



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

HEROES OF
AMERICAN HISTORY

DE SOTO



FERDINAND DE SOTO

FERDINAND DE SOTO

AND THE INVASION OF FLORIDA

BY
FREDERICK A. OBER

HEROES OF AMERICAN HISTORY

ILLUSTRATED



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

1906

Copyright, 1906, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

All rights reserved.

Published September, 1906.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

57012

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE MAN ON HORSEBACK	1
II.	FERDINAND AND ISABELLA	13
III.	IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA	30
IV.	DE SOTO, THE AVENGER	46
V.	THE REWARD OF DEVOTION	60
VI.	ADELANTADO AND GOVERNOR	76
VII.	THE LANDING IN FLORIDA	89
VIII.	IN THE FLORIDIAN FORESTS	101
IX.	BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS	112
X.	THE FIERCE APALACHEES	129
XI.	THE FIRST WINTER IN FLORIDA	142
XII.	THE TRACKLESS WILDERNESS	157
XIII.	THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS	170
XIV.	DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE	187
XV.	THE GREAT CHIEF, TUSCALOOSA	204
XVI.	DESPERATE ENCOUNTER AT MAUVILA	215
XVII.	DE SOTO'S FATAL DECISION	229
XVIII.	HOW THE MISSISSIPPI WAS CROSSED	242
XIX.	A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING	256
XX.	LAST DAYS OF DE SOTO	273
	INDEX	286

447944

ILLUSTRATIONS

FERDINAND DE SOTO	<i>Frontispiece</i>
MAP OF ANCIENT FLORIDA, SHOWING ROUTE OF DE SOTO, 1539-1543	<i>Facing p. 1</i>
ATAHUALLPA, INCA OF PERU	" 62
EARLY INDIAN LIFE	" 94
THE MARCH THROUGH THE FOREST	" 134
BATTLE OF MAUVILA	" 226
DE SOTO ON THE SHORE OF THE MISSISSIPPI	" 248
BURIAL OF DE SOTO	" 276

AUTHORITIES
ON
FERDINAND DE SOTO AND FLORIDA

XVITH CENTURY. The "first and best" of three contemporary narratives, describing the expedition of De Soto, was printed in Portugal, in 1557, as:

The True Relation of the Fidalgos of Elvas. It was translated and reprinted by Hakluyt in 1609, and appeared again in 1611, as *The Worthye and Famous Historie of the Travailles, Discovery, and Conquest of Terra Florida.* The latest edition, in English, was published in New York, 1904.

The Relation of the Conquest of Florida was written by Luis de Biedma, the king's factor on the expedition, as early as 1544, but did not appear in print until 1841.

Another personal narrative was that of Rodrigo Ranjel, De Soto's secretary, which, though written in the form of a journal, when on the march, also remained in manuscript for more than three hundred years, and was first issued in 1855.

XVIIITH AND XVIIIITH CENTURIES. *La Florida del Inca*, by Garcilaso (or Garcilasso) de la Vega, was derived from soldiers who were with De Soto (though more than forty years after the return of the expedition), and was published first in Lisbon, 1605; in Madrid, 1722. Translated and republished, New York, 1904.

The narratives of the Fidalgo and Ranjel, though written and published independently, are generally corroborative, and agree in important particulars with the "Florida" of the Inca.

XIXTH CENTURY. *The Conquest of Florida*, by Theodore Irving, New York, 1851, is based mainly upon the Inca's history, and is quite complete.

Buckingham Smith, Spanish scholar and indefatigable historian, devoted much time to original research, and published *The Career of Hernando de Soto*, 1864, as well as other valuable papers.

FERDINAND DE SOTO



FERDINAND DE SOTO

I

THE MAN ON HORSEBACK

1532

I N the doorway of his pavilion on the tented hill-slopes of Cassamarca sat the Inca of Peru. Around him were his nobles and captains of companies, from whom he was distinguished, not only by the deference they paid him, but by the crimson fringe, or *borla*, badge of royalty, with which his brow was banded. That memorable afternoon of November 15th was drawing to its close. Inca Atahualpa had watched since morning for the coming of the strangers, first of the white race to invade the valley of the sierras in which he was intrenched. He had seen them emerge from the gloomy defiles of the mountains, with the sun shining on their helmets and reflected from their swords

FERDINAND DE SOTO

and arquebuses. He had looked in awed wonder upon their prancing steeds, their glittering weapons, their flaunting banners, and had noted with apprehension their solid formation—that steel-girdled phalanx which was to prove a wedge to split his empire in twain.

The mailed men of Spain marched straight across the valley and into the city of Cassamarca, but had hardly reached its central square ere their commander, grim and merciless Pizarro, detached a small band of troopers as an embassy to the Inca, in his camp on the hill-side three miles distant. Again were the eyes of Atahualpa greeted with a vision of armor-clad horsemen as, emerging from behind the city walls, they swept across the intervening distance and approached his intrenchments. Conspicuously in advance was the leader of the cavalcade, a tall and handsome *hidalgo*, encased from head to foot in shining armor. He was mounted upon a milk-white charger of noble proportions, which, when midway the distance between city and camp it encountered a stream twenty feet in width, took it at a bound and seemed to fly over the ground. Soon the cavaliers were in front of

THE MAN ON HORSEBACK

the royal ruler, who, while astonished and secretly alarmed, yet preserved an unmoved countenance. He directed his gaze to the ground at his feet, nor would he look up while the leader of the troop delivered the message with which he had been charged by Pizarro. Out of the corners of his eyes, however, he could not refrain from glancing, observing which, and probably piqued at the Inca's lack of interest, the cavalier resolved to arouse it.

He was, and had been for years, the "best lance" in the army, and by far the finest horseman of Pizarro's cavalry, so it was from pardonable vanity, perhaps, that he suddenly put spurs to his horse and dashed down the hill-side to the plain out-stretched beneath. There, in the waning light of the departing day, he put the fiery war-horse through a variety of evolutions, circling round and round, impetuously charging an imaginary foe, and finally advancing at full speed upon the Inca and his nobles. The latter fled in wild dismay, but Atahualpa sat immovable, even when the snorting, panting charger, thrown suddenly upon his haunches, launched out with iron-shod hoofs close to his head.

This was the manner in which Ferdinand

FERDINAND DE SOTO

de Soto introduced himself to the Inca of Peru. For it was he (though by some accounts it was Hernando Pizarro) who, as the leader of that little band of troopers, was the first of white men to hold converse with the renowned "Child of the Sun." It is said that the Inca ordered such of his nobles as had fled at the approach of the war-horse to be executed; but whatever his feelings towards them may have been, for the gallant cavalier he ever after entertained the greatest respect, and this strange meeting was but the beginning of a friendship which lasted until severed by his untimely death.

The conquest of Peru was achieved, some historians have asserted, not so much by Francisco Pizarro, the reputed commander of the invading army, as by Ferdinand de Soto, captain of cavalry, and the adored leader of an invincible band of dragoons. Certain it is that he always led the advance, whether in reconnoitring the enemies' outposts on the skirmish line, scouting the unknown country, or in hand-to-hand encounters. He had joined Pizarro at the island of Puna, before he had really landed on the main, and when in sore need of reinforcements. From the very first he had asserted

THE MAN ON HORSEBACK

his independence of command, had refused to obey any orders that his judgment did not approve, and especially those which related to the plundering and massacring of the natives.

At the time he joined Pizarro, bringing two ships well laden, and one hundred companions armed to the teeth, the ferocious Francisco had so exasperated the Peruvians by his massacres and murders, that he and his band were about to be exterminated. They would doubtless have paid the extreme penalty of their evil deeds had it not been for the opportune arrival of De Soto, who not only supplied the men and munitions necessary for an invasion of the mainland, but also dictated the course to be pursued.

While it may not be claimed with truth that he was more humane than the majority of those cruel Spaniards who accomplished the conquest of Mexico, Central and South America, yet it may be confidently asserted that he had within him the elements of a manhood to which most of them were utter strangers. He was bold, dashing, and, above all, high-spirited and honorable. Though he had come to America with only a sword and a shield as his fortune, he was a gentle-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

man born, and no one could rob him of his birthright. With that sword he had fought his way to honorable distinction; with that shield he had turned aside the arrows of calumny, by which his enemies had assailed him often in the past.

We will not, at this moment, inquire into the circumstances which induced, or rather compelled, his going to the assistance of Pizarro; but let it suffice to state that he had been promised by the commander-in-chief the rank of lieutenant-general, or second in command. When he arrived at the seat of war, however, he found that post occupied by Francisco Pizarro's brother, Hernando, who, moreover, very plainly intimated that he intended to hold it against all comers.

It was not De Soto's desire to foment a disturbance, and demand a nominal authority of which he was the actual possessor; so, after roundly berating Pizarro for his bad faith, he accepted things as they were and took his place in the army of invasion. From that time forward, however, he treated the Pizarros with contempt, and though they were four in number (Francisco, Hernando, Juan, and Gonzalo, besides a half-brother, Martin Alcantara), he was always ready to

THE MAN ON HORSEBACK

fight them, one and all, at the winking of an eyelid or the dropping of a glove. This they well knew, and took good care never to offend him, so that they all departed their different ways eventually (most of them through meeting their death by violence) without coming into personal combat.

Holding, then, the position of a commander of dragoons, every one devoted to him and ready to fight for him to the death, yet nominally at the orders of the commander-in-chief, Ferdinand de Soto made common cause with the invaders, and was foremost of them all in the conquest of the Inca's kingdom. Hernando Pizarro commanded another body of dragoons, similar in size and equipment to De Soto's, and the wonder is that their followers did not clash in conflict. That they did not was probably owing to the fact that both bands of marauders were engaged against the poor natives, whom they despoiled without mercy, and sometimes murdered.

When we speak of Ferdinand de Soto as a chivalrous and merciful conqueror, we must bear in mind that he was in contrast with one of the most brutal and merciless of those Spaniards who trailed the flag of their coun-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

try through blood and dishonor, during the many years they were permitted by Providence to scourge the southern portions of our hemisphere. While in Peru, indeed, he was not only comparatively humane, but actually so; though when he had an absolutely independent command in Florida (as we shall see later) he hung and burned Indian *caciques*, cut off their hands, and cast them to the dogs, with that disregard for the sacredness of human life displayed by Pizarro himself.

Now, Francisco Pizarro was an astute commander who, though he had many and grievous faults, could appreciate a good man at his full worth. He saw that De Soto was immeasurably superior to his brothers, and governed himself accordingly, wisely ignoring his contempt and insubordination, and at all times treating him with respect. When, therefore, after the mainland invasion had commenced, De Soto, sent off to scout the country, remained many days over the time allowed him, and returned without any explanation, Pizarro said nothing. He sent him off again, and this time he was gone so long, it became common talk in the army that he had at last thrown off the commander's yoke and revolted. A spy returned, in

THE MAN ON HORSEBACK

fact, with information to that effect; but Pizarro knew his man, and gave no credence to the report. Meanwhile, De Soto and his men were ranging the country at will. They were the first, it is said, to discover that magnificent highway of the Incas, which connected the two great capitals, Quito and Cuzco; the first to penetrate the sierras and explore the wonderful valleys abounding in natural wealth and teeming with inhabitants.

Hernando Pizarro was jealous of the freedom and personal initiative allowed his rival, and one day tauntingly asked him if he intended to penetrate the kingdom as far as Cassamarca, where the Inca was said to dwell, and perchance form an alliance with him. Ferdinand flashed back at him the reply that he intended to do as he pleased, and he certainly was going to visit the Inca, whether the rest would keep him company or not.

“As for you, Señor Hernando—the only one of your family who can boast a father!—presume not upon your connections to insult me with impunity. Neither you nor your brother can control my movements!”

Hernando turned livid with rage, but he dared not reply. He reported the remark

FERDINAND DE SOTO

to Francisco, who merely shrugged his shoulders, though the allusion to his illegitimacy cut him to the quick.

"It is well," he finally said. "Let him go to see the Inca Atahualpa, for there may be no better way of getting rid of him! For it is said that the Inca is all-powerful, that he has warriors as the sands of the sea; and if this be so, who, my dear brother, can be better spared than Don Fernando?"

"Who, indeed?" answered Hernando, with a malignant smile. "But suppose he returns—that he escapes the Inca's warriors—then he gathers all the laurels!"

"Well, he may, so we get all the gold! Laurel leaves fade quickly, do they not? While gold, bright gold, can never tarnish."

Pizarro said no more, for he was a man of few words; but he lost no time in despatching De Soto on his dangerous errand. With only twenty-four men, though the pick of his company, he set out. Knowing no fear, craving adventure, always anxious to be first in a fight and the last to draw out, Ferdinand de Soto gayly pranced away, as to a tourney. He and his men sought again the great highway, along which they swept, resplendent in their armor, like blazing meteors, bursting

THE MAN ON HORSEBACK

upon the astonished gaze of the terrified natives, only to disappear again, with clash of weapons and metallic rattle of accoutrements.

Such forays as this were the delight of De Soto, for he had made many in the wilds of Nicaragua previous to his adventure in Peru. He had gained there a rich experience, which stood him in good stead now in his dealings with the natives. Indian nature is much the same the wide world over; and though the natives of Nicaragua were far beneath those of Peru in culture, at heart they did not differ. Thus it was that De Soto was successful, everywhere he went, in gaining the confidence of the aborigines; thus it was that, though he met an army ready to fight him, gathered in a valley of the mountains, he and his men were finally summoned to a banquet, rather than to battle. After it was over, he was about to ride on again, when he was met by an envoy from the Inca himself, bearing presents for Pizarro, and in all honor could not refuse his request to return and escort him to the camp of the commander-in-chief.

It was not in accord with De Soto's desires to return, for he had set himself the task of

FERDINAND DE SOTO

being the first of his race to meet and hold an interview with the then unknown Inca. So he went back reluctantly, and, if this were a narrative of Pizarro's doings, instead of De Soto's, we might tell how the envoy was received, how the commander was filled, first, with a great desire to see the owner of the golden treasure, of which he had sent specimens to Pizarro, and again with apprehension at the difficulties in the way. In the end, the whole army set out for Cassamarca, with De Soto's company in the lead, and Hernando Pizarro bringing up the rear.

II

FERDINAND AND ISABELLA

1501-1521

IT may be presumed that before proceeding further with the career of Ferdinand de Soto in Peru, the reader may wish to learn something of his previous life, and how he came to the New World in search of adventure. Acting upon this assumption, we will turn back a few leaves in his biography, and investigate the scant records of his early life as they exist in Spain. Like his great countrymen, Pizarro and Cortés, he was a native of Estremadura, which seems to have been prolific in sturdy sons and daughters. Unlike them, he was born a gentleman, "by all four descents"—which means that not only his father and mother were of "gentle" birth, but also their parents as well. Then again, he was born in the noble town of Jerés de los Caballeros, anciently a seat of the Templars, the ruins of whose castle may still be traced.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Some have given his birthplace as Barcarota, in the same province of Estremadura; but the majority of his biographers agree on Jerés, or Xerés (pronounced Hay-rás), which lies about forty miles south of Badajoz, where resided a family, that of Don Pedro Arias de Avila, with which he became intimately connected. It was in one of the ruinous castles of Jerés that Ferdinand de Soto was born; but so obscure was his family at that time, that no exact record was kept of the occurrence. The year, however, was probably 1500, or 1501, and it is generally agreed that he made his advent with the sixteenth century.

Though his family belonged to the *hidalgua*, or nobility, it must have been quite poor, for on the death of his parents, which occurred when he was a youth, Ferdinand was thrown upon the world. Fortunately for him, he had won the regard of Don Pedro de Avila, the Count of Puñorostro, who occupied one of the several castles for which ancient Badajoz is famous. This nobleman invited him to make his home at Badajoz, and is said to have supported him at the university of Salamanca for a number of years, where he acquired some knowledge of books,

FERDINAND AND ISABELLA

but not enough to make him eligible for a profession. As a member of the Spanish nobility, indeed, it was not necessary that he should be proficient in much besides horsemanship, sword-play, fencing, and the like, and in these he led all his young companions. Possessing a handsome face, muscular limbs, and a shapely body, combined with a happy disposition and gallant demeanor, he became a great favorite at the tourney, where he won the admiration of the fair sex, and took prizes in every competitive encounter with the *caballeros*. There was no other horseman like him in all Estremadura, neither a gallant who was so reckless and jovial with the cavaliers, but at the same time held in such high repute by the ladies.

Now, Don Pedro had a family, comprising several sons and daughters, as well as a wife who was so nearly related to royalty that she entertained the highest hopes of great alliances for her children. She was, in fact, a niece of the Marchioness of Moya, that beloved friend and constant companion of Queen Isabella of Spain, who was with her when she died, and who nearly lost her life by an assassin's dagger intended for her royal mistress. The Marchioness of Moya,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

it may be recalled, has the credit of inclining Queen Isabella's ear to the story told by Columbus when he went begging for some one to send him out to find a world. Her niece, the Doña Isabel, was also a favorite at court, at which, as soon as they became old enough, she presented her daughters, two of whom were noted for their beauty. The most promising of them all was the second daughter, named after her mother, Isabel de Bobadilla, and whom her parents had decided should marry no less than a prince of the royal blood. They had, in truth, picked out the very prince she should espouse; but, alas for their plans! Isabel fell in love with Ferdinand de Soto.

Ferdinand, of course, had fallen in love with her; but being only a poor cavalier, and regarded in the light of a dependant of the family, with no fortune but his sword, and that, perhaps, a borrowed one, he was a long time in declaring his affection. This should be said to his honor; but such a condition of things could not exist forever, it must be admitted, and the day came when each became acquainted with the affection of the other. And, what was very bad for them, Don Pedro became acquainted with it also!

FERDINAND AND ISABELLA

He was away when the affair first developed so far that Ferdinand first spoke of his love, having sought and obtained the position of governor of Darien. It was a position which the king had no right to give him, as it belonged really to Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, who had fought the natives of Darien, subdued the province, and also discovered the Pacific Ocean, before Don Pedro received his appointment.

But "might was right" with the king and Don Pedro, and the latter sailed from Spain in the year 1514 to take possession of his province. What he did there has a bearing on the fortunes of De Soto, else it would not be detailed in this connection; but it was of vastly greater consequence to poor Balboa, who lost, not only all his hard-earned possessions, but his head as well, which Don Pedro caused to be cut off in 1517. From this it will be seen that Ferdinand de Soto's prospective father-in-law was not the sort of man to be trifled with. In very truth, he was one of the most cruel and tyrannical of all those Spaniards who went out to conquer the natives of the New World. Not alone that, but he was peculiarly ferocious in his cruelty, taking delight in

FERDINAND DE SOTO

the infliction of pain and even torture upon the innocent natives of his territory.

Imagine, then, the reception he gave poor Ferdinand when, the old tyrant having returned to Spain, the young man threw himself at his feet and announced his love for Isabel. At first he was speechless from indignation, then, in a voice trembling with passion, he bellowed: "What? You—poverty-stricken wretch that you are, one who has sat at my table and lived in my castle for years! You, dastard, venture to aspire to the hand of the daughter of Don Pedro Arias de Avila, Count of Puñorostro, an hidalgo of ancient lineage, friend of the king and the queen? You must be mad! Mad, I say! Do you hear? Begone, ingrate, and never let me see thy face again!"

The young man thought it prudent to retire, not only from the immediate presence of Don Pedro, but from the castle; but before he departed from Badajoz he somehow secured a final interview with his beloved. She appeared at the grated window of her room, which overlooked a garden, and he, standing beneath, amid the myrtles and the rose-trees, poured forth his woes. She listened in silence, then said, in sorrowful ac-

FERDINAND AND ISABELLA

cents: "Ferdinand, it is true, you cannot remain here longer. My father is a cruel man, and he never forgives! He thinks you have betrayed a trust, that you have committed a crime, in loving me."

"But I do love you, Isabel. I will go away, but I shall return; and you—you will be true to me?"

"Always, Ferdinand. Always. But do not allow my father to get you in his power. Remember what he did to Vasco Nuñez [Balboa]. Did he not behead him? And for what? Merely because he aspired too greatly. And—and he was betrothed to my sister, too! Ah me, that I should be compelled to say it—but my father is a vengeful man!"

It was true, as Isabel had said, that in order to get the gallant Balboa completely in his power, Don Pedro had pledged him his eldest daughter in marriage, then had turned and slain him. Ferdinand pressed her to elope with him, as soon as her father should return to Darien; but she had too high a sense of honor and of her obligations to her family to consent.

"No," she mournfully replied, "it cannot be. He will return; but he will not leave

FERDINAND DE SOTO

you here to plot in his absence. He is too wise for that. And, being himself deceitful, he will not trust me, either. Ferdinand, he will compel you to go with him, and—and I see no way other than that you must go.”

“Compel!” replied De Soto, scornfully. “Isabel, no man hath ever compelled me yet. And again, he has driven me from him.”

“Yes, but that was when in a rage. He will recall you, Ferdinand, and (though I warn you to beware of his friendship), it may be, that way your fortune lies, beloved.”

“Ah, that would impel me,” declared De Soto, warmly. “If he does invite me, surely I will go to that land of gold, where quickly I may win a fortune, perchance fame. Then I will return, Isabel.”

“And I shall await you, Ferdinand, even through long years!”

This was the purport of their conversation, in the last meeting between Ferdinand and Isabel, and it fell out as she had predicted. Informed by her governess that Isabel’s heart was in the keeping of the young cavalier, Don Pedro at first stormed and raged, declaring that she should die rather than become the bride of an impecunious noble-

FERDINAND AND ISABELLA

man like De Soto. Then, as he grew calmer, he took counsel with himself and dissembled. He sent for Ferdinand and asked him if he would accept a captain's commission in the expedition he was then preparing for Darien. He pictured the land of promise, rich in vast possibilities for the young and ardent adventurer; he assured him that wealth and distinction awaited him in that land, where, as the favorite of the governor, he would be rapidly promoted.

"Enough, Don Pedro," exclaimed De Soto. "I will serve you faithfully; but I ask no favors, only an opportunity for winning my way with my sword."

"That you shall have," replied Don Pedro. "Darien is the land of opportunities, and you may carve out an empire. Sooth, there will be blood enough to spill, and gold enough for all!"

Don Pedro was as good as his word. Overjoyed to have De Soto in his power, and relieved at being able to part him so easily from his daughter, he advanced the money for a splendid outfit, and gave him a commission as captain of a troop. They sailed for Darien in the year 1519, with a gallant company of fortune-seekers, most of whom

FERDINAND DE SOTO

“found their graves in the land whither they had gone to dig for gold.”

As Ferdinand was about embarking, he was handed a note from Isabel, containing two lines, merely: “Dearest, remember my promise, and *remember my warning!*” Her promise—to remain faithful always; her warning—against the treachery of her own father.

Ferdinand de Soto pondered her words, and took heed. That he escaped the snares set for him by Don Pedro, was owing to the watchfulness of Isabel; that he held to higher aims and loftier purposes than his companion *conquistadores*, was because of his love for her and the consciousness that in the end she was to be his reward.

He was noble by nature; but many noble natures became perverted in that prolonged hunt for gold; many a man of honorable instincts became a monster of cruelty when pitted against the savages of Darien and Panama. It was, however, the universal testimony of De Soto's companions that he was constantly humane to the unfortunate Indians whom he was ordered by Don Pedro to torture or destroy. To women and children, especially, he was tender and consid-

FERDINAND AND ISABELLA

erate; thus many a poor wretch was saved from suffering through the love that existed between Isabel de Bobadilla and Ferdinand de Soto!

Old Don Pedro, or "Pedrarias," as he was sometimes called, dissembled well; but his settled purpose, which was to destroy his daughter's suitor at the earliest opportunity, was perfectly apparent to De Soto. It was no secret, even, among the men of his command, who, seeing the unequal fight that was being carried on, were the closer drawn to him, through sympathy. They soon became his pronounced partisans, and would follow him through fire, if need be, when he ordered them. Though never a word was spoken as to this between the captain and his men, the latter frequently foiled Pedrarias in his efforts to find a joint in De Soto's armor, through which he might thrust a poisoned weapon.

Ferdinand himself, while ever alert, always treated Don Pedro with the deference due to a benefactor, and the father of one whom he loved better than his life. As time went by, and Pedrarias found himself continually foiled in his evil purpose, he became nearly insane with rage. Indeed, it

FERDINAND DE SOTO

is doubtful if he were not insane during his entire term as governor of Darien and Nicaragua. For what man in his right mind would order, as he did often and again, the extermination of people who had never offended, save by withholding from him the gold they found in the forest, and which was theirs by right? And it was almost invariably Captain de Soto's troop of horsemen that was ordered on this disgusting service. Thus a twofold object was attained by crafty Pedrarias: the extermination of the natives, and the decimation of the detested troop.

As he did not accompany the troops on their forays, he was not aware, at first, that his orders were disobeyed, and that the poor natives were oftener warned of an attack than sufferers from it. At last, the suspicious old governor sent out a creature of his company to spy upon the doings of De Soto in the field, and this man reported the true condition of affairs. When he heard it, Don Pedro nearly choked with rage. "Ho!" he exclaimed. "That is it! Instead of putting those red scoundrels to the sword, and tearing them to pieces with the dogs, he merely sacks their dwellings and then allows them

FERDINAND AND ISABELLA

to return. Little wonder that I have not received gold enough, in the months just past, to pay the expenses of my household!

“Now, go you, Captain Perez, and tell that squeamish son of a nobody, Fernan Soto, that my orders are for all villages to be razed, or burned to the ground, and for all Indians to be killed. He is not to spare a single one, remember, and you are to see that he does as I command.”

This Captain Perez was scarcely less ferocious than Pedrarias himself—he could not be more so—and, moreover, he hated De Soto for his popularity. So he gladly undertook the errand that was to result in his humiliation; but when he delivered the orders he met with such a reception that he returned like a whipped cur to his master. He found De Soto sitting easily on his horse, superintending the collecting of tribute from some Indians of a forest hamlet, who were only too glad to escape with their lives, and were bringing him all their portable possessions.

He heard Perez through, disdainfully and in silence, then replied: “My life and my services are, of course, always at my superior’s commands, and I shall do his bidding—so long as I can do so without besmirching my

FERDINAND DE SOTO

character as a Spanish cavalier. But in this instance, Captain Perez, it would seem that the service to be performed could more fittingly be done by yourself! I am surprised at Don Pedro's lack of discrimination, and this, if you like, you may tell him from me."

This was the reply, in substance, which Perez carried back to Pedrarias, and, as the ferocious captain had the reputation of being in his element while massacring unarmed Indians and burning their dwellings, he took it as an insult. In this view he was supported by Pedrarias, who told him, in effect, that were he a younger man, this insolence should not go unpunished. "But, alas!" he exclaimed, smiling significantly, "I am no longer able to hold my own on the field of honor. Old age has palsied my arm, and perhaps, also, it has enfeebled my constitution, for I seem to lack courage to meet this insolent young man and chastise him as he deserves!"

This hint was not lost upon Perez, who, as Pedrarias knew, of course, was a noted duellist. He had already killed several men and had never, himself, been harmed. A challenge was promptly sent to De Soto and

FERDINAND AND ISABELLA

as promptly accepted. Feeling assured that the young man's doom was surely sealed, Pedrarias was in high glee, and issued invitations to all the officials and dignitaries of his capital, which was then at Panama, the city he had founded.

A noted and numerous assemblage witnessed the combat, which took place on the plain outside the city. Though each man had his partisans, and it was with difficulty that Ferdinand restrained his troopers from assaulting his opponents, fair play was given, and the fight proceeded according to the "code of honor." It was to be a sword-fight, and to the death. As the combatants stepped into the arena, a murmur of admiration went around the throng, chiefly on account of De Soto's gallant appearance and his youth, as contrasted with the savage aspect of his grizzled opponent.

Ferdinand was the embodiment of Spanish chivalry, in the eyes of the dames and gentlemen who loved Spain for her glorious traditions. He seemed a typical knight-errant, clad as he was in shining armor, tall, erect, confident of bearing, and sweeping the assemblage with his flashing glances. He reminded the veterans of the Moorish war

FERDINAND DE SOTO

(who, under King Ferdinand, had driven the Moslems from Andalusia) of their knightly defender, Garcilaso, when he went forth to meet the Moor in mortal combat on the *vega* of Granada.

Many a prayer was muttered for his success, and many a scowling glance was cast at old Pedrarias, who, crafty dissembler that he was, could not conceal his satisfaction. The combat lasted two long hours, and its various stages might have been followed by scanning the features of Don Pedro, who cried out in delight when Ferdinand received a scratch, and growled like a lion when his champion seemed in danger.

As Ferdinand received several slight wounds during the protracted conflict, while his opponent remained untouched, Pedrarias seemed to have no doubt as to the issue. The old soldier forced the fighting from the first, Ferdinand remaining mostly on the defensive, having all he could do to parry the lightning-like blows and thrusts that were rained upon him. But, through it all, he kept himself cool and collected, never once losing temper nor allowing himself to be taken off his guard.

From the very fact that the fierce Perez had forced the fighting, he had, naturally, ex-

FERDINAND AND ISABELLA

pended his strength in doing so, while Ferdinand had held his in reserve. As the old duellist's thrusts became feebler, those of his adversary became more forceful, until at last the veteran was compelled to act wholly on the defensive. He was finally forced upon his knees, while, with a rapid upward cut, Ferdinand gashed his sword-hand at the wrist. His weapon fell to the ground, whither, in attempting to recover it, Perez swiftly followed. He was then completely at the mercy of Ferdinand, who, planting a foot upon his breast, and holding the point of his sword at his throat, demanded submission. A single word would have saved the surly veteran's life, but, game to the last, he refused to utter it.

"Very well," exclaimed the magnanimous victor. "Then I give back to you a life not worth the taking, since it is not worth the asking." He removed his foot, and, carefully wiping his sword, returned it to its scabbard.

III

IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA

1521-1524

IMAGINE the rage and confusion of Pedrarias at beholding the man whom he persisted in regarding as his enemy the centre of a tumultuous and admiring throng. But he fumed and threatened to no purpose, for Ferdinand de Soto was the hero of the hour, and thenceforth the darling of the army. His delighted troopers lifted him upon their shoulders, all clad in weighty armor as he was, and carried him around the field, with shouts of triumph.

Don Pedro was compelled to overlook these proceedings, and, like the fabled Giant Despair at the cave's mouth, gnawed his nails with impotent vexation. As for the crestfallen duellist, he slipped out of sight as soon as possible, and took the first ship for Spain. Thus the Isthmus was well rid of one villain; and if old Pedrarias had gone with

IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA

him, there would have been few, if any, mourners over his absence in Panama. Still, the latter continued his depredations as before, and he by no means gave up the idea of making way with Ferdinand, though he had not the temerity to send him to the scaffold nor the courage to assassinate him openly. He could provoke nobody to challenge him a second time, for, aside from the fact that nearly everybody was his friend, he had proved himself the most accomplished swordsman in the army.

Not very far from Panama lay the rich region of Veragua, populous with Indians and abounding in gold. This region was invaded, by the orders of Don Pedro, and swept with fire and sword. Troops of blood-hounds accompanied the Spaniards, and the terrible outrages committed by man and beast combined at last aroused the resentment of a powerful chief named Uracca, who soon showed the ruthless invaders of what he was capable. He assembled a vast army of savages, who, though half-clothed in skins, or entirely naked, were skilled in the use of the poisoned arrow, and were otherwise armed with war-clubs, javelins, and spears made of hardened wood tipped with copper.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Pedrarias sent out his army in two divisions one in ships along the coast, and commanded by a lawyer named Espinosa; the other by land, under Francisco Pizarro, with orders to form a junction with the first division when it should reach and land in the enemies' country. As there were no roads, or even open trails, in that wild land, Pizarro's division was far behind Espinosa's in reaching the appointed place of rendezvous. Without awaiting the arrival of Pizarro, Espinosa disembarked his soldiers in a sheltered harbor and established a camp in a valley surrounded by forest.

Unknown to Espinosa, Chief Uracca himself was guiding the movements of the Indians. His scouts and spies had brought him exact information of the Spaniards' forces, and his most expert warriors had enticed them into the forest, where thousands of savages lay in ambush. Then, when he had drawn his foes into a deep and gloomy gorge, whence it was impossible for them to escape without great loss, Uracca shouted the piercing war-whoop. Suddenly, as if descended from the tops of the giant trees that towered above them, hundreds of Indians appeared, and from their powerful

IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA

bows launched a shower of poisoned arrows. Few of these arrows pierced the armor in which most of the Spaniards were encased, but such as were not thus protected were doomed to an agonizing death. They fell by scores, and many who escaped the arrows were trampled upon by their companions in the tumult of retreat. Too late, then, Espinosa saw that he had been entrapped, and wished he had waited for Pizarro, whose greater experience might have prevented this disaster.

The Spaniards were routed, and, in a panic, attempted to withdraw from their perilous position; but the wary Uracca had closed in behind them with a thousand warriors, and all hope of escape seemed to be vain. Massing in phalanx, so far as the broken nature of the ground would permit, the Spaniards forced a passage to the verge of the valley in which they had encamped; but here they were halted by the horde of savages resolved upon their extermination.

Their destruction seemed assured, when, just as the sun was sinking behind the hills, they observed a great commotion in the ranks of their opponents. It appeared as if they were being attacked in the rear, and

FERDINAND DE SOTO

such, indeed, was the case, for soon the despairing Spaniards heard the well-known war-cry, "Santiago! Santiago!" and upon their vision burst a band of horsemen, led by Ferdinand de Soto. He and his dragoons had formed a part of Pizarro's company, and, being in the van, were the first to hear the sound of conflict and the first to hurry to the rescue. They arrived, as we have seen, just in time to save their comrades from total destruction, for at sight of their horses, and on receiving their impetuous charge, the Indians fled in wild terror. They had felt sure of Espinosa's soldiers; but the horses and their riders, impervious in their armor of steel, were too powerful for them to resist. Uracca tried to rally them again to the attack, and they returned, like a wave rolling upon the strand; but De Soto quickly formed his battalion as a protection to the rear-guard, charging upon the Indians when they approached too closely, and a safe retreat was thus effected.

Pizarro arrived in time to establish a camp that night, but, famished and exhausted as they were, the Spaniards resolved upon a retreat to the ships, which was finally effected after midnight, De Soto and his troop-

IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA

ers holding the desperate savages at bay. They safely embarked, and, sailing down the coast, at quite a distance from the scene of their disgraceful defeat came upon an Indian village. Nearly all the men were with Uracca in the mountains, but the town was filled with defenceless women and children, whom Espinosa surrounded with his soldiers, intending to carry them away as slaves.

This proceeding was resented by De Soto, who denounced the lawyer-commander as a coward, and threatened to ride away with his entire troop if he still persisted in his intention. Espinosa, on his part, called De Soto a mutineer, and a traitor to the governor, to whom he would promptly report his conduct. The answer the young captain made to this threat was to assemble his men, and then, riding to Espinosa's tent, repeat his demand for the unconditional release of the prisoners.

"You may do as you please respecting making a report to Don Pedro," he said to Espinosa; "but I am not under your orders, neither am I disposed to assist you in the event that you are attacked by the warriors of Uracca. In a word, release these women

FERDINAND DE SOTO

and children or I and my men will ride away. Now, choose you, and at once!"

It was evident to Espinosa that the Indian chief was sending out runners to assemble his warriors for another attack, and as his force was already weakened by the great losses sustained, he was compelled to comply with De Soto's demand. As further retreat was impracticable, it was resolved to send to Panama for supplies and reinforcements, which were absolutely necessary to save the little army and hold what small portion of territory had been conquered. De Soto volunteered to go to Panama, and rode the entire distance through the forests, then swarming with hostile Indians, accompanied only by a single trooper, like himself a superb horseman and intrepid spirit. During his absence, Chief Uracca entirely surrounded Espinosa's encampment, effectually cutting off all supplies, and reducing the beleaguered Spaniards to a diet of roots and herbs.

Returning as rapidly as possible, De Soto broke through the line of investment, and threw a small reinforcement into the camp; then, taking command of his dragoons, he foraged the surrounding country with such success that the army was enabled to subsist

IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA

until assistance arrived from Panama, in the shape of more than four hundred men commanded by Don Pedro himself. Altogether, when he arrived, the army amounted to more than five hundred, counting new adventurers and volunteers. High hopes were entertained that with this force Veragua could be overrun and subdued; but they still had Chief Uracca to reckon with, and he had collected a larger army of warriors than ever before.

The two forces came into collision on the banks of a deep and rapid river, in attempting to cross which the Spaniards were assailed by such a storm of javelins and poisoned arrows that they wavered, then fell back, then broke into headlong flight. Not even the impassioned pleadings of Don Pedro could stop them; and, in fact, he himself was compelled to ride from the field in a hurry to avoid being made a prisoner. Owing to the efforts of De Soto and Pizarro, the men were rallied on open ground and made a stand, committing great havoc in the savage ranks with their ordnance; but they could not be induced to pursue the Indians into the forests again.

Don Pedro now saw what warfare against Uracca was like, and could understand how

FERDINAND DE SOTO

his captains had been, one after the other, driven with slaughter from the country. But he was obstinate—as we know—and hesitated to abandon the field and order a retreat. He needed but another lesson in Indian cunning, however, to induce him to change his mind. This was given him by Uracca in the following manner. Learning that the Spaniards were desperately enraged because of their lack of success in finding gold, he allowed several of his men to be captured, who, when threatened with torture unless they divulged the hiding-place of the chief's treasure, promised to conduct their captors to the place where it was concealed.

Pedrarias was in high glee, and taunted De Soto and his veteran officers with their lack of skill in matters of the sort. They were too chicken-hearted, he said, to apply the torture, by which alone information could be obtained as to the deposits of precious metal, and he would show them what they ought to do. De Soto retorted that a man would say anything expected of him when put to torture; and, moreover, he did not have faith in the pretended revelation, but, on the contrary, suspected treachery.

“You will give your opinion when asked

IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA

for it," snapped Don Pedro. "I was fighting Indians, remember, when you were eating the crumbs that fell from my table, while I was absent from my castle—yea, while you were prowling around that castle seeking to purloin my most precious jewel!"

Ferdinand laid his hand quickly on his sword-hilt, and his eyes flashed angrily; but he turned away without a word. His opinion, however, though unasked, was speedily confirmed, for when the forty men, whom the governor despatched to the spot indicated by the captives, arrived at the supposed treasure-vault, they were set upon by Indians in ambush and murdered. One mangled survivor finally reached camp with the dismal tidings, on receipt of which Pedrarias ordered every captive in his possession thrown at once to the dogs. As the ravening brutes tore the wretched Indians limb from limb, he looked on calmly, gloating over the gory spectacle, which was by no means an uncommon one for him to witness.

"Sorry am I we have so few to feed the hounds," he was heard to mutter. "The poor creatures are famished! Sooth, there is one Christian I would like them to try teeth upon!"

FERDINAND DE SOTO

He meant De Soto, of course; and it is said that Ferdinand overheard the remark, and, striding up to him, shook a mailed fist in his face, exclaiming: "One hound *has* tried his teeth on me, and perchance they are broken, Señor Governor!"

Pedrarias glared at him, but ventured no reply, for he too obviously merited the vile epithet De Soto had applied to him, and feared to provoke an encounter. Another hero of this war, who shone in contrast with Pedrarias, was the Indian chief, Uracca. Notwithstanding that his opponent had delivered to the blood-hounds, not only warriors taken in battle, but infants torn from their mothers' breasts (children whose innocence should have appealed to his heart), the chief did not retaliate. Indeed, it is said that once having made captive a Spanish lady of Panama, he treated her with great consideration, and when opportunity offered returned her safe and sound to her friends. When, at last, despairing of conquering this brave and gallant savage, Pedrarias ordered a retreat from Veragua, Uracca refrained from pursuit, satisfied at having driven the ferocious invaders from his country.

In such inglorious labors as we have nar-

IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA

rated, Ferdinand de Soto passed his first five years in America, and when they were gone he found himself no better off, as to fame or fortune, than when he landed at Darien. He had expected to gather gold-veined pebbles from every stream and precious pearls on every strand, but, in common with others, had been disappointed. If he ever reflected seriously, he must have seen that he was no better than a bandit—that he was one, in fact—for, instead of devoting himself to some honorable occupation, like mining, or the tilling of the soil, he had spent all his time in ravaging Indian villages, contributing towards, if not actively engaged in, the massacre of innocent natives, and destroying the fruits of their toil.

It is strange that he should have so persistently attached himself to Pedrarias; though the truth is that he might have gone east or west, north or south, and he could not have removed himself beyond his sphere of influence. He had an opportunity, in 1524, to sail southward with Francisco Pizarro, when he made his first voyage in search of Peru; but, though urged by that adventurer to accompany him, he positively refused, having no liking for the man.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Soon after the return of Pizarro from this voyage, Pedrarias was superseded by Don Pedro de los Rios, a new governor appointed by the king, with full authority to bring his immediate predecessor to trial for his numerous crimes. Having little to hope from the king's clemency, Pedrarias resolved to retire into the almost unknown territory of Nicaragua, and there, with his bandit band, follow to its final ending the lawless career he had pursued at Darien. He sent two of his generals, Fernando de Cordova and De Soto, to prepare the country for his arrival by suppressing the people and putting down any usurper who might dispute his authority. There was one unique individual, known as Gil Gonzales the fanatic, who had practically taken possession of Nicaragua, and went about "converting" its native inhabitants to the religion he and his fellow-bandits professed, at the head of a hundred followers. They were all well mounted and armed. Their alternative of "receive our religion or fight" was taken to mean that they desired gold in exchange for a promise of salvation, so the natives flocked to Gonzales and were baptized at the rate of thirty thousand a year. For baptismal fees alone he is said to have

IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA

received four hundred thousand dollars, and he was rapidly accumulating a fortune, when the arrival of De Cordova and De Soto interfered with his plans. Encountering the latter one night, he engaged him in battle, with the result that he lost fifty of his best men, though his force outnumbered De Soto's more than five to one. Ferdinand fought with his accustomed valor and energy, never counting the cost of a conflict, and so impressed the fanatic that he fled from the province and intrenched himself in the mountains.

There was no other foe to molest them, so De Cordova and De Soto carried out the instructions of old Pedrarias to the letter, and founded two towns, Granada and Leon, which, favored with a fertile soil and charming climate, soon became quite flourishing. Having done as he was directed by Pedrarias, De Soto returned to Panama to report. The distance was more than four hundred miles, and there were no roads or beaten paths for the guidance of the traveller; but the Spaniards of those days thought nothing of obstacles which to-day might be deemed insuperable.

Finding his irascible patron about to depart from Panama, and the new governor perilously near, the loyal Ferdinand attached

FERDINAND DE SOTO

himself to Pedrarias again and returned with him to Nicaragua. He was shocked, however, to discover that the old tyrant had conceived the idea that his friend, De Cordova, intended to cast off his allegiance and set up a government of his own. Captain Bernal Diaz, that veracious historian of the conquest of Mexico, states it was really De Cordova's intention to disavow Pedrarias, who was, to all intents, a fugitive, and ally with Hernando Cortés, then recently arrived in Honduras, on the northern border of Nicaragua.

However, the mere supposition was enough to excite the frantic Pedrarias to action. All the long way to Nicaragua, he was breathing vengeance against De Cordova, and as soon as he arrived at Leon he summoned him to appear before him in the public square. Now, De Cordova had been warned, not only by letters from De Soto, but by Gil Gonzales, that unless he successfully resisted Pedrarias he would do to him as he had done to Balboa — that is, cut off his head. And this is what he did, when, relying upon the justice of his cause, poor De Cordova appeared before him as ordered, unarmed and without soldiers, in a twinkling the stalwart

IN THE WILDS OF NICARAGUA

executioner, who had been concealed behind Don Pedro's chair, stepped forward and severed his head from his shoulders.

It was done so quickly that De Soto himself, who had charge of the soldiers on guard about the square, was taken by surprise. When he realized the appalling nature of the crime Pedrarias had committed before his very eyes, he drew sword and was about to dash forward and cut down the old man on the spot; but something within restrained him. This old man was the father of Isabel, whose memory he sacredly cherished in his heart, whom he still intended to claim as his bride. How, then, could he do so if he should be guilty of her father's death?

IV

DE SOTO, THE AVENGER

1524-1527

THE sword was reluctantly restored to its scabbard; but it was soon to have a victim, nevertheless. Hardly had the executioner held the bleeding head aloft and shouted: "This is the doom of a traitor," than Pedrarias issued an order to a file of soldiers, who marched across the square and closed about De Soto. They were the most reliable of the old tyrant's mercenaries, and led by an officer who had committed many a crime at his behest.

"Seize and drag him hither," cried Pedrarias, pointing at Ferdinand an accusing finger. "He, too, is a traitor, false to me and to his king. He shall share the penalty we have meted to his comrade." For a single instant Ferdinand sat as if petrified. He had long expected death at the hands of Pedrarias, but did not believe he would dare inflict it so openly.

DE SOTO, THE AVENGER

As the officer reached out to seize his bridle-rein, De Soto recovered himself. His good sword leaped from the scabbard, and like a flash descended upon the officer's helmet, cleaving it and the head within in twain. Wrenching it free with a violent effort, De Soto held the dripping blade aloft, and, putting spurs to his powerful charger, dashed through the ring of soldiers straight upon Pedrarias.

"Murderer! Usurper!" he shouted, placing the sword-point at the trembling tyrant's breast. "That I do not kill you is because I hold sacred the memory of one who is not here. Your death has long been overdue, but—" He made as if to sheath his sword, when there arose cries on every side: "Down with the tyrant! Kill him! Kill him!"

"You hear them? Those are the cries of your soldiers. They know, and I know, that the blood of our dead comrade cries aloud for vengeance—that justice demands your death. You killed Balboa—a most dastardly crime—Balboa, who was betrothed to your daughter; and now you would kill me! I have served you most faithfully many years, but henceforth my sword shall never be drawn in your service, not even to defend your life."

FERDINAND DE SOTO

With these words De Soto turned from the despicable wretch and joined his troop. The citizens of Leon and the soldiery gathered around him and urged that he seize upon the government of Nicaragua, in the name of the king, promising him their loyal and unwavering support. Nicaragua lay as a middle ground between Mexico-Guatemala and the Isthmus. With such an energetic ruler as De Soto would have made, it might have become great and powerful; but he put aside this opportunity and contented himself with exploration merely.

It must be remembered that at the time these occurrences took place the three Americas, North, Central, and South, were but little known. Mexico had only just been conquered; Guatemala was being invaded; the West Indies, alone, had been to any extent explored. The great problem that confronted the discoverers was what was termed the "secret of the strait"—of a passage supposed to exist between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific. Columbus had searched for it vainly; so had Cortés and others.

We know that it was never discovered, and that the waters of the sea and the ocean

DE SOTO, THE AVENGER

will be blended only after an artificial waterway shall have been opened through the mountains that separate them at the narrowest part of the Isthmus. But De Soto did not know this, and, believing the solution of the secret to be vastly more important than the founding or government of a colony, he set himself to the task. Choosing a few congenial spirits from his troop, he departed on an exploring expedition, which resulted in making known more than seven hundred miles of coast-line. He solved the secret by ascertaining that there was no strait; and in exploring it is quite as important to nail a fallacy as to make a new discovery. He returned greatly enriched, from traffic with the natives; and though this was, so far as can be ascertained, his first accumulation of gold, he generously shared it with his comrades, not only with those who went with him, but those of his troop who remained behind.

Pedrarias was still living, and, unfortunately for Nicaragua, still wielding a semblance of power; so Ferdinand remained in the country only long enough to set his affairs in order, and started south again. His loyal troopers accompanied him, but for what purpose they returned towards the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Isthmus is not exactly known, though it is conjectured that they were drawn thither by the reports of Pizarro's great successes in Peru. They all set out for Panama, taking no account of the difficulties in the journey; but when some distance on the way, while marching along the coast, they discovered a vessel, which De Soto promptly chartered. Had the master of this vessel known the character of De Soto and the relation in which he stood to Pedrarias, he would have refused him passage, to a certainty; but he paid the penalty of his ignorance with his life. Hereby hangs a short story of crime, for the proper development of which we must turn back a few years in the life of our hero.

It chanced that, in one of his forays, Ferdinand had found captive among the Indians, and rescued, an Italian astronomer named Micer Codro. He was a man of science, unacquainted with war, and went about looking for and delving into the secrets of nature. His head was always "in the stars"; but he valued it highly, just the same, and was very grateful to De Soto for having rescued him from the savages. Being something of an astrologer, he cast his horoscope,

DE SOTO, THE AVENGER

as, some years previously, he had foretold the fate of Balboa. He informed him that he was ever in peril while with Pedrarias, who would seek to take his life, as he had taken that of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa; but he would escape his wiles and live to accomplish the great aim of his life, which was a union with the one he loved.

“You will be more fortunate than Vasco Nuñez,” said the astrologer, and will live to the age he attained, which was forty-two, before death, in a strange manner and in a new land, shall claim you.”

“We are all in the keeping of God,” replied De Soto, humbly. “I rely upon Him to protect me.”

Shortly after this conversation took place the artless philosopher, Micer Codro, was selected by Pedrarias to represent him at the court of Spain. He could not trust a man less simple and unworldly than the astrologer, for fear his crimes might be made known; but, as it turned out, he was the last person he should have employed, owing to his friendship for Ferdinand. When he learned that he was to be sent to Spain, Codro was overjoyed at the opportunity it gave him to serve the man who had saved his life. He

FERDINAND DE SOTO

hastened to Ferdinand and said: "I am going to Spain. I shall see the family of Don Pedro, to whom I am to be intrusted with letters. Is there no member of that family you would like me to carry a message to? Five years is a long time, without news of one's beloved, is it not?"

Ferdinand started in astonishment. "How did you know?" he asked. "Oh, I forgot—perhaps you learned it of the stars. Yes, it is five years since I came here, and during that time not one word. Sometimes I question whether she has written."

"Nay, do not doubt her, friend. She has written, but her letters have been intercepted by her father. This chance I offer you is the only one you will have, for I not only go, but I return, and everything will be wrapped in secrecy."

"But," answered De Soto, doubtfully, "should Don Pedro discover it he would not hesitate to kill you."

"I fear him not. If he is to kill me, then it is so written in the stars. Prepare your letter, friend, and I will carry it."

Ferdinand raised no more objections, but wrote a letter to Isabel de Bobadilla, in which he poured forth the pent-up feelings of

DE SOTO, THE AVENGER

those five long years. It was taken by Micer Codro to Spain, and delivered in person to the delighted maiden, who responded with an epistle filled with fervent love and protestations of undying affection. She assured her lover that, though she had written him previously, and received no answer, she knew and appreciated the cause of that long silence. She had not for a moment distrusted him, nor would she ever do so. She impatiently awaited his return; but whatever time might elapse before that happy event, she would be faithful to the end.

Eight years more were to pass before the return of De Soto to Spain, or fifteen in all, ere he found the fortune which enabled him to go and claim his bride; but during this long period both were faithful to each other. Simple Micer Codro, though he could predict future events, did not possess the craft to conceal his intentions. There were spies about the castle, and spies in Panama, who reported to Don Pedro everything that had happened, and he knew that Isabel had sent a letter to her lover almost as soon as Ferdinand had received it.

He said nothing, and kept a smiling face

FERDINAND DE SOTO

for poor Codro, whom he rewarded for his services by sending him on an exploring trip down the coast. Such an expedition was what the man of science delighted in, and he embarked most joyfully; but he had not been long aboard the vessel before he discovered the real nature of the fiendish governor's intentions. The craft was a slaver, commanded by a brutal wretch named Geronimo de Valenzuela, who, carrying out the instructions he had received from Pedrarias, chained poor Codro to the main-mast. There he was kept until he finally died from exhaustion, exposed to the fierce rays of a tropical sun by day and the drenching dews of night. Ten days he was kept thus, all the time without food or water, and suffering abuse from the heartless crew. As his end approached he called Valenzuela to him and, with his last accents, said: "Captain, you have caused my death by your cruelty. I now summon you to appear with me, within a year, before the judgment-seat of God."

The vessel in which De Soto had taken passage worked its way along the southern coast of Veragua, and late one afternoon arrived off a group of islands about one hun-

DE SOTO, THE AVENGER

dred miles southwest of Panama, known as the Zebacos. They were green and beautiful isles. Something in their appearance seemed to excite in the captain of the vessel a spirit of reminiscence.

"Oh ho!" he exclaimed to his mate; "do you remember the last time we passed Zebacos, and the old wizard we buried there?"

"Sooth, I do," replied the mate; "and, moreover, the year is nearly up, my captain, so prepare yourself, perchance."

"What is it?" asked one of the soldiers.

A group of De Soto's men had gathered about, and among them was their commander, who listened carelessly as the master of the vessel gave the details of a fiendish story. He was a man of brutal appearance, whose whole career had been one of wickedness. His name was Geronimo de Valenzuela, and he was the same who had tortured poor Codro to death, though De Soto was not aware of that. Indeed, he had never learned what had become of his friend, who had mysteriously disappeared and left no trace by which his fate could be known. He was soon to learn, however, and in a startling manner was to avenge his death.

"Ye see that island standing up high

FERDINAND DE SOTO

above the sea, with a cocoa-palm on its highest part? Well, there we buried him, the old wizard who, somehow, had offended Pedrarias. He had proved treacherous, I believe, bringing back letters from Spain which Don Pedro would rather had not been sent. Whatever it was, he was to suffer for it, and I had orders to chain him to the mast and keep him there till he died. It was not so easy a task, for the old man was all of ten days in dying, though we helped him along somewhat. Eh, mate?"

The captain burst into a roar of brutal laughter, in which he was joined by such of his crew as were with him when poor Codro was tortured. Had they looked up, they would have seen that De Soto was standing near, with flashing eyes and paling cheek, one hand convulsively gripping his sword. But he kept silence, and the fiend continued:

"Well, towards the last the old man lost his speech; but some time before he died he recovered and called to me. 'Captain,' he said, 'I die; you have killed me; but know this: within one year you will appear with me before the judgment-seat of Almighty God.'

"Oh ho, he spoke like a prophet; but the year is within a week of its ending, and here

DE SOTO, THE AVENGER

am I. And there is the island where we buried him. Now, who can say Don Codro was no liar?"

"I say it," thundered a voice in his ear. "He was my friend and a good man, and with this blade I will prove he was no liar."

With one swift and powerful blow De Soto severed the man's head from his body, and it rolled upon the deck.

"Now come at me, varlets, one or all. Here stand I, Ferdinand de Soto, to defend the good name of my friend, to avenge an atrocious deed, for that friend doubtless died for doing me an inestimable service."

But not one of those cringing villains made a move towards the valiant swordsman. Instead, they slunk away, one by one, overpowered by the suddenness of the onslaught. The skill displayed by De Soto, as well as his courage, elicited their admiration; and though they murmured among themselves as they cast the captain's remains to the sharks, they attempted no reprisal.

The date of this incident and the length of De Soto's stay in Nicaragua are not known. It is probable that, after his return to Panama, he lingered so long, in a country already impoverished by the raids of in-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

satiate Spaniards, who repeatedly ravaged it with fire, sword, and packs of bloodhounds, that he expended all the gold he had obtained in Nicaragua. We know this: that when, after having reached the frontiers of Peru, and finding himself unable to advance because of the few men he had with him, Francisco Pizarro sent urgent calls to Panama for reinforcements, De Soto consented to go to the rescue.

He had long known Pizarro, from having come in contact with him during the frequent raids they had made together when in Panama and Darien, but by no means admired him. In fact, he heartily despised him, although he could not but have recognized his soldierly qualities. But Pizarro had now obtained the consent of the Spanish sovereign to the conquest of Peru; he had persisted in his attempt to reach that country during many years, and was at last on the verge of success. He offered great inducements to any cavaliers who would come to his assistance, and sent a special request to De Soto.

For several years previous to the departure of De Soto for Peru he and Pedrarias had held no communication. Don Pedro was consistent

DE SOTO, THE AVENGER

in his cruelties, it is believed, up to the time of his death, which occurred while De Soto was absent in Peru. He pursued the Indians vindictively, using blood-hounds unsparingly and committing atrocities which called down upon his head the curses of all who spoke his name. The natives of Nicaragua were enslaved, and the survivors of his massacres deprived of their harvests, so that famine resulted and many thousands perished of a pestilence.

De Soto would not lend himself to the enslavement of the Indians, nor is his name notably connected with any act of atrocity in Nicaragua or Panama. But, in transferring his allegiance from Pedrarias to Pizarro, he merely passed from the service of one unscrupulous villain to that of another. In the interim, however, he had become a free-lance, and owned no man as his master. His strength and prestige enabled him to dictate terms to the Conqueror of Peru, and, "according to the report of many persons who were there, he distinguished himself over all the captains and principal personages present, not only at the seizure of Atabalipa, lord of Peru, and in carrying the city of Cuzco, but at all other places wheresoever he went and found resistance."

V

THE REWARD OF DEVOTION

1532-1538

HAVING informed ourselves as to the influences which shaped the character of Ferdinand de Soto, we will now return to the Inca's court, at which we found our hero in the first chapter of this biography. Succeeding to the arrival of Pizarro's army at Cassamarca and the visit paid the Spaniards by the Inca, Atahualpa, came the horrible massacre by which Peruvian affairs were thrown into chaos and the "Child of the Sun" made a prisoner.

While this atrocious deed was planned by Pizarro, it evidently received the sanction of his captains, and there is nothing to show that De Soto disapproved it or did not lend his active assistance. As commander of the most active troop of cavalry, he probably took a leading part in the fiendish slaughter of unarmed Peruvians; but, as he is not

THE REWARD OF DEVOTION

mentioned particularly, we may give him the "benefit of the doubt," and hope, at least, that he did not. He was assuredly absent when the massacre was planned, but present when it was carried into execution.

It does not accord with our conception of him, as obtained through scanning his deeds in Darien and Nicaragua; but inasmuch as he shared in the spoils—which he did to a notable extent—he must have participated in the slaughter. However this may have been, it is known that he was the only man in Pizarro's army who was admitted to the confidence of the captive monarch, and perhaps the only one who could have saved him from an inglorious death. It is said that it was through him that Atahualpa offered to ransom himself by filling an immense room with gold and another with silver.

An ardent friendship existed between him and Atahualpa, who now regarded the handsome cavalier as his sole reliance. Pizarro did not dare attempt the Inca's life while De Soto was by, so he invented the report that a conspiracy had been formed by the Peruvians to release their ruler, and sent him off with his troopers to investigate. The un-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

suspicious Ferdinand set out on this toilsome journey as a mission of love—for it was said that the Inca had incited this conspiracy, and he was anxious to disprove it. He was gone several days, and when he returned the dreadful deed had been committed.

Atahualpa was dead. He had been sentenced to be burned at the stake, on the evening of the very day he went through the semblance of a trial, in order that he should be put out of the way before De Soto returned. Though the sentence of burning had been commuted to death by strangling, that "he might die a Christian," he had suffered the extreme penalty. When led to the stake, and while the fagots were being piled about him, the hapless Inca looked around for De Soto.

"Oh, where is he, my friend?" he asked. "It is not like him to consent to this foul murder. He can save me, I know. Why does he not compel my release?"

When told that De Soto had gone to suppress a conspiracy instigated by the Inca himself, he groaned, and said no more. The full extent of Pizarro's treachery was then apparent to him. His only friend with in-



ATAHUALLPA, INCA OF PERU

THE REWARD OF DEVOTION

fluence had been sent away, in order that he might be murdered without a protest.

When De Soto arrived at the place at which it was declared by Pizarro the Inca's followers were assembling, he found everything quiet and no signs of a disturbance. A terrible suspicion then took possession of him, and he hastened back to the city with all speed. On the way he learned the truth, and on his arrival at headquarters strode into the room where Pizarro was sitting, with a slouched hat drawn over his eyes, in sign of mourning, and fiercely upbraided him for his perfidy.

"Look up, miserable coward and assassin!" he shouted, drawing his sword and with its point lifting the hat from Pizarro's head. "There was no conspiracy—as you knew. There was no treachery, except in your own black heart—which I have a mind to thrust through with this sword, Francisco Pizarro!"

In this tenor he raved, his indignation blazing forth like a flame; but to no avail. The deed was done, and he could not restore the dead. It is said that he ended by challenging all the Pizarros^o to single combat, and that not one of them dared accept it; but it is certain that he threatened to re-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

sign his commission and leave Peru at once. Thinking it over, however, after his wrath had somewhat cooled, he concluded to remain, at least until Cuzco was taken.

The entire force of invaders amounted to less than five hundred men, while the Inca's standing army was ten times that number, and the people were everywhere rising to avenge the death of their ruler. To resign, in those circumstances, would appear the act of a coward, and De Soto resolved to remain until victory perched upon the Spanish standards. Nearly another year, in truth, he remained in Peru, and when he left it was with the satisfaction of having done his duty, in the light in which he saw it then.

But it was a sullen and fractious De Soto that went along with the army when, on a day in September, 1533, it set out for Cuzco, the former capital of the incas. He had accomplished the object of his ambition, and was now wealthy, even beyond the anticipations in which he had indulged when, as a young adventurer, he first set foot on American soil. He was at liberty to return to Spain and claim his bride, but his keen sense of honor restrained him.

Sullenly, then, he led his troopers over the

THE REWARD OF DEVOTION

mountains, taking as usual the post of danger, and obeying with alacrity the command of Pizarro to force a perilous pass held and fortified by the Indians. It was a gloomy defile between precipitous cliffs, and the only passage was over a narrow stairway cut in solid rock. Setting the example to his men, De Soto dismounted and, with his bridle-rein over one arm, began the perilous ascent. He had scarcely done so when a great boulder came rolling down, sent by a troop of howling savages above. It bounded over him, as he was sheltered by an intervening ledge, and cut a ghastly swath through his men, who were toiling behind. Several were crushed to death, as well as their horses; but, though the approaching contest promised to be one with cyclopean forces, Ferdinand hesitated only long enough to give directions to clear the pathway of the mangled remains, and hastened on. The air was filled with arrows, javelins, lances, hurled by sinewy arms, and now and again great rocks came thundering down; but still on he pressed, bowing his head to the storm, the missile-weapons glancing like hail from his armor.

Gallantly supported by his brave troopers, he gained at last a plateau on the mountain-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

top, where, forming his men in battle array, he charged the Indians and drove them to a distance. He did this repeatedly, but, just as often as he returned to the spot he had fixed upon for a camp, just so often came rolling back the tide of yelling savages, evidently intent upon forcing him and his men over the precipices. The coming of night alone saved the Spaniards from complete destruction; but they dared not sleep, for ominous noises in the surrounding forest told them that the desperate Peruvians were assembling by thousands, determined to make one last effort to save their capital from invasion.

They had chosen their stand with consummate strategy, and here they concentrated their warriors, with the intention of destroying the Spaniards at the coming of the dawn. They were only prevented from doing so by the opportune arrival of reinforcements under Almagro, the partner of Pizarro in this enterprise. He was in command of a strong detachment of infantry, which had camped at the foot of the mountain, unaware of the desperate situation of De Soto. A courier, sent by the latter, managed to break through the investing lines and take to Almagro ti-

THE REWARD OF DEVOTION

dings of the disaster. Without a moment's hesitation, the command was set in motion. It scaled the dizzy heights in midnight darkness, and gained the plateau, the first intimation of succor coming to De Soto from Almagro's bugle-blasts, which echoed through the forest.

Both commanders held a similar detestation of Pizarro, for both had been wronged by him; yet both were engaged in a common cause against the foe. Back to back, with the infantry in the centre and the mailed chargers presenting a front of steel, they repulsed the advancing Indians, then in loosened formation opened fire with cross-bows and arquebuses, while the cavalry charged madly across the plain. The slaughter was terrible, and the ground was soon covered with the slain; but victory was won at great cost to the Spaniards, many of whom were crushed beneath the blows from ponderous battle-axes or transfixes with arrows and javelins.

The Peruvians retreated in confusion, and, save for a slight skirmish a few days later, the Spaniards encountered no further opposition to their entry into Cuzco, which was accomplished on November 15, 1533. The battle of the plateau was the first of any im-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

portance fought between Peruvians and the invaders of their country, and it was also the last in which De Soto was engaged.

In Cuzco the Spaniards found a large amount of treasure, though not so much as if they had pushed on rapidly, as De Soto had desired to do after the battle of the pass. It may have been because Pizarro was feeling the effects of advancing years, or from an inclination to allow De Soto to bear the brunt of the attacks, that he lingered by the way, when the City of the Sun was almost within his grasp. But he did so, first in this seductive valley, then in another, until at last his fiery captain, provoked beyond measure at the delay, which was unpardonable from a military point of view, burst the slight bands of restraint which held him, and dashed forward with his devoted dragoons.

He and they led the advance, from beginning to end of that long march, as well as fought all the battles. When the setting sun of that November day in which the valley of Cuzco was entered glanced athwart the helms and banners of Pizarro's army descending the sierras, Ferdinand de Soto might have been seen well in the van. He was also the first in Cuzco, and not the last to engage in

THE REWARD OF DEVOTION

the sacking of the city, where the spoils were vast, notwithstanding much treasure had been taken away and secreted. Plunder, chiefly gold and silver, was divided among the common soldiers alone to the amount of half a million dollars, or above a thousand dollars to each one, while the officers, all, were made affluent for life, if they could but keep the treasure they had gained.

There was but one way to do this, and that was to retire at once from the country where the wealth had been acquired and return to Spain. To this sensible conclusion came Ferdinand de Soto, and, as his services were no longer urgently required—as, in fact, Pizarro would rather be rid of him than have him remain—he resolved to return. Sometime in the summer of 1534 he bade farewell to his comrades in arms and, after making the long journey from Cuzco to the coast, embarked for Spain. We have no particulars of the final scenes when De Soto and his faithful troopers parted company. They had been together during years of hard service, had encountered dangers, and run the gantlet of death many times in company, so it came hard, at the end, to say farewell. Some of his comrades, in truth, followed his

FERDINAND DE SOTO

example and returned in the same ship with him to Spain, afterwards going with him through Florida. All were enriched by the spoils of Peru, and Ferdinand himself took back, according to the old historian, one hundred and eighty thousand *cruzados* in gold, or more than half a million dollars.

Next we see this hero of many battles and numberless skirmishes with the Indians of America at the court of his sovereign, where he was received with great distinction, as the most heroic figure, on the Spanish side, in the conquest of Peru. The laurels of that conquest belong by right to Francisco Pizarro, and De Soto manifested no inclination to snatch them from his brow; but, as the first honorable man of importance to arrive in Spain from Peru, with his pockets well lined and his claim to nobility well founded, he became for a while the observed of all observers.

The king not only received him well, but honored him by accepting a loan—which, strange to say, he repaid. “De Soto made his home in Seville, where he set up in great state, employing a major-domo, or superintendent of the household, an usher, pages, chamberlain, footmen, and all other req-

THE REWARD OF DEVOTION

uisites for the establishment of a gentleman.”

And it was not a bachelor establishment, either, that he set up in that grand old city by the banks of the Guadalquivir, for, some time after his arrival, he took thither as its mistress none other than Doña Isabel de Soto, born Bobadilla, second daughter of the infamous Pedrarias.

The course of true love had not run very smooth with these two lovers, but it had run a long while, and nobody can with truth deny that Ferdinand was entitled to his Isabel, having fought for her and waited for her fifteen long and weary years. In the end, as all true lovers will rejoice to learn, he was successful in getting possession of her hand, having won it years before; but it was only after the death of Don Pedro, who sought to frustrate his designs by leaving his second daughter penniless.

The hardened old wretch had died, after lingering long in physical agony and mental anguish. His conscience was troubled, not at the thought of the misery he had caused in this world, but at the prospect of what he was to receive in the next. The only reparation he could make (the priests at his bedside

FERDINAND DE SOTO

assured him) was a liberal donation to the Church, and the way in which he did this was eminently characteristic of the man - fiend Pedrarias.

In his gloomy castle at Badajoz, ever since her father had assassinated her affianced husband, had lived his eldest daughter, Maria. She had remained true to the memory of Balboa, as her sister had continued faithful to De Soto, and her father rewarded this constancy by bequeathing her his vast fortune, for the founding of a nunnery, over which she was to rule as abbess. Unless she went into the nunnery, poor Isabel was left at the mercy of the world, without a centavo to her name; but at this juncture arrived Ferdinand de Soto from Peru, and she became the wife of a rich and powerful noble and the envy of her sex throughout all Spain.

Thus far, in narrating the adventures of De Soto, we have followed the accounts which have seemed most entitled to credence; but all are not alike, and, indeed, some writers have stated that Ferdinand first met his wife at court, whither she had gone with her mother, the widow of Pedrarias. Also, that, instead of being at feud with her father, he had lived with him in Nicaragua, without

THE REWARD OF DEVOTION

falling out at all. Whether this be true or not, most of us would rather believe that Ferdinand had met his Isabel in youth, and was constant to her throughout, and that he returned to Spain for the sole purpose of laying his hard-won fortune at her feet. Constancy in man is such a rare jewel, and so seldom discovered, that we cannot refrain from making the most of that which is said to have sparkled on the breast of Ferdinand de Soto.

Ferdinand was under forty years of age at the time he settled down in Seville and became a gentleman of leisure. As entitled to that distinction by birth, he was made a knight of Santiago, and felt bound to sustain the dignities of his position by a large establishment and vast expenditure. Within two years his fortune had been reduced more than one-half, and, having become wearied of inaction, he cast about for some means of replenishing his coffers and for a field in which to exercise his energies.

That field seemed to open to him in the then boundless region called Florida, which was in the main unknown, and extended from the most northern territory of which the Spaniards had knowledge to the confines of

Mexico. Though Ponce de Leon had landed on the coast of Florida in 1513, and eight years later had received his death-wound in a conflict with Indians there, little was known of the country until the attempted conquest by Pánfilo de Narvaez in 1527.

This unfortunate Spaniard, who had opposed Cortés in Mexico, where he lost an eye in the fight at Cempoalla, obtained from Emperor Charles V. permission to conquer Florida, of which country he was made *adelantado*, or military governor. He landed on its eastern coast, in a large bay open to the sea, with a force of four hundred men and forty horses. After crossing the peninsula, and after enduring incredible hardships, his command, diminished to about one-half its original strength, launched upon the waters of the gulf, with the intention of seeking a port of Cuba or Mexico.

The vessels in which Narvaez and his men had sailed to Florida could not be found, and they constructed rude barks from the wood of native trees, with nails forged from their bits and bridles, and sails made from their garments. They embarked, it is supposed, in the Bay of St. Marks, and coasted southwardly, occasionally landing and fight-

THE REWARD OF DEVOTION

ing with the Indians for food to keep them from starvation. A gale drove the boat in which was Narvaez out to sea, and he was never heard of after, while all the rest of his men save four perished through shipwreck or starvation. Nine years later, after most wonderful adventures with various Indian tribes, these four arrived in Mexico, and in 1537 one of their number, Cabeza de Vaca, met and conversed with Ferdinand de Soto in Spain.

VI

ADELANTADO AND GOVERNOR

1538-1539

IT was a wonderful story Cabeza de Vaca had to tell, of perils many and narrow escapes from savage Indians, and as he had been ten years absent, all the while exposed to danger, it might have been imagined that he had endured enough. But no, Alvar Nuño Cabeza de Vaca was of a piece with the others who had suffered in various parts of the New World. As soon as he reached home and friends, and was surrounded with comforts, he reverted regretfully to the active life he had led in the unknown country, and thought sorrowfully upon the chances he had let slip to become the richest man in the world.

As a matter of fact, the worthy Cabeza de Vaca (or Cow's Head, as his name might be literally rendered) found nothing but hard usage in the lands he had explored, and re-

ADELANTADO AND GOVERNOR

turned without even a grain of the gold with which his imagination filled them. But the gold was there, he convinced himself by frequently recalling what the various Indians had told him; and the air of mystery and reserve which he summoned up when questioned by friends convinced them, also, that Señor Vaca had much to reveal—if only he would reveal it!

Especially impressed was De Soto, who, just before the return of Vaca to Spain, had secured from the emperor all the rights and titles in Florida which had been vacated by the death of Narvaez. Emperor Charles was very generous always—with other peoples' properties—and had bestowed this same region of Florida—or the conquest of it—first upon Ponce de Leon, then upon Pánfilo de Narvaez, before he handed it over to De Soto. Each one of them had offered to explore and conquer it at his own expense, and, as this was a consideration which always had weight with the emperor, each one had been granted his request as soon as proffered.

Like the foolish explorers before him, Ferdinand de Soto was "created" by Charles adelantado and governor of Florida, and, in

FERDINAND DE SOTO

addition, captain-general of Cuba, which island he desired as a base of supplies in his projected conquest of the vast and far-stretching empire which he presumed to exist on the main. Cabeza de Vaca was offered a high position under him; but he himself desired a government of his own, and was given that of the Rio de la Plata, as a sop for relinquishing a country where he had endured unutterable privations, and which (it was afterwards hinted) he would not have accepted on any terms.

De Soto was thenceforth known as the adelantado and the governor; and, as titles cost the emperor nothing, he also made his favorite a marquis, bestowing upon him, with magnificent liberality, a marquise in Florida, thirty leagues in length and fifteen in breadth—which was to be won by his sword.

When it became noised abroad that the gallant hero of Peru was about setting forth on an independent expedition, recruits came flocking in from every direction, attracted by the splendor and magnificence with which De Soto was surrounded. The cavaliers of Spain vied with one another in securing places of honor, the rich ones pouring out their

ADELANTADO AND GOVERNOR

money with a lavishness exceeded only by that of their leader himself, and the poor ones being assisted by him in procuring extravagant equipments.

One day, as he was about sitting down to dinner, a brilliant band of Portuguese hidalgos came clattering into the court-yard of his great house in Seville. They were superbly mounted and clad in polished armor. Descending from the gallery overlooking the court, De Soto gracefully welcomed them and invited the whole party to dinner, afterwards sending out his major-domo to secure for them the best quarters in the city. Thus the cavaliers gathered around him, and in the course of a year the equipment was complete. Nearly a thousand persons assembled at the port of San Lucar, in April, 1538, whence sailed De Soto's magnificent expedition, comprised of ten vessels, large and small. The governor and his wife, together with their brilliant retinue, embarked in the *San Cristobal*, of eight hundred tons, and the fleet set sail, to the blare of trumpets and amid salvos of artillery.

Two weeks later the vessels dropped anchor off Gomera, in the Canary Islands, arriving there on Easter Sunday. The governor

FERDINAND DE SOTO

of the island, the Count of Gomera (wrote one of the Portuguese hidalgos in this gallant company), "was apparelled all in white—cloak, jerkin, hose, shoes, and cap—so that he looked like a governor of gypsies. He received the adelantado with much pleasure, lodging him well, and the rest with him, gratuitously. To Doña Isabel he gave a natural daughter of his to be a waiting-maid," and entertained the entire company right joyously for a week.

There were twenty-four ecclesiastics aboard ship—monks, priests, and clerics—and a large number of young nobles sumptuously arrayed, with silken doublets and cassocks, "silk over silk," and with retinues of servile attendants. The *reverendos* did not seek to mar the festivities, for they were going out merely to convert the heathen; while the cavaliers, many of them, devoted themselves to Doña Isabel and the attractive damsels in her train.

Among them all there was none more beautiful than the daughter of the Count of Gomera, who was less a "serving-maid" than companion to the fair Isabel, and who, before the voyage was over, won the heart of a cavalier named Nuño de Tobar. He was

ADELANTADO AND GOVERNOR

one of the men who had returned from Peru with De Soto, his fortune made and the best of his life still before him. Tobar went out as lieutenant-general in the expedition; but when, after arriving in Cuba, De Soto found that he had been trifling with the affections of the lovely Leonora, daughter of the count, he was summarily deposed.

Ferdinand and his wife regarded Leonora in the light of a daughter, having none of their own, and were wounded to the quick by the ungallant behavior of Tobar. It is said that De Soto, in addition to deposing Tobar, challenged him to mortal combat, as having committed an affront which could only be palliated by the shedding of blood. As such an encounter, with one whose sword was invincible, was equivalent to a sentence of execution, the young man begged for mercy, promising to make every reparation in his power. His life was contemptuously granted him; but he never recovered the confidence of his commander, though he served him long and well.

This untoward incident had not developed, fortunately, before the arrival of the fleet at Santiago de Cuba, which port was reached at the end of a month after leaving Gomera,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

where the new governor was received with great rejoicings. The festivities conducted by the wealthy residents of Santiago lasted nearly a week, and consisted of bull-fights, horse-racing, and tournaments by day, with banquets, balls, and theatrical displays by night. The planters of the island came into town with numerous fine horses, which they presented to such cavaliers as were in need of them, and, in fact, to many who had not, so that some of the noblemen possessed three or four each, all of them mettlesome chargers, finely caparisoned.

These planters vied with one another in extending hospitalities to the new arrivals, sending horses and mules for the governor and his lady, with their suites, to ride out to their estates in the country, where they were entertained in baronial style. Among these gentry there was one Vasco Porcallo, who lived near the town of Trinidad, having a vast estate, which he had bought with the proceeds of long years spent in fighting the enemies of Spain. He had thought to settle there for life, and had surrounded himself with every luxury that money could purchase in that lonely island. But on his visit to Santiago he met so many kindred spirits and saw so

ADELANTADO AND GOVERNOR

much that reminded him of his fighting days that he caught the enthusiasm of the cavaliers and volunteered his services to De Soto, out of hand. As he had great wealth and a lavish disposition, and, moreover, was possessed of military skill, De Soto accepted his offer at once. He was made lieutenant-general, in place of Tobar, and was so elated thereby that he showered the army with his gifts. He gave a vast amount of provisions to the fleet, and contributed heavily to its armament, besides presenting to various cavaliers who took his fancy more than fifty blooded horses. Thirty-six horses were included in the outfit he took with him to Florida, and a great number of Indian and negro servants and slaves.

All Cuba was aflame over the approaching conquest of the peninsula, which lay but a comparatively short distance away, yet had never been explored. Nearly forty years had passed since Columbus discovered the Bahamas and Cuba, thirty since the latter was circumnavigated, and twenty-five since its people were subjugated. Yet Florida, only a few miles distant across the Gulf Stream, still existed as a wilderness awaiting the coming of its conqueror.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Sending his fleet around to Havana, where Doña Isabel was instructed to await his arrival, De Soto spent three months in a careful inspection of the island, acquainting himself with its resources and accumulating supplies for his expedition. Travelling overland from Santiago, by the way of Trinidad and Puerto Principe, the governor arrived at Havana towards the end of August, and there remained several months, attending to the needs of the people and establishing his government on a sure foundation.

The commerce of Cuba had risen to such proportions as to attract the attention of the Caribbean corsairs, who had assailed both Havana and Santiago; thus much repairing of fortifications and planning of new ones was necessary, to secure the island from their depredations.

During this while, a small vessel, with a selected crew under Juan de Añasco, was engaged in cruising the Floridian waters in search of a harbor commodious enough for the fleet. This was found, after several months of dangerous navigating among the shoals and cays of the Florida Reefs. Two voyages were made before the end was attained, and on the second trip the frail

craft came near foundering, for a tempest assailed her, and the crew passed two months on an uninhabited islet, where their only subsistence consisted of raw shell-fish and wild fowl which they killed with stones and clubs.

This venture of Añasco's was the fifth or sixth that had come to grief on the coast of Florida, and it did not augur well for the next one. No one can say, however, that Ferdinand de Soto did not use great caution and care in opening the way for his expedition, even though it ended in greater ruin and disaster than any other that had preceded it in America.

The winter of 1538-1539 passed away, with the cavaliers in Cuba worn to desperation from lack of employment and sighing for a sight of the land for which they had set out so many months before. It was not until May, 1539, that De Soto finally set his sails for Florida, more than a year after he had departed from Spain.

Just as he was getting his last supply of sea-stores aboard, in the harbor of Havana, a ship came into port bearing as its most important passenger an old comrade of his, Hernan Ponce, with whom he had been most

FERDINAND DE SOTO

intimately associated in Peru. In truth, these two had formed a sort of partnership, common in those days, by which they had agreed to share equally all gains, honors, etc., that might be acquired by either. Ponce was now on his way to Spain, with a fortune in gold and gems, which he was by no means willing to share with De Soto, who, by the terms of their agreement, was entitled to the half of it. By the same terms, Ponce was also entitled to his moiety of De Soto's estate, and, as well, to participate in the honors which had been showered upon him by his sovereign.

These, indeed, the open-handed De Soto proffered to Ponce; but the latter professed himself as satisfied, and content to leave matters as they were. But his former partner delayed his voyage for the sake of honoring him, took him to his palace on shore, seated him at his table, and proclaimed that his ancient comrade, Hernan Ponce, was henceforth to be addressed as "governor" and to receive the same attentions as himself.

Still, Señor Ponce was uneasy, for something seemed to prey upon his mind. Going aboard his vessel in the harbor, in the dead

ADELANTADO AND GOVERNOR

of night, he caused several large boxes filled with gems to be taken ashore, where he had them buried, for fear that De Soto would discover his wealth and insist upon his share. But the frank yet wary Ferdinand had suspected something of the kind, and had stationed sentinels on the watch, who surprised Señor Ponce at his task, and, driving him away, bore off the treasure in triumph. It was taken to the governor, unknown, of course, to Ponce, who let his troubles be known, the following day, over the wine at dinner. De Soto whispered a word to his major-domo, who went out and soon returned with the stolen coffers intact.

“Are these your gems?” he asked, indignantly; “and did you bury them in order to deprive me of my portion? Take them, then, and as promptly as possible sail with them to Spain. My own fortune, my titles, and my honors I consider also yours, and have executed writings to that effect. Even now, I say, will you share with me in the conquest?”

The humiliated Ponce protested that he desired nothing more than what he had, and, to show that he held his comrade in esteem, begged that he be allowed to present Doña

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Isabel with ten thousand dollars' worth of gems. This generous proffer De Soto, with a laugh in his sleeve, consented to accept, and the gems were duly delivered to the fair lady.

But there is a sequel to this transaction. After De Soto had sailed, and was well on his way to Florida, the wily Ponce demanded his jewels back, asserting that they had been obtained by fraud. Doña Isabel sagely replied that they were in her possession; that Hernan Ponce owed her husband far more than they were worth, on old debts, for which he was liable to arrest, and arrested he should be forthwith. On receipt of which discouraging information he promptly departed for Spain.

VII

THE LANDING IN FLORIDA

1539

DE SOTO'S fleet, in which he sailed from Havana for Florida, on Sunday, May 18, 1539, consisted of five large vessels, two pinnaces, and two caravels. Doña Isabel greatly desired to accompany the expedition, but was compelled to remain in Cuba as regent. With her were left the wives of Nuño de Tobar, of Don Carlos, who had married a niece of De Soto, and of Baltasar de Gallegos, who had sacrificed a fine vineyard in Spain in order to gratify his ambition to be a soldier.

The castle-tower is still pointed out in Havana from the battlements of which these sorrowing wives waved farewell to the fleet as it ploughed its way into the open sea. It was to be a last farewell for Doña Isabel, who never set eyes on Ferdinand again. Fifteen years she had waited for this

FERDINAND DE SOTO

—to be united, at last, to the chosen companion of her heart, only to be separated from him, after a short period of wedded bliss, then to lose him forever. He sailed away with that gallant company, and the wilderness swallowed him up.

Thanks to the precautions De Soto had taken, a safe harbor was made in the great bay of Espiritu Santo, on the west coast of Florida, which was reached on May 25th. It is now known as Tampa Bay, and at present is a flourishing winter resort, between which and Havana frequent steamers perform the voyage in a few hours, which in De Soto's time consumed a week. There were nearly a thousand men in the expedition, with three hundred and fifty horses, so the debarkation was a slow and toilsome process, and was not accomplished until the last of May.

During this time the savages on shore had not been inactive, for they were alert and vigorous, expert in the use of bow-and-arrows, and efficient with their war-clubs. They had watched the progress of the fleet as it sailed along the coast, as numerous signal-smokes attested, and by the time it had come to anchor were gathered to oppose

THE LANDING IN FLORIDA

a landing. But they had not shown themselves, though lying in ambush in the forest, and the first detachment of soldiers, about three hundred in number, camped on the beach without taking any precautions against surprise.

The night air was warm and filled with the fragrance of a thousand flowers, so the soldiers threw themselves upon the sands and slept, wherever they could find a couch prepared by nature. Just before dawn they were awakened by the war-whoops of the savages, who broke upon them without other warning, out of the darkness, and wounded several with their javelins and arrows. So suddenly aroused, and attacked by an unseen enemy, the troops were thrown into confusion, and, instead of making a counter-attack, crowded tumultuously to the shore.

There was then a hasty buckling-on of armor and grasping of weapons on board ship, each cavalier being spurred to action by the terrible tumult ashore. Into the boats tumbled the doughty warriors, burning to have a brush with the enemy, and as dawn broke and revealed the Indians they leaped ashore and charged upon them with great shouts. Among the foremost of those to the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

rescue was Lieutenant-General Porcallo, who seized and mounted the first horse he could find and led the charge. He was sustained by seven troopers only; but these were sufficient to put the savages to flight, and the lusty Porcallo, having pursued them for quite a distance into the forest, soon returned to the beach, brandishing his lance and loudly vaunting his victory. While in the midst of his boastings, his gallant steed staggered and fell to the ground stone dead, having been shot through the ribs by an Indian arrow. Then the boastings of Porcallo were louder than ever, and he did not fail to call attention to the fact that his horse was the first to fall in battle with the pagans, and his weapon the first to be turned against them.

The Spaniards were astonished at the force with which the arrow that pierced the horse had been sent, and gathered around to examine the unfortunate beast. As to the Indians, says the chronicler of the expedition, "they are exceedingly ready with their weapons, and so warlike and nimble that they have no fear at all of infantry; for if these charge upon them they flee, but when they turn their backs are soon again upon them. They avoid nothing more easily than

THE LANDING IN FLORIDA

the flight of an arrow, and as they are continually running about and in motion, neither arquebuse nor cross-bow can be aimed at them with effect. Before a Christian can make a single shot with either, an Indian will discharge three or four arrows; and he seldom misses his aim. Where the arrow meets with no armor, it pierces as deeply as the shaft from a cross-bow. Their bows are very perfect, while the arrows are made of certain canes, like reeds, so heavy and rigid that when their ends are sharpened they will pass through a shield. Some are pointed with the bone of a fish, sharp and like a chisel; others have a stone, like the point of a diamond."

This testimony as to the bravery of the Floridian savages and the efficacy of their weapons is very important. It gives us an idea of the kind of people De Soto encountered at the outset. Instead of finding them less warlike, as he progressed with the invasion, he was to experience yet greater resistance from the natives of the interior. An Indian village was discovered near the shore, but deserted, at one end of which was a sort of temple, having a wooden fowl with "gilded eyes" perched upon it, and at the other was the dwelling of the chief, or

FERDINAND DE SOTO

cacique. This dwelling occupied the summit of a great artificial mound, probably a construction of the mysterious "mound-builders," who, however, had passed away before the advent of the Spaniards in America. A few pearls were found within the temple, but they were of little value, having been injured by fire. De Soto was to find bushels of such pearls later in his journey, and he looked upon these as promising evidences of the country's richness.

After the troops and munitions had been landed, the governor took up his residence in the chief's house, and lodged his soldiers in the huts that were grouped about the great mound. This mound, by the way, is said to exist to-day, and is one of the objects by which the place of debarkation and the subsequent wanderings of the Spaniards have been traced. The forest growth was cleared away "for the distance of a bow-shot" around the mound and village, and, while the great camp was being put in order, De Soto sent out messengers to find the cacique, whose name, an Indian captive told him, was Ucita. But Ucita was not only wary, he was fierce and crafty. Moreover, he was greatly incensed against all Spaniards,

EARLY INDIAN LIFE





THE LANDING IN FLORIDA

on account of a fiendish act committed by Narvaez when in Florida. Enraged at some action of the cacique, he had caused his nose to be cut off, and, not content with this act of cruelty, he had cast Ucita's poor old mother to the dogs, to be torn to pieces before his very eyes.

The cacique had sworn vengeance upon every Spaniard who should fall into his hands, and had already sacrificed several unfortunates who had been lured ashore by stratagem about twelve years previous to the arrival of De Soto. The wife of Narvaez had been left behind in Cuba when her husband sailed for Florida, and, becoming alarmed at his long absence, had sent a pinnace with a score of men to get news of him. They arrived at Tampa Bay, and, sailing near to shore, saw a folded paper, evidently a letter, in the cleft end of a reed stuck in the sands. The Spaniards naturally supposed this might be a letter left by Narvaez, before he set out on his disastrous march, and a boat containing four men was sent ashore to get it. The moment the keel struck the sands a horde of savages rushed out from ambush and, surrounding the men, took them to their village. At sight of this, the cowardly crew aboard

FERDINAND DE SOTO

the pinnacle made all haste to sail away, leaving the miserable captives to their fate, which was a horrible one, indeed.

The Indians belonged to Ucita's band, and when that savage found these hated white men in his clutches he resolved to put them to the torture. Three of them were shot to death with arrows, their sufferings being prolonged as much as possible, but the fourth was stretched upon a wooden frame in the shape of a gridiron over a fire. He was a young man, hardly eighteen years of age, and came of a noble family that lived in Seville. As the cruel flames scorched his skin he cried out in agony, and the heart of the cacique's daughter was touched with pity. She was a comely maiden, much beloved by the chief, and though his vengeance was far from satisfied he listened to her entreaties. He released his captive, and, after directing that his wounds should be dressed, sent him out to watch the graves in a cemetery. It was a lonely spot, in the depths of a forest; but the youth felt more secure amid the dead, and surrounded by wild beasts, than in the presence of the chief. His duty was to prevent the prowling beasts of prey from robbing the shallow graves of their contents, and so

THE LANDING IN FLORIDA

he was given a bow and arrows, and warned that if one corpse was removed he should be burned alive.

One night, overcome by weariness, he fell asleep, and was awakened by the falling of a coffin-lid, only in time to see an animal making off with the body of a boy, son of a man of consequence in the tribe. The night was very dark, but he let fly an arrow and shot the beast, which proved to be a panther, through the heart. His prowess was greatly admired by the Indians, and for a time secured him immunity from harm at the hands of the cacique; but the time came when the latter determined to carry out the sentence of death, and the captive was warned by the daughter to fly for protection to a neighboring chief, named Mocosó. This cacique was in love with Ucita's daughter, and for her sake, she assured the youth, he would be welcomed and sheltered from harm. He succeeded in reaching Mocosó's territory, and was warmly received by the chieftain, who soon became greatly attached to the captive, whom he stoutly defended when Ucita attempted to regain his prisoner for the purpose of putting him to death. He thus incurred the enmity of Cacique Ucita, who leagued his

FERDINAND DE SOTO

brother chiefs against him and ravaged his territory, but without forcing him to give up the young Spaniard.

All these particulars were related to De Soto, who was naturally desirous of securing the release of a fellow-countryman, and sent a troop of lancers into Mocoso's country for that purpose. It happened that about the same time the young man, whose name was Juan Ortiz, heard of the arrival of Spaniards in the bay of Espiritu Santo, and begged his master to allow him to join them. The generous savage not only gave his consent, but sent him to the coast with an escort and a message of welcome to the strangers, saying: "Go to the chieftain of this great army which has landed on our shores. Tell him what I have done for you, and entreat him, in return, not to lay waste my territory nor do harm to my people. In setting you free, while you were in my power, I shall hope to win the favor of your great lord, whose alliance I would fain secure against the enemies I have made on your account."

Juan Ortiz and his escort encountered the lancers sent in search of him as they were emerging from a dense forest, and the meeting is described by Rodrigo Ranjel, De Soto's

THE LANDING IN FLORIDA

secretary, who wrote a narrative of the expedition, in the manner following: "Towards sunset, being off their road, because the Indian who was their guide led them wandering and confused, it pleased God that they [the troopers] descried at a distance some twenty Indians, painted with a kind of red ointment that these Indians put on when they go to war or wish to make a fine appearance. They wore many feathers and had their bows and arrows. And when the Christians ran at them the Indians fled to a hill, and one of them came forth into the path, lifting up his voice and saying: 'Sirs, for the love of God and the holy Mary, slay not me; for I am a Christian like yourselves, and was born in Seville, and my name is Juan Ortiz.' The delight of the Christians was very great, in God's having given them a tongue and a guide, of which, at that time, they were in great need; and, with every one very much elated, Baltasar de Gallegos [the commander] and all the Indians who came with him, returned that night very late to the camp."

The governor received Juan Ortiz like a son who had been given up for lost, seated him on his right at table, and ordered that he should be fully equipped, with fine apparel,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

the best of armor, and an excellent horse. Thenceforth he was one of the most honored men in the command, and, as he had a good knowledge of the Indian language as spoken in Florida, he became invaluable as an interpreter.

The numerical strength of De Soto's army in Florida is variously given, as follows: "A thousand men and 350 horses," Theodore Irving; the same, J. S. C. Abbott; "570 men, 223 horses," J. G. Shea; "nearly a thousand," Rev. E. E. Hale; "*mil hombres*" (1000 men), Cronau, Spanish edition; "600," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Chambers' Encyclopædia*, and Hakluyt; "570 men, not including the sailors"—fully 700, Ranjel and the Fidalgo; "620 men, 223 horses," Biedma.

VIII

IN THE FLORIDIAN FORESTS

1539

FERDINAND DE SOTO himself wrote, respecting the acquisition of Juan Ortiz: "We rejoice no little over this interpreter, for he speaks the language; and although he had forgotten his own, yet it returned to him. . . . He puts a new life into us, in affording the means of our understanding these people, for without him I know not what would become of us. Glory be to God, who by His goodness has directed all, so that it appears as if He had taken this enterprise in His especial keeping!"

This letter of De Soto's was written July 9, 1539, at the port of Espiritu Santo, to the magistrates whom he had left in charge of affairs in Cuba. In it, also, he makes mention of what little information had been obtained, through Juan Ortiz, respecting the inland region which he purposed to explore:

FERDINAND DE SOTO

“There is a town called Ocalla, where is an abundance of fowl, a multitude of turkeys, kept in pens, and herds of tame deer that are tended. What this means I do not understand, unless they be cattle, of which we brought the knowledge with us. He says, also, there are many trades among that people, an abundance of gold and silver, and many pearls. May it please God that this be so; for of what these Indians say I believe nothing but what I see; although they know, and have it for a saying, that if they lie to me it will cost them their lives!”

We thus have a pen-picture of De Soto at this time, sketched by himself. We find him, at the outset of this great adventure, disposed to be just towards the Indians, but at the same time inclined to exact of them the “pound of flesh,” even though their lives be sacrificed. Oviedo the historian says that he “was much given to the sport of slaying Indians, from the time that he went on military expeditions with the governor, Pedrarias Davila, in the provinces of Castilla del Oro and of Nicaragua”; but, if what we have been able to discover is true, he was not greatly given to this “sport” previous to the year 1540. As he became entangled in the

IN THE FLORIDIAN FORESTS

morasses of Florida, with faint prospect of emerging with either the gold he sought or the honors he hoped to gain, his disposition grew morose. Such Indians as then fell into his hands fared badly.

It was, doubtless, gold that De Soto craved above all other things; but he had no assurance, either in what had been revealed by Narvaez or by information obtained from Juan Ortiz, that gold existed in the country. Pearls there were, said honest Juan, but no gold, so far as his knowledge went. Yet, with the gaining of gold as his object, Ferdinand de Soto set out from Espiritu Santo on one of the most desperate and protracted wanderings known to history. Sending his largest vessels back to Havana, and retaining only two brigantines and a caravel for coast service, thus cutting off all hopes of a speedy return that might be indulged in by his men, the governor struck inland from the great bay about the middle of July. He had not found the region roundabout sufficiently fertile for a settlement, so he took with him on the march a drove of three hundred hogs, which had been intended for the settlers, and nearly all the horses. A valiant veteran, Pedro Calderon,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

was left as commander of the port, and with him thirty cavalry and seventy infantry, provisioned for two years.

De Soto gave the order and the irregular columns were soon in motion, the cavalry in advance, the infantry bringing up the rear, with the drove of swine straggling along in charge of herders specially detailed for the purpose. This herd of swine was regarded as the mainstay of the army, in case starvation should threaten; but was to be reserved to the last, as a nucleus for the colony's livestock.

No more brilliant pageant has ever been seen in Florida than this assemblage of mailed knights and footmen, with shining helmets, prancing steeds, flaunting banners, and glistening weapons. It was a company such as might have been gathered for assault upon Moorish castle, citadel of Saracen, or pilgrimage to holy shrines. Every man was a crusader, yet every soldier was bent upon acquiring wealth enough to enable him to retire to Spain and lead a life of luxury.

The trumpets sounded, their blasts echoing through the forests of pine and over the broad savannas where flocked the cranes and curlews. The expedition had started, that

IN THE FLORIDIAN FORESTS

much - vaunted enterprise upon which De Soto had lavished all his wealth, and for the return of which his good wife was to look long years in vain. It began with a misadventure, in which figured conspicuously that fantastic rival of the "Knight of La Mancha," Vasco Porcallo de Figueroa.

Word came to De Soto that the cacique Ucita was concealed in a swamp not far distant and near the line of march. Having used all his endeavors to induce him to come in, the governor was not disposed to give the chieftain further thought; but old Porcallo insisted that he should be captured and rebuked, if not punished, for his lack of courtesy. He insisted, also, that he was the man to effect that capture, and, to humor him, De Soto placed a troop of horse at his disposal.

"Ah, ha, now we shall see!" shouted the old cavalier as he rode down the lines, with the troopers clattering at his heels. "Do you go on, señor governor, and I will soon join you with that caitiff savage a prisoner, or his head on a pole."

"Do him no harm, unless strictly in defence," was De Soto's answer. "We do not wish to war upon the natives, especially at the beginning of our march."

FERDINAND DE SOTO

"I know," rejoined Porcallo, and he was off at a gallop, his horse tearing through the forest at so swift a pace that soon the cacique's stronghold was in view. It was a vast and dismal swamp, in the centre of which was an island covered with "hammock" growth, matted together with vines. An Indian messenger met Porcallo, warning him of the difficulties and dangers in the way, but the old knight merely scoffed.

"Come on, my merry men!" he shouted to his escort. "We have him securely trapped. It is only to go in and fetch him out." So saying, he put spurs to his horse—and found himself bogged in a quagmire.

He fumed and swore, he called on all the saints, and then he called on his soldiers; but the former did not respond and the latter could not reach him. The weight of his heavy armor caused his struggling beast to sink deeper and deeper into the mire, until he was actually in danger of suffocation. At last, by a mighty effort, he extricated himself from his dangerous position and reached firm ground once more. But he was covered with mud from head to foot. His shining armor and the splendid accoutrements of his steed were bespattered, and he made such a

IN THE FLORIDIAN FORESTS

sorry spectacle that the soldiers were convulsed with merriment. Spanish gravity is a thing not easily upset, but in this instance the soldiers threw all restraint to the winds and gave vent to derisive shouts and laughter. Their taunts were more than the vain Porcallo could endure, and the instant he rejoined De Soto he resigned his commission and left the office of lieutenant-general once more vacant.

Old Porcallo was vain, and his motive in joining the expedition—which was said to be the hope of getting slaves for his plantations—was ignoble; but he was generous to the last. Before embarking for Cuba he gave away all his horses, accoutrements, and munitions, and bestowed upon the army his vast supply of provisions, reserving only enough to last him the voyage. Even at this cost, as the sequel will show, he bought his freedom cheaply; and though he retired because of pique, he afterwards had great reason to rejoice at the disaster which, for a time, covered him with shame and confusion.

Beyond the province of Mocosó lay that of Paracoxi, who was a wary savage, and had learned by sad experience that the Spaniards could not be trusted. As Narvaez had

FERDINAND DE SOTO

passed his way—as was ascertained by finding the remains of a bridge he had built—it is probable that the savage had suffered severely, and he could not be induced to emerge from his retreat, which was in the midst of a vast morass. Indeed, the whole country was of this character, apparently, from a point three leagues beyond Paracoxi's deserted village, and the army was three days in traversing a swamp which lay between it and the firm land of a rolling prairie. While involved in the darkness of this dismal swamp, lurking Indians, probably some of Paracoxi's band, annoyed the soldiers exceedingly by discharging arrows at them from their hiding-places. Some were killed, some were captured, and an attempt was made to use the prisoners as guides. Finding, however, that they were prone to lead them into ambush, the Spaniards let loose their dogs upon them, who killed four, by tearing them to pieces.

This is the first act of deliberate cruelty which we can fasten upon the soldiers of De Soto in Florida; but this mode of inflicting death was not unusual with the Spaniards, who thereby killed their prisoners without waste of ammunition. Alarmed at the pen-

IN THE FLORIDIAN FORESTS

alty which his companions had paid for their treachery, another Indian offered to guide the army to dry land; but before it was reached a stretch of water was entered which came up to the saddles of the cavalry and the shoulders of the infantry. It was a league in breadth and, in the centre, too deep to be forded. Here were discovered the remains of the bridge Narvaez had built years before. Two trees had been felled, one each side of the stream, and the intervening space filled by logs tied together and floored with poles.

This rude structure reminded De Soto of the aerial hammock bridges, made of vines, which he had seen and often crossed in Peru; and, to encourage his men, he told them that the difficulties here were as nothing compared with what he had encountered on the march to Cuzco. He detailed the most expert swimmers, with hatchets, to repair the bridge; but while they were at work they were frequently molested by Indians in canoes, and two of them severely wounded.

This difficult waterway is supposed to have been near the headwaters of the Hillsboro River or on the Ouithlacochee. Beyond it, several miles, lay a beautiful prairie, covered with fields of maize; and as the soldiers

FERDINAND DE SOTO

had been for days subsisting upon water-cresses, they greedily ate the young corn in the ear, as they stripped it from the stalk. Difficult and dangerous as this passage of the swamp had been, De Soto was obliged to send a courier back, through a country swarming with excited savages, to summon the remainder of the army, which had stayed behind under command of Lieutenant Luis de Moscoso. Two young men, Sylvestre and Lopez, were selected for this perilous enterprise, and they accomplished it only by riding night and day, following the trail by the sagacity of their horses, who picked it up like dogs on the scent. During three days and nights, these gallant steeds were hardly unsaddled and rarely unbridled, their riders sleeping in the saddle or standing by their heads as they snatched a bite of grass. At the perilous ford they found the Indians waiting for them in canoes, but they dashed through the water at speed, amid such a shower of darts and arrows that, looking back, they saw the surface covered, as with leaves that had fallen from the trees. Relays of Indians pursued them to the very vicinity of Moscoso's camp, and, hearing their cries, a rescue party dashed out, led by Nuño

IN THE FLORIDIAN FORESTS

de Tobar, on a dapple-gray horse that became as famous as his rider.

On the march to reinforce De Soto, it seemed to the soldiers that the entire country had roused itself to repel the invaders, for they were beset by Indians on every side, by night and by day. Still, they suffered very little from the missiles of the savages, who shouted continually: "Keep on, robbers and murderers! In Apalachee you will get what you deserve! No quarter will be given to captives, who will be hung on the highest trees along the trail!"

They found the governor encamped in a land of plenty, but at odds with the cacique, who, when invited to a friendly chat, had sent word: "I am a king in my own land; but, what is your employment? Why are you here? I know, for others of your accursed race have been here. It is to wander about like vagabonds; to rob the poor, murder the defenceless. No, with such as you I want no friendship. War only, and never-ending, shall be waged against the invaders of our soil!"

IX

BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS

1539

ALL the narratives of this expedition agree that up to this point De Soto had treated the Indians with great consideration. Three of the four caciques whose territory he had passed through had held aloof and refused to have aught to do with him. They had refrained from attacking the Spaniards, probably, on account of their weakness; but the fifth cacique, Acuera, the same who had sent his defiance to De Soto, enforced his remarks by frequent assaults upon the invaders. His warriors lurked in ambuscade about the camps, and not only shot all stragglers with their arrows, but dragged away and beheaded their victims before they could be recovered by their comrades.

Their vindictiveness was such that they even dug up their bodies, marking the graves in the daytime and returning to perform

BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS

their ghoulish work at night. These remains of gallant soldiers were then cut up and hung on the highest trees, while their heads were borne upon poles, as gory tokens of their triumph. The Spaniards retaliated, of course, and most cruelly; but, with their utmost efforts, they did not succeed in killing more than fifty Indians of Acuera's band. They scurried through his province with such expedition that little injury was done to fields of growing grain or to villages; so that Acuera might truly boast that he had accomplished something by his aggressiveness.

He was a type of the Indians generally encountered by De Soto in Florida, which were vastly different from those he had assisted in harrying in Darien and Peru. Except for their lower grade of civilization, they more resembled the Aztecs of Mexico than any other natives the Spaniards had met and subjugated. They opposed the foreigners from the first, encountering Ponce de Leon at the coast, resisting the aggressions of Pánfilo de Narvaez, and have left behind them a prestige fully sustained by the fierce Yemassees and Seminoles, who, three hundred years later, fought our armies in the Everglades.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

De Soto's scouts had brought him welcome information respecting the adjoining province of Ocali: that it was filled with fields of maize and dotted with prosperous farmsteads, while its forests were abundantly supplied with game, such as bear, deer, and wild turkeys. It was called Ocali, after the principal chief, whose town contained at least six hundred dwellings. When De Soto arrived, however, these dwellings were all found deserted, for the people had seized their portable effects and fled with them to the forests. But there was much that they could not carry away, and for a while the Spaniards revelled in an abundance of green corn fresh from the stalk, wild fruits, and cultivated vegetables.

Their supplies had been by this time entirely exhausted, excepting those they had taken along "on the hoof"—the three hundred swine—which, with infinite labor, they had saved for the colony that the governor still hoped to found in the wilderness. The thoughts of the soldiers were fixed on other things than colonizing, it is true, and the more they saw of Florida the less their desire to settle there. They would fain have turned about and made the best of their way

BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS

out of this dreadful peninsula, half water and half sand; but the governor's pride forbade such a step. Nothing more promising had as yet been found than Ocali, which in itself was but a miserable village, with no architectural pretensions, and without even the glamour of gold about it.

From motives of policy, De Soto endeavored to establish communication with the fugitive chieftain, Ocali, but was unable for a long time to draw him out of his retreat in the depths of the swamps. At last, one day, four young warriors appeared. They were nearly naked, but their heads were adorned with heron plumes, and in their hands the ever-present bows and arrows. Received by the governor with great cordiality, they sat down to a bountiful collation, of which they partook with avidity. Suddenly, without a word or motion of warning, all four rose to their feet and set off so fleetly that in a moment they were nearly out of sight.

Taken completely by surprise, the Spaniards would undoubtedly have allowed them to escape; but they were pursued and overtaken by a blood-hound, which pulled them to the ground, one after the other, and then stood over them, barking furiously, so that

FERDINAND DE SOTO

they were absolutely terrified into submission. After having been secured by the Spaniards and taken to camp, they were questioned as to their mysterious behavior, but would only admit that they had acted without any other intention than to show their agility and fleetness of foot. They had wonderingly admired the costumes, arms, armor, and horses of the strangers, and in their artless simplicity had thought to exhibit some accomplishment of their own.

The blood-hound that had effected their capture was a beast of uncommon sagacity. Only a short time before he had torn to pieces an Indian who had merely struck a Spaniard with his bow. Having done this, the Indian had leaped into a river, on the bank of which he stood, followed by several companions. The hound leaped in after them, and, passing by all the others, seized the culprit by the shoulder and destroyed him before their eyes.

Not long after the episode first related, as De Soto and his body-guard were walking along the bank of a wide river near the camp, a number of Indians suddenly appeared on the opposite bank and discharged a flight of arrows into their midst. It chanced that

BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS

the blood-hound spoken of was a short distance behind the company, held in leash by a keeper, with whom he struggled so desperately that he finally broke loose. Plunging into the river, the ferocious brute sought to swim across and reach the Indians, who greeted his approach with loud yells and a volley of arrows. So many of these missiles struck him in the head and shoulders that he looked, it is said, like a veritable porcupine; but he valiantly kept on until the opposite bank was reached, when he fell dead from loss of blood. The savages were overjoyed at the destruction of this most formidable enemy, and, after a parting volley of arrows at the governor and his party, dragged its carcass away as a trophy of their valor. This event greatly depressed the army, for the hound was considered equal to a score of sentinels for night duty, being always alert when savages were prowling about the camp, and able to discover an Indian by his sense of smell.

The cacique Ocali finally emerged from his retreat and held a conference with the governor; but he was found to be without any influence whatever, so was allowed to depart, which he did with alacrity, promis-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

ing to return and assist the Spaniards in building a bridge across the river. Needless to say, perhaps, he did not honor them with his presence thereafter, and the bridge was built without his aid. The country beyond was open pine-woods, through which the army passed rapidly, with De Soto, as usual, in the lead. After a three-days' march, he took with him two hundred horse and foot, and, pushing ahead in the night, at daybreak entered an Indian town known as Ochile, in the province of Vitachuco, which was under the dominion of three brothers.

De Soto always aimed to get possession of the cacique, or chief, of whatever tribe he encountered, to hold as a hostage for the good behavior of his people. Fearing that the cacique of Ochile might take alarm and escape, he approached the village by stealth, and at dawn clattered into it with clamor of trumpet and drum, so alarming the natives that they poured forth from their huts like bees from a hive. They found themselves prisoners, being surrounded by the strange warriors, who had descended upon them as if from the skies, and offered no resistance.

The house of the cacique was the largest of any mansion yet seen in Florida, being

BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS

nearly three hundred feet in length by more than one hundred in breadth, though constructed of logs and thatched with leaves and grass. Within it was the chief, as well as his principal warriors, who at first offered resistance, but were finally prevailed upon to surrender when the Spaniards threatened to set fire to the thatch. Received most graciously by De Soto, who explained the necessity, which he deprecated, for retaining him a nominal prisoner, the cacique of Ochile was won over at once. He seemed disposed to regard his captors as celestial visitors, and sent for a younger brother, who, like himself, governed a portion of Vitachuco province. Between them they controlled one-half the province, but the other half was ruled by an elder brother, who was made of sterner stuff than they, and vastly more sagacious. These two kissed the governor's hands, and their subjects remained passive, while De Soto sent back couriers with orders for the main army to come up. They were so friendly that the Spaniards greatly rejoiced; for hitherto, says the Portuguese chronicler, "No one had been able to get servants who could make his bread; and the method being to beat out the maize in log mortars

FERDINAND DE SOTO

with a one-handed pestle of wood (some also sifting the flour afterwards through their shirts of mail), the process was found so laborious that many, rather than crush the grain, chose to eat it parched and sodden."

From this it will be readily understood that the Spaniards gladly accepted the cacique's offer to supply them with cooks and porters, so long as they should remain in his country. He became alarmed, however, when they settled down around his village and in his fields, like a host of devouring locusts, and one day he broke loose from his guard in an attempt to escape. Some others were with him, who hastily formed a sort of body-guard, and all together started for the woods. Then "the governor ordered a bloodhound, *already fleshed upon him*, to be let loose, which, passing by many, seized upon the faithless cacique, and held him until the Christians came up."

Convinced that resistance was useless and that the Spaniards were invincible, this cacique of Ochile united with his younger brother in a petition to the eldest and most powerful of the three, begging him not to resist the advance of the strangers through his territory, but to submit as they had done.

BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS

This cacique was known as Vitachuco, or Uitachuco, his name, as the most powerful lord, being also that of the province. At first he treated their envoys with silent contempt, but finally, goaded to wrath by their urgency, he retorted (in the language of Garcilaso de la Vega): "It is evident that you are young, and have neither judgment nor experience, or you would never speak as you have done of these hated white men. The chains which they have hung upon you, and the mean and dastardly spirit which you have acquired during the short period you have been their slaves, have caused you to speak like women. Do you not remember that these strangers can be no better than those who formerly committed so many cruelties in our country? Do not their manner of life and actions prove them to be children of the Spirit of Evil, and not of the sun and the moon, our gods?"

"Go they not from land to land, plundering and destroying, and, like the vagabonds they are, maintaining themselves by the sweat and blood of others? Warn them, then, not to enter my dominions; for I vow that, valiant and powerful as they may be, if they dare do so they shall never go out

FERDINAND DE SOTO

alive. Yea, the whole race will I exterminate!"

This vainglorious message was accepted by De Soto as mere bravado; but, whether the cacique could enforce his threats or not, he surely meant them, as the sequel proved. He pretended, however, to be won over by his brothers, who in person went to him and entreated his submission. They returned in triumph, assuring the governor that their brother would receive him as a distinguished guest, provision his army, and entertain them all to the best of his ability. He was convinced, they said, that he had misjudged their character, and desired to make amends. As the most powerful chieftain south of the Apalachee country, he felt piqued that the Spaniards should not have perceived his greatness, and, in order to impress them properly, had arranged for a review of his army, which was the largest and best-appointed in the peninsula.

Setting out from Ochile in the morning, before night the Spaniards arrived at Vitachuco's town, which consisted of more than two hundred houses, some of them fortified with palisados. The settlement was seated in the centre of a vast and fertile prairie,

BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS

supposed to be that which is now known as Wacahauta, to the west of Micanopy, locally famous in the annals of Florida. Five hundred warriors accompanied Vitachuco when he went out to meet De Soto, and the latter could not but remark that they were the finest he had met, being tall and stalwart, painted, plumed, and armed in a superior manner.

A week of feasting and rejoicing followed, during which the Spaniards became convinced of the cacique's amicable intentions, and grew careless. This refers to the rank and file; for their commander never relaxed his vigilance when in an enemy's country, and still insisted upon patrols and sentinels, as usual. Neither was he surprised when, one evening, Juan Ortiz came to him with information of a plot which Vitachuco had formed to bring about the destruction of the army. Ten thousand warriors were to be assembled on the plain, weaponless but in battle array, in order that the Spaniards might be convinced of the formidable forces which the cacique could put in the field when occasion demanded. Their weapons, however, were to be concealed in the grass and thickets, and at a signal they were to close in upon the strangers and commence the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

massacre. Being ten to one, the cacique reasoned, they could easily overpower and destroy the Spaniards, who would probably be wandering about in careless security. De Soto was to be taken in hand by the cacique himself, who, with twelve of his stoutest warriors, was to accompany the leader of the Spaniards as he went out to view the spectacle. When the signal should be given, these warriors were to rush upon and overpower the governor, and the ten thousand were to grasp their arms and fall upon the army, with all the fury of savages inspired by confidence in their numbers.

“It is a very pretty plot,” declared De Soto, admiringly, at a council of his captains that evening. “And, my sons, I think we cannot do better than adopt the enemy’s tactics. I will take with me twelve stout soldiers, to offset the cacique’s dozen; and as to the rest—why, I never knew my men to fail me yet.”

Nor did they fail. On the beautiful morn of the morrow, when Cacique Vitachuco came to inform his guest that the entertainment was ready and invite him to view it, he was much surprised and taken aback to be informed that, in order not to seem remiss,

BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS

the Spaniards themselves had decided to have a mock battle, for the diversion of their Indian allies.

Though deeply chagrined, the cacique dared make no remonstrance, and was compelled to witness the marshalling of his opponents in full force and in battle array on the opposite side of the plain.

Civilization and barbarism were fairly and squarely opposed. The latter was superior in point of numbers, but the former in discipline and armament. Between the two bodies of soldiers strode the chiefs, accompanied by their body-guards. As they were about to ascend the knoll from which the sham contests were to be viewed, a war-whoop and a bugle-blast rang out at the same instant. The attendants of each commander were immediately locked in a death-struggle; the warriors sprang to arms; the Spanish soldiers came thundering down the plain, the cavalry in advance, and shouting the old battle-cry, "Santiago!"

De Soto's war-horse was led up to him by a page, and mounting it he placed himself at the head of his troops. Four Indian arrows pierced the noble beast, and he fell dead in his tracks. Another was instantly brought,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

and, in the saddle again, the gallant leader bore down upon the Indians like an avalanche. Before the onset of those three hundred chargers encased in armor the naked Indians went down like sheep on a mountain-side before a loosened boulder. They were fierce and valorous; but, though ten thousand in number, they could not withstand the cavalry and the arquebuses.

On one side the plain was a large lake, on the other a dense forest, where the Indians had concealed their weapons. Such as did not reach the forest, in their wild struggle to escape, cast themselves into the lake, to the number of several hundred. They swam out into deep water, and in groups of five or six, with the best archer mounted on the backs of his companions, kept up the unequal struggle all day long. Their arrows, though sent with good will, were impotent against the mailed soldiers, and when they attempted to regain the shore the cavalry would rush into the water and drive them back again. Daylight waned, and found them fighting yet, but by midnight some came in and surrendered, though the most intrepid remained till next day at dawn.

“At four o'clock in the morning,” says an

BATTLES WITH THE INDIANS

eye-witness of this affair, "they had all surrendered, save twelve of the principal men, who, as of more distinction and valiant than the rest, preferred to die rather than yield. Then the Indians of Paracoxi, who were going about unshackled, went in after them, swimming, and pulled them out by the hair. They were all put in chains, and, on the day following, were divided among the Christians for their service."

The cacique Vitachuco was caught in his own trap. At the beginning of the battle he had been overpowered and borne off to the Spanish camp, where, after having been put in chains, he was allowed unusual liberties. He was given a seat at the governor's table, and, except for his chains, was treated with the deference to which his rank entitled him. But he was implacable, and, though De Soto did all in his power to gain the friendship of his ferocious captive, he was bent upon revenge. He concerted another conspiracy, and one day, while seated at dinner, gave De Soto such a blow in the face that several teeth were broken and the blood gushed from his nose and mouth. As he sank to the floor insensible, the cacique leaped upon and was about to finish him, when a dozen

FERDINAND DE SOTO

swords and lances were thrust through his body, and he fell dead. The story of what followed, after the signal was thus given for the uprising, seems so improbable that we prefer the old chronicler should tell it.

"The Indians all rose together," he says. "He who could only catch up a pestle from a mortar, as well as he who could grasp a weapon, equally exerted himself to kill his master or the first one he met; and he whose fortune it was to light upon a lance or a sword, handled it in a manner as though he had been accustomed to use it all his days.

"One Indian, in the public yard of the town, with blade in hand, fought like a bull in the arena, until the halberdiers of the governor, arriving, put an end to him. Another got up, with a lance, into a maize-crib, made of cane (called by Indians *barbacoa*), and defended the entrance with the uproar of ten men, until he was stricken down with a battle-axe. They who were subdued may have been in all two hundred men. Some of the youngest the governor gave to those who had good chains; all the rest were ordered to execution, and, being bound to a post in the middle of the town yard, they were shot to death with arrows by the people of Paracoxi."

X

THE FIERCE APALACHEES

1539

SUCH a terrible blow had De Soto received that he lay half an hour unconscious, while the conflict raged around him. His face was battered in as though it had been struck by a sledge-hammer, and, having lost several teeth, he could eat no solid food for many a day thereafter. Nearly a week passed by before he and his wounded comrades were well enough to resume their wanderings, when the march was taken up for a province known as Osachile.

The Spaniards left behind them a land of desolation, for, besides Vitachuco and his chieftains, thirteen hundred warriors had been killed in the battles and massacres. When the town in which he had resided was revisited, some time after, it was found abandoned, without an inhabitant, because of an Indian superstition that it was ac-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

cursed. The invaders had good cause to remember it, for few of them had escaped scatheless in that savage uprising. Several had been killed, many there were with broken arms, scalded skins, and bruised bodies, so that they went limping away, with many a malediction on their lips.

Their first day's march brought them to a rapid-flowing river, believed to have been the Suwanee, across which they attempted to throw a bridge, as it was too deep to ford. But the sudden appearance of hostile Indians in considerable numbers forced them to abandon this undertaking and hastily construct several rafts, upon which the soldiers crossed, while the horses were driven into the river and compelled to swim. The intrepid troopers caught their steeds as they emerged from the water on the farther bank, and, quickly slipping on saddles and bridles, charged upon the savages, who were put to flight. They soon returned, however, and greatly annoyed the Spaniards by discharges of arrows from the corn fields through which they held their course. Many were wounded, though none was killed, and such of the Indians as were taken prisoners had chains placed about their

THE FIERCE APALACHEES

necks and were forced to serve as carriers.

Nearly all the slaves and porters had been slain in the massacre, when the exasperated Spaniards had wreaked their vengeance upon all alike. These new prisoners were as intractable as the others, and though they were "led off in chains, with collars about the neck," they sometimes managed to escape. "Sometimes it happened," says the old chronicler, "that, going with them for wood or maize, they would kill the Christian and flee, with the chain on, which others would file at night with a splinter of stone in the place of iron; at which work, when they were caught, they were punished, as a warning to others. The women and youths, when removed a hundred leagues from their country, no longer cared, and were taken along loose, doing the work, and in a very little time learning the Spanish language."

The town of Osachile, which was less than fifty miles from the last they had left, the Spaniards found to consist of about two hundred houses, and to occupy the centre of a fertile prairie covered with fields of maize and pumpkins. Most authorities agree that Osachile may have occupied the site of the pres-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

ent Suwanee Old Town, and the name is perhaps perpetuated by that of the river Oscilla. It was found deserted, all the inhabitants having fled, taking with them their portable possessions; but this fact did not disturb the Spaniards, who thus secured shelters already constructed and fields well tilled, which they could avail of without any fighting. Here in Osachile, as at Tampa, the cacique's house was set upon an artificial mound, the summit of which was large enough to accommodate a group of twenty wigwams, and was reached by an inclined roadway twenty feet in width. It was pyramidal in shape, and, though wholly of earth, much resembled the stone structures of Mexico, such as Papantla, in the province of Vera Cruz.

Though the governor would have been glad to have a short respite, as his wounds were healing but slowly, he did not tarry long at Osachile, for ahead of him lay the wonderful country of Apalachee, which was said to abound in gold. It was also the home (according to the southern Indians) of the fiercest warriors in Florida, who had never been defeated in battle, and who never allowed their land to be invaded. An Apalachee

THE FIERCE APALACHEES

scout had been captured, after holding at bay a score of soldiers for hours. Severely wounded as he was, and in chains, he was brought before the governor.

"Whence am I?" he said, proudly, holding his head erect and looking De Soto straight in the eye. "I am from Apalachee. What you get there, you will see! Our warriors will pin ye to the ground with their lances; they will hack ye in pieces with their swords, and consume ye with fire! Wait ye and see!"

Far from being deterred by these menaces, De Soto was moved to try conclusions with the savage Apalachees. He had decided to establish his winter quarters in their province, come what might, and the order was given to march. Three days of sweltering toil succeeded, in the traversing of an arid plain, and on the fourth the Spaniards entered the most dismal morass of any they had seen. It was a vast swamp, in the midst of a gloomy forest, through the tangled undergrowth of which there was a single narrow trail, only wide enough for them to march in Indian file. In the centre of this forest swamp was a lake of unknown extent, black and forbidding, swarming with snakes and alligators. Beyond the lake lay

FERDINAND DE SOTO

the land of promise, Apalachee (the Indians told De Soto), and that was sufficient for him to essay its passage.

Making camp on the skirts of the forest, he detailed a hundred cross-bow-men and halberdiers, together with twelve men who could swim, to penetrate the swamp and force a passage through the lake. They were driven back, before they had gone a hundred paces, by Indians concealed in the thickets, who assailed them with javelins, arrows, and lances, and compelled them to retreat. Receiving heavy reinforcements from the main army, they returned to the attack, but succeeded only in ascertaining that the water of the lake was too deep to be forded, and that beyond it extended the same black forest, through which the narrow trail wound like a snake for several miles.

No obstacle was ever encountered by De Soto which he deemed insurmountable. He was never daunted by circumstances the most adverse, nor discouraged by ill-fortune. He resolved to make a night march through the swamp of the dismal lake, and, sending on ahead two hundred chosen soldiers, who were encased in armor from head to foot, he fell in behind with the bulk of the army.

THE MARCH THROUGH THE FOREST





THE FIERCE APALACHEES

He formed a living wedge, as it were, faced with steel, and drove it home by ponderous blows. Entering the forest defile between midnight and dawn, the advance-guard succeeded in reaching and crossing the lake before the Indians were aroused. They had not expected a night attack, and had left the lake unwatched. Darkness enshrouded these brave cavaliers as they passed, in single file, between the trunks of ghostly cypress-trees, hung with funereal banners of moss and draped in vines that depended from their limbs like writhing serpents. Cautiously they felt their way, parting the vines with their swords and prodding the leaves with their lances. In the centre of the black lake water was a primitive bridge, formed of fallen trees and logs. They crawled across it like panthers, their stout hearts beating wildly, for here they had fully expected resistance. But they had safely passed the waterway, and were already assembling on the farther side of the lake, when the savages discovered them.

Daylight revealed them to the astonished Indians, who greeted the sight with yells and wolf-like howls. Like wolves, too, they fell upon these mailed monsters who had in-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

vaded their land, and dashed themselves to pieces against their armor-clad bodies. As well might the waves of ocean dash against a rock, for the Spaniards were unyielding. Some of them went down, for they were fighting waist-deep in the water, and never rose again; but their foes went with them.

They could not retreat, because of the pressure from behind. Arrows glanced from their armor, lances from their helmets, but now and again a ponderous battle-axe descended and crushed out all life within. Still, inch by inch and foot by foot the valorous Spaniards advanced, meeting lances with sword-thrusts, arrows with cross-bows and arquebuses; and thus the living wedge was driven home. Naked bodies were not proof against keen Toledo blades—they could not resist the impact of men in armor; and when, finally, the cavalry came into action, the savages went down like fields of grain before the hurricane. But Apalachee nature could not understand defeat, would not think of surrender, and the savage warriors continued to contest the pass two days and a night, until their foes were weary with fighting and almost dead from loss of sleep.

These Indians had fought the army of

THE FIERCE APALACHEES

Narvaez, and had defeated him, so they had a contempt for cross-bows and arquebuses. As for the horses—they impeded their advance by fallen trees, bound together with vines, and, when the horsemen were entangled, would creep up and slash at them from beneath, bringing steed and rider to the ground, where they were slaughtered. But the cavalry had their revenge when the open plains were reached. Then the horses themselves seemed to share their riders' rage and fury, and the Indians were cut down without mercy. No quarter was given nor asked, for the Spaniards had taken their lives in their hands, and the Apalachees gave theirs gladly in defence of their country.

After marching and fighting during several days, all the time in the midst of seemingly interminable fields of maize, where, beneath the rustling pennons, gleamed golden pumpkins innumerable, the weary Spaniards arrived at a dark and rapid stream coursing through a forest. Though it might have been easily forded had they been unopposed, they found their passage obstructed by a barrier of palisados, behind which the Indians had gathered in great force. Night was coming, and there was no time to parley,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

even if the governor had been in the mood, so he ordered a troop of dismounted horsemen, who were the best protected by their armor, to storm the barricade. With shields in front and swords and hatchets in hand, they dashed into the river, amid a storm of javelins and arrows. The Indians met them unflinchingly and killed several of their number, wounding many others; but the barrier was carried, and the troops poured tumultuously across the stream, putting to the sword such laggards in flight as they could overtake. A camp was established two leagues beyond the forest, in a fertile country similar to that which they had recently passed through, and here De Soto hoped to rest awhile and recuperate.

But, though the level fields presented a clear course for the cavalry, with no hiding-places save the stacks of maize, the wary and ferocious savages kept the camp in a constant state of alarm. The sentinels were shot down at their posts, patrols were attacked while going their rounds, and soldiers off duty were unable to sleep on account of the yells and howls that went up on every side. Flights of arrows, too, fell in the very centre of the camp and wounded several Spaniards

THE FIERCE APALACHEES

while they were endeavoring to prevent a stampede of their horses.

In distress and gloom, exposed to incessant assaults by the restless and determined enemy, the soldiers passed the fourth night since they had emerged from the swamp, after patiently enduring and sturdily resisting for nearly one hundred hours, all the time with weapons in their hands. Such captives as they had taken boasted loudly of their cacique's prowess, and assured the Spaniards that the reception they had given them was nothing to what they would get should they approach his capital.

Apalachee had been vaunted by the Indians all the way from Ocali; yet when entered it was found to contain no monument to human greatness, past or present. It consisted of about two hundred straw huts, without doors or windows, and with wattled walls plastered over with mud. Had De Soto been an ordinary man, his spirits would have sunk within him; but, as has been said before, he was not an ordinary man. He was heroic in his sublime faith, but grotesquely so in his blind persistence in following a path which led him nowhere and pursuing a course which became the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

more involved in difficulties the farther he went.

Following his usual practice, he endeavored to get the cacique, Capafi, in his power, at first by sending him valuable presents accompanied by proffers of his friendship, then by despatching scouting-parties to capture him in his stronghold. This retreat was established in the centre of a dense forest, swamp-surrounded and fortified at every point of approach. It was hunted out and assaulted by De Soto himself, at the head of a band of horsemen chosen for their courage and endurance. At the end of a long, narrow, and winding trail, the governor found himself confronted with a barricade made of palisados bound together with osiers. This was stormed and carried; but within it was another, still stronger, and defended by savages fighting with the desperation of despair. A hand-to-hand conflict ensued, which ended only with the death of nearly all the defenders.

When, at last, the cacique was discovered, squat like a toad in the farthest corner of the inmost hut, it was seen that he was too fat to walk. He could only crawl on his hands and knees; but he was evidently greatly

THE FIERCE APALACHEES

beloved by his surviving subjects, who bore him in their arms to De Soto, by whom he was kindly received and promised good treatment so long as he should keep the peace.

XI

THE FIRST WINTER IN FLORIDA

1539-1540

RETURNING with his captive to Anhayca, the Apalachee capital, the governor made preparations, the last week in October, 1539, for settling down there for the winter; but not to a life of inaction. While he had been in pursuit of Capafi, two of his captains, Tinoco and Vasconceles, were scouring the country for gold and supplies, and shortly after his return another, Juan de Añasco, was sent southward on a most important mission. This was to discover, if possible, a route to the sea, which, the Indians told De Soto, was not many leagues away.

Taking with him ninety horse and foot, Añasco, who was the *contador*, or auditor, of the expedition, and a man who could be trusted implicitly, started on his perilous trip to the sea-coast. It must be remem-

THE FIRST WINTER IN FLORIDA

bered that De Soto had no maps or charts upon which he could rely for guidance, and depended entirely upon information given him by the Indians, who were not always understood by the interpreter. On this occasion it happened that the governor had been correctly informed, and Añasco found the object of his search, though only after enduring great privations.

He took along as guide an Apalachee prisoner, who was soon accused of treachery, because he attempted (the soldiers said) to lose them in a vast morass. Several times he brought them within sound of the sea waves on a distant shore, and then started in a different direction, which invariably led into the wilderness. At last their suspicions became so strong that an iron collar was put on his neck, to which was attached a chain, held by a soldier, who was charged to keep strict watch, lest he should escape.

One night, as his enemies were asleep, he snatched a glowing brand from the camp-fire and beat the soldier with it over the head, at the same time trampling upon him as he lay helpless on the ground. This so exasperated Captain Añasco, who was already greatly incensed, that he thrust the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

recreant guide through with a lance, then loosed his hound, who quickly tore him to pieces. The Spaniards thus gratified their desire for revenge; but they had deprived themselves of the only man who knew the way out of the wilderness, and for fifteen days they wandered aimlessly about, finally reaching the coast nearly exhausted and on the verge of starvation.

Here they found, not only abundant supplies of fish, but a large and excellent bay, and came upon gruesome relics of the ill-starred expedition of Narvaez. That this bay was the one from which the remnants of his command had set sail was shown by the stumps of trees which had been felled for the construction of the brigantines, a forge for the making of bolts and nails, and finally by the skulls of horses which had been killed.

This bay was undoubtedly that of the present St. Marks, and is distant but a few leagues, in a direct line southward, from Anhayca, which was probably on or near the site of Tallahassee. It was called Auté by the natives, who had picked up a few Spanish words from the former visitors, and who conducted Añasco and his men to scenes identi-

THE FIRST WINTER IN FLORIDA

fied with its discovery. With this valuable information, after going out in a canoe and sounding the harbor, Añasco returned to Anhayca, whence he was soon despatched by De Soto to Tampa, with orders for Captain Calderon to abandon his encampment there and join him in Apalachee.

The intrepid Añasco, in command of thirty lancers, like himself men of valor and endurance, set out on November 20th for Tampa, or Espíritu Santo, which he reached at the end of ten days. As De Soto did not take part in this desperate dash through a country swarming with Indians already roused to fury by the outrages committed upon them by the Spaniards, we feel constrained to omit it from our narrative. But it was one of the most venturesome episodes of the expedition, and replete with exciting incident. Añasco took Calderon orders to proceed northward by land, while he himself was to sail along the coast to the harbor of Auté, and march thence to Apalachee. To a worthy companion of his, Gomez Arias, was given the enviable commission of bearing to Doña Isabel tidings from her liege lord in Apalachee, and he soon set sail with two caravels for Havana, carrying with him

FERDINAND DE SOTO

twenty Indian women and some pearls of the country as presents.

The garrison at Tampa had planted gardens, which were fruitful and flourishing at the time Añasco returned, and they were loath to leave them, especially when they learned that no gold had been discovered. This was their first demand: "Have you found any gold?" The welfare of their commander and comrades seemed to concern them no whit; but in refreshing contrast to their indifference was the lively interest of the good cacique, Mocosó, who inquired earnestly after his friends in distant Apalachee.

It is a pleasure to record that he was richly rewarded for his loyalty to the Spaniards, for to him and his people they gave all their surplus stores, helmets, armor, lances, pikes, etc., of which a mountain-heap remained after the retiring soldiers had taken all they could carry. It took Mocosó's people nearly a week to remove these articles to their town, though every man, woman, and child was impressed into service; and thereafter they were living examples of Spanish beneficiaries.

What became of all these things, especially of such as were in their nature imperishable,

THE FIRST WINTER IN FLORIDA

like the helmets and the armor, no one in recent times has been able to discover. It would seem likely that some relics of this expedition, which wound its way through the forests and over the prairies for years, scattering hundreds of objects in iron and steel along its route, might be found; but few, if any, have been recovered. Mocosó and his subjects have disappeared, along with the objects with which the Spaniards enriched them, and so, also, have all the tribes encountered, except a few in the northern region traversed by De Soto.

Gomez Arias sailed southward with two caravels, and safely reached Havana, with news which cheered the heart of Doña Isabel and at the same time saddened it. While the message from De Soto was affectionate, nevertheless it conveyed to her his stern resolve never to return without accomplishing the objects sought. Thus far there had been no indications either of a golden region or an extensive empire (as he frankly stated), but he should still persist in his search for both. His sorrowing consort knew him well enough to be convinced that, if neither existed, she might never see him again, for his proud nature would

FERDINAND DE SOTO

not permit him to return to Cuba impoverished.

She had already divined the situation, it is said, and had sent a letter to Tampa, which Captain Calderon bore to his commander, begging him to abandon the enterprise and resume his captain-generalcy in Cuba, which was an island already ripe for development. After entering a plea for the Indians of Florida, she continues: "I hope, my dearest husband, that no considerations of worldly advantage will make you neglectful of the precepts of humanity and of the duties of religion. Be persuaded to return to me at once, for you can gain nothing in Florida which can compensate me for the sorrow and anxiety I feel in your absence. . . . If you have gained nothing, I shall be better satisfied, because there may be the less cause for repentance. Whatever may have been your want of success or your losses, I implore you to come to me without delay; for any reverse of fortune is far better than the suspense and misery I now endure."

It would seem that the daughter of Pedrarias was paying the penalty of her father's sins, for surely few women have had to suffer more mental anguish than she en-

THE FIRST WINTER IN FLORIDA

dured during those long months of waiting, which stretched into still longer years that finally ebbed away into eternity. She was never to see her lover and husband again, yet she remained hopeful and faithful, sending several missions in search of him, all of which were fruitless in their quest.

While Juan de Añasco sailed northward, taking with him in the brigantines his thirty lancers, sturdy Pedro Calderon, with one hundred and twenty horse and foot, made his way to Apalachee by land. He had literally to carve a path anew through the forests and swamps, for, though thrice opened, it had closed behind the previous cavaliers, like the waves parted by a vessel's keel. Almost every mile of his route was contested by the enemy, and he arrived at Apalachee, the last of December, with his little force reduced by many killed and wounded.

Añasco arrived shortly before Captain Calderon, and De Soto received them both with rejoicings. The original band of adventurers was now reunited, and, as the soldiers looked upon their governor with feelings akin to reverence, there was no dissension in camp, but all dwelled together as brothers. The interior of Florida had been

FERDINAND DE SOTO

opened up by the various marches through it, and the west coast had been explored as far north as St. Marks. Westward from this bay both the coast and interior country were still unknown, and De Soto sent Diego Maldonado, in the brigantine *Añasco* had brought, with a company of soldiers and sailors, to investigate. He sailed away westward, and about seventy leagues from Auté found what his commander wanted—a magnificent harbor large enough for world-commerce and advantageously situated, with its splendid country adjacent, for a colony. The fleets of all Europe might safely ride at anchor there, Maldonado reported to De Soto, and, moreover, it was land-locked, with shores so “steep-to” that vessels might sail right up to the bluffs.

This information rejoiced the governor exceedingly, and he took energetic measures, by despatching Maldonado to Havana for a fleet well freighted with supplies, towards making this bay of Ochuse, as the natives called it, a nucleus for the great empire which he hoped to create in Florida. This fine harbor is known to-day as Pensacola, and is worthy of all the encomiums that the early navigators lavished upon it. Instruct-

THE FIRST WINTER IN FLORIDA

ing Maldonado to sail for Havana with all speed and rendezvous at Ochuse the following October, De Soto, with tireless energy, made preparations for an extended exploration of the interior country, intending to meet his lieutenant at the time appointed. He had kept the road to Auté open by marching and countermarching over it several companies of horsemen, so the various operations were conducted and communication was maintained between the port and Apalachee without any considerable losses by the Spaniards. Yet they were continually in warfare with the savages, who assailed them by night and by day, attacking not only their outposts, but the headquarters as well, with all the fury of their first assaults.

These Apalachees, in fact, were unconquerable, and, even though their capital was in the hands of the enemy, they never ceased their efforts until the Spaniards had departed from their province. De Soto had thought to restrain them somewhat by keeping their chief, the fat cacique, in custody; but this individual was as crafty as he was skilled in warfare, and one day he effected his escape by playing upon the credulity of his captors. His warriors continued to

FERDINAND DE SOTO

molest the Spaniards at every opportunity; and when the governor remonstrated, telling him that he thought it very ungrateful in his subjects to do so, when their chief was receiving from him every kindness and attention, he agreed and expressed great grief at their conduct.

"But," he said, "they do not know that I am well treated. They think of me as imprisoned in a dungeon and with fetters on my limbs. Let me but show myself to them unfettered, and doubtless they will cease their ravages at once."

De Soto agreed that this seemed reasonable, and asked him how he should proceed.

"My chief men are encamped in a forest, five or six leagues from here," answered the cacique. "Send me to them, guarded by a small company of soldiers, and I will soon bring them to terms. But do not put irons upon me, for that would enrage them."

As the obese cacique could not walk without assistance, much less run away, the governor assented to this proposition, and, closely guarded by a company of picked soldiers, he was sent to interview his warriors. Setting out at daylight one morning, they

THE FIRST WINTER IN FLORIDA

marched till near sunset, when the forest was reached in which the warriors were said to be concealed. The soldiers were weary from their march, and, though they took every precaution, by posting sentinels and surrounding the cacique with a very strong guard, they all fell asleep in the night.

Their prisoner was not weary, as he had been carried all the way, and he was very wide-awake, for, watching his opportunity, about midnight he crawled off into the thickets on his hands and knees; and that was the last the Spaniards ever saw of the fat cacique.

When his absence became known, next morning, the sentinels swore, by all the saints they could remember and name, that they had not slept a wink, so it was agreed among the company that the fat cacique must have been a necromancer, and, by conjuring a demon to his aid, had got himself spirited away. At least, this was the story they told the governor on their return, and he, wise and forbearing man that he was, said in reply (though with something approaching a twinkle in his eyes): "It is very possible, my sons, for I really believe these Indians are capable of more wonderful feats than merely

FERDINAND DE SOTO

conjuring off a fat cacique. Still, would I had been there to behold the feat!"

Relieved of anxiety respecting their chief, the Apalachee warriors redoubled their efforts to drive the invaders away. Whenever the Spaniards went to the forest for wood or to the streams for water, they were quickly surrounded by hosts of savages, who massacred and scalped the white men and broke the chains of their slaves, whom they took with them to their haunts. Though some few were captured, most of the Apalachees encountered fought to the death, and they were so regardless of pain that, says the Portuguese chronicler, "if their hands and noses were cut off, they made no more account of it than if each of them had been a Mucius Scaevola of Rome. Not one of them, for fear of death, would deny that he belonged to Apalachee."

Two young cavaliers, Diego de Soto, a nephew of the governor, and Diego Velasquez, were making their rounds one day, when they espied an Indian stealing across a field surrounded by a forest.

"At him!" shouted Diego de Soto, rising in his stirrups and shaking his lance. Finding himself unable to regain the forest, the

THE FIRST WINTER IN FLORIDA

Indian placed his back against an isolated tree in the cornfield, fixed an arrow in his bow, and calmly awaited his enemy. As he pranced up to the tree, Diego de Soto made a pass at the Indian with his lance, which the latter dodged, and then let loose an arrow. It struck the horse in a vital spot, and he fell dead in less than twenty paces.

Then Diego Valasquez took a hand in the affray, but met with no better luck than his companion. He missed the savage with his lance, and an arrow was buried in the body of his horse, just back of the saddle-girth, and the noble beast stumbled headlong to his death. Enraged beyond expression at the loss of their gallant steeds, the two cavaliers sprang for the Indian with their lances; but he was more than their equal afoot, and fled to the forest, keeping just beyond reach of their weapons and jeering them all the way.

The two Diegos walked ruefully back to camp, where they had to endure the gibes of their comrades also. But they were far more fortunate than two other horsemen, Simon Rodriguez and Roque de Yelves, who rode out one afternoon to gather wild grapes at the edge of the forest. Leaving

FERDINAND DE SOTO

their horses at the foot of a tree, they climbed up into the branches, where the vines were thick with fruit.

Some savages discovered them there, and shot them with barbed arrows. As they fell to the ground, their horses broke loose and fled wildly to the camp, pursued by bowshots from the Indians. One of them had a few drops of blood on his thigh, but nothing was thought of it at the time. Next morning he was dead, and when opened an arrow was found in his entrails, which had entered his thigh at the spot where the drops of blood were seen.

XII

THE TRACKLESS WILDERNESS

1540

THE scenery of Apalachee province was varied and beautiful, and its agricultural resources so great that the Spaniards had subsisted for five months upon the country in their immediate vicinity without foraging more than five miles from their camp. But of gold, the real object of their quest, they had found no trace. There was none in the country, though in a province which lay to the north and east, some Indians told De Soto, there was "great store" of the precious metal.

The easy credulity of the Spaniards and the eagerness with which they seized upon any chance bit of gossip relating to gold, we find quaintly set forth in the narrative of the Portuguese member of their company styled the "Fidalgo." "Of the Indians taken in Napetuca," he states, "the treasurer, Juan

FERDINAND DE SOTO

de Gaytan, brought a youth with him who said that he did not belong to that country, but to one afar, in the direction of the sun's rising, from which he had been a long time absent, visiting other lands. That its name was Yupaha, and was governed by a woman, the town she lived in being of astonishing size, and many neighboring lords her tributaries, some of whom gave her clothing, others gold in quantity.

“He showed how the metal was taken from the earth, melted, and refined, exactly as though he had seen it all done; or else the devil had taught him how it was; and they who knew aught of such matters declared it impossible that he could give that account without having been an eye-witness, and they who beheld the signs he made credited all that was understood as certain.”

This valuable information was conveyed entirely by signs, for the interpreter, Juan Ortiz, did not understand the speech of this youth who had come from the land of the sunrise; but, on the strength of this vague assurance of gold existing somewhere beyond the wilderness, the governor issued orders for the expedition to march. Refreshed by the long stay in a land of plenty, with most

THE TRACKLESS WILDERNESS

of the soldiers in fine fettle, and the horses in good condition, the army was once more set in motion, and another chapter was opened in that book of horrors with its letters written in blood.

That the winter had not passed without other tragedies than those we have recorded is shown by a casual remark of the narrator already referred to, who says: "The governor ordered his men to go provided with maize for a march through sixty leagues of desert. The cavalry carried their grain on the horses, and the infantry theirs on the back; because the Indians they brought with them for service, *being naked and in chains, had perished*, in great part, during the winter."

After a short stay at a place called Capachiqui, the march was resumed, with De Soto in the advance, at the head of his horsemen. He was anxious to reach the golden country, and, impatient with the plodding foot-soldiers, laden as they were with packs of provisions, in addition to their heavy weapons and armor, he dashed off in the direction of the wilderness. In the province of Atapaha, the name of which is still borne by a river of that region, he found a town, called by some Toalli, and by others Achese,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

which was the best-built of any he had seen. The huts, or houses, had their walls plastered with clay, while the roofs were covered with cane, "after the fashion of tile." Every Indian of prominence, he found, had a hut for summer-time, as well as for winter, and the latter was plastered inside and out. It had a very small door, which was closed at night in cold weather, and when a fire was started the room became so warm that the inmates slept without any clothing.

As to the costumes of these people: while the women wore finely dressed deerskins and shawls made of grass, the men considered themselves in "full dress" with a breech-cloth and a blanket, the latter cast over the shoulder, "after the manner of the gypsies." The warriors were an independent band of braves, who at once demanded of De Soto whence he came, why he came, and what he wanted. He replied that he came in peace, that his object was to convert them to his religion, and that he sought for gold.

"He told the cacique that he was going about the country seeking for the greatest prince there and the richest province." The cacique rejoined that he was the greatest prince, but that the richest province lay far

THE TRACKLESS WILDERNESS

to the northward and eastward. Still, he had an abundance of supplies, such as wild turkeys, partridges, conies, and native dogs, which he gave the Spaniards on request.

The dogs were especially appreciated, their meat being tender and finely flavored. Though the Spaniards had thus far been able to subsist on such vegetable food as they could forage in the Indian fields, they were famishing for meat. "On this account, the dogs were as much esteemed by the Christians as though they had been fat sheep," and many an invalid soldier, when sinking from debility, would say, "Now, if I had but a slice of meat, or only a few lumps of salt, I should not thus die!"

The Indians never lacked for meat in this country so plentifully supplied with wild game, as they were very skilful in shooting and snaring it; while the soldiers not only were unskilled, but dared not, when in the forests, stray from the line of march. "Such was the craving for meat," says one of them, "that when the six hundred men who followed Soto arrived at a town, and found there twenty or thirty dogs, he who could get sight of one and kill it thought he had done no little; and he who proved himself so ac-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

tive, if his captain knew of it, and he forgot to send him a quarter, would show his displeasure and make him feel it in the night watches."

Besides provisions, the cacique gave De Soto the services of four hundred carriers, who were to carry his luggage into the adjoining province, the ruler of which was one Patofa, a mighty man of war. Before De Soto parted from his hospitable friend, he made him a present of the one piece of ordnance, probably a falconet, that he had thus far brought with him from Espiritu Santo. It had been hauled all the way, by great exertions, and, so far as the records show, had never been fired in battle. As even the arquebuses were too slow of fire, and cumbersome, when opposed to the Indian archers (who could send from their bows at least a dozen arrows to one discharge of the fire-arm), the cannon had been found of little use. So the governor gave it to the cacique, who was filled with delight, and when it was fired, shattering an oak-tree with its heavy ball, he was overwhelmed with amazement and terror.

It is doubtful if that cannon was ever discharged again, as the Indians had no powder,

THE TRACKLESS WILDERNESS

and knew not how to load and fire it if they had. Nor, so far as we can tell, was it seen again by civilized man, after the soldiers of De Soto filed through the forest trails on their way to the next province. As the gift of his white friend, the "Son of the Sun," it was carefully guarded by the cacique, and, as a potent engine of destruction possessed of mysterious powers, it may have been sacredly cherished, even revered as a god, by those pagans of the Floridian forests.

From Atapaha, where De Soto had been so generously entertained, he passed to the province of Cofaqui, the cacique of which, already informed of his coming, met him on the frontier, with a retinue of richly costumed warriors. He desired to detain the Spaniards in his territory, but De Soto was intent upon seeing with his own eyes the province of Cofachiqui, in which were the mines of gold, and where lived the fair *cacica*, or female cacique. He would not tarry, therefore, longer than was necessary to rest his men and prepare for the crossing of the intervening desert, which was reported to be a seven days' journey in extent. As few living things existed there by which life might be sustained on the way, all supplies

FERDINAND DE SOTO

must be carried along, and the cacique ordered his subjects to gather vast quantities of walnuts, acorns, dried plums, and grapes. These Indians had no dogs, and were not so expert at snaring game as their neighbors, so the Spaniards looked forward, perforce, to a vegetarian diet, at which they grumbled greatly.

Four thousand warriors were quickly assembled by Cacique Patofa, and four thousand carriers to transport the supplies. When De Soto expressed surprise at the gathering of such a host, and intimated that the warriors, at least, might be left behind to advantage, the cacique replied that a perpetual enmity had existed between his tribe and the Cofachiquis, and as they were stronger than his people, he was going to avail himself of the protection afforded by the Spaniards to wreak vengeance on his enemies.

This frank admission somewhat perplexed the governor, whose general policy was to conciliate the natives rather than incense them, and he especially desired to cultivate the friendship of the Cofachiquis, in whose keeping was the treasure he had been seeking so long. But Cacique Patofa was a living presence, while Cofachiqui was a far country,

THE TRACKLESS WILDERNESS

which he could only reach, if at all, by the assistance of his savage friend. So he remained silent, though revolving in his mind how he should rid himself of such troublesome allies when they were no longer necessary.

He was not long left in doubt as to the actual intentions of Patofa, who, in order to impress his white friend with his prowess, threw aside his rich mantle of marten skin, which served him as a royal toga, and, seizing a great wooden broadsword, cut and thrust with it at an imaginary enemy, and so skilfully as to elicit De Soto's admiration. Addressing his warriors and the assembled Spaniards, he then said, "I have pledged my word that, with the assistance of these strangers, now our friends, I will avenge the insults, the deaths, and the losses our fathers have sustained from the Cofachiquis. And my vengeance shall be such that the memory of past defeats shall be wiped away forever."

Believing it best to dissemble his real feelings, De Soto made no reply to the cacique's boastful speech, but gave him a cap of yellow satin, a shirt, and a silver plume, at the same time directing him to reverence the cross, which he had set up on a mound in the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

village, and make his devotions before it. This the cacique promised to do, and, holding the ornament aloft, he said, "You are from heaven, and this plume of yours, which you have given me: I can eat with it, I shall sleep with it, and I shall go to war with it!"

"That is so," replied the governor, "you can do all that." Then the two embraced, and all present repaired to tables set beneath the trees, where they feasted and made merry; the Spaniards in their shining armor and the savages in their breech-clouts and blankets of deerskin.

They were to start on the following morning, but were delayed somewhat by an untoward event—namely, the strange conduct of their guide, a young lad named Perico, whom they had brought from Apalachee. He was to lead them to Cofachiqui, but, perhaps repenting of his promise, suddenly went mad, frothing at the mouth, and raving like a maniac.

He had chosen the hour of midnight for his outbreak, and, fearing the treachery of their host, whose warriors outnumbered them ten to one, the soldiery were in a panic. "To arms! To arms!" sounded the trumpets. Helmets and breastplates were donned in

THE TRACKLESS WILDERNESS

haste, and weapons seized, the first that came to hand.

When Perico's hut was entered, he was found trembling in affright, and so weak he could not stand. Commanded to tell what had occurred, he declared that he had been assailed by a demon—a most frightful monster, with a host of little imps in his train, who had beaten him until he fainted. The moment the Spaniards appeared, however, they promptly vanished, from which circumstance he was convinced it was the devil that had attacked him, and, to guard against future visits, he desired to become a Christian and be baptized. A priest who was standing by, one Friar John, solemnly shook his head and said it was even so; the youth was certainly possessed of a devil, and he would exorcise the arch fiend at once. This he did by the laying on of hands, and the afflicted boy recovered so quickly that all beholding were amazed.

The desert, or wilderness, proved to be so, merely, in the sense of being uninhabited, or *despoblado*, as the Spaniards termed it. It really comprised a beautiful country, with tree-crowned hills and rugged mountains, grassy glades and foaming rivers. A great

FERDINAND DE SOTO

deal of game was captured by the Indian hunters, but on the seventh day out the provisions became entirely exhausted, for there were nearly nine thousand mouths to feed. To add to the perplexity of the commanders, the broad road, or well-defined trail, which they had been following, abruptly terminated, and they found themselves confronted with an apparently impenetrable forest.

Both commanders became quite testy, and their men suffered in consequence, for they insisted upon the strictest discipline being maintained, even though their followers were on the verge of starvation. One of the Spaniards, a young man named Cadena, lost or misplaced his sword, and the governor ordered him to be hanged at once. He finally escaped the dread penalty through the intervention of his captain; but an Indian who had been made prisoner, and who refused to reveal the road to Cofachiqui, was, by order of De Soto, burned at the stake.

Not to be behind his rival in respect to discipline, Cacique Patofa made an example of a warrior who had deserted, by inflicting a peculiar punishment. He had him stripped and thrown down upon the bank of a small

THE TRACKLESS WILDERNESS

stream that flowed through his camp. Then, while two Indians stood over him with clubs, he was ordered to drink the streamlet dry. The poor wretch did his best; but still the stream flowed on, and whenever he ceased, from inability to perform the hopeless task, he was cruelly belabored by the Indians with their clubs. Patofa declared that he should dry up the stream or drink till he died; but the sympathies of De Soto were enlisted, and he interceded so effectually that the warrior was released.

XIII

THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS

1540

DE SOTO encamped in a pine grove on the bank of a deep river, and there awaited the return of his scouts. Most of the weary troopers came back at nightfall, one after another, driving their horses before them with sticks or leading them by the bridle, but without having found any road or sign of settlement. They were famished, as well as worn with fatigue, and, as the maize, acorns, wild grapes, and even the roots and herbs, were exhausted, the governor ordered some of the swine to be slaughtered, giving to each man half a pound of pork. This allowance was not sufficient to allay their hunger, but served to sustain them a little longer, and meanwhile four parties of cavalry were sent out again to scour the country.

Juan de Añasco proved the successful scout,

THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS

for, after travelling down-stream, along the river-bank, three days and nights, he espied an isolated hamlet. It held but few inhabitants at the time, but proved to be well supplied with provisions, one *barbacoa*, or corn-crib, containing five hundred measures of meal made from parched maize and a great quantity of corn on the cob. The famished Spaniards soon allayed the cravings of hunger, and Añasco sent back messengers to the governor and his people, "who were as much delighted as though they had been raised from death to life."

They broke camp immediately and pushed forward to the village, which De Soto aptly named *Socorro*, or Succor, and where he remained until all his scattered troopers had come in. For their information he had ordered an inscription cut into the bark of a pine-tree: "Dig here; at the root of this pine you will find a letter."

He reached Socorro on a Monday, and by Wednesday the three captains, who had been scouting in various directions, came straggling in, with nothing to add as to other villages existing in the country. But one of them exhibited to De Soto a skull and pair of horns which he had found, and which

FERDINAND DE SOTO

puzzled them all exceedingly. They had heard of herds of cattle owned by the Indians, and occasionally had been treated to a taste of beef, but could not learn where those herds were kept. The truth is, those "Indian cattle" were bison, or buffalo, which once roamed the prairies of the region traversed by De Soto in the year 1540 and thereafter.

The Spaniards remained at Socorro a week, during which time diligent inquiry was made for other villages, and the country was explored in every direction. Four Indians were captured, "not one of whom would say anything else than that he knew of no other town." The governor ordered one of them to be burned, and thereupon another said that two days' journey from there was a province called Cofachiqui. Socorro, in fact, was a frontier village of Cofachiqui, and several other settlements were discovered as the march was resumed down the river; but all were deserted, and had been recently ravaged. While the houses contained an abundance of provisions, and while the broad fields of maize had been carefully cultivated, showing that their owners could not have been long absent, not a living soul

THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS

came forth to greet or repel the Spaniards. But, scattered along the trails, floating in the river, and out-stretched upon the thresholds of many a deserted hut, were the mutilated corpses of men, women, and children who had been barbarously murdered and scalped. Patofa's bands had preceded the Spaniards, and had taken vengeance upon their ancient enemies, the Cofachiquis. Well aware that De Soto would not countenance such atrocities, they had committed the massacres stealthily, and had pressed so far ahead of their allies that it was difficult for the governor to overtake them.

Calling his captains around him, and pointing to the scalpless corpses collected by his orders and heaped up in the public square of the village he had last entered, De Soto exclaimed, indignantly: "Gentlemen, this must not be permitted to go on. We are, as you know, marching into an unknown country, and on the frontier of a province richer than any other we have entered. The queen of that province is reputed wealthy and powerful, and it behooves us to cultivate her friendship rather than incur her enmity. Go, then, forward, with your swiftest horse-

men, and by all means intercept our ally, the cacique. Tell him to return, to come to me at once, for I wish to say certain things to him of moment."

In this tenor spake the governor to his captains, and they obeyed him so well and so promptly that soon they had found and turned back the cacique, who came willingly, inasmuch as his vengeance had been sated, and he already had in his possession hundreds of scalps, which he would take back to his people as trophies of his prowess. When, therefore, De Soto said he had sent for the purpose of dismissing him with thanks and rich presents, and begged that he would return, Patofa assented, saying that he was satisfied, for he had done his duty by his ancestors, and their manes were appeased. He and his braves then returned to Cofaqui, while the Spaniards kept on to Cofachiqui, which they reached a few days later, with the gallant Juan de Añasco in the lead. At the head of a reconnoissance he discovered an Indian village on the opposite bank of the river, which, from its size, he imagined to be a place of importance, perhaps the residence of the chief. He approached it at night, and, having stealthily made his way

THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS

to the river-bank, where was a landing-place for canoes, and from which he could see innumerable lights and hear the confused murmur of many voices, he returned to report to his commander. Promptly at dawn the next day De Soto placed himself at the head of a hundred horsemen and advanced directly upon the town. When arrived at the river-bank he drew up his troopers in battle array, in order to make the most imposing appearance possible, and directed Juan Ortiz to say to the astounded Indians gathered on the opposite bank that he had a message for their cacique.

A grave and dignified warrior advanced a few paces and demanded: "Come ye in peace or in war?"

"In peace," replied De Soto, through the interpreter. "We desire only to speak with your cacique, and to have a free passage through your province, with provisions by the way."

"It is well," replied the warrior. "I will speak to my queen." He then made three profound salaams, the first towards the sun, in the east; the second towards the moon, in the west; the third towards De Soto, who returned the salute most courteously.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Soon after, a commotion was observed in the village, where a procession was being formed in front of the principal dwelling, and there later emerged from it a litter, or rustic palanquin, in which was seated a lovely Indian maid. The palanquin was borne on the shoulders of four stout men, who lowered it at the water-side and assisted the occupant, who was undoubtedly a princess or queen, into a large and gayly decorated canoe. There she reclined on soft cushions, beneath a canopy or awning supported on lances held by stalwart warriors. Eight comely attendants of her own sex surrounded and waited on this barbaric princess, whose barge of state was taken in tow by another grand canoe, filled with warriors and paddled by half-naked Indians. In this manner she approached the bank on which De Soto awaited her, seated in a gilded chair, like a throne, and surrounded by his captains in their shining armor. These brilliantly costumed strangers, with their caparisoned steeds and wonderful weapons, were things entirely new in the experience of this simple princess of the wilds; but she manifested neither alarm nor surprise as she landed from the barge and calmly took her

THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS

seat on a large stool provided by an attendant.

Then, with the aid of the interpreters, Juan Ortiz and Perico, the Indian boy, she and De Soto conversed together, while their attendants preserved a discreet silence. The Spaniards were impressed with her modesty, as well as her dignity, grace, and beauty of form and feature. She made a little speech, and a very pretty one, if we may believe the "Fidalgo of Elvas," who was one of the cavaliers present at the interview, and who thus reports it: "Excellent lord, be this coming to these your shores most happy. My ability can in no way equal my wishes, nor my services become the merits of so great a prince; nevertheless, good wishes are to be valued more than all the treasures of the earth without them. With sincerest and purest good-will, I tender you my person, my lands, my people, and make you these small gifts."

While she was speaking she had been toying with a necklace of beautiful pearls, which "passed three times round her neck and descended to her waist, so many there were." After disengaging the necklace, she handed it to Juan Ortiz, with the request that

FERDINAND DE SOTO

he give it to De Soto. When told that the governor would appreciate it most highly if received from her own hands, she shrank back timidly, saying that she could not do so with propriety. When urged, however, she rose, and with a shy laugh threw the precious rope of pearls about his neck, he stooping to receive the gift, with that knightly courtesy for which he was ever celebrated. In return he placed upon one of her fingers a ring of gold set with a ruby, with which she was far more pleased than with the pearls, and thanked him gratefully.

Then, the interview terminated, he handed her into her canoe, with helmet doffed the while, his captains likewise showing the princess those respectful attentions which are so highly appreciated by the gentler sex, whether living in the forest or at court. The cavaliers were glad, indeed, to behold this lovely apparition, suggestive of state and royalty; and though she was only half clad, in skins and not in silks, and her complexion was nut-brown in hue, her tresses raven black, they became quite enthusiastic in her praise. Her attendant maidens were equally discreet. Their eyes fell shyly as they beheld the bold glances of the soldiers,

THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS.

but they could not refrain from looking admiringly at those martial figures cased in armor.

The cacica had offered De Soto not only half her house, but half the village for his soldiers, and, by her direction, on the following day rafts and canoes were sent over to ferry the army across the river. In due time, all had crossed over, though several horses were lost in the rapids and whirlpools with which the river abounded, having been unwisely forced into them by their riders. A portion of the army was quartered in the village, but the bulk of the soldiers were lodged in capacious wigwams, which the princess had ordered built in a large mulberry grove on the bank of the river. After all their toils and battles, many of them would gladly have settled here, taking the Indian maidens for wives, and have made the beginnings of a settlement; and it would have been better for many of them if they had done so, for they marched thence to misery and to death.

The country was open, fertile, and attractive, with great groves of walnuts and mulberries, fine streams, and extensive grazing-lands. Two or three leagues distant from

FERDINAND DE SOTO

the village was another, the houses in which were abodes of bats and owls, for it had been abandoned by the Indians on account of a pestilence which had swept the land. In the old town were many sepulchres, filled, the natives told the Spaniards, with treasures of various sorts, such as skins of fur-bearing animals and pearls. Despite the pestilence, of which many of the inmates of these sepulchres had died, they were ravaged by the soldiers, who secured vast quantities of pearls, which they later threw away or lost on the march.

“The cacica,” says one of her guests, “observing that the Christians valued pearls, told the governor that, if he cared to order those sepulchres searched that were in her town, he would find many; and if he chose to send to those that were in the abandoned towns, he might load all his horses with them. They examined those that were in the town, and found three hundred and fifty pounds’ weight of pearls, and figures of babies and birds made of them.”

There were found, also, breastplates, glass beads, and armor. When the governor exclaimed at the sight of so many pearls, the cacica simply said: “Do you consider that of

THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS

much account? Go, then, to Talimico, another village of mine about a league from this, and you will find so many that your horses cannot carry them." The governor replied: "Let them stay there, then. To whom God gives a gift, may St. Peter bless it." With this enigmatical reply, it is thought, he would have diverted attention from this deposit of pearls, with the intention, perhaps, of returning to secure them at a more convenient time.

"That same day," wrote Rodrigo Ranjel, his secretary, "the governor and some of his staff entered a mosque and oratory of this heathen people, and, opening some burying-places, they found some bodies of men fastened on a barbacoa. Their breasts, necks, arms, and legs were adorned with pearls; and as they were taking them off, Ranjel saw something green, like an emerald of good quality, and he showed it to the governor, who was much rejoiced, and he ordered him to look out of the enclosure and call Juan de Añasco, their majesties' treasurer. Then Ranjel said to him, 'My lord, let us not call any one, for it may be that this is a precious stone or jewel.'

"The governor replied somewhat angrily,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

and said, 'Even if it be one, are we to steal it?' When Juan de Añasco came they took out this supposed emerald, and it was but a bit of glass, and there were also other and many beads of glass, as well as rosaries with their crosses. They also found Biscayan axes of iron; from all this recognizing that they were in the territory where the lawyer, Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon, came to his ruin. . . . In the mosque, or house of worship, at Talimico, there were found breastplates resembling corselets, and head-pieces made of raw-hide with the hair scraped off, also very good shields."

The axes, armor, and beads were, doubtless, relics of the ill-fated expedition of Vasquez de Ayllon, a lawyer from Santo Domingo, who had landed on the coast of what is now South Carolina in quest of Indian slaves. One cargo had been sent to Santo Domingo; but on the second voyage, Ayllon and his companions were set upon and massacred, to the number of more than two hundred, and the rich plunder was probably distributed among the tribes of the coast. No survivor of that expedition was found by De Soto; but these relics show that he had reached a point within a few days'

THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS

journey of the Atlantic coast, near the mouth of the Savannah River.

It appeared to some of De Soto's captains that the province of Cofachiqui would be a good one for a settlement. While the soil was not very fertile, yet it was good enough for their purpose, and while the colony was being established on a sure foundation, it might be supported by the pearl fisheries, and by trade opened direct with Spain.

"But Soto, as it was his object to find another treasure like that of Atabalipa, lord of Peru, would not be content with good lands, or pearls, even though many of them were worth their weight in gold; so he answered them who urged him to make a settlement, that in all the country together there was not support for his troops a single month; that it was necessary to return to Acusi (Pensacola), where Maldonado was to wait; and should a richer country not be found, they who would could always return; and in their absence the Indians would plant their fields and be better provided with maize."

Still, the governor was not insensible to the charms of the province, nor to the blandish-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

ments of its beautiful cacica, whose admiration for the handsome cavalier amounted at first almost to worship. She not only entertained him hospitably, but she endeavored to induce her mother, the queen-regent, to visit her and see for herself what wonderful creatures were these beings who had honored her with their attentions. But the mother of the princess was a widow, and wary. The more she was urged to emerge from her retreat and show herself, the farther she retired into the forest depths. Learning that she was a woman of superior attainments, and that she possessed vast quantities of pearls, De Soto was very earnest in his efforts to draw her from the forest. He despatched the trusty Añasco with a troop, and the princess sent with him a young man, her cousin, as guide. He resembled the beautiful princess, it is said, bore himself with dignity, and was garbed as became a member of the royal family.

It was noticed that the young prince departed on his mission with reluctance, though he received the request of the cacica as a command which he must obey. He led the Spaniards along the bank of a river, and at noon they rested in a grove

THE PRINCESS AND HER PEARLS

of walnut-trees, where lunch was spread. After the meal was over, the guide took the quiver from his shoulder, and drew out the arrows in it, one by one. He looked them all over thoughtfully, and the Spaniards gathered about to admire them, for they were superior to any they had ever seen. Some were barbed with flint, and some with crystal, while the shafts of all were highly polished and tipped with feathers. At length he drew forth an arrow dagger-pointed, though the barb was of flint. This, without a word, he plunged into his throat, and fell prostrate, bleeding from a mortal wound.

The Spaniards were at first unable to conjecture the cause of this action on the part of the youth; but it developed that, while he was a favorite of the princess, he was also deeply attached to the queen-mother, whom the Spaniards intended to kidnap. As they could succeed only through his aid, he resolved to extricate himself from the perplexing situation in which he was placed by committing suicide. Thus the attempt to secure the queen-regent was frustrated, for no one else could guide the Spaniards to her hiding-place. De Soto, it is said, mourned the death of the high-spirited youth; but not

FERDINAND DE SOTO

long after he confirmed the suspicions that chivalrous savage had formed of his intentions by carrying away as a captive the generous princess to whom he was so deeply in debt for inestimable favors.

XIV

DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

1540

THE generosity of the cacica was excessive, for the Spaniards lacked nothing that her kingdom could supply. When she learned from the interpreters that De Soto cared for gold above all other things, she told them that in a remote district of her territory there was a large deposit of yellow and shining metal, and she thought it must be that of which they were in search. She hoped so, at least, and if it proved to be, they had only to dig up and take away all they desired. So she sent some Indians for the "precious metal," who returned a few days later with as much as they could carry on their backs. The Spaniards, says their historian, did not have any acid, or touchstone, for testing the metal; but it did not need an expert to perceive that this was not gold the Indians had brought them, but an

FERDINAND DE SOTO

alloy of copper; and what they supposed, from the descriptions, might be silver, proved to be nothing but mica and crystals of quartz.

The Spaniards were bitterly disappointed, but the princess was grieved, and it was to console them that she gave permission for the desecration of the royal sepulchres. When De Soto and a retinue of his captains visited the tombs of Talimico, they were surprised to find them within an edifice a hundred paces in length and forty in breadth. The roof was of reeds, but lofty, and the entrances were guarded by statues of wood excellently carved, and about twelve feet in height. They were probably effigies of the warriors who reposed here, their mouldering remains contained in wooden chests, or caskets, like those which Juan Ortiz was set to guard, in the distant province governed by Ucita.

Besides the pearls, of which mention has been made already, there were robes of dressed skins, valuable furs, and rich mantles made of feathers and flax. All these articles had been placed here by the Indians in order that their chiefs and caciques, when they passed to the unknown region above, might

DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

carry with them the wealth they possessed on earth. Thus it will be seen that, whatever mistakes their superstitions may have led them into, the Cofachiquis were violating their most cherished traditions when they allowed the Spaniards to ravish the graves of their great warriors. This was their Valhalla, their Pantheon, and around it were clustered memories that must have been tender and sacred.

But even to this extent the generous nature of the cacica carried her, in the desire to serve her guests and promote their welfare. More than fourteen bushels of pearls were found in the sepulchres, according to the historians, and though most of them had lost their lustre by having been long buried, this fact did not detract from the value of the gift. The Spaniards were given permission to carry away everything they found, and, base and perfidious to the last degree, they so perverted the noble intention of the offer as to carry off the cacica herself!

By the time the spoils had been divided, and the lustrous pearls sifted out from those which had been injured by burial in the earth, or by fire used in opening the shells that contained them, the princess had dis-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

covered the true nature of her visitors, and meditated flight. It was quite natural that she should have grown cold and indifferent; but the Spaniards attributed the change to distrust, or treachery, and when De Soto was told that she refused to furnish guides and carriers for the army beyond the frontiers of her province, he took prompt measures to secure her person. It was his custom, as we have seen, to insure the services and fidelity of whatever people he was travelling among by seizing and holding in durance their chief or leader; but in this instance the action was hardly necessary as a precaution, and was assuredly a gross insult to the friendly Cofachiquis.

“On May 3, 1540,” wrote the Fidalgo of Elvas, “the governor set out from Cutifachiqui [Cofachiqui], and, it being discovered that the wish of the cacica was to leave the Christians, if she could, giving them neither guides nor carriers, because of the outrages committed upon the inhabitants (there never failing to be men of low degree among the many who will put the lives of themselves and others in jeopardy for some mean interest), the governor ordered that she should be put under guard, and took her with him.

DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

“This treatment was not a proper return for the hospitable welcome he had received; but thus she was carried away, on foot, with her female slaves. This brought us service in all the places that we passed, she ordering the Indians to come and take the loads from town to town. We travelled through her territories a hundred leagues, in which, according to what we saw, she was greatly obeyed, whatsoever she ordered being performed with diligence and efficiency.”

This offence of De Soto has been condoned by some, with the remark that he treated the princess with deference and bound her with “silken chains,” figuratively speaking; but she was a prisoner, nevertheless, having been made one against her will, and in violation of the most sacred rites of hospitality. She was constantly guarded, and her privacy invaded, though she was provided with a beautiful palanquin and allowed the attendance of her serving - maids. But neither princess nor maidens were the same as before the advent of the Spaniards; no longer the shy and fawnlike creatures who had greeted the cavaliers with downcast eyes and murmured welcomes. They spoke but seldom, they no longer sang, nor wove gar-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

lands for their favorites, as formerly, for their hearts were heavy. Silent and sad, the beautiful cacica was borne along in her palanquin, on the shoulders of her dejected warriors, while the maidens walked sullenly by her side. In this manner nearly three hundred miles were travelled, the governor going he knew not whither, save that he still sought for the yellow gold that had been the ruin of so many of his countrymen.

The general direction of the march, after leaving the cacica's capital, was north, and then northwest, across the present state of Georgia. The province of Achalaque, which the Spaniards reached after seven days' travel, is supposed to have been the so-called barren country of the Cherokees, and was "the poorest off for maize of any that was seen in Florida. The inhabitants subsisted on roots that they dug in the wilds, and on the animals they destroyed with their arrows." Their poverty was such that, when the cacique presented De Soto with two tanned deer-skins, he seemed to think it a very great gift. But the wild creatures of the woods were very abundant, such as turkeys and prairie-hens, of which latter seven hundred were presented to the Spaniards in a single village.

DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

As the western boundaries of her province were approached, the cacica grew nervous and uneasy, for she doubted the word of De Soto, that he would release her on the confines of her dominion, and she was seen to talk more than usual with her maidens. Taking advantage of a curve in the trail one day, as they were passing through a dense forest, the captive princess suddenly sprang from the palanquin, and, with her faithful females, hid in a thicket at the head of a ravine. All search for them was fruitless, for when hunted up they scattered like a covey of quail, and were quite as successful in concealing themselves. They were found and joined by a band of the cacica's warriors, who had skulked through the forest for this very purpose, and, though more than three hundred miles from their homes, finally reached them in safety. The cacica's departure was greatly lamented by De Soto; not from any considerations of a sentimental nature, but because she had taken with her, in her flight, besides two negro slaves and a Barbary Moor, a *petaca*, or small chest of pearls, which, never having been pierced or exposed to fire, were of extraordinary value and beauty.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Pearls, however, were a "drug in the market" at that time and in the circumstances which beset the Spaniards, having no value unless they could be exchanged for provisions. It is told of a foot-soldier named Juan Terron, that, becoming tired of carrying a bag of beautiful pearls which he had taken from one of the sepulchres, he offered bag and contents, weighing more than six pounds, to a comrade on horse-back.

"Nay, nay, Juan Terron," said the trooper. "Though I can carry them, still you had better keep them yourself. When next the governor sends to Havana, you can purchase, with the half of them, the finest horse in the island, and need no longer go afoot. Six pounds of pearls—verily, a king's ransom!"

"Whether they be so or no, here they go," exclaimed Terron, untying the mouth of the bag and whirling it about his head, with the result that all the pearls were scattered on the ground. Most of them were lost, as only thirty were recovered by the soldiers, who hastily scrambled for them; and when it was seen how fine they were, their former owner was bantered unmercifully. He finally be-

DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

came sensible of his folly, especially after the governor had rebuked him severely for his insensate act; but it gave rise to a saying in the army, "There are no pearls for Juan Terron," which passed into a proverb.

The two black runaways were recovered, but the lovely cacica and her maids were never beheld by the Spaniards again. As time passed, and the toilsome march still continued, apparently without end or aim, many a sigh was sent after them by the weary soldiers, who thought with regret of the prospects cast away by the governor when he turned his back upon the land of pearls. The thoughts of De Soto himself were not divulged; but doubtless he felt he had made a mistake, though his pride would not permit him to acknowledge it.

"He was an inflexible man, and dry of word," wrote one who was with him at the time, "who, although he liked to know what the others all thought and had to say, after he once said a thing he did not like to be opposed; and as he ever acted as he thought best, all bent to his will. For, though it seemed an error to leave that country, when another might have been found about it on which all the people could have been sus-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

tained until the crops had been made and the grain gathered, there was none who would say a thing to him after it became known that he had made up his mind."

Thus he marched on, grim and inflexible, regretting, perhaps, that he had treated the cacica so harshly, though outwardly he gave no sign, excusing himself on the grounds of expediency. The next province belonged to the cacique of Ichiaha, who sent word that he had collected a great quantity of maize and mulberries for the Spaniards, and would meet them with a retinue of warriors. His country was fertile and well watered, with beautiful valleys and extensive savannas. His maize-fields were seemingly boundless in extent, and when his chief village was reached there were twenty barbacoas full of the golden grain, which were placed at De Soto's disposal.

At the head of five hundred plumed and stately warriors, the cacique met the Spaniards two miles from his village, which was set in a valley among the hills. It contained about three hundred houses, the largest of which, the cacique's palace, was perched upon an artificial mound surrounded by a spacious terrace. Towards this mound, after

DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

fraternally greeting De Soto and his officers, the chieftain ordered his warriors to lead the way. As they approached it they parted column, and the Spaniards marched between their ranks, with banners flying and bugles blowing, to the quarters assigned them.

They remained here many days, during the month of June, in fact, literally living on the "fat of the land." "We found here," says one of the company, "an abundance of lard, in calabashes, drawn like olive-oil, which the inhabitants said was the fat of bears. There was likewise found much oil of walnuts, which, like the lard, was clear and of good taste; and also a honey-comb, which the Christians had never seen before in this country, nor saw they afterwards, nor honey, nor bees."

The Indian huts proving too confined, a camp was pitched in a grove of mulberry-trees between the hills, in front of which was a verdant meadow, where the lean and famishing steeds were turned loose to feast and recuperate. While the men and horses were refreshing themselves, De Soto was diligently inquiring for the gold-mines, which were reputed to be in the hills or mountains of this province. They lay, the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

cacique informed him, about thirty miles to the northward; but the intervening country was a mere wilderness, and the mountains said to contain the mines were so rugged that no horse could travel in that region.

By his advice, therefore, two sturdy soldiers were sent to explore, on foot and accompanied by guides. They were absent ten days, but returned in safety, though without any gold, of which, however, they thought they had discovered traces here and there. What they brought back with them was not gold, but ore of copper; thus again was the governor disappointed. The precious metal has been found in that province in times more recent; but not in such quantities as De Soto had hoped to discover it. The natives then had a few articles, in the shape of hatchets and "chopping-knives," of gold alloyed with copper, but no ornaments or jewels.

Nearly all the streams of this province, and they were quite numerous, abounded in the fresh-water mussels which yielded the precious pearls. The cacique of Ichiaha, one day, threw over De Soto's broad shoulders a string of pearls a fathom in length. Some of them were as large as filbert-nuts,

DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

and of perfect shape, but had been injured by boring, with the aid of fire, in order that they might be strung as necklaces. If the governor desired more and better pearls, said the cacique, he might seek them in the sepulchres of his ancestors, where were countless thousands.

The governor replied, with an affectation of horror at the thought, that he would never consent to such an act of desecration as ravishing the royal tombs, but that he should like to see how the pearls were obtained. Struck by the consideration manifested by his guest, the obliging cacique at once despatched forty large canoes to fish for pearl-oysters during the night. In the morning he and De Soto repaired to the river-side, accompanied by their officers, and there the Spaniards witnessed the operation of opening the oysters, or mussels. Fires had been made of hard wood, and upon their glowing coals were placed the shell-fish brought ashore in the canoes. They were quickly opened by the heat, and from their gaping mouths the pearls were taken out, some of them as large as peas, and presented to De Soto.

After the cacique had gratified his guest

FERDINAND DE SOTO

with this exhibition, he invited him to his house, where a repast was set forth at which the mussels were served in various dishes. While the meal was in progress, one of the soldiers at the lower end of the table uttered an exclamation, and, taking something from his mouth, after showing it to his companions, rose and went towards De Soto. "See, my lord," he said. "Here is a pearl that neither fire nor smoke has injured, for I just now found it within an oyster I was eating."

"Truly, my man," answered the governor, "it is large, and white, and beautiful. In Spain, I doubt not, it would bring four hundred ducats. Save it till we have occasion to send to the Havana, and there I will procure thee its value."

"Nay, my lord. Allow me, rather, to present it to our lady patroness, Doña Isabel, whom we all hold in great esteem."

"Not so," rejoined De Soto. "While I appreciate thy generosity, my son, I cannot allow thee to rob thyself. Keep it, then, and I myself will remit to the king his fifth part in thy stead."

Thus the soldier's liberal disposition brought him the regard of his commander,

DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

who, high - minded and generous himself, knew how to appreciate worth in others.

Another incident, though a sad one, that occurred at this time, emphasizes the fact that all the men of De Soto's command were youthful, or in the prime of life, for it relates to one Juan Mateos, who was the only man among them whose hair was gray. While De Soto and the cacique were inspecting the pearl-fisheries, gray-haired Juan Mateos slipped into the thicket and cut a cane, with which, by the aid of a line twisted from some flax, and an improvised hook, he went fishing. As he was sitting quietly on the bank, concealed in the long grasses, one of the cavaliers named Luis Bravo darted his lance at a small animal he saw a short distance away. As ill-luck would have it, the weapon missed the animal, but struck poor Juan Mateos in the temple, killing him instantly. Thus the Spaniards lost "Father Juan"—as he was called on account of his gray hairs—the oldest man in the army, but probably not more than fifty years of age at the time of his death.

Having nearly exhausted the resources of this generous host, and, very wisely, desiring to depart before he had wholly done so,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

De Soto announced his intention to proceed on his journey. The cacique of Ichiaha would have detained him, having conceived a great liking for the governor; but it was then midsummer (the first week in July, 1540), and a great distance yet remained to be traversed before cold weather set in. Whence he was going, and wherefore, De Soto could not inform his friend; but doubtless his intention was to describe a great circuit and make his winter quarters at Pensacola, where the brigantines were instructed to meet him in the month of October. Hence he followed the banks of the Coosa River, and constantly bore southwardly, on a westerly course, going farther and farther from the Atlantic and towards the Gulf of Mexico.

The next province to Ichiaha was that of Acoste, the cacique of which awaited the coming of De Soto in the great square of his chief town, with more than fifteen hundred warriors. He was fierce and warlike, his braves were well armed and insolent of manner; but while the two armies were confronting each other, some vagabond soldiers or camp-followers began pillaging the huts, without giving a thought to the possible

DE SOTO'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

consequences. The women who lived in the huts raised an outcry, at which many of the braves seized their war-clubs and set upon the vagabonds most lustily. De Soto, at the time, was well in advance of the main body, with a small retinue only. Perceiving his peril, should the cacique's warriors become exasperated and attack him, he sought to divert their attention by himself falling upon the soldiers who had caused the disturbance and beating them soundly.

XV

THE GREAT CHIEF, TUSCALOOSA

1540

THE cacique of Acoste and his warriors greatly enjoyed the spectacle of the governor beating his own men, being so diverted thereby that they neglected to secure him a prisoner while he was in their power. When they awoke to the fact, it was too late, for, meanwhile, De Soto had sent a message to the main army, which came hurrying forward to his rescue. Then their positions were reversed, for the cacique found himself a prisoner, together with his chiefs. He was greatly taken aback, and at first was disposed to be ugly; but when the governor explained to him that it was his custom to honor every cacique he met, by surrounding him with an armed guard, he became quite tractable. A message arrived from Ichiaha at this juncture, informing him of what had occurred in that province, and

THE GREAT CHIEF, TUSCALOOSA

he immediately gave orders for supplies of maize to be furnished the Spaniards, at the same time assuring De Soto that he and his people were entirely at his service. He was then liberated, and he not only calmed the ruffled feelings of his warriors, but assisted the Spaniards in crossing the river, by furnishing them with rafts and canoes.

The Spaniards were then in the province of Cosa, or Coosa, a name which is now applied to a county of Alabama, through which, doubtless, De Soto passed on his way to Pensacola. It was a vast and fertile province, also very populous, and nearly every night, during several weeks, the Spaniards encamped at or near an Indian village, the inhabitants of which received them hospitably, supplied them with provisions, and furnished carriers from one place to another, so that there was no need of demanding either, and no conflicts occurred by the way, of any kind whatever.

Such a rich and fruitful country the Spaniards had not seen in many a day. The fields of Indian-corn were of unknown extent, their green billows sweeping away to the horizon on every side, and there were beans and pumpkins, mulberries, wild plums, and

FERDINAND DE SOTO

grapes, in great variety. In the centre of the province was the village of Coosa, which was reached by the army about the last of July. The cacique had sent numerous and friendly messages to De Soto, and "came out to receive him at the distance of two bow-shots from the town," borne in a litter on the shoulders of four chiefs, and surrounded by many attendants playing upon flutes, singing, and dancing. Over his shoulders he wore a rich robe of marten-skins, and on his head a diadem with plumes. He was a young man, with a winning and expressive countenance, and behind him marched at least a thousand warriors, tall and stately men, with feathers adorning their head-dresses. When arrived opposite the governor he made a little speech of welcome, and together they set out for the village, the Indian chieftain in his palanquin and De Soto riding alongside on his war-horse.

Coosa was advantageously located for a colony, though a long distance from the sea-coast. De Soto was urged by his new friend to remain there, but he was anxious to meet Maldonado at the bay of Pensacola, and, though deeply sensible of the cacique's kindness, felt constrained to refuse his offer

THE GREAT CHIEF, TUSCALOOSA

of territory. He remained with him twenty days, and when he departed took the cacique with him, an "honorable hostage," but actually a prisoner. As the narrators are divided on this point, we would allow De Soto, again, the benefit of the doubt; but two of them are agreed that the cacique was constrained to go against his will. One, his own secretary, says: "The Indians went off and left their chief in the power of the Christians, with some principal men, and the Spaniards went out to round them up, and they took many, and they put them in iron collars and chains. And verily, according to the testimony of eye-witnesses, it was a grievous thing to see. But God failed not to remember every evil deed; nor were they left unpunished, as this history will tell." "When they reached the frontiers of his territory," says the Fidalgo of Elvas, "the chief was released; but he went in anger and in tears, because the governor would not give up a sister of his that they took, and because they had taken him so far from his country."

Another account, and that which we would rather believe, is to the effect that the cacique of Coosa went with De Soto to punish a re-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

fractory sub-chief, who was disposed to transfer his allegiance to a more powerful ruler named Tuscaloosa. This redoubtable chieftain, whose name, in Choctaw, is said to mean the great Black Warrior, governed the territory now chiefly comprised in the states of Alabama and Mississippi. He was probably a Choctaw, and the most haughty and warlike of his tribe. He had heard, through his scouts and runners, of the arrivals on his frontier, and sent his son to meet them. Though only eighteen years of age, this youth was taller than any Spaniard in the army, agile and strong. He was kindly received by De Soto, who entertained him at a banquet and gave him a quantity of beads, as a present for his father. When he returned to Tuscaloosa, he was accompanied by Luis de Moscoso, master of the camp, and fifteen cavalry, who were to observe what they could and report to De Soto, who followed leisurely after and encamped in a grove two leagues from the cacique's town.

Apprised by a courier from De Soto that the Spaniards were approaching, Chief Tuscaloosa took his stand on the crest of a hill which commanded a wide and beautiful prospect, and, seated on a concave block of

THE GREAT CHIEF, TUSCALOOSA

wood, which was his chair of state, or throne, awaited the coming of the strangers. Around him were his chief commanders, to the number of a hundred, while on the plain below lay his army, containing many thousand men. By his side stood a young warrior, who held aloft a lance, upon which was supported a banner of dressed deer-skin, dyed in bright colors and extended by crossed sticks to the shape and size of a Spanish buckler.

Tuscaloosa was a man of commanding appearance, and, though more than seven feet in height, was so symmetrically proportioned that he might have been chosen as a model of manly beauty. He was taller than any of his people by more than a foot; but, though his shoulders were broad and massive, his waist was slender, while his hands and feet were small and well moulded. His eyes and hair were black as coal; his face was expressive and intelligent; but his mouth was large, with teeth ivory-white and fanglike, giving him the appearance of a cannibal.

When the cavaliers attending De Soto pranced before him, forcing their horses to curvet and caracole, he paid no more attention to them than the Inca of Peru had be-

FERDINAND DE SOTO

stowed upon their commander himself in the environs of Cassamarca. He remained unmoved, hardly deigning to give them a glance; but when De Soto approached he extended his hand in welcome. He thanked him for the gifts he had sent, declaring that he esteemed them the more highly because they were from one whom he "regarded as a brother." The two conversed awhile, then, hand-in-hand, wended their way to the village, where quarters were assigned the troops, and a house given to the governor next to that occupied by the chieftain. There was no lack of hospitality in Tuscaloosa's town, but the coldness and hauteur of the cacique kept De Soto constantly on guard. He cautioned his captains to post their sentinels discreetly and not for an instant relax their vigilance, as he felt certain the cacique meditated treachery. He had observed him in close and frequent converse with his sub-chiefs, and had noticed that warriors were gathering from every quarter.

After remaining two days in the village, De Soto gave the order to march, and with him went Tuscaloosa, either voluntarily or as a hostage. The town of Talise, or that

THE GREAT CHIEF, TUSCALOOSA

first entered by the Spaniards, was on the frontier; forty or fifty miles farther lay the capital, Tuscaloosa; and still farther, by several days' march, was Mauvila, his great stronghold. Whether the cacique went along a prisoner or not, he was mounted on a horse and accompanied the governor unfettered of limb or movement. Considerable difficulty was experienced in finding a steed sufficiently strong to bear his mighty frame; but finally he was placed upon a pack-horse, the sturdiest beast in the troop, and, while his feet nearly touched the ground, he rode proudly, though fearsomely, at the head of the cavalcade. One of the governor's gifts to the cacique was a voluminous robe, scarlet in color, and a mantle to match, which, together with the chieftain's gigantic size and lofty plumes, made him "the observed of all observers." He might have been pardoned for indulging in a feeling of pride, even of exultation, for he out-matched De Soto in size and gorgeous garments, while in his heart he believed he was leading him to destruction. He coveted those wonderful animals, the horses, the armor and the weapons of the Spaniards, and after Mauvila was reached he determined to effect their capture.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Tuscaloosa town, like Talise, was built on a peninsula formed by the windings of a river supposed to be the Alabama. It was a place of strength, but not so strong as Mauvila, which, though it stood on a plain, was fortified with palisados. A short stay was made there, but only long enough to cross the river in canoes and on rafts furnished by the Indians. Thence the route lay through a very populous country, dotted with hamlets and swarming with warriors who, loosely gathered in troops and detached bands though they were, yet seemed converging towards a common centre, which was Mauvila. A few hundred only accompanied Tuscaloosa and the Spaniards; but the chieftain was proudly confident in his strength, for he knew that at a signal the fields and the forests would be alive with his hardy warriors, who by sheer force of numbers would overcome the Spaniards and destroy them utterly.

It was, perhaps, difficult for the grim cacique to restrain his wild braves, scattered as they were throughout the wilderness, and though he desired to commit no overt act until fully prepared to carry out the scheme of destruction in its entirety, a few of the

THE GREAT CHIEF, TUSCALOOSA

Spaniards disappeared, having probably been murdered by Indians in ambush. Two soldiers were missing one morning, and Tuscaloosa was asked if he knew what had become of them.

"Do I know?" he growled. "Why should I know? I have people of my own to care for. Why do you ask me about yours? Did I ask you to place them in my charge? I am not their keeper. Look for them yourself."

The Spaniards looked, but in vain. The missing soldiers never answered at roll-call, nor were they heard of again. De Soto's suspicions were confirmed by several circumstances on the march, and he exchanged hard words with Tuscaloosa, who finally became sullen and refused to speak after he had been taxed with treachery, but continued to supply the Spaniards with provisions and carriers, though acceding to their requisitions with evident impatience.

It was plain to the governor that the cacique was anticipating his arrival at Mauvila, and could scarce contain himself until the town was reached. It lay above the confluence of the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers, less than a hundred miles from Pensacola. What the exact distance was

FERDINAND DE SOTO

De Soto did not know, but he and his soldiers realized that they were nearing the projected rendezvous with Maldonado, and were already looking forward to a period of rest, as well as to news of their loved ones in Havana and Spain.

For, in the bay of Pensacola, Maldonado was to meet them with the brigantines, in the month of October. That month had already arrived, as it was on the 18th that they reached the town of Mauvila. After a few days here, devoted to rest and recuperation, they hoped to strike directly southward for the gulf. Already, they imagined, they could feel the sea-breezes kiss their cheeks, hear the roaring of the surf, and the cries of sea-birds as they skimmed the waves.

XVI

DESPERATE ENCOUNTER AT MAUVILA

1540

MAUVILA, the cacique Tuscaloosa's stronghold, was more like a fortress than a town. It contained eighty or a hundred houses; but they were huge, barrack-like structures, capable of holding from five hundred to a thousand people each, and were surrounded by an immense wall made of tree-trunks planted in the ground, wattled with vines, and plastered together with mud. Square towers, with platforms inside for fighting-men, rose above the wall at intervals of fifty paces or so, and it was pierced with numerous loop-holes, through which darts and arrows might be discharged.

As De Soto viewed this rude fortress, which seemed erected as a citadel for final defence, he acknowledged to himself that nothing short of artillery could breach its woven walls, and that it would be next to

FERDINAND DE SOTO

impossible to carry it by assault. He hoped there would be no occasion for attempting such a thing; but as it is a soldier's duty to consider every contingency, he looked Mauvila over with a critical eye. He noted that there were but two gates, or entrance-ways, and these were strongly defended; while outside the walls the ground had been cleared of all trees, and even shrubs, so that, for more than a musket-shot around the town, there was no spot in which an enemy could hide.

Sentinels were posted on the walls, and as De Soto (with his advance-guard only, comprising about a hundred men) approached the eastern gateway, troops of warriors swarmed forth to greet him. They were all fighting-men, and fully armed; but grim-visaged war was skilfully masked by bands of native musicians, lustily pounding wooden drums and evoking shrill sounds from Indian fifes, while be vies of graceful dancing-girls capered around and among them.

The warriors deployed on either side the gateway, while Tuscaloosa led the way within, the reluctant governor still by his side, but with suspicions all aroused. His martial instinct sounded the alarm; but though a scout whom he had sent in advance sought

DESPERATE ENCOUNTER AT MAUVILA

his side and reported that a dark and treacherous plot was brewing, he was compelled by circumstances to go with the chief. Ten thousand warriors were already assembled within the town, the scout informed him, the pick of Tuscaloosa's fighting-men, and armed to the teeth. They were concealed in the largest houses, which, he said, were veritable arsenals, filled with weapons of every sort. If the governor would look around him, he would see that, while the streets were alive with men-of-arms, there was hardly a single woman or child—in a word, scarcely a non-combatant—left within the walls. These had been strengthened, the towers filled with armed men, and quivers full of arrows hung at convenient stations.

Never before, perhaps, had De Soto walked deliberately into such a trap, and prepared, too, by one whom he already suspected. Still, he could not do else than dissemble; and when the cacique, with a grim smile that bared his cannibal fangs, indicated one of the houses as quarters for the governor and his officers, he thanked him courteously. He even consented to the tethering of their steeds and the encamping of the troops at a distance outside the walls, though he knew

FERDINAND DE SOTO

that this division of his army, separating officers from their horses and both from the main body of foot and cavalry, might insure their swift destruction.

Having disposed his guests to his satisfaction, the cacique dismounted, and was about to depart, when De Soto halted him with a request that he remain and share his quarters, also the noonday meal, which would soon be ready. Drawing himself up to his full height, and wrapping around his burly form the scarlet robe which the governor had given him, Tuscaloosa replied, with a snarl: "I have had enough of your company; I am tired of walking and of riding. This is my own land, and not any of it is yours. So, go you in peace, and when you will; but do not think that I, Tuscaloosa, shall go with you out of my own country. I shall stay in my stronghold." With these words, or others to their purport, the haughty chieftain strode away and entered a house which had been observed to be filled with Indians armed with bows and arrows.

The governor bit his lip with vexation; but he was, at the moment, helpless, for the main body of the army, including many of the cavalry and all the infantry, was yet at

DESPERATE ENCOUNTER AT MAUVILA

a distance. Captain Luis de Moscoso, master of the camp, had command of the rear-guard, and was responsible for its dilatory movements. He had said to the governor, that morning, that, since the Indians were so evil-disposed, it would be better to camp in the woods, to which De Soto had answered: "I am impatient of sleeping out, and purpose to lodge in the town." And he had his way, as he always had it, with the result that we have noted. While Moscoso and the main body were lagging behind in the forest, the governor was being consumed with anxiety. At any moment the trap might be sprung, the fire-brand be thrown, that would explode the mine beneath his feet.

Yet, with a calm countenance, he ordered his baggage taken to quarters and dinner prepared. It had been his custom to have the cacique at meals with him, as well as within sight all the time. When dinner was announced he sent the interpreter, Juan Ortiz, to call him, but he was not allowed to enter the house in which the cacique had concealed himself, though a young warrior promised to give him the message. After a while of waiting, De Soto sent again, and, receiving no satisfactory reply, despatched

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Ortiz a third time on his errand. This time, though he was again halted at the door of the house, he shouted so loud that all within might hear: "Tell the chief, Tuscaloosa, to come forth; for the food is on the table, and his excellency is tired of waiting."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than an Indian brave burst through the doorway, and, shaking his fists menacingly at Ortiz, exclaimed furiously: "Who are these robbers, these vagabonds, who keep calling to my chief, 'Tastalusa come out, come out!' as if he were one of them? By the Sun, our god, and the Moon, his wife, such insolence cannot longer be borne! Come out, brothers, come out, and let us cut them to pieces!"

His eyes flashed fire, he frothed at the mouth; but he may have meant nothing more than mere bravado. Still, when an Indian behind him placed a bow with arrows in his hand, he threw back his cloak of marten-skin, which hung over one shoulder, and made as if to use the weapons instantly. Fixing an arrow on the string, he drew it to its head, and was about to let fly at a group of Spaniards gathered in the square. In doing this he exposed his naked side, and Baltasar de Gallegos, a cavalier who had come with

DESPERATE ENCOUNTER AT MAUVILA

Ortiz, gave him such a gash with his sword that it was laid open in a gaping wound, through which his life-blood gushed in a crimson flood.

He fell dead on the spot; but an avenger appeared in the person of his son, a noble-looking youth, who sent six or seven arrows at Gallegos as fast as he could speed them. Seeing that they glanced harmless from his armor, he rained blows from his bow upon the helmeted head of the cavalier, with such force that the blood ran down his forehead. But he was soon laid low beside his father, with two thrusts of the sword, and the dazed Gallegos retreated with what speed he could.

At the same instant, as if at a preconcerted signal, a terrible war-whoop burst from ten thousand throats, and the concealed warriors poured forth into the streets. They attacked the Spaniards furiously, giving them scant time to seize their arms, and cutting off the cavalry from their horses, which were tethered outside the walls.

All within the town ran for the gates, and the governor was by no means a laggard in the race, though, encumbered by his armor as he was, he fell twice or thrice before he

FERDINAND DE SOTO

reached his horse. Leaping to the saddle and cutting loose the reins, he shouted to the soldiers: "Into the open, sons!—into the open! Draw the heathen away from the walls and then make a stand and fall upon them!" Some of the troopers followed him, and a little band was gathered; but some others were not so fortunate, for, unable to gain their mounts, they lost their horses, as they were shot to death with arrows, and most of them lost their lives.

De Soto received a severe wound early in the action, an arrow having struck him in the thigh; but, though unable to sit in his saddle, and compelled to fight standing in his stirrups, he continued in active conflict nine long hours, during which time the battle raged unceasingly. His wound was very painful; but he ignored it in the heat of battle, and his concern for himself was swallowed up in that for his men. Among those killed that day were his two nephews, Carlos Enriquez and Diego de Soto. Both were shot with Indian arrows, the one in the eye and the other in the neck.

Having drawn many of the savages out into the plain, De Soto turned upon them with his cavaliers and inflicted great slaugh-

DESPERATE ENCOUNTER AT MAUVILA

ter before they could regain the gates. The survivors retreated precipitately within the walls, and, shutting the gates, greeted the Spaniards with howls of defiance and derision. They considered themselves safe from attack, within their impregnable stronghold, and, having secured nearly all the baggage of the command, which had been brought in by the carriers, they proceeded to divide the plunder. As fast as the carriers came in, they had relieved them of their burdens, which they took inside the walls; then they broke their chains, and, placing weapons in their hands, sent them to join Mauvila's defenders.

In the midst of the tumult, the advance of the rear-guard, under Moscoso, came up, and, when all had arrived, a cordon was formed about the doomed stronghold, through which it was next to impossible for the invested force to break. As the fortress was well provisioned, the beleaguered Indians did not concern themselves as to the immediate future, but seemed to have resolved to await the dispersion of the Spaniards. Then they would sally forth and fall upon them in the forest, by their great numbers overcoming any advantage the strangers might have as to weapons and armor.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

But they did not understand those iron-hearted men of Spain, who never retired in defeat, who ever fought on to a victory. The savages had made it impossible for them to retire from the field, since they held their baggage, which contained, not alone all their surplus armor and clothing, their plunder of pearls, medicines, bandages for binding up wounds, and surgical instruments, but also many swords and arquebuses, which the careless soldiers had forced the porters to carry when weary with their weight.

Moreover, it was awesomely told De Soto that, in the hurry and confusion of the retreat, a small body of men had been left behind in the house he had occupied. There were five halberdiers and three cross-bow-men of the governor's guard, besides a friar, a priest, and two Indian slaves. These were in peril, and unless promptly succored would certainly be slain. Arms and equipment De Soto might, perchance, leave behind, but never a man of his command so long as there was hope that his life might be saved. Then, doubtless, the governor wished for the one piece of artillery which he had left with the cacique of Cofaqui, for with it he might have battered the walls and opened a breach

DESPERATE ENCOUNTER AT MAUVILA

through which to rush to the rescue of his comrades.

But rescued they must be—they should be—with the falconet or without it. He circled the walls in vain, looking for a weak place or any kind of an opening. Then he drew rein just out of bowshot from the eastern gate. “We must storm it,” he sternly said. “One hundred with bucklers and battle-axes, one hundred with lance and sword. On, my sons! Santiago! and at them!”

Then at the gate he led them—a human battering-ram. Nothing could withstand the onset of those steel-cased cavaliers. Protected by their bucklers, they wielded the ponderous battle-axes with such effect that the gate went down with a crash.

Into the gap they poured tumultuously, shouting their battle-cries, slashing and lancing all who opposed, and in the midst of showers of arrows that glanced from their armor like hail. Not all escaped, however, for the savages had found their vulnerable points, and shot at their faces and necks, as well as at their horses from beneath as they passed over those who were overthrown. The house was reached and the inmates rescued just in the nick of time, for the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

Indians had removed the roof and were shooting their arrows at the little group of defenders huddled within. The rescue effected, the troopers fought their way back to the fields, carrying their comrades with them and inflicting such slaughter by the way that the Indians finally paused, aghast.

Hundreds had fallen, but the end was not yet. At the command of De Soto, the village was set on fire, and scarcely anything within it escaped the devouring flames. Constructed of dry wood and grass, that burned like tinder, the houses and towers were quickly consumed, and with them all they contained, including the baggage of the army as well as the brave defenders of Mauvila. Maddened by their sufferings, choked by the volumes of smoke that swept the streets, and scorched by the flames, the Indians broke down the walls and made for the fields; but, again and again, the Spaniards drove them back.

The carnage was horrible; the slain lay in heaps, in windrows, in masses, mingled with charred timbers and the burning wreckage of the town. The Indians fought to the bitter end, and if one escaped it was not by mercy of the Spaniards, who ranged around the fallen walls like demons incarnate. The

BATTLE OF MAUVILA



DESPERATE ENCOUNTER AT MAUVILA

last of the warriors seen to fall was a gigantic savage, who perished by his own hand. He had been the centre of a group which, fighting with fury and despair, had been crushed out of existence by the Spaniards. All save himself had fallen, and, in a dazed way realizing this, he sprang to the rampart, intending to leap over and escape. But, seeing his retreat cut off by the soldiers, waiting like crocodiles beneath for him to fall into their jaws, he snatched a bow-string and hung himself from the limb of a tree that projected over the wall.

That intrepid warrior was the last Indian seen in the town, either in fight or flight. The dead and the wounded numbered nearly three thousand. The Spaniards lost eighty men and forty horses, and among them counted up seven hundred wounds, which there was but a single surgeon to dress, and he unskilled. What became of Cacique Tuscaloosa could not be learned, but he was never seen by the Spaniards after he entered the house in which the battle began. The body of his son, covered with wounds, was found in a field; but the gigantic chieftain disappeared as utterly as if swallowed up by the flames that devoured two thousand

FERDINAND DE SOTO

of his warriors. More than a thousand were said to have perished in a single building, having been suffocated by the smoke.

Whether Chief Tuscaloosa perished with them, or whether he survived that day of disaster to his tribe and in some other part of his broad domain ruled afterwards the remnant of his people, is not known; but his proud name will never be dissociated from the land in which he lived.

XVII

DE SOTO'S FATAL DECISION

1541

THE Spaniards had arrived at Mauvila, or Mabila (which, no doubt, was the Indian name for Mobile), on October 18th, and, says De Soto's secretary, Rodrigo Ranjel, "after the end of the battle as described they rested there until November 14th, caring for their wounds and their horses. Up to that time the total deaths, from the time the governor and his forces entered the land of Florida, were one hundred and two Christians—and not all, to my thinking, in true repentance." Further, he says: "They killed three thousand of the vagabonds, without counting many others who were wounded and whom they afterwards found dead in the cabins along the road. Whether the chief were alive or dead was never known; but the son they found thrust through with a lance."

FERDINAND DE SOTO

The battle of Mauvila was a crucial event with De Soto, for he lost more than men and horses, plunder and ammunitions: he lost hope, and, in a certain sense, he lost courage. Though he was not animated by the highest of motives hitherto, yet his invincible spirit, his dauntless bravery, compel our admiration. But after the terrible conflict at Mauvila we cannot but wonder at the obstinacy of the man in persisting in a course which every one in the army but himself recognized as criminally wrong.

While resting in Tuscaloosa's territory, endeavoring to repair his losses in some measure, waiting for the wounded to recover or die, he received the information that Maldonado had arrived at Pensacola with supplies and reinforcements. Such gladsome tidings, coming to him in the midst of dire discouragements and perplexities, could not but have given him the greatest satisfaction and renewed in his heart the long-deferred hope of establishing that colony which it was his intention to found in Florida. The bay of Pensacola was then but a seven days' journey, or less than a hundred miles, distant from Mauvila, and the soldiers naturally expected that his next move would be in that direc-

DE SOTO'S FATAL DECISION

tion. The general course of their route from Coosa had been southwest, and a continuation of it would have brought them to the gulf. The battle with Tuscaloosa's warriors was only an episode of the long journey, which, instead of frustrating their intention, should have emphasized the necessity for meeting the ships and securing supplies, even were the search for gold to be continued.

Nothing was further from the governor's intentions than to abandon this search, notwithstanding the fact that, after more than a year, devoted to toilsome marches and persistent seeking, no trace of the precious metal had been found. It was a reasonable assumption, then, that further search would be worse than useless, and this view was adopted by the soldiers generally, who, in discussing the situation among themselves, agreed that, the bay of Pensacola once arrived at, they would take the first opportunity that presented itself for leaving the country. There were still other lands, such as Peru and Mexico, where gold had already rewarded adventurers with great wealth, and which had been obtained with one-tenth the toil and fighting they had experienced.

No one could doubt their loyalty to the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

governor; no one could charge that they had not endured patiently and accepted without complaint the severe trials that had been their portion. But, while these dauntless spirits were not in the strictest sense disheartened, they saw that nothing was to be gained by continually fighting half-naked savages and wandering about aimlessly over a country that displayed no evidence of wealth, either in the accumulations of the people or in its natural resources.

Now, the information received by the governor respecting the arrival of Maldonado was conveyed to him privately, through the interpreter Ortiz, whom he cautioned to keep it secret. Rumors, however, reached the soldiers, and when De Soto talked with his officers of his plan for continuing the exploration after reaching the coast, they informed him that in all probability he would be left without support. This intelligence came to De Soto like a revelation, for up to that time his men had yielded unquestioning obedience to his slightest wishes, and he could not believe them capable of thwarting him in any event. So he disguised himself and went stealthily about the camp. The upshot of it was that he returned to his

DE SOTO'S FATAL DECISION

quarters with the worst news that he had heard confirmed, and from that moment was a changed individual.

He seemed to forget that these men, comprising Spaniards of every rank, from the humblest soldier to the proudest hidalgo, had embarked on this expedition at his own solicitations, had ventured their entire fortunes, whether large or small, had suffered extreme privations, witnessed the deaths of a hundred companions and the sweeping away of all their accumulations, with hardly a murmur of complaint.

He thought only of his own terrible losses: of the fortune he had spent in the equipment, of the renown and dignities he had gained, and hoped to gain, trampled, as it were, in the dust; of the return to Cuba, not only penniless, but an object of hatred and contempt. In a sentence, then, he resolved to turn his back on Pensacola and safety, "because the pearls he wished to send to Cuba for show, that their fame might raise the desire of coming to Florida, had been lost, and he feared that, hearing of him without seeing either gold or silver, or other thing of value from that land, it would acquire such a reputation that no one would

FERDINAND DE SOTO

be found to go there when men should be wanted."

Thus wrote one of the annalists who was with him, the anonymous Fidalgo of Elvas, who further says: "So he determined to send no news of himself until he should have discovered a rich country."

Yes, that was his resolve: to set his face again to the wilderness; to forego the luxury of rest and refreshment the ships would afford; to deprive himself of news from his wife and his government in Cuba; and all that his stubborn pride might not be wounded.

The stern, invincible nature of the man, De Soto, is displayed in this determination; but also, alas! his supreme selfishness. He thought only of himself, of his blasted hopes, his unsatisfied aspirations; but to the other nine hundred entities comprising his command he gave, apparently, scant consideration. They, too, had honorable aspirations, hopes, desires; they had wives and children, whose hearts were yearning for some news of them; they had fought, and freely shed their blood, that their commander might realize his ambitions; yet they were ignored.

It was in this spirit that he gave the or-

DE SOTO'S FATAL DECISION

der to leave Mauvila and march northward, instead of southward—into the unknown wilderness, instead of towards the coast and the ships. Pursued by this dæmon of unrest and unsatisfied ambition, he continued to wander thereafter, until a year later he met the messenger of death. That the soldiers murmured when ordered to march away from the haven of their desires, is not to be wondered at; that they did not mutiny is more surprising. But they did not dare to oppose their stern commander, who, though he might be irrational, even eccentric to the verge of insanity, yet represented the crown and their king. Silent and sullen were they, as they stored their wallets with two days' provisions of toasted maize and took their places in the ranks—those decimated ranks. Heavy must have been the hearts of the soldiers as they thought upon the comrades who had fallen.

“I have wondered many times,” wrote the historian, Oviedo, more than three hundred years ago, “at the venturesomeness, stubbornness, and persistency, or firmness—to use a better word for the way these baffled conquerors kept on, from one toil to another, and then to another still greater;

FERDINAND DE SOTO

from one danger to many others: here losing one companion, there three or four; going from bad to worse, without learning from experience.

“O wonderful God! That they should have been so blinded and dazed by a greed so uncertain and by such vain discourses as Hernando de Soto was able to utter to those deluded soldiers, whom he brought to a land which he had never seen, nor put foot into, and where three other leaders, more experienced than he, had ruined themselves. . . .

“O wicked men, O devilish greed, O bad consciences! O unfortunate soldiers! That ye should not have understood the perils ye were to encounter, how wasted would be your lives, and without rest your soul!”

How true the words of the moralist, coming down to us through the centuries which have intervened between his time and ours! Yet those men of action did not pause to moralize. They could not have scanned their deeds as they transpired, for, had they done so, we should not have to record such things of them as are shown in the preceding pages. “From the moment that De Soto discovered the purpose of his men to leave him, once were the coast attained,”

DE SOTO'S FATAL DECISION

writes the most entertaining of his biographers, "he became a moody, irritable, discontented man. He no longer pretended to strike out any grand undertaking, but, stung with secret disappointment, went recklessly wandering from place to place, apparently without order or object, as if careless of time and life, and only anxious to finish his existence."¹

Five days of marching through a fertile country, pleasant even in November, took them to the frontiers of another province, where they found, gathered on the farther bank of a deep, wide, and rapid river, fifteen hundred warriors to oppose them. These were commanded by a cacique who had heard of the atrocities committed in Mauvila, and who replied to De Soto's proffer of peace: "Nay, war is what we want, a war of fire and of blood."

"So be it," muttered De Soto. "We come as men of peace, but war is our vocation."

It would have fared ill with the cacique could the governor have reached him then; but twelve days elapsed before the stream was crossed, owing to the necessity for building *piraguas*. During that time the

¹ Theodore Irving, in *The Conquest of Florida*,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

opposing skirmishers were incessantly in conflict; but when, after infinite toil, the army had been ferried over the river, short work, indeed, was made of the Indians. After seizing and sacrificing a friendly native, who had been sent over with a message of peace, the savages fled to a fort of palisados and the Spaniards took possession of their village.

They were now in the country of the Chickasaws, and here they established themselves in cantonment for the winter of 1540-1541. Following his invariable custom, De Soto tried to draw the cacique of the Chickasaws from his retreat, sending him as a bait some roasted pork, having sacrificed a few of his precious swine for the purpose. The chief and his warriors ate the meat with relish, finding it so delicious that they could not resist the temptation to appropriate such of the swine as they could secure by prowling about the camp at night. The governor had not intended to go to this extreme of hospitality, and two Indians caught in the act of stealing hogs were by his orders summarily shot, while another thief had his hands cut off as a warning.

The cacique "appeared grieved that they

DE SOTO'S FATAL DECISION

had given offence, and glad that they were punished"; but when two Spanish soldiers entered his house during his absence, and stole several marten-skins, he insisted that the same punishment should be inflicted upon them. The governor, being then and thereafter in stern and melancholy mood, assented to the justice of this proposition, and condemned the soldiers to death. In vain his officers and chaplains begged him to be merciful. The culprits were led forth to be executed, when at this juncture a party of Indians arrived in the village. They came to complain of these very soldiers; but Juan Ortiz, the only interpreter, told the governor that the cacique desired him to pardon them, and, as a favor to the savage, he did so. Ortiz then informed the embassy that the real offenders were in prison, and would be punished with great severity.

Whether on account of this double-dealing or not, the Indians soon displayed unmistakable signs of hostility, and De Soto warned Camp-master Moscoso to be constantly on his guard. Twice, already, Moscoso had failed his commander at a critical moment, and a third time he was to prove unreliable, for, one dark and stormy night, when the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

north wind was shrieking through the village, the Indians stealthily passed the sentinels and gained the central square. Above the howling of the tempest rose the shrill war-whoop and rolling of barbaric drums. Suddenly the whole hamlet burst into a blaze, for the savages had shot fire-tipped arrows into the thatched roofs of straw, and also lighted them with torches, which they had carried concealed in earthen pots.

Fanned by the gale, the fire swept the village, driving the astonished Spaniards from their shelters and into the arms of their relentless foes. They were dazed by the swiftness of the assault, scorched by the flames, and half suffocated by the smoke; but they fought like fiends, grasping the first weapons they could lay hands upon.

De Soto himself leaped forth with less than half his armor on, but, sword in hand, mounted his horse and dashed into the midst of the savage throng. Seeing in front of him an Indian of gigantic frame, whom he took for the cacique, he charged at him with his lance, upon which he leaned with all his weight to give force to the blow. As he did so the saddle slipped, having been put on hastily and without being girthed, and he

DE SOTO'S FATAL DECISION

fell headlong to the ground. The savage leaped upon him, and the next moment would probably have been the governor's last, had not a dozen troopers dashed to his rescue, and with lance and sabre held the Indians off till he had gained his feet and remounted his horse. Then, without a moment's hesitation, he spurred into the thickest of the fight again.

Though more than forty Spaniards perished in the flames or at the hands of the Indians, victory eventually crowned De Soto's efforts, and the savages were vanquished. They had accomplished their chief design, however, which was to secure possession of the swine, for, shut within a thatched enclosure, nearly the whole herd met death in the flames, and for several days thereafter the Indians had a surfeit of roast pork.

Fifty horses, also, were destroyed that night, some by fire and others by the Indian arrows, so that when dawn revealed to the Spaniards the extent of their losses they found themselves in a worse plight than at Mauvila. They were houseless, almost without food or raiment, and as the weather was extremely cold, their condition was pitiable.

XVIII

HOW THE MISSISSIPPI WAS CROSSED

1541

THE fatal night of the fire was on March 4, 1541. That evening, after making his rounds, the governor had proclaimed aloud to his men: "To-night is an *Indian night*. I shall sleep armed and have my horse saddled; and do all ye cavaliers the same." It was well that he did so, and would have been better for all had they followed his example; but, by the plight in which the fire left them, they paid dearly for their carelessness.

"If by good luck any had been able to save a garment until then," says the Fidalgo, "it was there destroyed. Many remained naked, not having had time to catch up their skin dresses. And in that place they suffered greatly from cold, the only relief being in great fires, and they passed the long night in turning, without the power to sleep; for

HOW THE MISSISSIPPI WAS CROSSED

as one side of a man would warm, the other would freeze. Some contrived mats of dried grass, sewed together; and many who laughed at this expedient were afterwards compelled to do the like. The Christians, in fact, were left so broken up that, what with the want of saddles and arms which had been destroyed, had the Indians returned the second night they might, with little effort, have been overpowered."

"And that you may know, reader," wrote Oviedo, the historian, "what sort of a life these Spaniards led, Rodrigo Ranjel, an eyewitness, says that among many others who were enduring great hardships in this undertaking, he saw a knight, one Don Antonio Osorio, brother of the lord marquis of Astorga, wearing a short garment made of the blankets [buffalo - hides] of that country, torn at the sides, his skin showing, bare-headed, barefooted, without hose or shoes, a buckler at his back, a naked sword in his hand. And the stuff of which he was made, and his illustrious lineage, made him endure this toil, amid heavy frosts and cold, without laments such as many others made; for there was no one who could help him, although he was the man he was, and had

FERDINAND DE SOTO

in Spain two thousand ducats of income through the Church. And that day this gentleman saw him he did not believe he had eaten more than a mouthful, and that he had to dig up with his nails!

“I could hardly help laughing when I heard that this knight had left the Church and the income mentioned, to go in search of such a life as this, at the sound of the words of De Soto; because I knew Soto very well, and although he was a man of worth, I did not suppose he was so winning a talker, or so clever, as to delude such persons. Forsooth, what was it that a man like him wanted, of a land unexplored and unknown?”

What, forsooth? Many were asking themselves this question the morning after the fire, and could find no satisfactory answer. The Indians did not cease to attack them, by night and by day, so that constant vigilance was demanded of all, and few of the wearied soldiers secured the rest they greatly needed; though provisions were abundant, the foraging-parties always returning with great quantities of dried fruits and maize.

They removed to a plain a little distance

HOW THE MISSISSIPPI WAS CROSSED

off, and there set up a forge, with bellows of bear-skin, by which they retempered their swords, injured by the fire. They made lances and saddle-trees of ash-wood, shields of buffalo-hide, blankets of flexible grasses, and in a week were ready to march on again; but they remained in their temporary huts during the month of March, and the last week of April resumed their wanderings. The Spaniards had hoped for a cessation of hostilities after leaving Chicaza (the province in which they had suffered so terribly); but three days from the frontier they came upon a palisadoed fortress filled with Indians, "who looked like devils rather than men." How these "red devils" appeared to the astonished eye-witnesses let one of them tell, for of a truth his description cannot be improved upon, and it brings them vividly before us. They were naked, but seemed to be clothed, for "their bodies, legs, and arms were painted and ochred with red, black, white, and vermilion stripes, so that they appeared to have on stockings and doublet. Some wore feathers and others great horns on their heads, their faces blackened, and eyes encircled with vermilion, to heighten their fierce aspect. So soon as they saw us

FERDINAND DE SOTO

draw nigh, they beat their drums, and, with loud yells, in great fury came forth to greet us. . . . All in our sight they made a great fire, and, taking an Indian by the head and feet, pretended to give him many blows, and cast him into the flames; signifying in this way what they would do with the Christians."

When it was reported to De Soto that the Indians defied him, he cast caution to the winds, as usual, during that sullen mood which then possessed him, and replied to Juan de Añasco, who had led the reconnoissance: "What, devils—did you say? Sooth, then, we cannot pass them by. Nothing yet, in shape of men, have we seen and have not vanquished. At them—at the diablos!"

But the "devils" were strongly intrenched; nor did their looks belie their character. Their fortress was an involved labyrinth of palisados, considered by them impregnable, yet they sallied forth to meet the invaders with ferocious yells and discharges of arrows. Several soldiers were mortally wounded at the first fire; but, with the governor in his accustomed place, at the forefront of battle, leading the cavalry, the Spaniards charged upon and drove them within the portals of the fort. There they became so jammed

HOW THE MISSISSIPPI WAS CROSSED

within the narrow entrance-ways that the attacking troopers cut them down in heaps with their good swords, and when they had finally gained the interior, and the infantry gave their support, the carnage was horrible.

The savages fought with desperation and to the last gasp, but many escaped from the fort, and, swimming a deep stream on the banks of which it was built, gathered on a plain, where, undismayed by their fearful losses, they continued their cries of defiance. Wrought to a fever-heat by the action, and his anger inflamed by a blow he had received on the head, which "made him see stars," De Soto forded the stream and pursued the Indians for more than a league, night alone putting a stop to the dreadful slaughter.

This stronghold of the Indians was called by them Alibamo, and was probably situated on the Yazoo River, from which, four days after the battle, De Soto set forth, still in a northerly direction, to avoid the sea-coast, and in eight days reached the bank of a mightier stream. It was nearly half a league in width, so that "a man standing on the farther shore could not be told whether he were a man or not." Its current was swift, a turbulent flood, and on its surface were

FERDINAND DE SOTO

great trees and masses of drift-wood, telling of its tremendous force and the distant sources of its waters.

The Indian name of the river, at this point, was Chucagua; but, as it was the largest the Spaniards had seen in "Florida," De Soto called it the *Rio Grande*, or Great River.

It was, of course, none other than the Mississippi, our wonderful "Father of Waters," "De Soto was the first European," says Mr. Irving in his *Conquest of Florida*, "who looked upon the turbid waters of this magnificent river, and that event has more surely enrolled his name among those who will ever live in American history than if he had discovered mines of gold and silver."¹

Still, De Soto, at that time, would rather have found the mines of which he was in search; and, like Columbus, who discovered a new continent without being aware of the fact, was ignorant of the magnitude of his own discovery. It is doubtful if he could

¹ De Soto was not the discoverer of the Mississippi, nor the first European to look upon it, for its mouth had been entered in 1520 by Alonzo Alvarez de Poinda, commander of an expedition fitted out by Francisco de Garay, then governor of Jamaica. Pánfilo de Narvaez, also, must have entered, or crossed, its mouth in or about 1528.



DE SOTO ON THE SHORE OF THE MISSISSIPPI

HOW THE MISSISSIPPI WAS CROSSED

have appreciated its value had he been informed of it when, approaching the mighty stream, through tangled swamp and flooded lowlands, he looked anxiously across its vast expanse to the distant shore which he was so desirous of attaining. It was, to him, merely an obstacle in his march, "another wide river to cross," and he cast about at once for the means to accomplish his task.

"He went to look at the river," says the Fidalgo, "and saw that near it there was much good timber, of which pirogues might be made, and a good situation in which a camp might be placed. He directly moved, built houses, and settled on a plain a cross-bow-shot from the water, bringing together there all the maize of the towns behind him, that at once they might go to work and cut down trees for sawing out planks."

The nearest town to the Great River was called Quizquiz, which was the name borne by a chieftain in the Inca's armies; but whether De Soto was reminded by this of his adventures in Peru, and thereby constrained to draw a contrast between his former glorious career and his present pitiful state, does not appear. The contrast is obvious, for he was now not only broken in fortune, but to

FERDINAND DE SOTO

some extent in spirit. Instead of seeking further conquests, he desired only peace, and permission from the cacique of Quizquiz to build his pirogues and cross the Great River. This the cacique was himself disposed to grant; but he told De Soto that he was subject to a greater cacique, who would be angry if he did not oppose his progress, and so felt compelled to assemble his warriors, which he did, to the number of more than four thousand. He lived in a hut on the summit of a large artificial mound, and around it gathered his warriors, the while brandishing his spear and haranguing them as though about to lead on to an overwhelming victory.

Though with difficulty restraining his anger, De Soto held his men in hand, ready for the emergency of battle, and at last succeeded in pacifying the excited chieftain and securing his permission to remain for a while, provided his men abstained from ravaging the province. "The next day," according to the Fidalgo, "the great cacique arrived, with two hundred canoes, filled with warriors having weapons. The warriors were painted with ochre, wearing great bunches of plumes in many colors, having feathered shields in their hands, with which they sheltered the

HOW THE MISSISSIPPI WAS CROSSED

oarsmen on either side; standing erect, from bow to stern, holding bows and arrows.

“ All the canoes came down together, and arrived within a stone’s - cast of the ravine, whence the cacique said to the governor, who was standing on the river-bank, with others who bore him company, that he had come to visit, serve, and obey him; for he had heard that he was the greatest of lords, the most powerful on earth, and that he must see what he would have him to do. The governor expressed his pleasure, and besought him to land, that they might the better confer; but the chief gave no reply, ordering three barges to draw near, wherein was great quantity of fish, and loaves like bricks, made of the pulp of persimmons, which De Soto receiving, gave him thanks, and again entreated him to land.

“ Making the gift had been a pretext to discover if any harm might be done; but, finding the governor and his people on their guard, the cacique began to draw away from the shore, when the cross-bow-men, who were in readiness, with loud cries shot at the Indians, and struck down five or six. Still, they retired in good order, not one leaving the oar, even though the one next to him

FERDINAND DE SOTO

might have fallen. Afterwards they came many times and landed; but when approached they would go back to their barges. They were fine-looking men, very large and well-formed; and, what with the awnings, their plumes, their shields, the pennons, and the great number of people in the fleet, it appeared like a famous armada of galleys."

It was on a day in the second or third week of May, 1541, that De Soto first looked on the Mississippi, which appeared to him and his men "larger than the Danube"—as it really was—and on Saturday, June 18th, "the whole force crossed this great river in the four barges they had built, and gave thanks to God because, in His good pleasure, nothing more difficult could confront them."

"On the other side of the river," wrote De Soto's secretary, Ranjel, "about seven thousand Indians had got together to defend the passage. All of them had shields made of canes, so strong and so closely interwoven with thread that a cross-bow could hardly pierce them. The arrows came raining down so that the air was full of them, and their yells were something fearful. But when they saw that the work on the barges did not relax on their account, they said that Pehaca,

HOW THE MISSISSIPPI WAS CROSSED

whose men they were, ordered them to withdraw, and so they left the passage free."

These Indians, large of stature, and with their shields of buffalo-hide, were probably the warlike Sioux, and the place of crossing is thought to have been the lower Chickasaw Bluff, which had been an Indian landmark from time immemorial. The western bank of the river was occupied by the army at sunset, and the next day, after the boats had been broken up (for their nails and bolts, which were preserved for another occasion), the interrupted march was resumed. The route lay through a populous and fertile country, and the third week in June they entered the dominions of Lord Casqui, whose village of about four hundred houses was situated in the centre of vast cornfields and on the banks of a pleasant stream. This cacique welcomed them warmly, and placed his house, which was built upon a terraced mound, at the governor's disposal. Bowers were constructed for the soldiers, in which they reposed during the daytime, as well as by night; for the heat was oppressive, and the Indians so friendly that patrols and sentinels were hardly necessary.

This lord of Casqui, says the chronicler,

FERDINAND DE SOTO

was the first Indian the Spaniards had met in many months to show himself amenable to their religion. One day he came to De Soto, having in his company two blind men. "He said, that inasmuch as the governor was the son of the sun, he begged him to restore sight to those Indians; whereupon the blind men arose, and very earnestly entreated him to do so. De Soto answered them that in the heavens above there was One who had the power to make them whole and do whatever they could ask of Him, whose servant he was; that this great Lord made the sky and the earth, and man after His image; that he suffered on the tree of the true cross, to save the human race, and rose from the grave the third day, what there was man of Him dying, what of divinity being immortal; and that, having ascended into heaven, He was there with open arms to receive all that would be converted to Him.

"He then ordered a lofty cross to be made and set up in the highest part of the town, declaring to the cacique that the Christians worshipped that, in the form and memory of the one on which Christ suffered. He placed himself with his people before it, on their knees, which the Indians did likewise; and

HOW THE MISSISSIPPI WAS CROSSED

he told them that from that time henceforth they should thus worship the Lord, of whom he had spoken to them, that was in the skies, asking Him for whatsoever they stood in need."

One version of this incident is that the cacique asked the governor to request his God to send him rain, and that thereupon De Soto erected the great cross, amid the prayers and anthems of the army and in the presence of thousands of adoring Indians.

XIX

A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING

1541-1542

THE year that followed the crossing of the Mississippi was devoted to the same insensate quest for gold that had been pursued by De Soto during the two years preceding, and was equally barren of results. Learning that some hills, or mountains, many leagues distant to the south and west abounded in a certain yellow metal, the governor set out in search of them, accompanied by Cacique Casqui, with five thousand warriors and three thousand Indians laden with the baggage and supplies of the army. The Spaniards had rested nearly ten days on the western bank of the Great River, and they marched eagerly and with alacrity through an attractive country, until they reached the borders of an extensive swamp. This was crossed on rude bridges constructed by Casqui's Indians, two days' march beyond

A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING

which the army came in sight of the capital town of another cacique known as Capaha. This savage was at war with the allies of De Soto, who was not aware of this fact until the town was reached, when it was discovered that Casqui, who had forged ahead with the pick of his warriors (under pretence of clearing the trails and foraging for supplies), had sacked and plundered the place, besides massacring the inhabitants.

It then developed that a perpetual enmity existed between the two tribes, of Casqui and Capaha, and that the former had availed himself of the protection afforded by his new allies to commit a ravage which hitherto had been impossible, owing to his inferiority in strength and courage to his rival, who had always vanquished him when they met on the field of battle. He and his warriors gratified their long-deferred vengeance, not only by killing and scalping all they found alive in Capaha's town, but by breaking open and desecrating the sepulchres of his ancestors. They wrenched from their coffins the remains of warriors who had defeated them in the past, exposing them to every sort of indignity, and then, removing from poles planted around the sepulchre the heads of their own

FERDINAND DE SOTO

braves, who had been killed in previous wars, replaced them with similar gory trophies severed from the trunks of those they had so recently slain.

All this had been accomplished by the time the Spaniards arrived, and it was too late to repair the evil, though De Soto was greatly distressed, as he had hoped to make an ally of Capaha, and not an enemy. He could not afford to antagonize a cacique of his importance, in the condition in which he found himself at that time, and so he sent an embassy to seek him out and proffer his friendship.

Capaha had retreated from the town, because, being a practised warrior, he recognized the futility of opposing Casqui and the Spaniards in that defenceless position, but had intrenched himself on an island, where he awaited an attack, with a large force of warriors. As he spurned all proffers of peace, the governor had no alternative but to attack him in his stronghold, and by means of seventy canoes, which Casqui promptly provided, crossed over, with two hundred Spaniards and three thousand Indians. The invaders were met with such furious assaults, however, that they could hardly ef-

A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING

fect a landing, and had scarcely done so before Casqui's warriors, intimidated by the fury of their ancient enemies, abandoned the Spaniards to their fate and paddled away in the canoes.

This defection might have cost De Soto his life and his army had not the valiant Capaha ordered a cessation of hostilities, after inflicting terrible injuries upon his foes, and himself extended the olive-branch of peace. He was as sagacious, it seemed, as he was courageous, and, recognizing the wonderful prowess of his assailants, determined to conquer a peace and convert them into allies. This was the more readily accomplished since the Spaniards were inclined that way, and soon the recreant Casqui learned, to his great mortification, that his hated rival, Capaha, was in confab with his redoubtable ally. Recalling his men, he sent to De Soto presents of fish and mantles, as well as one of his own daughters as an ambassadress.

Though the governor despised Casqui for his cowardice, yet he felt the necessity of retaining both caciques as friends, and used his best efforts to bring about a reconciliation. When, however, Casqui came into the presence of De Soto and Capaha, the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

latter did not deign to look in his direction, but ignored him completely. He refused to listen to the governor's entreaties at first, for his heart was full of grief at the insults offered to the remains of his ancestors and dead warriors, which he had reverently gathered together again and, with tears and groans, deposited in their coffins. He finally gave his hand to Casqui, but at the same time significantly remarked: "Through the strength of these strangers you have revenged your past defeats, which you never could have accomplished unassisted. Thank them for it, then; but remember, they will not stay here always; they will go, while we remain. And, rest assured, we shall meet again on the battle-field!"

Capaha was a young man, of frank and manly bearing, and De Soto was more drawn to him than to Casqui; but the latter recovered the governor's confidence by the following pathetic appeal: "How is it possible, my lord," he said, "that after having given me the pledge of friendship, and without my having done any harm to you, now you desire to destroy me, your friend and brother? You gave me the cross, for a defence against my enemies; yet with it you now seek to

A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING

destroy me. Now, my lord, when God has heard us, by means of the cross; when my women and my men and my boys threw themselves on their knees before it, to pray to the God who you said suffered on it, and He heard us, and gave us water in abundance and refreshed our fields; now, when we had the most faith in it, and in your friendship, you desire to destroy these men and women and boys, who are so devoted to you and your God."

The governor, to his credit let us note it, was affected to tears as he replied: "Look you, Casqui, we are not come to destroy you, but to do for you what you know and understand is the work of the cross and our God — as you tell me. And these favors which it has bestowed upon you are small things in comparison with many others, and very great ones, which it will secure you if you love it and believe in it. Be, then, assured of this, and you will find it so, and realize it better every day. And when you ran off without my permission, I thought that you held the teaching we had given you of little account. But, now that you have come in humility, be assured that I wish you more good than you think; and if you have

FERDINAND DE SOTO

need of anything from me tell me of it, and you will see, since we do what our God commands us, which is not to lie; and, therefore, believe that I tell you the truth, since to speak a lie is a very great sin among us."

There is other evidence, also, that at this time the governor's mood was changing, his hard heart softening towards the Indians; but that his attitude with respect to the soldiers was unchanged is shown by an incident which occurred in the province of Quigate a few weeks after he had parted from Casqui and Capaha. Information was brought him, at or about midnight, that one Juan Gaytan, the king's treasurer, had refused to go on patrol at the morning watch, declaring it derogatory to his station. Now it chanced that this same Juan Gaytan had been among the loudest of the murmurers at Mauvila, and led the faction that desired to seize the ships at Pensacola for the purpose of returning to Cuba; so De Soto was particularly incensed at his defection. Springing from his couch in the dwelling of the cacique, he strode forth upon the terrace above the village and shouted, so that all his men might hear: "What is this, my soldiers and captains? Do the mutineers still live

A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING

who, when in Mauvila, talked of returning to Cuba or to Spain; and do they now, with the excuse of being officers of the royal revenue, refuse to patrol the four hours that are allotted them? . . . Shame, shame on you! And recollect that, officers of the royal treasury or not, you must all serve your sovereign. Presume not upon rank you may possess; for, be he who he may, I will *take off the head of that man* who refuses to do his duty. And, to undeceive you, know that while I live no one shall leave this country until we have conquered and settled it!"

Needless to say, Juan Gaytan went the rounds that morning, and every morning thereafter when it came his turn. And the soldiers saw that their stern commander was in no mood to tolerate murmuring, much less any suggestion looking towards a cessation of their wanderings. It mattered not that the "yellow metal" of the mountains proved to be nothing more valuable than copper, that the country became less attractive the farther it was penetrated, and the Indians, if possible, more hostile. De Soto was still inexorable. There was never a sign of civilization, any more than there had been before, in Florida. The people were savages, all of them,

and their dwellings were huts of the rudest character, while as for gold and gems, they possessed neither, and seemed never to have heard of them. Thus there was absolutely no excuse or reason for further wandering; yet De Soto wandered on, from one province to another, here meeting with kindness and hospitality, there with a hostile reception. Decidedly hostile was the greeting the Spaniards received in the province of Tula, which is a name likewise borne by an Indian settlement in Mexico. The natives of Tula were ugly by nature and in feature, so hideous in appearance that they appeared deformed. In truth, their foreheads were artificially compressed, by bandages applied in infancy, until their skulls were almost conical at the crowns. But they were as brave as they were ill-looking, and after the Spaniards had occupied their village, which they had abandoned at their approach, they made a midnight attack upon it, fiercely fighting till dawn, and killing many with their pikes and battle-axes. They fled at sunrise to the forest, and the Spaniards dared not pursue them; but of those made captive "the governor sent six to the cacique, their right hands and their noses cut off, with the

A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING

message that, if he did not come to him to apologize and render obedience, he would go in pursuit, and to him and as many of his as he might find would do as he had done to those he sent."

This barbarous act and peremptory message had the desired effect, for at the end of three days some Indians appeared, deputed by their chief to treat with De Soto. As soon as they saw him they wept copiously and cast themselves at his feet. They brought a present of cow-skins, dressed with their tails on, which, they said, were obtained in the north, where roamed great herds of enormous beasts—which were doubtless the bison, or buffalo.

About eighty leagues distant from Tula lay the province of Autiamque, where, the Indians said, was a "great water," which from their accounts appeared to be an arm of the sea. "Hence the governor determined to winter there, and in the following summer go to the seaside, where he would build two brigantines, one to send to Cuba, the other to Mexico, that the arrival of either might bear tidings of him, for three years had now elapsed since he had been heard of by Doña Isabel or by any other person in a civilized

FERDINAND DE SOTO

community. Two hundred and fifty of his men were dead, likewise one hundred and fifty horses. He desired to recruit from Cuba of man and beast, calculating out of his property there to refit and return, to discover farther on to the west, where he had not reached, and whither Cabeza de Vaca had not wandered."

In Autiamque De Soto resolved to pass the winter of 1541-1542; and as the abandoned Indian granaries were full to bursting with maize, beans, dried grapes and plums, while the meadows afforded fine pasturage for the horses, the Spaniards did not lack food for themselves or for their beasts. The few Indians who had lingered were made captive and served to bring in wood and water, thus the soldiers were relieved of labor, and passed the most enoyable winter of any they had experienced in "Florida."

While wintering in Autiamque (or Utianque) the expedition met with the greatest loss it was called upon to sustain, in the death of faithful Juan Ortiz, the interpreter. Of his last moments we know nothing; but, says one of the soldiers, plaintively, "His death was so great a hinderance to our going, whether on discovery or out of the country,

A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING

that to learn of the Indians what he would have rendered in four words it became necessary now to have the whole day; and oftener than otherwise the very opposite was understood of what we wished to know. Thenceforth a lad of Cutifachique, who had learned somewhat of the Christians' language, served as the interpreter."

Poor Juan's position had been no sinecure, and his services were in continual request, by day and by night. "Understanding only the Floridian language," says an historian, "he conducted conversations through the Indians of different tribes who understood one another and who attended the expedition. In conversing with the Chickasaws, for instance, he commenced with the Floridian, who carried the word to a Georgian, this one to the Coosa, the Coosa to the Mobilian, and the latter to the Chickasaw. In the same tedious manner the reply was conveyed to him, and finally reported to De Soto."

The Indian lad who succeeded to the post of interpreter was but a sorry substitute, and when, in the month of March, 1542, the winter cantonment was abandoned and the wearisome journeying again taken up, the Spaniards became acutely sensible of their

FERDINAND DE SOTO

irreparable loss. They were involved in all sorts of difficulties: lost in swamps and in dense forests, and plunged into encounters with Indians, which might have been avoided had they possessed an intelligent interpreter. Their only consolation lay in the fact that, at last, their commander had become convinced of his error, in continually wandering westward, after the *ignis fatuus* of gold that never materialized, and was now directing his course once more towards the Mississippi.

Having heard of a fertile province called Anilco, which the Indians said was near the Rio Grande, he was bent on reaching it before his waning energies should prevent him from carrying out his plan, as already mentioned, of building brigantines and sending to Cuba for supplies. He had not then, says one of the original chroniclers, more than four hundred efficient men, nor more than forty horses. "Some of these beasts were lame, and useful in making a show, only, of a cavalry troop; and, from the lack of iron, they had all gone a year without shoes."

Reflecting upon the sorry condition of his steeds, a painful contrast must have been forced upon the dispirited commander, when he recalled that his horses were once in a

A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING

similar predicament in Peru. Climbing the craggy steps of the sierras had worn out their shoes, and there was no iron available in the land; but that mattered not, for more precious metals were abundant in the Inca's country, and so they were shod with silver! Neither silver nor gold had been found in paying quantities, and no natural wealth, in fact, save pearls, the deposits of which lay so far to the eastward that they could not be regained.

The country was populous and fertile; but the more Indians De Soto encountered, the more foes there were; and he could not take advantage of the soil's fertility, even were he so disposed, owing to the lack of an advantageous situation for the founding of a colony. Anilco, which was reached after a toilsome march through swamps and rolling country, was a fruitful province, and, like Autiamque, was situated on a tributary of the Mississippi, supposed to be the Arkansas River. About twenty miles below its junction with the Great River, however, lay the populous town of Guachoya, between which and Anilco the country was of inexhaustible fertility.

Towards Guachoya, consequently, De Soto

FERDINAND DE SOTO

directed his march, and, finding the favorable descriptions verified, established himself there and at once began preparations for building two brigantines, in which a portion of his command should embark for Cuba and Mexico. The cacique of Guachoya was most hospitably inclined, receiving the governor into his own house and providing subsistence for the army; but, for reasons of his own, every day, at sunset, he and his warriors embarked in their canoes and sought the eastern bank of the Mississippi, where they remained till sunrise next morning, when they returned, to minister to the wants of their guests.

From the behavior of the cacique, De Soto suspected that he was forming an alliance against him of the neighboring chiefs, especially as the cacique of Quigaltanqui, on the opposite bank of the river, was decidedly hostile. Neither cacique would give him any information relating to the sea, or ocean, into which the Mississippi emptied its vast volume of waters, so he sent the trusty Juan de Añasco on a scouting expedition, from which he returned, eight days later, without having discovered anything of importance.

“Then the governor sank into a deep de-

A YEAR OF AIMLESS WANDERING

spondency," relates the Fidalgo of Elvas, "at sight of the difficulties presenting themselves to his reaching the sea; and, what was worse, from the way in which the men and horses were diminishing in numbers, he felt he could not sustain himself in the country without succor. Of that reflection he pined; but before he took to his pallet he sent a messenger to the cacique of Quigaltanqui, to say that he was a child of the sun, and whence he came all obeyed him, rendering their tribute; that he would rejoice to see him, and in token of his love and obedience he must bring something from his country that was most in esteem there.

By the same Indian the chief returned this answer: "As to what you say of your being the son of the sun, if you will cause him to dry up the Great River I will believe you; as to the rest, it is not my custom to visit any one; but, rather, all of whom I have ever heard have come to visit me, to serve me and to pay me tribute. If, then, you desire to see me, come where I am. If for peace, I will receive you with special goodwill; if for war, I will await you within my town; but neither for you nor for any other man will I set back one foot!"

FERDINAND DE SOTO

When the messenger returned, the governor was already very ill of fever. He grieved that he was not in a state to cross the river at once and go in quest of the cacique, to see if he could not abate that pride. But the stream was already flowing very powerfully, was nearly half a league broad, sixteen fathoms in depth, and rushing in furious torrent, while on either shore were many, many Indians.

XX

LAST DAYS OF DE SOTO

1542

WHILE many a description has been written of the scenes attendant upon the last hours of Ferdinand de Soto, there is none on record more affecting than that of the Fidalgo of Elvas, who was probably an eye-witness of the most important occurrences, and participated in them all. For this reason, his very words are quoted in this connection, and in order that the reader may be transported directly to the bedside of the dying discoverer as he lay on his rude pallet in a lowly hut belonging to the cacique of Guachoya.

“Conscious that the hour approached in which he should depart this life,” says the artless chronicler, “the governor commanded that all his officers should be called before him, the captains and principal personages, to whom he made speech:

FERDINAND DE SOTO

“He said that he was about to go into the presence of God, to give account of all his past life; and, since He had been pleased to take him away at such a time—when he could recognize the moment of his death—he, His most unworthy servant, rendered Him hearty thanks. He confessed his deep obligations to them all, whether present or absent, for their good qualities, their love, and their loyalty to his person. He begged that they would pray for him, that, through mercy, he might be pardoned his sins and be received into glory. He then asked that he might be relieved of the charge he held over them, as well as of any indebtedness he was under to them, and to forgive him any wrongs they might have received at his hands.

“Baltazar de Gallegos responded, in behalf of all, consoling him with remarks on the shortness of the life of this world, attended as it was by so many toils and afflictions, saying that whom God earliest called away He showed particular favor to, with many other things appropriate to such an occasion. And finally, since it had pleased the Almighty to take him to Himself, amid the deep sorrow they not unreasonably felt, it was necessary and becoming in him, as in them, to conform

LAST DAYS OF DE SOTO

to the divine will. That as respected the election of a governor, which he ordered, whomsoever his excellency should name to the command, him would they obey. Thereupon, the governor nominated Luis de Moscoso de Alvarado to be his captain-general, and by all those present he was straightway chosen and sworn.

“The next day, which was May 21, 1542, departed this life the virtuous, the magnanimous, and the intrepid captain Don Hernando de Soto, governor of Cuba and adelantado of the Floridas. He had been advanced by fortune, in the way she is wont to lead others, that he might fall the farther; he died in a land, and at a time, that could afford him little comfort in his illness, when the danger of being no more heard from stared his companions in the face, each one having need of sympathy; which was the reason why they neither gave him of their companionship nor visited him oft, as otherwise they would have done.

“Luis de Moscoso determined to conceal what had happened from the Indians, for De Soto had given them to understand that the Christians were immortal; besides which they held him to be sagacious, vigilant, brave;

FERDINAND DE SOTO

and, although they were at peace, should they know him to be dead, might venture on an attack. So soon, therefore, as death had taken place, he ordered the body to be placed secretly in a house apart, where it remained three days; and thence it was taken, by his orders, to a gate of the town and buried within the wall. The Indians, who had seen him ill, finding him no longer, suspected the reason, and, passing by where he lay, they observed the ground loose, and, looking about, talked among themselves. This coming to the knowledge of Luis de Moscoso, he ordered the corpse to be taken up at night, and, among the shawls that enshrouded it having cast an abundance of sand, it was taken out in a canoe and sunk in the middle of the stream."

These precautions were taken to prevent the Indians from offering insult to the revered remains, which, had they known the burial-place, they would certainly have torn from the grave, and, according to their barbarous custom, hung up in a lofty tree. By sinking the body of De Soto beneath the waters of the Mississippi, Moscoso effectually precluded the carrying-out of their evil intention; but the manner of his doing it was

BURIAL OF DE SOTO



LAST DAYS OF DE SOTO

not, probably, as given by the Fidalgo. According to the Inca Garcilaso, the body was disinterred and placed in a hollowed-out log of live-oak, where it was confined by a plank, nailed over the aperture. Then it was taken in a canoe to the centre of the river, where it was given to its last resting-place, one hundred feet beneath the surface of the stream.

Thus, in the darkness of midnight, in a strange land and surrounded by hostile savages, with the dramatic accessories of a torch-lighted canoe, hooded priests, and armored cavaliers, all that was earthly of Ferdinand de Soto was committed to the keeping of the great river he had discovered. Above his burial-place perpetually roll the waters of the mighty Mississippi, and if the Indians surmised where it was, at least they could not desecrate the remains of the cavalier who, in the language of the Inca Garcilaso, "had crossed a portion of the continent in search of gold, and found nothing so remarkable as his burial-place."

They were, doubtless, aware of what had occurred, and the cacique of Guachoya asked for De Soto, saying: "What has been done with my brother and lord, the governor?"

FERDINAND DE SOTO

“Luis de Moscoso replied that he had ascended into the skies, as he had done on many other occasions; but as he would have to be detained there some time, he had left him in his stead. The chief, thinking within himself that he was dead, ordered two well-proportioned young men to be brought, saying that it was the usage of his country, when any lord died, to kill some persons of inferior rank, who should accompany and serve him on the way; and he told him to command their heads to be struck off, that they might go accordingly to attend his friend and master.

“Then Moscoso rejoined, that the governor was not dead, but only gone into the heavens, having taken with him of his soldiers sufficient number for his needs; and he besought him to let those Indians go, and from that time forward not to follow so evil a practice. So they were presently ordered to be let loose, that they might return to their homes; but one of them refused to leave, alleging that he did not wish to remain in the power of one who, without cause, had condemned him to die, and that he desired to serve the one who had saved his life, so long as he should live.”

LAST DAYS OF DE SOTO

The departed commander's pitiful state was shown when, Moscoso having ordered a sale of his property by public outcry, it was found to consist solely of two male and three female slaves, three horses with their trappings, and seven hundred swine. These last had wonderfully increased, from the survivors of the many vicissitudes to which they had been exposed, and had been jealously safeguarded by De Soto, who knew their value as affording sustenance in the extremity of famine. Bought by the soldiers at two hundred crowns apiece (to be paid for when they should have the money), henceforth, says one of their number, they lived on pork so long as it lasted, having previously passed two or three months at a time without tasting meat of any sort.

While the life-story of Ferdinand de Soto ends with his burial beneath the waters of the Mississippi, yet it may be naturally assumed that the reader, having followed his fortunes so long, will be interested in the fate of those with whom he was intimately associated on the terrible journey. Many had looked forward to the death of their commander as likely to afford them opportunity to depart

FERDINAND DE SOTO

for Cuba, but at a council of war called by Moscoso it was decided to press on westward in search of Mexico. Moscoso proved himself a very incapable commander, and during the year that followed led his men on a wearisome and aimless journey, that finally terminated at or near the place where De Soto died.

They had marched over many hundred miles of new territory, and left behind them ghastly traces of their wanderings, in the corpses of soldiers who had fallen or been slain by the way in conflicts with the savages. Wheresoever the Spaniards had passed, the country lay devastated, and it was but a haggard, wretched, and famine-stricken remnant of the original company that finally arrived at Guachoya and viewed there, with many a sad foreboding, the place where the governor, De Soto, had died.

One by one the cavaliers with whom we became acquainted on the march through Florida had dropped from the ranks, among the most prominent being Nuño de Tobar, who (as doubtless the reader will recall) had incurred his commander's displeasure by his betrayal of the lovely Leonora. He had done everything in his power to placate the

LAST DAYS OF DE SOTO

incensed governor, and during the long period of their journeyings together had borne himself like a hero in every battle and skirmish; but De Soto passed away without showing any signs of relenting towards the unfortunate Nuño de Tobar.

The winter of 1542-1543 was passed in comparative comfort, for the caciques of the country had become aware of the intention of the Spaniards to depart, and, overjoyed at the prospect, hastened to supply provisions of every sort. But the building of the brigantines was a long and tedious process, for there was only one ship-carpenter in the army, and material for their construction was scarce. Nails and bolts were made from every scrap of iron obtainable: from the manacles of the Indian captives, then perforce set free; from the troopers' bits and stirrups, disused musket-barrels rendered inefficient by the lack of ammunition, and sword-blades that had been injured beyond repair. The Indians gave their services for the cutting of timber and bearing it from the forests to the river-bank; but it was not until July 2, 1543, that the wretched remains of De Soto's once-noble army, then reduced to less than three hundred and fifty men, embarked upon the

FERDINAND DE SOTO

bosom of the great river which, as the Spaniards supposed, would take them to the sea, upon whose shores they might find a haven of safety.

The cumbersome craft were difficult to manage, for the currents of the Mississippi were swift and dangerous; but they encountered yet another peril, in vast fleets of canoes manned with Indian warriors by the hostile cacique Quigaltanqui—the same who had sent the defiant message to De Soto when on his bed of death. Instead of endeavoring to placate this chieftain, Moscoso had further exasperated him by cutting off the hands of thirty spies, whom he had captured in his camp, and sent home thus horribly mutilated. Wrought to the highest pitch of fury, the cacique vowed revenge, and soon after the Spanish fleet put down the river it was assailed by thousands of savages, whose naked skins were hideously painted, and who proved fatally expert with bow and arrow, as well as with spear and war-club. It was not long before all but eight of the horses were killed and nearly every Spaniard wounded, while on the fourth day of the voyage four boats were cut off from the little fleet and forty-eight soldiers met death by

LAST DAYS OF DE SOTO

drowning or by Indian arrows. A few days later the hapless Spaniards were compelled to witness the extermination of their beloved horses, which they had landed for the purpose of foraging on shore. Left to their cruel fate—for their owners barely escaped with their lives—the poor beasts were felled by savages with war-clubs and transfixed with arrows, while the troopers looked on and wept, in futile rage and grief. As all their powder had been consumed in the fire at Mauvila, the few arquebuses remaining were useless, and the harried Spaniards could only defend themselves with their cross-bows, for once in their experience enduring greater losses than they inflicted upon the enemy. This unequal combat went on during sixteen days, until at last, their vengeance sated, the savages gave over the pursuit and departed up the river, amid howls and songs of victory.

Shortly after, the unfortunate voyagers sighted the sea; but their troubles were then by no means ended, for they were without chart, compass, pilot, or skilled navigator, and knew not whether to push out boldly into the Gulf of Mexico or follow the windings of the coast. The former course was adopted, but a gale of twenty-six hours'

FERDINAND DE SOTO

duration separated and nearly wrecked the frail brigantines, which after that were kept in near to shore. They voyaged so slowly that nearly two months were consumed in reaching a Mexican port now known as Tampico, the inhabitants of which received the starving survivors with generous hospitality. Clad in the skins of wild beasts, with hair and beards untrimmed, the once-vaunted soldiers of Florida were objects of wonder and commiseration. After having been supplied with food and clothing by the Mexicans, they were sent overland to the city of Mexico, where the viceroy and the commonalty vied in showing them kindness and attention.

Few of these Floridian soldiers ever returned to Spain or to Cuba, but ended their days in Mexico or Peru, where they enlisted for military service. The viceroy of Mexico offered to equip another expedition and send them back to colonize the country which at a distance and in retrospection, appeared to them fruitful and promising; but when put to the test they shrank from the fatigues and dangers to which they might be exposed.

They had reached Mexico about the middle of September, 1543. A month later one of several expeditions, sent out by Doña

LAST DAYS OF DE SOTO

Isabel from Havana, arrived at Vera Cruz and learned for the first time of the disasters that had overtaken De Soto. It was commanded by those loyal cavaliers Diego Maldonado and Gomez Arias, who (as the reader will remember) had been despatched by De Soto to Cuba for reinforcements and supplies. They faithfully fulfilled their respective missions, and returned to Pensacola, where they waited long and anxiously in the harbor, daily expecting their commander to appear. When finally convinced that further waiting was in vain, they searched the harbors east and west for many leagues, then returned to Cuba, whence, the next summer, they were again sent to Florida by the anxious and loyal wife of De Soto.

A second time they returned, after an equally fruitless quest, and the next season sailed again, cruising around the Gulf of Mexico as far as Vera Cruz, where at last they learned of what had happened. The sorrowful tidings which they carried back to Doña Isabel, still waiting and hoping in Havana, overwhelmed her so completely that she soon after sank broken-hearted to her grave.

INDEX

- ACHALAUQUE, province of, 192.
- Achese, province, 159.
- Acoste, cacique of, 202, 204, 207.
- Acuera, Indian cacique, 112, 113.
- Adelantado, title given De Soto, 78.
- Alibamo, Indian stronghold, 247.
- Añasco, Juan de, soldier, 84, 142, 143, 145, 146, 149, 181, 184, 246, 270.
- Anhayca, Apalachee capital, 142. (*see map*).
- Anilco, province of, 268, 269.
- Apalachee tribe of Indians, 133 *et seq.*; chap. x.
- Arias, Gomez, Spanish soldier, 145, 147; seeks De Soto, 285.
- Arkansas River crossed by De Soto, 269.
- Atahuallpa, Inca of Peru, 1, 2, 60-62.
- Atapaha, Floridian province, 159.
- Auté, bay of, 144, 151.
- Autiamque province, 265, 266.
- Avila, Don Pedro Arias de (Pedrarias), 14-18, 21, 23, 24, 31, 42; murders De Cordova, 44; denounced by De Soto, 47; atrocities and death of, 59.
- Ayllon, Vasquez de, lawyer-explorer, 182.
- BADAJOS, castle of, Spain, 72.
- Balboa, Vasco Nuñez de, 17, 19.
- Barbacoa, Indian corn-crib, 171.
- Bison, or buffalo, seen, 172.
- Blood-hound, a sagacious, 116.
- Bobadilla, Isabel de. *See* Isabel, and Doña.
- CACICA, female cacique, 163, 176, 180; generosity of, 189; made captive, 190; escape of the, 193.
- Calderon, Captain Pedro, 103, 149.
- Capachiqui, in Florida, 159.
- Capafi, cacique, 140, 152-154.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

- Capaha, Indian cacique, 257-260, 262.
- Casqui, Lord, 253, 256 *et seq.*
- Cherokees, country of the, 192.
- Chickasaws, country of the, 238.
- Child of the sun, 4, 271.
- Choctaws, land of the, 208.
- Chucagua, Indian name of Mississippi River, 248.
- Codro, astrologer, 50-56.
- Cofachiqui, cacica's province, 163.
- Cofaqui, cacique of, 163.
- Coosa River, the, 202, 205.
- Cordova, Fernando de, 42-44.
- Cross raised by De Soto, 254.
- DE CORDOVA, FERDINAND.
See Cordova.
- De Soto, Ferdinand. *See* Soto.
- Diaz, Bernal, 44.
- Dogs, native, as food supply, 161.
- Don Pedro. *See* Avila.
- Doña Isabel. *See* Isabel de Bobadilla.
- ESPINOSA, CAPTAIN, 32, 35, 36.
- Espiritu Santo, bay of, 90; original Spanish name of Mississippi River.
- FALCONET, the, abandoned, 162.
- "Fidalgo" of Elvas, Portuguese narrator, 157, 177, 207, 249, 271, 273.
- Florida, first landing in, 74; De Soto governor of, 77; lands in, 90; Indians of, 92.
- GALLEGOS, BALTASAR DE, soldier, 80, 99, 220; consoles De Soto, 274.
- Gaytan, Juan, defection of, 262.
- Gold, gossip about, 157, 158.
- Gomera, the governor of, 80; daughter of, 80, 81.
- Gonzales, Gil, 42-44.
- Granada, in Nicaragua, 43.
- Guachoya, town and chief of, 269, 270, 280.
- HAMMOCK bridges, 109.
- Havana, departure from, 89.
- Hidalguia* of Spain, 14.
- Hillsboro River, 109.
- ICHIAHA, cacique of, 196.
- Inca Garcilaso, the, 277.
- Indian princess, 176 *et seq.*
- Indians, of Nicaragua, 31; of Florida, 92, 93, 95, 96; fierce warriors of the, 112; different tribes, 113; battles with, 125-128, 135-140; of Apalachee, 133, 142; sufferings of, 159; sepulchres of, 188; treachery of, 220, 239; painted like devils, 245; intrepidity of, 247; on the Mississippi, 250, 253; languages of the, 267; revenge themselves upon the Spaniards, 282.

INDEX

- Irving, Theodore, *The Conquest of Florida*, 237, 248.
- Isabel de Bobadilla, 16, 17, 19, 22; married to De Soto, 71; Doña, remains in Cuba, 89; receives tidings from De Soto, 147; dies broken-hearted, 285.
- JERÉS DE LOS CABALLEROS**, 13, 14.
- "KNIGHT OF LA MANCHA," the, 105.
- LEON**, town in Nicaragua, 43; Ponce de, 74, 77.
- Leonora, daughter of Spanish governor, 81.
- MALDONADO, DIEGO**, 150, 214, 230; searches for De Soto, 285.
- Mauvila (or Mobile), Indian stronghold, 211-213; battle of, chapter xvi.
- Mexico, arrival of De Soto's men in, 284.
- Mississippi River, first glimpse of, by De Soto, 248, 252.
- Mocoso, Indian chief, in Florida, 97, 98, 107, 146.
- Moscoso, Luis de, Spanish captain, 110, 219, 239, 275, 276, 278, 280, 282.
- Moya, Marchioness of, 15.
- NARVAEZ, PÁNFILO DE**, 74, 75; relics of, 144.
- OCALI**, Indian town of, 114; cacique of, 117.
- Ochile, Indian town, 118.
- Ochuse, bay of Pensacola, 150.
- Ortiz, Juan, interpreter, 98, 99, 101; death of, 266.
- Osachile, village of, 131, 132.
- Osorio, Don Antonio, 243.
- Oviedo, historian, 235, 243.
- PANAMA** founded by Pedrarias, 27.
- Paracoxi, Indian chief, 107, 108.
- Patofa, cacique, 164, 165, 169, 173, 174.
- Pearls, vast quantities of, 180; fishing for, 199.
- Pedrarias. *See* Avila.
- Pensacola Bay discovered, 150; distance from Mauvila, 230.
- Perico, Indian interpreter, 166, 167.
- Pizarro, Francisco and brothers, 6; Hernando, 7, 9.
- Ponce, Hernan, 85, 88.
- Porcallo, Vasco, 82, 83, 92, 105, 107.
- QUIGALTANQUI**, cacique of, 270, 271, 282.
- Quizquiz, Indian town, 249; cacique of, 250.
- RANJEL, RODRIGO, De Soto's secretary**, 98, 181, 229, 243.
- Rio Grande, Great River—Mississippi, 248.

FERDINAND DE SOTO

- Rios, Don Pedro de los, 42.
- ST. MARKS BAY discovered, 144.
- "Secret of the strait," the, 48, 49.
- Sioux Indians, mention of, 253.
- Soto, Ferdinand de, advent of, 1-4; early life of, 13-20; sails for America, 21; fights a duel, 27; in Nicaragua, 30-44; defies Pedrarias, 47; explores Nicaragua, 49; avenges death of friend, 57; friend of the Inca, 61, 63; campaign in Peru, 60 *et seq.*; denounces Pizarro, 63; attacks Peruvians, 65; enters Cuzco, 67; returns to Spain, 69; enriched by plunder, 70; marries Isabel de Bobadilla, 71; adelantado of Florida, 77; sails for Cuba, 79; arrives at Santiago, 81; at Havana, 84; lands in Florida, 90; on the march, 107 *et seq.*; is wounded by Indian, 127; burns captive at stake, 168; takes a princess captive, 190; in a terrible battle, 221, 226; severely wounded, 222; loses his nephews in fight, 222; strange determination of, 234; in burning village, 240; in great extremity, 242; again wounded, 247; arrives at Mississippi River, 247; not its discoverer, 248; mutilates Indians, 264; last days of, 273; bids farewell to companions, 274; death of, 275; burial of beneath the Mississippi, 276.
- Suwanee River, 130; Old Town, 132.
- Swamp, battle of the, 135-138.
- TALIMICO, tombs of, 182, 188.
- Talise, Tuscaloosa's town, 210.
- Tallahassee, site of, 144.
- Tampa Bay—Espíritu Santo, 95.
- Tampico, Spaniards arrive at, 284.
- Terron, Juan, and his pearls, 194.
- Toalli, aboriginal town, 159.
- Tobar, Nuño de, cavalier, 80, 81; death of, 280.
- Tula, Indian town of, 264.
- Tuscaloosa, mighty warrior, 208, 212; encounter with, 215, 228.
- UCITA, Chief, maltreated by Narvaez, 94, 96.
- Uracca, Nicaraguan Indian, 31, 40.
- Utiangué, or Autiamque, 266.
- VACA, CABEZA DE, 75, 76, 78.

INDEX

- Valenzuela, Geronimo, 54, 55.
Veragua, province of, 31.
Vitachuco, cacique and province of, 118, 128.
WARRIOR, the Black, or Tuscaloosa, 208.
XERÉS DE LOS CABALLEROS, 14.
YAZOO RIVER, 247.
Yemasseees of Florida, 113.
ZEBACOS islands, 55.



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

NOV 18 1959

REC'D ED-URL

OCT 15 1986

SEP 19 1986

APR 19 1989

REC'D LD-URL APR 07 1989

REC'D LD-URL

MAY 07 1995

JAN 11 1995

Form L9-42m-8, '49 (B5578) 444

THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Ober -

25 Ferdinand de
7012 Soto.

BINDERY

JUL 15 1949

E125
S7012

3 1158 01136 62

