第三章 信仰、黄金和印第安人

Chapter 3 Faith, Gold And The Indian

美洲被“发现”之后，对于那里的主人印第安人来说，无疑是一场噩梦的开始。天花病毒和狼犬直到18世纪还在消灭着这一种族，而之前的三百年，在印第安人还不被认作人的时代，恐怖的血色使人不寒而栗。

作为美洲的合法主人，印第安人却如此轻易地为白人所征服。这要归因为美洲与外界隔离了万年。那里地广人稀，大多数印第安人还停留在游猎阶段，农业革命并未在那里形成燎原之势，这使得相对落后的印第安人一旦面对白人的枪炮便土崩瓦解。

而这批白人殖民者却目光炯炯，满怀着为上帝而战的激情。摩尔人刚从西班牙的土地上被驱逐出去，同样的仇恨使得圣战将士们将剑指向了这些不信上帝的异教野蛮人。在上帝面前的另一端，熠熠闪光的是黄金，发财的渴求使他们漂洋过海到新世界去碰自己的运气。在此，他们疯狂搜刮民财到了敲骨吸髓的地步，其赫赫战果就是每年源源不断被运向欧洲的黄金与白银。

问题也随之而至。印第安人在压榨下一批批死去。有一位善良的神父为此劝说殖民者不要再把印第安人投入矿山和种植园，作为替代物，他建议使用更为强壮的黑奴。而这将给大洋彼岸的另一批人带来不幸，猎奴人开始在非洲海岸出没，强行将一批批黑人送入黑色的地狱。
哥伦布改变了世界地图
Faith, Gold "And The Indian"

In the year of Grace 1732, General Jeffrey Amherst (who bestowed his name upon a well-known village and college in northern Massachusetts) had reason to instruct one of his subordinates in regard to the treatment of certain native tribes which recognized His Majesty the King of England as their Lord and Master.

“You will do well,” so wrote His Excellency, “to try to inoculate the Indians by means of blankets in which smallpox patients have slept, as well as by every other method that can serve to extirpate this execrable race. I should be very glad if your scheme of hunting them down by dogs could take effect.”

If such sentiments could be publicly expressed by a distinguished and not unfriendly British general during the first half of the eighteenth century (when the world had begun to take a sincere interest in the welfare of the less enlightened races of men) then what of the poor savages who three hundred years before had suddenly found themselves placed at the mercy of the soldiers and the friars of His Most Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain? Perhaps the less said, the better.

For the Spaniard, who as a child had learned to hate and despise the dusky Moors (who for five centuries had been the rulers of his fatherland) regarded the copper-colored inhabitants of his new possessions as a species of animal that had nothing whatsoever in common with the rest of the human race.

In one respect this proved to be of great advantage to the Indians. It made them exempt from the laws and regulations of the Inquisition which were supposed in deal exclusively with “reasonable beings.” Therefore whenever in Mexico City or in Cuzco a fresh batch of English heretics and Jewish
backsliders was solemnly marched to the funeral pyre, the natives were allowed to come to the Quemadero and take a cheerful part in the festivities without running the risk of being molested for their own heathenish opinions. But except upon such rare occasions the fate of the Indian was not a happy one and what made it all the worse was the conviction (hidden in some obscure comer of his poor pagan brain) that he was really the rightful owner of the soil and that the foreigner who had reduced him and his neighbors to slavery was merely an intruder and only survived because he was possessed of such large quantities of blunderbusses and ten-pounders.

The question of the origin of our Indians has never yet been settled. Whether the redskins were Asiatics who had reached the American mainland by way of the frozen Bering Strait or by way of a ridge of land which since then has disappeared, or whether they were descended from a primitive people who had wandered from Europe to Labrador via Iceland and Greenland is something which no one can decide at the hand of the available materials. This much seems certain: that the American continent was not settled until thousands of years after the appearance of true human beings in Asia, Africa and Europe, and that the ancestors of the Indians, once they had reached these shores, were cut off from communication with the rest of the world for perhaps fifteen or twenty thousand years. Mentally the American aborigines were in no way inferior to the races that lived in other parts of the planet. But they had been left so absolutely to themselves that in most respects they were thousands of years behind those Europeans who now descended upon them with their arquebuses and escopetas.

But there was another reason why the Indians should so easily have fallen victim to foreign conquest. There were so very few of them. The entire continent (both South and North America and the densely populated part known as Central America) probably did not contain more than ten million souls, as many as there are today in New York and Chicago alone. This small number was due to their wandering habits and to the fact that most of them were practically unfamiliar with agriculture.
Of course I am dealing in dangerous generalities. There were all sorts of Indians, from the highly civilized Mayas and Peruvians to the cannibalistic tribes of southern Patagonia. But by and large they were no match for the highly organized and well-armed groups of European invaders and their territories were overrun and occupied in an incredibly short space of time.

Most unfortunately for them the discovery of Columbus came at the very moment when the Spaniards, after about six hundred years of uninterrupted warfare, had just driven the last of the Mohammedan caliphs out of their own country. Spain was still full of that strange crusading spirit which is ready to commit the most hideous of crimes in the name of the most exalted of religions. Men like Cortez and Pizarro, who with a handful of highly drilled cutthroats destroyed Indian empires as large as France, Spain and England combined, could never have accomplished this had they not felt themselves to be the lineal descendants of the Cid and those other chosen messengers of the All Highest.

The Conquistadores of course were highly picturesque fellows. Their tales of heroism and sacrifice lost nothing in the telling and when we read of their exploits, their marches across swamps and mountains, their profound and bloodthirsty devotion, we are very apt to forget that this piety was strangely interwoven with a ruthless greed for gold. A desire to serve God and the heathen may have carried a few simple friars across the much feared ocean. But the mass of the newcomers merely wanted to get rich and wanted to get rich quick. What became of the people whose houses they plundered, the peasants whose irrigation canals they destroyed, the families whose daughters they stole, all that did not interest them in the least. And as for the people at home, they were just as rapacious and indifferent. Provided the annual “Silver Fleet” carried a sufficient amount of gold and silver to advance the endless campaigns of the Philips and Charleses and Alfonsos who succeeded each other in dull succession upon the Spanish throne, very few questions were asked and none were answered.

How disastrously this system reacted upon the Spanish people has become common history. Less than twenty years after the discovery of the first
American islands, such a large percentage of the native Mexican popular, ion had died that it was necessary to import laborers from elsewhere. At first these were found among the Indians of Florida and Venezuela. But the American Indians never made good slaves. As soon as they were held in captivity, they began to die like flies and so great became the scandal that a certain Bartolomeo de las Casas (the son of a man who had accompanied Columbus on his first voyage) proposed that no further natives should be forced to work in the mines and on the plantations and that their place should be taken by thehardier blackamoors from Africa.

Las Casas made this suggestion with the best of intentions, but his plan did not work as well as he had hoped. For soon all the scoundrels in Christendom (and there were a good many in those days, nor were they restricted to a single century) were hunting slaves along the Senegal River and the Congo, and this scandalous trade, once started, could not be stopped until centuries afterwards.

There was, however, one other prominent reason why the colonies in the new world were doomed to failure. I refer to the innate love of the Spanish crown for centralization. Everything in that unfortunate country had to be referred to Madrid. Not a single colony ever enjoyed a vestige of self-government. The officials, all of them, must be recruited in the mother country, and not a single person born overseas could ever hope to be entrusted with a position of honor or responsibility.

Under those circumstances the colonists shrugged their shoulders, said “What is the use?” (or words to that effect), kept away from all forms of municipal or state government and spent their time either enriching themselves at the expense of their white neighbors or lording it over their slaves, with the exception of those who entered the Church and made such excellent use of their advantageous position in society that soon more than eighty per cent of all real estate was in the hands of the clerics and their dependents.

But the economic error which definitely killed all progress was the system of monopolies which Spain introduced into the new world as part of her general policy of colonization. Private enterprise was ruthlessly stamped out. The
individual trader, when caught, was immediately handed over to the hangman and every ounce of gold and every pound of cinnamon that was exported from Buenos Aires or Havana had to be accounted for in Cadiz. Such a Paradise of stuffy clerks and bureaucrats offered no room for the development of an independent class of merchants. A small number of Jews (who by a strange coincidence were expelled from Spain on the very day when Columbus sailed from Palos) tried to get a foothold in Mexico and Peru and Venezuela. But as soon as they had accumulated a few thousand dollars by their personal thrift and energy the Inquisition invariably accused them of backsliding, burned them at the stake and confiscated their money. Whereupon the others moved to London or Amsterdam, put their brains and their credit at the disposal of Spain’s arch-enemies and in this roundabout way helped to destroy the nation that had been such a cruel taskmaster to their ancestors.

It would be easy to increase this chapter by several pages of duly enumerated grievances and errors of judgment. But enough has been said to show why a “Story of America” does not this day mean a history of that vast region where Spanish and Portuguese and not the English tongue happen to be the language of every-day life.

Spain, it is true, discovered and conquered a new continent. But as soon as this had been accomplished, the country made a mistake which doomed all her future efforts to failure she tried to turn the new world into an exact copy of the old one.

The Gods that shape man’s destinies are of exceeding patience.

But they draw the line at Some things.