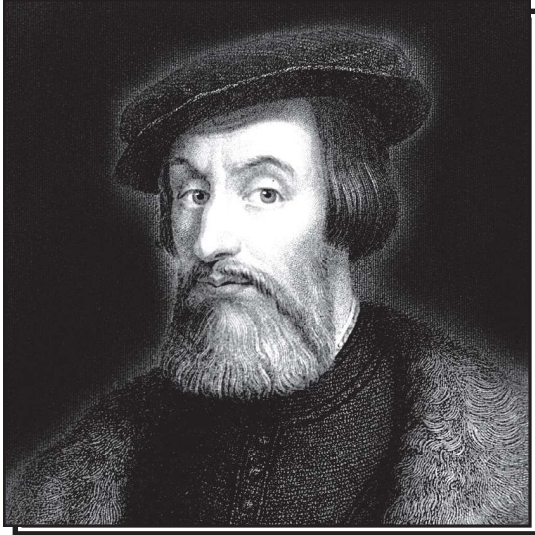


HERNANDO CORTES



Hernando Cortes was born in Spain in 1485. As a young man, he wanted to become famous like Columbus. He studied at a university in Spain. In 1511 he joined the Spanish explorer, Diego Velasquez, and sailed to Cuba. In Cuba, Cortes saw great opportunity. Educated and handsome, by the age of 26 Cortes was married to an important Spanish lady. He soon became rich. However, he was cruel to the natives who worked in his gold mines.

In 1519, Cortes arrived in Mexico. He traveled in 10 ships with 550 Spaniards, nearly 300 natives, 13 horses and 10 cannons. He fought with the natives. They were afraid of the Spaniards' horses and guns. They offered a slave as a peace offering. It is believed that the slave helped Cortes conquer Mexico. When some Spaniards wanted to return to Cuba, Cortes burned his 10 ships.

Cortes became friendly with natives who were enemies of Montezuma, the Aztec emperor. Montezuma sent messengers to meet Cortes. Cortes asked if their emperor had any gold. He told them that he and his soldiers had a disease of the heart that only gold could cure. This disease was really pure greed and was the cause of terrible crimes against the Aztec by the Spaniards. Cortes pushed on towards Mexico City and Montezuma. Some of the frightened natives tried to please Cortes by offering human sacrifices.

In November 1519, Cortes with 6,000 natives and 450 Spaniards arrived in Mexico City, a beautiful city on a lake. Montezuma received Cortes with kindness and offered him a beautiful palace to use. Cortes believed he needed to show his power to Montezuma. He attacked some of the Mexicans who had followed him to Mexico City. Cortes burned them alive at the gates of Montezuma's palace. He put Montezuma in prison and demanded gold to please the Emperor of Spain. Montezuma gave Cortes \$200,000. Once Cortes received the riches, he executed Montezuma.

The Aztec revolted and Cortes had to retreat. Cortes regrouped and conquered Mexico and the Aztec in 1521. Within two short years, all of Mexico had been conquered by Spain. The Spaniards murdered more natives than the Aztec had offered in human sacrifices in the previous 10 years. Cortes destroyed all the temples and idols the Aztec used for their worship. In their place he set up Christian statues. He believed he had done the right thing. He had brought Christianity to Mexico. Cortes returned to Spain in 1540 and died in Seville in 1547.