

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.

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## 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.

Moreover he began to adorn himself and be more careful of his appearance than before, and he wore a plume of feathers with a medal, and a gold chain, and a velvet cloak trimmed with knots of gold, in fact he looked like a gallant and courageous Captain. However, he had no money to defray the expenses I have spoken about, for at that time he was very poor and much in debt, although he had a good *encomienda* of Indians who were getting him a return from his gold mines, but he spent all of it on his person and on finery for his wife whom he had recently married, and on entertaining some guests who had come to visit him. For he was affable in his manner and a good talker, and he had twice been chosen *Alcalde*<sup>1</sup> of the town of Santiago Baracoa where he had settled, and in that country it is esteemed a great honour to be chosen as *Alcalde*.

When some merchant friends of his named Jaime Tria, Jerónimo Tria and Pedro de Jerez saw that he had obtained this command as Captain General, they lent him four thousand gold dollars in coin and gave him merchandise worth another four thousand dollars secured on his Indians and estates. Then he ordered two standards and banners to be made, worked in gold with the royal arms and a cross on each side with a legend which said, "Comrades, let us follow the sign of the holy Cross with true faith, and through it we shall conquer." And he ordered a proclamation to be made with the sound of drums and trumpets in the name of His Majesty and by Diego Velásquez in the King's name, and in his own as Captain General, to the effect that whatsoever person might wish to go in his company to the newly discovered lands to conquer them and to settle there, should receive his share of the gold, silver and riches which might be gained

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<sup>1</sup> Alcalde = Mayor.

and an *encomienda* of Indians after the country had been pacified, and that to do these things Diego Velásquez held authority from His Majesty.

Although he put in the proclamation this about the authority of Our Lord the King, the Chaplain, Benito Martínez, had not yet arrived from Spain with the Commission which Diego Velásquez had sent him to obtain, as I have already mentioned in a former chapter.

When this news was known throughout Cuba, and Cortés had written to all his friends in the different towns begging them to get ready to come with him on this expedition, some of them sold their farms so as to buy arms and horses, others began to prepare cassava bread and to salt pork for stores, and to make quilted cotton armour, and they got ready what was necessary as well as they could.

We assembled at Santiago de Cuba, whence we set out with the fleet more than three hundred and fifty soldiers in number. From the house of Velásquez there came Diego de Ordás, the chief Mayordomo, whom Velásquez himself sent with orders to keep his eyes open and see that no plots were hatched in the fleet, for he was always distrustful of Cortés although he concealed his fears. There came also Francisco de Morla and an Escobar, whom we called The Page, and a Heredia, and Juan Ruano and Pedro Escudero, and Martín Ramos de Lares, and many others who were friends and followers of Diego Velásquez; and I place myself last on the list for I also came from the house of Diego Velásquez, for he was my kinsman.

I have put down here the names of these soldiers from memory, later on, at the proper time and place I will record all those who went in the fleet whose names I can call to mind, and say from what part of Spain they came.

Cortés worked hard to get his fleet under way and hastened on his preparations, for already envy and malice had taken possession of the relations of Diego Velásquez who were affronted because their kinsman neither trusted them nor took any notice of them and because he had given charge and command to Cortés, knowing that he had looked upon him as a great enemy only a short time before, on account of his marriage, already mentioned by me; so they went about grumbling at their kinsman Diego Velásquez and at Cortés, and by every means in their power they worked on Diego Velásquez to induce him to revoke the commission.

Now Cortés was advised of all this, and for that reason never left the Governor's side, and always showed himself to be his zealous servant, and kept on telling him that, God willing, he was going to make him a very illustrious and wealthy gentleman in a very short time. Moreover Andrés de Duero was always advising Cortés to hasten the embarkation of himself and his soldiers, for Diego Velásquez was already changing his mind owing to the importunity of his family.

When Cortés knew this he sent orders to his wife that all provisions of food which he wished to take and any other gifts (such as women usually give to their husbands when starting on such an expedition) should be sent at once and placed on board ship.

He had already had a proclamation made that on that day by nightfall all ships, Captains, pilots and soldiers should be on board and no one should remain on shore. When Cortés had seen all his company embarked he went to take leave of Diego Velásquez, accompanied by his great friends and many other gentlemen, and all the most distinguished citizens of that town.

After many demonstrations and embraces of Cortés by the Governor, and of the Governor by Cortés, he took his

leave. The next day very early after having heard Mass we went to our ships, and Diego Velásquez himself accompanied us, and again they embraced with many fair speeches one to the other until we set sail.

A few days later, in fine weather, we reached the Port of Trinidad where we brought up in the harbour and went ashore, and nearly all the citizens of that town came out to meet us ; and entertained us well.

Here in this story will be seen all the opposition which Cortés met with, and how what happened differed entirely from the account given by Gómara in his history.

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NOTE.—This account differs very considerably from that given by Las Casas (Lib. III, cap. cxv). It appears that Diego Velásquez had already determined to take the command from Cortés, “at once on the very night that he became aware of what was going on, as soon as Diego Velásquez was in bed, and all those who belonged to [him,] Cortés, had left the Palace, he went in the profound silence of the night in the utmost haste to awaken the rest of his friends telling them that it was advisable to embark at once. Taking with him a company sufficient to defend his person, he immediately went off to the slaughter house and, although it troubled the contractor who had to supply the whole town with meat, he took it all away without leaving a single cow, pig, or sheep, and had it carried to the ships, exclaiming, but not out loud, for it might perhaps have cost him his life, that they could lay the blame on him [Cortés] for not supplying meat to the town. Then Cortés took off a small golden chain that he wore round his neck and gave it to the contractor or butcher, *and this Cortés told me himself.*

“Cortés at once went on board ship with all the people that he could arouse without noise. Many of the people who had agreed to go with him and who really went were already on board.

“When he was gone either the butcher or others who knew of his departure advised Diego Velásquez that Cortés was gone and was already on board ship. Diego Velásquez got up and mounted his horse, and all the people of the city, in a state of astonishment, accompanied him to the landing place by the sea at daybreak. When Cortés saw him he ordered a boat to be got ready with cannon, guns, muskets and crossbows, and all the necessary arms, and accompanied by the men he could trust best, with his magistrate’s wand [in his hand] he came within crossbow shot of the land and

there stopped. Diego Velásquez said to him 'How is it, compadre,<sup>1</sup> that you are going off like this? Is this the right way to take leave of me?' Cortés replied 'Señor, may your Excellency pardon me, but these things and the like are done before they are thought about, I am at your Excellency's orders.' Diego Velásquez had nothing to say when he saw his infidelity and shamelessness. Cortés ordered the boat's head to be turned and went back to the ships, and ordered the sails to be hoisted in all haste [and] on the 18th Nov. 1518 [he set out] with very little food for the ships were not yet fully laden."

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## CHAPTER XXI.

What Cortés did when he arrived at the town of Trinidad and concerning the soldiers who there joined him to go in his company, and other things that happened.

THE leading inhabitants of that town soon provided quarters for Cortés and all of us among their neighbours. Cortés was lodged in the house of Captain Juan de Grijalva, and he ordered his standard and the Royal pennant to be set up in front of his quarters and issued a proclamation as he had done in Santiago, and ordered search to be made for all sorts of arms, and food and other necessaries to be purchased.

From that town there came to join us five brothers, namely Pedro de Alvarado and Jorge de Alvarado, and Gonzalo and Gómez, and Juan de Alvarado the elder, who was a bastard. The Captain Pedro de Alvarado has often been mentioned by me already. There also joined us from this town Alonzo de Ávila, who went as a Captain in Grijalva's expedition, and Juan de Escalante and Pedro Sanchez Farfan, and Gonzalo Mejía who later on became treasurer in Mexico, and a certain Baena and Juanes of Fuenterrabia, and Lares, the good horseman, so called because there was another Lares, and Cristóbal de Olid, the Valiant, who was Maestro de Campo during the

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<sup>1</sup> *Compadre* = friend, crony.