

## CHAPTER V.

CORTÉS REVISITS MEXICO.—RETIRES TO HIS ESTATES.  
—HIS VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY.—FINAL RETURN TO  
CASTILE.—COLD RECEPTION.—DEATH OF CORTÉS.  
—HIS CHARACTER.

1530-1547.

EARLY in the spring of 1530, Cortés embarked for New Spain. He was accompanied by the marchioness, his wife, together with his aged mother, who had the good fortune to live to see her son's elevation, and by a magnificent retinue of pages and attendants, such as belonged to the household of a powerful noble. How different from the forlorn condition in which, twenty-six years before, he had been cast loose, as a wild adventurer, to seek his bread upon the waters!

The first point of his destination was Hispaniola, where he was to remain until he received tidings of the organization of the new government that was to take charge of Mexico.\* In the preceding chapter it was stated that the administration of the country had been intrusted to a body called the Royal Audience; one of whose first duties it was to investigate the charges brought against Cortés. Nuñez de Guzman, his avowed enemy, was placed at the head of this board; and the investigation was conducted with all

\* Carta de Cortés al Emperador, MS., Tezcuco, 10 de Oct., 1530.

the rancor of personal hostility. A remarkable document still exists, called the *Pesquisa Secreta*, or "Secret Inquiry," which contains a record of the proceedings against Cortés. It was prepared by the secretary of the Audience, and signed by the several members. The document is very long, embracing nearly a hundred folio pages. The name and the testimony of every witness are given, and the whole forms a mass of loathsome details, such as might better suit a prosecution in a petty municipal court than that of a great officer of the crown.

The charges are eight in number; involving, among other crimes, that of a deliberate design to cast off his allegiance to the crown; that of the murder of two of the commissioners who had been sent out to supersede him; of the murder of his own wife, Catalina Suarez; of extortion, and of licentious practices,—

\* Doña Catalina's death happened so opportunely for the rising fortunes of Cortés, that this charge of murder by her husband has found more credit with the vulgar than the other accusations brought against him. Cortés, from whatever reason, perhaps from the conviction that the charge was too monstrous to obtain credit, never descended to vindicate his innocence. But, in addition to the arguments mentioned in the text for discrediting the accusation generally, we should consider that this particular charge attracted so little attention in Castile, where he had abundance of enemies, that he found no difficulty, on his return there, seven years afterwards, in forming an alliance with one of the noblest houses in the kingdom; that no writer of that day (except Bernal Diaz, who treats it as a base calumny), not even Las Casas, the stern accuser of the Conquerors, intimates a suspicion of his guilt; and that, lastly, no allusion whatever is made to it in the suit instituted, some years after her death, by the relatives of Doña Catalina, for the recovery of property from Cortés, pretended to have been derived through her marriage with him,—a suit conducted with acrimony and protracted for several years.

of offences, in short, which, from their private nature, would seem to have little to do with his conduct as a public man. The testimony is vague and often contradictory; the witnesses are for the most part obscure individuals, and the few persons of consideration among them appear to have been taken from the ranks of his decided enemies. When it is considered that the inquiry was conducted in the absence of Cortés, before a court the members of which were personally unfriendly to him, and that he was furnished with no specification of the charges, and had no opportunity, consequently, of disproving them, it is impossible, at this distance of time, to attach any importance to this paper as a legal document. When it is added that no action was taken on it by the government to whom it was sent, we may be disposed to regard it simply as a monument of the malice of his enemies. It has been drawn by the curious antiquary from the obscurity to which it had been so long consigned in the Indian archives at Seville; but it can be of no further use to the historian than to show that a great name in the sixteenth century exposed its possessor to calumnies as malignant as it has at any time since.<sup>3</sup>

I have not seen the documents connected with this suit, which are still preserved in the archives of the house of Cortés, but the fact has been communicated to me by a distinguished Mexican who has carefully examined them, and I cannot but regard it as of itself conclusive that the family at least of Doña Catalina did not attach credit to the accusation. Yet so much credit has been given to this in Mexico, where the memory of the old Spaniards is not held in especial favor at the present day, that it has formed the subject of an elaborate discussion in the public periodicals of that city.

<sup>3</sup> This remarkable paper, forming part of the valuable collection of Don Vargas Ponçe, is without date. It was doubtless prepared in

The high-handed measures of the Audience, and the oppressive conduct of Guzman, especially towards the Indians, excited general indignation in the colony and led to serious apprehensions of an insurrection. It became necessary to supersede an administration so reckless and unprincipled. But Cortés was detained two months at the island, by the slow movements of the Castilian court, before tidings reached him of the appointment of a new Audience for the government of the country. The person selected to preside over it was the bishop of St. Domingo, a prelate whose acknowledged wisdom and virtue gave favorable augury for the conduct of his administration. After this, Cortés resumed his voyage, and landed at Villa Rica on the 15th of July, 1530.

After remaining for a time in the neighborhood, where he received some petty annoyances from the Audience, he proceeded to Tlascala, and publicly proclaimed his powers as Captain-General of New Spain and the South Sea. An edict issued by the empress

1529, during the visit of Cortés to Castile. The following Title is prefixed to it:

“*Pesquisa secreta.*”

“*Relacion de los cargos que resultan de la pesquisa secreta contra Don Hernando Cortés, de los quales no se le dió copia ni traslado á la parte del dicho Don Hernando, así por ser los dichos cargos de la calidad que son, como por estar la persona del dicho Don Hernando ausente como está. Los quales yo Gregorio de Saldaña, escribano de S. M. y escribano de la dicha Residencia, saqué de la dicha pesquisa secreta por mandado de los Señores, Presidente y Oidores de la Audiencia y Chancillería Real que por mandado de S. M. en esta Nueva España reside. Los quales dichos Señores, Presidente y Oidores, envían á S. M. para que los mande ver, y vistos mande proveer lo que á su servicio convenga.*” MS.

during her husband's absence had interdicted Cortés from approaching within ten leagues of the Mexican capital while the present authorities were there.<sup>4</sup> The empress was afraid of a collision between the parties. Cortés, however, took up his residence on the opposite side of the lake, at Tezcuco.

No sooner was his arrival there known in the metropolis than multitudes, both of Spaniards and natives, crossed the lake to pay their respects to their old commander, to offer him their services, and to complain of their manifold grievances. It seemed as if the whole population of the capital was pouring into the neighboring city, where the Marquis maintained the state of an independent potentate. The members of the Audience, indignant at the mortifying contrast which their own diminished court presented, imposed heavy penalties on such of the natives as should be found in Tezcuco, and, affecting to consider themselves in danger, made preparations for the defence of the city. But these belligerent movements were terminated by the arrival of the new Audience; though Guzman had the address to maintain his hold on a northern province, where he earned a reputation for cruelty and extortion unrivalled even in the annals of the New World.

Everything seemed now to assure a tranquil residence to Cortés. The new magistrates treated him with marked respect, and took his advice on the most important measures of government. Unhappily, this state of things did not long continue; and a misunderstanding arose between the parties, in respect to the

<sup>4</sup> MS., Tordelaguna, 22 de Marzo, 1530.

enumeration of the vassals assigned by the crown to Cortés, which the marquis thought was made on principles prejudicial to his interests and repugnant to the intentions of the grant.<sup>5</sup> He was still further displeased by finding that the Audience were intrusted, by their commission, with a concurrent jurisdiction with himself in military affairs.<sup>6</sup> This led occasionally to an interference, which the proud spirit of Cortés, so long accustomed to independent rule, could ill brook. After submitting to it for a time, he left the capital in disgust, no more to return there, and took up his residence in his city of Cuernavaca.

It was the place won by his own sword from the Aztecs previous to the siege of Mexico. It stood on the southern slope of the Cordilleras, and overlooked a wide expanse of country, the fairest and most flourishing portion of his own domain.<sup>7</sup> He had erected a stately palace on the spot, and henceforth made this city his favorite residence.<sup>8</sup> It was well situated for

<sup>5</sup> The principal grievance alleged was that slaves, many of them held temporarily by their masters, according to the old Aztec usage, were comprehended in the census. The complaint forms part of a catalogue of grievances embodied by Cortés in a memorial to the emperor. It is a clear and business-like paper. Carta de Cortés á Nuñez, MS.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, MS.

<sup>7</sup> ["Dominando una vista muy extensa sobre el valle hácia el Sur, lo que al Norte y Oriente se termina con la magestuosa cordillera que separa el valle de Cuernavaca del de Méjico." Alaman, *Disertaciones históricas*, tom. ii, p. 35.]

<sup>8</sup> The palace has crumbled into ruins, and the spot is now only remarkable for its natural beauty and its historic associations. "It was the capital," says Madame de Calderon, "of the Tlahuica nation, and, after the Conquest, Cortés built here a splendid palace, a church, and a convent for Franciscans, believing that he had laid the foun-

superintending his vast estates, and he now devoted himself to bringing them into proper cultivation. He introduced the sugar-cane from Cuba, and it grew luxuriantly in the rich soil of the neighboring lowlands. He imported large numbers of merino sheep and other cattle, which found abundant pastures in the country around Tehuantepec. His lands were thickly sprinkled with groves of mulberry-trees, which furnished nourishment for the silk-worm. He encouraged the cultivation of hemp and flax, and, by his judicious and enterprising husbandry, showed the capacity of the soil for the culture of valuable products before unknown in the land; and he turned these products to the best account, by the erection of sugar-mills, and other works for the manufacture of the raw material. He thus laid the foundation of an opulence for his family, as substantial, if not as speedy, as that derived from the mines. Yet this latter source of wealth was not neglected by him, and he drew gold from the region of Tehuantepec, and silver from that of Zacatecas. The amount derived from these mines was not so abundant as at a later day. But the expense of working them, on the other hand, was much less in the earlier stages of a great city. . . . It is, however, a place of little importance, though so favored by nature; and the Conqueror's palace is a half-ruined barrack, though a most picturesque object, standing on a hill, behind which starts up the great white volcano." *Life in Mexico*, vol. ii. let. 31. [The beautiful church of San Francisco, now the parish church, was constructed by Cortés, and enriched with jewels and sacred vessels by his wife, manifesting, says Alaman, the good taste and the piety of the *marquis* and the *marchioness*.—as, in consequence of their being the first and at that time the only persons who bore the title in Mexico, they were styled and always subscribed themselves. *Disertaciones históricas*, tom. ii. p. 35.]

of the operation, when the metal lay so much nearer the surface.<sup>9</sup>

But this tranquil way of life did not long content his restless and adventurous spirit; and it sought a vent by availing itself of his new charter of discovery to explore the mysteries of the great Southern Ocean. In 1527, two years before his return to Spain, he had sent a little squadron to the Moluccas. The expedition was attended with some important consequences; but, as they do not relate to Cortés, an account of it will find a more suitable place in the maritime annals of Spain, where it has been given by the able hand which has done so much for the country in this department.<sup>10</sup>

Cortés was preparing to send another squadron of four vessels in the same direction, when his plans were interrupted by his visit to Spain; and his unfinished little navy, owing to the malice of the Royal Audience, who drew off the hands employed in building it, went to pieces on the stocks. Two other squadrons were now fitted out by Cortés, in the years 1532 and 1533, and sent on a voyage of discovery to the Northwest.<sup>11</sup> They were unfortunate, though in the latter expedition the Californian peninsula was reached, and a landing

<sup>9</sup> These particulars respecting the agricultural economy of Cortés I have derived in part from a very able argument, prepared, in January, 1828, for the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, by Don Lucas Alaman, in defence of the territorial rights possessed at this day by the Conqueror's descendant, the duke of Monteleone.

<sup>10</sup> Navarrete, *Coleccion de los Viages y Descubrimientos* (Madrid, 1837), tom. v., *Viages al Maluco*.

<sup>11</sup> Instruccion que dió el Marques del Valle á Juan de Avellaneda, etc., MS.

effected on its southern extremity at Santa Cruz, probably the modern port of La Paz. One of the vessels, thrown on the coast of New Galicia, was seized by Guzman, the old enemy of Cortés, who ruled over that territory, the crew were plundered, and the ship was detained as a lawful prize. Cortés, indignant at the outrage, demanded justice from the Royal Audience; and, as that body was too feeble to enforce its own decrees in his favor, he took redress into his own hands.<sup>12</sup>

He made a rapid but difficult march on Chiametla, the scene of Guzman's spoliation; and, as the latter did not care to face his incensed antagonist, Cortés recovered his vessel, though not the cargo. He was then joined by the little squadron which he had fitted out from his own port of Tehuantepec,—a port which in the sixteenth century promised to hold the place since occupied by that of Acapulco.<sup>13</sup> The vessels were provided with everything requisite for planting a colony in the newly-discovered region, and transported four hundred Spaniards and *three hundred negro slaves*, which Cortés had assembled for that purpose. With this intention he crossed the Gulf, the Adriatic—to which an old writer compares it—of the Western World.

Our limits will not allow us to go into the details of this disastrous expedition, which was attended with no

<sup>12</sup> Provision sobre los Descubrimientos del Sur, MS., Setiembre, 1534.

<sup>13</sup> The river Huasacualco furnished great facilities for transporting across the isthmus, from Vera Cruz, materials to build vessels on the Pacific. Humboldt, *Essai politique*, tom. iv. p. 50.

important results either to its projector or to science. It may suffice to say that, in the prosecution of it, Cortés and his followers were driven to the last extremity by famine; that he again crossed the Gulf, was tossed about by terrible tempests, without a pilot to guide him, was thrown upon the rocks, where his shattered vessel nearly went to pieces, and, after a succession of dangers and disasters as formidable as any which he had ever encountered on land, succeeded, by means of his indomitable energy, in bringing his crazy bark safe into the same port of Santa Cruz from which he had started.

While these occurrences were passing, the new Royal Audience, after a faithful discharge of its commission, had been superseded by the arrival of a viceroy, the first ever sent to New Spain. Cortés, though invested with similar powers, had the title only of Governor. This was the commencement of the system, afterwards pursued by the crown, of intrusting the colonial administration to some individual whose high rank and personal consideration might make him the fitting representative of majesty. The jealousy of the court did not allow the subject clothed with such ample authority to remain long enough in the same station to form dangerous schemes of ambition, but at the expiration of a few years he was usually recalled, or transferred to some other province of the vast colonial empire. The person now sent to Mexico was Don Antonio de Mendoza, a man of moderation and practical good sense, and one of that illustrious family who in the preceding reign furnished so many distinguished ornaments to the Church, to the camp, and to letters.

The long absence of Cortés had caused the deepest anxiety in the mind of his wife, the marchioness of the Valley. She wrote to the viceroy immediately on his arrival, beseeching him to ascertain, if possible, the fate of her husband, and, if he could be found, to urge his return. The viceroy, in consequence, despatched two ships in search of Cortés, but whether they reached him before his departure from Santa Cruz is doubtful. It is certain that he returned safe, after his long absence, to Acapulco, and was soon followed by the survivors of his wretched colony.

Undismayed by these repeated reverses, Cortés, still bent on some discovery worthy of his reputation, fitted out three more vessels, and placed them under the command of an officer named Ulloa. This expedition, which took its departure in July, 1539, was attended with more important results. Ulloa penetrated to the head of the Gulf, then, returning and winding round the coast of the peninsula, doubled its southern point, and ascended as high as the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth degree of north latitude on its western borders. After this, sending home one of the squadron, the bold navigator held on his course to the north, but was never more heard of.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Instrucción del Marques del Valle, MS.—The most particular and authentic account of Ulloa's cruise will be found in Ramusio. (Tom. iii. pp. 340-354.) It is by one of the officers of the squadron. My limits will not allow me to give the details of the voyages made by Cortés, which, although not without interest, were attended with no permanent consequences.\* A good summary of his expeditions in

\* [The restless and determined spirit with which Cortés pursued his mainly ineffectual projects of discovery is exemplified by a letter

Thus ended the maritime enterprises of Cortés, sufficiently disastrous in a pecuniary view, since they cost him three hundred thousand *castellanos* of gold, without the return of a ducat.<sup>15</sup> He was even obliged to borrow money, and to pawn his wife's jewels, to procure funds for the last enterprise;<sup>16</sup> thus incurring a debt which, increased by the great charges of his princely establishment, hung about him during the remainder of his life. But, though disastrous in an economical view, his generous efforts added important contributions to science. In the course of these expeditions, and those undertaken by Cortés previous to his visit to Spain, the Pacific had been coasted from the Bay of Panamá to the Rio Colorado. The great peninsula of California had been circumnavigated as far as to the isle of Cedros, or Cerros, into which the name has since been corrupted. This vast tract, which

the Gulf has been given by Navarrete in the Introduction to his *Relacion del Viage hecho por las Goletas Sutil y Mexicana* (Madrid, 1802), pp. vi.-xxvi.; and the English reader will find a brief account of them in Greenhow's valuable *Memoir on the Northwest Coast of North America* (Washington, 1840), pp. 22-27.

<sup>15</sup> Memorial al Rey del Marques del Valle, MS., 25 de Junio, 1540.

<sup>16</sup> Provision sobre los Descubrimientos del Sur, MS.

to the Council of the Indies, September 20, 1538, begging that body to assist his agents in procuring pilots for him. He has at present, he says, nine vessels, very good and well equipped, and is only waiting for pilots, having tried in vain to obtain some from Panamá and Leon. Though he has not yet secured the fruits he had expected from his expeditions, he trusts in God that they will be henceforth attended with better fortune. Col. de Doc. inéd. relativos al Descubrimiento, Conquista y Colonización de las Posesiones españolas en América y Oceanía, tom. iii.—ED.]

had been supposed to be an archipelago of islands, was now discovered to be a part of the continent; and its general outline, as appears from the maps of the time, was nearly as well understood as at the present day.<sup>17</sup> Lastly, the navigator had explored the recesses of the Californian Gulf, or *Sea of Cortés*, as, in honor of the great discoverer, it is with more propriety named by the Spaniards; and he had ascertained that, instead of the outlet before supposed to exist towards the north, this unknown ocean was locked up within the arms of the mighty continent. These were results that might have made the glory and satisfied the ambition of a common man; but they are lost in the brilliant renown of the former achievements of Cortés.

Notwithstanding the embarrassments of the marquis of the Valley, he still made new efforts to enlarge the limits of discovery, and prepared to fit out another squadron of five vessels, which he proposed to place under the command of a natural son, Don Luis. But the viceroy Mendoza, whose imagination had been inflamed by the reports of an itinerant monk respecting an *El Dorado* in the north, claimed the right of discovery in that direction. Cortés protested against this, as an unwarrantable interference with his own powers. Other subjects of collision arose between them; till the marquis, disgusted with this perpetual check on his authority and his enterprises, applied for redress to Castile.<sup>18</sup> He finally determined to go there

<sup>17</sup> See the map prepared by the pilot Domingo del Castillo, in 1541, ap. Lorenzana, p. 328.

<sup>18</sup> In the collection of Vargas Ponce is a petition of Cortés, setting forth his grievances, and demanding an investigation of the viceroy's

to support his claims in person, and to obtain, if possible, remuneration for the heavy charges he had incurred by his maritime expeditions, as well as for the spoliation of his property by the Royal Audience during his absence from the country; and, lastly, to procure an assignment of his vassals on principles more conformable to the original intentions of the grant. With these objects in view, he bade adieu to his family, and, taking with him his eldest son and heir, Don Martin, then only eight years of age, he embarked at Mexico in 1540, and, after a favorable voyage, again set foot on the shores of his native land.

The emperor was absent from the country. But Cortés was honorably received in the capital, where ample accommodations were provided for him and his retinue. When he attended the Royal Council of the Indies to urge his suit, he was distinguished by uncommon marks of respect. The president went to the door of the hall to receive him, and a seat was provided for him among the members of the Council.<sup>19</sup> But all evaporated in this barren show of courtesy. Justice, proverbially slow in Spain, did not mend her gait for Cortés; and at the expiration of a year he found himself no nearer the attainment of his object than on the first week after his arrival in the capital.

In the following year, 1541, we find the marquis of the Valley embarked as a volunteer in the memorable expedition against Algiers. Charles the Fifth, on his return to his dominions, laid siege to that stronghold

conduct. It is without date. *Peticion contra Don Antonio de Mendoza Virrey, pidiendo residencia contra él*, MS.

<sup>19</sup> Bernal Diaz, *Hist. de la Conquista*, cap. 200.

of the Mediterranean corsairs. Cortés accompanied the forces destined to meet the emperor, and embarked on board the vessel of the Admiral of Castile. But a furious tempest scattered the navy, and the admiral's ship was driven a wreck upon the coast. Cortés and his son escaped by swimming, but the former, in the confusion of the scene, lost the inestimable set of jewels noticed in the preceding chapter; "a loss," says an old writer, "that made the expedition fall more heavily on the marquis of the Valley than on any other man in the kingdom, except the emperor."<sup>20</sup>

It is not necessary to recount the particulars of this disastrous siege, in which Moslem valor, aided by the elements, set at defiance the combined forces of the Christians. A council of war was called, and it was decided to abandon the enterprise and return to Castile. This determination was indignantly received by Cortés, who offered, with the support of the army, to reduce the place himself; and he only expressed the regret that he had not a handful of those gallant veterans by his side who had served him in the Conquest of Mexico. But his offers were derided, as those of a romantic enthusiast. He had not been invited to take part in the discussions of the council of war. It was a marked indignity; but the courtiers, weary of the service, were too much bent on an immediate return to Spain, to hazard the opposition of a man who, when he had once planted his foot, was never known to raise it again till he had accomplished his object.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Gomara, *Crónica*, cap. 237.

<sup>21</sup> Sandoval, *Hist. de Carlos V.*, lib. 12, cap. 25.—Ferrerás (trad. d'Hermilly), *Hist. d'Espagne*, tom. ix. p. 231.

On arriving in Castile, Cortés lost no time in laying his suit before the emperor. His applications were received by the monarch with civility,—a cold civility, which carried no conviction of its sincerity. His position was materially changed since his former visit to the country. More than ten years had elapsed, and he was now too well advanced in years to give promise of serviceable enterprise in future. Indeed, his undertakings of late had been singularly unfortunate. Even his former successes suffered the disparagement natural to a man of declining fortunes. They were already eclipsed by the magnificent achievements in Peru, which had poured a golden tide into the country, that formed a striking contrast to the streams of wealth that as yet had flowed in but scantily from the silver-mines of Mexico. Cortés had to learn that the gratitude of a court has reference to the future much more than to the past. He stood in the position of an importunate suitor whose claims, however just, are too large to be readily allowed. He found, like Columbus, that it was possible to deserve too greatly.<sup>22</sup>

In the month of February, 1544, he addressed a letter to the emperor,—it was the last he ever wrote him,—soliciting his attention to his suit. He begins by proudly alluding to his past services to the crown.

<sup>22</sup> Voltaire tells us that, one day, Cortés, unable to obtain an audience of the emperor, pushed through the press surrounding the royal carriage, and mounted the steps; and, when Charles inquired "who that man was," he replied, "One who has given you more kingdoms than you had towns before." (*Essai sur les Mœurs*, chap. 147.) For this most improbable anecdote I have found no authority whatever. It served, however, very well to point a moral,—the main thing with the philosopher of Ferney.