

them with bloodhounds; they burned them at the stake. The Indians became dangerous. De Soto hoped to awe them by claiming to be one of the gods, but the imposture was too palpable. "How can a man be God when he cannot get bread to eat?" asked a sagacious savage. It was now three years since De Soto had landed in America. The utter failure of the expedition would no longer conceal, and the men wished to return home. Broken in spirit and in frame, De Soto caught fever and died. His soldiers felled a tree and scooped room within its trunk for the body of the ill-fated adventurer. They could not bury their chief on land, lest the Indians should dishonour his remains. In the silence of midnight the rude coffin was sunk in the Mississippi, and the discoverer of the great river slept beneath its waters. The Spaniards promptly resolved now to make their way to Cuba. They had tools, and wood was abundant. They slew their horses for flesh; they plundered the Indians for bread; they struck the fetters from their prisoners to reinforce their scanty supply of iron. They built ships enough to float them down the Mississippi. Three hundred ragged and disheartened men were all that remained of the brilliant company whose hopes had been so high, whose good fortune had been so much envied.