

**NARRATIVES OF THE
CAREER OF HERNANDO
DE SOTO, VOLUME I**

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Narratives of the Career of Hernando De Soto, Volume I by Luis Hernández de Biedma & Edward Gaylord Bourne

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LUIS HERNÁNDEZ DE BIEDMA & EDWARD GAYLORD BOURNE

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*Originally published by the Bradford Club in 1866.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE expeditions of De Soto and Coronado were the most elaborate efforts made by the Spaniards to explore the interior of North America, and in some respects they have never been surpassed in the later history of the country. Between them they nearly spanned the continent from Georgia to the Gulf of California. Of the two, that of De Soto excited the most interest at the time, and this distinction it still retains. It was the first extensive exploration of at least six of our Southern States, and their written history opens with the narratives which tell its story; these same narratives contain the earliest descriptions which we possess of the life and manners of the southern Indians so famous in literature and history—the Choctaws, the Cherokees, the Creeks, and the Seminoles; these narratives also record the discovery of the Mississippi River and the story of the first voyage upon it by Europeans.

Nor are these narratives less interesting in literary history. One of them—that accorded the first place in this edition—is the only considerable contribution in the Portu-

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guese language, and by a Portuguese, to the early history of the United States. In making another, a descendant of the Incas of Peru transmuted the tale of hardships and meetings with the Indians, friendly and hostile, into an old romance of chivalry,—the first and certainly the most celebrated one dealing with an American theme,—in which a groundwork of fact is richly embroidered by the author's imagination with romantic details into a whole so full of charm as to have beguiled even professed historians. Finally, in contrast to this quaint compound of knight-errantry and Indian fighting, we have a plain, unvarnished account of what actually took place from day to day from the hand of De Soto's private secretary, Rodrigo Ranjel. This last is now made accessible, in English, for the first time in this edition.

The earliest narrative of De Soto's expedition to be published was drawn up by one of the Portuguese gentlemen who joined it from the town of Elvas, which lies just across the boundary from the Spanish city of Badajos, where De Soto was well known. The writer did not reveal his name, and his identity has never been discovered. His *True Relation*, as he entitled it, was published in Evora, Portugal, in 1557. It was brought to the attention of a wider public by the ever

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alert and energetic Richard Hakluyt, who, in 1609, to promote the interests of the newly founded Virginia colony, translated it into English under the title: *Virginia richly valued by the description of the maine land of Florida her next neighbour; out of foure yeeres continuall travell and discoverie for above one thousand miles east and west, of Don Ferdinando de Soto, and six hundred able men in his companie. Wherein are truly observed the riches and fertilitie of those parts abounding with things necessarie, pleasant, and profitable for the life of man; with the nature and dispositions of the inhabitants. Written by a Portugall gentleman of Elvas, employed in all the action, and translated out of Portuguese by Richard Hakluyt.* Two years later, with the same purpose in view, Hakluyt published a new edition of his version, changing the title to *The Discovery and Conquest of Terra Florida by Don Ferdinando de Soto and six hundred Spaniards his followers, etc.* This narrative, from its sobriety of tone, its nearness in time to the events which its author relates as an eye-witness, and the numerous indications that in its preparation he utilized memoranda made at the time, has generally been recognized by historians as the most trustworthy detailed account of De Soto's expedition that we have.

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Next in order of publication and equal in fame comes: *La Florida del Inca. Historia del Adelantado, Hernando de Soto, Governado, y Capitan General del Reino de la Florida. Y de otros heroicos caballeros, Españoles, e Indios. Escrita por el Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, capitan de su magestad, natural de la gran ciudad del Cozco, cabeza de los reinos y provincias del Peru, etc.* (Lisbon, 1605, and again, Madrid, 1722.) Garcilaso was born in Cuzco, Peru, in 1537. He was the son of a Spanish officer of the same name, and of the sister of the last Inca, Huayna Capac. While a boy in Peru he knew personally many of the followers of De Soto, who came thither to recover their fortunes.¹ In 1560 he went to Spain, and there, about the year 1567, became more or less intimately acquainted with a gentleman who was a survivor of the expedition, and from whom he often heard of the exploits of the Spaniards and the Indians. Garcilaso, with the blood of both races flowing in his veins, felt doubly drawn to rescue from oblivion such heroic deeds. Of the existence of the narrative of the "Gentleman of Elvas" he makes no mention.² Finally after the lapse

¹ *La Florida*, 264.

² Yet Pedro Fernandez del Pulgar, who wrote the continuation of Herrera, declares that Gar-

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of twenty years he persuaded his friend to tell him the story in course while he wrote it down. This took place about 1587,³ forty-four years after the return of the expedition.

Garcilaso nowhere reveals the name of this friend, and no one, so far as I am aware, has attempted to determine his identity. Yet I venture to conjecture that he was the cavalier named Gonçalo Silvestre, whose experiences in the expedition are narrated in considerable detail. In fact, in Garcilaso's narrative only De Soto himself, his successor, Luis de Moscoso, and Juan de Añasco receive as frequent notice as Gonçalo Silvestre, who is not even mentioned by the "Gentleman of Elvas." After the expedition was over Gonçalo Silvestre went to Peru. About the year 1555 he returned to Spain in poverty.⁴

cilaso followed the Portuguese narrative. (*Proemio* of Gabriel Daza de Cardenas to the ed. of 1722.) Jared Sparks held the same view. (*Life of Marquette*, 289.) Neither writer advanced any proofs.

³ Cf. the letter of Garcilaso of March 12, 1587, quoted in the *Proemio* of the edition of 1722, and the statement in Garcilaso's preface that he wrote it after the publication of his version of the dialogues of Leon Hebreo (1590), and, also, that on p. 190 of his text, that he was copying it in 1591.

⁴ Nothing is known of Silvestre except what Garcilaso tells us in his *La Florida* and *Historia General del Peru*. Yet, he there supplies enough to enable Mr. R. B. C. Graham to write an account