

business in which we were engaged, wherein we had no other alternative but conquest or death; for in case of defeat we had no means of escape, and must depend entirely, under God, on our own valour; afterwards adding many comparisons of our present situation with incidents drawn from the Roman history. We unanimously answered, That we were prepared to obey and follow him wherever he chose to lead, the lot being now cast, as Cæsar said on passing the Rubicon, and we devoted ourselves to the service of God and our emperor. He then addressed us in an eloquent speech; after which he called for the fat cacique, whom he informed of our intended march to Mexico, and gave him strict injunctions to take great care of the holy cross and the church we had established.

When we were ready to depart on our expedition to Mexico, a letter was brought from Escalente, informing Cortes that a strange ship had come to anchor in a river about three leagues from Villa Rica, from which he could get no answer to his signals. Cortes left the command of the army during his absence to Alvarado and Sandoval, and set out with four horsemen for Villa Rica, leaving orders for thirty of the lightest armed infantry to follow, who accordingly arrived that night. Escalente offered to go with twenty men to the vessel, lest she might escape; but Cortes set out along the coast without delay, and fell in with four Spaniards on the road, who had been sent on shore by Alonzo Alvarez de Pineda, the captain of the vessel, to take formal possession of the country. One of these was a notary, named Guillen de la Loa, and the rest attended him to witness the act. From these men Cortes was informed that Francisco de Garay, governor of Jamaica, had procured a commission from the court as adelantado of such districts as he might discover on this coast to the north of the river of St Peter and St Paul, and had sent three ships with 270 soldiers under Pineda, who was then in the river of Panuco. Cortes wished to have got possession of the ship, but no signals could induce the people to land, as we were informed by de la Loa that their captain was aware of our being on the coast. As a stratagem to decoy them on shore, Cortes dressed four of his soldiers in the clothes of the Spaniards he had taken, and left them on the spot, returning along-shore towards Villa Rica, that he might be noticed from the ship; but after we had got out of sight, we made a secret detour through the