

mination of his whole army, rather than from his own individual impulse.

Meanwhile the soldiers suffered greatly from the inconveniences of their position amidst burning sands and the pestilent effluvia of the neighbouring marshes, while the venomous insects of these hot regions left them no repose, day or night. Thirty of their number had already sickened and died; a loss that could ill be afforded by the little band. To add to their troubles, the coldness of the Mexican chiefs had extended to their followers; and the supplies for the camp were not only much diminished, but the prices set on them were exorbitant. The position was equally unfavorable for the shipping, which lay in an open roadstead, exposed to the fury of the first *norte* which should sweep the Mexican Gulf.

The general was induced by these circumstances to despatch two vessels, under Francisco de Montejo, with the experienced Alaminos for his pilot, to explore the coast in a northerly direction, and see if a safer port and more commodious quarters for the army could not be found there.

After the lapse of ten days the Mexican envoys returned. They entered the Spanish quarters with the same formality as on the former visit, bearing with them an additional present of rich stuffs and metallic ornaments, which, though inferior in value to those before brought, were estimated at three thousand ounces of gold. Besides these, there were four precious stones, of a considerable size,

resembling emeralds, called by the natives *chalchuites*, each of which, as they assured the Spaniards, was worth more than a load of gold, and was designed as a mark of particular respect for the Spanish monarch.²¹ Unfortunately they were not worth as many loads of earth in Europe.

Montezuma's answer was in substance the same as before. It contained a positive prohibition for the strangers to advance nearer to the capital; and expressed the confidence, that, now they had obtained what they had most desired, they would return to their own country without unnecessary delay. Cortés received this unpalatable response courteously, though somewhat coldly, and, turning to his officers, exclaimed, "This is a rich and powerful prince indeed; yet it shall go hard, but we will one day pay him a visit in his capital!"

While they were conversing, the bell struck for vespers. At the sound, the soldiers, throwing themselves on their knees, offered up their orisons before the large wooden cross planted in the sands. As the Aztec chiefs gazed with curious surprise, Cortés thought it a favorable occasion to impress them with what he conceived to be a principal object of his visit to the country. Father Olmedo accordingly

²¹ Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 40.

Father Sahagun thus describes these stones, so precious in Mexico that the use of them was interdicted to any but the nobles. "Las *chalchuites* son verdes y no trans-

parentes mezcladas de blanco, usanlas mucho los principales, trayéndolas á las muñecas atadas en hilo, y aquello es señal de que es persona noble el que las trae." Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 11, cap. 8.

expounded, as briefly and clearly as he could, the great doctrines of Christianity, touching on the atonement, the passion, and the resurrection, and concluding with assuring his astonished audience, that it was their intention to extirpate the idolatrous practices of the nation, and to substitute the pure worship of the true God. He then put into their hands a little image of the Virgin with the infant Redeemer, requesting them to place it in their temples instead of their sanguinary deities. How far the Aztec lords comprehended the mysteries of the faith, as conveyed through the double version of Aguilar and Marina, or how well they perceived the subtle distinctions between their own images and those of the Roman Church, we are not informed. There is reason to fear, however, that the seed fell on barren ground; for, when the homily of the good father ended, they withdrew with an air of dubious reserve very different from their friendly manners at the first interview. The same night every hut was deserted by the natives, and the Spaniards saw themselves suddenly cut off from supplies in the midst of a desolate wilderness. The movement had so suspicious an appearance, that Cortés apprehended an attack would be made on his quarters, and took precautions accordingly. But none was meditated.

The army was at length cheered by the return of Montejo from his exploring expedition, after an absence of twelve days. He had run down the Gulf as far as Panuco, where he experienced such

heavy gales, in attempting to double that headland, that he was driven back, and had nearly foundered. In the whole course of the voyage he had found only one place tolerably sheltered from the north winds. Fortunately, the adjacent country, well watered by fresh, running streams, afforded a favorable position for the camp; and thither, after some deliberation, it was determined to repair.²²

²² Camargo, Hist. de Tlascala, MS.—Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 121.—Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 40, 41.—Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 5, cap. 6.—Gomara, Crónica, cap. 29, ap. Barcia, tom. II.



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CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA

JUNTA DE ANDALUCÍA

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLES IN THE CAMP.—PLAN OF A COLONY.—MANAGEMENT OF
CORTÉS.—MARCH TO CEMPOALLA.—PROCEEDINGS WITH THE NA-
TIVES.—FOUNDATION OF VERA CRUZ.

1519.

THERE is no situation which tries so severely the patience and discipline of the soldier, as a life of idleness in camp, where his thoughts, instead of being bent on enterprise and action, are fastened on himself and the inevitable privations and dangers of his condition. This was particularly the case in the present instance, where, in addition to the evils of a scanty subsistence, the troops suffered from excessive heat, swarms of venomous insects, and the other annoyances of a sultry climate. They were, moreover, far from possessing the character of regular forces, trained to subordination under a commander whom they had long been taught to reverence and obey. They were soldiers of fortune, embarked with him in an adventure in which all seemed to have an equal stake, and they regarded their captain — the captain of a day — as little more than an equal.

There was a growing discontent among the men at their longer residence in this strange land. They were still more dissatisfied on learning the general's

intention to remove to the neighbourhood of the port discovered by Montejo. "It was time to return," they said, "and report what had been done to the governor of Cuba, and not linger on these barren shores until they had brought the whole Mexican empire on their heads!" Cortés evaded their importunities as well as he could, assuring them there was no cause for despondency. "Every thing so far had gone on prosperously, and, when they had taken up a more favorable position, there was no reason to doubt they might still continue the same profitable intercourse with the natives."

While this was passing, five Indians made their appearance in the camp one morning, and were brought to the general's tent. Their dress and whole appearance were different from those of the Mexicans. They wore rings of gold, and gems of a bright blue stone in their ears and nostrils, while a gold leaf delicately wrought was attached to the under lip. Marina was unable to comprehend their language, but, on her addressing them in Aztec, two of them, it was found, could converse in that tongue. They said they were natives of Cempoalla, the chief town of the Totonacs, a powerful nation who had come upon the great plateau many centuries back, and, descending its eastern slope, settled along the sierras and broad plains which skirt the Mexican Gulf towards the north. Their country was one of the recent conquests of the Aztecs, and they experienced such vexatious oppressions from their conquerors as made them very impatient of the yoke.

They informed Cortés of these and other particulars. The fame of the Spaniards had reached their master, who sent these messengers to request the presence of the wonderful strangers in his capital.

This communication was eagerly listened to by the general, who, it will be remembered, was possessed of none of those facts, laid before the reader, respecting the internal condition of the kingdom, which he had no reason to suppose other than strong and united. An important truth now flashed on his mind; as his quick eye descried in this spirit of discontent a potent lever, by the aid of which he might hope to overturn this barbaric empire. — He received the mission of the Totonacs most graciously, and, after informing himself, as far as possible, of their dispositions and resources, dismissed them with presents, promising soon to pay a visit to their lord.¹

Meanwhile, his personal friends, among whom may be particularly mentioned Alonso Hernandez Puertocarrero, Christóval de Olid, Alonso de Avila, Pedro de Alvarado and his brothers, were very busy in persuading the troops to take such measures as should enable Cortés to go forward in those ambitious plans, for which he had no warrant from the powers of Velasquez. “To return now,” they said, “was to abandon the enterprise on the threshold, which, under such a leader, must conduct to glory and incalculable riches. To return to Cuba would be to surrender to the greedy governor the little

¹ Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 41. — Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 121. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 28.

gains they had already got. The only way was to persuade the general to establish a permanent colony in the country, the government of which would take the conduct of matters into its own hands, and provide for the interests of its members. It was true, Cortés had no such authority from Velasquez. But the interests of the Sovereigns, which were paramount to every other, imperatively demanded it."

These conferences could not be conducted so secretly, though held by night, as not to reach the ears of the friends of Velasquez.² They remonstrated against the proceedings, as insidious and disloyal. They accused the general of instigating them; and, calling on him to take measures without delay for the return of the troops to Cuba, announced their own intention to depart, with such followers as still remained true to the governor.

Cortés, instead of taking umbrage at this high-handed proceeding, or even answering in the same haughty tone, mildly replied, "that nothing was further from his desire than to exceed his instructions. He, indeed, preferred to remain in the country, and continue his profitable intercourse with the natives. But, since the army thought otherwise, he should defer to their opinion, and give orders to return, as they desired." On the following morning, proclamation was made for the troops to hold them-

² The letter from the *cabildo* of az, who was privy to them, is a Vera Cruz says nothing of these sufficient authority. See Hist. de midnight conferences. Bernal Di- la Conquista, cap. 42.

selves in readiness to embark at once on board the fleet, which was to sail for Cuba.³

Great was the sensation caused by their general's order. Even many of those before clamorous for it, with the usual caprice of men whose wishes are too easily gratified, now regretted it. The partisans of Cortés were loud in their remonstrances. "They were betrayed by the general," they cried, and, thronging round his tent, called on him to countermand his orders. "We came here," said they, "expecting to form a settlement, if the state of the country authorized it. Now it seems you have no warrant from the governor to make one. But there are interests, higher than those of Velasquez, which demand it. These territories are not his property, but were discovered for the Sovereigns;⁴ and it is necessary to plant a colony to watch over their in-

³ Gomara, Crónica, cap. 30. — Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 121. — Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 80. — Bernal Diaz, Ibid., loc. cit. — Declaracion de Puertocarrero, MS.

The deposition of a respectable person like Puertocarrero, taken in the course of the following year after his return to Spain, is a document of such authority, that I have transferred it entire, in the original, to the *Appendix, Part 2, No. 7.*

⁴ Sometimes we find the Spanish writers referring to "the sovereigns," sometimes to "the emperor"; in the former case, in-

tending queen Joanna, the crazy mother of Charles V., as well as himself. Indeed, all public acts and ordinances ran in the name of both. The title of "Highness," which, until the reign of Charles V., had usually — not uniformly, as Robertson imagines (*History of Charles V., vol. II. p. 59*) — been applied to the sovereign, now gradually gave way to that of "Majesty," which Charles affected after his election to the imperial throne. The same title is occasionally found in the correspondence of the Great Captain, and other courtiers of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella.

terests, instead of wasting time in idle barter, or, still worse, of returning, in the present state of affairs, to Cuba. If you refuse," they concluded, "we shall protest against your conduct as disloyal to their Highnesses."

Cortés received this remonstrance with the embarrassed air of one by whom it was altogether unexpected. He modestly requested time for deliberation, and promised to give his answer on the following day. At the time appointed, he called the troops together, and made them a brief address. "There was no one," he said, "if he knew his own heart, more deeply devoted than himself to the welfare of his sovereigns, and the glory of the Spanish name. He had not only expended his all, but incurred heavy debts, to meet the charges of this expedition, and had hoped to reimburse himself by continuing his traffic with the Mexicans. But, if the soldiers thought a different course advisable, he was ready to postpone his own advantage to the good of the state."⁵ He concluded by declaring his willingness to take measures for settling a colony *in the*

⁵ According to Robertson, Cortés told his men that he had proposed to establish a colony on the coast, before marching into the country; but he abandoned his design, at their entreaties to set out at once on the expedition. In the very next page, we find him organizing this same colony. (History of America, vol. II. pp. 241, 242.) The historian would have been saved this inconsistency, if he had followed either of the authorities whom he cites, Bernal Diaz and Herrera, or the letter from Vera Cruz, of which he had a copy. They all concur in the statement in the text.

name of the Spanish sovereigns, and to nominate a magistracy to preside over it.⁶

For the *alcaldes* he selected Puertocarrero and Montejo, the former cavalier his fast friend, and the latter the friend of Velasquez, and chosen for that very reason; a stroke of policy which perfectly succeeded. The *regidores*, *alguacil*, treasurer, and other functionaries, were then appointed, all of them his personal friends and adherents. They were regularly sworn into office, and the new city received the title of *Villa Rica de Vera Cruz*, "The Rich Town of the True Cross"; a name which was considered as happily intimating that union of spiritual and temporal interests to which the arms of the Spanish adventurers in the New World were to be devoted.⁷ Thus, by a single stroke of the pen, as it were, the camp was transformed into a civil community, and the whole frame-work and even title of the city were arranged, before the site of it had been settled.

The new municipality were not slow in coming together; when Cortés presented himself, cap in hand, before that august body, and, laying the powers

⁶ Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 122. — Carta de Vera Cruz, MS. — Declaracion de Montejo, MS. — Declaracion de Puertocarrero, MS.

"Our general, after some urging, acquiesced," says the blunt old soldier, Bernal Diaz; "for, as the proverb says, 'You ask me

to do what I have already made up my mind to.'" *Tu me lo ruegas, é yo me lo quiero.* Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 42.

⁷ According to Bernal Diaz, the title of "Vera Cruz" was intended to commemorate their landing on Good Friday. Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 42.

of Velasquez on the table, respectfully tendered the resignation of his office of Captain-General, "which, indeed," he said, "had necessarily expired, since the authority of the governor was now superseded by that of the magistracy of Villa Rica de Vera Cruz." He then, with a profound obeisance, left the apartment.⁸

The council, after a decent time spent in deliberation, again requested his presence. "There was no one," they said, "who, on mature reflection, appeared to them so well qualified to take charge of the interests of the community, both in peace and in war, as himself; and they unanimously named him, in behalf of their Catholic Highnesses, Captain General and Chief Justice of the colony." He was further empowered to draw, on his own account, one fifth of the gold and silver which might hereafter be obtained by commerce or conquest from the natives.⁹ Thus clothed with supreme civil and mili-

⁸ Solís, whose taste for speech-making might have satisfied even the Abbé Mably, (See his Treatise, "De la Manière d'écrire l'Histoire,") has put a very flourishing harangue on this occasion into the mouth of his hero, of which there is not a vestige in any contemporary account. (Conquista, lib. 2, cap. 7.) Dr. Robertson has transferred it to his own eloquent pages, without citing his author, indeed, who, considering he came a century and a half after the Conquest, must be allowed to be not the best,

especially when the only voucher for a fact.

⁹ "Lo peor de todo que le otorgámos," says Bernal Diaz, somewhat peevishly, was, "que le daríamos el quinto del oro de lo que se huuiesse, despues de sacado el Real quinto." (Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 42.) The letter from Vera Cruz says nothing of this fifth. The reader, who would see the whole account of this remarkable transaction in the original, may find it in *Appendix, Part 2, No. 8.*

tary jurisdiction, Cortés was not backward in exerting his authority. He found speedy occasion for it.

The transactions above described had succeeded each other so rapidly, that the governor's party seemed to be taken by surprise, and had formed no plan of opposition. When the last measure was carried, however, they broke forth into the most indignant and opprobrious invectives, denouncing the whole as a systematic conspiracy against Velasquez. These accusations led to recrimination from the soldiers of the other side, until from words they nearly proceeded to blows. Some of the principal cavaliers, among them Velasquez de Leon, a kinsman of the governor, Escobar, his page, and Diego de Ordaz, were so active in instigating these turbulent movements, that Cortés took the bold measure of putting them all in irons, and sending them on board the vessels. He then dispersed the common file by detaching many of them with a strong party under Alvarado to forage the neighbouring country, and bring home provisions for the destitute camp.

During their absence, every argument that cupidity or ambition could suggest was used to win the refractory to his views. Promises, and even gold, it is said, were liberally lavished; till, by degrees, their understandings were opened to a clearer view of the merits of the case. And when the foraging party reappeared with abundance of poultry and vegetables, and the cravings of the stomach—that great laboratory of disaffection, whether in camp or capital—were appeased, good-humor returned with good

cheer, and the rival factions embraced one another as companions in arms, pledged to a common cause. Even the high-mettled hidalgos on board the vessels did not long withstand the general tide of reconciliation, but one by one gave in their adhesion to the new government. What is more remarkable is that this forced conversion was not a hollow one, but from this time forward several of these very cavaliers became the most steady and devoted partisans of Cortés.¹⁰

Such was the address of this extraordinary man, and such the ascendancy which in a few months he had acquired over these wild and turbulent spirits! By this ingenious transformation of a military into a civil community, he had secured a new and effectual basis for future operations. He might now go forward without fear of check or control from a superior, — at least from any other superior than the Crown, under which alone he held his commis-

¹⁰ Carta de Vera Cruz, MS. — sees nothing but good faith and Gomara, Crónica, cap. 30, 31. — loyalty in the conduct of the general, who acted from a sense of duty! (Conquista, lib. 2, cap. 6, Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 122. — Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 80. 7.) Solís is even a more steady — Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 42. — Declaraciones de Montejo y Puertocarrero, MSS. apologist for his hero, than his own chaplain, Gomara, or the worthy magistrates of Vera Cruz. A

more impartial testimony than either, probably, may be gathered from honest Bernal Diaz, so often quoted. A hearty champion of the cause, he was by no means blind to the defects nor the merits of his leader.

sion. In accomplishing this, instead of incurring the charge of usurpation, or of transcending his legitimate powers, he had transferred the responsibility, in a great measure, to those who had imposed on him the necessity of action. By this step, moreover, he had linked the fortunes of his followers indissolubly with his own. They had taken their chance with him, and, whether for weal or for woe, must abide the consequences. He was no longer limited to the narrow concerns of a sordid traffic, but, sure of their coöperation, might now boldly meditate, and gradually disclose, those lofty schemes which he had formed in his own bosom for the conquest of an empire.¹¹

Harmony being thus restored, Cortés sent his heavy guns on board the fleet, and ordered it to coast along the shore to the north as far as Chiahuitztlá, the town near which the destined port of the new city was situated; proposing, himself, at the head of his troops, to visit Cempoalla, on the march. The road lay for some miles across the dreary plains in the neighbourhood of the modern Vera Cruz. In this sandy waste no signs of vegetation met their eyes, which, however, were occa-

¹¹ This may appear rather in-different logic to those who consider that Cortés appointed the very body, who, in turn, appointed him to the command. But the affectation of legal forms afforded him a thin varnish for his proceedings, which served his purpose, for

the present, at least, with the troops. For the future, he trusted to his good star,—in other words, to the success of his enterprise,—to vindicate his conduct to the Emperor. He did not miscalculate.

sionally refreshed by glimpses of the blue Atlantic, and by the distant view of the magnificent Orizaba, towering, with his spotless diadem of snow, far above his colossal brethren of the Andes.¹² As they advanced, the country gradually assumed a greener and richer aspect. They crossed a river, probably a tributary of the *Rio de la Antigua*, with difficulty, on rafts, and on some broken canoes that were lying on the banks. They now came in view of very different scenery, — wide-rolling plains covered with a rich carpet of verdure, and overshadowed by groves of cocoas and feathery palms, among whose tall, slender stems were seen deer, and various wild animals with which the Spaniards were unacquainted. Some of the horsemen gave chase to the deer, and wounded, but did not succeed in killing them. They saw, also, pheasants and other birds; among them the wild turkey, the pride of the Amer-

¹² The name of the mountain is not given, and probably was not known, but the minute description in the MS. of Vera Cruz leaves no doubt that it was the one mentioned in the text. "Entre las quales así una que excede en mucha altura á todas las otras y de ella se vee y descubre gran parte de la mar y de la tierra, y es tan alta, que si el dia no es bien claro, no se puede divisar ni ver lo alto de ella, porque de la mitad arriba está toda cubierta de nubes; y algunos veces, cuando hace muy claro dia, se vee por cima de las dichas nubes lo alto de ella, y está tan blanco, que lo jugamos por nieve." (Carta de Vera Cruz, MS.) This huge volcano was called *Citlaltepetl*, or "Star-mountain," by the Mexicans, — perhaps from the fire which once issued from its conical summit, far above the clouds. It stands in the intendancy of Vera Cruz, and rises, according to Humboldt's measurement, to the enormous height of 17,368 feet above the ocean. (Essai Politique, tom. I. p. 265.) It is the highest peak but one in the whole range of the Mexican Cordilleras.

ican forest, which the Spaniards described as a species of peacock.¹³

On their route they passed through some deserted villages, in which were Indian temples, where they found censers, and other sacred utensils, and manuscripts of the *agave* fibre, containing the picture-writing, in which, probably, their religious ceremonies were recorded. They now beheld, also, the hideous spectacle, with which they became afterwards familiar, of the mutilated corpses of victims who had been sacrificed to the accursed deities of the land. The Spaniards turned with loathing and indignation from a display of butchery, which formed so dismal a contrast to the fair scenes of nature by which they were surrounded.

They held their course along the banks of the river, towards its source, when they were met by twelve Indians, sent by the cacique of Cempoalla to show them the way to his residence. At night they bivouacked in an open meadow, where they were well supplied with provisions by their new friends. They left the stream on the following morning, and, striking northerly across the country, came upon a wide expanse of luxuriant plains and woodland, glowing in all the splendor of tropical vegetation. The branches of the stately trees were gayly festooned with clustering vines of the dark-purple grape, variegated convolvuli, and other flowering parasites of the most

¹³ Carta de Vera Cruz, MS. — Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 44.

brilliant dyes. The undergrowth of prickly aloe, matted with wild rose and honeysuckle, made in many places an almost impervious thicket. Amid this wilderness of sweet-smelling buds and blossoms, fluttered numerous birds of the parrot tribe, and clouds of butterflies, whose gaudy colors, nowhere so gorgeous as in the *tierra caliente*, rivalled those of the vegetable creation; while birds of exquisite song, the scarlet cardinal, and the marvellous mocking-bird, that comprehends in his own notes the whole music of a forest, filled the air with delicious melody. — The hearts of the stern Conquerors were not very sensible to the beauties of nature. But the magical charms of the scenery drew forth unbounded expressions of delight, and as they wandered through this “terrestrial paradise,” as they called it, they fondly compared it to the fairest regions of their own sunny land.¹⁴

¹⁴ Gomara, Crónica, cap. 32, ap. Barcia, tom. II. — Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 5, cap. 8. — Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 1.

“Mui hermosas vegas y riberas tales y tan hermosas que en toda España no pueden ser mejores ansí de apaçibles á la vista como de fructíferas.” (Carta de Vera Cruz, MS.) The following poetical apostrophe, by Lord Morpeth, to the scenery of Cuba, equally applicable to that of the *tierra caliente*, will give the reader a more animated picture of the glories of

these sunny climes, than my own prose can. The verses, which have never been published, breathe the generous sentiment characteristic of their noble author,

“Ye tropic forests of unfading green,
Where the palm tapers and the orange
glows,
Where the light bamboo weaves her feath-
ery screen,
And her far shade the matchless *ceiba*
throws!

“Ye cloudless ethers of unchanging blue,
Save where the rosy streaks of eve give
way
To the clear sapphire of your midnight hue,
The burnished azure of your perfect day!

As they approached the Indian city, they saw abundant signs of cultivation, in the trim gardens and orchards that lined both sides of the road. They were now met by parties of the natives of either sex, who increased in numbers with every step of their progress. The women, as well as men, mingled fearlessly among the soldiers, bearing bunches and wreaths of flowers, with which they decorated the neck of the general's charger, and hung a chaplet of roses about his helmet. Flowers were the delight of this people. They bestowed much care in their cultivation, in which they were well seconded by a climate of alternate heat and moisture, stimulating the soil to the spontaneous production of every form of vegetable life. The same refined taste, as we shall see, prevailed among the warlike Aztecs, and has survived the degradation of the nation in their descendants of the present day.¹⁵

Many of the women appeared, from their richer dress and numerous attendants, to be persons of rank. They were clad in robes of fine cotton, curiously colored, which reached from the neck — in the inferior orders, from the waist — to the an-

"Yet tell me not my native skies are bleak,
That flushed with liquid wealth no cane
fields wave;
For Virtue pines and Manhood dares not
speak,
And Nature's glories brighten round the
Slave."

¹⁵ "The same love of flowers," observes one of the most delightful of modern travellers, "distinguish-

es the natives now, as in the times of Cortés. And it presents a strange anomaly," she adds, with her usual acuteness; "this love of flowers having existed along with their sanguinary worship and barbarous sacrifices." Madame Calderon de la Barca, *Life in Mexico*, vol. I. let. 12.

kles. The men wore a sort of mantle of the same material, *á la Morisca*, in the Moorish fashion, over their shoulders, and belts or sashes about the loins. Both sexes had jewels and ornaments of gold round their necks, while their ears and nostrils were perforated with rings of the same metal.

Just before reaching the town, some horsemen who had rode in advance returned with the amazing intelligence, "that they had been near enough to look within the gates, and found the houses all plated with burnished silver!" On entering the place, the silver was found to be nothing more than a brilliant coating of stucco, with which the principal buildings were covered; a circumstance which produced much merriment among the soldiers at the expense of their credulous comrades. Such ready credulity is a proof of the exalted state of their imaginations, which were prepared to see gold and silver in every object around them.¹⁶ The edifices of the better kind were of stone and lime, or bricks dried in the sun; the poorer were of clay and earth. All were thatched with palm-leaves, which, though a flimsy roof, apparently, for such structures, were so nicely interwoven as to form a very effectual protection against the weather.

The city was said to contain from twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. This is the most moderate computation, and not improbable.¹⁷ Slowly and

¹⁶ "Con la imaginacion que relucia." Gomara, Crónica, cap. llevaban, i buenos deseos, todo se 32, ap. Barcia, tom. II.
les antojaba plata i oro lo que

¹⁷ This is Las Casas' estimate.

silently the little army paced the narrow and now crowded streets of Cempoalla, inspiring the natives with no greater wonder than they themselves experienced at the display of a policy and refinement so far superior to any thing they had witnessed in the New World.¹⁸ The cacique came out in front of his residence to receive them. He was a tall and very corpulent man, and advanced leaning on two of his attendants. He received Cortés and his followers with great courtesy; and, after a brief interchange of civilities, assigned the army its quarters in a neighbouring temple, into the spacious court-yard of which a number of apartments opened, affording excellent accommodations for the soldiery.

Here the Spaniards were well supplied with provisions, meat cooked after the fashion of the country, and maize made into bread-cakes. The general received, also, a present of considerable value from the cacique, consisting of ornaments of gold and fine cottons. Notwithstanding these friendly demonstrations, Cortés did not relax his habitual vigilance, nor neglect any of the precautions of a good soldier. On his route, indeed, he had always march-

(Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 3, cap. 121.) Torquemada hesitates between twenty, fifty, and one hundred and fifty thousand, each of which he names at different times! (Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. III. p. 26, nota.) The place was gradually abandoned, after the Conquest, for others, in a more favorable position, probably, for trade.

Its ruins were visible at the close of the last century. See Lorenzana, Hist. de Nueva España, p. 39, nota.

¹⁸ "Porque viven mas política y rasonablemente que ninguna de las gentes que hasta oy en estas partes se ha visto." Carta de Vera Cruz, MS.

ed in order of battle, well prepared against surprise. In his present quarters, he stationed his sentinels with like care, posted his small artillery so as to command the entrance, and forbade any soldier to leave the camp without orders, under pain of death.¹⁹

The following morning, Cortés, accompanied by fifty of his men, paid a visit to the lord of Cempoalla in his own residence. It was a building of stone and lime, standing on a steep terrace of earth, and was reached by a flight of stone steps. It may have borne resemblance in its structure to some of the ancient buildings found in Central America. Cortés, leaving his soldiers in the court-yard, entered the mansion with one of his officers, and his fair interpreter, Doña Marina.²⁰ A long conference ensued, from which the Spanish general gathered much light respecting the state of the country. He first announced to the chief, that he was the subject of a great monarch who dwelt beyond the waters; that he had come to the Aztec shores, to abolish the inhuman worship which prevailed there, and to introduce the knowledge of the true God. The cacique replied, that their gods, who sent them the sunshine and the rain, were good enough for them; that he was the tributary of a powerful monarch also, whose capital stood on a lake far off among

¹⁹ Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 121. — Carta de Vera Cruz, MS. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 33, ap. Barcia, tom. II. — Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 1.

²⁰ The courteous title of *doña* is usually given by the Spanish chroniclers to this accomplished Indian.

the mountains; a stern prince, merciless in his exactions, and, in case of resistance, or any offence, sure to wreak his vengeance by carrying off their young men and maidens to be sacrificed to his deities. Cortés assured him that he would never consent to such enormities; he had been sent by his sovereign to redress abuses and to punish the oppressor;²¹ and, if the Totonacs would be true to him, he would enable them to throw off the detested yoke of the Aztecs.

The cacique added, that the Totonac territory contained about thirty towns and villages, which could muster a hundred thousand warriors,—a number much exaggerated.²² There were other provinces of the empire, he said, where the Aztec rule was equally odious; and between him and the capital lay the warlike republic of Tlascala, which had always maintained its independence of Mexico. The fame of the Spaniards had gone before them, and he was well acquainted with their terrible victory at Tabasco. But still he looked with doubt and alarm to a rupture with “the great Montezuma,” as he always styled him; whose armies, on the least provocation, would pour down from the mountain

²¹ “No venia, sino á deshacer agravios, i favorecer los presos, ayudar á los mezquinos, i quitar tiranías.” (Gomara, Crónica, cap. 33, ap. Barcia, tom. II.) Are we reading the adventures—it is the language—of Don Quixote, or Amadis de Gaula?

²² Ibid., cap. 36.

Cortés, in his Second Letter to the emperor Charles V., estimates the number of fighting men at 50,000. *Relacion Segunda*, ap. Lorenzana, p. 40.

regions of the West, and, rushing over the plains like a whirlwind, sweep off the wretched people to slavery and sacrifice!

Cortés endeavoured to reassure him, by declaring that a single Spaniard was stronger than a host of Aztecs. At the same time, it was desirable to know what nations would coöperate with him, not so much on his account, as theirs, that he might distinguish friend from foe, and know whom he was to spare in this war of extermination. Having raised the confidence of the admiring chief by this comfortable and politic vaunt, he took an affectionate leave, with the assurance that he would shortly return and concert measures for their future operations, when he had visited his ships in the adjoining port, and secured a permanent settlement there.²³

The intelligence gained by Cortés gave great satisfaction to his mind. It confirmed his former views, and showed, indeed, the interior of the monarchy to be in a state far more distracted than he had supposed. If he had before scarcely shrunk from attacking the Aztec empire in the true spirit of a knight-errant, with his single arm, as it were, what had he now to fear, when one half of the nation could be thus marshalled against the other? In the excitement of the moment, his sanguine spirit kindled with an enthusiasm which overleaped every obstacle. He communicated his own feelings to the

²³ Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, — Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., MS., lib. 3, cap. 121. — Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 81. lib. 33, cap. 1.

officers about him, and, before a blow was struck, they already felt as if the banners of Spain were waving in triumph from the towers of Montezuma! But many a bloody field was to be fought, many a peril and privation to be encountered, before that consummation could be attained.

Taking leave of the hospitable Indian, on the following day, the Spaniards took the road to Chihuitztlá,²⁴ about four leagues distant, near which was the port discovered by Montejo, where their ships were now riding at anchor. They were provided by the cacique with four hundred Indian porters, *tamanes*, as they were called, to transport the baggage. These men easily carried fifty pounds' weight, five or six leagues in a day. They were in use all over the Mexican empire, and the Spaniards found them of great service, henceforth, in relieving the troops from this part of their duty. They passed through a country of the same rich, voluptuous character as that which they had lately traversed; and arrived early next morning at the Indian town, perched like a fortress on a bold, rocky eminence that commanded the Gulf. Most of the inhabitants had fled, but fifteen of the principal men remained, who received them in a friendly manner, offering the usual compliments of flowers and in-

²⁴ The historian, with the aid of Clavigero, himself a Mexican, may rectify frequent blunders of former writers, in the orthography of Aztec names. Both Robertson and Solís spell the name of this place *Quiabislan*. Blunders in such a barbarous nomenclature must be admitted to be very pardonable.

cense. The people of the place, losing their fears, gradually returned. While conversing with the chiefs, the Spaniards were joined by the worthy cacique of Cempoalla, borne by his men on a litter. He eagerly took part in their deliberations. The intelligence gained here by Cortés confirmed the accounts already gathered of the feelings and resources of the Totonac nation.

In the midst of their conference, they were interrupted by a movement among the people, and soon afterwards five men entered the great square or market-place, where they were standing. By their lofty port, their peculiar and much richer dress, they seemed not to be of the same race as these Indians. Their dark, glossy hair was tied in a knot on the top of the head. They had bunches of flowers in their hands, and were followed by several attendants, some bearing wands with cords, others fans, with which they brushed away the flies and insects from their lordly masters. As these persons passed through the place, they cast a haughty look on the Spaniards, scarcely deigning to return their salutations. They were immediately joined, in great confusion, by the Totonac chiefs, who seemed anxious to conciliate them by every kind of attention.

The general, much astonished, inquired of Marina, what it meant. She informed him, they were Aztec nobles, empowered to receive the tribute for Montezuma. Soon after, the chiefs returned with dismay painted on their faces. They confirmed Marina's statement, adding, that the Aztecs greatly

resented the entertainment afforded the Spaniards without the Emperor's permission ; and demanded in expiation twenty young men and women for sacrifice to the gods. Cortés showed the strongest indignation at this insolence. He required the Totonacs not only to refuse the demand, but to arrest the persons of the collectors, and throw them into prison. The chiefs hesitated, but he insisted on it so peremptorily, that they at length complied, and the Aztecs were seized, bound hand and foot, and placed under a guard.

In the night, the Spanish general procured the escape of two of them, and had them brought secretly before him. He expressed his regret at the indignity they had experienced from the Totonacs ; told them, he would provide means for their flight, and to-morrow would endeavour to obtain the release of their companions. He desired them to report this to their master, with assurances of the great regard the Spaniards entertained for him, notwithstanding his ungenerous behaviour in leaving them to perish from want on his barren shores. He then sent the Mexican nobles down to the port, whence they were carried to another part of the coast by water, for fear of the violence of the Totonacs. These were greatly incensed at the escape of the prisoners, and would have sacrificed the remainder, at once, but for the Spanish commander, who evinced the utmost horror at the proposal, and ordered them to be sent for safe custody on board the fleet. Soon after, they were permitted to join their companions. — This

artful proceeding, so characteristic of the policy of Cortés, had, as we shall see, hereafter, all the effect intended on Montezuma. It cannot be commended, certainly, as in the true spirit of chivalry. Yet it has not wanted its panegyrist among the national historians! ²⁵

By order of Cortés, messengers were despatched to the Totonac towns, to report what had been done, calling on them to refuse the payment of further tribute to Montezuma. But there was no need of messengers. The affrighted attendants of the Aztec lords had fled in every direction, bearing the tidings, which spread like wildfire through the country, of the daring insult offered to the majesty of Mexico. The astonished Indians, cheered with the sweet hope of regaining their ancient liberty, came in numbers to Chiahuitztlá, to see and confer with the formidable strangers. The more timid, dismayed at the thoughts of encountering the power of Montezuma, recommended an embassy to avert his displeasure by timely concessions. But the dexterous management of Cortés had committed them too far to allow any reasonable expectation of indulgence from this quarter. After some hesitation, therefore, it was determined to embrace the protection of the Spaniards, and to make one bold effort for the recovery of freedom. Oaths of allegiance were taken by the chiefs to the Spanish sovereigns, and duly recorded by Godoy, the royal notary. Cortés, satisfied with

²⁵ "Grande artífice," exclaims Solís, "de medir lo que disponia con lo que recelaba; y prudente capitán él que sabe caminar en alcance de las contingencias"! Conquista, lib. 2, cap. 9.

the important acquisition of so many vassals to the crown, set out soon after for the destined port, having first promised to revisit Cempoalla, where his business was but partially accomplished.²⁶

The spot selected for the new city was only half a league distant, in a wide and fruitful plain, affording a tolerable haven for the shipping. Cortés was not long in determining the circuit of the walls, and the sites of the fort, granary, town-house, temple, and other public buildings. The friendly Indians eagerly assisted, by bringing materials, stone, lime, wood, and bricks, dried in the sun. Every man put his hand to the work. The general labored with the meanest of the soldiers, stimulating their exertions by his example, as well as voice. In a few weeks, the task was accomplished, and a town rose up, which, if not quite worthy of the aspiring name it bore, answered most of the purposes for which it was intended. It served as a good *point d'appui* for future operations; a place of retreat for the disabled, as well as for the army in case of reverses; a magazine for stores, and for such articles as might be received from or sent to the mother country; a port for the shipping; a position of sufficient strength to overawe the adjacent country.²⁷

²⁶ Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 81. — Rel. Seg. de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 40. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 34-36, ap. Barcia, tom. II. — Bernal Diaz, Conquista, cap. 46, 47. — Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 5, cap. 10, 11.

²⁷ Carta de Vera Cruz, MS. — Bernal Diaz, Conquista, cap. 48. — Oviedo, Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 1. — Declaracion de Montejo, MS.

Notwithstanding the advantages of its situation, La Villa Rica was abandoned in a few years for a

It was the first colony—the fruitful parent of so many others—in New Spain. It was hailed with satisfaction by the simple natives, who hoped to repose in safety under its protecting shadow. Alas! they could not read the future, or they would have found no cause to rejoice in this harbinger of a revolution more tremendous than any predicted by their bards and prophets. It was not the good Quetzalcoatl, who had returned to claim his own again, bringing peace, freedom, and civilization in his train. Their fetters, indeed, would be broken; and their wrongs be amply avenged on the proud head of the Aztec. But it was to be by that strong arm, which should bow down equally the oppressor and the oppressed. The light of civilization would be poured on their land. But it would be the light of a consuming fire, before which their barbaric glory, their institutions, their very existence and name as a nation, would wither and become extinct! Their doom was sealed, when the white man had set his foot on their soil.

neighbouring position to the south, not far from the mouth of the Antigua. This second settlement was known by the name of *Vera Cruz Vieja*, "Old Vera Cruz." Early in the 17th century this place, also, was abandoned for the present city, *Nueva Vera Cruz*, or New Vera Cruz, as it is called. (See Ante, chap. 5, note 7.) Of the true cause of these successive migrations we are ignorant. If,

as is pretended, it was on account of the *vómito*, the inhabitants, one would suppose, can have gained little by the exchange. (See Humboldt, *Essai Politique*, tom. II. p. 210.) A want of attention to these changes has led to much confusion and inaccuracy in the ancient maps. Lorenzana has not escaped them in his chart and topographical account of the route of Cortés.