

# WHY NAM'S EFFORTS TO SAVE THE AZTEC EMPIRE FAILED

By ACTON ARCHER

TERRIBLE conflicts raged in the ancient capital of the Aztecs in Mexico when the Spanish leader Cortez and his army first attempted to take possession of it. The Indians fought with the most desperate courage and finally drove the invaders for a time from the city in the lake of Texcoco. They fled in disorder by means of the long causeways of earth and stone which had been built to connect the city with the shore. They even retreated across the mountains, but it was only to prepare for another attack. Montezuma, the emperor, had been killed and his brother, who succeeded him, lived only a few months after coming to the throne. The Aztecs then chose his nephew, Guatemo, a young man of great bravery, to rule over them. Guatemo made such preparation as he could, but the enemy came back with a larger army than before. Cortez this time brought ships, which had been built beyond the mountains. They were carried in pieces by the natives over the rocky passes and put together on the lake. They gave the Spaniards command of the water, and Cortez soon made himself master of a large part of the city. The Aztecs, though they fought desperately, were forced back little by little until they were cooped up in a small quarter of the city, to defend themselves as best they could.

Here thousands of men, women and children were herded together. They had no water, for the lake was salt and the pipes that had brought water from the shore had been cut. Nor had they any means of getting food, and the small supply that had been provided was nearly gone. The wailing of hungry children sounded dolefully through days and nights.

Nam and Ital, who had been pages of the Emperor Montezuma, made up their minds that the end must come soon unless food could be brought from the shore. It is true that many of the Aztecs attempted to obtain supplies in their canoes, but few of them managed to escape the ships, which were always on the watch. The bold canoes were sunk by cannon shot and the men in them went to the bottom of the lake.

While the unfortunate Aztecs were starving their hunger was made sharper by the sight of fleets of canoes which passed daily between that part of the city held by the Spaniards and the shore laden with food. It was easier to bring it by water than along the causeways, for there were no horses in Mexico excepting those brought by the Spaniards for use in battle. Some of the provision fleets came from distant parts of the lake, making long journeys, and the boys watched them by the hour trying to devise some plan for getting at their precious cargoes.

There came a day at last when the sultry air seemed heavy with moisture and the sun looked faint in the hazy sky. The Aztecs prayed that it would rain and thus give them water. Nam and Ital, looking out over the lake from a housetop, noticed a provision fleet of several hundred canoes putting out from the distant shore for the Spanish side of the city.

"I think that we are going to have a chance to get something to eat," Nam remarked.

"What do you mean?" said Ital in surprise.

"Wait!" Nam replied. "I have a plan."

He had noticed that the mountain tops were gradually being hidden by a mist that settled lower and lower toward the surface of the lake. The canoes advanced from the shore over the smooth water, trailing long ripples behind them. Apparently the rowers had not seen the mist, or, if they had, thought nothing of it, since there was nothing to be feared from the Aztecs any longer upon the lake. But Nam saw that the misty curtain would soon hide everything.

"Come," he said, when he had made sure of what was to take place. Let us go to the emperor."

Ital followed, very curious to learn what Nam was thinking about. He knew that his companion was far cleverer than he, and he admired him greatly. They were admitted at once into the emperor's presence and Nam lost no time in explaining his idea.

"I would take all the canoes that can be made to float," he said, "and let them be in readiness upon the water-side, but in concealment. Ital and I will go out in a canoe and meet the fleet. The mist will lie thick upon the water, and we may be able to persuade them to land in our quarter of the city instead of on the other side. Night will fall soon and fires should be lighted to resemble the camp fires of the Spaniards."

He spoke eagerly and Guatemo, sad as he was, could not help smiling at his enthusiasm. "What would you have the other canoes do?" he asked.

"If we succeed in leading the fleet in this direction," said Nam, "we will cry out the name of Montezuma and the canoes that are in waiting should then put out and surround the fleet and drive it in."

"It is worth trying," said the emperor. "You have my permission. Go, and I will order the canoes to be made ready for your return."

Ital was on fire with excitement as



"HAVE PITY!" SHE SAID IN A TREMBLING VOICE

they ran to the lake. He loved fighting and danger.

Nam had carefully noted the position of the Spanish ships and he knew how to steer so as to avoid them. The mist closed down as he had expected and they had to use great care not to lose their own way. But they had not gone far when a line of watch fires gleamed out behind them, sending a red glow even through the mist which hid the city itself.

Cautiously and noiselessly they paddled on, stopping now and then to listen. For a long time they heard nothing and they began to fear that the fleet had put back, although Nam judged that it had been too far from the shore when the mist fell to try to return. At last, directly in front of them, came the sound of many voices and the dipping noise of paddles. The boys had agreed upon what they should do. Bending forward, they began paddling with all speed, at the same time crying out for help, as though in fear. Thus they dashed in among the canoes that were heading the provision fleet.

"Save us," Nam cried. "The Aztecs."

"Where are they?" the provision merchants asked.

Nam waved his hand in the direction that the fleet ought to have taken to

bring it to the Spanish part of the city. "They are there; before the quarter that they still hold," he said. "They are lying in wait along the edge of the lake."

"But the white men are in that direction," said the merchants.

"You are mistaken," Nam replied. "You have no doubt gone astray in the fog. The white men are in this direction, and in a short time you will no doubt see their camp fires."

"Who are you?" the merchants demanded, suspiciously.

"We came with the white men from beyond the mountains," said Nam, "and they sent us to guide you in case you should miss seeing the fires they have kindled."

"If you speak truth, it is fortunate that we met you," said the merchants; for we were going in the direction that you say would have led us into the ambush. We will follow you, but if you are deceiving us you shall pay for it with your lives."

"You will believe us when you see the fires," said Nam, with confidence.

"Lead on," the merchants replied, "and we shall see."

It was Ital's hope that they might get far enough in advance to escape when the merchants discovered the

trap, but Nam kept holding him back. He could not explain the reason to Ital without being overheard, but he knew that if the merchants saw that they were trying to get away they would take alarm. Soon the glow of the fires showed through the mist.

"What did I tell you?" said Nam to the merchants.

Apparently they were convinced, for they did not hesitate, but paddled on straight for the shore. Suddenly the outline of the buildings became visible behind the fires and the merchants knew then that they had been trapped, for the Spaniards had torn down all the houses on their side of the city. One of the merchants uttered a cry, and at the same moment Nam shouted "Montezuma!" at the top of his voice, and before Ital knew what was happening he found himself in the water. Nam had overturned the canoe to escape the weapons that he knew would be hurled at them by the merchants.

Both boys dived and swam toward the shore. The merchants halted in confusion, and in a twinkling it was too late for them to escape. The Aztec craft shot out upon the lake and surrounded them, and all the canoes were taken. By means of this capture thousands were saved from starvation and the Aztecs were able to continue their resistance for several days longer; but the time soon came when food again failed them.

Nam and Ital were fishing one day in a canal that ran close to the wall of the house where the emperor was lodged. A poor woman with a crying baby in her arms sat near watching them with hungry eyes.

"We shall never get away alive," Ital said, after a long silence.

"Perhaps not," Nam replied, "but at any rate the priests say that if we die here we shall be certain of happiness in the next world under the protection of their war god."

"I don't think much of his promises," Ital said contemptuously "since he has allowed the Spaniards to roll him down the steps of his own temple."

"Here's a fish!" cried Nam, and he drew up a small fish with bright silver scales. Ital pounced upon it and split it into two parts with his knife before it ceased to wriggle. The boys were about to devour it, raw as it was, when the woman who had been watching them drew nearer, holding out her child.

"Have pity!" she said in a trembling voice. "His father has been killed by the foes of the emperor and he can not live through the night unless I find food."

Nam and Ital looked at her and then at each other. The pangs of their hunger were sharp, but without a word each handed to the woman his share of the fish.

"We may catch another," said Nam, dropping his line again as she hastened away.

"There is no danger that we shall starve to death," said Ital.

"Why not?" Nam asked.

"Do you see that boat?" Ital replied, pointing to a magnificent barge that had been moored in the canal.

"Yes, what of it?"

"It has been brought here for the emperor," said Ital. "He intends to escape if he can. There is nothing left of the city, and he will continue the war on shore."

"When will he go?"

"In the next battle, when every one will be thinking of something else and his boat will not be noticed."

Ital was wrong in this, for the emperor remained in the city through the next fight, in which terrible losses were inflicted upon the Aztecs, who were so weak that they could scarcely shoot their arrows or hurl their spears. But on the following day, when the attack was renewed, the royal barge, with the emperor on board, dashed out of the canal and started for the shore across the lake. It was seen by one of the Spanish ships and captured before it had gone half way. The emperor was a prisoner. As soon as the fact became known to the Aztecs they laid down their arms. All their sacrifices and sufferings had been in vain.

Cortez spared the lives of the survivors and gave them permission to leave the hunger stricken city. For three days they dragged themselves by thousands mournfully along the causeways to the shore. After giving such aid as they could to the more helpless, Nam and Ital went to take leave of the emperor and to ask him whether there was anything that they could do for him.

"No," he replied sadly. "I thank you, but all is ended for me and my unfortunate people. You have been faithful to the last."

He gave them each a ring with his royal seal and they left his presence. Sore at heart and faint with privation and fatigue, they dragged themselves along the causeway to the shore and painfully climbed the steep slope of the mountains. After a time they paused to look back upon the desolate ruins of what a few weeks before had been one of the fairest cities in the world. The blue lake still lay like a jewel, ringed about by the purple mountains, but to the two boys the scene was no longer beautiful, only a dreadful place of cruelty and suffering, and without exchanging a word they continued upon their way, turning their backs upon it forever.

## The World's Best Runners

The best runners in the world are said to be a race of Indians living near the Gulf of California. They are known as Seris, and number only some 400. In the open country the women and children catch hares by hand without any artificial aid whatever. The men, however, look upon this as child's play, and themselves attack and capture antelopes, deer and wild buffalo. The swiftest horse can not outrun these fleet footed Indians, who perform on foot the same feats as the cowboy on his broncho.

A boy can be seen driving horses round and round in an enclosed track, and when they have got up a good speed one of the barriers is removed and a horse dashes into the prairie at full speed. It has not gone 120 yards before the Indian has caught up with it; another 60 yards and he has bounded on its back, seized its mane with one hand and its nostrils with the other and thrown it to the ground.

## Chrysanthemums

Chrysanthemums stand fourth in commercial importance among flowers. Only the rose, the violet and the carnation surpass them, and that chiefly because the chrysanthemum season is so short, while the others can be had from the florist nearly the whole year round. Greece gave us the name. Chrysanthemum means "golden flower." But the name was invented long before the big butter yellow globes were known in the occident. It referred to the prevailing gold in the small varieties that were known. Strangely enough, the first chrysanthemum brought into Europe was not gold, but purple. It was a small flower about two inches across, shaped like an aster. Somebody took it to Europe from China in 1790—and, presto, the modern history of chrysanthemums was begun.—Argonaut.

## If the Fish Will Bite

Fishin' days are my delight,  
River bank o' green;  
If the fish'll only bite,  
Country's all serene!  
Be it river, lake or brook—  
Let 'em bite, and bait the hook!

Watch me walk the dusty way  
To the friendly banks;  
Place me any time o' day  
In the fishin' ranks!  
Be it river, lake or brook—  
Let 'em bite and bait the hook!

## Why They Put It Up

Two young Americans who were visiting Paris—as all Americans, young or old, do if they can—dined one day in a cafe near the Seine. On the front wall of the building was a red mark, and underneath it the inscription, "Undated in 1910. High water mark." "Come, come," said one of the Americans to the proprietor, "you don't expect us to believe that the river ever rose that high?" "Oh, no!" replied the proprietor blandly; "it only came up to here." He made a sort of scratch with his thumb nail near the ground. "But you see when the mark was down there the children rubbed it out so continually that we had to put it up there out of reach."

## True, Anyhow

An old sea captain, well known for his powers of exaggeration, was describing a voyage at supper one night. "While cruising in the Pacific," said he, "we passed an island which was positively red with lobsters." "But," objected one of the guests, with an incredulous smile, "lobsters are not red until boiled." "Of course not," replied the undaunted captain, "but this was a volcanic island with boiling springs!"