

CHAPTER CLXXX.

How the day after arriving at that town, which I know by no other name than that of San Gil de Buena Vista, we set out with Captain Luis Marin and nearly eighty soldiers, all on foot, to search for maize and explore the country, and what happened I will go on to relate.

I HAVE already said that when we reached the town which Gil Gonzáles de Ávila founded, there was nothing to eat, and there were nearly forty men and four Castilian women and two Mulatto women, and all were ill and very yellow in colour. And as neither we nor they had anything to eat, we could barely await the hour to go and look for it.

Cortés ordered Captain Luis Marin to set out and search for maize, and more than eighty of us foot soldiers went with him to find out if there were roads fit for horses, and we took with us a Cuban Indian who guided us to some farms and pueblos eight leagues distant, where we found much maize and very numerous cacao plantations, and frijoles and other vegetables, where we had plenty to eat and we even sent to say that he [Cortés] should send all the Mexican Indians to carry maize, and we relieved him immediately with ten fanegas of it by means of other Indians, and we sent for our horses.

As soon as Cortés knew that we were in a good country, and learned from Indian merchants, whom they had just then captured in the River of the Golfo Dulce, that the place where we were was on the direct way to Naco, where they beheaded Cristóbal de Olid, he sent Sandoval with the greater part of his army to follow us, and ordered us all to stay in that camp until we received his orders. When Sandoval arrived where we were and saw that there was abundance of food, he was delighted, and promptly sent to

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Cortés over thirty fanegas of maize by some Mexican Indians, and he divided it among the settlers who remained in the town, and, as they were ravenous and accustomed to eat only roasted zapotes and cassava, they gorged themselves on tortillas made from the maize we sent them, until their bellies swelled, and, as they were [already] enfeebled, seven of them died. When they were in the condition I have described, it pleased God that a ship arrived in port which came from the Island of Cuba laden with seven horses, forty hogs and eight casks of salt meat and cassava bread, and about fifteen passengers came in her, and eight sailors, and the owner of most of the cargo of that ship was called Anton de Carmona the buskin maker. Cortés bought on credit all the supplies that came in it, and he divided part of them among the settlers and, as they had been formerly in such necessity and were run down, they gorged themselves on the salt meat and it gave many of them diarrhœa and fourteen of them died.

As that ship had arrived with men and sailors, it seemed to Cortés that it would be a good thing to go and explore and survey that mighty river, [and see] if there were towns up stream and what kind of land there was, so he promptly ordered a good launch belonging to the followers of Gil Gonzáles de Ávila, which had gone ashore, to be calked, and a boat to be repaired to serve as a lighter, and with four canoes tied one to the other, and thirty soldiers and the eight seamen from those lately arrived in the ship, and twenty Mexican Indians and Cortés himself as Captain, he went up the river. When he had proceeded a matter of ten leagues up stream, a broad lake was discovered six leagues in length and in width, and there were no villages at all around it, for it was all swampy, and going on up the river the stream became swifter than before, and there were some rapids which the launch, boats, and canoes could not ascend, so he decided to leave them there where the

stream was sluggish, with six Spaniards to guard them, and to go by land along a narrow track. He reached some small deserted villages and then came on some maize fields, and from there took three Indians as guides, and they led him to some small pueblos where there was much maize and many fowls and they even kept pheasants, which in this country they call "Sacachules," and partridges of the country and pigeons. This way of keeping partridges I saw and noticed [myself] among the pueblos in the neighbourhood of this Golfo Dulce, when I went in search of Cortés, as I shall relate further on.

To go back to my story: there Cortés captured guides and passed on and went to some other small pueblos which are called Çinacantençintle,¹ where they had great cocoa groves and maize fields and cotton, and before reaching them they heard the sound of drums and trumpets, for they were holding feasts and drunken orgies. So as not to be observed, Cortés and his soldiers remained hidden in the wood, and, as soon as he saw it was time to start, they fell upon them altogether and captured about ten Indians and fifteen women, but most of the Indians of the pueblo made off quickly to seize their arms, and returned with bows and arrows and lances, and began to shoot at our people. Cortés and his followers went against them and put to the sword eight Indians who were chieftains, and as soon as they saw how ill the fight was going, and that their women were captives, they sent four elders—and two of them were priests of Idols—and they approached very meekly to pray Cortés to give up the prisoners to them, and they brought some golden jewels of small value. Cortés spoke to them through Doña Marina who came there with her husband Juan Jaramillo, because Cortés could not understand the Indians without her.

5 ★ ¹ This is the pueblo called Chacujal by Cortés.

and he told them to take the maize, poultry, and salt, and all the provisions he indicated, to the place to which he explained they had come in the canoes and launches, and that then he would give up the prisoners to them. They replied that they would do so, and that near by there was a sort of creek which opened into the river, and they promptly made rafts, and, wading, they conveyed them to where they came to deep water, where they were able to float quite well. Then, although Cortés had agreed to give up all the prisoners, it appears that he ordered three of the Indian women with their husbands to stay with them, and make bread and wait on the Mexican Indians, and he would not give them up, and over this matter all the Indians of that pueblo got together and from the high banks of the river sent a great shower of darts, stones, and arrows, at Cortés and his soldiers, so that they wounded Cortés himself in the face, and a dozen of the soldiers. One boat came to grief there, and half its freight was lost and one Mexican was drowned. In that river there are so many mosquitos that they are beyond bearing, and Cortés endured it all and returned to his town (I don't know what it was named), and provisioned it much better than it had been before.

I have already stated that the pueblo which Cortés reached was named Sinacatençintla,¹ which is seventy leagues distant from Guatemala. Cortés was delayed on this journey, and he returned to the town in twenty-six days when he saw that as there were no Indian pueblos it would be no use to form a settlement there. As he was well provisioned both from what had already been collected before, and also from what he was now bringing, he decided to write to Gonzalo de Sandoval

¹ Çinacantençintle on the previous page.

to proceed at once to Naco,¹ and he told him all about his voyage on the Gulfo Dulce, just as I have related it here, and how he was going to settle at the Puerto de Caballos, and that Sandoval must send him ten soldiers who were Coatzacoalcos men, for without them he was not content when on expeditions.

CHAPTER CLXXXI.

How Cortés embarked with all the soldiers, both those which he had brought in his company and those who had remained at San Gil de Buena Vista, and went to settle the place now called Puerto de Caballos, which he named La Natividad, and what he did there.

AFTER Cortés had seen that the place he found settled by the followers of Gil Gonzáles de Ávila was of no use, he decided to embark in the two ships and the launch, with all those who were in the town, leaving none behind, and after voyaging for eight days he disembarked at what is now called Puerto de Caballos, and, when he beheld that it was a fine bay for a port and learnt that there were Indian villages near by, he decided to found a town, which he named "Natividad," and placed one Diego de Godoy in command. From this place he made two expeditions inland to some neighbouring pueblos, which are now deserted, and he learned from them that there were other pueblos near by, and

¹ Naco was situated in an inland valley, probably between the rivers Chamelicon and Santiago, the latter a branch of the Rio Ulua, and was sixty to seventy miles distant from Puerto Caballo.

"De ay (Puerto Caballo) a la villa de San Pedro . . . ay Catorze ó quinze leguas . . . estan cerca de alli 4 leguas las Minas de Zula . . . y quasi otras 4 el Valle de Naco . . . este Valle de Naco es muy llano y fertil corcado todo de Sierras." (*Relacion de la Provincia de Honduras y Higueras por el Obispo D. Cristóbal de Pedraza*, 1544 ; *Relaciones de Yucatan*, vol. i, p. 398.)