

Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542) (Project Gutenberg EBook)

Of the Island HISPANIOLA.

In this Isle, which, as we have said, the _Spaniards_ first attempted, the bloody slaughter and destruction of Men first began: for they violently forced away Women and Children to make them Slaves, and ill-treated them, consuming and wasting their Food, which they had purchased with great sweat, toil, and yet remained dissatisfied too, which every one according to his strength and ability, and that was very inconsiderable (for they provided no other Food than what was absolutely necessary to support Nature without superfluity, freely bestow'd on them, and one individual _Spaniard_ consumed more Victuals in one day, than would serve to maintain Three Families a Month, everyone consisting of Ten Persons. Now being oppressed by such evil usage, and afflicted with such greate Torments and violent Entertainment they began to understand that such Men as those had not their Mission from Heaven; and therefore some of them conceal'd their Provisions and others to their Wives and Children in lurking holes, but some, to avoid the obdurate and dreadful temper of such a Nation, sought their Refuge on the craggy tops of Mountains; for the _Spaniards_ did not only entertain them with Cuffs, Blows, and wicked Cudgelling, but laid violent hands also on the Governours of Cities; and this arriv'd at length to that height of Temerity and Impudence, that a certain Captain was so audacious as abuse the Consort of the most puissant King of the whole Isle. From which time they began to consider by what wayes and means they might expel the _Spaniards_ out of their Countrey, and immediately took up Arms. But, good God, what Arms, do you imagin? Namely such, both Offensive and Defensive, as resemble Reeds wherewith Boys sport with one another, more than Manly Arms and Weapons.

Which the _Spaniards_ no sooner perceived, but they, mounted on generous Steeds, well weapon'd with Lances and Swords, begin to exercise their bloody Butcheries and Strategems, and overrunning their Cities and Towns, spar'd no Age, or Sex, nay not so much as Women with Child, but ripping up their Bellies, tore them alive in pieces. They laid Wagers among themselves, who should with a Sword at one blow cut, or divide a Man in two; or which of them should decollate or behead a Man, with the greatest dexterity; nay farther, which should sheath his Sword in the Bowels of a Man with the quickest dispatch and expedition.

They snatcht young Babes from the Mothers Breasts, and then dasht out the brains of those innocents against the Rocks; others they cast into Rivers scoffing and jeering them, and call'd upon their Bodies when falling with derision, the true testimony of their Cruelty, to come to them, and

inhumanely exposing others to their Merciless Swords, together with the Mothers that gave them Life.

They erected certain Gibbets, large, but low made, so that their feet almost reacht the ground, every one of which was so order'd as to bear Thirteen Persons in Honour and Reverence (as they said blasphemously) of our Redeemer and his Twelve Apostles, under which they made a Fire to burn them to Ashes whilst hanging on them: But those they intended to preserve alive, they dismiss'd, their Hands half cut, and still hanging by the Skin, to carry their Letters missive to those that fly from us and ly sculking on the Mountains, as an exprobaton of their flight.

The Lords and Persons of Noble Extract were usually expos'd to this kind of Death; they order'd Gridirons to be placed and supported with wooden Forks, and putting a small Fire under them, these miserable Wretches by degrees and with loud Shreiks and exquisite Torments, at last Expir'd.

I once saw Four or Five of their most Powerful Lords laid on these Gridirons, and thereon roasted, and not far off, Two or Three more over-spread with the same Commodity, Man's Flesh; but the shrill Clamours which were heard there being offensive to the Captain, by hindring his Repose, he commanded them to be strangled with a Halter. The Executioner (whose Name and Parents at _Sevil_ are not unknown to me) prohibited the doing of it; but stopt Gags into their Mouths to prevent the hearing of the noise (he himself making the Fire) till that they dyed, when they had been roasted as long as he thought convenient. I was an Eye-Witness of these and innumerable Number of other Cruelties: And because all Men, who could lay hold of the opportunity, sought out lurking holes in the Mountains, to avoid as dangerous Rocks so Brutish and Barbarous a People, Strangers to all Goodness, and the Extirpaters and Adversaries of Men, they bred up such fierce hunting Dogs as would devour an _Indian_ like a Hog, at first sight in less than a moment: Now such kind of Slaughters and Cruelties as these were committed by the Curs, and if at any time it hapned, (which was rarely) that the _Indians_ irritated upon a just account destroy'd or took away the Life of any _Spaniard,_ they promulgated and proclaim'd this Law among them, that One Hundred _Indians_ should dye for every individual _Spaniard_ that should be slain.