

darkness of the night, to leave the squadron with the same purpose as before. Unluckily for him, he met with a succession of heavy gales and head winds, which drove him from his course, and he wholly lost his reckoning. For many days the vessel was tossed about, and all on board were filled with apprehensions, and no little indignation against the author of their calamities. At length they were cheered one morning with the sight of a white dove, which, wearied by its flight, lighted on the topmast. The biographers of Cortés speak of it as a miracle.⁷ Fortunately it was no miracle, but a very natural occurrence, showing incontestably that they were near land. In a short time, by taking the direction of the bird's flight, they reached the island of Hispaniola; and, on coming into port, the worthy master had the satisfaction to find his companions arrived before him, and their cargoes already sold.⁸

Immediately on landing, Cortés repaired to the house of the governor, to whom he had been personally known in Spain. Ovando was absent on an expedition into the interior, but the young man was kindly received by the secretary, who assured him there would be no doubt of his obtaining a liberal grant of land to settle on. "But I came to get gold," replied Cortés, "not to till the soil, like a peasant."

⁷ Some thought it was the Holy Ghost in the form of this dove; "Sanctum esse Spiritum, qui, in illius alitis specie, ut mœstos et afflictos solaretur, venire erat dignatus"; (De Rebus Gestis, MS. ;) a conjecture which seems very

reasonable to Pizarro y Orellana, since the expedition was to "redound so much to the spread of the Catholic faith, and the Castilian monarchy"! Varonès Ilustres, p. 70.

⁸ Gomara, Crónica, cap. 2.

On the governor's return, Cortés consented to give up his roving thoughts, at least for a time, as the other labored to convince him that he would be more likely to realize his wishes from the slow, indeed, but sure, returns of husbandry, where the soil and the laborers were a free gift to the planter, than by taking his chance in the lottery of adventure, in which there were so many blanks to a prize. He accordingly received a grant of land, with a *repartimiento* of Indians, and was appointed notary of the town or settlement of Açuá. His graver pursuits, however, did not prevent his indulgence of the amorous propensities which belong to the sunny clime where he was born; and this frequently involved him in affairs of honor, from which, though an expert swordsman, he carried away scars that accompanied him to his grave.⁹ He occasionally, moreover, found the means of breaking up the monotony of his way of life by engaging in the military expeditions, which, under the command of Ovando's lieutenant, Diego Velasquez, were employed to suppress the insurrections of the natives. In this school the young adventurer first studied the wild tactics of Indian warfare; he became familiar with toil and danger, and with those deeds of cruelty which have too often, alas! stained the bright scutcheons of the Castilian chivalry in the New World. He was only prevented by illness — a most fortunate one, on this occasion — from embarking in Nicuessa's expedition, which furnished a tale of woe, not often matched in the

⁹ Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 203.

annals of Spanish discovery. Providence reserved him for higher ends.

At length, in 1511, when Velasquez undertook the conquest of Cuba, Cortés willingly abandoned his quiet life for the stirring scenes there opened, and took part in the expedition. He displayed, throughout the invasion, an activity and courage that won him the approbation of the commander; while his free and cordial manners, his good-humor, and lively sallies of wit made him the favorite of the soldiers. "He gave little evidence," says a contemporary, "of the great qualities which he afterwards showed." It is probable these qualities were not known to himself; while to a common observer his careless manners and jocund repartees might well seem incompatible with any thing serious or profound; as the real depth of the current is not suspected under the light play and sunny sparkling of the surface.¹⁰

After the reduction of the island, Cortés seems to have been held in great favor by Velasquez, now appointed its governor. According to Las Casas, he was made one of his secretaries.¹¹ He still retained the same fondness for gallantry, for which his handsome person afforded obvious advantages, but which had more than once brought him into trouble

¹⁰ De Rebus Gestis, MS. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 3, 4. — Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 27.

¹¹ Hist. de las Indias, MS., loc. cit.

"Res omnes arduas difficilesque per Cortesium, quem in dies magis magisque amplectebatur, Velasquius agit. Ex eo ducis favore et gratiâ magnâ Cortesio invidia est orta." De Rebus Gestis, MS.

in earlier life. Among the families who had taken up their residence in Cuba was one of the name of Xuarez, from Granada in Old Spain. It consisted of a brother, and four sisters remarkable for their beauty. With one of them, named Catalina, the susceptible heart of the young soldier became enamoured.¹² How far the intimacy was carried is not quite certain. But it appears he gave his promise to marry her, — a promise, which, when the time came, and reason, it may be, had got the better of passion, he showed no alacrity in keeping. He resisted, indeed, all remonstrances to this effect, from the lady's family, backed by the governor, and somewhat sharpened, no doubt, in the latter by the particular interest he took in one of the fair sisters, who is said not to have repaid it with ingratitude.

Whether the rebuke of Velasquez, or some other cause of disgust, rankled in the breast of Cortés, he now became cold toward his patron, and connected himself with a disaffected party tolerably numerous in the island. They were in the habit of meeting at his house and brooding over their causes of discontent, chiefly founded, it would appear, on what they conceived an ill requital of their services in the distribution of lands and offices. It may well be imagined, that it could have been no easy task for

¹² Solís has found a patent of nobility for this lady also, — “doncella noble y recatada.” (Historia de la Conquista de Méjico, (Paris, 1838,) lib. 1, cap. 9.) Las Casas treats her with less ceremony. “Una hermana de un Juan Xuarez, gente pobre.” Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 17.

the ruler of one of these colonies, however discreet and well intentioned, to satisfy the indefinite cravings of speculators and adventurers, who swarmed, like so many famished harpies, in the track of discovery in the New World.¹³

The malecontents determined to lay their grievances before the higher authorities in Hispaniola, from whom Velasquez had received his commission. The voyage was one of some hazard, as it was to be made in an open boat, across an arm of the sea eighteen leagues wide; and they fixed on Cortés, with whose fearless spirit they were well acquainted, as the fittest man to undertake it. The conspiracy got wind, and came to the governor's ears before the departure of the envoy, whom he instantly caused to be seized, loaded with fetters, and placed in strict confinement. It is even said, he would have hung him, but for the interposition of his friends.¹⁴ The fact is not incredible. The governors of these little territories, having entire control over the fortunes of their subjects, enjoyed an authority far more despotic than that of the sovereign himself. They were generally men of rank and personal consideration; their distance from the mother country withdrew their conduct from searching scrutiny, and, when that did occur, they usually had interest and means of corruption at command, sufficient to shield them from

¹³ Gomara, *Crónica*, cap. 4. — Martinez, capellan de D. Velasquez, *Las Casas*, *Hist. de las Indias*, contra H. Cortés, MS. MS., ubi supra. — De Rebus Gestis, MS. — Memorial de Benito

¹⁴ *Las Casas*, *Hist. de las Indias*, MS., ubi supra.

punishment. The Spanish colonial history, in its earlier stages, affords striking instances of the extraordinary assumption and abuse of powers by these petty potentates; and the sad fate of Vasquez Nuñez de Balboa, the illustrious discoverer of the Pacific, though the most signal, is by no means a solitary example, that the greatest services could be requited by persecution and an ignominious death.

The governor of Cuba, however, although irascible and suspicious in his nature, does not seem to have been vindictive, nor particularly cruel. In the present instance, indeed, it may well be doubted whether the blame would not be more reasonably charged on the unfounded expectations of his followers than on himself.

Cortés did not long remain in durance. He contrived to throw back one of the bolts of his fetters; and, after extricating his limbs, succeeded in forcing open a window with the irons so as to admit of his escape. He was lodged on the second floor of the building, and was able to let himself down to the pavement without injury, and unobserved. He then made the best of his way to a neighbouring church, where he claimed the privilege of sanctuary.

Velasquez, though incensed at his escape, was afraid to violate the sanctity of the place by employing force. But he stationed a guard in the neighbourhood, with orders to seize the fugitive, if he should forget himself so far as to leave the sanctuary. In a few days this happened. As Cortés was carelessly standing without the walls in front of

the building, an *alguacil* suddenly sprung on him from behind and pinioned his arms, while others rushed in and secured him. This man, whose name was Juan Escudero, was afterwards hung by Cortés for some offence in New Spain.¹⁵

The unlucky prisoner was again put in irons, and carried on board a vessel to sail the next morning for Hispaniola, there to undergo his trial. Fortune favored him once more. He succeeded, after much difficulty and no little pain, in passing his feet through the rings which shackled them. He then came cautiously on deck, and, covered by the darkness of the night, stole quietly down the side of the ship into a boat that lay floating below. He pushed off from the vessel with as little noise as possible. As he drew near the shore, the stream became rapid and turbulent. He hesitated to trust his boat to it; and as he was an excellent swimmer prepared to breast it himself, and boldly plunged into the water. The current was strong, but the arm of a man struggling for life was stronger; and after buffet-
ing the waves till he was nearly exhausted, he succeeded in gaining a landing; when he sought refuge in the same sanctuary which had protected him before. The facility with which Cortés a second time effected his escape may lead one to doubt the fidelity of his guards; who perhaps looked on him as the victim of persecution, and felt the influence of those popular manners which seem to have

¹⁵ Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., loc. cit. — Memorial de Martínez, MS.

gained him friends in every society into which he was thrown.¹⁶

For some reason not explained, — perhaps from policy, — he now relinquished his objections to the marriage with Catalina Xuarez. He thus secured the good offices of her family. Soon afterwards the governor himself relented, and became reconciled to his unfortunate enemy. A strange story is told in connexion with this event. It is said, his proud spirit refused to accept the proffers of reconciliation made him by Velasquez; and that one evening, leaving the sanctuary, he presented himself unexpectedly before the latter in his own quarters, when on a military excursion at some distance from the capital. The governor, startled by the sudden apparition of his enemy completely armed before him, with some dismay inquired the meaning of it. Cortés answered by insisting on a full explanation of his previous conduct. After some hot discussion the interview terminated amicably; the parties embraced, and, when a messenger arrived to announce the escape of Cortés, he found him in the apartments of his Excellency, where, having retired to rest, both were actually sleeping in the same bed! The anecdote is repeated without distrust by more than one biographer of Cortés.¹⁷ It is not very probable,

¹⁶ Gomara, Crónica, cap. 4.

Herrera tells a silly story of his being unable to swim, and throwing himself on a plank, which, after being carried out to sea, was washed ashore with him at flood

tide. Hist. General, dec. 1, lib. 9, cap. 8.

¹⁷ Gomara, Crónica, cap. 4.

“ Cœnat cubatque Cortesius cum Velasquio eodem in lecto. Qui postero die fugæ Cortesii

however, that a haughty, irascible man like Velasquez should have given such uncommon proofs of condescension and familiarity to one, so far beneath him in station, with whom he had been so recently in deadly feud; nor, on the other hand, that Cortés should have had the silly temerity to brave the lion in his den, where a single nod would have sent him to the gibbet, — and that, too, with as little compunction or fear of consequences, as would have attended the execution of an Indian slave.¹⁸

The reconciliation with the governor, however brought about, was permanent. Cortés, though not reëstablished in the office of secretary, received a liberal *repartimiento* of Indians, and an ample territory in the neighbourhood of St. Jago, of which he was soon after made *alcalde*. He now lived almost wholly on his estate, devoting himself to agriculture with more zeal than formerly. He stocked his plantation with different kinds of cattle, some of which were first introduced by him into Cuba.¹⁹ He wrought, also, the gold mines which fell to his share, and which in this island promised better returns

nuntius venerat, Velasquium et Cortesium juxta accubantes intuitus, miratur." De Rebus Gestis, MS.

¹⁸ Las Casas, who remembered Cortés at this time "so poor and lowly that he would have gladly received any favor from the least of Velasquez' attendants," treats the story of the bravado with contempt. "Por lo qual si él [Ve-

lasquez] sintiera de Cortés una punta de alfiler de cerviguillo ó presuncion, ó lo ahorcara ó á lo menos lo echara de la tierra y lo sumiera en ella sin que alzara cabeza en su vida." Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 27.

¹⁹ "Pecuariam primus quoque habuit, in insulamque induxit, omni pecorum genere ex Hispania petito." De Rebus Gestis, MS.

than those in Hispaniola. By this course of industry he found himself, in a few years, master of some two or three thousand *castellanos*, a large sum for one in his situation. "God, who alone knows at what cost of Indian lives it was obtained," exclaims Las Casas, "will take account of it!"²⁰ His days glided smoothly away in these tranquil pursuits, and in the society of his beautiful wife, who, however ineligible as a connexion, from the inferiority of her condition, appears to have fulfilled all the relations of a faithful and affectionate partner. Indeed, he was often heard to say at this time, as the good bishop above quoted remarks, "that he lived as happily with her as if she had been the daughter of a duchess." Fortune gave him the means in after life of verifying the truth of his assertion.²¹

Such was the state of things, when Alvarado returned with the tidings of Grijalva's discoveries, and the rich fruits of his traffic with the natives. The news spread like wildfire throughout the island; for all saw in it the promise of more important results than any hitherto obtained. The governor, as already noticed, resolved to follow up the track of discovery with a more considerable armament; and he looked around for a proper person to share the expense of it, and to take the command.

²⁰ "Los que por sacarle el oro muriéron Dios abrá tenido mejor cuenta que yo." Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 27. The text is a free translation.

²¹ "Estando conmigo, me lo dixo que estava tan contento con ella como si fuera hija de una Duquesa." Hist. de las Indias, MS., ubi supra. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 4.

Several hidalgos presented themselves, whom, from want of proper qualifications, or from his distrust of their assuming an independence of their employer, he, one after another, rejected. There were two persons in St. Jago in whom he placed great confidence, — Amador de Lares, the *contador*, or royal treasurer,²² and his own secretary, Andres de Duero. Cortés was also in close intimacy with both these persons; and he availed himself of it to prevail on them to recommend him as a suitable person to be intrusted with the expedition. It is said, he reinforced the proposal, by promising a liberal share of the proceeds of it. However this may be, the parties urged his selection by the governor with all the eloquence of which they were capable. That officer had had ample experience of the capacity and courage of the candidate. He knew, too, that he had acquired a fortune which would enable him to coöperate materially in fitting out the armament. His popularity in the island would speedily attract followers to his standard.²³ All past animosities had long since been buried in oblivion, and the confidence he was now to repose in him would insure his fidelity and gratitude. He lent a willing ear, therefore, to the rec-

²² The treasurer used to boast he had passed some two and twenty years in the wars of Italy. He was a shrewd personage, and Las Casas, thinking that country a slippery school for morals, warned the governor, he says, more than once "to beware of the twenty-two

years in Italy." Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 113.

²³ "Si él no fuera por Capitan, que no fuera la tercera parte de la gente que con él fué." Declaracion de Puertocarrero, MS. (Coruña, 30 de Abril, 1520.)

ommendation of his counsellors, and, sending for Cortés, announced his purpose of making him Captain-General of the Armada.²⁴

Cortés had now attained the object of his wishes, — the object for which his soul had panted, ever since he had set foot in the New World. He was no longer to be condemned to a life of mercenary drudgery; nor to be cooped up within the precincts of a petty island. But he was to be placed on a new and independent theatre of action, and a boundless perspective was opened to his view, which might satisfy not merely the wildest cravings of avarice, but, to a bold, aspiring spirit like his, the far more importunate cravings of ambition. He fully appreciated the importance of the late discoveries, and read in them the existence of the great empire in the far West, dark hints of which had floated, from time to time, to the Islands, and of which more certain glimpses had been caught by those who had reached the continent. This was the country intimated to the "Great Admiral" in his visit to Honduras in 1502, and which he might have reached, had he held on a northern course, instead of striking to the south in quest of an imaginary strait. As it was, "he had but opened the gate," to use his own bitter expression, "for others to enter." The time had at length come, when they were to enter it; and the young adventurer, whose magic lance was to dissolve the

²⁴ Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 19. — De Rebus Gestis, MS. — Gomara, *Crónica*, cap. 7. — Las Casas, *Hist. General de las Indias*, MS., lib. 3, cap. 113.

spell which had so long hung over these mysterious regions, now stood ready to assume the enterprise.

From this hour the deportment of Cortés seemed to undergo a change. His thoughts, instead of evaporating in empty levities or idle flashes of merriment, were wholly concentrated on the great object to which he was devoted. His elastic spirits were shown in cheering and stimulating the companions of his toilsome duties, and he was roused to a generous enthusiasm, of which even those who knew him best had not conceived him capable. He applied at once all the money in his possession to fitting out the armament. He raised more by the mortgage of his estates, and by giving his obligations to some wealthy merchants of the place, who relied for their reimbursement on the success of the expedition; and, when his own credit was exhausted, he availed himself of that of his friends.

The funds thus acquired he expended in the purchase of vessels, provisions, and military stores, while he invited recruits by offers of assistance to such as were too poor to provide for themselves, and by the additional promise of a liberal share of the anticipated profits.²⁵

All was now bustle and excitement in the little town of St. Jago. Some were busy in refitting the vessels and getting them ready for the voyage; some in providing naval stores; others in converting their own estates into money in order to equip themselves;

²⁵ Declaracion de Puertocarrero, —Probanza en la Villa Segura, MS. —Carta de Vera Cruz, MS. MS. (4 de Oct., 1520.)

every one seemed anxious to contribute in some way or other to the success of the expedition. Six ships, some of them of a large size, had already been procured; and three hundred recruits enrolled themselves in the course of a few days, eager to seek their fortunes under the banner of this daring and popular chieftain.

How far the governor contributed towards the expenses of the outfit is not very clear. If the friends of Cortés are to be believed, nearly the whole burden fell on him; since, while he supplied the squadron without remuneration, the governor sold many of his own stores at an exorbitant profit.²⁶ Yet it does not seem probable that Velasquez, with such ample means at his command, should have thrown on his deputy the burden of the expedition, nor that the latter — had he done so — could have been in a condition to meet these expenses, amounting, as we are told, to more than twenty thousand gold ducats.

²⁶ The letter from the Municipality of Vera Cruz, after stating that Velasquez bore only one third of the original expense, adds, "Y sepan Vras. Magestades que la mayor parte de la dicha tercera parte que el dicho Diego Velasquez gastó en hacer la dicha armada fué, emplear sus dineros en vinos y en ropas, y en otras cosas de poco valor para nos lo vender acá en mucha mas cantidad de lo que á él le costó, por manera que podemos decir que entre nosotros los Españoles vasallos de Vras. Re-

ales Altezas ha hecho Diego Velasquez su rescate y granosea de sus dineros cobrándolos muy bien." (Carta de Vera Cruz, MS.) Puertocarrero and Montejo, also, in their depositions taken in Spain, both speak of Cortés' having furnished two thirds of the cost of the flotilla. (Declaracion de Puertocarrero, MS. — Declaracion de Montejo, MS. (29 de Abril, 1520.)) The letter from Vera Cruz, however, was prepared under the eye of Cortés; and the two last were his confidential officers.

Still it cannot be denied that an ambitious man like Cortés, who was to reap all the glory of the enterprise, would very naturally be less solicitous to count the gains of it, than his employer, who, inactive at home, and having no laurels to win, must look on the pecuniary profits as his only recompense. The question gave rise, some years later, to a furious litigation between the parties, with which it is not necessary at present to embarrass the reader.

It is due to Velasquez to state that the instructions delivered by him for the conduct of the expedition cannot be charged with a narrow or mercenary spirit. The first object of the voyage was to find Grijalva, after which the two commanders were to proceed in company together. Reports had been brought back by Cordova, on his return from the first visit to Yucatan, that six Christians were said to be lingering in captivity in the interior of the country. It was supposed they might belong to the party of the unfortunate Nicuessa, and orders were given to find them out, if possible, and restore them to liberty. But the great object of the expedition was barter with the natives. In pursuing this, special care was to be taken that they should receive no wrong, but be treated with kindness and humanity. Cortés was to bear in mind, above all things, that the object which the Spanish monarch had most at heart was the conversion of the Indians. He was to impress on them the grandeur and goodness of his royal master, to invite them "to give in their allegiance to him, and to manifest it by regaling him with such

comfortable presents of gold, pearls, and precious stones as, by showing their own good-will, would secure his favor and protection." He was to make an accurate survey of the coast, sounding its bays and inlets for the benefit of future navigators. He was to acquaint himself with the natural products of the country, with the character of its different races, their institutions and progress in civilization; and he was to send home minute accounts of all these, together with such articles as he should obtain in his intercourse with them. Finally, he was to take *the most careful care* to omit nothing that might redound to the service of God or his sovereign.²⁷

Such was the general tenor of the instructions given to Cortés, and they must be admitted to provide for the interests of science and humanity, as well as for those which had reference only to a commercial speculation. It may seem strange, considering the discontent shown by Velasquez with his former captain, Grijalva, for not colonizing, that no directions should have been given to that effect here. But he had not yet received from Spain the warrant for investing his agents with such powers; and that which had been obtained from the Hieronymite fathers in Hispaniola conceded only the right to traffic with the natives. The commission at the same

²⁷ The instrument, in the original Castilian, will be found in *Appendix, Part 2, No. 5*. It is often referred to by writers who never saw it, as the Agreement between

Cortés and Velasquez. It is, in fact, only the instructions given by this latter to his officer, who was no party to it.

time recognised the authority of Cortés as Captain-General of the expedition.²³

²³ Declaracion de Puertocarrero, MS. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 7.

Velasquez soon after obtained from the crown authority to colonize the new countries, with the title of *adelantado* over them. The instrument was dated at Barcelona, Nov. 13th, 1518. (Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 3, cap. 8.)

Empty privileges! Las Casas gives a caustic etymology of the title of *adelantado*, so often granted to the Spanish discoverers. "Adelantados porque se adelantaran en hazer males y daños tan gravísimos á gentes pacíficas." Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 117.



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CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA

CHAPTER III.

JEALOUSY OF VELASQUEZ. — CORTÉS EMBARKS. — EQUIPMENT OF HIS FLEET. — HIS PERSON AND CHARACTER. — RENDEZVOUS AT HAVANA. — STRENGTH OF HIS ARMAMENT.

1519.

THE importance given to Cortés by his new position, and, perhaps, a somewhat more lofty bearing, gradually gave uneasiness to the naturally suspicious temper of Velasquez, who became apprehensive that his officer, when away where he would have the power, might also have the inclination, to throw off his dependence on him altogether. An accidental circumstance at this time heightened these suspicions. A mad fellow, his jester, one of those crack-brained wits, — half wit, half fool, — who formed in those days a common appendage to every great man's establishment, called out to the governor, as he was taking his usual walk one morning with Cortés towards the port, "Have a care, master Velasquez, or we shall have to go a hunting, some day or other, after this same captain of ours!" "Do you hear what the rogue says?" exclaimed the governor to his companion. "Do not heed him," said Cortés, "he is a saucy knave, and deserves a good whipping." The words sunk deep, however, in the mind of Velasquez, — as, indeed, true jests are apt to stick.

There were not wanting persons about his Excellency, who fanned the latent embers of jealousy into a blaze. These worthy gentlemen, some of them kinsmen of Velasquez, who probably felt their own deserts somewhat thrown into the shade by the rising fortunes of Cortés, reminded the governor of his ancient quarrel with that officer, and of the little probability that affronts so keenly felt at the time could ever be forgotten. By these and similar suggestions, and by misconstructions of the present conduct of Cortés, they wrought on the passions of Velasquez to such a degree, that he resolved to intrust the expedition to other hands.¹

He communicated his design to his confidential advisers, Lares and Duero, and these trusty personages reported it without delay to Cortés, although, "to a man of half his penetration," says Las Casas, "the thing would have been readily divined from the governor's altered demeanour."² The two functionaries advised their friend to expedite matters as much as possible, and to lose no time in getting his fleet ready for sea, if he would retain the command of it. Cortés showed the same prompt decision

¹ "Deterrebat," says the anonymous biographer, "eum Cortesii natura imperii avida, fiducia sui ingens, et nimius sumptus in classe parandâ. Timere itaque Velasquius, cœpit, si Cortesius cum eâ classe iret, nihil ad se vel honoris vel lucri rediturum." De Rebus Gestis, MS. — Bernal Diaz, Hist.

de la Conquista, cap. 19. — Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., cap. 114.

² "Cortés no avia menester mas para entendello de mirar el gesto á Diego Velasquez segun su astuta viveza y mundana sabiduría." Hist. de las Indias, MS., cap. 114.

on this occasion, which more than once afterwards in a similar crisis gave the direction to his destiny.

He had not yet got his complement of men, nor of vessels; and was very inadequately provided with supplies of any kind. But he resolved to weigh anchor that very night. He waited on his officers, informed them of his purpose, and probably of the cause of it; and at midnight, when the town was hushed in sleep, they all went quietly on board, and the little squadron dropped down the bay. First, however, Cortés had visited the person whose business it was to supply the place with meat, and relieved him of all his stock on hand, notwithstanding his complaint that the city must suffer for it on the morrow, leaving him, at the same time, in payment, a massive gold chain of much value, which he wore round his neck.³

Great was the amazement of the good citizens of St. Jago, when, at dawn, they saw that the fleet, which they knew was so ill prepared for the voyage, had left its moorings and was busily getting under way. The tidings soon came to the ears of his Excellency, who, springing from his bed, hastily dressed himself, mounted his horse, and, followed by his retinue, galloped down to the quay. Cortés, as soon as he descried their approach, entered an armed boat, and came within speaking distance of the shore. "And is it thus you part from me!" ex-

³ Las Casas had the story from Cortés' own mouth. Hist. de las Indias, MS., cap. 114. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 7. — De Rebus Gestis, MS.

claimed Velasquez; "a courteous way of taking leave, truly!" "Pardon me," answered Cortés, "time presses, and there are some things that should be done before they are even thought of. Has your Excellency any commands?" But the mortified governor had no commands to give; and Cortés, politely waving his hand, returned to his vessel, and the little fleet instantly made sail for the port of Macaca, about fifteen leagues distant. (November 18, 1518.) Velasquez rode back to his house to digest his chagrin as he best might; satisfied, probably, that he had made at least two blunders; one in appointing Cortés to the command, — the other in attempting to deprive him of it. For, if it be true, that, by giving our confidence by halves, we can scarcely hope to make a friend, it is equally true, that, by withdrawing it when given, we shall make an enemy.⁴

This clandestine departure of Cortés has been severely criticized by some writers, especially by Las Casas.⁵ Yet much may be urged in vindication of

⁴ Las Casas, *Hist. de las Indias*, MS., cap. 114. — Herrera, *Hist. General*, dec. 2, lib. 3, cap. 12.

Solis, who follows Bernal Diaz in saying that Cortés parted openly and amicably from Velasquez, seems to consider it a great slander on the character of the former to suppose that he wanted to break with the governor so soon, when he had received so little provocation. (*Conquista*, lib. 1, cap. 10.) But it is not necessary to suppose

that Cortés intended a rupture with his employer by this clandestine movement; but only to secure himself in the command. At all events, the text conforms in every particular to the statement of Las Casas, who, as he knew both the parties well, and resided on the island at the time, had ample means of information.

⁵ *Hist. de las Indias*, MS., cap. 114.

his conduct. He had been appointed to the command by the voluntary act of the governor, and this had been fully ratified by the authorities of Hispaniola. He had at once devoted all his resources to the undertaking, incurring, indeed, a heavy debt in addition. He was now to be deprived of his commission, without any misconduct having been alleged or at least proved against him. Such an event must overwhelm him in irretrievable ruin, to say nothing of the friends from whom he had so largely borrowed, and the followers who had embarked their fortunes in the expedition on the faith of his commanding it. There are few persons, probably, who, under these circumstances, would have felt called tamely to acquiesce in the sacrifice of their hopes to a groundless and arbitrary whim. The most to have been expected from Cortés was, that he should feel obliged to provide faithfully for the interests of his employer in the conduct of the enterprise. How far he felt the force of this obligation will appear in the sequel.

From Macaca, where Cortés laid in such stores as he could obtain from the royal farms, and which, he said, he considered as "a loan from the king," he proceeded to Trinidad; a more considerable town, on the southern coast of Cuba. Here he landed, and, erecting his standard in front of his quarters, made proclamation, with liberal offers to all who would join the expedition. Volunteers came in daily, and among them more than a hundred of Grijalva's men, just returned from their voyage, and willing

to follow up the discovery under an enterprising leader. The fame of Cortés attracted, also, a number of cavaliers of family and distinction, some of whom, having accompanied Grijalva, brought much information valuable for the present expedition. Among these hidalgos may be mentioned Pedro de Alvarado and his brothers, Cristóval de Olid, Alonso de Avila, Juan Velasquez de Leon, a near relation of the governor, Alonso Hernandez de Puertocarrero, and Gonzalo de Sandoval, — all of them men who took a most important part in the Conquest. Their presence was of great moment, as giving consideration to the enterprise; and, when they entered the little camp of the adventurers, the latter turned out to welcome them amidst lively strains of music and joyous salvos of artillery.

Cortés meanwhile was active in purchasing military stores and provisions. Learning that a trading vessel laden with grain and other commodities for the mines was off the coast, he ordered out one of his caravels to seize her and bring her into port. He paid the master in bills for both cargo and ship, and even persuaded this man, named Sedeño, who was wealthy, to join his fortunes to the expedition. He also despatched one of his officers, Diego de Ordaz, in quest of another ship, of which he had tidings, with instructions to seize it in like manner, and to meet him with it off Cape St. Antonio, the westerly point of the island.⁶ By this he effected

⁶ Las Casas had this, also, from do esto me dixo el mismo Cortés, the lips of Cortés in later life. "To- con otras cosas cerca dello des-

another object, that of getting rid of Ordaz, who was one of the governor's household, and an inconvenient spy on his own actions.

While thus occupied, letters from Velasquez were received by the commander of Trinidad, requiring him to seize the person of Cortés and to detain him, as he had been deposed from the command of the fleet, which was given to another. This functionary communicated his instructions to the principal officers in the expedition, who counselled him not to make the attempt, as it would undoubtedly lead to a commotion among the soldiers, that might end in laying the town in ashes. Verdugo thought it prudent to conform to this advice.⁷

As Cortés was willing to strengthen himself by still further reinforcements, he ordered Alvarado with a small body of men to march across the country to the Havana, while he himself would sail round the westerly point of the island, and meet him there with the squadron. In this port he again displayed his standard, making the usual proclamation. He caused all the large guns to be brought on shore, and, with the small arms and crossbows, to be put in order. As there was abundance of cotton raised in this neighbourhood, he had the jackets of the soldiers thickly quilted with it, for a defence against

pues de Marques ; reindo y mofando é con estas formales palabras, *Á la mi fée andube por allí como un gentil cosario.*" Hist. de las Indias, MS., cap. 115.

⁷ De Rebus Gestis, MS. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 8. — Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., cap. 114, 115.

the Indian arrows, from which the troops in the former expeditions had grievously suffered. He distributed his men into eleven companies, each under the command of an experienced officer; and it was observed, that, although several of the cavaliers in the service were the personal friends and even kinsmen of Velasquez, he appeared to treat them all with perfect confidence.

His principal standard was of black velvet embroidered with gold, and emblazoned with a red cross amidst flames of blue and white, with this motto in Latin beneath; "Friends, let us follow the Cross; and under this sign, if we have faith, we shall conquer." He now assumed more state in his own person and way of living, introducing a greater number of domestics and officers into his household, and placing it on a footing becoming a man of high station. This state he maintained through the rest of his life.⁸

Cortés at this time was thirty-three, or perhaps thirty-four years of age. In stature he was rather above the middle size. His complexion was pale; and his large dark eye gave an expression of gravity to his countenance, not to have been expected in one of his cheerful temperament. His figure was slender, at least until later life; but his chest was

⁸ Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 24. — De Rebus Gestis, MS. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 8. — Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., cap. 115.

The legend on the standard was, doubtless, suggested by that on the *labarum*, — the sacred banner of Constantine.

deep, his shoulders broad, his frame muscular and well proportioned. It presented the union of agility and vigor which qualified him to excel in fencing, horsemanship, and the other generous exercises of chivalry. In his diet he was temperate, careless of what he ate, and drinking little; while to toil and privation he seemed perfectly indifferent. His dress, for he did not disdain the impression produced by such adventitious aids, was such as to set off his handsome person to advantage; neither gaudy nor striking, but rich. He wore few ornaments, and usually the same; but those were of great price. His manners, frank and soldierlike, concealed a most cool and calculating spirit. With his gayest humor there mingled a settled air of resolution, which made those who approached him feel they must obey; and which infused something like awe into the attachment of his most devoted followers. Such a combination, in which love was tempered by authority, was the one probably best calculated to inspire devotion in the rough and turbulent spirits among whom his lot was to be cast.

The character of Cortés seems to have undergone some change with change of circumstances; or, to speak more correctly, the new scenes in which he was placed called forth qualities which before lay dormant in his bosom. There are some hardy natures that require the heats of excited action to unfold their energies; like the plants, which, closed to the mild influence of a temperate latitude, come to their full growth, and give forth their fruits.

only in the burning atmosphere of the tropics. — Such is the portrait left to us by his contemporaries of this remarkable man; the instrument selected by Providence to scatter terror among the barbarian monarchs of the Western World, and lay their empires in the dust.⁹

Before the preparations were fully completed at the Havana, the commander of the place, Don Pedro Barba, received despatches from Velasquez ordering him to apprehend Cortés, and to prevent the departure of his vessels; while another epistle from the same source was delivered to Cortés himself, requesting him to postpone his voyage till the governor could communicate with him, as he proposed, in person. “Never,” exclaims Las Casas, “did I see so little knowledge of affairs shown, as in this letter of Diego Velasquez, — that he should have imagined, that a man, who had so recently put such an affront on him, would defer his departure at his bidding!”¹⁰ It was, indeed, hoping to stay the flight of the arrow by a word, after it had left the bow.

The Captain-General, however, during his short stay, had entirely conciliated the good-will of Barba. And, if that officer had had the inclination, he knew he had not the power, to enforce his principal's or-

⁹ The most minute notices of the person and habits of Cortés are to be gathered from the narrative of the old cavalier Bernal Diaz, who served so long under him, and from Gomara, the general's chaplain. See in particular the last chapter of Gomara's *Crónica*, and cap. 203 of the *Hist. de la Conquista*.

¹⁰ Las Casas, *Hist. de las Indias*, MS., cap. 115.

ders, in the face of a resolute soldiery, incensed at this ungenerous persecution of their commander, and "all of whom," in the words of the honest chronicler who bore part in the expedition, "officers and privates, would have cheerfully laid down their lives for him."¹¹ Barba contented himself, therefore, with explaining to Velasquez the impracticability of the attempt, and at the same time endeavoured to tranquillize his apprehensions by asserting his own confidence in the fidelity of Cortés. To this the latter added a communication of his own, couched "in the soft terms he knew so well how to use,"¹² in which he implored his Excellency to rely on his devotion to his interests, and concluded with the comfortable assurance that he and the whole fleet, God willing, would sail on the following morning.

Accordingly on the 10th of February, 1519, the little squadron got under way, and directed its course towards Cape St. Antonio, the appointed place of rendezvous. When all were brought together, the vessels were found to be eleven in number; one of them, in which Cortés himself went, was of a hundred tons, burden, three others were from seventy to eighty tons; the remainder were caravels and open brigantines. The whole was put under the direction of Antonio de Alaminos, as chief pilot; a veteran navigator, who had acted as pilot to Columbus in his last voyage, and to Cordova and Grijalva in the former expeditions to Yucatan.

¹¹ Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

Landing on the Cape and mustering his forces, Cortés found they amounted to one hundred and ten mariners, five hundred and fifty-three soldiers, including thirty-two crossbowmen, and thirteen arquebusiers, besides two hundred Indians of the island, and a few Indian women for menial offices. He was provided with ten heavy guns, four lighter pieces called falconets, and with a good supply of ammunition.¹³ He had besides sixteen horses. They were not easily procured; for the difficulty of transporting them across the ocean in the flimsy craft of that day made them rare and incredibly dear in the Islands.¹⁴ But Cortés rightfully estimated the importance of cavalry, however small in number, both for their actual service in the field, and for striking terror into

¹³ Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 26.

There is some discrepancy among authorities, in regard to the numbers of the army. The Letter from Vera Cruz, which should have been exact, speaks in round terms of only four hundred soldiers. (*Carta de Vera Cruz*, MS.) Velasquez himself, in a communication to the Chief Judge of Hispaniola, states the number at six hundred. (*Carta de Diego Velasquez al Lic. Figueroa*, MS.) I have adopted the estimates of Bernal Diaz, who, in his long service, seems to have become intimately acquainted with every one of his comrades, their persons, and private history.

¹⁴ Incredibly dear indeed, since, from the statements contained in

the depositions at Villa Segura, it appears that the cost of the horses for the expedition was from four to five hundred *pesos de oro* each! "Si saben que de caballos que el dicho Señor Capitan General Hernando Cortés ha comprado para servir en la dicha Conquista, que son diez é ocho, que le han costado á quatrocientos cinquenta é á quinientos pesos ha pagado, é que deve mas de ocho mil pesos de oro dellos." (*Probanza en Villa Segura*, MS.) The estimation of these horses is sufficiently shown by the minute information Bernal Diaz has thought proper to give of every one of them; minute enough for the pages of a sporting calendar. See *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 23.

the savages. With so paltry a force did he enter on a Conquest which even his stout heart must have shrunk from attempting with such means, had he but foreseen half its real difficulties!

Before embarking, Cortés addressed his soldiers in a short but animated harangue. He told them they were about to enter on a noble enterprise, one that would make their name famous to after ages. He was leading them to countries more vast and opulent than any yet visited by Europeans. "I hold out to you a glorious prize," continued the orator, "but it is to be won by incessant toil. Great things are achieved only by great exertions, and glory was never the reward of sloth.¹⁵ If I have labored hard and staked my all on this undertaking, it is for the love of that renown, which is the noblest recompense of man. But, if any among you covet riches more, be but true to me, as I will be true to you and to the occasion, and I will make you masters of such as our countrymen have never dreamed of! You are few in number, but strong in resolution; and, if this does not falter, doubt not but that the Almighty, who has never deserted the Spaniard in his contest with the infidel, will shield you, though encompassed by a cloud of enemies; for your cause is a *just cause*, and you are to fight under the banner of the Cross. Go forward, then," he concluded, "with alacrity and

¹⁵ "Io vos propongo grandes premios, mas embueltos en grandes trabajos; pero la virtud no quiere ociosidad." (Gomara, Crónica, cap.

9.) It is the thought so finely expressed by Thomson;

"For sluggard's brow the laurel never grows; Renown is not the child of indolent repose."