

## CHAPTER III.

How we coasted along towards the west, discovering capes and deep water, roadsteads and reefs.

BELIEVING this land to be an Island, as the Pilot, Anton de Alaminos, had assured us that it was, we travelled with the greatest caution, sailing only by day and anchoring by night. After voyaging in this manner for fifteen days, we descried from the ship, what appeared to be a large town near to a great bay or creek, and we thought that there might be a river or stream there, where we could provide ourselves with water of which we had great need, because the casks and other vessels which we had brought with us, were not watertight. It was because our fleet was manned by poor men who had not money enough to purchase good casks and cables, that the water ran short. We had to land near the town, and as it was Sunday, the day of San Lázaro, we gave the town that name, and so it is marked on the charts, but its proper Indian name is Campeche.

In order that we could all of us land at the same time, we agreed to approach the shore in the smallest of the vessels, and in the three boats, with all our arms ready, so as not to be caught as we had been at Cape Catoche.

In these roadsteads and bays, the water shallows very considerably at low tide, so that we had to leave our ships anchored more than a league from the shore.

We went ashore near the town where there was a pool of good water, used by the people of the place for drinking water, for as far as we had seen there were no rivers in this country. We landed the casks, intending to fill them with water, and return to our ships. When the casks were full, and we were ready to embark, a company of about fifty Indians, clad in good cotton mantles, came out in a peace-

ful manner from the town. From their appearance we believed them to be Caciques, and they asked us by signs what it was we were looking for, and we gave them to understand that we had come for water, and wished to return at once to our ships. They then made signs with their hands to find out whether we came from the direction of the sunrise, repeating the word "Castilan" "Castilan" and we did not understand what they meant by Castilan. They then asked us by signs to go with them to their town, and we took council together as to what we should do, and decided to go with them, keeping well on the alert and in good formation.

They led us to some large houses very well built of masonry, which were the Temples of their Idols, and on the walls were figured the bodies of many great serpents and snakes and other pictures of evil-looking Idols. These walls surrounded a sort of Altar covered with clotted blood. On the other side of the Idols were symbols like crosses, and all were coloured. At all this we stood wondering, as they were things never seen or heard of before.

It seemed as though certain Indians had just offered sacrifices to their Idols so as to ensure victory over us. However, many Indian women moved about us, laughing, and with every appearance of good will, but the Indians gathered in such numbers that we began to fear that there might be some trap set for us as at Catoche. While this was happening, many other Indians approached us, wearing very ragged mantles and carrying dry reeds, which they deposited upon the plain, and behind them came two squadrons of Indian archers in cotton armour, carrying lances and shields, slings and stones, and each captain drew up his squadron at a short distance from where we stood. At that moment, there sallied from another house, which was an oratory of their Idols, ten

Indians clad in long white cotton cloaks, reaching to their feet, and with their long hair reeking with blood, and so matted together, that it could never be parted or even combed out again, unless it were cut. These were the priests of the Idols, who in New Spain are commonly called *papas* and such I shall call them hereafter. These priests brought us incense of a sort of resin which they call *copal*, and with pottery braziers full of live coals, they began to fumigate us, and by signs they made us understand that we should quit their land before the firewood which they had piled up there should burn out, otherwise they would attack us and kill us. After ordering fire to be put to the reeds, the priests withdrew without further speech. Then the warriors who were drawn up in battle array began to whistle and sound their trumpets and drums. When we perceived their menacing appearance and saw great squadrons of Indians bearing down on us we remembered that we had not yet recovered from the wounds received at Cape Catoche, and had been obliged to throw overboard the bodies of two soldiers who had died, and fear fell on us, so we determined to retreat to the coast in good order, and began to march along the shore towards a large rock which rose out of the sea, while the boats and the small bark laden with the water casks coasted along close in shore. We had not dared to embark near the town where we had landed, on account of the great press of Indians, for we felt sure they would attack us as we tried to get in the boats. As soon as we had embarked and got the casks on board the ships, we sailed on for six days and nights in good weather, then we were struck by a *norther* which is a foul wind on that coast and it lasted four days and nights, and so strong was the storm that it nearly drove us ashore, so that we had to drop anchor, but we broke two cables, and one ship began to drag her anchor. Ah! the danger was terrible, for if

our last cable had given way we should have been driven ashore to destruction, but thank God we were able to ease the strain on the cable by lashing it with pieces of rope and hawsers, and at last the weather moderated. Then we kept on our course along the coast, going ashore whenever we were able to do so to get water, for, as I have already said, the casks we carried were not only leaky, but were gaping open, and we could not depend upon them, and we hoped that by keeping near the coast we should be able to find water, whenever we landed, either in pools or by digging for it.

As we were sailing along on our course, we came in sight of a town, and about a league on the near side of it, there was a bay which looked as though it had a river or stream running into it; so we determined to anchor. On this coast the tide runs out so far that there is danger of the ships being stranded, so for fear of this we dropped anchor at the distance of a league from the shore, and we landed in that bay from the vessel of least draught and from the boats, carrying all our casks along with us to fill them with water. We landed soon after mid-day, well armed with crossbows and guns. This landing place was about a league from the town, near to some pools of water, and maize plantations, and a few small houses built of masonry. The town is called Potonchan.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This town is called both Potonchan and Chanpoton by Bernal Díaz, and Chanpoton in the "Itinirario" and in the Letter from the Municipality of Vera Cruz to Chas. V. In modern maps it is called Champoton. There is a further difficulty about the name of this town, because the town at the mouth of the Rio de Grijalva (Sta. Maria de la Victoria) was also called Potonchon or Potonchan. In the "Relacion de la Villa de Santa Maria de la Victoria" (1579), printed in the *Documentos Ineditos, Relaciones de Yucatan* (Madrid, 1898) we find: "This province is called the province of Tabasco, because the Lord of this town was called Tabasco, and the name of the town is Potonchan, which in Spanish means the Chontal tongue, almost as though we should say the barbarous tongue, for Chontal in the Mexican language is the same as barbarous, and so this town is called Potonchan, as that is the language generally used in this province; and as

We filled our casks with water, but we could not carry them away on account of the great number of warriors who fell on us. I will stop now and tell later on about the attack they made on us.

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## CHAPTER IV

Concerning the attack made on us as we stood among the farms and maize fields already mentioned.

AS we were filling our casks with water there came along the coast towards us from the town of Potonchan<sup>1</sup> (as it is called) many squadrons of Indians clad in cotton armour reaching to the knees, and armed with bows and arrows, lances and shields, and swords like two handed broad swords, and slings and stones and carrying the feathered crests which they are accustomed to wear. Their faces were painted black and white, and ruddled and they came in silence straight towards us, as though they came in peace, and by signs they asked whether we came from where the sun rose, and we replied that we did come from the direction of the sunrise. We were at our wits end considering the matter and wondering what the words were which the Indians called out to us for they were the same as those used by the people of Lázaro, but we never made out what it was that they said.

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the Lord of this town was called Tabasco the province is called Tabasco."

Santa Maria de la Victoria appears to have lost both its original native and its Spanish name, and soon became known as the town of Tabasco, and is so marked on the map of Melchor de Santa Cruz (1579); not long afterwards the town itself disappeared.

Chanpoton has retained its name, and when Bernal Díaz mentions Chanpoton or Potonchan he invariably intends to indicate the site of the modern Champoton, between Campeche and the Laguna de Términos, the "Costa de Mala Pelea" of the expedition under Francisco Hernández de Córdova.

<sup>1</sup> Here written Pontuchan in the original text = Chanpoton.