



Ancient America

John Baldwin

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It is generally known, I suppose, that original manuscript records of Norse voyages to this continent have been carefully preserved in Iceland, and that they were first published at Copenhagen in 1837, with a Danish and a Latin translation. These narratives are plain, straightforward, business-like accounts of actual voyages made by the Northmen, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, to Greenland, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the coast of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Within the whole range of the literature of discovery and adventure no volumes can be found which have more abundant internal evidence of authenticity. It always happens, when something important is unexpectedly added to our knowledge of the past, that somebody will blindly disbelieve. Dugald Stewart could see nothing but “frauds of arch-forgers” in what was added to our knowledge of ancient India when the Sanskrit language and literature were discovered. In the same way, here and there a doubter has hesitated to accept the fact communicated by these Norse records; but, with the evidence before us, we may as reasonably doubt any unquestioned fact of history which depends on similar testimony.

Any account of these voyages should be prefaced by some notice of Iceland. Look on a map at the position of Iceland, and you will see at once that it should not be classed as a European island. It belongs to North America. It was, in fact, unknown to modern Europe until the year 861 A.D., when it was discovered by Nadodd, a Norse rover. There is some reason to believe the Irish had previously sailed to this island, but no settlement was established in it previous to the year 875, when it was occupied by a colony of Norwegians under a chief named Ingolf. Owing to civil troubles in Norway, he was soon followed by many of the most intelligent, wealthy, and honorable of his countrymen.

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