

CHAPTER CIV.

How Cortés told the great Montezuma that he should order all his Caciques throughout the land to pay tribute to His Majesty, for it was generally known that they possessed gold, and what was done about it.

As Captain Diego de Ordás and the other soldiers already named by me, arrived with samples of gold and the report that all the land was rich, Cortés, by the advice of Ordás and the other Captains and soldiers, decided to speak to, and demand of Montezuma, that all the Caciques and towns of the land should pay tribute to His Majesty, and that he himself as the greatest Chieftain, should also contribute from his treasure. Montezuma replied that he would send to all his towns to ask for gold, but that many of them did not possess any, only some jewels of little worth which had come to them from their ancestors. He at once despatched chieftains to the places where there were mines and ordered each town to give so many ingots of fine gold, of the same size and thickness as others that they were used to pay as tribute, and the messengers carried with them as samples two small ingots. From other parts they only brought small jewels of little worth.

He also sent to the province whose Cacique and Lord was that near kinsman of his who did not wish to obey him, who has already been mentioned by me. This province was distant from Mexico about twelve leagues, and the reply the messengers brought back was to the effect that he neither wished to give any gold nor to obey Montezuma, that he also was Lord of Mexico and that the dominion belonged to him as much as to Montezuma himself, who was sending to ask him to pay tribute.

When Montezuma heard this he was so enraged that he immediately sent his seal and sign by some faithful

captains with orders to bring him as a prisoner. When this kinsman was brought into Montezuma's presence he spoke to him very disrespectfully and without any fear, and very valiantly, and they say that he had intervals of madness, for he was as though thunderstruck. Cortés came to know all about this, and he sent to beg Montezuma as a favour, to give this man to him as he wished to place a guard over him, for he had been told that Montezuma had ordered him to be killed. When the Cacique was brought before him Cortés spoke to him in a most amiable manner and told him not to act like a madman against his prince, and wished to set him free. However, when Montezuma heard this he said that he should not be set free but should be attached to the great chain like the other Kinglets already named by me.

Let us go back to say that within twenty days all the chieftains whom Montezuma had sent to collect the tribute of gold, as I have already mentioned, came back again. And as they arrived Montezuma sent to summon Cortés and our captains and certain soldiers whom he knew, who belonged to his guard, and said these formal words, or others of like meaning :—

“I wish you to know, Señor Mauncne and Señores Captains and soldiers, that I am indebted to your great King, and I bear him good will both for being such a great Prince and for having sent to such distant lands to make inquiries about me ; and the thought that most impresses me is that he must be the one who is to rule over us, as our ancestors have told us, and as even our gods have given us to understand in the answers we have received from them. Take this gold which has been collected ; on account of haste no more has been brought. That which I have got ready for the Emperor is the whole of the Treasure which I have received from my father, which is in your possession and in your apartments.

“I know well enough that as soon as you came here you opened the chamber and beheld it all, and that you sealed it up again as it was before. When you send it to him, tell him in your papers and letters, ‘This is sent to you by your true vassal Montezuma.’ I will also give you some very valuable stones which you will send to him in my name ; they are Chalchihuites, and are not to be given to any one else but only to him, your Great Prince. Each stone is worth two loads of gold. I also wish to send him three blow guns with their bags and pellet moulds for they have such good jewelwork on them that he will be pleased to see them, and I also wish to give him of what I possess although it is but little, for all the rest of the gold and jewels that I possessed I have given you from time to time.”

When Cortés and all of us heard this we stood amazed at the great goodness and liberality of the Great Montezuma, and with much reverence we all doffed our helmets, and returned him our thanks, and with words of the greatest affection Cortés promised him that he would write to His Majesty of the magnificence and liberality of this gift of gold which he gave us in his own royal name. After some more polite conversation Montezuma at once sent his Mayordomos to hand over all the treasure and gold and wealth that was in that plastered chamber, and in looking it over and taking off all the embroidery with which it was set, we were occupied for three days, and to assist us in undoing it and taking it to pieces, there came Montezuma’s goldsmiths from the town named Azcapotzalco,¹ and I say that there was so much, that after it was taken to pieces there were three heaps of gold, and they weighed more than six hundred thousand pesos, as I shall tell further on, without the silver and many other rich

¹ Escapuçalco in the text.

things, and not counting in this the ingots and slabs of gold, and the gold in grains from the mines. We began to melt it down with the help of the Indian goldsmiths, who were, as I have said, natives of Azcapotzalco and they made broad bars of it, each bar measuring three fingers of the hand across. When it was already melted and made into bars, they brought another present separately which the Grand Montezuma had said that he would give, and it was a wonderful thing to behold the wealth of gold and the richness of the other jewels that were brought, for some of the Chalchihuites were so fine that among these Caciques they were worth a vast quantity of gold. The three blow guns with their pellet moulds, and their coverings of jewels and pearls, and pictures in feathers of little birds covered with pearlshell and other birds, all were of great value. I will not speak of the plumes and feathers and other rich things for I shall never finish calling them to mind.

Let me say that all the gold I have spoken about was marked with an iron stamp, which had been made by order of Cortés and the King's Officers, who had been appointed by Cortés with the consent of all of us and in the name of His Majesty until he should give other instructions. At that time these were Gonzalo Mejía, who was treasurer, and Alonzo Dávila who was accountant, and the stamp was the royal arms like those on a real¹ and the size of a testoon.² The mark was not put on the rich jewels which it did not seem to us should be taken to pieces.

For weighing all these bars of gold and silver, and the jewels which were not taken to pieces, we had neither marked weights nor scales, and it seemed to Cortés and to

¹ Real, a small silver coin.

² "Toston de a quatro," a half peso = four reals.

these same officers of His Majesty's treasury that it would be as well to make some iron weights, some as much as an arroba,¹ others of half an arroba, two pounds, one pound and half a pound, and of four ounces, and so many ounces, and this not that it would turn out very exact, but within half an ounce more or less in each lot that was weighed.

After the weight was taken the officers of the King said that there was of gold, both that which was cast in bars as well as grains from the mines, and in ingots and jewels, more than six hundred thousand pesos, and this was without counting the silver and many other jewels which were not yet valued.

Some soldiers said that there was more. As there was now nothing more to do than to take out the royal fifth, and to give to each captain and soldier his share, and to set aside the shares of those who remained at the port of Villa Rica, it seems that Cortés endeavoured not to have it divided up so soon, but to wait until there was more gold, and there were good weights, and proper accounts of how it turned out. But most of us captains and soldiers said that it should be divided up at once, for we had seen that at the time when the pieces were given out of the Treasury of Montezuma, there was much more gold in the heaps, and that a third part of it was missing, which they had taken and hidden both on behalf of Cortés, as well as of the Captains and the Fraile de la Merced, and it went on diminishing. In consequence of much argument what was left was weighed out, and they found over 600,000 pesos without the jewels and slabs, and next day they were to distribute the shares, and I will tell how it was divided, and the greater part remained with Captain Cortés and other persons, and what was done about it I will go on to relate.

¹ An arroba=25 lbs.

CHAPTER CV.

How the gold which we had obtained was divided, both that which was given by the Great Montezuma, as well as that which had been collected from the towns, and what happened to a soldier about it.

FIRST of all the royal fifth was taken out, then Cortés said that they should take out for him another fifth, the same as for His Majesty, for we had promised it to him at the sand dunes when we elected him Captain General and Chief Justice, as I have already related in the chapter that treats of that matter. After that, he said that he had been put to certain expenses in the Island of Cuba and that what he had spent on the expedition should be taken from the heap, and in addition to this that there should be taken from the same heap the expenses incurred by Diego Velásquez in the ships which we had destroyed, and we all agreed to it, and beside this the expenses of the procurators who were sent to Spain. Then there were the shares of those who remained in Villa Rica, and there were seventy of them, and for his horse that had died, and for the mare which had belonged to Juan Sedeño which the Tlaxcalans had killed with a sword cut; then for the Fraile de la Merced, and the priest Juan Díaz and the Captains and for those who had brought horses, double shares, and for musketeers and crossbowmen the same, and other trickeries, so that very little was left to each as a share, and it was so little that many of the soldiers did not want to take it, and Cortés was left with it all. At that time we could do nothing but hold our tongues, for to ask for justice in the matter was useless. There were other soldiers who took their shares at the rate of one hundred pesos and clamoured for the rest, and to content them Cortés secretly gave to one and