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HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

THE NEW WORLD

THE AWAKENING OF EUROPE



AMERICA is the child of Europe. Until the discoverers and explorers from the maritime nations of western Europe began to come to the shores of these continents, more than four hundred years ago, the vast regions now occupied by the United States, the British Dominion of Canada, and the Latin-American republics of Mexico, Central and South America were a wilderness of tribes of copper-colored barbarians or savages, whose ancestors had crossed by Bering Strait from north-eastern Asia to Alaska, we know not how many centuries before, and had slowly spread southward and eastward to Patagonia and Labrador. These American Indians (or "Amerinds," to use the cable-code name by which scholars distinguish them from the inhabitants of the country of India) showed great diversity of character and attainments, due to differences in climate, soil, food, building material, and the activities necessary to preserve life. The Mayas of Yucatan, the Incas of Peru, the Aztecs of Mexico, the Hopis of New Mexico, the Haidas of Queen Charlotte Island, and the Iroquois of central New York furnish examples of Indian tribes who had learned to construct quite elaborate calendars and temples, to weave

beautiful rugs and baskets, to bake pottery, to build houses of clay or of cedar beams, shaped with stone implements and ornamented with huge carved totem poles, to devise rude political institutions, and to raise crops of beans, pumpkins, and Indian corn. Other tribes were sunk in bestial savagery, sheltering themselves from wind and snow behind piles of brushwood, wallowing in the southern mud like hogs, eating roots, grass, snakes, and lizards, and dying by thousands from the ravages of the beasts and the diseases against which they were powerless to protect themselves. Nowhere had they risen above the stage of barbarism. It was for the European settlers to introduce civilization into the New World. They brought hither not only tools for the conquest of the wilderness, such as firearms, iron implements for building and farming, horses, cattle, sheep, and hogs, wheat and barley, vegetables and fruits, but also the forms of government, the religion, the books, and the languages of the Old World. For the ethnologist the American Indians have been a picturesque object of study; for the government, since the days of the earliest settlers, they have been an obstruction to be removed, by methods often unnecessarily cruel, from the path of civilization. They have contributed almost nothing to the making of America. The New World was a virgin continent for the European discoverers and their descendants, to make of it what they would.

2. The Middle Ages. To understand why and how this task was begun, therefore, it is necessary to know something of the conditions of life and of the currents of ideas which prevailed in western Europe some four and a half centuries ago. That was the time known to scholars as the age of the Renaissance, or "the new birth." Perhaps it would be better to call it a new awakening, for Europe had been not dead but sleeping, and the awakening was not a sudden start but a gradual stirring attended by a good deal of drowsiness and yawning. For five or six hundred years after the great Roman Empire had gone to pieces and its place in western Europe had been taken by the rude tribes of barbarian invaders from beyond the Rhine and the Danube, civilization was threatened with extinction.

Europe was passing through the Dark Ages. The political authority, the legal institutions, the commercial industry, the art and letters of the ancient world, were lost. The sap of creative energy ceased to flow. Life became dull, stagnant, and precarious. The strong built castles and filled the land with their incessant petty feudal wars and raids, while the stolid peasants or serfs lived in miserable hovels on their lord's domain and got a bare subsistence from the cultivation of their strip of the manor land. Such little learning as there was betook itself to the monasteries. The Church alone, with the fall of the political power of the Roman Empire, struggled to preserve a sense of unity, a show of authority, and a modicum of peace in western Europe. But it was a well-nigh hopeless task. The cement had fallen out of the structure of European society, leaving it to crumble into thousands of little baronial or ecclesiastical estates, without cultural or commercial contact beyond the borders of their immediate neighbors. Thirteen recorded plagues swept over the filthy, unsanitary hovels and halls of Europe in the tenth century, carrying away unnumbered thousands by scurvy, influenza, and leprosy.

3. The Crusades. Toward the close of the eleventh century, however, events occurred which were to stir Europe from her lethargy. Ever since the rapid conquests of the Mohammedan armies in the seventh century, the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, including the holy city of Jerusalem, had been in the hands of the Arabs, an enlightened people who respected the Christian religion and permitted the pilgrims from Europe to visit the Holy Sepulcher, or grave of Christ, unmolested. But now the cruel race of Seljuk Turks coming down from the north ousted the Arabs from control. They barred the Christian pilgrims from the holy places and made war on the Eastern emperor, conquering his vast province of Asia Minor and threatening his capital of Constantinople. The emperor appealed to the Pope for aid and the Pope appealed to the lords and knights of Europe to cease slaughtering their fellow Christians in feudal warfare and join for the rescue of the Holy Sepulcher from the Turks. The response to the Pope's impassioned plea

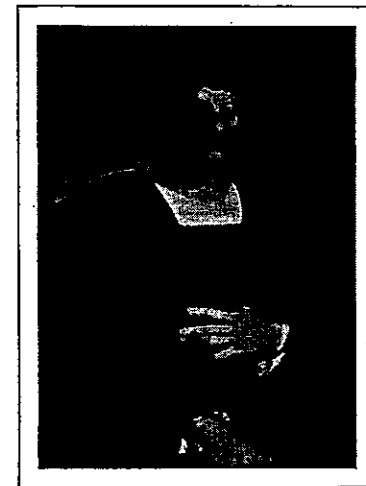
on the Atlantic began to compete with the Mediterranean cities, whatever the latter's fate might be. But even as Prince Henry's captains were finding their way down the coast of Africa, an event happened which spelled the commercial doom of the proud cities of Venice and Genoa. (In 1453 the Ottoman Turks, a race of savage fighters, overthrew the Eastern Empire and captured the great capital of Constantinople. They converted the Christian churches into Mohammedan mosques and drove the European merchants from the city. They seized the trading posts of the Venetians and Genoese in the Ægean Islands and on the Syrian coast, and made the whole eastern end of the Mediterranean unsafe for Christian commerce. The fall of Constantinople, while not the beginning either of the migration of Greek scholars to Italy or of the shifting of commerce from the cities of Italy to those of the Atlantic coast, accelerated both processes. The great days of Venice and Genoa were over. The future of world trade was with the rising cities of Lisbon, Cadiz, Bristol, London, and Antwerp. A new era was at hand. The Mediterranean shrank to the limits of an inland sea, and the age of European expansion across three world oceans began.

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

13. Christopher Columbus. Among the goodly company of navigators attracted to the Portuguese harbors was a young Genoese named Cristoforo Columbo. Of his early years we know almost nothing. Even the date of his birth is uncertain. At an early age the boy developed a great interest in the sea, picked up considerable knowledge of geography, shipping, and map making, and probably sailed with a Genoese captain to eastern Mediterranean ports. About fifteen years after the death of Prince Henry, Columbus arrived at Lisbon, where he soon won a conspicuous place among the mariners. He made voyages to England and to the African coast and married the daughter of one of Prince Henry's old sea-dogs, the royal governor of the Madeiras. From sources that are not clear to us, Columbus arrived at the unshakable conclusion that there were

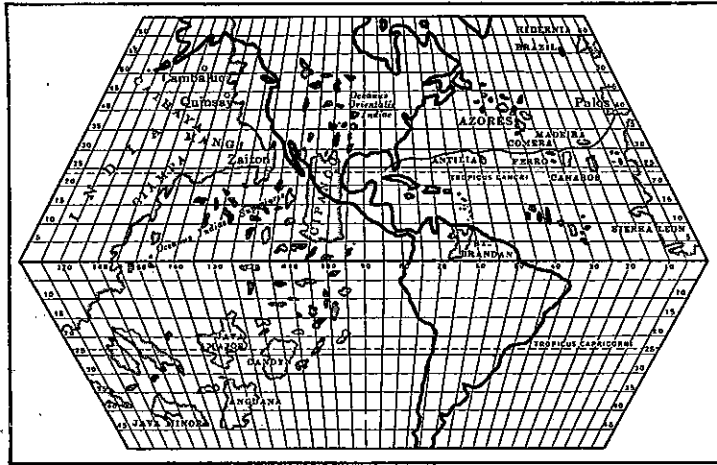
new lands to be found by sailing boldly out into the Atlantic. He broached his plan to the king of Portugal, whose commission of wise men ridiculed it as fantastic, but sent out a secret expedition to confirm their doubts. Disgusted with this trickery, Columbus shook the dust of Portugal from his feet and went to Spain, where for seven years he labored endeavoring to enlist the support of the sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, who were in the midst of a campaign to drive the Arabs out of their last stronghold in the country. After his scheme had been twice rejected by the royal commissioners, the indomitable man started to cross the Pyrenees to lay his plan before the king of France, but to his surprise he was recalled and graciously received by the Spanish sovereigns. They had just entered Granada in triumph. Queen Isabella, perhaps in gratitude for the victory over the infidels, perhaps through the persuasion of some high official who approved Columbus's plan, perhaps from jealousy lest another nation might after all reap the glory and profit from that plan, now gave the Genoese adventurer her whole-hearted support. "Capitulations," or articles of contract, were signed on April 17, 1492, conferring upon Columbus the title of Don and Admiral and the powers of viceroy and governor "in all the islands and lands which should be discovered or acquired" by him, together with the tenth part of "all the pearls, precious stones, gold, silver, spices and other merchandise" there found, and the right to subscribe one eighth of the cost of the expedition and to have one eighth of the profits.

14. The Great Voyage. Though the inhabitants of Palos and neighboring towns had been ordered to provide ships and men for the enterprise, it was not till the beginning of August that Colum-



CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

bus was able to equip three small vessels with about a hundred sailors. Few even of the hardy mariners of Portugal were willing to enlist in so hazardous and novel an expedition. On August 3, 1492, the little fleet (the *Santa Maria* of about two hundred and thirty tons, the *Pinta* and the *Niña*, somewhat smaller) left Palos and put in at the Canaries for final overhauling and instruction. Quitting the Canaries on September 6, they sailed due west into the uncharted sea. The weather was favorable



AN ITALIAN MAP OF THE LATER FIFTEENTH CENTURY WHICH PROBABLY REPRESENTS COLUMBUS'S IDEA OF THE RELATION OF THE INDIES TO EUROPE. The actual position of the western continent is shown by the heavy black outline.

and trade winds from the east bore them rapidly on their way. But as weeks passed and no sign of land appeared the sailors began to murmur and the murmurs rose to threats of mutiny. It took all the iron courage of the great commander to sail on. He had confidently expected to find land not more than seven hundred and fifty leagues from the Canaries; but by the end of September that point had been passed and still there stretched before him only the gray horizon, broken now and then by a cloud-bank which the lookouts eagerly mistook for a shore. On October 6 he yielded to the advice of his chief captain, Martin

Pinzon, to turn the course a little to the south, and soon after midnight of the eleventh a sailor on the *Pinta* spied a light ahead like a moving torch. The next morning the ships approached the shore of an island (probably Watling) in the Bahama group, and while the sailors thankfully chanted the *Gloria in Excelsis* Columbus landed and, with the red robe of the Admiral of Spain thrown over his armor and the standard of Spain held aloft, took possession of the land in the name of Ferdinand and Isabella. For several weeks he cruised among the islands of the West Indies, mistaking the long coast line of Cuba for a part of the mainland of Asia and identifying Haiti (or Hispaniola) with the island of Japan. Here on the day after Christmas he built the fort of the Nativity, in which he left a garrison of thirty-seven men, and started for home in the tiny ship *Niña*. After a stormy voyage he landed at Palos in March, 1493, and a few weeks later was summoned to the court at Barcelona, where he told his marvelous tale, exhibited the Indians, the strange birds and animals, and the specimens of gold which he had brought from the islands of the West, and received royal honors from his sovereign.

15. The Significance of the Voyage. Whatever purpose Columbus had in sailing to the west, and however mistaken he was in believing to his death that he had reached the Indies or the lands of the East, his wonderful voyage remains one of the greatest landmarks in history.¹ Unwittingly he had revealed a new world. Not that Columbus was the first European to see these shores. The Norse vikings in their stout seagoing galleys

¹ Because in Columbus's negotiations for the voyage and in his "Capitulations" with Ferdinand and Isabella there is no mention of any intention to sail to the Indies, but only of "lands and islands" to be discovered in the West, some scholars have denied that Columbus was seeking a new way to Asia. But if this is so, it is hard to understand why Columbus was provided with letters and presents for the Great Khan, whom he sought to find in Cuba, why he named the land which he found the "Indies," and why he insisted on his return and till the end of his life that he had reached the neighborhood of the coast of Asia. He may have had secret reasons for not wishing to divulge his plans before sailing. The whole question of the purpose of his voyage and of the charts which he had for his guidance is a subject of controversy, but this uncertainty in no way detracts from the importance of Columbus's discovery.

had sailed over the far northern arc of the Atlantic from Scandinavia to Greenland, where a considerable settlement existed in the tenth century. It seems well established that Leif the Lucky, son of Eric the Red, came from Iceland to the shores of America, somewhere between Labrador and Cape Cod, in the year 1000 and found a pleasant country abounding in wild grapes which he called "Vineland the Good." But in spite of Leif's visit, America, as Mark Twain humorously remarked, "did not stay discovered." It was Columbus's voyage that wove the first strand of a continuous and ever-thickening web of intercourse between the old world and the new. Columbus himself set out on a second voyage in September, 1493, with a fleet of seventeen vessels, carrying fifteen hundred men, with horses, cattle, sheep, hogs, and chickens, fruit and vegetables, seeds and sugar cane from the Canaries. On the island of Haiti he established the colony of Isabella as the capital of his viceroyalty — the first permanent settlement of Europeans in the Western Hemisphere.

16. Columbus's Ill Fortune and Death. Had Columbus dreamed that a solid barrier of land, reaching from arctic to antarctic snows, and beyond that another ocean wider than the one he had just crossed, lay between the islands which he mistakenly called the Indies and the real Indies of the East,¹ he would not have spent the remaining years of his life in the attempt to locate the rich cities of Cathay. He sailed along the northern coast of South America in 1498 and called it "a mainland and very large of which no knowledge has been had till now"; but it was obviously not the kingdom of the Great Khan. Then he tried to find a passage to Asia further west and for a whole year skirted the savage shores of Central America from Nicaragua to Panama with no better success. Meanwhile his misfortunes as an administrator equaled his disappointments as an explorer. His vanity, avarice, and despotism invited resentment and plots among his followers. The meager returns

¹ Columbus's error has been perpetuated to our own day in the name of the group of islands girding the Caribbean Sea. The term "West Indies" is a self-contradictory one. It means literally the "western lands of the east."

of his costly expeditions disappointed the sovereign and grandees of Spain. Even as he was sailing along the pestilential coast of South America the Portuguese Vasco da Gama had reached the harbors of India by way of the Cape of Good Hope [11]¹ and had brought back to Lisbon treasure sufficient to pay the cost of the voyage sixty times over. Compared with such returns the results of Columbus's exploits seemed trivial indeed. The court wits dubbed him "the Admiral of the Mosquitoes, who has discovered lands of vanity and delusion as the miserable graves of Castilian gentlemen." He returned to Spain in 1504 to find his benefactress Isabella on her deathbed and two years later, in the humiliation of poverty and obscurity, he followed her to the grave. Never was reward more ill-proportioned to deserts. The man whose vision and courage had discovered a new world was not even to have the honor of giving it his name.

17. The Pope's Demarcation Line. Missionary zeal was quite as prominent a motive as the search for wealth in the explorations of the new age. The Pope as the acknowledged head of Christian Europe was regarded as having a special interest and authority in matters pertaining to the conversion of heathen peoples. He had sanctioned the Portuguese establishments on the coast of Africa in the middle years of the fifteenth century. Now that Spain had entered into competition with Portugal for the exploitation of the Indies, her sovereigns asked for papal recognition of their claims too. Accordingly Pope Alexander VI, who was a Spaniard, issued a proclamation or "Bull" (from *bullo*, "a seal") a few weeks after Columbus returned from his first voyage, assigning to Portugal all the new heathen lands to be discovered to the eastward and to Spain all such lands to the westward of a line drawn from pole to pole, one hundred leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. The two countries accepted the papal idea of the division of the spoils in a treaty concluded at Tordesillas the following year (1494), but they shifted the location of the line to three hundred and seventy leagues west of the said islands. It will be seen from

¹ Figures in brackets refer to paragraphs where subject is treated.