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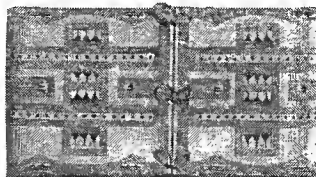
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HEROES OF  
AMERICAN HISTORY

VESPUCCI









AMERIGO VESPUCCI





AMERIGO VESPUCCI

BY  
FREDERICK A. OBER

HEROES OF AMERICAN HISTORY

ILLUSTRATED



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XVITH CENTURY. Vespucci's letters to Soderini and L. P. F. de' Medici, reproduced in this volume.

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AMERIGO VESPUCCI



# AMERIGO VESPUCCI<sup>1</sup>

## I

### YOUNG AMERIGO AND HIS FAMILY

1451-1470

**C**RADLED in the valley of the Arno, its noble architecture fitly supplementing its numerous natural charms, lies the Tuscan city of Florence, the birthplace of immortal Dante, the early home of Michael Angelo, the seat of the Florentine Medici, the scene of Savonarola's triumphs and his tragic end. Fame has come to many sons of Florence, as poets, statesmen, sculptors, painters, travellers; but perhaps none has achieved

<sup>1</sup> This name is variously spelled, as, for example: Albericus, Alberico, Almerigo, Americo, Americus, Amerigo; Despuche, Vespuche, Vespuchy, Vespuccio, Vespucius, Vespucci. The best writers use either the Italian, Amerigo Vespucci, or the Latinized, Americus Vespucius, with good authority for both.

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a distinction so unique, apart, and high as the subject of this volume, after whom the continents of the western hemisphere were named.

Amerigo Vespucci was born in Florence, March 9, 1451, just one hundred and fifty years after Dante was banished from the city in which both first saw the light. The Vespucci family had then resided in that city more than two hundred years, having come from Peretola, a little town adjacent, where the name was highly regarded, as attached to the most respected of the Italian nobility. Following the custom of that nobility, during the period of unrest in Italy, the Vespuccis established themselves in a stately mansion near one of the city gates, which is known as the Porta del Prato. Thus they were within touch of the gay society of Florence, and could enjoy its advantages, while at the same time in a position, in the event of an uprising, to flee to their estates and stronghold in the country.

While the house in which Christopher Columbus was born remains unidentified, and the year of his birth undecided, no such ambiguity attaches to the place and year of Vespucci's nativity. Above the door-

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way of the mansion which "for centuries before the discovery of America was the dwelling-place of the ancestors of Amerigo Vespucci, and his own birthplace," a marble tablet was placed, in the second decade of the eighteenth century, bearing the following inscription:

*"To AMERICO VESPUCCIO, a noble Florentine,  
Who, by the discovery of AMERICA,  
Rendered his own and his Country's name illustrious,  
[As] the AMPLIFIER OF THE WORLD.  
Upon this ancient mansion of the VESPUCCI,  
Inhabited by so great a man,  
The holy fathers of Saint John of God  
Have placed this Tablet, sacred to his memory.  
A.D. 1719."*

At that time, about midway between the date of Vespucci's death and the present, the evidence was strong and continuous as to the residence in that building (which was then used as a hospital) of the family whose name it commemorates. Here was born, in 1451, the third son of Anastasio and Elizabetha Vespucci, whose name, whether rightly or not, was to be bestowed upon a part of the world at that time unknown.

The Vespuccis were then aristocrats, with a long and boasted lineage, but without great

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wealth to support their pretensions. They were relatively poor; they were proud; but they were not ashamed to engage in trade. Some of their ancestors had filled the highest offices within the gift of the state, such as *prioris* and *gonfalonieres*, or magistrates and chief magistrates, while the first of the Vespuccis known to have borne the prænomen Amerigo was a secretary of the republic in 1336.

It is incontestable that Amerigo Vespucci was well-born, and in his youth received the advantages of an education more thorough than was usually enjoyed by the sons of families which had "the respectability of wealth acquired in trade," and even the prestige of noble connections. No argument is needed to show that the position of a Florentine merchant was perfectly compatible with great respectability, for the Medici themselves, with the history of whose house that of Florence is bound up most intimately, were merchant princes. The vast wealth they acquired in their mercantile operations in various parts of Europe enabled them to pose as patrons of art and literature, and supported their pretensions to sovereign power. The Florentine Medici attained to



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greatest eminence during the latter half of the century in which Amerigo Vespucci was born, and he was acquainted both with Cosimo, that "Pater Patriæ, who began the glorious epoch of the family," and with "Lorenzo the Magnificent," who died in 1492.

The Florentines, in fact, were known as great European traders or merchants as early as the eleventh century, while their bankers and capitalists not only controlled the financial affairs of several states, or nations, but exerted a powerful influence in the realm of statesmanship and diplomacy. The little wealth the Vespucci enjoyed at the time of Amerigo's advent was derived from an ancestor of the century previous, who, besides providing endowments for churches and hospitals, left a large fortune to his heirs. His monument may be seen within the chapel built by himself and his wife, and it bears this inscription, in old Gothic characters: "The tomb of Simone Piero Vespucci, a merchant, and of his children and descendants, and of his wife, who caused this chapel to be erected and decorated—for the salvation of her soul. Anno Dom. 1383."

The immediate ancestors, then, of Amerigo

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Vespucci were highly respectable, and they were honorable, having held many positions of trust, with credit to themselves and profit to the state. At the time of Amerigo's birth his father, Anastasio Vespucci, was secretary of the Signori, or senate of the republic; an uncle, Juliano, was Florentine ambassador at Genoa; and a cousin, Piero Vespucci, so ably commanded a fleet of galleys despatched against the corsairs of the Barbary coast that he was sent as ambassador to the King of Naples, by whom he was specially honored.

Another member of the family, one Guido Antonio, became locally famous as an expounder of the law and a diplomat. Respecting him an epitaph was composed, the last two lines of which might, if applied to Amerigo, have seemed almost prophetic:

*"Here lies GUIDO ANTONIO, in this sepulchre—  
HE WHO SHOULD LIVE FOREVER,  
Or else never have seen the light."*

This epitaph was written of the lawyer, who departed unknown and unwept by the world, while his then obscure kinsman, Amerigo, subsequently achieved a fame that filled the four quarters of the earth.

The youth of Amerigo is enshrouded in

## YOUNG AMERIGO AND HIS FAMILY

the obscurity which envelops that of the average boy in whatever age, for no one divined that he would become great or famous, and hence he was not provided with a biographer. This is unfortunate, of course, but we must console ourselves with the thought that he was not unusually precocious, and probably said little that would be considered worth preserving. It happened that after he became world-large in importance, tales and traditions respecting his earliest years crept out in abundance; but these may well be looked upon with suspicion. We know scarcely more than that his early years were happy, for he had a loving mother, and a father wise enough to direct him in the way he should travel.

It does not always follow that the course the father prescribes is the best one in the end, for sometimes a boy develops in un-surmised directions; and this was the case with Amerigo Vespucci. The fortunes of the family being on the wane, he was selected as the one to retrieve them, and of four sons was the only one who did not receive a college education. The other three were sent to the University of Pisa, whence they returned with their "honors" thick upon them, and soon

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lapsed into obscurity, from which they never emerged. That is, they never "made a mark" in the world; save one brother, Girolamo, who made a pilgrimage to Palestine, where he lived nine years, suffered much, and lost what little fortune he carried with him.

He may have thought, perhaps, in after years, that if he had not belonged to a family containing the world-famed navigator his exploits would have brought him reputation; but it is more probable that if he had not written a letter to his younger brother, Amerigo, the world would never have heard from him at all. However, he was the first traveller in the family, and with his university education he should have produced a good account of his adventures; but if he ever did so it has not been preserved from oblivion.

Amerigo was not given a college education, but something — as it eventuated — vastly better. His father had a brother, a man of erudition for his time, who had studied for the Church. This learned uncle, Georgio Antonio Vespucci, was then a Dominican friar, respected in Florence for his piety and for his learning. About the year

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1450, or not long before Amerigo was born, he opened a school for the sons of nobles, and in the garb of a monk pursued the calling of the preceptor. His fame was such that the school was always full, yet when his brother's child, Amerigo, desired to attend, having arrived at the age for receiving the rudiments of an education, he was greeted cordially and given a place in one of the lower classes. It may be imagined that he would have been favored by his uncle; but such seems not to have been the case, for the worthy friar was a disciplinarian first of all. He had ever in mind, however, the kind of education desired by his brother for Amerigo, which was to be commercial, and grounded him well in mathematics, languages, cosmography, and astronomy. His curriculum even embraced, it is said, statesmanship and the finesse of diplomacy, for the merchants of Vespucci's days were, like the Venetian consuls, "very important factors in developing friendly international relations."

There was then a great rivalry between Venice, Florence, Genoa, and Pisa for the control of trading-posts in the Levant, which carried with them the vast commerce of the Orient, then conducted by way of the Medi-

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terranean, the Black, and the Caspian seas, and overland by caravans with India and China. At the time our hero was growing into manhood, in the latter half of the fifteenth century, Florence, "under the brilliant leadership of the Medici and other shrewd merchant princes, gained control of strategic trading-posts in all parts of the [then known] world, and secured a practical monopoly in the trade through Armenia and Rhodes. . . . It was from banking, however, that Florence derived most of her wealth. For some time her bankers controlled the financial markets of the world. Most of the great loans made by sovereigns during this period, for carrying on wars or for other purposes, were made through the agency of Florentine bankers. Even Venetian merchants were glad to appeal to her banks for loans. In the fifteenth century Florence had eighty great banking-houses, many of which had branches in every part of the world." <sup>1</sup>

It is evident, therefore, that the sagacious Anastasio Vespucci had mapped out a great career for the son whom he had chosen to re-create the fortunes of his house. He was to

<sup>1</sup> From the *General History of Commerce*, by W. C. Webster, Ph.D.

## YOUNG AMERIGO AND HIS FAMILY

be a banker, a diplomat; eventually he might attain, like the greatest of the Medici, to the station and dignities of a merchant prince. To this end the worthy Georgio Antonio ever strove, and as he found his nephew a tractable and studious pupil, he congratulated himself and his family that in Amerigo they had the individual who was to restore the prestige of their ancient name.

But alas! the sequel proved that Friar Georgio was too ambitious, and had overshot the mark. In his desire to turn out a finished product, a scholar that should be a credit to his school and an ornament to his family, he not only inculcated the essentials for a commercial education, but, as has already been mentioned, led his eager follower into the wider fields of astronomy and cosmography. All he knew—and that included all the ancients knew—of these abstruse sciences he imparted to Amerigo, and in the end, so far as we can judge, the young man became more proficient in them than any other person of his age and time. So it eventuated that those studies, which were intended merely as subsidiary to the more serious pursuit, became the prime factors in shaping his career. They were his stepping-

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stones to greatness, as were his mercantile transactions; but, anticipating somewhat the events of his later life, we shall find that they did not conduce to the acquisition of wealth.

"In Florence," says the author previously quoted, "more than in any other Italian city during the Middle Ages, was displayed 'the direct influence of commerce upon the developments of all the finer elements of material and immaterial civilization. She was the Athens of Italy, and her art, literature, and science was the brightest gleam of intellectual light that was seen in Europe during that age. It was from Florence, more than from any other source, that came the awakening influence known as the Renaissance.'"

This truth we see exemplified in the formative period of Amerigo Vespucci's life, for, in order to become qualified to adorn the high position of a prince of commerce, he was as carefully trained as if to fill a prelate's chair or grasp the helm of state. So reluctant was his uncle, the good old monk Giorgio, to relinquish his talented nephew to the world, that we find them in company as late as 1471, as attested by this letter, written in Latin by Amerigo to his father, in October of that year:



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*"To the Excellent and Honorable Signor Anastasio Vespucci.*

"HONORED FATHER, — Do not wonder that I have not written to you within the last few days. I thought that my uncle would have satisfied you concerning me, and in his absence I scarcely dare to address you in the Latin tongue, blushing even at my deficiencies in my own language. I have, besides, been industriously occupied of late in studying the rules of Latin composition, and will show you my book on my return. Whatever else I have accomplished, and how I have conducted myself, you will have been able to learn from my uncle, whose return I ardently desire, that, under his and your own joint directions, I may follow with greater facility both my studies and your kind precepts.

"George Antonio, three or four days ago, gave a number of letters to you to a good priest, Signor Nerotto, to which he desires your answer. There is nothing else that is new to relate, unless that we all desire greatly to return to the city. The day of our return is not yet fixed, but soon will be, unless the pestilence should increase and occasion greater alarm, which may God avert!

"He, George Antonio, commends to your consideration a poor and wretched neighbor of his, whose only reliance and means are in our house, concerning which he addresses you in full. He asks you, therefore, that you would attend to his affairs, so that they may suffer as little as possible in his absence.

"Farewell, then, honored father. Salute all the

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family in my behalf, and commend me to my mother and all my elder relatives.

“Your son, with due obedience,  
“AMERIGO VESPUCCI.”<sup>1</sup>

The cause of Amerigo's absence from Florence was, it is said, the terrible plague which swept over that city and for a time paralyzed its activities. All who were able fled to the country, and, Friar Georgio's school having been broken up by the scattering of his pupils, he and Amerigo retired to their family estate, at or near Peretola, there to await the subsidence of the epidemic.

<sup>1</sup> This letter was discovered by Signor Bandini, author of the *Vita e Lettere di Amerigo Vespucci*, 1745, in the Strozzi Library. Harrisse says, “This, and two or three signatures added to receipts, which were brought to light by Navarrete, constitute the only autographs of Vespuccius known.”

In the original paper he uses the Latin form, Vespuccius; but in a letter written in 1508, when he was pilot-major of Spain, he signs himself “Amerigo Vespucci.”

## II

### AMERIGO'S FRIENDS AND TEACHERS

1470-1482

FLORENCE, in Vespucci's day, was the home of genius, of culture, and of art. Amerigo, doubtless, was acquainted with some of her sons whose fame, like his own, has endured to the present day, and will last for all time. The great Michael Angelo, who was born at or near Florence in 1475, and whose patron was Lorenzo the Magnificent, was his contemporary, although the artist and sculptor survived the discoverer more than fifty years. Savonarola, who came to Florence in 1482, was just a year the junior of Amerigo, and is said to have been an intimate friend of his uncle, who, like himself, belonged to the Dominican order. The young man may not have been touched by Buonarroti's art, nor have been moved by Savonarola's preaching, but, like the former, he possessed an artistic tempera-

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ment, and, like the latter, he was an enthusiast.

The man, however, who, next to his uncle, shaped Amerigo's career and turned him from trade to exploration, was a learned Florentine named Toscanelli. If you have followed the fortunes of Christopher Columbus, reader, you have seen this name before, for it was Toscanelli who, in the year 1474, sent a letter and a chart to the so-called discoverer of America, which confirmed him in the impression that a route to India lay westward from Europe across the "Sea of Darkness."

It is not known just when Amerigo first met "Paul the Physicist," as Toscanelli was called in Florence; but it may have been in youth or early manhood, for aside from the fact that "all the world" knew and revered the famous *savant*, there was the inclination arising from a mutual interest in cosmography and astronomy. Toscanelli was the foremost scientist of his age, and as he was born in 1397, at the time Amerigo met him he must have been a venerable man. He lived, however, until the year 1482, and as the younger man was in Florence during the first forty years of his life, and the last thirty of Toscanelli's, it is more than prob-

## AMERIGO'S FRIENDS AND TEACHERS

able that their intercourse was long and friendly.

It is known, at least, that they were acquainted at the time the learned doctor wrote Columbus, in 1474, and it does not require a stretch of the imagination to fancy them together, and wondering what effect that letter would have upon a man who entertained views similar to their own. Columbus, it is thought, had then been pondering several years over the possible discovery of land, presumably the eastern coast of India, by sailing westward. "It was in the year 1474," writes a modern historian, "that he had some correspondence with the Italian savant, Toscanelli, regarding this discovery of land. A belief in such a discovery was a natural corollary to the object which Prince Henry of Portugal had in view by circumnavigating Africa, in order to find a way to the countries of which Marco Polo had given golden accounts. It was, in brief, to substitute for the tedious indirection of the African route a direct western passage—a belief in the practicability of which was drawn from a confidence in the sphericity of the earth."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Justin Winsor, in *The Narrative and Critical History of America*.

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Later in life Columbus seems to have forgotten his indebtedness to Toscanelli, and "grew to imagine that he had been independent of the influences of his time," ascribing his great discovery to the inspiration of one chosen to accomplish the prophecy of Isaiah. But the venerable Florentine had pondered the problem many years before Columbus thought of it. "Some Italian writers even go to the extent of asserting that the idea of a western passage to India originated with Toscanelli, before it entered the mind of Columbus; and it is highly probable that this was the case."

There is this in favor of Toscanelli: He was a learned man, while Columbus was comparatively ignorant. He was then advanced in years, and had given the greater portion of his life to the consideration of just such questions, having had his attention called to them by reading the travels of Marco Polo and comparing the information therein contained with that derived from Eastern merchants who had traded for many years in the Orient. He was not a sailor, nor a corsair—though Columbus had been both, and had followed the sea for years—but he was an astronomer, and he knew

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more of the starry heavens, as well as of the earth beneath them, than any other scientist alive. "It was Toscanelli who erected the famous solstitial gnomon at the cathedral of Florence." For his learning he was honored, when but thirty years of age, with the curatorship of the great Florentine library, and for nearly sixty years thereafter he passed his days amid books, charts, maps, and globes.

As a speculative philosopher, he had arrived at a correct conclusion respecting the sphericity of the earth, and, with all the generosity of a humanitarian, he freely communicated his ideas to others. Columbus would have excluded every other human being from participating in his thoughts, and arrogated to himself alone the right to navigate westerly. This was the difference between the broad-minded philosopher and the narrow-minded sailor who by accident had stumbled upon a theory. The philosopher said, "It belongs to the world!" The ignorant sailor cried, "It is mine!"

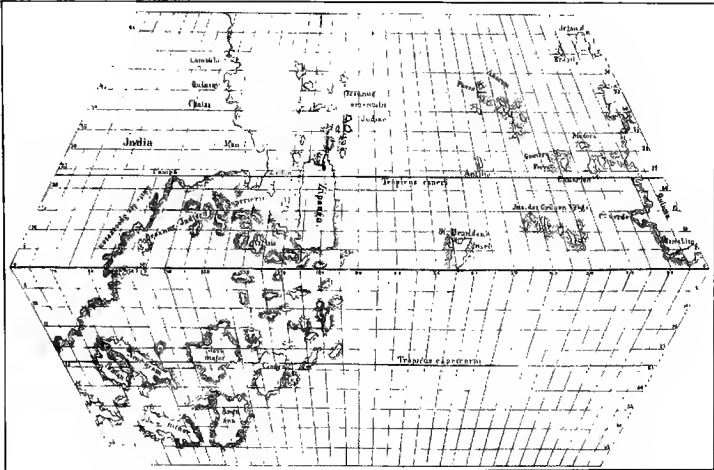
Toscanelli advanced the theory, but it was Columbus who put it to the test, and reaped all the rewards, as well as suffered for the mistakes. For mistakes there were,

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and the chief error lay in supposing the country "discovered" by Columbus pertained to the Indies. He died in that belief, and also Toscanelli, who passed away ten years before the first voyage made to that land, subsequently known as America. In one sense, perhaps, the Florentine doctor was the means of that first voyage of Columbus having been accomplished, for the chart he sent him made the distance between Europe and the western country seem so short that it was undertaken with less reluctance, and persisted in more stubbornly, than it might otherwise have been. But this was a mistake in detail only, and not in theory. A line was projected from about the latitude of Lisbon, on the western coast of Europe, to the "great city of Quinsai," as described by Marco Polo, on the opposite shores of Asia. This line was divided into twenty-six spaces, of two hundred and fifty miles each, making the total distance between the two points sixty-five hundred miles, which Toscanelli supposed to be one-third of the earth's circumference.

In short, Toscanelli calculated the distance, made a conjectural chart embodying the results of his readings of Aristotle, Strabo,





A CONJECTURAL RESTORATION OF TOSCANELLI'S MAP



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and Ptolemy, of his conversations during many years with Oriental travellers, and his own observations. He sent this chart to Columbus; the latter adopted it as his guide, and by means of it, faulty as it was, achieved his great "discovery." Whose, then, is the merit of this achievement? Does it not belong as much to Toscanelli as to Columbus?

To whomsoever the credit may be given—whether to the man who conceived the idea, or to him who developed it, and whether or not Columbus intentionally appropriated the honor and glory exclusively—by the irony of fate, there stood a man at Toscanelli's elbow, as it were, when he wrote to the Genoese, who was destined to rob him of his great discovery's richest reward. This man was Amerigo Vespucci, after whom—though unsuggested by him and unknown to him—the continents of America were named, by strangers, before Christopher Columbus had lain a year in his grave!

It is not at all improbable that Vespucci was aware of the correspondence between Toscanelli and Columbus, as he was then acquainted with the former, and at the age of twenty-three was intensely interested in the pursuits of the learned physician. Next

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to Toscanelli, in fact, he was probably the best-informed man then living in Florence as to the studies to which his friend had devoted the better part of his life, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that he saw the letters before they were sent to Columbus.

But this is a trivial matter compared with the importance of these letters, in a consideration of the effect they produced upon the mind of Columbus, for, if they did not suggest to him the idea of voyaging westerly to discover the Indies, they certainly confirmed him in the opinion that such a voyage could be successfully made. By a strange freak of fate these letters were preserved in the *Life of Columbus*, written by his son Fernando, and there can be no question of their authenticity. They breathe the spirit of benevolence for which Toscanelli was noted, and indicate the greatness of the man—a greatness decidedly in contrast to the mean and petty nature of his correspondent, who would have perished sooner than allow information so precious to escape from him to the world.

Toscanelli's first letter was written in Florence, June 25, 1474, and is as follows:

## AMERIGO'S FRIENDS AND TEACHERS

*"To Christopher Columbus, Paul the Physicist wishes health.*

"I perceive your noble and earnest desire to sail to those parts where the spice is produced, and therefore, in answer to a letter of yours, I send you another letter which, some days since, I wrote to a friend of mine, a servant of the King of Portugal before the wars of Castile, in answer to another that he wrote me by his highness's order, upon this same account. And I also *send you another sea-chart*, like the one I sent to him, which will satisfy your demands. This is a copy of the letter:

*"To Ferdinand Martinez, Canon of Lisbon, Paul the Physicist wishes health.*

"I am very glad to hear of the familiarity you enjoy with your most serene and magnificent king, and though I have very often discoursed concerning *the short way there is from hence to the Indies*, where the spice is produced, by sea (which I look upon to be shorter than that you take by the coast of Guinea), yet you now tell me that his highness would have me make out and demonstrate it, so that it may be understood and put in practice.

"Therefore, though I could better show it to him with a globe in my hand, and make him sensible of the figure of the world, yet I have resolved, to make it more easy and intelligible, to show the way on a chart, such as is used in navigation, and therefore I send one to his majesty, made and drawn with my own hand, wherein is set down *the utmost bounds of the earth, from Ireland in the west to the farthest parts of Guinea*, with all the

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islands that lie in the way; opposite to which western coast is described the beginning of the Indies, with the islands and places whither you may go, and how far you may bend from the North Pole towards the Equinoctial, and for how long a time—that is, how many leagues you may sail before you come to those places most fruitful in spices, jewels, and precious stones.

“Do not wonder if I term that country where the spice grows, *West*, that product being generally ascribed to the *East*, because those who sail westward will always find those countries in the west, and those who travel by land eastward will always find those countries in the east! The straight lines that lie lengthways in the chart show the distance there is from west to east; the others, which cross them, show the distance from north to south. I have also marked down in the chart several places in India where ships might put in, upon any storms or contrary winds, or other unforeseen accident.

“Moreover, to give you full information of all those places which you are very desirous to know about, you must understand that none but traders live and reside in all those islands, and that there is as great a number of ships and seafaring people, with merchandise, as in any other part of the world, particularly in a most noble port called Zaitun, where there are every year a hundred large ships of pepper loaded and unloaded, besides many other ships that take in other spices. This country is mighty populous, and there are many provinces and kingdoms, and innumerable cities, under the dominion of a *prince called the Grand Khan*, which name signifies king of kings, who for the

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most part resides in the province of Cathay. His predecessors were very desirous to have commerce and be in amity with Christians, and two hundred years since sent ambassadors to the Pope, desiring him to send them many learned men and doctors, to teach them our faith; but by reason of some obstacles the ambassadors met with they returned back, without coming to Rome. Besides, there came an ambassador to Pope Eugenius IV., who told him of the great friendship there was between those princes and their people, and the Christians. *I discoursed with him a long while* upon the several matters of the grandeur of their royal structures, and of the greatness, length, and breadth of their rivers, and he told me many wonderful things of the multitude of towns and cities along the banks of the rivers, upon a single one of which there were two hundred cities, with marble bridges of great length and breadth, adorned with numerous pillars.

“This country deserves as well as any other to be discovered; and there may not only be great profit made there, and many things of value found, but also gold, silver, many sorts of precious stones, and spices in abundance, which are not brought into our ports. And it is certain that many wise men, philosophers, astrologers, and other persons skilled in all arts and very ingenious, govern that mighty province and command their armies. From Lisbon directly westward there are in the chart twenty-six spaces, each of which contains two hundred and fifty miles, to the most noble and vast city of Quinsai, which is one hundred miles in compass—that is, thirty-five leagues. In it there are ten marble bridges. The name signifies a heavenly

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city, of which wonderful things are reported, as to the ingenuity of the people, the buildings, and the revenues.

““This space above mentioned is *almost the third part of the globe*. The city is in the province of Mangi, bordering on that of *Cathay*, where the king for the most part resides. From the island of Antilla, which you call the Island of the Seven Cities, and whereof you have some knowledge, to the most noble island of *Cipango* are ten spaces, which make two thousand five hundred miles. This island abounds in gold, pearls, and precious stones; and, you must understand, they cover their temples and palaces with plates of pure gold; so that, for want of knowing the way, all these things are concealed and hidden—and yet may be gone to with safety.

““Much more might be said; but having told you what is most material, and you being wise and judicious, I am satisfied there is nothing of it but what you understand, and therefore will not be more prolix. Thus much may serve to satisfy your curiosity, it being as much as the shortness of time and my business would permit me to say. So, I remain most ready to satisfy and serve his Highness to the utmost, in all the commands he shall lay upon me.’”

A second communication followed the reply of Columbus, in which Toscanelli wrote:

“I received your letters with the things you sent me, which I take as a great favor, and commend your noble and ardent desire of sailing from



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east to west, *as it is marked out in the chart I sent you*, which would demonstrate itself better in the form of a globe. I am glad it is well understood, and that the voyage laid down is not only possible, but certain, honorable, very advantageous, and most glorious among all Christians. You cannot be perfect in the knowledge of it but by experience and practice, as I have had in great measure, and by the solid and true information of worthy and wise men, who are come from those parts to this court of Rome, and from merchants who have traded long in those parts and who are persons of good reputation. So that, when the said voyage is performed, it will be to powerful kingdoms, and to most noble cities and provinces, rich, and abounding in all things we stand in need of, particularly all sorts of spice in great quantities, and stores of jewels. This will, moreover, be grateful to those kings and princes who are very desirous to converse and trade with Christians, or else have communication with the wise and ingenious men in these parts, as well in point of religion as in all sciences, because of the extraordinary account they have of the kingdoms and government of these parts. For which reasons, and many more that might be alleged, I do not at all wonder that you, who have a great heart, and all the Portuguese nation, which has ever had notable men in all undertakings, be eagerly bent upon performing this voyage."

In these letters we have outlined by Toscanelli the very voyage that Columbus

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took in 1492, eighteen years after he had received this precious information. In his journal of that voyage he makes mention of "*the islands marked on the chart*"; he was constantly seeking the island of Atlantis, and hoped eventually to arrive at the great and noble city of Quinsai, as well as at Cipango and Cathay. As for the "Grand Khan"—of whom he had been informed by Toscanelli, who obtained his information from Marco Polo's works—he not only sent an embassy in search of him, when in Cuba, but was looking for him throughout all his voyages.

It is well known that Columbus was not aware that he had really discovered a new world, but to the end of his days believed he had merely arrived at the eastern coast of India. So persistent was he in this belief that he falsified documents, and forced his crew to swear to what they did not know—namely, that Cuba was a continent, and not an island! He believed he had arrived at Cipango, when he heard the Indian word, *cibao*, on the coast of Hispaniola; and he says, in a letter written to Luis Santangel in 1493, "In Española there are gold-mines, and thence to terra firma, as well as thence

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to the Grand Khan, everything is on a splendid scale." Also, "When I arrived at Juana [Cuba], I followed the coast to the westward, and found it so extensive that I considered it must be a continent and a *province of Cathay!*"

Columbus, it has been said by some investigators, was a man of one idea—and that idea not his own! "It is impossible," says Washington Irving, in his *Life of Columbus*—which is, throughout, an elegant but labored apology for its hero—"to determine the precise time when Columbus first conceived the design of seeking a western route to India. It is certain, however, that he meditated it as early as the year 1474, though as yet it lay crude and unmaturing in his mind."

The year 1474, as we know, was that in which Toscanelli sent him the letter and the chart. In that letter the route to India was laid down, and on that chart it was made clear to any seafaring man how Cathay might be reached, by merely sailing westward! By setting his helm, and persisting in a westerly course, any one might reach the coast that was supposed to lie opposite to Europe and Africa. Columbus did that,

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according to directions received from Toscanelli eighteen years before. He did nothing more, and he reached, not the coast of India, but the outlying islands of a new world since called America.

The idea, then, which Columbus claimed as exclusively his own was conveyed to him by Toscanelli—or, at least, it so appears—and Toscanelli obtained it from the ancients. For, says one having authority, “Eratos-thenes, accepting the spherical theory, had advanced the identical notion which nearly seventeen hundred years later impelled Columbus to his voyage. He held the known world to span one-third of the circuit of the globe, as Strabo did at a later day, leaving an unknown two-thirds of sea; and if it were not that the vast extent of the Atlantic Sea rendered it impossible, one might even sail from the coast of Spain to that of India, along the same parallel.”

And again: “An important element in the problem was the statement of Marco Polo regarding a large island, which he called Cipango, and which he represented as lying in the ocean off the eastern coast of Asia. This carried the eastern verge of the Asiatic

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world farther than the ancients had known, and, on the spherical theory, brought land nearer westward from Europe than could earlier have been supposed. . . . Humboldt has pointed out that neither Christopher Columbus nor his son Ferdinand mentions Marco Polo; still, we know that the former had read his book.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Narrative and Critical History of America.*

### III

#### VESPUCCI'S FAVORITE AUTHORS

1485-1490

BOOKS of any sort were few and precious during the youthful period of Amerigo Vespucci's life, for the art of printing by the use of movable type was invented about the time he was born, and most of the great discoverers, including himself and Columbus, were to pass away before the printing-press was introduced into America.<sup>1</sup>

In the library of Paul the Physicist, however, the ardent scholar, Vespucci, must have seen many manuscripts which he was permitted to read, and among them, doubtless, the account of Marco Polo's wonderful

<sup>1</sup> The first printing-press in America was set up in Mexico in 1535, the first book printed on it was probably *La Escala de San Juan Climaco*, date 1536, and the first printer was Juan Pablos. The oldest existing example of this first Mexican printing is said to be the *Manual de Adultos*, bearing date 1540.

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journeys. It is thought that Toscanelli may have possessed, indeed, one of the first copies of *Marco Polo* ever printed, as it issued from a German press in 1477; or at least of the second edition, which appeared in 1481, the year before he died. A copy of the first Latin edition was once owned by Fernando Columbus, and has marginal marks ascribed to his father. This edition was printed in 1485, the year in which Hernando Cortés was born, and when Vespucci was thirty-four years old. Another Latin edition was brought out in 1490, an Italian in 1496, and a Portuguese in 1502, followed by many others.

Marco Polo, the Venetian, exercised a strong and lasting influence upon the minds of Toscanelli, Columbus, Vespucci, and, through them, upon others, although he died in the first quarter of the century in which the first-named of this distinguished triad was born. All these had this birth-right in common: they were Italians; and, moreover, it was in Genoa, the reputed birthplace of Columbus, that Marco Polo's adventures were first shaped into coherent narrative and given to the world.

These adventures have been stigmatized

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as romances; but surely nothing could be more romantic than the manner in which they came to be published, finally, after existing many years in the crude form of notes and journals made by the traveller during his journeyings. In the year 1298, three years after he had returned from his wanderings and settled down in Venice, Polo was called upon to assist in the defence of Curzola, during the hostilities which existed between his own republic and that of Genoa. To oppose the Genoese admiral, Doria, who had invaded their seas with seventy galleys, the Venetians fitted out a fleet under Andrea Dandolo, and a great battle was fought off the island of Curzola. Marco Polo commanded a galley of his own, and fought with valor; but, in common with the commanders of more than eighty Venetian vessels, he was defeated, the Genoese winning an overwhelming victory.

Taken as a prisoner to Genoa, he was cast into prison, where he remained immured for a year. That was the year in which his wonderful travels were woven into a story, for the entertainment of the young Genoese nobility, who, when they learned that the famous Marco Polo was a prisoner, flocked



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to his cell to see and converse with him. Yielding to their solicitations, he sent to Venice for his notes of travel, and during the days of his captivity dictated an account of his experiences to a fellow-captive, one Rusticiano, of Pisa.

The delighted young nobles devoured his wonderful story with avidity, and they could scarcely wait its unfolding from day to day, for it was to them a veritable tale of the *Arabian Nights*. From the Italian, in which the traveller dictated his story, it was translated into Latin and French, and scattered over Europe for others to enjoy. Thus Marco Polo acquired fame through the misfortune which befell him when fighting for Venice, and long before printing was invented his name became almost a household word in Europe. As one who, though indirectly, stimulated by his Oriental researches the first great ventures into the Occident, Marco Polo deserves a monument, or, at least, should not be omitted from a memorial group that contains such famous Italians as Columbus, Vespucci, Toscanelli, and Verazano. Admittedly, he deserves a chapter in this biography, and we cannot do better, perhaps, than glance at his history.

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If Marco had been consulted in the choice of his immediate ancestry, he could not have done better than fortune served him in the person of his father, Nicolo Polo, who was a nobleman and a merchant of Venice. He was a traveller prior to the birth of his son, for just previous to that event, which occurred nearly two hundred years before Amerigo Vespucci was born, he and his brother set out for Constantinople. Thence they went into Armenia, and around the south coast of the Caspian Sea to Bokhara, where they met some Persian envoys who were bound for Cathay, or China, and who persuaded them to go along.

At Peking, it is supposed, they met the great and powerful Kublai Khan, Emperor of the Mongols, and Tartars, who received them kindly and at whose court they remained a year. They were the first Europeans he had ever seen, and such was his interest in their stories of strange peoples and governments that he commissioned them as envoys to the pope, giving them letters in which he expressed his desire that Europeans learned in the arts and sciences should be sent for the instruction of his people. Then they were reluctantly dismissed, with

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gifts of gold and spices, and after many perilous adventures finally reached their home in Venice. They had been gone almost ten years, and when Nicolo Polo first saw his son, on his return to Venice, Marco was a youth at school, well advanced in his studies.

Two years later, when Marco was about twelve, the three Polos set out on their return to Cathay, accompanied by two friars, who were "endowed with ample powers and privileges, the authority to ordain priests and bishops, and to grant absolution in all cases, as fully as if the pope were personally present." They took with them rich presents for the khan, including a bottle of precious oil from the holy sepulchre in Jerusalem, which was supposed to possess miraculous virtues. The journey was commenced in or about the year 1271, but, owing to innumerable and vexatious delays on the way, the Polos did not reach the court of the grand khan until the spring of 1275. They were more than three years in making the journey, but in spite of difficulties and dangers these remarkable men persisted until the object of their travels was accomplished. The friars had become alarm-

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ed at the prospect of peril to themselves, and early in the undertaking beat a retreat to Acre, so the three Venetians alone arrived at Chambalu, and delivered to the grand khan the letters and presents from the pope. They were received with extreme cordiality by the khan, who was especially pleased with young Marco, and accepted the presents with delight, the holy oil from Jerusalem being reverently cherished.

Marco was introduced to the khan by Nicolo, as "your majesty's servant and my son"; but had he been a son of the ruler himself he could not have received greater honors than were bestowed upon him by the emperor. Having a natural aptitude for acquiring languages, he soon could read and write four different dialects, and being possessed of great intelligence and shrewdness withal, he was sent by the khan on important missions to various parts of his kingdom. He acquitted himself so well on these embassies, some of which required his absence from the capital for many months, and he brought back such interesting accounts of the people he met and their customs, that he was constantly employed.

In this manner he acquired, during many

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years of service in high positions, a most intimate acquaintance with the khan's dominions, and became immensely rich. His father and uncle shared wealth and honors with him, for they likewise were congenially employed; but the time came at last when their desire to revisit Venice became too strong to resist. They craved the khan's permission to depart; but when the old monarch heard their request he flew into a passion, declaring that he would never allow them to go. They should remain with him and become the richest men in the world.

Marco was sent off on another mission, this time by sea, and, discovering that there was direct communication between Cathay and the Indies, he entreated the khan to allow the Polos to go on a voyage, promising faithfully that they would return after a short stay with their friends in Venice. The old khan gave his consent reluctantly, overwhelming them with gifts at their departure, among other things giving them a tablet of gold, on which were engraved his orders to all the subjects in his vast dominions to provide guides, escorts, pilots—every convenience for their voyage and journey—without

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cost. He also authorized them to serve as his ambassadors to the pope and other European potentates, presented them with many precious stones, including rubies of great value, and money enough to defray their expenses for at least two years. From all this it will be seen that the grand khan was a very munificent prince, whose deeds must have made a lasting impression upon the minds of the generation in which he lived.

Fourteen large vessels were contained in the fleet he furnished the Polos, for with them was embarked, with a train of ambassadors, a noble maiden of Cathay who was to become the bride of a "king of the Indies" known as Argon. The voyage was so protracted that the king had died before she reached her destination, and whose bride she became was never known to the Polos, though they faithfully acquitted themselves of their charge, and then continued on towards the frontiers of Persia. Two years had been consumed in voyaging to Java, Sumatra, and along the coast of southern India. Three more elapsed before they finally reached their native city, in 1295, after an absence of nearly twenty-five years. Nobody in Venice knew them then, except



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by name, for Niccolo and his brother were advanced in age, and Marco had grown from a boy to manhood, while in their dress and manners they were more like Tartars than Venetians, and had almost completely lost their native speech.

Many of their former friends and relations were dead, and the survivors were at first inclined to denounce them as impostors, until the fertile imagination of Marco hit upon an expedient. They were invited to a magnificent banquet, at which the three Polos appeared arrayed in robes of crimson velvet, which, after their guests had arrived, they threw off and gave to their attendants. Then, after the last course was served, they produced from their queer Tartarian garments, which they ripped open for the purpose, precious gems by the handful, and displayed them to the astonished guests as their credentials.

They were promptly received into the best Venetian society, Maffei, the uncle, being appointed a magistrate, and Niccolo, the father, espousing a beautiful young lady. Such Polos as still bear the name—if there are any—must have descended from the children born of this second marriage, for

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though Marco himself took a wife, several years later, he left no male children to inherit the vast wealth that gave him the title, in Venice, of "Marco Millioni."

It was about three years after his return to Venice that Marco fell into the hands of the Genoese, and a little later that, as narrated, he wrote the story of his travels. His books abound in romantic adventures, and many, probably, that are fabulous; but that it stamped itself upon the times in which he lived and those of succeeding generations, has been shown already. Nearly two hundred years after the story was written, we find the Spaniards seeking the great island of Cipango, of which the following is Marco Polo's description:

"This is a very large island, fifteen hundred miles from the continent [of Asia]. The people are fair, handsome, and of agreeable manners. They are idolaters, and live quite separate from all other nations. Gold is very abundant, and no man being allowed to export it, while no merchant goes thence to the main-land, the people accumulate a vast amount. But I, Marco Polo, will give you a wonderful account of a very large palace all covered with that metal, as our churches are with lead. The pavements of its court, the halls, windows, and every other part, have it laid

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on two inches thick, so that the riches of this palace are incalculable. Here are also pearls, large and of equal value with the white, with many other precious stones.

“Kublai, on hearing of this amazing wealth, desired to conquer the island, and sent two of his barons with a very large fleet containing warriors, both horsemen and on foot. They sailed from Zaitun and Quinsai, reached the isle, landed, and took possession of the plain and of a number of houses; but they were unable to take any city or castle, when a sad misadventure occurred. A storm threatened and some of the troops were embarked; but about thirty thousand were left upon a small and barren island by the sailing of the ships. The sovereign and the people of the larger island rejoiced greatly when they saw the host thus scattered and many of them cast upon the islet. As soon as the sea calmed they assembled a great number of ships, sailed thither and landed, hoping to capture all those refugees. But when the latter saw that their enemies had disembarked, leaving the vessels unguarded, they skillfully retreated to another quarter and continued moving about till they reached the ships, when they went aboard without any opposition. They then sailed direct for the principal island, where they hoisted its own standards and ensigns.

“On seeing these, the people believed their own countrymen had returned, and allowed them to enter the city. Finding it defended only by old men, the Tartars soon drove them out, retaining the women as slaves. When the king and his

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warriors saw themselves thus deceived and their city captured, they were like to die of grief; but they assembled other ships, and invested it so closely as to prevent all communication. The Tartars maintained themselves thus seven months, and planned day and night how they might convey tidings to their master of their condition; but finding this impossible, they agreed with the besiegers to surrender, securing only their lives. This took place in the year 1269.

The grand khan ordered one of the commanders of the host that had returned to lose his head, and the other to be sent to the isle where he had caused the loss of so many men, and there put to death. I have to relate, also, a very wonderful thing: that these two barons took a number of persons in a castle of Cipango, and because they had refused to surrender ordered all their heads to be cut off. But there were eight on whom they could not execute this sentence, because these wore consecrated stones in their arms, between the skin and the flesh, which so enchanted them that they could not die by steel. They were therefore beaten to death with clubs, and the stones, being extracted, were held very precious. But I must leave this matter and go on with the narrative."

## IV

### IN THE SERVICE OF SPAIN

1490

**B**EFORE we revert to the real hero of this biography, let us seek to identify the various names we find in Marco Polo's book, and in Toscanelli's letter to Columbus, with the objects to which they were applied. We will imagine ourselves with the first-named in far Cathay, with the second in his library at Florence, and with the third as he gropes his way along the shores of islands for the first time then revealed to European eyes.

If Columbus had known—what we now know—that thousands of miles intervened between the places he was seeking and those to which he misapplied their names, he would not have died in the belief that he had discovered a new way to the Old World. To anticipate a little what will be revealed later in the unfolding of this story: it was

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Amerigo Vespucci, and not Columbus, who first applied to this newly discovered hemisphere the title *Mundus Novus*, or New World. However, we will not discuss that question now, but merely remark that *Cathay* was identical with northern China, while *Mangi* was the southern territory of that vast empire which, in Marco Polo's time, was in possession of Kublai Khan. *Chambalu*, or Peking, was its capital, while the "most noble and vast city of *Quinsay*," or Cansay, is the ancient *King-sze* connected with Peking by the grand canal.

The large island of *Cipango*, or *Zipangu*, outlying upon the coast of *Cathay*, was probably Japan, or Formosa; though its golden-tiled temples may never have been seen by the Polos, nor its red pearls have come into their hands. Forty years after Columbus began his vain search, Pizarro found and plundered the gold-plated temples of Cuzco, which were as rich as any described by Marco Polo in his account of *Cipango*; and in the Bahamas archipelago, through which the Spaniards passed in the voyage of 1492, precious pink pearls have been discovered in great numbers and of surpassing beauty.

Vasco da Gama, in 1497, was to open the

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way by water to the vast Oriental seas—to Calicut and Cathay—but until the last quarter of the fifteenth century the commerce of the eastern hemisphere depended mainly upon transportation by land. “Voyages of much extent were almost unknown, and the mariner confined himself to inland waters, or hovered along the shores of the great Western Ocean, without venturing out of sight of land. . . . The thriving republics of Italy were the carriers of the world. For many centuries their citizens were almost the only agents for commercial communication with the countries of the East. Venice and Genoa maintained establishments on the farthest shores of the Mediterranean and Black seas.

“Immense caravans crossed the deserts of Arabia and Egypt, their camels laden with the costly fabrics of the Indies, which were received by the Italian traders from the hands of the Mahometans and distributed over Europe. Here and there upon the deserts a green oasis, with its bubbling spring or rippling rivulet, served these mighty trains for a resting-place, where man and beast halted to recover from the fatigues of their weary journeys. Occa-

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sionally, on these spots where the soil was of sufficient fertility to sustain a population, villages grew up. In rarer instances and in earlier ages, large cities had been built upon these stopping-places and were for the time the centres of the traffic. . . . Travellers of the present day occasionally visit their sites, and tell wonderful tales of the gigantic ruins of some Baalbec or Palmyra of the wilderness.

“It was not to be supposed that the shrewd spirit of mercantile enterprise and speculation would remain dormant in this state of affairs. Traders in every part of Europe were alive to the advantages to be derived from the discovery of a new route of transportation. Several efforts were made, and in some cases attended with immense profit and success, to communicate with India by the long and arduous journey round the Black Sea, and through the almost unexplored regions of Circassia and Georgia. The far-off shores of the Caspian were reached by some travelling traders, and the geographical knowledge they circulated on their return gave a new impulse to the growing spirit of adventure. Apocryphal as the narratives of Marco Polo and



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Mandeville appeared, there was a sufficient mixture of truth with exaggeration to stimulate the minds of men, ever greedy of gain, and the endless wealth of the grand khan and his people were the subjects of many eager and longing anticipations.”<sup>1</sup>

The Polos were merely the forerunners, the pioneers, to the far Cathay, and in the fourteenth century missionaries and merchants followed on their trail with varying success. The death of Kublai Khan had relieved them from their obligation to return; but soon after they had reached Venice, in 1295, a Franciscan monk, John of Monte Corvino, penetrated to Chambalu and established missions there. In the year 1338 an ambassador arrived at Avignon from the then reigning Khan of Cathay, and in return John de Marignoli, a Florentine, was sent to the court at Chambalu, where he remained four years as legate of the holy see. Commercial travellers followed after them, and about 1340 a guide-book was written by another Florentine, Francesco Pelotti, who was a clerk in the great trading-house of Bardi, or Berardi, with

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Voyages of Americus Vesputius*, by C. Edwards Lester, 1845.

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which, at a later date, Amerigo Vespucci was connected in Spain.

“When the throne of the degenerate descendants of Ghengis Khan began to totter to its fall, missions and merchants alike disappeared from the field. Islam, with all its jealousies and exclusiveness, had recovered its grasp over Central Asia. Night again descended upon the farther East, covering Cathay, with those cities of which the old travellers had told such marvels, Chambalu and Cansay, Zaitun and Chinkalan. And when the veil rose before the Portuguese and Spanish explorers of the sixteenth century those names were heard of no more. . . .

“But for a long time all but a sagacious few continued to regard Cathay as a region distinct from any of the new-found Indies; while map-makers, well on into the seventeenth century, continued to represent it as a great country lying entirely to the north of China and stretching to the Arctic Sea. It was Cathay, with its outlying island of Zipangu, that Columbus sought to reach by sailing westward, penetrated as he was by his intense conviction of the smallness of the earth and of the vast extension of Asia to the eastward. To the day of his death

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he was full of the imagination of the proximity of the domain of the grand khan to the islands and coasts which he had discovered. And such imaginations are curiously embodied in some maps of the early sixteenth century, which intermingle on the same coast-line the new discoveries, from Labrador to Brazil, with the provinces and rivers of Marco Polo's Cathay." <sup>1</sup>

Having shown the state of European geographical knowledge in the fifteenth century, in the hope thereby of throwing light upon the conditions which surrounded Vespucci at the time, we will now follow as closely as possible the career which was then opening before him. He was, as we have stated, keenly alive to what was taking place in the world around him, and especially interested in geographical discoveries. Although it is not likely that he had an abundance of ready money, having been so many years engaged in preparation for his great pursuit, without immediate recompense of any sort, yet we learn from the records of his life that he was already making a collection of all the charts, maps, and globes that he could

<sup>1</sup> Article, "China," in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

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find. He had assembled the best works of the most distinguished projectors, and for one of the finest then available, "a map of sea and land," made in 1439 by one Gabriel de Valesca, he paid the large sum of one hundred and thirty ducats, equivalent to more than five hundred dollars at the present day. There was danger then, his parents and friends thought, of the abstruse and unprofitable science of cosmography absorbing him entirely; but, though he may have indulged in the hope of devoting his life to the studies which had so enriched the mind of his friend Toscanelli, he was rudely awakened from his day-dream by a family catastrophe.

Mention has been made of one of his brothers, Girolamo, who, about the year 1480, left home and went to Asia Minor, including in his travels a trip to Palestine. He finally established himself in one of the Grecian cities, and, being of a hopeful turn, sent for and obtained the greater portion of his father's money, with which he engaged in trade. All went well for a time, and the Vespuccis congratulated themselves upon having a son of the family finally embarked on the full tide of commercial prosperity.

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Nine years went by, and nothing but good news came from the absent Girolamo; but one day, in 1489, disastrous tidings arrived. A Florentine pilgrim, returning from a pious visit to the holy sepulchre in Jerusalem, brought Amerigo a letter from his brother. It was dated July 24th, and contained information to the effect that while Girolamo was attending religious services at a convent in his neighborhood his house was broken open and robbed. "At one fell swoop," he wrote, he had been deprived of all his earnings during those nine years of toil, besides the money his father had sent him, which represented the accumulations of a lifetime.

He did not explain how his entire capital was in cash at the time, when he was supposed to be in trade; but even if derelict, he was too far away to be sought out and his story investigated, so the loss was accepted by the family as an indication that Providence was not inclined to smile upon the substitution of the eldest for the youngest son as a retriever of the Vespucci fortunes. All looked now towards Amerigo to take up the distasteful business of money-making, for which he had been so long in

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training, but which hitherto he had so successfully evaded. In sorrow, it is said, but without a murmur, he turned his back upon his maps, globes, books, and astrolabes and faced the situation manfully.

A position had long been open to him with the great trading-house of Lorenzo de Medici, who was own cousin to the world-famous Lorenzo the Magnificent, and he had only to apply in order to receive it. For the Medici well knew the value of men—good and faithful men—trained, as Amerigo was, in the diplomacy as well as the routine of commercial life in that age. They needed just such a man as he in their foreign agency, and bidding farewell to his family he set sail from Leghorn for the Spanish city of Barcelona.

The Iberian peninsula afforded at that time a most attractive field for commercial as well as military adventure. The protracted wars with the Moors, which had been carried on for generations, were drawing to a close, but they had taken thither many a man athirst for glory, and the demand for supplies gave the merchants great opportunities for profits. The commerce of that day was, as we have seen, mainly in

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the hands of Italian merchants, and as early as 1486 the Florentine trader, Juan Berardi, obtained a safe conduct from Barcelona to Seville, where, a few years later, we find Amerigo busily engaged in outfitting vessels for the Spanish voyages of discovery.

It was in the year 1490, or 1491, that Amerigo Vespucci went to Spain, accompanied by his nephew Giovanni, and several other young Florentines, who were placed in his charge by their parents that they might receive the benefit of his experience and the advantages of foreign travel. Giovanni, or Juan, was greatly attached to his uncle, and subsequently went with him on his voyages to America. Many years later the historian, Peter Martyr, wrote of him: "Young Vespuccius is one to whom Americus, his uncle, left the exact knowledge of the mariner's faculties, as it were by inheritance, after his death, for he is a very expert master in the knowledge of the compass and the elevation of the pole star by the quadrant. He is my particular friend, a witty young man in whose company I take great pleasure, and therefore have him often for my guest."

Whether Giovanni was associated with

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Amerigo in business is not exactly known, nor can we tell just when the latter removed from Barcelona into southern Spain; but there is a letter extant, written at Cadiz in 1492, signed jointly by himself and a young Florentine, Donato Nicollini, as agents either of the Medici or the house of Berardi. The following extract was copied by his biographer, Bandidi, from this manuscript in Amerigo's handwriting:

“As it is necessary for one of us, either Amerigo or Donato, to proceed in a short time to Florence, we shall be able to give you better information on all points by word of mouth than can possibly be done by letter. As yet, it has been impossible to do anything respecting the freight of salt, for want of a vessel, as for some time past, we are sorry to say, no ship has arrived here which was not chartered. Be assured that if one arrives we shall be active for your interests.

“You will have learned from the elder Donato the good-fortune which has happened to his highness the king. Assuredly the most high God has given him His aid; but I cannot relate it in full. God preserve him many years—and us with him.

“There is nothing new to communicate. Christ preserve you.

“DONATO NICOLLINI.

“AMERIGO VESPUCCI.

“We date this January 30, 1492.”



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The last decade of the fifteenth century, which Amerigo was to pass chiefly in Spain, has been termed by historians the most important epoch in modern history. It was, admittedly, the most important for Spain, also for that country (then unknown) which her sailors were to discover and explore, and which was to receive the name of the Florentine merchant then living obscurely in Cadiz or Seville.

“The foreign intercourse of the country,” says the renowned author of *Ferdinand and Isabella*, “was every day more widely extended. Her agents and consuls were to be found in all the ports of the Mediterranean and the Baltic. The Spanish mariner, instead of creeping along the beaten track of inland navigation, now struck boldly across the great Western Ocean. The new discoveries had converted the land trade with India into a sea trade, and the nations of the peninsula, which had hitherto lain remote from the great highways of commerce, now became the factors and carriers of Europe.

“The flourishing condition of the nation was seen in the wealth and population of its cities, the revenue of which, augmented in all to a surprising extent, had increased in

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some forty and even fifty fold beyond what they were at the commencement of Ferdinand and Isabella's reign: the ancient and lordly Toledo; Burgos, with its bustling industrious traders; Valladolid, sending forth thirty thousand warriors from its gates; Cordova, in the south, and the magnificent Granada, naturalizing in Europe the arts and luxuries of the East; Saragossa, 'the abundant,' as she was called from her fruitful territory; Valencia, 'the beautiful'; Barcelona, rivalling in independence and maritime enterprise the proudest of the Italian republics; Medina del Campo, whose fairs were already the great mart for the commercial exchanges of the peninsula; and Seville, the golden gate of the Indies, whose quays began to be thronged with merchants from the most distant countries of Europe."

## V

### CONVERSATIONS WITH COLUMBUS

1492 OR 1493

WHILE we cannot affirm that Christopher Columbus and Vespucci were acquainted previous to the voyage which made America known to Europe, it is well established that Amerigo was in Spain when his favored rival sailed from Palos, in August, 1492, and also when he returned, in March, 1493. In the very month of January, 1492, in which Vespucci wrote the letter quoted in the previous chapter, Columbus and the Spanish sovereigns signed the "capitulation" that set forth the demands of the discoverer and the concessions of the king and queen. That paper was signed and sealed in the palace of the Alhambra, not far distant from Cadiz, and still nearer to Seville, whither Vespucci removed soon after. He may have been there when Columbus passed through the latter city

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on his way to Palos, Seville being in the direct route between Granada and the Rio Tinto; but if he then saw and conversed with him there is no record of the fact.

What must have been his feelings, though, when he learned of the transaction between Columbus and the sovereigns? Columbus had gained permission to make—what he himself was far better equipped for—a voyage across the Sea of Darkness, to the islands that lay on the route of Marco Polo's Cathay. And Columbus had merely corresponded with his master, Toscanelli, at whose feet he, Vespucci, had sat, and during days and hours discussed the problem that his rival was now going forth to solve!

While Vespucci plodded, almost hopelessly, at Cadiz and Seville, Columbus pushed forward preparations for his voyage, and finally set sail. Did not Amerigo, then, send a sigh after him and his caravels, and think regretfully of his maps, his charts, globes, and nautical instruments lying dusty and disused in Florence? They were more to him than anything else in the world. With their aid, and countenanced by royal favor, *he* might have been the fortunate one to adventure upon the ocean, and seek the un-

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known regions which he was positive lay there veiled from human sight. But he was pledged to repair the family fortune, he was committed to the interests of his employers, and even if the suggestion of embarking on a voyage of discovery came to him he could not entertain it for an instant. He could not then; but perhaps opportunity might yet offer, he thought, and so sent for his books, charts, and instruments, in order to perfect himself in cosmography and nautical science. He became so proficient that some years after he was appointed by King Ferdinand pilot-major of Spain, and even the charts that Columbus made were brought to him for correction or verification.

The months went by, spent by Columbus in "making history," by Vespucci in lading ships for others to sail in, and in the intervals of business poring over his books and charts. At last, in the spring of 1493, one day a courier came dashing into Seville with the news of Columbus's return, by way of Portugal, a letter having arrived from Lisbon addressed to the sovereigns, and another for Santangel, secretary to the king. Then Vespucci knew his opportunity had taken

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flight, for the New World had been discovered, the glory belonged to Columbus!

Soon after the return of the voyagers to Palos, he may have seen the triumphal procession led by Columbus to Barcelona, and probably had speech with him and with some of his sailors. He saw the six Indians who had been made captive in the islands and were brought to Seville, for they remained there some time while Columbus was awaiting orders from Barcelona. A letter from the sovereigns came at last, addressed to "Don Cristobal Colon, Admiral of the Ocean Sea and Viceroy of the Indies," which probably Amerigo himself perused—with what a sickening of heart may be imagined—for it contained a memorandum from the sovereigns referring to the equipment of a second expedition, and his firm received the contract. Vespucci was then connected with the house of Berardi (having left the employ of the Medici), either as contracting agent or partner. Whatever relation he stood in to the firm, it was a most responsible one, for to him was committed the furnishing of a large fleet without delay.

It was about the last of March, or early

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in April, that Columbus delivered to him the order from the king and queen, and then set out for Barcelona overland. He arrived there duly, to be received with almost royal honors, and meanwhile the house of Berardi, under the active supervision of Vespucci, was busy with the preparation of the fleet. Ships were sought and chartered; caravels built, bought, and repaired; munitions provided and crews of sailors assembled, which Vespucci was obliged to hold and keep together against the sailing of the squadron.

And what was the personal appearance of these two great navigators, thus so strangely brought into business relations, and whose fame in after times was to fill the world? Although there is no portrait existing of Columbus which we can affirm to be authentic, still verbal portraits have been left by his contemporaries which convey to us the impression that the "Admiral" was tall and stalwart, dignified in bearing, with fair complexion, blue eyes, and hair then silvery gray.

Amerigo Vespucci was his exact opposite, in superficial characteristics, for he was under rather than above the middle height, "thick-set and brawny," with a dark com-

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plexion, black hair mixed with gray, and flashing black eyes. An authentic portrait, painted at a later date, shows him with head nearly bald, encircled only by a fringe of hair, prominent cheek-bones, aquiline nose, a firm, sweet mouth, and without the thick black beard he wore when he first met Columbus. His temper was mild, while that of Columbus was hasty, though firmly controlled, save on a few occasions when, tried beyond measure, it burst its bounds and swept away all opposition. But both great men were courteous in speech, the dignified demeanor of Columbus commanding admiration, while the modesty of Vespucci won the friendship of all with whom he came in contact.

The following dialogue between the two, or the purport of it, is thought to have taken place soon after the return of Columbus from Barcelona, either at Cadiz or Seville. It was but natural that the two should meet, that they should exchange views and compare notes, for, while Columbus had made the great discovery—through having been the first to apply the theories of Toscanelli and the ancients—Vespucci had for many years been thinking on the subject, and had



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enjoyed the friendship of the physicist, whom both revered. Whether this conversation is apocryphal or not, at least it embodies the divergent views of the two, and does no violence to their sentiments, as can be shown by their writings. It is adapted from Lester's *Americus Vespucius*.

Having with him, it is believed, the charts and books from which he deduced his theories, Vespucci probably invited Columbus to his lodgings, where the two spent many an hour in good-natured controversy. Nearly twenty years had elapsed since the learned doctor sent the chart and letter to Columbus, and now the latter, with the laurels of the great "discovery" on his brow, was to engage in argument with the person best acquainted with his life-work—who had followed it from its very inception, and who was to enjoy its usufruct forever.

Let us try to imagine them within the walls of Vespucci's house—whether in golden Seville or crystal Cadiz cannot be told; but it is easy to find one like it to-day, for the architecture of neither city has changed much since that time. The house is of stone, with thick white walls and roof of tiles. The rooms are large and dreary, but

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open on a court, or Moorish patio, around which they are ranged, and where a fountain tinkles merrily. The floor of Vespucci's room is tiled and damp, the furniture is scanty, but in the centre of the apartment is a large and massive table, upon which are spread his charts, while a globe—perhaps one of Behaim's, recently constructed—stands in a corner.

The arrival of the distinguished stranger at Vespucci's modest lodgings causes a flutter of excitement, not only in the household, but in the street, which is lined with gaping citizens, anxious to see the new admiral, who has already taken on the dignities of his station, is costumed in velvet, wears a sword at his side, and is accompanied by a retinue of hired retainers. Vespucci, on the contrary, shows no ostentation in his garb, for he is but a man of business, and, entirely unconscious of any discrepancy in their apparel, conducts his guest to the room where lie his treasures.

To the credit of Columbus, it should be said, he sees in Vespucci only the man of science, the student, the cosmographer, and, with the gentle dignity inseparable from this man who had appeared before kings

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and at courts, he compliments his host upon his collection. They are soon in earnest consultation, scanning the sea-charts, quoting authorities, advancing theories, becoming so absorbed as to ignore the yawning hangers-on of the admiral's staff, who soon retire, one after another, leaving the two geographers alone.

Finally, Columbus says, looking up from the chart upon which he had been sketching the route of his voyage:

"It grieves me much, worthy Signor Vespucci, to learn from our friend the Signor Berardi that you do not estimate as I do the result of our recent navigation to the west. With your well-known skill in cosmography, I fear me, you combine more of doubt than would be becoming to a Christian navigator."

"Your excellency mistakes my views greatly, or has been misinformed of them," replies Vespucci, courteously. "Far from undervaluing the effect of the discoveries which your genius has accomplished, I am the rather disposed to place a greater estimate upon them than does the Admiral Colon himself. If I judged them in the light in which they are viewed by the most of

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those who hope to profit by them, then, indeed, the imputation would be just; but I look not to such things, and well I know that your own mind is above them."

"In that respect you only do me justice. If I look for gain in aught that I have undertaken, it is only that I may devote it to a holy purpose. Have I not, even within the last few days, recorded my solemn oath that I would, in the event of my prosperous arrival at the court of the grand khan—whom, by the favor of God, I hope to convert to the true faith—employ the riches I shall acquire in the equipment of a force of four thousand horse and fifty thousand foot, for the recovery of the holy sepulchre from the hands of the infidels? I am unwilling to think that your speech tends to the end of imputing to me mercenary motives; but wherein do we differ? Is not the way opened, and will not the intercourse I mean to establish with the pagan monarch contribute greatly to the purpose I keep ever in view? The holy father at Rome himself lends me encouragement in my undertaking, and regards with approbation my efforts to lead into the true Church so mighty a potentate."

"With all the deference that is due to your

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excellency's superior wisdom and experience, I would state that therein lies the very point of our difference. I deem it by no means certain that your ships have touched the territories of the grand khan at all, but rather land that has hitherto been alike unknown to him and to us. Thousands of leagues may yet intervene between that land and his dominions, whether of sea or earth remains to be discovered; and I judge in this wise as well from the accounts of cosmographers who have written on the subject, as from the description of the barbarous natives which you yourself have fallen in with in recent discoveries.

The accounts of those who have penetrated to distant regions of the East lead us to understand that the subjects of the grand khan live in the midst of the most profuse wealth and luxury; and bedeck themselves with superfine garments, gold, and jewelry. These people, however, are wild and naked, little if any superior to the beasts, and cannot, I think, be in any wise connected with a monarch of such magnificence. My own thoughts carry me to the conviction that there exists near unto the lands you have visited an immense country, which may

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possibly belong to and be part of the grand khan's dominions, though I doubt if such be the case. Marco Polo himself speaks of an island lying far out in the ocean which washes the eastern shores of Asia—the great Cipango, abounding in riches and precious stones, which has never been subdued by the sovereign of Cathay, although he has made attempts to conquer it. This island I deem it necessary to discover, in the first place; then, even after it is circumnavigated or passed over—and the last may be the easier way—a voyage of long duration will still have to be accomplished before the empire of Cathay is reached. When I speak of a passage over this unknown island, I do so in view of its great extent, as I estimate it to be of such size that it might more properly be designated *Terra Firma*,<sup>1</sup> being, according to my calculations, as large as, if not larger than, the whole of Europe. And herein do I estimate most highly the worth of the discoveries which your excellency has made, and their importance to this realm, as it will now be comparatively easy

<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the main-land, or continent, as opposed to islands, the Latin form, *terra*, is almost invariably used by the Spaniards, instead of *tierra*.

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to pass the lands you have fallen in with by sailing either in a more northerly or a more southerly direction, in either case striking the country I have in my mind.”

“Nay, nay, good Signor Vespucci. I have the confidence in my heart that you are mistaken. I feel, indeed, persuaded, by the many and wonderful manifestations of divine Providence in my especial favor, that I am the chosen instrument of God in bringing to pass a great event: no less than the conversion of millions who are now existing in the darkness of paganism. I would, indeed, provide for the good of the poor natives we have already met, as well by building cities on their islands and cultivating their lands, as by the erection of churches and the establishment of Christian worship. But I would by no means forget the greater end in view—namely, that of bringing to bear upon the infidels the wealth and power of the vast kingdom of Cathay, that thus being encompassed, by the armies from Europe on the one side, and by the innumerable hosts of Asia on the other, they may be utterly destroyed, and the tomb of our Lord be again placed in the possession of the true believers. . . . In these things I marvel much

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at your incredulity, Signor Vespucci, seeing that you have often had opportunities of conversing with the learned physicist Paolo, your own countryman—peace to his ashes!—who in his lifetime so nearly coincided with me in opinion.”

“I have, indeed, as your excellency observes, oftentimes disputed and argued with the venerable Toscanelli, and to him is due much of the little knowledge I have been able to acquire in cosmography and astronomy. But from him I also learned that the descriptions which are given by Marco Polo were considered by many wise men as not altogether beyond the reach of doubt. If, then, he is in error in some particulars, how shall we draw the line, and say wherein he speaks the truth of his own knowledge? And how could he know the distance which exists between Cathay and the western shores of Europe, save by hearsay, and the reports of mariners on that unknown shore, who themselves must have been falsifiers, as it is well known that not one of them has ever appeared here who might have estimated the distance? I cannot, then, think that we are so near to Cathay as your excellency supposes, and had much rather fol-



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low the opinion that you have possibly approached the shore that has been hitherto represented as inaccessible to mortals.”

“You speak of the paradise, which so many sound and able divines assert to be still in existence on earth.”

“I do, though not so firmly believing in the relation as they do. If there be such a place existing, as described by the learned St. Basil, methinks it must be near unto those balmy isles which you have discovered, so similar in climate and in verdancy.”

“Such, in sooth, has often been my opinion, and I deem it not to be inconsistent with the other, which holds to the proximity of Cathay. Oh, that I might, through the grace of God and intercession of the saints, ever arrive at that blessed spot, where all is happiness and beauty; where the harmonious songs of birds ever fall gratefully on the ear; where the air is filled with the fragrance of flowers, and a perpetual spring, combining with its own beauties those of every other season of the year, continually prevails; where the limpid waters flow smoothly and gently, or gush forth in purest fountains; where all is suggestive of perennial youth, and decay and death are unknown!

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But I perceive, Signor, that you are incredulous, as to this region of bliss, and even smile at my belief. Remember, then, that herein I only follow the opinions of the wise and learned fathers of our Church, but that in regard to Cathay I am supported by ample proof, from the discoveries of travellers and the relations of cosmographers."

"I am ever willing to yield to proofs; but methinks that the foundation of the error under which your excellency seems to labor is this: that you do not make sufficient allowance for exaggeration in the accounts of the great traveller Marco Polo. It appears to me that he has deceived himself as to the extent to which he penetrated Cathay, and that he has thereby carried out the eastern coast too far into the ocean. That being so, the learned Paolo, my countryman, in following him, finds it necessary to shorten the extent of ocean which intervenes between Cathay and Europe, in order to render accurate his estimate of the circumference of the globe."

"I note your objections, but cannot deem them correct, and yet hope to deliver the letters of my sovereigns, with which I was charged in my recent voyage, to the grand

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khan in person. But let us examine this question of longitude, for therein I am interested deeply, and have small doubt that I can turn you to my opinions."

"Most gladly will I do so, most noble admiral, for I am strongly moved to tempt the ocean myself, in the hope of adding something to the knowledge of mariners."

Within four or five years from the conjectural date of this dialogue, Vespucci made his first voyage, and saw for himself some of those "isles of paradise" which had so charmed Columbus. This was either in the year 1497 or 1499, depending upon whether we accept his own statement or the opinion of those who have challenged the authenticity of his narrative.

## VI

### VESPUCCI'S DEBATABLE VOYAGE

1497-1498

IT has been said that the house of Berardi, with which Vespucci was connected as a partner, outfitted the large fleet for the second voyage of Columbus in 1493; but this is true only in the sense that it served the crown in the capacity of sub-contractor. The real head of Indian affairs was the arch-deacon of Seville, Juan Rodriguez de Fonseca, who first rose to prominence at this time as general superintendent of all the New-World business, and for thirty years controlled the same. Invested by King Ferdinand with great, almost unlimited, power, he has the credit of having founded the royal India house, which was of such importance in the colonizing of new territory, and by the favor of which alone any voyage of discovery could be projected and carried to a successful conclusion.

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Fonesca has been held up to obloquy by the admirable eulogist of Columbus, Mr. Irving, "as a warning example of those perfidious beings in office, who too often lie like worms at the root of honorable enterprise, blighting by their unseen influence the fruits of glorious action and disappointing the hopes of nations." This denunciation he incurred by thwarting the schemes of Columbus, in their minor details at first, afterwards becoming his open and determined enemy. The first instance in which the two great men fell out occurred when Fonseca opposed the pretensions of Columbus and attempted to check his extravagance in the matter of personal retinue. Among other requisitions which Columbus sent in, those for ten footmen and twenty menials for his domestic establishment were objected to by the superintendent as superfluous.

In connection with the treasurer, Francisco Pinelo, and the *contador*, Juan de Soria, Fonseca used his utmost efforts to raise the necessary funds for the expedition, to provide for the vast expenses of which, says Mr. Irving himself, "the royal revenue arising from two-thirds of the Church tithes was placed at the disposition of Pinelo; and

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other funds were drawn from a disgraceful source—from the jewels and other valuables, the sequestrated property of the unfortunate Jews, banished from the kingdom according to a bigoted edict of the previous year. As these sources were still inadequate, Pinelo was authorized to supply the deficiency by a loan. Requisitions were likewise made for provisions of all kinds, as well as for artillery, powder, muskets, lances, corselets, and cross-bows. . . . The military stores which had accumulated during the war with the Moors of Granada furnished a great part of these supplies.”

Having great difficulty, therefore, in meeting the really needful demands of the expedition, it was quite natural that Fonseca should desire to cut down those he deemed extravagant, and it must be admitted that among these he might rightfully class the requisitions of Columbus intended merely to support his newly acquired dignity as admiral and grandee. He was supported by the sovereigns, however, and Fonseca was rebuked for denying him anything he desired. He was reminded that the expedition was intended solely to extend the power and prestige of the crown, and that

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but for Columbus it would never have been assembled, hence he was to study his wishes and comply with his demands. This implied reproof cut the haughty prelate to the heart, and from these trivial differences, remarks Mr. Irving, "we must date the rise of that singular hostility which he ever afterwards manifested towards Columbus, which every year increased in rancor, and which he gratified in the most invidious manner by secretly multiplying impediments and vexations in his path."

But for the fact that this enmity existing between Fonseca and Columbus made possible the first voyage of Amerigo Vespucci, we should not feel called upon to more than mention the first named in connection with an expedition in which all three were so deeply interested. The fleet finally sailed away, pursued by the maledictions of Fonseca, and followed by the heart-felt longings of Vespucci. Some historians have stated that the Florentine sailed with Columbus on this second voyage; but there are no records to prove this assertion, and he himself never made the claim. We have every reason for believing that he continued in his employment as purveyor to the crown and con-

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tractor for the furnishing of fleets, with his residence sometimes at Seville and sometimes at Cadiz, as occasion demanded, the office of the India house being at the former city, and the port of customs and sailing at the latter. He was, undoubtedly, brought into more or less intimate contact with Fonseca, whose supervision of colonial affairs and control of expeditionary fleets demanded his constant attention for many years. He probably appreciated such a man as Vespucci, whose even temper and mastery of detail, combined with great sagacity and learning, were invaluable to the man who was building up a government beyond the ocean. They were nearly of the same age — Fonseca having been born in 1441—and at this time in the fulness of their natural powers.

Just what Vespucci was doing in the two years succeeding to the departure of Columbus is not definitely known; but in December, 1495, we find him actively engaged in settling the estate of Juan Berardi, who had died in that month and year. He was then, it appears, the most influential if not the sole member of the firm then resident in Spain, and after Berardi's death he under-



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took and carried out the contracts entered into by the senior partner with the government.

About three hundred years after the death of Vespucci, some ancient documents were discovered by a Spanish historian, in which it was shown that on January 12, 1496, the royal treasurer, Pinelo, had paid to Vespucci the sum of ten thousand maravedis on account. He advanced pay and furnished subsistence for the mariners of an expedition which sailed on February 3, 1496, and was wrecked two weeks later, with the loss of several lives. The fragmentary records also show, apparently, that in the year 1497 and the early part of 1498, Vespucci was "busily engaged at Seville and San Lucar, in the equipment of the fleet with which Columbus sailed on his third voyage"; and yet, according to a letter which he wrote a former friend in 1504, he was himself upon the ocean at that very time, seeking to rival Columbus in the discovery of a continent!

The exact truth may never be learned as to this reputed voyage of Vespucci, which he calls his "first," and which his enemies say was never made! It seems incredible that he should be the "sole authority" for

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this voyage, and that all contemporary history "is absolutely silent in regard to it"; yet, so far as we can ascertain, it is the truth. Leaving for future discussion, however, the proof and disproof of this voyage—merely pausing to remark that at the period mentioned a man holding his relations to Fonseca would have had no difficulty in obtaining permission to make such a voyage, even without the sanction of royal authority—we will now peruse the famous letter. It is addressed to "Piero Soderini, Perpetual Gonfaloniere of the Republic of Florence," and was written in 1504.

"MOST EXCELLENT SIR,— . . . The principal reason why I am induced to write is the request of the bearer, Benvenuto Benvenuti, the devoted servant of your Excellency and my particular friend. He happened to be here in this city of Lisbon, and requested that I would impart to your Excellency a description of the things seen by me in various climes, in the course of four voyages which I have made for the discovery of new lands, two by the authority and command of Don Ferdinand, King of Castile, in the great Western Ocean, and the other two by order of Dom Manuel, King of Portugal, towards the south. So I resolved to write, as requested, and set about the performance of my task, because I am certain that your Excellency counts me among the number of your most devoted

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servants, remembering that in the time of our youth, we were friends, going daily to study the rudiments of grammar, under the excellent instruction of the venerable brother of St. Mark, Friar Georgio Antonio Vespucci, my uncle, whose counsels would to God I had followed! for then, as Petrarch says, I should have been a different man from what I am.

“. . . Your Excellency will please to observe that I came into the kingdom of Spain for the purpose of engaging in mercantile affairs, and that I continued to be thus employed about four years [six or seven], during which I saw and experienced the fickle movements of fortune, and how she ordered the changes of these transitory and perishing worldly goods, at one time sustaining a man at the top of the wheel, and at another returning him to the lowest part thereof, and depriving him of her favors, which may truly be said to be lent. Thus having experienced the continual labor of one who would acquire her favors, subjecting myself to very many inconveniences and dangers, I concluded to abandon mercantile affairs and direct my attention to something more laudable and stable. For this purpose I prepared myself to visit various parts of the world, and see the wonderful things which might be found therein. Time and place were very opportunely offered me when I came to this conclusion.

“King Ferdinand of Castile had ordered four ships to go in search of new lands, and I was selected by his highness to go in that fleet, in order to assist in the discoveries. We sailed from the port of Cadiz on the 10th of May, A.D. 1497,

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and steering our course through the great Western Ocean, spent eighteen months in our expedition, discovering much land and a great number of islands, the largest part of which were inhabited. As these are not spoken of by the ancient writers, I presume they were ignorant of them. If I am not mistaken, I well remember to have read in one of their books, which I possessed, that this ocean was considered unpeopled. In this voyage I saw many astonishing things, as your Excellency will perceive by the following relation.

“We had sailed so rapidly that at the end of twenty-seven days we came in sight of land, which we judged to be a continent, being about a thousand leagues west of the Fortunate Islands, now called the Grand Canaries. Here we anchored our ships at a league and a half from the shore, and, having cast off our boats and filled them with men and arms, proceeded to land. Before we landed we were much cheered by the sight of many people rambling along the shore. We found that they were all in a state of nudity, and they appeared to be afraid of us, as I suppose from seeing us clothed and of a different stature from themselves. They retreated to a mountain, and, notwithstanding all the signs of peace and friendship we could make, we could not bring them to parley with us; so, as the night was coming on and the ships were anchored in an insecure place, we agreed to leave there and go in search of some port or bay where we could place our ships in safety.

“We sailed two days along the coast, and on the morning of the third day, as dawn appeared, we saw on shore a great number of men, with their

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wives and children, all laden with provisions. Before we reached the land many of them swam to meet us, the distance of a bow-shot into the sea (as they are most excellent swimmers), and they treated us with as much confidence as if we had had intercourse with them for a long time, which gratified us much. All that we know of their life and manners is that they go entirely naked, not having the slightest covering whatever; they are of middling stature and very well proportioned, and their flesh is a reddish color, like the skin of a lion; but I think if they had been accustomed to wear clothing they would have been as white as we are. They have no hair on the body, except very long hair on the head; but the women especially derive attractiveness from this. Their countenances are not handsome, as they have large faces, which might be compared with those of the Tartars. Both men and women are very agile, easy in their carriage, and swift in running or walking, so that the women think nothing of speeding a league or two, as we have many a time beheld.

“Their weapons are bows and arrows beautifully wrought, but unfurnished with iron or any other hard metal, in place of which they make use of the teeth of animals, or fish, or sometimes a slip of hard-wood, made harder at the point by fire. They are sure marksmen, who hit whatever they wish, and in some parts the women also use the bow with dexterity. They have other arms, such as lances and staves, with heads finely wrought. When they make war they take their wives with them—not to fight, but to carry provisions on their backs, a woman frequently carry-

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ing a burden in this manner for thirty or forty leagues, which the strongest man among them could not do, as we have witnessed many times.

“These people have no captains, neither do they march in order, but each one is his own master. The cause of their wars is not a love of conquest, or of enlarging their boundaries, neither are they incited to engage in them by inordinate covetousness [unlike the Spaniards], but from ancient enmity which has existed among them in times past; and having been asked why they made war, they could give us no other reason than that they did it to avenge the deaths of their ancestors. Neither have these people kings or lords, nor do they obey any one, but live in their own entire liberty; and the manner in which they are incited to go to war is this: when their enemies have killed or taken prisoners any of their people, the oldest relative rises and goes about proclaiming his wrongs aloud, and calling upon them to go with him to avenge the death of his relation. Thereupon they are moved with sympathy and make ready for the fight.

“They have no tribunals of justice, neither do they punish malefactors; and what is still more astonishing, neither father nor mother chastises the children when they do wrong; yet, astounding as it may seem, there is no strife between them; or, to say the least, we never saw any. They appear simple in speech, but in reality are very shrewd and cunning in any matter which interests them. They speak but little, and that little in a low tone of voice, using the same accentuation that we use, and forming the words with the palate,

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teeth, and lips; but they have a different mode of diction. There is a great diversity of language among them, inasmuch as every hundred leagues or so we found people who could not understand one another. Their mode of life is most barbarous; they do not eat at regular intervals; but it is a matter of indifference to them whether appetite comes at midnight or at mid-day, and they eat upon the ground at all hours, without napkin or tablecloth, having their food in earthen basins, which they manufacture, or in half-gourd shells or calabashes. They sleep in nets of cotton, very large and suspended in the air; and although this may seem a very bad way of sleeping, I can vouch for the fact that it is extremely pleasant, and one sleeps better thus than on a mattress. They are neat and clean in their persons, which is a natural consequence of their perpetual bathing; but some of their habits are unmentionable. . . .

“ . . . We are not aware that these people have any laws. Neither are they like Moors or Jews, but worse than Gentiles or Pagans, because we have never seen them offer any sacrifice, and they have no houses of prayer. From their voluptuous manner of life, I consider them as Epicureans. Their dwellings are in communities and their houses are in the form of huts, but strongly built of large tree-trunks and covered with palm leaves, secure from winds and storms. In some places they are of such great length that in a single house we saw six hundred people, and we found that the population of thirteen houses only amounted to four thousand. They change their location every seven or eight years, and on being asked why they did so they

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said it was on account of the intense heat of the sun upon the soil, which by that time became infected and corrupted, and caused pains in their bodies, which seemed to us reasonable.

“The riches of these people consist in birds’ feathers of beautiful colors, of beads, which they fabricate from fish-bones or colored stones, with which they decorate their cheeks, lips, and ears, and of many other things which are held in little or no esteem by us. They carry on no commerce, neither buying nor selling, and, in short, live contentedly with what nature gives them. The riches which we esteem so highly in Europe and other parts—such as gold, jewels, pearls, and other wealth—they have no regard for at all. They are liberal in giving, never denying one anything, and, on the other hand, are just as free in asking. . . .

“In case of death they make use of various funeral obsequies. Some bury their dead with water and provisions placed at their heads, thinking they may have occasion to eat and drink, but they make no parade in the way of funeral ceremonies. In some places they have a most barbarous mode of interment, which is thus: When one is sick or infirm, and nearly at the point of death, his relatives carry him into a large forest, and there attaching one of their sleeping-hammocks to two trees, they place the sick person in it, and continue to swing him about for a whole day, and when night comes, after placing at his head water and provisions sufficient to sustain him for five or six days, they return to their village. If the sick person can help himself to eat and drink, and recovers



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sufficiently to be able to return to the village, his people receive him again with great ceremony; but few are they who escape this mode of treatment, as most of them die without being visited, and that is their only burial.

“They use in their diseases various kinds of medicines, so different from any in vogue with us that we are astonished that any escaped. I often saw, for instance, that when a person was sick with a fever, which was increasing upon him, they bathed him from head to foot with cold water, and making a great fire around him, they made him turn round in a circle for about an hour or two, until they fatigued him and left him to sleep. Many were cured in this way. They also observe a strict diet, eating nothing for three or four days. They practise blood-letting; not on the arm, unless in the arm-pit, but generally taking it from the thighs and haunches. Their blood or phlegm is much disordered on account of their food, which consists mainly of the roots of herbs, of fruit, and fish. They have no wheat or other grain, but instead make use of the root of a tree [shrub] from which they manufacture flour, which is very good and called *huca* [yucca]; the flour from another root is called *kazabi*, and from another *igname*.

“They eat little meat except human flesh, and you will notice that in this particular they are more savage than beasts, because all their enemies who are killed or taken prisoners, whether male or female, are devoured with so much fierceness that it seems disgusting to relate, much more to see it done, as I, with my own eyes, have many times witnessed this proof of their inhumanity. Indeed,

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they marvelled much to hear us say that we did not eat our enemies.

“And your Excellency may rest assured that their other barbarous customs are so numerous that it is impossible herein to describe them all. As in these voyages I have witnessed so many things at variance with our own customs, I prepared myself to write a collection, which I call *The Four Voyages*, in which I have related the major part of the things I saw as clearly as my feeble capacity would permit. This work is not yet published, though many advise me to publish it. In it everything will appear minutely, therefore I shall not enlarge any more in this letter, because in the course of it we shall see many things which are peculiar. Let this suffice for matters in general.

“In this commencement of discoveries we did not see anything of much profit in the country, owing as I think to our ignorance of the language, except some few indications of gold. We concluded to leave this place and go onward, and coasted along the shore, making many stops, and holding discourses with many people, until after some days we came into a harbor, where we fell into a very great danger, from which it pleased the Holy Spirit to deliver us. It happened in this manner: We landed in a port where we found a village built over the water, like Venice. There were about forty-four houses, shaped like bells, built upon very large piles, having entrances by means of draw-bridges, so that by laying the bridges from house to house the inhabitants could pass through the whole.

“When the people saw us they appeared to be

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afraid of us, and, to protect themselves, suddenly raised all their bridges and shut themselves up in their houses. While we were looking at them and wondering at this proceeding, we saw, coming in from the sea, about two and twenty canoes, which are the boats they make use of, and are carved out of a single tree. They came directly towards our boats, appearing to be astonished at our figures and dress, and keeping at a little distance from us. This being the case, we made signals of friendship to induce them to approach, endeavoring to reassure them by every token of kindness; but seeing that they did not come we went towards them. They would not wait for us, however, but fled to the land, making signs to us to wait, and giving us to understand that they would return. They fled to a mountain, but did not tarry long there, and when they returned brought with them sixteen of their young maidens, and entering into their canoes came near and put four of them into each boat, at which we were very much astonished, as your Excellency may well imagine. Then they mingled with their canoes among our boats, and we considered their coming to us in this manner to be a token of friendship. Taking this for granted, we saw a great crowd of people swimming towards us from the houses without any suspicion. At this juncture some old women showed themselves at the doorways of the huts, wailing and tearing their hair, as if in great distress. From this we began to be suspicious, and had recourse to our weapons, when suddenly the young girls, who were in our boats, threw themselves into the sea, and the canoes at the same time moved away, the

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people in them assailing us with their bows and arrows.

“Those who came swimming towards us brought each a lance, concealed as much as possible under the water, and their treachery being thus discovered, we began not only to defend ourselves, but to act severely on the defensive. We overturned many of the canoes with our boats, and making considerable slaughter among them they soon abandoned the canoes altogether and swam for the shore. Fifteen or twenty were killed, and many wounded, on their side, while on ours five were slightly wounded, all the rest escaping by divine Providence, and these five being quickly cured. We took prisoners two of their girls and three men, and on entering their huts found one sick man and two old women. Returning to our boats and thence to the ships, with the five prisoners, we put irons upon the feet of each, excepting the two young females; yet when night came the two girls and one of the men escaped, in the most artful manner in the world.

“The next day we concluded to depart from this port, and at length came to anchor at about eighty leagues distance, and found another tribe of people whose customs and language were very different from those we had last seen. We determined to land, seeing there a great multitude numbering about four thousand. They did not wait to receive us, but fled precipitately to the woods, abandoning all their things. We leaped ashore, and taking the path which led to the wood, found their tents within the space of a bow-shot, where they had made a great fire and two of them were cook-

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ing their food, roasting many animals of various kinds.

“We noticed that they were roasting a certain animal that looked like a serpent; it had no wings, and was so disgusting in appearance that we were astonished at its deformity. As we went through their huts or tents, we found many of these serpents alive. Their feet were tied, and they had a cord about their snouts so that they could not open their mouths, as dogs are sometimes muzzled so they may not bite. These animals had such a savage appearance that none of us durst turn one over, thinking they might be poisonous.<sup>1</sup> They are about the size of a kid, about the length and a half of a man's arm, and have long, coarse feet armed with large nails. Their skin is hard, and they are of various colors. They have the snout and face of a serpent, and from the nose there runs a crest, passing over the middle of the back to the root of the tail. We finally concluded that they were serpents, and poisonous; yet, nevertheless, they were eaten by the natives.

“... Finally these people became very friendly, told us that this was not their place of dwelling, but that they had come there only to carry on their fishery. They importuned us so much to go to their village that, having taken counsel, twenty-three of us Christians concluded to go with them, well prepared, and with firm resolution to die manfully if such was to be our fate. Three leagues

<sup>1</sup> These “serpents” were iguanas, and were seen and described by Christopher and Bartholomew Columbus, long before Vespucci made his voyages.

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from the coast we arrived at a well-peopled village, where we were received with so many and such barbarous ceremonies that no pen is equal to the task of describing them. There was dancing and singing, weeping mingled with rejoicing, and great feasting. After having passed the night and half of the next day, an immense number of people visiting us from motives of curiosity, we determined to proceed still farther inland, having been desired to visit other villages. And it is impossible to tell how much honor they did us there. We visited so many villages that we spent nine days in the journey. On our return we were accompanied by a wonderful number of both sexes, quite to the sea-shore; and when any of us grew weary with walking, they carried us in their hammocks, much at our ease. Many of them were laden with the presents they made us, consisting of very rich plumage, many bows and arrows, and an infinite variety of parrots, beautiful and varied in colors. Others carried loads of provisions and animals. For a greater wonder, I will tell your Excellency that when we had to cross a river they carried us on their backs.

“Having arrived at the sea and entered the boats, which had come ashore for us, we are astonished at the crowd which endeavored to get into the boats to go to see our ships, for they were so overloaded that they were oftentimes on the point of sinking. We carried as many as we could on board, and so many more came by swimming that we were quite troubled at the multitude, although they were all naked and unarmed. They marvelled greatly at the size of our ships, our equipments,

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and implements. Here quite a laughable occurrence took place, at their expense. We concluded to try the effect of discharging some of our artillery, and when they heard the thunderous report the greater part of them jumped into the sea from fright, acting like frogs sitting on a bank, who plunge into the water on the approach of anything that alarms them. Those who remained on the ship were so timorous that we repented of having done this. However, we reassured them by telling them that these were our arms, with which we killed our enemies. After they had amused themselves on the ship all day, we told them that they must go, as we wished to depart in the night; so they took leave of us with many demonstrations of friendship, even affection, and went ashore.

“I saw more of the manners and customs of these people while in their country than I care to dwell on here. Your Excellency will notice that in each of my voyages I have noted the most extraordinary things which have occurred, and have compiled the whole into one volume, in the style of a geography, and entitled it *The Four Voyages*. In this work will be found a minute description of the things which I saw; but, as there is no copy of it yet published, owing to my being obliged to examine it carefully and make corrections, it becomes necessary for me to impart them to you herein.

“This country is full of inhabitants and contains a great many rivers. Very few of the animals are similar to ours, excepting the lions, panthers, stags, hogs, goats, and deer, and even these are a little different in form. They have neither horses,

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mules, nor asses; neither cows, dogs, nor any kind of domestic animals. Their other animals, however, are so very numerous that it is impossible to count them, and all of them so wild that they cannot be employed for serviceable uses. But what shall I say of the birds, which are so numerous and of so many species and varieties of plumage that it is astounding to behold them? The country is pleasant and fruitful, full of woods and forests which are always green, as they never lose their foliage. The fruits are numberless and totally different from ours. The land lies within the torrid zone, under the parallel which describes the Tropic of Cancer, where the pole is elevated twenty-three degrees above the horizon.

“A great many people came to see us and were astonished at our features and the whiteness of our skins. They asked us where we came from, and we gave them to understand that we came from heaven, with the view of visiting the world, and they believed us. In this country we established a baptismal font, and great numbers were baptized. They called us, in their language, *Carabi*, which means men of great wisdom. The natives call this province *Lariab*. We left the port and sailed along the coast, in sight of land, until we had run, calculating our advances and retrogressions, eight hundred and seventy leagues towards the northwest, making many stops by the way and having intercourse with many people. In some places we found traces of gold, but in small quantities, it being sufficient for us to have discovered the country and to know that there was gold in it.

“We had now been thirteen months on the voy-



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age, and the ships and rigging were much worn, the men very weary. So by common consent we agreed to careen our ships on the beach in order to calk and pitch them anew, as they leaked badly, and then to return to Spain. When we took this resolution we were near one of the best harbors in the world, entering which we found a vast number of people, who received us most kindly. We made a breastwork on shore with our boats and casks, and placed our artillery so it would play over them; then, having unloaded and lightened our ships, we hauled them to land and repaired them wherever they needed it. The natives were of great assistance to us, continually providing food, so that in this port we consumed very little of our own. This served us a very good turn, for our provisions were poor and the stock so much reduced at this time that we feared it would hardly last us on our return to Spain.

“Having stayed here thirty-seven days, visiting their villages many times, where they paid us the highest honors, we wished to depart on our voyage. Before we set sail the natives complained to us that at certain times in the year there came from the sea into their territory a very cruel tribe, who, either by treachery or force, killed many of them and captured others, whom they ate, for they were man-eaters. They signified to us that this tribe were islanders, and lived at about one hundred leagues distance at sea. They narrated this to us with so much simplicity and feeling that we credited their story and promised to avenge their great injuries; whereat they were rejoiced, and many offered to go with us. We did not wish to take

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them for many reasons, and only carried seven, on the condition that they should come back in their own canoes, for we could not enter into obligations to return them to their own country. With this they were content, and then we parted from these gentle people, leaving them very well disposed towards us.

“Our ships having been repaired, we set sail on our return, taking a northeasterly course, and at the end of seven days fell in with some islands. There were a great many of them, some peopled, others uninhabited. We landed at one of them, where we saw many people, who called the island *Iti*. Having filled our boats with good men, and put three rounds of shot in each boat, we proceeded towards the land, where we saw about four hundred men and many women, all naked, like those we had seen before. They were of good stature and appeared to be very warlike men, being armed with bows and arrows and lances. The greater part of them carried staves of a square form, attached to their persons in such a manner that they were not prevented from drawing the bow. As we approached within bow-shot of the shore, they all leaped into the water and shot their arrows at us to prevent our landing. They were painted with various colors and plumed with feathers, and the interpreters with us said that when they were thus painted and plumed they showed a wish to fight. They persisted so much in their endeavors to deter us from landing that we were at last compelled to fire on them with our artillery. Hearing the thunder of our cannon and seeing some of their people fall dead, they all retreated to the shore. Having

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consulted together, forty of us resolved to leap ashore and, if they waited for us, to fight them. Proceeding thus, they attacked us and we fought about two hours, with little advantage, except that our bow-men and gunners killed some of their people and they wounded some of ours. This was because we could not get a chance to use lance or sword. We finally, by desperate exertion, were enabled to flash our swords, and as soon as they had a taste of our weapons they fled to the woods and mountains, leaving us masters of the field, with many of their people killed or wounded. This day we did not pursue them, because we were much fatigued, but returned to our ships, the seven men who had come with us being highly rejoiced.

“The next day we saw a great number of people coming through the country, still offering us signs of battle, sounding horns and shells, and all painted and plumed, which gave them a strange and ferocious appearance.<sup>1</sup> Whereupon all in the ships held a grand council, and it was determined that, since these people were determined to be at enmity with us, we should go to meet them and do everything to engage their friendship; but in case they would not receive it, resolved to treat them as enemies and to make slaves of all we could capture. Having armed ourselves in the best manner possible, we immediately rowed ashore, where they did not resist our landing, from fear, as I think, of our

<sup>1</sup>The fierce islanders, so accurately described by Vespucci, were doubtless the Caribs, and the numerous islands were probably Grenada and the Grenadines, perhaps including St. Vincent, in the north, where descendants of those Caribs live to-day.

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bombardment. We disembarked in four squares, being fifty-seven men, each captain with his own men, and then engaged them in battle. After a protracted fight, having killed many, we put them to flight and pursued them to their village, taking about two hundred and fifty prisoners. We then burned the village and returned victorious to the ships with our prisoners, leaving many killed and wounded on their side, while on ours only one died and not more than twenty-two were wounded. The rest all escaped unhurt, for which God be thanked!

“We soon arranged for our departure, and the seven men, of whom five were wounded, took a canoe from the island and, with three male and four female prisoners that we gave them, returned to their own country, very merry and greatly astonished at our power. We also set sail for Spain, with two hundred and twenty-three prisoners, and arrived at the port of Cadiz on October 15, 1498, where we were well received and found a market for our slaves. This is what happened to me on this, my first voyage, that may be considered worth relating.”

## VII

### VESPUCCI'S "SECOND" VOYAGE

1499-1500

THAT letter from Vespucci to the friend of his youth, Soderini, purporting to narrate the events of his first voyage, has proved a prolific source of doubt and perplexity. Although it was written before Columbus died, and although it was published while most of the actors therein mentioned were yet living, its authenticity was unchallenged until nearly a century after its appearance. Herrera, it is believed, was the first to accuse Vespucci of "artfully and wilfully falsifying in his narrative, with a view to stealing from Columbus the honor of being the discoverer of America." This charge was made public in his work on the West Indies, published in 1601, and ever since Vespucci has been stigmatized as an impostor.

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There is no official record of the voyage he claimed to have made in 1497-1498, and historians are silent as to his actions, in fact, during the period between 1496 and 1504. This signifies little, according to the historian Gomara, who says: "Learning that the territories which Columbus had discovered were very extensive, many persons proceeded to continue the exploration of them. Some went at their own expense, others at that of the king, all thinking to enrich themselves, to acquire honor, and to gain the royal approbation. But, as most of these persons did nothing but discover, memorials of them all have not come to my knowledge, especially of those who went in the direction of Paria, from the year 1495 to the year 1500."

Some writers have sought to "establish an alibi" by showing that Vespucci was in Spain throughout the period which, he says, was passed by him at sea, on this "first" voyage; but they have not been successful in doing so. Some, again, have declared that the narrative of the "four" voyages, beginning in May, 1497, was made up of that on which Vespucci certainly sailed with Ojeda, in May, 1499. "The points of re-

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semblance"—as the reader may see for himself—"are so many and so striking as to seem not only conclusive, but to preclude any other theory," says Alexander Humboldt, who, in his *Examen Critique*, made an exhaustive research into the Vespucci letters. Humboldt completely vindicated the character of Vespucci, leaving no shade of doubt upon his integrity, but he did not unravel the mystery.

How happens it that Vespucci could make a voyage of which no record exists or was ever known to exist? Why did he not mention the names of the fleet's commander? Why do his descriptions of scenery and people so closely resemble those of scenery and people seen on the second voyage? He alludes several times to his forthcoming book, *The Four Voyages (Quattro Giornate)*; but no trace has ever been found of that book, while the fragmentary letters to his "patrons," Soderini and Francesco de Medici, have survived to the present day.

Men of the keenest acumen and perfectly equipped for historical research, such as Humboldt, Irving, and Navarrete, have devoted themselves to the solution of this problem, but without complete success.

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The first and the last named have cleared his name from the aspersions of centuries; the second and third, in their endeavors to magnify Columbus by belittling Vespucci, have not convinced posterity that the Florentine was a liar and a villain. He was neither one nor the other; and that he was far more humane than his friend Columbus has been amply shown in his treatment of the Indians. He and his companions made a few slaves; they attacked the cannibals in behalf of rival natives; but they did not, in their lust for gold, put Indians to the torture, enslave whole tribes and communities, and commit massacres.

Vespucci's character is comparatively free from the stain of blood-guiltiness; from his dealings with men at all times, we infer him upright and honorable; yet he rests under a cloud of suspicion, because that so-called first voyage, which he says he took in 1497-1498, cannot be explained. Suspicion also attaches to his name because it was chosen as an appellation for the New World, which Columbus was the means of revealing to Europe; but for this (as will be shown in a succeeding chapter) he was not accountable.

Professor Fiske, following Vespucci's ardent



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defender, the Viscount Varnhagen, deduces from the vague generalizations in this letter that the voyage was made chiefly along the Honduras, Yucatan, Mexican, and Florida coasts, as far north, perhaps, as Chesapeake Bay. The cannibals attacked by the Spaniards were found, he says, in the Bermudas—where no Indians were ever seen, so far as known, and no cannibals inhabit, save, perhaps, the great Shakespeare's "Caliban." He accounts for the lost voyage by declaring that it may have been taken with Pinzon and Solis, who were said to have been on the coast of Honduras in 1506. There is no certainty as to that date, and the voyage may as well have been made in 1497-1498, as indirectly shown by a passage in Oviedo's history, as follows: "Some persons have attributed the discovery of the bay of Honduras to Don Christopher Columbus, the first admiral; but this is not true, for it was discovered by the pilots Vicente Yañez Pinzon, Juan Diaz de Solis, and Pedro de Ledesma, with three caravels; and that was before Vicente Yañez had discovered the river Amazon."

The Amazon and a portion of the Brazil coast were discovered by Pinzon in January,

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1500; and as the historian has proved to his own satisfaction that the gallant Vicente Yañez was in Spain during the years 1505 and 1506, it is probable that Oviedo is right. It is also probable, or at least possible, that Vespucci was with Pinzon on that Honduras voyage as consulting navigator, having been sent by the king, as he says, to "assist," in his capacity of astronomer and cosmographer. In this capacity, in fact, he went on all his voyages, for he rarely, if ever, held command. Captains, commanders, chief mates, and admirals there might be in plenty, but such a pilot and navigator as Vespucci was hard to find.

It is not unreasonable to presume that they were together, for the one was a skilful sailor, the other a great navigator, and both renowned for their hardihood and daring. King Ferdinand had no more loyal servants than these two, and as they had served him faithfully in their respective professions, the one on land, the other at sea, and inasmuch as both were intimately acquainted with Columbus and his plans, it was like the crafty old king to send them off to scour the seas his exacting "Admiral" claimed to control. Thereafter—whether Pinzon and Vespucci

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sailed together or not—their voyages alternated along the coast of South America, first one and then the other, and in 1505–1506 an expedition was actually projected, in which the king intended both should share. It did not sail, because the Portuguese objected, as its object was the exploration of the Brazilian coast south of the Tropic of Capricorn, to all which the great rivals of the Spaniards then made claim.

A seeming confirmation of this voyage is found in the map Juan de la Cosa made, in the year 1500, after he had been in company with Ojeda and Vespucci to the coast of pearls. He was with Columbus, in 1494, when the Admiral forced all his men to swear that Cuba was, to the best of their belief, part of the Asian continent. Yet, within six years, La Cosa depicts it on his map as an island—and that was before Ocampo had proved it one, by sailing around it, in 1508. It is thought that La Cosa obtained his information as to the insular character of Cuba from Vespucci, when they voyaged together on the coast of Terra Firma, which we now know as the northern shores of South America.

Admitting, still, the critics say, that Ves-

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pucci made the voyage he claimed, with Pinzon or with some one else, in 1497-1498, how does that affect the claim of Columbus? It does not affect it at all, for, though Vespucci may have discovered the continent a few months previous to his rival—and he never put forth the claim that he did so—Columbus, by his voyages of 1492 and 1493, led the way thither. If Vespucci, as some have asserted, claimed to have sailed in 1497, in order to establish a priority of discovery, he did it in a very bungling manner, and at a time when it might easily have been refuted, so many of his companions were then living. Besides, though his name was bestowed upon the newly discovered continent—perhaps as a consequence of the writing of this very letter—it was done without his knowledge and without the remotest suggestion of such a thing from him. This should be made clear: that Amerigo Vespucci had no thought of depriving his friend, Christopher Columbus, of a single leaf of his laurels, hard-won and well-deserved as he knew them to be.

There is no doubt whatever that Vespucci made a voyage in 1499-1500, along with Alonzo de Ojeda and the great pilot Juan

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de la Cosa, but whether this may be styled his first or his second must be left to the intelligence of the reader, for the historians are at odds themselves, and it might seem presumptuous in the biographer to assume to decide. This voyage was narrated by him in the following letter, written within a month of his return, to Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de Medici, of Florence. It is dated, "Seville, July 18, 1500," and has been called by one of his countrymen "the oldest known writing of Amerigo relating to his voyages to the New World." Mr. John Fiske, in *The Discovery of America*, denounces this letter as a forgery; but why, and for what reason it should have been written by another, he does not state.

"MOST EXCELLENT AND DEAR LORD,—It is a long time since I have written to your Excellency, and for no other reason than that nothing has occurred to me worthy of being commemorated. This present letter will inform you that about a month ago I arrived from the Indies, by way of the great ocean, brought by the grace of God safely to this city of Seville. I think your Excellency will be gratified to learn the results of my voyage, and the most surprising things which have been presented to my observation. If I am somewhat tedious, let my letter be read in your

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more idle hours, as fruit is eaten after the cloth is removed from the table.

“You will please to note that, commissioned by his highness the King of Spain, I set out with two small ships, the 18th of May, 1499, on a voyage of discovery to the southwest, by way of the Fortunate Isles, which are now called the Canaries. After having provided ourselves there with all things necessary, first offering our prayers to God, we set sail from an island which is called Gomera, and, turning our prows southwardly, sailed twenty-four days with a fresh wind, without seeing any land. At the end of that time we came within sight of land, and found that we had sailed about thirteen hundred leagues, and were at that distance from the city of Cadiz, in a southwesterly direction. When we saw the land we gave thanks to God, and then launched our boats and, with sixteen men, went to the shore, which we found thickly covered with trees, astonishing both on account of their size and their verdure, for they never lose their foliage. The sweet odors which they exhaled (for they were all aromatic) highly delighted us, and we were rejoiced in regaling our senses.

“We rowed along the shore in the boats to see if we could find any suitable place for landing; but, after toiling from morning till night, we found no way of passage, the land being low and densely covered with trees. We concluded, therefore, to return to the ships and make an attempt to land at some other spot.

“One very remarkable circumstance we observed in these seas, which was that, at fifteen leagues distance from the land, we found the water fresh, like

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that of a river, and we filled all our empty casks with it. Sailing in a southerly direction, still along the coast, we saw two larger rivers issuing from the land; and I think that these two rivers, by reason of their magnitude, caused the freshness of the water in the sea adjoining. Seeing that the coast was invariably low, we determined to enter one of these rivers with the boats, and did so, after furnishing them with provisions for four days, and twenty men well armed. We entered the river and rowed up it nearly two days, making a distance of about eighteen leagues; but we found the low land still continuing and so thickly covered with trees that a bird could scarcely fly through them.

"We saw signs that the inland parts of the country were inhabited; nevertheless, as our vessels were anchored in a dangerous place, in case an adverse wind should arise, at the end of two days we concluded to return. Here we saw an immense number of birds, including parrots in great variety, some crimson in color, others green and lemon, others entirely green, and others again that were black and flesh-colored [these last were probably toucans]. And oh! the songs of other species of birds, so sweet and so melodious, as we heard them among the trees, that we often lingered, listening to their charming music. The trees, too, were so beautiful and smelled so sweetly that we almost imagined ourselves in a terrestrial paradise; yet none of those trees, or the fruit of them, were similar to anything in our part of the world.

"On our way back we saw many people of various descriptions fishing in the river. Having arrived at our ships, we raised anchor and set sail in

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a southerly direction, standing off to sea about forty leagues. While sailing on this course, we encountered a current running from southeast to northwest, so strong and furious that we were put into great fear and were exposed to imminent peril. This current was so strong that the Strait of Gibraltar and that of the Faro of Messina appeared to us like mere stagnant water in comparison with it. We could scarcely make headway against it, though we had the wind fresh and fair; so, seeing that we made no progress, or but very little, we determined to turn our prows to the northwest.<sup>1</sup>

“As, if I remember aright, your Excellency understands something of cosmography, I intend to describe to you our progress in our navigation by the latitude and longitude. We sailed so far to the south that we entered the torrid zone and penetrated the circle of Cancer. . . . Having passed the equinoctial line and sailed six degrees to the south of it, we lost sight of the north star altogether, and even the stars of Ursa Major—or, to speak better, the guardians which revolve about the firmament—were scarcely seen. Very desirous of being the author who should designate the other polar star of the firmament, I lost, many a time, my night’s sleep, while contemplating the movement of the stars about the southern pole. I desired to ascertain which had the least motion, and which might be nearest to the firmament; but I was not able to accomplish it with such poor instru-

<sup>1</sup> The river was the Orinoco, the currents caused by which set with great force in the direction given by Vespucci.



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ments as I used, which were the quadrant and astrolabe. I could not distinguish a star which had less than ten degrees of motion; so that I was not satisfied, within myself, to name any particular one for the pole of the meridian, on account of the large revolution which they all made around the firmament.

"While I was arriving at this conclusion, I recollected a verse of our poet Dante, which may be found in the first chapter of his "Purgatory," where he imagines he is leaving this hemisphere to repair to the other and attempting to describe the antarctic pole, and says:

"To the right hand I turned, and fixed my mind  
On the other pole attentive, where I saw  
Four stars ne'er seen before, save by the ken  
Of our first parents. Heaven of their rays  
Seemed joyous. O! thou northern site, bereft  
Indeed, and widowed, since of these deprived!"

"It seems to me that the poet wished to describe in these verses, by the four stars, the pole of the other firmament, and I have little doubt, even now, that what he says may be true. I observed four stars in the figure of an almond which had but little motion; and if God gives me life and health I hope to go again into that hemisphere and not to return without observing the pole. In conclusion I would remark that we extended our navigation so far south that our difference in latitude from the city of Cadiz was sixty degrees and a half, because, at that city, the pole is elevated thirty-five degrees and a half, and we had passed six degrees beyond the equinoctial line. Let this suffice as to our

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latitude. You must observe that this our navigation was in the months of July, August, and September, when, as you know, the sun is longest above the horizon in our hemisphere and describes the greatest arch in the day and the least in the night. On the contrary, while we were at the equinoctial line, or near it, the difference between the day and night was not perceptible. They were of equal length, or very nearly so. . . .

“It appears to me, most excellent Lorenzo, that by this voyage most of the philosophers are controverted who say that the torrid zone cannot be inhabited on account of the great heat. I have found the case to be quite the contrary. The air is fresher and more temperate in that region than beyond it, and the inhabitants are more numerous here than they are in the other zones, for reasons which will be given below. Thus, it is certain, that practice is more valuable than theory.

“Thus far I have related the navigation I accomplished in the South and West. It now remains for me to inform you of the appearance of the country we discovered, the nature of the inhabitants and their customs, the animals we saw, and of many other things worthy of remembrance which fell under my observation. After we turned our course to the north, the first land we found inhabited was an island at ten degrees distant from the equinoctial line [island of Trinidad]. When we arrived at it we saw on the sea-shore a great many people, who stood looking at us with astonishment.

“We anchored within about a mile of land, fitted out the boats, and twenty-two men, well

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armed, made for the land. The people, when they saw us landing and perceived that we were different from themselves (because they have no beards and wear no clothing of any description, being also of a different color—brown, while we were white), began to be afraid of us and all ran into the woods. With great exertion, by means of signs, we reassured them and found that they were a race called cannibals, the greater part, or all of whom, live on human flesh. Your Excellency may be assured of this fact. They do not eat one another, but, navigating with certain barks which they call canoes, they bring their prey from the neighboring islands or countries inhabited by those who are their enemies, or of a different tribe from their own. They never eat any women, unless they consider them as outcasts. These things we verified in many places where we found similar people. We often saw the bones and heads of those who had been eaten, and they who had made the repast admitted the fact and said that their enemies stood in greater fear of them on that account.

“Still, they are a people of gentle disposition and fine stature, of great activity and much courage. They go entirely naked, and the arms which they carry are rare bows, arrows, and spears, with which they are excellent marksmen. In fine, we held much intercourse with them, and they took us to one of their villages, about two leagues inland, and gave us our breakfast. They gave whatever was asked of them, though I think more through fear than affection; and after having been with them all one day we returned to the ships, sailing along the coasts, and finding another large village of the

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same tribe. We landed in the boats and found they were waiting for us, all loaded with provisions, and they gave us enough to make a very good breakfast, according to their ideas.

“Seeing they were such kind people and treated us so well, we did not take anything from them, but made sail until we arrived at a body of water which is called the Gulf of Paria. We anchored off the mouth of a great river, which causes the gulf to be fresh, and saw a large village close to the sea. We were surprised at the great number of people to be seen there, though they were without weapons and peaceably disposed. We went ashore with the boats, and they received us with great friendship and took us to their houses, where they had made good preparations for a feast. Here they gave us three sorts of wine to drink; not the juice of the grape, but made of fruits, like beer, and they were excellent. Here, also, we ate many fresh acorns, a most royal fruit, and also others, all different from ours, and all of aromatic flavor.

“What was more, they gave us some small pearls and eleven large ones, telling us that if we would wait some days they would go and fish for them and bring us many of the kind. We did not wish to be detained, so, with many parrots of different colors, and in good friendship, we parted from them. From these people it was we learned that those of the before-mentioned island were cannibals and ate human flesh. We issued from the gulf and sailed along the coast, seeing continually great numbers of people; and when we were so disposed we treated with them, and they gave us everything we desired. They all go as naked as

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they were born, without being ashamed, and if all were related concerning the little shame they have it would be bordering on impropriety, therefore it is better to suppress it.

"After having sailed about four hundred leagues, continually along the coast, we concluded that this land was a continent, which might be bounded by the eastern parts of Asia, this being the commencement of the western parts of the continent, because it happened that we saw divers animals, such as lions, stags, goats, wild hogs, rabbits, and other land animals which are not found in islands, but only on the main-land. Going inland one day with twenty men, we saw a serpent all of twenty-four feet in length and as large in girth as myself. We were very much afraid, and the sight of it caused us to return immediately to the sea. Ofttimes, indeed, I saw many ferocious animals and enormous serpents. When we had navigated four hundred leagues along the coast, we began to find people who did not wish for our friendship, but stood waiting for us with their bows and arrows. When we went ashore they disputed our landing in such a manner that we were obliged to fight them, and at the end of the battle they found they had the worst of it, for, as they were naked, we always made great slaughter. Many times not more than sixteen of us fought with no less than two thousand, in the end defeating them, killing many, and plundering their houses.

"One day we saw a great crowd of savages, all posted in battle array, to prevent our landing. We fitted out twenty-six men, well armed, and covered the boats on account of the arrows which

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were shot at us and which always wounded some before we landed. After they had hindered us as long as they could, we leaped on shore and fought a hard battle with them. The reason why they had so much courage and made such great exertion against us was that they did not know what kind of a weapon the sword was, or how it cuts! So great was the multitude of people who charged upon us, discharging at us such a cloud of arrows that we could not withstand the assault, and, nearly abandoning the hope of life, we turned our backs and ran for the boats. While thus disheartened and flying, one of our sailors, a Portuguese, who had remained to guard the boats, seeing the danger we were in, leaped on shore and with a loud voice called out to us: 'Face to the enemy, sons, and God will give you the victory!' Throwing himself upon his knees, he made a prayer, then rushed furiously upon the savages, and we all joined him, wounded as we were. On that they turned their backs and began to flee; and finally we routed them, killing more than a hundred and fifty. We burned their houses also—at least one hundred and eighty in number. Then, as we were badly wounded and weary, we went into a harbor to recruit, where we stayed twenty days, solely that the physician might cure us. All escaped save one, who was wounded in the left breast and died.

"After we were cured we recommenced our navigation; and through the same cause we were often obliged to fight with a great many people, and always had the victory over them. Thus continuing our voyage, we came to an island fifteen leagues distant from the main-land. As at our

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arrival we saw no collection of people, eleven of us landed. Finding a path inland, we walked nearly two leagues and came to a village of about twelve houses, in which were seven women who were so large that there was not one among them who was not a span and a half taller than myself. When they saw us they were very much frightened, and the principal one among them, who seemed certainly a discreet woman, led us by signs into a house and had refreshments prepared for us. They were such large women that we were about determining to carry off two of the younger ones as a present to our king; but while we were debating this subject, thirty-six men entered the hut where we were drinking. They were of such great stature that each one was taller when upon his knees than I when standing erect. In fact, they were giants; each of the women appeared a Penthesilia, and the men Antei. When they came in, some of our number were so frightened that they did not consider themselves safe, for they were armed with very large bows and arrows, besides immense clubs made in the form of swords. Seeing that we were small of stature they began to converse with us, in order to learn who we were and from what parts we came. We gave them fair words, and answered them, by signs, that we were men of peace and intent only upon seeing the world. Finally, we held it our wisest course to part from them without questioning in our turn; so we returned by the same path in which we had come—they accompanying us quite to the sea-shore, till we went aboard the ships.

“Nearly half the trees on this island are of dye-

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woods, as good as any from the East. Going from this island to another in the vicinity, at ten leagues distance, we found a very large village, the houses of which were built over the sea, like those of Venice, with much ingenuity. While we were struck with admiration at this circumstance, we determined to go to see them; and as we went into their houses the people owning them attempted to prevent us. They found out at last the sharpness of our swords, and thought it best to let us enter. Then we found these houses filled with the finest cotton, and the beams of their dwellings are made of dye-woods. In all the parts where we landed we found a great quantity of cotton, and the country filled with cotton-trees. All the vessels of the world, in fact, might be laden in these parts with cotton and dye-wood.

“We sailed three hundred leagues farther along this coast, constantly finding savage but brave people, and very often fighting with and vanquishing them. We found seven different languages among them, each of which was not understood by those who spoke the others. It is said that there are not more than seventy-seven languages in the world; but I say that there are *more than a thousand*, as there are more than forty which I have heard myself. After having sailed seven hundred leagues or more our ships became leaky, so that we could hardly keep them free, with two pumps going. The men also were much fatigued, and the provisions growing short. We were then within a hundred and twenty leagues of the island called Hispaniola, discovered by the Admiral Columbus six [eight] years before. So we determined to pro-



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ceed to it and, as it was inhabited by Christians, to repair our ships there, allow our men a little repose, and recruit our stock of provisions; because, from this island to Castile there are three hundred leagues of ocean, without any land intervening. In seven days we arrived at this island, where we stayed two months, refitted our ships, and obtained a supply of provisions.

"We afterwards sailed through a shoal of islands, more than a thousand in number. We sailed in this sea nearly two hundred leagues, directly north, until our people had become worn with fatigue, through having been already nearly a year at sea. Their allowance per diem was only six ounces of bread for eating, and three small measures of water for drinking. Whereupon we concluded to take some prisoners as slaves, and loading the ships with them to return at once to Spain. Going, therefore, to certain islands, we possessed ourselves by force of two hundred and thirty-two, and then steered our course for Castile. In sixty-seven days we crossed the ocean, arriving at the Azores, thence sailed by way of the Canary Islands and the Madeiras to Cadiz.

"We were absent thirteen months on this voyage, exposing ourselves to awful dangers, discovering a very large country of Asia, and a great many islands, the largest of them all inhabited. According to the calculations I have made with the compass, we have sailed about five thousand leagues. . . . We discovered immense regions, saw a vast number of people, all naked, and speaking various languages, numerous wild animals, various kinds of birds, and an infinite quantity of trees, all

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aromatic. We brought home pearls in their growing state, and gold in the grain; we brought two stones, one of emerald color, the other of amethyst, which was very hard, at least half a span long, and three fingers thick. The sovereigns esteem them most highly and have preserved them among their jewels. We brought home also a piece of crystal, which some jewelers say is beryl, and, according to what the Indians told us, they had a great quantity of the same. We brought fourteen flesh-colored pearls, with which the queen was highly delighted. We brought many other stones which appeared beautiful to us; but of all these we did not bring a large number, as we were continually busied in our investigations and did not tarry long in any place.

“When we arrived at Cadiz we sold many slaves, two hundred then remaining to us, the others having died at sea. After deducting the expense of transportation we gained only about five hundred ducats, which, having to be divided into fifty-five parts, made the share of each very small. However, we contented ourselves with life, and rendered thanks to God that during the whole voyage, out of fifty-seven Christian men, which was our number, only two had died, they having been killed by Indians. I have had two quartan agues since my return; but I hope, by the favor of God, to be well soon, as they do not continue long now and are without chills. I have passed over many things worthy of being remembered, in order not to be more tedious than necessary, all of which are reserved for the pen, and in the memory,

“They are fitting out three ships for me here,

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that I may go on a new voyage of discovery, and I think they will be ready by the middle of September. May it please our Lord to give me health and a good voyage, as I hope again to bring very great news and discover the island of Trapobana, which is between the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Ganges. Afterwards I intend to return to my country and seek repose in the days of my old age. . . . I have resolved, most excellent Lorenzo, that as I have thus given you an account by letter of what has occurred to me, to send you two plans and descriptions of the world, made and arranged by my own hand and skill. There will be a map on a plain surface, and the other a view of the world in a spherical form, which I intend to send you by sea, in care of one Francesco Lotti, a Florentine, who is here. I think you will be pleased with them, particularly the globe, as I made one, not long since, for these sovereigns, and they esteem it highly. I could have wished to come with them personally; but my new departure for making other discoveries will not permit me that great pleasure. . . .

"I suppose your excellency has heard the news brought by the fleet which the King of Portugal sent two years ago to make discoveries on the coast of Guinea. I do not call such a voyage as that one of discovery, but only a visit to discovered lands; because, as you will see by the map, their navigation was continually within sight of land, and they sailed round the whole southern part of the continent of Africa, which is proceeding by a way spoken of by all cosmographical authors. It is true that the navigation has been very profit-

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able, which is a matter of great consideration here in this kingdom, where inordinate covetousness reigns.

"I understand they passed from the Red Sea and extended their voyage into the Persian Gulf, to a city called Calicut, which is situated between the Persian Gulf and the river Indus. More lately, the King of Portugal has received from sea twelve ships very richly laden, and he has sent them again to those parts, where they will certainly do a profitable business, if they arrive in safety.

"May our Lord preserve and increase the exalted state of your excellency, as I desire.

"AMERIGO VESPUCCI.

"*July 18th, 1500.*"

Respecting the letter in which the so-called first voyage is described, the same great authority, Mr. Fiske, from whom we have already quoted, says: "The perplexity surrounding the account of the first voyage of Vespucius is chiefly due to the lack of intelligence with which it has been read. There is no reason for imagining dishonesty in his narrative, and no reason for not admitting it as evidence on the same terms upon which we admit other contemporary documents." Perhaps we may be allowed to claim the same privilege for the foregoing letter; yet another historian, the amiable biographer of Columbus, Mr. Irving, while

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freely quoting from it, in his account of the voyage made with Alonzo de Ojeda, by imputation discredits it, and loses no occasion to disparage its author.

In order that nothing may be lacking, for the purpose of forming an accurate estimate of Vespucci's character and doings, Mr. Irving's account of the Ojeda voyage, somewhat condensed, is presented in the succeeding chapter. In constructing this story he, to use his own words, "collated the narratives of Vespucci, Las Casas, Herrera, and Peter Martyr, and the evidence given in the lawsuit of Diego Columbus, and has endeavored as much as possible to reconcile them." That he did not altogether succeed is the opinion of Mr. Fiske, who says, rather caustically, that "from its mixing the first and second voyages of Vespucci [the account] is so full of blunders as to be worse than worthless to the general reader."

However this may be, the story is interesting, and in a sense valuable, as it corroborates the statements of one to whom Mr. Irving was not favorably inclined.

## VIII

### WITH OJEDA THE FIGHTER

1499

THOSE who have read the *History of Columbus* will doubtless remember the character and exploits of Alonzo de Ojeda. He was about twenty-one years of age when he accompanied Columbus on his second voyage (1493); he had, however, already distinguished himself by his enterprising spirit and headlong valor, and his exploits during that voyage contributed to enhance his reputation. He returned to Spain with the Admiral, but did not go with him on his third voyage, in 1498. He had a cousin-german of his own name, Padre Alonzo de Ojeda, a Dominican friar, who was a great favorite with the Spanish sovereigns, and on intimate terms with Don Juan Rodriguez Fonseca, who had the chief management of affairs in the Indies.

Through the good offices of this cousin,

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young Alonzo was introduced to Fonseca, to whose especial favor and patronage he was warmly recommended. While Ojeda was lingering about the court, letters were received from Columbus giving an account of the events of his third (1498) voyage, accompanied by charts descriptive of his route, specimens of pearls, gold, etc., in order to impress the sovereigns with the great value of his most recent discovery. The Admiral had good and sufficient reasons for making the most of this discovery, as his enemies in Spain and in the West Indies were seeking to belittle his great deeds, hence his indiscretion in placing the proofs of his achievement in the hands of his implacable foe, Bishop Fonseca. He could not return at that time, owing to the terrible condition of affairs in Hispaniola, which demanded his continued presence there—as narrated in his *Life*.

The tidings he sent caused a great sensation among the maritime adventurers of Spain; but no one was more excited by them than Alonzo de Ojeda, who, from his intimacy with Fonseca, had full access to the charts and correspondence of Columbus, and who immediately conceived the project

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of making a voyage in the route thus marked out by the Admiral, and of seizing upon the first fruits of discovery which he had left ungathered. This scheme met with ready encouragement from Fonseca, who, as has heretofore been shown, was opposed to Columbus and willing to promote any measure that might injure or molest him. The bishop accordingly granted a commission to Ojeda, authorizing him to fit out an armament and proceed on a voyage of discovery, with the proviso merely that he should not visit any territories appertaining to Portugal, or any of the lands discovered in the name of Spain previous to the year 1495. The latter part of this provision appears to have been craftily worded by the bishop, so as to leave the coast of Paria and its pearl fisheries open to Ojeda, they having been recently discovered by Columbus in 1498.

The commission was signed by Fonseca alone, in virtue of general powers vested in him for such purposes; but the signature of the sovereigns did not appear on the instrument, and it is doubtful whether their sanction was sought on the occasion. He knew that Columbus had recently remon-



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strated against a royal mandate issued in 1495, permitting voyages of discovery by private adventurers, and that the sovereigns had in consequence revoked that mandate wherever it might be deemed prejudicial to the stipulated privileges of the Admiral. . . . Having thus obtained permission to make the voyage, the next consideration with Ojeda was to find the means. He was a young adventurer, a mere soldier of fortune, and destitute of wealth; but he had a high reputation for courage and enterprise, and hence had no difficulty in finding moneyed associates among the rich merchants of Seville, who, in that age of discovery, were ever ready to stake their property upon the schemes of roving navigators. With such assistance he soon equipped a squadron of four vessels, at Port St. Mary, opposite Cadiz.

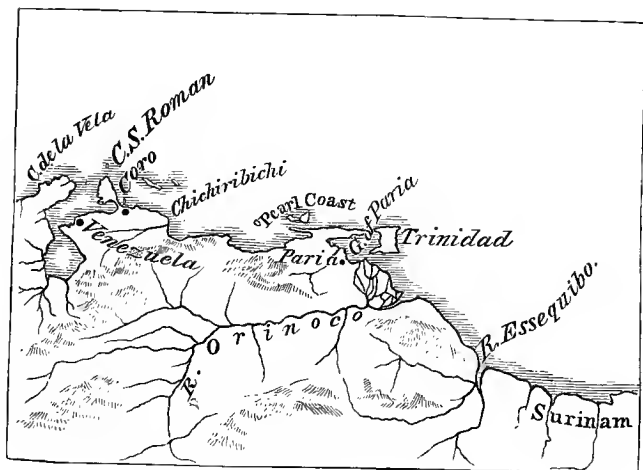
Among the seamen who engaged with him were several who had just returned from accompanying Columbus in his voyage to this very coast of Paria. The principal associate of Ojeda, and one on whom he placed great reliance, was Juan de la Cosa, who went with him as first mate, or, as it was termed, chief pilot. This was a bold Biscayan who may be regarded as a disciple

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of Columbus, with whom he had sailed on his second voyage, when he coasted Cuba and Jamaica, and he had also accompanied Rodrigo de Bastidas, in his expedition along the coast of Terra Firma. The hardy veteran was looked up to by his contemporaries as an oracle of the seas, and was pronounced one of the most able mariners of the day. He may be excused, therefore, if in his harmless vanity he considered himself on a par even with Columbus.

Another conspicuous associate of Ojeda on this voyage was Amerigo Vespucci, *a Florentine merchant, induced by broken fortunes and a rambling disposition to seek adventures in the New World.* Whether he had any pecuniary interest in the expedition, and in what capacity he sailed, does not appear. His importance has entirely arisen from subsequent circumstances—from his having written and published a narrative of his voyages, and from his name having eventually been given to the New World.

Ojeda sailed from Port St. Mary on May 20, 1499, and, having touched for supplies at the Canaries, took a departure from Gomera, pursuing the route of Columbus in his third voyage, being guided by the



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chart he had sent home, as well as by the mariners who had accompanied him on that occasion. At the end of twenty-four days he reached the continent of the New World, about two hundred leagues farther south than the part discovered by Columbus, being, as it is supposed, on the coast of Surinam. Hence he ran along the coast to the Gulf of Paria, passing the mouths of many rivers, but especially those of the Esquivo and the Orinoco. These, to the astonishment of the Spaniards, unaccustomed as yet to the mighty rivers of the New World, poured forth such a prodigious volume of water as to freshen the sea for a great extent. They beheld none of the natives until they arrived at the island of Trinidad, on which island they met with traces of the recent visit of Columbus. Vespucci, in his letters, gives a long description of the people of this island and of the coast of Paria, who were of the Carib race, tall, well-made, and vigorous, and expert with the bow, the lance, and the buckler. His description in general resembles those which have frequently been given of the aboriginals of the New World; there are two or three particulars, however, worthy of citation. [Here follows the narra-

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tive of Vespucci, as given in the preceding chapters, pages 82-124.]

After touching at various parts of Trinidad and the Gulf of Paria, Ojeda passed through the strait of the Boca del Drago, or Dragon's Mouth, which Columbus had found so formidable, and then steered his course along the coast of Terra Firma, landing occasionally until he arrived at Curiana, or the Gulf of Pearls. From hence he stood to the opposite island of Margarita, previously discovered by Columbus, and since renowned for its pearl fishery. This, as well as several adjacent islands, he visited and explored, after which he returned to the main-land, and touched at Cumana and *Maracapana*, where he found the rivers infested with alligators resembling the crocodiles of the Nile. Finding a convenient harbor at *Maracapana*, he unloaded and careened his vessels there, and built a small brigantine. The natives came to him in great numbers, bringing abundance of venison, fish, and cassava bread, and aiding the seamen in their labors. Their hospitality was not certainly disinterested, for they sought to gain the protection of the Spaniards, whom they revered as superhuman beings.

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When they thought they had sufficiently secured their favor, they represented to Ojeda that their coast was subject to invasion from a distant island, the inhabitants of which were cannibals, and carried their people into captivity, to be devoured at their unnatural banquets. They besought Ojeda, therefore, to avenge them upon these ferocious enemies. The request was gratifying to the fighting propensities of Alonzo de Ojeda, and to his love of adventure, and was readily granted. Taking seven of the natives on board of his vessels, therefore, as guides, he set sail in quest of the cannibals. After sailing for seven days he came to a chain of islands, some of which were peopled, others uninhabited, and which are supposed to have been the Caribbee Islands. [Then ensues Vespucci's account of the fight, with the substitution of Ojeda as captain in command.]

His crew being refreshed, and the wounded sufficiently recovered, Ojeda made sail and touched at the island of Curaçao, which, according to the accounts of Vespucci, was inhabited by a race of giants, "every woman appearing a Penthesilia, and every man an Antei." As Vespucci was a scholar, and as

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he supposed himself exploring the regions of the extreme East, the ancient realm of fable, it is probable his imagination deceived him, and construed the formidable accounts given by the Indians of their cannibal neighbors of the islands into something according with his recollections of classic fable. Certain it is that the reports of subsequent voyagers proved the inhabitants of the island to be of the ordinary size.

Proceeding along the coast, he arrived at a vast, deep gulf, resembling a tranquil lake, entering which he beheld, on the eastern side, a village, the construction of which struck him with surprise. It consisted of twenty large houses, shaped like bells, and built on piles driven into the bottom of the lake, which in this part was limpid and of but little depth. Each house was provided with a draw-bridge, and with canoes, by which the communication was carried on. From these resemblances to the Italian city, Ojeda gave to the bay the name of the Gulf of Venice, and it is called at the present day Venezuela, or Little Venice. The Indian name was *Coquibacoa*. [In this connection Irving quotes freely from Vespucci's account of the Lake Dwellers, and also gives



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entire his description of the Spaniards' entertainment by Indians of the interior.]

Continuing to explore this gulf, Ojeda penetrated to a port or harbor, to which he gave the name of St. Bartholomew, supposed to be the same at present known by the original Indian name of *Maracaibo*. . . . The Spaniards brought away with them several of the beautiful and hospitable females of this place, one of whom, named by them Isabel, was much prized by Ojeda, and accompanied him on a subsequent voyage. Leaving the friendly port of Coquibacoa, Ojeda continued along the western shores of the Venezuelan gulf, and standing out to sea, doubling Cape Maracaibo, he pursued his voyage from port to port, and promontory to promontory, of this unknown continent, until he reached that long stretching headland called Cape de la Vela, or Cape of the Sail. There the state of his vessels—and perhaps the disappointment of his hopes at not meeting with abundant sources of immediate wealth—induced him to abandon all further voyaging along the coast, and, changing his course, he stood across the Caribbean Sea for Hispaniola. The tenor of his commission forbade his visiting that

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island; but Ojeda was not a man to stand upon trifles when his interests or inclinations prompted him to the contrary. He trusted to excuse the infraction of his orders by the alleged necessity of touching at the island to calk and refit his vessels and to procure provisions; but his true object is supposed to have been to cut dye-wood, which abounds in Hispaniola.

Columbus, at that time, held command of the island, and, hearing of this unlicensed intrusion, despatched Francesco Roldan, the quondam rebel, to call Ojeda to account. The contest of stratagem and management that took place between these two adroit and daring adventurers has already been detailed. Roldan was eventually successful, and Ojeda, being obliged to leave Hispaniola, resumed his rambling voyage. He at length arrived at Cadiz, in June, 1500, his ships crowded with captives, whom he sold as slaves. So meagre, however, was the result of this expedition that we are told [by Vespucci] that when all the expenses were deducted but five hundred ducats remained to be divided between fifty-five adventurers. What made this result the more mortifying was that a petty armament, which had sailed some time after

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that of Ojeda, had returned two months before him rich with the spoils of the New World.

The successful armament alluded to was that of Pedro Niño, who had sailed with Columbus on his first voyage and on his third. With a caravel of only fifty tons, and a crew of thirty-three men, he sailed from Palos in June, 1499, returning in April, 1500, with a richer cargo of pearls than any other that had been brought from the new country. He had steered directly for the Pearl Coast, and at or near Cumana and Margarita, had amassed a fortune from the sea.

In this connection it should be mentioned, that the country adjacent to the Pearl Coast, opposite Cumana, was known to the natives as *Amaraca-pan*; that the name *Amaraca* occurs frequently in this region, as (*A*)*mar-acai-bo*, the great gulf where the Lake-Dwellers live. It is regarded only as a coincidence that a name so nearly like that which was bestowed upon the continent by Europeans should be found applied to portions of that continent by the aborigines; but some enthusiasts have undertaken to show that it was from this native appellation the cartographers and cosmographers derived the first "America" placed upon the maps.

## IX

### CANNIBALS, GIANTS, AND PEARLS

1499-1500

BESIDES the letter written by Vespucci to Lorenzo de Medici, he sent an account of the second voyage to his friend Soderini, in which are some incidents not mentioned in the first, with very little repetition of others. He wrote:

“ We set out from the port of Cadiz, three ships in company, on the 18th of May, and steered directly for the Cape de Verdes, passing within sight of the Grand Canary, and soon arriving at an island called De Fuego, or Fire Island, whence, having taken wood and water, we proceeded on our voyage to the southwest. In forty-four days we arrived at a new land, which we judged to be a continent, and a continuation of that mentioned in my former voyage. It was situated within the torrid zone, south of the equinoctial line, where the south pole is elevated five degrees and distant from said island, bearing south, about five hundred leagues. Here we found the days and nights

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equal on the 27th of June, when the sun is near the tropic of Cancer.

“We did not see any people here, and, having anchored our ships and cast off our boats, we proceeded to the land, which we found to be inundated by very large rivers. We attempted to enter these at many points, but from the immense quantity of water brought down by them we could find no place, after hard toiling, that was not overflowed. We saw many signs of the country's being inhabited, but as we were unable to enter it we concluded to return to the ships and make the attempt on some other part of the coast. We raised our anchors accordingly, and sailed along southeast by east, continually coasting the land which ran in that direction. We found the currents so strong on this part of the coast that they actually obstructed our sailing, and they all ran from the southeast to the northwest. Seeing our navigation was attended with so many inconveniences, we concluded to turn our course to the northwest; and having sailed some time in this direction we arrived at a very beautiful harbor, which was made by a large island at the entrance, inside of which was a very large bay. While sailing along parallel with the island with a view of entering the harbor, we saw many people on shore, and, being much cheered, we manœuvred our ships for the purpose of anchoring and landing where they appeared. We might have been then about four leagues out at sea. While proceeding on our course for this purpose, we saw a canoe quite out at sea, in which were several natives, and made sail on our ships in order to come up with and take

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possession of them, steering so as not to run them down. We saw that they stood with their oars raised—I think either through astonishment at beholding our ships, or by way of giving us to understand that they meant to wait for and resist us; but as we neared them they dropped the oars and began to row towards the land.

“Having in our fleet a small vessel of forty-five tons, a very fast sailer, she took a favorable wind and bore down for the canoe. When the people in it found themselves embarrassed between the schooner and the boats we had lowered for the purpose of pursuing them, they all jumped into the sea, being about twenty men, and at the distance of two leagues from the shore. We followed them the whole day with our boats, and could only take two, which was for them an extraordinary feat; all the rest escaped to the shore. Four boys remained in the canoe who were not of their tribe, but had been taken prisoners by them, and brought from another country. We were much surprised at the gross injuries they had inflicted upon these boys, and, having been taken on board the ships, they told us they had been captured in order to be eaten. Accordingly, we knew that those people were cannibals, who eat human flesh.

“We proceeded with the ships, taking the canoe with us astern, and following the course which they pursued, anchored at half a league from the shore. As we saw many people on the shore, we landed in the boats, carrying with us the two men we had taken. When we reached the beach all the people fled into the woods, and we sent one of the men to negotiate with them, giving them several trifles as

## CANNIBALS, GIANTS, AND PEARLS

tokens of friendship—such as little bells, buttons, and looking-glasses—and telling them that we wished to be their friends. He brought the people all back with him, of whom there were about four hundred men and many women, who came unarmed to the place where we lay with the boats. Having established friendship with them, we surrendered the other prisoner and sent to the ships for the canoe, which we restored. This canoe was twenty-six yards long and six feet wide, made out of a single tree and very well wrought. When they had carried it into a river near by, and put it in a secure place, they all fled, and would have nothing more to do with us, which appeared to us a very barbarous act, and we judged them to be a faithless and evil-disposed people. We saw among them a little gold, which they wore in their ears.

“Leaving this place, we sailed about eighty leagues along the coast and entered a bay, where we found a surprising number of people, with whom we formed a friendship. Many of us went to their village, in great safety, and were received with much courtesy and confidence. In this place we procured a hundred and fifty pearls (as they sold them to us for a trifle) and some little gold, which they gave us gratuitously. We noticed that in this country they drank wine made of their fruits and seeds, which looked like beer, both white and red; the best was made from acorns, and was very good. We ate a great many of these acorns and found them a very good fruit, savory to the taste and healthy to the body. The country abounded with means of nourishment, and the people were well disposed and pacific.

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“We remained at this port seventeen days, with great pleasure, and every day some new tribe of people came to see us from inland parts of the country, who were greatly surprised at our figures, at the whiteness of our skins, at our clothes, at our arms, and the form and size of our ships. We were informed by them of the existence of another tribe, still farther west, who were their enemies, and that they had great quantities of pearls. They said that those which they had in their possession were some they had taken from this other tribe in war. They told us how they fished for pearls, and in what manner they grew, and we found that they told us the truth—as your excellency shall hear.

“Sailing along the coast again, and finding an island about fifteen leagues from it at sea, we resolved to see if it were inhabited. We found on this island the most bestial and filthy people that were ever seen, but at the same time extremely pacific, so that I am able to describe their habits and customs. Their manners and their faces were filthy, and they all had their cheeks stuffed full of a green herb which they were continually chewing, as beasts chew the cud, so that they were scarcely able to speak. Each one of them wore, hanging at the neck, two dried gourd-shells, one of which was filled with the same kind of herb they had in their mouths, and the other with a white meal, which appeared to be chalk-dust. They also carried with them a small stick, which they wetted in their mouths from time to time and then put in the meal, afterwards putting it into the herb with which both cheeks were filled, and mixing the meal with it. We were surprised at their conduct,



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and could not understand for what purpose they indulged in the strange practice.

“As soon as these people saw us, they came to us with as much familiarity as if we had been old friends. Walking with them along the shore, and wishing to find some fresh water to drink, they made us to understand by signs that they had none, and offered us some of their herbs and meal; hence we concluded that water was very scarce in this island, and that they kept these herbs in their mouth in order to allay their thirst. We walked about the island a day and a half without finding any living water, and noticed that all they had to drink was the dew which fell in the night upon certain leaves that looked like asses' ears. These leaves being filled with dew-water the islanders use it for their drink, and most excellent water it was; but there were many places where the leaves were not to be found.

They had no victuals or roots, such as we found on the main-land, but lived on fish, which they caught in the sea, of which there was an abundance, and they were very expert fishermen. They presented us with many turtles, and many large and very good fish. The women did not chew the herb as the men did, but carried a gourd with water in it, of which they drank. They had no villages, houses, or cottages, except some arbors which defended them from the sun, but not from the rain; this appearing needless, for I think it very seldom rained on that island. When they were fishing out at sea, they each wore on the head a very large leaf, so broad that they were covered by its shade. They fixed these leaves also in the ground on shore, and

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as the sun moved turned them about, so as to keep within the shadow. The island contained many animals of various kinds, all of which drank the muddy water of the marshes.

“Seeing there was no gain in staying there, we left and went to another island, which we found inhabited by people of very large stature. Going into the country in search of fresh water, without thinking the island inhabited (as we saw no people), as we were passing along the shore we remarked very large footprints on the sands. We concluded that if the other members corresponded with the feet they must be very large men. While occupied with these conjectures, we struck a path which led us inland, and after we had gone about a league we saw in a valley five huts or cottages which appeared to be inhabited. On going to them we found only five women, two quite old, and three girls, all so tall in stature that we regarded them with astonishment. When they saw us they became so frightened that they had not even courage to flee, and the two old women began to invite us into the huts, and to bring us many things to eat, with many signs of friendship. They were taller than a tall man, and as large-bodied as Francisco of Albizzi, but better proportioned than we are. While we were consulting as to the expediency of taking the three girls by force and bringing them to Castile to exhibit as wonders, there entered the door of the hut thirty-six men, much larger than the women, and so well made that it was a pleasure to look at them. They put us in such perturbation, however, that we would much rather have been in the ships than have found ourselves with such

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people. They carried immense bows and arrows, and large-headed clubs, and talked among themselves in a tone which led us to think they were deliberating about attacking us.

"Seeing we were in such danger, we formed various opinions on the subject. Some were for falling upon them in the hut, others thought it would be better to attack them in the field, and others that we should not commence the strife until we saw what they wished to do. We agreed, at length, to go out of the hut and take our way quietly to the ships. As soon as we did this they followed at a stone's-throw behind us, talking earnestly among themselves, and I think no less afraid of us than we were of them; for whenever we stopped they did the same, never coming nearer to us. In this way we at length arrived at the shore, where the boats were waiting for us. We entered them, and as we were going off in the distance they leaped forward and shot many arrows after us; but we had little fear of them now. We discharged two arquebuses at them, but more to frighten them than injure, and on hearing the report they all fled to the mountain. Thus we parted from them, and it appeared to us that we had escaped a perilous day's work. These people were quite naked, like the others we had seen, and on account of their large stature I called this island the Island of Giants. We proceeded onward in a direction parallel with the main-land, on which it happened that we were frequently obliged to fight with the people, who were not willing to let us take anything away.

"When we had been at sea about a year, our

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minds were fully prepared for returning to Castile, as we had then but little provision left, and that little damaged, in consequence of the great heat through which we had passed. From the time we left Cape de Verde until then we had been sailing continually in the torrid zone, having twice crossed the equinoctial line (as before stated), having been five degrees beyond it to the south, and then fifteen degrees north of it. Being thus disposed for our return, it pleased the Holy Spirit to give us some repose from our great labors.

“Going in search of a harbor, in order to repair our ships, we fell in with a people who received us with friendship, and we found that they had a great quantity of Oriental pearls, which were very good. We remained with them forty-seven days and procured from them one hundred and nineteen marks of pearls, in exchange for mere trifles of our merchandise, which I think did not cost us the value of forty ducats. We gave them nothing whatever but bells, looking-glasses, beads, and brass plates; for a bell one would give all he had.

“We learned from them how and where they fished for these pearls, and they gave us many oysters in which they grew. We procured one oyster in which a hundred and thirty pearls were growing, but in others there were less number. The one with the hundred and thirty the queen took from me, but the others I kept to myself, that she might not see them. Your excellency must know that if the pearls are not ripe and loose in the shell they do not last, because they are soon spoiled. Of this I have seen many examples. When they are ripe they are loose in the oyster, mingled with

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the flesh, and then are good. Even the bad ones which they had, which for the most part were rough, were nevertheless worth a considerable sum.

“At the end of forty-seven days we left these people, in great friendship with us, and from the want of provisions went to the island of Antilla [meaning Hispaniola], which was discovered some years before by Christopher Columbus. Here we obtained many supplies and stayed two months and seventeen days. We passed through many dangers and troubles with the Christians, who were settled in this island with Columbus (I think through their envy), the relation of which, in order not to be tedious, I omit. We left there on the 22d of April, and, after sailing a month and a half, entered the port of Cadiz, where we were received with much honor on the 8th day of June. Thus terminated, by the favor of God, my second voyage.”

## X

### FAMOUS FELLOW-VOYAGERS

1497-1500

THOUGH Amerigo Vespucci was on occasions intimately associated with Christopher Columbus, conversed with him, corresponded, and had much to do with the outfitting of his ships, it cannot be shown that the two ever went on a voyage together. Some have asserted that the Florentine accompanied the Genoese on his second voyage, in 1493, but such is not the case. From the friendship that existed between the two, it would doubtless have been gratifying to both could they have explored the New World in company, for each was a complement of the other, and much might have resulted from their conjoined efforts.

Still, while the great Admiral himself was not favored by the presence of Vespucci on any of his voyages, it chanced that several of those who were with him at different times

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afterwards accompanied his rival, either as captains or pilots of his expeditions. Notable among these was Vicente Yañez Pinzon, one of the noble family that came to the rescue of Columbus when in straits at Palos, and furnished the funds with which the impecunious navigator provided and equipped the vessel he had promised his sovereigns to contribute. The Pinzons actually provided and manned this vessel, the *Niña*, though Columbus had the credit of it, and Vicente Yañez was its captain throughout the first voyage to America, in 1492-1493.

The eldest of the three brothers, who "risked their lives and fortunes with Columbus in his doubtful enterprise," the first voyage to the unknown hemisphere, was Martin Alonzo, who commanded the *Pinta*. He ran counter to the commands of Columbus when off the coast of Cuba, and as a result fell into disgrace with the Spanish sovereigns, and died of chagrin soon after the first voyage was over. Columbus seemed to consider himself released from any obligations to the Pinzons, owing to the defection of Martin Alonzo, and they never received a single maravedi for their assistance at the most critical juncture of the Ad-

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miral's fortunes. As captain of the *Niña*, Vicente Yañez, the younger brother, stood by Columbus loyally, all through the voyage, and after the wreck of the flag-ship, off the north coast of Haiti, took his commander aboard the little caravel and brought him safely back to Spain.

He seems to have received no recognition from Columbus, either for his pecuniary aid or loyal support to him in time of disaster, and after the voyage was accomplished he sank out of sight for a while, to emerge again in 1494 or 1495. About that time, says a learned historian, "Ferdinand and Isabella began to feel somewhat disappointed at the meagre results obtained by Columbus. The wealth of Cathay and Cipango had not been found; the colonists who had expected to meet with pearls and gold growing on bushes were sick and angry; Friar Boyle was preaching that the Admiral was a humbug, and the expensive work of discovery was going on at a snail's pace. Meanwhile, Vicente Yañez Pinzon and other bold spirits were grumbling at the monopoly granted to Columbus, and begging to be allowed to make ventures themselves.

"Now, in this connection, several docu-



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ments preserved in the archives of the Indies at Seville are very significant. On April 9, 1495, the sovereigns issued their letter of credentials to Juan Aguado, whom they were about sending to Hispaniola to inquire into the charges against Columbus. On that very day they signed the contract with Berardi [Vespucci's partner], whereby the latter bound himself to furnish twelve vessels, four to be ready at once, four in June, and four in September. On the next day they issued the decree throwing open the navigation to the Indies and granting to all native Spaniards, on certain prescribed conditions, the privilege of making voyages to the newly found coasts.

“On the 12th they instructed Fonseca to put Aguado in command of the first four caravels, . . . and it started off in August. The second squadron of four, which was to have been ready in June, was not yet fully equipped in December, when Berardi died. Then Vespucci, representing the house of Berardi, took up the work, and sent the four caravels to sea February 3, 1496. They were only two days out when a frightful storm overtook and wrecked them, though most of the crews were saved. The third

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squadron of four caravels was, I believe, that which finally sailed May 10, 1497. While it was getting ready, Vicente Yañez Pinzon returned from the Levant, whither he had been sent on important business by the sovereigns in December, 1495. Columbus, who had returned to Spain in June, 1496, protested against what he considered an invasion of his monopoly, and on June 2, 1497, the sovereigns issued a decree which for the moment was practically equivalent to a revocation of the general license accorded to navigators by the decree of April 10, 1495. Observe that this revocation was not issued until after the third squadron had sailed. The sovereigns were not going to be balked in the little scheme which they had set on foot two years before, and for which they had paid out, through Vespucci, so many thousand maravedis. So the expedition sailed, with Pinzon chief in command and Solis second; with Ledesma for one of the pilots, and Vespucci as pilot and cosmographer."

In the foregoing the historian accounts for the sailing of Pinzon and Vespucci in company, on that "debatable voyage" described in chapter VI. In the year 1499

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both Pinzon and Vespucci were to sail—though in separate fleets—for the coasts of the continent which Columbus had accidentally revealed in his voyage of 1498. Vespucci was to coast its northern shores, while Pinzon, with a confidence born of successive ventures on the ocean, was to strike farther southward than any had done before him (in the western hemisphere), cross the equinoctial line, and reveal to the knowledge of civilized man the great river, afterwards called the Amazon, and the country of Brazil. The fleet in which Vespucci took passage left Spain in the month of May, 1499, that commanded by Pinzon left in December; and it is still a moot question whether the first or the second was the first to arrive on the coast of Brazil. But Pinzon sailed beyond Vespucci on that voyage, though he was to be surpassed, the next year, in the generous rivalry that existed for making the “farthest south.”

Another companion of Vespucci worthy of note is the man called by Las Casas the best pilot of his day, Juan de la Cosa. He had been with Columbus on his first voyage, as owner and pilot of the *Santa Maria*, and also on his second, and may have had good

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grounds for believing himself as good a navigator as the Admiral, while as a cosmographer he was probably his superior. The historian, Peter Martyr, asserts that La Cosa and another pilot, Andres Morales, "were thought to be more cunning in that part of cosmography which teacheth the description and measurement of the sea" than any others in the world. In truth, the first map of importance made within a decade of the discovery of 1492 was that produced by La Cosa, in the summer of 1500, after his return from the voyage (his third to the New World) with Ojeda and Vespucci. It is thought that he embodied in that map the results of Vespucci's voyage of 1497-1498, as communicated to him during their intimate companionship of thirteen months. La Cosa, the Biscayan pilot, was a man cast in the same generous mould as Vespucci, and shared none of the narrow notions of Columbus. His great regard for Columbus is shown in the vignette to his map, which represents the giant Christopher (the "Christ-bearer") carrying the infant Jesus on his shoulders. Beneath this vignette is the legend, "Juan de la Cosa made this map, in the port of Santa Maria [near Cadiz], year

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1500." It is the best map that had been put forth up to that date, and for a long time thereafter remained as a guide to mariners.

His services were in great request at that time, and in the month of October, 1500, he was engaged by Rodrigo Bastidas, a lawyer of Seville, to pilot a small expedition he had fitted out to search for gold and pearls. This was the expedition in which Vasco Nuñez de Balboa first embarked for the New World, and which was so profitable that the leaders returned (though their vessels had sunk at their anchors in a harbor of Haiti) with sufficient pearls to give them each a fortune. If they had been content to live at ease in Spain, they might have done so during the remainder of their days; but both Bastidas and La Cosa were lured back to the coast of Terra Firma by the prospect of further enrichment, and there they came to untimely ends.

La Cosa was created *alguazil mayor* of the territory he and Vespucci had coasted, and finding Ojeda in want—both of money and an opportunity to display his prowess as a fighter—he generously shared his fortune with him and fitted out a fleet containing a

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ship and two small brigantines. Thenceforth, as fate willed it, the great-hearted pilot and the fiery cavalier were inseparable until cut down by death. In the month of November, 1509, they set sail from Santo Domingo with their three vessels and three hundred men. La Cosa piloted the little fleet into a safe harbor, as he knew the coast well from two previous visits to Terra Firma, but he endeavored to induce Ojeda to attempt a settlement farther on towards the Isthmus of Darien, as the Indians of this region were very ferocious and used poisoned arrows.

Ojeda, however, would not be turned from his purpose, which was to acquire a large number of slaves, either by stratagem or force. After the monks who accompanied his command had read a requisition to the savages, requiring them to submit gracefully and be converted, if they did not wish to incur the vengeance of the King of Spain, the Pope of Rome, and their emissaries there assembled, finding them obdurate, Ojeda gave the command to attack. The Indians, by this time, had assembled in great force, and if they understood the message (which was not likely, as it was in Spanish, a lan-

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guage they had never heard before) they manifested no inclination to heed its warnings. They brandished their spears, shot their arrows, and yelled defiance to the invaders. This was more than the rash Ojeda could endure, and he dashed head-long at the naked enemy without waiting for his men to follow.

Only the gallant La Cosa was with him at first, continually remonstrating with his friend for his temerity, but fighting bravely at his side. The old pilot was a man of peace, but he was destined to die a violent and a horrible death. While pressing forward in advance of their men, the retreat of Ojeda and La Cosa was cut off by the wily savages, who had pretended to retire to the hills, whence they soon returned in great force. La Cosa took refuge in a hut, where he gallantly defended himself until a poisoned arrow pierced his breast and he fell to the ground. One companion survived, to whom he said, as he felt the chill of death creeping over him, "Brother, since God hath protected thee from harm, sally out and fly; and if ever thou shouldst see Alonzo de Ojeda, tell him of my fate."

Thus expired Juan de la Cosa, former

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companion of Columbus and Vespucci, able pilot, skilled cartographer, loyal till death to the man who had led him into the forest where he met that fatal arrow.

It is claimed by some that Vespucci and La Cosa made two voyages together, in the years 1505 and 1507, but this is doubtful. After their return from the voyage of 1499-1500 they separated, Amerigo to take service with the King of Portugal, and La Cosa, upon the completion of his chart and after his return from the Bastidas expedition of 1500-1501, settling down to the enjoyment of his fortune. The third famous member of the trio, Alonzo de Ojeda, obtained authority from the king to colonize Coquibacoa, on the coast of Terra Firma, and received in addition a grant of land six leagues square in the island of Hispaniola.

The former venture had not been considered a success, but the merchants of Seville and Cadiz were persuaded to once more try their fortunes with the brave cavalier Ojeda, and fitted out for him a fleet of four large vessels. In command of these he set sail, in the year 1502, and after touching at Cumana, where he pillaged the Indians and took many prisoners, he proceeded to



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Coquibacoa. Finding the place unsuited for a settlement, he went farther westward and attempted a colony at Bahia Honda, building there a fortress and huts for his people. The Indians were hostile at first, but gold was found in abundance—so much of it, in fact, that the adventurers began to quarrel over it, and soon came to blows. Ojeda, as usual, was foremost in the fight that followed, and, as his company turned against him, he was entrapped on one of the caravels and placed in irons. Then the entire company sailed for Hispaniola, intending to submit the cause of their dissension, which was their strong-box full of gold, to the courts of that island for a decision. They arrived at a port on the western coast of Hispaniola, and in the night the manacled Ojeda slipped overboard into the water, intending to swim ashore and make his escape. The fetters on his feet were heavy, however, though his arms were free, and he was nearly drowned before his companions, hearing his cries for help, pulled him out of the water and again confined him in the hold of the vessel.

Taken to the city of Santo Domingo, he was placed on trial for attempting to defraud

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the government, and the decision was against him. He was not only deprived of his lands, but was stripped of everything he owned. For several years thereafter he roamed about the island, and made occasional voyages, but as a penniless, rather than an influential, adventurer. His good friend, the "ungodly bishop," Fonseca, was still in power, but inaccessible through the great distance that separated them. One happy day, however, Ojeda met La Cosa, who was then in the enjoyment of a considerable fortune, and who, with the reckless generosity for which sailors are proverbial, placed all his means at his disposal. He went to Spain, where he saw the bishop, secured a fleet (as already mentioned), and in it sailed for Santo Domingo, where he was met by his partner, and together the soldier and the sailor set out for Terra Firma.

Before they left the island, however, Ojeda must needs plunge himself into another difficulty by picking a quarrel with a rival discoverer, Nicuesa, whom he challenged to fight a duel. It seems that King Ferdinand had granted territory in Terra Firma to both these men; and, though there was certainly room enough and to spare in

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that vast region, they began to dispute over their perspective boundaries before they had staked them out. The hot-headed Ojeda was a skilled swordsman, but Nicuesa was artful enough to avoid an encounter, in which there was little doubt he would be killed, by insisting that each contestant should deposit five thousand castellanos with an umpire before engaging in the fight. As this was a larger sum than poor Ojeda could raise—which, of course, Nicuesa knew full well—the irate cavalier was obliged to sail without having obtained satisfaction.

This was the expedition that ended so disastrously, as narrated in a previous chapter. The Spaniard who was charged with La Cosa's last message to Ojeda was the only survivor of seventy who had followed the rash commander in his headlong attack. What had become of Ojeda himself none of the survivors could tell, for several days passed without news of him. His body was not to be found among the slain, and no one who knew him believed that the Indians could have captured him alive. He had fought like a tiger to reach and defend his friend La Cosa, but had been borne back by the thronging savages, and since then

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nothing had been heard of him. The woods and shore were searched by scouts, and he was finally found extended on some mangrove roots on the borders of the forest. He was in such an exhausted state that he could not speak, but, intrepid to the last, still clung to his buckler, and in his right hand grasped the good sword with which he had cut his way through the savage hordes.

Although famished, and so weak that he could not stand, it was discovered that he had not received a single wound; but on his shield were seen the dents made by more than three hundred arrows. His rescue had scarcely been effected before the ships of his deadly rival, Nicuesa, sailed into the harbor; but, instead of taking advantage of Ojeda's defenceless condition, the high-minded hidalgo offered to join with him in an attack upon the savages, in order to avenge his defeat. Combining their forces, the two erstwhile enemies fell upon the Indians while they were asleep, slaughtered an immense number, and then, after plundering their dwellings set them on fire.

Thus the unfortunate pilot and his comrades were avenged, and the ships sailed on, leaving behind hundreds of mangled corpses

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and huts reduced to ashes. It was not strange, then, that the surviving savages should ceaselessly attack the settlement soon after founded by Ojeda on their coast, and with such persistency that finally it had to be abandoned. It was in one of these attacks that Ojeda received his first wound. He had hitherto considered himself invulnerable, but, falling into an Indian ambush, a poisoned arrow pierced his thigh. After wrenching it from the wound, he ordered his surgeon, on pain of death for refusal, to burn out the venom with red-hot irons, and by this means, though his life was saved, he received injuries that made him permanently lame.

At last conditions in the settlement became so desperate that Ojeda seized the occasion of a pirate ship touching there to depart for Hispaniola in search of assistance. Leaving his company in charge of Francisco Pizarro—who in this manner began his conquering career—he embarked in the pirate ship, but had hardly cleared the harbor before he began a fierce quarrel with the commander, Talavera, by whose orders he was seized and fettered. Even when chained to the deck, the undaunted cavalier dared

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Talavera and his crew to fight him, two at a time, and when they refused denounced them all as cowards.

A violent gale arose, with the result that their ship was wrecked on the southern coast of Cuba. Escaping to shore, they endured terrible sufferings for weeks, wandering half famished in forests and through swamps, until finally rescued by a tribe of Indians who had not heard of Spanish atrocities and who gave them freely all the provisions they needed. A canoe was despatched to Jamaica with the tidings of disaster, and in the end Ojeda reached Hispaniola, where he had the satisfaction of seeing his late companions hung for their crimes, and where he passed the remainder of his life in poverty. He died in 1515, so poor, says Bishop Las Casas, "that he did not leave money enough to provide for his interment, and so broken in spirit that, with his last breath, he entreated his body might be buried in the monastery of San Francisco [the ruins of which may still be seen in Santo Domingo], just at the portal, in humble expiation of his past pride, 'that every one who entered might tread upon his grave.'"

## XI

### ON THE COAST OF BRAZIL

1501-1502

THE New World, subsequently to be called America, did not reveal itself to navigators during the lifetime of any one of those first engaged in its discovery. Its islands and coast-lines were brought to view one by one, and bit by bit, so that many years elapsed between the voyage of Columbus, in 1492, and that which finally enabled the map-makers to complete the outlines of the continents. It is interesting and instructive to trace the movements of the explorers, and note how, after the initial work of Columbus, they emulate one another in pushing farther and farther into the great ocean of darkness, their voyages overlapping at times, but ever extending, until at last the islands of the West Indies are all revealed and the vast southern continent is circumnavigated.

Columbus, in his first three voyages,

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brought to view most of those islands now known as the Antilles, and on his fourth and last he skirted the eastern coast of Central America; but he left gaps here and there which it took many years to fill. On his third voyage, in 1498, he discovered the island of Trinidad and the pearl islands off the coast of Cumana; but he did not proceed, as he should have done, along the coast of Terra Firma, and hence Ojeda, Vespucci, and La Cosa slipped in, guided by the very chart made by him and so treacherously furnished them by Fonseca.

While doubts may be entertained as to the "first" voyage of Vespucci, none can exist as to that made by him in 1499-1500, as we have the sworn testimony to that effect by Ojeda himself, who, when called to give the same, in the great suit brought by Diego Columbus against the crown, declared that he had with him on that voyage both La Cosa and the Florentine. This testimony was given in 1513, a year after Vespucci's death, and its object was to show that the coast of Terra Firma, so called, had been first seen by Columbus. By establishing the fact of his priority, it disposed of any claim Vespucci or his friends





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may have made, as he and Ojeda were sailing with the track-chart of Columbus as their guide. Thus they picked up the route pursued by the Admiral, and extended it several degrees, Bastidas and La Cosa, the next year, carrying it still farther.

In December, 1499, in June of which year Ojeda and Vespucci had set out together, Vicente Pinzon sailed along the Brazilian coast to a point eight degrees south of the equinoctial line. He returned to Spain in September, 1500, and in April of that year Pedro Alvarez Cabral, in command of a Portuguese fleet bound for the Spice Islands, over the route discovered by Da Gama, accidentally came in sight of land on the coast of the country since known as Brazil, in latitude sixteen degrees south of the line. Unable to prosecute explorations there, as he was bound for the East, around the Cape of Good Hope and along the west coast of Africa, Cabral sent a vessel of his fleet back to Portugal with the news, and proceeded on his way.

Casting about for a navigator eminently qualified as pilot and cosmographer to pursue the exploration indicated by Cabral, along the coast of the country he had so

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strangely revealed, King Emanuel of Portugal made up his mind that Amerigo Vespucci was the man he wanted. Just when he came to this decision, and when Vespucci shifted his allegiance from Spain to Portugal, is not exactly known, but it was probably late in the year 1500, after his return, of course, from the voyage with Ojeda and La Cosa. The particulars of this transaction we will let him relate in the following letter contained in this chapter. He does not quite satisfactorily explain how he came to break with King Ferdinand, especially as both the sovereign and Fonseca had received him with marked attention, the latter having presented him at court, where he was consulted as to new expeditions, and "his accounts of what he had already seen listened to with the greatest interest." The affair is all the more inexplicable from the fact that during the interval between his return from the second voyage and his going to Portugal he was married to a charming lady of Seville. This lady, Doña Maria Cerezo, was his betrothed during the time he was engaged with the house of Berardi, but the mania for exploring having seized him, their marriage was not consummated until after

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the two voyages had been made. She went with him to the court, sharing there the honors heaped upon him by the king; but after this little is heard of her, though it is known that she survived him several years, and on account of his distinguished services to Spain received a liberal pension from the government.

Leaving his newly wedded wife in Seville, Vespucci went to Portugal, "where he was received with open arms by King Emanuel, and commenced with ardor the preparation of the fleet." Respecting his sudden departure from Spain, his Italian eulogist, Canovai, has this to say: "It does not appear that King Ferdinand considered himself wronged by the sudden flight and, to say the least, apparent discourtesy of Amerigo in leaving the kingdom and the king, his patron, without salutation or leave-taking. It was probably looked upon as a trait of his reserved character, or an evidence of his aversion to idle and slanderous rumors, which he was unwilling to take the pains to contradict. Rumors and whisperings soon die away when they have nothing to feed upon, and when Vespucci returned, as though from a journey, the slight was for-

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gotten, and he was treated with greater honor than before.”

To what cause King Emanuel owed this acquisition of King Ferdinand's skilled navigator does not appear; but he was not to retain him very long. He made, however, two voyages under the flag of Portugal, the first of which is outlined in this letter to his friend, the Gonfaloniere of Florence, Piero Soderini:

“I was reposing myself in Seville, after the many toils I had undergone in the two voyages to the Indies, made for his Serene Highness Ferdinand, King of Castile, yet indulging in a willingness to return to the Land of Pearls, when Fortune, not seeming to be satisfied with my former labors, inspired the mind of his Majesty Emanuel, King of Portugal (I know not through what circumstances), to attempt to avail himself of my services. There came to me a royal letter from his majesty, containing a solicitation that I would come to Lisbon to speak with him, he promising to show me many favors. I did not at once determine to go, and argued with the messenger, telling him I was ill and indisposed for the undertaking, but that when recovered, if his highness wished me to serve him, I would do whatever he might command.

“Seeing that he could not obtain me thus, he sent Juliano di Bartolomeo del Giocondo, who at that time resided in Lisbon, with a commission to

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use every means to bring me back with him. Juliano came to Seville, and on his arrival, and induced by his urgent entreaties, I was persuaded to go, though my going was looked upon with ill favor by all who knew me. It was thus regarded by my friends, because I had abandoned Castile, where I had been honored, and because they thought the king had rightful possession of me; and it was considered still worse that I departed without taking leave of my host.

“Having, however, presented myself at the court of King Emanuel, he appeared to be highly pleased with my coming, and requested that I would accompany his three ships, which were then ready to set out for the discovery of new lands. Thus esteeming a request from a king as equivalent to a command, I was obliged to consent to whatever he asked of me.

“We set sail from the port of Lisbon with three ships in company, on the 13th of May, 1501, and steered our course directly for the Grand Canary Islands, which we passed without stopping, and coasted along the western shores of Africa. On this coast we found excellent fishing, taking fish called porgies, and were detained three days. From there we went to the coast of Ethiopia, arriving at a port called Beseneghe, within the torrid zone, and situated on the fourteenth degree of north latitude, in the first climate. Here we remained eleven days, taking in wood and water—as it was my intention to sail south through the great Atlantic Ocean. Leaving this port of Ethiopia, we sailed on our course, bearing a quarter south, and in ninety-seven days we made land, at

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a distance of seven hundred leagues from said port.

“In those ninety-seven days we had the worst weather that ever man experienced who navigated the ocean, in a succession of drenching rains, showers, and tempests. The season was very unpropitious, as our navigation was continually drawing us nearer the equinoctial line, where, in the month of June, it is winter, and where we found the days and nights of equal length, and our shadows falling continually towards the south. It pleased God, however, to show us new land, on the 17th day of August, at half a league distance from which we anchored. We launched our boats and went ashore, to see if the country was inhabited, and, if so, by what kind of people, and we found at length a population far more degraded than brutes.

“It should be understood that at first we did not see any inhabitants, though we knew very well, by the many signs we saw, that the country was peopled. We took possession of it, in the name of his most serene majesty, and found it to be pleasant and verdant, and situated five degrees south of the equinoctial line. This much we ascertained and then returned to the ships. On the next day, while we were ashore, we saw people looking at us from the summit of a mountain, but they did not venture to descend. They were naked, and of the same color and figure as those heretofore discovered by me for the King of Spain. We made much exertion to persuade them to come and speak with us, but could not assure them sufficiently to trust us. Seeing their obstinacy,



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as it was growing late we returned to the ships, leaving on shore for them many bells, looking-glasses, and other things, in places where they could find them. When we had gone away they descended from the mountain and took possession of the things we had left, appearing to be filled with wonder while viewing them. The next morning we saw from the ships that the people of the land were making many bonfires, and, taking them for signals to go ashore, we went and found that many had arrived; but they kept always at a distance, though they made signs that they wished us to accompany them inland. Whereupon two Christians were induced to ask the captain's permission to brave the danger and go with them, in order to see what kind of people they were, and whether they had any kind of riches, spices, or drugs. They importuned him so much that he finally consented, and after having been fitted out with many articles for trade they left us, with orders not to be absent more than five days, as we should expect them with great anxiety. So they took their way into the country, and we returned to the ships to wait for them, which we did for six days; but they never came back, though nearly every day there came people to the shore, who would not, however, speak with us.

“On the seventh day we landed and found that they had brought their wives with them, whom they commanded, as we reached the shore, to speak with us. We observed that they hesitated to obey the order, and accordingly determined to send one of our people, a very courageous young man, to address them. In order to encourage

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them, we entered the boats while he went to speak with the women. When he arrived they formed themselves into a great circle around him, touching and looking at him as with astonishment. While all this was going on, we saw a woman coming from the mountains carrying a large club in her hands. When she arrived where our young Christian stood she came up behind him and, raising the bludgeon, gave him such a blow with it that she laid him dead on the spot, and immediately the other women took him by the feet and dragged him away towards the mountain. The men ran towards the shore forthwith and began to assail us with their arrows, throwing our people into a great fright, in consequence of the boats having grounded, many arrows reaching them. No one resorted to arms, but for a time all was terror and panic. After a while, however, we discharged four swivels at them, which had no other effect than to make them flee towards the mountain, when they heard the report. There we saw that the women had already cut the young Christian in pieces, and at a great fire which they had made were roasting him in our sight, showing us the several pieces as they ate them. The men also made signs to us indicating that they had killed the other two Christians and eaten them in the same manner, which grieved us very much.

“ . . . We departed from this place and sailed along in a southeasterly direction, on a line parallel with the coast, making many landings, but never finding any people with whom to converse. Continuing in this manner, we found at length that the line of the coast made a turn to the south,

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and after doubling a cape, which we called St. Augustine, we began to sail in a southerly direction. This cape is a hundred and fifty leagues distant, easterly, from the aforementioned land where the three Christians were murdered, and eight degrees south of the equinoctial line. While sailing on this course, we one day saw many people standing on the shore, apparently in great wonder at the sight of our ships. We directed our course towards them, and, having anchored in a good place, proceeded to land in the boats, and found the people better disposed than those we had passed. Though it cost us some exertion to tame them, we nevertheless made them our friends and treated with them. In this place we stayed five days, and here we found cassia-stems very large and green, and some already dried on the tops of the trees. We determined to take a couple of men from the place, in order that they might learn the language, and three of them came with us voluntarily, wishing to visit Portugal.

“Being already wearied with so much writing, I will delay no longer the information that we left this port and sailed continually in a southerly direction in sight of the shore, making frequent landings and treating with a great number of people. We went so far to the south that we were beyond the tropic of Capricorn, where the south pole is elevated thirty-two degrees above the horizon. We had then entirely lost sight of Ursa Minor, and even Ursa Major was very low, nearly on the edge of the horizon; so we steered by the stars of the south pole, which are many, and much brighter than those of the north. I drew the

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figures of the greater part of them, particularly those of the first and second magnitude, with a description of the circles which they made around the pole, and an account of their diameters and semi-diameters, as may be seen in my *Quattro Giornate*, or *Four Journeys*.

“We ran on this coast about seven hundred and fifty leagues: one hundred and fifty from Cape St. Augustine towards the west, and six hundred towards the south. If I were to relate all the things that I saw on this coast, and others that we passed, as many more sheets as I have already written upon would not be sufficient for the purpose. We saw nothing of utility here, save a great number of dye-wood and cassia trees, and also of those trees which produce myrrh. There were, however, many natural curiosities, which cannot be recounted.

“Having been already full ten months on the voyage, and seeing that we had found no minerals in the country, we concluded to take leave of it, and attempt the ocean in some other part. It was determined in council to pursue whatever course of navigation appeared best to me, and I was invested with full command of the fleet. I ordered that all the people and the fleet should be provided with wood and water for six months—as much as the officers of the ship should deem prudent to sail with. Having laid in our provisions, we commenced our navigation with a south-easterly wind, on the 15th of February, when the sun was already approaching the equinoctial line, and tending towards this, our northern hemisphere. We were in such high southern latitude at this time

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that the south pole was elevated fifty-two degrees above the horizon, and we no longer saw the stars either of Ursa Minor or Major.

“On the 3d of April we had sailed five hundred leagues from the port we had left, and on this day commenced a storm so violent that we had to take in all our sails and run under bare poles. It was so furious that the whole fleet was in apprehension. The nights were very long, being fifteen hours in duration, the sun then being in Aries, and winter prevailing in this region. While driven by this storm, on the 7th of April, we came in sight of new land, and ran within twenty leagues of it, finding the coast wild, and seeing neither harbor nor inhabitants. The cold was so severe that no one in the fleet could withstand or endure it—which I conceive to be the reason for this want of population. Finding ourselves in great danger, and the storm so violent that we could scarce distinguish one ship from another, on account of the high seas that were running and the misty darkness of the weather, we agreed that the superior captain should make signals to the fleet to turn about, leave the country, and steer direct for Portugal.

“This proved to be very good counsel, for certain it is, if we had delayed that night, we should all have been lost. We took the wind aft, and during the night and next day the storm increased so much that we were apprehensive for our safety, and made many vows of pilgrimage, and the performance of other ceremonies usual with [superstitious] mariners in such weather. We ran five days, making about two hundred and fifty leagues,

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and continually approaching the equinoctial line, finding the air more mild and the sea less boisterous; till at last it pleased God to deliver us from this our great danger.

“It was our intention to go and reconnoitre the coast of Ethiopia, which was thirteen hundred leagues distant from us, through the great Atlantic sea, and by the grace of God we arrived at it, touching at a southern port called Sierra Leone, where we stayed fifteen days, obtaining refreshments. From this place we steered for the Azore Islands, about seven hundred and fifty leagues distant, where we arrived in the latter part of July, and stayed another fifteen days, taking some recreation. Then we departed for Lisbon, three hundred leagues farther, which port we entered on the 7th of September, 1502—for which the All-Powerful be thanked!—with only two ships, having burned the other in Sierra Leone because it was no longer sea-worthy.

“In this voyage we were absent about fifteen months, and sailed eleven of them without seeing the north star, or either of the constellations Ursa Major and Minor (which are called the “horn”), steering meanwhile by the stars of the other pole. The above is what I saw in this my third voyage, made for his Serene Highness the King of Portugal.”

## XII

### THE "FOURTH PART OF THE EARTH"

THE following letter from Vespucci to Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de Medici, his friend and patron in Florence, was probably written in the spring of 1503.

*"To my most Excellent Patron, Lorenzo :*

"My last letter to your excellency was written from a place on the coast of Guinea called Cape Verde, and in it you were informed of the commencement of my voyage. The present letter will advise you of its continuation and termination.

"We started from the above-mentioned cape, having first taken in all necessary supplies of wood, water, etc., to discover new lands in the ocean. We sailed on a southwesterly course until, at the end of sixty-four days, we discovered land, which, on many accounts, we concluded to be Terra Firma. We coasted this land about eight hundred leagues, in a direction west by south. It was well inhabited, and I noticed many remarkable things, which I will attempt to narrate.

"We sailed in those seas until we entered the torrid zone, and passed to the south of the equinoctial line and the tropic of Capricorn, so that

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we were fifty degrees south of the line. We navigated four months and twenty-seven days, seeing neither the arctic pole nor Ursa Major or Minor. We discovered here many beautiful constellations, invisible in the northern hemisphere, and noted their marvellous movements and their grandeur. . . . To proceed, now, to a description of the country, the plants therein, and of the customs of the inhabitants, I would observe that this region is most delightful, and covered with immense forests which never lose their foliage, and throughout the year yield aromatic odors and produce an infinite variety of fruit, grateful to the taste and healthful for the body. In the fields flourish so many sweet flowers and herbs, and the fruits are so delicious and fragrant, that I fancied myself near the terrestrial paradise. What shall I tell you of the birds and the brilliant colors of their plumage? What of their variety, their sweet songs, and their beauty? I dare not enlarge upon this theme, for I fear I should not be believed. How shall I enumerate the infinite variety of sylvan animals: lions, catamounts, panthers—though not like those of our regions—wolves, stags, and baboons of all kinds? We saw more wild animals—such as wild hogs, kids, deer, hares, and rabbits—than could ever have entered the ark of Noah; but we saw no domestic animals whatever.

“Now, consider reasoning animals. We found the whole region inhabited by people who were entirely naked, both men and women. They were well proportioned in body, with black, coarse hair, and little or no beard. I labored much to investigate their customs, remaining twenty-seven days



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for that purpose, and the following is the information I acquired. They have no laws and no religious beliefs, but live according to the dictates of nature alone. They know nothing of the immortality of the soul; they have no private property, but everything in common; they have no boundaries of kingdom or province; they obey no king or lord, for it is wholly unnecessary, as they have no laws, and each one is his own master. They dwell together in houses made like bells, in the construction of which they use neither iron nor any other metal. This is very remarkable, for I have seen houses two hundred and twenty feet long and thirty feet wide, built with much skill, and containing five or six hundred people. They sleep in hammocks made of cotton, suspended in the air, without any covering; they eat seated upon the ground, and their food consists of roots and herbs, fruits and fish. They eat also lobsters, crabs, oysters, and many other kinds of mussels and shell-fish which are found in the sea. As to their meat, it is principally human flesh. It is true that they devour the flesh of four-footed animals and birds; but they do not catch many, because they have no dogs, and the woods are thick and so filled with wild beasts that they do not care to go into them, except in large bodies and armed. The men are in the habit of decorating their lips and cheeks with bones and stones, which they suspend from holes they bore in them. I have seen some of them with three, seven, and even as many as nine holes, filled with white or green alabaster—a most barbarous custom, which they follow in order, as they say, to make them-

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selves appear ferocious. . . . They are a people of great longevity, for we met with many who had descendants of the fourth degree. Not knowing how to compute time, and counting neither days, months, nor years—excepting in so far as they count the lunar months—when they wanted to signify to us any particular duration of time, they did it by showing us a stone for each moon; and, computing in this manner, we discovered that the age of one man that we saw was seventeen hundred moons, or about one hundred and thirty-two years, reckoning thirteen moons to the year.

“They are a warlike race and extremely cruel. All their weapons are, as Petrarch says, “committed to the winds”—for they consist of spears, arrows, stones, and javelins. They use no shields for the body, going to battle almost wholly naked. There is no order or discipline in their fights, except that they follow the counsels of the old men. Most cruelly do they combat, and those who conquer in the field bury their own dead, but cut up and eat the dead of their enemies. Some who are taken prisoners are carried to their villages for slaves. Females taken in war they frequently marry, and sometimes the male prisoners are allowed to marry the daughters of the tribe; but occasionally a diabolical fury seems to come over them, and, calling together their relations and the people, they sacrifice these slaves, the children with the parents, accompanied by barbarous ceremonies. This we know of a certainty, for we found much human flesh in their huts, hung up to smoke, and we purchased ten poor creatures from them, both men and women, whom they were

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about to sacrifice, to save them from such a fate. Much as we reproached them on this account, I cannot say that they amended at all. The most astounding thing in all their wars and cruelty was that we could not find out any reason for them. They made war against each other, although they had neither kings, kingdoms, nor property of any kind, without any apparent desire to plunder, and without any lust for power—which always appeared to me to be the moving causes of wars and anarchy. When we asked them about this they gave no reason other than that they did so to avenge the murder of their ancestors. To conclude this disgusting subject: one man confessed to me that he had eaten of the flesh of over two hundred bodies, and I believe it was the truth.

"In regard to the climate of this region, I should say it was extremely pleasant and healthful; for in all the time that we were there, which was ten months, not one of us died, and only a few were sick. They suffer from no infirmity, pestilence, or corruption of the atmosphere, and die only natural deaths, unless they fall by their own hands or in consequence of accident. In fact, physicians would have a bad time in such a place.

"As we went solely to make discoveries, and started with that view from Lisbon, without intending to look for any profit, we did not trouble ourselves to explore the country much, and found nothing of great value; though I am inclined to believe that it is capable, from its climate and general appearance, of containing every kind of natural wealth. It is not to be wondered at that we did not discover at once everything that might

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be turned to profit there, for the inhabitants think nothing of gold or silver or precious stones, and value only feathers and bones. But I hope that I shall be sent again by the king to visit these regions, and that many years will not elapse before they will bring immense profits and revenue to the kingdom of Portugal.

“We found great quantities of dye-wood, enough to load all the ships that float, and costing nothing. The same may be said of cassia, crystals, spices, and drugs; but the qualities of the last are unknown. The inhabitants of the country tell of gold and other metals; but I am one of those who, like St. Thomas, are slow to believe. Time will show all, however. Most of the time of our stay the heavens were serene and adorned with numerous bright and beautiful stars, many of which I observed, with their revolutions.

“This may be considered a schedule, or, as it were, a *capita rerum*, of the things which I have seen in these parts. Many things are omitted which are worthy of being mentioned, in order to avoid prolixity, and because they are found in my account of the voyage. As yet I tarry at Lisbon, waiting the pleasure of the king to determine what I shall do. May it please God that I do whatever is most to His glory and the salvation of my soul.”

A third and fuller account of the third voyage, written to Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de Medici:

“In days past I gave your excellency a full account of my return, and, if I remember aright,

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wrote you a description of all those parts of the New World which I had visited in the ships of his Highness the King of Portugal. Carefully considered, they appear truly to form another world, and therefore we have, not without reason, called it the *New World*.

"Not one of all the ancients had any knowledge of it, and the things which have been lately ascertained by us transcend all their ideas. They thought there was nothing south of the equinoctial line but an immense sea and some poor and barren islands. The sea they called the Atlantic, and if sometimes they confessed that there might be land in that region, they contended that it must be sterile, and could not be otherwise than uninhabitable. The present navigation has controverted their opinions, and openly demonstrated to all that they were very far from the truth. For, beyond the equinoctial line I found countries more fertile and more densely inhabited than I have ever found anywhere else, even in Asia, Africa, and Europe—as will be more fully manifested by duly attending to the following narration. Setting aside all minor matters, I shall relate only those of the greatest importance, which are well worthy of commemoration, and those which I have *personally seen*, or heard of from men of credibility. I shall now speak with much care concerning those parts most recently discovered, and without any romantic addition to the truth.

"With happy omens of success, we sailed from Lisbon with three armed caravels, on the 13th of May, 1501, to explore, by command of the king, the regions of the New World. Steering a south-

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west course, we sailed twenty months in a manner which I shall now relate. In the first place, we went to the Fortunate Islands, which are now called the Grand Canaries. After navigating the ocean we ran along the coast of Africa and the country of the blacks as far as the promontory which is called by Ptolemy Etiopia, by our people Cape Verde, and by the negroes Biseneghe, while the inhabitants themselves call it Madanghan. The country is situated within the torrid zone, in about fourteen degrees south latitude, and is inhabited by the blacks. Here we reposed awhile to refresh ourselves, took in every kind of provision, and set sail, directing our course towards the antarctic pole. . . .

“To shorten my relation as much as possible, your excellency must know that we sailed ninety-seven days, experiencing harsh and cruel fortune. During forty-four days the heavens were in great commotion, and we had nothing but thunder and lightning and drenching rains. Dark clouds covered the sky, so that by day we could see but little better than we could in ordinary nights without moonshine. The fear of death came over us, and the hope of life almost deserted us. After all these heavy afflictions at last it pleased God in His mercy to have compassion on us and save our lives. On a sudden, the land appeared in view, and at the sight of it our courage, which had fallen very low, and our strength, which had become weakness, immediately revived. Thus it usually happens to those who have passed through great afflictions, and especially to those who have been preserved from the rage of evil fortune.

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"On the 17th of August, in the year 1501, we anchored by the shore of that country, and rendered to the Supreme Being our most sincere thanks, according to the Christian custom. The land we discovered did not appear to be an island, but a continent, as it extended far away in the distance, without any appearance of termination. It was beautifully fertile and very thickly inhabited, while all sorts of wild animals, which are unknown in our parts, were there found in abundance. . . . We were unanimously of the opinion that our navigation should be continued along this coast and that we should not lose sight of it. We sailed, therefore, till we arrived at a certain cape, which makes a turn to the south, and which is perhaps three hundred leagues distant from the place where we first saw land. In sailing this distance we often landed and held intercourse with the natives, and I have omitted to state that this newly discovered land is about seven hundred leagues distant from Cape Verde, though I was persuaded that we had sailed at least eight hundred. This was partly owing to a severe storm, our frequent accidents, and partly to the ignorance of the pilot.

"We had arrived at a place which, if I had not possessed some knowledge of cosmography, by the negligence of the pilot would have finished the course of our lives. There was no pilot who knew our situation within fifty leagues, and we went rambling about, and should not have known whither we were going if I had not provided, in season for my own safety and that of my companions, the astrolabe and quadrant, my astrolog-

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ical instruments. On this occasion I acquired no little glory for myself, so that from that time forward I was held in such estimation by my companions as the learned are held in by people of quality. . . .

“This continent commences at eight degrees south of the equinoctial line, and we sailed so far along the coast that we passed seventeen degrees beyond the winter tropic, towards the antarctic pole, which was here elevated fifty degrees above the horizon. The things which I saw here are unknown to the men of our times. That is, the people, their customs, their humanity, the fertility of the soil, the mildness of the atmosphere, the celestial bodies, and, above all, the fixed stars of the eighth sphere, of which no mention has ever been made. In fact, until now they have never been known, even by the most learned of the ancients, and I shall speak of them, therefore, more particularly. . . . The climate is very temperate and the country supremely delightful. Although it has many hills, yet it is watered by a great number of springs and rivers, and the forests are so closely studded that one cannot pass through them, on account of the thickly standing trees. Among these ramble ferocious animals of various kinds. . . . The country produces no metal except gold; and though we in this first voyage have brought home none, yet all the people certified to the fact, affirming that the region abounded in gold, and saying that among them it was little esteemed and nearly valueless. They have many pearls and precious stones, as we have recorded before. Now, though I should be willing to describe all these



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things particularly, yet, from the great number of them and their diverse nature, this history would become too extensive a work. Pliny, a most learned man, who compiled histories of many things, did not imagine the thousandth part of these. If he had treated of each one of them, he would have made a much larger but in truth a very perfect work. . . .

"If there is a terrestrial paradise in the world, it cannot be far from this region. The country, as I have said before, facing the south, has such a temperate climate that in winter they have no cold and in summer are not troubled with heat. The sky and atmosphere are seldom overshadowed with clouds, and the days are almost always serene. Dew sometimes falls, but very lightly, and only for the space of three or four hours, and then vanishes like mist. They have scarcely any vapors, and the sky is splendidly adorned with stars unknown to us, of which I have retained a particular remembrance, and have enumerated as many as twenty whose brightness is equal to that of Venus or Jupiter. I considered also their circuit and their various motions, and, having a knowledge of geometry, I easily measured their circumference and diameter, and am certain, therefore, that they are of much greater magnitude than men imagine. Among the others, I saw three *Canopi*, two being very bright, while the third was dim and unlike the others.

"The antarctic pole has not the Ursa Major and Minor, which can be seen at our arctic pole; neither are there any bright stars touching the pole, but of those which revolve around it there

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are four, in the form of a quadrangle. While these are rising, there is seen at the left a brilliant Canopus, of admirable magnitude, which, having reached mid-sky, forms the figure of a triangle. To these succeed three other brilliant stars, of which the one placed in the centre has twelve degrees of circumference. In the midst of them is another brilliant Canopus. After these follow six other bright stars, whose splendor surpasses that of all others in the eighth sphere. . . . These are all to be seen in the Milky Way, and when they arrive at the meridian show the figure of a triangle, but have two sides longer than the other. I saw there many other stars, and carefully observed their various motions, composing a book which treats of them particularly. In this book I have related almost all the remarkable things which I have encountered in the course of my navigation, and with which I have become acquainted. The book is at present in the possession of the king, and I hope he will return it soon into my hands.

“I examined some things in that hemisphere very diligently, which enables me to contradict the opinions of philosophers. Among other things, I saw the rainbow—that is, the celestial arch—which is white near midnight. Now, in the opinion of some, it takes the color of the four elements: the red from fire, the green from the earth, the white from the air, and blue from the water. Aristotle, in his book entitled *Meteors*, is of a very different opinion. He says: ‘The celestial arch is a repercussion of the sun’s rays in the vapors of the clouds where they meet, as brightness reflected from the water upon the wall returns to itself.

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By its interposition it tempers the heat of the sun; by resolving itself into rain it fertilizes the earth, and by its splendor beautifies the heavens. It demonstrates that the atmosphere is filled with humidity, which will disappear forty years before the end of the world, which will be an indication of the dryness of the elements. It announces peace between God and man, is always opposite the sun, is never seen at noon, because the sun is never in the north.'

"But Pliny says that after the autumnal equinox it appears every hour. This I have extracted from the *Comments of Landino* on the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, and I mention it that no man may be deprived of the fruits of his labors, and that due honors may be rendered to every one. I saw this bow two or three times; neither am I alone in my reflections upon this subject, for many mariners are also of my opinion. We saw also the new moon at mid-day, as it came into conjunction with the sun. There were seen also, every night, vapors and burning flames flashing across the sky. A little above, I called this region by the name of hemisphere, which, if we would not speak improperly, cannot be so called when comparing it with our own. It appeared to present that form only partially, and it seemed to us speaking improperly to call it a 'hemisphere.'

"As I have before stated, we sailed from Lisbon—which is nearly forty degrees distant from the equinoctial line towards the north—to this country, which is fifty degrees on the other side of the line. The sum of these degrees is *ninety*, and is the fourth part of the circumference of the globe,

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according to the true reckoning of the ancients. It is therefore manifest to all *that we measured the fourth part of the earth.*<sup>1</sup>

“We who reside in Lisbon, nearly forty degrees north of the equinoctial line, are distant from those who reside on the other side of the line, in angular meridional length, ninety degrees—that is, obliquely. In order that the case may be more plainly understood, I would observe that a perpendicular line starting from that part in the heavens which is our zenith strikes those obliquely who are fifty degrees beyond the equinoctial line: whence it appears that we are in the direct line, and they, in comparison with us, are in the oblique one, and this situation forms the figure of a right-angled triangle, of which we have the direct lines, as the figure more clearly demonstrates.

“Such are the things which in this, my last navigation, I have considered worthy of being made known; nor have I, without reason, called this work my *Third Journey*. I have before composed two other books on navigation which, by command of Ferdinand, King of Castile, I performed in the West, in which many things not unworthy of being made known are particularly described: especially those which appertain to the glory of our Saviour, who, with marvellous skill, built this machine, the world. And, in truth, who can ever sufficiently praise God? I have related marvellous things concerning him in the aforesaid work. I have stated briefly that which relates to the position and ornaments of the globe, so that

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI.

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when I shall be more at leisure I may be able to write out, with greater care, a work upon cosmography, in order that future ages may bear me in remembrance. Such works teach me more fully, from day to day, to honor the Supreme God, and finally to arrive at the knowledge of those things with which our ancestors and the ancient fathers had no acquaintance. With most humble prayers I supplicate our Saviour, whose province it is to have compassion upon mortals, that he prolong my life sufficiently for me to perform what I have purposed to do."

## XIII

### THE FOURTH GREAT VOYAGE

1503-1504

**D**OUBTLESS our readers share our wish that the personality of Vespucci could appear more strongly depicted than it has been presented in this volume; but that is a fault, not of the biographer so much as the hero of this biography. It must have been noticed, indeed, that Vespucci says little or nothing of his companions on these voyages, not even mentioning the commanders; but at the same time he makes rare mention of himself; so we cannot ascribe it to a desire for making himself prominent at their expense. It is simply a fault of style, or a result of his endeavor to be concise, and bring forward the most interesting events of the voyages and discoveries, with the least waste of time and effort.

He was engaged in exploring new regions;

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his time was occupied in noting the salient features of the scenery, the traits of the barbaric peoples, and especially closely observing and enumerating the stars. Astronomy was a passion with him, and he passed many nights without sleep, during both voyages to the southern hemisphere, in rapt contemplation of the glorious constellations. As he rightly observed in one of his letters, his observations would surely bring him fame, and no worthier object could claim his attention, even to the exclusion of all other work. So it is as the self-absorbed astronomer, the open-minded man of science, seeking to penetrate the secrets of nature and achieve immortal fame, that we must regard our hero at this time.

On his return from the third voyage, Vespucci was royally received by King Emanuel, even though he had come back almost empty-handed, without gold or gems, silver, spices, or pearls. He had sailed farther south than any of his predecessors, having gone beyond the latitude of the Cape of Good Hope, discovered the beautiful bay which he called Rio de Janeiro, and perhaps looked into the mouth of the River de la

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Plata. He had not discovered the "secret of the strait"—that passage through the land-mass which confronted all the voyagers from Columbus to Magellan; nor was it revealed until the last-named, in 1520, penetrated the great strait that now bears his name, and sailed through into the Pacific.

It may be argued that not Vespucci, but another (name unknown), was the commander of this expedition; but while this other was nominally in command, the Florentine was the chief pilot, the navigator, and directed the ships along their courses without mishap. In fact, one of his biographers has pointed out that the navigating of this fleet, especially the sailing in almost a straight line from the northern coast of Brazil to Sierra Leone, on the northwest coast of Africa, was a triumph of scientific navigation. There is no question that Amerigo Vespucci was the greatest navigator of his time, and a recognition of this fact is found in his appointment by King Ferdinand, a few years later, as the chief pilot of his kingdom.

Not alone King Emanuel and his court recognized the genius of Vespucci, but the people of Portugal and of Florence. He



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was received in Lisbon with transports of enthusiasm, and one of his ships, which had worn itself out in the voyage, was dismantled, "and portions of it were carried in solemn procession to a church, where they were suspended as precious relics." His fame extended far and wide, and in Florence, the city of his birth, public ceremonies were held, and honors bestowed upon his family.

He returned to Lisbon in September, 1502, and eight months later, at the urgent request of the king, started on another voyage in continuation of the last, in the hope of finally finding a strait through the continent by which India might be reached. About this time two events took place which are worthy of note. His patron, Lorenzo, died in June, 1503, and a year later a Latin version of his letter to him was published under the title *Mundus Novus*, or New World.

We must not lose sight of this title and this publication, for (as will be more fully explained in a succeeding chapter) they had much to do with the future defamation of Vespucci. He, it will be observed, was pursuing his voyage to, or from, that "New World," while that little quarto of only

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four leaves, with its significant title, was being printed and circulated in Europe. Both Vespucci and Columbus were then absent from Europe, and both engaged in a desperate struggle with adverse elements, at the time this pamphlet was published: the one on the coast of Brazil, the other on his last voyage to the West Indies, in which he suffered shipwreck and nearly perished of starvation.

Both Columbus and Vespucci were innocent of promulgating this title, or this pamphlet, except that the latter had used the term "new world" as possibly applying to his discoveries in the south Atlantic. But, while they were perilling their lives in the service of their sovereigns, each striving for a common goal, though neither envious of the other, capricious Fame was weaving a web in which both were to be enmeshed, and from which Vespucci was not to escape until after the lapse of centuries.

The inscription in this pamphlet states: "The interpreter Giocondo translated this letter from the Italian into the Latin language, that all who are versed in the latter may learn how many wonderful things are being discovered every day, and that the

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temerity of those who want to probe the Heavens and their majesty, and to know more than is allowed to know, be confounded: as, notwithstanding the long time since the world began to exist, the vastness of the earth and what it contains is still unknown.”

This inscription meant that Vespucci's letter had opened the eyes of even the clerics to the fact that there was much in the world then undiscovered, and existing contrary to their preconceived notions. The interpreter was a Dominican friar of erudition for his times, one Giovanni Giocondo, an eminent mathematician of Verona, and an architect, who was then living in Paris, where, it is said, he was engaged in building the bridge of Notre Dame. It was a Giocondo, and perhaps this same man, who was sent by King Emanuel to persuade Vespucci to enlist in his service (as told by him on page 170); but whether the same, or one of his family, he was intimately acquainted with the famous Florentines, including Vespucci, the Medici, and Piero Soderini. He, doubtless, saw the letters written by Vespucci when in manuscript, and condensed them into his narration, giving full credit to the author in his publication. He was

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the unconscious cause of an injustice to Columbus, perhaps, and also of undue prominence being given to the name of Amerigo Vespucci, for it was through the issue of his book that, in a roundabout way, the appellation *America* came to be bestowed upon the western continents.

We will elaborate this argument in another chapter; but (requesting the reader meanwhile to retain these premises in his mind) we will first follow Vespucci on his fourth, and last, important voyage to the southern hemisphere. In a passage appended to the letter quoted in the previous chapter, and which we herewith reproduce, Vespucci says:

“My three journeys I think I shall defer writing about in full until another time. Probably when I have returned safe and sound to my native country, with the aid and counsel of learned men, and the encouragement of friends, I shall write with care a larger work than this. Your excellency [Lorenzo de Medici] will pardon me for not having sent you the journals which I kept from day to day in this my last navigation, as I had promised to do. The king has been the cause of it, and he still retains my manuscripts. But, since, I have delayed performing this work until the present day, perhaps I shall add a *fourth journey*;

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for I contemplate going again to explore that southern part of the New World, and for the purpose of carrying out such intention two vessels are already armed, equipped, and supplied with provisions. I shall first go eastward, before making the voyage south; I shall then sail to the southwest, and when arrived there shall do many things for the praise and glory of God, the benefit of my country, the perpetual memory of my name, and particularly for the honor and solace of my old age, which has nearly come upon me.

“There is nothing wanting in this affair but the leave of the king, and when this is obtained, as it soon will be, we shall sail on a long voyage; and may it please God to give it a happy termination!”

This voyage was undertaken in the spring, or early summer, of 1503, and extended over twelve months, only terminating with the return to Lisbon on June 18, 1504. It was, perhaps, the least satisfactory of any Vespucci had undertaken, and his disgust is plainly apparent in the following account of it, contained in a letter to Piero Soderini, written in Lisbon a few months after his return:

“It remains for me to relate the things which were seen by me in my fourth voyage; and by reason that I have now become wearied, and also because this voyage did not result according to my wishes (in consequence of a misfortune which

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happened in the Atlantic Sea), I shall endeavor to be brief.

“We set sail from this port of Lisbon, six ships in company, for the purpose of making discoveries with regard to an island in the east called Malacca, which is reported very rich. It is, as it were, the warehouse of all the ships which come from the Sea of Ganges and the Indian Ocean, as Cadiz is the storehouse for all ships that pass from east to west, and from west to east, by way of Calcutta. This Malacca is farther east, and much farther south, than Calcutta, because we know that it is situated at the parallel of three degrees north latitude.

“We set out on the 10th of May, 1503, and sailed directly for the Cape Verde Islands, where we made up our cargo, taking in every kind of refreshment. After remaining here three days, we departed on our voyage, sailing in a southerly direction. Our superior captain [Coelho] was a presumptuous and very obstinate man; he would insist upon going to reconnoitre Sierra Leone, a southern country of Ethiopia, without there being any necessity for it, unless to exhibit himself as the captain of six vessels. He acted contrary to the wishes of all our captains in pursuing this course. Sailing in this direction, when we arrived off the coast of this country we had such bad weather that though we remained in sight of the coast four days, it did not permit us to land. We were compelled at length to leave the country, sailing from there to the south, and bearing southwest.

“When we had sailed three hundred leagues

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through the Great Sea, being then three degrees south of the equinoctial line, land was discovered, which might have been twenty-two leagues distant from us, and which we found to be an island in the midst of the sea. We were filled with wonder at beholding it, considering it a natural curiosity, as it was very high, and not more than two leagues in length by one in width. This island was not inhabited by any people, and was an evil island for the whole fleet, because, by the evil counsel and bad management of our superior captain, he lost his ship here. He ran her upon a rock, and she split open and went to the bottom, on the night of the 10th of August, and nothing was saved from her except the crew. She was a car-rack of three hundred tons, and carried everything of most importance in the fleet.

“As the whole fleet was compelled to labor for the common benefit, the captain ordered me to go with my ship to the aforesaid island and look for a good harbor, where all the ships might anchor. As my boat, filled with nine of my mariners, was of service, and helped to keep up a communication between the ships, he did not wish me to take it, telling me they would bring it to me at the island. So I left the fleet, as he ordered me, without a small boat, and with less than half my men, and went to the said island, about four leagues distant. There I found a very good harbor, where all the ships might have anchored in perfect safety. I waited for the captain and the fleet full eight days, but they never came; so that we were very much dissatisfied, and the people who remained with me in the ship were in such great fear that I could not

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console them. On the eighth day we saw the ship coming, off at sea, and for fear those on board might not see us, we raised anchor and went towards it, thinking they might bring me my boat and men. When we arrived alongside, after the usual salutations, they told us that the captain had gone to the bottom, that all the crew had been saved, and that my boat and men remained with the fleet, which had gone farther to sea. This was a grievous thing to us, as your magnificence may well think, for it was no trifle to find ourselves far distant from Lisbon, in mid-ocean, with so few men. However, we bore up under adverse fortune, and, returning to the island, supplied ourselves with wood and water, using the boat of my consort.

“This island we found uninhabited. It had plenty of fresh water, and an abundance of trees filled with countless numbers of land and marine birds, which were so simple that they suffered themselves to be taken with the hand. We took so many that we loaded a boat with them. We saw no other animals, except some very large rats, some snakes, and lizards with two tails. Having taken in our supplies we departed for the southwest, as we had an order from the king that if any vessel of the fleet, or its captain, should be lost, I should make for the land of my last voyage. We discovered a harbor which we called the bay of All Saints, and it pleased God to give us such good weather that we arrived at it in seventeen days. It was distant three hundred leagues from the island we had left, and we found neither our captain nor any other ship of the fleet in the course of the voyage. We waited full two



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months and four days in this harbor, and, seeing that no orders came for us, we agreed, my consort and myself, to run along the coast. We sailed two hundred and sixty leagues farther and arrived at a harbor, where we determined to build a fortress. This we accomplished, and left in it the twenty-four men that my consort had received from the captain's ship that was lost.

In this port we stayed five months, building the fortress and loading our ships with dye-woods. We could not proceed farther for want of men, and besides, I was destitute of many equipments. Thus, having finished our labors, we determined to return to Portugal, leaving the twenty-four men in the fortress, with provisions for six months, with twelve pieces of cannon, and many other arms. We made peace with all the people of the country—who have not been mentioned in this voyage, but not because we did not see and treat with a great number of them. As many as thirty men of us went forty leagues inland, where we saw so many things that I omit to relate them, reserving them for my *Four Journeys*.

“This country is situated eighteen degrees south of the equinoctial line, and fifty-seven degrees farther west than Lisbon, as our instruments showed us. All this being performed, we bade farewell to the Christians we left behind us, and to the country, and commenced our navigation on a northeast course, with the intention of sailing directly to this city of Lisbon. In seventy-seven days, after many toils and dangers, we entered this port on the 18th of June, 1504—for which God be praised! We were well received, although

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altogether unexpected, as the whole city had given us up for lost. All the other ships of the fleet had been lost, through the pride and folly of our commander, and thus it is that God rewards haughtiness and vanity.

“At present, I find myself here in Lisbon again, and I do not know what the king wishes me to do, but I am very desirous of obtaining repose. The bearer of this, who is Benvenuto di Domenico Benvenuti, will tell your magnificence of my condition, and of any other things which have been omitted, to avoid prolixity, but which I have seen and experienced. I have abbreviated the letter as much as I could, and omitted to say many things very natural to be told, that I might not be tedious.

“Allow me to commend to you Sr. Antonio Vespucci, my brother, and all my family. I remain, praying God that he may prolong your life, and prosper that exalted republic of Florence,

“Your very humble servant,

“AMERIGO VESPUCCI.

“*Lisbon, 4th September, 1504.*”

This was the last letter, so far as we can ascertain, written by Vespucci concerning his voyages—or, at least, the last that has been brought to light; though it is hoped that his manuscript journals, to which he repeatedly refers, may yet be found. They are, doubtless, buried in the secret archives of either the crown of Portugal or of Spain,

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as at different times he alludes to them as being in the hands of the kings, from whom he hopes to receive them at their pleasure. Both King Emanuel and King Ferdinand held Vespucci in great esteem; but, as consideration for their subjects, whether high or low, never entered their minds, they probably retained the manuscripts for years, and eventually these precious documents may have been buried beneath the vast accumulation of papers relating to the voyages and discoveries in both hemispheres.

Vespucci was in error respecting the remaining ships of the fleet engaged in his fourth voyage, for a few months later they came back to Lisbon in a shattered condition, but, so far as known, with their crews intact. They had sailed farther to the south than Vespucci went on this voyage, probably as far as the mouth of the great river La Plata, which Solis has the credit of discovering a few years later. It had been learned by that time that the coasts brought to view by the constantly lengthening voyages into the south were situated to the west of the great line of demarcation separating the discoveries of Spain and Portugal, and hence belonged to the former. This

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fact has a bearing upon the departure of Vespucci and other noted captains from Portugal about this time, as, if they would pursue these explorations to their logical conclusion, they must enlist beneath the banner of King Ferdinand. Hence we find our hero, towards the end of 1504, once again in Spain, and in high favor with the king.

## XIV

### KING FERDINAND'S FRIEND

1505-1508

THE summer of 1504 Vespucci passed in Portugal, attending to matters connected with his last voyage, which had such an unsatisfactory ending; but in the latter part of that year we find him once again in Seville. It is presumed he was warmly welcomed by his wife, after this long absence of nearly four years; but nothing exists at all to indicate his marital relations, and so far as furnishing material for his biographers is concerned, he might as well have remained single all his life. In point of fact, Amerigo Vespucci, though sterling in his friendships, ardent and even affectionate, was a true celibate. He was wedded to Science, his whole nature was absorbed by the pursuits to which he had, perhaps fortuitously, devoted his maturer years. If we contrast him with Columbus, in respect to the higher

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qualities of his character, we cannot but be impressed by the difference between these two, for, while the latter was weak, impressionable, if not passionate, the former was strong, flawless in his morals, devoted ever to the star-eyed goddess in whose service he had enlisted for life.

He was humane, generous, unselfish, while Columbus, though of more heroic proportions than his rival, was at times selfish, ungenerous, cruel—as witness his treatment of the Pinzons, his claiming the reward for the discovery of land, which rightly belonged to Rodrigo de Triana, his massacres of Indians in Hispaniola and enslavement of the survivors. Against Amerigo Vespucci no such charges of immorality, cruelty, and bigotry can be brought as against Columbus, and the sole accusation against him, of falsifying the date of his “first” voyage, has not been sustained by the evidence.

His eulogist, Canovai, says of him, in somewhat extravagant terms: “Behold the transport of that lively emulation which springs from the indisputable consciousness of talents, and is nourished by the pure and delicate essence of virtue, which shines uncontaminated in every footstep of the hero.

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It seems enmity, but is laudable strife; it seems envy, but is a generous ambition. If Columbus had found rivals and enemies resembling Amerigo, I should not see, as now, the magnificent scene of his triumph so suddenly changed into mourning and horror, the gloomy night of ignominy and mockery succeed the brief light of ephemeral happiness, and that invincible leader, who redoubled the power and dominions of ungrateful Castile, groaning under the weight of infamous chains, while he asks for nothing but liberty to carry her arms to the most distant shores of the West.

“Go now, and turning your eyes from the atrocious metamorphosis, exclaim it is chance—it is fate; arbitrary sounds and sterile syllables, with which no distinct idea can ever be associated. Alas! are there not imperceptible threads by which a regulating hand guides us through a crooked labyrinth from causes to effects, and prepares in silence the events of the universe? Prostrated by implacable vengeance, and despoiled of the exclusive right to discoveries and honors, Columbus pines in inaction; but no new columns of Hercules, beyond which the pilot dares not pass, stand erect before the shores

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of Mexico. Amerigo Vespucci reunites the web of fortunate events. Amerigo succeeds Columbus!"

In simpler diction, Columbus brought all his troubles upon himself. He dared much, but he demanded more than he was, by merit of mere achievement, entitled to receive. He was constantly warring for his alleged rights—with the king, with Fonseca, with his fellow-explorers, and especially with such commanders of ships or expeditions as might by their discoveries belittle his accomplishments. Hence resulted untold misery to the natives of the New World, consequent upon the crushing despotism he inaugurated in order to gain gold with which to vindicate himself to his sovereigns. Hence came Bodadilla and Ovando, sent out to investigate his doings, one of whom despatched him in fetters to Spain, and the other hastened the extinction of the Indians, already begun by Columbus himself.

The aggressive insistence of Columbus in the matter of honors and privileges, which were in their nature but temporary, are in decided contrast to the modesty and simplicity of Vespucci, who indeed was ambitious to acquire an honorable name which



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should be "the comfort and solace of his old age," but who, "by his quiet and unobtrusive manners, made friends even among his rivals." He was scrupulously regardful of the rights of others, treating the helpless natives with especial tenderness. This statement may seem to be disproved by the fact that on two of his voyages he took home gangs of Indians to be sold as slaves; but it is not known that he himself was responsible for this, as he was not the real commander of the expeditions, though the actual scientific head and navigator.

He was as deeply devout as Columbus himself, always rendering thanks to the Almighty for His favors, but was by no means a fanatic in religion. While Columbus ascribes his discoveries to the especial favor of some particular saint, on occasions, or his deliverance from danger to the direct interposition of Providence, Vespucci makes no such superstitious claims for himself, though acknowledging his dependence upon God and expressing gratitude for divine support. He believed, evidently, in the precept of the Golden Rule—"Do unto others as you would have them do to you"; and this, alas, cannot be said of Christopher

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Columbus. Though he married late in life, and had no children of his own, Vespucci "was full of affectionate feeling for his family, as his care and attention to the education and advancement of his nephew, and his memory of relatives in Florence, from whom he had been so long absent, amply testify."

Finally, the structure which Columbus vain would have raised has crumbled to ruins, while that built by Vespucci, who labored without thought of himself, or hope of reward, has been strengthened by the lapse of time, and will stand so long as the world endures. Vespucci humbled himself, and was exalted, for the name bestowed upon the hemisphere which these two were instrumental in revealing to Europe was suggested by utter strangers to the Florentine—men of penetrating mind, who perceived an eternal fitness in calling it *America*.

These reflections arise from the fact that, soon after the return of Vespucci to Seville, he met, and was probably entertained by, Christopher Columbus. The old Admiral had but recently returned from his fourth and last voyage to the West Indies, where he had escaped death by a miracle, and

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had suffered humiliation at the hands of the atrocious Ovando. He had come back to Spain to find his friend and protectress, Isabella, on a bed of death; to encounter the ingratitude of Ferdinand and meet the charges of his enemies. He was never to make another voyage until he embarked on that last long journey into the world unknown.

Broken in fortune, worn by the ills of advancing age, crushed beneath the calumnies of his foes, Columbus felt the end approaching, probably, and perhaps looked upon Vespucci as, in a sense, his successor. At least he perceived that the latter's star was in the ascendant, for he knew him as a friend of King Ferdinand, who, mistrustful ever of the man who had discovered a new empire for him to rule, yet was inclined to favor Vespucci, whose sterling qualities he appreciated. He had always liked the Florentine for his manly, modest bearing, his sturdy good sense, his industry, patience, erudition, and eminent abilities in general. Here was a man who made voyages by which the pathways were opened to new countries, without stipulating in advance that he should be rewarded with the ad-

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miralty of the Ocean Sea, without bargaining for the viceroyship of the countries he discovered, or for a tenth of all their resources and trade. He seemed to have no thought of himself, so absorbed was he in performing a work which, he had every reason to believe, would redound to the honor of the land he was born in and the sovereigns he served.

He had, to be sure, carried his talents to a rival sovereign, and served him as faithfully as he had King Ferdinand; but the latter bore him no ill-will for that. It is not certain, in truth, that he had not connived at Vespucci's entering the service of Portugal for a time, as, in view of his return to Spain, he received all the benefit of his experience. It was by means of Vespucci's voyage, most probably, that it was definitely ascertained how far Portugal had encroached upon territory assigned by the pope to her great rival, Spain. Deep and crafty was the diplomacy of King Ferdinand, and it is within the bounds of probability that he himself sent the silent, observant, faithful Vespucci to take service with King Emanuel for a season.

The overlapping voyages of Vespucci and

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Pinzon, in 1499, 1500, 1501, and 1503, had decided the question of sovereignty in South America—at least its northern coasts—in favor of Spain. These two, then, were soon commissioned by Ferdinand to equip a fleet, of which they were to be the joint commanders. This fleet was to sail for Brazil, and thence, after establishing colonies, or forts, continue the explorations they had severally so auspiciously begun. On April 11, 1505 (it is on record), the king made Vespucci a grant of twelve thousand maravedis, and on the 24th of the same month letters of naturalization were issued in his behalf, “in consideration of Amerigo Vespucci’s fidelity, and his many valuable services to the crown.”

Before proceeding to relate the story of Vespucci’s renewed service with King Ferdinand, let us, however, return to the subject of his intercourse with Columbus, with whom, as there is strong evidence in proof, he was on terms of intimate friendship. This proof is found in a letter written by Columbus, at a time (as already mentioned) when he was in disfavor at court, and after his return from the last and most unfortunate voyage. It furnishes evidence of the

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most positive character that Vespucci and Columbus did not consider themselves as rivals, but were actually on the best of terms. It was written nearly a year after the first publication of Vespucci's letter to Lorenzo de Medici, alluded to in the previous chapter; yet the relations between the two discoverers were such as might have existed between men united by fraternal ties.

*"To my very dear Son, Don Diego Columbus—at the Court.*

"MY DEAR SON,—“Diego Mendez departed from this place on Monday, the 3d of this month. After his departure I held converse with Amerigo Vespucci, the bearer of this letter, who goes to court on some business connected with navigation. He has always been *desirous of serving me, and is an honorable man*, though fortune has been unpropitious to him, as to many others; and his labors have not been as profitable as he deserves. He goes on my account, and with a great desire to do something which may redound to my advantage, if it is in his power.

“I know not here what instructions to give him that will benefit me, because I am ignorant of what will be required there; but he goes determined to do for me all that is possible. See what can be done to advantage there, and labor for it, that he may know and speak of everything, and devote himself to the work; and let everything be

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done with secrecy, that no suspicions may arise. I have said to him all that I can say touching the business, and have informed him of all payments which have been made me, and what is due.

"This letter is also intended for the adelantado [Don Bartholomew, Christopher's brother], that he may avail himself of any advantage and advice on the subject. His highness believes that the ships were in the best and richest portion of the Indies, and if he desires to know anything more on the subject, I will satisfy him by word of mouth, for it is impossible for me to tell him by letter.

"May the Lord have you in His holy keeping.

"Done at Seville, the 5th of February, 1505.

"Thy father, who loves thee better than himself,

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

"S.

"S. A. S.

"X. M. Y.

"Xpo. Ferens."

This precious document was found in the archives of Spain by Navarrete, whose volumes constitute a veritable mine of Spanish history. The superscription at the foot of the letter was adopted by Columbus after he became a "Don," and is supposed to mean: "Servus, Supplex Altissimi Salvatori; Christus, Maria, Josephus"; or, in English: "Humble Servant of the most high Saviour; Christ, Mary, Joseph." The

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original letter is contained in the collection of an indirect descendant of Columbus, the Duke of Veragua. It bears ample testimony to the important fact that, while the great Columbus was not permitted to present himself at court, his friend Vespucci not only had access to the throne but strong influence there.



## XV

### PILOT-MAJOR OF SPAIN

1508-1512

**I**F Vespucci had been as heedful of post-humous fame as Columbus, who lost no opportunity for trumpeting his deeds to the world, we should be better prepared to present a continuous narrative of his life than it is possible to gather from the fragmentary material he has left behind him. "The transactions of Vespucci at court," says Mr. Fiske, the eminent historian, "and the nature of the maritime enterprises that were set on foot or carried to completion during the next few years, are to be gathered chiefly from old account-books, contracts, and other business documents, unearthed by the indefatigable Navarrete, and printed in his great collection. . . . Unfortunately, account-books and legal documents, having been written for other purposes than the gratification of the historian, are—like the 'geo-

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logical record'—imperfect. Too many links are missing, to enable us to determine with certainty just how the work was shared among these mariners (Vespucci, La Cosa, Pinzon, and Solis), or just how many voyages were undertaken. But it is clear that the first enterprise contemplated (by King Ferdinand) was a voyage by Pinzon, in company with either Solis or Vespucci, or both, for the purpose of finding an end to the continent or a passage into the Indian Ocean. What Vespucci had failed to do in his last voyage for Portugal, he now proposed to do in a voyage for Spain."

While the large fleet for this purpose was being prepared, it is believed, Vespucci and La Cosa made two voyages, one in 1505 and another in 1507, to Darien and the Pearl Coast, which resulted more profitably to them than any others they had undertaken. As these voyages were simply for commercial purposes, and as Vespucci seems to have held in contempt the mere acquisition of riches, especially when the promotion of discovery was not the aim of his expeditions, he makes no mention of them whatever. In truth, but for the finding of two letters, sent to the Venetian senate by its diplo-

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matic agents in Spain, dated 1505 and 1507, these fifth and sixth voyages of Vespucci would have been overlooked entirely. The omission illustrates his carelessness in respect to the chronicling of his deeds, his heedlessness as to fame and glory. As one of his eulogists truly says: "In none of his writings does Vespucci claim for himself advancement, honor, or emolument, nor does he seek to delude his patrons with visions of untold wealth. His letters are the easy effusions of a great mind filled with admiration at the fertile regions, balmy climate, and primitive races of the New World. Ever modest, he merges himself in the greatness of his undertaking; and if the civilized world with one accord gave his name to the regions he was the first in modern times to visit, it was a tribute which it deemed just and paid unasked."

Owing to the protests of Portugal, it is thought, the great fleet intended for the extension of discovery along the southern coast of Brazil was dispersed and its vessels diverted to other seas. Vespucci had been active in its equipment, and during the uncertainty existing in Spain after the death of Queen Isabella, and the consequent de-

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rangement of affairs at court, he appears prominently in the business. He was despatched to court by the board of trade of Seville, especially commissioned to extricate them from the dilemma in which they found themselves: unable to determine whether they were to act in the name of the crazy princess, Juana, her foreign consort, Philip, or the old king, Ferdinand. In order to be able to meet any emergency, Vespucci was furnished with three different letters and sets of instructions. "You will take," wrote the president of the board of trade to Amerigo, "three letters: for the king, Vila, his grand chamberlain, and the secretary, Gricio, besides five memorials: one upon the despatch of the armament, two others received from Hispaniola concerning the tower which King Ferdinand commanded to be built upon the Pearl Coast, and the remaining two upon the caravels which are on service in Hispaniola, and concerning what things are necessary for the fortress which is building there. If Gricio is at court, and attends to the affairs of the Indies, give him the letter, show him the memorials, and he will guide you to the ear of the king and obtain for you good despatch. We are in-

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formed, however, that the king has intrusted the business of the Indies to M. de Vila, his grand chamberlain, and if that is the case go directly to him. What we principally desire is a full understanding of the agreement which has been entered into between the king, our lord (Philip, the consort of Juana Loca), and King Ferdinand, in order that we may be able to give to each prince that which is his."

Without going further into the affairs of court at this period—merely pausing to remark that after the death of Philip the old king soon extricated his kingdom from the state of embarrassment into which it had been plunged—we cannot but note that Amerigo Vespucci must have been a man of weight and influence to be selected for such a mission. It was a visit to the court previous to this which Columbus had in mind when he gave him the letter to his son Don Diego. The biographer of Columbus, Mr. Irving, has tried to make it appear that he was used by Columbus to further his own ends, for he says: "Among the persons whom Columbus employed at this time in his missions to the court was Amerigo Vespucci. He describes him as a worthy but

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unfortunate man, who had not profited as much as he deserves by his undertakings, and who had always been disposed to render him a service. His object in employing him appears to have been to prove the value of his last voyage, and that he had been in the most opulent parts of the New World, Vespucci having since touched upon the same coast, in a voyage with Alonzo de Ojeda."

Now, this amiable apologist, in his persistent efforts to thrust Amerigo Vespucci into positions subordinate to Columbus, defeats his own purpose and disparages his own hero, for by his very words can he be discredited. He himself says: "The incessant applications of Columbus [at court], both by letter and by the intervention of friends, appear to have been listened to with cool indifference. No compliance was yielded to his requests, and no deference paid to his opinions. . . . In short, he was not in any way consulted in the affairs of the New World."

And this was at about the time that Amerigo Vespucci was intrusted with most important business at court by the board of trade of Seville; about the time that he was called to court and highly honored

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by the king; just before the time that he was made captain of a fleet, with a salary of thirty thousand maravedis per annum. There was, in truth, no man in the employ of Spain more highly regarded than Vespucci for his talents, for his honesty, for his loyalty to the government. At the settlement of accounts pertaining to the fleet which had been intended for South America, more than five million maravedis passed through his hands—and he was never charged with having diverted a single centavo to himself.

Nothing can so abundantly testify to the respect in which Vespucci was held as his relations with King Ferdinand. While he has the unique honor of being almost the only man that Columbus never quarrelled with, it is also to his credit that he acquired, and retained to the last, the respect and confidence of the king. Ferdinand was always mistrustful of Columbus, and with good reason, but never refused Vespucci a favor—if he asked one—or hesitated to give him an audience. The reason was, most probably, that, aside from his deceitfulness (which was a quality the crafty Ferdinand could tolerate in no one but himself), Colum-

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bus was constantly importuning him for further honors and emoluments; while Vespucci rarely, if ever, craved glory or riches for himself. Nothing came of Vespucci's intercession at court for Columbus, and soon the latter dropped out of sight. He died in 1506, utterly neglected by the court and king, and in such obscurity that he was unnoticed in the local annals of the day.

In the mean time, Amerigo Vespucci was at the height of his career, trusted by the sovereign and honored by all with whom he came in contact. On the return of King Ferdinand to absolute power in Spain, through the death of his son-in-law Philip and the regency for his insane daughter Juana, he called Vespucci and La Cosa to court in order to consult with them respecting nautical affairs and future discoveries. In February, 1508, Vespucci, Pinzon, and Solis, who, together with La Cosa, were then the most highly honored navigators in Spanish employ, were charged with the safe conduct to the king's treasury of six thousand ducats in gold, for which service they received six thousand maravedis each.

Another consultation was held with the



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king, whose favorable opinion of Vespucci was so strengthened that the year following he created for him the office of pilot-major, as the most eminent navigator in his kingdom. This position was given him in March, 1508, and from that time till his death, in February, 1512, he received a salary of seventy-five thousand maravedis per annum. He was charged to examine and instruct all pilots in the use of the astrolabe "to ascertain whether their practical knowledge equalled their theoretical, and also to revise maps, and to make one of the new lands which should be regarded as the standard. . . . He was to correct the errors carried into the charts by the teachings and the maps of Columbus and others. The inaccuracy of the Columbus charts was so notorious that their use was subsequently prohibited, and a penalty imposed upon the pilot who should sail by them." Vespucci was at the head of a government department pertaining to pilotage, navigation, and charts. It was then unique in the world, and the weight of authority behind it was adverse to the use of charts made by Columbus; notwithstanding which Mr. Irving says: "When the passion for maritime discovery was

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seeking to facilitate its enterprises, the knowledge and skill of an able cosmographer like Columbus would be properly appreciated, and the superior correctness [?] of his maps and charts would give him notoriety among men of science."

The importance of this position created for Vespucci will appear from the royal order, or commission, which reads: ". . . We command that all pilots of our kingdom and lordships, who now are, shall henceforward be, or desire to be, pilots on the routes to the said islands and terra firma which we hold in the Indies, and other parts of the ocean sea, shall be instructed in and possess all necessary knowledge of the use of the quadrant and astrolabe; and in order that they may unite practice with theory, and profit thereby in the said voyages which they may make to the said lands, they shall not be able to embark as pilots in the said vessels, nor receive wages for pilotage, nor shall merchants be able to negotiate with them as such, nor captains receive them aboard their ships, without their *having been first examined by you, Amerigo Despuchi*, our pilot-major, and received from you a certificate of examination

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and approbation, certifying that they are possessed, each one, of the knowledge aforesaid; holding which certificate, we commend that they be held and received as expert pilots, wherever they shall show themselves—for it is our will and pleasure that you should be examiner of said pilots. And that those who do not possess the required knowledge shall the more easily acquire it, we command that you shall instruct, at your residence in Seville, all such as shall be desirous of learning and remunerating you for the trouble. . . . And as it has been told us that there are many different charts, by different captains, of the lands and islands of the Indies belonging to us, which charts differ greatly from each other—therefore, that there may be order in all things, it is our will and pleasure that a standard chart shall be made; and that it may be the more correct, we command the officers of our board of trade in Seville to call an assembly of our most able pilots that shall at that time be in the country, and, in the presence of you, Amerigo Despuchi, our pilot-major, there shall be planned and drawn a chart of all the lands and islands of the Indies, which have

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hitherto been discovered belonging to our kingdom; and upon this consultation, subject to the approval of you, our pilot-major, a standard chart shall be drawn which shall be called the Royal Chart, by which all pilots must direct and govern themselves. This shall remain in the possession of our said officers, and of you, our said pilot-major; and no pilot shall use any other chart, without incurring a penalty of fifty doubloons, to be paid to the board of trade in the city of Seville. . . . And it is our will and pleasure that, in virtue of the above, you, the said Amerigo Despucci, shall use and exercise the said functions of our pilot-major, and shall be able to do, and shall do, all things pertaining to that office contained in this our letter.”<sup>1</sup>

The remainder of Amerigo Vespucci's life may almost be summed up in the statement that he held this responsible post during the four years succeeding to his appointment, for he received his commission on March 22, 1508, and died on February 22, 1512. It was an onerous position, “and his appointment to it by Ferdinand was the

<sup>1</sup> From Navarrete's *Coleccion de los Viajes y Descubrimientos*.

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highest proof of the estimation in which he was held by that monarch that could have been bestowed upon him." It was a recognition of his supereminent qualities, as cosmographer and navigator, at a time when Spanish enterprise was reaching out to every part of the western world; and as he discharged its duties with fidelity and skill, confining himself closely to his desk, no leisure was afforded him for further voyaging, for writing out the long-deferred accounts of his travels, or for recreation of any sort. He made one short visit to Florence, where he was received with honor, as the most distinguished son of a city world-famous for its great men, and where the portrait was painted which has been universally accepted as authentic, representing him as advanced in years.

As already mentioned, authentic information relating to the latter years of Vespucci is of a fragmentary character, and is contained mainly in the official papers found in the archives of Simancas and Seville, by Don Martin Fernandez de Navarrete, to whom the biographers of Columbus were so deeply indebted. The date of the first of these papers is July, 1494, and relates to

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payments made to Berardi, as outfitter of the ships for the voyages of Columbus. By royal decree, April 11, 1505, the queen's treasurer is commanded to pay to Vespucci twelve thousand maravedis. Another decree, of March 22, 1508, grants Vespucci, as chief pilot of the kingdom, a salary of fifty thousand maravedis, subsequently increased to seventy-five thousand. Then follows the royal declaration (from which we have quoted), setting forth the duties of the pilot-major, which was issued during the regency of the crazy queen, Juana, and addressed to "Amerigo Despuchi."

There is no reference to the date and place of Vespucci's death; but this is not considered singular, in view of the fact that the demise of Columbus was officially unnoticed at the time. There is, rather, no direct reference; though confirmation of that event occurs in the continuation of his accounts to the day of his death, and after, one of which relates to the payment of ten thousand nine hundred and thirty-seven maravedis to Manuel Catano, a canon of Seville, as the executor of Vespucci's will, "that amount being the balance of his salary due at the date of his death."

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One of the very few references to the wife of Vespucci is contained in a royal decree of May 22, 1512, which grants a pension for life to his widow, Maria Cerezo, of ten thousand maravedis per annum. By a later decree, this pension is declared a fixed charge against the salary of the chief pilot and his successors. These were, in order of succession, Juan Diaz de Solis and Sebastian Cabot, after whom came others not so famous as these great navigators.

These papers are cited to show that Amerigo Vespucci was not looked upon as an adventurer by the dignitaries of Spain; that, on the contrary, he was held in great esteem, honored with the highest office in the gift of the king, in which his great accomplishments could have full scope. He filled that office with eminent ability, to the complete satisfaction of King Ferdinand, and when he died, on February 22, 1512, he left behind a name untarnished, a reputation for probity unsullied. Despite the honors accorded him by the kings of Spain and Portugal, however, and the high positions he occupied, he left no fortune for his heirs. His valuable papers were bequeathed to his nephew, Juan Ves-

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pucci, whom he loved like a son; but his widow was left in circumstances so straitened that she was actually dependent upon the pension granted her by the crown.



## XVI

### HOW AMERICA WAS NAMED

1504-1541

IF, in the foregoing narrative, the author has seemed to champion his hero unduly, going perhaps unnecessarily into the details of his voyages, it may have been owing to anticipated opposition on the part of his readers. There has always been a wide divergence of opinion respecting the merits of Amerigo Vespucci, and the world has never reconciled itself to his so-called usurpation of the glory rightly belonging to Columbus.

Even so great a writer as Emerson allowed himself to say: "Strange that broad America must wear the name of a thief! Amerigo Vespucci, the pickle-dealer at Seville, who went out in 1499, a subaltern with Hojeda, and whose highest naval rank was boatswain's mate, in an expedition that never sailed, managed in this lying world to sup-

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plant Columbus, and baptize half the earth with his own dishonest name!"

We, who have followed the career of Amerigo Vespucci from its beginning to its ending, know that he was not a thief; that—except by implication, as having been a purveyor of naval stores—he was not a "pickle-dealer"; that he held a far higher rank than boatswain's mate—as attested by the royal proclamation we have cited, naming him to be chief pilot of Spain; and that, so far as the evidence of his contemporaries and his own letters show, he made no attempt whatever to thrust his personality upon the world.

He did not "baptize half the earth with his own dishonest name," though it is true that the appellation by which a hemisphere is known to-day was derived from Americus, Amerigo, or Americo—whether we speak it in Latin, in Italian, or in Spanish.

How comes it then, the reader may well ask, that America derived its name from the Florentine, Vespucci, when it should, by right of "discovery," have been called after the Genoese, Columbus? The answer to this question involves the following of clews centuries old, through a labyrinth of

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falsehood and misstatement that was built up three hundred years ago. The first clew may be found on page 197 of this biography, where mention is made of the translation of Vespucci's letter to Lorenzo de Medici, by Giocondo, in 1504, and issued by him under the title *Mundus Novus*. This letter is said to have been first published in Lisbon and Augsburg in 1504, and in Strasburg in 1505.

Pick up this book and nail it to the wall, where it may be observed by all, for it was the very beginning of Vespucci's posthumous troubles. We have read the letter and known it to have been a plain, unvarnished account of Vespucci's third voyage, in which he chanced to say that he thought he had discovered the fourth part of the globe, and proposed to call it *Mundus Novus*, or the New World. He was quite right, and within bounds, when he did this, for he was thinking only of that portion of the *southern hemisphere* which he had found, and not of the entire western hemisphere. He did not extend the term to cover the northern regions, discovered by Columbus, for the latter had no idea that they pertained to a new world; in fact—as we know—believed to the last that they belonged to Asia or India.

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“At no time during the life of Columbus, nor for some years after his death,” says a learned historian, “did anybody use the phrase ‘New World’ with conscious reference to *his* discoveries. At the time of his death their true significance had not yet begun to dawn upon the mind of any voyager or any writer. It was supposed that he had found a new route to the Indies by sailing west, and that in the course of this achievement he had discovered some new islands,” etc.

We must, then, acquit Vespucci of any intention of depriving Columbus of his laurels, when he said he believed he had found a new world, for he referred only to that portion of South America now known as Brazil. Nor, so far as we know, was he either responsible for, or aware of, the publication of his letters to Medici and Soderini—for those to the latter were afterwards translated and printed—as he was, at that time, on the ocean. In truth, as the letters were merely epistles to friends, who would naturally be interested in his discoveries, and of course overlook any defects of diction, he openly stated that he was only waiting leisure for improving and elaborating them for issue in pamphlet form. He never acquired

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this leisure, and the world, tired of waiting, seized upon his material and brought it out in print, without so much as saying "by your leave."

The second person to take liberties with Vespucci's name was one Matthias Ringmann, a student in Paris, who was acquainted with Friar Giocondo, and of course saw the *Mundus Novus*, which he published in Strasburg in 1505. That same year he was offered the professorship of Latin in a college at Saint-Dié, a charming little town in the Vosges Mountains, which had long been a seat of learning. It is said to have been strangely associated with the discovery of America, from the fact that here was written, about 1410, the book called *Imago Mundi*, which Columbus read and probably took to sea with him on his first great voyage. In a double sense, this obscure town and college, nestling in a little-known valley of the Franco-German mountains, is known in connection with the name America, as will now be shown.

Young Professor Ringmann found at Saint-Dié a select and distinguished company of scholars, composed of Martin Waldseemüller, professor of geography; Jean Basin de Senda-

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cour, canon and Latinist; Walter Lud, secretary to Duke René, patron of literature, and especially of the college of Saint-Dié, which was to him as the apple of his eye. He was the reigning Duke of Lorraine, and titular "King of Sicily and Jerusalem," but had never strayed far from his own picturesque province, though he had won a great victory over Charles the Bold in 1477. He is, no doubt, worthy an extended biographical sketch, but in this connection can only be referred to as the patron of these great teachers in Saint-Dié, who, soon after the appearance of Ringmann among them, conceived the plan of printing a new edition of *Ptolemy*.

One of them, Walter Lud, was blessed with riches, and as he had introduced a printing-press, about the year 1500, the college was amply equipped. So many discoveries had been made since the last editions of *Ptolemy* had appeared, that the Saint-Dié coterie felt the need of new works on the subject, and sent Ringmann to Italy hunting for the same. He, it is thought, brought back, among other "finds" of great value, the letter written by Vespucci to Soderini from Lisbon, in September, 1504, a certified manuscript copy of which was made

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in February, 1505, and printed at Florence before midsummer, 1506.

No extended explanation is needed now to elucidate the scheme by which Vespucci's letters were incorporated in the treatise published by those wise men of Saint-Dié, entitled *Cosmographie Introductio*, or "Rudiments of Geography," and taken from the press on April 25, 1507.

It was a small pamphlet, with engravings of the crudest sort, but it made a stir in the world such as has been caused by but few books since. But one copy of this first edition is said to be extant, and that is in the Lenox Library, New York City. It caused a flutter in cosmographical circles, not alone at the time of its issue, but for centuries thereafter, for in it first occurs in print the suggestion that the "fourth part of the world," discovered by Amerigo Vespucci, should be called AMERICA.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Martin Waldseemüller was the culprit, and not Amerigo Vespucci, for he says, in Latin, which herewith find turned into English: "But now these parts have

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent article on Saint-Dié and the naming of America, see *Harper's Magazine*, vol. lxxxiv., p. 909 (1892).

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been more extensively explored and *another fourth part has been discovered by Americus Vesputius* (as will appear in what follows): *wherefore I do not see what is rightly to hinder us from calling it Amerige, or America—i.e., the land of Americus, after its discoverer, Americus, a man of sagacious mind, since both Europe and Asia have got their names from women. Its situation and the manners and customs of its people will be clearly understood from the twice two voyages of Americus, which follow.*”

It was a suggestion, merely, and by one who was a perfect stranger to Vespucci; but it promptly “took,” for the word America was euphonious, it seemed applicable, and, moreover, it was to be applied only to that quarter in the southern hemisphere which had been revealed by Amerigo Vespucci. It was a suggestion innocently made, without any sort of communication from Amerigo himself, intended to influence the opinion of contemporaries or the verdict of posterity.

“But for these nine lines written by an obscure geographer in a little village of the Vosges,” says Henry Harrisse, “the western hemisphere might have been called ‘The Land of the Holy Cross,’ or ‘Atlantis,’ or







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'Columbia,' 'Hesperides,' 'Iberia,' 'New India,' or simply 'The Indies,' as it is designated officially in Spain to this day." . . . "As it was, however," says another writer, "the suggestion by Waldseemüller was immediately adopted by geographers everywhere; the new land beyond the Atlantic had, by a stroke of a pen, been christened for all time to come."

The full title of the *Cosmographie Introductio* reads: "An Introduction to Cosmography, together with some principles of Geometry necessary to the purpose. Also four voyages of Americus Vesputius. A description of universal Cosmography, both stereometrical and planometrical, together with what was unknown to Ptolemy and has been recently discovered."

Notwithstanding the name was "promptly adopted" by the geographers, at the same time it "came slowly into use," for geographical knowledge was then in an inchoate state, especially as respected the New World. It is said to have first appeared on a map ascribed to Leonardo da Vinci in 1514; but in a pamphlet accompanying "the earliest known globe of Johann Schöner," made in 1515, the new region is described as the "fourth part of the globe named after

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its discoverer, Americus Vesputius, who found it in 1497." Vespucci did not find it, and he never made the claim that he discovered more than is given in his letters; but this misstatement by another caused him to be accused of falsifying the dates of his voyages in order to rob Columbus of his deserts.

It will be perceived, however, that the name was not applied at first to the entire land masses of America, but merely to that portion now known as Brazil, called by Cabral "*Terra Sanctæ Crucis*," or "Land of the Holy Cross," and by Vespucci, who continued his explorations, "*Mundus Novus*." Further than this Vespucci never went, and, moreover, he passed away "before his name was applied to the new discoveries on any published map." He was living, of course, when the *Cosmographie* appeared, and may have seen a copy of the book; but the argument advanced by some that he dedicated this work to Duke René of Lorraine, and hence must have written it, falls to the ground when that dedication is examined. The worthy canon who translated Vespucci's letter to Soderini into Latin, copied the dedication in the original, which was ad-

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dressed to "His Magnificence, Piero Soderini, etc.," but substituted for the last-named his patron, Duke René. This is proved by the title "His Magnificence," which was used in addressing the Gonfaloniere of Florence, and never in connection with Duke René of Lorraine.

It was not until near the middle of the sixteenth century that "America" was recognized "as the established continental name," when, after Mexico had been conquered by Cortés, Peru by Pizarro, and the Pacific revealed by Balboa and Magellan, it first appears on the great Mercator map of 1541. The appellation "America" had superseded *Mundus Novus* on several maps previous to this, but only as a term applied to restricted regions. "The stage of development," says the learned author of the *Discovery of America*, "consisted of five distinct steps. . . . 1. Americus called the regions visited by him *beyond the equator* a 'New World,' because they were unknown to the ancients; 2. Giocondo made this striking phrase, *Mundus Novus*, into a title for his translation of the letter, which he published at Paris (1504) while the author was absent from Europe, and probably without his

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knowledge; 3. The name *Mundus Novus* got placed upon several maps as an equivalent for *Terra Sanctæ Crucis*, or what we call Brazil; 4. The suggestion was made that *Mundus Novus* was the Fourth Part of the Earth, and might properly be named America, after its discoverer; 5. The name America thus got placed upon several maps as an equivalent for what we call Brazil, and sometimes came to stand alone for what we call South America, but still signified *only a part of the dry land beyond the Atlantic to which Columbus had led the way.*"

That there was no evil intention on Vespucci's part is amply proved by the fact that, while he himself lived four years after the *Introductio* was published, a certain contemporary of his, one Ferdinand Columbus, who was most acutely interested in seeing justice done the name and deeds of his father, survived Vespucci twenty-seven years. He not only saw this book, but owned a copy, which, according to an autograph note on the fly-leaf, he had bought in Venice in July, 1521, "for five *sueldos*." This book is still contained in the library he founded at Seville, and as it was copiously annotated by him, it must have been carefully read; yet,

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though he has the credit of having written a life of his father, Christopher Columbus, he makes no mention whatever of the "usurpation" by Vespucci.

Ferdinand Columbus knew the Florentine, and was an intimate friend of his nephew, Juan Vespucci; yet the question seems never to have arisen between them as to the great discoverers' respective shares of glory. The explanation lies in this fact: that Vespucci's name had been bestowed upon a region far remote from that explored by his father, who had never sailed south of the equator. Notwithstanding the good feeling that prevailed between them, however, long after Ferdinand's death, when the name America had become of almost universal application, the veteran Las Casas, in writing his great history, marvels that the son of the old Admiral could overlook the "theft and usurpation" of Vespucci. The old man's indignation was great, for he was a stanch friend of Columbus, and revered his memory. He made out a very strong case against Vespucci—being in ignorance of the manner in which his name came to be given to the lands discovered by Columbus—and when, in 1601, the histo-

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rian Herrera, who made use of the Las Casas manuscripts, repeated his statements as those of a contemporary, all the world gave him credence.

Vespucci's name rested under suspicion during more than three centuries, and was not even partially cleared until 1837, when Alexander von Humboldt undertook the gigantic task of vindication. It was not so much to vindicate Vespucci, however, as to ascertain the truth, that Humboldt made the critical and exhaustive examination which appeared in his *Examen Critique de l'Histoire de la Géographie de Nouveau Continent*.

Even Humboldt, however, did not secure all the evidence available, but by the discovery of valuable documents the missing links in the chain were supplied: by Varnhagen, Vespucci's ardent eulogist, by HARRISSE, and finally by FISKE. The last-named truthfully says: "No competent scholar anywhere will now be found to dissent from the emphatic statement of M. HARRISSE—'After a diligent study of all the original documents, we feel constrained to say that there is not a particle of evidence, direct or indirect, implicating Amerigo Ves-



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pucci in an attempt to foist his name on this continent.'” And moreover, “no shade of doubt is left upon the integrity of Vespucci. So truth is strong, and prevails at last.”

This is the conclusion arrived at by the impartial historian, who, without disparaging the deeds of Columbus, without detracting in any manner from his great discoveries, has restored Amerigo Vespucci to the niche in which he was placed by the German geographers four hundred years ago, and from which he was torn by injudicious iconoclasts, fearful for the fame of Spain's great Admiral.

It is enough for Columbus to have discovered America; it was far more than Amerigo Vespucci deserved to have this discovery given his name, by which it will be known forever; but this honor, though unmerited, was at the same time unsought.



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