

## [PREFACE]

The Americas were discovered in 1492, and the first Christian settlements established by the Spanish the following year. It is accordingly forty-nine years now since Spaniards began arriving in numbers in this part of the world.<sup>8</sup> They first settled the large and fertile island of Hispaniola, which boasts six hundred leagues of coastline and is surrounded by a great many other large islands, all of them, as I saw for myself, with as high a native population as anywhere on earth.<sup>9</sup> Of the coast of the mainland, which, at its nearest point, is a little over two hundred and fifty leagues from Hispaniola, more than ten thousand leagues had been explored by 1541, and more are being discovered every day. This coastline, too, was swarming with people and it would seem, if we are to judge by those areas so far explored, that the Almighty selected this part of the world as home to the greater part of the human race.

God made all the peoples of this area, many and varied as they are, as open and as innocent as can be imagined. The simplest people in the world – unassuming, long-suffering, unassertive, and submissive – they are without malice or guile, and are utterly faithful and obedient both to their own native lords and to the Spaniards in whose service they now find themselves. Never quarrelsome or belligerent or boisterous, they harbour no grudges and do not seek to settle old scores; indeed, the notions of revenge, rancour, and hatred are quite foreign to them. At the same time, they are among the least robust of human beings: their delicate constitutions make them unable to withstand hard work or suffering and render them liable to succumb to almost any illness, no matter how mild. Even the common people are no tougher than princes or than other Europeans born with a silver spoon in their mouths and who spend their lives shielded from the rigours of the outside world. They are also among the poorest people on the face of the earth; they own next to nothing and have no urge to acquire material possessions. As a result they are neither ambitious nor greedy, and are totally uninterested in worldly power. Their diet is every bit as poor and as monotonous, in quantity and in kind, as that enjoyed by the



Desert Fathers. Most of them go naked, save for a loincloth to cover their modesty; at best they may wrap themselves in a piece of cotton material a yard or two square. Most sleep on matting, although a few possess a kind of hanging net, known in the language of Hispaniola as a hammock.<sup>10</sup> They are innocent and pure in mind and have a lively intelligence, all of which makes them particularly receptive to learning and understanding the truths of our Catholic faith and to being instructed in virtue; indeed, God has invested them with fewer impediments in this regard than any other people on earth. Once they begin to learn of the Christian faith they become so keen to know more, to receive the Sacraments, and to worship God, that the missionaries who instruct them do truly have to be men of exceptional patience and forbearance; and over the years I have time and again met Spanish laymen who have been so struck by the natural goodness that shines through these people that they frequently can be heard to exclaim: ‘These would be the most blessed people on earth if only they were given the chance to convert to Christianity.’

It was upon these gentle lambs, imbued by the Creator with all the qualities we have mentioned, that from the very first day they clapped eyes on them the Spanish fell like ravening

wolves upon the fold, or like tigers and savage lions who have not eaten meat for days. The pattern established at the outset has remained unchanged to this day, and the Spaniards still do nothing save tear the natives to shreds, murder them and inflict upon them untold misery, suffering and distress, tormenting, harrying and persecuting them mercilessly. We shall in due course describe some of the many ingenious methods of torture they have invented and refined for this purpose, but one can get some idea of the effectiveness of their methods from the figures alone. When the Spanish first journeyed there, the indigenous population of the island of Hispaniola stood at some three million; today only two hundred survive. The island of Cuba, which extends for a distance almost as great as that separating Valladolid from Rome, is now to all intents and purposes uninhabited;<sup>11</sup> and two other large, beautiful and fertile islands, Puerto Rico and Jamaica, have been similarly devastated. Not a living soul remains today on any of the islands of the Bahamas, which lie to the north of Hispaniola and Cuba, even though every single one of the sixty or so islands in the group, as well as those known as the Isles of Giants and others in the area, both large and small, is more fertile and more beautiful than the



Royal Gardens in Seville and the climate is as healthy as anywhere on earth.<sup>12</sup> The native population, which once numbered some five hundred thousand, was wiped out by forcible expatriation to the island of Hispaniola, a policy adopted by the Spaniards in an endeavour to make up losses among the indigenous population of that island. One God-fearing individual was moved to mount an expedition to seek out those who had escaped the Spanish trawl and were still living in the Bahamas and to save their souls by converting them to Christianity, but, by the end of a search lasting three whole years, they had found only the eleven survivors I saw with my own eyes.<sup>13</sup> A further thirty or so islands in the region of Puerto Rico are also now uninhabited and left to go to rack and ruin as a direct result of the same practices. All these islands, which together must run to over two thousand leagues, are now abandoned and desolate.

On the mainland, we know for sure that our fellow-countrymen have, through their cruelty and wickedness, depopulated and laid waste an area which once boasted more than ten kingdoms, each of them larger in area than the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. The whole region, once teeming with human beings, is now deserted over a distance of more than

two thousand leagues: a distance, that is, greater than the journey from Seville to Jerusalem and back again.

At a conservative estimate, the despotic and diabolical behaviour of the Christians has, over the last forty years, led to the unjust and totally unwarranted deaths of more than twelve million souls, women and children among them, and there are grounds for believing my own estimate of more than fifteen million to be nearer the mark.

There are two main ways in which those who have travelled to this part of the world pretending to be Christians have uprooted these pitiful peoples and wiped them from the face of the earth. First, they have waged war on them: unjust, cruel, bloody and tyrannical war. Second, they have murdered anyone and everyone who has shown the slightest sign of resistance, or even of wishing to escape the torment to which they have subjected him. This latter policy has been instrumental in suppressing the native leaders, and, indeed, given that the Spaniards normally spare only women and children, it has led to the annihilation of all adult males, whom they habitually subject to the harshest and most iniquitous and brutal slavery that man has ever devised for his fellow-men, treating them, in fact, worse than animals. All the



many and infinitely varied ways that have been devised for oppressing these peoples can be seen to flow from one or other of these two diabolical and tyrannical policies.

The reason the Christians have murdered on such a vast scale and killed anyone and everyone in their way is purely and simply greed. They have set out to line their pockets with gold and to amass private fortunes as quickly as possible so that they can then assume a status quite at odds with that into which they were born. Their insatiable greed and overweening ambition know no bounds; the land is fertile and rich, the inhabitants simple, forbearing and submissive. The Spaniards have shown not the slightest consideration for these people, treating them (and I speak from first-hand experience, having been there from the outset) not as brute animals – indeed, I would to God they had done and had shown them the consideration they afford their animals – so much as piles of dung in the middle of the road. They have had as little concern for their souls as for their bodies, all the millions that have perished having gone to their deaths with no knowledge of God and without the benefit of the Sacraments. One fact in all this is widely known and beyond dispute, for even the tyrannical murderers themselves acknowledge the truth of it: the indige-

nous peoples never did the Europeans any harm whatever; on the contrary, they believed them to have descended from the heavens, at least until they or their fellow-citizens had tasted, at the hands of these oppressors, a diet of robbery, murder, violence, and all other manner of trials and tribulations.

# HISPANIOLA

As we have said, the island of Hispaniola was the first to witness the arrival of Europeans and the first to suffer the wholesale slaughter of its people and the devastation and depopulation of the land. It all began with the Europeans taking native women and children both as servants and to satisfy their own base appetites; then, not content with what the local people offered them of their own free will (and all offered as much as they could spare), they started taking for themselves the food the natives contrived to produce by the sweat of their brows, which was in all honesty little enough. Since what a European will consume in a single day normally supports three native households of ten persons each for a whole month, and since the newcomers began to subject the locals to other vexations, assaults, and iniquities, the people began to realize that these men could not, in truth, have descended from the heavens. Some of them started to conceal what food they had, others decided to send their women and children

into hiding, and yet others took to the hills to get away from the brutal and ruthless cruelty that was being inflicted on them. The Christians punched them, boxed their ears and flogged them in order to track down the local leaders, and the whole shameful process came to a head when one of the European commanders raped the wife of the paramount chief of the entire island.<sup>14</sup> It was then that the locals began to think up ways of driving the Europeans out of their lands and to take up arms against them. Their weapons, however, were flimsy and ineffective both in attack and in defence (and, indeed, war in the Americas is no more deadly than our jousting, or than many European children's games) and, with their horses and swords and lances, the Spaniards easily fended them off, killing them and committing all kind of atrocities against them.

They forced their way into native settlements, slaughtering everyone they found there, including small children, old men, pregnant women, and even women who had just given birth. They hacked them to pieces, slicing open their bellies with their swords as though they were so many sheep herded into a pen. They even laid wagers on whether they could manage to slice a man in two at a stroke, or cut an individual's head



from his body, or disembowel him with a single blow of their axes. They grabbed suckling infants by the feet and, ripping them from their mothers' breasts, dashed them headlong against the rocks. Others, laughing and joking all the while, threw them over their shoulders into a river, shouting: 'Wriggle, you litde perisher.' They slaughtered anyone and everyone in their path, on occasion running through a mother and her baby with a single thrust of their swords. They spared no one, erecting especially wide gibbets on which they could string their victims up with their feet just off the ground and then burn them alive thirteen at a time, in honour of our Saviour and the twelve Aposdes, or tie dry straw to their bodies and set fire to it. Some they chose to keep alive and simply cut their wrists, leaving their hands dangling, saying to them: 'Take this letter' – meaning that their sorry condition would act as a warning to those hiding in the hills. The way they normally dealt with the native leaders and nobles was to tie them to a kind of griddle consisting of sticks resting on pitchforks driven into the ground and then grill them over a slow fire, with the result that they howled in agony and despair as they died a lingering death.

It once happened that I myself witnessed their grilling of four or five local leaders in this fashion (and I believe they had set up two or three other pairs of grills alongside so that they might process other victims at the same time) when the poor creatures' howls came between the Spanish commander and his sleep. He



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gave orders that the prisoners were to be throttled, but the man in charge of the execution detail, who was more blood-



thirsty than the average common hangman (I know his identity and even met some relatives of his in Seville), was loath to cut short his private entertainment by throtding them and so he personally went round ramming wooden bungs into their mouths to stop them making such a racket and deliberately stoked the fire so that they would take just as long to die as he himself chose. I saw all these things for myself and many others besides. And, since all those who could do so took to the hills and mountains in order to escape the clutches of these merciless and inhuman butchers, these mortal enemies of human kind trained hunting dogs to track them down – wild dogs who would savage a native to death as soon as look at him, tearing him to shreds and devouring his flesh as though he were a pig. These dogs wrought havoc among the natives and were responsible for much carnage. And when, as happened on the odd occasion, the locals did kill a European, as, given the enormity of the crimes committed against them, they were in all justice fully entitled to, the Spanish came to an unofficial agreement among themselves that for every European killed one hundred natives would be executed.

## THE KINGDOMS OF HISPANIOLA

On Hispaniola there were five main kingdoms, each very extensive and each with its own king; most of the infinite number of local nobles paid allegiance to one or other of these five powerful leaders, although there were a few backwoodsmen who recognized no authority above and beyond their own. One of these kingdoms was called Maguá,<sup>15</sup> with the stress on the last syllable, which means Kingdom of the Plain. This plain is one of the wonders of the world, extending, as it does, for some eighty leagues, right from the southern coast of the island to its northern shore. For the most part it is some five to eight leagues wide and as much as ten in places, and is confined by high mountains on either side. Over thirty thousand streams and rivers flow into it, a dozen of them every bit as big as the Ebro, Duero, and Guadalquivir,<sup>16</sup> and those that come down from the mountains to the west (and there are twenty or twenty-five thousand of them) are rich in alluvial gold. Among those mountains lies the



province of Cibao <sup>17</sup> and its mines, famous throughout the region for their very high-quality gold. The king of Cibao was called Guarionex<sup>18</sup> and he had as vassals several extremely powerful local leaders; one of them, for example, had sixteen thousand men under arms and these he placed at the service of Guarionex. I met some of these men myself. The king himself was dutiful and virtuous, a man of placid temperament much devoted to the King and Queen of Spain. For a number of years, every householder throughout his realm made, on his orders, an annual gift of a hollow gourd completely filled with gold. The natives of Hispaniola know little of mining techniques and later, when there was less gold available, the king reduced this offering to half a gourd filled with gold. In order to put a stop to the Spaniards' incessant demands for gold, Guarionex suggested that he might better serve the King of Castile by putting a great area of his kingdom under cultivation, especially as his subjects had, as he himself quite correctly asserted, little or no notion of how to mine for gold. Such a plan was feasible, as I can vouch, and the king would have been quite happy to see it put into effect. The area involved would have stretched from Isabela, the site of the first European settlement on the island, as far as Santo

Domingo, some fifty or more leagues distant, and it would easily have produced an annual income of over three million castilians<sup>19</sup> and, had such a scheme been put into effect, it would have led to the establishment of fifty or more cities on the island, every one of them as large as Seville.<sup>20</sup>

The wicked European commanders rewarded this good and great man by dishonouring him when one of their number<sup>21</sup> took and raped his wife. To this the king could easily have reacted by biding his time and gathering an army to exact revenge, but he elected instead to abdicate and go into voluntary exile, alone, to an area called Ciguayos, where the powerful local leader was one of his vassals.<sup>22</sup> Once the Europeans realized he had gone, there was no chance of keeping his whereabouts secret, and they got up an army and attacked the local leader under whose protection the king was sheltering. The carriage was terrible and, eventually, they tracked down the fugitive, took him prisoner, put him in chains and shackles and bundled him on to a ship bound for Castile, only for him to perish, along with many Spaniards, when the ship was lost at sea.<sup>23</sup> A fortune in gold sank beneath the waves that day, among the cargo being the Great Nugget, as big as a loaf of bread<sup>24</sup> and weighing three thousand six hundred *castil-*



*ians*. In this way, God passed judgement on the great iniquities committed by the Spanish.

Another of these original kingdoms occupied the northern end of the plain where the royal harbour is today. Known as Marien, it was a rich region, larger than Portugal, although a good deal more fertile and far better suited to human habitation, criss-crossed as it is by several mighty mountain ranges and seamed with productive gold and copper mines. The king of this area was called Guacanagarí, with the stress on the last syllable, and he numbered among his vassals many men of high standing, several of whom I knew personally. This was the first place where the old Admiral<sup>25</sup> who discovered the New World first landed and was received on that occasion by this Guacanagarí, as were all his crew, with the greatest kindness and humanity imaginable. As Columbus himself told me, it was there that the Admiral's own ship was lost<sup>26</sup> and he and his men were as graciously treated and looked after as if they had been back home and were all part of the same close family. Guacanagarí himself died up in the mountains, broken and destitute, after he had fled to escape the massacres and the cruelty inflicted by the Spaniards, and all the other local leaders who owed allegiance to Guacanagarí perished as

a direct result of the despotism and slavery to which they were subjected and which I shall in due course set out in detail.

The third of these kingdoms was the sovereign state of Maguana, another strikingly beautiful and fertile area and one which enjoyed the healthiest of climates. It is this area that nowadays produces the best sugar on the whole island. The king, Caonabó, who outdid all others in strength, majesty of bearing and court ceremonial, was captured by an underhand trick and taken from his own house. He was put on board one of the Spanish ships bound for Castile; but the Almighty determined not to allow this act of duplicity and injustice to pass unnoticed and, that night, sent a violent storm in which all six of the ships, still in harbour and on the very point of setting sail, sank with the loss of all hands. Caonabó, shackled and chained as he was, perished along with them.<sup>27</sup> He had three or four brothers, all of them as valorous and as brave as he was himself, and, when they saw how their brother and lord had unjustly been taken prisoner and learned of the devastation and the massacres the Europeans had set in train in other parts of the island, they took up arms, determined, all the more so when they got wind of their brother's



death, to attack the Europeans and take revenge upon them. But the Christians, several of whom were on horseback (and the horse is the deadliest weapon imaginable against these people), attacked instead, slaughtering them to such effect that they destroyed and depopulated a good half of the kingdom.

The fourth kingdom was known as Xaraguá, and was really the heart and core of the whole island. In no other part of the island was the language as refined as here nor the court discourse as cultivated; nowhere else were the people of such quality and breeding, the leading families as numerous and as liberal – and this kingdom boasted many nobles and great lords – nor the inhabitants as handsome and easy on the eye. Chief among them were the king, Behechio,<sup>28</sup> and his sister, Anacaona, both of whom rendered great service to the Spanish Crown and gave every assistance to the European settlers, on occasion even saving their lives; after Behechio's death, Anacaona ruled in his stead. Over three hundred local dignitaries were summoned to welcome the then governor of the island<sup>29</sup> when he paid a visit to the kingdom with sixty horse and a further three hundred men on foot (the horsemen alone were sufficient in number to ravage not only the whole island

but the mainland as well). The governor duped the unsuspecting leaders of this welcoming party into gathering in a building made of straw and then ordered his men to set fire to it and burn them alive. All the others were massacred, either run through by lances or put to the sword. As a mark of respect and out of deference to her rank, Queen Anacaona was hanged. When one or two Spaniards tried to save some of the children, either because they genuinely pitied them or perhaps because they wanted them for themselves, and swung them up behind them on to their horses, one of their compatriots rode up behind and ran them through with his lance. Yet another member of the governor's party galloped about cutting the legs off all the children as they lay sprawling on the ground. The governor even decreed that those who made their way to a small island some eight leagues distant in order to escape this bestial cruelty should be condemned to slavery because they had fled the carnage.

The fifth kingdom was known as Higuey and its queen, a lady already advanced in years, went by the name of Higuana.<sup>30</sup> They strung her up and I saw with my own eyes how the Spaniards burned countless local inhabitants alive or hacked them to pieces, or devised novel ways of torturing



them to death, enslaving those they took alive. Indeed, they invented so many new methods of murder that it would be quite impossible to set them all down on paper and, however hard one tried to chronicle them, one could probably never list a thousandth part of what actually took place. All I can say is that I know it to be an incontrovertible fact and do here so swear before Almighty God, that the local peoples never gave the Spanish any cause whatever for the injury and injustice that was done to them in these campaigns. On the contrary, they behaved as honourably as might the inmates of a well-run monastery, and for this they were robbed and massacred, and even those who escaped death on this occasion found themselves condemned to a lifetime of captivity and slavery. I would go further. It is my firm belief that not a single native of the island committed a capital offence, as defined in law, against the Spanish while all this time the natives themselves were being savaged and murdered. Despite the enormous provocation, very few of the natives, I hazard, were guilty of even those sins which do not lie within the ambit of human law but are properly the province of God, such as hatred and anger, or the thirst for revenge against those who committed such enormities upon them. It is my

own experience of these peoples, gained over many years, that they are no more given to impetuous actions or to harbouring thoughts of retribution than are boys of ten or twelve years of age. I know beyond any shadow of a doubt that they had, from the very beginning, every right to wage war on the Europeans, while the Europeans never had just cause for waging war on the local peoples. The actions of the Europeans, throughout the New World, were without exception wicked and unjust: worse, in fact, than the blackest kind of tyranny.

After the fighting was over and all the men had been killed, the surviving natives – usually, that is, the young boys, the women, and the children – were shared out between the victors. One got thirty, another forty, a third as many as a hundred or even twice that number; everything depended on how far one was in the good books of the despot who went by the title of governor. The pretext under which the victims were parcelled out in this way was that their new masters would then be in a position to teach them the truths of the Christian faith; and thus it came about that a host of cruel, grasping and wicked men, almost all of them pig-ignorant, were put in charge of these poor souls. And they discharged this duty by



sending the men down the mines, where working conditions were appalling, to dig for gold, and putting the women to labour in the fields and on their master's estates, to till the soil and raise the crops, properly a task only for the toughest and strongest of men. Both women and men were given only wild grasses to eat and other unnutritious foodstuffs. The mothers of young children promptly saw their milk dry up and their babies die; and, with the women and the men separated and never seeing each other, no new children were born. The men died down the mines from overwork and starvation, and the same was true of the women who perished out on the estates. The islanders, previously so numerous, began to die out as would any nation subjected to such appalling treatment.<sup>31</sup> For example, they were made to carry burdens of three and four *arrobas*<sup>32</sup> for distances of up to a hundred or even two hundred leagues, and were forced to carry their Christian masters in hammocks, which are like nets slung from the shoulders of the bearers. In short, they were treated as beasts of burden and developed huge sores on their shoulders and backs as happens with animals made to carry excessive loads. And this is not to mention the floggings, beatings, thrashings, punches, curses and countless other vexations and cruelties to which

they were routinely subjected and to which no chronicle could ever do justice nor any reader respond save with horror and disbelief.

It is of note that all these island territories began to go to the dogs once news arrived of the death of our most gracious Queen Isabella, who departed this life in 1504.<sup>33</sup> Up to then, only a small number of provinces had been destroyed through unjust military action, not the whole area, and news of even this partial destruction had by and large been kept from the Queen, because, she – may her soul rest in peace – took a close personal interest in the physical and spiritual welfare of the native peoples, as those of us who lived through those years and saw examples of it with our own eyes can attest. There is one other general rule in all this, and it is that, wherever the Spaniards set foot, right throughout the Americas, they subjected the native inhabitants to the cruelties of which we have spoken, killing these poor and innocent people, tyrannizing them, and oppressing them in the most abominable fashion. The longer they spent in the region the more ingenious were the torments, each crueller than the last, that they inflicted on their victims, as God finally abandoned them and



left them to plummet headlong into a life of full-time crime and wickedness.