

CHAPTER CCX.

About other matters and advantages which have followed from our renowned conquests and labours.

THERE will already have been understood from the past chapters all that has been reported by me about the benefits and advantages which have been conferred by our renowned and holy exploits and conquests. I will now speak of the gold and silver and precious stones and other riches, from cochineal to sarsaparilla and cowhides, which have gone from New Spain and are going every year to Castile to our King and Lord, both on account of his Royal Fifths, as well as through many other presents which we sent him as soon as we took possession of these lands for him, not counting the great quantity which merchants and passengers took. Since the wise King Solomon built and ordered to be constructed the Holy Temple of Jerusalem with the gold and silver which they brought him from the Islands of Tarsis, Ophir, and Saba, there has never been reported in any ancient writings more gold and silver and riches than what has gone daily to Castile from these lands. I assert this, although already from Peru, as is notorious, innumerable thousands of pesos of gold and silver have been sent. At the time we conquered New Spain the name of Peru was not known, nor was it discovered or subdued until ten years¹ later. Always from the very beginning we sent very rich presents to His Majesty, and for this reason and for others which I will state I place New Spain first, for we well know that in the events which have taken place in Peru the Captains, Governors, and soldiers joined in civil war, and all has been upset in blood and in the

¹ Blotted out in the original : "two three four."

deaths of many soldier bandits, because they have not had the respect and obedience which was due to our Lord and King, and there has been a great decrease [in numbers] of the natives. In this New Spain we all bow down, and will for ever bend our breasts to the ground, as we are bound to do, to our King and Lord, and place our lives and fortunes, whatever may happen, at the service of His Majesty. Besides, let the interested readers take note that the cities, towns, and villages which are peopled by Spaniards in these parts (and they are so numerous that I do not know their names) keep quiet and pay attention to the bishops, who number ten, not counting the Archbishop of the very distinguished City of Mexico. There are three Royal Audiencias, all of which I will speak about further on, and also of those who have governed us, and of the Archbishops and bishops that there have been. Let them observe the holy cathedral churches and the monasteries where there are Dominican Friars, as well as Franciscans, and those of the order of Mercy, and Augustinians, and let them observe the Hospitals and the great indulgence they receive, and the Holy Church of our Lady of Guadalupe which is at Tepeaquilla, where the camp of Gonzalo de Sandoval used to be stationed when we captured Mexico, and let them observe the holy miracles which she has performed and is still doing every day, and let us give many thanks and praise to God and to His Blessed Mother Our Lady, for granting us favour and help so that we could win these lands where there is [now] so much Christianity.

Moreover, let them take note that there is in Mexico a university where grammar and theology, rhetoric, logic and philosophy, with other arts and branches of science, are studied and learned. They have type and craftsmen to print books both in Latin and in the Spanish, and they graduate as licentiates and doctors.

There are many other grandeurs and riches which one might mention, thus the rich silver mines which have been discovered here and are continually being discovered, by which our Castile is made prosperous and favoured and respected. As enough has been said about the advantages which have followed over and over again out of our heroical conquests, I wish to add that wise and learned persons may read this my story from beginning to end and they will see that in no writings which have been written in the world, nor in the records of human exploits, have there been seen men who have conquered more kingdoms or principalities than we the true conquistadores have done for our Lord and King, and among the brave conquistadores, my comrades, (and there were very valiant ones among them) they included me¹ as being the oldest of them all.

I once more assert, and I repeat it so many times, that I am the oldest of them, and have served as a very good soldier of His Majesty, and I say it with sorrow in my heart, for I find myself poor and very old, with a marriageable daughter and my sons young men already grown up with beards, and others to be educated, and I am not able to go to Castile to His Majesty to put before him things which are necessary for his Royal Service, and also that he should grant me favours, for they owe me many debts.

I will leave this talk, for if I dip my pen in it deeper I shall become very odious to jealous persons. I want to ask one question in the way of a dialogue, and in view of the fair and illustrious Fame that resounds in the world regarding our manifold good and noble services which we have rendered to God, His Majesty, and all Christendom. It [Fame] loudly clamours, saying, that it would be just

¹ Blotted out in the original: "as having the reputation of a good soldier."

and reasonable that we should have good incomes and more advantages than other persons have who have not done service in these conquests nor in other parts for His Majesty. So it [Fame] inquires, "Where are our palaces and mansions, and what coats of arms are there on them distinguishing us from the others?" And, "Are our heroic deeds and arms carved on them and placed as a memorial in the manner that gentlemen have them in Spain?" (who I have said in a former chapter, in years past, served the Kings who reigned at that time, for our exploits are not inferior to those they accomplished, on the contrary they are of memorable fame, and may be counted among the most glorious the world has ever seen.) Illustrious Fame furthermore asks on behalf of the Conquistadores who have escaped from the battles, and for the dead, "Where are their tombs and what blazons are there on them?" These can be answered in all truth with, "Oh Excellent and very Illustrious Fame, longed for and revered by the good and virtuous, your illustrious name is neither desired to be seen or heard among the malicious and among persons who have endeavoured to hide our heroic deeds, so that you should not extol our persons as is deserved.—We would have you know, Señora, that of the five hundred and fifty soldiers of Cuba there are alive in all New Spain, out of all of them, in this year fifteen hundred and sixty-eight, when I am writing this my story, only five! Most of them died in the wars already described by me at the hands of the Indians, and were sacrificed to the Idols, and the rest died natural deaths. If you ask me the whereabouts of their tombs, I say they are the bellies of the Indians who ate their legs and thighs, arms and flesh, and feet and hands, and the rest found sepulchre in, and their entrails were thrown to, the tigers and serpents and falcons which at that time they kept for show in strong houses, and

those were their tombs and there are their blazons. It seems to me that their names should be written in letters of gold, for they died that cruel death in the service of God and of His Majesty, and to give light to those who were in darkness, and also to acquire riches, which all of us men usually came to seek."

After having given [this] report to Illustrious Fame, she asks me about those who came over with Narvaez and Garay. I reply that the followers of Narvaez were thirteen hundred, without counting among them the sailors, and not more than ten or eleven of them are alive ; all the rest died in the wars and were sacrificed, and their bodies were eaten by Indians just the same as our [comrades] were. Of those who came over with Garay from the Island of Jamaica, according to my calculation, with the three companies which came to San Juan de Ulua before Garay came, and with those whom he brought last when he came himself, in all there would be another twelve hundred soldiers, and nearly all of them were sacrificed to the Idols in the province of Panuco and their bodies eaten by the natives of that province.

In addition to this, Revered Fame asks about those fifteen¹ soldiers who landed in New Spain, belonging to the Company of Lucas Vázquez de Ayllon, when he was defeated and died in Florida. As to what had become of them, to this I reply that I have not seen one of them, all are dead ; "and I would have you know, Excellent Fame, that of all those whom I have counted over and over again [only] five of us companions of Cortés are now living, and we are very old and suffering from infirmities and, worst of all, are very poor and burdened with sons and marriageable daughters and grandchildren, and with very little income, and thus we pass our lives in hardship and

¹ Blotted out in the original : "or twenty."

privations. I have already given a reply to all you have asked me and regarding our palaces and blazons and tombs, and I beg you, Illustrious Fame, from now onwards to raise higher your excellent and most virtuous voice, so that throughout the world our great prowess may be clearly distinguished, so that ill-disposed men with their harsh disseminating and envious tongues may not obscure or undo it, and to so manage that the reward is due to those who gained these lands for His Majesty, and is not to be bestowed on those who do not deserve it, because His Majesty has no account with them, nor they with His Majesty, for services rendered."

To this [question] which I have put to the most Virtuous Fame, she answers and says that she will very willingly do it, and adds that she is astonished that we do not possess the best assignments of Indians in the land, for we have conquered it, and His Majesty orders them to be given in the same way as to the Marquis Cortés, (it is not to be understood that it would be to the same extent, but in moderation). Moreover, Revered Fame says that the affairs of the brave and gallant Cortés are to be always highly esteemed and counted among the deeds of valiant Captains. Moreover Truthful Fame states that there is no mention of any of us in the books and histories which have been written by the Chronicler Francisco López de Gomara, nor in that of the Doctor Yllescas, who wrote the official report, nor in other recent writers. They say in their books that the Marquis Cortés alone discovered it [the land], and conquered it, and the Captains and Soldiers who gained it are left blank, without mention of our persons or conquests, and that now she is greatly rejoiced to know clearly that all that is written in my story is true, and that the writing itself expresses literally what happened, and not flatteries nor vicious words; nor in order to exalt one Captain alone

does it tend to belittle many Captains and brave soldiers, as Francisco López de Gomara has done, and the other recent chroniclers who follow history as presented by him, without adding to or deducting from anything he says. Good Fame promises me besides that, on her part, wherever she may be, she will proclaim it in a clear and ringing voice, and in addition to this, that she will explain so that, as soon as my history (if it is printed) is seen and heard, all will give it true belief and will cast doubt on the flatteries which the former [historians] have written. Apart from what I have stated in the form of a dialogue, a certain Doctor, Oidor of the Royal Audiencia of Guatemala, asked me how it was that Cortés, when he wrote to His Majesty, and when he went the first time to Castile, did not act as advocate for us, because through us, after God, he became Marquis and Governor. To this I answered then, and repeat it now, that as he took for himself in the beginning, when His Majesty granted him the government, all the best of New Spain, believing that he would always be absolute Lord and that by his hand [at will] he could give us Indians or take them away, for this reason it was supposed that he did not [then] do it, nor did he wish to write about it. Also because at that time His Majesty gave him the Marquisate which he holds, and as he was importuning him to give him back the government of New Spain as he had held it before, and he [His Majesty] answered that he had already given him the Marquisate, he did not seek to ask a single thing for us that might have benefited us, only for himself alone. Furthermore, the Factor and Veedor and other Gentlemen from Mexico had informed His Majesty that Cortés had taken for himself the best provinces and pueblos in New Spain, and had given other good pueblos to his friends and relations who had lately come from Castile, and that little was left as royal patrimony. Later on we got to

know that His Majesty ordered that from what he [Cortés] had in excess he should give to those who came with him, and at that time His Majesty embarked in Barcelona to go to Flanders. If Cortés at the time when we conquered New Spain (as I have said before in the Chapter which treats of it) had divided it into five parts, and had allotted the best and richest province and cities as a fifth part to our Lord the King for his Royal Fifth, he would have done well, and if he had taken for himself one part, and had left half a part for Churches and monasteries belonging to the cities, so that His Majesty should have two and a half parts over, for giving away and making grants and dividing among us. We might have kept these in perpetuity, Cortés his share and we ours, for as our Cæsar was a very good Christian and the conquests had cost him nothing at all, he might have granted us these favours. But as we, the true Conquistadores, at that time did not know what demanding justice meant, nor to whom to apply for it concerning our services, or other matters of grievances and violence that took place during the war, (except to Cortés himself as our Captain who should have settled it,) we were left positively denuded, with only the trifling amounts that had been deposited for us, until we saw that when Don Francisco de Montejo went to Castile into the presence of His Majesty, he appointed him Adelantado and Governor of Yucatan, and gave him the Indians he held in Mexico, and bestowed other favours on him ; and to Diego de Ordás, who also went before His Majesty, he gave an Encomienda of Señor Santiago and the Indians he held in New Spain ; and that Don Pedro de Alvarado, who also went to kiss the feet of His Majesty, was appointed Adelantado and Governor of Guatemala and Chiapa, and Comendador of Santiago, and was given further grants of the Indians ; and at last when Cortés went he gave him the Marquisate

and [made him] Captain General of the South Sea. Then, as soon as we Conquistadores saw and understood that for those who did not appear before His Majesty there was no thought of making grants, we sent to beg that he would order any [Indians] who from that time onward should be unallotted, to be given to us in perpetuity. The justice of our claim was recognised when the first Royal Audiencia was sent to Mexico, with Nuño de Guzman as president, and the Licentiate Delgadillo a native of Granada, and Matienzo of Bicaya, as Oidores, and two other Oidores, who died as soon as they arrived in Mexico. For His Majesty then distinctly ordered Nuño de Guzman to treat all the Indians of New Spain as one body, to the end that all the persons who held large Assignments which Cortés had given them should no longer hold so large [a number] but that some should be taken from them, and that we the true Conquistadores should be given the best and most profitable pueblos, and that for the Royal patrimony there should be reserved the chief towns and best cities. His Majesty also ordered that the Vassals of Cortés should be counted and he should retain those which were within the terms of his Marquisate, and as to the remainder, I do not remember what Nuño de Guzman ordered about it, or the reason why he and the Oidores did not make the Assignment, [but] it was on account of evil advisers, and for their honours sake I will not name them here. For they told him that, should he divide up the land, as soon as the Conquistadores and settlers found themselves possessing Indians in perpetuity, they would not hold them [the Audiencia] in such great respect, nor would they [the Audiencia] be such Lords [have such authority] to give them orders, because they would not possess [the power] to give and to take away, nor would they [the settlers] come to them to beg for something to eat. By [following]

the other course they would have [power] to give of what was vacant [i.e., Indians who were unallotted] to whomsoever they wished, and they [themselves] would become rich and would have the greater authority, and to this end they stopped doing anything.

It is true that Nuño de Guzman [and the Oidores], when there were any Indians unallotted, promptly handed them over to Conquistadores and settlers, and were not so bad in what they did for the settlers and inhabitants, for they contented them all and gave them food, and if they [the Oidores] were dismissed from out of the Royal Audiencia it was on account of the disputes which they had with Cortés and on account of the branding of free Indians for slaves.

I want to leave this chapter and go on to another and will speak about the perpetual Assignment.

CHAPTER CCXI.

How in the year IVVI [1550] when the Court was at Valladolid there met together in the Royal Council of the Indies certain prelates and gentlemen who came from New Spain and Peru as Proctors, and other noblemen who were present, in order to give the order that the Assignment [of Indians or pueblos] should be in perpetuity, and what was said and done at the meeting is what I shall relate.

IN the year fifteen hundred and fifty the Licentiate de la Gasca came from Peru and went to the Court, which at that time was in Valladolid, and brought in his company a certain Dominican Friar named Don Fray Martin, the Superior, and at that time His Majesty ordered this same Superior to be appointed to the Bishopric of Las Charcas.¹

¹ There is a blank space in the original. The name of the first Bishop of Charcas was Don Fray Tomas de San Martin, of the order of Santo Domingo.—G. G.