



BOOK II.

THE EXPEDITION UNDER HERNANDO CORTÉS. THE VOYAGE.

CHAPTER XVII.

How Diego Velásquez sent to Spain to petition His Majesty to grant him a commission, to trade with, and conquer the country, and to settle and apportion the land as soon as peace was established.



ALTHOUGH it may seem to the reader that in relating what I now call to mind, I am wandering far away from my story, nevertheless it seems to me proper that, before I begin to tell about the valiant and energetic Captain Cortés, certain things should be mentioned, both for reasons which will be apparent later on, and because when two or three events happen at the same time, one cannot relate them together, but only that one which falls into its place in the story.

The fact is that when the captain, Pedro de Alvarado arrived at Santiago de Cuba with the gold from the lands which we had discovered, as I have already related, Diego Velásquez was in fear lest, before he could make his report to His Majesty, some court favourite should rob

him of his reward, and ask it from His Majesty for himself. For this reason he sent to Spain his chaplain, named Benito Martínez, a man well skilled in business, with the evidence and letters for Don Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, Bishop of Burgos, and Archbishop of Rosano, for such are his titles, and to the Licentiate, Luis Zapata, and to the Secretary, Lope de Conchillos, who at that time looked after the Affairs of the Indies. Diego Velásquez was the very humble servant of them all, especially of the Bishop, and he gave them Indian townships in the Island of Cuba, so that their inhabitants might extract gold from the mines for them, and for this reason they were ready to do much for Diego Velásquez.

At this time His Majesty was away in Flanders. Velásquez also sent to these gentlemen, just now mentioned by me, some of the jewels of gold which we had obtained by barter. Now everything that was done by the Royal Council of the Indies was done by the orders of these gentlemen, and that which Diego Velásquez wished to have arranged was, that he should be given authority to trade with, conquer and settle all this land which he had recently discovered, and any that he might thereafter discover. He said in his reports and letters that he had spent many thousands of gold dollars in the discovery. So the Chaplain, Benito Martínez, went to Spain and succeeded in obtaining all that he asked for, and even more, for he brought back a decree appointing Diego Velásquez, Adelantado of the Island of Cuba. Although what I have here stated was already settled, the despatches did not arrive before the valiant Cortés had already sailed with a fresh fleet. I must leave this matter here, both the despatches of which Benito Martínez was the bearer, and the fleet of the captain Cortés, and state that while writing this story I have seen the chronicles written by the historian, Francisco

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Lopes de Gómara, and those of the Doctor Yllescas and of Jovio, in which they treat of the conquest of New Spain. I feel bound to declare that, wherever it appears to contradict the others, my story represents events clearly and truly, and runs very differently from what the historians I have named have written.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Concerning some errors and other things written by the Historians Gómara and Yllescas about affairs in New Spain.

WHILE I was writing this story, I saw by chance, what had been written by Gómara, Yllescas and Jovio, about the conquest of Mexico and New Spain, and when I had read their accounts and saw and appreciated their polished style, and thought how rudely and lamely my story was told, I stopped writing it, seeing that such good histories already existed. Being in this perplexed state of mind, I began to look into the arguments and discourses which are told in these books, and I saw that from beginning to end they did not tell correctly what took place in New Spain. When they begin to write about the great cities, and the great number of the inhabitants, they are as ready to write eighty thousand as eight thousand. Then about the great slaughter which they say we committed:—As we were only four hundred and fifty soldiers who marched to that war, we had enough to do to defend ourselves from being killed or defeated and carried off; and even had the Indians been craven cowards, we could not have committed all the slaughter attributed to us, more particularly as the Indians were very bold warriors who had cotton armour which shielded their bodies, and were armed with bows, arrows, shields, long lances, and two-handed stone-edged swords, which cut better than our swords did,