

Let them go on their journey, for I will not touch in this present story on the great tumults and discords which arose in Mexico, until their proper time and place. From the time when all these gentlemen I have mentioned, and many others, had joined Cortés and we set out from Coatzacoalcas, until we accomplished this laborious journey, we [continually] risked losing our lives as I will relate further on; but as two sets of events happened at the same time and I do not wish to break the thread of one in order to speak of the other I have decided to go on with our most laborious journey.

CHAPTER CLXXV.

What Cortés arranged after the Factor and Veedor returned to Mexico, and about the hardships we endured on our long journey, and about the great bridges we made and the hunger we suffered during the two years and three months that we spent on the journey.¹

AFTER despatching the Factor and Veedor to Mexico, the first thing Cortés decided was to write to Villa Rica, to his Mayordomo named Simon de Cuenca, to lade two vessels of small burden with maize biscuits (for at that time Mexico did not produce wheat) and six pipes of wine, oil and vinegar, and bacon, and horse shoes and other kinds of supplies, and ordered them to go coasting along towards the North, saying that he would write to him and inform him where to make port, and that Simon de Cuenca himself should go as Captain. Then he ordered all of us settlers of Coatzacoalcas to accompany himself and only the infirm to remain behind. I have already stated that this town was settled by the Conquistadores who had been longest in Mexico, and by all the best born among those who had taken part in

¹ For the route traversed see Appendix A.

the late victories in Mexico, and at the time when we should have been resting from our great labours, and endeavouring to acquire some wealth and estates, he ordered us to go a journey of more than five hundred leagues, with all the country through which we passed up in arms [against us], while all we possessed was given up as lost, and we were on that march more than two years and three months.

To go back to my story, we were all of us ready with our arms and horses, for we did not dare to say no (and when anyone did say so, he made him go by force,) and we numbered in all, those from Coatzacoalcos as well as those from Mexico, over two hundred and fifty soldiers—one hundred and thirty horsemen and the others musketeers and crossbowmen—without counting many other soldiers newly arrived from Castile.

He promptly ordered me to go as Captain of thirty Spaniards and three thousand Mexican Indians to some pueblos which were at war with us, named Cimatan,¹ and quartered the three thousand Mexican Indians on them; but, should the natives of that province be peaceable or come to render service to His Majesty, I was to do them no harm and put no pressure on them, beyond ordering them to feed these people. But if they did not wish to come [to peace], that I should summon them three times to make peace in a way they should fully understand, and in presence of a notary who accompanied me and witnesses. That if they would not then come in, I was to make war on them, and for this he gave me authority and instructions which I still possess to-day, signed with his name and that of his Secretary Alonzo Valiente.

¹ According to Melchior Alfaro Sta. Cruz, the Cimatanes were a Mexican people settled there by Montezuma, who held Cimatan and Xicalango as outposts of his empire (cf. *Relaciones de Yucatan*, vol. i, p. 352).

So I made that journey as he had ordered it, the pueblos keeping the peace, but a few months later, when they saw how few Spaniards remained in Coatzacoalcos and that we Conquistadores had gone with Cortés, they again rose in revolt.

I promptly set out with my Spanish soldiers and Mexican Indians for the pueblo whither Cortés had ordered me to go, which was named Iquinuapa.

Let us now return to Cortés and his journey. He set out from Coatzacoalcos and went to Tonalá, a distance of eight leagues, and at once crossed a river in canoes and went to another pueblo named Ayagualulco, and crossed another river in canoes, and from Ayagualulco at a distance of seven leagues he crossed an estuary flowing to the sea, and they made him a bridge half a quarter of a league in length. It was a marvellous thing how they made it in the estuary, but Cortés always sent ahead two Captains from among the settlers at Coatzacoalcos, one of these was named Francisco de Medina, a quick-witted man, who thoroughly understood how to manage the natives of this country.

Beyond that great bridge he went through some small pueblos before arriving at another great river called Maçapa, which is the river coming from Chiapas, called by the sailors the Rio de dos Bocas.¹ There he had many canoes, tied together two and two, and after crossing that river he went on to other pueblos whither I had set out with my company of soldiers, which as I have stated was called Iquinuapa.² After that he crossed another river on bridges, which we made of timber, and then an estuary, and arrived at another large town named Copilco ;

¹ The river with two mouths.

² Bernal Díaz was instructed to meet Cortés at Iquinuapa, but Cortés makes no mention of that Pueblo, and Bernal Díaz probably passed on to meet Cortés at Copilco.

from that point begins the province which they call La Chontalpa, which was all thickly peopled and full of orchards of Cacao and quite peaceful.

From Copilco we passed through Nacajuca¹ and arrived at Zaguatan, and on the road crossed another river in canoes. There Cortés lost certain horse-shoes. When we arrived at this town we found it peaceful, and then during the night the inhabitants went fleeing from it and crossed to the other side of a great river, all among swamps. Cortés ordered us to go and search for them in the woods, and that which he ordered was very inconsiderate and profitless.

The soldiers who went on the search crossed the river with the greatest difficulty and brought back seven chieftains and some common people, but it profited us little, for they quickly took to flight again and we were left alone without guides.

At that time the Caciques from Tabasco arrived with fifty canoes laden with maize and provisions, and there also came some Indians from the pueblos in the encomienda that I held at that time, named Teapa and Tecomajiaca,² bringing canoes laden with supplies. Then we went on our way to other pueblos named Tepetitan and Istapa, and on the road there was a river of great volume called Chilapa, and we spent four days in making rafts. I told Cortés that I had heard say that up stream was a town called Chilapa, which is the same name as that of the river, and that it would be as well to send [to that town], in a broken canoe which we had found, five of the Indians whom we had brought with us as guides, and to send word [to the people of Chilapa] to bring canoes. Cortés gave orders accordingly, and a

¹ Nacaxuxuyca, in the original.

² Tecomajayaca.

soldier went with the five Indians, and as they went up the river they met two Caciques who were bringing six large canoes and supplies, and with those canoes and the rafts we got across, and we were occupied four days over the passage. Thence we went to Tepetitan which we found deserted and the houses burnt down, and, as we then learnt, other pueblos had made war on it a few days before and had carried off many captives and burned the pueblo.

The whole of the road we traversed during the three days after crossing the river Chilapa was very boggy and the horses sank in the mud up to their girths, and there were some very large toads there. Thence we marched to another town named Istapa, and the Indians fled through fear of us and crossed to the other side of a very rapid river, and we went in search of them and we brought in the Caciques and many Indians with their wives and children, and Cortés spoke caressingly to them and ordered that four Indian women and three men whom we had captured in the forest should be given up to them, and in payment for this and quite willingly they brought and presented to Cortés some pieces of gold of small value.

We stayed in this pueblo for three days, for there was good forage there for the horses and plenty of maize, and Cortés said that it would be a good place to found a town, for we received information that there were good villages in the neighbourhood for the service of such a town.

In this pueblo of Istapa Cortés learned from the Caciques and native merchants all about the road we had to follow, and he even showed them a hennequen cloth which he brought from Coatzacoalcos, on which all the pueblos we should pass on the way were marked as far as Gueacalá, which in their language means the great

Acalá, for there is another pueblo which they call Acalá the Less. There [in Istapa] they told us that all the rest of our journey led across many rivers and great estuaries, and that before reaching another pueblo named Tamastepec¹ we should meet three more rivers and a great estuary, and that we should be three days on the road. When Cortés knew this and learnt about the rivers he asked all the Caciques to go and build bridges and provide canoes, but they did not do it. So with toasted maize and other vegetables we made provision for three days, believing what they told us. However, it was [merely] to get us out of their houses that they said the journey would be no longer, for it took seven days, and we found the rivers unbridged and no canoes, and we had to build a bridge of very thick timbers to enable the horses to pass, and all of us soldiers and Captains went off to cut wood and haul it, and the Mexicans helped all they could. We were three days building it and had nothing to eat but herbs, and some roots of what in this country they call wild quequexque,² which burned our tongues and mouths.

When we had crossed that estuary we found no road and we had to open one with our swords in our hands, and we travelled for two days along this road we had opened, thinking that it would lead us straight to a pueblo, until one morning we turned back into this same road which we had opened, and when Cortés saw this he was like to burst with rage; moreover he heard the murmur of evil things which they said of him and of his journey, on account of the great hunger we endured, and that he only looked to [the satisfaction of] his own appetite without

¹ Cortés calls this pueblo Tatahuitalpan and says Tamastepec is another name for Tepititan.

² Quequexque = ichintal, the root of the huisquil. (Sechium Edule?)

sufficient forethought, and that it was far better for us to turn back than all to die of hunger.

There was, moreover, another consideration, the forest was so excessively high and thick we could seldom see the sky, and, when they attempted to climb some of the trees in order to survey the country, they could see nothing at all, so dense was the forest, and two of the guides we had brought with us fled, and the one who remained was so ill that he could explain nothing about the road or any other matter. As Cortés was always prompt and was not careless from wanting in anxiety, we had with us a compass and a pilot named Pero López, and, with the plan on the cloth he brought from Coatzacoalcos on which the pueblos were marked, he ordered us to follow the compass through the forest, and with our swords we opened a road towards the east, which was where the pueblo was marked on the cloth, and Cortés even said that if we did not reach an inhabited place next day, he did not know what we should do, and many of us soldiers and all the others wanted to return to New Spain. Still we followed our direction through the forest, and it pleased God that we should find some trees which had been felled long ago and then a small pathway, and I and the pilot Pero López, who were going in front opening the road with some other soldiers, returned to tell Cortés to cheer up, as there were some farms, at which all our army expressed great content, but before reaching the habitations there was a river, which we crossed with very great difficulty in all haste, and came on a pueblo which had been deserted that very day, and there we found plenty to eat, both maize and beans and other vegetables, and as we were almost dead with hunger we had a real gorge and even the horses recovered, and for all this we gave many thanks to God.

The Juggler we brought with us, whom I have already

mentioned, and three other Spaniards who had lately come from Spain, had died on the road, as well as some of the Mechuacan and Mexican Indians, and many others fell ill and remained on the road in despair.

As the pueblo was deserted and we had no interpreter nor anyone to act as guide, Cortés ordered two companies to go through the forest and the farms to search for the inhabitants, and other soldiers went in some canoes which they found on the great river which flowed near the pueblo, and came upon many of the inhabitants of the pueblo, and with soft speeches and flatteries induced more than thirty of them and nearly all the Caciques and priests to come in. When Cortés spoke to them amicably through Doña Marina, they brought much maize and poultry and pointed out the road we had to follow to another pueblo named Ciguatpecad, which was distant three days' march, about sixteen leagues. Before reaching it there was another small pueblo subject to this Temastepeque from whence we set out.

Before I go on any further I wish to say that on account of the great hunger we endured, both Spaniards and Mexicans, it appears that certain Mexican Caciques had seized two or three Indians in the pueblos which we had left behind us, and had brought them along concealed [from us], as they carried burdens and were clothed as they were.

Then, on account of the hunger they endured on the march, they killed them and baked them in ovens made for the purpose in the ground with stones, as they had been accustomed to do in their time in Mexico, and they ate them, and in the same way they had seized the two guides we had brought with us who had fled, and they ate them.

When Cortés came to hear of it, on the advice of Guatemoc he ordered the Mexican Caciques to be called

before him and scolded them badly, and said that if it happened again he would punish them, and one of the Franciscan Friars we had brought with us, already mentioned by me, preached many holy and good words to them, and when he had finished his sermon, Cortés ordered one Mexican Indian to be burnt as punishment for the death of the Indians they had eaten, although he knew that all were guilty of it, so that he should appear to be doing justice, as though he did not know of the other culprits beside the one he burned.

I must refrain from telling in full all the many other hardships we endured, and how the players on the oboes, sacbuts and dulcimers, whom Cortés had brought with him, as I have already recorded, and who were accustomed to dainties in Castille, and knew nothing of hardships and had fallen ill through hunger, made no music, excepting one of them, and all the soldiers cursed the sound of it and we said it was like foxes and jackals howling and it would be better to have maize to eat than music.

To go back to my story, I must say that many persons have asked me how was it that enduring as much hunger as I have stated, we did not eat the herd of swine they brought for Cortés, for the necessity of hunger has no laws, even had they been [reserved] for the king, and that when Cortés saw the hunger we were enduring he would on such an occasion order them to be divided among us all. To this I answer that one who had come as Steward and Mayordomo to Cortés, named Guinea, a double dealer, had already spread a report and caused it to be believed that when crossing the rivers they had been eaten by the sharks and alligators, and in order that we should not see them they were always left behind four days' journey in the rear. Moreover, for as many soldiers as we were the whole of them would

not have sufficed for one day, and this is the reason we did not eat them, besides there was the fear of angering Cortés.

Let us leave this talk and I will relate that in all the pueblos and roads we passed we left crosses placed wherever there were good trees to cut them on, especially Ceibas,¹ on which the crosses remain [clearly] defined and are more permanent when cut on those trees than when made of timber, for the bark grows and the crosses remain perfect. Then we left notices in places where they could be read, and in these it was stated "Cortés passed by here at such a time" and this was done so that if others should come in search of us they might know that we had gone on ahead.

To return to our march to Ciguatpecad, we had with us over twenty Indians from that pueblo of Temastepaque, and they helped us to cross the rivers on rafts and in canoes; moreover they went as messengers to tell the Caciques of the pueblo whither we were going not to have any fear, as we would do them no harm whatever, so many of them remained in their houses, and what happened there I will relate further on.

CHAPTER CLXXVI.

How we had arrived at the town of Ciguatpecad and how he [Cortés] sent Francisco de Medina to meet Simon de Cuenca and proceed with the two vessels already mentioned by me to Triunfo de la Cruz or to the Golfo Dulce, and what else happened.

WHEN we arrived at the town I have mentioned, Cortés cajoled the Caciques and chieftains and gave them good Chalchihuites from Mexico, and asked where the large

¹ Cottonwood (*Bombax Ceiba*).