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Frontispiece to The Open Court.
I. LEIF ERIKSON OF THE SAGAS
BY CORNELIA STEKETEE HULST

Note: The main points in this study of Leif Erikson are as dictated by The Honorable Rasmus B. Anderson, L.L.D., and he has approved whatever additions have been made to his material, so this may stand as his final word on the subject. But for his eighty-three years and his many other activities he might even have undertaken the writing. His unified view of this subject and its ramifications makes his contribution of great value for future historians working in this field as well as for the general reader, as, also, does his great sum of knowledge, accumulated during the many years during which he has followed the subject closely. In the Sixties and early Seventies of the past Century he was lecturing on Leif Erikson and was able to enlist such men as Ole Bull and Longfellow for him, so giving the Norse Discoverer much of the strong emotional appeal that he has in America. From those days, when Dr. Anderson visited Norway twice with Ole Bull and as his guest, through the twenty-five years of his service as Professor of Scandinavian Language and Literature in the University of Wisconsin and the four years of his service of the United States as Minister to Denmark, he has known, often personally, the Scandinavian scholars who have written on Leif Erikson whose theories appear in this paper.

C. S. H.

WHEN Leif Erikson sailed his viking ship into the West and landed in America, in the year 1000, he regarded his discovery of this new land as an incident, for he was on a journey to Greenland to visit his father and his brothers and to execute a commission, or, to be exact, a Mission, entrusted to him by King Olaf Trigvason of Norway, the same King Olaf whom Longfellow’s Saga shows building the Long Serpent and converting his Berserks to Christianity by a masterful threat with his sword:

Then King Olaf raised the hilt
Of iron, cross-shaped and gilt,
And said, “Do not refuse;
Count well the gain and the loss,
Thor’s hammer or Christ’s Cross:
Choose!”
The important Mission which Leif Erikson was executing for King Olaf in the year 1000 was nothing less than the conversion of the people in Greenland to Christianity, and, like King Olaf, he had become a very ardent Christian; in fact, these two were united by bonds closer than those of blood, for Leif Erikson was King Olaf's son in the new faith—it was the King who had converted him and led him to the font where he received baptism.

And no person could have appreciated better than King Olaf the value that this young convert of his might be to the Christian cause, for Leif Erikson was an Icelander and sailed with his own company of shipmates in his own ship. He was, moreover, the son of that super-Icelander, Erik the Red, who had planted the successful colony in Greenland in 984 and was still living there in Brattelid, the homestead he had built. At that time, Iceland and Greenland were both republics, politically, peopled by those independent families who had been too high in spirit to submit to the kings when they established their rule in Norway. They had emigrated instead. That was in 874. And now King Olaf was doubtless hoping that they could be won back, religiously, to a brotherhood within the Christian fold.

It is easily seen that when Leif Erikson accepted King Olaf's Mission he was placing himself in a very delicate and difficult position, doubly difficult because the people he undertook to convert were politically at variance with Norway and harbored an old resentment against her, and again doubly difficult because among those to be converted were his own father and his own brothers, his brothers named both in honor of Thor, Thorvald and Thorstein, and his father a devoted worshipper of Thor as his choice of those names for his sons proclaims.

If this bold and independent Erik the Red had been one of the King's guests at his Yuletide Festival when he forced his Berserks to that choice between the hammer and the cross, it is more than likely that Erik would not have chosen the cross at the end of the King's sword, but its biting blade, instead. . . but it is likely, too, that if this bold and independent Erik had been among the guests at his board King Olaf would not have adopted so drastic a policy to convert him as the threat with the sword. He was wisely politic now in entrusting this Mission to the old hero's son, for the son would not use threats with his father, but would approach the old
hero in affection and reverence, and with a rich and most acceptable gift in his hand.

What gift? and why so acceptable? The gift of information on the important question which had remained unanswered since 986, when Bjarne Herjulfson, one of Erik’s friends, had been driven far out of his course toward the south and west and had sighted a heavily wooded coast, but did not land. Greenland produced no timber, and in that land in the West might be a source of supply as well as an advantageous site for a new colony, warmer in climate, too. We shall see that after Leif Erikson discovered Vinland, his two brothers, in succession, both tried to go there.

Since Leif Erikson’s purpose in this voyage to Greenland and Vinland was not merely adventure, discovery, and colonization, admirable as that would have been, but the fulfillment of a Christian Mission, he must be given rank among the great missionaries and the missionary saints of the early Church who carried their faith into foreign lands, as well as among the foremost navigators and discoverers.

It was a highly dramatic moment when at last Leif Erikson stood facing his father, Erik the Red, among the men of the Greenland Colony, a moment fraught with great consequence and historic significance. When he had accepted the new faith in Norway, his shipmates had all accepted it, too, and now he was to be almost completely successful among the men of Greenland. The Heimskringla Saga tells only the detail that he had with him a priest and other teachers, and the occasion must have been very much like that which is told of in England, when the missionaries from Rome arrived there carrying the Cross to the Northumbrian king. When the Christian story had been told to them, a Northumbrian chieftain pledged for the acceptance of the new faith before the King:

“You remember, it may be, O King, that which happens sometimes in winter when you are seated at table with your earls and thanes. Your fire is lighted and your hall is warmed, and without is rain and snow and storm. Then comes a swallow flying across the hall; he enters by one door and leaves by another. The brief moment when he is within is pleasant to him: he feels not rain nor cheerless winter weather; but the moment is brief—the bird flies away in the twinkling of an eye, and he passes from winter to winter. Such, methinks, is the life of man on earth, compared with the uncertain time beyond. It appears for
awhile, but what is the time which comes after? . . . the time which was before? We know not. If, then, this new doctrine may teach us somewhat of greater certainty, it were well we should regard it."

The Northumbrian King and his followers accepted the new faith, and perhaps Erik the Red himself was almost persuaded to be a Christian; perhaps he even advanced to the font to receive baptism, as a Frisian king had done, but asked as he stood there, as the Frisian king had asked, where, according to this new doctrine, his own forefathers would be in that other world. Perhaps he decided then, as that Frisian king had decided, to continue to live his life to the end so that he might be with them, for he told the men of Greenland finally that he would not forsake Odin and Thor now that he was old, because they had been his gods since he was a child and had been good to him. A very loyal old man, and an epic hero worthy of epic sons, such as his sons were. Apart from Erik, all accepted the Christian faith, and clad in white robes they received baptism at the hands of the priest who had come to Greenland with Leif.

By sailing to the south and west of Greenland, Leif Erikson, the Lucky, as he was called, came to that richly wooded shore which he expected to find because Bjarne Herjulfson had sighted it, and he named it Vinland because he found many wild grapes growing there. It was too late in the season for him to reach Greenland again before the winter set in, and he wanted to take timber back with him, so he built a house large enough to shelter his party of thirty-six men and remained there through the winter. In the spring they set sail with that rich and acceptable gift of Vinland in their hands, a far richer gift than they could have had any conception of. On the way, some people who had been shipwrecked were found afloat in their small boat, and Leif Erikson rescued them and took them with him to Brattelid. The man, Thorer, who had been in command of the wrecked ship, and his wife, Gudrid, thereafter lived at Brattelid, while their ship-companions lived apart with Leif’s men.

“Now Leif was very well off, both as to riches and honor,” says the Flatey Bok, which tells his story—the timber he brought from Vinland must have been rated at a high price, as well as the wine from the grapes. And facts and incidents are told in the saga which show that Leif was a man and a hero after the world’s own heart:
"Leif was a very tall man, and vigorous, a wise man, and a very moderate man in every regard."

He had had the power of making friends, and friends in high places; King Olaf had thought a great deal of him; and had cordially entertained him a whole winter, with all of his men:

"Was Leif with the King all the winter well treated." His men thought highly of him, too, and followed him in the new faith as across the unknown seas:

"Was he then christened and all his shipmates, too." His father loved him, for he was a very kind son:

"Leif begged his father, Erik, if he would a leader be in the expedition. Erik excused himself, said he was too old in age and said he could not endure the troubles of the sea as before. Leif said he might yet with best luck rule them, the kinsmen, and then Erik yielded to Leif and rode from home, when they were ready and there was not far to go to the ship. The horse stumbled which Erik rode, and fell he off from its back and hurt his foot. Then quoth Erik: not for me is fated to find more lands than this where now we dwell, we now no longer may follow together. Went Erik home to Brattelid, and Leif went to the ship, three tens and a half men."

It had been Leif's plan, then, to remove his father and his brothers to the wooded lands farther south and to build a new colony and homestead there, with them all still under his father's rule. An affectionate and dutiful son, and so persuasive that his father actually made the attempt.

Another incident shows Leif Erikson equally kind and affectionate to his old foster-father, a ridiculous Thersites in appearance, with a large forehead and restless eyes, small freckles on his face, a low stature, unseemly, and in the habit of making wry faces, but dear to Leif in spite of all this,

"because Tyrker had been long with his father and himself and loved much Leif in his childhood."

When this old fosterfather strayed away from the rest of Leif's party and was lost in the woods in Vinland, Leif was very much troubled and blamed his men severely for letting it happen. At once he set out with twelve of his men to hunt for Tyrker, and when Tyrker they found Leif did not rebuke him but received him well
and said to him kindly, "Where wert thou so late, fosterfather mine?"

Epic adventure ran in the veins of Leif Erikson’s brothers as in his father’s and his own, and Thorvald Erikson now, in the spring of 1002, took up the plan of exploring Vinland, while Leif Erikson remained in Greenland. Thorvald reached Vinland and lived there in Leif’s house, but the natives became hostile and he was wounded to the death by an arrow from their bows. He directed his men to make his grave on a headland and to place crosses at his head and his feet to mark the spot, and this they did, returning afterward to Greenland. So far as is known, Thorvald Erikson is the first Christian man whose ashes were mingled with the American soil. That winter, Erik the Red had died, and Leif Erikson was now the head of the family. That winter, also, Thorer, died, and his wife, Gudrid, was now a widow in Brattelid.

In the year 1004, Thorstein, the third of Erik’s sons, set sail for Vinland in the same good ship that Leif and Thorvald had used, but he did not reach his goal. He was obliged to turn back and died before he reached Brattelid. Again, a tragic death in this family of heroes, and deepened in its pathos by the fact that Gudrid, the widow of Thorer, whom Thorstein had taken as his wife, had undertaken this voyage with Thorstein, a very brave and gifted woman of whom much more will be heard later.

Then, in the year 1006, Thorfinn Karlsefne came to Greenland and visited Brattelid, a man of great wealth who sailed his own ship from Norway. "Soon he fell in love with Gudrid, and wooed her," says the Saga, and at Yuletide Gudrid and Thorfinn Karlsefne were married. Both Gudrid and all others now urged upon Karlsefne that he plant the colony in Vinland, and Leif Erikson lent him the use of his houses there. With three ships, one hundred and sixty-one men, and five women, they set sail in the spring of 1007, taking all sorts of chattels, including cattle; and they landed safely. They lived there for three years, and lived well, for

"they profitted by all the products of the land, that there were, both of grapes and deer and fish and all good things. . . ." "a whale was driven up there, both large and good. . . ." "were then not short of food."

Thorfinn Karlsefne felled trees and hewed them for a ship after he had dried the wood on the rocks. They gave the natives a con-
temptuous name, Skralings, meaning chips, because they were not so tall as the Norsemen; and they began to trade with them. The natives offered all kinds of skins, including grey fur and sable, and they wanted to exchange these for weapons, but Karlsefne was afraid to trust them with weapons and offered them milk instead, which they liked so well that thereafter they wanted milk and nothing else. Later the natives became hostile, and after three years the settlers had to abandon the colony, setting sail for Norway. Such a handful of men as they were could not hope to stand successfully against so many, with only such weapons as they had. If they had had firearms they could have done so.

It may be that their strongest reason for leaving Vinland was that a baby had arrived in their camp, a boy, born the year after Thorfinn and Gudrid landed, and far too precious a person to be risked amid tomahawks and arrows. So they sailed away with their little son, when they had named Snorre, the first white child born on this continent, so far as is known. And if they had not done so, it is very likely that one of the world's greatest artists would never have been known, the sculptor Bertel Thorwaldson, for this great man traced his ancestry to Snorre Thorfinnson, born in Vinland, the son of Thorfinn Karlsefne and Gudrid, as has been shown.

In 1010 Thorfinn Karlsefne and Gudrid sailed to Norway, where, the Flatey Bok tells, "they enjoyed good friendship, both Thorfinn and his wife, from the most distinguished men in Norway." The Flatey Bok tells that from abroad a stranger came to visit them, "a southerner, a native of Bremen in Saxonland," who arrived the year after they left Vinland, in 1011. This man was so much interested in Thorfinn Karlsefne's ship that he offered to buy the beakhead of it. Thorfinn did not want to sell it, but he finally sold it when the man from Bremen offered him half a Mark of gold for it. "Karlsefne knew not what wood it was, but it was Mazur, come from Vinland," says the Saga, and of course this "mazur" must have been bird's-eye maple, a wood native to America and not produced in Europe.

Bremen was an important city at that time, a seaport, and the seat of an Archbishopric; and it evidently had adventurous and rich citizens, at least one interested enough to make a long Northern journey and pay a high price to a traveller who had returned from the West, with a beautiful new kind of wood. This incident is evidence, too, that important navigators from Bremen now knew about
the Northmen's discoveries in Vinland, having received their information directly from Thorfinn Karlsefne and Gudrid themselves, only ten years after Leif Erikson left Vinland. A great deal of interest must have been aroused in Bremen on this navigator's return with Karlsefne's beakhead, not only by the mazur wood that he exhibited and the accounts of Thorfinn Karlsefne's three years in Vinland, but by accounts of Leif Erikson's Mission and his discovery of Vinland. The men of Bremen, also, were daring sailors, and why should they not begin to make voyages to secure this new kind of timber, and furs? Perhaps they did; and there is some reason to think that they did. It is certain that the churchmen of Bremen became eager to help in the work of Christianizing the West and the North, for the Archbishop of Bremen-Hamburg consecrated men to the work, and in 1059 a Bishop Jon of Iceland, one whom Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen-Hamburg had consecrated, fell as a martyr in Vinland beneath the arrows of the natives whom he was trying to convert. By that time, then, Vinland was known south of the Baltic, and in Rome.

II. LEIF ERIKSON AND COLUMBUS

Thorfinn Karlsefne and Gudrid, who left Vinland in 1010, seem to have been the last of Leif Erikson's own associates who tried to colonize Vinland, but many other voyages were made there and continued to be made for centuries to obtain supplies of timber; in fact, they may have continued up to the time when Columbus began his study of the facts which pointed to the existence of lands in the West.

The last of these voyages to Vinland that is recorded occurred in 1347. Until that date, Greenland had continued to develop steadily, she had many communities large enough to support priests of their own, and before the end of the 11th Century these were so numerous and so important that Greenland was made into an independent Bishopric, a fact which, alone, proves that it was considered at the Vatican. The Sagas mention seventeen Bishops of Greenland in succession, and one of these, Bishop Erik Upse, made a personal visit to Vinland, presumably at the direction of his superiors. Copies of his instructions and his report may possibly still be found among the documents in Rome.

At any rate, it is certain that Vinland was known at the Vatican,
and Columbus could have obtained information there in his investigations. The disappearance of Greenland from History has usually been ascribed to the Black Death, which nearly or quite depopulated whole sections of the North of Europe, but a letter has been found, dated 1488 and signed by Pope Nicholas V, which throws new light on the subject. This letter authorized sympathetic provision for the few poverty-stricken people of Greenland who had returned to their ruined homes after a "captivity" to which "the barbarians" had subjected them thirty years before. "The barbarians" had gathered "on the neighboring shores of the pagans," had crossed to Greenland with a fleet, had "devastated the land with fire and sword," had destroyed the cathedral and carried away all survivors as slaves. "Fire and sword" were the conventional Roman expressions, it is to be supposed, but the "sword" was really tomahawks and arrows. This, then, was the fate of the people of Greenland; and this letter from the Vatican was written only twenty-nine years before Columbus made his voyage of investigation to Iceland, only forty-four years before he sailed on his own voyage of discovery to America.

The question rises whether Columbus knew of the discovery of Vinland by Leif Erikson and whether, therefore, his own discoveries are to be credited in any measure to his great predecessor. There is considerable proof that he did know:

(1) Gudrid, the sister-in-law of Leif Erikson, made a pilgrimage to Rome after the death of Thorfinn Karlsefne left her again a widow and well along in years.

A Saga records that Gudrid was greatly admired in Rome for her intelligence and her curtesie, this last word being foreign to her native language, a southern word to describe the courtly manners of Southern Europe, where Feudalism and Chivalry had been introduced; and we may conclude from the use of this word "curtesie" that Gudrid adopted the manners of the South when she was there, did in Rome as the Romans did, and did it charmingly. The fact that the Saga records these things of her is a sufficient proof that Gudrid was regarded as a notable person and had won name and fame for herself.

To win this wide renown for intelligence, Gudrid had only to tell the story of the lands that she had seen and the people she had known, remaining strictly true. And what stories she could tell,
right out of the life, new, varied, ultra-romantic, and stranger far than fiction! Stories vivid, in the first person, with members of her own family as the heroes, and heroes in no merely literary sense of the word. Odysseys of shipwreck, of adventure and discovery, seas uncharted, lands hitherto unknown, perils as deadly as the worst that the adventurous Greek had survived in the Southern Seas only by the protection of Wisdom, his god! Iceland, Greenland, whales like Behemoth, icebergs like mountains floating! and a breed of heroes who had sailed their ships far beyond the Pillars of Hercules, beyond the uttermost bounds of the West! Erik the Red, her own father-in-law, and the greater son of that great father, Leif Erikson, who had out-sailed Erik and had carried the Cross for King Olaf into the North. . . . she had been herself among the many in Greenland who put on the white robes to receive baptism. . . . And all had put on the white robes to receive baptism excepting the one, Father Erik, who had chosen to go to his grave in the faith of Odin and Thor. . . . But he was a hero! Then, the tragic death of young Thorvald, lying alone on that headland with the crosses at head and feet, slain by the Red Skins; then, the tragic voyage of Thorstein, in which she had taken a part, returning his widow; and the three years in Vinland with Thorfinn Karlsfjne, with the Red Skins on every hand!

In Gudrid's narratives those Red Skins were new to Europe, and to Rome, fascinating, as they have always been, eagle feathers, war paint, war dances, war whoops, scalp locks, tomahawks, bows and arrows—perfectly thrilling! Gudrid could out-Cooper Cooper in thrills, for, after all, her stories were true and needed no dressing of fiction. Her hearers may have doubted much that she told, for the stories of the pilgrims had come to be proverbially dubious, but her manner in telling must have been very convincing, to judge by the term "intelligent" that the Sagaman used to describe her. If artfulness or artistry had been apparent, "intelligent" would not have been the word.

The facts that Gudrid told were of such extreme importance that they would cause much discussion and would be carried far from Rome, to the ends of Christendom, wherever navigators and churchmen and pilgrims went. That was an era of missionary effort, of Crusades and consequent extending travel, and such stories would naturally be repeated, repeated for years, even for centuries.
In a traditional form, a navigator like Columbus would hear them, for his was a profession that can use just such information as Gudrid gave—historians have come to realize that tradition is often the means of conveying valuable historical fact. Tradition may have served well, through Gudrid, in Leif Erikson’s case.

(2) However, the facts that Gudrid told were preserved in a better form than tradition, in the written work by Adam of Bremen, *The History of the Propagation of Christianity in the North of Europe*, which recorded the facts about King Olaf, Leif Erikson’s Mission, and Vinland in the West. This great scholar, a Canon and Magister Scholarum, held the highest position among scholars in the Archbishopric of Bremen-Hamburg. He died in 1076 and was, thus, a contemporary of Gudrid’s. He certainly knew about the important events in Greenland and Vinland that she had taken a part in and he may have met her personally when she was a distinguished and wealthy widow making her pious journey to Rome, intending to build a Convent when she returned and dedicate the remaining years of her life there to religion. She undertook this pilgrimage to Rome when her son, born in Vinland in 1008, had married and taken his father’s place in the management of his estate, probably about 1030; and even before that date the Archbishop of Bremen-Hamburg may have begun to christianize Vinland, for he must have known for years about Vinland through travellers like the man who visited Karlsefne and Gudrid and bought their mazur beakhead as well as through his own ecclesiastical sources—for the northern lands were all under his jurisdiction. It is most likely that Gudrid passed through Bremen on her way to Rome, for she belonged to that Archeepiscopate and she had the additional reason that she would meet there friends whom she had entertained in her own home and churchmen and navigators interested in her relation to Vinland and the Mission of Leif Erikson—it should never be forgotten that Gudrid was one of Leif Erikson’s converts and that she was fervid enough to go on this pilgrimage and to give herself to the religious life of the Convent. If she passed through Bremen on her way to Rome, particularly if she did so on her way home from Rome, where she had excited great interest in the New, Western Land, her influence with the Archbishop and with Adam of Bremen must have been considerable, stimulating the Archbishop to christianize Vinland and stimulating Adam of Bremen to write his History of
the Propagation of Christianity in the North of Europe, a continuation of the great work that he had long been writing, The History of the Archbishopric of Bremen-Hamburg from 778 to his own time. The History of the Mission to Greenland and the discovery of Vinland, both centering in Leif Erikson, would seem to him merely an extension of his earlier work. The facts of Leif Erikson's efforts could have come to him through various sources: first, through the navigator who had bought the mazur wood beakhead from Thorfinn Karlsefne, in 1011, also through passing travellers before and after that, probably also directly or indirectly through Gudrid on her pilgrimage, as well as through those who had heard her, or heard about her, in Rome, the returned pilgrims. Such were the usual sources of information in that day.

But it is not likely that so eminent a scholar as Adam of Bremen would consider such sources of information reliable and quotable. However distinguished and intelligent Gudrid herself might be, she was only a woman and a pilgrim, her information to be discounted and discredited unless confirmed by a higher authority. That higher authority and that confirmation, Adam of Bremen sought and found in Denmark by discussion with the most eminent men. He certainly adopted a policy which secured for his History the respect that he aimed to secure—and his policy was, to seek an audience, first, with the Danish King. Svend Estridson, that Danish King, was himself deeply interested in all kinds of knowledge, especially in History, so he received Adam of Bremen well and gave him introductions to the most reliable authorities in Denmark, from whom accurate accounts were obtained of the propagation of Christianity in the North of Europe. And these Adam of Bremen wrote in his book.

And he did not stop there. After he had presented the history of the propagation of Christianity in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Greenland, he added an Appendix on the geography of those lands; and when he had described Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Greenland, he added this statement about Vinland:

"Besides, there is another country far out in that Ocean, which has been frequently visited by the Northmen, and which they call Vinland because the grapes grow there wild, producing a very good wine, and grain grows there unsown."
His account ends with these emphatic words:

"These facts we have learned not from mythical conjecture, but from positive statements of the Danes."

Quoting the very best of the Danish authorities, Adam of Bremen agreed, thus, with the accounts preserved in the Sagas of Iceland: and his History establishes the additional fact that men of the greatest eminence, kings, archbishops, scholars, as well as navigators, were keenly interested and well informed in his day on missions, colonies, exploration, discoveries, and geography, and that this century of Leif Erikson was teeming with such activities. Adam of Bremen's work has always been regarded as standard, and numerous transcriptions were made of it, so it was known throughout Europe though published before the art of printing with type was discovered. Columbus, who was widely read on all that pertained to navigation and geography, could not have missed seeing it.

(3) The next link in the chain of evidence that Columbus knew of Leif Erikson and his discovery of Vinland is the account by Columbus himself of the voyage he made to Iceland in the winter of 1477. This was published in the biography of Columbus written by his own son and published in Genoa in 1521—this son had always been in close contact with Columbus and had accompanied him on many of his journeys. Of his father's voyage to Iceland, he says:

"In 1477 my father made a voyage to Iceland, and in regard to that voyage he wrote me the following letter: 'In February, 1477, I made a voyage from Bristol, in England, to Iceland. Iceland is an island about the size of Great Britain,' etc."

The letter describes correctly the climate, the tides, and other physical features of Iceland, and then the quotation is ended abruptly, with "etc.", a most tantalizing "etc." to the historian, for it covers just what the reader wants most to know, (1) what facts Columbus had learned that made him want to go to Iceland, and (2) what facts he learned in Iceland from the records, Sagas, and learned men there. To make that long, expensive, and uncomfortable journey at that time in the year, he must have had a strong motive. It was not usual for ships to enter the harbor of Iceland in the winter, for it is icebound, but that Columbus did make that journey and in that month is corroborated by a record in the annals
of Iceland, for 1477, that in February and March the harbor was ice-free, and that a ship entered the harbor that winter.

(4) Recent investigation has brought out another important fact about Columbus' visit to Iceland, which is, that the Bishop of Skalholt, Magnus Eiolfson, a bishop famed for his learning, was visiting the neighboring churches in Iceland when Columbus was there, and that he conversed with Columbus, in Latin. It is in the record that Columbus questioned Bishop Magnus "concerning the Western lands," and it can hardly be doubted that he obtained the information for which he came. It may have been merely by chance that Bishop Magnus was in Iceland just at that unusual time, but it is thought more probable that he had been apprised from Rome through ecclesiastical channels of Columbus' coming, and thus put himself in his way.

(5) In 1484, Columbus' theories were submitted to the learned monks at the Rabida Convent, and his son, who was with him, tells that they questioned him closely. When he spoke with the greatest assurance of the lands in the West, they asked him how he could be so sure, since he had not yet seen those lands, and he answered them,

"I base my assurance on three things:
(1) On the nature of things.
(2) On the reports of navigators.
(3) On the authority of learned writers.

Among the "learned writers," Adam of Bremen would stand high; and the "reports of navigators" would include the Annals and the Sagas of Iceland.

Too little credit has been given to Columbus for the patient and exhaustive study that he gave to ascertain the facts and verify information before he put his well-matured theories to the test. He was anything but an audacious gambler staking his Queen's jewels and his men's lives on a doubtful hazard. His estimate that he must sail 700 nautical leagues to reach the further shore of the Atlantic was proved correct, based on the distance to Vinland; and the only errors he made in his calculations concerning the size of the earth and what lands he would reach by sailing West, were inevitable, given only such data as he had been able to secure. The existence of the Pacific Ocean as a separate body of water was not known in his day.
That Columbus chose to sail far to the south of Vinland was in accordance with what he had learned about Vinland and the lands to the south of it; and it was wise of him to steer his course to the south because lands there would be nearer to the Latitude of Spain, warmer, and in the locality of India, as he supposed. It was not required of him to tell all he had learned about the northern lands and about Leif Erikson, particularly because that would have complicated the main question with irrelevant debates concerning lands in which he was not interested, and which had been abandoned probably, debates that would have deferred his own voyage indefinitely. In all of his dealings there seems to have been nothing to tarnish his honor, but everything to his credit. Like that of Leif Erikson, his aim seems to have been far higher than that of the adventurer, discoverer, or colonizer, for he foresaw, tradition tells, that the New World would be a Land of Promise, offering hope and opportunity to the oppressed and the poor of Europe. . . . Did the fact that Leif Erikson sailed with the Mission of King Olaf serve to strengthen the trust of Columbus in his own Vision of the Promised Land? One likes to think that it did.

Tried by exacting standards, both Leif Erikson and Columbus were very great men, and both are worthy to be honored as national heroes in America. In them, we of the internationally-constituted nation have a rare opportunity to unite with both Northern and Southern Europe in homage to their own heroes, who are our heroes as well. Both are celebrated in October, and it would be fit and fortunate to celebrate the two together, anything but fit and fortunate to disparage either of them through sectional or national bias or to make invidious comparisons between them. These great Discoverers are Bridges across the Atlantic, both now celebrated in Europe by the nations whence they came to us, most fitly to be celebrated on this Continent to which they opened the way, thus becoming a bond of union for the Future between the East of the Atlantic and the West of the Atlantic, between the North and the South, a bond of union that might prove stronger than treaties to bring Good Will.