

JOHN ABBOTT

HERNANDO

CORTEZ

John Abbott
Hernando Cortez

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John S. C. Abbott

Hernando Cortez Makers of History

PREFACE

The career of Hernando Cortez is one of the most wild and adventurous recorded in the annals of fact or fiction, and yet all the prominent events in his wondrous history are well authenticated. All *truth* carries with itself an important moral. The writer, in this narrative, has simply attempted to give a vivid idea of the adventures of Cortez and his companions in the Conquest of Mexico. There are many inferences of vast moment to which the recital leads. These are so obvious that they need not be pointed out by the writer.

A small portion of this volume has appeared in Harper's Magazine, in an article furnished by the writer upon the Conquest of Mexico.

Chapter I.

The Discovery of Mexico

The shore of America in 1492

Three hundred and fifty years ago the ocean which washes the shores of America was one vast and silent solitude. No ship plowed its waves; no sail whitened its surface. On the 11th of October, 1492, three small vessels might have been seen invading, for the first time, these hitherto unknown waters. They were as specks on the bosom of infinity. The sky above, the ocean beneath, gave no promise of any land. Three hundred adventurers were in these ships. Ten weeks had already passed since they saw the hills of the Old World sink beneath the horizon.

For weary days and weeks they had strained their eyes looking toward the west, hoping to see the mountains of the New World rising in the distance. The illustrious adventurer, Christopher Columbus, who guided these frail barks, inspired by science and by faith, doubted not that a world would ere long emerge before him from the apparently boundless waters. But the blue sky still overarched them, and the heaving ocean still extended in all directions its unbroken and interminable expanse.

Doubt and alarm

Discouragement and alarm now pervaded nearly all hearts, and there was a general clamor for return to the shores of Europe. Christopher Columbus, sublime in the confidence with which his exalted nature inspired him, was still firm and undaunted in his purpose.

A light appears

He watches the light

The shore is seen

The night of the 11th of October darkened over these lonely adventurers. The stars came out in all the brilliance of tropical splendor. A fresh breeze drove the ships with increasing speed over the billows, and cooled, as with balmy zephyrs, brows heated through the day by the blaze of a meridian sun. Columbus could not sleep. He stood upon the deck of his ship, silent and sad, yet indomitable in energy, gazing with intense and unintermitted watch into the dusky distance. It was near midnight. Suddenly he saw a light, as of a torch, far off in the horizon. His heart throbbed with an irrepressible tumult of excitement. Was it a meteor, or was it a light from the long-wished-for land? It disappeared, and all again was dark. But suddenly again it gleamed forth, feeble and dim in the distance, yet distinct. Soon again the exciting ray was quenched, and nothing disturbed the dark and sombre outline of the sea. The long hours of the night to Columbus seemed interminable as he waited impatiently for the dawn. But even before any light was seen in the east, the dim outline of land appeared in indisputable distinctness before the eyes of the entranced, the now immortalized navigator. A cannon – the signal of the discovery – rolled its peal over the ocean, announcing to the two vessels in the rear the joyful

tidings. A shout, excited by the heart's intensest emotions, rose over the waves, and with tears, with prayers, and embraces, these enthusiastic men accepted the discovery of the New World.

The Spaniards land and are hospitably received

The bright autumnal morning dawned in richest glory, presenting to them a scene as of a celestial paradise. The luxuriance of tropical vegetation bloomed in all its novelty around them. The inhabitants, many of them in the simple and innocent costume of Eden before the fall, crowded the shore, gazing with attitude and gesture of astonishment upon the strange phenomena of the ships. The adventurers landed, and were received upon the island of San Salvador as angels from heaven by the peaceful and friendly natives. Bitterly has the hospitality been requited. After cruising around for some time among the beautiful islands of the New World, Columbus returned to Spain to astonish Europe with the tidings of his discovery. He had been absent but seven months.

A quarter of a century passed away, during which all the adventurers of Europe were busy exploring these newly-discovered islands and continents. Various colonies were established in the fertile valleys of these sunny climes, and upon the hill-sides which emerged, in the utmost magnificence of vegetation, from the bosom of the Caribbean Sea. The eastern coast of North America had been during this time surveyed from Labrador to Florida. The bark of the navigator had discovered nearly all the islands of the West Indies, and had crept along the winding shores of the Isthmus of Darien, and of the South American continent as far as the River La Plata. Bold explorers, guided by intelligence received from the Indians, had even penetrated the interior of the isthmus, and from the summit of the central mountain barrier had gazed with delight upon the placid waves of the Pacific. But the vast indentation of the Mexican Gulf, sweeping far away in an apparently interminable circuit to the west, had not yet been penetrated. The field for romantic adventure which these unexplored realms presented could not, however, long escape the eye of that chivalrous age.

Mexico is discovered

Arts and sciences of the Mexicans

The mines of precious metals

Some exploring expeditions were soon fitted out from Cuba, and the shores of Mexico were discovered. Here every thing exhibited the traces of a far higher civilization than had hitherto been witnessed in the New World. There were villages, and even large cities, thickly planted throughout the country. Temples and other buildings, imposing in massive architecture, were reared of stone and lime. Armies, laws, and a symbolical form of writing indicated a very considerable advance in the arts and the energies of civilization. Many of the arts were cultivated. Cloth was made of cotton, and of skins nicely prepared. Astronomy was sufficiently understood for the accurate measurement of time in the divisions of the solar year. It is indeed a wonder, as yet unexplained, where these children of the New World acquired so philosophical an acquaintance with the movements of the heavenly bodies. Agriculture was practiced with much scientific skill, and a system of irrigation introduced, from which many a New England farmer might learn many a profitable lesson. Mines of gold, silver, lead, and copper were worked. Many articles of utility and of exquisite beauty were fabricated from these metals. Iron, the ore of which must pass through so many processes before it is prepared for

use, was unknown to them. The Spanish goldsmiths, admiring the exquisite workmanship of the gold and silver ornaments of the Mexicans, bowed to their superiority.

Fairs were held in the great market-places of the principal cities every fifth day, where buyers and sellers in vast numbers thronged. They had public schools, courts of justice, a class of nobles, and a powerful monarch. The territory embraced by this wonderful kingdom was twice as large as the whole of New England.

Code of laws

Punishments

The code of laws adopted by this strange people was very severe. They seemed to cherish but little regard for human life, and the almost universal punishment for crime was death. This bloody code secured a very effective police. Adultery, thieving, removing landmarks, altering measures, defrauding a ward of property, intemperance, and even idleness, with spendthrift habits, were punished pitilessly with death. The public mind was so accustomed to this, that death lost a portion of its solemnity. The rites of marriage were very formally enacted, and very rigidly adhered to.

Slavery

Prisoners taken in war were invariably slain upon their religious altars in sacrifice to their gods. Slavery existed among them, but not hereditary. No one could be born a slave. The poor sometimes sold their children. The system existed in its mildest possible form, as there was no distinction of race between the master and the slave.

Military glory

Military glory was held in high repute. Fanaticism lent all its allurements to inspire the soldier. Large armies were trained to very considerable military discipline. Death upon the battle-field was a sure passport to the most sunny and brilliant realms of the heavenly world. The soldiers wore coats of mail of wadded cotton, which neither arrow nor javelin could easily penetrate. The chiefs wore over these burnished plates of silver and of gold. Silver helmets, also, often glittered upon the head. Hospitals were established for the sick and the wounded.

Mexican mythology

Their religious system was an incongruous compound of beauty and of deformity – of gentleness and of ferocity. They believed in one supreme God, the Great Spirit, with several hundred inferior deities. The god of war was a very demon. The god of the air was a refined deity, whose altars were embellished with fruits and flowers, and upon whose ear the warbling of birds and the most plaintive strains of vocal melody vibrated sweetly.

The three states of existence

There were, in their imaginations, three states of existence in the future world. The good, and especially those, of whatever character, who fell upon the field of battle, soared to the sun, and floated

in aerial grace and beauty among the clouds, in peace and joy, never to be disturbed. The worthless, indifferent sort of people, neither good nor bad, found perhaps a congenial home in the monotony of a listless and almost lifeless immortality, devoid of joy or grief. The wicked were imprisoned in everlasting darkness, where they could do no farther harm.

Infant baptism

It is an extraordinary fact that the rite of infant baptism existed among them. This fact is attested by the Spanish historians, who witnessed it with their own eyes, and who have recorded the truly Christian prayers offered on the occasion. As the infants were sprinkled with water, God was implored to wash them from original sin, and to create them anew. Many of their prayers dimly reflected those pure and ennobling sentiments which shine so brilliantly in the word of God.

Worship

Their worship must have been a costly one, as the most majestic temples were reared, and an army of priests was supported. One single temple in the metropolis had five thousand priests attached to its service. The whole business of youthful instruction was confided to the priests. They received confession, and possessed the power of absolution.

The temples and altars

Mode of offering sacrifice

The temples were generally pyramidal structures of enormous magnitude. Upon the broad area of their summits an altar was erected, where human victims, usually prisoners taken in war, were offered in sacrifice. These awful ceremonies were conducted with the most imposing pomp of music, banners, and military and ecclesiastical processions. The victim offered in sacrifice was bound immovably to the stone altar. The officiating priest, with a sharp instrument constructed of flint-like lava, cut open his breast, and tore out the warm and palpitating heart. This bloody sacrifice was presented in devout offering to the god. At times, in the case of prisoners taken in war, the most horrid tortures were practiced before the bloody rite was terminated. When the gods seemed to frown, in dearth, or pestilence, or famine, large numbers of children were frequently offered in sacrifice. Thus the temples of Mexico were ever clotted with blood. Still more revolting is the well-authenticated fact that the body of the wretched victim thus sacrificed was often served up as a banquet, and was eaten with every accompaniment of festive rejoicing. It is estimated that from thirty to fifty thousand thus perished every year upon the altars of ancient Mexico. One of the great objects of their wars was to obtain victims for their gods.

City of Mexico

The population of this vast empire is not known. It must have consisted, however, of several millions. The city of Mexico, situated on islands in the bosom of a lake in the centre of a spacious and magnificent valley of the interior, about two hundred miles from the coast, was the metropolis of the realm.

Montezuma

Civilization of the inhabitants

Montezuma was king – an aristocratic king, surrounded by nobles, upon whom he conferred all the honors and emoluments of the state. His palace was very magnificent. He was served from plates and goblets of silver and gold. Six hundred feudatory nobles composed his daily retinue, paying him the most obsequious homage, and expecting the same from those beneath themselves. Montezuma claimed to be lord of the whole world, and exacted tribute from all whom his arm could reach. His triumphant legions had invaded and subjugated many adjacent states, as this *Roman empire* of the New World extended in all directions its powerful sway.

It will thus be seen that the kingdom of Mexico, in point of civilization, was about on an equality with the Chinese empire of the present day. Its inhabitants were very decidedly elevated above the wandering hordes of North America.

Montezuma had heard of the arrival, in the islands of the Caribbean Sea, of the strangers from another hemisphere. He had heard of their appalling power, their aggressions, and their pitiless cruelty. Wisely he resolved to exclude these dangerous visitors from his shores. As exploring expeditions entered his bays and rivers, they were fiercely attacked and driven away. These expeditions, however, brought back to Cuba most alluring accounts of the rich empire of Mexico and of its golden opulence.

The Governor of Cuba resolves to subjugate the country

The Governor of Cuba now resolved to fit out an expedition sufficiently powerful to subjugate their country, and make it one of the vassals of Spain. It was a dark period of the world. Human rights were but feebly discerned. Superstition reigned over hearts and consciences with a fearfully despotic sway. Acts, upon which would now fall the reproach of unmitigated villainy, were then performed with prayers and thanksgivings honestly offered. We shall but tell the impartial story of the wondrous career of Cortez in the subjugation of this empire. God, the searcher of all hearts, can alone unravel the mazes of conscientiousness and depravity, and award the just meed of approval and condemnation.

Motives for carrying on conquests

Many good motives were certainly united with those more questionable which inspired this enterprise. It was a matter of national ambition to promote geographical discoveries, to enlarge the realms of commerce, and to extend the boundaries of human knowledge by investigating the arts and the sciences of other nations. The Christian religion – Heaven's greatest boon to man – was destined, by the clear announcements of prophecy, to fill the world; and it was deemed the duty of the Church to extend these triumphs in all possible ways. The importance of the end to be attained, it was thought, would sanctify even the instrumentality of violence and blood. Wealth and honors were among the earthly rewards promised to the faithful.

Allowances must be made for the darkness of the age. It is by very slow and painful steps that the human mind has attained to even its present unsteady position in regard to civil and religious rights.

Hernando Cortez

The Governor of Cuba, Velasquez, looked earnestly for a man to head this important enterprise. He found just the man for the occasion in Hernando Cortez – a fearless, energetic Spanish adventurer, then residing upon the island of Cuba. His early life will be found in the next chapter.

Chapter II. Early Life of Cortez

Village of Medellin

Early character of Cortez

In the interior of Spain, in the midst of the sombre mountains whose confluent streams compose the waters of the Guadiana, there reposes the little village or hamlet of Medellin. A more secluded spot it would be difficult to find. Three hundred and seventy years ago, in the year 1485, Hernando Cortez was born in this place. His ancestors had enjoyed wealth and rank. The family was now poor, but proud of the Castilian blood which flowed in their veins. The father of Hernando was a captain in the army – a man of honorable character. Of his mother but little is known.

Not much has been transmitted to our day respecting the childhood of this extraordinary man. It is reported that he early developed a passion for wild adventure; that he was idle and wayward; frank, fearless, and generous; that he loved to explore the streams and to climb the cliffs of his mountainous home, and that he ever appeared reckless of danger. He was popular with his companions, for warm-heartedness and magnanimity were prominent in his character.

Hernando sent to Salamanca

Life at the university

His father, though struggling with poverty, cherished ambitious views for his son, and sent him to the celebrated university of Salamanca for an education. He wished Hernando to avoid the perils and temptations of the camp, and to enter the honorable profession of the law. Hernando reluctantly obeyed the wishes of his father, and went to the university. But he scorned restraint. He despised all the employments of industry, and study was his especial abhorrence. Two years were worse than wasted in the university. Young Cortez was both indolent and dissipated. In all the feats of mischief he was the ringleader, and his books were entirely neglected. He received many censures, and was on the point of being expelled, when his disappointed father withdrew the wayward boy from the halls of the university, and took him home.

He turns soldier

Hernando was now sixteen years of age. There was nothing for him to do in the seclusion of his native village but to indulge in idleness. This he did with great diligence. He rode horses; he hunted and fished; he learned the art of the swordsman and played the soldier. Hot blood glowed in his veins, and he became genteelly dissolute; his pride would never allow him to stoop to vulgarity. The father was grief-stricken by the misconduct of his son, and at last consented to gratify the passion which inspired him to become a soldier.

Expedition to Hispaniola

At seventeen years of age the martial boy enlisted in an expedition, under Gonsalvo de Cordova, to assist the Italians against the French. Young Cortez, to his bitter disappointment, just as the expedition started, was taken seriously sick, and was obliged to be left behind. Soon after this, one of his relatives was appointed, by the Spanish crown, governor of St. Domingo, now called Hayti, but then called Hispaniola, or Little Spain. This opening to scenes and adventures in the New World was attractive to the young cavalier in the highest possible degree. It was, indeed, an enterprise which might worthily arouse the enthusiasm of any mind. A large fleet was equipped to convey nearly three thousand settlers to found a colony beneath the sunny skies and under the orange groves of the tropics. Life there seemed the elysium of the indolent man. Young Cortez now rejoiced heartily over his previous disappointment. His whole soul was engrossed in the contemplation of the wild and romantic adventures in which he expected to luxuriate. It is not to be supposed that a lad of such a temperament should, at the age of seventeen, be a stranger to the passion of love. There was a young lady in his native village for whom he had formed a strong youthful attachment. He resolved, with his accustomed ardor and recklessness, to secure an interview with his lady-love, where parting words and pledges should not be witnessed by prudent relatives.

His early love, and unfortunate consequences attending it

One dark night, just before the squadron sailed, the ardent lover climbed a mouldering wall to reach the window of the young lady's chamber. In the obscurity he slipped and fell, and some heavy stones from the crumbling wall fell upon him. He was conveyed to his bed, severely wounded and helpless. The fleet sailed, and the young man, almost insane with disappointment and chagrin, was left upon his bed of pain.

He arrives at Hispaniola

At length he recovered. His father secured for him a passage to join the colonists in another ship. He, with exultation, left Medellin, hastened to the sea-shore, where he embarked, and after an unusually adventurous and perilous voyage, he gazed with delight upon the tropical vegetation and the new scenes of life of Hispaniola. It was the year 1504. Cortez was then nineteen years of age.

The young adventurer, immediately upon landing, proceeded to the house of his relative, Governor Ovando. The governor happened to be absent, but his secretary received the young man very cordially.

"I have no doubt," said he to Hernando, "that you will receive a liberal grant of land to cultivate."

"I come to get gold," Hernando replied, haughtily, "not to till the soil like a peasant."

Patronage of the governor

Ovando, on his return, took his young relative under his patronage, and assigned to him posts of profit and honor. Still Cortez was very restless. His impatient spirit wearied of the routine of daily duty, and his imagination was ever busy in the domain of wild adventure.

Two Spaniards upon the island of Hispaniola about this time planned an expedition for exploring the main land, to make discoveries and to select spots for future settlements. Cortez eagerly joined the enterprise, but again was he doomed to disappointment. Just before the vessels sailed he

was seized by a fever, and laid prostrate upon his bed. Probably his life was thus saved. Nearly all who embarked on this enterprise perished by storm, disease, and the poisoned arrows of the natives.

Life at Hispaniola

Seven years passed away, during which Cortez led an idle and voluptuous life, ever ready for any daring adventure which might offer, and miserably attempting to beguile the weariness of provincial life with guilty amours. He accepted a plantation from the governor, which was cultivated by slaves. His purse was thus ever well filled. Not unfrequently he became involved in duels, and he bore upon his body until death many scars received in these encounters. Military expeditions were not unfrequently sent out to quell the insurrections to which the natives of the island were goaded by the injustice and the cruelty of the Spaniards.

Cortez's courage

Cortez was always an eager volunteer for such service. His courage and imperturbable self-possession made him an invaluable co-operator in every enterprise of danger. He thus became acquainted with all the artifices of Indian warfare, and inured himself to the toil and privations of forest life.

The island of Cuba

In the year 1492 the magnificent island of Cuba, but a few leagues from Hispaniola, had been discovered by Columbus. As he approached the land, the grandeur of the mountains, the wide sweep of the valleys, the stately forests, the noble rivers, the bold promontories and headlands, melting away in the blue of the hazy distance, impressed him with unbounded admiration. As he sailed up one of the beautiful rivers of crystal clearness, fringed with flowers, and aromatic shrubs, and tropical fruits, while the overhanging trees were vocal with the melody of birds of every variety of song and plumage, enraptured he exclaimed,

"Cuba! It is the most beautiful island that eyes ever beheld. It is an elysium. One could live there forever."

The new governor

The filibustering expedition

The natives of the favored land were amiable and friendly. The Spaniards did not for several years encroach upon their rights, and no Spanish colony was established upon their enchanting shores. It was now the year 1511. Nineteen years had elapsed since the discovery of the island. Ovando had been recalled, and Diego Columbus, the son of Christopher, had been appointed, in his stead, governor of Hispaniola. He took the title of Viceroy, and assumed all the splendors of royalty. Diego Columbus devoutly decided that it was manifest destiny that Cuba should belong to Spain. He organized a *filibustering* expedition to wrest from the natives their beautiful island. The command of the expedition was intrusted to Don Velasquez, a bold adventurer, of much notoriety, from Spain, who had been residing for many years at Hispaniola, and who had been lieutenant under Governor Ovando. A foray of this kind would, of course, excite the patriotic zeal of every vagabond. Cortez was one of the first to hasten to the standard of Velasquez. The natives of the island, unarmed and

voluptuous, made hardly the shadow of resistance, and three hundred Spanish adventurers, with but a slight struggle, took possession of this magnificent domain. The reputation and ability of Cortez gave him a prominent position in this adventure.

Resistance

One brave and patriotic Indian chief, who had fled from the outrages perpetrated at Hispaniola, urged the Cubans to repel the invaders. Though unable to rouse in a mass the peace-loving islanders, he gathered a small band around him, and valiantly contended to resist the landing. His efforts were quite unavailing. Gunpowder soon triumphed. The Indians were speedily put to flight, and the chieftain Hatuey was taken prisoner.

Hatuey condemned to death

Velasquez ignobly and cruelly condemned the heroic patriot to be burned alive; but religiously the fanatic invader wished, though he burned the body, to save the soul. A priest was appointed to labor for the conversion of the victim.

His conversation

"If you will embrace our religion," said the priest, "as soon as the fire has consumed your body, you will enter heaven, and be happy there forever."

"Are there Spaniards," inquired Hatuey, "in that happy place of which you speak?"

"Yes," replied the priest; "such as are holy."

"Then I will not go there!" Hatuey energetically rejoined. "I will never go to a place where I shall meet one of that cruel people."

The poor Indian was burned to ashes. The natives gazed upon the spectacle with horror. They were appalled, and ventured to make no farther resistance to their terrible conquerors.

Such is Spain's title-deed to the island of Cuba. God has not smiled upon regions thus infamously won. May the United States take warning that all her possessions may be honorably acquired. "God helps," says blind unbelief, "the heavy battalions;" but experience has fully proved that "the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."

The colony

One or two colonies were soon established upon the conquered island. They grew very rapidly. Velasquez was appointed governor; Cortez was his secretary.

The conspiracy

Many families were enticed from Spain by the charms of this most beautiful of the isles of the ocean. A gentleman came from old Castile with four beautiful daughters. Velasquez became attached to one; Cortez trifled grievously with the affections of another. The governor reproached him for his infamous conduct. The proud spirit of Cortez could not brook reproof, and he entered into a conspiracy to proffer complaints against the governor, and to secure his removal. It was a bold and a perilous undertaking.

Cortez imprisoned

He flees to a church

Cortez prepared to embark in an open boat, and push out fearlessly but secretly into the open sea, to make a voyage of nearly sixty miles to Hispaniola. There he was to enter his complaints to Diego Columbus. The conspiracy was detected upon the eve of its execution. Cortez was arrested, manacled, thrown into prison, and was, after trial, sentenced to death for treason. He, however, succeeded in breaking his fetters, forced open his prison window, and dropped himself down, in the darkness of the night, from the second story, and escaped to the sanctuary of a neighboring church. Such a sanctuary, in that day, could not be violated.

Arrest and escape

A guard was secreted to watch him. He remained in the church for several days. But at length impatience triumphed over prudence, and, as he attempted one night to escape, he was again arrested, more strongly chained, and was placed on board a ship to be sent to Hispaniola for execution.

The code of Spanish law was in that day a bloody one. Spanish governors were almost unlimited despots. Cortez was not willing to go to Hispaniola with the cord of a convicted traitor about his neck. With extraordinary fortitude, he drew his feet, mangling them sadly, through the irons which shackled them. Creeping cautiously upon deck, he let himself down softly into the water, swam to the shore, and, half dead with pain and exhaustion, attained again the sanctuary of the church.

Cortez is pardoned

His marriage

He now consented to marry the young lady with whose affections and reputation he had so cruelly trifled. The family, of course, espoused his cause. The governor, who was the lover of her sister, regarded this as the *amende honorable*, and again received the hot-blooded cavalier to his confidence. Thus this black and threatening cloud suddenly disappeared, and sunshine and calm succeeded the storm. Cortez returned to his estates with his bride a wiser, and perhaps a better man, from the severe discipline through which he had passed. Catalina Suarez, whom he married, was an amiable and beautiful lady of very estimable character. She eventually quite won the love of her wayward and fickle husband.

"I lived as happily with her," said the haughty Castilian, "as if she had been the daughter of a duchess."

Voyage of discovery

Velasquez, like every other Spanish governor at that time, was ambitious of extending his dominions. In the year 1517, a number of restless spirits, under his patronage, resolved to sail upon a voyage of discovery and conquest.

Discoveries

Disasters

Reports from Yucatan

Three vessels were fitted out for this adventure. One hundred and ten men embarked in the enterprise, under the command of Francisco Hernandez, of Cordova. Velasquez directed them to land upon some neighboring islands, and seize a number of inhabitants, and make slaves of them, to pay the cost of the expedition. "But when the proposal," says one of the party, "was made known to the soldiers, we to a man refused it, saying that it was not just, nor did God or the king permit that free men should be made slaves. That our expedition," the same writer continues, "might be conducted on proper principles, we persuaded a clergyman to accompany us." In fervent prayer, commending themselves to God and the Virgin, they unfurled their sails, and steered resolutely toward the setting sun. They discovered the island of Cozumel and the vast promontory of Yucatan.¹ The expedition, however, encountered many disasters. The natives assailed them fiercely. At length the shattered ships returned, having lost seventy men, and bringing with them quite a number bleeding and dying. Cordova died of his wounds ten days after arriving at Havana.

Another expedition

It arrives at Mexico

Accounts from Montezuma

The golden hatchets

The tidings, however, of the magnificent discovery, and the fabulous report that the country was rich in gold, incited Velasquez to fit out a second expedition of four ships, under the command of Juan de Grijalva. Two hundred and forty adventurers embarked in the enterprise. On the 5th day of April, 1518, after having devoutly partaken of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the anchors were lifted, and the little squadron sailed from the port of Matanzas. Eight days brought them to Cozumel. They then passed over to the continent, and coasted along the shore for many leagues to the north and west. They made frequent attempts to land and open intercourse with the natives, but they were invariably attacked with the utmost determination. Though the Spaniards were generally victorious in these conflicts, they lost several men, and very many were sorely wounded. At length they arrived upon the coast of Mexico, and landed at the point now called St. Juan de Ulua. Here they were kindly received by the natives, and acquired considerable gold in exchange for glass beads.

¹ *Yuca* is the Indian name of the plant used for bread. The heap of earth in which it is planted is called *tule*. The two words repeated together made Yucatul, or Yucatan as it was expressed by the Spaniards. —*Bernal Diaz*.

They also obtained vague information of the great monarch Montezuma, and of the extent and power of his realms. Greatly elated with this success, Grijalva sent one of his vessels back to Cuba with specimens of the gold, and with most glowing accounts of the grandeur, wealth, and power of the newly-discovered empire of Mexico. To their extreme delight, the voyagers found that the natives had hatchets apparently of solid burnished gold. The excitement was intense on board the ships. Six hundred of these hatchets were eagerly bought. At length the expedition returned to Cuba. The six hundred golden hatchets were triumphantly displayed, when, to the unutterable chagrin of their possessors, they proved to be but copper. The disappointed adventurers were overwhelmed with ridicule. "There was much laughter," says Diaz, who accompanied the expedition, "when the six hundred hatchets were produced and assayed."

Reports carried to Spain

The tidings of the discovery of Mexico spread, however, like wildfire over the island of Cuba. Every bosom which could be moved by avarice or by the love of adventure was intensely excited. Velasquez promptly dispatched the welcome intelligence to Spain, and immediately commenced fitting out another expedition upon a scale of grandeur hitherto unattempted. No one heard these tidings with such a thrill of emotion as Hernando Cortez. Though enjoying a rich estate, his extravagance had involved him in debt and distress. To retrieve his ruined fortunes, and to gratify his insatiable love of adventure, he resolved to leave no efforts untried to secure for himself the command of the expedition.

Cortez obtains a commission

He bribed some of the powerful friends of the governor to advocate his cause, promising them a rich share of the booty which he hoped to obtain. He also offered to contribute largely of his own wealth to fit out the naval armament.

His enthusiasm

It was manifest to all that there could not be a man better adapted to fill such a post than Hernando Cortez. The governor was well instructed in his energy, capacity, and courage. But he feared these traits of character. He wished for a man who would act as his agent, who would be submissive to his authority, and who would transfer the glory of successful achievement to his name. But Cortez was a man to lead, not to be led. The governor hesitated. At last he yielded to the powerful considerations which were pressed upon him, and publicly announced Cortez as captain general of the armada.

Mission and means

As soon as Cortez received this commission, all the glowing enthusiasm and tremendous energy of his nature were roused and concentrated upon this one magnificent object. His whole character seemed suddenly to experience a total change. He became serious, earnest, thoughtful. Mighty destinies were in his hands. Deeds were to be accomplished at which the world was to marvel. Strange as it may seem, for the heart of man is an inexplicable enigma, religion, perhaps we should say religious fanaticism, mingled the elements of her mystic power in the motives which inspired the soul of this extraordinary man. He was to march the apostle of Christianity to overthrow the idols in the halls of Montezuma, and there to rear the cross of Christ. It was his heavenly mission to convert

the benighted Indians to the religion of Jesus. With the energies of fire and sword, misery and blood, horses rushing to the charge and death-dealing artillery, he was to lead back the wandering victims of darkness and sin to those paths of piety which guide to heaven.

Such was Hernando Cortez. Let Philosophy explain the enigma as she may, no intelligent man will venture the assertion that Cortez was a hypocrite. He was a frank, fearless, deluded enthusiast.

The governor alarmed

Attempt to deprive Cortez of the command

Governor Velasquez soon became alarmed in view of the independent energy with which Cortez pressed forward the enterprise. It was quite evident that the bold adventurer would regard no instructions, and that, having acquired wealth and fame, he would, with his commanding genius, become a formidable rival. Velasquez therefore determined, before it should be too late, to deprive Cortez of the command. But it was already too late. The energetic captain received from a friend an intimation of his peril. With the decision which marked his character, he that very night, though the vessels were not prepared for sea, and the complement of men was not yet mustered, resolved secretly to weigh anchor.

The squadron sails

Cortez and the governor

The moment the sun went down he called upon his officers and informed them of his purpose. Every man was instantly and silently in motion. At midnight the little squadron, with all on board, dropped down the bay. Intelligence was promptly conveyed to the governor of this sudden and unexpected departure. Mounting his horse, he galloped to a point of the shore which commanded a view of the fleet at anchor in the roadstead. Cortez, from the deck of his ship, saw the governor upon the beach surrounded by his retinue. He entered a boat and was rowed near to the shore. The governor reproached Cortez bitterly for his conduct.

"Pardon me," said the captain, courteously; "time presses, and there are some things which should be done before they are even thought of."

Then, with Castilian grace, waving an adieu to the governor, he returned to his ship. The anchors were immediately raised, the sails spread, and the little fleet, the renown of whose extraordinary achievements was to fill the world, was wafted from the harbor of St. Jago, and soon disappeared in the distant horizon of the sea.

St. Jago and Trinidad

St. Jago was then the capital of Cuba. Cortez directed his course to Mocaca, about thirty miles distant. Hastily collecting such additional stores as the place would afford, he again weighed anchor and proceeded to Trinidad. This was an important town on the southern shore of the island. Here he landed, raised his banner, and, with alluring promises, invited volunteers to join the expedition. He marshaled and drilled his men, collected military supplies, and, more than all, by the charms of his daily intercourse secured the enthusiastic devotion of his followers.

The standard

His men were armed with cross-bows and muskets, and he had several small cannon. Jackets, thickly wadded with cotton, were provided as coats of mail for the soldiers, which were a great protection against the missiles of the natives. Neither arrow nor javelin could pierce them. A black velvet banner, embroidered with gold, and emblazoned with a cross, bore the characteristic device, "Let us follow the cross. Under this sign, with faith, we conquer."

Beneath such a standard did these stern men march upon an expedition of wanton aggression, crime, and woe.

Providential gifts

A trading vessel appeared off the coast, laden with provisions and valuable merchandise. It was a providential gift of exactly that which the adventurers needed. Cortez, with gratitude to God, seized both ship and cargo, and by his peculiar powers of moral suasion induced the captain and most of the crew to enlist in his service. Another ship made its appearance; it was a renewed token of God's kindness to his servants; it was received with alacrity. Whatever remonstrances the owners might raise were drowned in thanksgivings and praises. Every movement of the expedition was inspired by the fanatical spirit of the Crusades.

Orders to arrest Cortez

Cortez now, with his force much strengthened, sailed around the western point of the island to Havana. With renewed diligence, he here resumed his labor of beating up recruits and of augmenting his stores. Governor Velasquez, informed of his arrival at this port, dispatched orders to Pedro Barba, commander at Havana, to arrest Cortez and seize the fleet. But it was much easier to issue this order than to execute it. Cortez was now too strong to be apprehended by any force which Barba had at his command. Cortez received from a friend an intimation of the order for his arrest which had been received from the governor.

His speech

He assembled his bold followers around him; made a rousing speech, full of eloquence and of the peculiar piety then in vogue; painted in glowing colors the wealth and the renown opening before them in the vast realms of Mexico; and then portrayed, with biting sarcasm, the jealousy and the meanness of Velasquez, who wished to deprive him of the command of the enterprise.

The result

The speech was convincing. His tumultuary followers threw up their hats and filled the air with acclamations. They declared that they would acknowledge Cortez, and Cortez only, as their leader; that they would follow him wherever he might guide; that they would defend him with their lives, and that they would wreak unsparing vengeance upon any enemies who should attempt to molest him in his glorious career. This was the efficient reply which Cortez made to the order for his arrest.

Cortez writes to Velasquez

The squadron proceeds to Cape Antonio

The reply was not lost upon Barba. He perceived that it would be folly to attempt to execute the command of the governor. He wrote to him accordingly, stating the impracticability of the attempt. In fact, Barba had no disposition to arrest Cortez. He had become strongly attached to the bold and earnest captain. Cortez himself also wrote a very courteous letter to the governor, with studied politeness informing him that, with the blessing of God, he should sail the next day, and assuring the governor of eternal devotion to his interest. As there was some danger that Velasquez might send from St. Jago a force sufficiently strong to cause some embarrassment, the little squadron the next morning weighed anchor and proceeded to Cape Antonio, an appointed place of rendezvous on the extreme western termination of the island.

The armament

Here Cortez completed his preparations and collected all the force he desired. He had now eleven vessels. The largest was of but one hundred tons. Three were of but seventy tons, and the rest were open barks. His whole force consisted of one hundred and ten seamen, five hundred and fifty-three soldiers, two hundred Indians, and a few Indian women for menial service. His regular soldiers consisted of sixteen horsemen, thirty musketeers, and thirty-two cross-bowmen. He had also, as the most formidable part of his armament, fourteen pieces of artillery, with an ample supply of ammunition. All the soldiers, excepting the musketeers and the bowmen, were armed simply with swords and spears. Sixteen horses formed also an exceedingly important part of the physical force of the army. This noble animal had never yet been seen on the continent of America. With great difficulty, a few had been transported across the ocean from Spain. With such a force this enthusiastic adventurer undertook the subjugation of a nation of many millions.

Personal appearance of Cortez

Cortez was now thirty-three years of age. He was a handsome, well-formed man, of medium stature, of pale, intellectual features, with a piercing, dark eye, and frank and winning manners. He was temperate, indifferent respecting all personal comforts, and reckless of hardship and peril. He fully appreciated the influence of dress, and ever appeared in the rich garb of a Spanish gentleman. He was courtly yet frank in his manners, and possessed a peculiar power of attracting to his person all who approached him.

The eve of departure

On the eve of his departure from Cape Antonio, he again assembled his followers around him, and thus harangued them:

The harangue

"The enterprise in which you are engaged will fill the world with your renown. I am leading you to countries more vast and opulent than European eyes have ever yet beheld. It is a glorious prize which I present to you. But this prize can only be won by hardship and toil. Great deeds are only achieved by great exertions. Glory is never the reward of sloth. I have labored hard and staked my all on this undertaking, for I love that renown which is the noblest recompense of man.

"Do you covet riches more? Be true to me, and I will make you masters of wealth of which you have never dreamed. You are few in numbers, but be strong in resolution, and doubt not that the Almighty, who has never deserted the Spaniard in his contest with the infidel, will shield you, though encompassed by enemies. Your cause is just. You are to fight under the banner of the cross. Onward, then, with alacrity. Gloriously terminate the work so auspiciously begun."

Result of the speech

The squadron sails

This speech was received with tumultuous cheers. Mass was then celebrated by the ecclesiastics who accompanied the fleet, and with many religious ceremonies the squadron was placed under the protection of St. Peter. The anchors were raised, the sails were spread, and a favoring breeze pressed them rapidly over the waves toward the setting sun. It was the 18th of February, 1519.

Chapter III.

The Voyage to Mexico

The voyage

They reach the island of Cozumel

Light and variable winds retarded the progress of the squadron as it was headed in a southwesterly direction toward the shores of Yucatan. A terrible tempest succeeded, and the ships were driven wildly before the storm. But after the lapse of about a week, as the storm abated, they were cheered by the sight of land. The mountains of the island of Cozumel rose towering before them. This large island is separated from the main land of Yucatan by a channel of from twelve to thirty miles in width.

Treasures seized

The island and its inhabitants

When the natives saw the ships approaching, they fled from the shores in terror. Such a fleet must have, indeed, presented to the artless inhabitants an appalling spectacle. The squadron cast anchor in a spacious bay, and those who first arrived were the first to land. The captain of one of the vessels, with some of his crew, entered one of the native temples, and, seeing the idol decorated with gold, seized the treasure promptly as lawful prize, and also captured two or three of the natives. Cortez was indignant at conduct so rash and impolitic. He severely rebuked the over-zealous captain, ordered the ornaments to be replaced, and liberated the captives and loaded them with presents. He thus appeased the fears of the natives, and induced them to return to their dwellings. They soon became quite reconciled to the strangers, and opened with them a lucrative traffic. The island was not very fertile, and was thinly inhabited; but the natives had large and comfortable houses, built of stone cemented with mortar. There were several spacious temples, with lofty towers, constructed of the same durable materials. The adventurers were also exceedingly surprised to find in the court-yard of one of the temples an idol in the form of a massive stone cross. It was erected in honor of the god of rain. It is, indeed, a curious question, and one which probably will never be answered, how the natives of this new world obtained those apparently shadowy ideas of Christianity. They certainly performed the rite of baptism. The cross was one of their idols. They also believed in original sin, which was to be in some way removed by sprinkling an infant with water.

Exploring parties to the main land

Cortez remained upon this island about a fortnight. During this time all his energies were engrossed in accomplishing the great object of his mission. He sent two vessels to the main land to make inquiries about some Spaniards, who, it was reported, had been shipwrecked upon the coast, and were still lingering in captivity. The captain in command of this expedition was instructed to

return within eight days. Several parties were also sent in various directions to explore the island thoroughly and ascertain its resources.

Missionary labors

But one of the most important objects, in the estimation of Cortez, to be accomplished, was the conversion of the natives to the Catholic religion. He had with him several ecclesiastics – men whose sincerity no candid man can doubt. The Indians were assembled, and urged, through an interpreter, to abandon their idols and turn to the living God. The simple natives understood but little of the harangue, except the injunction to destroy their idols. At this suggestion they were horror-stricken. They assured Cortez that were they to harm or insult their gods, destruction in every awful form would immediately overwhelm them.

The first mass

The bold warrior wielded bold arguments. His logic was truly military. With his mailed cavaliers he made a prompt onslaught upon the idols, hewed them down, smashed them to pieces, and tumbled the dishonored and mutilated fragments into the streets. He then constructed a Christian altar, reared a cross and an image of the holy Virgin and the holy child, and mass, with all its pomp of robes, and chants, and incense, was for the first time performed in the temples of Yucatan.

Miraculous conversions

The natives were at first overwhelmed with grief and terror as they gazed upon their prostrate deities. But no earthquake shook the island; no lightning sped its angry bolt; no thunder broke down the skies. The sun still shone tranquilly, and ocean, earth, and sky smiled untroubled. The natives ceased to fear gods who could not protect themselves, and without farther argument consented to exchange their ungainly idols for the far prettier idols of the strangers. The heart of Cortez throbbed with enthusiasm and pride as he contemplated his great and glorious achievement – an achievement, in his view, unparalleled by the miracles of Peter or of Paul. In one short fortnight he had converted these islanders from the service of Satan, and had won them to that faith which would secure their eternal salvation. The fanatic sincerity with which this deed was accomplished does not redeem it from the sublimity of absurdity. Faith, said these mailed theologians, saves the soul; and these pagans have now turned from their idols to the living God. It is true that man is saved by faith, but it is that faith which *works by love*.

Return of the exploring party

Arrival of Aguilar

In the mean time the parties returned from the exploration of the island, and Orday brought back his two ships from the main land. He was unsuccessful in his attempts to find the shipwrecked Spaniards. Cortez had now been at Cozumel a fortnight. As he was on the point of taking his departure, a frail canoe was seen crossing the strait, with three men in it, apparently Indians, and entirely naked. As soon as the canoe landed, one of the men ran frantically to the Spaniards and informed them that he was a Christian and a countryman. His name was Aguilar.

History of Aguilar's life at Yucatan

Seven years ago, the vessel in which he was sailing from Darien to Hispaniola foundered in a gale. The ship's company, twenty in number, took to the boats. For thirteen days they were driven about at the mercy of the winds and currents. Seven perished miserably from hunger and thirst. The rest reached the barbarian shores of Yucatan. The natives seized them as captives, guarded them carefully, but fed them abundantly with the choicest food, and inflicted upon them no sufferings, and required of them no toil. Their treatment was an enigma which was soon dreadfully explained.

Escape and capture

Guerrero takes to savage life

One day four of these captives who were in the best condition were selected, sacrificed upon the bloody altars of the idols, and their cooked flesh served up for a cannibal repast. The howlings of the savages over the midnight orgies of this horrible entertainment fell dismally upon the ears of the miserable survivors. In their despair they succeeded in escaping, and fled to the mountain forests. Here they wandered for a time in the endurance of awful sufferings. At length they were again taken captive by the cacique or chief of another province. He spared their lives, but made them menial slaves. Their masters were merciless and exacting in the extreme. Under this rigorous treatment all died but two – Aguilar, a priest, and Guerrero, a sailor. The sailor, having no scruples of any kind, and being ready to conform himself to all customs, gradually acquired the good will of the savages. He obtained renown as a warrior; identified himself entirely with the natives; tattooed his face; slit his ears, his lips, and his nose, for those dangling ornaments which ever accompany a barbarian taste, and took to him a native wife.

Escape

Aguilar, however, was a man of more cultivation and refinement. He cherished his self-respect, and, resisting all enticements to marry an Indian maiden, was true to the vows of celibacy which his priestly profession imposed. Curious stories are related of the temptations to which the natives exposed him. Weary years lingered along, presenting no opportunity for escape. Cortez at last arrived at Cozumel. Some Indians carried the tidings into the interior. Aguilar received this intelligence with transport, and yet with trembling. He, however, succeeded in reaching the coast, accompanied by two friendly natives. He found upon the beach a stranded canoe, half buried in the sand. Embarking in this with his two companions, they paddled themselves across the strait, at that place twelve miles wide, to the island. The frail boat was seen by the party of Cortez upon the surface of the sea. As soon as Aguilar landed he dropped upon his knees, and with streaming eyes gave thanks to God for his escape.

Guerrero remains with the savages

His companion in captivity refused to accompany him. "Brother Aguilar," said he, after a moment's thought, "I am married. I have three sons, and am a cacique and captain in the wars. My face is tattooed and my ears bored. What would the Spaniards think of me should I now go among them?" All Aguilar's entreaties for him to leave were unavailing.

Aguilar appears to have been truly a good man. As he had acquired a perfect acquaintance with the language of the natives, and with their manners and customs, Cortez received him as a heaven-sent acquisition to his enterprise.

Squadron again sails

On the 4th of March the squadron again set sail, and, crossing the narrow strait, approached the shores of the continent. Sailing directly north some hundred miles, hugging the coast of Yucatan, Cortez doubled Cape Catoche, and turning his prow to the west, boldly pressed forward into those unknown waters which seemed to extend interminably before him. The shores were densely covered with the luxuriant foliage of the tropics, and in many a bay and on many a headland could be discerned the thronged dwellings of the natives.

They enter the Tabasco

They ascend the river

After sailing west about two hundred miles, they found the coast again turning abruptly to the south. Following the line of the land some three hundred miles farther, they came to the broad mouth of the River Tabasco, which Grijalva had entered, and which Cortez was seeking. A sand-bar at the mouth of the river prevented the heavily-loaded vessels from passing. Cortez, therefore, cast anchor, and taking a strong and well-armed party in the boats, ascended the shallow stream.

A forest of majestic trees, with underwood dense and impervious, lined the banks. The naked forms of the natives were seen gliding among the foliage, following, in rapidly-accumulating numbers, the advance of the boats, and evincing, by tone and gesture, any thing but a friendly spirit. At last, arriving at an opening in the forest, where a smooth and grassy meadow extended with gradual ascent from the stream, the boats drew near the shore, and Cortez, through his interpreter Aguilar, asked permission to land, avowing his friendly intentions. The prompt answer was the clash of weapons and shouts of defiance.

Landing postponed

Encampment

Upon this Cortez decided to postpone a forcible landing until the morning, and retired to a small island in the river which was uninhabited. He here encamped for the night, establishing a vigilant line of sentinels to guard against surprise.

Preparation for the conflict

The reception

In the early dawn of the next morning the party were assembled for prayers and for the celebration of mass. They then, with new zeal and courage, entered their boats, and ascended the

glassy, forest-fringed stream, upon which the morning sun shone brightly. Bird-songs filled the air, and hardly a breath of wind moved the leaves, glittering in the brilliant sunlight, as these bronzed men of iron sinews moved sternly on to the demoniac deeds of war. The natives, in preparation for the conflict, had been all the night rallying their forces. The shore was lined with their war-canoes, and the banks were covered with Indian troops drawn up in martial array. Gorgeous plumes decorated their persons, and the rays of the sun were reflected from their polished weapons. As soon as the Spanish boats appeared, the vast army of the natives raised shouts of defiance, and the ear was almost deafened with the clangor of their trumpets and drums.

The battle

The charge

Victory

The battle soon commenced. The sky was almost darkened by the shower of arrows thrown by those upon the land. The warriors in the canoes fought fiercely with their javelins. The conflict was bloody, but short. Native valor could avail but little against European discipline and art. The spears, stones, and arrows of the natives fell almost harmless upon the helmets and shields of the Spaniards; but the bullets from the guns of the invaders swept like hail-stones through the crowded ranks of the natives, unimpeded by their frail weapons of defense. Cortez himself headed a charge which broke resistlessly into the hostile ranks. Appalled by the terrific thunder and lightning of the musketry, the Indians soon scattered and fled, leaving the ground covered with their slain.

March to Tabasco

Cortez now reviewed his troops in triumph upon the shore. He found that fourteen were wounded, but none slain. To attend to the wounded and to rest his exhausted men, he again encamped. The bloodstained banner of the cross, which they had so signally dishonored, floated proudly over their intrenchments. Prayers were offered and mass celebrated in honor of the victory achieved by Christian arms against idolaters. The next morning the Spaniards marched unresisted to Tabasco, the capital of the province, a large town upon the river, but a few miles above the place where the invaders had effected a landing. The inhabitants, men, women, and children, fled from the place in dismay.

Possession taken of the town

Gathering of the natives

Cortez took possession of the town in the name of the King of Spain. But the whole surrounding region was now aroused. The natives, in numbers which could not be counted, gathered in the vicinity of Tabasco, and organized their forces anew, to repel, if possible, the terrible foe. They were assembled on the great plain of Ceutla. Cortez had anticipated this, and was also gathering his strength for a decisive battle. He sent to the ships for six pieces of cannon, his whole cavalry of sixteen horses, and every available man. A few only were left to guard the vessels. This powerful re-enforcement

soon arrived. Thus strengthened, his whole army was called together to celebrate the solemnities of mass, and to implore the blessing of God in extending the triumphs of the cross over the kingdom of Satan. Thus they marched forth, with powder, and ball, and neighing steeds, to the merciless slaughter of those brave men who were fighting for their country and their homes.

The two armies meet

The conflict

The Spaniards now advanced to meet their foes. It was a lovely morning, the 25th of March. The natives, in point of civilization, raised far above the condition of savages, had large fields in a high state of cultivation, waving with the rich vegetation of the tropics. After a march of three or four miles through a country cultivated like a garden, they arrived at the ground occupied by the native army. The lines of their encampments were so extended and yet so crowded that the Spaniards estimated their numbers at over forty thousand. To meet them in the strife Cortez had but six hundred men. But his terrible engines of destruction made his force more powerful than theirs. The natives were ready for the battle. They greeted their assailants with a war-whoop, which rose in thunder tones over the plain, and showered upon them volleys of arrows, sling-stones, and javelins. At this first discharge, seventy Spaniards were wounded and one was slain. The conflict soon raged with all imaginable horrors. The natives fought with the courage of desperation. They seemed even regardless of the death-dealing muskets. And when the terrible cannon, with its awful roar, opened huge gaps in their ranks, manfully they closed up, and with new vigor pressed the onset. The odds were so fearful that for some time it seemed quite doubtful on which side victory would rest.

The cavalry charge

Cortez, heading his cavalry, swept around the plain, and, by a circuitous route, came unperceived upon the rear of the tumultuous foe. The sixteen horsemen, clad in steel, urging their horses to their utmost speed, with loud shouts and sabres gleaming in the air, plunged into the midst of the throng. Their keen-edged swords fell on the right hand and on the left upon the almost naked bodies of the natives. At the same moment, the energies of musketry and artillery were plied with murderous carnage.

Terror of the natives

The fight

Estimates of the number killed

The natives had never seen a horse before. They thought the rider and the steed one animal. As these terrific monsters, half human, half beast, came bounding into their midst, cutting down and trampling beneath iron hoofs all who stood in the way, while at the same time the appalling roar of the cannonade seemed to shake the very hills, the scene became too awful for mortal courage to endure. The whole mighty mass, in uncontrollable dismay, fled from the presence of foes of such demoniac

aspect and energy. The slaughter of these poor Indians was so awful that some of the Spaniards extravagantly estimated the number left dead upon the field at thirty thousand. Though many of the Spaniards were wounded, but two were killed.

Cortez immediately assembled his army under a grove upon the field of battle to give thanks to God for the victory. The pomp and pageantry of war gave place to the pomp and pageantry of the Church. Canonical robes and banners fluttered in the breeze, processions marched, the smoke of incense floated in the air, and mass, with all its imposing solemnities, was celebrated in the midst of prayers and thanksgivings.

"Then," says Diaz, "after dressing our wounds with the fat of Indians whom we found dead thereabout, and having placed good guards round our post, we ate our supper and went to our repose."

The declaration

Under the placable influence of these devotions, the conqueror sent word to the vanquished that he would now *forgive them* if they would submit unconditionally to his authority. But he declared that if they refused this, he would ride over the land, and put every thing in it, man, woman, and child, to the sword.

The natives submissive

The spirit of resistance was utterly crushed. The natives immediately sent a delegation to him laden with presents. To impress these ambassadors still more deeply with a sense of his power, he exhibited before them the martial evolutions of his cavalry, and showed them the effects of his artillery as the balls were sped crashing through the trees of the forest. The natives were now effectually conquered, and looked upon the Spaniards as beings of supernatural powers, wielding the terrors of thunder and lightning, and whom no mortal energies could resist.

The new religion

St. Mary of Victory

They had become as little children. This Cortez thought a very suitable frame of mind to secure their conversion. He recommended that they should cast down their idols, and accept instead the gods of papal Rome. The recommendation of Cortez was potent over the now pliant natives. They made no opposition while the soldiers, whose hands were hardly yet washed of the blood of their relatives, hewed down their images. With very imposing ceremonies, the religion of the conquerors was instituted in the temples of Yucatan, and, in honor of the Virgin Mary, the name of Tabasco was changed into St. Mary of Victory.

Motives which actuated the adventurers

In all this tremendous crime there was apparently no hypocrisy. Human motives will seldom bear rigid scrutiny. Man's best deeds are tainted. Cortez was very sincere in his desire to overthrow the abominable system of idolatry prevailing among the natives. He perhaps truly thought that these violent measures were necessary to accomplish this object, and that Christianity, thus introduced,

would prove an inestimable blessing. We may abhor his conduct, while we can still make generous allowances for the darkness of his mind and of the age in which he lived. It requires infinite wisdom to adjust the balance of human deeds.

Christian instruction

Principle and practice

Two of the Catholic ecclesiastics, Olmedo and Diaz, were probably unaffected Christians, truly desiring the spiritual renovation of the Indians. They felt deeply the worth of the soul, and did all they could rightly to instruct these unhappy and deeply-wronged natives. They sincerely pitied their sufferings, but deemed it wise that the right eye should be plucked out, and that the right arm should be cut off, rather than that the soul should perish. It is a consoling thought, that "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust." The natives were assembled in their temples; they came together in immense multitudes. The priests, through their interpreter, Aguilar, endeavored to instruct them in the pure doctrines and the sublime mysteries of Christianity. If the natives perceived a marked difference between these precepts and the awful carnage on the field of Ceutla, it was not the first time that principles and practice have been found discordant.

The altar

Devotions

Baptism

A grand religious ceremony was instituted to commemorate the conversion of the nation. The whole army took a part in the solemnities of the occasion, with all the martial and ecclesiastical pomp which their situation could furnish. The natives in countless multitudes joined the procession, and gazed with astonishment upon the scene. Advancing to the principal pyramidal temple of Tabasco, which was an enormous structure, with a vast area upon its summit, they wound around its sides in the ascent. Upon this lofty platform, beneath the unclouded sun, with thousands of Indians crowding the region around to witness the strange spectacle, a Christian altar was reared, the images of the Savior and of the Virgin were erected, and mass was celebrated. Clouds of incense rose into the still air, and the rich voices of the Spanish soldiers swelled the solemn chant. It must have been an impressive scene. There must have been some there into whose eye the tear of devotion gushed. If there were in that throng – all of whom have long since gone to judgment – one single broken and contrite heart, that was an offering which God could accept. Father Olmedo preached upon the occasion "many good things touching our holy faith." Twenty Indian girls who had been given to the Spanish captains for wives were baptized.

The presents

Marina

Indulgences

Cortez having thus, in the course of a week, annexed the whole of these new provinces of unknown extent to Spain, and having converted the natives to Christianity, prepared for his departure. The natives, among their propitiatory offerings, had presented to Cortez, as we have mentioned, twenty young and beautiful females whom they had captured from hostile tribes, or who in other ways had become their slaves. Cortez distributed these unenlightened maidens among his captains, having first selected one of the youngest and most beautiful of them, Marina, for his wife. Cortez had a worthy spouse upon his plantation at Cuba. No civil or religious rites sanctioned this unhallowed union; and he was sufficiently instructed to know that he was sinning against the laws of both God and man; but the conscience of this extraordinary adventurer had become involved in labyrinths utterly inexplicable. He seemed to judge that he was doing so much for the cause of Holy Mother Church that his own private sins were of little comparative moment. His many good deeds, he appeared to think, purchased ample indulgence.

Character of Marina

But Marina was a noble woman. The relation which she sustained to Cortez did no violence to her instincts or to her conscience. She had never been instructed in the school of Christ. Polygamy was the religion of her land. She deemed herself the honored wife of Cortez, and dreamed not of wrong. Marina was in all respects an extraordinary woman. Nature had done much for her. In person she was exceedingly beautiful. She had winning manners, and a warm and loving heart. Her mind was of a superior order. She very quickly mastered the difficulties of the Castilian tongue, and thus spoke three languages with native fluency – the Mexican, the Yucatanese, and the Spanish. "I am more happy," said she one day, "in being the wife of my lord and master Cortez, and of having a son by him, than if I had been sovereign of all of New Spain."

Her career

Her career had been eventful in the extreme. She was the daughter of a rich and powerful cacique, who was tributary to the Emperor of Mexico. Her father died during her infancy, and her mother married again. A son by her new husband gradually estranged the affections of the unnatural mother from her daughter. These feelings increased, till she regarded the child with deep dislike, and secretly gave her away to some slave-drivers, circulating the report that the child was dead. The slave-merchants brought her from her distant home, where the language of Mexico was her native tongue, and sold her to one of the chiefs of Tabasco. Here she acquired the language of Yucatan.

Her devotion to Cortez

There was much in the energy, magnanimity, fearlessness, and glowing temperament of Cortez to rouse a woman's love. Marina became devotedly attached to him. She watched over his interests with a zeal which never slumbered; and when she became the mother of his son, still more tender ties bound her to the conqueror of her race. In subsequent scenes of difficulty and danger, her acquaintance with the native language, manners, and customs made her an invaluable acquisition to the expedition.

Departure from Tabasco

Blessings left behind

After a few days spent at Tabasco, the hour for departure came. The boats, decorated with the banner of the cross, and with palm leaves, the symbols of happiness and peace, floated down the beautiful river to the squadron riding at anchor at its mouth. Again spreading the sails, and catching a favorable breeze, the adventurers were wafted rejoicingly on toward the shores of Mexico. The newly-converted natives were left to meditate upon the instructions which they had received – to count the graves of the slain – to heal, as they could, the gory wounds and splintered bones of their friends, still writhing in anguish, and to wail the funeral dirge in the desolate homes of the widow and the orphan. Seldom, in the history of the world, has such a whirlwind of woe so suddenly burst upon any people. How long they continued to cherish a religion introduced by such harbingers we are not informed.

They coast along the shore

Arrival at San Juan de Ulua

The sun shone brightly on the broad Mexican Gulf, and zephyrs laden with fragrance from the luxuriant shores swelled the flowing sheets. As the fleet crept along the land, the temples and houses of the natives, and their waving fields of grain, were distinctly visible from the decks. Many a promontory and headland was covered with multitudes of tawny figures, decorated with all the attractions of barbarian splendor, gazing upon the fearful phenomena of the passing ships. Cortez continued his course several hundred miles, sweeping around the shores of this magnificent gulf, until he arrived at the island of San Juan de Ulua. He was seeking this spot, which Grijalva had visited, and here he dropped his anchors in one of the harbors of the empire of Mexico.

Chapter IV. Founding a Colony

The fleet anchors

It was a beautiful afternoon in April when the fleet sailed majestically into the Mexican bay. Earth, sea, and sky smiled serenely, and all the elements of trouble were lulled into repose. As the ships glided over the smooth waters to their sheltered anchorage, a scene, as of enchantment, opened around the voyagers. In the distance, on grassy slopes, and in the midst of luxuriant groves, the villages and rural dwellings of the natives were thickly scattered. The shores were covered with an eager multitude, contemplating with wonder and awe the sublime spectacle of the fleet.

Arrival of the canoes

The two chiefs

Hardly were the anchors dropped ere two canoes shot from the shore, filled with natives. The ship in which Cortez sailed was more imposing than the rest, and the banner of Spain floated proudly from its topmast. The Mexicans steered promptly for this vessel, and, with the most confiding frankness, ascended its sides. Two of the persons in these boats were men of high distinction in the Mexican empire. As Marina understood their language perfectly, and the liberated Spanish captive Aguilar was thoroughly acquainted with the language of the Tabascans, there was no difficulty in the interchange of ideas. One of these men was the governor of the province in which Cortez had landed; the other was commander-in-chief of all the military forces in that province. It has been mentioned that Grijalva had previously landed at this spot, and given it the name of San Juan de Ulua. The Mexicans had thus some knowledge of the formidable strangers who were invading the New World, and in various ways tidings, for now the quarter of a century, had been reaching their ears of the appalling power of this new race.

The legend

Perhaps to this fact is to be attributed the general and discouraging impression which then prevailed, that a fearful calamity which nothing could avert was impending over the nation; that it was the decree of destiny that a strange race, coming from the rising of the sun, should overwhelm and desolate their country.

The presents

The interview

The government of the empire

The two chiefs brought Cortez a present of bread, fruit, fowls, flowers, and golden ornaments. The interview was conducted by the interchange of the most formal social ceremonies of Mexico and of Spain. Cortez invited his guests to remain and dine. The communication between them was necessarily slow, as Marina interpreted their speech to Aguilar, and Aguilar to Cortez. The Spanish commander, however, thus ascertained the most important facts which he wished to know respecting the great empire of Mexico. He learned that two hundred miles in the interior was situated the capital of the empire, and that a monarch named Montezuma, beloved and revered by his subjects, reigned over the extended realm. The country was divided into provinces, over each of which a governor presided. The province in which Cortez had landed was under the sway of Governor Teutile, who resided about twenty miles in the interior.

Cortez lands

Cortez, though uninvited, immediately, with great energy and boldness, landed his whole force upon the beach. He constructed a fortified camp, and planted his heavy artillery upon the surrounding hillocks to sweep all the approaches. Characteristically it is recorded that, having posted their artillery, they *raised an altar*, and not till after that was done did they erect barracks for themselves. The friendly natives aided the Spaniards in building huts, brought them presents of flowers and food, and entered into an active traffic, in which both parties exulted in the great bargains which they made. Thus the Mexicans warmed the vipers who were fatally to sting them.

Scene on the shore

It was indeed a novel scene, worthy of the pencil of the painter, which that beach presented day after day. Men, women, and children, boys and girls, in all the variety of barbaric costume, thronged the encampment. Mexicans and Spaniards mingled merrily in all the peaceful and joyful confusion of a fair. The rumor of the strange visitors spread far and wide, and each day increasing multitudes were assembled.

Visit of Governor Teutile

The intelligence was speedily communicated to Governor Teutile. With a numerous retinue, he set out from his palace to visit his uninvited guests, and to ascertain their object and purposes. The governor entered the Spanish camp accompanied by the commander-in-chief of all the provincial forces. Each party vied in the external demonstrations of respect and friendship. The eyes of the Spaniards glistened with avarice as Teutile spread before Cortez many valuable ornaments of massive silver and gold, wrought in exquisite workmanship. The sight inflamed them with more intense desires

to penetrate a country where such treasures could be obtained. After a splendid repast given by the Spaniards, Cortez said to his visitors,

Cortez's speech

"I am the subject of Charles V., the most powerful monarch in the world. My sovereign has heard of the greatness and the glory of Montezuma, the Emperor of Mexico. I am sent to his court to convey the respects of my sovereign, to offer suitable presents, and to confer with him upon matters of great moment. It is therefore my desire to proceed immediately to the capital, to accomplish the purposes of my mission."

Teutile's uneasiness

Teutile could not conceal the uneasiness with which he heard this avowal. He knew that Montezuma and all the most intelligent men of the nation contemplated with dread the power and the encroachments of the Europeans, now so firmly established on the islands of the Caribbean Sea. With embarrassment he replied,

His reply

"I hear with pleasure of the magnificence of your sovereign. Our monarch is not less glorious. No earthly king can surpass him in wealth or goodness. You have been but a few days in these realms, and yet you are impatient to be admitted, without delay, into the presence of Montezuma. Our king will doubtless hear with pleasure from your sovereign, and receive his ambassador honorably. But it will be first necessary to inform him of your arrival, that he may communicate to you his royal pleasure."

Embassadors to be sent to Montezuma

Picture writing

Cortez was exceedingly annoyed by this delay. Deeming it, however, important to secure the friendship of the Mexicans, he consented to wait until the return of the couriers who were immediately to be sent to Montezuma. The natives were not acquainted with the alphabet, but they had in use a sort of *picture writing*, delineating upon fine cotton cloth pictures of scenes which they wished to represent. Teutile requested that his painters might be permitted to take a sketch of the Spaniards and their equipage. Consent being obtained, the painters commenced their work, which they executed with remarkable rapidity and skill. The fleet in the harbor, the encampment upon the shore, the muskets, the artillery, the horses, all were delineated true to life. They were so accurate in the figures and portraits of Cortez and his leading companions that the Spaniards immediately recognized them.

Military review

The manœuvres

Terror of the natives

When Cortez observed this remarkable skill, that he might impress Montezuma the more deeply with a sense of his power, he ordered his whole force to be assembled for a military review. The trumpets pealed forth the martial summons which the well-drilled bands so perfectly understood. The troops instantly formed in order of battle. Infantry, artillery, cavalry, all were at their posts. The most intricate and beautiful manœuvres were performed. Martial music contributed its thrilling charms; banners floated in the breeze; helmets, cuirasses, swords, and polished muskets gleamed in the rays of the unclouded sun. Mounted horsemen bounded over the plain in the terrific charge, and the artillerymen, with rapid evolutions, moved to and fro, dragging over the sands their lumbering yet mysterious engines of destruction, whose awful roar and terrific power the Mexicans had not yet witnessed. It was a gorgeous spectacle even to eyes accustomed to such scenes. The Mexicans, in countless thousands, gazed upon it in silent amazement. But when, at the close, Cortez placed his cannon in battery, and ordered a simultaneous discharge, aiming the heavily-shotted guns into the dense forest, the bewilderment of the poor natives passed away into unspeakable terror. They saw the lightning flash, they heard the roar, louder than the heaviest thunders. As the iron storm was shot through the forest, the limbs of the gigantic trees came crashing to the ground. Dense volumes of sulphurous smoke enveloped them. Even the boldest turned pale, and the timid shrieked and fled.

Departure of the runners

Cortez was much pleased in seeing how deeply he had impressed his visitors with a sense of his power. The painters made a very accurate delineation of the whole scene to be transmitted to Montezuma. They then, with much ceremony, departed.

Police regulations

The police regulations of Mexico were in some respects in advance of that which then prevailed in Europe. For the rapid transmission of intelligence from the remotest bounds of the empire to the capital, well-trained runners were posted, at suitable stations, all along the principal roads. Each man had a short stage, which he passed over with great rapidity, and communicated his message, verbal or written in the picture language, to a fresh runner. Burdens and governmental officers were also rapidly transmitted, in a sort of palanquin, in the same way, from post to post, by relays of men.

Kindness of the natives

A week passed while Cortez remained impatiently in his encampment awaiting an answer to the message sent to Montezuma. The friendly natives, in the mean time, supplied the Spaniards with every thing they could need. By the command of the governor, Teutile, more than a thousand huts of branches of trees and of cotton matting were reared in the vicinity of the encampment for the

accommodation of the Mexicans, who, without recompense, were abundantly supplying the table of Cortez and of his troops.

Arrival of the embassy

On the eighth day an embassy arrived at the camp from the Mexican capital. Two nobles of the court, accompanied by a retinue of a hundred *men of burden*, laden with magnificent gifts from Montezuma, presented themselves before the pavilion of Cortez. The ambassadors saluted the Spanish chieftain with the greatest reverence, bowing before him, and surrounding him with clouds of incense, which arose from waving censers borne by their attendants. The presents which they brought, in silver, in gold, in works of art, utility, and beauty, excited the rapture and the amazement of the Spaniards. There were specimens of workmanship in the precious metals which no artists in Europe could rival. A Spanish helmet which had been sent to Montezuma was returned filled with grains of pure gold. These costly gifts were opened before Cortez in lavish abundance, and they gave indications of opulence hitherto undreamed of. After they had been sufficiently examined and admired, one of the ambassadors very courteously said,

Message from Montezuma

"Our master is happy to send these tokens of his respect to the King of Spain. He regrets that he can not enjoy an interview with the Spaniards. But the distance of his capital is too great, and the perils of the journey are too imminent to allow of this pleasure. The strangers are therefore requested to return to their own homes with these proofs of the friendly feelings of Montezuma."

Chagrin of Cortez

Disaffection in the camp

Cortez was much chagrined. He earnestly, however, renewed his application for permission to visit the emperor. But the ambassadors, as they retired, assured him that another application would be unavailing. They, however, took a few meagre presents of shirts and toys, which alone remained to Cortez, and departed on their journey of two hundred miles, with the reiterated and still more earnest application from Cortez for permission to visit the emperor. It was now evident that the Mexicans had received instructions from the court, and that all were anxious that the Spaniards should leave the country. Though the natives manifested no hostility, they immediately became cold and reserved, and ceased to supply the camp with food. With the Spaniards the charm of novelty was over. Insects annoyed them. They were blistered by the rays of a meridian sun, reflected from the burning sands of the beach. Sickness entered the camp, and thirty died. Disaffection began to manifest itself, and some were anxious to return to Cuba.

Second message from Montezuma

But the treasures which had been received from Montezuma, so rich and so abundant, inspired Cortez and his gold-loving companions with the most intense desire to penetrate an empire of so much opulence. They, however, waited patiently ten days, when the ambassadors again returned. As before, they came laden with truly imperial gifts. The gold alone of the ornaments which they brought was valued by the Spaniards at more than fifty thousand dollars. The message from Montezuma was,

however, still more peremptory than the first. He declared that he could not permit the Spaniards to approach his capital. Cortez, though excessively vexed, endeavored to smother the outward expression of his irritation. He gave the ambassadors a courteous response, but, turning to his officers, he said,

"This is truly a rich and a powerful prince. Yet it shall go hard but we will one day pay him a visit in his capital."

The Ave Maria

Curiosity of the natives

The sermon

Presentation of the crucifix

"At this moment," says Diaz, "the bell tolled for the Ave Maria, and all of us fell upon our knees before the holy cross. The Mexican noblemen being very inquisitive to know the meaning of this, Cortez hinted to the reverend father Olmedo the propriety of a sermon, such as should convey to them the truths of our holy faith. Father Olmedo accordingly preached, like an excellent theologian which he was, explaining the mysteries of the cross, at the sight of which the evil beings they worshiped as gods fled away. These subjects, and much more, he dilated upon. It was perfectly explained to the Mexicans and understood by them, and they promised to relate all they had seen and heard to their sovereign. He also declared to them that among the principal objects of our mission thither were those of putting a stop to human sacrifices, injustices, and idolatrous worship; and then, presenting them with an image of our Holy Virgin, with her son in her arms, he desired them to take it with them, to venerate it, and to plant crosses similar to that before them in their temples."

Desertion of the huts

The mutiny

The ambassadors again retired with dignity and with courtesy, yet with reserve indicative of deep displeasure at the pertinacity of the Spaniards. That night every hut of the natives was abandoned. When the morning sun arose, silence and solitude reigned upon the spot which had so recently witnessed the life and the clamor of an innumerable multitude. Cortez and his companions were left alone. The long hours of the tropical day passed slowly, and no native approached the encampment. No food was to be obtained. Not only was all friendly intercourse thus suspended, but the Spaniards had much reason to fear that preparations were making for an assault. The murmuring in the camp increased. Two parties were formed: one party were in favor of returning to Cuba, affirming that it was madness to think of the subjugation by force of arms of so mighty an empire

with so feeble an armament. One of the generals, Diego de Ordaz, was deputed by the disaffected to communicate these sentiments to Cortez, and to assure him that it was the general voice of the army.

Shrewdness

The shrewdness of this extraordinary man was peculiarly conspicuous in this crisis. He promptly, and apparently with cordiality, assented to their views, and began to make arrangements to relinquish the enterprise. Orders were issued to commence the re-embarkation.

The mutineers outwitted

While thus dissimulating, he roused his friends to effort, and secretly employed all his powers to excite a mutiny in the camp against a return. Every motive was plied to stimulate the bold and the avaricious to persevere in an undertaking where glory and wealth held out such attractions. His emissaries were completely successful. The whole camp was in a ferment. Before the sun went down, a large party of the soldiers surrounded his tent, as in open mutiny. They declared that, having entered upon a majestic enterprise, it was poltroonery to abandon it upon the first aspect of danger; that they were determined to persevere, and that, if Cortez wished to return with the cowards to Cuba, they would instantly choose another general to guide them in the career of glory upon which they had entered.

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