

for astronomical studies, and is said to have had an observatory on one of his palaces.⁷⁷ He was devoted to war in his youth, but, as he advanced in years, resigned himself to a more indolent way of life, and sought his chief amusement in the pursuit of his favorite science, or in the soft pleasures of the sequestered gardens of Tezcotzinco. This quiet life was ill suited to the turbulent temper of the times, and of his Mexican rival, Montezuma. The distant provinces fell off from their allegiance; the army relaxed its discipline; disaffection crept into its ranks; and the wily Montezuma, partly by violence, and partly by stratagems unworthy of a king, succeeded in plundering his brother monarch of some of his most valuable domains. Then it was, that he arrogated to himself the title and supremacy of emperor, hitherto borne by the Tezcucan princes, as head of the alliance. Such is the account given by the historians of that nation, who, in this way, explain the acknowledged superiority of the Aztec sovereign, both in territory and consideration, on the landing of the Spaniards.⁷⁸

voice of nature in his own bosom, in obedience to the laws. As Suetonius said of a prince who had not his virtue, "Vehemens et in coercendis quidem delictis immodicus." Vita Galbæ, sec. 9.

⁷⁷ Torquemada saw the remains of this, or what passed for such, in his day. Monarch. Ind., lib. 2, cap. 64.

⁷⁸ Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 73, 74.

This sudden transfer of empire from the Tezcucans, at the close of the reigns of two of their ablest monarchs, is so improbable, that one cannot but doubt if they ever possessed it, — at least, to the extent claimed by the patriotic historian. See Ante, Chap. 1, note 25, and the corresponding text.

These misfortunes pressed heavily on the spirits of Nezahualpilli. Their effect was increased by certain gloomy prognostics of a near calamity which was to overwhelm the country.⁷⁹ He withdrew to his retreat, to brood in secret over his sorrows. His health rapidly declined; and in the year 1515, at the age of fifty-two, he sunk into the grave;⁸⁰ happy, at least, that, by this timely death, he escaped witnessing the fulfilment of his own predictions, in the ruin of his country, and the extinction of the Indian dynasties, for ever.⁸¹

In reviewing the brief sketch here presented of the Tezcucan monarchy, we are strongly impressed with the conviction of its superiority, in all the great features of civilization, over the rest of Anahuac. The Mexicans showed a similar proficiency, no doubt, in the mechanic arts, and even in mathematical science. But in the science of government, in legislation, in speculative doctrines of a religious nature, in the more elegant pursuits of poetry, elo-

⁷⁹ Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 72.

The reader will find a particular account of these prodigies, better authenticated than most miracles, in a future page of this History.

⁸⁰ Ibid., cap. 75.—Or, rather, at the age of fifty, if the historian is right, in placing his birth, as he does, in a preceding chapter, in 1465. (See cap. 46.) It is not easy to decide what is true, when the writer does not take the trouble to be true to himself.

⁸¹ His obsequies were celebrated with sanguinary pomp. Two hundred male and one hundred female slaves were sacrificed at his tomb. His body was consumed, amidst a heap of jewels, precious stuffs, and incense, on a funeral pile; and the ashes, deposited in a golden urn, were placed in the great temple of Huitzilopotchli, for whose worship the king, notwithstanding the lessons of his father, had some partiality. Ibid.

quence, and whatever depended on refinement of taste and a polished idiom, they confessed themselves inferior, by resorting to their rivals for instruction, and citing their works as the masterpieces of their tongue. The best histories, the best poems, the best code of laws, the purest dialect, were all allowed to be Tezcucan. The Aztecs rivalled their neighbours in splendor of living, and even in the magnificence of their structures. They displayed a pomp and ostentatious pageantry, truly Asiatic. But this was the development of the material, rather than the intellectual principle. They wanted the refinement of manners essential to a continued advance in civilization. An insurmountable limit was put to theirs, by that bloody mythology, which threw its withering taint over the very air that they breathed.

The superiority of the Tezcucans was owing, doubtless, in a great measure, to that of the two sovereigns whose reigns we have been depicting. There is no position, which affords such scope for ameliorating the condition of man, as that occupied by an absolute ruler over a nation imperfectly civilized. From his elevated place, commanding all the resources of his age, it is in his power to diffuse them far and wide among his people. He may be the copious reservoir on the mountain top, drinking in the dews of heaven, to send them in fertilizing streams along the lower slopes and valleys, clothing even the wilderness in beauty. Such were Nezahualcoyotl, and his illustrious successor, whose en-

lightened policy, extending through nearly a century, wrought a most salutary revolution in the condition of their country. It is remarkable that we, the inhabitants of the same continent, should be more familiar with the history of many a barbarian chief, both in the Old and New World, than with that of these truly great men, whose names are identified with the most glorious period in the annals of the Indian races.

What was the actual amount of the Tezcucan civilization, it is not easy to determine, with the imperfect light afforded us. It was certainly far below any thing, which the word conveys, measured by a European standard. In some of the arts, and in any walk of science, they could only have made, as it were, a beginning. But they had begun in the right way, and already showed a refinement in sentiment and manners, a capacity for receiving instruction, which, under good auspices, might have led them on to indefinite improvement. Unhappily, they were fast falling under the dominion of the warlike Aztecs. And that people repaid the benefits received from their more polished neighbours by imparting to them their own ferocious superstition, which, falling like a mildew on the land, would soon have blighted its rich blossoms of promise, and turned even its fruits to dust and ashes.

Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, who flourished in the beginning of the sixteenth century, was a native of Tezcuco, and descended in a

direct line from the sovereigns of that kingdom. The royal posterity became so numerous in a few generations, that it was common to see them reduced to great poverty, and earning a painful subsistence by the most humble occupations. Ixtlilxochitl, who was descended from the principal wife or queen of Nezahualpilli, maintained a very respectable position. He filled the office of interpreter to the viceroy, to which he was recommended by his acquaintance with the ancient hieroglyphics, and his knowledge of the Mexican and Spanish languages. His birth gave him access to persons of the highest rank in his own nation, some of whom occupied important civil posts under the new government, and were thus enabled to make large collections of Indian manuscripts, which were liberally opened to him. He had an extensive library of his own, also, and with these means diligently pursued the study of the Tezcucan antiquities. He deciphered the hieroglyphics, made himself master of the songs and traditions, and fortified his narrative by the oral testimony of some very aged persons, who had themselves been acquainted with the Conquerors. From such authentic sources he composed various works in the Castilian, on the primitive history of the Toltec and the Tezcucan races, continuing it down to the subversion of the empire by Cortés. These various accounts, compiled under the title of *Relaciones*, are, more or less, repetitions and abridgments of each other; nor is it easy to understand why they were thus composed. The *Historia Chichimeca* is the best digested and most complete of the whole series; and as such has been the most frequently consulted, for the preceding pages.

Ixtlilxochitl's writings have many of the defects belonging to his age. He often crowds the page with incidents of a trivial, and sometimes improbable character. The improbability increases with the distance of the period; for distance, which diminishes objects to the natural eye, exaggerates them to the mental. His chronology, as I have more than once noticed, is inextricably entangled. He has often lent a too willing ear to traditions and reports which would startle the more skeptical criticism of the present time. Yet there is an appearance of good faith and simplicity in his writings, which may convince the reader, that, when he errs, it is from no worse cause than national partiality. And surely such partiality is excusable in the descendant of a proud line, shorn of its ancient splendors, which it was soothing to his own feelings to revive again,—though with something more than their legitimate lustre,—on the canvass of history. It should also be considered, that, if his narrative is sometimes startling, his researches penetrate into the mysterious depths of antiquity, where light and darkness meet and melt into each other; and when everything is still further liable to distortion, as seen through the misty medium of hieroglyphics.

With these allowances, it will be found that the Tezcucan historian has just claims to our admiration for the compass of his inquiries, and the sagacity with which they have been conducted. He has introduced us to the knowledge of the most polished people of Anahuac, whose records, if preserved, could not, at a much later period, have been comprehended; and he has thus afforded a standard of comparison, which much raises our ideas of American civilization. His language is simple, and, occasionally, eloquent and touching. His descriptions are highly picturesque. He abounds in familiar anecdote; and the natural graces of his manner, in detailing the more striking events of history, and the personal adventures of his heroes, entitle him to the name of the Livy of Anahuac.

I shall be obliged to enter hereafter into his literary merits, in connexion with the narrative of the Conquest; for which he is a prominent authority. His earlier annals — though no one of his manuscripts has been printed — have been diligently studied by the Spanish writers in Mexico, and liberally transferred to their pages; and his reputation, like Sahagun's, has doubtless suffered by the process. His *Historia Chichemeca* is now turned into French by M. Ternaux-Compans, forming part of that inestimable series of translations from unpublished documents, which have so much enlarged our acquaintance with the early American history. I have had ample opportunity of proving the merits of his version of Ixtlilxochitl; and am happy to bear my testimony to the fidelity and elegance with which it is executed.

NOTE. It was my intention to conclude this Introductory portion of the work with an inquiry into the *Origin of the Mexican Civilization*. "But the general question of the origin of the inhabitants of a continent," says Humboldt, "is beyond the limits prescribed to history; perhaps it is not even a philosophic question." "For the majority of readers," says Livy, "the origin and remote antiquities of a nation can have comparatively little interest." The criticism of these great writers is just and pertinent; and, on further consideration, I have thrown the observations on this topic, prepared with some care, into the *Appendix (Part 1)*; to which those, who feel sufficient curiosity in the discussion, can turn before entering on the narrative of the Conquest.

BOOK SECOND.

DISCOVERY OF MEXICO

P.C. Monumental de la Alhambra y Generalife

CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA



JUNTA DE ANDALUCIA

VOL. I.

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BOOK II.

DISCOVERY OF MEXICO.

CHAPTER I.

SPAIN UNDER CHARLES V.—PROGRESS OF DISCOVERY.—COLONIAL POLICY.—CONQUEST OF CUBA.—EXPEDITIONS TO YUCATAN.

1516 — 1518.

IN the beginning of the sixteenth century, Spain occupied perhaps the most prominent position on the theatre of Europe. The numerous states, into which she had been so long divided, were consolidated into one monarchy. The Moslem crescent, after reigning there for eight centuries, was no longer seen on her borders. The authority of the crown did not, as in later times, overshadow the inferior orders of the state. The people enjoyed the inestimable privilege of political representation, and exercised it with manly independence. The nation at large could boast as great a degree of constitutional freedom, as any other, at that time, in Christendom. Under a system of salutary laws and an equitable administration, domestic tranquillity was secured,

public credit established, trade, manufactures, and even the more elegant arts, began to flourish; while a higher education called forth the first blossoms of that literature, which was to ripen into so rich a harvest, before the close of the century. Arms abroad kept pace with arts at home. Spain found her empire suddenly enlarged by important acquisitions both in Europe and Africa, while a New World beyond the waters poured into her lap treasures of countless wealth, and opened an unbounded field for honorable enterprise.

Such was the condition of the kingdom at the close of the long and glorious reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, when, on the 23d of January, 1516, the sceptre passed into the hands of their daughter Joanna, or rather their grandson, Charles the Fifth, who alone ruled the monarchy during the long and imbecile existence of his unfortunate mother. During the two years following Ferdinand's death, the regency, in the absence of Charles, was held by Cardinal Ximenes, a man whose intrepidity, extraordinary talents, and capacity for great enterprises were accompanied by a haughty spirit, which made him too indifferent as to the means of their execution. His administration, therefore, notwithstanding the uprightness of his intentions, was, from his total disregard of forms, unfavorable to constitutional liberty; for respect for forms is an essential element of freedom. With all his faults, however, Ximenes was a Spaniard; and the object he had at heart was the good of his country.

It was otherwise on the arrival of Charles, who, after a long absence, came as a foreigner into the land of his fathers. (November, 1517.) His manners, sympathies, even his language, were foreign, for he spoke the Castilian with difficulty. He knew little of his native country, of the character of the people or their institutions. He seemed to care still less for them; while his natural reserve precluded that freedom of communication, which might have counteracted, to some extent, at least, the errors of education. In everything, in short, he was a foreigner, and resigned himself to the direction of his Flemish counsellors with a docility that gave little augury of his future greatness.

On his entrance into Castile, the young monarch was accompanied by a swarm of courtly sycophants, who settled, like locusts, on every place of profit and honor throughout the kingdom. A Fleming was made grand chancellor of Castile; another Fleming was placed in the archiepiscopal see of Toledo. They even ventured to profane the sanctity of the *córtes*, by intruding themselves on its deliberations. Yet that body did not tamely submit to these usurpations, but gave vent to its indignation in tones becoming the representatives of a free people.¹

¹ The following passage — one among many — from that faithful mirror of the times, Peter Martyr's correspondence, does ample justice to the intemperance, avarice, and intolerable arrogance of the Flemings. The testimony is worth the more, as coming from

one who, though resident in Spain, was not a Spaniard. "Crumentas auro fulcire inhiant; huic uni studio invigilant. Nec detrectat juvenis Rex. Farcit quacunque possedatur; non satiat tamen. Quæ qualisve sit gens hæc, depingere adhuc nescio. Insufflat vulgus hic

The deportment of Charles, so different from that to which the Spaniards had been accustomed under the benign administration of Ferdinand and Isabella, closed all hearts against him; and, as his character came to be understood, instead of the spontaneous outpourings of loyalty, which usually greet the accession of a new and youthful sovereign, he was everywhere encountered by opposition and disgust. In Castile, and afterwards in Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia, the commons hesitated to confer on him the title of *King* during the lifetime of his mother; and, though they eventually yielded this point, and associated his name with hers in the sovereignty, yet they reluctantly granted the supplies he demanded, and, when they did so, watched over their appropriation with a vigilance which left little to gratify the cupidity of the Flemings. The language of the legislature on these occasions, though temperate and respectful, breathes a spirit of resolute independence not to be found, probably, on the parliamentary records of any other nation at that period. No wonder that Charles should have early imbibed a disgust for these popular assemblies,—the only bodies whence truths so unpalatable could find their way to the ears of the sovereign!² Unfortunately,

in omne genus hominum non arc-
tuum. Minores faciunt Hispanos,
quam si nati essent inter eorum clo-
acas. Rugiunt jam Hispani, labra
mordent, submurmurant taciti, fato-
rum vices tales esse conqueruntur,
quod ipsi domitores regnorum ita
floccifiant ab his, quorum Deus uni-

cus (sub rege temperato) Bacchus
est cum Citherea." Opus Episto-
larum, (Amstelodami, 1610,) ep.
608.

² Yet the nobles were not all
backward in manifesting their dis-
gust. When Charles would have
conferred the famous Burgundian

they had no influence on his conduct; till the discontent, long allowed to fester in secret, broke out into that sad war of the *comunidades*, which shook the state to its foundations, and ended in the subversion of its liberties.

The same pestilent foreign influence was felt, though much less sensibly, in the Colonial administration. This had been placed, in the preceding reign, under the immediate charge of the two great tribunals, the Council of the Indies, and the *Casa de Contratacion*, or India House, at Seville. It was their business to further the progress of discovery, watch over the infant settlements, and adjust the disputes which grew up in them. But the licenses granted to private adventurers did more for the cause of discovery, than the patronage of the crown or its officers. The long peace, enjoyed with slight interruption by Spain in the early part of the sixteenth century, was most auspicious for this; and the restless cavalier, who could no longer win laurels on the fields of Africa or Europe, turned with eagerness to the brilliant career opened to him beyond the ocean.

It is difficult for those of our time, as familiar from childhood with the most remote places on the globe as with those in their own neighbourhood, to picture to themselves the feelings of the men who

order of the Golden Fleece on the Count of Benavente, that lord refused it, proudly telling him, "I am a Castilian. I desire no honors but those of my own country, in my opinion, quite as good as—

indeed, better than those of any other." Sandoval, *Historia de la Vida y Hechos del Emperador Carlos V.*, (Ambéres, 1681,) tom. I. p. 103.

lived in the sixteenth century. The dread mystery, which had so long hung over the great deep, had, indeed, been removed. It was no longer beset with the same undefined horrors as when Columbus launched his bold bark on its dark and unknown waters. A new and glorious world had been thrown open. But as to the precise spot where that world lay, its extent, its history, whether it were island or continent,—of all this, they had very vague and confused conceptions. Many, in their ignorance, blindly adopted the erroneous conclusion into which the great Admiral had been led by his superior science,—that the new countries were a part of Asia; and, as the mariner wandered among the Bahamas, or steered his caravel across the Caribbean seas, he fancied he was inhaling the rich odors of the spice-islands in the Indian Ocean. Thus every fresh discovery, interpreted by this previous delusion, served to confirm him in his error, or, at least, to fill his mind with new perplexities.

The career thus thrown open had all the fascinations of a desperate hazard, on which the adventurer staked all his hopes of fortune, fame, and life itself. It was not often, indeed, that he won the rich prize which he most coveted; but then he was sure to win the meed of glory, scarcely less dear to his chivalrous spirit; and, if he survived to return to his home, he had wonderful stories to recount, of perilous chances among the strange people he had visited, and the burning climes, whose rank fertility and magnificence of vegetation so far surpassed any thing

he had witnessed in his own. These reports added fresh fuel to imaginations already warmed by the study of those tales of chivalry which formed the favorite reading of the Spaniards, at that period. Thus romance and reality acted on each other, and the soul of the Spaniard was exalted to that pitch of enthusiasm, which enabled him to encounter the terrible trials that lay in the path of the discoverer. Indeed, the life of the cavalier of that day was romance put into action. The story of his adventures in the New World forms one of the most remarkable pages in the history of man.

Under this chivalrous spirit of enterprise, the progress of discovery had extended, by the beginning of Charles the Fifth's reign, from the Bay of Honduras, along the winding shores of Darien, and the South American continent, to the Rio de la Plata. The mighty barrier of the Isthmus had been climbed, and the Pacific descried, by Nuñez de Balboa, second only to Columbus in this valiant band of "ocean chivalry." The Bahamas and Caribbee Islands had been explored, as well as the Peninsula of Florida on the northern continent. To this latter point Sebastian Cabot had arrived in his descent along the coast from Labrador, in 1497. So that before 1518, the period when our narrative begins, the eastern borders of both the great continents had been surveyed through nearly their whole extent. The shores of the great Mexican Gulf, however, sweeping with a wide circuit far into the interior, remained still concealed, with the rich realms that

lay beyond, from the eye of the navigator. The time had now come for their discovery.

The business of colonization had kept pace with that of discovery. In several of the islands, and in various parts of Terra Firma, and in Darien, settlements had been established, under the control of governors who affected the state and authority of viceroys. Grants of land were assigned to the colonists, on which they raised the natural products of the soil, but gave still more attention to the sugarcane, imported from the Canaries. Sugar, indeed, together with the beautiful dye-woods of the country and the precious metals, formed almost the only articles of export in the infancy of the colonies, which had not yet introduced those other staples of the West Indian commerce, which, in our day, constitute its principal wealth. Yet the precious metals, painfully gleaned from a few scanty sources, would have made poor returns, but for the gratuitous labor of the Indians.

The cruel system of *repartimientos*, or distribution of the Indians as slaves among the conquerors, had been suppressed by Isabella. Although subsequently countenanced by the government, it was under the most careful limitations. But it is impossible to license crime by halves, — to authorize injustice at all, and hope to regulate the measure of it. The eloquent remonstrances of the Dominicans, — who devoted themselves to the good work of conversion in the New World with the same zeal that they showed for persecution in the Old, — but, above all, those of

Las Casas, induced the regent, Ximenes, to send out a commission with full powers to inquire into the alleged grievances, and to redress them. It had authority, moreover, to investigate the conduct of the civil officers, and to reform any abuses in their administration. This extraordinary commission consisted of three Hieronymite friars and an eminent jurist, all men of learning and unblemished piety.

They conducted the inquiry in a very dispassionate manner; but, after long deliberation, came to a conclusion most unfavorable to the demands of Las Casas, who insisted on the entire freedom of the natives. This conclusion they justified on the grounds, that the Indians would not labor without compulsion, and that, unless they labored, they could not be brought into communication with the whites, nor be converted to Christianity. Whatever we may think of this argument, it was doubtless urged with sincerity by its advocates, whose conduct through their whole administration places their motives above suspicion. They accompanied it with many careful provisions for the protection of the natives. But in vain. The simple people, accustomed all their days to a life of indolence and ease, sunk under the oppressions of their masters, and the population wasted away with even more frightful rapidity than did the Aborigines in our own country, under the operation of other causes. It is not necessary to pursue these details further, into which I have been led by the desire to put the reader in possession of the general policy and state of affairs

in the New World, at the period when the present narrative begins.³

Of the islands, Cuba was the second discovered ; but no attempt had been made to plant a colony there during the lifetime of Columbus ; who, indeed, after skirting the whole extent of its southern coast, died in the conviction that it was part of the continent.⁴ At length, in 1511, Diego, the son and successor of the "Admiral," who still maintained the seat of government in Hispaniola, finding the mines much exhausted there, proposed to occupy the neighbouring island of Cuba, or Fernandina, as it was called, in compliment to the Spanish monarch.⁵ He prepared a small force for the conquest, which he placed under the command of Don Diego Velasquez ; a man described by a contemporary, as "possessed of considerable experience in military affairs, having served seventeen years in the European wars ; as honest, illustrious by his lineage and reputation, covetous of glory, and somewhat more

³ I will take the liberty to refer the reader, who is desirous of being more minutely acquainted with the Spanish colonial administration and the state of discovery previous to Charles V., to the "History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella," (Part 2, ch. 9, 26,) where the subject is treated *in extenso*.

⁴ See the curious document attesting this, and drawn up by order of Columbus, ap. Navarrete, Colec-

cion de los Viages y de Descubrimientos, (Madrid, 1825,) tom. II. Col. Dip., No. 76.

⁵ The island was originally called by Columbus, Juana, in honor of prince John, heir to the Castilian crown. After his death it received the name of Fernandina, at the king's desire. The Indian name has survived both. Herrera, Hist. General, Descrip., cap. 6.

covetous of wealth.”⁶ The portrait was sketched by no unfriendly hand.

Velasquez, or rather, his lieutenant, Narvaez, who took the office on himself of scouring the country, met with no serious opposition from the inhabitants, who were of the same family with the effeminate natives of Hispaniola. The conquest, through the merciful interposition of Las Casas, “the protector of the Indians,” who accompanied the army in its march, was effected without much bloodshed. One chief, indeed, named Hatuey, having fled originally from St. Domingo to escape the oppression of its invaders, made a desperate resistance, for which he was condemned by Velasquez to be burned alive. It was he, who made that memorable reply, more eloquent than a volume of invective. When urged at the stake to embrace Christianity, that his soul might find admission into heaven, he inquired if the white men would go there. On being answered in the affirmative, he exclaimed, “Then I will not be a Christian; for I would not go again to a place where I must find men so cruel!”⁷

After the conquest, Velasquez, now appointed governor, diligently occupied himself with measures

⁶ “Erat Didacus, ut hoc in loco de eo semel tantum dicamus, veteranus miles, rei militaris gnarus, quippe qui septem et decem annos in Hispania militiam exercitus fuerat, homo probus, opibus, genere et fama clarus, honoris cupidus, pecuniæ aliquanto cupidior.” De Rebus Gestis Ferdinandi Cortesii, MS.

⁷ The story is told by Las Casas in his appalling record of the cruelties of his countrymen in the New World, which charity — and common sense — may excuse us for believing the good father has greatly overcharged. *Brevíssima Relacion de la Destruycion de las Indias*, (Venetia, 1643,) p. 28

for promoting the prosperity of the Island. He formed a number of settlements, bearing the same names with the modern towns, and made St. Jago, on the south-east corner, the seat of government.⁸ He invited settlers by liberal grants of land and slaves. He encouraged them to cultivate the soil, and gave particular attention to the sugar-cane, so profitable an article of commerce in later times. He was, above all, intent on working the gold mines, which promised better returns than those in Hispaniola. The affairs of his government did not prevent him, meanwhile, from casting many a wistful glance at the discoveries going forward on the continent, and he longed for an opportunity to embark in these golden adventures himself. Fortune gave him the occasion he desired.

An *hidalgo* of Cuba, named Hernandez de Cordova, sailed with three vessels on an expedition to one of the neighbouring Bahama Islands, in quest of Indian slaves. (February 8, 1517.) He encountered a succession of heavy gales which drove him far out of his course, and at the end of three weeks he found himself on a strange and unknown coast. On landing and asking the name of the country, he was answered by the natives, "*Tectetan*," meaning "I do not understand you," — but which the Spaniards, misinterpreting into the name of the place,

⁸ Among the most ancient of these establishments we find the Havana, Puerto del Príncipe, Trinidad, St. Salvador, and Matanzas,

or *the Slaughter*, so called from a massacre of the Spaniards there by the Indians. Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 8.

easily corrupted into Yucatan. Some writers give a different etymology.⁹ Such mistakes, however, were not uncommon with the early discoverers, and have been the origin of many a name on the American continent.¹⁰

Cordova had landed on the north-eastern end of the peninsula, at Cape Catoche. He was astonished at the size and solid materials of the buildings constructed of stone and lime, so different from the frail tenements of reeds and rushes which formed the habitations of the islanders. He was struck, also, with the higher cultivation of the soil, and with the delicate texture of the cotton garments and gold ornaments of the natives. Every thing indicated a civilization far superior to any thing he had before witnessed in the New World. He saw the evidence of a different race, moreover, in the warlike spirit of the people. Rumors of the Spaniards had, perhaps, preceded them, as they were repeatedly asked if they came from the east; and, wherever they landed, they were met with the most deadly hostility. Cordova himself, in one of his skirmishes with the Indians,

⁹ Gomara, *Historia de las Indias*, cap. 52, ap. Barcia, tom. II.

Bernal Diaz says the word came from the vegetable *yuca*, and *tale* the name for a hillock in which it is planted. (*Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 6.) M. Waldeck finds a much more plausible derivation in the Indian word *Ouyouckatan*, "listen to what they say." *Voyage Pittoresque*, p. 25.

¹⁰ Two navigators, Solís and Pinzon, had descried the coast as far back as 1506, according to Herrera, though they had not taken possession of it. (*Hist. General*, dec. 1, lib. 6, cap. 17.) It is, indeed, remarkable it should so long have eluded discovery, considering that it is but two degrees distant from Cuba.

received more than a dozen wounds, and one only of his party escaped unhurt. At length, when he had coasted the peninsula as far as Campeachy, he returned to Cuba, which he reached after an absence of several months, having suffered all the extremities of ill, which these pioneers of the ocean were sometimes called to endure, and which none but the most courageous spirit could have survived. As it was, half the original number, consisting of one hundred and ten men, perished, including their brave commander, who died soon after his return. The reports he had brought back of the country, and, still more, the specimens of curiously wrought gold, convinced Velasquez of the importance of this discovery, and he prepared with all despatch to avail himself of it.¹¹

He accordingly fitted out a little squadron of four vessels for the newly discovered lands, and placed it under the command of his nephew, Juan de Grijalva, a man on whose probity, prudence, and attachment to himself he knew he could rely. The fleet left the port of St. Jago de Cuba, May 1, 1518.¹² It took the course pursued by Cordova, but was driven somewhat to the south, the first land

¹¹ Oviedo, *General y Natural Historia de las Indias*, MS., lib. 33, cap. 1. — *De Rebus Gestis*, MS. — *Carta del Cabildo de Vera Cruz*, (July 10, 1519,) MS.

Bernal Diaz denies that the original object of the expedition, in which he took part, was to procure slaves, though Valasquez had proposed it. (*Hist. de la Conquista*,

cap. 2.) But he is contradicted in this by the other contemporary records above cited.

¹² *Itinerario de la isola de Iuchathan*, novamente ritrovata per il signor Joan de Grijalva, per il suo capellano, MS.

The chaplain's word may be taken for the date, which is usually put at the eighth of April.

that it made being the island of Cozumel. From this quarter Grijalva soon passed over to the continent and coasted the peninsula, touching at the same places as his predecessor. Everywhere he was struck, like him, with the evidences of a higher civilization, especially in the architecture; as he well might be, since this was the region of those extraordinary remains which have become recently the subject of so much speculation. He was astonished, also, at the sight of large stone crosses, evidently objects of worship, which he met with in various places. Reminded by these circumstances of his own country, he gave the peninsula the name of "New Spain," a name since appropriated to a much wider extent of territory.¹³

Wherever Grijalva landed, he experienced the same unfriendly reception as Cordova, though he suffered less, being better prepared to meet it. In the *Rio de Tabasco*, or *Grijalva*, as it is often called, after him, he held an amicable conference with a chief who gave him a number of gold plates fashioned into a sort of armor. As he wound round the Mexican coast, one of his captains, Pedro de Alvarado, afterwards famous in the Conquest, entered a river, to which he, also, left his own name. In a neighbouring stream, called the *Rio de Vanderas*, or "River of Banners," from the ensigns displayed by the natives on its borders, Grijalva had the first communication with the Mexicans themselves.

¹³ De Rebus Gestis, MS. — Itinerario del Capellano, MS.

The cacique who ruled over this province had received notice of the approach of the Europeans, and of their extraordinary appearance. He was anxious to collect all the information he could respecting them and the motives of their visit, that he might transmit them to his master, the Aztec emperor.¹⁴ A friendly conference took place between the parties on shore, where Grijalva landed with all his force, so as to make a suitable impression on the mind of the barbaric chief. The interview lasted some hours, though, as there was no one on either side to interpret the language of the other, they could communicate only by signs. They, however, interchanged presents, and the Spaniards had the satisfaction of receiving, for a few worthless toys and trinkets, a rich treasure of jewels, gold ornaments and vessels, of the most fantastic forms and workmanship.¹⁵

Grijalva now thought that in this successful traffic — successful beyond his most sanguine expectations — he had accomplished the chief object of his mission. He steadily refused the solicitations of his followers to plant a colony on the spot, — a work of no little

¹⁴ According to the Spanish authorities, the cacique was sent with these presents from the Mexican sovereign, who had received previous tidings of the approach of the Spaniards. I have followed Sahagun, who obtained his intelligence directly from the natives. *Historia de la Conquista*, MS., cap. 2.

¹⁵ Gomara has given the *per* and *contra* of this negotiation, in which gold and jewels, of the value of fifteen or twenty thousand *pesos de oro*, were exchanged for glass beads, pins, scissors, and other trinkets common in an assorted cargo for savages. *Crónica*, cap. 6.

difficulty in so populous and powerful a country as this appeared to be. To this, indeed, he was inclined, but deemed it contrary to his instructions, which limited him to barter with the natives. He therefore despatched Alvarado in one of the caravels back to Cuba, with the treasure and such intelligence as he had gleaned of the great empire in the interior, and then pursued his voyage along the coast.

He touched at San Juan de Ulua, and at the *Isla de los Sacrificios*, so called by him from the bloody remains of human victims found in one of the temples. He then held on his course as far as the province of Panuco, where finding some difficulty in doubling a boisterous headland, he returned on his track, and, after an absence of nearly six months, reached Cuba in safety. Grijalva has the glory of being the first navigator who set foot on the Mexican soil, and opened an intercourse with the Aztecs.¹⁶

On reaching the island, he was surprised to learn, that another and more formidable armament had been fitted out to follow up his own discoveries, and to find orders, at the same time, from the governor, couched in no very courteous language, to repair at once to St. Jago. He was received by that personage, not merely with coldness, but with reproaches for having neglected so fair an opportunity of establishing a colony in the country he had visited. Velasquez was one of those captious spirits, who, when things do not go exactly to their minds.

¹⁶ Itinerario del Capellano, MS. — Carta de Vera Cruz, MS.

are sure to shift the responsibility of the failure from their own shoulders, where it should lie, to those of others. He had an ungenerous nature, says an old writer, credulous, and easily moved to suspicion.¹⁷ In the present instance it was most unmerited. Grijalva, naturally a modest, unassuming person, had acted in obedience to the instructions of his commander, given before sailing; and had done this in opposition to his own judgment and the importunities of his followers. His conduct merited any thing but censure from his employer.¹⁸

When Alvarado had returned to Cuba with his golden freight, and the accounts of the rich empire of Mexico which he had gathered from the natives, the heart of the governor swelled with rapture as he saw his dreams of avarice and ambition so likely to be realized. Impatient of the long absence of Grijalva, he despatched a vessel in search of him under the command of Olid, a cavalier who took an important part afterwards in the Conquest. Finally he resolved to fit out another armament on a sufficient scale to insure the subjugation of the country.

He previously solicited authority for this from the Hieronymite commission in St. Domingo. He then despatched his chaplain to Spain with the royal share

¹⁷ "Hombre de terrible condicion," says Herrera, citing the good Bishop of Chiapa, "para los que le servian, i aiudaban, i que facilmente se indignaba contra aquellos." Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 3, cap. 10.

¹⁸ At least, such is the testimony of Las Casas, who knew both the parties well, and had often conversed with Grijalva upon his voyage. Historia General de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 113.

of the gold brought from Mexico, and a full account of the intelligence gleaned there. He set forth his own manifold services, and solicited from the court full powers to go on with the conquest and colonization of the newly discovered regions.¹⁹ Before receiving an answer, he began his preparations for the armament, and, first of all, endeavoured to find a suitable person to share the expense of it, and to take the command. Such a person he found, after some difficulty and delay, in Hernando Cortés; the man of all others best calculated to achieve this great enterprise, — the last man, to whom Velasquez, could he have foreseen the results, would have confided it.

¹⁹ Itinerario del Capellano, MS. to Ferdinand Columbus, is still extant in the library of the great church of Seville. The book had — Las Casas, Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 113.

The most circumstantial account of Grijalva's expedition is to be found in the *Itinerary* of his chaplain above quoted. The original is lost, but an indifferent Italian version was published at Venice, in 1522. A copy, which belonged to Ferdinand Columbus, is still extant in the library of the great church of Seville. The book had become so exceedingly rare, however, that the historiographer, Muñoz, made a transcript of it with his own hand, and from his manuscript that in my possession was taken.

CHAPTER II.

HERNANDO CORTÉS.—HIS EARLY LIFE.—VISITS THE NEW WORLD.
—HIS RESIDENCE IN CUBA.—DIFFICULTIES WITH VELASQUEZ.—
ARMADA INTRUSTED TO CORTÉS.

1518.

HERNANDO CORTÉS was born at Medellin, a town in the south-east corner of Estremadura, in 1485.¹ He came of an ancient and respectable family; and historians have gratified the national vanity by tracing it up to the Lombard kings, whose descendants crossed the Pyrenees, and established themselves in Aragon under the Gothic monarchy.² This royal genealogy was not found out till Cortés had acquired a name which would confer distinction on

¹ Gomara, Crónica, cap. 1.— Bernal Diaz, Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 203. I find no more precise notice of the date of his birth; except, indeed, by Pizarro y Orellana, who tells us "that Cortés came into the world the same day that that *infernal beast, the false heretic Luther*, went out of it,— by way of compensation, no doubt, since the labors of the one to pull down the true faith were counterbalanced by those of the other to maintain and extend it"! (Varones Ilustres del Nuevo Mundo, (Madrid, 1639,) p. 66.) But this

statement of the good cavalier, which places the birth of our hero in 1483, looks rather more like a zeal for "the true faith," than for historic.

² Argensola, in particular, has bestowed great pains on the *prosapia* of the house of Cortés; which he traces up, nothing doubting, to Narnes Cortés, king of Lombardy and Tuscany. Anales de Aragon, (Zaragoza, 1630,) pp. 621—625.— Also, Caro de Torres, Historia de las Órdenes Militares, (Madrid, 1629,) fol. 103.

any descent, however noble. His father, Martin Cortés de Monroy, was a captain of infantry, in moderate circumstances, but a man of unblemished honor; and both he and his wife, Doña Catalina Pizarro Altamirano, appear to have been much regarded for their excellent qualities.³

In his infancy Cortés is said to have had a feeble constitution, which strengthened as he grew older. At fourteen, he was sent to Salamanca, as his father, who conceived great hopes from his quick and showy parts, proposed to educate him for the law, a profession which held out better inducements to the young aspirant than any other. The son, however, did not conform to these views. He showed little fondness for books, and, after loitering away two years at college, returned home, to the great chagrin of his parents. Yet his time had not been wholly misspent, since he had laid up a little store of Latin, and learned to write good prose, and even verses "of some estimation, considering" — as an old writer quaintly remarks — "Cortés as the author."⁴ He now passed his days in the idle, unprofitable manner of one who, too wilful to be guided by

³ De Rebus Gestis, MS.

Las Casas, who knew the father, bears stronger testimony to his poverty than to his noble birth. "Un escudero," he says of him, "que yo conocí harto pobre y humilde, aunque Christiano, viejo y *dizen que hidalgo*." Hist. de las Indias, MS., lib. 3, cap. 27.

⁴ Argensola, Anales, p. 220.

Las Casas and Bernal Diaz both state that he was Bachelor of Laws at Salamanca. (Hist. de las Indias, MS., ubi supra. — Hist. de la Conquista, cap. 203.) The degree was given probably in later life, when the University might feel a pride in claiming him among her sons.

others, proposes no object to himself. His buoyant spirits were continually breaking out in troublesome frolics and capricious humors, quite at variance with the orderly habits of his father's household. He showed a particular inclination for the military profession, or rather for the life of adventure to which in those days it was sure to lead. And when, at the age of seventeen, he proposed to enrol himself under the banners of the Great Captain, his parents, probably thinking a life of hardship and hazard abroad preferable to one of idleness at home, made no objection.

The youthful cavalier, however, hesitated whether to seek his fortunes under that victorious chief, or in the New World, where gold as well as glory was to be won, and where the very dangers had a mystery and romance in them inexpressibly fascinating to a youthful fancy. It was in this direction, accordingly, that the hot spirits of that day found a vent, especially from that part of the country where Cortés lived, the neighbourhood of Seville and Cádiz, the focus of nautical enterprise. He decided on this latter course, and an opportunity offered in the splendid armament fitted out under Don Nicolas de Ovando, successor to Columbus. An unlucky accident defeated the purpose of Cortés.⁵

As he was scaling a high wall, one night, which gave him access to the apartment of a lady with whom he was engaged in an intrigue, the stones gave way, and he was thrown down with much vio-

⁵ De Rebus Gestis, MS. — Gomara, Crónica, cap. 1

lence and buried under the ruins. A severe contusion, though attended with no other serious consequences, confined him to his bed till after the departure of the fleet.⁶

Two years longer he remained at home, profiting little, as it would seem, from the lesson he had received. At length he availed himself of another opportunity presented by the departure of a small squadron of vessels bound to the Indian islands. He was nineteen years of age, when he bade adieu to his native shores in 1504, — the same year in which Spain lost the best and greatest in her long line of princes, Isabella the Catholic.

The vessel in which Cortés sailed was commanded by one Alonso Quintero. The fleet touched at the Canaries, as was common in the outward passage. While the other vessels were detained there taking in supplies, Quintero secretly stole out by night from the island, with the design of reaching Hispaniola, and securing the market, before the arrival of his companions. A furious storm, which he encountered, however, dismasted his ship, and he was obliged to return to port and refit. The convoy consented to wait for their unworthy partner, and after a short detention they all sailed in company again. But the faithless Quintero, as they drew near the Islands, availed himself once more of the

⁶ De Rebus Gestis, MS. — Gomara, Ibid.

Argensola states the cause of his detention concisely enough;

“Suspendió el viaje, por enamorado y por quartanario.” Anales, p. 621.