BERNAL DIAZ DEL CASTILLO.

HIS LIFE.

Bernal Díaz del Castillo was born in the very noble, famous and celebrated town[1] of Medina del Campo in the year 1492 at the very time when Christopher Columbus was joining the two worlds.

Bernal tells us that at the time that he made up his mind to come to New Spain, about the year 1517, he was a youth "of about twenty-four years," a statement which corroborates the date of his birth.

His parents were Don Francisco Díaz del Castillo and Doña María Diez Rejón.

Bernal was not the only son, he tells us of his brother, probably older than himself, whom he wished to imitate.

Bernal himself writes that he was a gentleman,[2] and that his grandparents, his father and his brother were always servants of the Crown and of their Catholic Majesties Don Fernando and Doña Isabel, which Carlos V. confirms by calling them "our retainers and servants."

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[1] "Muy noble é insigne y muy nombrada Villa." In old Spain towns and cities were formally granted such titles of honour.

[2] Hijodalgo.

If the family of Bernal had not enjoyed esteem and respect in Medina del Campo, the inhabitants would not have chosen Don Francisco as their *Regidor*.[1] On the other hand, his financial position must have been a very modest one, for the author most certainly came here to seek his fortune, and often complains of his poverty.

After all, the fact that in the *True History* he discloses a very scrupulous moral sense, a fair amount of learning, accurate philosophy, and a piety out of the common, permits us to infer that his family educated him with great care; it would be exceptional for a man illiterate and untaught during his youth to acquire such qualities in his old age; it is proven, on the other hand, that the author knew how to write when he reached New Spain. Nevertheless, we know nothing for certain about the childhood and youth of Bernal, our information begins in the year 1514.

The author was then twenty-two years old.

From some of his remarks one may judge that he was tall or of middle height, active, quick, well made and graceful; his comrades called him "the elegant" (el galan).

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Following the example of so many other Spanish youths, Bernal left his country in the year 1514 to emigrate to America in search of adventures and riches, resolved to be worthy of his ancestry. He

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[1] Regidor = magistrate, prefect.

accompanied Pedro Arias de Avila, the Governor of Tierra Firme, as one of his soldiers.

When he reached Nombre de Dios he remained there three or four months, until an epidemic that broke out and certain disputes that arose between the Governor and his son-in-law, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, obliged him to flee to Cuba, to his relation, Diego Velásquez, who was Governor of the Island.

During three years Bernal "did nothing worthy of record," and on that account he determined to set out on the discovery of unknown lands with the Captain Francisco Hernández de Córdova and one hundred and ten companions.

They sailed in three ships from the port of Ajaruco on the 8th February, 1517, and after enduring a passage occupying twenty-one days and one fierce gale, they arrived at Cape Catoche, where the natives gave them a hostile reception.

After touching at Lázaro they stopped at Chanpotón, where the natives killed forty-eight Spaniards, captured two of them, and wounded the rest, including the captain, who received ten arrow wounds, and the author, who received "three, and one of them in the left side which pierced my ribs, and was very dangerous."

The survivors returned by way of Florida to Cuba, disillusioned and in ill-health, suffering from burning thirst and barely escaping shipwreck, for the ships were leaking badly. When recounting these calamities the author exclaims—

"Oh! what a troublesome thing it is to go and

discover new lands and the risks we took it is hardly possible to exaggerate."

Nevertheless Bernal was not discouraged by experience; his poverty, which, of necessity, increased daily, impelled him to seek his fortune even at the risk of losing his life, and his youth made him naturally impatient; he did not care to wait for the Indians which Diego Velásquez had promised to give him as soon as there were some unemployed, and he at once enlisted in a second expedition, composed of four ships and two hundred soldiers, under the command of Juan de Grijalva, which weighed anchor in the port of Matanzas on the 8th April, 1518.

The author says that he went "as ensign," but it is doubtful.

The expedition went by way of Cozumel and Chanpotón, whose intrepid inhabitants wounded Grijalva and broke two of his teeth, and killed seven soldiers, by the Boca de Términos, the Rio de Tabasco which they called the Rio de Grijalva, La Rambla, the Rios de Tonalá or de Santo Antón, de Coatzacoalcos, de Papaloapan or de Alvarado, and the Rio de Banderas, where they obtained by barter "more than sixteen thousand pesos in jewels and low grade gold." They sighted the Isla Blanca and the Isla Verde, and landed on the Isla de Sacrificios and the sand dunes of Ulúa; thence Alvarado, accompanied by certain soldiers, returned to Cuba in search of reinforcements, while Grijalva, with the rest of his followers, including the author,

pushed ahead by Tuxtla,[1] Tuxpan and the Rio de Canoas, where the Spaniards were attacked by the natives. to Cape Rojo; then Grijalva, yielding to the entreaties of his soldiers, agreed to return to Cuba.

Velásquez, fascinated beyond measure by the gold which Grijalva had obtained by barter, organised a third expedition consisting of "eleven ships great and small," and appointed Hernan Cortés to command it. Bernal again enlisted, as at this time he found himself much in debt. Cortés set out from the Port of Trinidad on the 18th February, 1519. The author had started eight days earlier in the company of Pedro de Alvarado. All met together again at the Island of Cozumel, where a review was held, which showed a muster of five hundred and eight soldiers, "not including ship-masters, pilots and seamen, who numbered one hundred, and sixteen horses and mares." Keeping on their course they passed close by Chanpotón without venturing to land; they stopped at Tabasco, where they fought with the natives, who gave the author "an arrow wound in the thigh but it was not a severe wound," and finally they arrived at Ulúa.

They went inland and marched to Cempoala and Quiahuiztlan, and in the neighbourhood of the latter they founded the Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, and they determined to push on to México, whose

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[1] This is an error. Tuxtla was passed before reaching the Isla de Sacrificios.

Prince, Motecuhzoma,[1] had been exciting their cupidity by rich presents of gold and other objects of value.

Before undertaking this march, the friends of Cortés (one of whom was Bernal) advised him to destroy the ships, lest any of the soldiers should mutiny and wish to return to Cuba, and so that he could make use of the ship-masters, pilots and seamen "who numbered nearly one hundred persons" as we have already stated. When this had been done, "without concealment and not as the chronicler Gómara describes it," they started for Mexico in the middle of August, probably on the sixteenth, and passed without incident through Jalapa Xicochimalco, Ixhuacan, Texutla, Xocotla and Xalacingo, but on reaching the frontiers of Tlaxcala they were stopped by the natives, who fought against them for several days. There the author received "two wounds, one on the head from a stone, and the other an arrow wound in the thigh," from which he was seriously ill in the Capital of Tlaxcala, after Cortés had made peace and an alliance with the inhabitants.

"On the 12th October" they continued their march by Cholula, where they committed a shocking massacre, Itzcalpan, Tlamanalco, and Itztapalatengo. Here Cacamatzin the Lord of Tetzcoco met them in royal state to welcome them in the name of Motecuhzoma, and they accompanied him along the

[1] Montezuma

causeway of Itztapalapa, which crossed the lake in a straight line to Mexico, and from it could be seen on both sides innumerable "cities and towns," some in the water and others on dry land, all of them beautified by stately temples and palaces. This wonderful panorama, as picturesque as it was novel, made the deepest impression on Bernal and his companions, and he says, "we were amazed and said that it was like the enchantments they tell us of in the story of Amadis, on account of the great towers and cues[1] and buildings rising from the water, and all built of masonry. And some of our soldiers even asked whether the things that we saw were not all a dream."

When they reached the junction of the causeways of Itztapalapa and Coyohuacan they met many Caciques and Chieftains of importance coming in advance of Motecuhzoma, who received the Spaniards a little further on, almost at the gates of Mexico, with sumptuous pomp and extreme ceremony. Many times the Mexican sovereign had contemplated attacking the Spaniards, but weighed down by superstition and rendered powerless by a timid and vacillating character, he now conducted them into the great Tenochtitlan, only to deliver it up to them at once. The autocrat felt himself fatally conquered before beginning the struggle.

Thence step by step within a few days he suffered seven Spaniards, among whom was Bernal, to make

[1] Cue = temple. This is not a Nahua or Maya word but one picked up by the Spaniards in the Antilles.

him a prisoner in his own palace; he allowed his jailors to burn [to death] Quauhpopoca and other native chieftains, whose crime consisted in having, by his own orders, given battle to Juan de Escalante and other Spanish soldiers; he handed over to Cortés Cacamatzin, Totoquihuatzin, Cuitláhuac and Cuauhtémoc, lords respectively of Tetzcoco, Tlacopan, Itztapalapan and Tlatelolco, who wished to set their sovereign at liberty, and finally, weeping like a tender unhappy woman, he swore fealty to the King of Spain.

With ease and in a short time Cortés was able to collect an immense treasure which amounted to "seven hundred thousand gold dollars," which he found it necessary to divide among his soldiers; nevertheless, he made the division with such trickery and cunning that there fell to the soldiers "a very small share, only one hundred dollars each, and it was so very little that many of the soldiers did not want to take it, and Cortés was left with it all." If the author did not complain of this as much as some of his companions, for example, as Cárdenas, who even "fell ill from brooding and grief," it was owing to his having already received from Motecuhzoma some presents of "gold and cloths," as well as of "a beautiful Indian girl . . . the daughter of a chieftain," whom he ventured to beg of the Sovereign through the good offices of the page Orteguilla, a gift which he certainly thought that he had gained by his respectful courtesy "for whenever I was on guard over him, or passed before

him, I doffed my helmet to him with the greatest respect."

The Spaniards began to enjoy the gold divided among them, abandoning themselves to a life of licentious pleasure, when in March 1520 Pánfilo de Narvaez arrived at Ulúa with sixteen ships,[1] fourteen hundred soldiers, ninety crossbowmen, seventy musketeers, and eighty horses.

Diego Velásquez had sent him to punish Cortés and his followers as traitors, because they had rebelled against him without reason. However, as Cortés was immensely rich, and there is no power greater than riches, he soon won over almost all the soldiers of Narvaez with ingots and jewels of gold, in such a way that when the fight took place at Cempoala, Narvaez was the only man who fought in earnest, until he was wounded and lost an eye. The author figures among his captors: "the first to lay hands on him was Pedro Sanchez Farfan, a good soldier, and I handed him (Narvaez) over to Sandoval."

After his victory Cortés returned with all speed to Mexico, where the inhabitants had risen in arms with the purpose of avenging the inhuman massacre carried out by Pedro de Alvarado in the precincts of the great Teocalli, which Alonzo de Avila pronounced to be disgraceful, saying that it would

[1] The author says that there were nineteen, but the Oidor Lucas Vásquez de Ayllon, who accompanied Narvaez, writes that there were sixteen. (Hernan Cortés, *Cartas y Relaciones*, Paris, 1866. Page 42.)—G. G.

for ever remain "an ill memory in New Spain." Cortés now brought with him over thirteen hundred soldiers, eighty crossbowmen and as many musketeers, and ninety mounted men, without counting his numerous native allies.

Although they all reached the great Tenochtitlan "on the day of San Juan de Junio (St. John's Day) in the year 1520" they could not make a stand against the Mexicans, who, under the command of Cuitláhuac and Cuauhtémoc, killed the greater number of the invaders and forced the rest, wounded and ruined, for they were unable to save the riches they had collected, to flee to Tlaxcala. The Tlaxcalans received them, lodged them and attended to them with affection. When they were somewhat recovered, the Spaniards began Vandal-like forays through Tepeyácac, Cachula, Guacachula, Tecamachalco, the town of the Guayabos, Ozúcar, Xalacingo, Zacatami, and other places in the neighbourhood, enslaving and branding with a hot iron all the youths and women they met with; "they did not trouble about the old men:" the inhuman mark was placed "on the face," and not even the most beautiful young woman escaped it.

The author did not assist in all these forays because "he was very ill from fever, and was spitting blood."

Cortés then founded a second city, which he named Segura de la Frontera.

After the Spaniards had been reinforced by various expeditions that had come from Cuba, they

resolved to return to Mexico to recover their lost treasure, and they forthwith took the road to Tetzcoco.

They took with them many thousands of native allies.

When the headquarters had been established at Tetzcoco, Cortés opened hostilities by an assault on Itztapalapa, where he and his followers nearly lost their lives by drowning, for the Mexicans "burst open the canals of fresh and salt water and tore down a causeway:" the author was "very badly wounded by a lance thrust which they gave me in the throat near the windpipe, and I was in danger of dying from it, and retain the scar from it to this day."

Cortés did not think of a direct attack on Mexico, he understood that it could lead to no satisfactory result; he proposed merely to invest the city and reduce it by starvation; so as to accomplish this he had entrusted to the Tlaxcalans the construction of thirteen launches, which he anxiously awaited.

Meanwhile, he attacked the neighbouring towns with fire and sword. The author did not join in these earlier combats as he was still ill from his dangerous wound, but as soon as it healed, he again took up arms, and accompanied Cortés, who went to assist the natives of Chalco, and distinguished himself among the most intrepid soldiers.

On his side, Cuauhtémoc, who was now Lord

of Mexico, took measures for the defence of his country with unequalled courage; he had obtained from his subjects a promise "that they would never make peace, but would either all die fighting or take our lives."

The strife was remarkably prolonged and bloody, and no quarter was given.

The siege began on the 21st May, 1521, and lasted eighty-five days. Not for one moment did the Mexicans show signs of discouragement, notwithstanding the scarcity of fresh water and provisions, the superiority of the arms of the Spaniards, and the immense number of their native allies;[1] each day as it came was for them as the first day of the strife, so great was the determination and the strength with which they appeared on the field of battle, and, moreover, they never ceased fighting "from dawn to dusk."

When the greater number of them had already perished, the few who still remained stoically resisted thirst, hunger, weariness and pestilence in the defence of their country, and even then refused, with indomitable fortitude, the proposals of peace which Cortés repeatedly made to them. In this manner only did they die.

The army which was to attack the Mexicans by

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[1] The author makes immoderate efforts to lessen the number of the allies, but Cortés informs us that there were "numberless people," "an infinite number," "which could not be counted," that those that accompanied him alone numbered "more than one hundred and fifty thousand men."—G. G.

land was divided from the beginning into three sections. It fell to the lot of the author to serve in that of Tlacopan, commanded by Pedro de Alvarado. Many times Bernal was in danger of losing his life, first of all when the siege had just been commenced; a few days later when the Mexicans succeeded in seizing him, "many Indians had already laid hold of me, but I managed to get my arm free, and our Lord Jesus Christ gave me strength so that by some good sword thrusts that I gave them, I saved myself, but I was badly wounded in one arm;" on another occasion they succeeded in taking him prisoner, but "it pleased God that I should escape from their power;" and, finally, at the end of June on the day that Cortés suffered his terrible defeat, the author received "an arrow wound and a sword thrust."

The siege ended on the 13th August, 1521, with the capture of the north-east corner of the city, where the few surviving Mexicans still offered a heroic resistance.

As soon as Cortés was master of the Great Tenochtitlan, he got together, for the second time, a great quantity of gold, although it was not as much as he had acquired before. On the division being made, again for the second time the Spaniards were profoundly discontented, for they found that after all their terrible hardships and their constant danger of death, "there fell to the share of a horseman eighty dollars, and to that of the cross-bowmen, musketeers and shield bearers sixty or

fifty, I do not well remember which." The most annoying thing for the Spanish adventurers was "that some owed fifty or sixty dollars for cross-bows, and others fifty dollars for a sword, and similarly everything that we bought was equally dear, then too a surgeon named Master Juan, who dressed some severe wounds, charged an exorbitant price for his cures, as did also a sort of quack doctor named Murçia, who was an apothecary and barber and also undertook cures, and there were thirty other traps and trickeries for which we were in debt."

The author continued to contract debts in consequence, in spite of his sturdy fighting and his many and serious wounds.

Although his expectations had not been fulfilled, Bernal did not abandon the hope of mending his fortunes, which had brought him to Mexico, and he accompanied his friend Gonzalo de Sandoval to the conquest of Tuxtépec, a place which, according "to the tribute rolls of Montezuma," which the author had studied, abounded in gold. When he arrived there, Sandoval advised him to stay there, and offered him in allotment "the rich towns of Matlatan, Orizaba and Ozotequipa; but Bernal refused, "for it seemed to me that unless I went with Sandoval and as his friend, that I should not be doing what was becoming to my rank."

He passed on to Coatzacoalcos, where the town of Espíritu Santo was established, and here Bernal

settled, for on the 20th September, 1522, Cortés gave him in allotment the towns of "Tlapa and Potonchan," which belonged to the province of Cimatan. Neither one nor the other proved satisfactory to him, because the land was poor, or more probably because he found no gold there, the metal which represented the only acceptable form of riches to the author and his companions, who had migrated on that very account from the Valley of Mexico, because it produced "merely an abundance of maize and aloes."

The settlers at the town of Espíritu Santo chose him as their Magistrate, a clear proof of the esteem and consideration in which he was held.

After all, the new life that Bernal led did not free him from frequent turmoil; he was continually obliged to sally forth and pacify the towns in the province, and this was not without risk, for on one occasion he was "struck by an arrow wound in the throat, and the great loss of blood, for at the time it was not possible either to bandage [the wound] or staunch the flow, greatly endangered my life."

During Lent in the year 1523 he set out with Captain Luis Marín to fight the natives of Chiapas, "the greatest warriors that I had seen in the whole of New Spain, although that includes Tlaxcalans, Mexicans, Zapotecs and Minxes."

The author now travelled on horseback—doubtless his towns were not in such poor land as he had imagined.

He had to suffer many hardships during this

expedition; the people of Chiapas fought like "rabid lions," and in Chamula they gave him "a good blow with a lance which pierced my armour, and had it not been made of thick cotton and well quilted, they would have killed me, for good as it was they thrust through it and out came a thick wad of cotton, and they gave me a slight wound." In spite of this he was one of the two first soldiers who stormed and took the fortress of the natives. As a reward for his heroic conduct Luis Marín gave him in allotment this town of Chamula, a place of great importance.

On the return to Espíritu Santo he fought [a duel] of swords with Godoy in a most noble cause, and both were wounded.

Bernal did not enjoy his ease for long, for in obedience to an order from Cortés, whom all the *Conquistadores* greatly feared, he found himself forced to follow Rodrigo Rangel to the conquest of the Zapotecs; it is fair to say that, although he did so unwillingly, for he already felt wearied, and Rangel did not inspire sympathy, he acquitted himself with great efficiency throughout the expedition, for which he gained honourable praise. It was then[1] when the natives "had hung seven arrows on him, which only failed to pierce on account of the thickness of the cotton armour, and nevertheless I emerged wounded in one leg;" he would, however,

[1] This happened in a subsequent expedition under Rangel in Tabasco.

not give way, but, in spite of all, he pursued the natives for a long distance until "they took refuge in some great quaking morasses which no man who entered them could get out of again except on all fours or with much assistance."

He returned to Espíritu Santo without having accomplished anything to his profit, and went on to Mexico, where he was present on the 18th or 19th June, 1524, at the magnificent reception given by Cortés to Fray Martín de Valencia and his twelve Franciscan companions, among them Fray Toribio de Benavente, whom the Indians named Motolinía, "which means in their language the poor Friar, for all that was given him for the sake of God he gave to the Indians, so that at times he went without food, and wore very ragged garments and walked barefoot, and he always preached to them, and the Indians loved him greatly for he was a saintly person."

The author returned to his town almost at once. He was there at the end of October in the same year when Cortés arrived on his way to the Hibueras,[1] whither he was going personally, resolved to punish Cristóbal de Olid, who had rebelled.

The conqueror was followed by a formidable army, and a numerous court of friars and clergy, doctors and surgeons, major domos, waiters, butlers, chamberlains, stewards, and keepers of his "great

[1] Honduras.

services of gold and silver," pages, orderlies, huntsmen, pipers, trumpeters and fifers, acrobats, conjurers, puppet players, equerries and muleteers, and "a great herd of pigs that they ate as they went along." Among the soldiers and attendants of Cortés there also marched, but not of their own will, Cuauhtémoc and other great native princes.

When Cortés arrived at Coatzacoalcos he ordered all the settlers to go with him to the Hibueras, and it was owing to this that the author had to accompany him: nobody would have then dared to disobey Cortés.

It was hard luck for Bernal, for as he says "At the time when we should have been resting from our great labours and endeavouring to secure some property and profit, he ordered us to go on a journey of over five hundred leagues, the greater part of it through hostile country, and all that we possessed we left behind and lost."

Bernal was not consoled by Cortés appointing him Captain on this occasion, nor by taking his own followers with him, who had been recruited from the towns of his *encomienda*.[1]

While the author marched upon Cimatán at the head of thirty Spaniards and three thousand natives, Cortés overran the towns of Tonalá and Ayagua-

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[1] Encomienda = The Indian townships and land, with the Indians necessary for its cultivation, assigned or allotted to a Spaniard.

Iulco, crossed a neighbouring estuary after throwing across it "a bridge which was nearly half a quarter of a league long, an astonishing feat, in the way they did it," and he went along the great river Mazapa to the towns of Iquinuapa where he rejoined the author.

Together, they soon passed through the towns of Copilco, Nacaxuxuyca, Zaguatan, Tepetitan and Itztapa. Going on in search of Hueyacalá, or "the great Acalá, for there was another town called Acalá the lesser," they penetrated into the forest [monte] and lost their way, and found themselves then compelled to clear a track with their swords through the thick undergrowth; they suffered from hunger and four Spaniards and many of the natives died from it, for they fell down "as though in despair." In this extremity Bernal and Pero López saved the army, for they found the lost road which soon led them to Temastépec. The pipers, trumpeters and fifers no longer made music, for "they were used to luxury and did not understand hardship and they had sickened with the hunger; only one of them had the spirit to play, and all of us soldiers refused to listen to him, and said that it sounded like the howling of foxes and coyotes and that it would be better to have maize to eat than music."

In Ciguatepécad the author and Gonzalo Mexía went on ahead by the order of Cortés to win over peacefully the inhabitants of Acalá, a mission which Bernal, on his part, accomplished satisfactorily, for

he soon returned with a large quantity of provisions; but as the soldiers were starving they seized them all and fought one another for them. In vain did the Steward cry out to them that they should leave something for Cortés, the soldiers answered petulantly "you and Cortés have had fine pigs to eat." When Cortés heard what had happened he put up with it, and asked the author in the mildest manner whether he had not left a little of the food hidden on the road, and ended by asking him most humbly for a share of it. The author consented and generously invited him to partake of that which he had reserved for himself and the natives from the towns of his *encomiendas*.

The army entered the province of Acalá, and there at Izancánac Cortés ordered Cuauhtémoc and his cousin Tetepanquetzatl, the lord of Tlacopan, to be hanged, on suspicion of engaging in a conspiracy. The author tells us that he was very sorry for these great princes, and adds, "their death was very unjust and appeared an evil thing to all of us, who were on the march." This was at Shrovetide in 1525.

Cortés arrived at the land of the Mazatecas, and after passing through two towns, one situated on an island and another near a fresh-water lake, entered into Tayasal. A little further on Bernal began to feel very ill "from fever and from the power of the sun which had affected my head and all my body." In this condition, nevertheless, he was obliged to cross the toilsome range of the Pedernales, not so

very lofty, but whose stones "cut like knives." In front of Tayca a river "which one could clearly hear two leagues off" delayed the army for three days, and Cortés threw a bridge across it similar to the one constructed at Ayagualulco, bridges which survived for many years, for the admiration of travellers who were accustomed to say, "here are Cortés' bridges as though they were speaking of the Pillars of Hercules."

Again they felt the pangs of hunger, such as the author had never before experienced; he suffered anguish at this time "for I had nothing to eat or to give to my people and I was ill with fever." Cortés ordered him nevertheless to go out and seek for food for the army, and the author, rising superior to his serious infirmities, obeyed him. Guided by his experience and sagacity, he was not long in finding poultry, maize, beans and "other vegetables," with which he promptly supplied all the soldiers.

They went on to Tania, a town surrounded by rivers and streams, from which they were unable to get out, for once more they lost their way. Cortés despatched several Spaniards to find it again, but without result. It was necessary to confide the task to the author, in spite of his illness, for after God it was in him "that he had confidence that he would bring help," and when he brought it, for he succeeded in finding the road which they were to follow, Cortés evinced profound gratitude, and made him fair promises: "I pledge you," he

told him, "this, my beard, that I owe your honour a debt."

The conqueror arrived at last with his huge army at Ocoliztle, a town quite close to Naco, where he expected to fight with Cristóbal de Olid; it was not until then he learnt that he (Olid) had had his throat cut long before by Gil González de Avila and Francisco de las Casas. Nevertheless, before returning to Mexico, he wished to leave his rule established in that far off district, his boundless ambition making the vast territory of New Spain appear small to him. Thus he founded the town of La Natividad, "which is now called Puerto de Caballos," and obliged the natives who had been scared away to return and repopulate Naco.

While this was happening, news was received from Mexico that the Agent Gonzalo de Salazar, after spreading the report that Cortés and his soldiers had perished, seized their property and their Indians to divide them among his partizans; and he ordered the wives who had become widows to pray for the souls of their husbands and promptly proceed "to marry again, and he even sent to say so to Guaçacualco and other towns." It is certain that the wife of Alonzo Yáñez, an inhabitant of Mexico, respected the order, and hurriedly re-married.

Nevertheless, while all the soldiers were indignant and excited, as was only natural, and prepared themselves to return as fast as possible to New Spain to recover their wives, their Indians

and their property, and even cursed Cortés and Salazar, "and our hearts throbbed with anger," Cortés, formerly energetic, prompt and venturesome to rashness, now weak, irresolute and timid, confined himself to weeping disconsolately, shutting himself up for long hours in his room, and permitting no one to see him: overmuch power had weakened his character. When at last he came out of his room, the soldiers unanimously addressed him and entreated him to embark at once in the three ships that were there and go to New Spain, and he answered us very affectionately: "Oh my children and companions, I see on one side that evil man, the Agent, has become very powerful, and I fear that when he knows that we are in the port, he will do some other shameless and daring things to us beyond what he has already done, or he will kill or drown me, or make me and all of you prisoners." The abundant riches which Cortés now possessed made him love life too much.

Selfishly abandoning the bulk of his army, he set out on the sea with a few followers. The author had begged him very urgently to take him in his company; he had an abundant right to ask this and other much greater favours, but Cortés, ever deaf to gratitude, left him there to return by land.

So by land he went, once more suffering daily hardships, and having also to fight against the natives. He passed through Maniani and Cholulteca-Malalaca, the Chaparrastiques, Cuzcatlan or Cascacatan, whose inhabitants gave him an arrow

wound, Petapa, Guatemala, Olnitépec, Soconusco, Tehuantépec, Oaxaca and Mexico. He entered the capital in the beginning of 1527, after a most laborious march extending over more than "two years and three months," during which he had served throughout "very well and loyally" without receiving "pay or any favour whatever." He returned poor, in debt, and with ragged clothes. Andrés de Tápia received him in his house, and Gonzalo de Sandoval sent him garments with which to clothe himself, "and gold and cacao to spend."

At this time Marcos de Aguilar was governing New Spain, and Bernal begged him to give him Indians in Mexico as those of Coatzacoalcos "were of no profit." Aguilar merely made him fine promises, alleging that he had not yet received power to apportion Indians.

During the same year Aguilar was succeeded by Alonzo de Estrada, first of all in company with Sandoval and afterwards alone, whose rule was very unfortunate for the author; under it Baltazar Osorio and Diego de Mazariegos turned him out "by force" from his *encomiendas* of Micapy, Tlapa and Chamula, to the end that they might be incorporated in the new towns of Chiapas and Tabasco.

The author, finding it impossible "to carry on lawsuits with two towns," went to Estrada to obtain justice, and got from him, dated 3rd April, 1528, the *encomienda* "of the towns of Gualpitán and

Micapa, which are in the Cachulco range, and used to be subject to Cimatán, and of Popoloatán in the province of Citla." Nevertheless, the author was not satisfied owing to the fact that these towns were of little importance, and did not nearly compensate him for the loss of Tlapa, which contained "more than a thousand houses," and that of Chamula, which numbered "more than four hundred, and the farms more than two hundred."

At the end of this same year, 1528, Estrada was succeeded by the First *Audiencia*,[1] which wished to proceed at once to the perpetual assignment[2] of the Indians, and with this object ordered the cities and towns settled by Spaniards to appoint attorneys to come to the Capital. The arrangement could not have been more opportune nor more agreeable for Bernal, who could now believe with good reason that his labours and his poverty were soon going to cease. He set out in all haste for Espíritu Santo, and was successful in arranging that the settlers should entrust him with their authority, and he returned at once to Mexico. However, the much talked of division came to nothing, and the judges, far from favouring Bernal, imprisoned him twice on despicable pretexts, together with other old *Conquistadores*. He was obliged at last to return to Coatzacoalcos, persuaded that he would obtain no protection from the First Audiencia, and that he must resign himself to live there "in the midst of

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[1] Audiencia = a Council of Government.

[2] The "Repartimiento."

want," but maintaining "his high honour, and seeing to it that he lived uprightly and without indulging in any vice," and justly enjoying "a very good reputation."

When the First Audiencia retired in the month of January 1531, the honest members of the Second Audiencia assumed control, and, as they appreciated the merits of the author, they nominated him *Visitador General* of Coatzacoalcos and Tabasco, and they entrusted to him the delimitation of both those settlements, a duty which he carried out with prudence in company with the stipendiary Benito López. Encouraged by these distinctions, and trusting in the rectitude of the Second Audiencia, Bernal approached it [with a request] that he should be given some Indian towns in compensation for those "that had been taken from him by force," but the Judges told him that "unless the order came from his Majesty in Spain they were not able to give them."

In the year 1535 the first Viceroy, Don Antonio de Mendoza, arrived in Mexico, and Bernal approached him also with the same demand, and again met with a similar refusal.

However, if adversity and deception never ceased to lay in wait for and wound the author, he, on the other hand, never gave way to their blows, and always knew how to preserve his energy undiminished. It must certainly have been towards 1535 when, in spite of having already reached the age of forty-three years, and feeling "very weary

and poor," he married Teresa Becerra, the eldest legitimate daughter of Captain Bartolomé Becerra, a *Conquistador* of Guatemala, and the first regular Mayor of that city. By this marriage Bernal had several sons and daughters, the eldest being Francisco, who was born a year after the wedding.

Bernal had already born to him other children by a native woman, who was perhaps that beautiful girl he had begged from Montezuma through the good offices of the page Orteguilla. Baltasar Dorantes de Carranza knew a "Diego Díaz de Castillo, a half-caste" and a natural son of Bernal, and Philip II mentions in a Royal Decree some brothers of this Diego.

The author proved to be an excellent father of a family, the greatest, in fact the chief, anxiety throughout his life, was not having the means with which to secure the future of his wife and children; he constantly mentions this subject in all his letters, as well as in the *True History*.

As Bernal's difficulties necessarily increased with his growing family, and he knew by sad experience that he could hope for nothing from those governing New Spain, he resolved to go to Court to beg for justice from the Lords of the Royal Council. Cortés and the Viceroy gave him letters of recommendation to them with which, and the authenticated record of his merits and services, he arrived in Spain about 1540. Once there, he presented his petition in [proper] form. The Lords of the Royal Council ordered it to be handed over to the Fiscal,

the Licentiate Don Juan de Villalobos, who declared openly and frankly, for some reason of which we know nothing, that he would not allow him anything, because "he had not been a *Conquistador* such as he asserted."

The Fiscal doubly offended the author, because at the same time that he ignored his services given during so many years with painful toil and in frequent danger of death, he treated him publicly as an impostor, him who judged and proclaimed the truth to be "a thing blessed and holy."

This disillusion was without any doubt the most painful of all the author's sufferings. Fortunately the Lords of the Royal Council took no notice of the Fiscal's pleading in settling the matter, and issued a writ on the 15th April, 1541, advising that a Royal Decree should be given to the author addressed to the Viceroy of New Spain, to the end that "he should examine the quality and number of the towns which had been given to the said Bernal Díaz and which he held possessed and which were taken away from him to form the townships of Chiapas and Tabasco, and should give him in recompense for them other towns of the same kind and as good in the same province so that he might gain profit therefrom during his Majesty's pleasure."

The Decree was issued two months later, together with another to the same effect, which was addressed to Pedro de Alvarado, the Governor of Guatemala, which the author asked for with a view of obtaining the new towns in either of the two provinces,

wherever they could most promptly be granted. Provided with these two Decrees he returned immediately to the New World. He obtained nothing in New Spain, but, when he went on to Guatemala, the Licentiate Alonzo Maldonado, who was Governor on the death of Alvarado, assigned him the towns of Zacatépec, Joanagacapa and Misten, which were clearly of "little worth," and promised him that as soon as there were others of greater importance he would give them to him and put him in charge of them. As the promise was never realised, Bernal never escaped from his life of poverty.

Without any incidents worth recording—at least so far as is known to us—time went on until 1550, in which year Bernal was summoned to Spain to assist at the Congress of Valladolid, in the character of "the oldest *Conquistador* of New Spain." He went there, joined in the Congress and voted for the perpetual assignment of the Indians, in spite of having heard the humanitarian and persuasive arguments alleged against it by the eminent Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and his worthy companions Fray Rodrigo de Labrada and Fray Tomás de San Martín; his own poverty was a stronger argument.

Bernal utilised his short stay at Court to obtain a Royal Decree, dated the 1st December, 1550, ordering the Licentiate Alonzo López Zerrato, President of the Audiencia of Guatemala, to carry out the previous Decree recorded in 1541, and have it respected.

On the 1st September, 1551, the author exhibited his new Decree before the Licentiate López Zerrato, who unfortunately did not execute it, in spite of having that very day taken it in his hands, examined it and placed it above his head as was the custom, to show that he would obey it and carry it out.

We say that he did not carry it out, because a year later Bernal wrote to his Majesty that the said Licentiate cared only to give assignments "to his relations, servants and friends," without taking any notice of the *Conquistadores* who had won [the country] "by their sweat and blood;" on this account the author prays that his Majesty may be pleased to order him to be admitted "into his Royal house as one of his servants."

This petition shows that Bernal did not harbour any hope of improving his miserable lot. Here he nevertheless remained, for he did not succeed in being admitted into the number of his Majesty's servants.

Moreover, if it had not been possible for him to prosper during youth and middle life, it was still less so now that he was entering on old age, and we find, as was natural and even to be expected, that he writes to Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, on 20th February, 1558, that he was still "very straightened as he possessed so little property."[1]

[1] As the author then adds that he was "heavily burdened by children and grandchildren," and that he had a young wife, it is not hazardous to think that he had recently contracted a second marriage, etc.—G. G.

It must have been a great consolation to him that he continued to be esteemed and respected in Guatemala. He had not ceased to be a Magistrate, and this same year he was elected "arbitrator and executor," and he had been named the previous year to carry the banner on the feast of Santa Cecilia, an honour which was again conferred on him in 1560, on the occasion of the feast of Saint James the Apostle.[1] The affection and consideration which all the persons who knew him had for Bernal Díaz was owing to his "charming conversation" and noble sentiments, but principally to the fact that in spite of his poverty, he always managed to live "with great dignity."

Thus then, poor enough, although much loved and esteemed, fearing no one, he dedicated himself to the writing of his *True History* when he was over seventy years of age, convinced that in the history of the world there was no more daring deed than the conquest, nor more heroic men in existence than the *Conquistadores*, resigned to not having received the reward which was justly due to him, free from pessimism, rancour and regrets, with a perfectly tranquil conscience, with an exceptional memory and an intelligence uncommon in its full vigour. His work was now and then interrupted by visits to the towns assigned to him, sometimes accompanied by friends. Neither travel nor change of climate broke down his health; he

[1] Garcia Peláez. *Memoria para la Historia del Antiguo Reyno de Guatemala.* Guatemala, 1851-52, vol. ii, page 227.—G. G.

himself tells us that even at that time he did not use a bed, from habit acquired during the conquest, nor was he able to sleep unless he walked "some time in the open air, and this without any covering on his head, neither cap nor kerchief, and, thanks to God, it did me no harm." With all this, he also tells us, not perhaps without exaggeration, that by that time he had "lost his sight and hearing." He had penned but little of the History when the Chronicles composed by Paulo Giovio, Francisco López de Gómara and Gonzalo de Illescas[1] came into his hands. As soon as he began to read them, "and observed from their good style the roughness and lack of polish of my language," he gave up writing his History. However, when the first impression had faded, he returned to their perusal, and was then able to decide that they spoke truth neither in the beginning, nor the middle, nor the end, and for this reason he definitely resolved to continue his own work. Probably this did not happen before 1566, for Bernal knew no Latin, and could not, therefore, understand the Chronicle of Giovio until Baeza published his translation in Spanish.

However that may be, it is clear that in the year 1568 he made the fair copy of the *True History*.

We know nothing more of his life. We can

[1] The work of Giovio was published in Latin in 1550-52, and translated into Spanish by Gaspar de Baeza in 1566; Gomara printed his Chronicle in 1552-53, and Illescas published his in 1564. All three soon went through several editions.—G. G.

only add that the author died in Guatemala about 1581, poor as he had lived, leaving his numerous family no riches except "his true and wonderful story," which was, nevertheless, the chief title to glory for his descendants, for in it was enshrined his fair name of honourable *Conquistador* and genial Historian.

The original manuscript of the *True History* forms a large folio volume, containing 297 leaves in an old leather binding. Although it is generally in a fairly good condition, there are some leaves partly destroyed, principally those at the beginning and at the end.

All the writing, which covers both sides of the leaves, is in the handwriting of the author; on some pages it is well done and normal, on others careless and irregular. The author could not have preserved the same composure throughout the long time occupied in writing his work.

The principal subject of this work is the Conquest "of New Spain and its provinces and the Cape of Honduras and all that lies within these lands." Those who tax Bernal with vanity and conceit suppose that when he began the *True History* his only object was to tell about himself, an entirely gratuitous supposition, for the author frequently chronicles a series of years, without including one of his personal deeds. His work begins within the year 1514 and ends with that of 1568. He divides it into 214 chapters, perhaps

intending to finish it with Chapter CCXII, at the end of which he placed his signature and *rubrica*,[1] but he changed his intention, and wrote two new chapters in the same year in which he had written Chapter CCXII, namely, the year 1568. He still intended to write another, or others, for he declares at the end of Chapter CCXIV: "It will be well in another chapter to speak of the Archbishops and Bishops that there have been." Surely Bernal did not finish his work, unless one assumes the loss of the final pages, which is not probable. The binder who bound up the manuscript understood little of the composition of ancient writings, and attached to the last folio the leaf which contained the signature of the author.

Bernal did not pretend to be a man of letters; he confesses his slight knowledge of literature, and on this account humbly begs the indulgence of his readers: "May your honours pardon me in that I cannot express it better." Nevertheless, his mode of speech is still current to-day, and is interesting and expressive, in spite of the immoderate use of copulative conjunctions, of its almost complete want of imagery, its words with variable spelling, either obsolete or incorrect, its semi-arbitrary punctuation, its erroneous concordances, its strange contractions and its unusual abbreviations.

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[1] *Rubrica*, the flourish which then and at the present time forms part of a signature among Spaniards.

INTRODUCTION

BY THE

TRANSLATOR.

FOUR eye-witnesses of the discovery and conquest of Mexico have left written records :—

Hernando Cortés, who wrote five letters known as the *Cartas de Relacion* to the Emperor Charles V.

The First of these letters, despatched from Vera Cruz, has never been found, but its place is supplied by a letter written to the Emperor at the same time by the Municipality of Vera Cruz, dated 10th July, 1519.

The Second letter, from Segura de la Frontera (Tepeaca), is dated 30th October, 1520.

The Third letter was written from Coyoacan, and dated 15th May, 1522.

The Fourth letter was written from the city of Temixtitan (Mexico), and dated 15th October, 1524.

The Fifth letter, written from Temixtitan