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# THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA BY THE NORTHMEN.

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The following short sketch has been written at the request of several persons abroad. It may be of use for insertion in, or in preparing articles for, **EDUCATIONAL WORKS**, **ENCYCLOPEDIAS**, the **JOURNALS OF HISTORICAL SOCIETIES** and other similar works, through which it may be wished to give still further publicity to historical facts so important. They have indeed already been referred to in some books of this kind, but often with considerable errors.

The present Paper is **COMMUNICATED BY CHARLES C. RAFN**, and is founded on his work "**ANTIQUITATES AMERICANE sive Scriptores Septentrionales rerum Ante-Columbianarum in America**", published by him in 1837 through the **ROYAL SOCIETY OF NORTHERN ANTIQUARIES** of Copenhagen.

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**THE DAVE GARPAR**, of Swedish origin, was the first Northman who discovered **ICELAND**, in 863. Only a few out-places of this country had been visited previously, about 70 years before, by Irish hermits. Eleven years subsequently, or in 874, the Norwegian **INGOLF** began the colonization of the country, which was completed during a space of 60 years. The colonists, many of whom belonged to the most illustrious and most civilized families in the North, established in Iceland a flourishing Republic. Here, on this distant isle-rock, the Old-Danish or Old-Northern language was preserved unchanged for centuries, and here in the *Eddas* were treasured those Folk-songs and Folk-myths, and in the *Sagas* those historical Tales and Legends, which the first settlers had brought with them from their Scandinavian mother-lands. Iceland was therefore the cradle of an historical literature of immense value.

The situation of the island and the relationship of the colony to foreign countries in its earlier period, compelled its inhabitants to exercise and develop their hereditary maritime skill and thirst for new discoveries across the great Ocean. As early as the year 877 **GUNNRIORN** saw for the first time the mountainous coast of **GREENLAND**. But this land was first visited by **ERIK THE RED**, in 983, who three years afterwards, in 986, by means of Icelandic emigrants, established the first colony on its south-western shore, where afterwards, in 1124, the Bishop's See of Gardar was founded, which subsisted for upwards of 300 years. The head firths or bays were named after the chiefs of the expedition. Erik the Red settled in Eriks-firth, Einar, Rafn and Ketil in the firths called after them, and Heriulf on Heriulfsnes. On a voyage from Iceland to Greenland this same year (986), **BIARNE**, the son of the latter, was driven far out to sea towards the south-west, and for the first time beheld the coasts of the American lands, afterwards visited and named by his countrymen. In order to examine these countries more narrowly, **LEIF THE FORTUNATE**, son of Erik the Red, undertook a voyage of discovery thither in the year 1000. He landed on the shores described by Biarne, detailed the character of these lands more exactly, and gave them names according to their appearance: **HELLULAND (NEWFOUNDLAND)** was so called from its flat stones, **MARKLAND (NOVA SCOTIA)** from its woods, and **VINELAND (NEW ENGLAND)** from its vines. Here he remained for some time, and constructed large houses, called after him **LEIFSBUDIR (Leif's Booths)**. A German named Tyrker, who accompanied Leif on this voyage, was the man who found the wild vines, which he recognised from having seen them in his own land, and Leif gave the

country its name from this circumstance. Two years afterwards Leif's brother, THORWALD, repaired thither, and in 1003 caused an expedition to be undertaken to the south, along the shore, but he was killed in the summer of 1004 on a voyage northwards, in a skirmish with the natives.

The most distinguished however of all the first American discoverers is THORFINN KARLSEFNE, an Icelander, whose genealogy is carried back in the Old-Northern annals to Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Scottish and Irish ancestors, some of them of royal blood. In 1006 this chief on a merchant-voyage visited Greenland and there married GUDRID, the widow of Thorstein (son of Erik the Red), who had died the year before in an unsuccessful expedition to Vineland. Accompanied by his wife, who encouraged him to this voyage, and by a crew of 160 men on board three vessels, he repaired in the spring of 1007 to Vineland, where he remained for three years, and had many communications with the aborigines. Here his wife Gudrid bore him a son SNORRE, who became the founder of an illustrious family in Iceland, which gave that island several of its first Bishops. His daughter's son was the celebrated Bishop Thorlak Runolfson, who published the first Christian Code of Iceland. In 1121 Bishop ERIK sailed to Vineland from Greenland, doubtless for the purpose of strengthening his countrymen in their Christian faith.

The notices given by the old Icelandic voyage-chroniclers respecting the climate, the soil and the productions of this new country are very characteristic. Nay, we have even a statement of this kind as old as the eleventh century from a writer not a Northman, Adam of Bremen; he states, on the authority of Svein Estridson, the King of Denmark, a nephew of Canute the Great, that the country got its name from the vine growing wild there. It is a remarkable coincidence in this respect that its English re-discoverers, for the same reason, name the large island which is close off the coast *Martha's Vineyard*. Spontaneously growing wheat (maize or Indian corn) was also found in this country.

In the mean time it is the total result of the nautical, geographical and astronomical evidences in the original documents, which places the situation of the countries discovered beyond all doubt. The number of days' sail between the several newly-found lands, the striking description of the coasts, especially the white sand-banks of Nova Scotia and the long beaches and downs of a peculiar appearance on Cape Cod (the KIALARNES and FURDUSTRANDIR of the Northmen) are not to be mistaken. In addition hereto we have the astronomical remark that the shortest day in Vineland was 9 hours long, which fixes the latitude of  $41^{\circ} 24' 10''$ , or just that of the promontories which limit the entrances to Mount Hope Bay, where Leif's booths were built, and in the district around which the old Northmen had their head establishment, which was named by them HÓP.

The Northmen were also acquainted with American land still farther to the South, called by them HVÍTRAMANNALAND (the land of the White Men) or IRLAND IT MIKLA (Great Ireland). The exact situation of this country is not stated; it was probably North and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. In 1266 some priests at Gardar in Greenland set on foot a voyage of discovery to the arctic regions of America. An astronomical observation proves that this took place through Lancaster Sound and Barrow's Strait to the latitude of Wellington's Channel. The last memorandum supplied by the old Icelandic records, is a voyage from Greenland to Markland in 1347.

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