

CHAPTER LVI.

How our Proctors passed through the Bahama Channel in good weather and in a short time arrived in Castille, and what happened to them at Court.

I HAVE already said that our Proctors left the port of San Juan de Ulúa on the 6th July, 1519, and after a good passage they arrived at Havana and they soon passed through the Bahama Channel, and it is said that this was the first time that it was navigated, and in a short time they reach the Islands of Tercera¹ and thence went to Seville. They journeyed post haste to the court which was at Valladolid and to the President of the Royal Council of the Indies, Don Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, Bishop of Burgos (who styled himself Archbishop of Rosano), and ruled all the Court because our Lord the Emperor was absent in Flanders.² When our proctors quite cheerfully, expecting that he would show them favour, went to kiss the hands of the President, and to give him our letters and narrative and deliver all the gold and jewels, and begged him to send a messenger at once to His Majesty to hand over to him the present and letters, with whom they themselves would go to kiss the Royal feet, he received them with such an evil frown and such ill will, and even spoke to them contemptuously because they had thus addressed him, that our ambassadors were about to retort. However, they restrained themselves and replied that his Lordship should consider the great services that Cortés and his companions were rendering to His Majesty and they again begged him at once to send all those golden jewels and the letters and narratives to His Majesty that he might know what had happened, and that they

¹ Terceira in the Azores.

² This is an error ; Charles V was in Catalonia.

would go to him. He retorted very haughtily and even ordered that they should not have charge of it [the letters and jewels]; that he himself would write to say what was really happening, and not what they reported, for they had risen in rebellion against Diego Velásquez; and many other bitter words passed between them.

At this time Benito Martin, Chaplain to Diego Velásquez, who has been already mentioned by me, arrived at Court, and made many complaints against Cortés and all of us, which still more incensed the Bishop against us. As Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero was a gentleman and cousin of the Count de Medellin (for Montejo held back and did not dare to displease the President), he said to the Bishop that he appealed to him most earnestly to listen to them without passion, and not to utter such words as he had spoken, and at once to despatch those presents as they were brought for His Majesty; that we were most faithful servants of the Royal Crown, and worthy of favours and not of insults and rude words. When the Bishop heard that, he ordered him to be arrested, for he was told that three years before, he [Alonzo Puertocarrero] had seized a woman of Medellin and carried her off to the Indies. So all our merits and presents of gold were in the position that I have here related, and our Ambassadors decided to hold their tongues until the right time and place should occur.

The Bishop wrote to Flanders to his Majesty in favour of his favourite and friend Diego Velásquez and very evil words against Cortés and against all of us, and he made no report of the letters that we were bringing him, but merely said that Hernando Cortés had risen in rebellion against Diego Velásquez, and such-like things.

Let me go back to say that Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero and Francisco de Montejo and even Martin Cortés the father of Cortés and a certain Nuñez, a licentiate and a

Reporter of His Majesty's Royal Council and a near relation of Cortés, who worked on his behalf, decided to send a messenger to Flanders with other letters, the same as those they had given to the Bishop, for duplicates had been sent by our Proctors, and they wrote to His Majesty an account of all that was happening, and a memorandum of the golden jewels of the present, and made complaint of the Bishop and disclosed his business connection with Diego Velásquez. There were even other gentlemen who favoured them, those who did not stand well with Don Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, for it was rumoured that he was generally disliked on account of the great injustice and arrogance he displayed in the high offices that he held. As our great services were for God our Lord and for His Majesty, and we always put our full strength into them, it pleased God that His Majesty arrived at a clear knowledge of the affair and when he saw and understood it he and the Duke, Marquises, Counts and other gentlemen who were at his royal Court, showed such great satisfaction that they talked of nothing else but of Cortés and all of us who were helping him in the conquests for several days, and of the riches we were sending him from these lands. As for the letters of comment which the Bishop of Burgos had written to him about the matter, when His Majesty saw that it was all contrary to the truth, from then onwards he took a particular dislike to the Bishop, especially because he had not sent all the articles of gold but had kept back a great number of them. The Bishop got to know all this when it was written to him from Flanders, and he was very angry about it, and if the Bishop had spoken much that was evil of Cortés and all of us before our letters had come before His Majesty, from that time forward he openly called us traitors, but it pleased God that he lost his fury and vigour, and within two years he was defied and even shamed and dishonoured and we were reputed as very

loyal subjects, as I shall relate further on when occasion arises. His Majesty wrote to say that he was soon coming to Castille and would take notice of the matters concerning us, and would grant us favours. As I shall later on narrate more fully, how and in what manner this happened, I will leave the matter here, with our Proctors awaiting the arrival of His Majesty.

Before I go on any further I wish to speak with regard to what certain gentlemen who are curious in the matter have asked me, and they have a right to know about it, how it is that I am able to write down in this narrative things that I did not see, as at the time when our Proctors delivered the letters, messages, and presents of gold which they were carrying for His Majesty and had these disputes with the Bishop of Burgos, I was engaged in the conquest of New Spain. I say this, that our Proctors wrote to us the true *conquistadores*, word for word in Chapters, all that was happening, both about the Bishop of Burgos, as well as what His Majesty was pleased to promise in our favour, and how it all happened ; and Cortés sent us to the towns where we were living at the time, other letters that he had received from our Proctors that we might see how well they negotiated with His Majesty and how hostile the Bishop was to us. This I give as an answer to what I have been asked. Let us leave this subject and tell in another chapter what happened in our camp.

CHAPTER LVII.

What was done in camp and the judgment which Cortés delivered after our ambassadors had departed to go to His Majesty with all the gold and letters and narratives.

WITHIN four days of the departure of our proctors to present themselves before our Lord the Emperor, as I have already narrated, (as it seems that men's hearts are of many kinds and are swayed by different thoughts,) some of the friends and dependents of Diego Velásquez, named Pedro Escudero, Juan Cermeño, and Gonzalo de Umbria a pilot, and Bernaldino de Coria, who was afterwards a settler in Chiapas, the father of a certain Centeno and a priest named Juan Diaz, and certain sailors who called themselves Peñates¹, natives of Gibraltar², who bore Cortés ill will, some of them because he had not given them leave to return to Cuba when he had promised to do so, others because they had not received their shares of the gold which had been sent to Spain, and the Peñates on account of the flogging they had received in Cozumel for stealing salt pork from a soldier named Barrio, as I have already related. These men determined to seize a small ship and sail in her to Cuba to give notice to Diego Velásquez and advise him how at Havana he might be able to seize our proctors on the estate of Francisco de Montejo, with all the gold and the messages, for it appears that they [the conspirators] had been advised by other persons in our camp that they [the proctors] would go to that estate and they [the other persons] had even written to Diego Velásquez that he would have an opportunity of capturing them. Thus, these men, whom I have named, had already got their stores in the ship, such as cassava bread, oil, fish, water, and made other preparations, and the time being past midnight, were ready to embark, when

¹ Peñates = rockmen.

² Gibraleon in the text.