

CHAPTER LII.

How Cortés had an altar made and set up an image of Our Lady and a Cross, and how mass was said and the eight Indian damsels were baptized.

WHEN the Caciques, priests and chieftains were silenced, Cortés ordered all the idols which we had overthrown and broken to pieces to be taken out of sight and burned. Then eight priests who had charge of the idols came out of a chamber and carried them back to the house whence they had come, and burned them. These priests wore black cloaks like cassocks and long gowns reaching to their feet, and some had hoods like those worn by canons, and others had smaller hoods like those worn by Dominicans, and they wore their hair very long, down to the waist, with some even reaching down to the feet, covered with blood and so matted together that it could not be separated, and their ears were cut to pieces by way of sacrifice, and they stank like sulphur, and they had another bad smell like carrion, and as they said, and we learnt that it was true, these priests were the sons of chiefs and they abstained from women, but they indulged in the cursed practice of sodomy, and they fasted on certain days, and what I saw them eat was the pith or seeds of cotton when the cotton was being cleaned, but they may have eaten other things which I did not see.

Let us leave the priests and go back to Cortés who made them a good speech through our interpreters, Doña Marina and Jerónimo de Aguilar, and told them that now we would treat them as brothers and would help them all we could against Montezuma and his Mexicans, and we had already sent to tell him not to make war on them or levy tribute, and that as now they were not to have any more idols in their lofty temples he wished to leave with them

a great lady who was the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we believe in and worship, and that they too should hold her for Lady and intercessor, and about this matter and others which were mentioned he made them an excellent discourse, so concisely reasoned, considering the time at his disposal, that there was nothing left to be said. He told them many things about our holy religion as well stated as only a priest could do it nowadays, so that it was listened to with good will. Then he ordered all the Indian masons in the town to bring plenty of lime so as to clean the place and he told them to clear away the blood which encrusted the cues and to clean them thoroughly. The next day when they were whitewashed, an altar was set up with very good altar cloths and he told the Indians to bring many of the roses which grew in the country and are very sweet-scented, and branches of flowers, and told the people to adorn the altar with garlands and always keep the place swept and clean. He then ordered four of the priests to have their hair shorn, for, as I have already said, they wore it long, and to change their garments and clothe themselves in white, and always keep themselves clean, and he placed them in charge of the altar and of that sacred image of our Lady, with orders to keep the place swept clean and decked with flowers. So that it should be well looked after, he left there as hermit one of our soldiers named Juan de Torres de Córdoba, who was old and lame. He ordered our carpenters, whose names I have already given, to make a cross and place it on a stone support which we had already built and plastered over.

The next morning, mass was celebrated at the altar by Padre Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo, and then an order was given to fumigate the holy image of Our Lady and the sacred cross with the incense of the country, and we showed them how to make candles of the native wax and ordered these candles always to be kept burning on the altar, for

up to that time they did not know how to use the wax. The most important chieftains of that town and of others who had come together, were present at the Mass.

At the same time the eight Indian damsels were brought to be made Christians, for they were still in the charge of their parents and uncles and they were given to understand that they must not offer more sacrifices, nor worship idols, but believe in our Lord God. And they were admonished about many things touching our holy religion and were then baptized. The niece of the fat Cacique was named Doña Catalina, and she was very ugly; she was led by the hand and given to Cortés who received her and tried to look pleased. The daughter of the great Cacique, Cuesco, was named Doña Francisca, she was very beautiful for an Indian, and Cortés gave her to Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero. I cannot now recall to mind the names of the other six, but I know that Cortés gave them to different soldiers. When this had been done, we took leave of all the Caciques and chieftains who from that time forward always showed us good will, especially when they saw that Cortés received their daughters and that we took them away with us, and after Cortés had repeated his promises of assistance [against their enemies] we set out for our town of Villa Rica.

What happened there I will speak of later on. This, however, is the true account of what took place in the town of Cempoala, and differs from the stories told by Gómara and the other historians which are all stuff and nonsense.

CHAPTER LIII.

How we returned to Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz and what happened there.

AFTER we had finished our expedition and the people of Cempoala and Cingapacinga had been reconciled to one another, and the other neighbouring towns had given their fealty to His Majesty, and the idols had been overturned and the image of Our Lady and the Holy Cross set up in their place, and the old soldier placed in charge as hermit, and all the other things that I have told about had happened, we returned to our settlement and took with us certain chieftains from Cempoala. On the day of our arrival there came into port a ship from the Island of Cuba, under the command of Francisco de Saucedo, whom we called *El Pulido*.¹ We called him this from his excessive pride in his good looks and elegance. They say that he was a native of Medina Rio Seco, and had been *Maestresala*² to the Admiral of Castille.

At the same time there arrived Luis Marin (a man of great merit who was afterwards a captain in the expedition against Mexico) and ten soldiers. Saucedo brought a horse, and Luis Marin a mare; and they brought from Cuba the news that the decree had reached Diego Velásquez from Spain giving him authority to trade and found settlements, at which his friends were greatly rejoiced, all the more when they learned that he had received his commission appointing him Adelantado of Cuba.

Being in that town without any plans beyond finishing the fort, for we were still at work on it, most of us soldiers suggested to Cortés to let the fort stand as it was, for a

¹ The elegant.

² *Maestresala*, the chief waiter at a nobleman's table.