

consent. Every mark of honor and respect was still paid to him. The shadow of power remained, but the substance was gone. Every step of the Spanish guard, as the patrol paced before the gates, told him too surely he was a prisoner; without a blow he had relinquished his freedom, conquered not by the strong arms of force, but by the coward terrors of a weak, superstitious mind. Montezuma had yet a greater indignity to endure before his spirit was finally subdued. On the arrival of the party implicated in the death of the Spanish soldiers, the decision of the case being left to Cortés, he sentenced the chief and his accomplices to be burnt alive; and on the ground that they had accused Montezuma as the author of the crime, he caused him to be put in fetters; remaining in the apartment till his orders were obeyed. It was not, however, his intention that this punishment should be of long continuance. Accordingly, after the execution of the criminals, Cortés entered the chamber of Montezuma, and kneeling down, unclasped the fetters, pretending deeply to regret the painful necessity imposed on him.

Cortés seemed now to have advanced successfully in his scheme. Montezuma nominally, Cortés virtually, governed the vast region of Mexico; but his mind was ill at ease. Could he expect a whole nation calmly to submit to the usurped dominion of a handful of strangers? They had been taken by surprise; would they not awake from their lethargy, and one day call him to a severe account for his proceedings? His fears were not groundless. A most formidable conspiracy was organized, which nearly proved fatal to his enterprise; but a Providence, they did not always acknowledge, watched over the Spaniards. Timely warning was given, and Cortés, by an exercise of that active policy for which he was so remarkable, got the ringleaders into his power, and thus broke up a most dangerous confederation, and secured his present authority. One of Cortés' first efforts was to establish the Christian worship; and to this purpose was devoted one of the idol temples which was cleansed and purified for the occasion. The Spaniards rejoiced in this as a token of the favor of heaven, and considered it as the first fruits of many such victories of the cross. They could not foresee the long and fearful contests that were to take place before the idols were dethroned and the Aztec worship abolished.