

COR'SICA. This island possession of France, acquired the year before the birth there of Corsica's most famous son, Napoleon Bonaparte, is noted for its "vendettas," or blood-feuds. For the haughty Corsicans, simple, sober and dignified as they are on most occasions, still show themselves passionate and revengeful when their enmity is aroused, and the primitive practice of private warfare to avenge an injury has not yet died out.

Corsica lies in the Mediterranean Sea, about 100 miles south-east of France. It is due south of Genoa, and is separated from the island of Sardinia on the south by the Strait of Bonifacio. It has an area of 3,367 square miles; its length is 110 miles, and its breadth 53 miles.

Lofty Mountains and Extensive Forests

The surface is mountainous, with two snowy summits over 8,600 feet high. There are extensive forests of pines, evergreen oaks, cork-trees, beeches, and chestnuts. Although the soil is fertile, agriculture is backward, and scarcely enough grain is produced for home consumption. Chestnuts are ground into flour and form the chief food of many of the poorer inhabitants. Olives, grapes, oranges, and lemons are grown abundantly, and these, together with wine, oil, and fish, are the chief exports. The coral fisheries are also important. The mineral wealth consists chiefly of fine granite, porphyry, as well as marble.

Corsica was first colonized by the Phoenicians; it was acquired by the Romans, who gave it its present name, and was for periods held by Vandals, Goths, Franks, Saracens, Pisans, and Genoese. France purchased the island in 1768 from Genoa. During the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, Corsica came for a time under British rule. It was regained by the French in 1815, and since then has formed a department of France. The language of the people, however, is mainly Italian. The capital is Ajaccio, on the west coast; the largest city (25,000 inhabitants), Bastia, is on the north-east coast. Population, about 290,000.

CORTEZ (*kôr'těz*), **HERNANDO** (1485-1547). In the same year (1518) that Magellan sailed from Spain on his great voyage round the world, a Spanish expedition led by Hernando Cortez left Cuba to conquer Mexico. In the 26 years that had gone by since Columbus discovered the New World, this was the only region that promised the fabulous riches which that explorer had vainly sought.

This military adventurer, who set out to win fame and fortune, was the son of a poor Spanish

nobleman who had won distinction by his exploits in San Domingo and in Cuba. He had no sooner got ready his expedition than the governor of Cuba repented of the appointment, and promptly sent word to Cortez to give up the leadership of the expedition. But Cortez, paying no attention to the order, proceeded on his way, and landed on the shore of Mexico in March 1519.

Cortez and the Mexican Princess

Cortez was an extraordinary man, courageous, persevering, and resourceful. In order to prevent the desertion of his men, he sank his ships when he landed, so that all must fight or perish. He was aided in his conquest by a Spaniard who had been wrecked on the shores of Mexico several years before, and who had gained a knowledge of some of the Mexican languages. He was also helped by a beautiful Mexican princess, who was given to him by one of the chieftains as a slave and whose love he had won.

More valuable than either of these aids was the support lent to Cortez by an old Mexican tradition. According to it a fair-skinned god had once ruled over the land, but he had been driven eastwards by a cruel bloodthirsty deity who demanded human sacrifices. The Mexicans for a long time had looked for the return of this fair god, and when they learned that white strangers had come "in towers which moved hither and thither upon the sea," they thought it was their gracious deity, and they flocked to do him homage.

Cortez's "Frightful Beasts"

Not until Cortez had laid the foundations of Vera Cruz and marched two-thirds of the distance to the capital, Mexico City, did any of the natives appear to doubt his divine origin. Then a large army decided to test whether he really were a god. The decision was in favour of Cortez, for his little army of a few hundred men, mounted on "frightful beasts" (horses) and using "weapons that shot forth fire and made a loud noise" (guns), defeated a force of 50,000 men armed with bows and wooden swords.

These natives then became the firm allies of the Spaniards and joined them in their march upon the Aztecs who ruled Mexico. About 70 miles from Mexico City the Aztecs planned a treacherous attack upon Cortez, but he was warned in time by his Mexican princess and disastrously defeated them.

HERNANDO CORTEZ



The renowned Spanish adventurer who conquered Mexico and governed it for Spain for nine years. He also discovered California, and took part in an expedition to Algiers.