

JOHN ABBOTT

FERDINAND DE SOTO,
THE DISCOVERER OF
THE MISSISSIPPI

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**Ferdinand De Soto, The
Discoverer of the Mississippi**

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John S. C. Abbott

Ferdinand De Soto, The Discoverer of the Mississippi / American Pioneers and Patriots

PREFACE

Mr. Theodore Irving, in his valuable history of the "Conquest of Florida," speaking of the astonishing achievements of the Spanish Cavaliers, in the dawn of the sixteenth century says:

"Of all the enterprises undertaken in this spirit of daring adventure, none has surpassed, for hardihood and variety of incident, that of the renowned Hernando de Soto, and his band of cavaliers. It was poetry put in action. It was the knight-errantry of the old world carried into the depths of the American wilderness. Indeed the personal adventures, the feats of individual prowess, the picturesque description of steel-clad cavaliers, with lance and helm and prancing steed, glittering through the wildernesses of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and the prairies of the Far West, would seem to us mere fictions of romance, did they not come to us recorded in matter of fact narratives of contemporaries, and corroborated by minute and daily memoranda of eye-witnesses."

These are the wild and wondrous adventures which I wish here to record. I have spared no pains in obtaining the most accurate information which the records of those days have transmitted to us. It is as wrong to traduce the dead as the living. If one should be careful not to write a line which dying he would wish to blot, he should also endeavor to write of the departed in so candid and paternal a spirit, while severely just to the truth of history, as to be safe from reproach. One who is aiding to form public opinion respecting another, who has left the world, should remember that he may yet meet the departed in the spirit land. And he may perhaps be greeted with the words, "Your condemnation was too severe. You did not make due allowance for the times in which I lived. You have held up my name to unmerited reproach."

Careful investigation has revealed De Soto to me as by no means so bad a man as I had supposed him to have been. And I think that the candid reader will admit that there was much, in his heroic but melancholy career, which calls for charitable construction and sympathy.

The authorities upon which I have mainly relied for my statements, are given in the body of the work. There is no country on the globe, whose early history is so full of interest and instruction as our own. The writer feels grateful to the press, in general, for the kindly spirit in which it has spoken of the attempt, in this series, to interest the popular reader in those remarkable incidents which have led to the establishment of this majestic republic.

CHAPTER I

Childhood and Youth

Birthplace of Ferdinand De Soto. – Spanish Colony at Darien. – Don Pedro de Avila, Governor of Darien. – Vasco Nuñez. – Famine. – Love in the Spanish Castle. – Character of Isabella. – Embarrassment of De Soto. – Isabella's Parting Counsel.

In the interior of Spain, about one hundred and thirty miles southwest of Madrid, there is the small walled town of Xeres. It is remote from all great routes of travel, and contains about nine thousand inhabitants, living very frugally, and in a state of primitive simplicity. There are several rude castles of the ancient nobility here, and numerous gloomy, monastic institutions. In one of these dilapidated castles, there was born, in the year 1500, a boy, who received the name of Ferdinand de Soto. His parents were Spanish nobles, perhaps the most haughty class of nobility which has ever existed. It was, however, a decayed family, so impoverished as to find it difficult to maintain the position of gentility. The parents were not able to give their son a liberal education. Their rank did not allow them to introduce him to any of the pursuits of industry; and so far as can now be learned, the years of his early youth were spent in idleness.

Ferdinand was an unusually handsome boy. He grew up tall, well formed, and with remarkable muscular strength and agility. He greatly excelled in fencing, horseback riding, and all those manly exercises which were then deemed far more essential for a Spanish gentleman than literary culture. He was fearless, energetic, self-reliant; and it was manifest that he was endowed with mental powers of much native strength.

When quite a lad he attracted the attention of a wealthy Spanish nobleman, Don Pedro de Avila, who sent him to one of the Spanish universities, probably that of Saragossa, and maintained him there for six years. Literary culture was not then in high repute; but it was deemed a matter of very great moment that a nobleman of Spain should excel in horsemanship, in fencing, and in wielding every weapon of attack or defence.

Ferdinand became quite renowned for his lofty bearing, and for all chivalric accomplishments. At the tournaments, and similar displays of martial prowess then in vogue, he was prominent, exciting the envy of competitive cavaliers, and winning the admiration of the ladies.

Don Pedro became very proud of his foster son, received him to his family, and treated him as though he were his own child. The Spanish court had at that time established a very important colony at the province of Darien, on the Isthmus of Panama. This isthmus, connecting North and South America, is about three hundred miles long and from forty to sixty broad. A stupendous range of mountains runs along its centre, apparently reared as an eternal barrier between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. From several of the summits of this ridge the waters of the two oceans can at the same time be distinctly seen. Here the Spanish court, in pursuit of its energetic but cruel conquest of America, had established one of its most merciless colonies. There was gold among the mountains. The natives had many golden ornaments. They had no conception of the value of the precious ore in civilized lands. Readily they would exchange quite large masses of gold for a few glass beads. The great object of the Spaniards in the conquest of Darien was to obtain gold. They inferred that if the ignorant natives, without any acquaintance with the arts, had obtained so much, there must be immense quantities which careful searching and skilful mining would reveal.

The wanton cruelties practised by the Spaniards upon the unoffending natives of these climes seem to have been as senseless as they were fiendlike. It is often difficult to find any motive for their atrocities. These crimes are thoroughly authenticated, and yet they often seem like the outbursts of demoniac malignity. Anything like a faithful recital of them would torture the sensibilities of our

readers almost beyond endurance. Mothers and maidens were hunted and torn down by bloodhounds; infant children were cut in pieces, and their quivering limbs thrown to the famished dogs.

The large wealth and the rank of Don Pedro de Avila gave him much influence at the Spanish court. He succeeded in obtaining the much-coveted appointment of Governor of Darien. His authority was virtually absolute over the property, the liberty, and the lives of a realm, whose extended limits were not distinctly defined.

Don Pedro occupied quite an imposing castle, his ancestral mansion, in the vicinity of Badajoz. Here the poor boy Ferdinand, though descended from families of the highest rank, was an entire dependent upon his benefactor. The haughty Don Pedro treated him kindly. Still he regarded him, in consequence of his poverty, almost as a favored menial. He fed him, clothed him, patronized him.

It was in the year 1514 that Don Pedro entered upon his office of Governor of Darien. The insatiate thirst for gold caused crowds to flock to his banners. A large fleet was soon equipped, and more than two thousand persons embarked at St. Lucar for the golden land. The most of these were soldiers; men of sensuality, ferocity, and thirst for plunder. Not a few noblemen joined the enterprise; some to add to their already vast possessions, and others hoping to retrieve their impoverished fortunes.

A considerable number of priests accompanied the expedition, and it is very certain that some of these at least were actuated by a sincere desire to do good to the natives, and to win them to the religion of Jesus: – that religion which demands that we should do to others as we would that others should do to us, and whose principles, the governor, the nobles, and the soldiers, were ruthlessly trampling beneath their feet. Don Pedro, when measured by the standard of Christianity, was proud, perfidious and tyrannical. The course he pursued upon his arrival in the country was impolitic and almost insane.

His predecessor in the governorship was Vasco Nuñez. He had been on the whole a prudent, able and comparatively merciful governor. He had entered into trade with the natives, and had so far secured their good will as to induce them to bring in an ample supply of provisions for his colony. He had sent out Indian explorers, with careful instructions to search the gold regions among the mountains. Don Pedro, upon assuming the reins of government, became very jealous of the popularity of Nuñez, whom he supplanted. His enmity soon became so implacable that, without any cause, he accused him of treason and ordered him to be decapitated. The sentence was executed in the public square of Acla. Don Pedro himself gazed on the cruel spectacle concealed in a neighboring house. He seemed ashamed to meet the reproachful eye of his victim, as with an axe his head was cut off upon a block.

All friendly relations with the Indians were speedily terminated. They were robbed of their gold, of their provisions, and their persons were outraged in the most cruel manner. The natives, terror-stricken, fled from the vicinity of the colony, and suddenly the Spaniards found all their supplies of provisions cut off. More than two thousand were crowded into a narrow space on the shores of the gulf, with no possibility of obtaining food. They were entirely unprepared for any farming operations, having neither agricultural tools nor seed. Neither if they had them could they wait for the slow advent of the harvest. Famine commenced its reign, and with famine, its invariable attendant, pestilence. In less than six months, of all the glittering hosts, which with music and banners had landed upon the isthmus, expecting soon to return to Europe with their ships freighted with gold, but a few hundred were found alive, and they were haggard and in rags.

The Spaniards had robbed the Indians of their golden trinkets, but these trinkets could not be eaten and they would purchase no food. They were as worthless as pebbles picked from the beach. Often lumps of gold, or jewels of inestimable value, were offered by one starving wretch to another for a piece of mouldy bread. The colony would have become entirely extinct, but for the opportune arrival of vessels from Spain with provisions. Don Pedro had sent out one or two expeditions of half-famished men to seize the rice, Indian corn, and other food, wherever such food could be found.

The natives had sufficient intelligence to perceive that the colonists were fast wasting away. The Indians were gentle and amiable in character, and naturally timid; with no taste for the ferocities of war. But emboldened by the miseries of the colonies, and beginning to despise their weakness, they fell upon the foraging parties with great courage and drove them back ignominiously to the coast. The arrival of the ships to which we have referred with provisions and reinforcements, alone saved the colony from utter extinction.

Don Pedro, after having been in the colony five years, returned to Spain to obtain new acquisitions of strength in men and means for the prosecution of ever-enlarging plans of wealth and ambition. North and south of the narrow peninsula were the two majestic continents of North and South America. They both invited incursions, where nations could be overthrown, empires established, fame won, and where mountains of gold might yet be found.

It seems that De Soto had made the castle of Don Pedro, near Badajoz, his home during the absence of the governor. There all his wants had been provided for through the charitable munificence of his patron. He probably had spent his term time at the university. He was now nineteen years of age, and seemed to have attained the full maturity of his physical system, and had developed into a remarkably elegant young man.

The family of Don Pedro had apparently remained at the castle. His second daughter, Isabella, was a very beautiful girl in her sixteenth year. She had already been presented at the resplendent court of Spain, where she had attracted great admiration. Rich, beautiful and of illustrious birth, many noblemen had sought her hand, and among the rest, one of the princes of the blood royal. But Isabella and De Soto, much thrown together in the paternal castle, had very naturally fallen in love with each other.

The haughty governor was one day exceedingly astounded and enraged, that De Soto had the audacity to solicit the hand of his daughter in marriage. In the most contemptuous and resentful manner, he repelled the proposition as an insult. De Soto was keenly wounded. He was himself a man of noble birth. He had no superior among all the young noblemen around him, in any chivalric accomplishment. The only thing wanting was money. Don Pedro loved his daughter, was proud of her beauty and celebrity, and was fully aware that she had a very decided will of her own.

After the lapse of a few days, the governor was not a little alarmed by a statement, which the governess of the young lady ventured to make to him. She assured him that Isabella had given her whole heart to De Soto, and that she had declared it to be her unalterable resolve to retire to a convent, rather than to become the wife of any other person. Don Pedro was almost frantic with rage. As totally devoid of moral principle as he was of human feelings, he took measures to have De Soto assassinated. Such is the uncontradicted testimony of contemporary historians. But every day revealed to him more clearly the strength of Isabella's attachment for De Soto, and the inflexibility of her will. He became seriously alarmed, not only from the apprehension that if her wishes were thwarted, no earthly power could prevent her from burying herself in a convent, but he even feared that if De Soto were to be assassinated, she would, by self-sacrifice, follow him to the world of spirits. This caused him to feign partial reconciliation, and to revolve in his mind more cautious plans for his removal.

He decided to take De Soto back with him to Darien. The historians of those days represent that it was his intention to expose his young protégé to such perils in wild adventures in the New World, as would almost certainly secure his death. De Soto himself, proud though poor, was tortured by the contemptuous treatment which he received, even from the menials in the castle, who were aware of his rejection by their proud lord. He therefore eagerly availed himself of the invitation of Don Pedro to join in a new expedition which he was fitting out for Darien.

He resolved, at whatever sacrifice, to be rich. The acquisition of gold, and the accumulation of fame, became the great objects of his idolatry. With these he could not only again claim the hand of Isabella, but the haughty Don Pedro would eagerly seek the alliance of a man of wealth and renown. Thousands of adventurers were then crowding to the shores of the New World, lured by the accounts

of the boundless wealth which it was said could there be found, and inspired by the passion which then pervaded Christendom, of obtaining celebrity by the performance of chivalric deeds.

Many had returned greatly enriched by the plunder of provinces. The names of Pizarro and Cortez had been borne on the wings of renown through all the countries of Europe, exciting in all honorable minds disgust, in view of their perfidy and cruelty, and inspiring others with emotions of admiration, in contemplation of their heroic adventures.

De Soto was greatly embarrassed by his poverty. Both his parents were dead. He was friendless; and it was quite impossible for him to provide himself with an outfit suitable to the condition of a Spanish grandee. The insulting treatment he had received from Don Pedro rendered it impossible for him to approach that haughty man as a suppliant for aid. But Don Pedro did not dare to leave De Soto behind him. The family were to remain in the ancestral home. And it was very certain that, Don Pedro being absent, ere long he would hear of the elopement of Ferdinand and Isabella. Thus influenced, he offered De Soto a free passage to Darien, a captain's commission with a suitable outfit, and pledged himself that he should have ample opportunity of acquiring wealth and distinction, in an expedition he was even then organizing for the conquest of Peru. As Don Pedro made these overtures to the young man, with apparently the greatest cordiality, assuming that De Soto, by embarking in the all-important enterprise, would confer a favor rather than receive one, the offer was eagerly accepted.

Don Pedro did everything in his power to prevent the two lovers from having any private interview before the expedition sailed. But the ingenuity of love as usual triumphed over that of avarice. Isabella and De Soto met, and solemnly pledged constancy to each other. It seems that Isabella thoroughly understood the character of her father, and knew that he would shrink from no crime in the accomplishment of his purposes. As she took her final leave of her lover, she said to him, very solemnly and impressively,

"Ferdinand, remember that one treacherous friend is more dangerous than a thousand avowed enemies."

CHAPTER II

The Spanish Colony

Character of De Soto. – Cruel Command of Don Pedro. – Incident. – The Duel. – Uracca. – Consternation at Darien. – Expedition Organized. – Uracca's Reception of Espinosa and his Troops. – The Spaniards Retreat. – De Soto Indignant. – Espinosa's Cruelty, and Deposition from Command.

It was in the year 1519, when the expedition sailed from St. Lucar for Darien. We have no account of the incidents which occurred during the voyage. The fleet reached Darien in safety, and the Spanish adventurers, encased in coats of mail, which the arrows and javelins of the natives could not pierce, mounted on powerful war horses, armed with muskets and cannon, and with packs of ferocious bloodhounds at their command, were all prepared to scatter the helpless natives before them, as the whirlwind scatters autumnal leaves.

De Soto was then but nineteen years of age. In stature and character he was a mature man. There are many indications that he was a young man of humane and honorable instincts, shrinking from the deeds of cruelty and injustice which he saw everywhere perpetrated around him. It is however probable, that under the rigor of military law, he at times felt constrained to obey commands from which his kindly nature recoiled.

Don Pedro was a monster of cruelty. He gave De Soto command of a troop of horse. He sent him on many expeditions which required not only great courage, but military sagacity scarcely to be expected in one so young and inexperienced. It is however much to the credit of De Soto, that the annalists of those days never mentioned his name in connection with those atrocities which disgraced the administration of Don Pedro. He even ventured at times to refuse obedience to the orders of the governor, when commanded to engage in some service which he deemed dishonorable.

One remarkable instance of this moral and physical intrepidity is on record. Don Pedro had determined upon the entire destruction of a little village occupied by the natives. The torch was to be applied, and men, women and children, were to be put to the sword. Don Pedro had issued such a command as this, with as much indifference as he would have placed his foot upon an anthill. It is not improbable that one of the objects he had in view was to impose a revolting task upon De Soto, that he might be, as it were, whipped into implicit obedience. He therefore sent one of the most infamous of his captains to De Soto with the command that he should immediately take a troop of horse, proceed to the doomed village, gallop into its peaceful and defenceless street, set fire to every dwelling, and with their keen sabres, cut down every man, woman and child. It was a deed fit only for demons to execute.

De Soto deemed himself insulted in being ordered on such a mission. This was not war, – it was butchery. The defenceless natives could make no resistance. Indignantly and heroically he replied:

"Tell Don Pedro, the governor, that my life and services are always at his disposal, when the duty to be performed is such as may become a Christian and a gentleman. But in the present case, I think the governor would have shown more discretion by entrusting you, Captain Perez, with this commission, instead of sending you with the order to myself."

This reply Captain Perez might certainly regard as reflecting very severely upon his own character, and as authorizing him to demand that satisfaction which, under such circumstances, one cavalier expects of another. He however carried the message to the governor. Don Pedro was highly gratified. He saw that a duel was the necessary result. Captain Perez was a veteran soldier, and was the most expert swordsman in the army. He was famed for his quarrelsome disposition; had already fought many duels, in which he had invariably killed his man. In a rencontre between the youthful De Soto and the veteran Captain Perez, there could be no doubt in the mind of the governor as to the

result. He therefore smiled very blandly upon Captain Perez, and said in language which the captain fully understood:

"Well, my friend, if you, who are a veteran soldier, can endure the insolence of this young man, De Soto, I see no reason why an infirm old man like myself should not show equal forbearance."

Captain Perez was not at all reluctant to take the hint. It was only giving him an opportunity to add another to the list of those who had fallen before his sword. The challenge was immediately given. De Soto's doom was deemed sealed. Duels in the Spanish army were fashionable, and there was no moral sentiment which recoiled in the slightest degree from the barbaric practice.

The two combatants met with drawn swords in the presence of nearly all the officers of the colonial army, and of a vast concourse of spectators. The stripling De Soto displayed skill with his weapon which not only baffled his opponent, but which excited the surprise and admiration of all the on-lookers. For two hours the deadly conflict continued, without any decisive results. De Soto had received several trifling wounds, while his antagonist was unharmed. At length, by a fortunate blow, he inflicted such a gash upon the right wrist of Perez, that his sword dropped from his hand. As he attempted to catch it with his left hand, he stumbled and fell to the ground. De Soto instantly stood over him with his sword at his breast, demanding that he should ask for his life. The proud duellist, thus for the first time in his life discomfited, was chagrined beyond endurance. In sullen silence, he refused to cry for mercy. De Soto magnanimously returned his sword to its scabbard, saying: "The life that is not worth asking for, is not worth taking."

He then gracefully bowed to the numerous spectators and retired from the field, greeted with the enthusiastic acclaim of all who were present. This achievement gave the youthful victor prominence above any other man in the army. Perez was so humiliated by his defeat, that he threw up his commission and returned to Spain. Thus the New World was rid of one of the vilest of the adventurers who had cursed it.

The region of the peninsula, and the adjoining territory of South America, were at that time quite densely populated. The inhabitants seem to have been a happy people, not fond of war, and yet by no means deficient in bravery. The Spanish colonists were but a handful among them. But the war horse, bloodhounds, steel coats of mail and gunpowder, gave them an immense, almost resistless superiority.

There was at this time, about the year 1521, an Indian chief by the name of Uracca, who reigned over quite a populous nation, occupying one of the northern provinces of the isthmus. He was a man of unusual intelligence and ability. The outrages which the Spaniards were perpetrating roused all his energies of resentment, and he resolved to adopt desperate measures for their extermination. He gathered an army of twenty thousand men. In that warm climate, in accordance with immemorial usage, they went but half clothed. Their weapons were mainly bows, with poisoned arrows; though they had also javelins and clumsy swords made of a hard kind of wood.

The tidings of the approach of this army excited the greatest consternation at Darien. A shower of poisoned arrows from the strong arms of twenty thousand native warriors, driven forward by the energies of despair, even these steel-clad adventurers could not contemplate without dread. The Spaniards had taught the natives cruelty. They had hunted them down with bloodhounds; they had cut off their hands with the sword; they had fed their dogs with their infants; had tortured them at slow fires and cast their children into the flames. They could not expect that the natives could be more merciful than the Spaniards had been.

Don Pedro, instead of waiting the arrival of his foes, decided to assail the army on its march, hoping to take it by surprise and to throw consternation into the advancing ranks. He divided his army of attack into two parties. One division of about one hundred men, he sent in two small vessels along the western coast of the isthmus, to invade the villages of Uracca, hoping thus to compel the Indian chief to draw back his army for the defence of his own territories. This expedition was under the command of General Espinosa.

The main body of the Spanish troops, consisting of about two hundred men, marched along the eastern shore of the isthmus, intending eventually to effect a junction with the naval force in the realms of the foe. The energetic, but infamous Francisco Pizarro, led these troops. A very important part of his command consisted of a band of dragoons, thirty or forty in number, under the leadership of De Soto. His steel-clad warriors were well mounted, with housings which greatly protected their steeds from the arrows of the natives.

The wary Indian chieftain, who developed during the campaign military abilities of a high order, had his scouts out in all directions. They discerned in the distant horizon the approach of the two vessels, and swift runners speedily reported the fact to Uracca. He immediately marched with a force in his judgment sufficiently strong to crush the invaders, notwithstanding their vast superiority in arms.

The Spaniards entered a sheltered bay skirted by a plain, which could be swept by their guns, and where the Indian warriors would have no opportunity to hide in ambush. Uracca allowed the Spaniards to disembark unopposed. He stationed his troops, several thousand in number, in a hilly country, several leagues distant from the place of landing, which was broken with chasms and vast boulders, and covered with tropical forest. Here every Indian could fight behind a rampart, and the Spaniards could only approach in the scattered line of skirmishers. The proud Spaniards advanced in their invading march with as much of war's pageantry as could be assumed. They hoped that nodding plumes and waving banners, and trumpet peals, would strike with consternation the heart of the Indians.

Uracca calmly awaited their approach. His men were so concealed that Espinosa could form no judgment of their numbers or position. Indeed he was scarcely conscious that there was any foe there who would venture to oppose his march. Accustomed as he was to ride rough shod over the naked Indians, he was emboldened by a fatal contempt for the prowess of his foe. Uracca allowed the Spaniards to become entangled in the intricacies of rocks and gullies and gigantic forest trees, when suddenly he opened upon them such a shower of poisoned arrows as the Spaniards had never encountered before. The touch of one of these arrows, breaking the skin, caused immediate and intense agony, and almost certain death. The sinewy arms of the Indians could throw these sharp-pointed weapons with almost the precision and force of a bullet, and with far greater rapidity than the Spaniards could load and fire their muskets.

Espinosa found himself assailed by a foe outnumbering him ten or twenty to one. The air was almost darkened with arrows, and every one was thrown with unerring aim. The rout of the Spaniards was almost instantaneous. Several were killed, many wounded. In a panic, they turned and fled precipitately from the trap in which they had been caught. The natives impetuously pursued, showing no quarter, evidently determined to exterminate the whole band.

It so happened that De Soto, with his dragoons, had left Pizarro's band, and in a military incursion into the country, was approaching the bay where Espinosa had landed his troops. Suddenly the clamor of the conflict burst upon his ear – the shouts of the Indian warriors and the cry of the fugitive Spaniards. His little band put spurs to their horses and hastened to the scene of action. Very great difficulties impeded their progress. The rugged ground, encumbered by rocks and broken by ravines, was almost impassable for horsemen. But the energy of De Soto triumphed over these obstacles, even when the bravest of his companions remonstrated and hesitated to follow him. At length he reached the open country over which the Spaniards were rushing to gain their ships, pursued by the Indians in numbers and strength which seemed to render the destruction of the Spaniards certain.

The natives stood in great dread of the horses. When they saw the dragoons, glittering in their steel armor, come clattering down upon the plain, their pursuit was instantly checked. Espinosa, thus unexpectedly reinforced, rallied his panic-stricken troops, and in good order continued the retreat to the ships. De Soto with his cavalry occupied the post of danger as rear-guard. The Indians cautiously

followed, watching for every opportunity which the inequalities of the ground might offer, to assail the invaders with showers of arrows. Occasionally De Soto would halt and turn his horses' heads towards the Indians. Apprehensive of a charge, they would then fall back. The retreat was thus conducted safely, but slowly.

The Spaniards had advanced many leagues from the shores of the Pacific. They were now almost perishing from hunger and fatigue. Indian bands were coming from all directions to reinforce the native troops. The sun was going down and night was approaching. All hearts were oppressed with the greatest anxiety. Just then Pizarro, with his two hundred men, made his appearance. He had not been far away, and a courier having informed him of the peril of the Spaniards, he hastened to their relief. Night with its gloom settled down over the plain, and war's hideous clamor was for a few hours hushed. The morning would usher in a renewal of the battle, under circumstances which caused the boldest hearts in the Spanish camp to tremble.

In the night Generals Espinosa and Pizarro held a council of war, and came to the inglorious resolve to steal away under the protection of darkness, leaving Uracca in undisputed possession of the field. This decision excited the indignation of De Soto. He considered it a disgrace to the Spanish arms, and declared that it would only embolden the natives in all their future military operations. His bitter remonstrances were only answered by a sneer from General Espinosa, who assured him that the veteran captains of Spain would not look to his youth and inexperience for guidance and wisdom.

At midnight the Spaniards commenced their retreat as secretly and silently as possible. But they had a foe to deal with who was not easily to be deceived. His scouts were on the alert, and immediate notice was communicated to Uracca of the movements of the Spaniards. The pursuit was conducted with as much vigor as the flight. For eight and forty hours the fugitives were followed so closely, and with such fierce assailing, that large numbers of the rank and file perished. The officers and the dragoons of De Soto, wearing defensive armor, generally escaped unharmed. The remnant at length, weary and famine-stricken, reached their ships and immediately put to sea. With the exception of De Soto's dragoons, they numbered but fifty men. Deeply despondent in view of their disastrous campaign, they sailed several leagues along the western coast of the isthmus towards the south, till they reached a flourishing Indian village called Borrica. Conscious that here they were beyond the immediate reach of Uracca's avenging forces, they ventured to land. They found all the men absent. They were probably in the ranks of the native army.

General Espinosa, who was now chief in command, meanly sacked the defenceless village and captured all the women and children, to be sent to the West Indies and sold as slaves. The generous heart of De Soto was roused by this outrage. He was an imperious man, and was never disposed to be very complaisant to his superiors. Sternly the young captain rebuked Espinosa as a kidnapper, stealing the defenceless; and he demanded that the prisoners should be set at liberty. An angry controversy ensued. De Soto accused Espinosa of cowardice and imbecility, in ordering the troops of Spain to retreat before naked savages. Espinosa, whose domineering spirit could brook no opposition, accused De Soto of mutinous conduct, and threatened to report him to the governor. De Soto angrily turned his heel upon his superior officer and called upon his troops to mount their horses. Riding proudly at their head, he approached the tent of Espinosa and thus addressed him:

"Señor Espinosa, the governor did not place me under your command, and you have no claim to my obedience. I now give you notice, that if you retain these prisoners so cruelly and unjustly captured, you must do so at your own risk. If these Indian warriors choose to make any attempt to recover their wives and their children, I declare to you upon my solemn oath, and by all that I hold most sacred, that they shall meet with no opposition from me. Consider, therefore, whether you have the power to defend yourself and secure your prey, when I and my companions have withdrawn from this spot."

Pizarro does not seem to have taken any active part in this dispute, though he advised the headstrong Espinosa to give up his captives. While these scenes were transpiring, about one hundred

of the men of the village returned. Most earnestly they entreated the release of their wives and children. If not peacefully released, it was pretty evident that they would fight desperately for their rescue. It was quite apparent that the Indian runners had gone in all directions to summon others to their aid. The withdrawal of De Soto left Espinosa so weakened that he could hardly hope successfully to repel such forces. Indeed he was so situated that, destitute of provisions and ammunition, he did not dare to undertake a march back through the wilderness to Darien. He therefore very ungraciously consented to surrender his captives.

Governor Don Pedro had established his headquarters at Panama. De Soto, accompanied by a single dragoon, who like himself was an admirable horseman, rode with the utmost possible dispatch to Panama, where he informed the governor of the disasters which had befallen the expedition, and of the precarious condition in which he had left the remnant of the troops. He also made such representation of the military conduct of General Espinosa as to induce the governor to remove him from the command and send General Herman Ponce to take his place. The garrison at Panama was then so weak that only forty men could be spared to go to the relief of the troops at Borrica.

In the mean time the Indian chief Uracca had received full information of the position and condition of the Spanish troops. Very sagaciously he formed his plan to cut off their retreat. Detachments of warriors were placed at every point through which they could escape; they could not venture a league from their ramparts on any foraging expedition, and no food could reach them. They obtained a miserable subsistence from roots and herbs.

At length De Soto returned with a fresh supply of ammunition and the small reinforcement. By the aid of his cavalry he so far broke up the blockade as to obtain food for the famishing troops. Still it was very hazardous to attempt a retreat to Panama. With the reinforcements led by General Ponce, their whole army, infantry and cavalry, amounted to less than one hundred and fifty men. They would be compelled on their retreat to climb mountains, plunge into ragged ravines, thread tropical forests and narrow defiles, where armies of uncounted thousands of natives were ready to dispute their passage.

CHAPTER III

Life at Darien

Reinforcements from Spain. – Aid sent to Borrica. – Line of Defense Chosen by the Natives. – Religion of the Buccaneers. – The Battle and the Rout. – Strategy of Uracca. – Cruelty of Don Pedro. – The Retreat. – Character of Uracca. – Embarrassment of Don Pedro. – Warning of M. Codro. – Expedition of Pizarro. – Mission of M. Codro. – Letter of De Soto to Isabella.

While governor Don Pedro was awaiting with intense anxiety the receipt of intelligence from Borrica, a ship arrived from Spain bringing three or four hundred adventurers, all of whom were eager for any military expedition which would open to them an opportunity for plunder. One hundred and fifty of these were regular soldiers, well taught in the dreadful trade of war. Don Pedro took these fresh troops and one hundred and fifty volunteers; and set out with the utmost expedition for Borrica. His impetuous nature was inspired with zeal to retrieve the disgrace which had befallen the Spanish arms. He took with him several pieces of ordnance, – guns with which the Indians thus far had no acquaintance.

Upon arriving at Borrica he very earnestly harangued his troops, reminding them of the ancient renown of the Spanish soldiers, and stimulating their cupidity by the assurance that the kingdom of Veragua, over which Uracca reigned, was full of gold; and that all that was now requisite for the conquest of the country and the accumulation of princely wealth, was a display of the bravery ever characteristic of Spanish troops.

There was a deep and rapid river, the Arva, rushing down from the mountains, which it was necessary for the Spaniards to cross in their renewed invasion of Veragua. On the northern banks of this stream Uracca stationed his troops, selecting this spot with much skill as his main line of defence. He however posted an advanced guard some miles south of the stream in ground broken by hills, rocks and ravines, through which the Spaniards would be compelled to pass, and where their cavalry could be of very little avail.

By great effort Don Pedro had collected an army of about five hundred men. Rapidly marching, he soon reached the spot of broken ground where the native troops were stationed awaiting their approach.

It seems almost incomprehensible that this band of thieves and murderers, who, without the slightest excuse or provocation, were invading the territory of the peaceful natives, carrying to their homes death and woe, that they might acquire fame for military exploits and return laden with plunder, could have looked to God for his blessing upon their infamous expedition. But so it was. And still more strange to say, they did not apparently engage in these religious services with any consciousness of hypocrisy. The thoughtful mind is bewildered in contemplating such developments of the human heart. Previous to the attack the whole army was drawn up for prayers, which were solemnly offered by the ecclesiastics who always accompanied these expeditions. Then every soldier attended the confessional and received absolution. Thus he felt assured that, should he fall in the battle, he would be immediately translated to the realms of the blest.

Thus inspired by military zeal and religious fanaticism, the Spaniards rushed upon the natives in a very impetuous assault. We are happy to record that the natives stood nobly on the defence. They met their assailants with such a shower of arrows and javelins that the Spaniards were first arrested in their march, then driven back, then utterly routed and put to flight. In that broken ground where the cavalry could not be brought into action, where every native warrior stood behind a tree or a rock, and where the natives did not commence the action till the Spaniards were within half bow shot of them, arrows and javelins were even more potent weapons of war than the clumsy muskets then in use.

Upon the open field the arrows of the natives were quite impotent. A bullet could strike the heart at twice or three times the distance at which an arrow could be thrown. The Spaniards, hotly pursued, retreated from this broken ground several miles back into the open plain. Many were slain. Here the rout was arrested by the cavalry and the discharges from the field-pieces, which broke the Indian ranks.

The natives, however, boldly held their ground, and the Spaniards, disheartened and mortified by their discomfiture, encamped upon the plain. It was very evident that God had not listened to their prayers.

For several days they remained in a state of uncertainty. For five hundred Spaniards to retreat before eight hundred natives, would inflict a stigma upon their army which could never be effaced. They dared not again attack the natives who were flushed with victory in their stronghold. They were well aware that the band of warriors before them was but the advanced guard of the great army of Uracca. These eight hundred natives were led by one of Uracca's brothers. Even should these Indians be attacked and repulsed, they had only to retreat a few miles, cross the river Arva in their canoes, and on the northern banks join the formidable army of twenty thousand men under their redoubtable chief, who had already displayed military abilities which compelled the Spaniards to regard him with dread.

Affairs were in this position when Uracca adopted a stratagem which completely deceived the Spaniards and inflicted upon them very serious loss. He caused several of his warriors to be taken captive. When closely questioned by Don Pedro where gold was to be found, and threatened with torture if they refused the information, they with great apparent reluctance directed their captors to a spot, at the distance of but a few leagues, where the precious metal could be obtained in great abundance. These unlettered savages executed their artifice with skill which would have done honor even to European diplomatists.

Don Pedro immediately selected a company of forty of his most reliable men and sent them to the designated spot. Here they were surrounded by Indian warriors in ambush, and the whole party, with the exception of three, put to death. The three who escaped succeeded in reaching the Spanish camp with tidings of the disaster. Don Pedro in his rage ordered his captives to be torn to pieces, by the bloodhounds. They were thrown naked to the dogs. The Spaniards looked on complacently, as the merciless beasts, with bloody fangs, tore them limb from limb, devouring their quivering flesh. The natives bore this awful punishment with fortitude and heroism, which elicited the admiration of their foes. With their last breath they exulted that they were permitted to die in defence of their country.

The expedition of Don Pedro had thus far proved an utter failure. He had already lost one-fourth of his army through the prowess of the natives. The prospect before him was dark in the extreme. His troops were thoroughly discouraged, and the difficulties still to be encountered seemed absolutely insurmountable. Humiliated as never before, the proud Don Pedro was compelled to order a retreat. He returned to Panama, where, as we have mentioned, he had removed his seat of government from Darien. Panama was north of Darien, or rather west, as the isthmus there runs east and west. Its seaport was on the Pacific, not the Atlantic coast.

Uracca, having thus rescued his country from the invaders, did not pursue the retreating Spaniards. He probably in this course acted wisely. Could Don Pedro have drawn his enemies into the open field, he could undoubtedly have cut down nearly their whole army with grape shot, musketry, and charges by his strongly mounted steel-clad cavaliers. A panic had however pervaded the Spanish camp. They were in constant apprehension of pursuit. Even when they had reached Panama, they were day after day in intense apprehension of the approach of their outnumbering foes, by whose valor they had already been discomfited, and so greatly disgraced.

"When the Spaniards looked out towards the mountains and the plains," writes the Spanish historian Herrera, "the boughs of trees and the very grass, which grew high in the savannas, appeared to their excited imagination to be armed with Indians.

And when they turned their eyes towards the sea, they fancied that it was covered with canoes of their exasperated foemen."

Uracca must have been in all respects an extraordinary man. We have the record of his deeds only from the pen of his enemies. And yet according to their testimony, he, a pagan, manifested far more of the spirit of Christ than did his Christian opponents. In the war which he was then waging, there can be no question whatever that the wrong was inexcusably and outrageously on the side of Don Pedro. We cannot learn that Uracca engaged in any aggressive movements against the Spaniards whatever. He remained content with expelling the merciless intruders from his country. Even the fiendlike barbarism of the Spaniards could not provoke him to retaliatory cruelty. The brutal soldiery of Spain paid no respect whatever to the wives and daughters of the natives, even to those of the highest chieftains.

On one occasion a Spanish lady, Donna Clara Albitez, fell into the hands of Uracca. He treated her with as much delicacy and tenderness as if she had been his own daughter or mother, and availed himself of the first opportunity of restoring her to her friends.

Though De Soto was one of the bravest of his cavaliers, and was so skilful as an officer that his services were almost indispensable to Don Pedro, yet the governor was anxious to get rid of him. It is probable that he felt somewhat condemned by the undeniable virtues of De Soto; for the most of men can feel the power of high moral principle as witnessed in others. De Soto, intensely proud, was not at all disposed to play the sycophant before his patron. He had already exasperated him by his refusal to execute orders which he deemed dishonorable. And worst of all, by winning the love of Isabella, he had thwarted one of the most ambitious of Don Pedro's plans; he having contemplated her alliance with one of the most illustrious families of the Spanish nobility.

Don Pedro did not dare to send De Soto to the scaffold or to order him to be shot. He had already braved public opinion by the outrageous execution of Vasco Nuñez, without a shadow of law or justice, and had drawn down upon himself an avalanche of condemnation from the highest dignitaries of both church and state. He was trembling through fear that the Spanish government might call him to account for this tyrannic act. Thus situated, it was highly impolitic to send De Soto, who was greatly revered and admired by the army, to the block. He therefore still sought, though with somewhat waning zeal, to secure the death of De Soto on the field of battle. De Soto could not fail to perceive that Don Pedro was not his friend. Still, being a magnanimous man himself, he could not suspect the governor of being guilty of such treachery as to be plotting his death.

When the little army of Spaniards was beleaguered at Borrica, and De Soto with his cavalry was scouring the adjacent country on foraging expeditions, he chanced to rescue from captivity M. Codro, an Italian philosopher, who had accompanied the Spaniards to Darien. In the pursuit of science, he had joined the forty men who, under the command of Herman Ponce, had been sent as a reinforcement to Borrica. While at some distance from the camp on a botanical excursion, he was taken captive by the natives, and would have been put to death but for the timely rescue by De Soto.

M. Codro was an astrologer. In that superstitious age he was supposed by others, and probably himself supposed, that by certain occult arts he was able to predict future events. Six months after the return of the Spaniards from their disastrous expedition against Uracca, this singular man sought an interview with De Soto, and said to him:

"A good action deserves better reward than verbal acknowledgment. While it was not in my power to make any suitable recompense to you for saving my life, I did not attempt to offer you any. But the time has now come when I can give you some substantial evidence of my gratitude. I can now inform you that your life is now in no less danger than mine was when you rescued me from the Indians."

De Soto replied: "My good friend, though I do not profess to be a thorough believer in your prophetic art, I am no less thankful for your kind intentions. And in this case, I am free to confess that your information, from whatever source derived, is confirmed in a measure by my own observations."

"Ferdinand De Soto," said the astrologer with great deliberation and solemnity of manner, "I think I can read the page of *your* destiny, even without such light as the stars can shed upon it. Be assured that the warning I give you does not come from an unearthly source. But if any supernatural confirmation of my words were needed, even on that score you might be satisfied. While comparing your horoscope with that of my departed friend Vasco Nuñez, I have observed some resemblances in your lives and fortunes, which you, with all your incredulity, must allow to be remarkable. Nuñez and you were both born in the same town; were both members of noble but impoverished families; both sought to ally yourselves with the family of Don Pedro, and both thus incurred his deadly resentment."

"These coincidences are certainly remarkable," replied De Soto; "but what other similarities do you find in the destinies of Nuñez and myself?"

"You are a brave man," replied M. Codro, "and you are too skeptical to be much disturbed by the prognostications of evil. I may therefore venture to tell you that according to my calculations, you will be in one important event of your life more happy than Vasco Nuñez. It seems to be indicated by the superior intelligences, that your death will not be in the ordinary course of nature; but I find likewise that the term of your life will be equal to that which Nuñez attained. When I consider your present circumstances, this appears to me to be the most improbable part of the prediction."

Nuñez was forty-two years old at the time of his death. This gave De Soto the promise of nearly twenty years more of life. Reverently he replied, "I am in the hands of God. I rely with humble confidence on his protection."

"In that you do well," rejoined M. Codro. "Still it is your duty to use such human means as may be required to defend yourself against open violence or fraudulent malice."

De Soto thanked the astrologer for the caution he had given him, and as he reflected upon it, saw that it was indeed necessary to be constantly on his guard. As time passed on Don Pedro became more undisguised in his hostility to De Soto. Ferdinand and Isabella exerted all their ingenuity to correspond with each other. Don Pedro had been equally vigilant in his endeavors to intercept their letters; and so effectual were the plans which he adopted, that for five years, while the lovers remained perfectly faithful to each other, not a token of remembrance passed between them.

These were weary years to De Soto. He was bitterly disappointed in all his expectations. There was no glory to be obtained even in victory, in riding rough-shod over the poor natives. And thus far, instead of victory attending the Spanish arms, defeat and disgrace had been their doom. Moreover, he was astonished and heartily ashamed when he saw the measures which his countrymen had adopted to enrich themselves. They were highway robbers of the most malignant type. They not only slaughtered the victims whom they robbed, but fired their dwellings, trampled down their harvests and massacred their wives and children.

The most extravagant tales had been circulated through Europe respecting the wealth of the New World. It was said that masses of pure gold could be gathered like pebble stones from the banks of the rivers, and that gems of priceless value were to be found in the ravines. De Soto had been now five years on the isthmus of Darien, and had acquired neither fame nor fortune, and there was nothing in the prospect of the future to excite enthusiasm or even hope.

There was quite a remarkable man, made so by subsequent events, under the command of Don Pedro. His name was Francisco Pizarro. He was a man of obscure birth and of very limited education, save only in the material art of war. He could neither read nor write, and was thus intellectually hardly the equal of some of the most intelligent of the natives. We have briefly alluded to him as entrusted with the command of one portion of the army in the inglorious expedition against Uracca. De Soto had very little respect for the man, and was not at all disposed as a subordinate officer to look to him for counsel. Don Pedro, however, seems to have formed a high opinion of the military abilities of Pizarro. For notwithstanding his ignominious defeat and retreat from Veragua, he now appointed him as the leader of an expedition, consisting of one hundred and thirty men, to explore the western coast of the isthmus by cruising along the Pacific Ocean.

Pizarro set sail from Panama on the fourteenth of November, 1524, in one small vessel. It was intended that another vessel should soon follow to render such assistance as might be necessary. De Soto was urged to become one of this party; but probably from dislike of Pizarro, refused to place himself under his command.

The vessel, which was soon joined by its consort under Almagro, coasted slowly along in a northerly direction, running in at every bay, and landing whenever they approached a flourishing Indian village, plundering the natives and maltreating them in every shameful way. At length they aroused such a spirit of desperation on the part of the natives, that they fell upon the buccaneers with resistless ferocity. Two-thirds of the miscreants were slain. Pizarro barely escaped with his life, having received severe wounds and being borne to his ship in a state of insensibility.

While Pizarro was absent on this ill-fated expedition, a new trouble befell Don Pedro. Las Casas, a devoted Christian missionary, whose indignation was roused to the highest pitch by the atrocities perpetrated upon the Indians, reported the inhuman conduct of Don Pedro to the Spanish government. The King appointed Peter de Los Rios to succeed him. The new governor was to proceed immediately to Panama and bring the degraded official to trial, and, if found guilty, to punishment. The governor of a Spanish colony in those days was absolute. Don Pedro had cut off the head of his predecessor, though that predecessor was one of the best of men. He now trembled in apprehension of the loss of his own head. Conscious of his deserts, he was terror-stricken.

About four or five hundred miles north of Panama there was the magnificent province of Nicaragua. The isthmus is here about one hundred and fifty miles in breadth, and the province being about two hundred miles in a line from north to south, extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific shores. Don Pedro was popular with his brutal soldiery, since he allowed them unlimited license and plunder. He resolved, surrounded by them, to take refuge in Nicaragua. Nevertheless, to render himself as secure as possible, he decided to send an agent to plead his cause at the Spanish court.

Among those rude, unprincipled adventurers, men of violence and blood, it was very difficult to find a suitable person. At length he fixed with much hesitation upon M. Codro, the astrologer. He was a simple-minded, good man; learned, though very artless. M. Codro was strongly attached to De Soto, the preserver of his life. As we have seen, he was well aware of the peril to which his benefactor was hourly exposed from the malignity of the governor. Gladly therefore he accepted the mission, as he hoped it would afford him an opportunity of conferring some favor upon his imperilled friend.

Don Pedro had adopted the most rigorous measures to prevent any communication between the colony and Spain, which was not subjected to his inspection. He was mainly influenced to this course that he might prevent the interchange of any messages whatever between De Soto and Isabella. The most severe penalties were denounced against all persons who should convey any writing across the seas, excepting through the regular mails. But the grateful M. Codro declared himself ready to run all risks in carrying a letter from De Soto to Isabella. Though De Soto at first hesitated to expose his friend to such hazard, his intense desire to open some communication with Isabella, at length induced him to accept the generous offer.

As we have mentioned, for five years not one word had passed between the lovers. It is said that the following is a literal translation of the letter which De Soto wrote. We cannot be certain of its authenticity, but it bears internal evidence of genuineness, and a manuscript copy is in the library of a Spanish gentleman who has spent his life in collecting documents in reference to the past history of his country:

"Most Dearly Beloved Isabella:

"For the first time within five years, I write to you with some assurance that you will receive my letter. Many times have I written before; but how could I write freely when I had reason to fear that other eyes might peruse those fond expressions which your goodness and condescension alone could pardon? But what reason have I to hope that you can still look with favorable regard on my unworthiness? My mature

judgment teaches me that this dream of my youth, which I have so long cherished, is not presumption merely, but madness.

"When I consider your many perfections, and compare them with my own little deserving, I feel that I ought to despair, even if I could empty into your lap the treasure of a thousand kingdoms. How then can I lift my eyes to you when I have nothing to offer but the tribute of an affection which time cannot change, and which must still live when my last hope has departed.

"O Isabella! the expectation which brought me to this land has not been fulfilled. I can gather no gold, except by such means as my honor, my conscience and yourself must condemn. Though your nobleness may pity one on whom fortune has disdained to smile, I feel that your relations are justified in claiming for you an alliance with exalted rank and affluence; and I love you far too well to regard my own happiness more than your welfare. If, therefore, in your extreme youth you have made a promise which you now regret, as far as it is in my power to absolve you from that engagement, you are released. On my side, the obligation is sacred and eternal. It is not likely that I shall ever return to my country. While I am banished from your presence, all countries are alike to me.

"The person who brings you this exposes himself to great danger in his desire to serve me. I entreat you to use such precautions as his safety may require. If your goodness should vouchsafe any message to me, he will deliver it, and you may have perfect confidence in his fidelity. Pardon my boldness in supposing it possible that I still have a place in your remembrance. Though you may now think of me with indifference or dislike, do not censure me too severely for calling myself unchangeably and devotedly, Yours, De Soto."

CHAPTER IV

Demoniac Reign

Giles Gonzales. – Unsuccessful Contest of De Soto with Gonzales. – Bold Reply of De Soto to the Governor. – Cruelty of Don Pedro to M. Codro. – Assassination of Cordova. – New Expedition of Discovery. – Revenge upon Valenzuela. – Reign of Don Pedro at Nicaragua. – Unwise Decision of De Soto.

It was supposed at that time that there must be a strait somewhere north of Panama across the narrow isthmus, which would connect the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Several expeditions had been fitted out in search of this all-important passage. Almost invariably a company of priests joined these expeditions, who exerted all their energies to convert the Indians to nominal Christianity. A fanatic adventurer by the name of Giles Gonzales, acquired much celebrity for his success in inducing the natives to accept the Christian faith and to acknowledge fealty to the king of Spain. He was at the head of one hundred steel-clad warriors. His mode of persuasion, though unique, was very potent. When he approached the seat of the chief of Nicaragua, he sent a courier to him with the following message:

"I am coming as a friend to teach you the only true religion, and to persuade you to recognize the most powerful monarch on the globe. If you refuse to yield to my teachings, you must prepare for battle, and I challenge you to meet me in the field."

The gentle and peace-loving natives contemplated with consternation these fierce Spaniards mounted on powerful war horses, animals which they had never before seen, and glittering in coats of mail. They had no religious creed to which they adhered with any tenacity. The Nicaraguan chief unhesitatingly expressed his readiness to accept the new faith, and in token of friendship, sent Gonzales a quantity of gold, equal it is said in value to seventy-five thousand dollars of our money. The Spanish historian Herrera, whose record is generally deemed in the main accurate, says that the chief, his family, and nine thousand of his subjects, were baptized and became Christians. Influenced by this example, and by the glowing representations of the rewards which were sure to follow the acceptance of the Christian faith, more than thirty-six thousand of the natives were baptized within the space of half a year. The baptismal fees charged by Gonzales amounted to over four hundred thousand dollars.

While Gonzales was engaged on his own responsibility in this career of spiritual conquest, with its rich pecuniary accompaniment, Don Pedro sent two of his generals, Ferdinand de Cordova and Ferdinand De Soto, to explore Nicaragua and take possession of it in his name. He assumed that Gonzales, acting without authority, was engaged in a treasonable movement. The two parties soon came into collision.

De Soto, with a party of fifty men, twenty of them being well mounted cavaliers, encamped at a small village called Torebo. Gonzales was in the near vicinity with a little army of three hundred men, two hundred of whom were Indians. In the darkness of the night, Gonzales fell upon De Soto, and outnumbering him six to one, either killed or took captive all the thirty footmen; while the cavaliers, on their horses, cut their way through and escaped. Gonzales lost fifty of his best men in the conflict, and was so impressed with the military vigor of De Soto, that he was not at all disposed again to meet him on the field of battle. He therefore retired to a distant part of the province, where he vigorously engaged in the work of converting the natives, never forgetting his baptismal fee.

De Soto and Cordova established themselves in a new town which they called Grenada. Here they erected a church, several dwelling houses, and barracks for the soldiers. They also surrounded the village with a trench and earthworks, as protection from any sudden assault. Gonzales was a fugitive from justice, having assassinated an officer sent by Hernando Cortes to arrest him.

Cordova was a mild and humane man. Under his sway the Indians were prosperous and happy. Two flourishing towns grew up rapidly quite near each other, Leon and Grenada. The climate was delightful, the soil fertile, the means of living abundant. Many of the inhabitants of Panama emigrated to this more favored region.

De Soto, leaving Cordova in command of Nicaragua, returned to Panama to report proceedings to Don Pedro. It was not till then that he learned, to his extreme regret, that the Governor had selected Nicaragua as a place for his future abode. He knew that the presence of the tyrannical governor could only prove disastrous to the flourishing colony, and ruinous to the happiness of the natives. The gloom with which the contemplation oppressed his mind spread over his speaking countenance. The eagle eye of the suspicious governor immediately detected these indications of discontent. With an air of deference, but in a tone of mockery, he said:

"I judge from your appearance, captain, that my Nicaraguan enterprise does not meet with your cordial approbation."

De Soto boldly, and with great deliberation of words, replied:

"Governor Don Pedro, I confess that I feel but little interested in any of your movements or intentions, except when they encroach upon the rights of others. Nicaragua is at this time well governed by Ferdinand de Cordova. The change you propose to make, is to be deprecated as one of the greatest misfortunes that could befall not only the Indian inhabitants of that district, but our own countrymen likewise, who have flocked thither to escape from your jurisdiction."

The countenance of Don Pedro became pallid with rage. Struggling, however, to suppress the unavailing outburst of his passion, he said, with a malignant smile:

"I thank you, Captain De Soto, for giving me this opportunity which I have so long desired. Were I to permit such insolence to go unpunished, my authority in this colony would soon be at an end."

"It is at an end," replied De Soto. "You must be aware that your successor, De Los Rios, is now on his way to Panama."

"I do not choose," replied Don Pedro, "to debate this matter with you. I still claim the right to command you as your superior military officer. I now command you to hold yourself and your company in readiness to march. When we arrive at Leon, I promise you that full justice shall be done to your friend De Cordova, and to yourself."

De Soto fully comprehended the significance of these threats. He wrote immediately to Cordova, urging him to be on his guard. The inhabitants of Leon and Grenada, learning of the intention of Don Pedro, – to take the government into his own hands, – entreated De Cordova to resist the tyrant, promising him their unanimous and energetic support. But De Cordova declined these overtures, saying, that all the authority to which he was legitimately entitled was derived from Don Pedro, and that it was his duty to obey him as his superior officer, until he should be deposed by the Spanish crown.

Just before Don Pedro, with his suite, left Panama for Nicaragua, M. Codro returned from Spain. He brought dispatches to the governor, and also secretly a letter from Isabella to De Soto. The spies of the governor, in his castle in Spain, watched every movement of M. Codro. The simple minded man had very little skill in the arts of duplicity. These spies reported to Don Pedro that M. Codro had held a secret interview with Isabella, and had frankly stated that he was entrusted with a private message to her. Don Pedro knew that such a message could have gone only from De Soto; and that unquestionably M. Codro had brought back from his daughter a response. We may remark in passing, that the letter from Isabella to De Soto informed him of the inflexible fidelity of Isabella, and filled the heart of De Soto with joy.

The malignant nature of Don Pedro was roused by these suspicions to intensity of action, and he resolved upon direful revenge. As the new governor was hourly expected, he could not venture upon any open act of assassination or violence, for he knew that in that case summary punishment

would be his doom. Calling M. Codro before him, he assumed his blandest smile, thanked the artless philosopher for the services he had rendered him in Spain, and said that he wished to entrust him with the management of a mineralogical survey of a region near the gulf of San Miguel.

The good man was delighted. This was just the employment which his nature craved. He was directed to embark in a vessel commanded by one of the governor's tools, an infamous wretch by the name of De Valenzuela. This man had been for many years a private, and was then engaged in kidnapping Indians for the slave trade. He was ordered as soon as the vessel was at sea, to chain M. Codro to the foremast, to expose him to all the tortures of the blaze of a tropical sun by day and chilling dews by night. The crew were enjoined to assail him with insulting mockery. Thus exposed to hunger, burning heat, and incessant abuse, he was to be kept through these lingering agonies until he died.

For ten days the good man bore this cruel martyrdom, when he breathed his last, and was buried on a small island about a hundred miles southwest of Panama. This brutal assassination was so conducted, that De Soto at the time had no knowledge of the tragedy which was being enacted.

Early in the year 1526, Don Pedro, surrounded by a large retinue of his obedient soldiery, left Panama to assume the government of Nicaragua, to which he had no legitimate title. De Soto accompanied the governor. Much as he detested his character, he could not forget that he was the father of Isabella. When Don Pedro approached the little town of Leon, he sent a courier before him, to order De Cordova to meet him in the public square, with his municipal officers and his clergy, prepared to give an account of his administration.

De Soto with his horsemen was ordered to form in line on one side of the square. The foot soldiers of Don Pedro surrounded the governor on the other side. All the vacant space was filled with citizens and natives. By the side of the governor stood his executioner; a man of gigantic stature and of herculean strength, whose massive sword few arms but his could wield. De Cordova advanced to meet Don Pedro, and bowing respectfully before him, commenced giving an account of the state of affairs in the province. Suddenly he was interrupted in his narrative by Don Pedro, who with forced anger exclaimed:

"Silence, you hypocrite! Your treasonable projects cannot be hidden under these absurd pretensions of loyalty and patriotism: I will now let your accomplices see how a traitor should be punished."

He made a sign to his executioner. His gleaming sword flashed through the air, and in an instant the dissevered head of Cordova rolled in the dust. The headsman grasped the gory trophy by the hair, and raising it high above his head exclaimed,

"Behold the doom of a traitor."

All this took place in an instant. The spectators were horror stricken. De Soto instinctively seized his sword, and would doubtless have put spurs to his horse, rushed upon the governor, and plunged the weapon to the hilt in his breast, but for the restraining memories of the past. Hesitatingly he returned his sword to its scabbard.

But Don Pedro had not yet finished the contemplated work of the day. Another victim he had doomed to fall. A file of soldiers, very resolute men, led by a determined officer, crossing the square, approached De Soto, at the head of his troops. Don Pedro then exclaimed in a loud voice,

"Ferdinand De Soto, you are ordered to dismount and submit yourself to the punishment which you have just seen inflicted on your traitorous comrade. Soldiers! drag him from his horse if he refuse to obey."

The officer reached forth his hand to seize De Soto. Like lightning's flash, the sword of the cavalier fell upon the officer, and his head was cleft from crown to chin. The spurs were applied to the fiery steed. He plunged through the soldiers, knocking several of them down, and in an instant

De Soto had his sword's point at the breast of the governor. Shouts of "kill the tyrant," rose from all parts of the square, which were echoed even from the ranks of Don Pedro's soldiers. Again De Soto held back his avenging hand; but in words which made Don Pedro quake in his shoes, he said,

"You hear the expression of public sentiment. You hear the wishes of those who are subject to your authority. It is the voice of justice speaking through these people. In refusing to obey the call, I am scarcely less guilty than yourself. But remember, Don Pedro, that in sparing your life at this moment, I discharge all the obligations I have owed you. Miserable old man! Be thankful that the recollection of one that is absent, can make me forget what I owe to my murdered friend.

"I will now sheathe my sword, but I solemnly declare by the sacred emblem of the cross which it bears, that I will never draw it again in your service."

The assassination, for it could hardly be called execution, of De Cordova, excited the general indignation of the Spanish settlers. They all knew that Don Pedro had no authority from the king of Spain to assume the government of Nicaragua, and that he was therefore an usurper. The noble character which De Soto had exhibited, and his undeniable ability and bravery, had won for him universal regard. The Spaniards generally rallied around him, and entreated him to assume the command, promising him their enthusiastic support. They could not comprehend why De Soto so persistently refused their solicitations. They knew nothing of the secret reasons which rendered it almost impossible for De Soto to draw his sword against the father of Isabella.

As we have mentioned, it was generally supposed that there must be some strait between the Isthmus of Darien and the southern frontiers of Mexico, which connected the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The king of Spain had offered a large reward for the discovery of this passage. Several of the wealthy citizens of Leon organized an expedition in pursuit of this object. De Soto was placed at its head. He selected, from his cavalry troop, five of his most intelligent and energetic young men. They started from Leon, and followed along the coast of the Pacific, in northwesterly course, penetrating every bay and inlet. They travelled on horseback and encountered innumerable difficulties from the rugged and pathless wilderness, through which they pressed their way. They also had much to fear from the unfriendly character of the natives, whose hostility had been aroused by the outrages which companies of vagabond Spaniards had inflicted upon them.

De Soto, however, and his companions, by their just and kindly spirit, soon won the regards of the Indians. They found that the natives possessed large quantities of gold, which they seemed to esteem of little value. Eagerly they exchanged the precious metal for such trinkets as the explorers took with them. Upon this arduous expedition, which De Soto managed with consummate skill, he was absent eleven months. Seven hundred miles of sea-coast were carefully explored, and he became fully convinced that the looked-for strait did not exist. Though in this respect the expedition had proved a failure, he returned to Leon quite enriched by the gold which he had gathered. With honesty, rarely witnessed in those days, he impartially divided the treasure among the projectors of the enterprise.

As De Soto was returning, he discovered a small Spanish vessel anchored near the present site of San Salvador. As his men and horses were worn down by their fatiguing journey, he engaged a passage in the vessel to Leon. Upon embarking he found the captain and crew consisted of some of the most depraved and brutal men who had ever visited the New World. They were cruising along the coast, watching for opportunity to kidnap the natives, to convey them to the West Indies as slaves. The captain was the infamous Valenzuela, who, as agent of Don Pedro, had tortured M. Codro to death.

De Soto had no knowledge, as we have mentioned, of the dreadful doom which had befallen his friend. One day the fiendlike captain was amusing his crew with a recital of his past deeds of villany. He told the story of the murder of Codro.

"He was," he said, "an old wizard whom Don Pedro, the governor of Panama, commissioned me to torture and to put to death, in consequence of some treachery of which he had been guilty while on a mission to Spain."

The words caught the ear of De Soto. He joined the group, and listened with breathless attention and a throbbing heart, to the statement of Valenzuela.

"I chained the old fellow," said the captain, "to the mainmast, and the sailors amused themselves by drenching him with buckets of cold water, till he was almost drowned. After several days, he became so sick and exhausted, that we saw that our sport would soon be at an end. For two days he was speechless. He then suddenly recovered the use of his voice, and endeavored to frighten me by saying:

"Captain, your treatment has caused my death. I now call upon you to hear the words of a dying man. Within a year from this time, I summon you to meet me before the judgment seat of God."

Here the captain burst into a derisive and scornful laugh. He then added:

"Come comrades, we'll have a hamper of wine, and drink to the repose of M. Codro's soul."

De Soto stepped forward, and repressing all external exhibition of the rage which consumed his soul, said calmly to the captain,

"You say that the astrologer prophesied that you should die within the year. When will that year expire?"

"In about two weeks," the captain replied. "But I have no fear but that the prophet will prove to be a liar."

"He shall not," De Soto added. And drawing from his scabbard his keen, glittering sword, with one blow from his sinewy arm, severed the captain's head from his body. The ghastly trophy rolled gushing with blood upon the deck. These wild and savage men were accustomed to such scenes. They admired the courage of De Soto, and the marvellous skill with which, at one blow, he had struck off the head of the captain. De Soto then turned to the crowd and said:

"Gentlemen, if any of you are disposed to hold me accountable for what I have just done, I am ready to answer you according to your desires. But I consider myself bound, in reason and in courtesy, to inform you, that M. Codro, the man whom this villain murdered, was my friend; and I doubt not that he was condemned to death for doing me an important service."

All seemed satisfied with this explanation. These sanguinary scenes in those days produced but a momentary impression.

De Soto and Don Pedro no longer held any intercourse with each other. The reign of the usurping governor was atrocious beyond the power of language to express. With horses and bloodhounds he ran down the natives, seizing and selling them as slaves. Drove of men, women and children, chained together, were often driven into the streets of Leon.

The assumption then was that a nominal Christian might pardonably inflict any outrages upon those who had not accepted the Christian faith. Several of the Indian chiefs had embraced Christianity. Don Pedro compelled them all to pay him a tribute of fifty slaves a month. All orphans were to be surrendered as slaves. And then the wretch demanded that all parents who had several children, should surrender one or more, as slaves to the Spaniards. The natives were robbed of their harvests, so that they had no encouragement to cultivate the soil. This led to famine, and more than twenty thousand perished of starvation. Famine introduced pestilence. The good Las Casas declares that in consequence of the oppressions of the Spaniards, in ten years, more than sixty thousand of the natives of Nicaragua perished.

About this time Francisco Pizarro had embarked in a hair-brained enterprise for the conquest of Peru, on the western coast of South America. Very slowly he had forced his way along, towards that vast empire, encountering innumerable difficulties, and enduring frightful sufferings, until he had reached a point where his progress seemed to be arrested. His army was greatly weakened, and he had not sufficient force to push his conquests any farther. Threatened with the utter extermination of his band, he remembered De Soto, whom he had never loved. He knew that he was anxious for fame and fortune, and thought that his bravery and great military ability might extricate him from his embarrassments.

He therefore wrote to Don Pedro, praying that De Soto, with reinforcements, might be sent to his aid. For three years there had been no communication whatever between the governor and the lover of his daughter. But Don Pedro regarded the adventure of Pizarro as hazardous in the extreme, and felt sure that all engaged in the enterprise would miserably perish. Eagerly he caught at the idea of sending De Soto to join them; for his presence was to Don Pedro a constant source of annoyance and dread. He therefore caused the communication from Pizarro to be conveyed to De Soto, saying to the messenger who bore it:

"Urge De Soto to depart immediately for Peru. And I pray Heaven that we may never hear of him again."

De Soto, not knowing what to do with himself, imprudently consented, and thus allied his fortunes with those of one of the greatest villains of any age or country.

CHAPTER V

The Invasion of Peru

The Kingdom of Peru. – Its Metropolis. – The Desperate Condition of Pizarro. – Arrival of De Soto. – Character of the Spaniards. – Exploring tour of De Soto. – The Colony at San Miguel. – The General Advance. – Second Exploration of De Soto. – Infamous Conduct of the Pizarros.

The kingdom of Peru, skirting the western coast of South America, between the majestic peaks of the Andes and the mirrored waters of the Pacific Ocean, was one of the most beautiful countries in the world. This kingdom, diversified with every variety of scenery, both of the sublime and the beautiful, and enjoying a delicious climate, was about eighteen hundred miles in length and one hundred and fifty in breadth. The natives had attained a high degree of civilization. Though gunpowder, steel armor, war horses, and bloodhounds gave the barbarian Spaniards the supremacy on fields of blood, the leading men, among the Peruvians, seem to have been in intelligence, humanity and every virtue, far superior to the savage leaders of the Spaniards, who so ruthlessly invaded their peaceful realms.

The metropolis of the empire was the city of Cuzo, which was situated in a soft and luxuriant valley traversing some table-lands which were about twelve thousand feet above the level of the sea. The government of the country was an absolute monarchy. But its sovereign, called the Inca, seems to have been truly a good man, the father of his people; wisely and successfully seeking their welfare. The Peruvians had attained a degree of excellence in many of the arts unsurpassed by the Spaniards. Their houses were generally built of stone; their massive temples, though devoid of architectural beauty, were constructed of hewn blocks of granite, so admirably joined together that the seams could be with difficulty discerned.

Humbolt found, among the ruins of these temples, blocks of hewn stone thirty-six feet long, nine feet wide, and six feet in thickness. Their great highways, spanning the gulfs, clinging to the precipitous cliffs and climbing the mountains, were wonderful works of mechanical skill.

De Soto was thoroughly acquainted with the cruel, faithless, and treacherous character of Pizarro. A stigma must ever rest upon his name, for consenting to enter into any expedition under the leadership of such a man. It may however be said, in reply, that he had no intention of obeying Pizarro in any thing that was wrong; that his love of adventure was roused by the desire to explore one of the most magnificent empires in the New World, which rumor had invested with wealth and splendor surpassing the dreams of romance. And perhaps, most important of all, he hoped *honestly* to be able to gather from the fabled mines of gold, with which Peru was said to be filled, that wealth with which he would be enabled to return to Spain and claim the hand, as he had already won the heart, of the fair and faithful Isabella.

Pizarro had entered upon his enterprise with an army of one hundred and eighty men, twenty-seven of whom were mounted. It seems to be the uncontradicted testimony of contemporary historians, that this army was composed of as worthless a set of vagabonds as ever disgraced humanity. There was no crime or cruelty from which these fiends in human form would recoil.

Pizarro, following down the western coast of South America five or six hundred miles, had reached the island of Puna, in the extreme northern part of Peru. It was separated from the mainland by a narrow strait. The inhabitants received him cordially, but the murders, rapine and other nameless atrocities, perpetrated by the Spaniards upon the friendly natives, soon so aroused their resentment that a conspiracy was formed for the entire extermination of the invaders. The expedition had become so weakened and demoralized that even Pizarro saw that it would be the height of imprudence for him to venture, with his vile crew, upon the mainland, before reinforcements under some degree of

military discipline should arrive. He was in this precarious condition, and on the eve of extermination, when De Soto and his select and well-ordered troops reached the island.

They came in two vessels, bringing with them an abundant supply of arms and ammunition. The party consisted of fifty men, thoroughly equipped. Thirty of them were steel-clad cavaliers, well mounted. De Soto had been offered the rank of second in command. But when he arrived at Puna, he found that Pizarro's brother – Hernando – occupied this post, and that he had no intention of relinquishing it. De Soto reproached Pizarro in very plain terms for this wrong and insult. He however did not allow it long to trouble him. Surrounded by his own brave and devoted followers, he felt quite independent of the authority of Pizarro, and had no intention of obeying him any farther than might be in accordance with his own wishes.

On the other hand, Pizarro had but little confidence in his brother, and was fully conscious that the success of his enterprise would be mainly dependent upon the energy and skill of De Soto.

Pizarro, now finding himself at the head of really a formidable force, prepared to pass over to the mainland. There was quite a large town there called Tumbez, surrounded by a rich and densely populated country. The Peruvians had gold in abundance, and weapons and utensils of copper. With iron and steel, they were entirely unacquainted. As when fighting at a distance, the bullet of the Spaniard was immeasurably superior to the arrow of the native, so in a hand to hand fight, the keen and glittering sabre of steel, especially in the hands of steel-clad cavaliers left the poorly armed Peruvians almost entirely at their mercy.

Arrangements were made to cross the strait and make a descent upon Tumbez. Pizarro had already visited the place, where he had been kindly received by the inhabitants, and where he had seen with his own eyes that the houses and temples were decorated with golden ornaments, often massive in weight, and of almost priceless value. He floated his little band across the narrow strait on rafts.

The inhabitants of Tumbez and its vicinity had been disposed to receive their Spanish visitors as guests, and to treat them with the utmost courtesy and kindness. But the tidings had reached them of the terrible outrages which they had inflicted upon the inhabitants of Puna. They therefore attacked the Spaniards as they approached the shore on their rafts and endeavored to prevent their landing. But the invaders, with musketry and a cannon which they had with them, speedily drove off their assailants, and with horses and hounds planted their banners upon the shore. They then marched directly upon Tumbez, confident of gathering, from the decorations of her palaces and her temples, abounding wealth. Bitter was their disappointment. The Peruvians, conscious of their probable inability to resist the invaders, had generally abandoned the city, carrying with them, far away into the mountains, all their treasures.

The Spaniards, who had entered the city with hideous yells of triumph, being thus frustrated in the main object of their expedition, found, by inquiry, that at the distance of several leagues easterly from the sea-coast, among the pleasant valleys of the mountains, there were populous cities, where abundance of booty might be found.

The whole number of Spaniards, then invading Peru, did not exceed two hundred and fifty. The Peruvians were daily becoming more deeply exasperated. With such a number of men, and no fortified base to fall back upon, Pizarro did not deem it safe to enter upon a plundering tour into the interior. Keeping therefore about one hundred and thirty men with him, and strongly fortifying himself at Tumbez, he sent De Soto, at the head of eighty men, sixty of whom were mounted, back into the mountains, to search for gold, and to report respecting the condition of the country, in preparation for future expeditions.

The bad fame of Pizarro was spreading far and wide. And though De Soto enjoined it strictly upon his men, not to be guilty of any act of injustice, still he was an invading Spaniard, and the Peruvians regarded them all as the shepherd regards the wolf. De Soto had passed but a few leagues from the seashore, ere he entered upon the hilly country. As he was ascending one of the gentle eminences, a band of two thousand Indians, who had met there to arrest his progress, rushed down

upon him. His sixty horsemen instantly formed in column and impetuously charged into their crowded ranks. These Peruvians had never seen a horse before. Their arrows glanced harmless from the impenetrable armor, and they were mercilessly cut down and trampled beneath iron hoofs. The Spaniards galloped through and through their ranks, strewing the ground with the dead. The carnage was of short duration. The panic-stricken Peruvians fled wherever there was a possibility of escape. The trumpets of the conquerors pealed forth their triumphant strains. The silken banners waved proudly in the breeze, and the victors exultingly continued their march through one of the defiles of the mountains.

Whatever excuses De Soto may make for himself, humanity will never forgive him for the carnage of that day. Having thus fairly embarked upon this enterprise, where he was surely gaining military renown, infamous as it was, and where there was the prospect before him of plunder of incalculable worth, De Soto seems to have assumed to act upon his own responsibility, and to have paid very little regard to the authority of Pizarro, whom he had left behind. He had already penetrated the country much farther than he had been authorized to do by the orders of his superior. One of the men, whom Pizarro had sent with him, very probably as a spy upon his movements, deserted, and returned to Tumbez with the report that De Soto was already practically in revolt, and had renounced all dependence on Pizarro. For this alleged insubordination, Pizarro did not venture to call his energetic lieutenant to account.

In the mean time, Pizarro was exploring the country in the vicinity of Tumbez, for the site of the colony he wished to establish. He selected a position about ninety miles south of that city, in a rich and well-watered valley which opened upon the placid surface of the Pacific. His troops were transported to the spot by the two vessels. Here he laid the foundations of a town, which he called San Miguel. With timber from the mountains, and stone from the quarries, and the labor of a large number of natives, who were driven to daily toil, not as servants, by the stimulus of well-paid labor, but as slaves, goaded by the sabres of their task masters, quite a large and strongly-fortified town rapidly arose.

De Soto continued his explorations in the interior for some time, and discovered a very magnificent highway, leading to the capital of the empire. It was smoothly paved with flat blocks of stone, or with cement harder than stone. He returned to San Miguel with the report of his discoveries, and quite richly laden with the gold which he had received as a present from the natives, or which he had seized as what he considered the lawful spoils of war. The sight of the gold inspired all the Spaniards at San Miguel with the intense desire to press forward into a field which promised so rich a harvest.

It was ascertained that the Inca had command of an army of over fifty thousand men. Pizarro, leaving sixty men in garrison at San Miguel, set out with one hundred and ninety men to visit the Inca in his capital. De Soto accompanied him. It was not ostensibly a military expedition, seeking the conquest of the country, or moving with any hostile intent whatever. De Soto had a conscience; Pizarro had none. Whatever reproaches might arise in the mind of De Soto in reference to the course he was pursuing, he silenced them by the very plausible assumption that he was an ambassador from the king of Spain, commissioned to make a friendly visit to the monarch of another newly-discovered empire; that he was the messenger of peace seeking to unite the two kingdoms in friendly relations with each other for their mutual benefit. This was probably the real feeling of De Soto. The expedition was commissioned by the king of Spain. The armed retinue was only such as became the ambassadors of a great monarch. Such an expedition was in every respect desirable. The fault – perhaps we ought in candor to say the calamity – of De Soto was in allowing himself to be attached to an expedition under a man so thoroughly reckless and unprincipled as he knew Pizarro to have been. Perhaps he hoped to control the actions of his ignorant and fanatic superior officer. It is quite manifest that De Soto did exert a very powerful influence in giving shape to the expedition.

An Indian courier was sent forward to Cuzco, one of the capitals of the Peruvian monarch, with a friendly and almost an obsequious message to the Inca, whose name was Attahuallapa. The courier bore the communication that Pizarro was an ambassador commissioned by the king of Spain to visit the king of Peru, and to kiss his hand in token of peace and fraternity. He therefore solicited that protection in passing through the country which every monarch is bound to render to the representatives of a foreign and friendly power.

Pizarro, as it will be remembered, was a rough and illiterate soldier, unable either to read or write. In this sagacious diplomatic arrangement, we undoubtedly see the movement of De Soto's reflective and cultivated mind. The expedition moved slowly along, awaiting the return of the courier. He soon came back with a very indefinite response, and with a present of two curiously carved stone cups, and some perfumery. The guarded reply and the meagre present excited some alarm in the Spanish camp. It was very evident that the expedition was not to anticipate a very cordial reception at the Peruvian court. Pizarro was much alarmed. He was quite confident that the Inca was trying to lure them on to their ruin. Having called a council of war, he urged that they should proceed no farther until he had sent some faithful Indian spies to ascertain the intentions of Attahuallapa.

But De Soto, whose youthful energies were inspired by love and ambition, was eager to press forward.

"It is not necessary," said he, "for the Inca to use treachery with us. He could easily overpower us with numbers were he so disposed. We have also heard that he is a just and merciful prince; and the courtesy he has already shown us, is some token at least of his good will. But why should we hesitate? We have no longer any choice but to go forward. If we now retreat, it will prove our professions to be false; and when the suspicions of the Inca are once aroused, we shall find it impossible to escape from his country."

Pizarro's brother – Hernando – was a man of ignoble birth, of ruffianly manners, of low and brutal character. Tauntingly he inquired of De Soto, if he were ready to give proof of his confidence in the faith of the Peruvian monarch, by going forward to his court, as an envoy from the embassy.

De Soto turned his keen and flashing eye upon the man, whom he despised, and said in slow and measured words:

"Don Hernando, I may yet convince you that it is neither civil nor safe to call my sincerity in question. I have as much confidence in the honor of the Inca as I have in the integrity of any man in this company, not excepting the commander or yourself. I perceive that you are disposed to go backward. You may all return, when and how you please, or remain where you are. But I have made up my mind to present myself to Attahuallapa. And I shall certainly do so, without asking the assistance or permission of any of your party."

This was certainly a very defiant speech. It asserted his entire rejection of the authority of Pizarro. De Soto could not have dared thus to have spoken, unless he had felt strong in the support of his own dragoons.

Hernando Pizarro was silent, indulging only in a malignant smile. It was not safe for him to provoke De Soto to a personal rencontre. Francisco Pizarro smothered his chagrin and very adroitly availed himself of this statement, to commission De Soto to take twenty-four horsemen, such as he might select, and accompanied by an Indian guide called Filipillo, go forward to the Peruvian court.

Both of the Pizarros seemed quite relieved when the sound of the departing squadron of brave cavaliers died away in the distance. De Soto, during the whole of his adventurous life, seems to have been entirely unconscious of the emotion of fear. During his residence in the camp of the Pizarros, he had exerted a powerful restraint upon their ferocious natures. He had very earnestly endeavored to impress their minds with the conviction that they could not pass through the populous empire of Peru, or even remain in it, if their followers were allowed to trample upon the rights of the natives. So earnestly and persistently did he urge these views, that Pizarro at length acknowledged their truth, and in the presence of De Soto, commanded his men to abstain from every act of aggression.

But now that De Soto was gone, the Pizarros and their rabble rout of vagabonds breathed more freely. Scarcely had the plumed helmets of the cavaliers disappeared in the distance, when Hernando Pizarro set out on a plundering expedition into the villages of the Peruvians. The natives fled in terror before the Spaniards. Pizarro caught one of the leading men and questioned him very closely respecting the designs of Attahuallapa. The captive honestly and earnestly declared, that he knew nothing about the plans of his sovereign.

This demoniac Hernando endeavored to extort a confession from him by torture. He tied his victim to a tree, enveloped his feet in cotton thoroughly saturated with oil and applied the torch. The wretched sufferer in unendurable agony, said "yes" to anything and everything. Two days after, it was proved that he could not have known anything respecting the intended operations of the Inca. It is a satisfaction to one's sense of justice to remember that there is a God who will not allow such crimes to go unpunished.

De Soto, with his bold cavaliers, pressed rapidly on towards the Peruvian camp. Very carefully he guarded against every act of hostility or injustice. Everywhere the natives were treated with the utmost courtesy. In the rapid advance of the Spaniards through the country, crowds flocked to the highway attracted by the novel spectacle. And a wonderful spectacle it must have been! These cavaliers, with their nodding plumes, their burnished armor, their gleaming sabres, their silken banners, mounted on magnificent war horses and rushing along over the hills and through the valleys in meteoric splendor, must have presented an aspect more imposing to their minds than we can well imagine.

De Soto, who had not his superior as a horseman in the Spanish army, was mounted on a milk white steed of extraordinary size and grace of figure, and wore a complete suit of the most costly and showy armor. It is said that on one occasion his path was crossed by a brook twenty feet wide. The noble animal disdained to wade through, but cleared it at a single bound.

The crowds who lined the highways seemed to understand and appreciate the friendly feelings De Soto manifested in gracefully bowing to them and smiling as he passed along. He soon ascertained, though his guide Filipillo, that the headquarters of the Peruvian camp was at a place now called Caxamarca, among the mountains, about eighty miles northeast of the present seaport of Truxillo.

After a rapid ride of about six hours, the expedition approached quite a flourishing little town called Caxas. Several hundred Peruvian soldiers were drawn up in battle array in the outskirts, to arrest the progress of the Spaniards. De Soto halted his dragoons, and sent forward Filipillo to assure the commandant that he was traversing the country not with any hostile intent, and that he bore a friendly message from his own sovereign to the king of Peru.

The kindly disposed Peruvians immediately laid aside their arms, welcomed the strangers, and entertained them with a sumptuous feast. Thus refreshed, they pressed on several leagues farther, until they reached a much larger city called Guancabama. From all the accounts given it would seem that the inhabitants of this region had reached a degree of civilization, so far as the comforts of life are concerned, fully equal to that then to be found in Spain. This city was on the magnificent highway which traversed fifteen hundred miles through the very heart of the empire. The houses, which were built of hewn stone, admirably jointed, consisted of several rooms, and were distinguished for cleanliness, order, and domestic comfort.

The men seemed intelligent, the women modest, and various arts of industry occupied their time. De Soto testified that the great highway which passed through this place far surpassed in grandeur and utility any public work which had ever been attempted in Spain. Happy and prosperous as were the Peruvians, compared with the inhabitants of most other countries, it is quite evident that the ravages of the Fall were not unknown there.

Just before entering the town, De Soto passed a high gibbet upon which three malefactors were hung in chains, swaying in the breeze. That revolting spectacle revealed the sad truth that in Peru,

as well as elsewhere, man's fallen nature developed itself in crime and woe. The Emperor had also a large standing army, and the country had just been ravaged by the horrors of civil war.

De Soto was kindly received at Guancabama. Just as he was about to leave for Caxamarca, an envoy from the Inca reached the city on its way to the Spanish camp. The ambassador was a man of high rank. Several servants accompanied him, laden with presents for Pizarro. He entreated De Soto to return with him to the headquarters of the Spaniards. As these presents and this embassy would probably convince Pizarro of the friendly feeling of the Peruvian monarch, De Soto judged it wise to comply with his request. Thus he turned back, and the united party soon reached Pizarro's encampment.

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