

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 Sedefio 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

the other, apparently bestowing favours so as to satisfy them, and with the smooth speeches that he made to them they put up with it. Let us turn to the shares which remained for those who were in Villa Rica which he ordered to be sent to Tlaxcala to be taken care of there, and as it was badly divided, so it ended [badly], as I shall relate at the proper time.

At that time many of our Captains ordered very large golden chains to be made by the Great Montezuma's goldsmiths, who I have already said had a large town of their own called Azcapotzalco, half a league from Mexico. Cortés, too, ordered many jewels made, and a great service of plate. Some of our soldiers had their hands so full, that many ingots of gold, marked and unmarked, and jewels of a great diversity of patterns were openly in circulation. Heavy gaming was always going on with some playing cards which were made from drum skins by Pedro Valenciano and were as well made and painted as the originals. So this was the condition we were in, but let us stop talking of the gold and of the bad way it was divided, and worse way in which it was spent, and say what happened to a soldier named something de Cárdenas. It seems that this soldier had been a pilot and seaman, and was a native of Triana or of that county, and the poor fellow had a wife and family at home, and as happens to many of us he was destined to remain poor, so he came to seek for a livelihood with the intention of returning to his wife and children. As he had seen so much wealth of gold in slabs and in grains from the mines, and in ingots and bars, and when it was divided up he found that they only gave him a hundred pesos, he fell ill at the thought of it through sadness. When one of his friends saw him day by day so depressed and ill, he went to see him and asked him why he was like that and sighed so much from time to time. The Pilot Cárdenas, that is the man who

was ill, answered him: "Curse it all, have I no right to be ill, seeing that Cortés has carried off all the gold, and like a king takes a fifth, and has charged for his horse that died, and for the ships of Diego Velásquez, and for many other underhand claims, and that my wife and children die of hunger. I might have helped them when the procurators went with our letters, but we gave them all the gold and silver which we had acquired up to that time." Then his friend said to him, "How much gold had you got to send them?" and Cárdenas replied, "If Cortés would give me my share of what is due to me, my wife and children could live on it and even have to spare, but see what tricks he played us, making us sign that we would be doing a service to His Majesty by giving up our shares, and then taking out of the gold over six thousand pesos for his father Martin Cortés, besides what he hid away, while I and other poor men have been fighting by night and by day, as you have seen in the late wars in Tabasco and Tlaxcala, and in those at Cingapacinga and Cholula, and we are now in the greatest danger, looking death in the face every day should there be a rebellion in this city, in order that Cortés may carry off all the gold and take his fifth like a King."

And he said other things about it, and that we ought not to allow him to take that fifth, nor did we want so many kings, we only wanted His Majesty. His companion replied and said to him: "This anxiety is killing you, and now you can see that everything that is brought in by Montezuma and the Caciques is absorbed, by this one under his chin, by that in his pocket, and by another under his arm, and that all goes whither Cortés and his captains choose, they carry off everything even to the food. Get rid of such thoughts as these and pray God that we do not lose our lives in this city." Then the conversation ended, but it reached the ears of Cortés, and as they told him that

many of the soldiers were discontented over their share of the gold and the way the heaps had been robbed, he determined to make a speech to them all with honeyed words, and he said that all he owned was for us, and he did not want the fifth but only the share that came to him as Captain General, and that if any one had need of anything he would give it to him, and that the gold we had collected was but a breath of air, that we should observe what great cities there were there and rich mines, and that we should be lords of them all and very prosperous and rich, and he used other arguments very well expressed which he knew well how to employ. In addition to this he secretly gave to some of the soldiers jewels of gold and to others he made great promises, and he ordered that the food brought by Montezuma's stewards should be divided among all the soldiers so that he and all of them should share alike. In addition to this he called Cárdenas apart and flattered him with words and promised to send him back to Spain to his wife and children in the first ship that should sail, and he gave him three hundred dollars, and this contented him. I will stop here and will relate in its proper place what happened to Cárdenas when he went to Spain, and how he was very hostile to Cortés in the affairs that were brought before His Majesty.

CHAPTER CVI.

How Juan Velásquez de Leon and the Treasurer, Gonzalo Mejía, had words about the gold that was missing from the heaps before it was melted down, and what Cortés did about it.

AS all men in general covet gold, and the more they have the more they want, it happened that as many known pieces of gold were missing from the heaps already mentioned by me, and at the same time Juan Velásquez de