

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."

Majesty when the Court was at Toledo, and how those who laid the complaints were the partizans of Diego Velásquez and all the others I have often mentioned, and the letters of Albornoze gave support to them. As His Majesty thought they [the complaints] were true, he had ordered the Admiral of Santo Domingo to come with a great company of soldiers and arrest Cortés, and all of us who went with him when he defeated Narvaez. I have also related how when the Duque de Béjar, Don Alvaro de Zuñiga, heard of it, he went to beg His Majesty not to believe the letters of a man who was very hostile to Cortés until he could ascertain the truth. As the Admiral did not come, nor the evidence in support of the suit, His Majesty ordered a nobleman who was at that time in Toledo, named the Licentiate Ponce de Leon (a cousin of the Count of Alcandete), to come and take his Residencia [of Cortés], and, if he should find him incriminated by the accusations which were brought against him, to punish him in such a way that the sentence which he should deliver should resound throughout the land. In order to obtain information regarding all the accusations that were brought against Cortés, he [Ponce de Leon] took along with him the records of all the matters they were talking of and alleging, as well as instructions as to where he was to take the Residencia. He promptly started on his journey and voyage with three ships (I do not remember exactly whether there were three or four), and, with the good weather he experienced, reached the port of San Juan de Ulua and at once disembarked and came to the town of Medellin. As soon as it was known who he was, and that he had come as judge to take the Residencia of Cortés, a Mayordomo of Cortés named Gregorio de Villalobos sent post haste to inform Cortés, and within four days he knew it in Mexico. And Cortés marvelled to hear of the sudden arrival, for he would have wished to

know it as early as possible so that he could go and give him the greatest honour and reception that he was able.

At the time when the letters reached him he was in the Monastery of San Francisco, and about to receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with much humility he prayed God to aid him in all things. When he heard that the news was quite true, he at once despatched messengers to find out who those were who were coming, and whether they brought letters from His Majesty. Two days after the messengers had arrived with the first news there came three messengers sent by the Licentiate Luis Ponce with letters for Cortés, and one was from His Majesty, from which he learned that His Majesty had ordered his Residencia to be taken.

When he saw the Royal Letters he kissed them with great reverence and humility, and placed them on his head and said that he was receiving a great favour, in that His Majesty was sending someone who would listen to him with fairness, and he immediately sent messengers with a reply to Luis Ponce himself, with pleasant words and assurances much better expressed than I know how to write them. He asked him to give him notice by which of the two roads he wished to come to Mexico, for there was one road in one direction and another by a short cut, so that he might have prepared all that was suitable for a servant of such a mighty King and Lord.

When the Licentiate saw the nature of his reply, he answered that he was very tired from his voyage and that he wished to rest for a few days, and gave him many thanks and acknowledgments for the great goodwill that he showed.

Now some settlers in that town who were enemies of Cortés, and some others whom Cortés had brought with him from the expedition to Honduras, who were not on good terms with him (they were amongst those whom

he had deported from Panuco), wrote letters from Mexico to Luis Ponce, and other opponents of Cortés told him that Cortés wished to have the Factor and Veedor executed before the Licentiate could go to Mexico. Moreover they told him that he should look well to his personal safety, for, if Cortés wrote to him with so many assurances and [tried] to find out by which of the two roads he wished to come, it was in order to kill him, and that he should place no faith in his words and assurances. They told him many other iniquities which they said Cortés had perpetrated as well on Narvaez as on Garay, and about the soldiers whom he had left abandoned in Honduras, and the three thousand Mexicans who had died on the journey, and about a Captain named Diego de Godoy whom he left settled there with thirty soldiers, all of them invalids, and it was believed that they were dead, (it turned out to be true what they said about Godoy). They begged him at once to go post haste to Mexico, and not to worry about doing anything else, and implored him to take warning from the affair of Captain Narvaez and that of the Adelantado Garay, and that of Cristóbal de Tápia who refused to obey him, whom he made to embark and return whence he had come; and they told him many other hurtful things and nonsense against Cortés in order to create prejudice, and they even made him believe that Cortés would not obey him. When the Licentiate Luis Ponce heard all this, he had in his company other gentlemen, namely the Chief Alguacil Proaño, a native of Córdoba, and his brother, and one Salazar de la Pedrada who came as Alcaide of the fortress and soon died of pleurisy, and a Licentiate or Bachelor named Marcos de Aguilar, and one Bocanegra of Córdoba, and certain Dominican Friars and their Provincial, one Fray Tomas Ortiz, who they say had been for some years Prior in some country

of which I do not remember the name ; and about this monk who was their Prior, all who came in his company said that he was more diligent in looking after business than after the office he held. To go back to my story—Luis Ponce took counsel with these gentlemen whether he should go to Mexico at once or no, and all advised him not to tarry by day or night, believing that the rumours were true about the iniquities of Cortés, so that when messengers from Cortés arrived with more letters in reply to those which the Licentiate had written, and brought many fresh supplies for him, the Licentiate was already close to Iztapalapa, where he was given a great reception on account of the great happiness and contentment that Cortés felt at his coming. He ordered a very sumptuous banquet for him, and after being well served at the dinner with many and excellent viands, Andrés de Tápia (for so he was called), who acted as steward at that feast, suggested as an appetizing and novel matter, and at that time a new thing in those countries, that His Excellency might like to be served with cream and curds. All the gentlemen who dined there with the Licentiate were delighted that they should be brought, and ate of them, and the cream and curds were very good, and some of them ate so much of them that their greed turned and overflowed. This I state as true, that when I eat them my stomach turns because they are cold, but others had no sensation of their having done any harm in the stomach. Then that Friar named Fray Tomas Ortiz, who came as Provincial Prior, said that the creams and curds had been mixed with realgar¹ and that he did not wish to eat them for fear of it, and others who ate there said that they saw the Friar eat of them to repletion, and he had said that they were very good,

¹ Realgar = red sulphide of arsenic.

and because Andrés de Tápia served as steward they suspected him of a thing that never entered his head. To go back to our story—Cortés was not present at this reception at Iztapalapa and remained in Mexico.¹ Then, as Iztapalapa is two leagues from Mexico, he had men posted to advise him at what hour they were coming to Mexico, and Cortés went out to receive him with all the horsemen that Mexico could turn out. With Cortés himself went Gonzalo de Sandoval, and the Treasurer Alonzo de Estrada, and the Accountant and all the Municipality and the Conquistadores, and Jorge de Alvarado and Gomez de Alvarado (for Pedro de Alvarado was not in Mexico but in Guatemala whither he had gone in search of Cortés), and many other gentlemen came out who had recently arrived from Castile. When they met on the Causeway great respect was shown between the Licentiate and Cortés, and the Licentiate in every way appeared² very reserved,³ giving himself airs in the matter of Cortés shaking hands with him, not wishing to take his hand, and they paid each other compliments until he took it. When they entered the City the Licentiate expressed admiration at the great fortress which was in it, and at the many cities and towns which he had seen on the lake, and said that he felt sure that there had never been a Captain in the world who, with so few soldiers, had won so many countries and captured such a strong city. As they went along talking of this they proceeded straight to the Monastery of Señor San Francisco where Mass was at once said. When Mass was

¹ Blotted out in the original: "there was a report that on his behalf he sent very secretly to Luis Ponce a good present of blocks and bars of gold, and they say he would not accept it."

² Blotted out in the original: "a true gentleman."

³ Blotted out in the original: "a very courteous and upright judge."

over Cortés asked the Licentiate Luis Ponce to exhibit the Royal Decrees and decide to carry out what His Majesty had ordered him to do, because he [Cortés] was obliged to seek justice against the Factor and the Veedor, and he [Luis Ponce] replied that it should stand over till next day.

Cortés then, accompanied by all the horsemen who had come out for the reception, took him to lodge in his palaces, which were all hung with tapestry, and to a very stately dinner served with so much gold and silver plate and so well arranged that Luis Ponce himself said secretly to the Chief Alguacil Proaño, and to one Bocanegra, that from all his arrangements and speeches and deeds Cortés certainly appeared to have been a great lord for many years past.

I will cease speaking of these praises and say that the next day they went to the principal church, and, after Mass had been said, he [Luis Ponce] ordered the Municipality of the City to be present, and the officers of the Royal Exchequer, and the Captains and Conquistadores of Mexico, and when he saw them all together, in the presence of the two notaries (one on behalf of the Municipality and the other whom Luis Ponce brought with him), he presented his Royal Decrees. Cortés with great respect kissed them and placed them on his head, and said that he obeyed them as commands and edicts of his Lord and King, and would fulfil them with his breast to the ground, and so did all the gentlemen and Conquistadores and the Municipality and His Majesty's officials. After this had been done the Licentiate took the wands of justice from the Chief Alcalde and the subordinate Alcaldes, and from the Hermandad¹ and Alguacils, and after he had them in his possession he

¹ An association forming a minor Court of Justice.

gave them back to all of them, and said to Cortés: "Señor Capitan, this Government of your Excellency His Majesty has commanded me to take over for myself, not because you cease to be worthy of many other and greater offices, but we are obliged to do what our Lord and King commands us." Cortés with great respect gave him thanks for this, and said that he was ready to do what he was ordered to do in the service of His Majesty, which his Excellency would quickly perceive, and, through the evidence and the investigation to which he would subject him, would learn how loyally he had served our Lord the King, and would understand the malignity of certain persons who had already gained a hearing from him with advice and letters full of malice. The Licentiate replied "Wherever there are honest men there are also others who are not, for such is the way of the world, and those who have received benefits from a man will speak well of him and those who have suffered wrongs will do the contrary."

Thus that day passed, and the next day after hearing Mass, which was said in the palaces where the Licentiate was lodging, he [Luis Ponce] sent a gentleman with much respect to summon Cortés, and in the presence of Fray Tomas Ortiz who had come as Prior—no other persons being present, only those three in secret—the Licentiate Luis Ponce de Leon said to him [Cortés], with much respect: "Señor Capitan, Your Excellency should know that His Majesty commanded and charged me that to all the Conquistadores who left the Island of Cuba and were present at the capture of these lands and cities, and to most of the Conquistadores who arrived later, I should give assignments of good Indians, and should give precedence and should favour the former somewhat more, and this I say because I am informed that many of the Conquistadores who came with Your Excellency hold poor assignments, and you have given

the better ones to persons who have now lately come from Castile, who do not deserve them. If this is so, His Majesty did not give you the Government for this purpose but to carry out his royal commands."

Cortés replied that he had given Indians to all, and that the luck of each one was that good Indians fell to the share of some, and to others not such good ones, but that he [Luis Ponce] could correct this, as he had come for that purpose, and the Conquistadores were worthy of it. He [Luis Ponce] also asked him what had become of all the Conquistadores whom he had taken with him to Honduras, and how it was that he left them there abandoned and dying of hunger. They had especially told him about one Diego de Godoy, whom he left as leader of a company of thirty or forty men at Puerto de Caballos, and that the Indians had probably killed him, for all [his companions] were very ill (and what they told him turned out to be true as I shall relate further on), and that it would have been well if, after capturing that great city and New Spain, they should have remained to enjoy the reward and rest, and that he should have taken those who had lately arrived to labour and form settlements there; and he asked after Captain Luis Marin and many of the soldiers and about me. Cortés replied that in matters of assault and wars he did not dare to go to distant lands unless he took trustworthy soldiers, and that they would soon reach the city, for they ought already to be on the road, and that His Excellency [Luis Ponce] should assist them in every way and give them good assignments of Indians.

The Licentiate Luis Ponce also asked him with pleasant words how was it that he had gone on such a long and distant journey against Cristóbal de Olid without having His Majesty's permission, leaving Mexico

in danger of being lost. To this Cortés replied that, as His Majesty's Governor and Captain General, it seemed to him to be advisable in His Majesty's interest, in order that other Captains should not revolt, and that he reported it first to His Majesty. In addition to this [the Licentiate] asked him about the capture and defeat of Narvaez, and how the fleet and soldiers of Francisco de Garay were lost, and what he died of, and why he forced Cristóbal de Tápia to embark; and he asked him about many other things which I do not record here, all in the presence of Fray Tomas Ortiz.

And Cortés replied to them all, giving very good reasons, so that Luis Ponce appeared to be partially satisfied. All these questions that he asked him he brought in a memorandum from Castile, and many others were about things they had told him on the road and had communicated to him in Mexico. As Fray Tomas Ortiz was present at these questionings, when they had finished talking and Cortés had gone to his quarters, the Friar secretly took aside three Conquistadores, who were friends of Cortés, and told them that Luis Ponce intended to cut off Cortés' head, for such were the orders he had brought from His Majesty, and to that end he had asked him what I have recorded. Early in the morning of the following day this same Friar very secretly addressed Cortés in these words: "Señor Capitan, on account of my great regard for you, and as my duty and religion [impel me] to offer advice in such cases, I give you to know, Señor, that Luis Ponce brings decrees from His Majesty to have you beheaded."

When Cortés heard this, after they had carried on the conversations reported by me, he became very distressed and thoughtful. On the other hand they had told him that the Friar was ill-conditioned and seditious, and that he had better not believe much of what he said, and it

seemed as though he had addressed these remarks to Cortés to ensure his taking him as intercessor and petitioner, so that the decree should not be carried out against him, and in order that Cortés should give him some bars of gold for it. Other persons reported that Luis Ponce told it to Cortés in order to frighten him, so that he should implore not to be beheaded. When Cortés perceived this, he replied to the Friar with much courtesy and with great promises that he would give him the wherewithal to return to Castile, and Cortés told him that he had confidence that His Majesty, as a most Christian King, would send to confer favours [on him] for his many and great services which he had always rendered him, and would not find that he had done him any disservice whatever; this confidence which he held he likewise placed in Señor Luis Ponce de Leon as a person who would not go beyond what His Majesty had commanded him. When the Friar heard this, and found that Cortés did not beg him to become his intercessor with Luis Ponce, he became disconcerted, and I will relate what more happened, for Cortés never gave him any of the money he had promised him.

CHAPTER CXCII.

How the Licentiate Luis Ponce, after he had exhibited the Royal Decrees and met with obedience, ordered the Residencia of Cortés and those who had held judicial office to be proclaimed, and how he fell ill of sleeping sickness and died of it, and what else happened.

AFTER he [the Licentiate] had exhibited the Royal Decrees, and they had been obeyed with much reverence by Cortés, by the Municipality, and by the rest of the Conquistadores, he ordered a Residencia General to be proclaimed against Cortés and against those who had