THE MEDICI LETTER. Letter on his Third Voyage from AMERIGO VESPUCCI to LORENZO PIETRO FRANCESCO DI MEDICI.

March (or April) 1503.

Alberico Vesputio to Lorenzo Pietro di Medici, salutation. In past days I wrote very fully to you of my return from the new countries, which have been found and explored with the ships, at the cost, and by the command, of this Most Serene King of Portugal; and it is lawful to call it a new world, because none of these countries were known to our ancestors, and to all who hear about them they will be entirely new. For the opinion of the ancients was, that the greater part of the world beyond the equinoctial line to the south was not land, but only sea, which they have called the Atlantic; and if they have affirmed that any continent is there, they have given many reasons for denying that it is inhabited. But this their opinion is false, and entirely opposed to the truth. My last voyage has proved it, for I have found a continent in that southern part; more populous and more full of animals than our Europe, or Asia, or Africa, and even more temperate and pleasant than any other region known to us, as will be explained further on. I shall write succinctly of the principal things only, and the things most worthy of notice and of being remembered, which I either saw or heard of in this new world, as presently will become manifest....

It was on the 7th of August 1501, that we reached those countries, thanking our Lord God with solemn prayers, and celebrating a choral Mass. We knew that land to be a continent, and not an island, from its long beaches extending without trending round, the infinite number of inhabitants, the numerous tribes and peoples, the numerous kinds of wild animals unknown in our country, and many others never seen before by us, touching which it would take long to make reference. The clemency of God was shown forth to us by being brought to these regions; for the ships were in a leaking state, and in a few days our lives might have been lost in the sea. ... We took counsel, and resolved to navigate along the coast of this continent towards the east, and never to lose sight of the land. We sailed along until we came to a point where the coast turned to
the south. The distance from the landfall to this point was nearly 300 leagues. In this stretch of
coast we often landed, and had friendly relations with the natives, as I shall presently relate. I had
forgotten to tell you that from Cape Verde to the first land of this continent the distance is nearly
700 leagues; although I estimate that we went over more than 1,800, partly owing to ignorance of
the route, and partly owing to the tempests and foul winds which drove us off our course, and
sent us in various directions. If my companions had not trusted in me, to whom cosmography was
known, no one, not the leader of our navigation, would have known where we were after running
500 leagues. We were wandering and full of errors, and only the instruments for taking the
altitudes of heavenly bodies showed us our position. These were the quadrant and astrolabe, as
known to all. These have been much used by me with much honour; for I showed them that a
knowledge of the marine chart, and the rules taught by it, are more worth than all the pilots in the
world. For these pilots have no knowledge beyond those places to which they have often sailed.