

distant vassals, and resolved to profit by the intelligence. He was well aware that his single arm could do little against the legions of the Indian Monarch, and that his hope of success lay either in arming one half of the kingdom against the other, or in forming an alliance with its powerful enemies. The event proved the truth of his anticipations. But Cortés foresaw other difficulties that required more than ordinary caution and policy to deal with. Disaffection appeared in his little camp. A conspiracy was actually formed to seize one of the ships and return to Cuba, and report to Velasquez the proceedings of Cortés. Fortunately, this plan was defeated. One of the party betrayed the rest. Cortés immediately seized the ringleaders, and by the severity and promptness of their punishment, struck a salutary terror into the rest. In order to leave his followers no alternative but conquest or death, he resolved to destroy the shipping, and thus prevent the hope of return to their own country. This he did, casting over the transaction the veil of necessity, alleging the ships were not seaworthy. It needed all the consummate address and presence of mind that peculiarly characterized the Spanish General to enable him to appease the murmurings of the soldiers, and induce them to second his efforts; but his politic oratory finally prevailed, and the pent-up feelings of rage and despair with which they were met, found vent in enthusiastic shouts,—“To Mexico!” “To Mexico!”

The little band were now fairly embarked in the great enterprise. They turned their faces towards Mexico; and leaving their infant colony, traversed the wide plain that extends from the sea coast to the Valley of Mexico. At times their road lay through a country rich in all the treasures of agriculture, aided by a most genial climate,—“a land where fruits and flowers chase one another in an unbroken circle through the year, where the gales are loaded with perfumes, and the groves are filled with many-colored birds.” The journey did not continue long so agreeable. They soon experienced a change of climate; cold winds, with rain, sleet, and hail, drenched their clothes, and produced much sickness and suffering. But dangers of a sterner nature waited them ere long. They were about to encounter an enemy in the field justly held in the highest estimation as warriors, to whom belonged the exclusive glory of having suc-