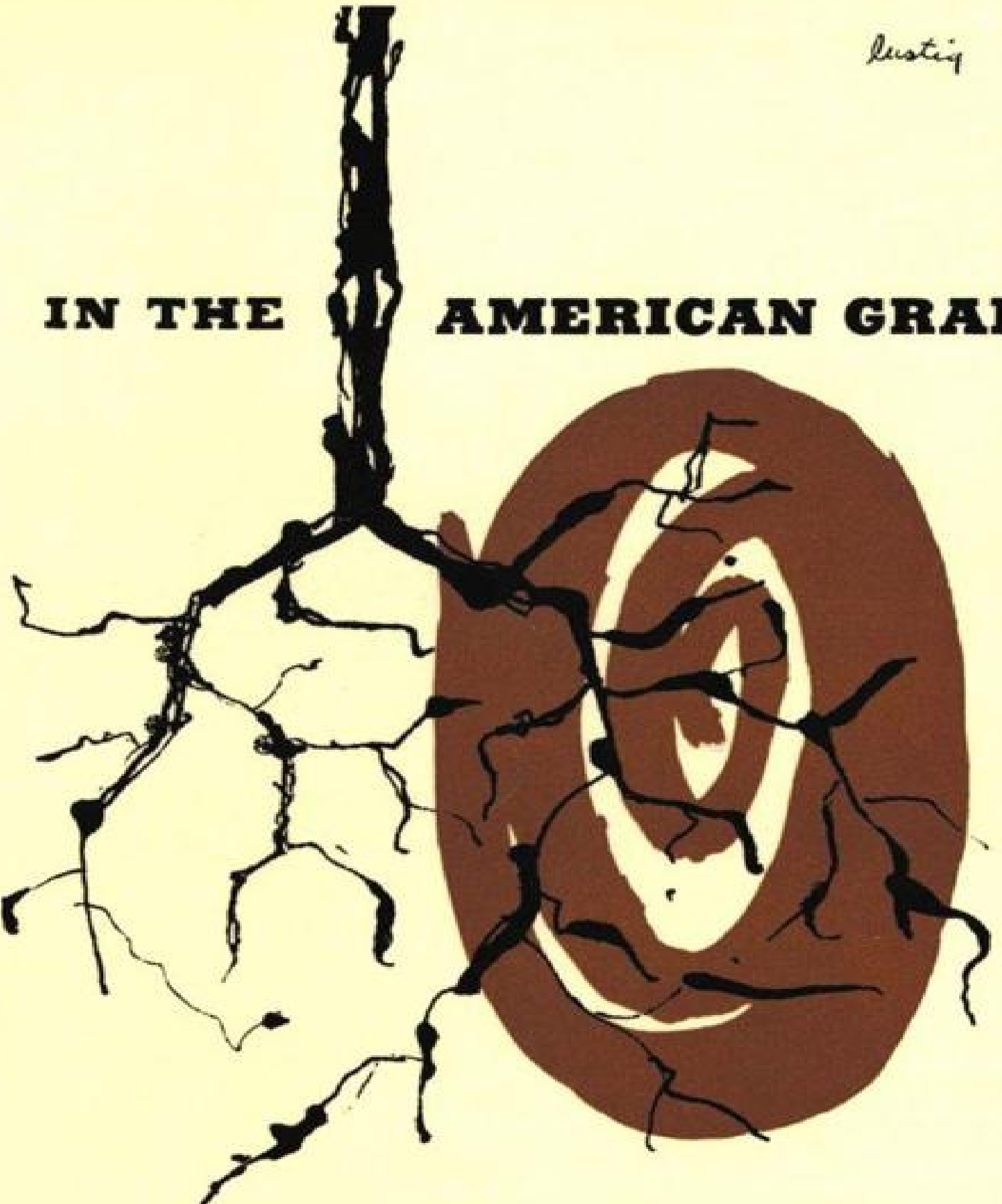


*Lustig*

**IN THE AMERICAN GRAIN**



**WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS**

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ESSAYS BY  
**WILLIAM CARLOS WILIAMS**

INTRODUCTION BY  
**RICK MOODY**

AFTERWORD BY  
**HORACE GREGORY**



A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

In these studies I have sought to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid. In letters, journals, reports of happenings I have recognized new contours suggested by old words so that new names were constituted. Thus, where I have found noteworthy stuff, bits of writing have been copied into the book for the taste of it. Everywhere I have tried to separate out from the original records some flavor of an actual peculiarity the character denoting shape which the unique force has given. Now it will be the configuration of a man like Washington and now a report of the witchcraft trials verbatim, a story of a battle at sea—for the odd note there is in it, a letter by Franklin to prospective emigrants; it has been my wish to draw from every source one thing, the strange phosphorus of the life, nameless under an old misappellation.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

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# Introduction

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In *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, the author gives us a few tantalizing clues about the genesis of *In the American Grain*. It was, Williams says, “a study to try to find out for myself what the land of my more or less accidental birth might signify.” A very ambitious undertaking! In a mere 250 pages! Perhaps the urgency of such a study results in part from Williams’ international origins (his father was British, and his mother was from Puerto Rico). Perhaps Williams felt he had a unique vantage point on the binding myths of our North American legacy.

The plan was to try to get inside the heads of some of the American founders or “heroes,” if you will, by examining their original records. I wanted nothing to get between me and what they themselves had recorded...

Like the epic *Paterson*, therefore, the work would require a mix, sometimes a collage, registers: of imagination, point of view, voice.

The time of composition was the teens and early twenties of the twentieth century. It is worth noting, meanwhile, that a good portion of the work was composed on a trip to Europe undertaken by Williams and his wife, Flossie, in 1922. Because of Williams’ demanding medical practice, they’d been married ten years without a proper vacation. Before setting out, Williams worked briefly on the manuscript in the American History room at the New York Public Library, during which period the following occurred:

One day the De Soto chapter was burning in my head. So I took out my paper, sat down at a table and, not waiting to take out a book, began to write furiously. I’d been going for five or ten minutes, I guess, when the attendant, a stupid ass with a British accent, came up behind me and, tapping me on the shoulder, said I couldn’t write in that room. I was furious.

Apparently, you absolutely had to be *researching* there: “So I had to get up, go out to the desk, get out a book, put it on the table before I could go on. My day was ruined.” We learn later in the same passage that Williams didn’t exclusively perform the preliminary work himself. *In the American Grain* was a team effort: “Floss did *all* the reading on the Aaron Burr Alexander Hamilton theme and what with her notes and what she told me, I was so stirred that I completed the chapter at one sitting.”

Later, in Europe: “We did walk there about Villefranche; we talked, we ate, drank and played otherwise as saw fit and did considerable writing besides during those weeks. I finished the De Soto piece from *In the American Grain* and one or two others. It can’t all be told.”

Of the layout of the whole, Williams remarks:

The Tenochtitlan chapter was written in big, square paragraphs like Inca masonry. Raleigh was written in what I conceived to be Elizabethan style; the Eric the Red chapter in the style of the Icelandic saga; Boone in the style of Daniel’s autobiography; Franklin was in Franklin’s words; and John Paul Jones I gave verbatim. Thus I tried to make each chapter not only in content but in the style itself a close study of the theme.

Indeed, the lovely, warm plain speech of the later Williams, of Williams the poet and William the occasional prose writer, is rarely to be found in *In the American Grain*. Some of this may have to do with the historical moment in which these pages were composed, amid the cross currents of high modernism, the modernism of Pound, Eliot, Woolf, Joyce, and Stein. B

more likely the rationale for the competing voices has much to do with American colonial history itself. If *In the American Grain* amounts to the search for organic psychological, emotional, and historical certainties in the momentous “discovery” of the New World, etc., its voices were, originally, European, coming from the violently disparate nations of the old continent.

Was this profusion of voices and styles the reason the book didn't find much of an audience upon its first publication? Williams' account of publication is, for any author, such a story to arouse paroxysms of sympathy:

It was my first book by a commercial publisher and I was dancing on air—because to that point nothing I had written had any market: I either paid for it myself or had it accepted, for the most part, without pay. The Bonis [his publishers] made a beautiful book of it, for which I shall be forever grateful, but, as far as marketing it, they did next to nothing.

As a book, it fell flat. I made trip after trip to the publisher's offices until they got so sick of seeing me that all of them would give me a nod and walk by, talking together, and close themselves in before me, leaving me sitting there: a beautiful brushoff.... I had to see my high hopes of success go skittering out the window. In no time at all the thing was remaindered and I began to pick up copies wherever I could.

It's one of the great mysteries of publishing how some titles (*Moby Dick* is a fine example) fail initially to secure an audience, but then go on to have vigorous lives later. A writer requires a champion, an Edmund Wilson or a Tim Page, to be rescued from oblivion. Although, Williams remarks, as others have, *In the American Grain* did, from the first, fall into the hands of some very influential readers, among them Martha Graham, Alfred Stieglitz, and Hart Crane.

Still, Williams' America, as depicted here, is by no means for the faint of heart, and that may have repelled tenderer sensibilities. From the initial chapter, concerning the murder of Eric the Red, we find ourselves in a blood-dappled and unforgiving New World: “Rather the idea than their way: to take what is mine by single strength, theirs by the crookedness of their law. But they have marked me—even to myself. Because I am not like them, I am evil.”

The American explorer sketched out in this chapter, in the elevated and somewhat comic imitation of an Icelandic saga, is no admirable character (“Manslaughter had driven me there”), and neither are those who follow him in the early chapters of *In the American Grain*. We have Columbus, penurious, neglected by his patrons, in danger of mutiny (“With his archaic smile, America found Columbus its first victim”); Cortez, who assassinated Montezuma and destroys all that he built (only *after* Williams lovingly catalogues all that is soon to be lost); and de Soto, whose failure in the interior of the continent is antiphonally narrated—half in the third person, and half in the first person voice of the seductive and voracious American continent herself.

Despite the mortality and the destruction in each of these cases, in the constructed point of view, we discover some “strange phosphorous” of life. America is the land that is no longer to be understood in any unitary way—in the historian's voice. Only a multiplicity of understandings and interpretations will do the job.

And somehow, in these early chapters of *In the American Grain*, Williams accomplishes all of this while being considerably entertaining. In these explorations, you turn the pages eagerly for that unmistakable whiff of the adventure narrative. When, in “De Soto and the New World,” Williams describes the relentlessness of mosquitoes in the jungles of the New World (“Silences, death, rotting trees; ‘insects so that the sails were black with them and the men laughed, in spite of their forlorn condition, to see each others' faces so swollen and out of shape in the morning’”), he does so because the texture of the colonial experience, in

unrelenting daily miseries, does more to bring our past to life than a whole shelf full of textbooks on the territorial purchases or the eminent martial campaigns.

This texture of the real also enables the characters themselves to rise up memorably. These are not the historical personages from grade school—they may not even be the “actual” characters, if in fact history can render such a thing. They are Williams’ interpretations thereof, consistent with the *grain* of the landscape in which they flowered, consistent with the bloodshed and the self-reliance of their place and time. Accordingly, on these pages, we find a Daniel Boone of such remarkable sturdiness that he eclipses even the founding fathers:

Some one must have taken the step. He took it. Not that he settled Kentucky or made a path to the west, not that he defended, suffered, hated and fled, but because of a descent to the ground of his desire was Boone’s life important and does it remain still loaded with power,—power to strengthen every form of energy that would be voluptuous, passionate, possessive in that place which he opened.

Against these wild, obsessive, and (to use Williams’ word) *passionate* forebears, Williams juxtaposes the malignant Puritans. Though as a man of science he might have detested the Puritans simply on philosophical grounds, Williams did, in his youth, flirt with Unitarianism, and darken the doorway of the occasional house of worship. Thus, it’s less the fact of *belief* than it is the joyless restraint of the Puritan world view that is considerably scorned in these pages, especially in the tour de force, “Cotton Mather’s Wonders of the Invisible World,” a chapter complete not only with the relentless italics of that early American divine, but with an elucidation of witchcraft that can only, at this late date, appear ludicrously precise—witches for all their supernatural powers, were apparently inclined to sit on people, keep them up all night, and make mischief with their livestock. Not much more.

“The atavism that thwarts and destroys,” Williams calls the Puritan phenomenon, and the only force that seems to temper it, or keep it in check, is the force of the indigenous North American population. Boone, in these pages, is a friend of the indigenous Americans. Champlain is a friend of the indigenous Americans, Père Sebastian is a friend of them, in this supple and unusual chapter that serves as the midpoint of Williams’ study, “Père Sebastian Rasles”: “There *is* the Indian. We are none. Who are we? Degraded whites riding our fears on a market where everything is by accident and only one thing sure: the fatter we get the duller we grow.”

If the possibility exists that Williams reads into the native population, as did Rousseau before him, remaking them along lines that might satisfy his epiphenomenalist interpretation of history (“What we are has its origin in what *the nation* in the past has been; that there is no source in AMERICA for everything we think or do”), that seems to yield when the reader arrives at the chapter having to do with Jacataqua, Aaron Burr’s native-American lover. This chapter verges on a screed against the fairer sex, morphing from a kind of Nietzschean reversal (compare “Supposing that truth is a woman—then what?” from *Beyond Good and Evil* to Williams’ “One is forced on the conception of the New World as a woman”) to become a lamentation on the refusal of American civilization—in the years of the French and Indian Wars and the years since—to understand its baser composition:

Atlanta, Georgia, is far worse than Paris for girls on the streets soliciting, but there is no good on it,—I don’t suppose there has been an American woman like Kiki or that delightful Baronness who paraded Fifth Avenue one day with a coal-scuttle for a chapeau. Naturally they arrested her. Naturally. She would have been arrested in any city, but not, I imagine, with quite such a sense of duty as in America.



*In the American Grain* concludes with a couple of rather tendentious chapters about Burr and Edgar Allan Poe, two patriots who most readers of American history might have supposed anything but. Similar to the rest of Williams' study, it is Burr's lustfulness, and Poe's unusual marriage (to his young cousin), that serve as the exemplary aspects of character. Of contradiction and paradox! These chapters then give way to a very brief meditation on Lincoln—metaphorical hermaphrodite—serving as the blunt end of this idiosyncratic narrative of American history, this narrative in which presidential assassination is the just and appropriate punctuation mark, what with the rivers of blood that irrigated the country unto that moment.

Having come this far, the reader might be eagerly asking what kind of book is *In the American Grain*? Is it a book of history? Is it a work of imagination? Is it a poetical work notwithstanding that it isn't set in lines? And of what use is it now, nearly a hundred years after its composition in an era of controversy surrounding the "discovery" and colonization of the North American continent? Well, *In the American Grain* never settles on a genre, never provides easy solutions to any of these very reasonable questions. For this writer, that's part of what is so memorable about it. William Carlos Williams finds his truths about American history in motif, in syntax, in voice, in the slippery surface of point of view. He's *passionate* about these things, possessed of a literary spirit consonant with what he finds so laudable among our discoverers and colonizers. When Williams is at his most unyielding, his most contentious, his most pitiless, his language is at its most elevated, and, as a consequence, the book is at its most indelible. No modern historian, worried about the facts of American history, would write, as Williams does here, aping Poe:

[America] has become "the most lawless country in the civilized world," a panorama of murders, perversions, a terrific ungoverned strength, excusable only because of the horrid beauty of its machines. To-day it is a generation of gross know-nothingism, of blackened churches where hymns groan like chants from stupefied jungles, a generation universally eager to barter permanent values (the hope of an aristocracy) in return for opportunist material advantages, a generation hating those whom it obeys.

The piling up of assertion, of generalization, does not make for conventional history, true, and these lines may not even be right, whatever that might mean in a historical context. And yet they are beautiful, sublime, and give us an idea of the psychology of Poe and of the early Americans, just as Cormac McCarthy (to use a contemporary example who is not, in fact, terribly far from Williams in *In the American Grain*) gives us an idea of how these ideas play out now. The young Williams, the mostly unpublished Williams, felt that American history was his to lay claim to, his to reconsider and reconceive, and this is a strikingly original approach, surely accounting for why *In the American Grain* is still being read, generations after its first rather tentative publication. In our own time, when the verifiable factuality of nonfiction is the subject of lawsuits and talk shows and online jeremiads, a hybrid literary work of this kind may seem nearly dangerous, and perhaps it is. Williams intended, one day, to write a sequel to *In the American Grain*, connecting Jefferson, he said, to Grover Cleveland. When the first volume suffered its inglorious fate, he scrapped the plan. And we are the worse for it. Nevertheless, here is the first flowering of Williams' rash and ambitious urge to compile some of the true voices of Americana. It's just as fresh as it was nearly a century ago.

Rick Moody

# *Red Eric*

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RATHER THE ICE than their way: to take what is mine by single strength, theirs by the crookedness of their law. But they have marked me—even to myself. Because I am not like them, I am evil. I cannot get my hands on it: I, murderer, outlaw, outcast even from Iceland. Because their way is the just way and my way—the way of the kings and my father—crossed them: weaklings holding together to appear strong. But I am alone, though in Greenland.

The worst is that weak, still, somehow, they are strong: they in effect have the power, by hook or by crook. And because I am not like them—not that I am evil, but more in accord with our own blood than they, eager to lead—this very part of me, by their trickery must not appear, unless in their jacket. Eric was Greenland: I call it Greenland, that men will go there to colonize it.

I, then, must open a way for them into the ice that they follow me even here—their servant, in spite of myself. Yet they must follow.

It was so from the beginning. They drove me from Jaederen, my father and me. Who was this Christ, that he should come to bother me in my own country? His bishops that lie and falsify the records, make me out to be what I am not—for their own ends—because we killed a man.

Was he the first man that was ever killed, that they must sour over it? That he was important to their schemes, that he meant much to them—granted: one of their own color, whose death who altered him must be driven from Norway. Their courts and soft ways. Not that we killed him. One or the other of us had to die, under the natural circumstance. He or we. But that if we had been killed, would he then have been driven from his country? They would have made him Archbishop.

To Iceland, then. Forget Norway. What there? My father dead. Land to the north cleared. A poor homestead. Manslaughter had driven me there. Then I married Thorhild, removed from the north and cleared land at Haukadal. Must I be meek because of that? If my slaves cause a landslide on Valthioff's farm and Valthioff's kinsman slays them, shall I not kill him? Is it proper for me to stand and to be made small before my slaves? I am not a man to shake and sweat like a thief when the time comes.

Rather say I killed two men instead of the one. They tried me among themselves and drove me out once more. To the north, then. Iceland wilderness.

There Thorgest comes to me and asks if I will lend him my outer dais-boards: ready to take me at a loss. Why else? For Eric the Red is a marked man, beyond the law, so it would seem: from that man one steals at will—being many in the act against his one. Thorgest keeps the decorated wood-pieces. I go to his house and remove my property. He gives chase and two of his sons are killed in the encounter.

This time they have done the thing. They search for us among the islands—me and my people.

This is the way of it, Thorhall, this has always been the way with me from the first. Eric loves his friends, loves bed, loves food, loves the hunt, loves his sons. He is a man that can throw a spear, take a girl, steer a ship, till the soil, plant, care for the cattle, skin a fox, sing

dance, run, wrestle, climb, swim like a seal. A man to plan an expedition and pay for it, kill an enemy, take his way through a fog, a snowstorm, read a reckoning by the stars, live in stench, drink foul water, withstand the fierce cold, the black of winter and come to a new country with a hundred men and found them there. But they have branded me. They have separated murder into two parts and fastened the worse on me. It rides in the air around me. What is it to be killed? They have had their fling at me. Is it worse, so much worse, than to be hunted about the islands, chased from Norway to Iceland, from south to north, from Iceland to Greenland, because—I am I, and remain so.

Outlaws have no friends. Murderers are run down like rabbits among the stones. Yet my ship was built, fitted, manned, given safe conduct beyond the reefs. To Thorbiorn I owe much. And so to Greenland—after bitter days fighting the ice and rough seas. Pestilence struck us. The cattle sickened. Weeks passed. The summer nearly ended before we struck land. This is my portion. I do not call it not to my liking. Hardship lives in me. What I suffer is myself that outraces the water or the wind. But that it only should be mine, cuts deep. It is the half only. And it takes it out of my taste that the choice is theirs. I have the rough of it not because I want it, but because it is all that is left, a remnant from their coatcloth. This is the gall on the meat. Let the hail beat me. It is a kind of joy I feel in such things.

Greenland then. So be it. Start over again. It turns out always the one way. A wife, her two sons and a daughter. So my life was split up. The logic of it also. This is my proof. We lived on our homestead, well rid of the world. Traders visited us. Then Lief, Eric's son, sails to Norway a thousand miles, in one carry. But on his return, Lief the Lucky, he is driven westward upon a new country, news of which he brings to Brattahlid. At the same stroke he brings me back pride and joy-in-his-deed, my deed, Eric moving up, and poison: an edict from Olaf—from my son's mouth—solid as an axe to cut me, half healed, into pieces again.

Not that it was new. Only that here in Greenland I had begun to feel that I had left the curse behind. Here through the winters, far to the west, I had begun to look toward summer when I should be whole again. My people at work, my wife beside me, the boys free from my smear, growing in strength and knowledge of the sea. Here was an answer to them and to Thorstein and Lief Erickson, sons of Red Eric, murderer! Myself in the teeth of the world.

So they chopped me up. The Pope wins Olaf. Lief at court—Olaf commissions him to carry the thing back to Greenland. It grows like fire. Why not? Promise the weak strength and have the strength of a thousand weak at your bidding. Thorhild bars me, godless, from her bed. Both sons she wins to it. Lief and Thorstein both Christians. And this is what they say: Eric, son of evil, come and be forgiven.—Let her build a church and sleep in it.

\* \* \*

With the years there began to be much talk at Brattahlid of Vinland the Good that Lief had first seen, that it should be explored. And so Karlsefni and Snorri fitted out a ship. Eric, too old to go with them, watches the ship depart. But Eric is in the ship, with the men, Eric the bedless, the sonless. Fate has pulled him out at the holes of his eyes and flung him again to sea as the ship steers southward. Now the glass darkens as the sea takes them to the New World.

They found wild rice, they built booths and palisades. First they traded with the Skrellings whose cheekbones were high, whose eyes wide, then fought them. Whereas Karlsefni and his men had shown white shields before, now they took red shields and displayed them. The

Skrellings sprang from their canoes and they fought together. Karlsefni and Snorri were beaten. They fell back. Then it was that Freydis, Eric's natural daughter, came out from her cabin. Seeing that the men were fleeing, she cried: Why do you flee from these wretches when ye should slaughter them like cattle? Had I a weapon I would fight better than any of you.

Lagging behind the rest as they ran, because of her belly, she being with child, she found a dead man in front of her. It was Snorri's son, with his head cleft by a stone, his naked sword beside him. This she took up and prepared to defend herself. The Skrellings then approached her, whereupon she stripped down her shirt and slapped her breast with her bare sword. At this the Skrellings were terrified and ran down to their boats.

So, thinning out, more and more dark, it ran: Eric in Freydis' bones: Freydis now, mistress of her own ship, persuades two brothers, Helgi and Finnbogi, to sail with her again to Vinland, all to share equally the good things that might there be obtained. Lief to lend her his house there. Two ships, each to have thirty able-bodied men besides the women, but at the start Freydis violated the compact by concealing five men more. Karlsefni feared her.

Now they put out to sea, the brothers in one ship and Freydis and Karlsefni in the other, having agreed that they would sail in company. But although they were not far apart from each other the brothers arrived somewhat in advance and carried their belongings up to Lief's house. Freydis comes and does the same. The brothers withdraw and build a new house nearby. Within a month, the two houses are at odds and winter comes on.

Spring. Freydis, one night, after long thinking, arose early from her bed and dressed herself, but did not put on shoes and stockings. A heavy dew had fallen. She took up her husband's cloak, wrapped it about her and walked in the dark to the brothers' house and up to the door, which had been only partly closed by one of the men, who had gone out only a short time earlier. She pushed open the door and stood silently in the doorway for a moment. Finnbogi was awake and said: What dost thou wish here, Freydis? She answered: I wish thee to arise and go with me for I would speak with thee. They walked to a tree which lay close to the wall of the house and seated themselves upon it. How art thou pleased here, she said. He answered that he was well pleased with the place, except for the quarrel which had come up between them. They talked.

It was the brothers' boat—it seemed—she wanted, larger than her own. Finnbogi slowly and thickheaded, or asleep, consents to let her have it. Freydis, split with anger or bad blood, returns home and Finnbogi to his bed.

The woman climbed into bed and awakened her husband with her cold feet. Why so cold and wet? I have been to the brothers to buy their ship, but they refused and beat me!

Thorvard roused his men. They went to the brothers' house, took them and all their people, and slaughtered them one by one as they were brought from within. Only the women were left. These no man would kill. What? said Freydis. Hand me an axe! This done, she fell upon the five women and left them dead.

In Greenland, Lief, now head of the family, has no heart to punish his sister as she deserves: But this I predict of them, that there is little prosperity in store for their offspring. Hence it came to pass that no one from that time forward thought them worthy of aught but evil. Eric in his grave.

# The Discovery of the Indies

THE NEW WORLD, existing in those times beyond the sphere of all things known to history, lay in the fifteenth century as the middle of the desert or the sea lies now and must lie forever marked with its own dark life which goes on to an immaculate fulfillment in which we have no part. But now, with the maritime successes of that period, the western land could not guard its seclusion longer; a predestined and bitter fruit existing, perversely, before the white flower of its birth, it was laid bare by the miraculous first voyage. For it is as the achievement of a flower, pure, white, waxlike and fragrant, that Columbus' infatuated course must be depicted, especially when compared with the acrid and poisonous apple which was later by him to be proved.

No more had Columbus landed, the flower once ravished, than it seemed as if heaven itself had turned upon this man for disturbing its repose. But the initiative taken, the course broached, the story must go on. He left a handful of colonists in the islands while he, himself, returned to Spain with the news and for aid.

As the outward journey had been pleasant "like April in Andalusia"—still seas, clear, fine weather and steady winds, so now the return was difficult. Through tempest, assault, trickery among the Portuguese Azores, capture and despair, he fought his way. But as he neared the home coast at last his trials grew worst of all. Everything hung on the point of being lost:

\* \* \*

... daylight until sunset, great trouble with the wind, high and tempestuous seas. Lightning struck three times to the N.N.E.—sign of a great storm coming from that quarter or its opposite. We lay to most of the night, afterwards showing a little sail. In the day the wind moderated a little but soon increased again and during the night the waves were terrible, rising against each other and so shaking and straining the *Niña* that she was in danger of being stove in. We carried the mainsail very closely reefed, so as just to give her steer-way.

Meanwhile the sea and wind increased, and we began to run before it, there being nothing else to do. The caravel *Pinta* began to run before it at the same time, and Martin Alonzo ran her out of sight, although he kept showing lanterns all night and they answered us.

Sunrise the wind blew still harder, and the cross seas were terrific. Continued to show the closely reefed mainsail to enable her to rise between the waves, or she would otherwise have been swamped. Now I feared that we should perish. I should have borne this misfortune with less distress had my life alone been in peril, but what caused me boundless grief and trouble was the thought that just now when our gainsayers were to be convinced and the discovery of a New World victoriously to be announced, that just now the Divine Will should wish to block me with my destruction.

Of this mind I resolved, that even if I should die, the ship be lost, to find a means of not losing a victory already won. I wrote on a parchment, with that brevity which the time demanded, how I had discovered the lands I had promised to find, describing the route I had followed and how your Highness had possession of all that had been found by me.

This folded and sealed, I had a cask brought, and having wrapped the writing in waxed

cloth surrounded by a large cake of wax, I enclosed all in a barrel stoutly hooped, which I threw into the sea. All believed it some act of devotion.

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Later amid showers and squalls, the wind veered to the west and we sailed before it, in a very confused sea, for five hours. We had taken in the reefed mainsail, for fear that the wind would carry all away. That night at the time of repeating the *Salve*, some of the men saw a light to leeward. During the night a terrible storm, expecting to be overwhelmed by the cross seas, while the wind seemed to raise the caravel into the air. In these straits, not knowing whether there was any port for shelter, I set the mainsail....

\* \* \*

Forced by the storm into Lisbon harbor, the turn of his destiny quickly multiplied his misfortunes. In Spain, when he finally arrived there, they immediately accused him of playing traitor to Castile, of having tried to bargain with the Portuguese sovereign.

But that passed; there was too much still for him to endure for catastrophe to have overtaken him so early; some savage power had him in its care, preserving him for its later pleasure. Now his triumph was acclaimed, his captives were paraded in Madrid, his gold was witnessed, his birds, monkeys and native implements were admired. This over, immediate the urge was on him once more. He must return at once to the New World. Never content would he be for the balance of his whole life, following his fortune, whose flower, unknown to him, was past.

But now he saw before him the illusive bright future of a great empire founded, coupled with a fabulous conquest of heathendom by the only true church. Much had been promised him. He had succeeded in the sternest hazard, the great first step; should not the rest prove easy and natural? It rose before him like a great gilded mountain. Again and again he called before his mind their agreements:

\* \* \*

... that henceforth I should be called Don, and should be Chief Admiral of the Ocean Sea, perpetual Viceroy and Governor of all the islands and continents that I should discover and gain in the Ocean Sea, and that my eldest son should succeed, and so from generation to generation forever.

. . . . .

Item: that of all and every kind of merchandise, whether pearls, precious stones, gold, silver, spices, etc., of whatever kind, name and sort which may be bought, bartered or discovered within the said Admiralty, your Highnesses grant from henceforth to the said Don Cristóbal, the tenth part of the whole ... granted, in the town of Santa Fe de la Granada on the 17th day of April, in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1492. I, the King. I, the Queen.

\* \* \*

Unhappy talk. What power had such ridiculous little promises to stay a man against the terrific downpour on the brink of which they were all floating? How could a king fulfill them? Yet this man, this straw in the play of the elemental giants, must go blindly on. More and more he threw everything he had into the contest, his sons, his brothers, in the hope that his fortunes would be retrieved in the end. How could he have realized that against which he was

opposed? His instinctive enemies, however, were not so backward on their part. With malicious accuracy, finding him more and more alone, they sensed everything and turned it to their own advantage, being closer to that curious self-interest of natural things than he.

Heroically, but pitifully, he strove to fasten to himself that enormous world, that present crushed him among its multiple small disguises.

With its archaic smile, America found Columbus its first victim. This was well, even merciful. As for the others, who shall say?—when riding a gigantic Nature and when through her heat they could arrogate to themselves a pin's worth of that massive strength, to turn against another of their own kind to his undoing,—even they are natural and as much a part of the scheme as any other.

There is no need to argue Columbus' special worth. As much as many another more successful, everything that is holy, brave or of whatever worth there is in a man was contained in that body. Let it have been as genius that he made his first great voyage possessed of that streamlike human purity of purpose called by that name—it was still as man that he would bite the bitter fruit that Nature would offer him. He was poisoned and his fellows turned against him like wild beasts.

Bewildered, he continued, voyage after voyage, four times, out of his growing despair; seemed that finally by sheer physical effort a way must be found—till the realization of it all last grew firmly upon him:

\* \* \*

Seven years passed in discussion and nine in execution, the Indies discovered, wealth and renown for Spain and great increase to God and to his Church. And I have arrived at and am in such condition that there is no one so vile but thinks he may insult me.

What have I not endured? Three voyages undertaken and brought to success against all who would gainsay me; islands and a mainland to the south discovered; pearls, gold, and, in spite of all, after a thousand struggles with the world and having withstood them all, neither arms nor counsels availed, it cruelly kept me under water.

If I were to steal the Indies or the land which lies beyond them from the altar of St. Peter and give them to the Moors, they could not have greater enmity toward me in Spain.

When on my last voyage, having turned homeward, I had left Paria (Brazil) and come again to Española (Porto Rico), I found half the people in revolt; and the Indians on the other side grievously harassed me. It was at this time that Bobadilla came to Santo Domingo. I was at La Vega. He took up his abode in my house and, just as he found it, so he appropriated everything to himself. Well and good; perhaps he was in want of it. On the second day after his arrival he created himself Governor.

I thought the affair would end like that of Hojeda and the others, but I restrained myself when I learned for certain from the friars that your Highnesses had sent him. I wrote to him that his arrival was welcome, that I was prepared to hand it over to him as smooth as my palm. But he gave me no answer. On the contrary, he put himself in a warlike attitude and compelled all who were there to take an oath to him as Governor. Together with them, he ordered inquisitions concerning me, the like whereof were never known in hell. I was made prisoner and returned to Spain in the condition of which you know.

I should have freed myself forever from this affair and undertaken that holy pilgrimage which has long been in my heart had it been honorable to my Queen to do so. But the supplic

of Our Lord and Her Highness made me persevere. I undertook a fresh voyage to the ne ~~Heaven and Earth.~~ And if this, the most honorable and profitable of all, is held in small esteem in Spain, it is because it has been looked upon as my work.

Up to the period of reaching these shores, I experienced most excellent weather, but the night of my arrival came on with a dreadful tempest, and the same bad weather has continued ever since. On reaching the island of Española, I despatched a packet of letters, by which I begged as a favor that a ship be supplied me at my own cost in lieu of one of those that I had brought with me, which had become unseaworthy, and could no longer carry sail. The letters were taken, and your Highnesses will know if a reply has been given them. For my part I was forbidden to go on shore.

The tempest was terrible throughout the night, all the ships were separated, and each one driven to the last extremity without hope of anything but death; each of them also looked upon the loss of the rest as a matter of certainty. What man was ever born, not even excepting Job, who would not have been ready to die of despair at finding himself as I then was, with an anxious fear for my own safety, and that of my son, my brother and my friends, and yet I refused permission either to land or to put into harbor on the shores which by God's mercy I had gained for Spain sweating blood?

And this is the thing which calls most loudly for redress and remains inexplicable to this moment. The lands in this part of the world, which are now under your Highnesses' sway, are richer and more extensive than those of any other Christian power, and yet, after that I had, by the Divine Will, placed them under your high and royal sovereignty, and was on the point of bringing your Majesties into receipt of a very great and unexpected revenue; and while I was waiting for ships to convey me to safety, and with a heart full of joy, to your royal presence to victoriously announce the news of the gold that I had discovered, I was arrested and thrown with my two brothers, loaded with irons, into a ship, stripped, and very ill treated without being allowed any appeal to justice.

Who could believe that a poor foreigner would have risen against your Highnesses, in such a place without any motive or argument on his side; without even the assistance of any other Prince upon whom to rely; but on the contrary amongst your own vassals and natural subjects, and with my sons staying at the royal court? I was twenty-eight years old when I came into your Highnesses' service, and now I have not a hair upon me that is not gray; my body is infirm, and all that was left me, as well as to my brothers, has been taken away and sold, even to the frock that I wore.

I would implore your Highnesses to forgive my complaints. I am indeed in as ruined a condition as I have related. With regard to temporal things, I have not even a *blanca* for an offering; and in spiritual things, I have ceased here in the Indies from observing the prescribed forms of religion....

But to return to the ships: although the tempest had so completely separated them from me as to leave me single, yet the Lord restored them to me in His good time. The ship for which we had the greatest fear, had put out to sea to escape being blown toward the island. The *Gallega* lost her boat and a part of her provisions, which latter loss indeed all of the ships suffered. With this tempest I struggled on till I reached Jamaica, and there the sea became calm, but there was a strong contrary current which carried me as far as the Queen's Garden without seeing land. Hence, as opportunity offered, I pushed on for the mainland, in spite of the wind and a fearful contrary current, against which I contended for sixty days. All this time



was unable to get into harbor, nor was there any cessation of the tempest, which was on a continuation of rain, thunder and lightning. I at length reached the Cape of Gracias a Dios and after that the Lord granted me fair wind and tide; this was on the twelfth of September. Twenty-eight days did this fearful tempest continue, during which I was at sea and saw neither sun nor stars, my ships lay exposed, with sails torn, and anchors, rigging, cables, boats and a great quantity of provisions lost. Other tempests have been experienced, but never of so long a duration as this. I myself had fallen sick, and was many times on the point of death, but from a little cabin that I had caused to be constructed on deck, I directed our course. My brother was in the ship that was in the worst condition and the most exposed to danger; and my grief on this account was the greater that I had brought him with us against his will.

Such is my fate, that the twenty years of service through which I have passed with so much toil and danger, have profited me nothing, and at this very day I do not possess a room in Spain that I can call my own; if I wish to eat or sleep, I have nowhere to go but to the inn or tavern, and most times lack wherewith to pay the bill.

I reached the land of Cariay, where I stopped to repair my vessels and take in provisions, as well as to afford relaxation to my men, who had become very weak. There I gained information respecting the gold mines of which I was in search and two Indians conducted me to Carambaru, where the people, who go naked, wear golden mirrors round their necks, which they will neither sell, give, nor part with for any consideration. They named to me many places on the sea-coast where there were both gold and mines. I started with the intention of visiting all of them. It was on the eve of St. Simon and St. Jude, which was the day fixed for our departure; but that night there arose so violent a storm, that we were forced to go wherever it drove us. I ran before the wind without power to resist it. Never was the sea seen so high, so terrific and so covered with foam; not only did the wind oppose our proceeding onward, but it also rendered it highly dangerous to run in for any headland, and kept me in that sea, which seemed to me as a sea of blood, seething like a cauldron on a mighty fire. Never did the sky look more fearful; during day and night it burned like a furnace and every instant I looked to see if my masts and my sails were not destroyed. These flashes came with such alarming fury that we all thought the ships must have been destroyed. All this time the waters from heaven never ceased, not to say that it rained, for it was like a repetition of the deluge. Twice had the ships suffered loss in boats, anchors, rigging, and were now lying bare without sails still raining. The sea very tempestuous and I was driven backward under bare poles....

I anchored at an island, where I lost, at one stroke, three anchors; and at midnight, when the weather was such that the world appeared to be coming to an end, the cables of the other ship broke, and it came down upon my vessel with such force that it was a wonder we were not dashed to pieces; the single anchor that remained to me was our only preservation. After six days, when the weather became calm, I resumed my journey, having already lost all my tackle; my ships were pierced with borers more than a honeycomb and the crew entirely paralyzed with fear and in despair. There the storm returned to drive me back ... I continued beating against contrary winds, and with the ships in the worst possible condition. With three pumps, and the use of pots and kettles, we could scarcely clear the water that came into the ship, there being no remedy but this, against the shipworm, I determined on keeping the sea in spite of the weather, when we miraculously came upon land.

Weep for me whoever has charity, truth and justice. I did not come out on this voyage to gain to myself honor and wealth; for at that time all hope of such a thing was dead. I do not

when I say, that I went to your Highnesses with honest purpose of heart, and sincere zeal your cause. I humbly beseech your Highnesses, that if it please God to rescue me from this place, you will graciously sanction my pilgrimage to Rome and other holy places. May the holy Trinity protect your Highnesses' lives, and add prosperity....

\* \* \*

Storms and men; the very worms of the sea were opposed to him. But if, as he instinctively, but for his insane doggedness, would have done, he had undertaken that holy pilgrimage of which he had spoken, the flower might again, in that seclusion, often have appeared to him in all its old-time loveliness, as when he himself floated with luck and sunshine on that tropic sea toward adventure and discovery:

\* \* \*

... at the third hour of Saturday night it began to blow from the N.E. and I shaped my course to the west. We took in much water over the bows, which retarded our progress and nineteen leagues were made during the day and night.

Sunday we made nineteen leagues, and I decided to reckon less than the number run, for should the voyage prove of long duration, the people would not be so terrified and disheartened. This day we lost sight of land, and many fearful of not seeing it again sighed and shed tears. The sailors steered badly, letting the ships fall off to N.E. and even more, which I was forced to complain several times.

Monday ... Tuesday we sailed on our course which was west and made twenty leagues or more. We saw a large piece of the mast of a ship of one hundred and twenty tons, but were unable to get it.

Wednesday ... On this day, Thursday, thirteenth September, at the commencement of the night, the needles turned a half point to the north-west, and in the morning still more so. This took to be due to a movement of the North Star which must have an orbit like the other stars, howbeit less than they.

Friday, on the westerly course, day and night, twenty leagues, counting a little less. Here those on the caravel *Niña* reported that they had seen a tern, a bird which is never far from land.

Saturday, we made twenty-seven leagues on the west course; and in the early part of the night there fell into the sea a marvelous flame of fire, at a distance of about four or five leagues from the ship.

Sunday, the sixteenth, day and night, I steered the course west, making thirty-nine leagues but counted only thirty-six. There were some clouds and small rain. From this day and ever afterward very temperate breezes, so that there was great pleasure in enjoying the mornings, nothing being wanted but the song of nightingales. It was like April in Andalucía. Here we began to see many tufts of grass that were very green and appeared to have been quite recently torn from the land. All this I called to the attention of the men and from this I judged that we were near land, but not the mainland which I make to be more distant.

The seventeenth of September, Monday, I proceeded on the west course and made over fifty leagues in the day and night, counting only forty-seven. A favorable current aided us on our way. There was very much fine grass and herbs from rocks, which came from the west, so that it seemed for certain that land must be near. This day the pilots observed the north

point and found, for the first time, that the needles turned a full point to the west of north. ~~At this day the mariners were alarmed and dejected and would not give their reason. But I knew~~ that it was because of the needle. At dawn I ordered that the north should be again observed. They then found that the needles were true for the cause was that the star makes the movement and not the needles. At dawn we observed much more weed appearing, like herbs from a river, in which one of the men discovered a live crab. This I kept that all might see and believe on the land. The sea water was found to be less salt than it had been since leaving the Canaries. This I caused many to taste. The breezes were always soft. Every one was pleased and the best sailors went ahead to sight the first land. Many tunnyfish passed on all sides of us and the crew of the *Niña* killed one. All these signs came from the west in which direction I trust in that high God in whose hands are all victories that very soon we shall see land. On that morning there appeared a white bird, called boatswainbird, which is not in the habit of sleeping on the sea.

Tuesday, we made forty-five leagues, counting only thirty-eight. The sea was like the river of Seville. Martin Alonzo, with the *Pinta*, which was a fast sailer, did not wait, but said to me from his caravel, that he hoped to see land that night. A great cloud appeared to the north, sign of the nearness of land.

Wednesday, twenty-five leagues, but it was calm, and counted only twenty-two. This day at ten o'clock, a booby came to the ship and in the afternoon another, these birds are generally going more than twenty leagues from the land. There was also some drizzling rain without wind, which is a sure sign of land. I felt it to be certain that there were islands both to the north and south of our position and that we were passing through them. This I explained to all saying that my desire was to press on to the Indies, the weather being fine, as such was, and that on the return we should see all. Here the pilots found their position. He of the *Niña* made the Canaries four hundred and forty leagues distant, the *Pinta* four hundred and twenty. But he of my own ship made the distance exactly four hundred leagues, which I gave out to be the true.

Thursday, twentieth of September, the course was W. by N. and as her head was a round the compass, owing to the calm that prevailed, the ship made only seven or eight leagues. Two boobies came to the ship, and afterwards another, a sign of the proximity of land. One of the men caught a bird with the hand, which was like a tern. But it was a riverbird not a seabird, the feet being like those of a gull. At dawn two or three land birds came singing to the ship and they disappeared before sunset.

Twenty-first of September, most of the day was calm, later a little wind. During the day and night we made only thirteen leagues. At dawn we saw so much weed that the sea appeared to be covered with it. And it came from the west. A booby was seen. The sea was very smooth, like a river, and the air the best in the world. Toward midday a whale was sighted, which is a sign of land, because they always keep near the shore.

Saturday, September twenty-second, I shaped my course W.N.W. more or less, her head turning from one to the other point and made thirty leagues. This contrary wind was very necessary to me, because my people had become much excited at the thought that in these seas no wind ever blew in the direction of Spain. In the morning there was no weed but in the afternoon it was very thick.

This day, Sunday, the twenty-third of September, I shaped a course N.W. and at times more northerly; sometimes getting upon our course, which was west, and made about twenty

two leagues. A dove was seen and also another booby, another riverbird and some white birds. Great quantities of weed and crabs in it. The sea being calm and smooth, the crew began to murmur, saying that here there was no great sea and the wind would never blow so that they could return to Spain. Many were in great despair and torment of mind thinking that they would never be able to return. Afterward the sea arose very much and later adverse winds appeared. The adverseness of the wind and the high sea were very helpful to me since they freed the crew of the idea that there would be no favorable sea and winds for their return. Yet even then some objected, saying that the wind would not last.

Monday, on the west course all day and night making fourteen leagues. I counted only twelve.

Tuesday, calm and afterwards wind. On the west course till night. This day I signaled that the *Pinta* should draw near and conversed with Martin Alonzo Pinzón respecting a chart which I had sent to the caravel three days before on which I had depicted certain islands in that sea. Martin Alonzo said that the ships were in the position on which the islands were placed, with which I agreed but added that it might be that we had not fallen in with them due to the currents which had always set the ships to the N.E. and that we had not made so much as the pilots had reported. At my request the chart was sent back on a line. Thereat I plotted our position on it with the aid of the pilot and mariners that they might be reassured. At sunset Martin Alonzo went up on the poop of his ship and with joy called out that he had sighted land. I fell on my knees and gave thanks to the Lord, so heavy had been my burdens these latter days at the despair among the men and the murmurs going among them, that I should have to turn back. And Martin Alonzo said the *Gloria in Excelsis* with his people. My own crew did the same. Those of the *Niña* all went up on the mast and into the rigging and declared that there was land. It seemed distant twenty-five leagues. So it appeared until night. I ordered the course to be altered from west to S.W. in which direction the land had appeared. For four leagues that day on a west course and seventeen S.W. during the night, in all twenty-one, but I told the men that thirteen was the distance made good. The sea was very smooth so that many sailors bathed alongside. We saw many giltheads and other fish.

Wednesday, what had been said to be land was only clouds and I continued on the west course till afternoon, then altered to S.W. Day and night thirty-one leagues counting twenty-four for the people. The sea was like a river, the air pleasant and mild. The despair of the crew redoubled at this disappointment but I comforted them as best I could, begging them to endure a while longer for all that would be theirs in the end.

Thursday, the course west, and distance made good day and night twenty-four leagues, twenty being counted for the people. Many giltheads came. One was killed. A boatswain-bird came.

Twenty-eighth September, Friday, the course was west and the distance, owing to calms, only fourteen leagues, counting only thirteen. Little weed but more giltheads. Caught one.

Saturday, the course was west, twenty-four leagues, counting only twenty-one. Calm, no much distance made good during day and night. Today we saw a man-o-war bird, which makes the boobies vomit what they have swallowed, and eats it, maintaining itself on nothing else. It is a seabird but does not sleep on the sea, and does not go more than twenty leagues from land. The sea smooth as a river. Much weed.

Sunday, the last day of September, west fourteen leagues, eleven being counted. Four boatswainbirds came to the ship which I considered a great sign of land.

Monday, first of October, west twenty-five leagues, counted twenty. A heavy shower of rain. At dawn the pilot of our ship made the distance from Hierro five hundred eighty-four leagues to the west. The reduced reckoning which I showed to the crew made it five hundred seventy-eight leagues, but the truth which I kept secret was seven hundred seven. Thus the wisdom of the double reckoning was confirmed.

Tuesday, west, day and night thirty-nine leagues, counted for the crew thirty. The weed many thanks to God, coming from east to west, contrary to the usual course. Many fish seen and one killed. A white bird like a gull.

Wednesday, still the west course, and made good forty-seven leagues, counted forty. Sandpipers appeared, and much weed, some old and some quite fresh and having fruit. Many birds. So I gave it out that we had left the islands behind that were depicted on the chart. Here many called upon me to turn about and search for the land but I did not wish to keep the ships beating about, although I had certain information of islands in this region. It would not have been good sense to do this since the weather was favorable and the chief intention was to go in search of the Indies by way of the west. This was what I had promised to the King and Queen, and they had sent me for this purpose.

Thursday, west sixty-three leagues, counted forty-six. More than forty sandpipers came to the ship in a flock and two boobies. A shipsboy hit one with a stone. There also came a man-of-war bird and a white bird like a gull. The crew here became ever louder in their complaining but I gave as little heed as I was able though many were now openly mutinous and would have done me harm if they dared.

*Peter Gutierrez:* So that, virtually, you have staked your life and the lives of your companions, upon the foundation of a mere speculative opinion.

*Columbus:* So it is: I cannot deny it. But consider a little. If at present you and I, and all our companions, were not in this vessel, in the midst of this sea, in this unknown solitude, in a state as uncertain and perilous as you please; in what other condition of life should we pass these days? Perhaps more cheerfully? or should we not rather be in some greater trouble or solicitude, or else full of tedium? I care not to mention the glory and utility we shall carry back if the enterprise succeeds according to our hope. Should no other fruit come from this navigation, to me it appears most profitable inasmuch as for a time it preserves us free from tedium, makes life dear to us, makes valuable to us many things that otherwise we should not have in consideration.

Friday, fifth of October, fifty-seven leagues, but counted forty-five. The sea smooth and quiet. To God be given thanks, the air being pleasant and temperate, with no weed, many sandpipers, and flying fish coming on the deck in numbers.

Saturday, continued the west course, forty leagues, thirty-three being counted. Martin Alonzo said that it would be best to steer west by south, that night, for the island of Cipango which the map showed but I thought it best to go at once to the continent and afterwards to the island.

Sunday, seventh October, west twenty-three leagues, counting eighteen. This day the *Niña* hoisted a flag at the masthead, and fired a gun, which was the signal I had ordered that land had been sighted. At this time also, I ordered that at sunrise and sunset, all the ships should join me, because at these times things are most proper for seeing the greatest distance, the haze clearing away. No land was seen during the afternoon as reported by the *Niña*. But we passed great numbers of birds flying from N. to S.W. This I believed to be due

either to the birds going to sleep on land or that they were flying from the winter which might be supposed to be near in the land from which they were coming. And this in some measure consoled the men from their disappointment over the false news from the *Niña* since it is known that most of the islands held by the Portuguese were discovered by the flight of birds. For this reason I resolved to give up the west course and to shape a course W.S.W. for two days. We began the new course an hour before sunset, expecting to see land soon and this served to encourage the crew with renewed hope.

Monday, the course W.S.W. and twelve leagues were made during the day and night. Thanks be to God the air is very soft like April at Seville; and it is a pleasure to be here, so balmy are the breezes. The weed this day is very fresh, there are many land birds and one was taken that was flying S.W., terns, ducks and a booby.

Tuesday, ninth October, the course S.W. The wind then changed and I steered W. by N. four leagues. Throughout the night birds were heard passing.

Wednesday, fifty-nine leagues, W.S.W., but counted no more than forty-four. Here the people could endure no longer. All now complained of the length of the voyage. But I cheered them as best I could, giving them good hopes of the advantages they might gain by it. Roused to madness by their fear, the captains declared they were going back but I told them that however much they might complain, I had to go to the Indies and they along with me, and that I would go on until I found them, with the help of our Lord. And so for a time it passed but now all was in great danger from the men.

Thursday, eleventh of October. The course was W.S.W. More sea than there had been during the whole of the voyage. Sandpipers and a green reed near the ship. And for this I gave thanks to God as it was a sure sign of land. Those of the *Pinta* saw a cane and a pole and they took up another small pole which appeared to be worked with iron; also another of cane, a land plant and a small board. The crew of the caravel *Niña* also saw signs of land and a small plant covered with berries.

After sunset I returned to the west course. Up to two hours past midnight we had gone ninety miles, when the *Pinta* which was the fastest sailer and had gone ahead, found the land and gave the signals. The land was first seen by Rodrigo de Triana.

Though on the night before, at ten o'clock, I saw a light and called Peter Gutierrez and he said that there seemed to be a light, and that he should look at it. He did so and saw it. The same to Rodrigo Sanchez who at first could see nothing but afterward saw the light once or twice like a wax candle rising and falling. When they said the *Salve*, which all the sailors are accustomed to sing in their way, I admonished the men to keep a good lookout on the fore-castle and to watch well for land and to him who should first cry out that he had seen land I would give a silk doublet besides the other rewards promised by the Sovereigns which were ten thousand *maravedis* to him who should first see it. Two hours past midnight, the moon having risen at eleven o'clock and then shining brightly in the sky, being in its third quarter and a little behind Rodrigo de Triana, the land was sighted at a distance of about two leagues. As soon as I ordered them to shorten sail and we lay under the mainsail without the bonnets, however to waiting for daylight.

On Friday, the twelfth of October, we anchored before the land and made ready to go on shore. Presently we saw naked people on the beach. I went ashore in the armed boat and took the royal standard, and Martin Alonzo and Vincent Yañez, his brother, who was captain of the *Niña*. And we saw the trees very green, and much water and fruits of divers kinds.

Presently many of the inhabitants assembled. I gave to some red caps and glass beads to put round their necks, and many other things of little value. They came to the ships' board afterward, where we were, swimming and bringing us parrots, cotton threads in skeins, darts, and other things—what they had, with good will. As naked as their mothers bore them, and so the women though I did not see more than one young girl. All I saw were youths, well made with very handsome bodies and very good countenances. Their hair short and coarse, almost like the hairs of a horse's tail. They paint themselves some black, some white, others red and others of what color they can find. Some paint the faces and others the whole body, some only round the eyes and others only on the nose. They are themselves neither black nor white.

On Saturday, as dawn broke, many of these people came to the beach, all youths. Their legs are very straight, all in one line and no belly. They came to the ship in canoes, made of the trunk of a tree, all in one piece, and wonderfully worked, propelled with a paddle like a baker's shovel, and go at a marvelous speed.

Bright green trees, the whole land so green that it is a pleasure to look on it. Gardens and the most beautiful trees I ever saw. Later I came upon a man alone in a canoe going from one island to another. He had a little of their bread, about the size of a fist, a calabash of water, a piece of brown earth, powdered then kneaded, and some dried leaves which must be a thing highly valued by them for they bartered with it at San Salvador. He also had with him a native basket. The women wore in front of their bodies a small piece of cotton cloth. I saw many trees very unlike those of our country. Branches growing in different ways and all from one trunk; one twig is one form and another is a different shape and so unlike that it is the greatest wonder in the world to see the diversity; thus one branch has leaves like those of a cane, and others like those of a mastic tree; and on a single tree there are five different kinds. The fish so unlike ours that it is wonderful. Some are the shape of dories and of the finest colors, so bright that there is not a man who would not be astounded, and would not take great delight in seeing them. There are also whales. I saw no beasts on land save parrots and lizards.

On shore I sent the people for water, some with arms, and others with casks; and as there was some little distance, I waited two hours for them.

During that time I walked among the trees which was the most beautiful thing which I have ever seen....

*Eia ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos convene. Et Jesu benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exsilium ostende. O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Maria.*

# ***The Destruction of Tenochtitlan***

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UPON THE ORCHIDEAN beauty of the new world the old rushed inevitably to revenge itself after the Italian's return. Such things occur in secret. Though men may be possessed by beauty while they work that is all they know of it or of their own terrible hands; they do not fathom the forces which carry them. Spain cannot be blamed for the crassness of the discoverers. They moved out across the seas stirred by instincts, ancient beyond thought as the depths they were crossing, which they obeyed under the names of King or Christ or whatever it might be while they watched the recreative New unfolding itself miraculously before them, before *them* deafened and blinded. Steering beyond familiar horizons they were driven to seek perhaps self-justification for victorious wars against Arab and Moor; but these things are the surface only. At the back, as it remains, it was the evil of the whole world; it was the perennial disappointment which follows, like smoke, the bursting of ideas. It was the spirit of malice which underlies men's lives and against which nothing offers resistance. And bitter as that thought may be that Tenochtitlan, the barbaric city, its people, its genius wherever found should have been crushed out because of the awkward names men give their emptiness, yet it was no man's fault. It was the force of the pack whom the dead drive. Cortez was neither malicious, stupid nor blind, but a conqueror like other conquerors. Courageous almost beyond precedent, tactful, resourceful in misfortune, he was a man of genius superbly suited to his task. What his hand touched went down in spite of him. He was one among the rest. Velasquez, the Cuban Governor who sent him out, traitorously attacked him from the rear a week afterward. His own captains would have deserted him, so hard was he to follow. But the entire enterprise lived for many years on the verge of being allowed to languish, ruin and succeed destruction, because of the fortuitous anger which blossomed so naively, so mysteriously in Fonseca, Bishop of Burgos, President of the Council of the Indies. This the man, Cortez' most powerful enemy, already so notorious for the spiteful malevolence with which he thwarted the views of Columbus—a logic clearer had there been two Fonsecas instead of the one. After a rough voyage from Cuba, across the gulf, Cortez landed his small force safely before what is now Vera Cruz, near the native city of Cempoal. There, lest his men should desert him in view of the hardships which lay ahead, he had his vessels beached under pretext of their being no longer seaworthy, and destroyed them.

Montezuma immediately sent gifts, at the same time begging the Spaniard not to risk coming up into the back country: a gold necklace of seven pieces, set with many gems like small rubies, a hundred and eighty-three emeralds and ten fine pearls, and hung with twenty-seven little bells of gold.—Two wheels, one of gold like the sun and the other of silver with the image of the moon upon it, made of plates of those metals, twenty-eight hands in circumference, with figures of animals and other things in bas relief, finished with great skill and ingenuity.—A headpiece of wood and gold, adorned with gems, from which hung twenty-five little bells of gold, and, on it, instead of plume, a green bird with eyes, beak and feet of gold.—Several shoes of the skin of deer, sewed with gold thread, the soles of which were made of blue and white stones of a brilliant appearance.—A shield of wood and leather, with little bells hanging to it and covered with plates of gold, in the middle of which was cut the



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