

EARLY DISCOVERIES IN AMERICA.

MR RASIN ON THE FIRST EXPEDITIONS OF THE NORTHMEN.

Charles F. Rafn, author of *Antiquitates Americanæ*, prepared the following paper, descriptive of the early discoveries of the Northmen in America. Several disjointed statements of the Northmen's early explorations have been published, but this paper, communicated by Mr. Rafn in order to correct prevalent errors and give still further publicity to important historical facts, is worth preservation:

'The Dane Gardar, 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 873, 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 our 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 Gunnbiorn 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 southwestern

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 Heriulfæus. 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 southwest, 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: Hell-land, (Newfoundland) was so called from its flat stones, Markland, (Nova Scotia) from its woods, and Vineland (New England) from its vines. Here he remained some time, and constructed large houses, called after him Leifabudir (*Leif's Booths*). A German, named Tyrker, who accompanied Leif on this voyage, was the man who found the wild vines, which he recognized 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 Islander, 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 the 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, Aram of Eremen; 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, named 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 doubts. 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 Kialarner and Furdstrandir of the Northmen) are not to be mistaken. In addition hereto we have the astronomical remark that the shortest day in Vineland was nine hours long, which fixes the



ISLAND OF ORLEANS.

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE ISLE OF ORLEANS.

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(CONTINUED.)

This part of the Island possesses no little interest, as having been the basis of Wolfe's operations at the capture of Quebec, in 1759; the troops having disembarked at St. Laurent, were marched up to this point and placed under canvas, and sundry redoubts were constructed as shown in the chart accompanying Hawkins' Picture of Quebec.

From this spot Wolfe (fresh from his victory at Louisbourg, Cape Breton,) first looked upon the harbor of Quebec and that frowning citadel, the Gibraltar of America, which he was ordered to besiege. Warburton has drawn such an interesting picture of this incident that I must be allowed to quote it entire:

'Accompanied by the chief engineer, Mr. McKellar, and an escort of light infantry, Wolfe, as soon as he landed, pushed on to the extremity of the Island near Quebec; a magnificent but disheartening scene lay before him. On the summit of the highest eminence over the strait, in the Great River, from whence the basin before him opened, the French flag waved. The crest of the rocky height was crowned with formidable works, redoubted and flanked, every favorable spot above, below, or on the rugged ascent, were batteries bristling with guns. This stronghold formed the right flank of a position, eight miles in extent—the falls and the deep and rapid stream of the Montmorency was the left; the shoals and rocks of the St. Lawrence protected the broad front, and the rich valley of the St. Charles, with the prosperous and beautiful villages of Charlesbourg and Lake Beauport, gave shelter and hospitality in the rear. A crested bank of some height over the Great River marked the main line of defences from east to west, parapets flanked

latitude 41° 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 Hop.

'The Northmen were also acquainted with American land still farther to the South, called by them Hvitrarnaland (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.'

The French navy has an aggregate strength of 478 ships, carrying 9,718 guns. Of the whole number of vessels, 94 are iron-clad in whole or in part. One hundred and eleven of the number are sailing vessels.