

Even the brute creation appeared instinctively to have shunned the fatal spot, and neither beast nor bird of any description was seen by the wanderers. Silence reigned unbroken in the heart of these dismal solitudes; at least, the only sounds that could be heard were the plashing of the rain-drops on the leaves, and the tread of the forlorn adventurers.<sup>13</sup>

Entirely discouraged by the aspect of the country, the Spaniards began to comprehend that they had gained nothing by changing their quarters from sea to shore, and they felt the most serious apprehensions of perishing from famine in a region which afforded nothing but such unwholesome berries as they could pick up here and there in the woods. They loudly complained of their hard lot, accusing their commander as the author of all their troubles, and as deluding them with promises of a fairy land, which seemed to recede in proportion as they advanced. It was of no use, they said, to contend against fate, and it was better to take their chance of regaining the port of Panamá in time to save their lives, than to wait where they were to die of hunger.

But Pizarro was prepared to encounter much greater evils than these, before returning to Panamá, bankrupt in credit, an object of derision as a vainglorious dreamer, who had persuaded others to embark in an adventure which he had not the courage to carry through himself. The present was his only chance. To return would be ruin. He used every argument, therefore, that mortified pride or avarice could suggest to turn his followers from their purpose; represented to them that these were the troubles that necessarily lay in the path of the discoverer; and called to mind the brilliant successes of their countrymen in other

<sup>13</sup> Xerez, *Conq. del Peru*, ap. Barcia, tom. III. p. 180.—*Relacion del Primer. Descub.*, MS.—Montesinos, *Annales*, MS., año 1515.—Zarate, *Conq. del Peru*, lib. 1, cap. 1.—Garcilasso, *Com. Real.*, Parte 2, lib. 1, cap. 7.—Herrera, *Hist. General*, dec. 3, lib. 6, cap. 13.

quarters, and the repeated reports, which they had themselves received, of the rich regions along this coast, of which it required only courage and constancy on their part to become the masters. Yet, as their present exigencies were pressing, he resolved to send back the vessel to the Isle of Pearls, to lay in a fresh stock of provisions for his company, which might enable them to go forward with renewed confidence. The distance was not great, and in a few days they would all be relieved from their perilous position. The officer detached on this service was named Montenegro; and taking with him nearly half the company, after receiving Pizarro's directions, he instantly weighed anchor, and steered for the Isle of Pearls.

On the departure of his vessel, the Spanish commander made an attempt to explore the country, and see if some Indian settlement might not be found, where he could procure refreshments for his followers. But his efforts were vain, and no trace was visible of a human dwelling; though, in the dense and impenetrable foliage of the equatorial regions, the distance of a few rods might suffice to screen a city from observation. The only means of nourishment left to the unfortunate adventurers were such shell-fish as they occasionally picked up on the shore, or the bitter buds of the palm-tree, and such berries and unsavory herbs as grew wild in the woods. Some of these were so poisonous, that the bodies of those who ate them swelled up and were tormented with racking pains. Others, preferring famine to this miserable diet, pined away from weakness and actually died of starvation. Yet their resolute leader strove to maintain his own cheerfulness and to keep up the drooping spirits of his men. He freely shared with them his scanty stock of provisions, was unwearied in his endeavors to procure them sustenance, tended the sick, and ordered barracks to be constructed for their accommodation, which might, at least, shelter them from the drenching storms of the season. By this ready



sympathy with his followers in their sufferings, he obtained an ascendancy over their rough natures, which the assertion of authority, at least in the present extremity, could never have secured to him.

Day after day, week after week, had now passed away, and no tidings were heard of the vessel that was to bring relief to the wanderers. In vain did they strain their eyes over the distant waters to catch a glimpse of their coming friends. Not a speck was to be seen in the blue distance, where the canoe of the savage dared not venture, and the sail of the white man was not yet spread. Those who had borne up bravely at first now gave way to despondency, as they felt themselves abandoned by their countrymen on this desolate shore. They pined under that sad feeling which "maketh the heart sick." More than twenty of the little band had already died, and the survivors seemed to be rapidly following.<sup>14</sup>

At this crisis reports were brought to Pizarro of a light having been seen through a distant opening in the woods. He hailed the tidings with eagerness, as intimating the existence of some settlement in the neighborhood; and, putting himself at the head of a small party, went in the direction pointed out, to reconnoitre. He was not disappointed, and, after extracting himself from a dense wilderness of underbrush and foliage, he emerged into an open space, where a small Indian village was planted. The timid inhabitants, on the sudden apparition of the strangers, quitted their huts in dismay; and the famished Spaniards, rushing in, eagerly made themselves masters of their contents. These consisted of different articles of food, chiefly maize and cocoanuts. The supply, though small, was too seasonable not to fill them with rapture.

The astonished natives made no attempt at resistance. But, gathering more confidence as no violence was offered

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, ubi supra.—Relacion del Primer. Descub., MS.—Xerez, Conq. del Peru, ubi supra.

to their persons, they drew nearer the white men, and inquired, "Why they did not stay at home and till their own lands, instead of roaming about to rob others who had never harmed them?"<sup>15</sup> Whatever may have been their opinion as to the question of right, the Spaniards, no doubt, felt then that it would have been wiser to do so. But the savages wore about their persons gold ornaments of some size, though of clumsy workmanship. This furnished the best reply to their demand. It was the golden bait which lured the Spanish adventurer to forsake his pleasant home for the trials of the wilderness. From the Indians Pizarro gathered a confirmation of the reports he had so often received of a rich country lying farther south; and at the distance of ten days' journey across the mountains, they told him, there dwelt a mighty monarch whose dominions had been invaded by another still more powerful, the Child of the Sun.<sup>16</sup> It may have been the invasion of Quito that was meant, by the valiant Inca Huayna Capac, which took place some years previous to Pizarro's expedition.

At length, after the expiration of more than six weeks, the Spaniards beheld with delight the return of the wandering bark that had borne away their comrades, and

<sup>15</sup> "Porque decian à los Castellanos, que por què no sembraban, i cogian, sin andar tomando los Bastimentos agenos, pasando tantos trabajos?" Herrera, Hist. General, loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup> "Dioles noticia el viejo por medio del lengua, como diez soles de alli habia un Rey muy poderoso yendo por espesas montañas, y que otro mas poderoso hijo del sol habia venido de milagro á quitarle el Reino sobre que tenian mui sangrientas batallas." (Montesinos, *Annales*, MS, año 1525.) The conquest of Quito by Huayna Capac took place more than thirty years before this period in our history. But the particulars of this revolution, its time or precise theatre, were, probably, but very vaguely comprehended by the rude nations in the neighborhood of Panamá; and their allusion to it in an unknown dialect was as little comprehended by the Spanish voyagers, who must have collected their information from signs much more than words.



Montenegro sailed into port with an ample supply of provisions for his famishing countrymen. Great was his horror at the aspect presented by the latter, their wild and haggard countenances and wasted frames,—so wasted by hunger and disease, that their old companions found it difficult to recognize them. Montenegro accounted for his delay by incessant head winds and bad weather; and he himself had also a doleful tale to tell of the distress to which he and his crew had been reduced by hunger, on their passage to the Isle of Pearls.—It is minute incidents like these with which we have been occupied, that enable one to comprehend the extremity of suffering to which the Spanish adventurer was subjected in the prosecution of his great work of discovery.

Revived by the substantial nourishment to which they had so long been strangers, the Spanish cavaliers, with the buoyancy that belongs to men of a hazardous and roving life, forgot their past distresses in their eagerness to prosecute their enterprise. Reëmbarking therefore on board his vessel, Pizarro bade adieu to the scene of so much suffering, which he branded with the appropriate name of *Puerto de la Hambre*, the Port of Famine, and again opened his sails to a favorable breeze that bore him onwards towards the south.

Had he struck boldly out into the deep, instead of hugging the inhospitable shore, where he had hitherto found so little to recompense him, he might have spared himself the repetition of wearisome and unprofitable adventures, and reached by a shorter route the point of his destination. But the Spanish mariner groped his way along these unknown coasts, landing at every convenient headland, as if fearful lest some fruitful region or precious mine might be overlooked, should a single break occur in the line of survey. Yet it should be remembered, that, though the true point of Pizarro's destination is obvious to us, familiar with the topography of these countries, he was wandering in the

dark, feeling his way along, inch by inch, as it were, without chart to guide him, without knowledge of the seas or of the bearings of the coast, and even with no better defined idea of the object at which he aimed than that of a land, teeming with gold, that lay somewhere at the south! It was a hunt after an *El Dorado*; on information scarcely more circumstantial or authentic than that which furnished the basis of so many chimerical enterprises in this land of wonders. Success only, the best argument with the multitude, redeemed the expeditions of Pizarro from a similar imputation of extravagance.

Holding on his southerly course under the lee of the shore, Pizarro, after a short run, found himself abreast of an open reach of country, or at least one less encumbered with wood, which rose by a gradual swell, as it receded from the coast. He landed with a small body of men, and, advancing a short distance into the interior, fell in with an Indian hamlet. It was abandoned by the inhabitants, who, on the approach of the invaders, had betaken themselves to the mountains; and the Spaniards, entering their deserted dwellings, found there a good store of maize and other articles of food, and rude ornaments of gold of considerable value. Food was not more necessary for their bodies than was the sight of gold, from time to time, to stimulate their appetite for adventure. One spectacle, however, chilled their blood with horror. This was the sight of human flesh, which they found roasting before the fire, as the barbarians had left it, preparatory to their obscene repast. The Spaniards, conceiving that they had fallen in with a tribe of Caribs, the only race in that part of the New World known to be cannibals, retreated precipitately to their vessel.<sup>17</sup> They were not steeled by sad

<sup>17</sup> "I en las Ollas de la comida, que estaban al Guego, entre la Carne, que sacaban, havia Pies i Manos de Hombres, de donde conocieron, que aquellos Indios eran Caribes." Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 3, lib. 8, cap. 11.



familiarity with the spectacle, like the Conquerors of Mexico.

The weather, which had been favorable, now set in tempestuous, with heavy squalls, accompanied by incessant thunder and lightning, and the rain, as usual in these tropical tempests, descended not so much in drops as in unbroken sheets of water. The Spaniards, however, preferred to take their chance on the raging element rather than remain in the scene of such brutal abominations. But the fury of the storm gradually subsided, and the little vessel held on her way along the coast, till, coming abreast of a bold point of land named by Pizarro Punta Quemada, he gave orders to anchor. The margin of the shore was fringed with a deep belt of mangrove-trees, the long roots of which, interlacing one another, formed a kind of submarine lattice-work that made the place difficult of approach. Several avenues, opening through this tangled thicket, led Pizarro to conclude that the country must be inhabited, and he disembarked, with the greater part of his force, to explore the interior.

He had not penetrated more than a league, when he found his conjecture verified by the sight of an Indian town of larger size than those he had hitherto seen, occupying the brow of an eminence, and well defended by palisades. The inhabitants, as usual, had fled; but left in their dwellings a good supply of provisions and some gold trinkets, which the Spaniards made no difficulty of appropriating to themselves. Pizarro's flimsy bark had been strained by the heavy gales it had of late encountered, so that it was unsafe to prosecute the voyage further without more thorough repairs than could be given to her on this desolate coast. He accordingly determined to send her back with a few hands to be careened at Panamá, and meanwhile to establish his quarters in his present position, which was so favorable for defence. But first he despatched a small party under Montenegro to reconnoitre the country,

and, if possible, to open a communication with the natives.

The latter were a warlike race. They had left their habitations in order to place their wives and children in safety. But they had kept an eye on the movements of the invaders, and, when they saw their forces divided, they resolved to fall upon each body singly before it could communicate with the other. So soon, therefore, as Montenegro had penetrated through the defiles of the lofty hills, which shoot out like spurs of the Cordilleras along this part of the coast, the Indian warriors, springing from their ambush, sent off a cloud of arrows and other missiles that darkened the air, while they made the forest ring with their shrill war-whoop. The Spaniards, astonished at the appearance of the savages, with their naked bodies gaudily painted, and brandishing their weapons as they glanced among the trees and straggling underbrush that choked up the defile, were taken by surprise and thrown for a moment into disarray. Three of their number were killed and several wounded. Yet, speedily rallying, they returned the discharge of the assailants with their cross-bows,—for Pizarro's troops do not seem to have been provided with muskets on this expedition,—and then gallantly charging the enemy, sword in hand, succeeded in driving them back into the fastnesses of the mountains. But it only led them to shift their operations to another quarter, and make an assault on Pizarro before he could be relieved by his lieutenant.

Availing themselves of their superior knowledge of the passes, they reached that commander's quarters long before Montenegro, who had commenced a countermarch in the same direction. And, issuing from the woods, the bold savages saluted the Spanish garrison with a tempest of darts and arrows, some of which found their way through the joints of the harness and the quilted mail of the cavaliers. But Pizarro was too well practised a soldier to be



off his guard. Calling his men about him, he resolved not to abide the assault tamely in the works, but to sally out, and meet the enemy on their own ground. The barbarians, who had advanced near the defences, fell back as the Spaniards burst forth with their valiant leader at their head. But soon returning with admirable ferocity to the charge, they singled out Pizarro, whom, by his bold bearing and air of authority, they easily recognized as the chief; and, hurling at him a storm of missiles, wounded him, in spite of his armor, in no less than seven places.<sup>18</sup>

Driven back by the fury of the assault directed against his own person, the Spanish commander retreated down the slope of the hill, still defending himself as he could with sword and buckler, when his foot slipped and he fell. The enemy set up a fierce yell of triumph, and some of the boldest sprang forward to despatch him. But Pizarro was on his feet in an instant, and, striking down two of the foremost with his strong arm, held the rest at bay till his soldiers could come to the rescue. The barbarians, struck with admiration at his valor, began to falter, when Montenegro luckily coming on the ground at the moment, and falling on their rear, completed their confusion; and, abandoning the field, they made the best of their way into the recesses of the mountains. The ground was covered with their slain; but the victory was dearly purchased by the death of two more Spaniards and a long list of wounded.

A council of war was then called. The position had lost its charm in the eyes of the Spaniards, who had met here with the first resistance they had yet experienced on their expedition. It was necessary to place the wounded in some secure spot, where their injuries could be attended to. Yet it was not safe to proceed farther, in the crippled state of

<sup>18</sup> Naharro, *Relacion Sumaria*, MS.—Xerez, *Conq. del Peru*, ap. Barcia, tom. III. p. 180.—Zarate, *Conq. del Peru*, lib. 1, cap. 1.—Balboa, *Hist. du Perou*, chap. 15.

their vessel. On the whole, it was decided to return and report their proceedings to the governor; and, though the magnificent hopes of the adventurers had not been realized, Pizarro trusted that enough had been done to vindicate the importance of the enterprise, and to secure the countenance of Pedrarias for the further prosecution of it.<sup>19</sup>

Yet Pizarro could not make up his mind to present himself, in the present state of the undertaking, before the governor. He determined, therefore, to be set on shore with the principal part of his company at Chicamá, a place on the main land, at a short distance west of Panamá. From this place, which he reached without any further accident, he despatched the vessel, and in it his treasurer, Nicolas de Ribera, with the gold he had collected, and with instructions to lay before the governor a full account of his discoveries, and the result of the expedition.

While these events were passing, Pizarro's associate, Almagro, had been busily employed in fitting out another vessel for the expedition at the port of Panamá. It was not till long after his friend's departure that he was prepared to follow him. With the assistance of Luque, he at length succeeded in equipping a small caravel and embarking a body of between sixty and seventy adventurers, mostly of the lowest order of the colonists. He steered in the track of his comrade, with the intention of overtaking him as soon as possible. By a signal previously concerted of notching the trees, he was able to identify the spots visited by Pizarro,—Puerto de Piñas, Puerto de la Hambre, Pueblo Quemado,—touching successively at every point of the coast explored by his countrymen, though in a much shorter time. At the last-mentioned place he was received by the fierce natives with the same hostile demonstrations as Pizarro, though in the present encounter the Indians did not venture beyond their defences. But the

<sup>19</sup> Herrera, *Hist. General*, dec. 3, lib. 8, cap. 11.—Xerez, ubi supra.



hot blood of Almagro was so exasperated by this check, that he assaulted the place and carried it sword in hand, setting fire to the outworks and dwellings, and driving the wretched inhabitants into the forests.

His victory cost him dear. A wound from a javelin on the head caused an inflammation in one of his eyes, which, after great anguish, ended in the loss of it. Yet the intrepid adventurer did not hesitate to pursue his voyage, and, after touching at several places on the coast, some of which rewarded him with a considerable booty in gold, he reached the mouth of the *Rio de San Juan*, about the fourth degree of north latitude. He was struck with the beauty of the stream, and with the cultivation on its borders, which were sprinkled with Indian cottages showing some skill in their construction, and altogether intimating a higher civilization than any thing he had yet seen.

Still his mind was filled with anxiety for the fate of Pizarro and his followers. No trace of them had been found on the coast for a long time, and it was evident they must have foundered at sea, or made their way back to Panamá. This last he deemed most probable; as the vessel might have passed him unnoticed under the cover of the night, or of the dense fogs that sometimes hang over the coast.

Impressed with this belief, he felt no heart to continue his voyage of discovery, for which, indeed, his single bark, with its small complement of men, was altogether inadequate. He proposed, therefore, to return without delay. On his way, he touched at the Isle of Pearls, and there learned the result of his friend's expedition, and the place of his present residence. Directing his course, at once, to Chicamá, the two cavaliers soon had the satisfaction of embracing each other, and recounting their several exploits and escapes. Almagro returned even better freighted with gold than his confederate, and at every step of his progress he had collected fresh confirmation of the existence of

some great and opulent empire in the South. The confidence of the two friends was much strengthened by their discoveries; and they unhesitatingly pledged themselves to one another to die rather than abandon the enterprise.<sup>20</sup>

The best means of obtaining the levies requisite for so formidable an undertaking—more formidable, as it now appeared to them, than before—were made the subject of long and serious discussion. It was at length decided that Pizarro should remain in his present quarters, inconvenient and even unwholesome as they were rendered by the humidity of the climate, and the pestilent swarms of insects that filled the atmosphere. Almagro would pass over to Panamá, lay the case before the governor, and secure, if possible, his good-will towards the prosecution of the enterprise. If no obstacle were thrown in their way from this quarter, they might hope, with the assistance of Luque, to raise the necessary supplies; while the results of the recent expedition were sufficiently encouraging to draw adventurers to their standard in a community which had a craving for excitement that gave even danger a charm, and which held life cheap in comparison with gold.

<sup>20</sup> Xerez, ubi supra.—Naharro, *Relacion Sumaria*, MS.—Zarate, *Conq. del Peru*, loc. cit.—Balboa, *Hist. du Perou*, chap. 15.—*Relacion del Primer. Descub.*, MS.—Herrera, *Hist. General*, dec. 3, lib. 8, cap. 13.—Levinus Apollonius, fol. 12.—Gomara, *Hist. de las Ind.*, cap. 108.