

CHAPTER I.

THE RESULTS OF EXPLORERS, HISTORIC AND LEGENDARY.

Man lernt die Welt am besten durch Reisen kennen.

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ONE of the most interesting and pathetic passages to be found in all literature is that in which Christopher Columbus announces to his royal patrons his supposed discovery of the ascent to the gate of the long-lost Garden of Eden. With what emotions must his heart have thrilled as, steering up this ascent, he felt his "ships smoothly rising toward the sky," the weather becoming "milder" as he rose! To be so near the Paradise of God's own planting, to be the first discoverer of the way in which the believing world could at length, after so many ages, once more approach its sacred precincts even if forbidden to enter, —what an exquisite experience it must have been to the lonely spirit of that great explorer!

It is his third voyage. He is in the Gulf of Paria to the north or north-west of the mouth of the Orinoco. In his loyal epistle to Ferdinand and Isabella thus he writes: —

The Holy Scriptures record that our Lord made the earthly Paradise and planted in it the tree of life; and thence springs a fountain from which the four principal rivers of the world take their source; namely, the Ganges in India, the Tigris and Euphrates, and the Nile.

I do not find, nor ever have found, any account by the Romans or Greeks which fixes in a positive manner the site of the terrestrial Paradise, neither have I seen it given in

any *mappe-monde*, laid down from authentic sources. Some placed it in Ethiopia at the sources of the Nile, but others, traversing all these countries, found neither the temperature nor the altitude of the sun correspond with their ideas respecting it; nor did it appear that the overwhelming waters of the deluge had been there. Some pagans pretended to adduce arguments to establish that it was in the Fortunate Islands, now called the Canaries.

St. Isidore, Bede, and Strabo and the Master of scholastic history, with St. Ambrose and Scotus, and all the learned theologians agree that the earthly Paradise is in the East.

I have already described my ideas concerning this hemisphere and its form, and I have no doubt that if I could pass below the equinoctial line after reaching the highest point of which I have spoken, I should find a much milder temperature and a variation in the stars and in the water: not that I suppose that elevated point to be navigable, nor even that there is water there; indeed, I believe it is impossible to ascend thither, because I am convinced that it is the spot of the earthly Paradise, whither no one can go but by God's permission; but this land which your Highnesses have now sent me to explore is very extensive, and I think there are many other countries in the south, of which the world has never had any knowledge.

I do not suppose that the earthly Paradise is in the form of a rugged mountain, as the descriptions of it have made it appear, but that it is on the summit of the spot which I have described as being in the form of the stalk [or stem end] of a pear; the approach to it from a distance must be by a constant and gradual ascent; but I believe that, as I have already said, no one could ever reach the top; I think also that the water I

have described may proceed from it, though it be far off, and that stopping at the place I have just left, it forms this lake.

There are great indications of this being the terrestrial Paradise, for its situation coincides with the opinions of the holy and wise theologians whom I have mentioned; and, moreover, the other evidences agree with the supposition, for I have never either read or heard of fresh water coming in so large a quantity, in close conjunction with the water of the sea; the idea is also corroborated by the blandness of the temperature; and if the water of which I speak does not proceed from the earthly Paradise, it seems to be a still greater wonder, for I do not believe that there is any river in the world so large and deep.

When I left the Dragon's Mouth, which is the northernmost of the two straits which I have described, and which I so named on the day of our lady of August, I found that the sea ran so strongly to the westward that between the hour of mass, when I weighed anchor, and the hour of complines I made sixty-five leagues of four miles each; and not only was the wind not violent, but on the contrary very gentle, which confirmed me in the conclusion that in sailing southward there is a continuous ascent, while there is a corresponding descent towards the north.

I hold it for certain that the waters of the sea move from east to west with the sky, and that in passing this track they hold to a more rapid course, and have thus eaten away large tracts of land, and hence has resulted this great number of islands; indeed, these islands themselves afford an additional proof of it, for on the one hand, all those which lie west and east, or a little more obliquely north-west and south-east, are broad; while those which lie north and south or north-east

and southwest, that is in a directly contrary direction to the said winds, are narrow; furthermore, that these islands should possess the most costly productions is to be accounted for by the mild temperature, which comes to them from heaven, since these are the most elevated parts of the world. It is true that in some parts the waters do not appear to take this course, but this only occurs in certain spots where they are obstructed by land, and hence they appear to take different directions. .

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I now return to my subject of the land of Gracia, and of the river and lake found there, which latter might more properly be called a sea; for a lake is but a small expanse of water, which, when it becomes great, deserves the name of a sea, just as we speak of the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea; and I think that if the river mentioned does not proceed from the terrestrial Paradise, it comes from an immense tract of land situated in the south, of which hitherto no knowledge has been obtained. But the more I reason on the subject the more satisfied I become that the terrestrial Paradise is situated in the spot I have described; and I ground my opinion upon the arguments and authorities already quoted. May it please the Lord to grant your Highnesses a long life, and health and peace, to follow out so noble an investigation; in which I think our Lord will receive great service, Spain considerable increase of its greatness, and all Christians much consolation and pleasure, because by this means the name of our Lord will be published abroad.

Alas for the hope of settling the problem of Eden's site by actual exploration! Columbus never lived to find his Paradise; and geographers have long ago ascertained that the golden summit of the world is not in Venezuela, nor in any of its neighbor states.

Of course, Columbus supposed himself to be off the eastern coast, not of a new continent, but of Asia. His idea of the location of the terrestrial Paradise as in, or to the eastward of, Farther India was the prevailing idea of his age. The Hereford map of the world, dating from the thirteenth century, represents the favored spot as a circular island to the East of India, and as separated from the mainland, not only by the sea, but also by a battlemented wall, with its one gate to the West, through which our first parents were supposed to have been expelled. Hugo de St. Victor wrote: "Paradise is a spot in the Orient productive of all kinds of woods and pomiferous trees. It contains the Tree of Life; there is neither cold nor heat there, but perpetually an equable temperature. It contains a fountain which flows forth in four rivers." So, Gautier de Metz, in a poem written in the thirteenth century, describes the terrestrial Paradise as situated in an unapproachable region in Asia, surrounded by flames, and guarded at its only gate by an armed angel.

In the year 1322 Sir John de Maundeville made his memorable pilgrimage to the East. In his account of these travels, after describing the marvelous kingdom of Prester John in India, he says: "And beyond the land and isles and deserts of Prester John's lordship, in going straight towards the East men find nothing but mountains and great rocks; and there is the dark region where no man may see, neither by day nor by night, as they of the country say. And that desert and that place of darkness lasts from this coast unto terrestrial Paradise, where Adam, our first father, and Eve were put, who dwelt there but a little while; and that is towards the East, at the beginning of the earth. . . . Of Paradise I cannot speak properly, for I was not there. It is far beyond; and I repent not going there, but I was not worthy. But as I have heard say of wise men beyond, I shall tell you with good will.