

## CHAPTER XLVII.

How Cortés ordered the five tax gatherers of Montezuma to be taken prisoners and gave out that from that time forward neither obedience nor tribute should be rendered to the Mexicans, and how the rebellion against Montezuma was started.

AS soon as Cortés understood what the chiefs were telling him, he said that he had already explained to them that our lord the King had sent him to chastise evil doers and that he would not permit either sacrifice or robbery, and that as these tax gatherers had made this demand, he ordered them to make prisoners of them at once and to hold them in custody until their lord Montezuma should be told the reason, namely, how they had come to rob them and carry off their wives and children as slaves and commit other violence. When the Caciques heard this they were thunderstruck at such daring. What!—to order the messengers of the great Montezuma to be maltreated? They said that they were too much afraid, and did not dare to do it. But Cortés went on impressing on them that the messengers should be thrown into prison at once, and so it was done, and in such a way that with some long poles and collars (such as are in use among them) they secured them so that they could not escape, and they flogged one of them who would not allow himself to be bound. Then Cortés ordered all the Caciques to pay no more tribute or obedience to Montezuma, and to make proclamation to that effect in all their friendly and allied towns, and if any tax gatherers came to their other towns, to inform him of it, and he would send for them. So the news was known throughout that province, for the fat Cacique promptly sent messengers to spread the tidings, and the chiefs who had come in company with the tax gatherers, as soon as they had seen them taken prisoners,

noised it abroad, for each one returned to his own town to deliver the order and relate what had happened.

When they witnessed deeds so marvellous and of such importance to themselves they said that no human beings would dare to do such things, and that it was the work of Teules, for so they call the idols which they worship, and for this reason from that time forth, they called us Teules, which, as I have already explained, is as much as to say that we were either gods or demons. When in the course of my story I may use the word *Teule* in matters connected with our persons, let it be understood that we (Spaniards) are meant.

I must go back to tell about the prisoners. It was the advice of all the Caciques that they should be sacrificed so that none of them could return to Mexico to tell the story; but when Cortés heard this he said that they should not be killed, and that he would take charge of them, and he set some of our soldiers to guard them. At midnight, Cortés sent for these soldiers who were in charge and said to them: "See to it that two of the prisoners are loosened [the two] that appear to you the most intelligent, in such a way that the Indians of this town shall know nothing about it." And he told them to bring the prisoners to his lodging. When the prisoners came before him, he asked them through our interpreters why they were prisoners and what country they came from, as though he knew nothing about them. They replied that the Caciques of Cempoala and of this town, with the aid of their followers and ours, had imprisoned them, and Cortés answered that he knew nothing about it, and was sorry for it, and he ordered food to be brought them and talked in a very friendly manner to them, and told them to return at once to their lord Montezuma and tell him that we were all his good friends and entirely at his service, and that lest any harm should happen to them he had taken them from their prison, and

had quarrelled with the Caciques who had seized them and that anything he could do to serve them he would do with the greatest good will, and that he would order the three Indians their companions who were still held prisoners to be freed and protected. That they two should go away at once and not turn back to be captured and killed.

The two prisoners replied that they valued his mercy and said they still had fear of falling into the hands of their enemies, as they were obliged to pass through their territory. So Cortés ordered six sailors to take them in a boat during the night a distance of four leagues and set them on friendly ground beyond the frontier of Cempoala. When the morning came and the Caciques of the town and the fat Cacique found that the two prisoners were missing they were all the more intent on sacrificing those that remained, if Cortés had not put it out of their power and pretended to be enraged at the loss of the two who had escaped. He ordered a chain to be brought from the ships and bound the prisoners to it, and then ordered them to be taken on board ship, saying that he himself would guard them, as such bad watch had been kept over the others. When they were once on board he ordered them to be freed from their chains and with friendly words he told them that he would soon send them back to Mexico.

I must leave this subject and say that when this was done, all the Caciques of this town and of Cempoala, and all the other Totonac chiefs who had assembled, asked Cortés what was to be done, and that all the force of the great Montezuma and of Mexico would descend upon them and they could not escape death and destruction.

Cortés replied with the most cheerful countenance that he and his brothers who were here with him would defend them and would kill anyone who wished to molest them. Then the Caciques and other townsmen vowed one and all

that they would stand by us in everything we ordered them to do and would join their forces [with ours] against Montezuma and all his allies. Then, in the presence of Diego de Godoy, the scribe, they pledged obedience to his Majesty and messengers were sent to relate all that had happened to the other towns in that province. And as they no longer paid any tribute and no more tax gatherers appeared there was no end to the rejoicing at being rid of that tyranny.

Now, I will leave this incident and tell how we agreed to descend to the plain to some fields where we began to build a fort. This is what really took place and not the story that was told to the historian Gomara.<sup>1</sup>

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#### CHAPTER XLVIII.

How we determined to found "La Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz" and to build a fort in some meadows near the salt marshes, and close to the harbour with the ugly name [Bernal] where our ships were at anchor, and what we did there.

As soon as we had made this federation and friendship with more than twenty of the hill towns, known as [the towns of] the Totonacs, which at this time rebelled against the great Montezuma, and gave their allegiance to His Majesty, and offered to serve us—we determined with their ready help at once to found the Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz on a plain half a league from this fortress-like town, called Quiahuitzlan, and we laid out plans of a church, market-place and arsenals, and all those things that are needed for a town, and we built a fort, and from the laying of the foundations until the walls were high enough to receive

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<sup>1</sup> Blotted out in the original MS. "No matter how eloquently he may relate it."—G. G.