



Hernando Cortez

A Story of
The Spanish Conquest of Mexico.

BY R. M. BIRD.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

During the year after the landing of Cortez in Mexico, Amador de Leste, a young Spanish nobleman, arrives at Vera Cruz and learns that the Knight Calavar, of whom he is in search, is with Cortez. He makes his way to him in company with a stripling secretary, sent with him by Admiral Cavallero. In the cavalcade are a Moorish prisoner and his boy, whom Amador defends from assault by an officer, Salvatierra. Arrived at the camp of Gen. Narvaez, Amador asks to be passed on to Cortez, nearby. Now, the triumphs of Cortez have fired with jealousy the heart of Velasquez, Governor of Cuba, who sent him to conquer Mexico, and Cortez and Narvaez, sent by Velasquez, are about to fight. Narvaez, enraged, throws Amador into prison, whence he is rescued by one of Narvaez's officers; Botello, a reputed magician attached to Cortez, escaping at the same time. They meet Cortez.

CHAPTER XXI.

The sun was declining fast when the travelers made their way to the camp of Cortez. The River of Canoes ran through a fertile valley; but this was of no great extent, and towards its upper termination, the scene of the events of the day, it was arid and broken with rocks. Immediately beyond the river, in a place made strong by rocks and bushes, impenetrable to cavalry, and affording the safest covert to his arquebusiers and crossbowman, the wary rival of Narvaez had pitched his quarters.

They had a weather-beaten and veteran appearance; most of them were apparelled in the escaup, cut in separate pieces resembling cumbersome plate-armor, and occasionally so hacked by the weapons of the natives that the white lining gaped out somewhat ludicrously from its darker covering. These arrayed in a better investment had their merions and breastplates commonly covered with rust, as if kept too much occupied with perils by night and day to allow leisure for burnishing them. Nevertheless, they looked like disciplined and experienced soldiers.

Under the shadow of a tall tree, remote from the rest, and attended only by a single armed follower—on a coal-black horse, heavily harnesssed, which stood under his weight with a tranquillity as marble-like as his own—sat the knight of Calavar. He was in full armor, but the iron plates were rusted on his body, and in many places shattered. The plumes were broken and disordered on his helmet; the spear lay at the feet of his steed; his buckler was in the hands of his attendant; and instead of the red tabard which was worn in a season of war by the brothers of his order, the black mantle of peace, with its great white cross, hung or drooped heavily from his shoulders. His beaver was up, and his countenance, wan and even ghastly, was fully revealed.

The ravages of an untimely age were imprinted upon his aspect; yet, notwithstanding the hollow cheeks and grizzled

heard, the brow furrowed with a thousand wrinkles, the lips colorless and contracted into an expression of deep pain, he presented the appearance of a ruin majestic in its decay. His hands were clasped, and lay on the pommel of the saddle, and, together with his whole attitude and air, indicated a state of the most profound and sorrowful abstraction. In truth, he seemed the prey of thoughts, many and deep; and it scarcely needed the simple and touching legend, *Miserere mei, Deus!* which usurped the place of a scutcheon or other device on his shield, to know that if he sat on his saddle, sorrow rested under his bosom.

No sooner had the neophyte beheld this gloomy apparition, than, with a loud cry, he threw himself from his horse; and, rushing forward, he seized the relaxed hand of the figure, and pressed it to his lips with reverence and affection. But the knight, not yet roused from his reverie, or struggling vainly with imperfect recollections, looked only into his face with a wistful stare.

"Patron and cousin! my friend and my father!" cried the novice, passionately, "do you not know me? I am Amador!"

"Amador!" muttered the knight, with a troubled look and a tone of perplexity. "Very well—to-morrow—to-morrow!"

"He will not understand you now," said the General. "He is often in these trances."

"Mi padre! mi amigo!" cried the youth, vehemently, without regarding the interruption of the commander, "will you not know me? I am Amador! Look—here is Baltasar, old Baltasar, your servant and favorite, that has been at your side ever from the days of the Alpujarras to the fall of Rhodes."

"The Alpujarras!" echoed the knight, with a deep sigh. "Wo is mei! miserere mei, Deus!"

"He will recollect us now," said Baltasar, who had also descended, and who testified his fidelity by a tear that glittered in his ancient eye. "I never knew that word fail to call him out of his mood, though I have often known it fling him into one—Master! I am Baltasar; and here is your honor's kinsman, Don Amador!"

"Ay! is it so indeed? I thought I was dreaming," said the knight. "Art thou here indeed, my son Amador? Give me thy brows, for I am rejoiced to find thee in the world again." And stooping and flinging his arms around his neck, he kissed the forehead of the neophyte with a parental affection.

"This, my masters," said Cortez, in an under voice, "is not a spectacle for us. Let us pass on, and arrange proceedings for the attack." And, with his suite, he instantly departed.

"And how dost thou prosper at Almeria?" continued Calavar, mildly, and without any incoherence of manner, though it was evident his thoughts were far away. "Hast thou found me any brave hearts who will march with me against the infidels of Barbary?"

"Dear knight and patron," said Amador,

"we are not now in Spain, but in the heathen lands of Mexico."

"Ay! Dios mio, I had forgotten that!" said Don Gabriel, with a bewildered air. "Whither I have come," said the novice, "to beg your pardon for my negligence and desertion, and never more to part from your side."

"I remember me now," said the knight, slowly and sadly. "Wo is mei! a sore infirmity is on my brain; and sometimes I am not master of my own acts. But I remember thee, my friend; I remember that, in an evil hour of forgetfulness, I forsook thee to come to this unknown land. But I beg thy pardon, my son; the dark mood took me from thee, and in truth I knew it not."

The tears came into the eyes of Amador as he listened to the self-accusation of his kinsman, and remembered how much the blame should rest on his own momentary defection.

"It is I that must bear the reproach, and I that must look for forgiveness," he cried. "But I will never need to be rebuked or forgiven again; for I swear, dear kinsman, I will follow thee truly now until my death."

"And thou hast left the fair hills of Spain, thy true friends, and thy lady-love," said Calavar, with a mournful voice, "to follow me over the wide seas and the hostile deserts? I welcome thee with gratitude, for thy love is great, and thy task will be bitter. I welcome thee well, Amador, but surely it is with sorrow; for I heard thou hadst won the love of a noble and virtuous lady; and heaven forbid I should not lament to sever thee, in thy youth, from the enjoyment of thy affection."

A flush of shame and pain mantled the countenance of the devoted novice as he replied:

"I confess I have much need of thy forbearance, dear knight; but they did me wrong who said I could forget thee for the love of woman. I acknowledge no duty that is not to thee, and no passion but that of serving thee with constancy and truth. But I am sent to thee not more by the impulses of my own love than by the commands of his most eminent highness, the Grand Master, who leaves it to thyself, as a well-beloved and much-trusted follower of the holy order, whether thou wilt remain fighting the infidels of this new world or return at thy pleasure to the island of Malta, which his majesty the King and Emperor, Don Carlos of Spain and Austria, hath promised to bestow upon the good knights, the defenders of Christendom."

"Among the infidels of the new world, then," said Calavar, casting his eyes meekly to heaven; "for I know that what poor service I may yet render the faith must be rendered soon; and if God uphold me, I will render it truly and well. But thou, Amador, my son, my faithful and my beloved! I adjure thee that, when my task is finished, thou return to the land of thy birth, and give thyself to a life of virtue, and, if possible, of peace. Watch well the creatures that are in thy breast, for among them are devils, which, if thou do not chain them, will rend thee. Check thy wrath, fetter thy fury," continued the knight, vehemently; "and when thou drawest thy sword, call on God, that it may not fall unjustly; for when blood is shed that should not have been shed, it lives on the soul forever—Ay de mi! Miserere mei, Deus!"

Don Amador feared as he listened with a superstitious reverence to the adjurations of the knight that he was about to relapse into his gloomy stupor; but he was deceived. The lips of Calavar muttered on for a moment, as if continuing to repeat the solemn and impassioned appeal of the psalmist; and then, making the sign of the cross on his breast, he

turned again to the novice with a kind of dismal cheer, and said:

"I welcome thee again to this land, Amador. And Baltasar—What now, Baltasar? is it possible I should forget thee? I am glad to look upon thy loyal countenance; thine old friend Marco will rejoice to fight again at thy side.—If I do not err, this is thy henchman, Lazaro; I greet thee well, Lazaro; be very true to thy master, and forget not thy religion. And this youth that rests behind thee—if he be thy follower, my son, he shall share thy welcome."

"I recommend the youth Fabueno to thy kindness," said Amador, well pleased to perceive his kinsman so collected. "He is the secretary of the Admiral Cavallero, who claims to be related to your honor, and sends you the assurance of his love. I have been constrained, without yet knowing the pleasure of his excellency, to receive the youth into my protection; and this I did the more cheerfully that he was my fellow-sufferer in the camp of Narvaez, and did, for my sake, very courageously expose himself to the painful shot of a crossbow, which now maims his right arm."

"If he have suffered for thee, my friend, I will not forget him," said the knight; "and I am rejoiced for his sake that now, in this season of peace, we may cure his wound before we call upon him to endure another."

The countenance of Don Amador fell; he thought the knight's dream of peace denoted that he was sinking again into abstraction.

"Call this not the season of peace," he cried. "The commander Cortez is resolute to fall upon his enemy, Narvaez, the enemy of honor; and it needs we should burnish up our arms to give him help."

Calavar looked seriously at the youth, and, touching his black mantle with an expressive gesture, said:

"It is the time of peace, my son—the time of peace for those that follow the good St. John. I remember me now, that Cortez came down from the mountains, to fight the man Narvaez and his host; but these are not infidels, but Christians."

"Cousin," said the cavalier, warmly, "though this man have the name, yet do I very much doubt if he possess any of the religion of a Christian; and I have to assure you I have endured such causeless indignities at his hands, such as direct insult, violent seizure, and shameful imprisonment, as can only be washed away with his blood."

"Wo's mei wo's mei!" cried the knight; "the blood that is poured in anger, will now flow like water; it will not dry like water; nor will water, though blessed by the holy priest in the church, wash its crust from the hand! Thou seest," he cried, extending his gauntleted member, and gazing piteously into the face of his heated kinsman—"thou seest, that though, for thrice five years, I have washed it in brook and font, in the river that flows from the land of the Cross, and in the brine of the sea, it oozes still from between the scales, like a well that must trickle forever and will not be hidden.—Thou art very wroth with me, heaven!—Miserere mei, Domine!"

Don Amador was greatly shocked and grieved that his imprudent obstinacy had so nearly again recalled the distraction of his kinsman. But it needed not many expressions of gentleness and submission to divert the current of his thoughts. The appearance of the young and devoted follower had come to the spirit of the penitent knight like a cool breeze over the temples of a fevered man; and having once been roused from his gloom he could not be long insensible to the excitement of his presence. He cast an eye of kindness and affection on the youth, and obeying, as one who had been long accustomed to such control, the humble suggestion of Marco, he turned to the tents of the encampment.

The sun had not yet set, when the rays, stealing through the vapors that gathered among the distant peaks, beheld the senior Cortez and his little army crossing the River of Canoes. A quarter-league above his encampment was the very ford which had given him passage, when, with a force short of 500 men, and a few score of wild Totonacs, taken with him less as warlike auxiliaries than as beasts of burthen and hostages for the fidelity of their tribe, he set out to cross mountains of snow and fire, rocky deserts and foaming rivers, in the invasion of an empire, whose limits, as well as its resources and power, were utterly unknown.

that if, as seems reasonable enough, you are vanquished, there is not a man of you that shall not hang at some corner of Zempoala to-morrow!"

A murmur running through the whole crew marked the disgust of all at this unsavory exordium. "Know, my good brothers, that, at this moment, though you very loyally and truly avow yourselves the soldiers of his majesty, our king and master, it hath somehow entered into the head of the General Narvaez, the lieutenant of his majesty's Governor, to consider you as villain rebels and traitors, and declaring war upon us with sword, fire, and free

shall have my head for the 3,000 crowns, if he can take it."

"How it happens he has not thought any other head in this company worth buying," said the commander, with an adroit bitterness, "is an insult he must himself explain."

"Lead us on!" cried all, with a shout of exultation. "We will conquer!"

"Ye will have hotter work than ye think," said Cortez; "and surely I believe ye will take to your heels, like the old Arrowauks of Cuba, leaving me to die at the pyramid—For I swear you, if ye force me to conduct you to Zempoala, I will not come from it alive unless as its master!"

"Let it be proclaimed death to anyone that turns his back!" cried a hundred voices.

"Ay, then, ye mad valiant rogues! ye shall have your wish!" cried Cortez, yielding to an excitement he had not easily suppressed, rising in his stirrups and looking round him with that fiery and fanatical enthusiasm which was the true secret of his greatness, and which left him not for a moment even in the darkest and most perilous hour of his enterprise. "We will march to Zempoala with God in our hearts and the name of the Holy Spirit on our lips; and remembering that,



"PATRON AND COUSIN, MY FRIEND AND MY FATHER," CRIED THE NOVICE PASSIONATELY, "DO YOU NOT KNOW ME? I AM AMADOR."

The rivulet was crossed, and the hardy desperadoes who were now marching with spears to attack a foe of five times their own number, fortified with cannon on an eminence, gathered about their leader as he sat his horse on the bank as if expecting his final instructions and encouragement. He surveyed them not only with gravity but with complacency, and smiling as if in derision of their weakness,—for they did not number much over 250 men,—he said, with imitable dryness.

"My good friends and companions! you are now about to fight a battle, the issue of which will depend very much on your own conduct; and I have to inform you,

rope, has sworn to give us to the death of catiffs and felons!"

The cavaliers clashed their swords upon their bucklers, the footmen drove their spears into the soil, and, foaming with rage, swore they would thus answer the calumny in the heart of their enemy.

"Does it need I should give you more proof of the bloody and insolent violence of Narvaez?" said the General. "He hath set a price upon my head, and on the head of my loyal friend Sandoval, as though we were vile bandits and assassins."

"What needs more words?" cried the young Captain thus referred to. "He

under such influence, we scattered the tens of thousands that beset us on the plains of Tlascala, we will show this dog of a Biscayan what it is to oppose the arms of heaven,—Amen!"

And Amen was uttered fiercely and frantically by the adventurers as they prepared to follow their leader. But a wave of his hand checked their ardor for a moment; a few words explained the order of attack, and the duties of the several leaders, of whom the young Sandoval was appointed to the most honorable and dangerous task—to seize the artillery by a coup-de-main, and thus give passage for De Leon in the assault of the towers, while Cortez himself should stand by with