

ILLUSTRATED AMERICANA. (1493-1624.)

BY JAMES F. HUNNEWELL.

ILLUSTRATED books on America have been made ever since its discovery by Columbus was announced to the world. Along with examples of nearly all styles and qualities of engraving, they also show us an even greater variety of what has been learned, or imagined, about the western hemisphere. Maps, which are very numerous, form a class by themselves, as in later times do almost countless woodcuts. Before 1590 the latter were, however, about the only sort of engravings relating to the New World, and to some examination of them and of the plate engravings that followed them we turn our attention.

In the great mass of works known as Americana the number of those that can be called illustrated is, until recent years, relatively small, yet they afford more than ample matter for a limited paper. Accordingly the present paper will be confined to those produced before English colonization was to any considerable extent begun. The matter we find is significant for what it shows as well as for what it does not show. If it furnishes much less full and precise information than is given by some type, it still presents not a little that is important and interesting, and the plates often prove to be no mere curiosities or embellishments.

At the outset we recall a remark by HARRISSE, that "it is curious to notice how few of the original books relating to the early history of the New World can be found in the public libraries of Europe,"—or, we may add, anywhere else except as the greatest rarities. It is a circumstance that indicates, as he says in another place, "the compara-

tively limited and transient effect produced upon the public mind by the discovery of America." The early engravings in works relating to this subject strengthen such an opinion.

The event, that we now know was so important, occurred in no age of dulness and ignorance—mediæval as it was—but at a time of wonderful awakening in thought, enterprise, and art. In literature, the Bible, works of the Greek and Roman authors, of the great Italian poets, and of a large number of writers then modern, had been printed, and that too in marvellous style, often on a grand scale, or in various editions. Twenty years earlier the "Geographia" of Strabo had been twice printed at Rome, and once at Venice. Of Ptolemy's "Cosmographia" there had been several editions, one of them, in 1478, with copper-plate maps, others with remarkably large wood-cut maps. As early as 1475 an essay at Universal History, illustrated, had appeared—the "Rudimentum Noviciarum" at Lubeck, and while Columbus was first westward bound engravers were cutting the blocks for the Nuremburg Chronicle, its largest view measuring twenty-one by thirteen and one-half inches. Military art had been illustrated by very spirited and well drawn cuts in the "Valturius" at Verona, 1472, republished with some changes in 1483. Copper or metal plate engravings had appeared in the Monte Santo di Dio, 1477; in the Dante of 1481, and probably the Triumphs of Petrarch. In 1486, a book of travels, the Perigrinatio of Breydenbach, had been issued with very notable wood-cuts, some fine and small, some very large—the view of Venice being no less than four feet three and one-half inches long. There were at least three editions of this work before 1492. Even that sometimes despised bit of geography, the local guide-book, had appeared as early as 1473 in the "Mirabilia Romæ," and in the "Libellus" of Arnold of Brussels at Naples, 1475.

At the close of the fifteenth century there were certainly art and enterprise enough to illustrate a subject that was

considered important or of interest. Even devices thought to be modern, possibly inventions of the astute Yankee, were then known. We have heard of the recent wood-cut that portrays a candidate for the State House, or the State Prison, but Anthony Coburger knew all that sort of useful economy, and more than that, for he could make the same block give a view of Damascus, Naples, Perugia, Verona, and several other dissimilar places. Publishers now-a-days could give the pioneers points on art, but hardly, it seems, in enterprise.

It was in an age of invention and bold undertaking, that as Irving wrote, "the great mystery of the ocean was revealed," and a new world was opened to Europe. Yet what did art then, and for generations indeed, do to illustrate it and make it known?

The printers' services, of course, were the first to be used. A Spanish letter describing the event appeared and was hastily translated into Latin and issued in over half a dozen forms at about as many places. Poor, thin, cheap, little tracts, some of them padded with wood-cuts, ornamental as the art was, illustrative as ships in general were, properly demonstrative so far as a coat of arms went, nothing to show what the New World or its discoverer were like—only a few curious examples of guess-work by the engravers. Yet slight as these tracts are in mere size, or as examples of early printing and engraving, they have become crown jewels in a collection of Americana, so rare that probably no one library has originals of all the editions. Two series that are renowned the world over, and that happily still exist, help to do honor to members of this Society—the late Mr. James Lenox of New York, and Mr. John Nicholas Brown of Providence. To the latter, it should be added, a facsimile of a recently discovered edition has been dedicated.

Quickly following the printed letter came (October 25, 1493), a poem by Giuliano Dati, a popular Italian poet, giving the account in rhyme, and in a second edition (the

next day) a view of the strange land. So far as this was represented in any of the cuts, it was as a sort of Eden just before and after the fall, with a good many Eves.

As scanty illustration was given to the early published accounts of the discoveries by Vespucci. For instance, a thin quarto issued at Nuremberg, about 1505, has three escutcheons and a sort of portrait of the King of Portugal, and a Dutch tract issued in 1509-10, also describing the third voyage, has four rude cuts, two of which are repeated. Men and women are represented with long hair and bows and arrows. We cannot at the same time help noticing a fact recently spoken about—that the name of the discoverer appears to have been Alberico, and not Amerigo. It is the former in sixteen out of nineteen early accounts, as the writer notes them. The amount of exact information that can be given by cuts like these in the earliest quartos, and of the different opinions that can be formed from them, may be shown by the description that two learned men have printed of a cut (four and one-fourth by three and one-fourth inches) in the first German edition of the Columbus letter. It represents an open country in which a bare-footed figure, with a sort of halo around his head, stands conversing with a king who wears a crown and holds a sceptre, behind whom are three or four men in robes, and another man bearing a large sword. One says it is “the king receiving Columbus,” the other that it is “the apprehension of Christ in the Garden.”

By 1503 an account of the discoveries appeared not in pamphlet form but in a thick folio, the “*Supplementum Chronicarum*,” published at Venice. Small square woodcuts, views of cities, vary, if they do not adorn, the pages, but the short account of America is not illustrated, as is the case in the edition of 1513, also Venetian, although both editions contain a full-page view of the creation of Eve.

Only a few scattered cuts, indeed, appeared for some years afterwards, as before, in publications about the New

World, and even these could be called little more than book ornaments by courtesy.

In 1522, John of Desborowe printed (at Antwerp?) a quarto of twenty-two pages with half a dozen cuts,—said to be the first book in English containing a notice of America. The same year an edition of Ptolemy was published at Strasbourg, containing, besides forty-nine maps, fourteen wood-cuts (about seven and one-fourth by three and three-fourths inches). They give very dubious, if any, hints about America, but very positive representations of animals and supposed human beings of a sort we hope science will never discover and introduce to us. At about this date appeared a short anonymous account of Yucatan, in German, with two wood-cuts, both repeated, although hardly for their beauty. One of them shows three evil-looking men, dressed like Europeans, engaged in chopping up babies. Harrisse also mentions five cuts in Oviedo's "Natural General Historia de las Indias" (Toledo, 1526), but they are of slight account. A folio by Laurent Fries (Strasbourg, 1527), contains an account of America, and eleven cuts. It is a very rare book, not yet seen by the writer, but it is mentioned as one of the few works with illustrations at this period.

In 1528 appeared at Venice the "Isole del Mondo," by Benedetto Bordone, with one hundred and five maps, most of them small, and seven wood-cuts. One of the latter is a view (six and one-half inches square) labelled "La gran citta di Temistitan," that is unmistakably Mexico, surrounded by water and reached by causeways. Although the workmanship is rude, there seems to be reason to think that the main features of the view are truthful. Unskilful as were some of the engravers at and before this time, there is good evidence that they, as well as their superiors in art, could strikingly delineate prominent points in a view. A generation earlier this fact was proved by the large cut of Nuremberg in the famous Chronicle of 1493,

by the really immense view of Venice, already mentioned, and by five views of Cologne in its far rarer Chronicle of 1499, where the unfinished Dom with the huge old crane is sketched as some of us remember it was thirty years ago.

At the period now mentioned events were occurring in the New World that might not only arouse imagination—and to a greater degree than its discovery, peopled as it then seemed to be by savages—but that were of evident importance in their effect on European politics. Two hitherto unknown and unthought of empires were found, and were subjugated, by Spain, whose wealth and power were thus greatly increased. El Dorado and Ophir, with all they could yield, seemed to have been opened and to have been seized by a strong, aggressive European state. Wonders in nature and strange works of man were disclosed. New, and, we would think, attractive subjects for the engraver were found. In the course of thirty years his art had advanced and was more generally practised. Nature and architecture were, indeed, still imperfectly sketched, but the human form and its costumes were often portrayed in masterly style. The work was still, to a great extent, on wood, but it had grown remarkable, not only for its character, but also for the variety of its subjects and the ability of the artists. Lucas Cranach illustrated the Bible, Holbein the younger, religious books, Albert Dürer showed genius in many a way, and Hans Burgmair with his associates had drawn the marvellous “Triumphs of Maximilian.” Virgil, Cæsar, Terence, and other classic authors had also been illustrated. Even the not very forward art of England had produced the Book of St. Albans¹ (1486), and the Mirror of the World (1481) and the Golden Legend (1484–87) by Caxton.

Yet the conquest and exploration of Mexico (1519–21), and of Peru (1532—about 35), were, for a long time at least, very slightly noticed in art. The Renaissance while

¹ It has one hundred and nineteen cuts but they are only small ones of shields.

it despised mediæval art, or gave little attention to any other than classic, and in a way almost worshipped that—and at the same time ruthlessly destroyed Roman works—could not be expected to bestow much thought on the monuments of aboriginal America, or the characteristics of the natives. The schools of landscape art, and the feelings and study that made them, were undeveloped. Scientific observation and drawing were limited or imperfect. However much we may regret that so little was done during most of the sixteenth century to illustrate the antiquities and condition of America, it was not strange, it was a matter of course, in regard to the antiquities, for with all the worship of classic art, it was only until some half a dozen generations later that even this began to be at all adequately illustrated.

We cannot, however, help noticing how little was done in an age of engraving applied to subjects then of interest, to show events in the conquest of the New World and the features and manners of its people. Opinions about the Spanish conquests and earlier rule in America have often been strongly expressed by voice or in type. Hardly less marked is the silent evidence by neglect that art has left. While it was giving new expression to the records or ideals of Christian faith, or to the thoughts of great authors, and was glorifying the altars and palaces of Europe by its noblest efforts, it did not stoop to portray the atrocities of adventurers, bold and lucrative as might be their robberies even in the realms of the Montezumas and the Incas.

In the first, or early, editions of the histories of the conquests issued before 1590 we find almost as many books as plates, and few works that could be called illustrated. Gomara's *Indies and Conquest of Mexico*, Çaragoça, 1552, besides a map has a plate of a buffalo. Cieça de Leon's *Chronicle of Peru*,¹ a 12^o, Seville, 1553, has wood-cuts in

¹Three parts, only the first of which was issued above (reissued, Anvers, 1554). The second is missing, the third has been printed in this century.

the text, as also has Zarate's *Discovery and Conquest*, another 12^o, Seville, 1555. With Thevet's "*La France Antarelrique*," Paris, 1558, relating largely to Brazil, and containing unusually good wood-cuts, the French press had an early representation among illustrated Americana.

Only a bibliography, and that one of minor things, can note all the scattered plates or cuts relating to America that appeared during the next thirty-five years. A sketch of the more notable does not, however, require great space.

Between 1550 and 1583 various editions of Ramusio's *Collection of Voyages* were published at Venice, with about forty cuts. Several of these, good for the times, relate to the natives or the natural history of the Spanish possessions, one of the largest showing the temple in Mexico (III., 307), and another (308) the city with its environs. The *Cosmography* of Sebastian Munster was apparently a popular book at this period, as there were several editions. It is a corpulent folio of a thousand four hundred and seventy-five pages containing accounts of the whole world, and of some things never therein, illustrated by over nine hundred cuts, including not a few repeated. Five leaves with eight cuts are all that are allotted to the "New Islands" and world, the latter described under a heading of Asiatic Lands. One cut shows a man and woman, in what is called the garb of nature, dismembering a human being on a table, while another cut shows the man, who had acquired German clothes and imported European hardware, sitting comfortably on a stool beside a slow fire, over which he turns a spit thrust through the human body, then headless. As the same cut is used to illustrate the industries of other countries any objection solely to the original native American cooking is averted.

On this it seems popular subject, Hans Staden issued at Frankfort (1556), a small quarto with a history of the lands "of the wild, naked, cruel cannibals" in the New World, fully illustrated. It was speedily translated from German

into Flemish, and sundry times published in the Low Countries. The size was decreased to the more handy 12^o, but the cuts were retained, and the descriptive adjectives were increased so that the alleged Americans were also called "most ungodly." So popular was the work that it was published at Amsterdam as late as 1627.

Natural history of a milder type was a favorite subject so far as one could be while books were few. The "Historia Medicinal" of the West Indies, by Dr. Monardes (Seville, 1574, 80), contained a dozen wood-cuts of plants. John Frampton's "Joyfull Newes" (London, 1577), a translation had them of animals as well as plants.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century the engraver's art was at length applied on a large scale, and in fine work, to illustrate American subjects. Theodore de Bry of Liège, born in 1528, who spent most of his long life at Frankfort-on-the-Main, was a skilful engraver. In 1587¹ he went to England, where Richard Hakluyt, already engaged on a Collection of Voyages,² advised him to undertake one of his own illustrated with designs from nature. A series on each of the Indies was undertaken by him, and six parts on the West were issued during the last years of his life (1590-98).³ His sons, John Theodore and John Israel, already associated with him, continued the work until they died (1612? and 1623), and Matthew Marian, who had married a sister, carried it on for some years longer. Thirteen parts were published in Latin, making fourteen in a German edition, and there were additions and reimpressions, all in folio. The first part, if no other, was also issued in English and in French. Only a discourse of more than the dimensions of an old fashioned New England one could contain an account of the intricacies of the whole collection, and it is enough to state here that owing to these

¹ Camus, p. 13.

² Coll., 1589, and 2d ed., 1598-1600, without plates.

³ Camus, p. 15.

features, and to the rarity of many parts, few persons for at least a century have made a nearly complete set. Possession of a partial one is apt to give a sensation of delight to common mortals. Again the names of at least two members of this Society, Messrs. Lenox and Brown, are associated with two wonderful collections of books—their sets of the works of the DeBrys.

Historical order was not followed in publication. Something new was apparently thought needed to start the series; accordingly the first part (1590) contained Harriot's Account of Virginia, written in 1588. The next part (1591), Le Moyne's Three Expeditions to Florida (1564–68), was in one sense also a novelty. Le Moyne was an artist of Dieppe who had been sent to observe and portray, and who after great trials reached England, where DeBry found him in 1587.

It was not until the fourth part was reached that the discovery of America was described, as it is in the History by Jerome Benzono, several times earlier printed, and here continued in the next part, where there is a fine portrait of Columbus. Not until the tenth part were the first and second voyages of Vespucci treated. In other parts, America from New England to the extreme south, and also circumnavigations, are described, the latest date of a voyage being 1617, and of publication 1624.

It has been said that DeBry copied from wood-cuts in Thevet's "*La France Antarctique*" (Paris, 1558), and also from those in Benzoni's "*Historia del Mondo Nuovo*" (Venetia, 1565), but the latter cuts, only eighteen in number and three and one-eighth by two and three-eighths inches, and not elaborate, seem, if they were used, to have been little more than suggestions to DeBry for his elaborate and extensive series. His plates, executed on copper, and in varying merit, number about two hundred and sixty-five, besides a moderate number of maps. Some are in the text, but generally they are placed together at the ends

of the parts, and occupy the upper half of the page, on the lower half of which is a printed description.

The range of subjects is very great. There are conceptions of mythology from classic to Aztec, of nature from carefully drawn realities to impossible monstrosities, of mankind from wild savages to Spaniards dressed with surprising precision. Never before, perhaps never since, has such a series of illustrations of the New World and the Western Ocean appeared, with customs and scenes portrayed, as is this series prepared and issued by the DeBrys in that quaint, mediæval-looking, interior city of Frankfort. Along with all the variety of people and things that it showed we can hardly help noticing that it tried to show some justice to the Indians, and also that it did not neglect what was thought due reference to some of our British ancestors. The fearful trials of the American aborigines are vividly illustrated, as also are the missionary labors of some of their conquerors, who, it is evident, successfully taught at least the meaning of the word hell, until they may have suggested to the simple red men that it was a biblical name for a Spanish colony.

In order to hint at what the Indians might become under favoring circumstances, and perhaps also to modify the pride of white men then living, or forthcoming, is the reference to early inhabitants of Britain, whereby in exceptionally large plates is shown their savage mein, as well as what seems to have been their chief art—that of combining the maximum of tattooing with the minimum of tailoring.

While the DeBrys were publishing their collection, Levinus Hulse issued another, that after his death (1606) was continued until 1650 by his widow or successors, chiefly at Frankfort.¹ Small quartos, usually thin, with plates inferior to those in the rival folios, they seem to have been cheaper books for popular use, and hence apt to be

¹There were twenty-six parts, eleven of which with thirty-three maps and sixty-three plates are on American subjects. Eight of the eleven parts were also issued by the DeBrys.

worn out or lost, so that they are now very rare. In them America was illustrated from the Straits of Magellan to, at least, Newfoundland. During more than half a century these two collections must have done a great deal to make the New World better known. If their plates now give us less information than we want, it is simply because art at their date was directed more by imagination than by exact research.

Until 1624, when the issue of the Great Voyages by the DeBrys ceased, the presses of Italy, Germany, Spain, Basle, London, and of the Low Countries had supplied illustrated books on America. Italy was foremost in time, Germany, and then Spain came next, closely followed by the Low Countries, where the production of such books became remarkable. One of the earliest issues from the London press, later than any of these, was in 1559, Wm. Cunningham's "Cosmical Glasse," a folio with small woodcuts. The French press after Thevet's work, in 1558, supplied little of special note until 1613, when Champlain's Voyages appeared.

For Germany, the native land of successful printing, a pre-eminence in illustrative art was maintained by the DeBrys and Hulse. Apart from their works, however, fully one-half of the illustrated books on America issued between 1550 and 1624 were produced in the Low Countries, many at Antwerp, and still more at Amsterdam. Changes in the engraver's art, along with its greater diffusion were to follow. The seas with their rovers and wonders, and the far southern regions were more fully shown. Through the earlier period of colonization, where the stars and stripes were to wave, there was little enough engraved to show the land or its people, but illustrations of both were to increase in quantity and excellence, as has pretty much all else pertaining to the continental republic.

NOTE. It is proposed by the writer to continue this subject to recent times. As only a bibliography of impracticable size could present the full titles or references to all the works or additions mentioned, or that could be included, the notes to this paper have been made brief.

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