INTRODUCTION

ARLY in the month of April of the year fifteen hundred and thirty-eight, a fleet of tall-masted ships slid over the treacherous sand bar at San Lúcar de Barrameda and turned its prows toward a fabulous kingdom in the west which Ponce de León had poetically dubbed *La Florida* or the land of flowers. Hernando de Soto, swollen with the riches of Cajamarca and honored with a writ from his Caesarean Majesty, Charles the Melancholy, had set forth to explore and exploit the unlimited reaches of the North American continent. Never previously had there been assembled such an impressive array of ships, men, dogs and horses for any expedition to the Indies, and the hearts of these cavaliers burned with expectancy, for rumor persisted that this new kingdom would yield more gold, silver and precious gems than had all the lands of either Mexico or Peru. Moreover, for those fired with a messianic zeal, there was additional temptation since the pagan domains of the Indies offered unlimited possibilities for the enrichment of the Church as well as the Crown.

But once again the hardships of the great North American wilderness were to convert a resplendent dream of exploration and conquest into a doleful reality; De Soto's vast enterprise was destined for dismal failure. By the year fifteen hundred and forty-three, the deep forests and broad savannas of Florida were strewn with Spanish dead; the fever-ridden body of De Soto himself had been lowered to a watery sepulchre in the depths of the Mississippi; and the last of that gallant band of horses, the very sinew of the Spanish

army, had been ignominiously sacrificed to facilitate the escape of those men fortunate enough to survive. In the end several hundred lean, naked, and half-starved stragglers fought their way down the Mississippi and on to the shores of Mexico while two faithful captains sailed the American coast from Nombre de Dios to the Land of the Cod in a vain search for their commander. And the Indians of Florida? Not as yet having received the waters of baptism, they went on, as in centuries past, worshipping the sun and the moon.

Survivors of the De Soto expedition were quick to tell their story in whatever parts of the world they happened to land, and their tales must soon have become incorporated into the folk culture of Spain and Portugal as well as all of the Spanish speaking regions of the newly discovered Indies. To some of these same eyewitnesses is to be traced the bulk of our present day knowledge of a tremendously important phase of early American history. We have, for instance, the day-by-day record of Luis Hernández de Biedma, who served as factor to the expedition, and the invaluable diary of Rodrigo Ranjel, who traveled as De Soto's official secretary. Again, one of the Portuguese contingent, who preferred to be known to his contemporaries and to posterity simply as "A Fidalgo of Elvas," published as early as 1557 what he described as "A true relation of the vicissitudes attending the Governor Don Hernando de Soto and some nobles of Portugal in the discovery of the province of Florida." But the account which is of specific interest to us in this study is that poured by an anonymous Spanish cavalier into the ears of a Peruvian mestizo who bore the baptismal name of Gómez Suárez de Figueroa. This story, supplemented by excerpts from the manuscripts of two additional eyewitnesses, Juan Coles and Alonso de Carmona, is known to us today as *The Florida of the Inca,* and its Peruvian compiler has identified himself as the Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega, a name which he apparently assumed in his more mature years.

Garcilaso, from time to time both in Peru and in Spain, encountered men who had participated in De Soto's expedition, but on several occasions he declares that the material for *The Florida* was

derived solely from the three above mentioned sources. The account of Alonso de Carmona, he tells us, was received from the author himself, and that of Juan Coles he found in a somewhat battered condition at the establishment of a printer in Cordova. But the bulk of his facts came to him orally from the aforementioned noble Spaniard, whom he eventually cornered in Las Posadas. The identity of this man he for some reason leaves shrouded in mystery; nevertheless there is sufficient evidence for speculation, and historians in general have concluded that he was none other than Gonzalo Silvestre, a native of Herrera de Alcántara, whose fine horsemanship and exceptional boldness displayed as he gallops through the pages of *The Florida* threaten at times to eclipse the glory of the Adelantado himself.

Strong reasons for believing that Silvestre occupied this important role are to be seen in the text of *The Florida.* For here many of his more trivial words and conversations are quoted, and here we find anecdotes concerning him which only he would have been likely to consider of sufficient importance to remember. Moreover, he fits comparatively well into the description which the Inca has offered of his source, and, whereas he is ignored by other commentators, his is one of the names most frequently encountered in *The Florida.* But more conclusive evidence, it would seem, is to be found in the movements of this man after the conquest and in his subsequent association with Garcilaso himself. For when the wretched and disgruntled survivors of the expedition began to disperse, Silvestre found his way down into Peru and became embroiled in the same civil wars which occupied so much of the attention of Garcilaso's own father. Then when some years later he refused to obey the Viceroy's order to settle down and espouse one of the ladies of questionable virtue whom the King had sent out for the pleasure and comfort of his subjects, the old conquistador was shipped back to Spain, where at Las Posadas, according to records, he had some dealings with the future author of *The Florida.* Garcilaso himself tells of Silvestre's return to Spain, and he several times acknowledges

having received from this man personally information which he incorporated into his history of Peru. Since this history and *The Florida* were in the process of composition simultaneously, we can suppose with some confidence that the old warrior was relating the story of De Soto's struggle through North America at the same time he was telling of the turmoil in Peru.

But of more interest to us than this spinner of tales is the man who took these tales and wove them into the fabric of early American history. For in the Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega, we have a chronicler who, because of the unusual circumstances of his birth and early environment as well as the unique associations he enjoyed through a long life, was able to give a sympathetic view of the De Soto story from several levels: first, from that of the invading Spaniard who had set forth upon an adventure or a crusade for God, the Crown, and incidentally, Mammon; second, from that of the Indian who found himself confronted with strange white men, demanding at the point of the sword that he shift his way of life, his faith, and his allegiance; and finally, from that of the scholar and historian touched with a zeal to see the culture and faith of old Spain bestowed upon the pagan realms of the far-flung Indies.

The Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega, who, as stated, bore the baptismal name of Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, was born at Cuzco on the twelfth of April in the year fifteen hundred and thirty-nine. He was the only son of a "second" conquistador, Don Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega Vargas, and an Indian princess, Chimpa Ocllo, a niece of Huayna Capac, last of the legitimate rulers of the Inca empire. Hence there flowed through the veins of this mestizo not only the blood of the great Spanish lords of Sierrabrava and Feria, but also that of pagan emperors who from remote antiquity had held sway over the Children of the Sun.

Don Sebastián had wandered into Peru with the lusty and covetous band of Pedro de Alvarado, and then, joining forces with Francisco Pizarro, he had launched into a career which was to keep him embroiled for much of the remainder of his life in the turbulent

civil wars and rebellions of the land. It was possibly while a prisoner of Diego de Almagro at Cuzco that he first formed his liaison with the native girl who was to become the mother of the author of *The Florida.* This union was destined never to receive the sanction of the Church, for marriage between conquistadors and Indian maidens was not usual and concubinage was respectable. Nevertheless, either because of a true conversion to the Faith or because a certain delicacy of taste among cavaliers dictated such procedure, Chimpa Ocllo did receive the waters of baptism and was christened Isabel.

After the defeat of Almagro, Don Sebastián received the bounty of his chieftain, which consisted, among other things, of extensive and productive farms and, in addition, a large house at Cuzco. During the early childhood of Garcilaso, this house was presided over by his mother, and here under her care and amid the ruins of the fast-fading Inca empire, he passed one of the most significant periods of his entire life. For Chimpa Ocllo, though a heretic among her people, was visited regularly by numbers of her kinsmen, who filled the ears of the little mestizo with the ancient lore of Peru. Hence at an early age he began to absorb information which was to bring him renown as an outstanding authority on the Inca civilization. Moreover, he began to develop a pride and sympathy which was to extend to all of the Indians of the New World, a warmth of feeling which he continued to manifest in his writing and his course of action throughout his life. Repeatedly in *The Florida* he proclaims that he is a Peruvian and furthermore that he is an Indian, and though he at times does so modestly, his modesty is feigned. And he would have us feel that the Indian, given an equal chance, would not prove himself inferior physically, mentally, or spiritually. In scene after scene, he reminds us that the Spaniard, when deprived of his horse and his armor, was but a poor match for his native antagonist; once in a burst of ecstasy over the intellectual possibilities of his Indian and mestizo companions, he pictures his Latin master, the good Canon of Cuzco, as yearning to see a dozen of these young

Peruvians exposed to the academic wonders of Salamanca; and he makes as the basis of his principal plea in *The Florida* the fact that the mind of the Indian is ready and competent to receive and absorb the cultural and spiritual splendors of Christianity. Moreover, when in his later years he laid aside his baptismal name to take that of a renowned ancestor, he did not become simply Garcilaso de la Vega, but Garcilaso de la Vega, el Inca.

On the other hand, Garcilaso's excessive pride in his Indian background was mingled strangely and almost paradoxically with a similar pride in the noble blood and daring achievements of his father's people. From Don Sebastián and other kinsmen he gleaned reports of what Spaniards had accomplished in all parts of the world, and within the ranks of his own ancestors he found names which had become fixed in the heroic legends of old Spain. Such, for instance, was that of Garcí Pérez de Vargas, who in 1348 had helped Ferdinand the Holy wrest Seville from the Moors and thus came to have his name spelled upon the walls of the ancient city and within the poetry of the land as well. Then there was an early Garcí Lasso who brought just retribution to a pagan upon the plains of Granada when that dastard appeared with an Ave Maria draped conspicuously across the rump of his steed. This spectacular incident had added a Hail Mary to the family escutcheon and accounts for the Vega in the Lasso name. But much of Garcilaso's pride sprang from a continuous panorama of bold achievements which was unfolding before his youthful eyes, for both his father and an uncle, Don Juan de Vargas, were fighting the battles of Peru, and he frequently found himself sharing the glories and miseries of their victories and defeats. Once he pictures himself as a very small boy riding by his father's side in a triumphal procession to Cuzco. But again, he tells of a time when he and his mother huddled within the great house at Cuzco while its walls resounded to the thud of enemy shells; and in another instance he speaks of a hairbreadth escape over house tops and down narrow streets when he himself helped his father elude the forces of Francisco Hernández Girón.

He was trained in the saddle, he tells us modestly, to the detriment of his nominatives, and he knew personally those men whose swords were hewing the destiny of Peru, counting among his playmates some of their very sons.

Equal in significance to what this boy actually saw and experienced in the travail of his land are the contacts which he made, undoubtedly through his father and uncle, with those adventurers who wandered into Peru from other regions of the Indies, bringing with them prodigious stories of giants and pygmies, monsters, Amazonian women, gold, silver, pearls, and far-away realms without limit. For among these tale bearers were men who had followed Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón and Hernando de Soto through the North American wilderness. Garcilaso names some of these men and we can be sure that in their number was the cavalier who later was to prove such a rich source of information at Las Posadas.

Don Sebastián appears to have veered with the wind in his loyalties, attaching himself usually to those forces which he felt were to his best advantage; but in the main his sympathies lay with the King's regents and he consequently was able to pass his riper years in comparative wealth, peace and power. Some time before he was to die, he was named Corregidor of Cuzco and while occupying this position was able to ennoble himself with a number of beneficent acts. Meanwhile, however, his domestic affairs had shifted, for when new laws for the Indies made it necessary for him to seek a more conventional union, he married Doña Luisa Martel de los Ríos, a creole from Panama, and Chimpa Ocllo became the legitimate bride of Juan del Pedroche, a merchant of sorts, whom her son never saw fit to mention.

With the death of his father in 1559 Garcilaso began to make plans to sail for Spain. Some say that his decision had been instigated by Don Sebastián himself, who had provided for the journey in his will; and others have suggested that it was an idea of Philip II who was beginning to fear the rising influence of this young mestizo among the Children of the Sun. Be that as it may, Garcilaso

no doubt felt a natural yearning to witness the splendors of the Spanish court; and the very modest circumstances in which he now found himself moved him to seek substantial recognition for his father's services to the Crown. And so it was that in 1560, when scarcely twenty years of age, he gave his mother the annuities from a farm in exchange for a few pesos of gold and set out for Europe, going first to Lisbon and Seville, and then to Estremadura, the land of his father's people.

Don Sebastián had left influential friends and relatives in Spain who could come to the aid of his mestizo son. A brother, Alonso de Vargas y Figueroa, from whom Garcilaso later was to inherit comfortable annuities, had fought at the side of Charles V throughout Europe and on to the shores of Africa; and the head of his mother's family, the Duke of Feria, had been of sufficient importance to accompany Philip II to England, where he, like the King, obtained an English bride. And of those who came to his aid, Garcilaso makes particular mention of Alonso Fernández de Córdoba y Figueroa, Marquis of Priego, and Francisco de Córdoba, son of the Count of Alcaudete. One is not surprised therefore to find him at Madrid in 1561 preparing to lay his petition before the King and his Council. But the spectacle of a mestizo at court must have been novel and the outcome of his mission does not lead us to believe that he was received with warm sympathy. Here, we are told, he fell in with Hernando Pizarro and Bartolomé de las Casas, but by this time Pizarro was old and an object of pity, and Las Casas, on learning that Garcilaso was not a Mexican, treated him with coolness. Furthermore, the petition to the Council of the Indies, though at first favored, was, after several years, denied, the councilors having been apprised of certain discrepancies in Don Sebastián's loyalties at the battle of Huarina. Garcilaso's disappointment was no doubt keen, for soon after we find him contemplating a return to Peru.

And now there was to come a short interlude in the life of the Inca which is partially shrouded in mystery and which marks his

last efforts to share in the affairs of the Crown. He entered the army. It may be that he was attempting to strengthen his case with the Council, or that he was simply seeking a livelihood in an activity which had occupied the attention of many of his forebears and which was considered requisite to the education of a man of station. And apropos of the latter, it is interesting to note that during this interlude he possibly passed some time in Italy, that "Utopia of irregularity," whose culture was to impregnate the cultures of France, England and Spain. Here he could have acquired the knowledge of Tuscan needed to translate León Hebreo, and here he could have developed his taste for the *novellieri* and other forms of Italianism which show a marked influence upon his literary style. Be that as it may, he was again in Spain in 1568, for when the Moriscos of Alpujarras were forced into rebellion by the obstinacy of the King, Garcilaso took part in their subjugation, assuming two commands under Philip II and two under his brother, Don Juan of Austria. Thus this half-Indian descendant of the famed Garcí Lasso found himself, like his progenitor, fighting the Moors in the vicinity of Granada, and one wonders if it were not here that he resolved to be known as the Inca of the Vega.

Garcilaso had served the King well, but he was to realize even more acutely that merit did not always receive its just reward in the high councils of Spain. At one point in his *Comentarios* he declares that because of the old reproach against his father he was unable to obtain satisfactory recognition for his own military service and as a result left the army so naked and impoverished that he dared not appear again at Court. Even lands of his mother which had escheated to the Crown were beyond recovery. His experience during the past few years had brought disillusionment and resignation, and when urged by friends to present another petition to the Council under more auspicious circumstances, he declined to make the effort. The extent to which he felt his failure is to be detected in several subtle barbs in *The Florida* which he obviously is directing at Philip II and the Council of the Indies; and of some interest in

this connection is the fact that whereas the first production of his pen carries dedications to the King, his later writings are directed either to Portuguese princes or to the Queen of Heaven.

During his first decade in Spain, the Inca had spent some time in Seville perfecting his Latin with Pedro Sánchez de Herrera and arranging for the reburial of his father's remains in the old church of San Isidoro of that city. On leaving the army, however, he had retired to Cordova, where in 1671 he received news of the death of his mother. But he could have felt no impulse to remove the remains of this woman to Spain as he had done in the case of his father, for though Chimpa Ocllo as the years rolled by had adopted more and more the habits and the character of the Spaniard, even signing her will as Isabel Suárez, she was ever to her son a symbol of the vanishing glories of the Inca empire. Only through the adoption of the Christian Faith, he declares, had she made herself more noble than she already was as a daughter of the earliest monarchs of Peru. It takes but little reasoning, therefore, to understand Garcilaso's reluctance to discuss her marriage to a "son of nobody" in the Indies.

The retirement to Cordova was not accompanied by the penury and solitude which Garcilaso's words lead us to believe he was to experience, for he spoke figuratively and comparatively. This old Moorish stronghold was still the busy haunt of all types of men, and in addition to what he already possessed, Garcilaso was to inherit eventually from the estate of his father's brother, Alonso de Vargas, who resided at Montilla. There were to be some inconveniences in collecting annuities, particularly from the Marquis of Priego, who never permitted monetary problems to destroy a warm friendship, but Garcilaso in the meantime was able to ease his economic situation with stipends which he received as major-domo of the Hospital of the Immaculate Conception. Nevertheless the retirement to Cordova did mark his retreat from the world and his entrance into the life of the scholar and religious. For here he began to devote much time to pious duties, forming fast friendships with the Jesuits as well as various other ecclesiastics, and eventually

assuming the austere habit of the cleric. And here also he began to apply himself more and more to his literary activities, writing feverishly, in what he thought was a race with death, in order to bring to a conclusion his monumental record of the accomplishments of Spaniards, Indians, mestizos, and creoles in the Indies. And when several years before his death, he completed the final lines of the last thing he was to write, he closed this work significantly with an "Amen, Jesus, a hundred thousand times, Jesus."

Possibly the literary production for which Garcilaso is best known is the book which he concluded last; i.e., the *Comentarios Reales,* the second part of which is usually referred to as the *Historia General del Perú.* In its two parts, this book treats of the history of Peru from the origin of the Inca empire through the conquest and subjugation of that kingdom by the Spaniards. Garcilaso's initial literary essay, however, was a work of a different nature, a translation from the Tuscan of *The Dialogues of Love* by Judas Abrabanel, who used the pseudonym of León Hebreo. This romantic discourse on a popular subject had been several times translated by Spaniards, and was of sufficient importance to bring the condemnation of the Holy Office as well as the mockery of Cervantes. The only additional work, other than *The Florida,* which Garcilaso is known to have written is the *Relación de la Descendencia de Garci Pérez de Vargas,* an account, as is manifest, of one branch of his father's distinguished family.

In the year 1616, on the twenty-second day of April, the same month which had witnessed his birth, the author of *The Florida* made his confessions and departed this life. His body was laid within the great cathedral at Cordova, in the Chapel of the Souls of Purgatory, which he some time previously had purchased and prepared for his sepulchre. In his last testament he had provided funds for the upkeep of the chapel, and, among other things, annuities for one Diego de Vargas, a man who came eventually to serve as its sacristan. It is of some significance that Garcilaso throughout his life apparently made no effort to acknowledge the

true identity of this man, because he too, though the natural son of a serving girl at Montilla, bore in his veins the blood of high lords of Spain as well as that of ancient Peruvian potentates. For records of the ecclesiastical *Cabildo* at Cordova have revealed that Diego de Vargas was the Inca's own son.

Washington Irving, in his *Knickerbocker History of New York* has humorously accused the romantic historians of feeling that they can color both characters and events to suit their fancy so long as they do not tamper with certain incontrovertible facts. And this tendency, although not always intentional, is especially evident in *The Florida* since it is a history which has been twice processed, first by the narrator and then by the scribe. For Silvestre was glancing nostalgically back over the years, and Garcilaso, in spite of his insistence that his role was no more than that of an amanuensis, was tinting the picture with his personality, his erudition, and a well-defined literary style. Therefore, in searching for the truth of history in *The Florida,* we should be mindful of the character of all sources, and we especially should not lose sight of certain obvious facts concerning the man who gave this story its final form. First, his excessive pride in the two races which contributed to his being, made him overzealous about depicting both the Spaniard and the Indian in a splendid and equally valiant light. Second, he wrote with a burning purpose. As yet the vast wilderness of North America remained uncolonized and un-Christianized, and he sought to persuade Spain that it was her duty, as the one Catholic nation uncontaminated by the heresies of Luther, to bring the true Faith to the pagans of Florida and while doing so to enrich her domains with some of the most extensive and productive lands in the Indies. Third, though at times chiding explorers and conquerors for their omissions and procrastinations, he felt a genuine urge to sing the glory of their deeds, often in such a way as to disclose that the merits of these men exceeded the recognition they received from the Crown. And finally, Garcilaso, as an historian, was a product

of the thought and the literature of the Spanish Renaissance. His was an age when fact was likely to be confused with fiction and serious chroniclers were prone to give credence to the marvelous. Moreover, cavaliers were well-versed in the chivalric cycles and frequently sought to imitate in reality the role of some legendary hero. Hence a correct picture of these adventurers sometimes required that they be presented in a gilded frame.

A rather trustworthy key to the sources of Garcilaso's erudition and literary style is to be found in an inventory of the books with which he surrounded himself at Cordova. Here among Bibles, breviaries, holy treatises, moral reflections and all the necessary equipment for a man of piety, one may see long lists of Greek and Roman classics, the poetry and prose of the Italian Renaissance, philosophies, histories both ancient and modern, including the works of outstanding figures on the Indies, contemporary Spanish writers, books on equitation and military science, and many other titles which one would expect to find in the library of a sixteenth-century scholar. We do not have to look far to discover patterns and sources for Garcilaso's Byzantine and Italianesque scenes, the classical speeches and harangues of his Indians, his historical references, and the many maxims and proverbs, which, when touched with the art of the mestizo, add such charm to his book. But strangely and disappointingly, this library seems not to have yielded a single tome of Miguel de Cervantes, and though rich in the names of the Italian *novellieri* and even possessed of a manual of chivalry, it apparently was barren of the *libros de caballería.* Furthermore, with the possible exception of the fact that *The Florida* abounds in such incidents as Cervantes was burlesquing and the additional fact that Garcilaso a number of times would appear to be depicting chivalric scenes with his tongue in his cheek, we can find no trace of his having known this man who, in the same year that *The Florida* was published, was to administer the *coup de grâce* to the books of chivalry. On the other hand, we do know that at an early age Garcilaso had been exposed to these so-called "lying histories"; for not only does

he tell us so, somewhat penitently, but he records that his godfather at confirmation was none other than Diego de Silva, son of Feliciano de Silva, whose *Don Florisel de Niquea* was to equal the *Amadís de Gaula* in its power to stimulate chivalric tastes.

Because of the presence of so much of the romantic in Garcilaso's account, many historians, while admitting its essentiality to a study of De Soto's expedition, have been careful to warn readers to regard it with suspicion, admonishing them to beware of the poetic passages and probe deep for the truth—an admonition which it of course is wise to heed even in the case of many better known and more generally recognized historical classics. And it would appear that this suspicion has blinded some to the true worth of *The Florida.* For while adhering in general to what others have reported of geography and events, it reflects, in its very romanticism, the true heart and soul of those cavaliers who in imitation of Amadís, Palmerín, or Roland set forth to brave unknown perils and explore mystic and pagan lands. Thus in *The Florida,* which represents the most lengthy of the early accounts of De Soto's expedition, we find not only innumerable trustworthy details of a vast area of what is now the United States, but in addition a most accurate picture of the spirit and temper of the age which witnessed the discovery of these lands. Moreover, laying aside its value as a chronicle, we still may see in its pages a splendid specimen of sixteenth-century literary art. And so it is that this first truly American work, along with the well-known *Comentarios Reales,* has won for Garcilaso the distinction of being the first American to attain pre-eminence in literature.