

Letters of Cortes

First Letter, July 10, 1519

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Cortes to the Emperor Charles V.
Volume One



Translated, and Edited, with a Biographical Introduction
and Notes Compiled from Original Sources

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FIRST LETTER

Sent to the Queen Doña Juana, and the Emperor Charles V., her son, by the Judiciary and Municipal Authorities of the Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, dated the 10th July 1519.

Very High and Very Powerful and Excellent Princes, Very Catholic and Very Great Sovereigns and Rulers. We believe that Your Majesties by a letter from Diego Velasquez,¹ Lieutenant of the Admiral² in the Island of Fernandina,³ will have been informed of the new land, which was discovered in these parts about two years ago, which in the beginning was called Cozumel,⁴ and has since been named Yucatan,⁵ without its being the one or the other. This your Royal Highnesses will be able to perceive

¹ He was a native of Cuellar, and accompanied Columbus on his second voyage in 1493; under commission of Diego Columbus, then viceroy, he effected the conquest of Cuba, and became governor of the island. He showed himself ungrateful to his benefactor, Diego Columbus, and he was in his turn betrayed, and finally outgeneraled, by Cortes. When the royal appointment of the latter, as Captain General of New Spain, was proclaimed in Cuba by Rodrigo de Paz, and Francisco de las Casas, to the sound of trumpets in 1522, Diego Velasquez took to his bed from sheer mortification, and died within a few months. Fuller notice of his character, and his dealings with Cortes, are given in the preceding Biographical Note.

² Diego Columbus, only son of the Admiral Christopher Columbus and his wife Felipa Mogniz Perestrello of Lisbon, succeeded Don Nicolas de Ovando as governor, and bore the title of viceroy.

³ Cuba, which was discovered by Columbus, on October 28, 1492, and named by him, Juana, in honor of the Royal Infante, Don Juan. He was convinced that he had reached China, or Cipango, of which he had read in Marco Polo's narrative. It was discovered to be an island by Ocampo, who first circumnavigated it in 1508. The island was conquered in 1511 by Velasquez, in command of three hundred men, but so peaceable and indolent were the natives, that the conquest was effected almost without a struggle; for only one chief, Hatuey, with a few followers, attempted to dispute the landing of the Spaniards. Hatuey was captured, and sentenced to be burned. When the cruel sentence was about to be carried out, a friar exhorted him to be baptized, and thus ensured his soul going to paradise. The chief asked if there would be Spaniards there, and when the friar answered that they all hoped to go there, he replied that then he would rather not. So he was burned, but not converted. The Indian name Cuba has persisted and survived all others. (Oviedo, *Hist. Gen.*, libxxvii., cap. iii.; Las Casas, *Hist. de las Indias*, lib. iii., cap. xxi.-xxv.)

⁴ Cozumel, also sometimes called Acuzamil (*Ah-Cuzamil* meaning the "Swallows"), was discovered by Juan de Grijalba on the feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross, and hence named by him Santa Cruz. He took possession in the name of the Spanish sovereigns, and of Diego Velasquez, under whose commission the expedition had sailed. There was a stone building on the island, having a square tower with a door in each of its four sides. Inside this there were idols, palm branches, and bones, which they said were those of a great chief (Oviedo, lib. xvii., cap. ix.). The tower was surmounted by a smaller square turret which was reached by an outside staircase. Grijalba hoisted the Spanish flag on this turret, and named the place San Juan de Puerta Latina. The Chaplain Fray Juan Diaz said mass. Cristobal de Olid, who was sent by Velasquez in search of Grijalba's expedition, about whose safety fears were felt, also landed at Cozumel, and took formal possession, thinking that he was its discoverer (Orozco y Berra, tom. iv., cap. i.). The inhabitants seemed poor, and what gold they produced was mostly an alloy with copper, of little value, which the Indians called *guanin*, and prized highly (Las Casas, lib. 7, cap. lxvii.).

Cozumel was a place of pilgrimage, and in one of the great temples there stood a hollow statue called *Teel-Cuzam* (the Swallows' Feet), made of terra-cotta, in which a priest placed himself to give oracular answers to the pilgrims (Cogolludo, *Hist. de Yucatan*, lib. iv., cap. vii.).

⁵ Yucatan, "The land of wounds and calamities," as Bernal Diez called it. This coast was first sighted by Columbus, but he did not land. In 1511, a boat load of men from the wreck of Valdivia's caravel drifted onto the coast, and the men were sacrificed, and eaten, all save two, who escaped as will be explained later. The coast was first really discovered by Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba, as is here related, and the name of Yucatan was the word *tectetan*, meaning "I don't understand," caught by the Spaniards from the natives, and which they took to be the name of the country (Motolinia, trat. iii., cap. viii.). The Indian name was *Ulumil Cuz*, and *Etel Ceh*, meaning the land of birds and game; they also called it *Peten*, an island, though they well knew that it was not one. According to Ordoñez, not only the coast province, but the entire country, was also called *Maya* (a waterless land). The language of all the country was known as the Maya tongue.

The subjoined references will be useful to students of the history of this most interesting country and its stupendous antiquities: Cogolludo, *Hist. de Yucatan*; Brasseur de Bourbourg, *Histoire des Nations civilisées du Mexique*; Diego de Landa, *Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan* (French translation by Brasseur de Bourbourg); Stephens, *Incidents of Travels in Yucatan*; Bancroft, *Native Races*; and Carrillo, *Compendia de la Hist. Yucatan*.

from our narration because, until now the accounts, which have been made to Your Majesties concerning this country, both of its customs and wealth, as well as concerning the manner of its discovery, and other things which have been stated about it, are not and, could not have been exact, for, as will appear from this account which we send to Your Highnesses, up till now no one has known them.

We will deal with it here from the beginning of its discovery up to its present state, so that Your Majesties will know the country as it really is, the people who possess it, and the manner of their life, and the rites and ceremonies, the sect or law they obey, and the profit which Your Royal Highnesses may derive from it; and may also know who have here rendered services to Your Majesties, in order that Your Royal Highnesses may act as best suits your service. The most faithful and exact account is as follows:

It may be two years, a little more or less, Most Enlightened Princes, that, in the City of Santiago,⁶ which is in the Island of Fernandina, of whose towns we have been citizens, three inhabitants of the said Island united, and "the one was called Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba,⁷ another Cordoba Lope Ochoa de Caicedo, and the third Cristobal Morante; and, as it is customary in these Islands, which have been peopled by Spaniards in the name of Your Majesties, to bring Indians for their service from the other Islands which have not been peopled by Spaniards, these said persons sent two ships and a brigantine, in order to fetch Indians from those Islands⁸ to Fernandina to make slaves of them. We believe, although we do not positively know it, that the said Diego Velasquez, Lieutenant of the Admiral, owned a fourth

⁶ Santiago was the seat of the governor, and the cathedral city of the first bishop.

⁷ This expedition was organized by the men who had originally come from Spain with Pedro Arias de Avila, commonly called Pedrarias de Avila, when he was sent in command of an admirably equipped fleet to supersede Balboa as governor of Darien. Among these men was Bernal Diaz del Castillo, whose copious narrative of the events in the islands, and in Mexico, is one of the most valuable sources of American history.

These men, on their return from Darien, were cordially received in Cuba by Diego Velasquez, who encouraged them to continue explorations. After three years of fruitless delays during which many were ill and some had died, they decided to organize a venture on their own account, and they secured the co-operation of Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba, a rich colonist, who was willing to put his money into the undertaking. He was chosen as captain, three vessels were bought, one of which Cortes and others assert, was furnished by Velasquez, on condition that he should be reimbursed for his outlay by slaves, who should be brought back from the islands. Bernal Diaz says that they refused this condition, but that Velasquez furnished the ship just the same; this, however, does not accord with other testimony, and it may well be that Bernal Diaz, who was simply an enlisted soldier-adventurer, knew little of the conditions negotiated amongst the owners and leaders.

The little flotilla put to sea from Santiago on February 8, 1517, stopping first at Puerto del Principe for supplies, and continuing thence under the direction of the pilot Alaminos, who laid the course. After a voyage not free from dangers, they discovered a small island off the peninsula of Yucatan, which they called Isla de las Mujeres (Woman's Island), because they found there statues of the goddesses Xchel and Ixchebeliax, and others. From this island an important looking town on the mainland was visible, which they named Grand Cairo, This expedition, as will be seen in succeeding notes, ended badly.

⁸ The Spanish settlements in the New World were, at that time, limited to the islands of Hispaniola (Haiti), Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica, which were called the Indies by the discoverers and conquerors, because they were firmly persuaded they had encircled half the globe, and reached the Orient. Besides these four islands, there was the colony of Darien, of which more information will be given later. Popular imagination in Spain was inflamed by the tales of vast wealth in gold, silver, pearls, precious stones, and spices, lying in the virgin lands waiting to be picked up by the first comer. Avaricious adventurers set out to enrich themselves by a lucky venture, and return with their easily and quickly won fortunes to Spain. Serious projects for colonization were not yet conceived, and, what settlements there were, had been made by disillusioned immigrants who, when they found that gold and pearls, instead of lying at their feet, had to be sought as elsewhere with labor, enslaved the natives for the exploitation of the natural resources of the islands. Thus the slave trade sprang up, and as the Indians, unaccustomed to hard work and harsh treatment, died off in such numbers as to rapidly depopulate the neighborhoods of the Spanish settlements, expeditions were constantly organized to the neighboring islands for the purpose, as Cortes states, of capturing the natives. The system of *repartimientos* and *encomiendas* was begun under the sanction of Columbus, and, in spite of the denunciations of the Church, and repeated edicts from the home government, the slave trade flourished, and the island population rapidly dwindled. This subject is more fully noticed in Appendix I. to the Fourth Letter.

part of the armada. One of the owners of the said armada, called Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba, went as its Captain, taking as pilot a resident of the town of Palos⁹ one Anton de Alaminos¹⁰ whom we have also now as pilot, and whom we have sent to Your Royal Highnesses that he may furnish information to Your Majesties.

Pursuing their voyage, they arrived at the said Island of Yucatan, at its uttermost point, which may be sixty or seventy leagues both from the said Island of Fernandina, and from this country of the rich land of Vera Cruz, [*thus in the MS.*], where we now are in the name of Your Royal Highnesses. At this point they disembarked at a town called Campoche,¹¹ whose chief they named Lazaro, and gave two spindles with a piece of cloth of gold; but, as the natives of the country did not allow them to remain in the town, or on land, they left, and went about ten leagues down the coast, where they again landed at a town called Machocobon,¹² whose chief was Champoto. Here they were well received by the natives, though they were not allowed to come into the towns; and that night they slept out of their ships, and on land.

The natives, seeing this, attacked them¹³ on the morning of the following day, in such a manner that 26 Spaniards perished, and all the rest were wounded, and at last the Captain Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba, seeing this, escaped with those who were left to him by taking refuge in the ships. The said Captain, seeing that more than a quarter of his people had been killed, and that he himself had received 30 odd wounds, and was almost dead, and despairing of escape, returned with the ships and people to the said Island of Fernandina.¹⁴ Here they made known to Diego Velasquez that they had found a land very rich in gold, because they had seen that all the natives wore it, some in their noses, some in their ears, and some in other parts, and, likewise, that there were in that country edifices built of mortar and stone. They made known to him also many other facts, which they published about the admirable things and riches of the said land, and they counseled him to send ships to barter for gold, saying that, if he would do so, a great amount of it could be obtained.¹⁵

Upon learning this, the said Diego Velasquez, moved more by cupidity than any other zeal, sent a

⁹ Anton de Alaminos had served under Columbus on his voyage in 1502, when the other pilots were Comacho de Triana, and Juan Alvarez; there was also the inspector of the royal fifth Bernardino de Iñiquez, and a Chaplain, Alonzo Gonzalez from the town of San Cristobal.

¹⁰ The little port from which Columbus originally sailed in 1493.

¹¹ The point of Catoche, where they landed on March 5th, is the extremity of the peninsula nearest to Cuba. A chief and many people came out to the caravels in canoes, and having no interpreter they made themselves understood as best they could by signs, inviting the Spaniards to land, and saying *Conex Cotoche*, which means "come to our houses," but was thought by the Spaniards to be the name of the place. They called it Catoche therefore (Carrillo, *Compendia de la Hist. Yucatan* p. 105). Cortes here confuses Catoche with Campeche (in Maya, *Kimpech*), further westward on the bay of the same name, where the caravels arrived on Sunday, the feast of San Lazaro (March 22nd). Oviedo says that the Spaniards called the chief of the place Lazaro, and that the Indian name for the place was Campeche, but Orozco y Berra states that, in ancient letters, the *place* is called llazaro, and the *river* Campeche (tom. iv., cap. i., note).

¹² There is much confusion amongst the early writers in the spelling of Indian names, and in assigning them correctly. In this case the place was called Poton-Chan, and the bay received the name of Mala Pelea from the Spanish sailors, on account of the disastrous rout they suffered there. The Cacique, Machocobon, according to Gomara, was a very formidable warrior.

¹³ See Appendix I. at close of Letter.

¹⁴ Alaminos, after consulting the other pilots, decided to sail for Florida, as being the best way back to Cuba, and because he knew that coast since its discovery by Ponce de Leon. They reached Florida in four days, and, upon landing to get water, they were again attacked. Both Alaminos and Bernal Diaz were wounded, while Berrio, the only soldier who had come unscathed out of the Mala-Pelea fight, met the worse fate of being taken alive. After many mishaps, they finally landed at Carenas (*Habana*), and, ten days later, Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba died from his wounds, and thus ended this disastrous expedition (Bernal Diaz, cap. i-vi.; Oviedo, lib xvii., cap. iv.; Gomara, *Hist. de las Indias*, cap. lii.; Herrera, dec. ii., lib. iii., cap. xvii-xviii.; Cogolludo, *Hist. Yucatan*, lib. i., cap. i-ii.; Torquemada, lib. iv., cap. iii.).

¹⁵ Their description of the solidly built houses and temples, the spoils of gold which they brought, together with the two converted captives, aroused the greatest excitement, and inflamed Diego Velasquez's cupidity. Speculation as to the origin of the natives of Yucatan was rife, and the theory was advanced that they descended from the tribes of Jews exiled from Jerusalem under Vespasian and Titus.

Procurator to the Island of Hispaniola, with a certain account, which he made to the Reverend Fathers of St. Jerome,¹⁶ who resided there as Governors of the Indies, to obtain permission to colonize in the name of Your Majesties, by virtue of the authority which Your Highnesses had given them. He told them that they would do a great service to Your Majesties if they would give him permission to trade with the natives, for gold and pearls and precious stones and other things, all of which would become his property by paying the fifth part to Your Majesties. All this was granted by the said Reverend Fathers of St. Jerome, the Governors, inasmuch as he said in his account that he had discovered the land at his own cost, and moreover knew the secrets of it, and that he would provide in every respect as should best advance the service of Your Royal Highnesses. On the other hand, without communicating it to the said Jeronymite Fathers, he sent to Your Royal Highnesses a certain Gonzalo de Guzman,¹⁷ with power of attorney, and the same account, saying that he had discovered the country at his own cost, thus rendering service to Your Majesties, and that he wished to conquer it at his own cost, and he prayed Your Royal Highnesses to make him *adelantado*¹⁸ and governor of it, with certain privileges for which he asked further on, as Your Majesties will have seen by his account, and for which reason we do not express them here.

In the meantime, as the permission was given by the Reverend Fathers of St. Jerome, the Governors in the name of Your Majesties, he hastened to fit out three ships and a brigantine, so that, if Your Majesties were not pleased to grant Gonzalo de Guzman what he had asked, the ships would have already been sent, with the permission given by the said Reverend Jeronymite Fathers, the Governors. He sent as Captain one of his relatives, called Juan de Grijalba,¹⁹ and with him 160 men of the

¹⁶ Fray Bartolomé Las Casas had succeeded, by the moving picture he drew of the oppression and injustice practiced by the Spaniards on the natives of the islands, in interesting the Cardinal-Regent Ximenez de Cisneros in their behalf, and His Eminence's first step was to apply to the General of the Jeronymites at San Bartolomé de Lupiano to furnish some men of that order for service in the Indies. A chapter of the Priors of Castile, which the General assembled, assented to the Cardinal's wish, and furnished three friars who were sent out with instructions, and very full powers. Las Casas says that they did not go as governors, as some supposed, but rather to see that the laws for the protection of the Indians were observed, and to report abuses. They were instructed to visit each island personally, to ascertain the number of chiefs and tribes and to see how they were treated by the holders of *encomiendas*, as well as by the governors, judges, and other officials. Hispaniola (Haiti), Cuba, and Jamaica, were particularly designated for their visitations, and they were enjoined to inspect the mines, and report on possible ameliorations. They had power to regulate the amount of meat to be allowed each laborer, the market price of necessities, the housing of the Indians, the education of children, marriages between Spaniards and natives, etc.

These friars were selected by Cardinal Ximenez from among twelve names presented to him by four Priors, sent by the Chapter to Madrid for that purpose, and they sailed from San Lucar, November 11, 1516, landing in San Domingo thirteen days later (Las Casas). Gayangos, *Cartels de Cortes*, p. 3, mentions the Jeronymite Fathers as numbering but two, Fray Luis de Figueroa, a native of Seville, who was Prior of Mejorada, and Fray Alonso de Santo Domingo, Prior of San Juan de Ortega. The third, however, was Fray Bernardino de Manzanedo.

The island of Hispaniola, where the Jeronymites resided, was discovered on December 6, 1492, by Christopher Columbus who named the harbor where he landed San Nicolas. San Domingo became the principal city and residence of the viceroy. In consequence of the dissensions between Don Diego Columbus, who held that office, and various persons, notably the royal treasurer, Miguel Pasamonte, who headed a faction against him, the Spanish government in 1510 established the *Royal Audiencia*. This was a court of appeal for all causes in which the viceroy had pronounced judgment. The name Hispaniola (Española) given by Columbus to the island had been superseded by the original Indian name of Haiti.

¹⁷ Gonzalo de Guzman was a royal treasurer in the islands.

¹⁸ Spanish title for the governor of a province.

¹⁹ A native of Cuellar, who came to Cuba when a mere lad. Las Casas describes him as a youth of great promise, and Gomara says he was a nephew of Velasquez's. He was of gentle birth, and, as a fellow-townsmen, he was treated by Velasquez with much consideration, whether he was a relative or not. The armada furnished him consisted of four caravels, the *Santiago*, *San Sebastian*, *La Trinidad*, and *Santa Maria de los Remedios*; the pilots were the same who went with the first expedition, with the addition of a fourth one, unnamed. There was a treasurer, Anton de Villasaña, an inspector, Francisco de Peñalosa, and a chaplain, Fray Juan Diaz; in all told above two hundred persons composed the company. After several false starts, they finally set sail on May 1st. This date, in spite of divers contradictions, is established by the *Itinerario de l'armata del Re Cattolico verso la Isola de Yucatan*, MDXVII., which is given in the *Documentos Ineditos* of Joaquin Garcia Icazbalceta, Mexico, 1858.

inhabitants of said Island, amongst whom some of us came as Captains for the purpose of serving Your Majesties and not only did we and those of the said armada come risking our own persons, but we and they also provided almost all the outfit of the said armada from our own resources, in which we and they spent a very great part of our fortunes. And there went again as pilot of this armada the same Anton de Alaminos, who first discovered the said country when he went with Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba.

In making this voyage, they followed in his former track, and, before they reached the said land, they discovered a small island, called Cozumel, which may measure about thirty leagues, and lies off the southern part of the said land; and they arrived in the Island at a town, to which they gave the name of San Juan de Puerta Latina,²⁰ and the Island they named Santa Cruz.²¹ The same day on which they arrived there about 150 Indians of the town came to see them, and as it appeared, on the following day these Indians abandoned the town and fled to the woods.

Being in need of water, the Captain hoisted sail in order to obtain it elsewhere that same day, and while pursuing his voyage, it was agreed to return to the said port and Island of Santa Cruz, where he anchored and went on shore, finding the town without people, as though it had never been inhabited. He took his supply of water, returning to his ships without taking soundings, or learning anything so as to be able to give a true account to Your Royal Highnesses concerning that Island.

Setting sail he left, keeping on his voyage until he arrived at the land which Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba had discovered, where they coasted about, from south to west, until they came to a bay, which the said Captain Gonzalo and the chief pilot, Anton de Alaminos, named Bay of Ascension.²² This, according to the opinion of the pilots, is very near to Punta de las Velas, discovered by Vicente Yañez²³ which is the part [*passage in the MS. not intelligible*] of the Bay which is very large, and it is thought that it reaches to the Sea of the North.

Thence they returned along the same coast by which they had gone, until they rounded the point of

Three other captains were Pedro de Alvarado, Francisco de Montejo, and Alonso Davila; the men including pilots and sailors numbered 250. They discovered the Tabasco River, which was henceforth named Grijalba, though the name Tabasco (Tabzcoob was the Indian name) remained to the province between Yucatan and Cuazocoalco.

After Rio Tabasco, they discoverer a river (Xamapan now called Jamapa), which they called Banderas, because Indians carrying white flags were seen along the coast. They received them with great civility and interest, and traded to the amount of 15,000 dollars worth of gold (Bernal Diaz, cap. xiii.). Here the name of Montezuma was first heard by the Spaniards. The next stopping place was named Isla de los Sacrifios, because they found in a temple there six or seven bodies of men with their breasts cut open, and their hearts gone. The Island of Ulua was so named from the Indian word Culua, which the Spaniards imperfectly caught, and, to distinguish it from San Juan de Puerto Rico, they called the place San Juan de Ulua (Bernal Diaz, cap. xiv.; Orozco y Berra, vol. iv., cap. ii.).

On the Island of Ulua the Spanish government afterwards built a fortress said to have cost forty millions of dollars, and which was the last stronghold of Spain in Mexico. On November 23, 1825, the President of the new republic announced its fall by a proclamation: "The standard of the republic floats over the castle of Ulua! I announce to you, fellow citizens, with inexpressible pleasure that, after a lapse of three hundred and four years, the flag of Castile has now disappeared from our coasts."

From here, Pedro de Alvarado with one of the four ships, the *San Sebastian*, was sent to report to Diego Velasquez what had been discovered. He took also the gold and treasures, and was to ask for further instructions concerning settlements, which Grijalba had no power to make. The others next went on to Panuco. Velasquez was vexed with Grijalba for not colonizing, though the latter justified himself by the instructions given him, which expressly forbade this (Bernal Diaz, cap. xv.; Oviedo, lib. xvii., cap. xviii.; Gomara, *Cronica*, cap. v., vi.; Cogolludo, lib. i., cap. iii., iv.; Orozco y Berra, vol. iv., cap. ii-iii.).

²⁰ The town thus named by Grijalba, as described in Note I, page 124.

²¹ Cozumel. Here the converted Indians, Melchor and Julian, began to act as interpreters.

²² Bay of Ascension. This was on Thursday the 13th, feast of the Ascension, and they remained there reconnoitring until Sunday.

²³ Vicente Yañez Pinzon, who landed here about January 26, 1500, was one of the three Pinzon brothers who first sailed with Columbus from Palos in 1492. He afterwards commanded an expedition composed of four small ships which sailed from Palos in 1499, making the first discovery of land at the present Cape St. Augustine, on the coast of Brazil, in 1506. He again sailed with Juan de Solis, on a voyage to find the strait which it was thought joined the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and, in 1508, he repeated this fruitless experiment.

the said land, and, continuing in a northerly direction, they sailed until they arrived at the said Point Campoche, whose chief was named Lazaro, where Francisco Fernandez de Cordoba had stopped to trade, and, as ordered by Diego Velasquez, as well as to take the water he greatly needed, landed there.

As soon as the natives saw them coming, they placed themselves near their town, in array of battle, so as to defend its entrance. The Captain called to them, through the interpreters who accompanied him, and certain Indians came, whom he made to understand that he came merely for the purpose of trading with them for such things as they might have, and to get water; and thus he went with them until they arrived at a place, very near their town, where there was a spring. While taking the water he asked them through the said interpreter for gold, saying he would give them in exchange the valuables which he brought, and, as soon as the Indians saw this, having no gold to give him, they told him to go away; but he begged them to allow him to finish taking water, saying that he would immediately leave. In spite of this, however, he was unable to save himself from being obliged the next day, at the hour of mass, to fight the Indians, armed with their bows and arrows, their lances, and *rodelas*,²⁴ so that they killed a Spaniard, and wounded the said Captain Grijalba and many others. That same afternoon they re-embarked in their caravels with all their people, without having gone into the town of the said Indians, and without having learned anything which they could truly relate to Your Majesties.

From there they went along the said coast until they came to a river, which they named Grijalba, and which they ascended about the hour of vespers. Early the following morning, they found on both sides of the river a great number of Indians and warriors, with their bows and arrows, and lances, and *rodelas*, to defend the entrance to their country; and to some, it seemed there were about five thousand Indians.

The Captain seeing this, no one landed, but he spoke to them from the ship through his interpreters, praying them to approach nearer so that he might explain to them the motives of his coming, and twenty Indians entered a canoe, and cautiously approached the ships. The Captain Grijalba then told them, and made them understand through his interpreter, that he had come only to barter, and that he wished to be their friend, and that they should bring their gold for which he would give them many valuables which he carried; and thus they did.

The next day, they brought certain jewels of thin gold, for which the said Captain gave them in return such valuables as he thought proper, and they returned to their town; and the said Captain remained there that day.

The next day he set sail, without learning anything else about the country, and continued until he arrived at the Bay, to which they gave the name of San Juan.

The Captain went ashore there with some of his people to some desolate sand-hills, and as, when the natives had seen the ships coming along the coast, they had assembled, he spoke to them, through his interpreter, and had a table brought on which he spread out some of his valuables, making them understand that he had come to trade with them and to be their friend. When the Indians saw and understood this, they brought some stuffs, and ornaments of gold, which they traded with the Captain; and from there the said Captain Grijalba dispatched one of the caravels to Diego Velasquez, with all that they had up till then obtained.

The caravel having departed for the Island of Fernandina where Diego Velasquez was, the Captain Grijalba went down the coast with the remaining caravels, cruising for a distance of about forty-five leagues without landing, or seeing anything except what could be seen from the sea. He then set out to return towards the Island of Fernandina, and never more did he see anything of the country worth mentioning, from which your Royal Highnesses may believe that all the accounts which have been made about this country cannot have been exact, because they knew nothing more of the secrets of it than what it has suited their purpose to write.

As soon as the said caravel, which the Captain Juan de Grijalba had dispatched from the Bay of San Juan, arrived, and Diego Velasquez saw the a which it carried, and learned from Grijalba's letters about the stuffs and valuables which had been given in exchange, it seemed to him, according to information given him by those who arrived in the said caravel, that he had obtained little in proportion to what he

²⁴ These were round shields for defense, which were adorned with different colored feathers of herons, parrots, and other birds, according to the category of the troops, or the heraldic emblem of the chief.

expected. He declared that he had not even covered the cost he had incurred in the said armada, and he was vexed, and showed dissatisfaction at the little which Captain Grijalba had accomplished in this country.

In truth, Diego Velasquez had no reason to complain, because his outlays in the said armada were covered from certain casks, and tuns of wine, and other merchandise, and boxes of laced shirts, and beads, which he had sent with it. The wine was sold there to us at four dollars in gold, which are two thousand *maravedis*²⁵ the *aroba*, and each shirt at two dollars in gold, and the string of green beads at two dollars, so that he thus covered his outlay in the armada, and even made money. We make special mention of this to Your Majesties that it may be known that the armadas, which until now have been fitted out by Diego Velasquez, have been intended as much for trading merchandise as for privateers, and this with our persons and with our property; and although we have suffered infinite hardships we have served, and we shall serve, Your Royal Highnesses as long as life lasts.

Diego Velasquez being vexed by the small amount of gold that had been brought him, and wishing to obtain more, determined, without making it known to the Governors, the Jeronymite Fathers, to equip a swift armada, and to send it in search of his relative, the said Captain Juan de Grijalba. To do this at less cost to himself, he spoke to Fernando Cortes, a resident and alcalde for Your Majesties in the city of Santiago, proposing to him that they should fit out between them eight or ten ships, because at that time Fernando Cortes had more resources than any other person in the said Island, and because it was believed that more people would enlist with him than with any other.

The said Fernando Cortes, considering what Diego Velasquez had proposed, and moved by zeal to serve Your Royal Highnesses, was ready to spend all he had, and to equip almost two parts of this armada at his own cost, not only in ships, but also in stores, and moreover to distribute his moneys amongst those who were going in the armada, and who needed to provide things necessary for the voyage.

The armada having been fitted and equipped, Diego Velasquez in the name of Your Majesties, named the said Fernando Cortes Captain of it, that he should come to this land to trade, and accomplish what Grijalba had failed to do. The agreement respecting the said armada, although he did not invest or spend more than one-third part of it, was made entirely according to Diego Velasquez's wishes as Your Royal Highnesses may command to be verified from the instructions and faculty which the said Fernando Cortes received from him in the name of Your Majesties. These we now send with these our procurators to Your Royal Highnesses.

Let it be known to Your Majesties that the larger part of the third, which Diego Velasquez spent in fitting out the said armada, consisted in investing his money in wines, and clothing, and in other things of little value, in order to sell them to us here at a much higher price than they had cost him, so that we may say that Diego Velasquez has made his bargains, and the profits on his money, amongst us Spaniards, vassals of your Royal Highnesses, doing a very good business.

Having finished fitting out the said armada, Your Royal Highnesses' Captain, Fernando Cortes, sailed upon his voyage from the Island of Fernandina, having ten caravels, and four hundred men at arms, amongst whom were many knights and other noblemen, and sixteen horses. Pursuing their voyage, the first land where they arrived was the Island of Cozumel (now called Santa Cruz, as has been said), in the port of San Juan de Puerta Latina. Upon landing, the town which existed there was found to be deserted, as though it had never been inhabited, and the Captain Fernando Cortes, wishing to know the cause of that place being deserted, brought the people on land, and quartered them in that town.

²⁵ A small Spanish coin: Bancroft (*Hist. Mex.*, vol ii., p. 376) gives the value of the *ducat* as equal to 375 *maravedis*, and *peso de minas* as 450 *maravedis*, which he computes as equal to \$9.75; he refers to Clemencin, secretary of the Spanish Royal Academy as his authority. Prescott (*Conquest of Mex.*) computes the *ducat* at \$8.75, and gives the *peso de oro*, and the *castellano* as identical, and worth \$11.67. Mr. George Folsom, in his English translation of three Letters of Cortes, gives the value of the *castellano* as only \$2.75. According to these calculations, the *peso de minus*, and the *peso de oro*, were different coins. The value of these monies is difficult to estimate. Their purchasing power was far greater than their exact equivalent would be today, and the value of articles of European manufacture, of horses, iron, and other imported necessities was variable, according to their scarcity, and to the needs of the buyer. Nails, horseshoes, and like objects, sometimes cost their weight in gold, or double in silver.

While there with his people he learned from three Indians, who had been taken in a canoe²⁶ at sea while going to Yucatan, that the caciques of that Island, seeing the Spaniards were approaching, had, out of fear of them (not knowing with what purpose, and in what disposition they came), abandoned their town, and gone with all their Indians into the woods.

Fernando Cortes, speaking to them through the medium of an interpreter who accompanied him, told them we were not going to do them any evil injury, but only to instruct them, and win them to the knowledge of our Holy Catholic Faith, so that they might become vassals of Your Majesties, serving and obeying them, as had all the Indians of these parts which the Spaniards have settled, who are likewise vassals of Your Royal Highnesses. The said Captain, having thus reassured them they put aside their fears, in great part, and said that they would go and call the caciques who had gone into the woods; and the Captain immediately gave them a letter, so that the said caciques might come in all confidence, and, the Captain having given them a term of five days in which to return, they went off thus.

But while the Captain was waiting for the reply the Indians were to bring, and as already three or four days beyond the five which he had stipulated had elapsed, and he saw that they did not come, he determined, in order that the Island might not remain deserted, to send along the coast to the other side. He dispatched two captains, therefore, each with one hundred men, directing that one should go to the extremity of the island from one side, and the other from the other, and that they should speak to the caciques whom they might encounter, telling them that he was waiting for them in that town and port of San Juan de Puerta Latina to speak to them on behalf of Your Majesties. He also directed that they should invite and attract them as best they could, so as to induce them to come to the said port of San Juan, and that they should do them no harm, either in their persons, or houses, or property, so as not to alarm them, nor drive them further away than they already were.

The two captains went as the Captain Fernando Cortes had ordered them, and three or four days afterwards they returned, saying that all the towns they had found were empty and bringing with them ten or twelve persons whom they had captured. Amongst these was a principal Indian to whom the said Fernando Cortes spoke in the name of Your Highnesses, through his interpreter, telling him to go and call the caciques, as he would on no account leave the Island without having seen and spoken with them. The Indian answered that he would do this, and thus he left with a letter to the said caciques, returning two days later with the principal cacique, who said that he was Lord of the Island, and had come to see for what he was wanted.

The Captain spoke to him through the interpreter, and told him that he did not wish, nor had he come to do them any harm, but in order to bring them to a knowledge of our Holy Faith, and to let them know that our rulers were the greatest Princes in the world, and that they obeyed a Greater Prince. And what the said Captain Fernando Cortes told them he wanted of them was that the caciques and Indians of the said Island should also obey Your Royal Highnesses, and that in so doing they would be much favored, and no one would ever molest them. The cacique answered that he would be glad to do this, and he immediately sent to call all the principal people of the Island, who came and were much pleased with all that the said Captain Fernando Cortes had told the chief cacique of the Island. Thus he ordered them to come back, which they joyfully did, becoming reassured to such an extent that, within a few days, the towns were as full of people as before, and all the Indians went about amongst us with as little fear as if they had already had a long period of intercourse with us.

In the meantime, the Captain learned that there were in the power of certain caciques in Yucatan, some Spaniards who had been made captives as long since as seven years, when, having been lost in a certain caravel²⁷ which was wrecked on the reefs of Jamaica,²⁸ while coming from Tierra Firma, they

²⁶ Their canoes were made of tree-trunks, hollowed, and were sometimes large enough to hold forty or fifty men (Bernal Diaz, cap. ii.).

²⁷ The caravel of Valdivia, sent from Darien and wrecked (1511) on the reefs called *las Viboras*, situated fifteen leagues to the south of Jamaica, and which extend for a distance of forty-five leagues, from 27° 10' longitude, and 17° north latitude (Alcedo, *Diccionario Geogr. Hist. de las Indias Occid.*). Twenty were saved in an open boat without sails, food, or water, and, after thirteen days' drifting, reached the Maya coast. Seven or eight had died in the meantime from exhaustion, and Valdivia and five others were fattened and sacrificed by the Mayas, who captured them on their landing, and were afterwards eaten. Notice of those who escaped is given in a later note.

had escaped in one of the boats of the caravel, and reached that coast. From that time they had been held captives and prisoners by the Indians. Since the said Captain Fernando Cortes had left the Island of Fernandina to seek for these Spaniards, and as he here received information about them, and about the country where they were, it seemed to him that he was rendering a great service to God and to Your Majesty in striving to liberate them from their imprisonment and captivity. He himself with the whole fleet would have gone immediately to rescue them, had not the pilots told him on no account to do this, as it would be the cause of the loss of the fleet and all the people of it, because the coast was very rough, as it really is, and has no port or any place where the ships could anchor. For this reason he abandoned the idea, and ordered that certain Indians, who had told him they knew that cacique with whom those Spaniards were, should go in a canoe; and he wrote to the Spaniards that the only reason why he gave up coming himself with his armada to liberate them was because the coast was very bad and rough for anchoring, but that he prayed them to strive for their liberation, and to escape in canoes, and that he should wait for them in the Island of Santa Cruz.

Three days after the said Captain had sent those Indians with his letters, as it appeared to him that he had not acted satisfactorily, and believing that those Indians would not know how to carry out his wishes, he determined to send forty Spaniards to the said coast with two brigantines, and a boat from his armada, so that they might recover those captive Spaniards if they could find them. With them he sent three other Indians, who should go ashore with another letter²⁹ of his to seek the Spanish prisoners. When those two brigantines and the boat reached the coast, they landed the three Indians, and sent them to seek for the Spaniards, as the Captain had ordered; and they remained six days along the coast with much difficulty, always waiting for them, though they were almost lost and nearly foundered as the sea along the said coast was very rough, just as the pilots had said. Seeing then that neither the Spanish captives, nor the Indians who had gone to look for them, returned, they determined to go back to the Island of Santa Cruz where the Captain Fernando Cortes was waiting for them.

When they reached the Island, and the Captain learned their bad news he was much grieved, and immediately proposed to embark the next day, firmly resolved to visit that country, even if the whole flotilla should be lost, for the purpose of ascertaining whether there was any truth in the report which Captain Juan de Grijalba had sent to the Island of Fernandina, to the effect that it was all an invention, and that no such Spaniards as were said to be captives had ever arrived on that coast.

Having taken this decision, he had all the people embarked, except himself, and some other twenty Spaniards, who remained with him on shore. The weather had been most favorable to his intention to leave the port, but there suddenly sprang up a contrary wind, with squalls of rain, so that the pilots advised the Captain not to set sail while the weather was unfavorable for getting to sea; so, in view of this, the Captain commanded all on board the armada to disembark once more.

The next day at noon, a canoe with sails was seen coming in the direction of the Island, in which, upon its approach, we saw one of the Spanish captives, whose name was Jeronimo de Aguilar,³⁰ who

²⁸ Discovered by Columbus on his second voyage, in 1494, and named Santiago. His son Diego effected its conquest, and governed it from San Domingo, through his captains, of whom the best known was Francisco de Garay.

²⁹ NOBLE SIRS,—I left Cuba with a fleet of eleven ships, and five hundred Spaniards, and have arrived at Cozumel, whence I write you this letter.

The people of this island assure me that there are five or six bearded white men in this country, who greatly resemble us, and, I conjecture, though they can give me no other indications, that you are Spaniards. I, and the gentlemen, who have come with me to explore and take possession of these countries, earnestly beg you to come to us within five or six days after you receive this, without further delay or excuse.

If you will come, all of us will recognize, and thank you, for the assistance this armada shall receive from you. I send a brigantine to bring you, with two ships as escort.

HERNAN CORTES.

The Indian took this letter tied in his hair.

³⁰ He was a native of Encija, and had taken holy orders. Seeing the dreadful fate of their companions, Aguilar and Gonzalo Guerrero managed to escape from the cages, in which they were being fattened for the sacrificial feasts, and to lose themselves in the forests. Here they were finally captured by the cacique of another tribe, who was less bloodthirsty, and held them as slaves instead of killing them. Aguilar's virtues and abilities soon attracted

told us all about how he came to be lost, and the length of time he had been in captivity, which is as we have already related to Your Royal Highnesses.

Of a truth, this adverse weather coming upon us so unexpectedly seemed a great mystery and miracle of God, and led us to believe that no enterprise undertaken in Your Majesties' service, be it what it may, could end in anything but good.

We learned from Jeronimo de Aguilar, that the other Spaniards, who were lost with him in the shipwrecked caravel, were scattered over all the land, which he told us was very extensive, and that it would be quite impossible to gather them without staying and losing much time over it. So, as the Captain Fernando Cortes saw that the provisions of the armada were giving out, and that the people would be exposed to suffer great want from hunger if they delayed longer, and that this would not contribute to the object of their voyage, had determined, with the approval of the others to depart. They immediately set sail, therefore, leaving that Island of Cozumel, which is now called Santa Cruz, entirely pacified, so that had it been their intention to colonize, the Indians would have served them to the best of their ability; and the caciques were very pleased and contented both with what the said captain had told them on the part of Your Royal Highnesses, and with the many ornaments he had given them; and I am confident that any Spaniards who from henceforward shall arrive at Cozumel will be as well received there as in any of those Islands which have been long since settled. The said Island is small, and there is no creek or river in it, and all the water which the Indians drink is from wells, and there are only rocks, and stones, and mountains. The only trade which the Indians have is in bee-hives, and our Procurators will bear to Your Highnesses specimens of the honey and the bee-hives that you may command them to be examined.³¹

Be it known to Your Majesties, that the Captain exhorted the caciques of the said Island, admonishing them to renounce the heathen sect in which they were living, and, when they asked him to give them a law according to which they might henceforth live, the said Captain instructed them as best he could in the Catholic Faith. He left them also a cross of wood in a lofty house, and an image of Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, making them understand perfectly well what they were obliged to do to become good Christians; and they showed that they received everything with the best will, and thus they were left contented and happy.

After leaving the Island, we went to Yucatan, and, continuing towards the north, we kept in sight of land, until we arrived at the great river called Grijalba (Rio de Tabasco), which, according to the account given to Your Royal Highnesses, is where Captain de Grijalba, relative to Diego Velasquez, had been. The mouth of that river is so shallow, that none of the larger ships could enter, but, as the said Captain Fernando Cortes is so devoted to the service of Your Majesties, and has the best intention to relate truthfully everything about that country, he determined not to go further until he had learned the mystery of that river, and because of their great reputation for wealth, of the towns which people its banks.

He therefore embarked all the people of his armada in his small brigantines and boats, and ascended the said river, observing the country and the towns along it; and when we came to the Tabasco first town we found the Indians drawn up on the banks, to whom the said Captain spoke through the interpreter, and through the said Geronimo de Aguilar, who having, as we have heretofore stated, been a captive in Yucatan, understood and spoke the language of that country very well. He made them understand how

attention, and won the respect of his captor, and he rose to a position of influence in the country.

When the news came of the arrival of the ships with more white men, and Cortes' letter was delivered to Aguilar, he procured permission to go to his countrymen; but his companion Guerrero, who had married, and had a family, refused to go, for he was ashamed to show himself naked and tattooed, and with his nose and lips pierced in Indian fashion. Jeronimo de Aguilar was not distinguishable from the Indians, as he was burned nearly black, and wore the same ornaments. He remained with Cortes as his interpreter, rendering invaluable services throughout the conquest.

³¹ Clavigero notices six different varieties of bees in Mexico, some like those common in Europe, and others without stingers, which make the honey "Estabentun," the clearest, sweetest, and most aromatic known. These bees are found in Yucatan, and Chiapa, and it is doubtless their honey which is here mentioned. It was collected every two months, but the November honey was the best, because it was made from a very sweet flower called "Estabentun," which blooms in September.

he had not come to do them any harm or evil, but only to speak to them on the part of Your Majesties; and that he, therefore, prayed that they would allow and approve of his landing, because we had no place to sleep that night in the brigantines and barques, in which we could not even stand on our feet; and as for returning to our ships, it was already very late and they were on the high sea. The Indians answered to this that he could say all he wished from where he was, but that he should not talk of landing, neither he nor his people, for they would dispute his entrance; and, saying this, they menaced us with their arrows, bidding us to go away from there. So as it was late in the afternoon (it being already the hour of sundown), the Captain ordered us to go to some sand-hills which were opposite the town, and there we slept that night.

On the morning of the following day some Indians came in a canoe and brought us a certain number of chickens and a little maize, which might be sufficient for [text missing] number of men for one meal. They told us to take that, and to depart from their country, and the captain spoke to them through the interpreter whom we had, and made them understand that he would in no wise go away until he knew the secret of it, so that he might write a true account of it to Your Majesties. He again begged them that, as they would suffer no harm from him, they would not obstruct his entrance to the said town, because they were vassals of Your Royal Highnesses. But still they answered, that we should not venture into the said town but must depart from their country.

When they were gone the Captain determined to go there, so he ordered one of his captains to start with two hundred men by a road which he had discovered during the night we slept on land, while he, himself, embarked with about eighty men in the barques and brigantines, stationing himself in front of the town, ready to disembark whenever they would allow him.

When he came there he found the Indians ready for battle, armed with their bows and arrows and lances and *ridelas*, and they told him to depart from their country, but if he would not go, and wanted war, to begin at once, for they were men to defend their town. After the Captain had required³² them three times and asked Your Highnesses' notary, whom he carried with him, to bear witness to the fact, he told them that he did not want war. Seeing, however, that it was the determination of the said Indians to resist his landing and that they began to discharge arrows at us, he ordered the charges of artillery to be fired, and that we should charge them. When the shots were being fired and while landing they wounded some of us, but finally, in consequence of our rapid charges, and of the attack in the rear by those who had gone by the road, they fled, leaving us the town, and we took possession of that part of it which seemed to us the stronger.

The next day following, at the hour of vespers, two Indians,³³ on the part of the caciques, came to

³² See appendix II. at close of Letter.

³³ The appearance of the ships of de Cordoba and Grijalba, and the fighting in Yucatan, were quickly reported to Montezuma, whose superstitious mind was so affected by events, in which he saw the disasters to himself and his people foretold by Quetzalcoatl, that his first impulse was to save himself by some enchantment or incantation, which should translate him to the abode, or Walhalla, of the famous kings and demi-gods of antiquity. The simultaneous apparition of a great comet in the sky confirmed these forebodings, and he gave himself entirely into the hands of his diviners and necromancers, who exercised all their resources of interpreting dreams, reading signs in natural phenomena, and studying the heavens, to obtain direction for their sovereign in his perplexity. Many, whose dreams presaged evil, were starved to death or put to tortures; a reign of terror set in, and none dared to speak in the sovereign's presence, while the prisons were full of luckless magicians, and death penalties were inflicted even upon their families in the provinces (Duran, cap. Iviii., and Tezozomoc. apud Orozco y Berra, tom. iv., cap. ii.). As the proofs of the presence of the white strangers in their floating houses accumulated, despite Montezuma's reluctance to believe the reports which were repeatedly brought to him, the sovereign fell into a state of profound depression, and despairing of warding off the ominous presence, he ordered costly gifts to be especially made, and he sent the two envoys, Teutlamacazqui and Cuitlalpitoc, to Pinotl, governor of Cuertlachtla, commanding him to provide in every way for the reception and entertainment of the celestial guests. After the departure of Grijalba's men, the fears of Montezuma somewhat subsided, and he persuaded himself that he had staved off the impending disaster. The governor of the coast provinces, however, had strict orders to keep watch, and immediately report any further appearance of the fearsome strangers. Hence the arrival of Cortes, nine months later, was at once announced, by fleet messengers, to the Emperor, who decided in council to send ambassadors to welcome him, and bring exact information concerning all they could see and learn. Thus, on Easter Day, the twenty-fourth of April, Teuhtlilli, governor of Cuertlachtla and Cuitlalpitoc, who had been before sent to Grijalba,

us, bringing certain jewels of very thin gold of little value. They told the Captain that they brought him those ornaments to induce him to go away, and, without doing them any harm or injury, to leave them their land where they had always been. The said Captain answered, saying, that, as to doing them any harm or injury, he had no such wish, and as to leaving them the land, they must understand that from henceforward they were to have for their Lords, the greatest Princes of the earth, whose vassals they would be, and that they would have to serve them, and that, in acting thus, Your Majesties would grant them many mercies, and favors would grow upon them, and that they should be protected and defended from their enemies. They answered that they would be satisfied to do this, but still they required that their country should be left to them. Thus we all became friends, and, our friendship being established, the Captain told them that the Spaniards there with him had nothing to eat, as nothing had been brought from the ships, and he prayed them to bring us food during the time we remained on the Island; they answered that the next day they would, and thus they went away, and remained away that day and the next, nor did they bring us any food.

As all of us were, on this account, in great need of supplies, on the third day some Spaniards asked permission of the Captain to go to some farms in the neighborhood to look for something to eat; and the Captain, seeing that the Indians did not return as they had promised, sent four captains with more than two hundred men to hunt round about the town, and see if they could find anything to eat. While these were engaged in searching, they met many Indians who immediately shot arrows at them, wounding twenty Spaniards, and had not the Captain been immediately advised of this, so as to go, as he did, to their assistance, they would probably have killed more than half the Christians. So we all retreated to our camp, where the wounded were cared for, and those who had fought obtained some rest.

The Captain, seeing how wrongly the Indians had acted, in that, instead of bringing us food as they had agreed, they had wounded us with their arrows, and made war upon us, ordered ten of the horses and mares we had on board to be brought, and all the people to be prepared, because he thought that those Indians, encouraged by the advantage they had obtained the day before, would fall upon us hoping to injure us. On the next day when all was thus prepared, he sent certain captains with three hundred men, to the place where the battle had been fought the day before, to learn if the Indians were still there or what had become of them. A little later, he sent two other captains, with a rear-guard and another hundred men, and the said Captain Fernando Cortes went secretly to one side with ten men on horseback. Proceeding in this order, those who went ahead met a great number of warriors coming to attack us in our camp, and, if we had not gone out that day to encounter them on the road, we should probably have found ourselves in great distress.

When the captain of artillery, who went ahead, made certain requirements before the notary, of the warriors whom he met, giving them to understand through the interpreters that we desired no war, but peace and love with them, they did not bother to answer us with words, but let fly a thick volley of arrows at us. While those in the fore were fighting with the Indians, two captains of the rear-guard came up, and, after two hours of fighting, the Captain Fernando Cortes arrived with the horsemen, coming out from the woods at the point where the Indians were surrounding the Spaniards on all sides; and so he kept up the fight with the Indians for an hour, and such was their multitude that neither those who were fighting the Spanish foot-soldiers could see the horsemen, nor know where they were, nor could the horsemen, advancing and retreating amongst the Indians, see each other. As soon, however, as the Spaniards realized that the horsemen had come up, they charged quickly upon the Indians, who immediately began to fly, and pursued them for half a league. The Captain, seeing that the Indians were in full flight, and that nothing remained to be done, and that his troops were very fatigued, gave the order that all should collect in some farmhouses nearby; and, when they were assembled, twenty were

appeared before Cortes. While extending the welcome his superstitious fears forbade him to withhold, the Emperor secretly charged his magicians, whom he assembled from far and wide, to rid the country of the strangers by the power of magic. The allied kings and nobles were in constant council from which no decision issued, the greater number being of Cacamatzin's opinion, that, if the strangers were gods, it was useless to resist them, if they were envoys of a distant monarch, they should be received as such, while if they were men who came with hostile intent, they could easily be crushed. Only Cuitlahuac, lord of Itztapalapan, opposed this view (*Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chichimeca*, cap. IXXX.) This prince with patriotic foresight was for crushing the strangers instantly, and before they could work the nation any evil.

found to be wounded, of whom no one died, nor did anyone who had been wounded the day before. Thus assembled, and the wounded cared for, we returned to our camp, carrying with us two Indians whom we had captured, whom the Captain ordered to be liberated, and sent letters by them to the caciques, telling them that, if they would come to him, he would pardon them the offence which they had committed, and they would be his friends.

That same afternoon two who seemed to be principal Indians³⁴ came, saying that they were very sorry for the past, and that those caciques besought him to pardon them, and not to do any further injury nor kill any more of their people, for there were as many as two hundred and twenty men slain. They also said that the past should be the past, and henceforward they wished to be vassals of those Princes of whom he had told them, giving and holding themselves as such, and that they would acknowledge and bind themselves to serve them whenever they should be commanded to do so in the name of Your Majesties. Thus peace was made and agreed upon, and the Captain asked the said Indians, through the interpreter whom we had with us, who were the people who had taken part in the battle, and they answered that they came from eight provinces, and according to their counting they were in all forty thousand men,³⁵ and that they knew perfectly well how to count up to that number. Your Royal Highnesses may believe for certain, that this battle was won, rather by the will of God, than by our forces, because weak was the defense of our four hundred against forty thousand warriors.

After we had become good friends, they gave us, during the four or five days we still remained there, some one hundred and forty dollars of gold in pieces of all kinds, and very thin, and so much esteemed by them that it seemed their country was very poor in gold, because it appeared certain that the little they possessed had come from other parts in trading. The land is very good and provisions are abundant, both in maize, as well as fruits, fish, and other things which they eat. This town is situated on the banks of the afore-named river, about which extends a plain, where there are many farms and cultivated fields, such as they have. He [Cortes] reproved them for the evil they did in adoring their idols and gods, and he made them understand that they should come to the knowledge of our Very Holy Faith, and he left them a large wooden cross set up on an elevation, and they remained very satisfied, saying they would hold it in great veneration, and would adore it; thus these Indians became our friends and vassals of Your Royal Highnesses.

The said Captain Fernando Cortes left there, continuing his voyage, and we arrived at the port, and bay, which is called San Juan, where the above-named Captain Grijalba traded, of which extensive relation has heretofore been made to Your Majesty. Immediately upon our arrival, the natives came to inquire what caravels were those which had arrived, and as it was very late that day, almost night, the Captain remained quietly in the caravel, and ordered that no one should go on shore. Early the next day the Captain landed with a great part of the people of his armada, and found two of the principal Indians there, to whom he presented certain of his own valuable garments, and, speaking to them through the interpreters, he gave them to understand that he had come to these parts, by command of Your Royal

³⁴ The first messengers seemed from their dress to be slaves, and though their gifts of chickens, smoked fish, and maize-cakes, were accepted, and they were given some glass beads in return, they were sent back to say that if their people wanted peace the chiefs must come themselves, as the Spaniards could not treat with slaves. Some thirty head-men appeared the next day, bringing the usual present of provisions, and asking permission to bury and cremate their dead, offering to conclude peace the following day. This was agreed to, and the dead were buried, or burned according to the usage of each tribe. At noon the next day, the chiefs appeared, and in the conversation Jeronimo de Aguilar acted as interpreter. Cortes adroitly arranged a show of gun firing and horsemanship to impress them, and he threw all the blame for the fighting upon them, but declared that, if they were ready for peace his sovereigns would regard them as friends, and favor and help them. Negotiations terminated the next day, when an assembly of all the neighboring chiefs acknowledged themselves vassals of the Spanish king, giving Cortes presents of gold and slaves. Amongst these latter was Marina, of whom further notice will appear.

³⁵ Andres de Tapia fixes the number at 48,000, but these figures seem hardly possible, and Orozco y Berra observes that they must be taken as representing the idea of multitude, rather than an actual counting. This decisive battle, which took place on March 25th, became known as the battle of Ceutla, and in Gomara's chronicle, as well as in Tapia's narrative, and that of others, the victory was attributed to the miraculous intervention of St. James, the patron of Spain, or of St. Peter the patron of Cortes. Bernal Diaz says that it may be as Gomara describes, and that "*los gloriosos apóstolos Señor Santiago and Señor San Pedro*" did appear, but he, miserable sinner, was not worthy to behold the apparition.

Highnesses, to speak to them, and to tell them what they should do to advance your service. For this he besought them that they should immediately go to their town, and call the cacique, or caciques who might be there, to come and speak to him; and, to ensure their coming, he gave them two shirts for those caciques, and two jackets, one of silk and one of velvet, also various caps, and some hawk's bells; so they went with these valuables to the said caciques. The next day a little before noon one of the caciques of that town came, to whom the said Captain spoke, and made him understand, through the interpreter, that he had not come to do them any hurt nor injury, but to inform them that they were to be vassals of Your Majesties, and how they were to serve them and to pay tribute of what they had in their country, as did all who are such. And the cacique answered that he was very satisfied to be such, and to obey, and that he would be much pleased to serve them, and to have such high Princes for lords as the Captain had made them understand Your Royal Majesties were. Immediately afterwards, the Captain told him that, since he was so well disposed towards his King and Lord, he would see what great favors Your Majesties would grant him in the future; and, saying this, he made him put on a shirt of holland, and a robe of velvet, and a girdle of gold, with which the said cacique was much pleased and happy. He told the Captain then, that he wanted to go to his country, and asked him to wait for him there, for the next day he would come back, and bring him such things as he had, so that we might more fully understand his good will towards the service of Your Royal Highnesses. Thus he took his leave, and departed; and, the next day, the said cacique returned, as he had agreed, and spreading a white cloth before the Captain, he offered him certain precious jewels of gold, which he placed upon it; of these, and the others which we afterwards obtained, we make relation to Your Majesties in a memorial which our procurators take with them.

After the said cacique had taken leave of us, and returned satisfied to his house, some of those noble persons³⁶ who came in this armada, gentlemen, and sons of gentlemen, zealous in the service of our Lord, and of Your Royal Highnesses, and desirous for the exaltation of your royal crown, and the extension of your dominions, and the increase of your revenues, assembled and spoke with the Captain Fernando Cortes, saying that this land was good and that, judging by the sample of gold which that cacique had brought, it was reasonable to believe that it must be very rich, and that he and all his Indians were well disposed towards us. For these reasons, it seemed to us that it was not advantageous for Your Majesties' service to do as Diego Velasquez had ordered the said Captain Fernando Cortes to do (which was to trade for all the gold we could, and, having obtained it, to return to the island of Fernandina, in order that the said Diego Velasquez, and the said Captain might profit exclusively by it, and that it seemed better to all of us that a town should be founded and peopled there in the name of Your Royal Highnesses. In this, there should be a court of justice, so that you would have your jurisdiction in this country just as in your kingdoms and dominions, since possibly this country, being peopled by Spaniards, in addition to the increase of the kingdoms and dependencies, and the incomes of Your Majesties, you might show some favors to us, and to the colonists who would come there hereafter.

Having decided this, we all agreed with one accord and mind, and we made a requirement to the said Captain, in which we told him that, as he saw how agreeable it would be to the service of God, Our Lord, and of Your Majesties, that this country should be peopled (giving the reasons which we have heretofore recounted to Your Highnesses), we required him to cease trading, as he was doing, inasmuch as it was equivalent to destroying the country to a great extent, and that Your Majesties would thus be but poorly served; and that, for the same reason, we asked and required him to name alcaldes, and municipal authorities, in the name of Your Royal Highnesses, for the town which was to be founded and built by us. This was accompanied by intimations in legal form that we would protest against him if he acted otherwise. This requirement having been made to the said Captain, he replied that he would give

³⁶ The armada was composed of eleven vessels, of which the largest, on which Cortes sailed, was of 100 *tonels*, the *tonel* being somewhat more than one ton. The number of men is variously given by different authorities, but, in the memorandum of Cortes at the time of his *residencia* in 1534, it is stated that there were 530 men. The persons of nobility must be sought among the leaders and captains who were Pedro de Alvarado, Gonzalo de Sandoval, Francisco de Orozco, Alonso Hernandez Puertocarrero, Diego de Ordaz, Alonzo de Avila, Juan de Escalante, Francisco de Montejo, Francisco de Morla, Francisco de Saucedo, Juan Velasquez de Leon, and Cristobal de Olid. Pedro de Alvarado had two brothers, Jorge and Gomez, and a natural brother, called Juan, and there may have been some other adventurers of good origin amongst the company (Orozco y Berra; tom, iv., cap. iii.).

his answer the next day; and the said Captain, having seen how all that we had asked him to do would be profitable to the service of Your Royal Highnesses, answered us the next day, saying that he was exclusively devoted to the service of Your Majesties, and that, without considering the profit which might result to him from carrying on the trading as planned, so as to recover the great expenses which had been sustained out of his property in fitting out that armada with the said Diego Velasquez, but rather putting aside everything else, he was glad and satisfied to do whatever we had asked him to do, inasmuch as it was advantageous to the service of Your Royal Highnesses. Immediately, therefore, he began with great diligence to found and people a town, to which the name was given of Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz.³⁷ He named those of us who will sign at the ends alcaldes and municipal officers of the said town receiving from us the oath in the name of Your Royal Highnesses, with the solemnity customary in such cases; after which we assembled the next day in our council and assembly chamber, and, being thus assembled, we sent to summon the Captain Fernando Cortes, and we asked him in the name of Your Royal Highnesses to show us the powers and instructions, which the said Diego Velasquez had given him for coming to these parts. He immediately sent for these, and showed them to us, and, having been seen and read by us, and well examined according to the best of our understanding, it seemed to us that, by those powers and instructions, the said Captain Fernando Cortes, had no longer any authority, and that, they having expired, he could no longer exercise the office of justice, or of captain.

It seemed to us, Very Excellent Princes, that, for the sake of peace and concord amongst us, and in order to govern us well, it was necessary to install a person for Your Royal service to act in the name of

³⁷ The legal formalities so scrupulously observed, were a trifle farcical in this particular instance, and Cortes doubtless listened to the reading of the "requirements" with a solemn exterior, but with his "tongue in his cheek." The narrative here is clear. He resigned the authority he had received from Velasquez, the royal governor of Cuba, into the hands of the municipal authorities he had himself appointed in response to the popular demand, and who thereby likewise became royal officials. They in their turn exercised their powers to appoint him Captain-General, and Chief Justice, of the new colony, and thus, by due form of law, Cortes found himself, within twenty-four hours after his abdication, installed as the recognized dispenser of civil justice, and as military commander. He showed a becoming reluctance to accept the nomination, and finally had all the appearance of yielding to an irresistible expression of the popular will. Bernal Diaz quotes to the point an old Spanish proverb: *Tu mi lo ruegas y yo mi lo quiero*. The partisans of Cortes, led by the Alvarados, Olid, Avila, Escalante, and Puertocarrero, secretly formed a party among the men and propounded the new plan of colonization for the crown, in substitution for that of merely trading in the interest of Diego Velasquez, arguing that he, Velasquez would get the lion's share of the profits, on their return to Cuba, while they would be about as poor as when they started. This idea won adherents, but was not slow in reaching the knowledge of the friends of Velasquez, who protested vigorously against such a betrayal of confidence, and insisted that they should return to Cuba with the treasure, and make their report to the governor. Cortes feigned to accede to their view, and perplexed them greatly by giving immediate orders to embark the next day. No sooner were these orders given, than the "imperialist" group, to describe them by a modern term, held a second meeting, in which it was resolved that their allegiance and duty were to the crown, that being already in practical possession of a rich strip of coast, and well received by the Indians, since they had proved their superiority, they should rather consider the conversion of the natives, and the extension of His Majesty's dominions, than the mere trading profits of the governor of Cuba, and hence that they should found there a port and city in the name of the sovereigns who would certainly approve when they came to understand the circumstances. The Velasquez party seems to have offered no open resistance.

The elaborate name of Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz was given to the new settlement, the "*rica*" being suggested by the rich character of the soil, and the "Vera Cruz" by the date of their landing, which was a Good Friday, the day when the Cross is especially venerated.

The transformation scene was very complete. Cortes, from being the semi-rebellious captain of a trading fleet became the recognized representative of the King of Spain in Mexico; the volunteer soldiers of the expedition became a militia; municipal officers, and royal officials sprang into existence, who acknowledged no superior but the King, while Diego Velasquez was eliminated from the scheme of things entirely. The partisans of Velasquez, though in a minority, still argued that Cortes's election was irregular, because they had not taken part in it, nor had it been confirmed, either by the Jeronymite Fathers, or the governor of Cuba. This incipient sedition was characteristically met, by Cortes offering as many as were dissatisfied permission to re-embark, and return to Cuba, and, at the same time, to demonstrate the reality of the new state of things, he ordered the Alguacil Mayor to arrest Juan Velasquez, Diego de Ordaz, Pedro Escudero, and others of the more active agitators, and to imprison them on the captain's ship. This drastic move had the desired effect upon the waverers.

Your Majesties in the said town, and in these parts as Chief Justice, and Captain, and head, whom we could all respect and obey until we might give account of everything to Your Royal Highnesses, so that you could provide as best suited your service. Recognizing that to no one could we better give such a charge than to the said Fernando Cortes, because, besides being a most suitable person, he is moreover very zealous in the service of Your Majesties, as well as being very experienced in these parts and islands, of which he has always given good proofs, for having spent all that he possessed to serve Your Majesties in this armada, and heeded so little (as we have already related) his possible gains and profits from continuing to trade, we therefore elected him, in the name of Your Royal Highnesses, to the office of Justice and Superior Alcalde, receiving from him the oath which is required in such cases. And, having done this as profitable to the service of Your Majesty, we received him in Your Royal name in our Council and Assembly Chamber, as Chief Justice and Governor of Your Royal arms, and thus he is, and will continue, until Your Majesties provide what is best for your service.

We have wished to fully relate all this to Your Royal Highnesses, that you may know what has been done here, and in what condition we are living here.

Having done as stated, and, being all assembled in our Council Chamber, we agreed to write to Your Majesties, and to send you, in addition to the one-fifth part which belongs to your rents, according to Your Royal prescriptions, all the gold, and silver, and valuables which we have obtained in this country, on account of its being the first, and above which we keep nothing for ourselves. We place this at the disposition of Your Royal Highnesses, as a proof of our very good will for your service, as we have heretofore done with our persons and property, and, having agreed upon this amongst ourselves, we selected as our procurators³⁸ Alonso Hernandez Portocarrero, and Francisco de Montejo, whom we send to Your Majesties with all this, that they may kiss Your Royal hands on our behalf, and that, in our names, and in that of this town, and its Council, they may pray Your Royal Highnesses to favor us as may be agreeable to God, and to Your Majesties, and for the coming good of this town, as will appear at greater length from the instructions which we have given them. We humbly beg Your Majesties, with all the respect which is becoming, to receive them, to give them Your Royal hands to kiss on our behalf, and to grant them all the favors they may ask and supplicate on behalf of this Council, and ourselves, because, in doing this Your Majesties, besides rendering service to Our Lord, and this town and Council, will bestow on us the special favor which we daily hope that Your Royal Highnesses will grant us.

In one chapter of this letter, we have already said that we would send an account to Your Royal Highnesses, by which Your Majesties might be perfectly informed of everything about this country, its condition, riches, the people who possess it, and of the law and sect, rites and ceremonies which they observe. This country, Most Potent Princes, where we now are in the name of Your Majesties, has fifty leagues of coast on the one side and the other of this town, the seacoast being low with many sand-hills, some of which are two leagues or more in length. The country beyond these sand-hills is level, with many fertile plains, in which are such beautiful river banks, that in all Spain there can be found no better; these are as grateful to the sight as they are productive in everything sown in them, and very orderly and well kept with walks, and facilities for grazing all kinds of animals. There is every kind of game in this country, and animals, and birds such as are familiar to us,—deer, fallow deer, wolves, foxes, quails, doves, and pigeons, and two or three kinds of hares and rabbits,—so that there is no difference between this country and Spain, as regards birds and animals; there are lions and tigers³⁹ about five leagues from the sea, in some places, and others are very beautiful [*word missing*]. There is, moreover, a great range of very beautiful mountains, some of them very high, amongst which one⁴⁰ very greatly exceeds all the others, and from it can be discovered and seen a great part of the sea and land; and it is so high that if the day is not very clear you cannot see or distinguish the summit of it, because

³⁸ See Appendix III. at close of Letter.

³⁹ The largest beasts of prey in Mexico were the puma, the jaguar, and the ocelot; lions and tigers there were none.

⁴⁰ Orizaba: the usual Indian name for the volcano was *Citlaltepētl*, meaning star-mountain, though they also called it *Zenctepatl*, and *Pojauhtecatl*. According to Humboldt, its known period of greatest activity was from 1545 to 1566; he also notes that both this crater, and that of Popocatepetl, incline towards the south-east. His measurement of Orizaba is 5395 meters (*Essai Politique*, vol. i.). Fencer's measurement is 5450 meters.

one half of it is all covered with clouds; and sometimes when the day is very clear the peak of it can be seen above the said clouds, and it is so white that we judge it to be snow, and the natives even tell us that it is snow, but as we have not seen it well, although we have been very near to it, and because this region is so hot, we do not affirm it to be snow. We will endeavor to know and see it, as well as many other things about which we have information, so as to send a true account to Your Royal Highnesses of the wealth of gold and silver and stones, and we judge that Your Majesties may order it to be examined according to the samples of all which we remit to Your Royal Highnesses. According to our judgment, it is credible that there is everything in this country which existed in that from whence Solomon is said to have brought the gold for the Temple, but, as we have been here so short a time, we have not been able to see more than the distance of five leagues inland, and about ten or twelve leagues of the coast length on each side, which we have explored since we landed; although from the sea it must be more, and we saw much more while sailing.

The people who inhabit this country, from the Island of Cozumel, and the Cape of Yucatan to the place where we now are, are a people of middle size, with of the bodies and features well proportioned, except that in each province their customs differ, some piercing the ears, and putting large and ugly objects in them, and others piercing the nostrils down to the mouth, and putting in large round stones like mirrors, and others piercing their under lips down as far as their gums, and hanging from them large round stones, or pieces of gold, so weighty that they pull down the nether lip, and make it appear very deformed. The clothing which they wear is like long veils, very curiously worked. The men wear breech-cloths about their bodies, and large mantles, very thin, and painted in the style of Moorish draperies. The women of the ordinary people wear, from their waists to their feet, clothes also very much painted, some covering their breasts and leaving the rest of the body uncovered. The superior women, however, wear very thin shirts of cotton, worked and made in the style of *rochets*. Their food is maize and grain, as in the other Islands, and *potuyuca*, as they eat it in the Island of Cuba, and they eat it broiled, since they do not make bread of it; and they have their fishing, and hunting, and they roast many chickens, like those of the Tierra Firma, which are as large as peacocks.⁴¹

There are some large towns well laid out, the houses being of stone, and mortar when they have it. The apartments are small, low, and in the Moorish style, and, when they cannot find stone, they make them of adobes, whitewashing them, and the roof is of straw. Some of the houses of the principal people are very cool, and have many apartments, for we have seen more than five courts in one house, and the apartments very well distributed, each principal department of service being separate. Within them they have their wells and reservoirs for water, and rooms for the slaves and dependents, of whom they have many. Each of these chiefs has at the entrance of his house, but outside of it, a large courtyard, and in some there are two and three and four very high buildings, with steps leading up to them, and they are very well built; and in them they have their mosques and prayer places, and very broad galleries on all sides, and there they keep the idols which they worship, some being of stone, some of gold, and some of wood, and they honor and serve them in such wise, and with so many ceremonies, that much paper would be required, to give Your Royal Highnesses an entire and exact description of all of them. These houses and mosques, wherever they exist, are the largest and best built in the town, and they keep them very well adorned, decorated with feather-work and well-woven stuffs, and with all manner of ornaments. Every day, before they undertake any work, they burn incense in the said mosques, and sometimes they sacrifice their own persons, some cutting their tongues and others their ears, and some hacking the body with knives; and they offer up to their idols all the blood which flows, sprinkling it on all sides of those mosques, at other times throwing it up towards the heavens, and practicing many other kinds of ceremonies, so that they undertake nothing without first offering sacrifice there.

They have another custom, horrible, and abominable, and deserving punishment, and which we have never before seen in any other place, and it is this, that, as often as they have anything to ask of their idols, in order that their petition may be more acceptable, they take many boys or girls, and even grown men and women, and in the presence of those idols they open their breasts, while they are alive, and take out the hearts and entrails, and burn the said entrails and hearts before the idols, offering that

⁴¹ These were turkeys, which were unknown in Europe

smoke in sacrifice to them.⁴² Some of us who have seen this say that it is the most terrible and frightful thing to behold that has ever been seen. So frequently, and so often do these Indians do this, according to our information, and partly by what we have seen in the short time we are in this country, that no year passes in which they do not kill and sacrifice fifty souls in each mosque; and this is practiced, and held as customary, from the Isle of Cozumel to the country in which we are now settled. Your Majesties may rest assured that, according to the size of the land, which to us seems very considerable, and the many mosques which they have, there is no year, as far as we have until now discovered and seen, when they do not kill and sacrifice in this manner some three or four thousand souls. Now let Your Royal Highnesses consider if they ought not to prevent so great an evil and crime, and certainly God, Our Lord, will be well pleased, if, through the command of Your Royal Highnesses, these peoples should be initiated and instructed in our Very Holy Catholic Faith, and the devotion, faith, and hope, which they have in their idols, be transferred to the Divine Omnipotence of God; because it is certain, that, if they served God with the same faith, and fervor, and diligence, they would surely work miracles.

It should be believed, that it is not without cause that God, Our Lord, has permitted that these parts should be discovered in the name of Your Royal Highnesses, so that this fruit and merit before God should be enjoyed by Your Majesties, of having instructed these barbarian people, and brought them through your commands to the True Faith. As far as we are able to know them, we believe that, if there were interpreters and persons who could make them understand the truth of the Faith, and their error, many, and perhaps all, would shortly quit the errors which they hold, and come to the true knowledge; because they live civilly and reasonably, better than any of the other peoples found in these parts.

To endeavor to give to Your Majesties all the particulars about this country and its people, might occasion some errors in the account, because much of it we have not seen, and only know it through information given us by the natives; therefore we do not undertake to give more than what may be accepted by Your Highnesses as true. Your Majesties may, if you deem proper, give this account as true to Our Very Holy Father, in order that diligence and good system may be used in effecting the conversion of these people, because it is hoped that great fruit and much good may be obtained; also that His Holiness may approve and allow that the wicked and rebellious, being first admonished, may be punished and chastised as enemies of Our Holy Catholic Faith, which will be an occasion of punishment and fear to those who may be reluctant in receiving knowledge of the Truth; thereby, that the great evils and injuries they practice in the service of the Devil, will be forsaken. Because, besides what we have just related to Your Majesties about the men, and women, and children, whom they kill and offer in their sacrifices, we have learned, and been positively informed, that they are all sodomites, and given to that abominable sin.⁴³ In all this, we beseech Your Majesties to order such measures taken as are most profitable to the service of God, and to that of Your Royal Highnesses, and so that we who are here in your service may also be favored and recompensed.

Amongst other things which are contained in our instructions to our procurators, whom we send to Your Highnesses, one is to pray Your Majesties on our own behalf, that you should in no way give, or make concession in these parts, to Diego Velasquez Lieutenant Admiral in the Island of Fernandina of the *adelantamiento*, nor the perpetual governorship, nor any other, nor the charge of justice; and if any such has been given to him, to order it to be revoked, because it is not profitable to the service of Your Royal Crown that the said Diego Velasquez, nor any other person, should have authority, or any other perpetual concession of any sort, save as may be the will of Your Majesties, in this country of Your

⁴² See Appendix IV. at close of Letter.

⁴³ Clavigero denounces the blameworthy facility with which this vice was imputed to the Mexicans in general, by some of the early writers and, in accord with other authorities, asserts that while it existed amongst the Panuchesi, the only evidence of it elsewhere was the severe laws enacted for its punishment. He does not hesitate to say, that the accusation was made by some of the Spaniards to palliate their own excesses,—a peculiarly heinous tactic. The friars, who were later in the best position to know the morals and customs of the Indians, unanimously repudiate the charge. Amongst modern authorities, Orozco y Berra combats the imputation as unfounded. Bernal Diaz records that obscene images were found in the temples at Cozumel, and the *Anonymous Conqueror* describes in language which I do not translate, the debauchery common amongst the Indians of Panuco, and gives some singular details of their different ways of intoxicating themselves, similar to nothing I have ever heard of amongst any people, ancient or modern (Apud Icazbalceta, *Doc. Ined. Il Modo di Sacrificare, etc.*).

Royal Highnesses, inasmuch as it is, as far as we can foresee and hope, very rich. Moreover, far from profiting Your Majesties' service, should the said Diego Velasquez be provided with some office, we foresee that we, the vassals of Your Royal Highnesses, who have begun to colonize, and to live in this country, will be ill treated by him, because we are convinced that, what has already been done in Your Majesties' service, in sending this gift of gold and silver, and valuables, which we have obtained here in this country, and now send, would not have been approved by him. This clearly appears through four of his servants who have come here, and who, when they perceived our wish to send all to Your Royal Highnesses, as we do, declared that it would be better to send it to Diego Velasquez, and otherwise opposed their being sent to Your Majesties. For this we ordered them to be imprisoned, and they will remain prisoners until justice decides, after which we shall relate to Your Majesties what we have done with them.⁴⁴ So, because we have seen what the said Diego Velasquez has done, and our experience of it, we fear that, if he should come to this country with any commission, he would treat us ill, as he has done in the Island of Fernandina, during the time that he had charge of its government, doing justice to none except as he pleased, and punishing those whom he chose, from anger or passion, but not from justice or reason. He has thus destroyed many good subjects by reducing them to great poverty, in refusing to give them any Indians, and taking them all for himself, and in taking all the gold which they had obtained without giving them any share of it. He also has interests with dishonest men, for his own advantage, and by the mere fact of his having the Governorship, and power of distribution, nobody dares to oppose him, knowing and fearing that he can ruin them. Your Majesties have no information about this, nor has there ever been any account made of it, because the procurators, who have gone heretofore from the said Island, are creatures and servants of his hands, whom he holds by giving them Indians at their pleasure; and the procurators, who come from the smaller towns to attend to the affairs of the communities, have to do as he wishes, because he buys them up with Indians. When such procurators return to their towns, and are asked to give an account of what they have done, the people declare that poor men should not be sent as procurators, because, for one cacique whom Diego Velasquez gives them, they will do everything he wants. The municipal officers and alcaldes who have Indians dare not speak to, or reprove, the procurators, who have done what they ought not to have done out of compliance to Diego Velasquez, for fear that the said Diego Velasquez might take away their Indians. In this, and other things, it is very good [*word missing* in MS.] from which Your Royal Highnesses may see, that all the accounts which the Island of Fernandina has made of what Diego Velasquez has done, and the favors which they asked for him, are on account of the Indians he has given to the procurators, and not because the communities are satisfied or wish such things; rather would they desire that those procurators were punished. The above being notorious to all the inhabitants and householders of this town of Vera Cruz, they assembled with the procurator of this council, and have asked and required us, by their requirements, signed with their names, that, in the name of all, we should beg Your Majesties not to provide the said Diego Velasquez with the said, or any other, commission, but rather to order him to give his *residencia*,⁴⁵ and to deprive him of the charge of the Island of

⁴⁴ Bernaldino de Coria, one of the conspirators, weakened at the last moment, and betrayed the plot to seize a boat, with provisions, and to put off to Cuba, for the purpose of warning Diego Velasquez of the sailing of the envoys, so that he might intercept them. Cortes did not mince matters; he promptly hanged Diego Cermeño, and Juan Escudero. The latter was the same alguacil who had captured him before the church in Santiago, where he had taken sanctuary during his quarrel with Velasquez, and had imprisoned him on the ship in the harbor. Gonzalo de Umbria had his feet cut off, and two hundred lashes were administered to each of the others, except the priest, Juan Diaz, whose cloth protected him. Gomara suppresses the amputation of Umbria's feet, and says he was whipped with the others. Bernal Diaz reports that Cortes exclaimed, when he signed the warrant for these punishments, "who would not rather be unable to write, than to have to sign away the lives of men!" but the old soldier shrewdly adds, that he believes most judges from the days of Nero down have expressed the same sentiment (Orozco y Berra, vol. iv., cap. viii.).

⁴⁵ This was done by means of a commission, with full powers to inquire into all administrative acts of a governor, and to receive and decide upon all complaints against him. Upon the arrival of the commissioners, the governor and his officials resigned their authority and badges of office into their hands, pending the outcome of the investigation. The *residencia* was not of itself an indignity, nor did it necessarily imply a want of confidence in the governor, but it was the most effective check the home government had upon the colonial officials.

Fernandina. By taking his *residencia*, the above statements would be shown to be true, for which we beseech Your Majesties to name a judge and inquisitor, in order to make an investigation of all which we have related to Your Royal Highnesses, not only about the Island of Cuba, but also elsewhere; for our intention is to prove things from which Your Majesties may judge if it be justice or conscience that he should have royal charges in these parts, or in the others where he at present resides.

In the same manner, the procurator, and the inhabitants and householders of this town, have asked us in the said petition that we should supplicate Your Majesty in their name to provide a warrant and Royal Provision to be given in favor of Fernando Cortes, Captain, and Superior Justice of Your Royal Highnesses, in order that he may govern us with justice, until this country shall be conquered and pacified, and for such time as may appear best to Your Majesties, and be best for your service; for they recognize in him such a person as is fit for it. Which petition and requirement we send with these, our procurators, to Your Majesties, and we all humbly supplicate Your Royal Highnesses, that you will grant not only this, but all the other favors, which in the name of this council and town may be petitioned by the said procurators, and that you will regard us as your most loyal vassals, such as we have been and always will be. The gold, and silver, and jewels, and valuables, and the *rodelas*, and the wearing apparel, which we send by the procurators to Your Royal Highnesses, and which, over and above the one-fifth which belongs to Your Majesty, Captain Fernando Cortes, and this council, pray you to accept, go with this memorial, signed by them and by the said procurators, as Your Royal Highnesses may see from it.⁴⁶ From the Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz, on the tenth of July, 1519.

⁴⁶ The first treasure sent to Spain contained the following curious objects:

A gold necklace composed of seven pieces, with 185 small emeralds set in it, and 232 gems, like rubies, from which hung 27 small bells of gold, and some pearls.

Another necklace of four pieces of gold, with 102 red gems, like rubies, 172 emeralds, 10 fine pearls, set in it, and 26 little golden bells pendant.

Two wheels, one of gold representing the sun, the other of silver bearing the image of the moon, 28 hands in circumference, and bearing various figures of animals, and other devices, beautifully worked in relief.

A head-dress of wood, decorated with gold and gems, with 25 golden bells pendant; instead of a plume it had a green bird, whose eyes, beak, and feet, were of gold.

A gold bracelet; a small scepter with two rings of gold, set with pearls at the ends.

Four tridents, tied with feathers of different colors, and pearl points tied with gold thread.

Several deerskin shoes, sewn with gold thread, and having soles of brilliant blue and white stones.

A shield of wood and leather, decorated with hanging bells of gold, and having gold plates in the centre, carved with the figure of the god of war, surrounded by four heads of a lion, a tiger, an eagle, and an owl, represented with their hair and feathers.

Several skins, tanned with the hair and feathers on them.

Twenty-four curious and beautiful golden shields, decorated with feathers and small pearls, four others of feathers and silver.

Four fish, two ducks, and other birds, made of gold.

Two sea-shells, imitated in gold, and a large crocodile, girt with golden threads.

A large mirror, and several small ones, of gold.

Several head-dresses, and crowns of feathers and gold, ornamented with pearls and gems.

Several large plumes of beautiful feathers, of various colors, spangled with gold and small pearls.

Several fans; some of gold and feathers, others of feathers alone, but all very rich.

A variety of cotton robes; some all white, others checkered white and black, or red, green, yellow, and blue, the outside being shaggy, and the inside smooth, without color.

A number of coats, handkerchiefs, bedcovers, tapestries, and carpets of cotton stuffs.

There were several Mexican books, written in hieroglyphics, on their paper, which was about the consistency of light pasteboard. Peter Martyr describes them as folding tablets, and says of the writing, '*Sunt characteres a nostris valde dissimilis, Egypteas fere formas aemulantur*' (*De Insulis nuper inventis*).

Gomara says the paper was made of cotton, and a kind of gum, or paste; sometimes also of aloe leaves; Peter Martyr describes it as made of fine crushed bark, kneaded together with a gum.

APPENDIX I.

The first attack, of which Cortes makes no mention was made at Catoche, just before dawn, March 6th. The Indians fought with great fury, in spite of the fire-arms which they heard for the first time, and were repulsed only with difficulty, after they had wounded fifteen Spaniards. Bernal Diaz relates that fifteen Indians were killed, and two were captured, who were afterwards baptized Christians, under the name of Melchor, and Julian, by the chaplain Fray Alonzo Gonzalez. The Spaniards looted the temples and houses of their idols and golden ornaments. The Indians at Champoton repeated inquiringly the words "*Castelan? Castelan?*" and, by gestures, asked if the strangers came from the East. Orozco y Berra (vol. iv., cap. i.) says that they connected the arrival of the unknown guests with the prophecy of Kukulcan (*Quetzalcoatl*), foretelling the coming of bearded white men from the land of the rising sun, and also that they had knowledge of Spaniards, from the time of the wreck of Valdivia's men, whom they had probably helped to sacrifice and eat.

The Spaniards passed an anxious night, listening to the noisy preparations of the Indians for battle, and in consulting vainly to discover some escape. At dawn, a hand-to-hand fight was fiercely waged, the Indians showing no fear of fire-arms, and driving the retreating Spaniards into the sea. Fifty Spaniards were killed, and one, Alonzo Bote, and a Portuguese, were captured alive. Bernal Diaz says that every soldier but one had from one to four wounds, for which the only dressing was fat taken from the dead Indians; he himself had three and Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba had twelve wounds. The name of *Mala Pelea* was given the place to commemorate this disaster.

The Spaniards found here the crosses which excited such interest and speculation that later a whole literature grew up to explain them. Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba had also seen crosses in Cozumel (Bernal Diaz, cap. iii., Oviedo, lib. xvii., cap. viii.; Gomara, *Hist. de las Indias*, cap. iii., Las Casas, *Hist. Apolog.*, cap. cxxv.).

The crosses found in various parts of Mexico were of several kinds. Those discovered in the western coast provinces, show a Buddhistic type, while those in the eastern parts are like either the simple Latin or Greek shapes. The cross at Metztitlan had the *Tau* form, while the famous one at Palenque presents no features by which it may be accurately classified, and has been thought to be an astronomical sign, or an emblem of the four winds. That the cross was an object of cult amongst the Indians is certain, though there is much disagreement amongst authorities as to its origin, age, and significance. Bernal Diaz says that if it was of Christian origin and meaning, the natives had forgotten them, and Oviedo, who even regarded the existence of these crosses as a fable, maintained that if they did exist, and the Indians ever had known why they venerated them, they had long since lost their knowledge. (Oviedo, lib. xvii., cap. viii.). Gomara described the cross seen at Cozumel as the rain-god, and said that quails were sacrificed before it (Gomara, *Hist. de las Indias*, cap. liv.).

The cross was an instrument of punishment among the Egyptians, Persians, Macedonians, Greeks, and Romans, as also among Buddhist peoples. Hardly an ancient religion is found in which some form of cross does not appear as a symbol. Among the Aryan races, two crossed sticks were the emblem of the sacred fire, produced by friction called *pramatha*, from which comes the name Prometheus, of Vedic origin. The *Tau* borne by Isis, symbolized the rainy season (hence fertility) in Abyssinia, and, in the Egyptian cult, was the emblem of fecundation, (phallus of Osiris). Among the Jews, the cross had no sacred character, but was on the contrary, the vilest instrument of capital punishment.

APPENDIX II.

This "making a requirement" was at once a naive and arrogant formality by which the Spaniards sought to give legal sanction to their high-handed invasion and claims on the Indians' submission. By a bull dated May 4, 1493, Alexander VI. gave in donation to the Spanish sovereigns all lands which might be discovered in the new world, defined by a line drawn one hundred leagues west of the Azores and Cape Verde Islands. A convention was afterwards signed between Spain and Portugal at Tordesillas, removing the line seventy leagues further westward.

Martin V. had made a similar grant to the Portuguese in the East Indies in 1420, which was afterwards confirmed by Nicholas V. and Calixtus III. Orozco y Berra observes that, whatever may be thought today of such a concession, it is certain that it gave an undoubted right to the sovereigns thus favored, which nobody, whether nation, king, or philosopher, disputed at that time. Pope Alexander's bull had the condition attached, that the natives of the countries discovered should be Christianized.

Such, therefore, was the high authority on which the "requirement" was based. The form of this document was invented, and drawn up, by Dr. Palacios Rubios, a juriconsul, and member of the Royal Council, for the use of Pedrarias de Avila, coming afterwards to serve in the other colonies.

The requirement began thus: "On the part of the King Fernando, and of the Queen Dona Juana, his daughter, Queen of Castile, Leon, etc., rulers of the barbarous natives: we their servants notify and make it known, to you, as best we can, that the living and eternal God, our Lord, created the heavens and the earth, and a man and a woman, of whom you, and we, and all men in the world are descendants, as well as all who shall come after us. However, because of the multitude of generations issuing from these, in the five thousand years since the creation of the world, it was necessary that some should go one way, and some another, and that they should be divided into many kingdoms and provinces, as they could not maintain themselves in one. God, our Lord gave the charge of all these people to one called St. Peter, that he should be lord and superior over all men in the world, and that all should obey him, and that he should be the head of all the human race, and should love all men of whatsoever land, religion, and belief; and He gave him the world for his kingdom ordering his seat to be placed in Rome, as the place best suited for ruling the world; but he was permitted also to establish his seat in any other part of the world, and to judge and govern all peoples, Christians, Moors, Jews, Gentiles, and of whatsoever other sect or creed they might be." etc. (Orozco y Berra, vol. iv., p. 86.).

The provisions of the bull giving the dominion over America to the Spanish sovereigns then followed.

The notary or clerk who accompanied the expedition read this unique document, indifferent to the fact that the Indians could not comprehend a word, even were they near enough to hear, and sometimes the reading would take place with no Indians at all present. All scruples were satisfied by this formality, and, if submission did not follow, the commander dealt with the natives as with obdurate rebels against the royal authority.

The way for the conquest was already prepared, and the Aztec historians, as well as the earliest Spanish authorities, record that, for a number of years, the belief that the hour of the Empire's dissolution was at hand had been steadily gaining ground, promoted by several events which were regarded as supernatural warnings of the approaching downfall. The lake of Texcoco had in 1510 risen suddenly, and inundated the city, without any visible cause or accompanying earthquake or tempest; one of the towers of the great teocalli was destroyed in 1511 by a mysterious conflagration, which resisted all efforts to extinguish it; comets, strange lights in the skies, accompanied by shooting stars, and weird noises, were all interpreted by the astrologers as portents of gloomy presage. The miraculous resurrection, three days after her death of Montezuma's sister, the Princess Papantzin who brought him a prophetic warning from her tomb, is reported at length by Clavigero (vol. i., p. 289). Legal proofs of this event, which occurred in 1509, were afterwards forwarded to the Spanish court. The princess is said to have lived many years, and to have been the first person to receive Christian baptism which she did in Tlatelolco, in 1524, being henceforth known as Dona Ana Papantzin, Her life became a model of Christian virtue. Whatever may have been the exact nature of this occurrence, the reported miracle doubtless rests upon some fact which was interpreted by the Mexicans as supernatural.

APPENDIX III.

The messengers carried also the first letter of Cortes, which has never since been found. It could not have differed essentially from the letter of the magistrates of Vera Cruz, as the one was intended to confirm the other. Bernal Diaz says that Cortes' letter made no mention of the discoveries of Cordoba, and Grijalba, and that he wished all such to be suppressed in the collective letter, though he was satisfied with its references to himself. After assisting at a mass, said by Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo, the two envoys sailed on July 16, 1519, and they took with them the royal fifth of all the gold, besides the other treasures which Cortes had induced the men to surrender, in order to make up an imposing gift to the Emperor. By Bernal Diaz, the sailing date is once given as the 16th of July, and in another place as the 6th; Gomara gives the 26th. They were enjoined to sail by the channel of the Bahamas, and to avoid Cuba, but they disobeyed this warning, and stopped several days at Marien, where Montejo had a property near by. They renewed their supplies at this place, and showed some of the treasure to a servant, besides which, Montejo also wrote to a former overseer of his, Juan de Reja, who had meanwhile passed into Diego Velasquez's service, and as through him the governor learned of what was happening, he promptly dispatched a vessel to overhaul the messengers, and bring them back; but he was too late. The envoys landed, early in October, 1512, but Benito Martin, a friend and agent of Velasquez's, was already advised of their coming, and lodged a complaint with the *Casa de Contractacion* in Seville, in which he described Cortes as a rebel against his superior's authority, and asked for the arrest of the envoys, and the sequestration of the letters, and the treasure. He found a ready ally in Rodriguez de Fonseca, Bishop of Burgos, who was omnipotent as President of the Royal Council for the Indies, a warm friend and supporter of Velasquez's, with whose family his own was about to be connected by a marriage.

Peter Martyr, who was then at Court, and noted every circumstance of interest, mentions the arrival of the two envoys in December as "recent," which might mean that he had only recently heard of it. All authorities agree that they got a rough reception from the Bishop of Burgos, and saw the Emperor only in March, 1520, after many difficulties. This audience was at Tordesillas, where His Majesty was then paying a visit to his mother, Dona Juana, before proceeding to Santiago de Compostella. Bernal Diaz would seem to be the original authority for the erroneous statement that Charles V. was in Flanders at this time, which has been repeated by many later historians. Charles had arrived in Spain in Nov. 1517. Peter Martyr, however, says that the Emperor had then already seen the gold and presents from Mexico, which confirms another authority, who states that while they were stopped by the Bishop in Seville, Martin Cortes, the father of Fernando, and an official of the Royal Council, who was friendly, one Nuñez contrived to forward duplicates of the dispatches to the Emperor, and a memorial describing the Bishop of Burgos's behavior, and the sequestration of the treasures. The Emperor was well impressed by the letters, and ordered the gifts to be sent on to him. He was, however, so absorbed with business of importance, prior to quitting the country for Germany to assume the imperial crown, that he left without giving a decision. The envoys followed him to La Coruña and there exists, in the archives of Simancas, the deposition given under oath before Dr. Carbajal, member of the Royal Council for the Indies, by Francisco Fernandez Puertocarrero, dated, Coruña, April 30, 1520, copied by Prescott, Appendix VII. The memorial of Benito Martin is found, according to Prescott, in the collection of MSS., made by Don Vargas Ponce, sometime president of the Academy of History.

APPENDIX IV.

Human sacrifices were very general among all the Mexican tribes, at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, and the description here given of the horrible temple rites is in no way exaggerated, but is indeed rather meager. The practice is traced, by some historians, to the tribe of the Mexi, which descended from Tenoch, son of Iztacmixcoati, the progenitor of the Nahoia family, but, with what justice, does not clearly appear, as this people may have received it from some tribe or race preceding, or allied, to them. Prisoners taken in war were the most highly prized victims, but failing these, or for the celebration of minor festivals, slaves were easily bought, or were offered by their owners for the purpose. Small infants were also commonly sold by their mothers, and instances of free-born men offering themselves as victims, for one motive or another, were not unknown. The victims were frequently drugged, in such wise that they went unconsciously, or even willingly to the altar. If a great festival, requiring many, and choice, victims, fell in a time of peace, war would be undertaken upon any frivolous pretext, in order to procure the desired offerings.

The rites were carefully prescribed, and were of the most solemn description. Different kinds of sacrificial stones were used for different classes of victims; the usual one called *techcatl* is described by Veladés (*Rhetorica Christiana*) as "*Mensa quadrata magiia non et splendida habent singla latera longitudinem trium ulnarum non absimilis lapideis illis qua inter Romana monumenta ad hunc servantur.*"

This table-shaped stone was about waist high, and stood as an inverted pyramid. Six priests officiated, five of whom held the arms, legs, and head of the victim, who was stretched upon the stone in such wise as to throw his chest well forward. These five had their faces and bodies painted black, with a white line around the mouth; their hair was bound up with a leather band, and ornamented with tufts of colored papers; their vestment was a white dalmatic, striped with black.

The sixth priest was the celebrant whose vestment varied according to the feast, or the deity, to be propitiated. His head was adorned with colored plumes, and in his ears were golden ornaments, set with green stones, while a blue stone was set in his under lip. Pronouncing the words of the ritual, he plunged a sharp knife, made of silex, into the victim's breast, and, quickly thrusting his hand into the opening, tore out the beating heart, which he first elevated, and then deposited at the feet of the image of the god. Sometimes the heart was placed in a vase, and left standing on the altar, or it might be buried, or preserved with divers ceremonies, as a relic, or it might be eaten by the priests; the fresh blood was smeared on the lips of the idols. If the victim were a prisoner taken in battle, his head was given to the priests, to be kept as a trophy, the entrails were fed to the dogs, and the other parts of the body were cooked with maize, and offered in small pieces to the guests invited to partake by the giver of the sacrificial feast.

The warrior who had captured the victim in battle could not eat of the latter's flesh, as a sort of spiritual relationship was held to exist between them, not dissimilar to that of a sponsor and his god-child in Christian baptism, or even closer, for the flesh of the victim was considered also as the very flesh of the captor. The eating of this human body was not an act of gluttonous cannibalism alone, but was believed to have mystic significance, the flesh having undergone some mysterious, transmutation by virtue of the sacrificial rite, and to be really consecrated; it was spoken of also, as the true body of the deity, to whom it was offered, and, also, as the "food of soul." None but chiefs, and distinguished persons, specially designated, were permitted to partake of the sacramental feast, which was celebrated with much ceremony and gravity. If the victim were a slave, the rites were similar, but simpler. Orozco y Berra, in the first, and the third volumes of his authoritative work, gives the fullest, and most interesting information on human sacrifices amongst the Mexicans.