

CHAPTER XIX.

How we came again with another fleet to the newly discovered lands with the valiant and energetic Don Hernando Cortés (who was afterwards Marqués del Valle) as captain of the fleet, and the attempts that were made to prevent his going in command.

AFTER the return of the Captain Juan de Grijalva to Cuba, when the Governor Diego Velásquez understood how rich were these newly discovered lands, he ordered another fleet, much larger than the former one to be sent off, and he had already collected in the Port of Santiago, where he resided, ten ships, four of them were those in which we had returned with Juan de Grijalva, which had at once been careened, and the other six had been got together from other ports in the Island. He had them furnished with provisions, consisting of Cassava bread and salt pork, for at that time there were neither sheep nor cattle in the Island of Cuba, as it had been only recently settled. These provisions were only to last until we arrived at Havana, for it was at that port that we were to take in our stores, as was afterwards done.

I must cease talking of this and tell about the disputes which arose over the choice of a captain for the expedition. There were many debates and much opposition, for some gentleman said that Vasco Porcallo, a near relation of the Conde de Feria, should be captain, but Diego Velásquez feared that he would rise against him with the fleet, for he was very daring; others said that Agustin Bermudez or Antonio Velásquez Borrejo, or Bernadino Velásquez, kinsman of Diego Velásquez should go in command.

Most of us soldiers who were there said that we should prefer to go again under Juan de Grijalva, for he was a good captain, and there was no fault to be found either with his person or his capacity for command.

While things were going on in the way I have related,

two great favourites of Diego Velásquez named Andrés de Duero, the Governor's Secretary, and Amador de Lares, His Majesty's accountant, secretly formed a partnership with a gentleman named Hernando Cortés, a native of Medellín, who held a grant of Indians in the Island. A short while before, Cortés had married a lady named Catalina Juarez la Marçayda; this lady was sister of a certain Juan Juarez who after the conquest of New Spain was a settler at Mexico. As far as I know, and from what others say, it was a love match. On this matter of the marriage other persons who saw it have had much to say, and for that reason I will not touch any more on this delicate subject.

I will go on to tell about this partnership, it came about in this manner:—These two great favourites of Velásquez agreed that they would get him to appoint Cortés Captain General of the whole fleet, and that they would divide between the three of them, the spoil of gold, silver and jewels which might fall to Cortés' share. For secretly Diego Velásquez was sending to trade and not to form a settlement, as was apparent afterwards from the instructions given about it, although it was announced and published that the expedition was for the purpose of founding a settlement.

When this arrangement had been made, Duero and the accountant went to work in such a way with Diego Velásquez, and addressed such honied words to him, praising Cortés highly, as the very man for the position of Captain, as in addition to being energetic he knew how to command and ensure respect, and as one who would be faithful in everything entrusted to him, both in regard to the fleet and in everything else, (pointing out too, that he was his godson, for Velásquez was his sponsor when Cortés married Doña Catalina Juarez), that they persuaded him to choose Cortés as Captain General.

Andrés de Duero, the Governor's Secretary, drew up the documents in very good ink¹ as the proverb says, in the way Cortés wished with very ample powers.

When the appointment was made public, some persons were pleased and others annoyed.

One Sunday when Diego Velásquez went to Mass,—and as he was Governor he was accompanied by the most distinguished persons in the town,—he placed Hernando Cortés on his right hand so as to pay him honour. A buffoon, called the mad Cervantes, ran in front of Diego Velásquez, making grimaces and cracking jokes and he cried out—

“The parade of my friend Diego, Diego,
 “Who then is this captain of your choice?
 “He comes from Medellin in Estramadura
 “A very valiant captain indeed
 “Have a care lest he run off with the fleet
 “For all judge him a man to take care of his own.”

And he cried out other nonsense, all of it somewhat malicious. And as he would go on shouting in this way, Andrés de Duero who was walking near Diego Velasquez, gave the buffoon a cuff and said “Silence thou crazy drunkard, and don't be such a rogue, for we are well aware that these malicious sayings, passed off as wit, are not made up by thee,” and still the madman ran on, notwithstanding the cuffs, saying, “Viva, Viva, the parade of my friend Diego and his daring Captain Cortés, I swear friend Diego that so as not to see thee weeping over the bad bargain thou hast made this day, I wish to go with Cortés to these rich lands.” There is no doubt that some kinsman of the Governor had given gold pieces to the buffoon to utter these malicious sayings, passing them off as witty. However, this all came true, and it is said that madmen do sometimes hit the mark in their speeches.

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¹ De muy buena tinta = most efficiently.

Truly Hernando Cortés was chosen to exalt our holy faith and to serve his Majesty, as I will tell later on.

Before going any further I wish to say that the valiant and energetic Hernando Cortés was a gentleman by birth (hijo-d'algo) by four lines of descent. The first through the Cortéses, for so his father Martin Cortés was named, the second through the Pizarros, the third through the Monroys and the fourth through the Altamiranos. Although he was such a valiant, energetic and daring captain, I will not from now on, call him by any of these epithets of valiant, or energetic, nor will I speak of him as Marqués del Valle, but simply as Hernando Cortés. For the name Cortés alone was held in as high respect throughout the Indies as well as in Spain, as was the name of Alexander in Macedonia, and those of Julius Caesar and Pompey and Scipio among the Romans, and Hannibal among the Carthaginians, or in our own Castille the name of Gonzalo Hernández, the Great Captain. And the valiant Cortés himself was better pleased not to be called by lofty titles but simply by his name, and so I will call him for the future. And now I must cease talking of this, and relate in the next chapter what he undertook and accomplished about the preparation of his fleet.

CHAPTER XX.

How Cortés prepared and continued the arrangements necessary for the dispatch of the fleet.

AS soon as Hernando Cortés had been appointed General in the way I have related, he began to search for all sorts of arms, guns, powder and crossbows and every kind of warlike stores which he could get together, and all sorts of articles to be used for barter, and other things necessary for the expedition.