

panied us and showed us their burnt townships and gave information to Cortés about the Spaniards who were on ahead of us. I will leave off here and relate how the next day we left that pueblo, and what else happened on the journey.

CHAPTER CLXXVIII.

How we went on our way, and what happened to us.

WHEN we left the "fenced pueblo" (for so we called it), we entered from there onwards on a good and flat road all through treeless savannahs with a sun so hot and strong that greater noontide heat we had never felt throughout our march. As we went along those flat plains we saw many deer and they hardly ran at all, so that we soon overtook them on horseback, however little we raced after them, and over twenty of them were killed.

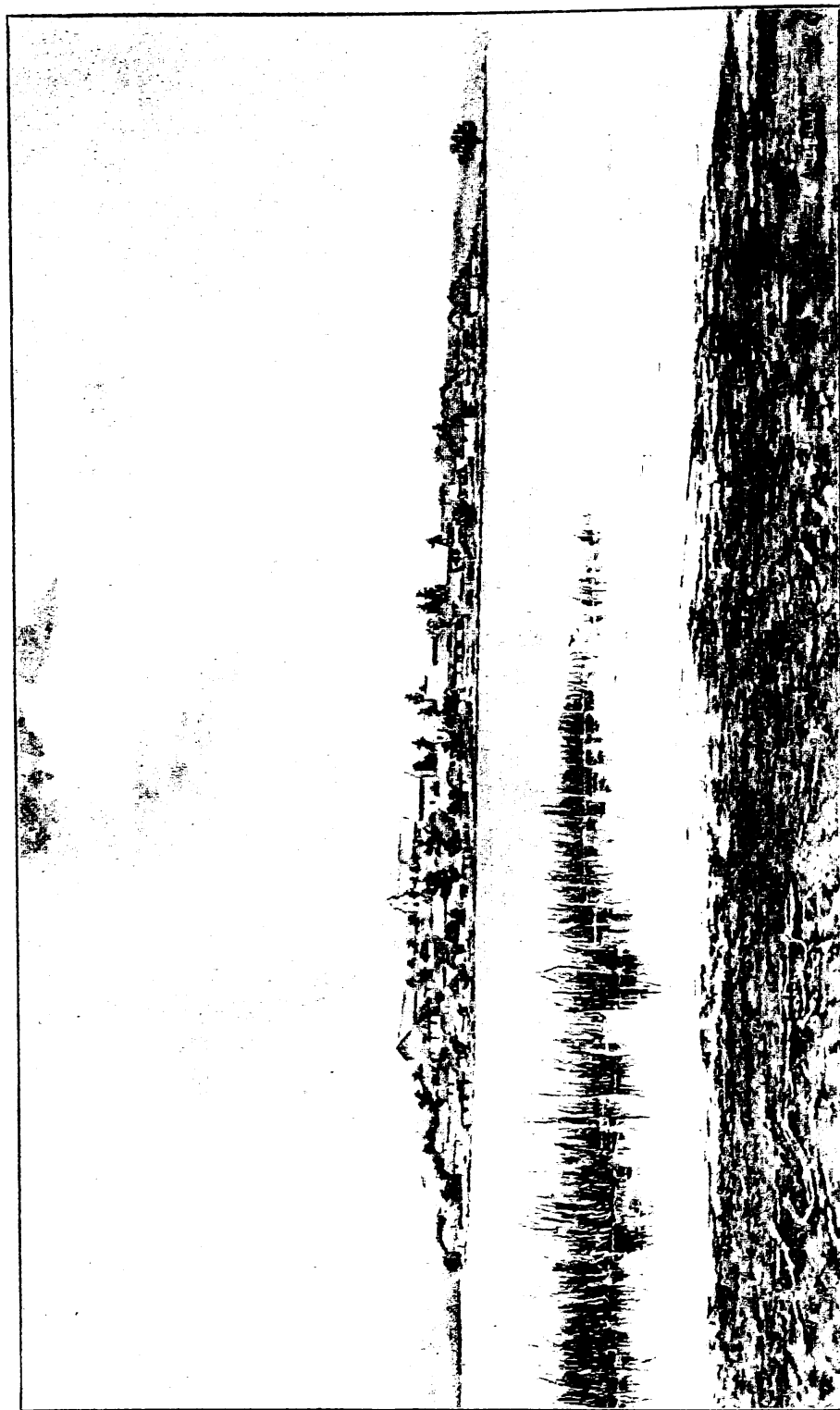
On asking the guides we had with us why the deer ran so little, and why they were not frightened at the horses nor at anything else, they replied that in those pueblos, which I have already said they call the *Mazatecas*, they are considered to be gods, because gods have appeared in their shape, and their Idol has commanded them not to kill or frighten them, and they have not done so, and this is the reason why they do not run away.

During that chase the horse of a relation of Cortés, named Palacios Rubios, died, for the fat of his body melted from having galloped so much.

Let us leave this chase and I will say that we soon reached the settlements already mentioned by me, and it was sad to see them all destroyed and burnt. As we went on our way, as Cortés always sent scouts ahead on horseback and active men on foot, they overtook two

Indians, natives of another pueblo which was ahead of us on the road we had to take, who were returning from the chase laden with a great lion and many iguanas, which are of the form of small serpents, and in these parts they are called iguanas and are very good to eat. They asked these Indians if their pueblo was near by, and they answered 'yes,' and they would guide them to the pueblo which was in a narrow strait surrounded by fresh water, and we could not reach it from the side where we were except in canoes. So we went round a little more than half a league to where there was a ford, and the water came up to one's waist, and we found more than half the inhabitants in the pueblo, and the rest had hurried away to some cane brakes which were near their plantations, where many of our soldiers slept; for by staying in the maize fields they supped well and provisioned themselves for some days. We took guides for another pueblo, and were two days in reaching it, and found there a great lake of fresh water full of fish which were like very tasteless shad and full of bones. With some old cloaks and some rotten nets which we found in the pueblo, which was already deserted, we caught all the fish in the pool, which numbered over a thousand.

Then we searched for guides and captured them in some cultivated land, and after Cortés had told them through Doña Marina that they must show us the way to the pueblo where there were men with beards and horses, they were delighted to find we should do them no harm, and said they would willingly show us the road, for at first they thought we wished to kill them. Five of them went with us along a broad road, but the further we advanced the narrower it became, on account of a great river and lagoon which was near to it, and it appears that they used to embark and disembark from canoes and go on to that pueblo



TAVASAL (Flores) Lake of Peten Itza.
From Photo by A. P. M.

named Tayasal, whither we were bound, which stood on an island surrounded by water, and it could not be reached by land, but only in canoes. The houses and oratories were whitewashed so that they could be seen for more than two leagues. It was the capital of other small pueblos which were near to it.

To go back to my story, when we saw that the broad road which we had hitherto followed changed to a very narrow pathway, we fully understood that the way was by the lagoon and the guides we brought with us told us that it was so. We decided to sleep near to some thick forest, and that night four companies of soldiers went along the paths which led to the lagoon to capture guides, and it pleased God that they captured two canoes laden with maize and salt, with ten Indians and two women, and they at once took them to Cortés, who coaxed them and spoke very affectionately to them through the interpreter Doña Marina. They stated that they were natives of the pueblo on the small island, and they explained by signs that it was distant about four leagues. Cortés promptly ordered that the larger canoe with four Indians and the two women should remain with us, and he sent the other canoe to the pueblo with six Indians and two Spaniards to ask the Cacique to bring canoes for the passage of the river, and [to say] that no annoyance would be given him, and he sent him some beads from Castile. We at once set out on our way by land towards the great river, and the one canoe went by the lagoon to reach the river, and the Cacique was already there with many other chieftains waiting with five canoes to pass us across, and they brought four chickens and maize.

Cortés showed them great goodwill, and after much persuasion by the Caciques he agreed to go with them to their pueblo in those canoes, and he took with him

thirty Crossbowmen, and when he arrived at the houses they gave him food to eat, and even brought gold, which was of poor quality and little value, and some cloths; and they told him that there were Spaniards the same as ourselves in two pueblos. One I have already said was called Nito, which is at San Gil de Buena Vista near the Golfo Dulce, and they then gave him the news that there were many other Spaniards at Naco, and that it was ten days' journey from one pueblo to the other, that Nito was on the North Coast and Naco inland.

Cortés said to us that perhaps Cristóbal de Olid had divided his people among two towns, for at that time we knew nothing of the people of Gil González de Ávila who settled at San Gil de Buena Vista.

To return to our journey we all crossed that great river in canoes and slept about three leagues beyond, and we marched no further because we were waiting for Cortés who was coming from the pueblo of Tayasal. As soon as he arrived, he ordered us to leave at that pueblo a black horse which was ill from the chase after deer, and the fat of its body had melted and it could not stand upright.¹

¹ The fate of this horse is interesting :—

In 1618 the Padres Bartolomé de Fuensalida and Juan de Orbita set out from Merida on a Missionary expedition to Peten by way of Tipu, then the Spanish outpost in Yucatan, situated on the Rio Hondo, near the present frontier of British Honduras, and within a few days' march of the Lake of Peten.

On reaching Tayasal the missionaries were well received by the Chief of the Itzáes, and on the day after their arrival were conducted round the town.

"The Padres estimated the number of houses at about two hundred; these stood along the shore of the lagoon at a little distance from one another, and in each of them dwelt parents and sons with their families. On the higher ground in the middle of the island stood the Cués or oratories, where they kept their Idols. They (the padres) went to see them and found twelve or more temples equal in size and capacity to any of the churches in this province of Yucatan, and according to their account each one could hold more than a thousand persons. In the middle of one of these temples there

At this pueblo a negro and two Indian servants ran away, and three Spaniards remained behind, who were not missed until three days later; they preferred to stay among enemies than to go with us through such hardships. This day I was very ill with fever and from

was a great Idol in the form of a horse, made of stone and cement. It was seated on the floor of the temple on its haunches, with its hind legs bent under it, raising itself on its fore legs. It was worshipped as the God of Thunder and called Tzimin Chac, which means the horse of thunder or the thunderbolt. The reason why they possessed this Idol was that when Don Fernando Cortés passed through this land on his way to Honduras, he left behind him a horse which could travel no further. As the horse died the Indians, terrified at the thought of not being able to give it up alive should Cortés by chance return that way and ask them for it, had a statue made of the horse and began to hold it in veneration, so that it might be clear that they were not to blame for its death.

"Believing the horse to be an intelligent being, they gave it to eat chickens and other meat, and offered it garlands of flowers as they were wont to do to their own chieftains. All these honours, for such they were in their sight, helped to bring about the death of the poor horse, for he died of hunger. It was given its name (the God of the Thunderbolt) because they had seen some of the Spaniards discharging their arquebuses or guns when on horseback hunting the deer, and they believed that the horses were the cause of the noise, which appeared to them like thunder, and the flash from the muzzle of the gun and the smoke of the powder they mistook for lightning. Upon this the devil took advantage of the blindness of their superstition so to increase the veneration in which the statue was held that, by the time the missionaries arrived, this Idol had become the principal object of their adoration.

"As soon as the Padre Fray Juan de Orbita caught sight of the Idol (says the Padre Fuensalida) it seemed as if the Spirit of Our Lord had descended on him, for, carried away by a fervid and courageous zeal for the glory of God, he took a great stone in his hand, climbed to the top of the statue of the horse and battered it to pieces, scattering the fragments on the ground." (From *Cogolludo's History of Yucatan*, 1688.)

This act naturally roused the anger of the Indians, who, however, refrained from attacking the missionaries, but a few days later the Padres, finding that their preaching was of no effect, left the island and returned to Tipu.

I may add that the tradition still exists in the locality, for when crossing the lake my Indian canoemen told me that had the water been clear I might have seen a white horse at the bottom of the lake. The description of the temples as holding a thousand persons, unless the courtyards of the temples were included, must have been a gross exaggeration.

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the heat of the sun, which had penetrated my head and all my body.

I have already said the sun was very fierce, and the reason became apparent, because presently it began to rain in floods and it never ceased raining for three days and nights, but we did not halt on the road because, although we might have wished to wait for better weather, we had no supply of maize, and for fear of it failing us we kept on our way.

To go back to my story: After two days we came to a range of hills which was not very lofty, and consisted of stones which cut like knives, and although our soldiers went more than a league on one side and the other in search of another road so as to avoid that Sierra de los Pedernales they could not find another road, and we had to follow on the way we were going; but those stones did much damage to the horses, for as it rained they slipped and fell and cut their hind and fore legs and even their bodies, and the further we went the worse were the stones and, when we reached the descent from these hills, two horses were left there dead, and most of those which escaped were hocked.

A soldier named Palacios Rubio, a kinsman of Cortés, broke his leg, and when we found ourselves free from that Sierra de los Pedernales, for so we called it thenceforward, we gave many thanks and much praise to God. When at last we approached a pueblo called Tayca, we even rejoiced, thinking to find food. Before reaching it there was a river which flowed from a range between great rocky cliffs and precipices, and as it had rained for three nights it came down so furiously and with such an uproar, one could hear it two leagues off falling among the rocks: in addition to this it ran very deep and it was impossible to ford it. We determined to make a bridge from one cliff to the other, and we put

such haste into getting it finished with very thick tree trunks that in three days we began the passage to the pueblo. As we had to delay there for three days making the bridge, the native Indians had time to hide their maize and all their provisions, and place themselves in safety, so that we could not find them anywhere round about. On account of the hunger that was already wearing us out we were all dazed with thinking of food. I say assuredly that never had I felt such grief in my heart as we all suffered then, seeing that neither had I myself anything to eat or [food] to give to my men, besides being ill with fever. We searched for food diligently throughout the neighbourhood within two leagues of the pueblo, and this was on the eve of the festival of the holy resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Let my readers think what sort of Easter we should pass with nothing to eat, and we should have been very contented with [only] maize.

When Cortés observed the state of things, he at once, on the first day of Easter, sent off his servants and grooms with the guides to search for maize through the woods and plantations, and they brought in a matter of a fanega.¹ And when Cortés saw the extreme necessity, he ordered certain soldiers to be summoned, nearly all of them settlers from Coatzacoalcos, and among them he named me, and he said to us that he prayed us earnestly to turn the country upside down in our search for food, for we could see in what a condition the whole camp found itself. At that time when Cortés was giving us our orders, there stood before Cortés one Pedro de Ircio who was a great talker, and he begged Cortés to send him as our Captain, and Cortés replied—"Go and good luck to you." When I understood this, knowing that

¹ About eight bushels.

Pedro de Ircio could not march on foot and would hinder rather than aid us, I said secretly to Cortés and to Captain Sandoval that Pedro de Ircio had better not go, because he was not able to march through the mud and swamps with us for he had a game leg, and he was no good for that sort of thing, but only for talking a lot, and not fit to go on expeditions, and that he would stop or sit down on the road from time to time. So Cortés promptly ordered that he should remain behind, and we set out five soldiers and two guides through two rivers, both very deep, and after we had crossed the rivers we came on to some swamps and then into some farms where most of the people of the pueblo had collected, and there we found four houses full of maize and beans in quantity, and over thirty chickens and melons of the country which they call ayotes,¹ and we seized four Indians and three women, and we had a fine Easter. That night more than a thousand Mexicans, whom Cortés ordered to go after us and follow us so that they should get something to eat, arrived at the farms, and all of us, very jubilantly, loaded the Mexicans with all the maize they could carry for Cortés to apportion, and we also sent for him and Sandoval twenty fowls and the Indians and Indian women. We remained to guard two of the houses full of maize, lest the natives of the pueblo should burn them or carry it off during the night.

The next day we went on ahead with other guides and came on other farms where there was maize and poultry and different sorts of vegetables, and I at once wrote² to Cortés to send me many Indians for I had found other farms, and how I had sent him the Indian

¹ Pumpkins.

² Blotted out in the original: "I made ink [and wrote] on the skin of a drum."

men and women already mentioned, and all the camp heard about it.

The next day more than thirty soldiers and five hundred Indians arrived, and all carried away provisions, and in this way, thanks to God, the camp was supplied.

In that pueblo, which I have already said was called Tayca, we stayed five days.

Let us leave this, for I wish to mention how we made this bridge, and all along the journey we had made great bridges as I have already stated. Later on when those lands and provinces were pacified, the Spaniards who passed along those roads found, and still find at the present time, some of the bridges undestroyed after so many years have passed, and wonder at the great tree trunks which we placed in them, and now they are in the habit of saying "Here are the bridges of Cortés," as though they were saying "Here are the Pillars of Hercules."

Let us leave these reminiscences, for they do not belong to our story, and I will relate how we went on our way to another pueblo called Tania, and we were two days reaching it and found it deserted, and we searched for food and found maize and other vegetables but not very plentiful, and we went about the neighbourhood looking for roads and found nothing but rivers and brooks, and the guides, whom we had brought from the pueblo we had left behind, ran away one night from certain soldiers who guarded them, who were newcomers from Castile and who apparently had fallen asleep. As soon as Cortés knew of it he wished to punish the soldiers for it, but owing to entreaties he let it alone. Then he sent to search for guides and a road. It was useless to look for them by dry land, for the pueblo was altogether surrounded by rivers and streams and we were unable to capture any Indian men or women, and in addition

to this it rained continuously, and we could not make a stand against so much wet. Cortés and all of us were horrified and distressed at not knowing or finding a road by which we could travel, and then Cortés said very angrily to Pedro de Ircio and other Captains who were of the Mexican company "I wish now that there was somebody to say that he would like to go and search for guides and a road, and not leave everything to the settlers from Coatzacoalcos." When Pedro de Ircio heard those words he got ready with six soldiers, his companions and friends, and went off in one direction, and Francisco Marmolejo, who was a person of quality, with other six soldiers went in another, and a certain Santa Cruz Burgalés, who was regidor of Mexico, went in another direction with other soldiers, and they all walked the whole of three days and found neither guides nor a road—nothing but streams and rivers. When they had returned without any supplies, Cortés nearly burst with rage and asked Sandoval to tell me the great straits we were in, and to beg me on his behalf to go and look for guides and a road, and he said this with affectionate expressions like entreaties, because he knew for certain that I was ill.¹ They had already named me before Sandoval spoke to me, to go with Francisco Marmolejo who was my friend, and I said I could not go because I was ill and tired, and that they always put all the work on me and they could send someone else. Then Sandoval came again to my ranch and implored me to go with two companions whom I might choose myself, for Cortés said that after God he had faith in me to bring provisions, and although I was ill I could not permit myself to be shamed, and asked that a certain Hernando

¹ Blotted out in the original: "as I have already said I still had fever and was feeling ill."

de Aguilar and one Ynojosa should go with me, as I knew they were men who could endure hardships. So we all three set out and followed down some streams, and away from the streams in the bush there were some signs of cut branches, and we followed that trail more than a league, and at last we left the stream and came on some small ranchos which had been deserted that day, and following the trail we saw on a hill in the distance some maize plantations and a house, and we observed people in it. As the sun had already set, we stayed in the wood until the night was well advanced, and it seemed to us the inhabitants of those maize plantations should be asleep, so keeping very quiet we came very suddenly on the house and captured three Indians and two women, young and good-looking for Indians, and one old woman. They owned two fowls and a little maize, and we carried off the maize and fowls and the Indian men and women, and very cheerfully returned to camp. When Sandoval knew it, and he was the first found waiting for us on the road at the close of the day, we went before Cortés, who valued it more than if we had given him a much greater thing. Then Sandoval said to Pedro de Ircio, who had come with him, before many of the gentlemen—"It seems to us Señor Pedro de Ircio that Bernal Díaz was right the other day when he went to search for maize, that he only wished to go with men, and not with one who would go all the way very slowly, relating what happened to the Conde Durueña and Don Pedro Giron his son (for these were stories Pedro de Ircio told many times), and you have no reason to complain saying that he stirs up trouble with the Señor Captain and with me." They all laughed at this, and Sandoval said it because Pedro de Ircio was unfriendly to me.

Then Cortés thanked me for it and said it ever happened that I had to bring in provisions, and "I pledge

you this (meaning his beard) that I will remember your honour."

I must leave these flatteries, for they are hollow and bring no profit, but others repeated them in Mexico when they told the story of this toilsome journey. I must go back to say that Cortés sought information from the guides and the two women, and all agreed that we must go down stream to a pueblo which was distant two days' march, and the name of the pueblo was said to be Oculizte, which contained more than two hundred houses and had been deserted a few days before.

As we went on our way down stream we came on some large ranchos which were used by Indian traders when they are travelling. There we slept and the next day we followed the same river and water-course, and after following it for about half a league we came upon a good road, and that day arrived at the pueblo of Oculizte, where there was plenty of maize and vegetables. In a house which was a shrine of their Idols was found an old red cap and a hempen shoe as an offering to the Idols. Some soldiers who went through the farms brought to Cortés two old Indians and four women whom they had captured in the maize fields belonging to the pueblo, and Cortés questioned them through the interpreter Doña Marina about the road, and how far off the Spaniards were, and they replied "two days," and that there was no inhabited land until we arrived there, and that they [the Spaniards] have their houses near the sea coast.

Then Cortés instantly ordered Sandoval to proceed on foot with six other soldiers and find his way to the sea, and by some means or other to enquire and to find out whether there were many Spaniards who were settled there with Cristóbal de Olid, for at that time we did not believe there could be any other Captain in that country.

Cortés wanted to know this so that we might fall on Cristóbal de Olid in the night if he were there, and might capture him and his soldiers.

Gonzalo de Sandoval set out with the six soldiers and three Indians as guides whom he took for that purpose from the pueblo of Oculizte, and as he went along the north coast he saw a canoe rowing and sailing swiftly over the sea, and he hid himself during the day in the forest, for they saw that the canoe which was coming over the sea belonged to Indian traders, and it was coasting along and bringing salt and maize as merchandize and was about to enter into the great river of the Golfo Dulce, and during the night they [the Spaniards] took possession of it in a bay which was a canoe harbour, and Sandoval got into the canoe with two of his companions and the Indian rowers who had brought the canoe and his three guides, and set off along the coast, the rest of the soldiers going by land, for they knew that the great river was near by. When they were close to the great river, as chance would have it, four settlers and a Cuban Indian from the town which had been settled by the followers of Gil Gonzáles de Ávila had come that morning in a canoe, and crossed to that side of the river in search of a fruit which they call zapotes, to be eaten when roasted, for in the town whence they came they were enduring great hunger because most of them were ill, and [they] did not dare to go out in search of food among the pueblos because the Indians in the neighbourhood had made war on them and killed six soldiers since Gil Gonzáles de Ávila had left them there.

While these followers of Gil Gonzáles de Ávila were pulling down zapotes from the tree, and two of the men were up the tree, when they saw a canoe coming along the sea in which were Sandoval and his two companions, they were startled and marvelled at such a novel sight,

and did not know whether to stay or flee. When Sandoval approached them he told them to have no fear as they were men of peace, so they stood quiet but very much terrified. After Sandoval and his companions had been fully informed by the two Spaniards, how and in what way the followers of Gil Gonzáles de Ávila had been settled there, and of the ill fate of the Armada of Las Casas, which was lost; and how Cristóbal de Olid had made prisoners of Las Casas and Gil Gonzáles de Ávila; and how they had beheaded Cristóbal de Olid at Naco in execution of the sentence then pronounced against him; and how they had already set off for Mexico; they learned who and how many were in the town and the great hunger they were enduring, and how a few days earlier they had hanged in that town the Lieutenant and leader, a man named Armenta, whom Gil Gonzáles de Ávila had left there; and the reason why they hanged him, which was because he would not let them go to Cuba. Sandoval determined to carry those men at once to Cortés, and not to attract attention or go to the town without him, in order that he [Cortés] should receive the information from these men in person. Then a soldier named Alonzo Ortiz, who was afterwards a settler at a town called San Pedro, begged Sandoval to do him the favour of permitting him to go on one hour ahead to take the news to Cortés and all of us who were with him, so that he might get a reward. This he did and Cortés and all the camp were delighted at the news, believing that there would come an end to all the hardships we were suffering, but they were to increase twofold as I shall tell later on. To Alonzo Ortiz who carried the news Cortés gave a very good chestnut horse called Cabeza de Moro,¹ and we all gave him something from what we still possessed. Then Captain

¹ The Moor's Head.

Sandoval arrived with the soldiers and the Cuban Indian, and they gave a report to Cortés of all I have stated, and many other things which they were asked about. As they owned at that town a ship, which was being caulked in a harbour about half a league distant, which had room enough in it for all of them to embark and go to Cuba, and because the lieutenant Armenta had not let them embark, they had hanged him, also because he had ordered a cleric who revolutionized the town to be flogged; and they chose for lieutenant one Antonio Nieto in place of Armenta whom they had hanged.

Let us stop talking about the news brought by the two Spaniards, and I will speak of the lamentations they raised in that town when they knew that the two settlers and the Cuban Indian who had gone to search for zapote fruit (for so they call it) had not returned, and they believed they had been killed by Indians or by lions or tigers. One of the settlers was married and his wife wept much for him, and the priest named the Bachelor Fulano Valásquez and all the settlers assembled in the Church and prayed God to help them and deliver them from further misfortune, and the woman was all the time praying God for the soul of her husband.

To go back to my story. Cortés promptly ordered the whole army to go along the road by the sea, a distance of six leagues. There was yet on the road a very swollen lagoon which rose and fell with the tide, and we waited half a day for the water to fall and crossed it jumping and swimming and reached the great river of the Golfo Dulce.

The first to go to the town, which was two leagues distant, was Cortés himself with six soldiers and two pages. He set out in two canoes tied together, the one in which the two soldiers of Gil González had come to search for zapotes, and the other which Sandoval had taken from the Indians on the coast, and as it was necessary to

conceal it they had stuck it in the ground and hidden it in the bush. They went to launch it in the water and tied the two one to the other so that they were well secured, and in them Cortés and his servants crossed over, and then with the same canoes he ordered two horses to be sent over, and it was done in this manner: the canoes were paddled, and the horses, tied by their halters, swam near the canoes, and care had to be taken not to give too much rope to the horse lest it should upset the canoe. Cortés sent to say that, until we received an order or a letter from him, none of us were to cross in these same canoes on account of the great risk of the passage, for he had repented of going in them himself as the river came down with such great fury. I will leave off here then go on to say what else happened.

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

How Cortés entered the town where the followers of Gil Gonzáles de Ávila were settled, and about the great joy shown by all the inhabitants, and what Cortés decreed.

AFTER Cortés had crossed the great river of the Golfo Dulce in the way I have related, he went to the town where the Spaniards of Gil Gonzáles de Ávila were settled, about two leagues distant and close to the sea, and not to where they made their first settlement named San Gil de Buena Vista.¹

When these saw a man on horseback and six others on foot among their houses, they were greatly startled, and when they knew that it was Cortés who was so renowned throughout the Indies and in Castile they were beside themselves with delight. After all the caciques had come to kiss his hand and give him a welcome

¹ Nito, in the Fifth letter of Cortés.