

[Chanpoton] and Cortés ordered the Pilot to drop anchor in the bay, but the Pilot replied that it was a bad port, for the tide ran out so far that the ships had to be brought up more than two leagues from the shore. Cortés had a mind to give the Indians a lesson on account of the defeat they had inflicted on Francisco Hernández de Córdoba and Grijalva, and many of us soldiers who had been in those battles begged him to go in, and not to leave without giving the Indians a good chastisement, even if it did detain us two or three days. But the Pilot Alaminos and the other pilots contended that if we should go in it might, with a head wind, be eight days before we could get out again; that we had a fair wind now for Tabasco and could get there in two days. So we passed on and after three days sail arrived at the Rio de Grijalva called in the Indian language the Tabasco River, and what happened to us there and the attack that was made on us I will go on to relate.

CHAPTER XXXI.

How we arrived at the Rio de Grijalva, which in the language of the Indians is called Tabasco, of the attack the Indians made on us, and what else happened to us with them.

ON the 12th March, 1519, we arrived with all the fleet at the Rio de Grijalva, which is also called Tabasco, and as we already knew from our experience with Grijalva that vessels of large size could not enter into the river, the larger vessels were anchored out at sea, and from the smaller vessels and boats all the soldiers were landed at the Cape of the Palms (as they were in Grijalva's time) which was about half a league distant from the town of

Tabasco.¹ The river, the river banks and the mangrove thickets were swarming with Indians, at which those of us who had not been here in Grijalva's time were much astonished.

In addition to this there were assembled in the town more than twelve thousand warriors² all prepared to make war on us, for at this time the town was of considerable importance and other large towns were subject to it and they had all made preparation for war and were well supplied with the arms which they are accustomed to use.

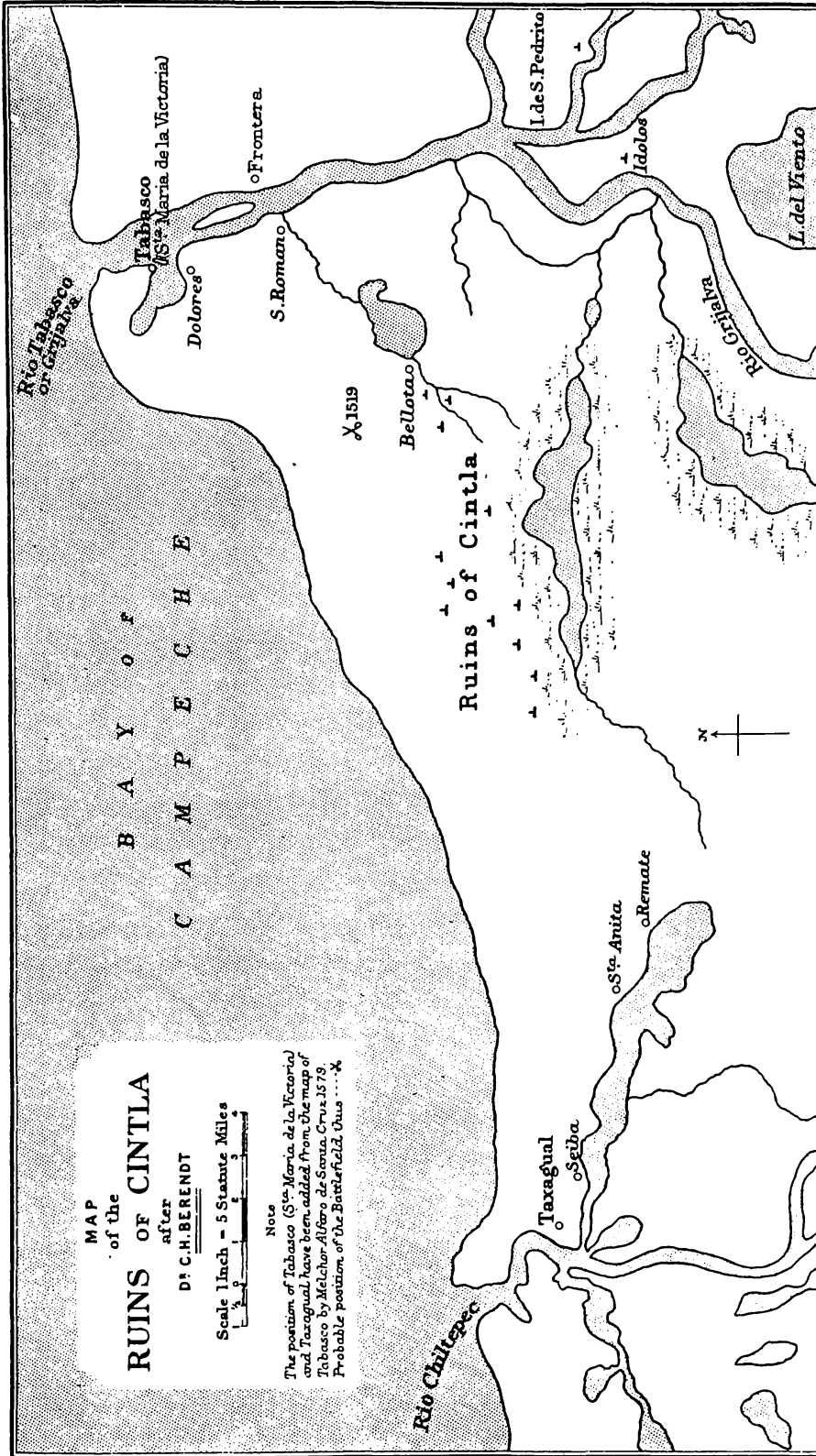
The reason for this was that the people of Potonchan³ and Lázaro and the other towns in that neighbourhood had looked upon the people of Tabasco as cowards, and had told them so to their faces, because they had given

¹ The large town which the author here calls Tabasco appears originally to have been called Potonchan; it was renamed by the Spaniards Santa Maria de la Victoria; it was later on called Tabasco, and it soon fell into ruin and disappeared altogether, its place as a port being taken by Frontera on the other side of the river. In the *Relacion de la Villa de Santa Maria de la Victoria*, 1579 (*Relaciones de Yucatan*, vol. ii, p. 341), we find: "This river and port is at 18° 30' (N. Lat.), where this town was established about a league from the mouth of the river on a *placel** of water which is formed on the north side, and on a branch of the river which leads to a town called Taxagual, of fifteen households (*vecinos*) more or less, which is three leagues from this town and one league away from the river. The land of this town [Santa Maria] is sterile because it is built on sand and swamps. This branch of the river turns to the south-west, and into it enter swamps and lagoons, and it has many deep places (*bajos*). The barques and frigates anchor in this branch of the river when they come to this town to load or unload at the foot of the Cross which is at the end of the street and the mound on which it stands." See also Note to Chapter III. In the *American Antiquarian* for September, 1896, Dr. Daniel Brinton published an article on "The Battle and the Ruins of Cintla," taken principally from notes made by the late Dr. C. H. Berendt, who visited and surveyed the ruins in March and April, 1869.

² Blotted out in the original: "twenty eight thousand."

³ Chanpoton.

* "Sobre un placel de Agua que se hace de la parte del Norte" = on a sandbank which has formed to the north of the water (?).



Published by the Hakluyt Society 1908.

Grijalva the gold jewels which I have spoken about in an earlier chapter, and they said that they were too faint hearted to attack us although they had more towns and more warriors than the people of Potonchan and Lázaro. This they said to annoy them and added that they in their towns had attacked us and killed fifty six of us. So on account of these taunts which had been uttered, the people of Tabasco had determined to take up arms.

When Cortés saw them drawn up ready for war he told Aguilar the interpreter, who spoke the language of Tabasco well,¹ to ask the Indians who passed near us, in a large canoe and who looked like chiefs, what they were so much disturbed about, and to tell them that we had not come to do them any harm, but were willing to give them some of the things we had brought with us and to treat them like brothers, and we prayed them not to begin a war as they would regret it, and much else was said to them about keeping the peace. However, the more Aguilar talked to them the more violent they became, and they said that they would kill us all if we entered their town, and that it was fortified all round with fences and barricades of large trunks of trees.

Aguilar spoke to them again and asked them to keep the peace, and allow us to take water and barter our goods with them for food, and permit us to tell the Calachones² things which would be to their advantage and to the service of God our Lord, but they still persisted in saying that if we advanced beyond the palm trees they would kill us.

When Cortés saw the state of affairs he ordered the

¹ These people were Tzendals, a branch of the Maya stock, and Aguilar, who spoke Maya, could understand and speak to them.

² Calachiones?

boats and small vessels to be got ready and ordered three cannon to be placed in each boat and divided the crossbowmen and musketeers among the boats. We remembered that when we were here with Grijalva we had found a narrow path which ran across some streams from the palm grove to the town, and Cortés ordered three soldiers to find out in the night if that path ran right up to the houses, and not to delay in bringing the news, and these men found out that it did lead there. After making a thorough examination of our surroundings the rest of the day was spent in arranging how and in what order we were to go in the boats.

The next morning we had our arms in readiness and after hearing mass Cortés ordered the Captain Alonzo de Avila and a hundred soldiers among whom were ten crossbowmen, to go by the little path which led to the town, and, as soon as he heard the guns fired, to attack the town on one side while he attacked it on the other. Cortés himself and all the other Captains and soldiers went in the boats and light draft vessels up the river. When the Indian warriors who were on the banks and among the mangroves saw that we were really on the move, they came after us with a great many canoes with intent to prevent our going ashore at the landing place, and the whole river bank appeared to be covered with Indian warriors carrying all the different arms which they use, and blowing trumpets and shells and sounding drums. When Cortés saw how matters stood he ordered us to wait a little and not to fire any shots from guns or crossbows or cannon, for as he wished to be justified in all that he might do he made another appeal to the Indians through the interpreter Aguilar, in the presence of the King's Notary, Diego de Godoy, asking the Indians to allow us to land and take water and speak to them about God and about His Majesty, and adding that should

they make war on us, that if in defending ourselves some should be killed and others hurt, theirs would be the fault and the burden and it would not lie with us, but they went on threatening that if we landed they would kill us.

Then they boldly began to let fly arrows at us, and made signals with their drums, and like valiant men they surrounded us with their canoes, and they all attacked us with such a shower of arrows that they kept us in the water in some parts up to our waists. As there was much mud and swamp at that place we could not easily get clear of it, and so many Indians fell on us, that what with some hurling their lances with all their might and others shooting arrows at us, we could not reach the land as soon as we wished.

While Cortés was fighting he lost a shoe in the mud and could not find it again, and he got on shore with one foot bare. Presently someone picked the shoe out of the mud and he put it on again.

While this was happening to Cortés, all of us Captains as well as soldiers, with the cry of "Santiago," fell upon the Indians and forced them to retreat, but they did not fall back far, as they sheltered themselves behind great barriers and stockades formed of thick logs until we pulled them apart and got to one of the small gateways of the town. There we attacked them again, and we pushed them along through a street to where other defences had been erected, and there they turned on us and met us face to face and fought most valiantly, making the greatest efforts, shouting and whistling and crying out "al calacheoni", "al calacheoni", which in their language meant an order to kill or capture our Captain. While we were thus surrounded by them Alonzo de Ávila and his soldiers came up.

As I have already said they came from the Palm grove by land and could not arrive sooner on account of the swamps and creeks. Their delay was really unavoidable,

just as we also had been delayed over the summons of the Indians to surrender, and in breaking openings in the barricades, so as to enable us to attack them. Now we all joined together to drive the enemy out of their strongholds, and we compelled them to retreat, but like brave warriors they kept on shooting showers of arrows and fire-hardened darts, and never turned their backs on us until [we gained] a great court with chambers and large halls, and three Idol houses, where they had already carried all the goods they possessed. Cortés then ordered us to halt, and not to follow on and overtake the enemy in their flight.

There and then Cortés took possession of that land for His Majesty, performing the act in His Majesty's name. It was done in this way ; he drew his sword and as a sign of possession he made three cuts in a huge tree called a *Ceiba*, which stood in the court of that great square, and cried that if any person should raise objection, that he would defend the right with the sword and shield which he held in his hands.

All of us soldiers who were present when this happened cried out that he did right in taking possession of the land in His Majesty's name, and that we would aid him should any person say otherwise. This act was done in the presence of the Royal Notary. The partizans of Diego Velásquez chose to grumble at this act of taking possession.¹

I call to mind that in that hard fought attack which the Indians made on us, they wounded fourteen soldiers, and

¹ This was the first overt act showing the intention of Cortés to free himself from the control of Velásquez and place himself directly under the protection of his sovereign, a policy which was consummated a few weeks later on the sands at Vera Cruz. Had Cortés intended to continue his subservience to Diego Velásquez, his name would have been used in the formal act of taking possession as it had been used in the proclamations made by Cortés in Cuba.

they gave me an arrow wound in the thigh, but it was only a slight wound ; and we found eighteen Indians dead in the water where we disembarked.

We slept there [in the great square] that night with guards and sentinels on the alert. I will stop here and go on to tell what more happened.

NOTE.—The Carta de Vera Cruz says that the Indians then sent a deputation and a small present to Cortés, but still insisted that the Spaniards should leave the country. Cortés demanded food for his men, and the Indians promised to send it. Cortés then waited for two days, and as no Indians with food made their appearance he sent out the foraging expeditions described in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER XXXII.

How Cortés ordered two of his Captains each with a hundred soldiers to go and examine the country further inland, and what happened to us.

THE next morning Cortés ordered Pedro de Alvarado to set out in command of a hundred soldiers, fifteen of them with guns and crossbows, to examine the country inland for a distance of two leagues, and to take Melchorejo the interpreter from Cape Catoche in his company. When Melchorejo was looked for he could not be found as he had run off with the people of Tabasco, and it appears that the day before he had left the Spanish clothes that had been given to him hung up in the palm grove, and had fled by night in a canoe. Cortés was much annoyed at his flight, fearing that he would tell things to his fellow countrymen to our disadvantage,—well, let him go as a bit of bad luck, and let us get back to our story. Cortés also sent the Captain Francisco de Lugo, in another direction, with a hundred soldiers, twelve of them musketeers and crossbowmen, with instructions not to go beyond two leagues and to return to the camp to sleep.

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