

## Literature, &amp;c.

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From Hogg's Instructor.

HERNANDO CORTES AND THE  
CONQUEST OF MEXICO.

At the time when Columbus was vainly soliciting royal aid to go forth on his noble scheme of discovery, in the year 1485, the most illustrious of his followers, Hernando Cortes, was born in the small town of Medellin, in Estramadura. He was descended from a poor but honourable family, his father, Martin Cortes, being a captain of infantry. His constitution in infancy was feeble, but strengthened with his years. At fourteen he was sent to Salamanca to study law. This, however did not suit his taste, and after loitering two years at college, he returned home and spent some time in idle dissipation. He now turned his thoughts to a military life, and intended to have sailed for Hispaniola with Ovando, the successor of Columbus, but he was detained in consequence of an accident met with in prosecuting an intrigue. At last, in 1504, he sailed for the Indies, and landed in Hispaniola. Here he was offered a grant of land, but answered, with characteristic pride—'I came to get gold, not to till the soil like a peasant.' He, however, accepted a grant of land and slaves, and for some years followed this pursuit, diversified by military expeditions against the natives, and numerous duels, arising out of the amorous intrigues in which he was constantly engaged.

In 1511, Cortes followed Velasquez to the conquest of Cuba, and for a time stood high in his favour. A quarrel, arising from some new intrigue, induced him to join a conspiracy against the governor, who, having discovered it, seized him, and would have hung him but for the interposition of his friends. Cortes escaped from prison and took sanctuary in a church, but having inadvertently gone without the walls, was seized by an alguacil, and again put in prison. Cortes seems not to have forgotten this treatment, as he afterwards had the officer hung for some offence in New Spain. He was carried on board a ship about to sail for Hispaniola, but again freeing his feet from the fetters, got on shore, and took refuge in the same sanctuary. He was at length reconciled to the governor, and receiving a grant of land, lived for some time cultivating it, and working gold mines, by which he amassed a considerable sum of money.

Many reports of the wealthy regions of Yucatan and Mexico on the neighbouring mainland, having been brought to Cuba, the governor, in 1518, fitted out a fleet under his nephew Grijalva, to investigate their truth. The commander was struck with the proofs of high civilisation, especially in architecture, which he found along the coast, and after carrying on a profitable traffic with the natives, in which gold and jewels were freely bartered for glass beads and other trinkets, sent back one of his ships with this rich cargo, whilst he continued his voyage. Velasquez resolved to follow up this splendid discovery, and without waiting for the return of his nephew, prepared an armament for the colonisation and conquest of the newly discovered realms. He was induced to trust this to the command of Cortes, with whom he was now on good terms, and who would contribute materially to defray the necessary expense. Cortes set about equipping his fleet with such energy, that the suspicions of Velasquez were aroused, lest his officer should prove too independent. He even had resolved to deprive him of the command, but Cortes, with his usual decision, set sail in the night, without taking leave of the governor, though his fleet was as yet but imperfectly furnished with supplies. He afterwards touched at several harbours on the coast, where he completed his stores, and filled up his crew by volunteers. Velasquez wrote to the governors of these places to seize and detain Cortes; but they had not the power, as his followers would have cheerfully laid down their lives for him. He finally mustered his forces at Cape St. Antonio, the westerly point of Cuba, where they amounted to eleven vessels, the largest of a hundred tons burthen. He was accompanied by 110 mariners, and 553 soldiers, with about 200 Indians. He had also 14 pieces of artillery and 16 horses, for which he had paid a large price, but of whose importance for striking terror into the savages he was well aware. With this paltry force he set out to conquer a country larger and probably more populous than Spain itself. Cortes was then about thirty-three years of age, of a pale complexion, a grave countenance, and large dark eyes. He was rather above the middle size, with a slender but muscular figure, and remarkable for vigour and agility. His manners were frank, his disposition gay and humorous, but he possessed a cool calculating spirit, and bold prompt decision, which never failed him in the hour of trial.

On the 17th day of February, 1519, Cortes sailed for the coast of Yucatan. He landed first on the Island of Cozumel, and there was joined by Jeronimo de Aguilar, a Spanish ecclesiastic, who had been eight years captive among the Indians, with whose language he was now familiar, but had almost forgotten his native Castilian. Cortes next touched at the mouth of the Tabasco, took possession of the town, and defeated the natives in a great battle. They then submitted, sent presents to the Spaniards, among which were twenty female slaves, and were nominally converted to Christianity. The natives showed many marks

of civilisation; but the Spaniards were much disappointed by finding only a small quantity of gold; which, they were informed, came from Calhua, or Mexico, in the west. Cortes again set sail along the shores, and at last landed on a desolate sandy beach, where the town of Vera Cruz was afterwards built. He entered into communication with the natives through one of the female slaves, named Marina by the Spaniards, who was a Mexican by birth, and subsequently became the mistress of Cortes. He had an interview with the governor of this distant province of the Mexican empire, from whom he received various presents, and was astonished by seeing an artist sketching a picture of himself and followers on canvass, for the information of the emperor. In the ships, or 'water houses,' of the strangers; their horses, so new and strange to the Indians; their cannon, vomiting out fire, and crushing the forest trees with irresistible violence were not forgotten.

Mexico was then ruled by Montezuma, whose name signifying the 'sad, or severe man,' well expressed his character. He had extended the empire by successful war, but disgusted the people by haughty arrogance, and alienated them by grievous impositions. He had also offended his neighbours, the kingdom of Tezcuco being divided by the successful revolt of a younger brother of the sovereign, and the small republic of Tlascalala lying midway to the coast, fearing the growing power of the neighbouring monarch. Montezuma had been a priest before he was called to the throne, and a dark superstition had a deep hold on his mind. He was constant in his religious services, hecatombs of human victims were sacrificed to avert, if possible, the destruction of his empire, foretold by ancient oracles, and announced by recent prodigies—by a miraculous overflowing of the lakes, by the burning of the national temple, by comets in the heavens, and by a vast sheet of flood of fire 'thickly powdered with stars' seen in the east—the latter supposed by some historians to have been a volcanic eruption.

The arrival of the strangers seemed to give reality to all these strange prodigies, and spread consternation through the Mexican court. Montezuma assembled his wisest councillors, with his allied kings; but much diversity of sentiment prevailed, some advising to repel the intruders by force, others to give them an honourable reception. Montezuma chose a more impolitic course; he sent rich presents to Cortes, but forbade him to approach his capital. These rich gifts only excited the cupidity of the Spaniards, who had been suffering much from the heat, but were well supplied with all necessities by the natives. Cortes still insisted on visiting the court, but the ambassador firmly refused, and requested the strangers to return to their own land, and a second embassy to the emperor brought back a similar reply. Meantime disease and discontent had broken out in the camp, many of the soldiers insisting on an immediate return. This Cortes evaded on various grounds, and was confirmed in his refusal by an embassy from the Totanacs, a neighbouring nation recently conquered by the Mexicans, and bearing the yoke with impatience. They informed him of the discontent prevailing in the empire, and invited him to Cempoalla, their chief town. There he met with a kind reception, and moving his ships to a river in its vicinity, he laid the foundation of a city and fortress. Cortes used all his influences to excite the Totanacs against their rulers; and with such success, that when some Aztec nobles came to demand tribute, this was refused, and the messengers put into prison. Cortes contrived that they should escape, treated them kindly, and sent them to Montezuma with a message, in which the insult was ascribed entirely to the Totanacs. By this base duplicity, the Spaniard thought to secure in some measure the friendship of both parties, and he so far succeeded. The Totanacs became wholly subject to the foreigners, who could alone protect them from their incensed masters, and Montezuma sent a new embassy with costly gifts, and a promise to spare the rebels for the sake of the Spaniards. So much did this proof of his power increase the influence of Cortes, that when he soon after commanded his soldiers to violate the national temple, and destroy the images, not a hand was raised to protect them, but the whole people apparently adopted the faith of the foreigners, who set up an image of the Virgin and Child in the shrine from whence they had ejected the heathen idols.

Cortes was now meditating a bolder enterprise, even the conquest of the great empire of Montezuma. To this his force was utterly inadequate, but he trusted to the dissensions among the natives, and prepared for his attempt with remarkable skill and energy. The adverse part of his followers were won by gifts and promises, or silenced by stern punishment; the commission he had received from the governor of Cuba was assigned into the hands of the magistracy of the new city, only to be restored with more ample bounds, and a vessel, loaded with rich presents, was dispatched to Spain to secure the royal sanction to these proceedings. But fearing lest the timid hearts of some among his followers might still shrink from the desperate enterprise, he resolved to cut off all hope of retreat. He procured a report from the carpenters condemning the vessels as not seaworthy and all of them were dismantled and sunk except one small bark. The army was filled with consternation, and loud murmurs rose against their general, who seemed thus for his own ambition to be leading them like cattle to be butchered in the shambles, 'wit out means or hope of escape. But in an eloquent harangue, he soothed their fears and excited their cupidity anew, concluding in

the stirring words—'As for me I have chosen my part. I will remain here while there is one to bear me company. If there be any so craven as to shrink from sharing the dangers of our glorious enterprise, let them go home in God's name. There is still one vessel left. Let them take that and return to Cuba. They can tell there how they deserted their commander and their comrades, and patiently wait till we return loaded from the spoils of the Aztecs.' When he was concluded, all fear was gone, and the enthusiastic shout burst from the assembled multitude—'To Mexico! To Mexico!'

And for this city he set out on the 16th August, 1519, with four hundred foot, fifteen horse, and seven pieces of artillery. He was accompanied by thirteen hundred Indian warriors, and a thousand porters to convey the artillery and baggage. In a few marches they traversed the warm region, and leaving its luxuriant groves, began to ascend the mountains. Pausing at Xalapa, they saw below them the plain over which they had passed, covered with meadows, woods, streams, and villages, and bounded as by a white streak by the ocean, beyond which was their native home. Behind was the steep ascent, crowned with its snowy mountains to which they turned with renewed vigour as they felt the cool breeze from the upland regions. They then wound round the base of the Cofre de Perote, rising 13,000 feet above the sea, and suffered much from the cold winds, with driving rain and sleet, while toiling through the rugged and barren tracts of lava which encircle the volcano. Emerging on the plateau, the Spaniards found a more congenial climate, but the fields filled with plants previously unknown. They soon after reached a large city where they were very coolly received, but remained four days for rest and refreshment. They continued their route through the plain, then well wooded and crowded with villages, marching in regular order, 'as in the midst of a battle,' and never laying their weapons from their side. Cortes was advised by his Indian allies to proceed by the town of Tlascalala, and sent some of them forward to ask permission from the warlike republicans. The embassy occasioned much diversity of opinion in that city, but the war party at last prevailed, and the ambassadors were detained on various pretences. Cortes continued to push forwards, and entered the Tlascalalan territory, whose limits were marked by a strong rampart, but wholly without guards. He had not proceeded far, however, when he encountered an army of Tlascalans whom he defeated, though with the loss of two horses and one of his men. In the evening two of his ambassadors returned with a friendly message, on which he put little reliance; and the next day his doubts were confirmed by the arrival of the other two, who had been retained as sacrifices, but contrived to escape. A body of Indians soon appeared, and having fought for some time, retired with precipitation. The Spaniards following incautiously, found themselves in the middle of a narrow pass defended by a vast army, which attacked them with great courage. With much difficulty the white men gained the open ground, where their artillery and cavalry soon drove back their foes. Cortes encamped on a hill, where he rested the next day, and on the second sent an embassy to the Tlascalans, who returned the fierce answer, that they would hew the flesh from their bones for sacrifice to the gods. This bold defiance, and the rumours of the number and prowess of the enemy, struck terror into the Spaniards, so that, as Bernal Diaz says, 'We feared death, for we were men.' But there was no retreat, and next day, after a long and dubious contest, the arms and discipline of the Europeans again prevailed. The priests having assured the Indians that the Spaniards, the children of the sun, would lose all their power when his beams were withdrawn, a night attack on the camp was next tried, but failed by the vigilance of Cortes.

These repeated victories of the strangers seem to have convinced the Tlascalans that further resistance was in vain. Their general, however still delayed the embassy, and dispatched spies into the camp of Cortes, where they were discovered, and sent home with their hands cut off. This proof of Spanish sagacity broke the spirit of the chief, the embassy was allowed to proceed, and he soon followed in person to seek peace with the conquerors. This was readily granted by Cortes, whose troops were already murmuring at the labour and danger to which they were subjected. After some delay to restore his own health, during which messengers again arrived with presents from Montezuma, and an offer of tribute, provided he would abstain from visiting the capital, Cortes proceeded to Tlascalala. He was received with great kindness, and formed an alliance with that brave people, of the utmost importance to the success of his great enterprise. Whilst he remained in their city, another embassy arrived from Montezuma, who now invited him to his capital, and recommended the road by Cholula, which notwithstanding the dissuasions of his new allies, he resolved to follow.

Cholula was the great emporium of commerce and centre of religion in the Mexican empire. There stood the greatest of the teocallis, or religious mounds, covering about forty-four acres with its square base, and rising to a height of 477 feet. On the top was a magnificent temple, and a splendid image of the 'god of the air.' Numerous other temples filled the city; pilgrims flocked to it from all quarters, and six thousand human victims are reported to have annually perished on its cruel altars. But its people were effeminate and treacherous, seeking to gain by cunning what they lost in

open war. In this city, Cortes was at first received with kindness, but this soon changed to cool civility, and his mistress, Marina, discovered that they were plotting the destruction of him and his followers. His vengeance was quick and terrible. Seizing an opportunity when many of the chiefs and people were assembled in the square where he lodged, he ordered a general massacre, let loose his Indian allies to waste and plunder the devoted city, and consumed the great temple, its idols and obstinate defenders, in one vast conflagration. Three, some say six, thousand of the people were slain, and the survivors reduced to the most complete subjection. The surrounding cities, struck with the power, and dreading the cruel vengeance of the Spaniards, sent in their submission, and even Montezuma hastened to deny all participation in the conspiracy, and to soothe the conquerors with rich presents. Cortes remained a fortnight longer in the city, endeavouring to convert the natives to Christianity, and then resumed his march. He here parted with regret from his Totanac allies, who had followed him thus far from the coast, and stood by him faithfully in all difficulties, but feared to venture nearer to the capital of the great Montezuma.

The route of the Spaniards now led over the sierra that walls in the Mexican valley. The emperor had shut up the direct road, wishing to involve his unwished-for guests in another more dangerous. But his disaffected subjects revealed the deceit, and Cortes moved on between two of the loftiest mountains of the Cordillera. He paused till some of his followers ascended the highest, Popocatepetl, but it was then in a state of eruption, which prevented them reaching the summit, about 18,000 feet above the sea. Continuing their march, the troops at length reached the ridge of the sierra when the glorious valley of Mexico, then richly wooded, and sprinkled with cultivated fields, silvery lakes, and shining cities, burst on their enraptured view, in the clear atmosphere of the tropics. At first his troops exclaimed—'It is the promised land!' but, in a moment, its wealth, its populous cities, its vast resources rose before them, and terror-struck by the prospect, they demanded to be led back to the ships. But the voice and eloquence of their undaunted leader had its customary effect, and with buoyant step they hastened down the sierra. Their progress was impeded by the admiring crowd who flocked from every quarter, and who did not fail to discover their discontent with the harsh rule of Montezuma. Again an embassy from this monarch met them, and tried by entreaty and the offer of vast bribes to induce them to return. But all in vain: Cortes moved on towards the capital, whose sovereign, in a paroxysm of despair, sought counsel of his dumb idols, by fasting, prayers, and horrid sacrifices. Some of his councillors advised him to receive the Spaniards with courtesy; his more warlike brother, Cuiclahua, to summon his armies and drive them back to the ocean, or die nobly like a king. He chose the former, the Prince of Tezcuco, was sent to welcome Cortes to Mexico. Under his guidance the Spaniards were led safely amidst the winding lakes, where a bold enemy might have placed them at defiance. One night they lodged in a royal palace, whose stately architecture seemed to excel that of Europe; whilst its pleasure gardens, its aviaries and fish-ponds, filled their rude hearts with amazement. Next day they were led over the long causeway which unites the city of Mexico to the mainland, where the emperor met and welcomed them to his capital. He was clad with great magnificence, and waited on by his numerous attendants with the most reverential submission. One of the royal palaces was assigned to Cortes for an abode; whose numerous halls were amply sufficient to accommodate not only him and his European followers, but also the six thousands Tlascalans who had accompanied him into the very centre of their hereditary foes. All their wants were liberally supplied, and the emperor soon after paid Cortes a visit in person, and made many inquiries concerning the country whence he had come, and his motives for such a journey. Montezuma still regarded them as more than mortal, and the children of that fair-haired god who ages before had been driven from his land. Cortes next day returned the visit and tried in vain to convert the emperor to Christianity. In his reply, Montezuma acknowledged the superior power of the Christians, that their king was the rightful lord of all, and in his name he would rule 'Rest now,' he concluded, 'from your labours. You are here in your own dwellings, and every thing shall be provided for your subsistence. I will see that your wishes shall be obeyed in the same manner as my own.' At those words tears filled his eyes, as the image of his ancient independence, of his vanished glory, flitted across his mind. Cortes took his departure, struck with the power and liberality of the emperor, having obtained leave to visit the various parts of the vast city.

From the Presbyterian Herald.

## MY GRANDMOTHER.

TRULY does the Inspired Volume say, "The memory of the just is blessed." True it is in my experience, and doubtless in that of many others. Of all the pleasant memories of my pleasant childhood, there are none more delightful or precious to my mind than those which recall the precepts and example of my beloved grandmother. The child of pious parents, blessed with many godly relatives, nurtured on the Bible, and early taught the way to a throne of grace, I still feel as if the instructions and prayers, and the more powerful though silent preaching of her holy life, are,