

CHAPTER CLXXXIV.

How Captain Gonzalo de Sandoval, who was at Naco, captured forty Spanish soldiers and their Captain, who had come from the province of Nicaragua, and did much damage and robbed the Indians of the pueblos through which they passed.

WHILE Sandoval was at the pueblo of Naco pacifying nearly all the pueblos of that neighbourhood, there came before him four Caciques of the pueblos named Quespan and Talchinalchapa, who said that in their pueblos there were many Spaniards of the same kind as those who were with him, with arms and horses, and that they seized their property and their daughters and wives and put them in iron chains. At this Sandoval was very indignant and asked how far off they were, and they replied that we could arrive there early in one day. Sandoval promptly ordered us who were to go with him to get ready as well as we could with our arms and horses, our crossbows and muskets, and we were seventy men who went with him. When we arrived at the pueblos where they were, we found them very tranquil, without a suspicion that we were about to capture them, and as soon as they saw us coming in that manner they were aroused and grasped their arms, but we quickly seized the Captain and many of the others before blood was shed on one side or the other. Sandoval asked them in rather bitter words whether they thought it right to go about robbing the vassals of His Majesty, and if that was a proper sort of conquest and pacification, bringing Indian men and women in chains and collars? Then he had them [the chains] taken off and gave the women to the Cacique of that pueblo and ordered the others to go back to their own country which was near by.

When that was done he ordered the Captain who had come there, who was named Pedro de Garro, and his soldiers, to be arrested and to accompany us at once to the pueblo of Naco, whither we marched them, and they brought many Indian women from Nicaragua, some of them handsome, and Indian women servants whom they kept to wait on them, and most of them had horses with them. As we were so battered and ragged from the past journeys and had no Indian women to make bread for us, or only very few, they looked like counts in comparison with our poverty.

When we arrived with them at Naco, Sandoval gave them lodgings in a convenient place, for there were among them some hidalgos and persons of quality. When they had rested a day, their Captain Garro, seeing that we belonged to the company of Cortés who was so celebrated, became great friends with Sandoval and all of us, and they took pleasure in our company.

I wish to state how and in what manner and for what reason that Captain and those soldiers had come; it was in the way I will relate :—

It seems that Pedrarias de Ávila, who was Governor of Tierra Firme at that time, sent a Captain named Francisco Hernández, a man of great importance among them, to conquer and pacify the country of Nicaragua, and to explore other lands, and he gave him a company of soldiers, both horsemen and crossbowmen, and he [Francisco Hernández] arrived at the provinces of Nicaragua and Leon, for so they were called, and pacified and settled them; thus he was prosperous, had command of many soldiers, and was out of reach of Pedrarias de Ávila.

Then he consulted certain advisers, among them, as I understand, a certain Bachelor Moreno, of whom I have already spoken as having been sent by the Royal

Audiencia of Santo Domingo and the Geronimite Friars, who govern the islands, to Tierra Firme because of a certain lawsuit which, if my memory serves me, was about the death of Balboa the son-in-law of Pedro Arias, who beheaded him after he had married him to his daughter Doña Ysabel Arias de Peñalosa, for so she was called. This Bachelor Moreno said to Captain Francisco Hernández that as soon as he conquered any country he should appeal to our King and Lord to make him Governor of it, as that would not be treason, for it was contrary to justice for Pedrarias to behead his son-in-law Balboa, because Balboa had first sent his proctor to His Majesty asking to be made Adelantado.

Under the influence of these speeches of the Bachelor Moreno, Francisco Hernández sent his Captain Pedro de Garro to search for a port on the North coast, so that he could inform His Majesty about the provinces which he had pacified and settled, in order that he should grant him the favour of being the governor of them, as they were widely separated from the Government of Pedro Arias.

Pedro de Garro was captured while employed on that mission, as I have already stated, and when Sandoval understood the object of his coming he conversed very secretly with Garro, and orders were given that we should inform Cortés, who was at Trujillo, about it, for Sandoval felt certain that Cortés would help him so that Francisco Hernández should remain as Governor of Nicaragua.

When this had been arranged, Sandoval and Garro sent ten men, five of ours and the other five soldiers of Garro's company, to go along the coast to Trujillo with the letters, for, as I have stated in the chapter that treats of it, Cortés was at that time stationed there. They also took with them more than twenty Nicaraguan Indians, whom Garro had brought, to help them to cross the rivers.

When they went on their way they were not able to cross the Rio Pichin or another called the Rio de Balahama, for they were in flood, and at the end of fifteen days the soldiers returned to Naco without having accomplished anything they were ordered to do, at which Sandoval was so much incensed that he reviled the commander who went in charge of them. Then without delay he ordered Captain Luis Marin to go overland with ten soldiers, five of them Garro's men and the others our own, and I was one of them.

We all went on foot and passed through many hostile pueblos, and if I were to describe at length the great hardships and the fights with warlike Indians that we went through and the rivers and bays we crossed swimming or on rafts, or the hunger we some days endured, I should not quickly finish. Other notable things I have to speak of, such as how on one day we crossed three rapid rivers on rafts and by swimming, and when we reached the coast there were many creeks where there were alligators, and we were two days in crossing on rafts a river called Xagua which is ten leagues from Triunfo de la Cruz, because it was running so swiftly, and there we found skulls and bones of seven horses which had died of the poison grass they had grazed on, and they had belonged to the followers of Cristóbal de Olid.

Thence we went to Triunfo de la Cruz and found some wrecked ships on their beam ends. Thence we marched in four days to a pueblo named Quemera, and many hostile Indians came out against us with long and heavy lances and shields, and they use them [the lances] with the right hand over the left arm and make play with them in the way we fight with pikes, and they came on to fight hand to hand. Owing to the crossbows we carried and our sword thrusts, they gave way to us,

and we went on ahead, but they wounded two of our soldiers there.

These Indians who, as I have related, came out to attack us, did not believe that we belonged to the party of Cortés, but to other Captains who went about robbing the Indians.

Let us stop talking about past hardships and I will state that after two more days on the road we reached Trujillo. Before entering the town, about the hour of Vespers, we observed five horsemen, who were Cortés and other gentlemen on horseback who had gone for a ride along the shore, and when they saw us from afar off, they did not know what new thing it could be. When Cortés recognised us he dismounted from his horse and with tears in his eyes came to embrace us and we him, and he said to us, "Oh! my brothers and comrades, how I longed to see you and know how you were." He was thin and we were grieved to see it, for, as we knew, he had been at the point of death from fever and the melancholy which held him, for still at that time he knew neither good or bad news from Mexico. Other persons said that he was still so near death that they had already prepared for him a cowl of [the order of] Señor San Francisco for him to be buried in. Then he went with us all on foot to the town and found us lodgings and we supped with him, and he was so badly off that there was not even enough cassava for us to eat our fill. When we had made our report of why we had come, and he had read the letters about the affair of Francisco Hernández, begging for help, he said that he would do all he was able for him. At the time we arrived at Trujillo, three days had passed since the arrival of the two small vessels with the merchandise which I have before mentioned was sent from Santo Domingo, which consisted of horses and foals and mules and old

arms, and some shirts and red caps and things of little value, and they only brought one pipe of wine and nothing more that was useful, yet those vessels had no sooner come than we all of us got into debt buying gew-gaws and foals.

While we were with Cortés telling him about the hardships of our journey, they saw a sailing ship coming from the high seas, and it arrived in port having come from the Havana sent by the Licentiate Zuazo, the same licentiate whom Cortés had left in Mexico as Chief Alcalde; he sent a few provisions for Cortés and a letter which now follows, and if I do not repeat the exact terms which it contained at least I give the substance of it.

CHAPTER CLXXXV.

How the Licentiate Zuazo sent a letter to Cortés from the Havana, and what was contained in it I will now relate.

WHEN the ship I have mentioned had come into port, and the gentleman who was her Captain had come ashore, he went to Cortés to kiss hands, and gave him a letter from the Licentiate Zuazo whom he had left in Mexico as Chief Alcalde.

As soon as Cortés had read the letter he became so miserable that he shut himself in his chamber and began to sob, and he did not come out again until the next morning, which was Saturday, and he ordered Mass of Our Lady to be said early in the morning. After Mass had been said, he begged us to listen to him and we should hear news from New Spain, how a report had been spread that we were all dead, and how they had seized our property and sold it at auction, and taken away our Indians and divided them among other