

general, in granting the *repartimientos*, made many humane regulations for limiting the power of the master, and for securing as many privileges to the natives as were compatible with any degree of compulsory service.²¹ These limitations, it is true, were too often disregarded; and in the mining districts, in particular, the situation of the poor Indian was often deplorable. Yet the Indian population, clustering together in their own villages and living under their own magistrates, have continued to prove by their numbers, fallen as these have below their primitive amount, how far superior was their condition to that in most other parts of the vast colonial empire of Spain.²² This condition has been gradually ameliorated, under the influence of higher moral views and larger ideas of government, until the servile descendants of the ancient lords of the soil have been permitted, in republican Mexico, to rise—nominally, at least—to a level with the children of their conquerors.

Whatever disregard he may have shown to the political rights of the natives, Cortés manifested a commendable solicitude for their spiritual welfare. He requested the emperor to send out holy men to the country; not

²¹ Herrera, Hist. general, dec. 4, lib. 6, cap. 5.—Ordenanzas, MS.—The ordinances prescribe the service of the Indians, the hours they may be employed, their food, compensation, and the like. They require the *encomendero* to provide them with suitable means of religious instruction and places of worship. But what avail good laws, which in their very nature imply the toleration of a great abuse?

²² The whole population of New Spain in 1810 is estimated by Don Fernando Navarro y Noriega at about 6,000,000; of whom more than half were pure Indians. The author had the best means for arriving at a correct result. See Humboldt, *Essai politique*, tom. i. pp. 318, 319, note.

bishops and pampered prelates, who too often squandered the substance of the Church in riotous living, but godly persons, members of religious fraternities, whose lives might be a fitting commentary on their teaching. Thus only, he adds,—and the remark is worthy of note,—can they exercise any influence over the natives, who have been accustomed to see the least departure from morals in their own priesthood punished with the utmost rigor of the law.²³ In obedience to these suggestions, twelve Franciscan friars embarked for New Spain, which they reached early in 1524. They were men of unblemished purity of life, nourished with the learning of the cloister, and, like many others whom the Romish Church has sent forth on such apostolic missions, counted all personal sacrifices as little in the sacred cause to which they were devoted.²⁴

²³ Rel. Quarta, ap. Lorenzana, pp. 391–394.—The petition of the Conquerors was acceded to by the government, which further prohibited “attorneys and men learned in the law from setting foot in the country, on the ground that experience had shown they would be sure by their evil practices to disturb the peace of the community.” (Herrera, Hist. general, dec. 3, lib. 5, cap. 2.) These enactments are but an indifferent tribute to the character of the two professions in Castile.

²⁴ Toribio, Hist. de los Indios, MS., Parte 1, cap. 1.—Camargo, Hist. de Tlascala, MS. [My views of the character of the Spanish missionaries find favor with Señor Alaman, who warmly eulogizes the spirit of self-sacrifice and the untiring zeal which they showed in propagating the gospel among the natives: “El Sr. Prescott hace de los misioneros el justo aprecio que sus virtudes merecieron, y sus elogios son tanto mas recomendables, cuanto que sus opiniones religiosas parece deberian hacerle contrario á ellos. En efecto, solo la iglesia católica ha producido misioneros inflamados de un verdadero celo religioso, que los ha hecho sacrificar su vida por la propagacion de la religion y en beneficio de la humanidad.” *Conquista de Méjico*

The presence of the reverend fathers in the country was greeted with general rejoicing. The inhabitants of the towns through which they passed came out in a body to welcome them; processions were formed of the natives bearing wax tapers in their hands, and the bells of the churches rang out a joyous peal in honor of their arrival. Houses of refreshment were provided for them along their route to the capital; and when they entered it they were met by a brilliant cavalcade of the principal cavaliers and citizens, with Cortés at their head. The general, dismounting, and bending one knee to the ground, kissed the robes of Father Martin of Valencia, the principal of the fraternity. The natives, filled with amazement at the viceroy's humiliation before men whose naked feet and tattered garments gave them the aspect of mendicants, henceforth regarded them as beings of a superior nature. The Indian chronicler of Tlascala does not conceal his admiration of this edifying condescension of Cortés, which he pronounces "one of the most heroic acts of his life!"²⁵

(trad. de Vega), tom. ii. p. 255. Mr. Gallatin, also, in his "Notes on the Semi-civilized Nations of America," pays a hearty tribute to the labors of the Roman Catholic missionaries in the New World: "The Dominican monks, though inquisitors and relentless persecutors in Spain, became in America the protectors of the Indians. . . . The praise must be extended to all the Catholic priests, whether Franciscans or Jesuits, monks or curates. All, from the beginning, were, have ever been, and continue to be, the protectors and the friends of the Indian race." *Transactions of the American Ethnological Society*, i. 213.]

²⁵ "Cuyo hecho del rotísimo y humilde recibimiento fué uno de los heroicos hechos que este Capitan hizo, porque fué documento para que con mayor fervor los naturales desta tierra viniesen á la conver-

The missionaries lost no time in the good work of conversion. They began their preaching through interpreters, until they had acquired a competent knowledge of the language themselves. They opened schools and founded colleges, in which the native youth were instructed in profane as well as Christian learning.*

sion de nuestra fee." (Camargo, *Hist. de Tlascala*, MS.—See also Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 171.) Archbishop Lorenzana falls nothing short of the Tlascalcan historian in his admiration of the religious zeal of the great *Conquistador*, which, he assures us, "entirely overwhelms him, as savoring so much more of the apostolic missionary than of the soldier!" Lorenzana, p. 393, nota.

* [A singular tribute to the thoroughness of the instruction thus given, and the facility with which it was imbibed, is rendered in a long complaint on the subject addressed to the emperor by Gerónimo Lopez, under date of October 20, 1541. The writer, a person evidently commissioned to send home reports on the condition of the country, denounces the system of education instituted by the Franciscan monks as diabolically pernicious,—"*muy dañoso como el diablo.*" He considers that the Indians should at the most be taught to repeat the Pater Noster and Ave Maria, the Creed and the Commandments, without any expositions, or any distinction of the persons of the Trinity and their attributes, above all without learning to read and write. Instead of this, they are taught not only these pernicious branches of knowledge, but punctuation, music,—nay, even grammar! Their natural ability is so great, and the devil is so largely interested in the matter, that they have acquired a skill in forming different kinds of letters which is marvellous, and a great number of them are thus enabled to carry on a correspondence and learn what is going on in the country from one sea to the other. There are boys among them who speak as elegant Latin as Tullius. They have translated and read the whole of the Scriptures,—the same thing that has ruined so many in Spain and given birth to a thousand heresies. A secular ecclesiastic told him that, having visited one of the colleges, he found there two hundred students, who stunned him with questions about religion, till the place seemed to him hell, and its inmates disciples of Satan.—Icazbalceta, *Col. de Doc. para la Hist. de México*, tom. ii.—ED.]

The ardor of the Indian neophyte emulated that of his teacher. In a few years every vestige of the primitive *teocallis* was effaced from the land. The uncouth idols of the country, and, unhappily, the hieroglyphical manuscripts, shared the same fate. Yet the missionary and the convert did much to repair these losses by their copious accounts of the Aztec institutions, collected from the most authentic sources.²⁶

The business of conversion went on prosperously among the several tribes of the great Nahuatlac family. In about twenty years from the first advent of the missionaries, one of their body could make the pious vaunt that nine millions of converts—a number probably exceeding the population of the country—had been admitted within the Christian fold!²⁷ The Aztec worship was remarkable for its burdensome ceremonial, and prepared its votaries for the pomp and splendors of the Romish ritual. It was not difficult to pass from

²⁶ Toribio, *Hist. de los Indios*, MS., Parte 3, cap. 1.—Father Sahagun, who has done better service in this way than any other of his order, describes with simple brevity the rapid process of demolition. "We took the children of the caciques," he says, "into our schools, where we taught them to read and write, and to chant. The children of the poorer natives were brought together in the court-yard, and instructed there in the Christian faith. After our teaching, one or two brethren took the pupils to some neighboring *teocalli*, and, by working at it for a few days, they levelled it to the ground. In this way they demolished, in a short time, all the Aztec temples, great and small, so that not a vestige of them remained." (*Hist. de Nueva-España*, tom. iii. p. 77.) This passage helps to explain why so few architectural relics of the Indian era still survive in Mexico.

²⁷ "De manera que á mi juicio y verdaderamente serán bautizados en este tiempo que digo, que serán quince años, mas de nueve millones de ánimas de Indios." Toribio, *Hist. de los Indios*, MS., Parte 2, cap. 3.

the fasts and festivals of the one religion to the fasts and festivals of the other; to transfer their homage from the fantastic idols of their own creation to the beautiful forms in sculpture and in painting which decorated the Christian cathedral. It is true, they could have comprehended little of the dogmas of their new faith, and little, it may be, of its vital spirit. But, if the philosopher may smile at the reflection that conversion, under these circumstances, was one of form rather than of substance, the philanthropist will console himself by considering how much the cause of humanity and good morals must have gained by the substitution of these unsullied rites for the brutal abominations of the Aztecs.

The Conquerors settled in such parts of the country as best suited their inclinations. Many occupied the southeastern slopes of the Cordilleras towards the rich valley of Oaxaca. Many more spread themselves over the broad surface of the table-land, which, from its elevated position, reminded them of the plateau of their own Castiles. Here, too, they were in the range of those inexhaustible mines which have since poured their silver deluge over Europe. The mineral resources of the land were not, indeed, fully explored or comprehended till at a much later period; but some few, as the mines of Zacatecas, Guanajuato, and Tasco,—the last of which was also known in Montezuma's time,—had begun to be wrought within a generation after the Conquest.²⁸

²⁸ Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. i. p. 43.—Humboldt, *Essai politique*, tom. iii. pp. 115, 145.—*Esposicion de Don Lúcas Alaman* (México, 1828), p. 59.

But the best wealth of the first settlers was in the vegetable products of the soil, whether indigenous, or introduced from abroad by the wise economy of Cortés. He had earnestly recommended the crown to require all vessels coming to the country to bring over a certain quantity of seeds and plants.²⁹ He made it a condition of the grants of land on the plateau, that the proprietor of every estate should plant a specified number of vines in it.³⁰ He further stipulated that no one should get a clear title to his estate until he had occupied it eight years.³¹ He knew that permanent residence could alone create that interest in the soil which would lead to its efficient culture, and that the opposite system had caused the impoverishment of the best plantations in the Islands. His various regulations, some of them not a little distasteful to the colonists, augmented the agricultural resources of the country by the addition of the most important European grains and other vegetables, for which the diversified climate of New Spain was admirably adapted. The sugar-cane was transplanted from the neighboring islands to the lower level of the country, and, together with indigo, cotton, and cochineal, formed a more desirable staple for the colony than its precious metals.

²⁹ "Páraque cada Navío traiga cierta cantidad de Plantas, y que no pueda salir sin ellas, porque será mucha causa para la Poblacion, y perpetuacion de ella." Rel. Quarta de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 397.

³⁰ "Item, que cualquier vecino que tubiere Indios de repartimiento sea obligado á poner en ellos en cada un año con cada cien Indios de los que tuvieren de repartimiento mil sarmientos aunque sean de la planta de su tierra, escogiendo la mejor que pudiesse hallar." Ordenanzas municipales, año de 1524, MS.

³¹ Ordenanzas municipales, año de 1524, MS.

Under the sun of the tropics, the peach, the almond, the orange, the vine, and the olive, before unknown there, flourished in the gardens of the table-land, at an elevation twice as great as that at which the clouds are suspended in summer above our heads. The importation of a European fruit or vegetable was hailed by the simple colonists with delight. The first produce of the exotic was celebrated by a festival, and the guests greeted each other, as on the appearance of an old familiar friend, who called up the remembrance of the past and the tender associations of their native land.³²

While thus occupied with the internal economy of the country, Cortés was still bent on his great schemes of discovery and conquest. In the preceding chapter we have seen him fitting out a little fleet at Zacatula to explore the shores of the Pacific. It was burnt in the dock-yard when nearly completed. This was a serious calamity, as most of the materials were to be transported across the country from Villa Rica. Cortés, however, with his usual promptness, took measures to repair the loss. He writes to the emperor that another squadron will soon be got ready at the same port, and, "he doubts not, will put his Majesty in possession of more lands and kingdoms than the nation has ever heard of!"³³ This magnificent vaunt shows

³² ["No general interest would attach to the private undertakings of Cortés, if the sole object of them had been the aggrandizement of his own fortune. But they were in fact the germs of what are now the most important branches of the national wealth; and they prove the grandeur of those views which in the times of the Conquest gave an impulse to whatever promised to contribute to the prosperity of the country." Alaman, *Disertaciones históricas*, tom. ii. p. 63.]

³³ "Tengo de ser causa, que Vuestra Cesarea Magestad sea en estas

the common sentiment of the Spaniards at that time, who looked on the Pacific as the famed Indian Ocean, studded with golden islands and teeming with the rich treasures of the East.

A principal object of this squadron was the discovery of a strait which should connect the Atlantic with the Pacific. Another squadron, consisting of five vessels, was fitted out in the Gulf of Mexico, to take the direction of Florida, with the same view of detecting a strait. For Cortés trusted—we at this day may smile at the illusion—that one might be found in that direction which should conduct the navigator to those waters which had been traversed by the keels of Magellan!³⁴

The discovery of a strait was the great object to which nautical enterprise in that day was directed, as it had been ever since the time of Columbus. It was in the sixteenth century what the discovery of the Northwest passage has been in our own age,—the *ignis fatuus* of navigators. The vast extent of the American continent had been ascertained by the voyages of Cabot in the North, and of Magellan very recently in the South. The proximity, in certain quarters, of the two great oceans that washed its eastern and western shores had been settled by the discoveries both of Balboa and of Cortés. European scholars could not

partes Señor de mas Reynos, y Señoríos que los que hasta hoy en nuestra Nacion se tiene noticia." Rel. Quarta de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 374.

³⁴ "Much as I esteem Hernando Cortés," exclaims Oviedo, "for the greatest captain and most practised in military matters of any we have known, I think such an opinion shows he was no great cosmographer." (Hist. de las Ind., MS., lib. 33, cap. 41.) Oviedo had lived to see its fallacy.

believe that Nature had worked on a plan so repugnant, apparently, to the interests of humanity, as to interpose, through the whole length of the great continent, such a barrier to communication between the adjacent waters. The correspondence of men of science,³⁵ the instructions of the Court, the letters of Cortés, like those of Columbus, touch frequently on this favorite topic. "Your Majesty may be assured," he writes, "that, as I know how much you have at heart the discovery of *this great secret of a strait*, I shall postpone all interests and projects of my own, some of them of the highest moment, for the fulfilment of this great object."³⁶

It was partly with the same view that the general caused a considerable armament to be equipped and placed under the command of Cristóval de Olid, the brave officer who, as the reader will remember, had charge of one of the great divisions of the besieging army. He was to steer for Honduras and plant a colony on its northern coast. A detachment of Olid's squadron was afterwards to cruise along its southern shore towards Darien in search of the mysterious strait. The country was reported to be full of gold; so full that "the fishermen used gold weights for their nets." The life of the Spanish discoverers was one long day-dream. Illusion after illusion chased one another like the bubbles which the child throws off from his pipe, as bright, as beautiful, and as empty. They lived in a world of enchantment.³⁷

³⁵ Martyr, Opus Epist., ep. 811.

³⁶ Rel. Quarta, ap. Lorenzana, p. 385.

³⁷ The illusion at home was kept up, in some measure, by the daz-

Together with these maritime expeditions, Cortés fitted out a powerful expedition by land. It was intrusted to Alvarado, who, with a large force of Spaniards and Indians, was to descend the southern slant of the Cordilleras and penetrate into the countries that lay beyond the rich valley of Oaxaca. The campaigns of this bold and rapacious chief terminated in the important conquest of Guatemala. The general required his captains to send him minute accounts of the countries which they visited, the productions of the soil, and their general resources. The result was several valuable and interesting communications.³⁸ In his instructions for the conduct of these expeditions, he enjoined a considerate treatment of the natives, and inculcated a policy which may be called humane, as far as humanity is compatible with a system of subjugation.³⁹ Unfortunately, the character of his officers too often rendered these instructions unavailing.

In the prosecution of his great enterprises, Cortés, within three short years after the Conquest, had re-

zling display of gold and jewels remitted from time to time, wrought into fanciful and often fantastic forms. One of the articles sent home by Cortés was a piece of ordnance, made of gold and silver, of very fine workmanship, the metal of which alone cost 25,000 *pesos de oro*. Oviedo, who saw it in the palace, speaks with admiration of this magnificent toy. *Hist. de las Ind.*, MS., lib. 33, cap. 41.

³⁸ Among these may be particularly mentioned the Letters of Alvarado and Diego de Godoy, transcribed by Oviedo in his *Hist. de las Ind.*, MS. (lib. 33, cap. 42-44), and translated by Ramusio for his rich collection, *Viaggi*, tom. iii.

³⁹ See, among others, his orders to his kinsman, Francisco Cortés,—“Instrucción civil y militar por la Expedición de la Costa de Colima.” The paper is dated in 1524, and forms part of the Muñoz collection of MSS.

duced under the dominion of Castile an extent of country more than four hundred leagues in length, as he affirms, on the Atlantic coast, and more than five hundred on the Pacific, and, with the exception of a few interior provinces of no great importance, had brought them to a condition of entire tranquillity.⁴⁰ In accomplishing this, he had freely expended the revenues of the crown, drawn from tributes similar to those which had been anciently paid by the natives to their own sovereigns; and he had, moreover, incurred a large debt on his own account, for which he demanded remuneration from the government. The celebrity of his name, and the dazzling reports of the conquered countries, drew crowds of adventurers to New Spain, who furnished the general with recruits for his various enterprises.

Whoever would form a just estimate of this remarkable man must not confine himself to the history of the Conquest. His military career, indeed, places him on a level with the greatest captains of his age. But the period subsequent to the Conquest affords different, and in some respects nobler, points of view for the study of his character. For we then see him devising a system of government for the motley and antagonist races, so to speak, now first brought under a common dominion; repairing the mischiefs of war; and employing his efforts to detect the latent resources of the

⁴⁰ *Rel. Quarta*, ap. Lorenzana, p. 371.—“Well may we wonder,” exclaims his archiepiscopal editor, “that Cortés and his soldiers could have overrun and subdued, in so short a time, countries, many of them so rough and difficult of access that even at the present day we can hardly penetrate them!” *Ibid.*, nota.

country and to stimulate it to its highest power of production. The narrative may seem tame, after the recital of exploits as bold and adventurous as those of a paladin of romance. But it is only by the perusal of this narrative that we can form an adequate conception of the acute and comprehensive genius of Cortés.

CHAPTER III.

DEFECTION OF OLID.—DREADFUL MARCH TO HONDURAS.
— EXECUTION OF GUATEMOZIN. — DOÑA MARINA. —
ARRIVAL AT HONDURAS.

1524-1526.

IN the last chapter we have seen that Cristóval de Olid was sent by Cortés to plant a colony in Honduras. The expedition was attended with consequences which had not been foreseen. Made giddy by the possession of power, Olid, when he had reached his place of destination, determined to assert an independent jurisdiction for himself. His distance from Mexico, he flattered himself, might enable him to do so with impunity. He misunderstood the character of Cortés, when he supposed that any distance would be great enough to shield a rebel from his vengeance.

It was long before the general received tidings of Olid's defection. But no sooner was he satisfied of this than he despatched to Honduras a trusty captain and kinsman, Francisco de las Casas, with directions to arrest his disobedient officer. Las Casas was wrecked on the coast, and fell into Olid's hands, but eventually succeeded in raising an insurrection in the settlement, seized the person of Olid, and beheaded that unhappy delinquent in the market-place of Naco.*

* Carta Quinta de Cortés, MS.