NORMAN B. WOOD

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF THE MOST FAMOUS INDIAN CHIEFS

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From Cofachiqui the Indian Princess to Geronimo

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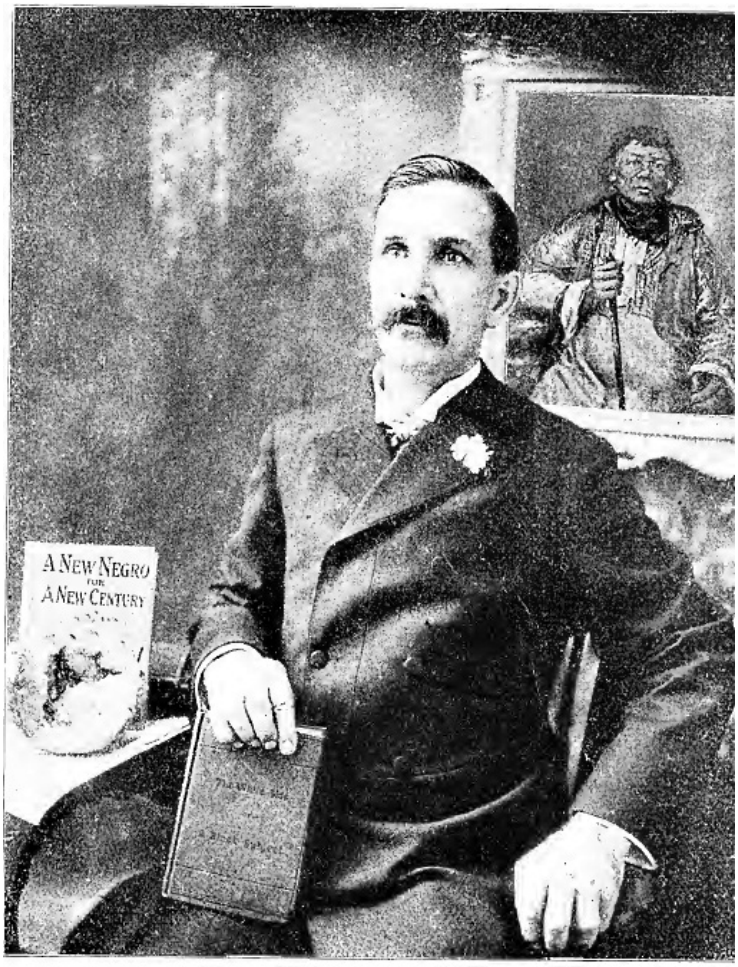

Yours to
"Take up the White Man's Burden"
Norman B. Wood

COFACHIQUI, THE INDIAN PRINCESS,

PRESENTING THE STRING OF PEARLS TO DE SOTO.

From an old Spanish painting.

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Chapter I.
Cofachiqui, the Indian Princess.
A True Story of De Soto and His Cavaliers.

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Cofachiqui seems to have been the name of a populous and wealthy Indian province visited by Hernando De Soto and his army of adventurers and cavaliers in their wanderings in search of gold. They also applied this name to the beautiful and intelligent young queen or princess who ruled the Indians of this and a confederation of neighboring tribes.

It is impossible to trace the route traversed by De Soto, as it was at times an aimless wandering through what is now the States of Florida, Georgia, and, perhaps, the border of South Carolina. But Indian traditions locate Yupaha, the capital of the province of Cofachiqui, at what is now Silver Bluff, on the east bank of the Savannah river, in Barnwell county, South Carolina. From time to time rumor reached De Soto and his men of this great princess, a veritable "She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed," whose subjects were so devoted and faithful that her slightest wish was law.

One day an Indian youth, who had been brought into camp with other prisoners, told the Spaniards that all the neighboring chiefs paid tribute to this great ruler, and sent her at stated intervals provision, fine clothing and gold. The cavaliers cared nothing for the provision and clothing, but they were all interest when gold was mentioned, and asked the youth many questions, through their interpreter, which he answered in full. He told how the gold was taken from

the earth, how it was melted and refined. His description was so exact that the Spaniards had no longer any doubt. They were greatly elated at the news, and after robbing and plundering the Indians who had fed and sheltered them during the winter months—the usual return for such kindness—they broke camp and marched northward. Many times during the march the Spaniards were on the verge of starvation and wandering aimlessly in the wilderness, where they must have perished, had they not been rescued and fed by the simple-minded, hospitable natives. Even those from whom they received such timely aid were often robbed and murdered indiscriminately. No doubt the Indians regarded them as demons rather than Christians, for the unprovoked savage ferocity of the Spaniards would be beyond belief if the sickening details were not piously set forth by the historian of the expedition.

On the 28th day of April, 1540, De Soto and his Spaniards reached the neighborhood of Cofachiqui. While the army camped for the night the enterprising Juan De Añasco with a band of thirty foot-soldiers went out to reconnoiter. They soon found a broad, well-worn path leading along the banks of a large river, probably the Savannah. They followed this path about two leagues when, just as it grew dark, they reached a landing opposite a large Indian town. There was no means of crossing the river, neither would it have been prudent to have crossed with such small numbers, not knowing the kind of reception to expect, or the force they might encounter.

So Añasco dispatched couriers back in the night to inform De Soto of their discovery. By daylight the vanguard of the army, consisting of one hundred horse and as many foot, was in motion, led by De Soto himself. When he reached the banks of the river, and the natives upon the opposite shore

caught sight of his glittering dragoons on their magnificent steeds, they were struck with amazement and consternation.

The interpreter shouted loudly for some one to bear a message to their chief. After some little hesitation and deliberation, the Indians launched a large canoe, in which six warriors took seats. They were men of fine appearance and probably the counselors of the chief. Quite a number of lusty men grasped the oars, and the canoe was driven rapidly through the water. De Soto, who had watched these movements with interest, knew he was about to be visited by the head men of the town, He therefore ordered his showy throne or chair of state, which he had with him for such occasions, to be placed in position. Here he took his seat with his officers around. The distinguished natives landed without any apparent fear, and, advancing toward the Spaniards, all six of them at the same time made three profound bows, the first toward the east, to the sun, the second toward the west, to the moon, and the third to De Soto. "Sir," said their spokesman, "do you wish peace or war?" "Peace," answered the Spanish general, as usual, "not war"; adding that he only asked passage through the territory and provision, in order to reach other provinces, which were his destination; he desired rafts and canoes also to cross the army over the river, and lastly friendly treatment while he was marching through the country so that he might cause it the least damage possible.

Peace, the ambassadors said they could promise; as for food, they had themselves but little, because during the past year a pestilence had swept off many of their people and driven others from their villages into the woods, so that they had not planted their fields; and although the pestilence was now over, yet many of the Indians had not

returned to their homes. The settlement opposite alone had escaped the scourge. They went on to explain that their chief was a woman—a young princess, but recently raised to the position. They would return and bear to her the request of the strangers, who in the meantime must await her answer with good confidence, however, for although their ruler was a maiden, she had the judgment and spirit of a man, and they doubted not would do for the Spaniards all she possibly could. With this the six envoys returned to their boats, and crossing the river were soon lost to sight in the waiting crowd upon the other shore. After a short interval the Spaniards saw a decided commotion among the Indians. A large and highly decorated canoe appeared and was hastily made ready, mats and cushions were placed in it and a canopy raised over one end. Then quite a gorgeous palanquin was seen borne by four stalwart men, descending toward the stream a young squaw, evidently the princess descended from it, and seated herself in the canoe that had the awning.

Eight Indian women followed, taking the paddles; the men went in the other canoes. The women rowed the princess across the river, and when she stepped out of her barge they followed, walking up the bank after her. If there were any among the cavaliers who knew classical history they must have been reminded (although the scene was rustic and simple in comparison) of Cleopatra going up the river Cydnus to meet Mark Antony, when according to Shakespeare,

> "The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne, Burn'd on the water. . . . . .

For her own person, It beggar'd all description: she did lie In her pavilion. . . .

Her gentlewomen, like the Nereids, So many mermaids, tended her . . . . . .

At the helm A seeming mermaid steers."

The princess, making a low and graceful bow before the Spanish general, seated herself upon the throne, which he brought and placed for her at his side, and without waiting an instant began to speak. She repeated what her warriors had said; that the pestilence of the past year made it impossible for her to furnish the amount of provision she would wish, but that she would do all in her power. And that De Soto might see her will in her deed, she gave him at once one of her two storehouses of corn, collected in her village for the relief of her people who had escaped from the pestilence; the other one she requested De Soto to kindly spare, for her own necessities were great.

She said she had another store of corn in a neighboring village, part of which he could take if necessary. She offered half of her own residence for De Soto's accommodation, and half of the houses in the village as barracks for his soldiers. If it would please him more, she and all her people would abandon the village and retire to a neighboring one. She also promised that by the next day rafts and canoes should be in readiness to transport the Spaniards across the river.

Abbott informs us that "The generous soul of De Soto was deeply touched as he assured her of his lasting friendship and that of his sovereign." But there is not the slightest evidence that De Soto was ever actuated by a generous motive. We are inclined to believe, with Joel

Chandler Harris, that the truth seems to be that De Soto and his men cared nothing for the courtesy and hospitality of the Queen and that they were not moved by her beauty and kindness.

According to the historian of the expedition, the Spaniards had quite a conversation with the young princess and were astonished at her sound judgment and well ordered ideas. But they also noticed that the Indians of this tribe were more refined and intelligent in appearance, more affable and less warlike, than the others they had met in their explorations. They were, moreover, quite graceful and attractive, and almost as white as the Spaniards.

While talking the princess had quietly and slowly unwound a long string of pearls, as large as hazelnuts, that coiled three times around her neck and fell to her waist. When the interview was over she handed the string of pearls to Juan Ortiz, the interpreter, and told him to give them to the governor. The interpreter told her his commander would appreciate them more if presented with her own hands. She replied that she dare not do that for fear of being considered immodest. De Soto now inquired of the interpreter what was said, and being informed, answered with much earnestness like a truly gallant cavalier (which he was not) "More than the pearls themselves would I value the favor of receiving them from her hands; and in acting so she would not go against modesty, for we are treating of peace and friendship, of all things the most important, most serious between strange people." Having heard this the princess arose and with her own fair hands suspended the string of costly pearls around the neck of De Soto. The governor then arose and taking from his finger a gold ring set with a handsome ruby that he always wore (which he had probably pillaged from the Peruvians) he

gave it to the princess. She received it with great dignity and placed it on one of her fingers.

Grace King, in her book, "De Soto and His Men in Florida," says, in this connection: "This little ceremony over, she took her leave and returned to her village, leaving the Spanish cavaliers charmed and half in love with her, not only on account of her mind, but of her beauty, which they vowed then and ever afterward she possessed to the extreme of perfection. And so also then and afterward they called her by no other name or title than La Sanora, the lady of Cofachiqui; and the name was right, says the chronicler, for a lady she was in all respects." The master of camp arrived with the rest of the army and it was put across the river next day by means of the rafts and canoes provided by the Indians.

De Soto and his cavaliers found themselves surrounded by the most hospitable Indians they had yet seen. They were supplied with everything the land afforded and rested in comfortable houses and wigwams under the shades of the mulberry trees.

The soldiers were so delighted with the situation that they were anxious to form a settlement there; but De Soto refused to forget the only object of the expedition, which was to search for gold and other treasures. The general was a man of few words but an iron will, and his determination had the desired effect. His men soon recovered their energies. While enjoying the hospitalities of the princess they found out the burial place of her people, and robbed their graves, according to the Spanish historian, of three hundred and fifty weight of pearls, and figures of babies and birds made from iridescent shells.

Learning that the widowed mother of the princess lived in retirement about forty miles down the river, and that she

was said to be the owner of many fine pearls, De Soto determined to get her in his power. He pretended, however, to be actuated only by a desire to make sure of peace and tranquillity as long as he was in the country.

At his request Cofachiqui dispatched twelve of her principal officers inviting her mother to come to town and meet a people never before seen by the Indians and see the wonderful animals on which they rode. The Queen's mother, instead of complying, sent her daughter a severe reprimand for having admitted into her capitol a body of strangers of whom she knew nothing. All this being reported to De Soto made him more determined than ever to get her in his power. Accordingly he ordered Juan De Añasco to take thirty soldiers, and disregarding the privacy and seclusion of the queen mother to bring her kindly but with force with him to the camp. Añasco, although the day was well advanced, set out at once on his mission. A young warrior about the age of the princess was appointed by her to be guide for the party. The princess also gave him special instructions that when the men neared the dwelling place of the queen mother, he was to go in advance and warn her of the Spaniards coming, and supplicate her to go peaceably and as a friend with them, and he was to be sure and say that her daughter and all her people made the same petition to her. The young warrior had been reared in the very arms of the queen mother, and she loved him as her own son, and the princess chose him for this very reason, hoping that love for the messenger would mitigate the pain inflicted by this message. The young warrior matched his princess chief in looks and learning and was strikingly attractive in face and figure. He wore a diadem of rarest feathers, a mantle of finest and softest deerskin. At his back was a magnificent bow just his own height and an elegant quiver of arrows.

About midday the party stopped to eat and to rest a while under the shade of a grove of trees, for it was quite warm. Sitting apart the guide seemed to give himself up to thought, resting his head on his hand and every now and then breathing a low sigh. Presently he took his quiver of arrows and placing it before him on the ground, began slowly to draw them out one by one and passed them to the Spaniards, who broke into exclamations of surprise and pleasure, for each one was different from the other and had a beauty and novelty of its own. In polish and workmanship they were indeed remarkable. Some were tipped with staghorn, others with fishbones wonderfully and cunningly adapted. At last the young warrior drew out a flint head, pointed and edged like a dagger. Casting an anxious glance around and seeing the attention of the Spaniards engrossed in examining his weapons, he plunged the sharp-pointed arrow into his throat, severing an artery, and fell. Before the Spaniards could rush to him he was dead. There were several Indian attendants in the company who seemed overwhelmed with distress, uttering loud cries of grief over the corpse. These were now questioned by the Spaniards, and it was learned that the young guide knew that the queen mother was very unwilling to have any acquaintance with the Spaniards, because she had emphatically refused to meet them when first importuned; and now for him to guide those same Spaniards to her that they might compel her to come by fair means or foul, would make him appear as a miserable ingrate after her great kindness. On the other hand the princess, whom he revered and loved, had commissioned him to conduct the Spaniards to her mother's abode. He did not dare to disobey her commands. Either alternative was more to be dreaded by him than death. The

ingenious young man had therefore endeavored to escape the dilemma by self-destruction.

Savage history offers not, perhaps, another instance of such refined and romantic devotion. He could not live to please both, so he determined to die for both.

The other Indians were now pressed to act as guides, but they all swore, truly or falsely, that they did not know where the queen mother lived; that the young warrior alone knew the secret of her hiding place. The cavaliers pushed on as best they could without a guide, but the bad walking, the excessive heat and the weight of their armor wearied and disgusted them, and after two days they returned empty-handed to the camp.

Two days after his return an Indian came to Añasco and offered to conduct him down the river in a canoe to the home of the queen mother. He gladly accepted the proposition. Two large canoes with strong rowers were quickly made ready, and Añasco with twenty companions set out on this second expedition. But it was also doomed to failure. The queen mother heard of his approach and with a few attendants secretly fled to another retreat far away. After a fruitless search of six days, the canoes returned. De Soto never again attempted to get possession of the widow.

AMERICAN HORSE, SIOUX CHIEF.

Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution.

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In the meantime, while Añasco was engaged in these unsuccessful expeditions, De Soto had been making anxious inquiries respecting the silver and gold he had been informed was to be found in the province. He began by summoning the princess before him and his officers and commanding her to bring all the yellow and white metals and pearls she possessed, like the finger rings and pieces of silver and pearls and stones set in the rings that the Spaniards showed her. The princess replied that both the

white and yellow metals were to be found in great abundance in her territory. She immediately sent out Indians to bring him in specimens. They quickly returned laden with a yellow metal somewhat resembling gold in color, but which proved to be copper. The shining substance which he had supposed was silver was nothing but a worthless species of mica or quartz. The sight of these articles dissipated, in an instant, all the bright and chimerical hopes which had prompted the Spaniards to undertake this long and perilous expedition.

It would seem that the warm-hearted princess sympathized with the Spaniards in their great disappointment, or she may have feared they would vent their rage on her hapless people; certain it is, she informed them that while there were no precious stones in her realm, they did have great abundance of pearls. Pointing with her fingers to a temple that stood upon a neighboring mound, she said: "That is the burial place of the warriors of this village, there you will find our pearls. Take what you wish; and if you wish more not far from here there is a village which was the home of my forefather; its temple is far larger than this, you will find there so many pearls that even if you loaded all your horses with them and yourselves with as much as you could carry, you would not come to the end of them. Many years have my people been collecting and storing pearls. Take all, and if you still want more, we can get more, and even more still for you from the fishing places of my people."

This great news and the magnificently queenly manner in which it was told soon raised the drooping spirits of the Spaniards and consoled them for the bitter disappointments about the gold and silver.

The fact of her inviting the Spaniards to ransack the tombs of her forefathers for pearls, seems, as Goodrich says, "utterly inconsistent with all our notions of the reverence for ancestry which is so striking a characteristic of the Indians. We should have a strong doubt of the truth of the statement, were it not distinctly asserted in both the narratives of the expedition." To our mind there is only one of two explanations of it—either the two historians deliberately falsified their statements to cover up the impious sacrilege of De Soto and his cavaliers, or else the princess was intimidated until she pursued the peace-at-any-price policy, even to the profanation of her ancestors' tombs.

The Spaniards soon visited the temple which the princess had pointed out and took from it pearls amounting to fourteen bushels, according to one author, while others record a very much larger amount.

Two days later De Soto, with a large retinue of his own officers and of the household of the princess, started out to visit the large temple at Talomeco, as it was called, situated upon the high bank of the river about three miles distant.

The country through which they passed en route was very fertile and in places covered with fruit trees filled with ripe fruit which the Spaniards picked and ate with relish, while they congratulated themselves that the golden dawn of a realization of their dreams was brightening before them.

They found this village contained about five hundred cabins, all substantially built, and from its superiority of size and appearance over other villages they inferred it had one day been the seat and residence of several powerful chiefs. The chief's residence on a mound rose larger and more conspicuous than the others, but it was in turn dominated

by the temple. The Spaniards' eyes, in fact, could see nothing but the temple as it loomed up before them on a commanding eminence at the side of this deserted village. As it was by far the largest and most imposing edifice they saw in their journey through the Southland it merits a description. It was about three hundred feet in length by one hundred and twenty in breadth, with a tall pointed roof that glittered like an enchanted palace. Canes, slender and supple, woven into a fine mat, served for thatching, and this was studded with row upon row of all kinds and sizes of shells with the bright side out. There were great sea shells of curious shapes, conchs and periwinkles—a marvel of playing light and color.

Grace King has given such a full description of the interior of this temple that she must have received her information from the records of the historians of the expedition. Said she, "Throwing open the two large doors the Spaniards paused at the threshold spellbound. Twelve gigantic statues of wood confronted them, counterfeiting life with such ferocity of expression and such audacity of posture as could not but awe them. Six stood on one side and six on the other side of the door as if to guard it and to forbid any one to enter. The first ones, those next the door, were giants about twelve feet high, the others diminished in size by regular gradation. Each pair held a different kind of weapon and stood in attitude to use it. The first and largest raised in both hands great clubs, ornamented a quarter of their length with points and facets of copper; the second brandished broadswords of wood shaped much like the steel swords of the Spaniards. The next wielded wooden staves about six feet long, the end flattened out into a blade or paddle. The fourth pair had tomahawks with blades of brass or flint; the fifth held bows with arrows aimed and strung,

drawn ready to shoot; the sixth and last statues grasped pikes pointed with copper.

"Passing between the file of monsters the Spaniards entered the great room. Overhead were rows of lustrous shells such as covered the roof, and strands of pearls interspersed with strings of bright feathers, all seemed to be floating in the air in wildering tapestry. Looking lower the Spaniards saw that along the upper sides of the four walls ran two rows of statues, figures of men and women of natural size, each placed on a separate pedestal. The men held various weapons and each weapon was ornamented with strings of pearl. The women had nothing in their hands. All the space around these statues was covered with shields of skins and fine cane mats. The burial chests were placed on benches around the four sides of the room, but in the center upon the floor were also rows of caskets, placed one on top of another in regular gradation like pyramids. All the caskets, large and small, were filled with pearls; and the pearls, too, were distributed according to size, the largest in the largest caskets, the smallest, the seed pearls, in the smallest caskets. In all there was such a quantity of pearls that seeing it with their own eyes, the Spaniards confessed that what the princess had told them about the temple was truth and not pride and exaggeration. As she declared, even if they loaded themselves with as much as they could carry (and there were more than nine hundred of them) and loaded their three hundred horses with them, they could not take them all, there would still be hundreds of bushels of them left. And in addition there were great heaps of the largest and handsomest deerskins, dyed in different colors, and skins of other animals dressed with the hair on—cured and dressed as perfectly, the Spaniards said, as could have been done in Germany or Muscovy. Around this great room

were eight small rooms all filled with different weapons—pikes, clubs, tomahawks, bows and arrows of all varieties and of the most exquisite workmanship; some with three-pronged heads, like harpoons, some two-pronged; some with chisel edges, like daggers; some shaped like thorns. In the last room were mats of cane, so finely woven that there were few among the Spanish crossbowmen could have put a bolt through them."

The revenue officers now proposed to take from the spoils the royal fifth that belonged to his imperial majesty and to carry it away with them. But De Soto said that this would only embarrass the movements of the army with excessive luggage, that even now it could not carry its necessary munitions and provisions. "They were not dividing the land now," he reminded them, "only exploring it."

Such is the story taken from the historians of the expedition. But, as Joel Chandler Harris says "It is just as well to believe a little of this as to believe a great deal. It was an easy matter for the survivors of the expedition to exaggerate these things and they probably took great liberties with the facts, but there is no doubt the Indians possessed many pearls. Mussels like those from which they took the gems are still to be found in the small streams and creeks of Georgia, and an enterprising boy might even now be able to find a seed pearl if he sought for it patiently."

It is not to be doubted that rich stores of pearls were found. Some were distributed to the officers and men, but the bulk of them, strange to say, were left undisturbed to await the return of the Spaniards another day. It is said that De Soto dipped into the pearls and gave his two joined hands full to each cavalier to make rosaries of, he said to say prayers for their sins on. We imagine if their prayers

were in proportion to their sins they must have spent the most of their time at their devotions.

The Spaniards were greatly elated at the discovery of these riches. Some of them must have known that real pearls were estimated at a value next to diamonds, and there were undoubtedly many real pearls of great value in so large a collection, possibly rivaling the one possessed by Philip II. of Spain, which was about the size of a pigeon egg and valued at one hundred and sixty thousand dollars, or that of Cleopatra, which was valued at three hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars.

De Soto was urged to establish his colony in this country, which was at once beautiful, fertile and rich in treasures. But the persistent spirit of De Soto was not to be turned from its one great all-absorbing object, the search for gold. He was a man of few words but of wonderful will power.

Accordingly he eagerly inquired of the Indians if they knew of any still greater land or chief farther inland. The princess and her advisers had learned by this time that the best way to get rid of such unwilling guests was to answer such questions in the affirmative. They assured him that further on was a greater and more powerful chief ruling over a richer country called Chiaha. He determined at once to march thither. In answer to the objections of those who wished to remain where they were, he urged that in consequence of the recent pestilence there was not sufficient provision in the country to support the army for a month. That by continuing their march they might find gold mines. Should they fail, they could then return, and in the meantime, the Indians having replanted their land, there would be abundance of food. He had his way and preparations were made for the journey.

The conduct of the Spaniards had been so cruel during their stay at Cofachiqui that the princess and her people had come to regard them with fear and hatred. There were some indications that the princess so far distrusted the treacherous and marble-hearted Spaniards, that, like her more prudent mother, she was about to secretly escape from them by flight. In some way De Soto heard of this and appointed a guard who was to keep a constant watch upon the princess, so that she could by no possibility escape. And when he took up his march for Chiaha, May 4, 1540, the princess who had received him with so much grace, dignity and hospitality was compelled to accompany him on foot with an escort of female attendants. Even the old Spanish chronicler is moved to remark that, "it was not so good usage as she deserved for the good will she showed and the good entertainment that she made him."

We fully agree with him, for there are but few instances in all history of baser ingratitude. One reason why De Soto made the princess his prisoner and carried her with the expedition was to use her influence in controlling the Indians along his line of march. In fact, the Indians of Florida, Mexico and Peru were so loyal and devoted to their rulers that they often refrained from attacking the Spaniards, lest they should imperil their lives. It was true in this case that the Indians not only did not attack the invaders while the princess was with them, but at her command they supplied them with guides to conduct them through the wilderness, porters to carry their extra baggage and provision as it was needed along the route through her domain.

But had the Spaniards treated the princess and her people kindly and with justice all this would have been done

from motives of hospitality and good will. Kindness begets kindness even among savage races.

De Soto did not accept the spirit of the letter from the noble Isabella, in which she wrote, "I will no longer persevere in this invasion of the lands of others which is always plunging me more and more deeply into difficulties." Instead of this he followed the infamous example which Pizarro, in Peru, and Cortez, in Mexico, had set him. There is nothing whatever to justify his action, as it was alike cruel, dastardly and unnecessary.

After being dragged a prisoner in the Spanish army for two or three weeks and covering a distance of about three hundred miles, she found an opportunity to escape from her treacherous and brutal captors. Passing one day through a thick forest she and her attendants suddenly darted from the train and disappeared. De Soto never saw her or heard from her again, though every effort was made to recapture her, partly because of the casket of splendid pearls which one of her attendants carried off with her. Undoubtedly a band of her warriors were in rendezvous there to receive her.

The historian of Florida, Garcilasode la Vega, terminates his account of this princess by declaring that she possessed a truly noble soul and was worthy of an empire. Shame for his country-men has induced him to suppress all mention of the brutal indignity to which she was subjected by De Soto, and for which, as a Castilian knight, he deserved to have been deprived of his spurs. The Portuguese narrator who accompanied the expedition states the facts too circumstantially to leave us in any doubt about the matter, and the noble and generous Cofachiqui is to be numbered among those who suffered by trusting to the honor and justice of the plunderers of the New World.

Again quoting from Joel Chandler Harris (Uncle Remus), we feel moved to say that "De Soto's expedition was organized by the spirit of greed. It spread desolation wherever it went and it ended in disaster and despair. De Soto himself found a grave in the waters of the Mississippi, and the survivors who made their way back home were broken in health and spirit."

An attempt has been made to throw a halo of romance over the march of the Spaniards through the wilderness of the New World, but there is nothing romantic or inspiring about it. It was simply a search for riches in which hundreds of lives were most cruelly sacrificed and thousands of homes destroyed.

The only permanent good which resulted from it was the discovery of the Father of Waters and this noble, Indian Princess Cofachiqui.

POWHATAN, OR WAH-UN-SO-NA-COOK,

A TYPICAL AMERICAN INDIAN.

From an original drawing.

Chapter II.
Powhatan, or Wah-un-so-na-cook.

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When the English colonists first landed in Virginia, in 1607, they found the country occupied by three large tribes of natives known by the general names Mannahoack, Monacans and Powhatans.

Of these the two former might be called highland or mountain Indians, because they occupied the hill country east of the Alleghany ridge, while the Powhatan nation inhabited the lowland region extending from the seacoast westward to the falls of the rivers and from the Patuxent southward to Carolina.

Mr. Jefferson, in his "Notes on Virginia," estimates that the Powhatan confederacy at one time occupied about eight thousand square miles of territory, with a population of about eight thousand people, of whom twenty-four hundred were warriors. When it is remembered that there were thirty tribes in this coalition, and that this estimate is less than one hundred warriors to the tribe, it seems moderate enough, especially since it is recorded by an early writer that three hundred warriors appeared under one Indian chief in one body at one time and seven hundred at another, all of whom were apparently of his own tribe.

Moreover, the Powhatan confederacy inhabited a country upon which nature bestowed her favors with lavish profusion. Their settlements were mostly on the banks of the James, Elizabeth, Nansamond, York and Chickahominy rivers, all of which abounded with fish and fowl. The forest was filled with deer and wild turkey, while the toothsome

oyster was found in great abundance on the shores of the Chesapeake and its numerous inlets. Indeed, the whole region seems to have been a veritable paradise for hunter and fisherman. Vast quantities of corn, too, yearly rewarded even the crude agriculture of the Indians, bestowed as it was upon the best portion of a fertile soil.

Captain John Smith, the hero and historian of early Virginia, informs us that at one time "the rivers became so covered with swans, geese, ducks and cranes that we daily feasted with good bread, Virginia pease, pumpions (pumpkins) and putchamins (a wild plum), fish, fowl and diverse sorts of wild beasts so fat as we could eat them." He might have added, "And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness," but at first were ready to divide with them their ample store, for on one occasion when Smith undertook an exploring tour into the interior late in the season a violent storm obliged him and his men to keep Christmas among the savages. "And we were never more merry," he relates, "nor fed on more plenty of good oysters, fish, flesh, wild fowl and good bread, nor ever had better fires in England."

The mention of oysters here is the first account of this palatable bivalve we have found in history. They also graced the first Thanksgiving dinner, as will be seen in another chapter. But it might be asked, why is it, since Virginia was a land of such great abundance of food, we read so much of famine and "the starving time" among the colonists at Jamestown? Simply because the men sent over by King James were for the most part so idle, improvident and utterly worthless that they would have literally starved to death "with stewed pigeons flying into their mouths." Shortly after the settlement at Jamestown Captains Smith and Newport, accompanied by twenty-three others, sailed

up the James river to its falls. A few miles below where Richmond now stands, near what is known as Mayo's plantation, they visited an Indian village of a dozen houses called Powhatan. Here they met and were entertained by the leading chief, or werowance, of the Powhatan confederacy, who, strange to say, was also called Powhatan. Indeed, the English understanding but little of the Indian language, and hearing this name often mentioned, and always with awe or reverence, by turns regarded it as the name of a river, of the country, of the people, of a town and of their head sachem.

But little is known of this, the first interview between Captain Smith and company and the great sagamore and his people, but it is recorded that the English were kindly and hospitably received, as they usually were, and feasted on fruit, fish and vegetables, as well as roast deer and cakes.

Bancroft says the savages at first murmured at this intrusion of strangers into the country; but their crafty chief disguised his fear and would only say, "They hurt you not; they take but a little waste land."

But even Powhatan grew suspicious of a cross which Newport insisted on erecting as a sign of English dominion until the latter, probably at the suggestion of Smith, told him the arms represented Powhatan and himself, and the middle their united league. The interview ended by the return of the explorers to Jamestown, but before doing so Newport presented the chief with a hatchet, with which he was much delighted.

The English invested savage life with all the dignity of European courts. Powhatan was styled "king" or "emperor," his wives, of whom he had many, were "queens," his