



PENGUIN  CLASSICS

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies

**A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE
DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIES**

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY NIGEL GRIFFIN
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ANTHONY PAGDEN

PENGUIN BOOKS

Translation and notes © Nigel Griffin, 1992.

Introduction © Anthony Pagden, 1992.

Published by the Penguin Group, London & New York, 1992.

CONTENTS

Synopsis	3
Prologue	5
[Preface]	9
Hispaniola	14
The Kingdoms of Hispaniola	18
The Islands of Puerto Rico and Jamaica	26
Cuba	27
The Mainland	31
The Province of Nicaragua	37
New Spain	42
New Spain [continued]	45
The Province and Kingdom of Guatemala	57
New Spain, Pánuco and Jalisco	65
The Kingdom of Yucatán	71
The Province of Santa Marta	80
The Province of Cartagena	85
The Pearl Coast, Paria and Trinidad	86
The River Yuyapari	95
The Kingdom of Venezuela	96
The Mainland in the Region Known as Florida	102
The River Plate	105
The Great Kingdoms and Provinces of Peru	107
The Kingdom of New Granada	116
[Conclusion]	127

SYNOPSIS

Everything that has happened since the marvellous discovery of the Americas – from the short-lived initial attempts of the Spanish to settle there, right down to the present day – has been so extraordinary that the whole story remains quite incredible to anyone who has not experienced it at first hand. It seems, indeed, to overshadow all the deeds of famous men of the past, no matter how heroic, and to silence all talk of other wonders of the world. Prominent amid the aspects of this story which have caught the imagination are the massacres of innocent peoples, the atrocities committed against them and, among other horrific excesses, the ways in which towns, provinces, and whole kingdoms have been entirely cleared of their native inhabitants. Brother Bartolomé de Las Casas, or Casaus, came to the Spanish court after he entered the Order, to give our Lord, the Emperor, an eye-witness account of these enormities, not a whisper of which had at that time reached the ears of people here. He also related these same events to several people he met during his visit and they were deeply shocked by what he had to say and listened open-mouthed to his every word; they later begged him and pressed him to set down in writing a short account of some of them, and this he did. Some years later, he observed that not a few of the people involved in this story had become so anaesthetized to human suffering by their own greed and ambition that they had ceased to be men in any meaningful sense of the term and had become, by dint of their own wicked deeds, so totally degenerate and given over to a reprobate mind¹ that they could

not rest content with their past achievements in the realms of treachery and wickedness (when they honed to perfection the art of cruelty in order to wipe human beings from a large part of the globe), but were now pestering the Crown to grant them official authority and licence once again to commit their dreadful deeds, or even (if such a thing were conceivable) to devise yet worse atrocities. He therefore decided to present this summary of what he had written to His Royal Highness the Prince² to implore him to do everything in his power to persuade His Majesty to frustrate the plans of these men. It seemed to him a good idea to have the account printed to enable His Highness to read it more easily. This is the background to the following epitome, or Short Account.

PROLOGUE

*of Bishop Brother Bartolomé de Las Casas, or Casaus,
to the most high and most mighty Prince of Spain,
our Lord the Prince Philip*

Most high and most mighty Lord:

As Divine Providence has ordained that the world shall, for the benefit and proper government of the human race, be divided into kingdoms and peoples and that these shall be ruled by kings, who are (as Homer has it) fathers and shepherds to their people and are, accordingly, the noblest and most virtuous of beings, there is no doubt, nor could there in all reason be any such doubt, but that these kings entertain nothing save that which is morally unimpeachable. It follows that if the commonwealth suffers from some defect, or shortcoming, or evil, the reason can only be that the ruler is unaware of it; once the matter is brought to his notice, he will work with the utmost diligence to set matters right and will not rest content until the evil has been eradicated. This would appear to be the sense of the words of Solomon in the Bible: ‘A king that sitteth in the throne of judgement scattereth away all evil with his eyes’.³ For, granted the innate and natural virtue of the ruler, it follows that the simple knowledge that something is wrong in his kingdom is quite sufficient to ensure that he will see that it is corrected, for he will not tolerate any such evil for a moment longer than it takes him to right it.

Contemplating, therefore (most mighty Lord), as a man with more than fifty⁴ years' experience of seeing at first hand the evil and the harm, the losses and diminutions suffered by those great kingdoms, each so vast and so wonderful that it would be more appropriate to refer to them as the New World of the Americas—

kingdoms granted and entrusted by God and His Church to the Spanish Crown so that they might be properly ruled and governed, converted to the Faith, and tenderly nurtured to full material and spiritual prosperity⁵—I am persuaded that, if Your Highness had been informed of even a few of the excesses which this New World has witnessed, all of them surpassing anything that men hitherto have imagined even in their wildest dreams, Your Highness would not have delayed for even one moment before entreating His Majesty to prevent any repetition of the atrocities which go under the name of ‘conquests’: excesses which, if no move is made to stop them, will be committed time and again, and which (given that the indigenous peoples of the region are naturally so gentle, so peace-loving, so humble and so docile) are of themselves iniquitous, tyrannical, contrary to natural, canon, and civil law, and are deemed wicked and are condemned and proscribed by all such legal codes. I therefore concluded that it would constitute a criminal neglect of my duty to remain silent about the enormous loss of life as well as the infinite number of human souls despatched to Hell in the course of such ‘conquests’, and so resolved to publish an account of a few such outrages (and they can be only a few out of the countless number of such incidents that I could relate) in order to make that account the more accessible to Your Highness.

Thus it was that, when the then bishop of Cartagena and tutor to your Highness, the archbishop of Toledo,⁶ asked me for a copy of my Account, I duly gave him one and this he presented to Your Highness. But Your Highness has been fully occupied with journeys, by land and sea, as well as other pressing royal

business,⁷ and it may well be that Your Highness has never found the time to read the Account, or has perhaps allowed it to slip to the back of your mind. Meanwhile, the boldness and the unreason of those who count it as nothing to drench the Americas in human blood and to dispossess the people who are the natural masters and dwellers in those vast and marvellous kingdoms, killing a thousand million of them, and stealing treasures beyond compare, grow by the day, and, masquerading under false colours, they do everything within their power to obtain further licence to continue their conquests (licence that cannot be granted without infringing natural and divine law and thereby conniving at the gravest of mortal sins, worthy of the most terrible and everlasting punishment). I therefore determined to present Your Highness with this Short Account, which is but a brief digest of the many and various outrages and depredations which could and should be recorded. I implore Your Highness to accept it and to read it in that spirit of clemency and royal benevolence with which Your Highness traditionally approaches the works of those of Your Highness's subjects and servants whose only desire is to serve the public good and the interests of the Crown. It is my fervent hope that, once Your Highness perceives the extent of the injustices suffered by these innocent peoples and the way in which they are being destroyed and crushed underfoot, unjustly and for no other reason than to satisfy the greed and ambition of those whose purpose it is to commit such wicked atrocities, Your Highness will see fit to beg and entreat His Majesty to refuse all those who seek royal licence for such evil and detestable ventures, and to put a stop once and for all to their infernal clamour in such a way that nobody will henceforth dare to make such a request nor even to mention ventures of this kind.

This, Your Royal Highness, is a matter on which action is

both urgent and necessary if God is to continue to watch over the Crown of Castile and ensure its future well-being and prosperity, both spiritual and temporal. Amen.

[PREFACE]

The Americas were discovered in 1492, and the first Christian settlements established by the Spanish the following year. It is accordingly forty-nine years now since Spaniards began arriving in numbers in this part of the world.⁸ They first settled the large and fertile island of Hispaniola, which boasts six hundred leagues of coastline and is surrounded by a great many other large islands, all of them, as I saw for myself, with as high a native population as anywhere on earth.⁹ Of the coast of the mainland, which, at its nearest point, is a little over two hundred and fifty leagues from Hispaniola, more than ten thousand leagues had been explored by 1541, and more are being discovered every day. This coastline, too, was swarming with people and it would seem, if we are to judge by those areas so far explored, that the Almighty selected this part of the world as home to the greater part of the human race.

God made all the peoples of this area, many and varied as they are, as open and as innocent as can be imagined. The simplest people in the world – unassuming, long-suffering, unassertive, and submissive – they are without malice or guile, and are utterly faithful and obedient both to their own native lords and

to the Spaniards in whose service they now find themselves. Never quarrelsome or belligerent or boisterous, they harbour no grudges and do not seek to settle old scores; indeed, the notions of revenge, rancour, and hatred are quite foreign to them. At the same time, they are among the least robust of human beings: their delicate constitutions make them unable to withstand hard work or suffering and render them liable to succumb to almost any illness, no matter how mild. Even the common people are no tougher than princes or than other Europeans born with a silver spoon in their mouths and who spend their lives shielded from the rigours of the outside world. They are also among the poorest people on the face of the earth; they own next to nothing and have no urge to acquire material possessions. As a result they are neither ambitious nor greedy, and are totally uninterested in worldly power. Their diet is every bit as poor and as monotonous, in quantity and in kind, as that enjoyed by the Desert Fathers. Most of them go naked, save for a loincloth to cover their modesty; at best they may wrap themselves in a piece of cotton material a yard or two square. Most sleep on matting, although a few possess a kind of hanging net, known in the language of Hispaniola as a hammock.¹⁰ They are innocent and pure in mind and have a lively intelligence, all of which makes them particularly receptive to learning and understanding the truths of our Catholic faith and to being instructed in virtue; indeed, God has invested them with fewer impediments in this regard than any other people on earth. Once they begin to learn of the Christian faith they become so keen to know more, to receive the Sacraments, and to worship God, that the missionaries who instruct them do truly have to be men of exceptional patience and forbearance; and over the years I have time and again met Spanish laymen who have been so struck by the natural goodness that shines through these people that they

frequently can be heard to exclaim: ‘These would be the most blessed people on earth if only they were given the chance to convert to Christianity.’

It was upon these gentle lambs, imbued by the Creator with all the qualities we have mentioned, that from the very first day they clapped eyes on them the Spanish fell like ravening wolves upon the fold, or like tigers and savage lions who have not eaten meat for days. The pattern established at the outset has remained unchanged to this day, and the Spaniards still do nothing save tear the natives to shreds, murder them and inflict upon them untold misery, suffering and distress, tormenting, harrying and persecuting them mercilessly. We shall in due course describe some of the many ingenious methods of torture they have invented and refined for this purpose, but one can get some idea of the effectiveness of their methods from the figures alone. When the Spanish first journeyed there, the indigenous population of the island of Hispaniola stood at some three million; today only two hundred survive. The island of Cuba, which extends for a distance almost as great as that separating Valladolid from Rome, is now to all intents and purposes uninhabited;¹¹ and two other large, beautiful and fertile islands, Puerto Rico and Jamaica, have been similarly devastated. Not a living soul remains today on any of the islands of the Bahamas, which lie to the north of Hispaniola and Cuba, even though every single one of the sixty or so islands in the group, as well as those known as the Isles of Giants and others in the area, both large and small, is more fertile and more beautiful than the Royal Gardens in Seville and the climate is as healthy as anywhere on earth.¹² The native population, which once numbered some five hundred thousand, was wiped out by forcible expatriation to the island of Hispaniola, a policy adopted by the Spaniards in an endeavour

to make up losses among the indigenous population of that island. One God-fearing individual was moved to mount an expedition to seek out those who had escaped the Spanish trawl and were still living in the Bahamas and to save their souls by converting them to Christianity, but, by the end of a search lasting three whole years, they had found only the eleven survivors I saw with my own eyes.¹³ A further thirty or so islands in the region of Puerto Rico are also now uninhabited and left to go to rack and ruin as a direct result of the same practices. All these islands, which together must run to over two thousand leagues, are now abandoned and desolate.

On the mainland, we know for sure that our fellow-countrymen have, through their cruelty and wickedness, depopulated and laid waste an area which once boasted more than ten kingdoms, each of them larger in area than the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. The whole region, once teeming with human beings, is now deserted over a distance of more than two thousand leagues: a distance, that is, greater than the journey from Seville to Jerusalem and back again.

At a conservative estimate, the despotic and diabolical behaviour of the Christians has, over the last forty years, led to the unjust and totally unwarranted deaths of more than twelve million souls, women and children among them, and there are grounds for believing my own estimate of more than fifteen million to be nearer the mark.

There are two main ways in which those who have travelled to this part of the world pretending to be Christians have uprooted these pitiful peoples and wiped them from the face of the earth. First, they have waged war on them: unjust, cruel, bloody and tyrannical war. Second, they have murdered anyone and everyone who has shown the slightest sign of resistance, or even of wishing to escape the torment to which they have

subjected him. This latter policy has been instrumental in suppressing the native leaders, and, indeed, given that the Spaniards normally spare only women and children, it has led to the annihilation of all adult males, whom they habitually subject to the harshest and most iniquitous and brutal slavery that man has ever devised for his fellow-men, treating them, in fact, worse than animals. All the many and infinitely varied ways that have been devised for oppressing these peoples can be seen to flow from one or other of these two diabolical and tyrannical policies.

The reason the Christians have murdered on such a vast scale and killed anyone and everyone in their way is purely and simply greed. They have set out to line their pockets with gold and to amass private fortunes as quickly as possible so that they can then assume a status quite at odds with that into which they were born. Their insatiable greed and overweening ambition know no bounds; the land is fertile and rich, the inhabitants simple, forbearing and submissive. The Spaniards have shown not the slightest consideration for these people, treating them (and I speak from first-hand experience, having been there from the outset) not as brute animals – indeed, I would to God they had done and had shown them the consideration they afford their animals – so much as piles of dung in the middle of the road. They have had as little concern for their souls as for their bodies, all the millions that have perished having gone to their deaths with no knowledge of God and without the benefit of the Sacraments. One fact in all this is widely known and beyond dispute, for even the tyrannical murderers themselves acknowledge the truth of it: the indigenous peoples never did the Europeans any harm whatever; on the contrary, they believed them to have descended from the heavens, at least until they or their fellow-citizens had tasted, at the hands of these oppressors, a diet of robbery, murder, violence, and all other manner of trials and tribulations.

HISPANIOLA

As we have said, the island of Hispaniola was the first to witness the arrival of Europeans and the first to suffer the wholesale slaughter of its people and the devastation and depopulation of the land. It all began with the Europeans taking native women and children both as servants and to satisfy their own base appetites; then, not content with what the local people offered them of their own free will (and all offered as much as they could spare), they started taking for themselves the food the natives contrived to produce by the sweat of their brows, which was in all honesty little enough. Since what a European will consume in a single day normally supports three native households of ten persons each for a whole month, and since the newcomers began to subject the locals to other vexations, assaults, and iniquities, the people began to realize that these men could not, in truth, have descended from the heavens. Some of them started to conceal what food they had, others decided to send their women and children into hiding, and yet others took to the hills to get away from the brutal and ruthless cruelty that was being inflicted on them. The Christians punched them, boxed their ears and flogged them in order to track down the local leaders, and the whole shameful process came to a head when one of the European commanders raped the wife of the paramount chief of the entire island.¹⁴ It was then that the locals began to think up ways of driving the Europeans out of their lands and to take up arms against them. Their weapons, however, were flimsy and ineffective both in attack and in defence (and, indeed, war in the Americas is no more deadly than our jousting,

or than many European children's games) and, with their horses and swords and lances, the Spaniards easily fended them off, killing them and committing all kind of atrocities against them.

They forced their way into native settlements, slaughtering everyone they found there, including small children, old men, pregnant women, and even women who had just given birth. They hacked them to pieces, slicing open their bellies with their swords as though they were so many sheep herded into a pen. They even laid wagers on whether they could manage to slice a man in two at a stroke, or cut an individual's head from his body, or disembowel him with a single blow of their axes. They grabbed suckling infants by the feet and, ripping them from their mothers' breasts, dashed them headlong against the rocks. Others, laughing and joking all the while, threw them over their shoulders into a river, shouting: 'Wriggle, you little perisher.' They slaughtered anyone and everyone in their path, on occasion running through a mother and her baby with a single thrust of their swords. They spared no one, erecting especially wide gibbets on which they could string their victims up with their feet just off the ground and then burn them alive thirteen at a time, in honour of our Saviour and the twelve Apostles, or tie dry straw to their bodies and set fire to it. Some they chose to keep alive and simply cut their wrists, leaving their hands dangling, saying to them: 'Take this letter' – meaning that their sorry condition would act as a warning to those hiding in the hills. The way they normally dealt with the native leaders and nobles was to tie them to a kind of griddle consisting of sticks resting on pitchforks driven into the ground and then grill them over a slow fire, with the result that they howled in agony and despair as they died a lingering death.

It once happened that I myself witnessed their grilling of four or five local leaders in this fashion (and I believe they had set up two or three other pairs of grills alongside so that they might process other victims at the same time) when the poor creatures' howls came between the Spanish commander and his sleep.

He gave orders that the prisoners were to be throttled, but the man in charge of the execution detail, who was more bloodthirsty than the average common hangman (I know his identity and even met some relatives of his in Seville), was loath to cut short his private entertainment by throttling them and so he personally went round ramming wooden bungs into their mouths to stop them making such a racket and deliberately stoked the fire so that they would take just as long to die as he himself chose. I saw all these things for myself and many others besides. And, since all those who could do so took to the hills and mountains

in order to escape the clutches of these merciless and inhuman butchers, these mortal enemies of human kind trained hunting dogs to track them down – wild dogs who would savage a native to death as soon as look at him, tearing him to shreds and devouring his flesh as though he were a pig. These dogs wrought havoc among the natives and were responsible for much carnage. And when, as happened on the odd occasion, the locals did kill a European, as, given the enormity of the crimes committed against them, they were in all justice fully entitled to, the Spanish came to an unofficial agreement among themselves that for every European killed one hundred natives would be executed.

THE KINGDOMS OF HISPANIOLA

On Hispaniola there were five main kingdoms, each very extensive and each with its own king; most of the infinite number of local nobles paid allegiance to one or other of these five powerful leaders, although there were a few backwoodsmen who recognized no authority above and beyond their own. One of these kingdoms was called Maguá,¹⁵ with the stress on the last syllable, which means Kingdom of the Plain. This plain is one of the wonders of the world, extending, as it does, for some eighty leagues, right from the southern coast of the island to its northern shore. For the most part it is some five to eight leagues wide and as much as ten in places, and is confined by high mountains on either side. Over thirty thousand streams and rivers flow into it, a dozen of them every bit as big as the Ebro, Duero, and Guadalquivir,¹⁶ and those that come down from the mountains to the west (and there are twenty or twenty-five thousand of them) are rich in alluvial gold. Among those mountains lies the province of Cibao¹⁷ and its mines, famous throughout the region for their very high-quality gold. The king of Cibao was called Guarionex¹⁸ and he had as vassals several extremely powerful local leaders; one of them, for example, had sixteen thousand men under arms and these he placed at the

service of Guarionex. I met some of these men myself. The king himself was dutiful and virtuous, a man of placid temperament much devoted to the King and Queen of Spain. For a number of years, every householder throughout his realm made, on his orders, an annual gift of a hollow gourd completely filled with gold. The natives of Hispaniola know little of mining techniques and later, when there was less gold available, the king reduced this offering to half a gourd filled with gold. In order to put a stop to the Spaniards' incessant demands for gold, Guarionex suggested that he might better serve the King of Castile by putting a great area of his kingdom under cultivation, especially as his subjects had, as he himself quite correctly asserted, little or no notion of how to mine for gold. Such a plan was feasible, as I can vouch, and the king would have been quite happy to see it put into effect. The area involved would have stretched from Isabela, the site of the first European settlement on the island, as far as Santo Domingo, some fifty or more leagues distant, and it would easily have produced an annual income of over three million castilians¹⁹ and, had such a scheme been put into effect, it would have led to the establishment of fifty or more cities on the island, every one of them as large as Seville.²⁰

The wicked European commanders rewarded this good and great man by dishonouring him when one of their number²¹ took and raped his wife. To this the king could easily have reacted by biding his time and gathering an army to exact revenge, but he elected instead to abdicate and go into voluntary exile, alone, to an area called Ciguayos, where the powerful local leader was one of his vassals.²² Once the Europeans realized he had gone, there was no chance of keeping his whereabouts secret, and they got up an army and attacked the local leader under whose

protection the king was sheltering. The carnage was terrible and, eventually, they tracked down the fugitive, took him prisoner, put him in chains and shackles and bundled him on to a ship bound for Castile, only for him to perish, along with many Spaniards, when the ship was lost at sea.²³ A fortune in gold sank beneath the waves that day, among the cargo being the Great Nugget, as big as a loaf of bread²⁴ and weighing three thousand six hundred castilians. In this way, God passed judgement on the great iniquities committed by the Spanish.

Another of these original kingdoms occupied the northern end of the plain where the royal harbour is today. Known as Marién, it was a rich region, larger than Portugal, although a good deal more fertile and far better suited to human habitation, criss-crossed as it is by several mighty mountain ranges and seamed with productive gold and copper mines. The king of this area was called Guacanagarí, with the stress on the last syllable, and he numbered among his vassals many men of high standing, several of whom I knew personally. This was the first place where the old Admiral²⁵ who discovered the New World first landed and was received on that occasion by this Guacanagarí, as were all his crew, with the greatest kindness and humanity imaginable. As Columbus himself told me, it was there that the Admiral's own ship was lost²⁶ and he and his men were as graciously treated and looked after as if they had been back home and were all part of the same close family. Guacanagarí himself died up in the mountains, broken and destitute, after he had fled to escape the massacres and the cruelty inflicted by the Spaniards, and all the other local leaders who owed allegiance to Guacanagarí perished as a direct result of the despotism and

slavery to which they were subjected and which I shall in due course set out in detail.

The third of these kingdoms was the sovereign state of Maguana, another strikingly beautiful and fertile area and one which enjoyed the healthiest of climates. It is this area that nowadays produces the best sugar on the whole island. The king, Caonabó, who outdid all others in strength, majesty of bearing and court ceremonial, was captured by an underhand trick and taken from his own house. He was put on board one of the Spanish ships bound for Castile; but the Almighty determined not to allow this act of duplicity and injustice to pass unnoticed and, that night, sent a violent storm in which all six of the ships, still in harbour and on the very point of setting sail, sank with the loss of all hands. Caonabó, shackled and chained as he was, perished along with them.²⁷ He had three or four brothers, all of them as valorous and as brave as he was himself, and, when they saw how their brother and lord had unjustly been taken prisoner and learned of the devastation and the massacres the Europeans had set in train in other parts of the island, they took up arms, determined, all the more so when they got wind of their brother's death, to attack the Europeans and take revenge upon them. But the Christians, several of whom were on horseback (and the horse is the deadliest weapon imaginable against these people), attacked instead, slaughtering them to such effect that they destroyed and depopulated a good half of the kingdom.

The fourth kingdom was known as Xaraguá, and was really the heart and core of the whole island. In no other part of the island was the language as refined as here nor the court discourse as cultivated; nowhere else were the people of such quality and breeding, the leading families as numerous and as liberal – and this kingdom boasted many nobles and great lords – nor the inhabitants as handsome and easy on the eye. Chief among them

were the king, Behechio,²⁸ and his sister, Anacaona, both of whom rendered great service to the Spanish Crown and gave every assistance to the European settlers, on occasion even saving their lives; after Behechio's death, Anacaona ruled in his stead. Over three hundred local dignitaries were summoned to welcome the then governor of the island²⁹ when he paid a visit to the kingdom with sixty horse and a further three hundred men on foot (the horsemen alone were sufficient in number to ravage not only the whole island but the mainland as well). The governor duped the unsuspecting leaders of this welcoming party into gathering in a building made of straw and then ordered his men to set fire to it and burn them alive. All the others were massacred, either run through by lances or put to the sword. As a mark of respect and out of deference to her rank, Queen Anacaona was hanged. When one or two Spaniards tried to save some of the children, either because they genuinely pitied them or perhaps because they wanted them for themselves, and swung them up behind them on to their horses, one of their compatriots rode up behind and ran them through with his lance. Yet another member of the governor's party galloped about cutting the legs off all the children as they lay sprawling on the ground. The governor even decreed that those who made their way to a small island some eight leagues distant in order to escape this bestial cruelty should be condemned to slavery because they had fled the carnage.

The fifth kingdom was known as Higuey and its queen, a lady already advanced in years, went by the name of Higuana.³⁰

They strung her up and I saw with my own eyes how the Spaniards burned countless local inhabitants alive or hacked them to pieces, or devised novel ways of torturing them to death, enslaving those they took alive. Indeed, they invented so many new methods of murder that it would be quite impossible to set them all down on paper and, however hard one tried to chronicle them, one could probably never list a thousandth part of what actually took place. All I can say is that I know it to be an incontrovertible fact and do here so swear before Almighty God, that the local peoples never gave the Spanish any cause whatever for the injury and injustice that was done to them in these campaigns. On the contrary, they behaved as honourably as might the inmates of a well-run monastery, and for this they were robbed and massacred, and even those who escaped death on this occasion found themselves condemned to a lifetime of captivity and slavery. I would go further. It is my firm belief that not a single native of the island committed a capital offence, as defined in law, against the Spanish while all this time the natives themselves were being savaged and murdered. Despite the enormous provocation, very few of the natives, I hazard, were guilty of even those sins which do not lie within the ambit of human law but are properly the province of God, such as hatred and anger, or the thirst for revenge against those who committed such enormities upon them. It is my own experience of these peoples, gained over many years, that they are no more given to impetuous actions or to harbouring thoughts of retribution than are boys of ten or twelve years of age. I know beyond any shadow of a doubt that they had, from the very beginning, every right to wage war on the Europeans, while the Europeans never had just cause for waging war on the local peoples. The actions of the Europeans, throughout the New World, were without exception wicked and unjust: worse, in fact, than the blackest kind of tyranny.

After the fighting was over and all the men had been killed, the surviving natives – usually, that is, the young boys, the

women, and the children – were shared out between the victors. One got thirty, another forty, a third as many as a hundred or even twice that number; everything depended on how far one was in the good books of the despot who went by the title of governor. The pretext under which the victims were parcelled out in this way was that their new masters would then be in a position to teach them the truths of the Christian faith; and thus it came about that a host of cruel, grasping and wicked men, almost all of them pig-ignorant, were put in charge of these poor souls. And they discharged this duty by sending the men down the mines, where working conditions were appalling, to dig for gold, and putting the women to labour in the fields and on their master's estates, to till the soil and raise the crops, properly a task only for the toughest and strongest of men. Both women and men were given only wild grasses to eat and other unnutritious foodstuffs. The mothers of young children promptly saw their milk dry up and their babies die; and, with the women and the men separated and never seeing each other, no new children were born. The men died down the mines from overwork and starvation, and the same was true of the women who perished out on the estates. The islanders, previously so numerous, began to die out as would any nation subjected to such appalling treatment.³¹ For example, they were made to carry burdens of three and four arrobas³² for distances of up to a hundred or even two hundred leagues, and were forced to carry their Christian masters in hammocks, which are like nets slung from the shoulders of the bearers. In short, they were treated as
beasts of

burden and developed huge sores on their shoulders and backs as happens with animals made to carry excessive loads. And this is not to mention the floggings, beatings, thrashings, punches, curses and countless other vexations and cruelties to which they were routinely subjected and to which no chronicle could ever do justice nor any reader respond save with horror and disbelief.

It is of note that all these island territories began to go to the dogs once news arrived of the death of our most gracious Queen Isabella, who departed this life in 1504.³³ Up to then, only a small number of provinces had been destroyed through unjust military action, not the whole area, and news of even this partial destruction had by and large been kept from the Queen, because, she – may her soul rest in peace – took a close personal interest in the physical and spiritual welfare of the native peoples, as those of us who lived through those years and saw examples of it with our own eyes can attest. There is one other general rule in all this, and it is that, wherever the Spaniards set foot, right throughout the Americas, they subjected the native inhabitants to the cruelties of which we have spoken, killing these poor and innocent people, tyrannizing them, and oppressing them in the most abominable fashion. The longer they spent in the region the more ingenious were the torments, each crueller than the last, that they inflicted on their victims, as God finally abandoned them and left them to plummet headlong into a life of full-time crime and wickedness.

[pp. 27-30 on "Cuba" are not included here]

THE ISLANDS OF PUERTO RICO AND JAMAICA

In 1509, the Spanish, with the same purpose in mind as they had when they landed on Hispaniola, found their way to the two verdant islands of Puerto Rico and Jamaica, both of them lands flowing with milk and honey.³⁴ Here they perpetrated the same outrages and committed the same crimes as before, devising yet further refinements of cruelty, murdering the native people, burning and roasting them alive, throwing them to wild dogs³⁵ and then oppressing, tormenting and plaguing them with toil down the mines and elsewhere, and so once again killing off these poor innocents to such effect that where the native population of the two islands was certainly over six hundred thousand (and I personally reckon it at more than a million) fewer than two hundred survive on each of the two islands, all the others having perished without ever learning the truths of the Christian religion and without the benefit of the Sacraments.

THE MAINLAND

It was in 1514 that a governor landed on the Mainland.⁴¹ This man, who descended on the region like the wrath of God, was the cruellest of tyrants, totally devoid as he was of any feelings of mercy or even of common sense. He was determined to settle the whole area with Spaniards. The Mainland had seen its share of despots before, who had pillaged and murdered and alienated the local people, but their depredations and iniquities had so far been confined to the coastal areas. This individual, however, outstripped all his predecessors, transcending in cruelty even those that had ravaged the islands, and his devilish deeds surpassed all the abominations that had taken place before his arrival. Nor did he confine his attentions to the coastal area, but cut great swathes through the interior, driving the locals out, killing left, right and centre, and despatching everyone he encountered to Hell. He devastated the land for many leagues north of Darién right up to and including the kingdom and provinces of Nicaragua – a distance of more than five hundred leagues over some of the most fertile and densely populated areas that are to be found anywhere in the known world. It was a region in which there lived many great lords, and where there were countless large cities. Nowhere on the face of the earth had such an enormous wealth of gold been discovered, for, although the island of Hispaniola had filled Spain to overflowing with gold, and gold of the highest quality, this had all to be extracted from the bowels of the earth by the sweat

of natives who toiled down the mines and, as we have noted, perished there.

This governor and his men dreamed up new ways of tormenting the native population and whole new techniques for torturing them in order to force them to reveal the whereabouts of their gold and to hand it over. A Franciscan friar, Francisco de San Román, witnessed at first hand an expedition, mounted by the governor and led by one of his right-hand men to wipe out the natives and rob them of everything they possessed. His report suggests that this expedition alone resulted in the deaths of over forty thousand natives, who were variously put to the sword, burned alive, thrown to wild dogs, or subjected to torture of one form or another.

From the very beginning, Spanish policy towards the New World has been characterized by blindness of the most pernicious kind: even while the various ordinances and decrees governing the treatment of the native peoples have continued to maintain that conversion and the saving of souls has first priority, this is belied by what has actually been happening on the ground. The gulf that yawns between theory and practice has meant that, in fact, the local people have been presented with an ultimatum: either they adopt the Christian religion and swear allegiance to the Crown of Castile, or they will find themselves faced with military action in which no quarter will be given and they will be cut down or taken prisoner. It is as though the Son of God, who gave His life for every living soul, when He instructed His followers with the words: ‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations’,⁴² intended heathens, living in peace and tranquillity in their own lands, to be confronted with a demand that they convert on the spot, without their ever hearing the Word or having Christian doctrine explained to them; and that, should they show any reluctance to do so and to swear allegiance to a king they have never heard of nor clapped eyes on, and whose

subjects and ambassadors prove to be cruel, pitiless and bloodthirsty tyrants, they should immediately surrender all their worldly goods and lose all rights to their land, their freedom, their womenfolk, their children and their lives. Such a notion is as absurd as it is stupid and should be treated with the disrespect, scorn and contempt it so amply deserves. This wicked wretch of a governor was accordingly under instructions to ensure that the terms of this government legislation were made known to the native population, as though by doing this one could justify the absurdity, unreasonableness and injustice of the terms themselves;⁴³ what he did in practice, whenever he or the bandits in his employ learned that there was gold in a particular town or village, was to get his gang of robbers to make their way there at dead of night, when the inhabitants were all in bed and sound asleep and, once they got within, say, half a league of the town itself, to read out the terms of this edict, proclaiming (and only to themselves): ‘Leaders and citizens of such-and-such a town of this Mainland. Be it known to you that there is one true God, one Pope, and one King of Castile who is the rightful owner of all these lands. You are hereby summoned to pay allegiance, etc. Should you fail to do so, take notice that we shall make just war upon you, and your lives and liberty will be forfeit, etc.’ Then, in the early hours of the morning, when the poor people were still innocently abed with their wives and their children, they would irrupt into the town, setting fire to the houses, which were commonly of straw, and burning the women and children alive and often the men, too, before the poor wretches realized what was happening. They would slaughter the people with impunity and those they took alive they either tortured to death in an attempt to get them to tell of other towns where there might be gold or of the whereabouts of more gold in their own town, or else they branded them as slaves. Once the fires had died down or gone out, they conducted a house-to-house search

for gold. This was how this wicked man and his evil followers spent their waking hours from 1514 until 1521 or 1522: amassing a huge fortune (over and above, that is, his stipend as Captain General) by sending five or six or more of his close associates on raiding parties such as this and then taking his share of all the gold, pearls and jewels they plundered as well as of the slaves they took. Other Crown servants behaved in much the same fashion, each of them releasing as many men as he could spare to participate in these raids; even the first bishop of the kingdom⁴⁴ sent his underlings so that he, too, could get his hands on a share of the loot. My own conservative estimate of the total value of the gold stolen from that kingdom during these few years is that it amounted to more than a million castilians, and of those only some three thousand ever found their way into the royal coffers. Over eight hundred thousand souls perished as a direct result of operations such as these. The villains who succeeded the butcher of whom we have been speaking as governors of the province right up until 1533 either massacred the survivors or else turned a blind eye when others did, the few who were not slaughtered being taken prisoner and later dying in the slavery to which they were reduced after the actual fighting had come to an end.

One could list a whole host of other atrocities perpetrated by this man or to which he turned a blind eye. When, for example, one of the local lords or caciques made him an outright gift of nine thousand castilians, either because he wanted to or (more plausibly) because he was in terror of the Spaniards, they seized him and, tying him in a sitting position to a stake set in the ground, lit a fire under his outstretched feet to induce him to hand over yet more gold. He sent home for a further three thousand castilians, but they were still not satisfied and recommenced the torture. When he produced no further gold, either

because he had no more or because he chose not to, they carried on until all the marrow ran out through the soles of his feet and he died. And this is but one of countless examples of murder and torture inflicted on the natives in this relentless search for gold.

On another occasion a troop of soldiers on a pillaging expedition happened upon a mountain region where a large number of natives had sought refuge from the reign of terror the Christians were conducting in their towns and villages. Taking the fugitives by surprise, they carried off seventy or eighty women and young girls, killing at the same time as many of the men as they could. The following day, the survivors regrouped and, sick with worry about their wives and daughters, set off in pursuit of the soldiers. Finding themselves hard-pressed, and loath to allow their pace to slacken, the soldiers stuck their swords into the guts of the women and the young girls, massacring every single one of them. The native men, beside themselves with grief and tearing at their own flesh, shouted after them, saying: 'Oh, wicked men! Oh, cruel Christians! You kill iras!' The word *ira* is the local term for women, and what they meant by shouting in this fashion was: 'Killing women is a cruel abomination, and clear proof that you are brutes and no better than wild beasts.'⁴⁵

Some ten or fifteen leagues from Panama lived a great lord who went by the name of Paris.⁴⁶ He had amassed gold in great quantity and, when a party of Europeans arrived in his territory, he received them as long-lost brothers and made the captain of the party a gift of fifty thousand castilians. It seemed to the captain and his men that someone who could make an unsolicited gift of that magnitude must be very rich indeed and, gold being the reason for their presence in the first place, they made a pretence of departing, only to return at the dead of night when the place was undefended. They set fire to the buildings, killing

and burning many of the locals, and stealing a further fifty or sixty thousand castilians. The local lord himself escaped with his life and, mustering as many men as he could, set off after the soldiers; in two or three days he had caught up with them and their loot of a hundred and thirty or a hundred and forty thousand castilians.⁴⁷ He and his men set about them valiantly, killing fifty of them, severely wounding many others, putting them to flight and making off with all the gold. Later, a large band of Christians mounted an attack on this lord, butchering him along with vast numbers of his people and taking all the survivors into slavery, where they duly perished, so that today not a trace remains of what was previously a community with dominion over an area of some thirty leagues. So widespread was the ruin and carnage inflicted by this wicked Spanish governor throughout the region that no accurate record can now be compiled and today the whole area lies abandoned and deserted.

THE PROVINCE OF NICARAGUA

This same tyrant⁴⁸ set out in 1522 or 1523 – a black date for the inhabitants of the area – to add to his fiefdom the very fertile province of Nicaragua. It would be impossible to express in words the beauty and fertility of this region, its healthy climate and the prosperity of its many people. The sheer number and size of the towns in the area was truly astonishing: it was often three and four leagues from one end of a town to the other, and the quality and abundance of the local produce was sufficient to support a huge population. The terrain here is flat and level and there are no mountains for the locals to hide in; it is also quite delightful and the people were extremely reluctant to leave. So they stayed and put up as best they might with persecution by the soldiers, with the atrocities they committed, and the slavery they inflicted upon them. These people are also naturally gentle and unaggressive. The despot himself and his tyrannical companions proceeded to wreck this region just as they had wrecked others: they indulged in the same outrages, the same wanton destruction, the same wholesale slaughter, the same atrocities as they had elsewhere; indeed, it is beyond human capacity to compile an accurate log of the murder, cruelty, false imprisonment and other crimes they committed. He sent fifty men on horseback who proceeded to annihilate the entire population of an area greater than the county of Roussillon,⁴⁹ sparing not a single man or woman, old man or child, and this they did on the flimsiest of pretexts, accusing their victims of not coming

quickly enough when they were summoned, or of not having brought enough cargoes⁵⁰ of maize (which is to the region what wheat is to Europe), or of not surrendering sufficient of their kinsmen as slaves either to the governor himself or to one or another of his henchmen. These men were driven by the Devil and not a single native managed to escape, what with the land being as flat as it was and the Spaniards having horses.

He sent expeditionary forces (that is, raiding parties) to other provinces and permitted his accomplices to take off as slaves as many of these harmless and peace-loving natives as they chose. They would chain their prisoners together so that none could slip the load of three arrobas⁵¹ which he or she was forced to carry. On one of these occasions – and there were many such – of the four thousand natives who began the journey loaded down in this fashion not even six ever saw their homeland again, all the others being left by the roadside where they fell. And when a native bearer flagged and became utterly debilitated and wearied by the enormous burden he was expected to carry and the shortage of food and lack of rest, they cut his head from his shoulders so they would not have to break the chains that held the line of prisoners together, and his head would fall to one side of the baggage train and his trunk to the other. You can imagine what effect this had upon his companions in misery. And, in time, as they came to realize that none of their people ever returned from pilgrimages of this kind, the impressed natives would set out on such a trip with tears running down their cheeks, sighing and bemoaning their fate, saying: ‘These are the roads we travelled to go and offer to work for the Christians, and, however hard the work, we thought to return in time to our homes and to our wives and children. That expectation is now a thing of the past, and we know that this trip will be our last.’

On one occasion the governor decided on a re-allocation of slaves, either on a whim or (as some say) because he wanted to remove them from a number of his companions with whom he was no longer on good terms and share them out among his latest cronies. As a result of this upheaval, the natives did not get a chance to sow some of the fields, and consequently there was not enough grain to go round. The Christians seized all the maize the locals had grown for themselves and their own families and, as a consequence, some twenty or thirty thousand natives died of hunger, some mothers even killing their own children and eating them.

As we have said, all the towns of the region stood amid fertile lands of their own. Each of the settlers took up residence in the town allotted to him (or encomended to him as the legal phrase has it),⁵² put the inhabitants to work for him, stole their already scarce foodstuffs for himself and took over the lands owned and worked by the natives and on which they traditionally grew their own produce. The settler would treat the whole of the native population – dignitaries, old men, women and children – as members of his household and, as such, make them labour night and day in his own interests, without any rest whatever; even the small children, as soon as they could stand, were made to do as much as they could, and more. Thus have the settlers exterminated the few indigenous people who have survived, stripping them of their houses and all their possessions and leaving them nothing for themselves (and these abuses continue to this day). In this regard, their treatment of the locals here has been even worse than on Hispaniola.

They have oppressed the many people of the province, worn them to a shadow and hastened their demise, forcing them to carry over distances of thirty leagues, from the interior of the country to the port, all the blocks of wood and planking needed to make ships and sending them to search for honey and wax up

in the hills where jaguars tear them to pieces. And they have used and still use even pregnant women and the mothers of newborn babes as beasts of burden.

The most insidious pestilence dreamed up by this governor was the system whereby he granted licences to Spaniards to demand slaves from native caciques and nobles. This development has done more to ravage that country than anything else. Demands for fifty slaves at a time were made every four or five months or whenever an individual obtained permission and a licence from the governor to make such a demand. The demand was always accompanied by the threat that, if the requisite number of slaves was not produced, the noble concerned would be burned alive or thrown to the wild dogs. Since slavery is practically unknown among the local population, even their caciques having at most two or three or four of them, the lords would themselves have to find the slaves. At first they might round up all the orphans they could find; then they might ask any family with two children to surrender one, and a family with three to produce two, thereby fulfilling the demand made of them by the tyrant in their midst. But they did so against a background of wailing and gnashing of teeth, for these people appear to entertain a love for their children which surpasses that of any other people in the world. Since demands of this nature were so frequent, the whole region was devastated within the space of a few years, for during six or seven of the years between 1523 and 1533 five or six slaving vessels patrolled the coast and carted off vast numbers of these innocents to be sold in Panama and Peru, where they all perished. Indeed, experience shows time and time again that these people die very quickly once you remove them from their native lands, especially as they often are forced to go without food while still being made to do a full day's work, those who buy and sell them having no other thought in their heads but the work these slaves can be forced to undertake. In this fashion, more than five hundred thousand

poor souls, each of them as free as you or me,⁵³ have been taken from their homelands. On top of that, a further five or six hundred thousand have so far been killed, either during the course of the hellish fighting initiated by the Spanish or as a direct result of the horrendous conditions in which they have been imprisoned. And the carnage continues to this day. All this devastation has taken place over the past fourteen years, and in the whole of the province of Nicaragua today, once (as I have said) among the most densely populated places on the face of the earth, there remain only four or five thousand people and every day sees even some of these succumb to the work they are made to do, and the personal abuses to which they are subjected every day of their lives.

NEW SPAIN

New Spain was discovered in 1517 and, at the time, great atrocities were committed against the indigenous people of the region and some were killed by members of the expedition. In 1518 the so-called Christians set about stealing from the people and murdering them on the pretence of settling the area. And from that year until this – and it is now 1542 – the great iniquities and injustices, the outrageous acts of violence and the bloody tyranny of these Christians have steadily escalated, the perpetrators having lost all fear of God, all love of their sovereign, and all sense of self-respect. The heinous outrages and acts of barbarity have been so vile, the violence so intense, the murders so frequent, other acts of despotism so extreme, and the havoc and devastation so widespread throughout the kingdoms of the Mainland that what we have so far set down in this account is as nothing compared with what went on in New Spain, and the scale and nature of the atrocities committed without a break from 1518 right up to this day beggars description. Even now, in September 1542, the atrocities get worse by the day, it being the case, as we have said, that the infernal brutality and utter inhumanity of the acts committed have steadily increased as time has gone on.

From the very first day they set foot in New Spain, which was the eighteenth of April 1518, until 1530, there was no respite whatever in the carnage and mayhem provoked by these cruel and bloodthirsty Spaniards.⁵⁴ Throughout those twelve long

years they pillaged their way over an area of some four hundred and fifty leagues around Mexico City, putting those who lived there to the sword and committing all manner of barbarities against them. This area had originally boasted four or five great kingdoms, each of them as large as Spain and a good deal better favoured, and each of them inhabited, as the Almighty had ordained, by more people than the combined population of Toledo, Seville, Valladolid, Saragossa and Barcelona, even when these Spanish cities were at the very height of their fortunes. The whole area veritably teemed with humanity, even though if one were to walk its frontier one would travel over one thousand eight hundred leagues. Yet, over the twelve years of which we are speaking, and during the course of what they term the 'conquest' (which is really and truly nothing other than a series of violent incursions into the territory by these cruel tyrants:⁵⁵ incursions condemned not only in the eyes of God but also by law, and in practice far worse than the assaults mounted by the Turk in his attempt to destroy Christendom), the Europeans have, throughout these four hundred and fifty leagues, butchered, burned alive or otherwise done to death four million souls, young and old alike, men, women and children. And this figure does not include those killed and still being killed today as a direct result of the tyrannical slavery and the oppression and privation its victims are forced to endure on a daily basis.

And no account, no matter how lengthy, how long it took to write, nor how conscientiously it was compiled, could possibly do justice to the full horror of the atrocities committed at one time or another in various parts of this region by these mortal enemies of the human race. Even if one were simply to select one or two outrages from among the many, it would still be nigh on impossible to describe them in all their bloody and terrible detail. That said, and even though I am well aware that I can

hardly recount one atrocity in a thousand, I will endeavour to say something about a few of these incidents.

NEW SPAIN [continued]

Among other massacres was one which took place in Cholula,⁵⁶ a great city of some thirty thousand inhabitants. When all the dignitaries of the city and the region came out to welcome the Spaniards with all due pomp and ceremony, the priests to the fore and the high priest at the head of the procession, and then proceeded to escort them into the city and lodge them in the houses of the lord and the leading citizens, the Spaniards decided that the moment had come to organize a massacre (or 'punishment' as they themselves express such things) in order to inspire fear and terror in all the people of the territory. This was, indeed, the pattern they followed in all the lands they invaded: to stage a bloody massacre of the most public possible kind in order to terrorize those meek and gentle peoples. What they did was the following. They requested the local lord to send for all the nobles and leading citizens of the city and of all the surrounding communities subject to it and, as soon as they arrived and entered the building to begin talks with the Spanish commander, they were seized without anyone outside getting wind of what was afoot. Part of the original request was that they should bring with them five or six thousand native bearers and these were mustered in the courtyards when and as they arrived. One could not watch these poor wretches getting ready to carry the Spaniards' packs without taking pity on them, stark naked as

they were with only their modesty hidden from view, each with a kind of little net on his shoulders in which he carried his own modest store of provisions. They all got down on their haunches and waited patiently like sheep. Once they were all safely inside the courtyard, together with a number of others who were also there at the time, armed guards took up positions covering the exits and Spanish soldiers unsheathed their swords and grasped their lances and proceeded to slaughter these poor innocents. Not a single soul escaped. After a day or two had gone by, several victims surfaced, soaked from head to foot in the blood of their fellows beneath whose bodies they had sheltered (so thick was the carpet of corpses in the courtyard) and, with tears in their eyes, pleaded for their lives; but the Spaniards showed them no mercy nor any compassion, and no sooner did they crawl out from under the pile of corpses than they were butchered. The Spanish commander gave orders that the leading citizens, who numbered over a hundred and were roped together, were to be tied to stakes set in the ground and burned alive. One of these dignitaries, however, who may well have been the first among them and the king of that whole region, managed to get free and took refuge, along with twenty or thirty or forty others, in the great temple of the city, which was fortified and was known in the local language as quu.⁵⁷ There they put up a stout defence against the Spaniards which lasted for the best part of the day. But the Spaniards, against whom no resistance is really possible, especially when it is mounted by unarmed civilians, set fire to the temple, burning those inside alive, the victims shouting all the time: 'Oh, wicked men! What harm had we done to you? Why do you kill us? Wait till you get to Mexico City, for there our great king, Montezuma,⁵⁸ will avenge our deaths.' It is said

that, while the Spaniards were slaughtering the five or six thousand men gathered in the courtyard, their commander regaled his men with snatches of:

Nero watched from Tarpey's height
the flames engulf Rome's awesome might;
children and ancients shout in pain,
he all regards with cold disdain.⁵⁹

They were responsible also for another huge massacre in Tepeaca, a city bigger than Cholula and one with a larger population. Here the Spaniards put countless thousands to the sword in the cruellest possible manner.⁶⁰

From Cholula they made their way to Mexico City.⁶¹ On their journey, they were showered with thousands of gifts from the great king Montezuma who also sent some of his men to stage entertainments and banquets for them on the way. When they reached the Great Causeway which runs for some two leagues right up to the city itself, they were greeted by Montezuma's own brother and many local dignitaries bearing valuable gifts of gold, silver and apparel from the great lord.⁶² At the city gates, Montezuma himself came out to meet them, carried on a litter of gold and surrounded by the entire court. He escorted them into the city to the great houses where he had directed they should be lodged. Yet that same day, or so I am reliably informed by a number of eye-witnesses, the Spaniards seized the great king unawares by means of a trick and held him under armed guard of eighty soldiers, eventually putting him in irons.⁶³ But, leaving aside all of this, although much passed of consequence and one could dwell upon it at length, I should like to relate just one incident contrived by these tyrants. It happened that the Spanish commander had occasion to go to the sea-port to deal with one of his captains who was planning an attack on him,⁶⁴ and he left

another of his henchmen, with a hundred or so men at his command, to guard King Montezuma while he was away.⁶⁵ The garrison decided to stage a show of strength and thereby boost

the fear they inspired in the people of this kingdom, a classic Spanish tactic in these campaigns, as we have had occasion to remark before. All the local citizens, great and small, as well as all the members of the court, were wholly taken up with entertaining their imprisoned lord. To this end, they organized fiestas, some of which involved staging traditional dances every afternoon and evening in squares and residential quarters throughout the city. These dances are called in the local language *mitotes* (those typical of the islands being known as *areitos*);⁶⁶ and since these dances are the principal form of public entertainment and enjoyment among the people, they deck themselves out in all their best finery. And the entertainments were organized with close attention to rank and station, the noblest of the citizens dancing nearest the building where their lord was being held. Close by this building, then, danced over two thousand youths of quality, the flower of the nobility of Montezuma's whole empire. Thither the Spanish captain made his way, accompanied by a platoon of his men, under pretence of wanting to watch the spectacle but in fact carrying orders to attack the revellers at a prearranged time, further platoons with identical orders having been despatched to the other squares where entertainments were being staged. The nobles were totally absorbed in what they were doing and had no thought for their own safety when the soldiers drew their swords and shouting: 'For Saint James, and at 'em, men!'⁶⁷ proceeded to slice open the lithe and naked bodies of the dancers and to spill their noble blood. Not one dancer was left alive, and the same story was repeated in the other squares throughout the city. This series of events caused horror, anguish and bitterness throughout the land; the whole nation was plunged into mourning and, until the end of time,

or at least as long as a few of these people survive, they will not cease to tell and re-tell, in their areitos and dances, just as we do at home in Spain with our ballads, this sad story of a massacre which wiped out their entire nobility, beloved and respected by them for generations and generations.

Once the native population learned of this barbaric and unprecedented outrage, perpetrated against innocent individuals who had done nothing whatever to deserve such cruelty, the whole city, which had up to then tolerated the equally unmerited imprisonment of its lord and master simply because he himself had issued orders that no one was to fight the Christians nor to offer any resistance to them, took up arms and attacked them. Many Spaniards were wounded and only narrowly managed to make good their escape. They ordered Montezuma out on to the terrace at dagger point and forced him to order his men not to attack the house and to cease their insurrection. But the people ceased altogether at that juncture to obey such orders and there was a feeling that they should elect another lord in Montezuma's place who would be able and willing to lead them in battle. At this point, it became known that the Spanish commander was on his way back from the coast after his victory over the rebel forces and that he was not far off and was bringing reinforcements. There followed a lull in the fighting which lasted until he arrived some three or four days later; meanwhile, the number of protesters had swollen with the influx of people from all over the territory. Once the commander arrived, the natives attacked with such unrelenting ferocity that it seemed to the garrison that not one of them would be left alive, and they decided to abandon the city in secret and at night. The locals got wind of this, catching up with many as they fled across the causeways that span the lake and killing them in great numbers,⁶⁸ as, indeed, they had every right to, given the attacks we have described that

had been made on them: a reasonable and fair-minded man will see that theirs was a defensive action and a just one. The Spaniards then regrouped and there followed a battle for the city in which terrible and bizarre outrages were committed against the indigenous population, vast numbers of whom were killed and many others, several leaders among them, burned alive.⁶⁹

After the vile outrages and abominations perpetrated by the Spaniards, both in Mexico City itself and throughout the whole region (an area of ten or fifteen or twenty leagues all round the city saw countless natives perish at their hands), they transferred their pestilential attentions to the densely populated Pánuco province, where once again they swept through the territory, pillaging and murdering on the grand scale as they went. They then moved on to the provinces of Tuxtepec,⁷⁰ Impilcingo,⁷¹ and finally Colima,⁷² each one of them greater in extent than the kingdoms of Castile and León, and in each they wrought the same destruction as they had in Mexico City and its province. It would be impracticable to compile a complete dossier of all the atrocities, foul murders and other barbarities they committed, and any such account would be so lengthy it would prove impossible for the reader to take in.

It should be recalled that the pretext upon which the Spanish invaded each of these provinces and proceeded to massacre the people and destroy their lands – lands which teemed with people and should surely have been a joy and a delight to any true Christian – was purely and simply that they were making good the claim of the Spanish Crown to the territories in question. At no stage had any order been issued entitling them to massacre the people or to enslave them. Yet, whenever the natives did not drop everything and rush to recognize publicly the truth of the

irrational and illogical claims that were made, and whenever they did not immediately place themselves completely at the mercy of the iniquitous and cruel and bestial individuals who were making such claims, they were dubbed outlaws and held to be in rebellion against His Majesty. This, indeed, was the tenor of the letters that were sent back to the Spanish court, and everybody involved in the administration of the New World was blind to the simple truth enshrined in the first principles of law and government that nobody who is not a subject of a civil power in the first place can be deemed in law to be in rebellion against that power. Any reasonable person who knows anything of God, of rights and of civil law can imagine for himself what the likely reaction would be of any people living peaceably within their own frontiers, unaware that they owe allegiance to anyone save their natural lords, were a stranger suddenly to issue a demand along the following lines: ‘You shall henceforth obey a foreign king, whom you have never seen nor ever heard of and, if you do not, we will cut you to pieces’ – especially when they discover that these strangers are indeed quite prepared to carry out this threat to the letter. Even more shocking is the fact that when the local people do obey such commands they are harshly treated as common slaves, put to hard labour and subjected to all manner of abuse and to agonizing torments that ensure a slower and more painful death than would summary execution. Indeed, for them, the end result is the same: they, their wives and their children all perish and the whole of their nation is wiped from the face of the earth. And so blinded by ambition and driven by greed are the devils who advocate such treatment of these people that they cannot see that, when their victims come to obey under duress this foreign overlord and publicly recognize his authority over them, simply because of their fear of what will happen to them if they do not, such a recognition of suzerainty has no standing in law whatever, any such prerogative obtained by menaces from any people anywhere in the world being invalid. In practice, the only rights these perfidious crusaders have

earned which can be upheld in human, divine, or natural law are the right to eternal damnation and the right to answer for the offences and the harm they have done the Spanish Crown by utterly ruining every one of these kingdoms and (as far as it is within their power) invalidating all claims the Spanish Crown may have to the territories of the New World. These, then, are the true services they have performed and continue to perform for their sovereign in this part of the world.

With this same unimpeachable title to possession, this tyrant of a commander sent two of his captains, both of them even more ferocious and barbaric, more implacable and merciless than he was himself, to two vast, prosperous and highly favoured kingdoms, sharing a common frontier and some three hundred leagues from Mexico City. The first of these two densely populated realms, Guatemala, lies on the Pacific; the other, known as Naco and Honduras (or Guaimura), has an Atlantic seaboard.⁷³ Both expeditionary forces were well-manned, with both cavalry and infantry, the commander sending one overland and the other by sea.⁷⁴

It is no exaggeration to say that one could make a whole book – and a book that would stagger not only contemporaries but future generations also – out of the atrocities, barbarities, murders, clearances, ravages and other foul injustices perpetrated by members of these two expeditions, and particularly by those that went to Guatemala, the leader of the other expedition coming to an abrupt and sticky end.⁷⁵ Here were abominations that not

only outdid, in number and in kind, everything that had been seen before in the New World but also went far beyond those perpetrated by contemporaries, vast tracts of land being laid waste and turned into desert and an incalculable number of natives killed.

The seaborne expedition sacked the towns all along the coast, committing all manner of violence against the people who lived there, as, for example, when the locals of Yucatán, a province which lay on their route to the kingdom of Naco and Guaimura, whither the Spaniards were headed, came out to greet them and offer them gifts and then the Spaniards, once they had landed, sent out raiding parties throughout the territory, robbing and killing and destroying everything and everyone in sight. There was one Spanish captain who mutinied and, taking three hundred men with him, set off inland towards the kingdom of Guatemala, burning and looting the towns, and robbing and killing those who lived there. He deliberately followed such a scorched-earth policy for some one hundred and twenty leagues, so that, should his erstwhile companions-inarms decide on pursuit, they would find the whole region empty and barren, and all the local people athirst to take revenge on their pursuers in return for the harm and destruction wrought by him and his men. A few days later the officer in overall charge of the expedition, against whom he had mutinied, was killed and his place taken by a whole series of barbaric despots who inflicted unspeakable cruelty on the natives, butchering them, enslaving them and selling them to merchant-sailors in exchange for wine, clothing and other things. The despotism of the invaders and the enslavement of the population led, between 1524 and 1535, to the complete destruction of all the territories of the kingdom of Naco and Honduras, once a veritable paradise on earth supporting a denser population than anywhere else in the world. Nowadays, when one travels through this area, one sees nothing but bare, ruined settlements, and the whole melancholy spectacle is enough to melt the hardest of

hearts.⁷⁶ During these eleven years, more than two million souls have perished and, in an area of more than a hundred leagues by a hundred leagues, only two thousand survivors are to be seen; and even this number is shrinking day by day as the survivors succumb to the rigours of a life of slavery.

Turning our attention once more to the implacable tyrant in charge of the Guatemala expedition, we find him outdoing, as we have already had occasion to remark, all his predecessors in cruelty and barbarism, rivalling in wickedness even those who are active in the area today. He covered (as he was to report back to the commander who had sent the expedition) a distance of some four hundred leagues, from the provinces around Mexico City to the Guatemala border, killing and stealing, burning and pillaging. His pretext for destroying everything and everyone in his path was the one we have seen invoked before: that the locals must recognize the suzerainty of a bunch of inhuman and unjust barbarians who proclaimed themselves the representatives of a Spanish sovereign the locals had never seen, of whom they had never heard, and whom they soon judged to be even more cruel than his agents, for he and his men never allowed the people time to think over the implications of this proclamation, but fell upon them, killing and burning, the minute it had been read.

[pp. 57-64 on "The Province and Kingdom of Guatemala" are not included]

NEW SPAIN, PÁNUCO AND JALISCO

In 1525, in the wake of the barbarity and carnage we have described and of yet further atrocities committed in the provinces of New Spain and Pánuco, there arrived yet another butcher who was to be responsible for outrage upon outrage in Pánuco province.⁸⁵ He it was who saw to the depopulation of the entire province, for he took to branding any number of free men as slaves, in the same way as we have seen others do before him, and bundling them on to vessel after vessel for transport to the island slave-markets of Cuba and Hispaniola where they would fetch a better price. He also bartered one mare against eighty locals: against, that is, eighty members of the human race. He was later appointed as governor of Mexico City and of the whole of New Spain, presiding over the Audiencia⁸⁶ there with a number of fellow-villains as his magistrates. Together, they conspired to effect a devastation that beggars all description, committing outrages and atrocities, robberies and every other form of abomination. They brought the whole province to such a state that, had God not cut short their efforts, first through the opposition mounted by Franciscan friars and then through the establishment of a godly and just Audiencia, they would, within

the space of two short years, have reduced the whole of New Spain to that state of utter wretchedness that now greets the visitor to the island of Hispaniola.⁸⁷ For example, one of this man's companions-in-arms decided that he would have a wall built to enclose some land he had acquired, imported eight thousand natives to work, unpaid and unfed, on this project, and took not a blind bit of notice when one after another they dropped dead of hunger.

Once he learned that a new Audiencia had been appointed and was already on its way, this villain, already responsible for bringing Pánuco province to its knees, set off inland in search of fresh fields for his talents, taking with him some fifteen or twenty thousand hapless Mexicans to carry his baggage and that of his fellow-Spaniards; of the native bearers, fewer than two hundred were to survive the journey, all the others perishing en route. When he fetched up in the province of Michoacán, some forty leagues from Mexico City and yet another area every bit as fertile and populous as Mexico itself, the lord of Michoacán came out in solemn procession with many of his people to welcome him and his men and offer them every kindness, showering them all the while with gifts.⁸⁸ This lord had the reputation of being extremely wealthy and of having much gold and silver in his possession, and so the Spaniards seized him and, in an attempt to force him to hand over his treasures, proceeded to torture him in the fashion I shall now describe. They put him in fetters and tied his hands to a plank which ran the full length of his body; they then lit a brazier under the soles of his feet and had a lad with a hyssop filled with oil sprinkle them from time

to time to ensure a nice even roasting. On one side of the hapless victim stood one tormentor holding an armed crossbow pointed at his heart, while on the other stood a second holding a wild dog which constantly snapped at him and which would have torn him to pieces in the twinkling of an eye. They went on torturing him in this way, trying to get him to reveal the whereabouts of the gold and silver he was supposed to possess, until a Franciscan finally got wind of what was going on and came and released him, although the poor man later died of the injuries they had inflicted. This is only one instance of the treatment meted out to the lords and leading citizens of these provinces; many others were tortured and murdered in similar fashion, in the hope that they could be made to hand over gold and silver.

Another of these bullies was appointed at this time as Inspector of Indian Affairs,⁸⁹ although, in the event, he was to prove less interested in their physical and spiritual welfare than he was in their purses and their lands. When he discovered that a number of them still had idols hidden away, the wretched Spaniards never having taken the trouble to teach them a word about another and better God, he seized them and tortured them into surrendering these idols, thinking they would be made of gold and silver. When he discovered that they were not, he was so determined not to lose out on a single opportunity to make money, which was what he was after, that he forced his victims to bring him all the gold and silver they could lay their hands on so that they might buy back their gods and worship them in the traditional manner. This is yet another example of the great deeds of these benighted Spaniards and of the ways in which they bring lustre and honour to the name of the Lord.

This same butcher then journeyed from Michoacán to the province of Jalisco, which was at that time still virgin territory to the Spanish. One of the most fertile and wonderful parts of the New World, it was home to a huge number of people who

lived there undisturbed in harmony and comfort. One of the principal settlements was itself as much as seven leagues broad. When the Spaniards arrived, the local people came out to welcome them with smiling faces and bearing gifts, as is the custom throughout the New World. But this wretch immediately embarked upon the by now habitual Spanish policy of inflicting pain and terror upon them, acknowledging no limits to his frenzied quest for his great God, gold. He burned towns and cities to the ground, seized the local lords, torturing them and enslaving all those he could lay his hands upon. He led away thousands in chains, burdening women who had recently given birth with his baggage and that of his wicked companions so that, what with the huge loads they had to carry and the hunger they were forced to endure, they could no longer carry their children as well and were forced to leave them by the side of the road where they perished in huge numbers.

One Spaniard, who wished to satisfy his evil lust on a young girl, took out his dagger – or as it may be his sword – and cut off the hand of the girl's mother who was trying to wrench her from his grasp. When the girl persisted in refusing him, he stabbed her to death.

Although these people had afforded him every welcome as an honoured guest, this commander caused four thousand five hundred of them to be branded as common slaves, even though, legally, they were all free, as, indeed, are all the indigenous peoples of the New World. Nor did he make any difference between men and women, taking and branding even the children from one to five years of age, some of them still unweaned. And he committed other atrocities too many and too dreadful to recount.

After numerous iniquitous attacks on the native population during the course of which, and quite without provocation, he was responsible for carnage on a grand scale, he proceeded to impose throughout the area the reign of terror so beloved of Spanish butchers in the New World, allowing free rein to the

officers under his command to inflict unprecedented barbarities upon the local people in order to squeeze gold and other offerings out of them. One of his officers was responsible for the indiscriminate slaughter of many locals, hanging some, burning others alive, and throwing yet others to wild dogs, sometimes sawing off their hands and feet, sometimes pulling out their tongues or hacking off their heads. Even though the locals never raised a finger against the Spaniards, the distinguished commander knowingly allowed this spate of atrocities to continue unchecked, directed as it was to terrorizing the local people into doing his bidding and into bringing him gifts of gold or other precious objects. On top of this, the Spaniards inflicted pain and untold misery on the entire native population, subjecting them to an unrelenting daily – even hourly – round of lashes, beatings, and cruel treatment of every kind.

It is said that this man was directly responsible for the looting and destruction of eight hundred towns and villages throughout the kingdom of Jalisco and that it was because of his harsh treatment that the local people, seeing all around them perish under the Spanish yoke, were driven to despair and, fleeing into the mountains, finally began to offer a measure of organized resistance, killing a handful of their oppressors, as in all justice they were fully entitled to do. As they were subjected to more and yet more injustice by Spaniards passing through the region on their way to tyrannize other provinces (or, as they would put it, ‘explore’ them), many fortified themselves in certain mountain redoubts, although even there they were prey to the ferocious assaults which have ravaged and all but depopulated the entire province and which have occasioned the deaths of countless innocents. The wretched Spaniards, having abandoned all Christian sense of right and wrong and been totally given over to a reprobate mind,⁹⁰ are utterly impervious both to the justice of the actions of the local inhabitants and to the rights these people

quite properly enjoy under natural, divine, and Roman law to defend themselves by cutting the Spanish forces to pieces and, if only they were sufficient in number and possessed of the necessary weapons, throwing them out of their land once and for all. The Spanish also prove blind to their own wickedness in persisting in waging war (even though such a course of action is condemned by all the laws known to man) on a people on whom they have previously inflicted unpardonable wrongs and towards whom they have behaved in an evil and wicked fashion. On the contrary, they now proclaim and record for posterity their conviction that the ‘victories’ they continue to enjoy over an innocent local population, by dint of massacring them, come from God, and that their wicked campaigns in the New World amount to a just war; and they take care to give paeans of praise to the Lord and to recognize the part He has played in their success and His gift to them of wickedness, just like the thieves of whom the prophet Zechariah says, in Chapter 11: ‘Thus saith the Lord my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter; Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed be the Lord; for I am rich.’⁹¹

[pp. 71-79 on “The Kingdom of Yucatán” are not included here]

THE PROVINCE OF SANTA MARTA⁹⁸

The natives of the province of Santa Marta had a great deal of gold, the province and its immediate neighbours being rich in the metal and the people who lived there having the will and the know-how to extract it. And this is the reason why, from 1498 right down to today, in 1542, the region has attracted an uninterrupted series of Spanish plunderers who have done nothing but sail there, attack, murder and rob the people, steal their gold and sail back again. Each expedition in turn – and there have been many over the years – has overrun the area, causing untold harm and a monstrous death-toll, and perpetrating countless atrocities. Until 1523, it was for the most part only the coastal strip that was blighted, and the countryside for a few leagues inland; but, in that year, a number of these Spanish brigands established a permanent settlement in the area and, since the region was, as we have said, extremely rich, that settlement witnessed the arrival of one commander after another, each set on outdoing his predecessor in villainy and cruelty, as though to prove the validity of the principle we outlined earlier.⁹⁹ The year 1529 saw the arrival of a considerable force under the command of one such Spaniard, a grimly determined individual, with no fear of God and not an ounce of compassion for his fellow-men; he proceeded to outshine all who had gone before him in the arts of terror, murder, and the most appalling cruelty. In the six or seven years he and his men were in the province,

they amassed a huge fortune. After his death – and he died without benefit of confession and in full flight from his official residence – there came other robbers and murderers who wiped out those of the local population who had survived the attentions of their predecessors. They extended their reign of terror far inland, plundering and devastating whole provinces, killing or capturing the people who lived there in much the same way as we have seen happening elsewhere, torturing chiefs and vassals alike in order to discover the whereabouts of the gold and, as we have said, far outdoing, in both quantity and quality, even the awfulness of those who had gone before them. This they did to such effect that they contrived to depopulate, between 1529 and today, an area of over four hundred leagues which was once as densely inhabited as any other.

I must confess that if I were to set down on paper each and every unforgivable violent crime committed against God, the King and the innocent people of the province by the Spanish in Santa Marta – every murder, every injustice, every atrocity, every attempt at genocide – they would make a very lengthy chronicle indeed. But that will be for the future, if the Lord spares me.¹⁰⁰ All I can do here is to quote a few words from a letter sent by the bishop of the province¹⁰¹ to His Majesty the King. The letter bears the date 20 May 1541:

I submit, sacred Cæsar,¹⁰² that the remedy for the ills that beset this territory is that Your Majesty remove from positions of authority the cruel usurpers presently in control and entrust it to someone who will love and care for it as he would his own offspring and will treat it properly as it deserves, and that Your Majesty attend to this as a

matter of the highest priority. If nothing is done, I am certain that the whole territory will very soon simply disappear from the face of the earth, given the ways in which the cruel usurpers now maltreat and belabour it.

Further on in this same letter, the bishop writes:

It will be clear to Your Majesty from this how vital it is that those who presently govern these regions be stripped of their stewardship, so that the cruel yoke may be removed from the whole republic. If this is not done, I can see no remedy for the ills that now beset it. Your Majesty will also now perceive that here there are no Christians but only devils; no servants of God and the Crown but only traitors to His laws and Yours. It is my considered opinion that the greatest obstacle that stands in the way of the pacification of the New World, and with it the conversion of the people to Christ, is the harshness and cruelty of the treatment meted out by ‘Christians’ to those who surrender. This has been so harsh and so brutal that nothing is more odious nor more terrifying to the people than the name ‘Christian’, a word for which they use in their language the term *yares*, which means ‘demons’. And such a usage is amply justified, for what has been done to them by the Spanish commanders and by their men has been neither Christian nor indeed the work of rational human beings, but rather the work of devils; and so, when the locals find themselves on the receiving end of such merciless butchery, they assume that such actions are standard among Christians and that they derive ultimately from a Christian God and a Christian King. Any attempt to persuade them otherwise is doomed to failure and quite understandably occasions snorts of derision, jibes about Christ and jeers at Him and His laws. The treatment of those who surrender only serves to confirm the belief of those who continue the

struggle that it is better to die once and for all in battle than to suffer a thousand slow deaths at the hands of the Spanish. This, I know, Most Invincible Cæsar, from first-hand experience, etc.

And he goes on to say:

There are more servants of the Crown in these realms than Your Majesty may realize. For there is not a single soldier in the entire territory who does not declare openly, as he robs and plunders, as he murders or burns Your Majesty's subjects in order to get them to hand over gold, that he is doing so on Your Majesty's behalf and with Your Majesty's express authority. It would, therefore, be appropriate, Most Christian Cæsar, for Your Majesty to make it known, by the exemplary punishment of some of these culprits, that the Crown is not served by actions that are a disservice to God.

All this comes from an official report by the bishop of Santa Marta, and one can see clearly from it what is happening to these unfortunate territories and to their innocent inhabitants. When he speaks of those natives who ‘continue the struggle’ he means those who have managed to flee into the hills to escape butchery by Spanish scoundrels; and by those ‘who surrender’ he means those who, having survived the wholesale slaughter of their fellow-countrymen, now suffer the barbaric slavery to which the Spanish subject them and which we have already described – a slavery which will, as the bishop makes clear in his report, eventually prove fatal to each and every one of them. Indeed, he understates the horrific nature of the suffering to which they are subjected.

When they have been brought to the very edge of collapse by the labours to which they are put and begin to drop from hunger and toil as they stumble through the mountains

with enormous loads on their backs, the Spaniards kick them and beat them with sticks to make them get up and resume their wearisome trudge. They do not allow them to stop and gasp for breath, and even knock their teeth out with the pommel of their swords. Their only response to such treatment is: 'I give up. You are evil and wicked. I cannot go on any longer. Kill me now. I do not want to live another moment.' This they say as they lie groaning and clutching their chests in what is clearly great agony.¹⁰³ Oh, would that I could describe even one hundredth part of the afflictions and calamities wrought among these innocent people by the benighted Spanish! May God grant enlightenment to those who are in a position to do something about what has been happening.

[p. 85 on the "Province of Cartagena" is not included here]

THE PEARL COAST, PARIA AND TRINIDAD¹⁰⁵

The whole of the area lying between the Paria and the Gulf of Venezuela, a distance of some two hundred leagues, has been the scene of wholesale destruction wrought upon the indigenous people by Spanish adventurers who have attacked them, taking as many as possible alive to sell as slaves. Often they have achieved this by deception, offering the people friendship and safe conduct and then going back on their word in a totally shameless fashion, even after the people have welcomed them into their homes as though they were long-lost brothers and done everything they possibly can for them. It would be impossible to compile a detailed and accurate record of every instance of injustice, insult, harassment and outrage suffered by the people of the coast at the hands of the Spanish between 1510 and now, and I shall describe only two or three incidents as examples of countless such ugly atrocities, each and every one of them sufficient to earn the perpetrators the everlasting torment of Hell-fire.

The people who live on the island of Trinidad, which is both larger and more fertile than Sicily and lies just off the mainland close by Paria, are as good and virtuous as any to be found anywhere in the New World. In 1516, one of these adventurers¹⁰⁶ made his way there with sixty or seventy men experienced in the

ways of robbery and announced that he and his men were coming to settle on the island and to live alongside the native people. The locals welcomed them as though they were their own flesh and blood, both the chief and the people dancing attendance upon them, showing every sign of joy and affection, and bringing them every single day twice as much food as they could possibly eat. Indeed, the indigenous peoples of the New World are by nature extremely generous and, in their rush to provide the Spanish with more than they need, often hand over everything they possess. They built a large wooden house big enough for all the members of the Spanish expedition to live in, since the Spaniards insisted on being quartered together in order that they might carry out the plan they had hatched. Once the wooden framework of the house was complete, work began on thatching the structure. As soon as the walls were finished to more than twice the height of a man and those inside the building could no longer see what was going on outside, the Spanish made a great pretence of wanting to finish the job as quickly as possible and packed a very large number of men inside the building. They then took their arms and deployed themselves around the outside of the house to seal off all the exits, and also stationed a number of men inside the building itself. Those inside then drew their swords and instructed the naked and defenceless natives to stand perfectly still, threatening to kill them if they did not. They next began to tie them up, while those that tried to escape were hacked to pieces by the guards stationed outside. A few did manage to get away, although some were wounded in the process, and regrouped in another building, joining forces with those locals who had not been in the new house during the attack. Here they set about defending themselves as best they could with bows and arrows. There were between a hundred and two hundred of them, but the Spanish posted men on the doors to prevent any escape and then set fire to the building, burning them alive, before making for their ship, taking with them a prize consisting of the one hundred and eighty to two

hundred men they had seized and bound at the outset and, setting sail for Puerto Rico, they sold half of the consignment there as slaves before sailing on to Hispaniola where they sold the rest. When I was on the island of Puerto Rico and had the opportunity to confront this particular commander with his wicked behaviour and with having betrayed these people, his reply was: ‘Come off it, Sir. The orders I had from my superiors were quite specific: if I could not capture them in battle, I was to promise them peace as a way of tricking them into giving themselves up, and then enslave them.’ When, in conversation, he admitted the enormity of his crimes and the shame he felt about them, he confessed that he had never felt more at home than he had on the island of Trinidad and that the local people had treated him as one of their own and had done everything they could for him. Yet incidents like this, in which local people have been lured into giving themselves up by promises that no harm will be done to them, have been commonplace enough on the mainland, and one is left to judge for oneself the justice of such a method of enslaving natives.

On another occasion, the Dominicans, our own Order, decided to mount a mission to bring the Word of Christ to the peoples of the New World because they were ignorant of the truth and were accordingly (and still are) in mortal danger of being denied the Life Everlasting. It was decided to send among them a monk, a man of great virtue and holiness and fully versed in theology, and he was to have a lay brother as his companion.¹⁰⁷ The idea was that they should get to know the lie of the land and make contact with local people with a view to deciding where best to establish monasteries. The people received them as angels from Heaven, listening with rapt attention and great emotion and joy to what they had to say, even though this had to be conveyed by

sign and gesture as the Dominicans did not speak the local language. After the ship which had brought the missionaries had sailed away another vessel arrived. The Dominicans were not aware of it at the time, but the Spaniards invited the local chief on board this vessel together with a hundred of his men, ostensibly for a party.¹⁰⁸ This local chief, who was known as Alonso (presumably a name given him by the Spaniards or by the missionaries, local people being very keen to acquire a Christian name and often asking for one even before they are taught the rudiments of Christianity necessary for baptism), would not normally have trusted such an invitation but he was tricked into a false sense of security by the presence of the Dominicans, believing that the Spaniards would not do him any harm all the time the missionaries were there. He, his wife and seventeen others went on board, but no sooner had they done so than the ship set sail for Hispaniola where the hostages were sold into slavery. The people, seeing their chief and his wife carried off in this manner, were minded to execute the missionaries in return, and the missionaries themselves were mortified at the wickedness shown by the Spanish, for they would have died rather than countenance such treachery, especially as they sensed it would prove a real obstacle to the conversion of the people. They did their best to mollify them, assuring them that they would send word to Hispaniola by the first available vessel and would contrive to ensure the safe return of the chief and those who were with him. As God would have it, a vessel did arrive and with it an opportunity to confirm the perfidy of those in authority throughout the region. For the Dominicans duly wrote to their fellow-missionaries on Hispaniola, protesting repeatedly about this treachery, only for it soon to become plain that the magistrates there had no intention of investigating the case because they had themselves received a number of the slaves

taken in this evil and criminal fashion. Once the two who had made the original promise that chief Alonso and his companions would be back safe and sound within four months saw no sign of this happening four or even eight months later, they prepared to meet their fate and to give their lives for the Lord to whom they had pledged themselves before setting out on their mission. And so it was that the local people exacted their revenge, executing two innocent men. Yet they did so justly according to their own lights, for they thought the missionaries had been party to the act of treachery, the missionaries' solemn promise had not been honoured, and they no more knew then than they do now that there is a distinction between monks on the one hand and the Spanish robbers, bandits, and tyrants who roam the territory on the other. These blessed brothers were the victims of injustice and, as such, there can be no doubt that they are true and blessed martyrs of the faith nor that they are now united with God in the kingdom of Heaven, having done their duty on earth as enjoined by the vow of obedience and having laboured as instructed to spread the Gospel, to save the souls of all the peoples of the region, and to suffer in the name of the crucified Christ whatever trials and whatever destiny should befall them.

On yet another occasion, which I witnessed at first hand as only by a miracle did I escape the same fate, local people killed two other Dominicans and a Franciscan.¹⁰⁹ Once again, this horrendous incident was sparked off by the wickedness of Christians and it proved sufficiently grave to shock the whole world. But in this brief account I shall not dwell upon it,¹¹⁰ but rather wait until the Day of Judgement when all shall be made clear and God will come to punish the wickedness and atrocious behaviour towards the inhabitants of the New World of men masquerading as Christians.

Another incident occurred in this same area, at Codera Point, where stood a town whose chief was known as Higoroto, which was either the chief's own name or possibly a title given to all the lords in the area in question.¹¹¹ The chief himself was a goodly man and his people so virtuous that a Spaniard putting in there could be sure to find food and rest, and an opportunity to relax and recuperate. Indeed, many Spaniards who fetched up there, dropping from exhaustion and hunger in their headlong rush to escape from other parts of the country that they had made too hot for themselves by their atrocities and excesses, and whom he could have quietly despatched without anyone being any the wiser, were instead given food and safe passage to Margarita Island where there was a Christian garrison. In short, the town of Higuero was known to all the Europeans as every man's hostel and every man's home. The local people had no apparent reason to be on their guard against anybody and, because of this, one Spanish adventurer¹¹² decided they would be easy game. He sailed in and issued a general invitation for the locals to come aboard his ship, which was something they were used to doing when Spanish vessels were in port. With many of them – men, women and children – safely on board, he set sail for Puerto Rico, where he sold them all into slavery. When I myself arrived in Puerto Rico, I met this Spanish captain and learned in detail of what he had done. He was responsible for the destruction of the entire town, an abomination which gave rise to great consternation among the Spanish adventurers operating in the area, all of whom looked upon it as a safe refuge and a home from home.

I repeat that many similar atrocities and countless acts of wickedness will here pass unremarked, even though they continue unabated to the present day.

From what was once the heavily populated coastal area of the Paria Peninsula, over two million souls have been kidnapped and taken to the islands of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico to be sent down the mines or put to other work. There, as did those of whom we spoke earlier, they perished in droves. It is a heart-rending sight to travel along that coast, once so fertile and so populous, and to see it as it is today, totally abandoned and left to go to rack and ruin.

It is a fact beyond dispute that whenever one of these vessels sets sail, loaded to the gunwales with natives who have been rounded up and forcibly embarked, at least a third of the poor wretches perish during the voyage and are thrown overboard, and one has also to remember that many are killed before they ever get as far as the ships. The reason the death-toll is so high is that, in order to maximize profits, the men who finance these slave-fleets arrange for the vessels to carry nothing in the way of victuals except a basic minimum for the crew and so there is hardly any food or water for the poor prisoners who, as a consequence, perish from thirst and hunger and are consigned to a watery grave. One witness told me personally that, on a voyage from the Bahamas, where many natives had been rounded up, to Hispaniola, a distance of sixty or seventy leagues, one vessel, which was navigating without a compass and with no chart of the region, kept its course only by reference to the string of dead bodies wallowing in its wake.

Later, the spectacle of these poor creatures disembarked on the island where they are to be sold is enough to break the heart of anyone with a spark of human feeling. They are naked, and so weakened by hunger that many – old and young alike, men and women – simply drop where they stand. Then they are split up into groups of between ten and twenty, like so many sheep being driven to market: a parent is parted from a child, a woman from her husband; and lots are cast as a way of apportioning the little flocks between the wretched armadores (the individuals who originally pooled resources to charter the two or three vessels

that make up the slave convoy) and those who actually sailed to the native villages and took part in the round-up itself. If a man finds himself allotted a flock in which there is an old man or in which someone is sickly, his response is normally: ‘To the Devil with this old man. Why make me take him? I suppose you want me to bury him? Why should I take this sickly one? Am I to waste my substance on curing him?’ Reactions like these serve to give some idea of what the Spanish think of the native people, and how closely they obey that commandment to love one’s neighbour that underpins the Law and the books of the Prophets.

One of the cruellest and most damnable things in the whole of Creation is the way in which the Spanish use natives to fish for pearls. The life of a pearl-fisher in these conditions is worse than any other on the face of the earth; it is even more dreadful and more terrible than that of the native gold-miner, ghastly though that undoubtedly is. They are in the water from dawn to dusk, often operating at depths of four and five fathoms. Seldom are they permitted to surface for air but must spend their time swimming under water and tearing at the oysters in which pearls grow. Once they have filled their nets they surface, gasping, and hand the oysters to the Spanish taskmaster who sits in a smack or a canoe. If they spend more than a few seconds at the surface to get their breath back, he will punch them or grab them by the hair and push them back under, making them dive once more. Their only food is fish – and then only oysters – plus, perhaps, some cassava bread (they bake with cassava flour throughout the region), the oysters providing little in the way of sustenance and the cassava being extremely hard to make.¹¹³ They are kept perpetually hungry. At night, they are shackled to prevent them from escaping and have to sleep on the hard ground. Often, when out fishing or searching for pearls, a man will dive never

to resurface, for the poor wretches are easy prey to all manner of sharks, those most ferocious of marine creatures, capable of swallowing a man whole. One can see just how closely the greed of those Spaniards involved in this profitable enterprise of pearl-fishing induces obedience to God's commandment to love Him and to love one's neighbour, for they place their fellow-creatures in peril of both body and soul (the wretches dying without learning of Christ and without the benefit of the Sacraments). On top of this, their victims are forced to spend their last days in agony, and the nature of the work is such that they perish in any case within a few days, for no man can spend long under water without coming up for air, and the water is so cold that it chills them to the marrow. Most choke on their own blood as the length of time they must stay under water without breathing and the attendant pressure upon their lungs makes them haemorrhage from the mouth; others are carried off by dysentery caused by the extreme cold to which they are subjected. Their hair, which is naturally jet black, takes on a singed appearance more typical of sea-wolves, and their backs come out in great salt sores, so that they look more like deformed monsters than men, or like members of another species altogether. By condemning them to this quite unbearable toil – or, to put it more accurately, this living Hell – the oppressors have exterminated the entire population of the Bahamas, not a single soul living there when the Spanish first discovered this trade having survived. The pearl-divers fetch fifty or a hundred castilians on the open market because of the great skill of Bahamians as swimmers and they are sold despite an unusually enlightened ban on these auctions issued by the justices. The pearl fisheries have been the grave of countless non-Bahamians also, drafted in from other parts of the New World.

[p. 95-126 on “The River of Yuyaparí,” “The Kingdom of Venezuela,” “The Mainland in the Region Known as Florida,” “The River Plate,” “The Great Kingdoms and Provinces of Peru,” and “The Kingdom of New Granada” are not included here]

[CONCLUSION]

I, Bartolomé de Las Casas, or Casaus, a brother in the Dominican Order, was, by the grace of God, persuaded by a number of people here at the Spanish court, out of their concern for the Christian faith and their compassion towards the afflictions and calamities that befall their fellow-men, to write the work you have before you in order to help ensure that the teeming millions in the New World, for whose sins Christ gave His life, do not continue to die in ignorance, but rather are brought to knowledge of God and thereby saved. My deep love of Castile has also been a spur, for I do not wish to see my country destroyed as a divine punishment for sins against the honour of God and the True Faith. It had always been my intention to pen this account, although it has been long delayed by my being taken up with so many other tasks. I completed it in Valencia on the eighth day of December 1542, at a time when the violence, the oppression, the despotism, the killing, the plunder, the depopulation, the outrages, the agonies and the calamities we have described were at their height throughout the New World wherever Christians have set foot. It may be that some areas are worse than others: Mexico City and the surrounding territories are a little better than most, for there, at least, outrages cannot be committed so publicly, as there is justice of a sort, despite the crippling taxation unjustly imposed on the people. Yet I do see hope for the future, for, as the Emperor and King of Spain, Charles V (whose person and whose Empire may God preserve), learns of the crimes committed against his will and against that of God by his servants in the New World and of their treachery towards the people of the continent (for, until now, there has been an effective conspiracy of silence about what has really

been happening), he will, as one wedded to the concept of justice and avid to see it prevail, put a stop to the wickedness and undertake a total reform of the administration of this New World that God has bestowed upon him and will do so for the greater glory of the Holy Catholic Church and for the salvation of his own royal soul. Amen.

After the above was written, a number of laws and ordinances, drawn up by His Majesty during a stay in Barcelona in November 1542, were given the royal assent and published in Madrid the following year.¹⁴⁰ These provide, in the most efficacious manner the drafters have been able to devise, for the eradication of the evil and godless crimes perpetrated against Our Lord and our fellow-human beings – crimes that threaten to bring a collapse of civilization and to presage the end of the world. His Majesty drew up the ordinances only after lengthy consultation with men of great learning and high moral standing, and after the issues involved had been fully debated in Valladolid. They were also approved in writing by true Christians, not only expert in theology but also completely free from the taint of the corruption and filth that has been indissolubly associated with the pursuit of wealth in the New World, the authorities there having been contaminated, body and soul, by the actions of those under them, a fact which goes a long way to explain why their agents have got away with destroying the region unchecked. Once the laws had been promulgated, those who, back at the Spanish court, were the prime movers behind the adventurism and the tyranny that has bedevilled the New World lost heart, because it seemed to them that the doors opening on to opportunity, exploitation and despotism had been shut in their faces. Many of them had copies of the New Laws made and sent them to various parts of the New World; and their agents on the ground (whose brief it was to plunder, exploit and devastate, and who had never known any regulatory check on their activities but

had rather revelled in a chaos worthy of Lucifer himself) saw, from the copies they had been sent, just what was in the New Laws. They were also informed by those in Spain on whose connivance they had always depended that they would have to observe these new dispensations; and when fresh and uncorrupt officials, charged with putting the new legislation into effect, arrived in the area, these godless agents, by now beyond any respect for the law, quite openly flouted the new provisions and, accepting that they had in effect placed themselves beyond the pale, proceeded to behave, particularly in Peru, as true outlaws, recognizing no limit whatever to their actions and inflicting a tyrannical misery on the people. Now, in 1546, Peru daily witnesses acts of a spine-chilling barbarity unequalled by anything seen before, either in the New World or anywhere else on earth, the upshot being that not only have entire indigenous populations been wiped out and their kingdoms abandoned, but God has decided to give them these butchers just deserts (the legal representatives of the Crown having proved ineffective against them) by turning them against each other. Many have died at the hands of their fellow-criminals.¹⁴¹ In the wake of their open rebellion against the Crown, others, too, in many parts of the New World, have taken the law into their own hands and, while affecting to observe the new dispensations, are now in fact in open revolt. They have all been, in every case, extremely reluctant to give up the position and the wealth they have won for themselves during their lives of crime, and unwilling, also, to free the natives they have acquired and condemned to perpetual slavery. Now they have sheathed their swords and no longer murder the natives on sight, they have got into the habit of killing them slowly with hard labour and the imposition of other intolerable and totally unmerited vexations. And, to

date, the Crown has not shown itself strong enough to put a stop to these injustices, because everyone, young and old alike, who journeys to the New World is either openly or in secret a fortune-hunter, albeit that some are worse than others, and all such fortunes are made at the expense of the local people. That they serve their own ends while pretending to serve those of the Crown is something that not only damages the Spanish interest but also brings dishonour on the name of God and on that of the King.

NOTES

1 Romans 1: 28: 'And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.' The phrase is used twice more later in the work (see below, pp. 69 and 74)

2 In this Synopsis Las Casas refers to Emperor Charles V (abdicated 1556) as 'His Majesty' and to his son and heir, the future Philip II, to whom the work is dedicated in the Prologue, as 'His Highness'

3 Proverbs 20:8

4 See Introduction, pp. xviii–xxx

5 The reference is to the Bulls of Donation of 1493 by the terms of which Pope Alexander VI conceded to Ferdinand and Isabella sovereignty over the Americas in exchange for an obligation to convert their inhabitants to Christianity. See Introduction, p. xvi

6 Juan Martínez de Silíceo, a rare bird indeed in mid-sixteenth-century Spain. The son of a rural labourer, he rose to be a philosophy professor at the university of Salamanca, tutor-confessor to Prince Philip, bishop of Cartagena (1540), and archbishop of Toledo (1546)

7 This would appear to be a reference to Philip's visit to the Netherlands in 1549, the last time he was ever to leave the Iberian Peninsula

8 The Short Account was written in 1542; see Introduction, p. xv

9 The island of Hispaniola, comprising today Haiti and the Dominican Republic, is, at its most extensive, some 400 miles from west to east and covers an area of nearly 30,000 square miles. The Spanish league (legua) was calculated as one twenty-fifth of a degree of latitude measured on the earth's surface, or about 2.6 miles (compare the 'maritime' or 'mariners' league equal to three minutes or one twentieth of a degree of latitude). In the absence of reliable means of measuring distances accurately, a day's journey on horseback was often calculated, whatever the terrain, at seven leguas (Hernán Cortés, Letters from Mexico, translated by Anthony Pagden (London: OUP, 1972, 2nd ed., New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 1986, p. 529)

10 'Hammock' (hamaca in Spanish) is one of a dozen or so words common to a great number of European languages – among them potato, tomato, hurricane – which derive from the Taino language of Santo Domingo

11 The maximum east–west extent of Cuba is approximately 700 miles; the distance from Valladolid to Rome some 750

12 The Royal Gardens (Huerta del Rey) were an extensive pleasure ground lying outside the Seville city walls

13 On this expedition, mounted by Pedro de Isla, who would later become a Franciscan friar, see Las Casas, History of the Indies, book II, chapter 45

14 Guarionex; see below, p. 19

15 See Las Casas, History of the Indies, book III, chapter 1

16 The three principal rivers of Spain

17 Columbus called the region 'Cipango' in the belief that it was Japan; see his History of the Indies, book I, chapter 60

18 In Las Casas's account – the only one we have – this Guarionex was one of four kings on the island, all of whom perished, together with Francisco Bobadilla and Francisco Roldán, in the shipwreck described below, p. 20. The others were 'Caonabó', 'Behechio', and 'Higuanama'; see Las Casas, History of the Indies, book II, chapter 5

19 The castilian was a gold coin worth some 480 maravedís and weighing 1.6 ounces

20 The population of Seville has been estimated at between sixty and seventy thousand in 1500 and approximately one hundred thousand in 1565

21 Francisco Roldán, one of the companions of Columbus

22 Mayonabex. On his death, see Las Casas, History of the Indies, book I, chapter 123

23 In 1502

24 The term used by Las Casas for a loaf of bread (hogaza) normally referred at this time to the largest of loaves in common use, round in shape and weighing more than two pounds. By this calculation, the Great Nugget would have weighed over three hundredweight (but see Introduction, pp. xxxi–xxxii)

25 Christopher Columbus

26 Columbus's flagship, the Santa Maria, was lost on Christmas Day 1492

27 On the capture of Caonabó by Alonso de Hojeda and his subsequent loss at sea, see Las Casas, History of the Indies, book I, chapter 102

28 See above, p. 18, n. 18

29 Presumably Nicolás de Ovando (1451–1511), who was made governor of the Americas in 1501 and reached Hispaniola in April of the following year. According to his own account, Las Casas arrived in the Antilles in the same fleet; see Introduction, p. xix. Here, as throughout the Short Account, Las Casas refrains from identifying individuals by name (see Introduction, p. xl). For an exception see below, p. 77, n. 97

30 See above, p. 18, n. 18. In book I of his History of the Indies, chapter 100, Las Casas refers to Higuanama as a 'king' but in book II, chapter 8, calls her 'an old and great queen'

31 Figures for the pre-contact population of the Antilles are necessarily wildly approximate. The highest is about eight million; the lowest – and, because it is based on the potential agricultural yield of the land, the most reliable – is around half a million. The total population of the islands when the Short Account was written did not exceed three hundred thousand. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Arawak were virtually extinct.

32 The arroba, in origin an Arabic term, was widely used throughout the Spanish empire as a measure, both of weight (roughly 25 pounds) and of dry capacity (roughly 15 litres), though its precise value varied regionally

33 This is a pious exaggeration. Yet it was Queen Isabella (died Medina del Campo, Old Castile, 26 November 1504) who, in 1495, had prevented Columbus from selling Amerindians as slaves and who, in 1501, instructed Ovando that she wished the inhabitants of Hispaniola ‘to be well treated as our subjects and our vassals’; see Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indians and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 41–2

34 These expeditions of Juan Ponce de León to Puerto Rico and Juan de Esquivel to Jamaica are discussed at greater length in Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, book II, chapters 46–55

35 Spanish mastiffs proved one of the most feared and most effective weapons of the conquest. The only dogs known to the indigenous inhabitants of the Antilles were the ancestors of the modern Chihuahua, very small and edible

36 See above, p. 11. The Cuba expedition was under the command of Diego Velázquez; see Introduction, p. xxi

37 The Arawak term cacique simply designated a tribal leader, but it came to be used by the Spanish administration all over the Americas to describe Amerindian chieftains who were believed to be inferior in rank to ‘kings’ and ‘princes’ (principales) and who were frequently employed as tax-gatherers

38 Details of this story may be found in Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, book 111, chapters 21 and 25

39 Pánfilo de Narváez (?1480–1528). He had participated with Diego Velázquez in the conquest of Cuba and in 1520 led an army to Mexico in an unsuccessful attempt to wrest control of the country from Hernán Cortés (see below, p. 48). In 1527 he captained an ill-fated expedition to Florida and the following year was the first European to land on the coast of what is today Texas

40 Details of the massacre of Caonao are given at greater length in Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, book 111, chapters 29–30

41 Pedro Arias de Ávila, or Pedrarias Dávila; see Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, pp. 513–14. The Mainland (Tierra Firme) was the name given to northern South America and southern Central America, and was the area referred to by the English as the ‘Spanish Main’

42 Matthew 28:19, a text much cited in justification of missionary work

43 The legislation referred to is the Requerimiento of 1513; see Introduction, pp. xxiv–xxv

44 Fray Juan Cabedo (or Quevedo); see Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, book 111, chapter 59

45 Las Casas may have intended a pun here with the Spanish word ira (‘anger’): ‘You murder anger’

46 In the *History of the Indies*, book 11, chapter 120, the land is variously given as ‘Pariza’, ‘Paris’ and ‘Pariba’, and its cacique as Cutara

47 The numerical inconsistency is in the original

48 Pedrarias Dávila; see above p. 31, n. 41

49 The county of Roussillon, astride the Eastern Pyrenees with its capital at Perpignan

50 The Spanish term carga, generally denoting the maximum quantity a single man could carry at any one time, was also used more narrowly in Castile as a measure of cereals, equal to four fanegas or just over six bushels

51 See above, p. 24, n. 32

52 See Introduction, p. xx

53 Legally, all Amerindians were subjects of the Crown of Castile and enjoyed equal rights with all other subjects of the Crown. Making war on Amerindians, said the great theologian Francisco de Vitoria, was like making war on the inhabitants of Seville; see Introduction, p. xx, and Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, pp. 29–33

54 Francisco Hernández de Córdoba led the first expedition to Mexico in 1517; he was followed by Juan de Grijalva in 1518. Both of these, however, were trading expeditions and neither had formal leave to settle. The first fully equipped military venture was that led by Cortés which left Cuba on 18 November 1519

55 See Introduction, p. xxxix

56 This was Cortés’s most spectacular and widely reported massacre. Cholula was a wealthy town on the major Central America trade-route; it was also the cult-centre of Quetzalcoátl, the Mexican deity with whom Cortés is supposed to have been confused. Cortés gave the number of dead as three thousand, but another witness, Vázquez de Tapia, claimed the death-toll was ten times higher. The precise figures are irrecoverable; see Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, pp. 465–6

57 Cúe (or quu) was simply the Mexican (Nahuátl) word for a temple

58 There is little substance to this account, as Mexican temples were built of stone and thus could not be destroyed by fire. For the name and title of the Mexican chieftain, normally known in English as Montezuma (from the common Spanish form of his name, Moctezuma), see Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, p. 460

59 A traditional Spanish ballad:

*Mira Nero de Tarpeya, a Roma cómo se ardia
gritos dan niños y viejos, y él de nada se dolia.*

60 For Cortés's account of the attacks mounted against his men in Tepeaca 'from strong and dangerous positions' – which, for reasons he does not explain, led to the attackers' neither 'killing nor wounding a single Spaniard' – see Letters from Mexico, pp. 145–8

61 The proper name for the city which Las Casas calls 'Mexico' was Temixtitán or Tenochtitlán

62 Montezuma's brother Cuitlahuac (Cuetravacin) was lord of Yztapalapa, a city through which Cortés had passed on his journey from Cholula. See Cortés's account of this episode in Letters from Mexico, pp. 83–4.

63 By Cortés's own account, Montezuma was not seized until more than a week later (Letters from Mexico, pp. 88–90)

64 The commander was Cortés, the captain Pánfilo de Narváez. On this expedition and the reasons behind the Narváez expedition, see the essay by J.H. Elliott, 'Cortés, Velázquez, and Charles V', in Letters from Mexico, pp. xi–xxxvii (xxiii–xxvi)

65 The captain left in charge was Pedro de Alvarado, a veteran of Juan de Grijalva's expedition and effectively second-in-command to Cortés; see J.E. Kelly, Pedro de Alvarado, conquistador (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932; reissue Washington, etc.: Kennikat Press, 1971). Cortés's claim that he left Mexico City garrisoned by 'five hundred men' (Letters from Mexico, p. 119) is at odds with eyewitness accounts which put the number at about one hundred and twenty, many of them sick and wounded

66 For a previous reference to areitos, see above p. 28

67 Santiago, the name of Saint James of Compostela, was traditionally used by the Spanish as a battle-cry, the legend being that he appeared in person, mounted on a white charger, at the battle of Clavijo against the Moors which supposedly took place in the year 822

68 On the site of Tenochtitlán and Cortés's retreat on what became known as the 'Black Night' (noche triste), see his Letters from Mexico, pp. 131–8

69 Las Casas is here conflating two events: the retreat which took place in 1520 and the siege of the city by Cortés the following year

70 Various 'Tatutepeque', 'Tuchitebeque', 'Tututepec', or 'Tuxtepeque'

71 Or 'Ipilcingo'

72 Also known as 'Colimán' or 'Alimán'

73 Las Casas calls the Pacific 'the southern shore' and the Atlantic 'the northern shore' (e.g. below, p. 63)

74 The overland expedition to Guatemala was under the command of Pedro de Alvarado (see above, p. 49, n. 65), the fleet headed for Honduras under that of Cristóbal de Olid. Alvarado's own account of the conquest of Guatemala is contained in his two surviving letters to Cortés, reproduced in English translation in Patricia de Fuentes, The Conquistadores (New York: Orion Press, 1963), pp. 182–96, and used extensively by Las Casas in compiling the present account

75 For an account of Olid's drumhead court-marshal and execution at the hands of Francisco de Las Casas and Gil González Dávila, see Cortés, Letters from Mexico, p. 412 and Robert S. Chamberlain, The Conquest and Colonization of Honduras, 1502–1550 (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute, 1953), pp. 11–14

76 Las Casas is presumably alluding to his journey through the area in 1540 on his way to take ship for Europe

77 Utatlán (or Uclalán), known to its original inhabitants as Gumarkaaj and capital of the Quiché kingdom, stood near the modern town of Santa Cruz de Quiché. The chief mentioned here was Tecum Uman, later assassinated by Alvarado

78 Pedro de Alvarado took three of his brothers on the Guatemala expedition: Gonzalo, Gómez and Jorge; see Kelly, Pedro de Alvarado, pp. 121–55

79 Las Casas gives this as 'Cuzcatán'

80 Possibly Antigua, which was hit by a hurricane in September 1541

81 The imperial Spanish quintal weighed one hundred pounds

82 Las Casas here uses the term 'cannon' to invoke an image of the artillery trains of European armies. Alvarado would have had only a few mortars

83 The first expedition was to Peru in 1534; the second, which was to have sailed under Alvarado to the Spice Islands in 1541, never got off the ground

84 Alvarado was killed in a skirmish in Nochistlán in July 1541

85 Beltrán Nuño de Guzmán. For an account of Nuño in English, characterizing him as 'a natural gangster', see J.H. Parry, The Audiencia of New Galicia in the Sixteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948; reprinted 1968), pp. 19–26

86 The Audiencias, or Chanceries, were royal courts of justice, normally presided over by a high-ranking churchman but staffed by qualified lawyers. The first such body was established in Castile in the mid-fifteenth century. In the New World, the Audiencias had far greater authority than in mainland Spain and were intimately involved in the government of the colony in question. The magistrates (oidores) in this first Audiencia of New Spain, presided over by Nuño de Guzmán, were Paredes, Francisco Maldonado, Matienzo and Delgadillo

87 The first Franciscans, known as 'the Twelve', arrived in 1524. The oidores of the second Audiencia, convened under the presidency of Francisco Ramírez de Fuenleal, bishop of Santo Domingo, were Vasco de Quiroga (the first bishop of Michoacán), Alonso Maldonado, Juan de Salmerón and Francisco de Ceynos; see Arthur S. Aiton, Antonio de Mendoza, First Viceroy of New Spain (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1927), p. 58

88 The lord of the independent Tarascan state of Michoacán was known as the cazonci, or catzontzin

89 The Spanish term is visitador, literally, 'visitor'

90 See above, p. 3, note 1

91 Zechariah 11: 4–5

92 Francisco de Montejo (?1479–1553), who had been one of Cortés's companions in 1519 and conquered much of the Yucatán Peninsula between 1526 and 1537. His son, also named Francisco, founded the city of Mérida there in 1542

93 See above, p. 24, note 32

94 See above, p. 3, note 1

95 Jacobo de Tastera (or Testera), O.S.F., was a personal friend of Las Casas

96 Antonio de Mendoza, who did not in fact arrive in Mexico until late 1535

97 This is one of the very few occasions in the Short Account on which Las Casas names one of the 'blackguards' he is attacking. However, the name is too common for any identification to be possible

98 Santa Marta was founded by Rodrigo de Bastidas in 1525 in what is now the Republic of Colombia

99 Alonso de Hojeda, Diego de Nicuesa, Vasco de Balboa, Pedrarias Dávila, García de Lerma, Pedro Fernández de Lugo, Alonso Luis de Lugo, etc. The 'principle' of which Las Casas speaks is set out on p. 25, above

100 This is a reference to his History of the Indies; see Introduction, pp. xvii–xviii

101 Fray Juan Fernández de Ángulo. The practice of elevating members of the regular clergy to colonial bishoprics had grown up during the reign of Charles V

102 The Emperor Charles V was normally addressed as 'Cæsar'

103 Many of the journeys described took place at high altitude

104 Among those active in this region were Juan de la Cosa, Cristóbal Guerra, Alonso de Hojeda and Diego de Nicuesa

105 What Las Casas terms the 'Pearl Coast' and the 'Paria Coast' refer together to what is today known as the Paria Peninsula, in northeast Venezuela. The pearl-fishing was conducted in the waters around the Isla Margarita (literally, 'Pearl Island')

106 Juan Bono. Las Casas, History of the Indies, book 111, chapter 91, says no more than that Bono was a Basque, remarking sourly that he was as good (bono) as the negro Juan Blanco – a famous pirate and despoiler of the Amerindians – was white (blanco)

107 See Las Casas, History of the Indies, book 111, chapters 4 and 39. Francisco Hernández de Córdoba O.P. was one of the companions of Antonio Montesinos (see Introduction, pp. xx–xxi); Juan Garcés, like Las Casas himself, had been an encomendero before his conversion to the Amerindian cause.

108 There is a more detailed account of this episode in Las Casas, History of the Indies, book 111, chapter 33

109 This occurred during the abortive attempt by Francisco de Soto to colonize Cumaná in January 1522

110 See Las Casas, History of the Indies, book 111, chapter 159

111 The modern town of Higuerote lies to the south of Codera Point (Cabo Codera) and some sixty miles east of Caracas. The discrepancy in the spelling is in the original

112 See Las Casas, History of the Indies, book 111, chapter 166

113 The making of flour from the roots of the cassava (caçabí, in Old Spanish), widely grown throughout the region, was a complex process involving the removal of poisonous juices

114 The deal, signed in the spring of 1528 (not 1526) with the Welser banking house of Augsburg, was to have important implications for the slave trade. Welser agents in Venezuela included Heinrich Ehiger, Hieronymus Sieler, Ambrosius Eingher (or Alfinger), Georg Spier and Nikolaus Federmann

115 The Spanish term employed by Las Casas, luterano (strictly speaking, 'Lutheran'), was widely used, both in Europe and the New World, to indicate any deviant from the prevailing Catholic religious orthodoxy

116 See above, p. 24, note 32

117 The pun in Spanish is: 'animales o alemanes' (animals or Germans)

118 Probably Ponce de León and Pánfilo de Narváez. See above, pp. 29 and 48

119 Hernando de Soto, who died in the area in 1542 or 1543

120 See above, p. 25

121 The region, discovered in 1515 by Díaz de Solís, was the object of expeditions by, among others, Sebastian Cabot, Pedro de Mendoza, Martínez de Irala, Juan de Ayolá and Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca

122 Francisco Pizarro

123 The island, given by Las Casas as 'Pugna', lies off the coast of Ecuador in the Gulf of Guayaquil

124 In northwest Peru, Las Casas giving this as 'Tumbala', possibly as a result of confusion with the name of the cacique of Puná

125 Consistently called by Las Casas 'Atabalíba'

126 Fray Marcos's accusations were originally made in a letter to the bishop of Mexico, the Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga

127 It is not clear whether this figure is meant to indicate two million castilians (see above, p. 19, note 19) or a similar number of pesos

128 A people of southern central Ecuador

129 This is probably the person the royal chronicler Antonio de Herrera calls 'Zope-Zopahua'. He had, in fact, been leader of the opposition to Sebastián de Benalcázar in the Quito region

130 Benalcázar was the conqueror of Nicaragua and one of the members of Pizarro's first expedition

131 Las Casas gives this as 'Andón'

132 This is a reference to the revolt of 1537–8 led by the Inca Tupac Amaru; see below, p. 115

133 The text gives 'Elingue'

134 The reference would appear to be to the puppet ruler of Cuzco who led an unsuccessful revolt against the Spaniards in 1537–8

135 Jiménez de Quesada. Other pioneers in the area included Nikolaus Federmann and Sebastián de Benalcázar

136 See Introduction, p. xx

137 Las Casas gives his name as 'Bogotá'

138 See above, p. 25

139 Las Casas did not in fact arrive in the Antilles until 1502

140 These are the famous 'New Laws'; see Introduction, p. xxvii

141 The reference is to the civil war between the followers of the Pizarro brothers and those of one of Pizarro's former captains, Diego de Almagro. It lasted from 1537 until 1548 and nearly destroyed the colony