

INTRODUCTION

The biography of Amerigo Vespucci (1451-1512), the Italian explorer whose discoveries led to the continent of America being named after him.

Amerigo Vespucci made four voyages during which he discovered a lot of the coastline and rivers of South, Central and North America. The first of Amerigo's voyages has been disputed since he first described it, because it meant that Amerigo Vespucci had reached the mainland of America before Christopher Columbus. So instead of the continent of America being named after Columbus, it came to be named America after Amerigo. Often out of resentment at the lessening of Columbus's achievements, allegations have persisted for centuries that Amerigo or somebody else has either fabricated much of what was described of his voyages, or has been mistaken in what was written.

Amerigo saw peoples, plants and animals never seen before by Europeans. His crew found the bird song so melodious, and the trees so beautiful and sweet smelling, that they imagined themselves in a terrestrial paradise.

His voyages brought him in to contact with thousands of naked natives, who met with Amerigo's crew with anything from a warm and curious welcome to vicious warfare.

He described some of the natives as being lascivious beyond measure, especially the women, and that the men took as many wives as they pleased, often marrying their mothers or their sisters.

Amerigo wrote that the natives had neither laws nor religion. Many of them were cannibals, some of whom smoked the meat of their victims before eating it. Even some of Amerigo's own men were killed by being pulled to pieces, before being eaten in view of the rest of the crew.

Included are all of the first hand accounts of the four voyages, detailed in letters written by Amerigo Vespucci to his friend Pietro Soderini who was Gonfaloniere of the Republic of Florence, and to Lorenzo di Piero Francesco de Medici, who was an Italian banker and politician.

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CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY LIFE OF AMERIGO VESPUCCI

Amerigo Vespucci was born in Florence on the 9th March 1451. The date of his birth is definitively established by the books of the Ufficio delle Tratte, preserved in the Reale Archivio di Stato of Florence, where the following passage is found: "Amerigo, son of Ser Nastagio, son of Ser Amerigo Vespucci, on the IX day of March MCCCCLI".

Amerigo Vespucci was the third son of Ser Anastasio, a Florentine notary and son of Amerigo Vespucci, and Lisabetta. Lisabetta was a daughter of Ser Giovanni, who was the son of Ser Andrea Mini. Her mother was Maria, daughter of Simone, son of Francesco di Filicaia. The mother of Amerigo's father was Nanna, daughter of Mestro Michele, of the Onesti of Pescia, and sister of Mestro Michele, the father of Nicole and of Francesco.

At the time, Amerigo Vespucci's family was in moderate circumstances in respect of wealth. However, they traced their descent through a long line of noble progenitors, and took a high rank among the aristocratic families of the Republic of Florence.

Amerigo Vespucci's earliest biographer, Bandini, devotes a number of pages to an account of the illustrious members of the Vespucci family who preceded Amerigo. As everything connected with him becomes a matter of interest, some parts of this genealogical narrative have been divested as much as possible of the unnecessary detail.

The family originated in the town of Peretola, which at the time was distant only a few miles from Florence. There they possessed considerable estates, and were celebrated for their hospitality, and the patronage they bestowed upon men of letters. Ugolino Verini commemorates them in a Latin poem. About the commencement of the thirteenth century, the Vespucci family moved to Florence. It was then the custom for the noble families of the Republic to establish their residence near the gates of the city that led to their country estates.

CHAPTER 2

PRIOR TO THE FIRST VOYAGE

History throws little light on that period of the life of Amerigo Vespucci between the completion of his studies and his departure for Spain, which took place some time in the year 1490.

It is probable that Amerigo resided in Florence during the whole of this period, and it may be that he was engaged in commercial pursuits in his native city, although no evidence of it has come down to modern times. Whether such was the case or not, it is well known that he continued to pursue his researches in cosmography.

Among the cosmographers of the times, Amerigo Vespucci frequently encountered the celebrated Toscanelli, and derived from him many of the views respecting the position of the Indies, which that philosopher afterwards communicated to Columbus by letter.

Amerigo was very curious in collecting all the best maps, charts and globes of the time, the works of distinguished projectors. The value of these maps was extraordinary even considering that their scarcity enhanced their price. The projectors were so highly esteemed that the making of one good map rendered the name of the cosmographer illustrious.

The Venetians struck a medal in honour of Mauro, an eminent friar who drew a map that was considered the most accurate of the time. It is recorded that Amerigo paid the high price of one hundred and thirty ducats for a map of sea and land made at Mallorca in 1439 by Gabriel de Velasca.

The subsequent celebrity of Amerigo Vespucci was mainly owing to the direction of his labours at this time. It appears that his chief ambition was to excel as a geographer, so that when he left the monastery of San Marco, he was, in all probability, better fitted to astonish the world with novel theories, than to acquire the fortune for which his family had destined him. Only one portion of his uncle's

CHAPTER 3

THE FIRST VOYAGE (LETTER TO SODERINI)

Amerigo Vespucci wrote a letter to his friend Pietro Soderini, who at the time was Gonfaloniere of the Republic of Florence. In the first part of the letter, Amerigo Vespucci describes his first voyage, which lasted from 10th May 1497 until 15th October 1498. If his coordinates are correct, Amerigo Vespucci landed on the north coast of Honduras. That would mean that he had discovered the continent of America. This has become a contentious claim because Amerigo Vespucci would have reached the mainland before Christopher Columbus, who up until that time had only reached some of the islands. Amerigo Vespucci then details his travels along what appears to be the Caribbean coast and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, before returning to Spain.

Magnificent lord [supposed to be Pietro Soderini, Gonfaloniere of the Republic of Florence in 1504]. I submit humble reverence to you and offer due recommendations. It may be that your Magnificence will be astonished at my temerity that I should dare so absurdly to write the present long letter to your Magnificence, knowing that your Magnificence is constantly occupied in the high councils and affairs touching the lofty Republic. And I may be considered not only presumptuous but also idle in writing things not convenient to your condition nor agreeable, and written in a barbarous style. But as I have confidence in your virtues and in the merit of my writing, which is touching things never before written upon either by ancient or modern writers, as will be seen, I may be excused by your Magnificence. The principal thing that moved me to write to you was the request of the bearer, who is named Benvenuto Benvenuti, our Florentine, who is very much the servant of your Magnificence, as he tells me, and a great friend of mine. He, finding himself here in this city of Lisbon, requested me to give an account to your Magnificence of the things by me seen in different parts of the world, during the four voyages that I have made to discover new lands; two by order of the Catholic King Ferdinand, by the Great Gulf of the Ocean Sea towards the west, the

CHAPTER 4

LAS CASAS ON AMERIGO'S VOYAGES

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566) was a Spanish Dominican priest and writer. Las Casas originated claims persisting for centuries that Amerigo Vespucci had fabricated the claims of the discoveries he made during his first voyage. The father of Bartolomé de Las Casas had sailed with Columbus, and was partial to the posthumous reputation of the Columbus, which he thought was diminished by the voyage of Amerigo Vespucci. If Las Casas had any proof for his opinion, he did not provide it.

Chapter CXL

It is manifest that the Admiral Don Cristobal Colon was the first by whom Divine Providence ordained that this our great continent should be discovered, and chose him for the instrument through whom all these hitherto unknown Indies should be shown to the world. He saw it on Wednesday, the 1st of August, one day after he discovered the island of Trinidad, in the year of our salvation, 1498. He gave it the name of Isla Santa, believing that it was an island. He then began to enter the Gulf of La Bellena, by the entrance called the mouth of the Serpent by him, finding all the water fresh, and it is this entrance that forms the island of Trinidad, separating it from the mainland called Santa. On the following Friday, being the 3rd of August, he discovered the point of Paria, which he also believed to be an island, giving it the name of Gracia. But all was mainland, as in due time appeared, and still more clearly now is it known that here there is an immense continent.

It is well here to consider the injury and injustice which that Americo Vespucio appears to have done to the Admiral, or that those have done who published his 'Four Navigations', in attributing the discovery of this continent to himself, without mentioning anyone but himself. Owing to this, all the foreigners who write of these Indies in Latin, or

CHAPTER 5

THE VERACITY OF AMERIGO'S CLAIMS

It would not be proper to lay the letter of Amerigo Vespucci to Piero Soderini before the reader, without noticing, as briefly as possible, consistently with a fair statement of the case, the question that has been discussed by historical critics touching on the accuracy of its date and authenticity. As far as can now be ascertained, the oldest version of the letter is found in a volume of cosmography, written by Martin Ilacamillo, which was published in Latin in Strabourg, in the year 1509. Neither of the biographers, Bandini or Canovai, appears to have been cognizant of this edition, and in it the letter is addressed to René, Duke of Lorraine and Bar, and King of Jerusalem and Sicily. All the letters in the work of Bandini are taken from records in the celebrated collection of the Bibliotheca Riccardiana, from the text of Ramusio, and from a pamphlet that Canovai calls the edition of Valori.

Bandini considers it useless to speculate on this subject of the direction, and accounts for the fact that it is different in different copies, by supposing that after the original had been sent to Soderini, Amerigo forwarded copies to various friends and people of quality, one of which was afterwards published by the King of Sicily and Jerusalem, as directed to himself. Navarrète adopts the Latin edition, and gives the same address, but it is said that since the publication of his collection of voyages, the original Latin manuscript itself has been discovered among the scrolls of the Riccardi palace that is directed to Soderini. As far as any judgement can be formed from the internal evidence of the document itself, the address was that which is given in this work, for it speaks of the old student friendship of the writer with his correspondent, in a manner that he would not have been likely to have made use of toward a person of royal birth.

Whatever may be the opinion of critics as to the address, the authenticity of the letter itself is undoubted, and it was written by Amerigo Vespucci himself. Until the publication of Herrera in 1601 it was received by most literary and scientific men as an accurate and veracious account. That writer asserted, without a particle of proof, and

CHAPTER 6

PREPARATIONS FOR THE SECOND VOYAGE

On 18th October 1498, just three days after the arrival of Amerigo Vespucci's ship in Cadiz, five of Columbus's ships set sail for Spain from the port of Isabella in Hispaniola.

Not long before that, on 30th August 1498, Columbus had arrived at the settlement he had founded on the island of Hispaniola. He had found the affairs of the colony in the greatest state of confusion and anarchy. Despite the sagacious and vigorous government of his brother, whom he had left behind him as his lieutenant or adelantado, a serious insurrection, headed by an ambitious man named Roldan, had broken out, and threatened the utter destruction of the new colony. Roldan was the last man who should have rebelled against the authority of Columbus, for he had been raised by the Admiral from poverty and a low position, to one of usefulness and distinction. However, he was "one of those basic spirits that grow venomous in the sunshine of prosperity."

Columbus saw at once the necessity of vigorous measures to quell the growing spirit of discontent and rebellion. He was well aware that many of the colonists were extremely anxious to return to Spain. They were composed mostly of refugees from justice, and convicts who had been pardoned, on the condition of accompanying him on his second and third voyages, and looked upon their residents in Hispaniola as a punishment.

He deemed it advisable, therefore, to get rid of as many of these unruly subjects as possible, and accordingly, on the 12th September 1498, he made proclamation, offering a free passage home to such of the colonists who wished to avail themselves of the chance, in five vessels, which he determined to dispatch at once for Spain. He hoped by this means to weaken the force of the disaffected, and was desirous, also, of sending to his sovereigns an account of his further discoveries.

They reached Spain in December 1498 after a passage of about two

CHAPTER 7

THE SECOND VOYAGE (LETTER TO SODERINI)

Amerigo Vespucci wrote a letter to his friend Pietro Soderini, who at the time was Gonfaloniere of the Republic of Florence. In the second part of the letter, Amerigo Vespucci describes his second voyage, which he details as lasting from 18th May 1499 until 8th September 1500. A subsequent letter suggests that they returned to Spain in June 1500. According to the evidence given by Alonso de Ojeda, who captained the expedition, they reached the South American coast at Surinam, and then travelled along the coast as far as Venezuela before eventually returning to Spain. However, the coordinates of Amerigo Vespucci, who was the navigator, would have meant that they travelled much further south, down the coast of Brazil. Vespucci's coordinates also suggest that they travelled much further north along the coast than Venezuela.

As regards the second voyage, what I saw in it most worthy of mention is as follows : We left the port of Cadiz, with three ships, on the 16th of May 1499, and shaped our course direct for the Cape Verde islands, passing in sight of the island of Gran Canaria; and we navigated until we reached an island that is called the island of FUOCO. Here we got in our supplies of wood and water, and thence shaped our course to the south-west. In forty-four days we came in sight of a new land, and we judged it to be the mainland, continuous with that of which mention has already been made. This land is within the Torrid Zone, and beyond the equinoctial line on the south side, over which the Pole rises from the meridian 5°, beyond every climate. It is distant from the said islands by the S.W. wind 500 leagues. We found the day and night to be equal, because we arrived on the 27th of June, when the sun is near the tropic of Cancer. We found this land to be all drowned, and full of very great rivers. At first we did not see any people. We anchored our ships and got our boats out, going with them to the land, which, as I have said, we found to be full of very large rivers, and drowned by these great rivers. There we tried in many directions to see if we could enter; and

CHAPTER 8

THE SECOND VOYAGE (LETTER TO MEDICI))

Amerigo Vespucci wrote a second letter in which he described his second voyage, which he details as setting out on 18th May 1499, and returning thirteen months later, which would be some time in June 1500. The letter was written to Lorenzo di Piero Francesco de Medici (1463-1503), who was an Italian banker and politician. The letter was written on 18th July 1500. This makes it the oldest known writing by Amerigo Vespucci concerning his voyages. As with his letter to Solderini, Vespucci's coordinates suggest that they travelled far down the coast of Brazil rather than only as far south as Surinam, which is what Alonso de Ojeda later claimed. Amerigo Vespucci, as the navigator, would have had a far better knowledge than Alonso de Ojeda of precisely where they had travelled to.

Most Excellent and Dear Lord :

It is a long time since I have written to your Excellency, and for no other reason than that nothing has occurred to me worthy of being commemorated. This present letter will inform you that about a month ago, I arrived from the Indies, by the way of the great ocean, brought, by the grace of God, safely to this city of Seville. I think your Excellency will be gratified to learn the result of my voyage, and the most surprising things that have been presented to my observation. If I am somewhat tedious, let my letter be read in your more idle hours, as fruit is eaten after the cloth is removed from the table. Your Excellency will be pleased to note that commissioned by his highness the King of Spain, I set out with two small ships, on the 18th of May, 1499, on a voyage of discovery to the south-west, by way of the great ocean, and steered my course along the coast of Africa, until I reached the Fortunate Islands, which are now called the Canaries. After having provided ourselves with all things necessary, first offering our prayers to God, we set sail from an island that is called Gomera, and turning

CHAPTER 9

THE VOYAGE OF ALONSO DE OJEDA

Alonso de Ojeda (c1465-1515) was a Spanish explorer who sailed with Columbus. He gave evidence in a lawsuit that the son of Christopher Columbus, Don Diego, commenced after the death of his father, and prosecuted against the crown of Spain. In his evidence, Alonso de Ojeda detailed the second voyage of Amerigo Vespucci, which was captained by Alonso de Ojeda. He claims that they reached the South American coast at Surinam, and then travelled along the coast as far as Venezuela before eventually returning to Spain. The description is taken from Navarréte iii, pages 3-11.

In December 1498 the news arrived of the discovery of Paria. The splendid ideas of the discoverer touching the beauty and wealth of that region were presently made known, and the spirit of maritime enterprise was revived with renewed vigour. Some of those who had sailed with the Admiral, and had benefited by his instruction and example, solicited and obtained from the Court licences to discover, at their own proper cost, the regions beyond what was already known, paying into the Treasury a fourth or fifth part of what they acquired.

The first who adventured was Alonso de Hojeda, a native of Cuenca. Owing to his energy and the favour of the Bishop Don Rodriguez de Fonseca, he soon collected the funds and the crews necessary for the equipment of four vessels in the Port of Santa Maria, where Juan de la Cosa resided, a great mariner according to popular ideas, and not inferior to the Admiral himself in his own conceit. He had been a shipmate and pupil of the Admiral in the expedition of Cuba and Jamaica. This man was the principal pilot of Hojeda. They also engaged others who had been in the Paria voyage. Among the other sharers in the enterprise, the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci merits special mention. He was established in Seville, but became tired of a mercantile life, and entered upon the study of cosmography and nautical subjects, with the desire of embracing a more glorious career.

CHAPTER 10

PREPARATIONS FOR THE THIRD VOYAGE

It was during the month of July, in the year 1500, that Amerigo Vespucci wrote his letter to Lorenzo de Medici, giving a description of his second voyage, which had just been brought to a conclusion. He apologises, as has been seen, for his long silence, and gives as an excuse for it, the reason, that nothing had occurred to him worthy of being commemorated, except that which he proceeded to narrate.

A most unjustifiable use has been made of this expression of the navigator by those who are desirous of discrediting his account of his first voyage. They argue that it is equivalent to saying that he had not made a previous voyage, for it would have been a remarkable forgetfulness to have said that nothing of importance had occurred, if he had made a previous voyage, of eighteen months duration, in 1497-1498. How much more ingenuous would it be to suppose that he had previously written De' Medici an account of that first voyage, in letters that have been lost in the lapse of time, and that the interval between those communications and the one under consideration, a period of more than fourteen months at the least, compelled him to speak of his long silence and make excuses for it. The weakness of the argument made use of to discredit him, is of itself evidence of the want of cogent proof in support of their position.

Gaspar de Lemos had returned to Portugal from Brazil some time during the summer of 1500, bringing with him letters to the king from members of Pedro Cabral's fleet and particularly one from Pero Vaz de Caminha. The return of Gaspar de Lemos and the report of the discovery of Brazil evidently did not create great excitement in Portugal. There is no mention of his arrival in any existing document. De Lemos may not have brought back any of the parrots that seemed such novelties when Pedro Cabral's fleet returned, nor is there any indication in the letter of Caminha that brazil-wood had been found. Both of these appear very prominently on the Cantino map, where they seem to be associated with the voyage of Amerigo Vespucci.

CHAPTER 11

AMERIGO'S DESCRIPTION OF CABRAL'S VOYAGE

Soon after he had set out on his third voyage on 13th May 1501, Amerigo Vespucci's ships spent a few days securing a supply of fish along the African coast, and then continued to Beseguiche for water and wood. Beseguiche is now called Goree Island, which is just off the coast of Senegal. It is here that they encountered two ships of Pedro Cabral's fleet, on their way back from their voyages of discovery.

It was from Beseguiche, on 4th June 1501, that Amerigo Vespucci sent a letter back to Lisbon to Lorenzo di Piero Francesco de Medici, in which he described Pedro Cabral's voyages. Pedro Cabral's fleet had discovered much of Brazil, and it was to Brazil that Amerigo Vespucci's fleet were destined.

Vespucci evidently met some of the Florentines on one of the ships, the *Anunciada*, particularly the representatives of Marchioni, who showed him the jewels that they had obtained. He naturally would not mention them by name, because of the injunction of secrecy regarding the voyage that Dom Manuel had imposed.

The authenticity of this letter has been questioned by some historians for two reasons: because of the belief that it was not in the handwriting of Vespucci, and because it was not, judging by the printed accounts of his voyage which were assumed to be authentic, the kind of letter that he would have written. It is true that the letter is not in Vespucci's hand and is a copy. The copy, however, was made by Piero Vagliente at Florence and forms part of a collection of thirty-two accounts which otherwise appear to be authentic. Vagliente was closely associated with Nicoló Sernigi of Florence and thus with Girolamo Sernigi of Lisbon and would be in a position to obtain copies of letters addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici which, because of their interest, he would naturally include in his collection. Vespucci had gone to Seville at the age of forty to represent the Medici, with whom he had previously been associated.

CHAPTER 12

THE THIRD VOYAGE (LETTER TO SODERINI)

Amerigo Vespucci wrote a second letter to his friend Pietro Soderini, who was Gonfaloniere of the Republic of Florence. In the first part of the letter, Amerigo Vespucci describes his third voyage, which he details as lasting from 13th May 1501 until 7th September 1502. After travelling along the west coast of Africa, Amerigo Vespucci's ships sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. They landed on the north coast of Brazil. They then travelled right along the coastline of Brazil. According to Vespucci's coordinates they reached the south of Brazil before returning via Africa to Portugal.

Being afterwards in Seville, resting from so many labours that I had endured during these two voyages, and intending to return to the land of pearls, fortune showed that she was not content with these my labours. I know not how there came into the thoughts of the Most Serene King Don Manuel of Portugal the wish to have my services. But being at Seville, without any thought of going to Portugal, a messenger came to me with a letter from the Royal Crown, in which I was asked to come to Lisbon, to confer with his Highness, who promised to show me favour. I was not inclined to go, and I despatched the messenger with a reply that I was not well, but that when I had recovered, if his Highness still wished for my services, I would come as soon as he might send for me. Seeing that he could not have me, he arranged to send Giuliano di Bartholomeo di Giocondo for me, he being in Lisbon, with instructions that, come what might, he should bring me. The said Giuliano came to Seville, and prayed so hard that I was forced to go. My departure was taken ill by many who knew me, for I left Castille where honour was done me, and where the King held me in good esteem. It was worse that I went without bidding farewell to my host.

When I was presented to that King, he showed his satisfaction that I had come, and asked me to go in company with three of his ships that were ready to depart for the discovery of new lands. As the request of a

CHAPTER 13

THE THIRD VOYAGE (BRIEF LETTER TO MEDICI)

Amerigo Vespucci had already described the outset of his third voyage, and Pedro Cabral's discoveries, in a letter to Lorenzo di Piero Francesco de Medici (1463-1503). The second letter to him concerning the third voyage briefly describes the continuation of that journey, and what they found along the coast of Brazil. It was published for the first time in 1789, by Bartolozzi, at the close of his work entitled "Ricerche Istorico Critiche circa alle Scoperie d'Amerigo Vespucci."

My Most Excellent Patron, Lorenzo :

(After due commendation), My last letter to your Excellency was written from a place on the coast of Guinea, called Cape Verd, and in it you were informed of the commencement of my voyage. This present letter will advise you of its continuation and termination.

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

We sailed in these seas until we entered the Torrid Zone and passed to the south of the equinoctial line and the Tropic of Capricorn, so that we were fifty degrees to the south of the line. We navigated here four mouths and twenty-seven days, seeing neither the Arctic Pole, nor Ursa Major or Minor. We discovered here many beautiful constellations, invisible in the Northern Hemisphere, and noted their marvellous movements and grandeur. We marked the course of their revolutions and with geometrical calculations determined the positions of these

CHAPTER 14

THE THIRD VOYAGE (LONG LETTER TO MEDICI)

The third letter that Amerigo Vespucci wrote to Lorenzo di Piero Francesco de Medici (1463-1503) concerning the third voyage gave a fuller account of that voyage. Amerigo wrote that they left Lisbon on 13th May 1501, and travelled down the coast of Africa. He then described how, often in harsh weather, they crossed the Atlantic Ocean, without sighting land again, until they reached Brazil, on 17th August 1501. Amerigo describes in detail what he saw during his travels along the southern coast of Brazil.

In days past, I gave your Excellency a full account of my return, and if I remember aright, wrote you a description of all those parts of the New World that I had visited in the vessels of his serene highness the King of Portugal. Carefully considered, they appear truly to form another world, and therefore we have, not without reason, called it the New World. Not one of all the ancients had any knowledge of it, and the things that have been lately ascertained by us, transcend all their ideas. They thought there was nothing south of the equinoctial line but an immense sea, and some poor and barren islands. The sea they called the Atlantic, and if sometimes they confessed that there might be land in that region, they contended that it must be sterile, and could not be otherwise than uninhabitable.

The present navigation has controverted their opinions, and openly demonstrated to all, that they were very far from the truth. Beyond the equinoctial line, I found countries more fertile and more thickly inhabited, than I have ever found anywhere else, even in Asia, Africa, and Europe, as will be more fully manifested by duly attending to the following relation. Setting aside all minor matters, I shall relate only those of the greatest importance, and that are well worthy of commemoration, and those that I have personally seen or heard of from men of credibility. I shall now speak with much care concerning those

CHAPTER 15

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FOURTH VOYAGE

The results of the third voyage were of very great importance to Portugal. Brazil, an immensely wealthy country, was added to her dominions. Its mines of gold and diamonds furnished her most opportunely with resources for prosecuting her conquests and discoveries in the East.

The return of Amerigo Vespucci from his third voyage occasioned great joy in Lisbon. He was received with high honours by King Emmanuel, who celebrated his safe arrival with much magnificence. His ship, which had become unseaworthy, was broken up, and portions of it were carried in solemn procession to a church, where they were suspended as valuable relics.

Nor were the rejoicings and celebrations confined to Portugal. His own countrymen received the accounts of his discoveries with exultation. Public ceremonies were ordered, and honours were bestowed upon those members of his family who were then in Florence.

Amerigo acquired as much, if not more reputation, in consequence of his astronomical and geometrical discoveries in his two last voyages, as in consequence of his exploration of new countries. He was generally admitted to be vastly in advance of all the navigators of the age in his knowledge of these sciences; and though his calculations are undoubtedly defective in many points, they are far more accurate than those of any preceding or contemporary mariner.

"Astronomy" says the Justificatory Dissertation, "had in ancient times comparatively very little influence in nautical affairs. The wisest pilot, in his studies of the planets and stars, was limited to observations of the phases of the moon, in order to foresee the tides - to a calculation, in the daytime of the meridian altitude of the sun, and in the night-time, to the steering of his vessel by the constellations of Ursa Major and Minor. Longitude was calculated by an inexact and precarious method,

CHAPTER 16

THE FOURTH VOYAGE (LETTER TO SODERINI)

Amerigo Vespucci wrote a letter to his friend Pietro Soderini, who at the time was Gonfaloniere of the Republic of Florence. In the second part of the letter, Amerigo Vespucci describes his fourth voyage. It was captained by Gonçalo Coelho, and lasted from 10th May 1503 until 18th June 1504. Their aim was to travel to the East Indies. However, they lost some of their ships near to an island, which, accounting for errors in distance, was Fernando de Noronha, an island off the Brazilian coast. These losses caused them to go to Brazil instead, and then eventually return to Lisbon without completing their objective.

It remains for me to relate the things I saw in the fourth voyage; but as I am already tired, and as the voyage did not end as was intended, owing to an accident that happened in the Atlantic, as your Magnificence will shortly understand, I propose to be brief. We departed from this port of Lisbon with six ships, having the intention of discovering an island in the East called Melaccha, of which it was reported that it was very rich, and that it was the mart of all the ships that navigate the Gangetic and Indian Seas, as Cadiz is the mart for all vessels passing from east to west or from west to east by way of Galicut. This Melaccha is more to the west than Galicut, and much more to the south, for we know that it is in 33° from the Antarctic Pole. We departed on the 10th of May 1503, and shaped a course direct for the Cape Verde Islands, where we careened and took in fresh provisions, remaining for thirteen days. Thence we continued on our voyage, shaping a south-easterly course, and as our commander was a presumptuous and very obstinate man, he wanted to go to Serra-liona, in the southern land of Ethiopia, without any necessity, unless it was to show that he was commander of the six ships, and he acted against the wishes of all the other captains. Thus navigating, when we came in sight of the said land the weather was so bad, with a contrary wind, that we were in sight for four days without being able to reach the place, owing to the storm. The consequence was that we were obliged to resume our proper course, and give up the said

CHAPTER 17

THE NATURALISATION OF AMERIGO

Thus ended the last voyage of Amerigo Vespucci. Desiring rest, and perhaps disheartened by its unfortunate result, he abandoned, for the present, all ideas of again proceeding to sea, and devoted himself to the task of writing full accounts of his discoveries. It is greatly to be regretted that not all the works to which he makes allusion have been preserved for the benefit of the world. For it is evident, by the way in which he speaks of them, that they contained more ample accounts than the letters. The spirit of research may yet lead some industrious antiquarian to the discovery of those documents, his manuscript journals, the loss of which are to be deplored.

Amerigo Vespucci remained in Portugal for only a short time after his unexpected return from his fourth voyage. In the latter part of 1504, he returned to Seville, and in February 1505 he left that city, on his way to the court, which was then held at Segovia, bearing the letter from Columbus referring to Amerigo Vespucci, after Amerigo had offered his services to Columbus :

"MY DEAR SON, - Diego Mendez left here on Monday, the 3rd of this month. After his departure, I spoke with Amerigo Vespucci, the bearer of this letter, who is going to the Court on matters relating to navigation. He always showed a desire to please me, and is a very respectable man. Fortune has been adverse to him, as to many others. His labours have not been so profitable to him as he might have expected. He leaves me with the desire to do me service, if it should be in his power. I am unable here to point out in what way he could be useful to me, because I do not know what may be required at Court; but he goes with the determination of doing all he can for me. You will see in what way he can be employed. Think the matter over, as he will do everything, and speak, and put things in train; but let all be done secretly, so as not to arouse suspicion of him. I have told him all I can about my affairs, and of the payments that have been made to me and are due. This letter is also for the Adelantado, for he can see in what way use can be made of it, and will apprise you of it, etc., etc.

CHAPTER 18

THE NAMING OF AMERICA

It was about this time that the name of America began to be first used, and was applied to the countries that Amerigo had visited during his last voyages. The assertion has been made, that soon after his return to Spain, Amerigo prepared a chart, in which the coast of Brazil was delineated and called by the name of America, but it is unsupported by any verifying evidence or authority. If he had done this, however, it would not be sufficient reason to justify his calumniators in their charges against him of dishonourable treatment of Columbus.

It was a custom then, and has continued a custom since then, for discoverers to call after themselves some prominent place, river, or mountain, fallen in with in the course of their explorations. Amerigo never could have imagined the greater significance that the name was afterwards destined to attain, and the injustice of those who attribute to him the crime of falsifying the date of his first voyage, with this end in view, which is apparent to anyone who is not ignorant of the limited application of the name in the first instance.

We may conjecture, with a great degree of certainty, that on Amerigo Vespucci's return from his last voyage, the coast that he had visited began to pass by his name. Two reasons may be given why this honour should have been conferred on him, rather than on his superior officers. One reason, is that although he was not first in command, his pre-eminence in nautical and geographical knowledge gave him that control over the proceedings of the rest, that men of strong minds inevitably acquire in moments of difficulty and danger.

Indeed, we find that he came back from his fourth voyage, when Coelho, with the greater part of the squadron, had perished, and when he himself was no longer expected, in which circumstances it would be perfectly natural for the Portuguese to attribute to him the sole merit of the discovery of Brazil. The second reason is, that, as Amerigo Vespucci was highly skilled in the construction of charts, and as those

CHAPTER 19

THE INTENDED FIFTH VOYAGE

Being qualified to serve the king in the capacity of a commander, preparations were commenced, by the orders of government, for a new Americas expedition. Amerigo Vespucci and Vicente Yañez Pinzon were named the commanders. The spirit of discovery was aroused again in the mind of Amerigo, and so he set out for the ports of Palos and Moguer, where he remained throughout the month of May, to see and consult with his colleague, in relation to the necessary wants of the expedition.

There is little doubt that the representations of Amerigo Vespucci alone led to this new enterprise, and that Pinzon was the most proper person to associate with him in the undertaking, for he had already been upon the coast of Brazil, which was the destination of the fleet. In fact, all the claims of Spain to any part of that region rested upon a previous voyage of Pinzon, who, in 1500, had taken possession of the more northern part, in the name of the Spanish sovereigns.

The new expedition that was in preparation for Amerigo Vespucci and Pinzon was the occasion of much perplexity to the officers of the Board of Trade, and for this reason : by the last testament of Queen Isabella, her consort, King Ferdinand, was appointed Regent of Castile during the minority of her grandson Charles, in case of the absence or incapacity of her daughter Joanna, who had given occasional evidence of insanity, during the lifetime of her mother. This princess was, at the time of the death of the queen, with her husband, the Archduke Philip, in Flanders. King Ferdinand at once proclaimed his daughter queen, and assumed the regency, but from the outset was unpopular with the nobles and people, and at length, on the arrival of Philip and Joanna in Spain, was compelled to resign his power in Castile and retire to his own kingdom of Aragon.

From the moment of accession of Philip to the throne, as the consort of Joanna, a complete change took place in all of the departments of government. Almost all the old officers of state were dismissed, and

CHAPTER 20

AMERIGO'S FINAL YEARS

On March 14th and 18th 1508 Amerigo Vespucci was with the Court at Burgos. On the 22nd of March, 1508, Ferdinand, with the following document, appointed Amerigo to the office of chief pilot, with an annual salary of seventy-five thousand maravedis. It would seem, from the decree which was issued on the 6th of August of the same year, that this place was by no means a sinecure :

"Doña Juana :- Seeing that it has come to our notice, and that we have seen by experience, that, owing to the pilots not being so expert as is necessary, nor so well instructed in what they ought to know, so as to be competent to rule and govern the ships that navigate in the voyage over the Ocean Sea to our islands and mainland that we possess in the Indies; and that through their default, either in not knowing how to rule and govern, or through not knowing how to find the altitude by the quadrant or astrolabe, nor the methods of calculating it, have happened many disasters, and those who have sailed under their governance have been exposed to great danger, by which our Lord has been ill-served, as well as our finances, while the merchants who trade thither have received much hurt and loss. And for a remedy to the above, and because it is necessary, as well for that navigation as for other voyages by which, with the help of our Lord, we hope to make new discoveries in other lands, that there should be persons who are more expert and better instructed, and who know the things necessary for such navigation, so that those who are under them may go more safely, it is our will and pleasure, and we order that all the pilots of our kingdoms and lordships, who are now or shall hereafter be appointed as pilots in the said navigation to the islands and mainland that we possess in the parts of the Indies, and in other parts of the Ocean Sea, shall be instructed and shall know what it is necessary for them to know respecting the quadrant and astrolabe, in order that, by uniting theory with practice, they may be able to make good use of them in the said voyages made to the said parts, and, without such knowledge, no one shall go in the said ships as pilots, nor receive pay as pilots, nor may the masters receive them on board ship, until they have first been