



BOOK XV.

THE RETURN TO MEXICO.

CHAPTER CXC.

How Cortés embarked at Havana to go to New Spain and with favourable weather arrived at Vera Cruz, and the delight shown by all at his coming.



AFTER Cortés had rested five days in Havana he could hardly await the hour when he would be in Mexico, and he promptly ordered all his people to embark and set sail, and with good weather he arrived in two days near to the Port of Medellin, opposite to the Island of Sacrificios. There he ordered the ships to be anchored (for the wind was not favourable for going any further), and so as not to sleep that night at sea, Cortés, with twenty soldiers who were friends of his, went ashore and marched on foot about half a league, and, as luck would have it, came on a drove of horses which had come to the port with certain passengers who were about to embark for Castile, and they went to Vera Cruz, a matter of five leagues, on the horses and mules of this drove. He ordered that no one should go and give notice that he was coming by land, and about two

hours before dawn he reached the town and went straight-way to the church, the door of which was open, and entered it with all his company.

It was very early in the morning when the Sacristan, who was a man newly come from Castile, arrived and saw the church full of men, and, as he did not know Cortés nor those who were with him, he ran out to the street shouting and calling to the Alguacils that the church was full of strange men, so that they should order them out. On hearing the cries of the Sacristan, the chief Alcalde, with other subordinate Alcaldes and three Alguacils and many other settlers, came out armed, thinking that something worse had happened, and entered in haste and began to order us with angry words to leave the church. As Cortés was gaunt from his journeys they did not recognise him until they heard him speak, and when they saw that it was Cortés they all went to kiss his hands and bid him welcome.

Then Cortés embraced the Conquistadores who lived in the town and called them by their names, asked them how they were and spoke kindly words to them, and then Mass was said, and they took him to lodge in the best houses which belonged to Pedro Moreno Medrano, and he stayed there eight days and they entertained him with many feasts and rejoicings. They sent messengers post haste to Mexico to say that he had arrived, and Cortés wrote to the Treasurer and to the Accountant, although he was unfriendly, and to all his friends and to the Monastery of San Francisco, and all were delighted at the news.

As soon as the Indians in the neighbourhood knew about it, they all brought him presents of gold and cloths and cacao, poultry and fruits. Then he set out from Medellin and went on his journey over roads which they had cleared for him, and his lodgings were all

garlanded¹ and plentifully supplied with food for Cortés and all who went in his company. Then I could tell what the Mexicans did in the way of rejoicings, how all the pueblos round the lake combined to send him during his journey a great present of gold and cloth and poultry and all sorts of fruits of the country that were ripe in that season, and sent to ask his pardon for not sending more owing to his sudden arrival, but when he should go to his city they would do their duty and render service to him as the Captain who had conquered them and dealt with them justly ; and other pueblos came to do the same thing.

Nothing was forgotten in the province of Tlaxcala, for all the chieftains came out to receive him with dances and routs and rejoicings and plenty of food. When he arrived within three leagues of the City of Texcoco, which is a City with its subject pueblos nearly the size of Mexico, the Accountant Albornoz sallied forth [to meet him], for he had come for the purpose of receiving Cortés so as to stand well with him, for he feared him greatly.

He collected many Spaniards from all the pueblos in the neighbourhood, and together with those who were in his company and the Caciques of that City they went to receive Cortés more than two leagues [out from the city] with great preparations of games and dances. Cortés was pleased at this.² Then when he reached Texcoco they gave him another great reception, and he slept there that night and the next morning continued his journey.

Then the Municipality of Mexico, and the Treasurer,

¹ Blotted out in the original : "with flowers and roses and sweet scent."

² Blotted out in the original : "showing much affection towards Albornoz because he knew that in him he had a friend."

and all the gentlemen and Conquistadores and friends of Cortés, wrote to him begging him to tarry in some pueblos two leagues distant from Tenochtitlan Mexico, although he could well have entered that day, but that he should delay it until the next morning early, so that all might enjoy the great reception they would give him. Then the Treasurer sallied forth with all the gentlemen and Conquistadores, and the municipality of the City, and all the officials in their robes, wearing the richest garments and hose and doublets they possessed, with all kinds of musical instruments, and the Caciques for their part with many sorts of devices and liveries as was their wont, and the lake full of canoes with Indian warriors in them, just as they were used to fight with us in the time of Guatemoc, and others who came along the causeway. There were so many games and such rejoicings that one could say they went on all day long, and in the streets of Mexico all was routs and dances, and as soon as it was night much illumination in the doorways. The best of all remains to be told, for the day after Cortés arrived the Franciscan Friars formed processions giving many thanks to God for the mercy He had shown in the return of Cortés.

Then (to go back to his entry into Mexico), he went at once to the Monastery of Señor San Francisco, where he had Mass said and gave thanks to God for delivering him from the past hardships in Honduras, and bringing him back to the city.

Then he went to his houses which were well built like rich palaces, and there he was served and treated by all like a prince. And the Indians from all the provinces came to see him and brought him presents of gold, and even the Caciques from the Hill of Coatlan, who had been in rebellion, came to bid him welcome and brought him presents.

Cortés made his entry into Mexico in the month of June 1524 or 1525, and as soon as he had rested he promptly ordered the bandits to be seized, and began to make investigation into the dealings of the Factor and Veedor, and he also seized Gonzalo de Ocampo or Diego de Ocampo (I do not remember clearly his Christian name), for it was on him that they found the papers with the defamatory libels.¹ He also arrested one Ocaña, a notary who was a very old man, whom they called the body and soul of the Factor. When they were prisoners Cortés had the intention, seeing that he had justice on his side, of taking proceedings against the Factor and Veedor and as a penalty to take their lives, and, if he had done so at once, there would have been no one in Castile who would have said it was ill done, and His Majesty would have approved of it. I heard it stated before the members of the Royal Council of the Indies in the presence of the Bishop Fray Bartolomé de las Casas in the year 1540, when I went there about my lawsuits, that Cortés was very careless in the matter, and they charged him with weakness and carelessness.

CHAPTER CXCI.

How the Licentiate Luis Ponce de Leon, who came to take the 'Residencia' of Cortés, arrived at this very moment at the port of Vera Cruz with three ships, and what happened about it.

It is necessary to go back a little, so that what I say now may be clearly understood.

I have already told in former chapters about the many complaints which were made against Cortés before His

¹ Blotted out in the original: "which was that he was making a Monastery with certain Friars, and attributing to each one of them things without truth."