

## CHAPTER XLII.

How we raised Hernando Cortés to the post of Captain General and Chief Justice, until His Majesty's wishes on the matter should be known, and what was done about it.

I HAVE already said that the relations and friends of Diego Velásquez were going about the camp raising objections to our going on any further and insisting that we should return at once from San Juan de Ulúa to the Island of Cuba. It appears that Cortés had already talked the matter over with Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero, and Pedro de Alvarado and his four brothers, Jorge, Gonzalo, Gómez and Juan, and with Cristóbal de Olid, Alonzo de Ávila, Juan de Escalante, Francisco de Lugo, and with me and other gentlemen and captains, and suggested that we should beg of him to be our captain. Francisco de Montejo understood what was going on and was on the watch. One night, after midnight, Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero, Juan de Escalante and Francisco de Lugo, came to my hut. Francisco de Lugo and I came from the same country and were distant kinsmen. They said to me : " Señor Bernal Díaz, come out with your arms and go the rounds ; we will accompany Cortés who is just now going the rounds." When I was a little distance from the hut they said to me : " Look to it, sir, that you keep secret for a time what we wish to tell you, for it is a matter of importance, and see that your companions in your hut know nothing about it, for they are of the party of Diego Velásquez." What they said to me was : " Sir, does it seem to you to be right that Hernando Cortés should have deceived us all in bringing us here, he having proclaimed in Cuba that he was coming to settle, and now we find out that he has no power to do so, but only to trade, and they want us to return to Santiago de Cuba with all the gold

that has been collected, and we shall lose our all, for will not Diego Velásquez take all the gold as he did before? Look, sir, counting this present expedition, you have already come to this country three times, spending your own property and contracting debts and risking your life many times with the wounds you have received. Many of us gentlemen who know that we are your honour's friends wish you to understand that this must not go on; that this land must be settled in the name of His Majesty, and by Hernando Cortés in His Majesty's name, while we await the opportunity to make it known to our lord the King in Spain. Be sure, sir, to cast your vote so that all of us unanimously and willingly choose him captain, for it will be a service to God and our lord the King." I replied that it was not a wise decision to return to Cuba and that it would be a good thing for the country to be settled and that we should choose Cortés as General and Chief Justice until his Majesty should order otherwise. This agreement passed from soldier to soldier and the friends and relations of Diego Velásquez, who were more numerous than we were, got to know of it, and with overbold words asked Cortés why he was craftily arranging to remain in this country instead of returning to render an account of his doings to the man who had sent him as captain, and they told him that Diego Velásquez would not approve of it, and that the sooner we embarked the better; that there was no use in his subterfuges and secret meetings with the soldiers, for we had neither supplies nor men, nor any possibility of founding a settlement. Cortés answered without a sign of anger, and said that he agreed with them; that he would not go against the instructions and notes which he had received from Diego Velásquez, and he issued an order for us all to embark on the following day, each one in the ship in which he had come. We who had made the agreement answered that it was

not fair to deceive us so, that in Cuba he had proclaimed that he was coming to make a settlement, whereas he had only come to trade; and we demanded on behalf of our Lord God and of His Majesty that he should at once form a settlement and give up any other plan, because that would be of the greatest benefit and service to God and the King; and they placed many other well-reasoned arguments before him saying that the natives would never let us land again as they had done this time, and that as soon as a settlement was made in the country soldiers would gather in from all the islands to give us help and that Velásquez had ruined us all by stating publicly that he had received a decree from His Majesty to form a settlement, the contrary being the case; that we wished to form a settlement, and to let those depart who desired to return to Cuba. So Cortés agreed to it, although he pretended to need much begging, as the saying goes: "You are very pressing, and I want to do it,"<sup>1</sup>—and he stipulated that we should make him Chief Justice and Captain General, and the worst of all that we conceded was that we should give him a fifth of all the gold which should be obtained, after the royal fifth had been deducted, and then we gave him the very fullest powers in the presence of the King's Notary, Diego de Godoy, embracing all that I have here stated. We at once set to work to found and settle a town, which was called the "Villa rica de la Vera Cruz" because we arrived on Thursday of the (last) supper and landed on "Holy Friday of the Cross" and "rich" because of what that gentleman said, as I have related in a former chapter (XXVI) who approached Cortés and said to him: "Behold rich lands! May you know how to govern them well!" and what he wanted to say was—"May you

---

<sup>1</sup> "Tu me lo ruegas y yo me lo quiero."

remain as their Captain General." That gentleman was Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero.

To go back to my story : as soon as the town was founded we appointed *alcaldes* and *regidores* ; the former were Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero and Francisco Montejo. In the case of Montejo, it was because he was not on very good terms with Cortés that Cortés ordered him to be named as *Alcalde*, so as to place him in the highest position. I need not give the names of the *Regidores*, for it is no use naming only a few of them ; but I must mention the fact that a pillory was placed in the Plaza and a gallows set up outside the town. We chose Pedro de Alvarado as captain of expeditions and Cristóbal de Olid as *Maestro de Campo*.<sup>1</sup> Juan de Escalante was chosen chief *Alguacil* ;<sup>2</sup> Gonzalo Mejia, treasurer, and Alonzo de Ávila accountant. A certain Corral was named as *Ensign*, because Villaróel who had been *Ensign* was dismissed from the post on account of some offence (I do not exactly know what) he had given Cortés about an Indian woman from Cuba. Ochoa, a Biscayan, and Alonzo Romero were appointed *Alguaciles* of the Camp.<sup>3</sup>

It will be said that I have made no mention of the Captain Gonzalo de Sandoval, he of whom our lord the Emperor has heard such reports, who was such a renowned captain that he ranked next to Cortés<sup>4</sup> in our estimation. I say this was because at that time he was a youth, and we did not take such count of him and of other valiant captains until we saw him grow in worth in such a way that Cortés and all the soldiers held him in the same esteem as Cortés himself, as I shall tell later on.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Maestro de Campo* = Quartermaster.

<sup>2</sup> *Alguacil Mayor* = High Constable.

<sup>3</sup> *Alguacil del Real* = Constables and storekeepers.

<sup>4</sup> Blotted out in the original : "y Pedro de Alvarado."—G. G.

I must leave my story here and say that the historian, Gomara, states that he was told all that which he has written down. But I assert that these things happened as I have related them. Gomara is wrong in other things that he wrote because his informants did not give him a true account. However good the style may be in which he tells the story, so that all may appear to be true, I assert that all he says about this matter is wrong.

I will drop the subject now and go on to tell how the party of Diego Velásquez tried to stop the election of Cortés as captain, and to insist on our returning to the Island of Cuba.

---

### CHAPTER XLIII.

How the party of Diego Velásquez tried to upset the powers we had given to Cortés, and what was done about it.

**WHEN** the partisans of Diego Velásquez realized the fact that we had chosen Cortés for our Captain and Chief Justice, and had founded a town and chosen the Alcaldes and Regidores, and appointed Pedro de Alvarado as captain [of expeditions] and named the Alguacil Mayor and Maestro de Campo and had done all that I have narrated, they were angry and furious and they began to excite factions and meetings and to use abusive language about Cortés and those of us who had elected him, saying that it was not right to do these things unless all the captains and soldiers who had come on the expedition had been parties to it; that Diego Velásquez had given Cortés no such powers, only authority to trade, and that we partisans of Cortés should take care that our insolence did not so increase as to bring us to blows. Then Cortés secretly told Juan de Escalante that we should make him produce the instructions given him by Diego Velásquez.