three leagues from the said town of Taxisco when I heard that warriors had come out and fought with the rear-guard and had killed many friendly Indians and taken a large part of the baggage and all the strings of the bowmen and all the iron that I

carried for the war, and they could not resist them. And at once I sent Jorge de Alvarado, my brother, with forty or fifty horsemen, to look for all that they had taken, and he found many armed people in the fields, and he fought with them and defeated them, and could recover nothing that had been lost because the clothes had already been torn in pieces and each one wore a loin cloth of it in the war. And having arrived at this town of Nacendelan, Jorge de Alvarado returned, because all the Indians had fled to the mountains. And from here I again sent Don Pedro with foot soldiers that he might search the mountains for them and see if he would be able to bring them to the service of His Majesty, and never could anything be done on account of the great thickness of the forests, and so he returned. And I sent Indians of their own country to them as messengers with requirements and orders, and warning them that if they did not come I would make them slaves, and with all this they did not wish to come, neither the messengers nor themselves.

And at the end of eight days that I had been in this town of Nacendelan, there came a people in peace called Pasaco, which was on the road by which we had to go, and I received them and gave them of what we had and I entreated them that they be good. And next morning I left for this town, and at its entrance found the roads closed and many stakes thrust in, and when I was entering into the town I saw certain Indians cutting a dog in quarters in the manner of a sacrifice, and in the said town they made an uproar, and we saw a great multitude of the people of the country, and we attacked them, breaking them up until we drove them from the town, and we followed them in pursuit all we could.

And from here I left for another town called Mopicalco and was received in exactly the same way as in the others, and when I arrived at the town I did not find a living person. And from here I left for another town called Acatepeque where I found nobody, it being entirely abandoned rather.

And following my idea, which was to explore the said hundred leagues, I left for another town called Acaxual, which is on the coast of the south sea, and when I had arrived within half a league of the said town, I saw the fields full of its warriors with their plumage and insignias and with their offensive and defensive arms, in the middle of a plain where they were awaiting me, and I arrived within a bow-shot of them, and there I waited until all my people had arrived, and after we had gathered, I went about half a bow-shot towards the warriors and there was no movement or alteration in them that I could tell, and it seemed to me that they were somewhat near to a woods where they could shelter from me, and I ordered that all my people retreat, (who were a hundred horsemen and a hundred and fifty foot, and about five or six thousand friendly Indians), and so we were retreating, and I remained in the rearguard to make the people retire. The pleasure they had on seeing me retire was so great that they followed me, even up to the horses' tails,--the arrows that they shot passed in front of us. And all this took place on a plain where neither for them nor us was there anything to stumble over. And when I had retreated a quarter of a league to where each one had to fight instead of running away, I turned on them with all my people and broke through their ranks. And the destruction that we made amongst them was so great that in a short time none were left alive, because they came so heavily armed that those who fell to the ground could not get up, and their arms are corslets of cotton three fingers thick, reaching to their feet, and arrows and long lances, and when falling, the foot soldiers killed all of them. In this encounter many Spaniards were wounded, myself amongst the rest. They shot an arrow at me that passed through my leg and entered my saddle, from which wound I remained lame, as one leg remained shorter than the other a good four fingers. And I was forced to remain five days in this town to cure our wounds.

And at the end of that time I left for another town called Tacuxalco, to where I sent as scouts Don Pedro and other companions, who caught two spies who told us that ahead were many warriors of that town and others near by, awaiting us, and to make certain, they went forward to see the said people, and saw a great multitude of them. At this time Gonzalo de Alvarado, who was leading the advance, arrived with forty horsemen, because I was coming, as I have said, suffering from a wound, and he made front until we had all arrived. As soon as we all had arrived and all the forces were gathered, I mounted a horse as best I could, in order to be better able to arrange the attack. And I saw that they had a body of warriors ready and formed in battle against the enemy, and I sent Gomez de Alvarado with twenty horsemen on the right hand, and Jorge de Alvarado should attack

them with the rest of the army. To see them from afar was terrifying, because most of them had lances thirty palms long, all raised high. And I mounted a hill to better see what happened and I saw that all the Spaniards arrived at within a quoit's length of the Indians and that neither the Indians fled nor the Spaniards attacked, so that I was afraid of the Indians who so dared to wait. The Spaniards had not attacked them because they thought that a field that lay between them was a marsh, and after they saw it was firm and good, they attacked the Indians and defeated them, and were following in pursuit through the town for more than a league; and here they made a great massacre and punishment. And as the people thereafter saw that we defeated them in the plain, they determined to hide and leave us the towns. And in this town I rested two days, and at the end of that time I left for a town called Miaguaclam, and also they left for the woods like the others. And from here I left for another town called Atehuan and there the chiefs of Cuxcaclan sent me their messengers to give obedience to Their Majesties and to say they wished to be his vassals and be good. Thus they gave their obedience to me in Their Majesties' name, and I received them, thinking that they would not lie like the others. And arriving at this city of Cuzcaclan I found many Indians who received me, and the whole town empty. And while we were making camp, there did not remain a man of them in the town, and all went to the hills. And as I saw this, I sent my messengers to the chiefs there to tell them that they behaved badly, and to understand that they had given obedience to His Majesty and to me in his name, assuring them that if they came, I would not make war against them nor take their property, but merely bring them to the service of God and His Majesty. They sent me word they did not know either of them, that they did not wish to come, and that if I wanted anything from them, they were there waiting with their arms. And when I saw their evil intentions, I sent them an order and requirement on the part of the Emperor, in which I required and ordered that they should not break the peace nor revolt, as they had already given themselves as his vassals, and if not, I would proceed against them as rebellious traitors and rebels against the service of His Majesty, and that I would make war against them, and all that were taken alive would be slaves and would be branded, and that if they were loyal, they would be favored and protected by me as vassals of His Majesty. And to this, neither the messengers returned, nor was there any answer from them. And as I saw their wickedness, and because that country should not remain without punishment, I sent the army to the woods and mountains to look for them, who found the warriors and fought with them, and Spaniards and friendly Indians were wounded. And after all this, a principal of this city was made prisoner, and for greater justification I returned him again with another order, and they answered the same as before. And then, as I saw this, I proceeded against them and against the others that had made war against me, and called them by proclamation, and still they would not come, and as I saw their rebelliousness, and the proceedings were closed, I sentenced them, as traitors, to death, both the chiefs of these provinces and all the others that had been taken during the war, and might be taken henceforth, until such time that they would give obedience to His Majesty, should be slaves and be branded. And that from them and from their value, they should pay eleven horses that had been killed in conquering them, and all those that might thereafter be killed, and for the arms and other necessary things for such a conquest. After these Indians of this said city of Cuxcaclan I was for seventeen days, and never by the expeditions I ordered to be made, nor the messengers I sent them, as I have told, could I attract them, on account of the great thickness of the woods and the great mountains and broken ground and other great powers that they had.

Here I learnt of very great countries inland, cities of stone and mortar, and learnt from the natives that this land has no end, and to conquer it, as it is large and of very great cities, much time is required, and on account of the rigorous winter that was beginning, I did not go farther to conquer, but rather decided to return to this city of Guatemala, and to pacify, while returning, the country that I had left behind. And so I did, and labored with them, but never could attract them to the service of His Majesty, because all this southern coast where I went, is densely wooded and the mountains are near, where they have a refuge. So it is that I am come to this city on account of the heavy rains, where, for the better conquest and pacification of this land, so great and so thickly inhabited, I made and built in the name of His Majesty, a Spanish city which is called the city of our lord Santiago, because this is the centre of all the country, and there are more and better arrangements for the said

conquest and pacification, and to populate the surrounding country. And I elected two *alcaldes ordinarios* and four *regidores*, as Your Grace will see by the election.

At the end of these two coming winter months, which are the most rigorous of all, I will leave from this city in quest of the province of Tepalan that is fifteen days' journey from here towards the interior, which, according to my information, is a city as large as that of Mexico, of large buildings of rough stone and mortar, and flat roofed. And apart from this there are many others, and four or five of them have come here to me to give obedience to His Majesty, and they say that one of them has thirty thousand inhabitants. I do not wonder at it because, as the towns of this coast are so large, the interior of the country may have what they say. This coming summer, God willing, I expect to go forward two hundred leagues, where I think His Majesty will be well served and his estate augmented. And Your Grace will have news of other new matters. From that city of Mexico to where I have traveled and conquered there are four hundred leagues, and, believe it Your Grace, that this land is more populated and has more people than all the lands that Your Grace has governed up to now.

In this country we have found a mountain range where there is a volcano that is the most terrifying thing ever seen, that throws from its mouth stones as large as a house, burning in living flames, and when they fall, they break in pieces and cover all the mountain with fire.

Sixty leagues beyond this we saw another volcano, which threw out very terrifying smoke that rose to the sky and which has a width or circumference of half a league. Nobody can drink the waters of any of the rivers that come down from there because they are sulfurous, and there is specially one large river which comes from there, very beautiful, and so hot that it could not be crossed by certain people of my company who were making a certain raid. They went to look for a ford and they found another, cold river that entered into this one, and there where they joined, they found a temperate ford where they could cross.

Of the things of these parts there is not more to advise Your Grace, but that the Indians tell me that from this southern sea to that of the north there is a winter's and a summer's travel. As the Indians say so it is of course to be understood that the journey is made on foot.

Your Grace gave me the honor of the Lieutenancy of this city, and I helped to gain it and defended it when I was there, with the danger and suffering that Your Grace knows, and if I might have gone to Spain, for what I have served His Majesty he would have confirmed me in it and granted me other favors. They tell me that His Majesty has disposed of it, which does not surprise me, as he has no notice of me, and for this, nobody is to blame but Your Grace for not having given an account to His Majesty of how I have served him since you sent me here. I pray Your Grace to give him an account of who I am and of how I have served His Majesty in these parts, and where I am and what I have conquered recently, and the will that I have to serve him, and will have in the future, and how, in his service, I am lamed in one leg, and of how little return I and thee hidalgos that are in my company, have received up to the present and the little profit that we have made so far.

May our Lord prosperously increase the life and very magnificent estate of Your Grace for a long time.