

***JOHN  
S. C. ABBOTT***



***HERNANDO  
CORTEZ***

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A portrait of Hernando Cortez, a Spanish explorer and conquistador. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark cap and a dark garment with a white ruffled collar. He has a full, grey beard and mustache, and his gaze is directed slightly to the left. The background is dark and indistinct.

***HERNANDO  
CORTEZ***

**John S. C. Abbott**

# **Hernando Cortez**

**Makers of History**

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# PREFACE.

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The career of Hernando Cortez is one of the most wild and adventurous recorded in the annals of fact or fiction, and yet all the prominent events in his wondrous history are well authenticated. All *truth* carries with itself an important moral. The writer, in this narrative, has simply attempted to give a vivid idea of the adventures of Cortez and his companions in the Conquest of Mexico. There are many inferences of vast moment to which the recital leads. These are so obvious that they need not be pointed out by the writer.

A small portion of this volume has appeared in Harper's Magazine, in an article furnished by the writer upon the Conquest of Mexico.



# ENGRAVINGS.

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# HERNANDO CORTEZ.

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# CHAPTER I.

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## THE DISCOVERY OF MEXICO.

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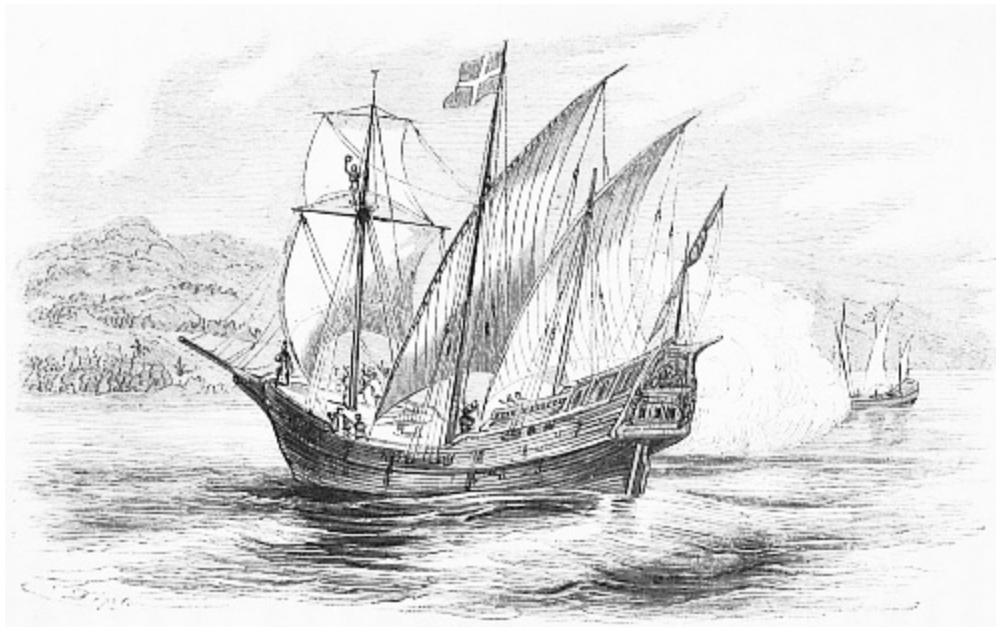
The shore of America in 1492.

Three hundred and fifty years ago the ocean which washes the shores of America was one vast and silent solitude. No ship plowed its waves; no sail whitened its surface. On the 11th of October, 1492, three small vessels might have been seen invading, for the first time, these hitherto unknown waters. They were as specks on the bosom of infinity. The sky above, the ocean beneath, gave no promise of any land. Three hundred adventurers were in these ships. Ten weeks had already passed since they saw the hills of the Old World sink beneath the horizon.

For weary days and weeks they had strained their eyes looking toward the west, hoping to see the mountains of the New World rising in the distance. The illustrious adventurer, Christopher Columbus, who guided these frail barks, inspired by science and by faith, doubted not that a world would ere long emerge before him from the apparently boundless waters. But the blue sky still overarched them, and the heaving ocean still extended in all directions its unbroken and interminable expanse.

Doubt and alarm.

Discouragement and alarm now pervaded nearly all hearts, and there was a general clamor for return to the shores of Europe. Christopher Columbus, sublime in the confidence with which his exalted nature inspired him, was still firm and undaunted in his purpose.



### **AMERICA DISCOVERED.**

A light appears.  
He watches the light.  
The shore is seen.

The night of the 11th of October darkened over these lonely adventurers. The stars came out in all the brilliance of tropical splendor. A fresh breeze drove the ships with increasing speed over the billows, and cooled, as with balmy zephyrs, brows heated through the day by the blaze of a meridian sun. Columbus could not sleep. He stood upon the deck of his ship, silent and sad, yet indomitable in energy, gazing with intense and unintermitted watch into the dusky distance. It was near midnight. Suddenly he saw a light, as of a torch, far off in the horizon. His heart throbbed with an

irrepressible tumult of excitement. Was it a meteor, or was it a light from the long-wished-for land? It disappeared, and all again was dark. But suddenly again it gleamed forth, feeble and dim in the distance, yet distinct. Soon again the exciting ray was quenched, and nothing disturbed the dark and sombre outline of the sea. The long hours of the night to Columbus seemed interminable as he waited impatiently for the dawn. But even before any light was seen in the east, the dim outline of land appeared in indisputable distinctness before the eyes of the entranced, the now immortalized navigator. A cannon—the signal of the discovery—rolled its peal over the ocean, announcing to the two vessels in the rear the joyful tidings. A shout, excited by the heart's intensest emotions, rose over the waves, and with tears, with prayers, and embraces, these enthusiastic men accepted the discovery of the New World.

The Spaniards land and are hospitably received.

The bright autumnal morning dawned in richest glory, presenting to them a scene as of a celestial paradise. The luxuriance of tropical vegetation bloomed in all its novelty around them. The inhabitants, many of them in the simple and innocent costume of Eden before the fall, crowded the shore, gazing with attitude and gesture of astonishment upon the strange phenomena of the ships. The adventurers landed, and were received upon the island of San Salvador as angels from heaven by the peaceful and friendly natives. Bitterly has the hospitality been requited. After cruising around for some time among the beautiful islands of the New World, Columbus returned to Spain to astonish Europe with the tidings of his discovery. He had been absent but seven months.

A quarter of a century passed away, during which all the adventurers of Europe were busy exploring these newly-

discovered islands and continents. Various colonies were established in the fertile valleys of these sunny climes, and upon the hill-sides which emerged, in the utmost magnificence of vegetation, from the bosom of the Caribbean Sea. The eastern coast of North America had been during this time surveyed from Labrador to Florida. The bark of the navigator had discovered nearly all the islands of the West Indies, and had crept along the winding shores of the Isthmus of Darien, and of the South American continent as far as the River La Plata. Bold explorers, guided by intelligence received from the Indians, had even penetrated the interior of the isthmus, and from the summit of the central mountain barrier had gazed with delight upon the placid waves of the Pacific. But the vast indentation of the Mexican Gulf, sweeping far away in an apparently interminable circuit to the west, had not yet been penetrated. The field for romantic adventure which these unexplored realms presented could not, however, long escape the eye of that chivalrous age.

Mexico is discovered.  
Arts and sciences of the Mexicans.  
The mines of precious metals.

Some exploring expeditions were soon fitted out from Cuba, and the shores of Mexico were discovered. Here every thing exhibited the traces of a far higher civilization than had hitherto been witnessed in the New World. There were villages, and even large cities, thickly planted throughout the country. Temples and other buildings, imposing in massive architecture, were reared of stone and lime. Armies, laws, and a symbolical form of writing indicated a very considerable advance in the arts and the energies of civilization. Many of the arts were cultivated. Cloth was made of cotton, and of skins nicely prepared. Astronomy was sufficiently understood for the accurate measurement

of time in the divisions of the solar year. It is indeed a wonder, as yet unexplained, where these children of the New World acquired so philosophical an acquaintance with the movements of the heavenly bodies. Agriculture was practiced with much scientific skill, and a system of irrigation introduced, from which many a New England farmer might learn many a profitable lesson. Mines of gold, silver, lead, and copper were worked. Many articles of utility and of exquisite beauty were fabricated from these metals. Iron, the ore of which must pass through so many processes before it is prepared for use, was unknown to them. The Spanish goldsmiths, admiring the exquisite workmanship of the gold and silver ornaments of the Mexicans, bowed to their superiority.

Fairs were held in the great market-places of the principal cities every fifth day, where buyers and sellers in vast numbers thronged. They had public schools, courts of justice, a class of nobles, and a powerful monarch. The territory embraced by this wonderful kingdom was twice as large as the whole of New England.

Code of laws.  
Punishments.

The code of laws adopted by this strange people was very severe. They seemed to cherish but little regard for human life, and the almost universal punishment for crime was death. This bloody code secured a very effective police. Adultery, thieving, removing landmarks, altering measures, defrauding a ward of property, intemperance, and even idleness, with spendthrift habits, were punished pitilessly with death. The public mind was so accustomed to this, that death lost a portion of its solemnity. The rites of marriage were very formally enacted, and very rigidly adhered to.

Slavery.

Prisoners taken in war were invariably slain upon their religious altars in sacrifice to their gods. Slavery existed among them, but not hereditary. No one could be born a slave. The poor sometimes sold their children. The system existed in its mildest possible form, as there was no distinction of race between the master and the slave.

#### Military glory.

Military glory was held in high repute. Fanaticism lent all its allurements to inspire the soldier. Large armies were trained to very considerable military discipline. Death upon the battle-field was a sure passport to the most sunny and brilliant realms of the heavenly world. The soldiers wore coats of mail of wadded cotton, which neither arrow nor javelin could easily penetrate. The chiefs wore over these burnished plates of silver and of gold. Silver helmets, also, often glittered upon the head. Hospitals were established for the sick and the wounded.

#### Mexican mythology.

Their religious system was an incongruous compound of beauty and of deformity—of gentleness and of ferocity. They believed in one supreme God, the Great Spirit, with several hundred inferior deities. The god of war was a very demon. The god of the air was a refined deity, whose altars were embellished with fruits and flowers, and upon whose ear the warbling of birds and the most plaintive strains of vocal melody vibrated sweetly.

#### The three states of existence.

There were, in their imaginations, three states of existence in the future world. The good, and especially those, of whatever character, who fell upon the field of battle, soared to the sun, and floated in aerial grace and beauty among

the clouds, in peace and joy, never to be disturbed. The worthless, indifferent sort of people, neither good nor bad, found perhaps a congenial home in the monotony of a listless and almost lifeless immortality, devoid of joy or grief. The wicked were imprisoned in everlasting darkness, where they could do no farther harm.

Infant baptism.

It is an extraordinary fact that the rite of infant baptism existed among them. This fact is attested by the Spanish historians, who witnessed it with their own eyes, and who have recorded the truly Christian prayers offered on the occasion. As the infants were sprinkled with water, God was implored to wash them from original sin, and to create them anew. Many of their prayers dimly reflected those pure and ennobling sentiments which shine so brilliantly in the word of God.

Worship.

Their worship must have been a costly one, as the most majestic temples were reared, and an army of priests was supported. One single temple in the metropolis had five thousand priests attached to its service. The whole business of youthful instruction was confided to the priests. They received confession, and possessed the power of absolution.

The temples and altars.  
Mode of offering sacrifice.

The temples were generally pyramidal structures of enormous magnitude. Upon the broad area of their summits an altar was erected, where human victims, usually prisoners taken in war, were offered in sacrifice. These awful ceremonies were conducted with the most imposing pomp of music, banners, and military and ecclesiastical



processions. The victim offered in sacrifice was bound immovably to the stone altar. The officiating priest, with a sharp instrument constructed of flint-like lava, cut open his breast, and tore out the warm and palpitating heart. This bloody sacrifice was presented in devout offering to the god. At times, in the case of prisoners taken in war, the most horrid tortures were practiced before the bloody rite was terminated. When the gods seemed to frown, in dearth, or pestilence, or famine, large numbers of children were frequently offered in sacrifice. Thus the temples of Mexico were ever clotted with blood. Still more revolting is the well-authenticated fact that the body of the wretched victim thus sacrificed was often served up as a banquet, and was eaten with every accompaniment of festive rejoicing. It is estimated that from thirty to fifty thousand thus perished every year upon the altars of ancient Mexico. One of the great objects of their wars was to obtain victims for their gods.

City of Mexico.

The population of this vast empire is not known. It must have consisted, however, of several millions. The city of Mexico, situated on islands in the bosom of a lake in the centre of a spacious and magnificent valley of the interior, about two hundred miles from the coast, was the metropolis of the realm.

Montezuma.  
Civilization of the inhabitants.

Montezuma was king—an aristocratic king, surrounded by nobles, upon whom he conferred all the honors and emoluments of the state. His palace was very magnificent. He was served from plates and goblets of silver and gold. Six hundred feudatory nobles composed his daily retinue, paying him the most obsequious homage, and expecting the

same from those beneath themselves. Montezuma claimed to be lord of the whole world, and exacted tribute from all whom his arm could reach. His triumphant legions had invaded and subjugated many adjacent states, as this *Roman empire* of the New World extended in all directions its powerful sway.

It will thus be seen that the kingdom of Mexico, in point of civilization, was about on an equality with the Chinese empire of the present day. Its inhabitants were very decidedly elevated above the wandering hordes of North America.

Montezuma had heard of the arrival, in the islands of the Caribbean Sea, of the strangers from another hemisphere. He had heard of their appalling power, their aggressions, and their pitiless cruelty. Wisely he resolved to exclude these dangerous visitors from his shores. As exploring expeditions entered his bays and rivers, they were fiercely attacked and driven away. These expeditions, however, brought back to Cuba most alluring accounts of the rich empire of Mexico and of its golden opulence.

The Governor of Cuba resolves to subjugate the country.

The Governor of Cuba now resolved to fit out an expedition sufficiently powerful to subjugate their country, and make it one of the vassals of Spain. It was a dark period of the world. Human rights were but feebly discerned. Superstition reigned over hearts and consciences with a fearfully despotic sway. Acts, upon which would now fall the reproach of unmitigated villainy, were then performed with prayers and thanksgivings honestly offered. We shall but tell the impartial story of the wondrous career of Cortez in the subjugation of this empire. God, the searcher of all hearts, can alone unravel the mazes of conscientiousness and

depravity, and award the just meed of approval and condemnation.

Motives for carrying on conquests.

Many good motives were certainly united with those more questionable which inspired this enterprise. It was a matter of national ambition to promote geographical discoveries, to enlarge the realms of commerce, and to extend the boundaries of human knowledge by investigating the arts and the sciences of other nations. The Christian religion—Heaven's greatest boon to man—was destined, by the clear announcements of prophecy, to fill the world; and it was deemed the duty of the Church to extend these triumphs in all possible ways. The importance of the end to be attained, it was thought, would sanctify even the instrumentality of violence and blood. Wealth and honors were among the earthly rewards promised to the faithful.

Allowances must be made for the darkness of the age. It is by very slow and painful steps that the human mind has attained to even its present unsteady position in regard to civil and religious rights.

Hernando Cortez.

The Governor of Cuba, Velasquez, looked earnestly for a man to head this important enterprise. He found just the man for the occasion in Hernando Cortez—a fearless, energetic Spanish adventurer, then residing upon the island of Cuba. His early life will be found in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER II.

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### EARLY LIFE OF CORTEZ.

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Village of Medellin.  
Early character of Cortez.

In the interior of Spain, in the midst of the sombre mountains whose confluent streams compose the waters of the Guadiana, there reposes the little village or hamlet of Medellin. A more secluded spot it would be difficult to find. Three hundred and seventy years ago, in the year 1485, Hernando Cortez was born in this place. His ancestors had enjoyed wealth and rank. The family was now poor, but proud of the Castilian blood which flowed in their veins. The father of Hernando was a captain in the army—a man of honorable character. Of his mother but little is known.

Not much has been transmitted to our day respecting the childhood of this extraordinary man. It is reported that he early developed a passion for wild adventure; that he was idle and wayward; frank, fearless, and generous; that he loved to explore the streams and to climb the cliffs of his mountainous home, and that he ever appeared reckless of danger. He was popular with his companions, for warm-heartedness and magnanimity were prominent in his character.

Hernando sent to Salamanca.  
Life at the university.

His father, though struggling with poverty, cherished ambitious views for his son, and sent him to the celebrated university of Salamanca for an education. He wished Hernando to avoid the perils and temptations of the camp, and to enter the honorable profession of the law. Hernando reluctantly obeyed the wishes of his father, and went to the university. But he scorned restraint. He despised all the employments of industry, and study was his especial abhorrence. Two years were worse than wasted in the university. Young Cortez was both indolent and dissipated. In all the feats of mischief he was the ringleader, and his books were entirely neglected. He received many censures, and was on the point of being expelled, when his disappointed father withdrew the wayward boy from the halls of the university, and took him home.

He turns soldier.

Hernando was now sixteen years of age. There was nothing for him to do in the seclusion of his native village but to indulge in idleness. This he did with great diligence. He rode horses; he hunted and fished; he learned the art of the swordsman and played the soldier. Hot blood glowed in his veins, and he became genteelly dissolute; his pride would never allow him to stoop to vulgarity. The father was grief-stricken by the misconduct of his son, and at last consented to gratify the passion which inspired him to become a soldier.

Expedition to Hispaniola.

At seventeen years of age the martial boy enlisted in an expedition, under Gonsalvo de Cordova, to assist the Italians against the French. Young Cortez, to his bitter disappointment, just as the expedition started, was taken seriously sick, and was obliged to be left behind. Soon after

this, one of his relatives was appointed, by the Spanish crown, governor of St. Domingo, now called Hayti, but then called Hispaniola, or Little Spain. This opening to scenes and adventures in the New World was attractive to the young cavalier in the highest possible degree. It was, indeed, an enterprise which might worthily arouse the enthusiasm of any mind. A large fleet was equipped to convey nearly three thousand settlers to found a colony beneath the sunny skies and under the orange groves of the tropics. Life there seemed the elysium of the indolent man. Young Cortez now rejoiced heartily over his previous disappointment. His whole soul was engrossed in the contemplation of the wild and romantic adventures in which he expected to luxuriate. It is not to be supposed that a lad of such a temperament should, at the age of seventeen, be a stranger to the passion of love. There was a young lady in his native village for whom he had formed a strong youthful attachment. He resolved, with his accustomed ardor and recklessness, to secure an interview with his lady-love, where parting words and pledges should not be witnessed by prudent relatives.

His early love, and unfortunate consequences attending it.

One dark night, just before the squadron sailed, the ardent lover climbed a mouldering wall to reach the window of the young lady's chamber. In the obscurity he slipped and fell, and some heavy stones from the crumbling wall fell upon him. He was conveyed to his bed, severely wounded and helpless. The fleet sailed, and the young man, almost insane with disappointment and chagrin, was left upon his bed of pain.

He arrives at Hispaniola.

At length he recovered. His father secured for him a passage to join the colonists in another ship. He, with

exultation, left Medellin, hastened to the sea-shore, where he embarked, and after an unusually adventurous and perilous voyage, he gazed with delight upon the tropical vegetation and the new scenes of life of Hispaniola. It was the year 1504. Cortez was then nineteen years of age.

The young adventurer, immediately upon landing, proceeded to the house of his relative, Governor Ovando. The governor happened to be absent, but his secretary received the young man very cordially.

"I have no doubt," said he to Hernando, "that you will receive a liberal grant of land to cultivate."

"I come to get gold," Hernando replied, haughtily, "not to till the soil like a peasant."

Patronage of the governor.

Ovando, on his return, took his young relative under his patronage, and assigned to him posts of profit and honor. Still Cortez was very restless. His impatient spirit wearied of the routine of daily duty, and his imagination was ever busy in the domain of wild adventure.

Two Spaniards upon the island of Hispaniola about this time planned an expedition for exploring the main land, to make discoveries and to select spots for future settlements. Cortez eagerly joined the enterprise, but again was he doomed to disappointment. Just before the vessels sailed he was seized by a fever, and laid prostrate upon his bed. Probably his life was thus saved. Nearly all who embarked on this enterprise perished by storm, disease, and the poisoned arrows of the natives.

Life at Hispaniola.

Seven years passed away, during which Cortez led an idle and voluptuous life, ever ready for any daring adventure which might offer, and miserably attempting to beguile the weariness of provincial life with guilty amours. He accepted a plantation from the governor, which was cultivated by slaves. His purse was thus ever well filled. Not unfrequently he became involved in duels, and he bore upon his body until death many scars received in these encounters. Military expeditions were not unfrequently sent out to quell the insurrections to which the natives of the island were goaded by the injustice and the cruelty of the Spaniards.

Cortez's courage.

Cortez was always an eager volunteer for such service. His courage and imperturbable self-possession made him an invaluable co-operator in every enterprise of danger. He thus became acquainted with all the artifices of Indian warfare, and inured himself to the toil and privations of forest life.

The island of Cuba.

In the year 1492 the magnificent island of Cuba, but a few leagues from Hispaniola, had been discovered by Columbus. As he approached the land, the grandeur of the mountains, the wide sweep of the valleys, the stately forests, the noble rivers, the bold promontories and headlands, melting away in the blue of the hazy distance, impressed him with unbounded admiration. As he sailed up one of the beautiful rivers of crystal clearness, fringed with flowers, and aromatic shrubs, and tropical fruits, while the overhanging trees were vocal with the melody of birds of every variety of song and plumage, enraptured he exclaimed,

"Cuba! It is the most beautiful island that eyes ever beheld. It is an elysium. One could live there forever."



The new governor.  
The filibustering expedition.

The natives of the favored land were amiable and friendly. The Spaniards did not for several years encroach upon their rights, and no Spanish colony was established upon their enchanting shores. It was now the year 1511. Nineteen years had elapsed since the discovery of the island. Ovando had been recalled, and Diego Columbus, the son of Christopher, had been appointed, in his stead, governor of Hispaniola. He took the title of Viceroy, and assumed all the splendors of royalty. Diego Columbus devoutly decided that it was manifest destiny that Cuba should belong to Spain. He organized a *filibustering* expedition to wrest from the natives their beautiful island. The command of the expedition was intrusted to Don Velasquez, a bold adventurer, of much notoriety, from Spain, who had been residing for many years at Hispaniola, and who had been lieutenant under Governor Ovando. A foray of this kind would, of course, excite the patriotic zeal of every vagabond. Cortez was one of the first to hasten to the standard of Velasquez. The natives of the island, unarmed and voluptuous, made hardly the shadow of resistance, and three hundred Spanish adventurers, with but a slight struggle, took possession of this magnificent domain. The reputation and ability of Cortez gave him a prominent position in this adventure.

Resistance.

One brave and patriotic Indian chief, who had fled from the outrages perpetrated at Hispaniola, urged the Cubans to repel the invaders. Though unable to rouse in a mass the peace-loving islanders, he gathered a small band around him, and valiantly contended to resist the landing. His efforts were quite unavailing. Gunpowder soon triumphed.