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Bernal Diaz del Castillo

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BOOK XIV.

THE EXPEDITION TO HONDURAS.

CHAPTER CLXXIV

How Hernando Cortés set out from Mexico on the road to Las Higueras in search of Cristóbal de Olid and Francisco de Las Casas and the other Captains, soldiers, and gentlemen whom he had sent there; and what Captains he took from Mexico to accompany him, and about the material and retinue he took with him as far as the town of Coatzacoalcos, and other things that happened.



WHEN some months had passed since Captain Hernando Cortés sent Francisco de Las Casas against Cristóbal de Olid, as stated in the last chapter, it seemed to him that perchance the armada he had dispatched had not been successful. Moreover he had been told that the land was rich in gold mines and for that reason he was as covetous about the mines as he was anxious about the contentions which might have arisen in the armada, taking into consideration the mischances that ill luck is wont to occasion on such journeys. As he was naturally of high courage he had repented

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LIEUTENANT GOVERNORS APPOINTED.

having sent Francisco de Las Casas instead of going himself. However, he had no doubt that the man he had sent was strong enough to repel any offence.

Being of this way of thinking, he decided to set out himself, and he left behind in Mexico a good supply of artillery in the fortress as well as in the dockyards, and the Treasurer Alonzo de Estrada, and the Accountant Albornoz, as lieutenant governors in his place; and had he known about the letters which Albornoz had written, speaking evil of him to His Majesty in Castile, he would not have left him such authority and I do not yet understand how he happened to do so. He left as his principal Alcalde the Licentiate Zuazo, already mentioned by me, and, as lieutenant to the principal Alguacil and as Mayor-domo of all his estate, his kinsman one Rodrigo de Paz. He left as large a garrison as he was able to do in Mexico.

He charged all these officers of the King's Treasury, on whom he left the burden of Government, to devote great care to the conversion of the natives, and he also impressed it on Fray Toribio Motolinia of the order of Señor San Francisco and other good ecclesiastics. With a view to preventing Mexico and the other provinces from revolting, and in order that they should remain peaceful and not be influenced by the more important Caciques, he carried with him the great Lord of Mexico named Guatemoc, often mentioned by me before, the same who made war on us when we captured Mexico, also the Lord of Tacuba and one Juan Velásquez, a Captain of the same Guatemoc, and many other chieftains—among them one Tapiezuelo, a chieftain of great importance; and he even brought other Caciques from Michuacan, and [he took with him] Doña Marina, the interpreter, for Gerónimo de Aguilar was already dead. He took in his company many gentlemen and Captains

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THE STAFF OF THE EXPEDITION.

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who were settlers in Mexico, namely Gonzalo de Sandoval, who was chief Alguacil, and Luis Marin and Francisco Marmolejo, Gonzalo Rios de Ocampo and Pedro de Írcio, Avalos and Sayavedra who were brothers, and one Palacios Rubios and Pedro de Sauzedo the flat-nosed, Gerónimo Ruiz de la Mota, Alonzo de Grado, Santa Cruz Burgalés,¹ Pedro Solis Casquete, Juan Jaramillo, Alonzo Valiente, and one Navarrete, and one Serna, and Diego de Mazariegos, a cousin of the Treasurer, Gil Gonzáles de Benavides and Hernan López de Ávila and Gaspar de Garnica, and many others whose names I do not remember. He also took with him a priest and two Franciscan Friars, Flemings and great theologians, who preached during the journey. As Mayordomo he took one Carranza, and as Maestresala Juan de Xaso and one Rodrigo Mañuelo, and as Butler one Zervan Vejarano and as Chamberlain Fulano² de San Miguel, who was living in Oaxaca, and for Steward one Guinea, who was also a settler in Oaxaca. He took great services of gold and silver plate, and he who had charge of it was Tello de Medina. The chamberlain was a certain Salazar, a native of Madrid, and the doctor a Licentiate Pedro López, who was a settler in Mexico, and the Master Surgeon Diego de Pedraza, and many others as pages, one of them being Don Francisco de Montejo, who was in after time Captain in Yucatan (I am not speaking of the Adelantado his father); besides two lance pages, one of them named Puebla, and eight grooms and two falconers named Perales and Garci Caro and Alvaro Montañez. He also brought five players on the oboe, sackbut and dulcimer,

¹ Of Burgos?

² It has been thought best to retain the term "Fulano," as it is not easily translated. The term is Arabic in origin, and means "such a one," "so and so," and is used when the first name is not known, or not worth mentioning.

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4 A PETITION FROM THE CONQUISTADORES.

and an acrobat and another who did sleight of hand tricks and worked puppets, and as equerry Gonzalo Rodríguez de Ocampo; also some mules with three Spanish Muleteers, and a great herd of swine, which fed along the roadside. The Caciques whom I have named were accompanied by over three thousand armed Mexican Indians, and many others who were the servants of those Caciques.

When [the expedition] was on the point of setting out, the Factor Salazar and the Vedor Chirinos, who were to remain in Mexico, seeing that Cortés had assigned no office to them, nor treated them with as much consideration as they expected, decided to become very friendly with the Licentiate Zuazo and Rodrigo de Paz and all the old conquistadores who were friends of Cortés and remained behind in Mexico. All of them together made a petition to Cortés that he should not leave Mexico, but stay and govern the country, and they pointed out to him that the whole of New Spain might revolt, and over this arose long discussions and replies between Cortés and those who made the petition, and when they could not convince him that he should remain, the Factor and Vedor said that they wished to serve him and accompany him as far as Coatzacoalcos as his road passed through that town.

Having set out from Mexico in the way I have related, I wish to record that the great reception and fiestas which they gave Cortés in all the towns he passed through were wonderful, and moreover there joined him on the road fifty more soldiers and other stray persons newly arrived from Castile.

Cortés ordered the expedition to proceed by two separate roads as far as Coatzacoalcos, for had all gone together there would not have been enough food.

As they went their way, the Factor Gonzalo de Salazar

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MARRIAGE OF DOÑA MARINA.

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and the Veedor performed a thousand services for Cortés, especially the Factor, who, when Cortés spoke to him, doffed his cap to the ground, with many deep bows and suave speeches, evincing great friendship, and with lofty eloquence continually advised him to return to Mexico and not to engage in such a long and laborious journey, placing before him the many obstacles [in the way] and even sometimes so as to humour him, he sang as he went along the road, saying in his songs :

Ay tio volvamosnos	Let us go back Uncle
Ay tio volvamosnos	Let us go back Uncle
Questa mañana he visto	This morning I have seen
Una señal muy mala	A very bad omen
Ay tio volvamosnos	Let us go back Uncle.

and Cortés answered in song :

Adelante mi sobrino	Forward my nephew
Adelante mi sobrino	Forward my nephew
Y no creays en agueros	And do not believe in auguries
Que sea lo que Dios quisiere	It will be as God wills
Adelante mi sobrino	Forward my nephew.

Let us cease talking about the Factor and his courteous and suave speeches, and I will relate how, on the journey, at the pueblo of one Ojeda the squint-eyed, near another pueblo named Orizaba, Juan Jaramillo was married in presence of all to Doña Marina the interpreter. Let us go on and I will relate how they continued their march towards Coatzacoalcos and arrived at a large pueblo called Guaspaltepec in the encomienda of Sandoval. When we knew in Coatzacoalcos that Cortés was coming with so many gentlemen, we went out with the Chief Alcalde, the Captains, and all the municipality, a distance of thirty-three leagues to receive Cortés and give him welcome, as though we were about to receive favours from him. This I state here, so that interested

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readers and others may see that Cortés was so greatly esteemed as well as feared, that now nothing was done except what he wished, were it good or bad.

From Guaspaltepec he marched to our town, and at a great river that he passed on the way he began to meet with misfortune, for in crossing it two canoes were overturned and he lost some plate and clothes, and Juan Jaramillo lost the half of his baggage, and nothing could be recovered because the river was full of great alligators. From there we went to a pueblo named Uluta, and we accompanied him thence to Coatzacoalcos through inhabited country all the way.

I wish to mention the large collection of canoes which we had ordered to be in readiness, tied together two and two, at the great river near to the town, for they numbered over three hundred; and the grand reception that we gave him, with triumphal arches and dances of Christians and Moors and other great rejoicings and cunning diversions, and we lodged him as well as we were able—both Cortés and all those he brought in his company—and he stayed there for six days.

All this time the Factor kept on saying to him that he ought to turn back from his journey, that he ought to bear in mind to whom it was that he had delegated his authority, that he [the Factor] held the Accountant to be very rebellious and double dealing and a friend of innovations, and that the Treasurer boasted that he was a son of the Catholic King and that he [the Factor] did not think well of certain doings and conversations, and had noticed that they were conversing in secret after Cortés had placed them in power and even before. In addition to this Cortés had already received, while on the journey, letters from Mexico speaking evil of the Government of those he had left in authority, and the friends of the Factor had informed him of this, and

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POWERS GIVEN TO THE FACTOR AND VEEDOR. 7

speaking on this subject the Factor said to Cortés that he and the Veedor, who was there present, would know how to govern as well as those he (Cortés) had left behind in Mexico; they professed themselves his most obedient servants and they spoke such honied words, with such affectionate expression, that they induced him to confer on [them], the Factor and the Veedor Chirinos, power to act as Governors, under condition that, should they see that Estrada and Albornoz were not doing what they ought to do for the service of our Lord and His Majesty, they were to be the sole governors. These powers were the cause of many troubles and revolts which took place in Mexico, as I will relate further on after I have finished the next four chapters, and our very laborious journey. Until that journey is ended and we are stationed at a town called Trujillo I will not relate in my story anything that happened in Mexico.

I wish to mention that for this reason Gonzalo de Ocampo said in his defamatory libels: "Oh fat brother Salazar maker of quarrels, you deceived the Prior with your false show of reverence. A Friar of holy life told me to beware of a man who spoke such polished rhetoric."

Let us cease speaking about libels and I will state that when the Factor and Veedor took leave of Cortés on returning to Mexico, it was with many compliments and embraces, and the Factor had a way of sobbing which made it appear as though he must weep at saying good-bye; but he carried his commission in his breast in such a manner as to draw attention to it, and the Secretary named Alonzo Valiente, who was his friend, had drawn it up in the way that he wished it to be worded.

They returned to Mexico, and with them returned Hernan López de Ávila, who was ill with pain and crippled with boils.

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8 SETTLERS AT COATZACOALCOS IMPRESSED.

Let them go on their journey, for I will not touch in this present story on the great tumults and discords which arose in Mexico, until their proper time and place. From the time when all these gentlemen I have mentioned, and many others, had joined Cortés and we set out from Coatzacoalcos, until we accomplished this laborious journey, we [continually] risked losing our lives as I will relate further on; but as two sets of events happened at the same time and I do not wish to break the thread of one in order to speak of the other I have decided to go on with our most laborious journey.

CHAPTER CLXXV.

What Cortés arranged after the Factor and Veedor returned to Mexico, and about the hardships we endured on our long journey, and about the great bridges we made and the hunger we suffered during the two years and three months that we spent on the journey.¹

AFTER despatching the Factor and Veedor to Mexico, the first thing Cortés decided was to write to Villa Rica, to his Mayordomo named Simon de Cuenca, to lade two vessels of small burden with maize biscuits (for at that time Mexico did not produce wheat) and six pipes of wine, oil and vinegar, and bacon, and horse shoes and other kinds of supplies, and ordered them to go coasting along towards the North, saying that he would write to him and inform him where to make port, and that Simon de Cuenca himself should go as Captain. Then he ordered all of us settlers of Coatzacoalcos to accompany himself and only the infirm to remain behind. I have already stated that this town was settled by the Conquistadores who had been longest in Mexico, and by all the best born among those who had taken part in

¹ For the route traversed see Appendix A.

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DÍAZ ORDERED TO CIMATAN.

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the late victories in Mexico, and at the time when we should have been resting from our great labours, and endeavouring to acquire some wealth and estates, he ordered us to go a journey of more than five hundred leagues, with all the country through which we passed up in arms [against us], while all we possessed was given up as lost, and we were on that march more than two years and three months.

To go back to my story, we were all of us ready with our arms and horses, for we did not dare to say no (and when anyone did say so, he made him go by force,) and we numbered in all, those from Coatzacoalcos as well as those from Mexico, over two hundred and fifty soldiers—one hundred and thirty horsemen and the others musketeers and crossbowmen—without counting many other soldiers newly arrived from Castile.

He promptly ordered me to go as Captain of thirty Spaniards and three thousand Mexican Indians to some pueblos which were at war with us, named Cimatan,¹ and quartered the three thousand Mexican Indians on them; but, should the natives of that province be peaceable or come to render service to His Majesty, I was to do them no harm and put no pressure on them, beyond ordering them to feed these people. But if they did not wish to come [to peace], that I should summon them three times to make peace in a way they should fully understand, and in presence of a notary who accompanied me and witnesses. That if they would not then come in, I was to make war on them, and for this he gave me authority and instructions which I still possess to-day, signed with his name and that of his Secretary Alonzo Valiente.

¹ According to Melchior Alfaro Sta. Cruz, the Cimatanes were a Mexican people settled there by Montezuma, who held Cimatan and Xicalango as outposts of his empire (cf. *Relaciones de Yucatan*, vol. i, p. 352).

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So I made that journey as he had ordered it, the pueblos keeping the peace, but a few months later, when they saw how few Spaniards remained in Coatzacoalcos and that we Conquistadores had gone with Cortés, they again rose in revolt.

I promptly set out with my Spanish soldiers and Mexican Indians for the pueblo whither Cortés had ordered me to go, which was named Iquinuapa.

Let us now return to Cortés and his journey. He set out from Coatzacoalcos and went to Tonalá, a distance of eight leagues, and at once crossed a river in canoes and went to another pueblo named Ayagualulco, and crossed another river in canoes, and from Ayagualulco at a distance of seven leagues he crossed an estuary flowing to the sea, and they made him a bridge half a quarter of a league in length. It was a marvellous thing how they made it in the estuary, but Cortés always sent ahead two Captains from among the settlers at Coatzacoalcos, one of these was named Francisco de Medina, a quick-witted man, who thoroughly understood how to manage the natives of this country.

Beyond that great bridge he went through some small pueblos before arriving at another great river called Maçapa, which is the river coming from Chiapas, called by the sailors the Rio de dos Bocas.¹ There he had many canoes, tied together two and two, and after crossing that river he went on to other pueblos whither I had set out with my company of soldiers, which as I have stated was called Iquinuapa.² After that he crossed another river on bridges, which we made of timber, and then an estuary, and arrived at another large town named Copilco ;

¹ The river with two mouths.

² Bernal Díaz was instructed to meet Cortés at Iquinuapa, but Cortés makes no mention of that Pueblo, and Bernal Díaz probably passed on to meet Cortés at Copilco.