

A CURIOUS OLD VOLUME.

THE THIRD LETTER OF THE EXPLORER AMERICUS VESPUCCIUS.

Undoubtedly Was the Practical Discoverer of this Continent, and His Book Is of Interest Now: that the Discoveries of Columbus Are to Be Celebrated.

[Special Correspondence.]

New York, Jan. 16.—That the great continent of North America, or rather both the continents, were discovered by Alberico Vespucci, or, as he is better known, Americus Vespucci, is now an acknowledged fact. He was an Italian gentleman of high education and adventurous spirit, who at an early age resigned a remunerative commercial position in order to gratify his taste for travel and excitement. Of his life we know but little. It has been found that in 1490 he was a student of high promise in Florence. In 1493 he came to Spain as a commercial representative of his cousin, Lorenzo Pietro Francisco de Medici, whose family was world renowned. Later on he entered the service of the king of Portugal.



THE TITLE PAGE.

He made at least four great transatlantic voyages during his career in Spain and Portugal. Of the first two nothing is left but hearsay, excepting dates and names.

The first began May 20, 1497, or May 10, 1497, or May 20, 1499, and was undertaken for the king of Spain.

The second was started under the same auspices on about May 16, 1497, from the port of Cadiz.

In these he probably discovered Cuba and the larger isles of the West Indies.

His third, and the one on which his fame will ever rest, was undertaken for the king of Portugal, and started from Lisbon on May 14, 1501. It consumed sixteen months, during which time Vespucci gathered a vast amount of information, and it must be added, misinformation.

Shortly after his return to Portugal he wrote the celebrated letter, of which portions are given below, and which has never before been published in English. The original is lost. At the time he wrote it he had it translated from Italian, which he spoke, to Latin, the literary language of the world at that time. Within a few weeks after its reception by Lorenzo de Medici, it was given to Jehan Lambert, the greatest illuminator, engraver and printer of his age, for reproduction and preservation.

How many copies were made is unknown. There are two or three in this country, and less than a dozen in Europe. The finest one extant is that owned by Edmund A. Bonaventure, a famous bibliophile of New York city, from which the illustrations are taken. The leaves of the manuscript are of the heaviest parchment, and the colors are as brilliant today as when first applied by the brush. Another but much poorer copy, recently sold at Frankfort-on-the-Main, brought \$300.

The book opens with an illuminated title page in gold, ultramarine and scarlet, of which the following picture may give a fair idea.

Then follow nine pages of closely written matter, in which the queer Latin of the sixteenth century is made half unintelligible by senseless contractions, abbreviations and arbitrary symbols. The difficulty encountered in reading this old black letter cannot be appreciated by any one unless he tries to decipher the pages.

At the close of the letter is what is called a tail piece, a symbolic design which, while it may have conveyed a clear idea to its maker, is more than incomprehensible today. So far as the story is concerned let Alberico Vespucci speak for himself:

In former days it was my fortune to write unto thee fully concerning my return from those regions which with the fleet, and by the suggestion and command of his most serene majesty the king of Portugal, we have sought out and discovered. These regions it is allowable to style the New World. Since among our ancestors there was no knowledge concerning those things, the matter will prove most novel to all who hear it. For this thing differs from the opinion of our antiquaries, since the greater part of them declare that beyond the equinoctial line (equator) and toward the south there is no continent, but a sea as large as that which they have termed the Atlantic, and if any of them have admitted that a continent is there, they have denied for many reasons that the land is habitable. But my last voyage has shown that this opinion of theirs is false and altogether contrary to truth, since in those parts towards the south I have found a continent inhabited with more numerous peoples and animals than in Europe, Asia, or Africa, and moreover an atmosphere milder and more agreeable than in any other region known by us, as you will perceive later on, where we describe the chief points. The matters more worthy of notice and memory which were seen or heard by me in this new world will appear below.

On the 14th day of the month of May, in the year 1501, we departed from Lisbon by the command of the king with three ships on an auspicious voyage in order to discover the new lands towards

the west. We sailed towards the south, the course of which voyage was as follows:

Our course lay through the Fortunate Islands, as they were formerly called, but now are styled the Great Canary Islands, which are in the third climate and on the confines of the inhabited west. Thence through the ocean, we skirted the whole shore of Africa and a part of Ethiopia, as far as the Ethiopian promontory, as it is called by Ptolemy, but by us Cape Verde, and from Ethiopia and the Mandingha land 14 deg. within the torrid zone from the equinoctial line (equator) toward the north, which region is inhabited by black races. There, our strength being refreshed, and with necessaries for our voyage, we raised anchor, spread our sails to the wind, and directing our course toward the vast ocean for a short distance toward the Antarctic pole, we then bent our course to the westward through the wind which is called the Vulturinus (southeast wind), and from the day on which we departed from the above mentioned promontory we sailed for the space of two months and three days before any land appeared, but in the vastness of the sea what we suffered, what perils of shipwreck, what torments of body we sustained, and under what anxieties of mind we labored, I leave to the imagination of those who through experience of many affairs can best understand what it is to seek out uncertain things and investigate things of which they may be ignorant. That you may understand everything in a word, know that out of sixty-seven days in which we sailed, we had forty-four continuous days of rain, thunder and lightning, days so dark that we could neither see the sun by day nor a serene sky at night. From which it happened that so great fear came upon us that we had already cast aside all hope of life. But in these so many and so great tempests of the sea and of the sky, it pleased the Most High to show unto us the continent, the new regions, and the unknown world. Which things being seen we were filled with as great joy as it is possible to be conceived by those who, out of various calamities and adverse fortune, have obtained safety. But on the 7th day of August, in the year 1501, we cast anchor on the shores of those regions, giving thanks unto our God with solemn supplications and with the celebration of a mass. There we recognized the land to be not an island, but a continent, because it stretched out with very long coasts not to be circumnavigated, and is filled up with numberless inhabitants. For on this continent we discovered innumerable races and peoples, and all the species of forest animals which are found in our regions, and many other species never seen by us before, concerning which it would be a long story for me to describe individually.

Many things the mercy of God applied unto us when we touched those regions, for water and wood had failed us, and we were able to preserve our lives on the sea only a few days more. To himself he the honor and glory and the exercise of His grace.

We adopted the plan of sailing along the shore of this continent toward the eastward, without leaving the sight of land, and afterwards we ran along this shore to a point where we came to an angle when the coast made a turn to the south, and from that place where we first touched land up to this angle there was a distance of about 300 leagues. In the space of this voyage we several times descended to the land and conversed in a friendly manner with that people, as you shall hear below.

I had forgotten to write that from the promontory at Cape Verde up to the commencement of this continent, there are about 700 leagues, and I should estimate that we had sailed more than 1,800 leagues, partly on account of the admiral's ignorance of the place and partly by the tempests and winds, which impeded our direct course and drove us into frequent deviations. But if my companions had not turned to me, who understood cosmography (there was no admiral or commander of our voyage who knew within 500 leagues where we were), we were lost and wandering; moreover, the instruments only showed accurately the elevation of the heavenly bodies, and these were the quadrant and the astrolabe, as all were aware. Hence afterwards they all bestowed upon me much honor; for I showed unto them that without a marine chart, in the science of navigation I was more skillful than all the admirals in the world. For these admirals have no knowledge except of those places which they have visited frequently in their voyages.

But where the above mentioned angle of the land showed to us a turning of the shore toward the south, we agreed to sail beyond it, and search out what might be in those regions. We proceeded along the coast about six hundred leagues, and often disembarked on the land and talked and conversed with the inhabitants of those regions, and by them were received kindly, and by themselves, whenever we would remain fifteen or twenty days together, were amicably and hospitably entertained, as you will learn below.

A part of this new continent is in the torrid zone, beyond the equinoctial line (equator) toward the antarctic pole, for the head of it begins in the eighth degree beyond the equinoctial line (equator) itself. We sailed along so much of this coast, that the tropic of Capricorn having been passed, we found the antarctic pole 50 degs. higher than their horizon, and we were near to the antarctic circle, as far as the latitude of 174 degs., and what there I saw and learned concerning the character, habits and tractability of those races, the fertility of the soil, the salubrity of the air, and the arrangement of the heavenly bodies, and especially concerning the fixed stars, and the eight spheres never before seen or considered by our ancestors, I will speak

later.

First, then, as to the peoples so far as we came upon the multitude of the race in those regions so great that no man could count them, as we read in the Apocalypse. I call the race gentle and tractable. All members of both races approach each other naked and covering no part of the body, and even as they come into the world so do they go unto the time of their death.

For they have large bodies with figures square and shoulders well proportioned, and a color bordering on redness, which I think happens to them because from going about naked they are tanned with the sun. They have thick, black hair. In their gait, especially in their sports, they are agile and easy, and of a comely countenance, which, however, they mar, for they pierce the cheeks, the lips, the nose and the ear; nor would you think these holes to be small or large as they are. For I have seen some of them who had in their face alone seven holes, any one of which was as large as a small plum. They stop up these holes with pieces of crystal resembling marble and bits of alabaster, which pieces are very beautiful, and also with bits of glittering white bone and other substances, skillfully carved according to their custom. But if you could see anything so strange and monstrous—a man, forsooth, having in his cheeks and in his lips seven stones, some of them half as long again as your hand, you would not be without astonishment; for oftentimes have I considered and thought that seven such stones would weigh sixteen ounces and more. In each ear, pierced with three holes, they are accustomed to carry other pendant stones in rings, and this custom is peculiar to the men, for the women do not perforate the face, but only the ears.

They do not have garments or cloaks—linen or silk—because they are not necessary to them, nor do they possess individual property, but all things are owned in common. They live at the same time without a king, without a government, and each man is a law unto himself. They have as many wives as they please, and the son marries his mother, and the brother with his sister, and the first man the first woman wherever he meets her. As often as they wish they break up their marriages, and in these matters observe no rule. Moreover, they have no temple and no law, nor are they idolaters. What can I say more? They live according to nature, and may be called epicureans rather than stoics. Among them there are no traders nor is there any exchange of goods. The tribes carry on war among themselves without art or recognized rules. The elders in certain public assemblies of their own turn the young men to whatever course they desire. They are also eager for wars, in which they kill each other with cruelty, and those whom they have made captives in battle they preserve for killing, not for the sake of their lives, but for the purpose of food. For sometimes one side and sometimes the other is victorious, and eat up the vanquished, and among them human flesh is a common article of food.

Of this fact you may be certain, because already a father has been known to eat up his sons and his wives, and I myself have known and talked with a man whom they used to report had partaken of more than three hundred human bodies; besides I spent twenty-seven days in a certain town where I saw in the houses human flesh salted and hung from the ceiling, just as it is the custom among us to hang bacon and pork. I say further, that they wonder why we don't eat our enemies, and do not use their flesh as food, which flesh they declare to be most savory.

The limitation of space compels the cutting short of the letter at this point. But what an interesting story the Italian voyager tells! Even in its quaint language it reads as well as Stanley's latest letter upon Central Africa. It is but little wonder that his admirers changed his name and called him Americus rather than Alberico Vespucci in honor of the New World he had discovered.

WILLIAM E. S. FALES.

Chinese Literature.

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 13.—The work of missionaries outside of their strictly religious field has not received the attention it deserves. To them we are indebted for much valuable knowledge of wild countries, and still more for reports on the religion, habits and philosophy of other races. Especially is this true of China, for there is so little general interest in such matters that but for the missionaries we should have remained much longer in ignorance of Chinese philosophy.

The only foreigners making any effort to acquire the Chinese language are the missionaries, and it is due to such men as Williams and Legge that the doctrines of Confucius and the teachings of Buddhism have been exhumed from their deep oblivion and set up in readable language. It is here, more than in anything else, that the work of these men is manifest. Through years of ceaseless toil of Dr. Legge, the metaphysical and ethical writings of Mencius have been placed alongside of Bacon and Plato and Moses.

The literature of Buddhism likewise shows deep thought and ascetic piety, and has marked the founders and exponents of that ancient religion. Gems of literature, poetry and proverbs have been brought to light by the researches of Christian scholars.

While the general influence of European life has not tended to increase the respect of the Chinese for our alleged superior civilization and morality, yet it is true that the literary research of missionaries has done much toward bringing about a better understanding between the two races, by giving to each, in their own language, the ideas and purposes of the other.

With increased shipping facilities and a consequent increasing commerce in China, and with the demoralizing and enervating effects of opium upon her people removed, there is yet hope for a brighter future for that queer old country.

B. N. TON.

Example: What letter sucks honey? Answer: A B.

1. We are fond of —'s in spring.

2. George Washington wore his hair in —.

3. — means "all right."

4. Mary of — will call the cattle home.

5. I said to the horse.

6. John — was a great statesman.

7. How — in a common salutation.

8. An abbreviation, which answers to purpose of the index is —.

9. The printer eagerly counts his —'s.

10. The house has an —.

11. I will take mine —'s in mine inn.

12. We will live for —.

13. The tax on — plays an important part in history.

14. The French word for "life" is —.

15. Cramps — up.

16. We — face marks with a sponge.

17. — is the sign of multiplication.

18. Happy Dutch maiden of the Zuyder —.

19. The —lar is an ornamental evergreen tree.

20. We wish to be thought —'s.

21. — the children cried while playing hide and seek.

22. —, a famous earl of the reign of Queen Bess.



No. 736.—Letter Puzzles.

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No. 737.—Charade.

My first is not oval, my first is not square, My first can be never oblong;

My second is something we can't do without, Though often it leadeth us wrong!

My whole an upholder of freedom was reckoned, And lived in the days of Charles Stuart the Second.

No. 738.—An Enigma.

I am a word of four letters. Within me find: A place of entertainment for man and for beast; a pronoun, a preposition, an abbreviation for "that is," and a German word meaning "no." When you have found me, you will have a number which no person now living will probably ever again be able to omit from the date of any document.

No. 739.—A Familiar Prose Quotation.

E U P T T D OF RUSTAN AND FRANGE RUSSIA

No. 740.—Anagram.

The horse I bought looked very nice, And seemed a good one for the price; But when I found he balked and fled, And was not safe to drive or ride; That he was spavined and spring halt, And of crib biting had the fault; That he would kick and run away, And never would the rein obey; That worse than all, he was stone blind— Without good will, I spoke my mind, And told the man who sold the brute He was a fraud and cheat to boot. He only answered, "Do not fret, That is a 'curious nag,' you bet."

No. 741.—Crossword Enigma.

In barn, not in fold; In given, not in sold; In new, not in old; In buy, not in take; In hoe, not in rake; In work, not in jail; In work, not in fail. My whole will a city unveil.

No. 742.—Word Squares.

An animal; solitary; minute openings; sluggish; pauses.

A bird; a noted general of the Revolution; to look at steadfastly; permission; to penetrate.

No. 743.—Conundrums.

Why is a pig with a curly continuation like the ghost of Hamlet's father? Why is the root of the tongue like a detected criminal? When are we most likely to find the sky blue? What instrument of war does an angry lover resemble? When are culprits like old books? When is an arm as long as three feet? How does the most punctual payer incur debt? When can a man have something and nothing in his pocket at the same time? Old but Good. Beneath the sun a creature once did dwell, As sacred writers uncontented tell. 'Twas in this world his mortal breath he drew. Yet never sinned nor moral evil knew; He never can be raised from the dead, Nor at the day of judgment show his head; Yet in him was a soul that must Exist in hell or dwell among the just.—The whale that swallowed Jonah.

Key to the Puzzle.

No. 738.—Enigma—A Little Fairy: The road up to the palace Toward a thimble wend; The fairy and her sisters You've at your fingers' ends.

No. 739.—A Cut Up Puzzle:

No. 740.—Beholdings Transposed: A—ado—ends G—raid—lark A—late—lent S—nite—time S—apt—paid I—mage—game Z—ebra—bear

No. 741.—A Charade: Afternoon

No. 742.—Rhyming Numerical Enigma: Heart.

No. 743.—A Riddle: A shoe.

No. 734.—An Animal in Anagram: Armadillo.

No. 735.—Enigmatical Fishes: Whiting; carp; ray; poll; pike; gudgeon; perch.

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