

# The True History *of* Christopher Columbus

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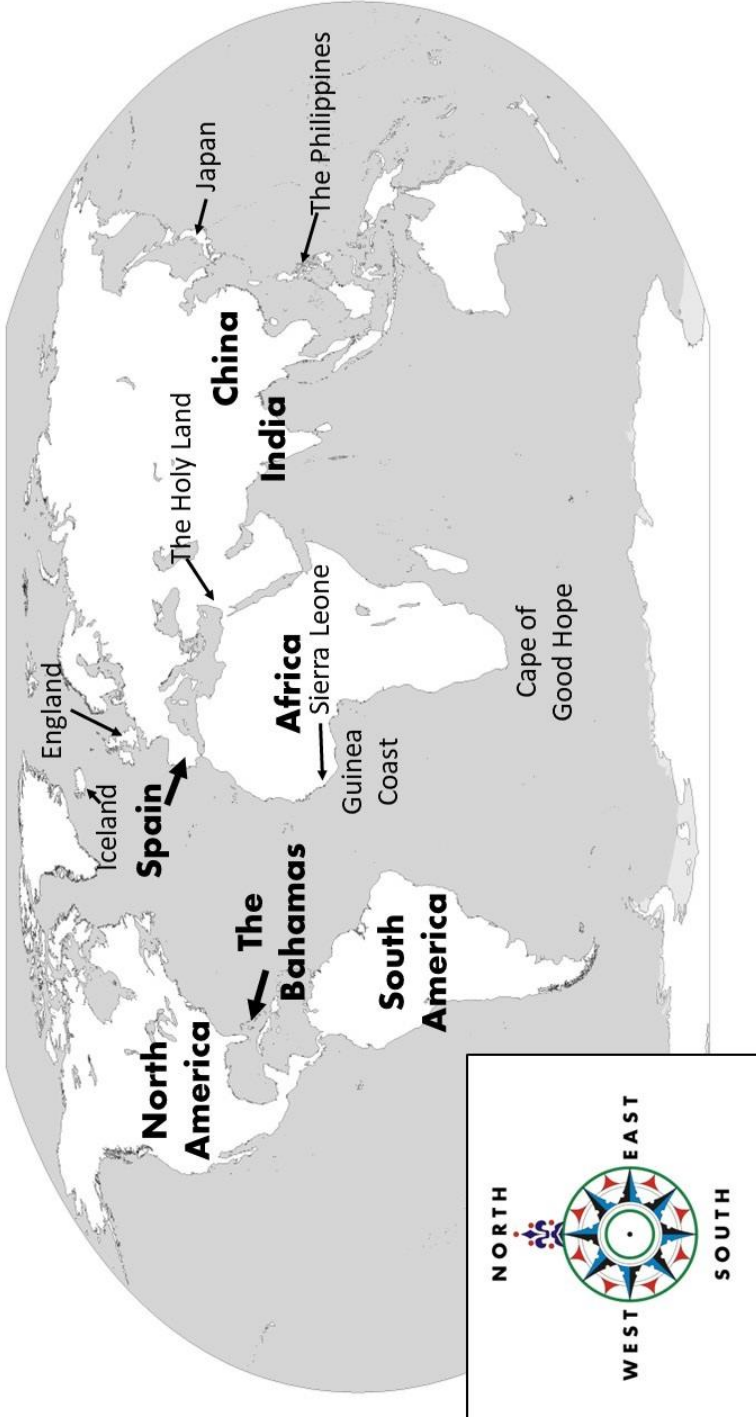
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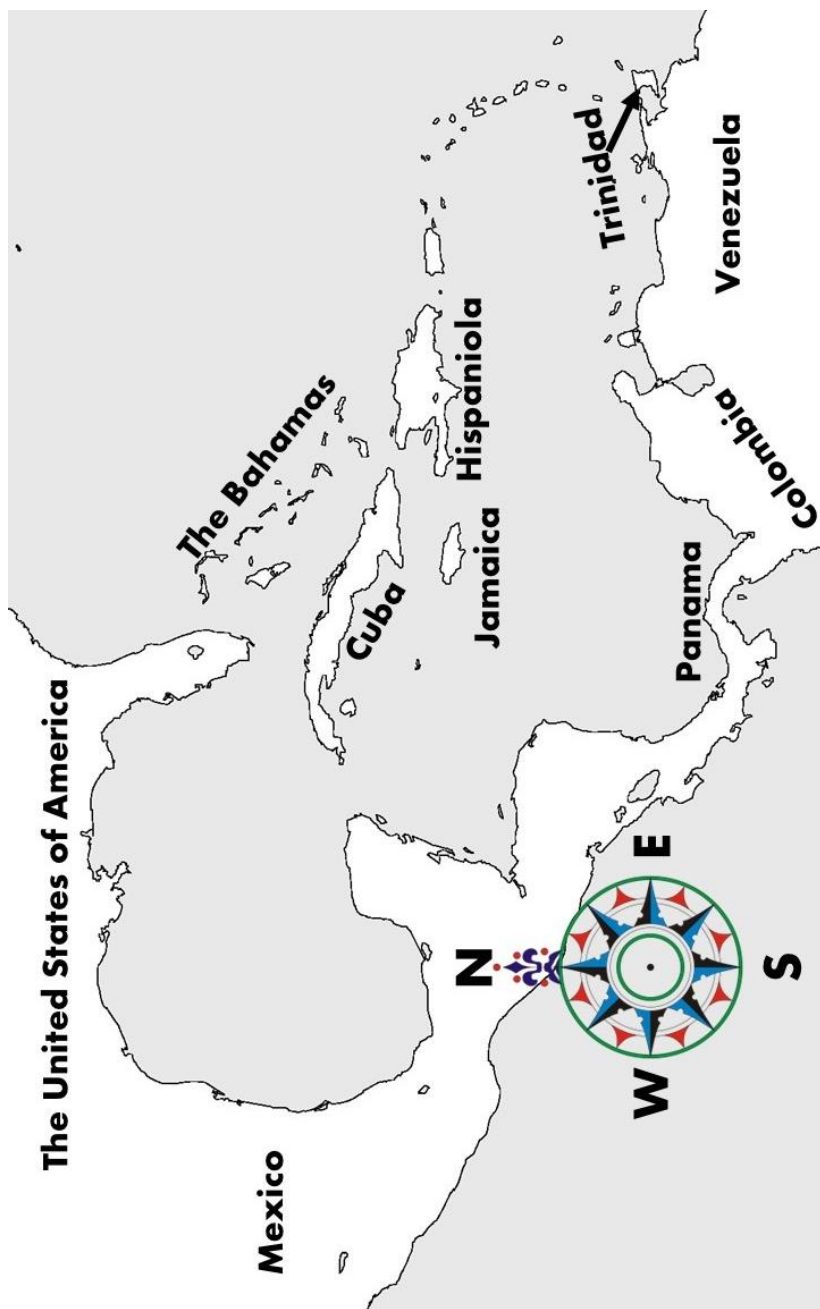


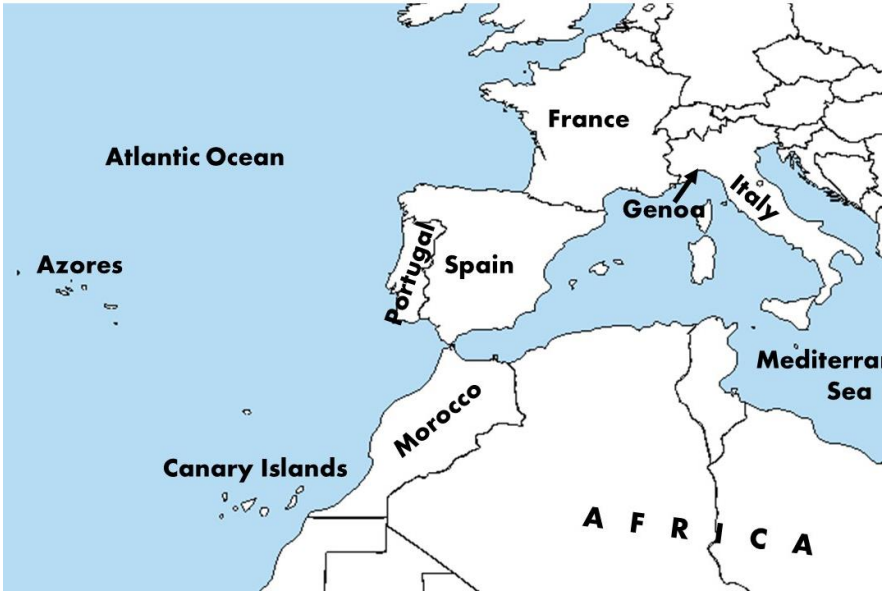
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## INTRODUCTION

In America today, the name Columbus is so widespread and the honor given to him so vast that it is difficult to recognize it. It seems just as common as the grass under one's feet. For example, the U.S. capital is Washington D.C. But what does D.C. stand for? It stands for "District of Columbia," which comes from Christopher Columbus's name. There too is Columbus Day every October 12 in the United States; there is Colombia the South American country; there is the state of Ohio's most populous and capital city, Columbus; there is the ivy-league university Columbia in New York City; there is the Canadian province British Columbia; and there is an endless stream of cities, counties, and companies, as well as hundreds of Columbus statues and monuments.

In fact, historically, the name Columbia was used interchangeably with the name America (which came from the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci who came to America not long after Columbus but wrote about it and mapped it much more effectively). Some say that the United States of America was almost named the United States of Columbia. Such is the fame earned by Columbus for discovering for Europeans the New World, which he thought was India and Asia.

It is a common trait of human nature that whenever a person's fame grows large, it inevitably incites jealousy and then hatred. This has also been the case for Christopher Columbus. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the hatred against Columbus has gotten so intense that people have in recent years even torn down or vandalized Columbus statues.

This anger toward Columbus is driven by ignorance, and like most ignorance it begins in facts but quickly goes off track and has a basic misunderstanding. The ignorance about Columbus is grounded in instances of the newly arrived Europeans' mistreatment of the Native Americans, or "Indians" as Columbus mistakenly called them. What must be understood is that Columbus, like many great figures in history, was essentially a conqueror advancing what he believed was a morally superior cause. This sense of moral superiority was undoubtedly strengthened by the fact that one group of Native Americans he encountered was cannibalistic and likely ate some of his men. Our concept of a civilian's (non-military person's) mistreatment today of

another civilian simply doesn't make sense in the context of a military figure, a conqueror, in 15th century Europe and Spain and throughout much of history leading up to that moment. Under Columbus's leadership the conquering proceeded in a manner that was so courteous and friendly as to not seem like conquering at all. He was Italian and apparently had both a passion for discovery and spiritual pursuits. He needed concrete results too in order to fund his voyages, and these came in the form of gold and land ownership. However, the personal benefits were always secondary for him, as his life story in this book shows.

Columbus's style of conquering was not shared by the Spaniards who took charge of the colony that he founded not long after he founded it. They were more interested in riches and personal gain, and this led to, at times, the ordinary sort of blood-soaked conquering that some have mistakenly associated with Columbus. Therefore, in addition to being a brilliant explorer, Columbus was a model military figure worth admiring to this day. That said, he was a military figure, a conqueror, and that typically involves battle, war, taking prisoners, and punishing people in unpleasant ways. Virtually all of the major nations of the world and cultures are built on the foundations laid by such military figures, both conquerors and defenders.

## **Historical Context**

To better understand Columbus and his life, one must have some basic understanding of the world he lived in and of Western civilization up to this point.

In ancient times, over 2,000 years ago, people worshipped the Greek and Roman Gods, Zeus, Apollo, Mars, Venus, etc., and many other peoples worshipped Gods of a similar nature. According to stories that were passed down, such Gods ruled over people, nature, and the universe in supernatural ways. At times, they became involved in human affairs and didn't seem too different from ordinary people.

Then, in what we consider the year 1, more or less, among a group of people known as the Jews, a baby named Jesus was born. This was not in Europe, but a little bit east of it in an area we call today the Middle East. The God who Jesus spoke of was more peaceful and different from what most people had understood about Gods and Goddesses



before this. Jesus's teachings encouraged self-sacrifice, kindness toward enemies, and forgiving others. He performed many miracles such as healing the sick, walking on water, and driving away demons.

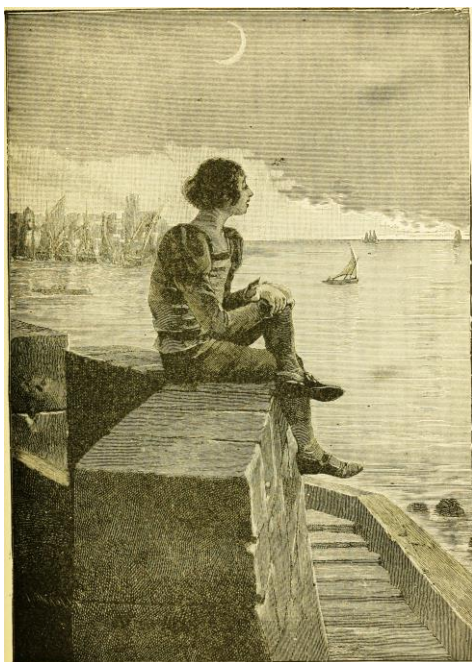
Jesus's teachings became so popular and so important that the calendar we use today is based on his birth year. He was called Christ, meaning the christened one or the chosen one. Jesus Christ and his followers were persecuted by their fellow Jews and by the Roman Empire—a persecution that lasted for about 300 years. After that, the Roman Emperor Constantine decided to give Christianity a try. He led his army into a significant battle with Christian symbols painted on his soldiers' shields and flags. He was victorious, and must have thought to himself afterwards, "It works!" After that, he decided to become a Christian himself and legalize Christianity, causing it to flourish throughout the vast lands of the Roman Empire.

That was in the 300s A.D. A few hundred years later in the 500s A.D., another spiritual leader arose in the Middle East, an Arab military leader named Muhammad. He said he followed the same God that the Jews and the Christians followed, but also claimed greater authority than those religions' teachings. Muhammad's teachings encouraged violence and punishment against non-followers. Unlike other key spiritual figures in human civilization at the time, particularly Jesus Christ and Buddha Shakyamuni, Muhammad was directly engaged in ordinary politics and encouraged violence, while at the same time saying he had divine authority over other traditional religions. It is perhaps no surprise that in the present time, many suicidal terrorists claim to be followers of Muhammad, also known as Muslims. The religion formed by Muhammad's followers is today called Islam. Historically, Christians viewed Islam as an evil religion.

Another 500 years later, around 1000 A.D., most of civilization west of Asia and east of the Atlantic Ocean was divided into two groups, Christians in the North, primarily in Europe, and Muslims in the South, primarily in the Middle East and Africa (this is a very rough simplification, but it gives you the general idea). As mentioned above, Christianity actually started in the Middle East, and the particular area where Jesus lived and taught in the Middle East was called the Holy Land. At some point, the Muslims conquered this area and took it from the Christians. They also continued to press further northward into

central Europe and even conquered all of Spain in Europe. This led to a series of crusades, which involved European monarchs teaming up together to try to fight off Muslim forces and take back the Holy Land. In the long run, these crusades all failed to keep the Holy Land in Christian hands. However, they did stop the northward spread of Islam into Europe.

Particularly of interest to the story of Christopher Columbus is the case of Spain, which is the European country closest to Africa. It was completely overrun and controlled by Muslims by around 1000 A.D. Over the next 500 years, the European Christians fought to take Spain back and were gradually successful. This is where our story begins. Intense warring against the last Muslim lands in Spain is what keeps the King and Queen of Spain from sending Christopher Columbus to the West to search for a trade route to India sooner. Only when Spain is fully recovered in 1492, does Columbus get sent on the voyage to “the Indies” he had been awaiting for years.



*A depiction of Columbus as a boy.*

## CHAPTER 1

# The Early Life of Christopher Columbus

Growing up in the Italian republic Genoa, Christopher Columbus's father was not a rich man, but he was able to send Christopher, as a boy, to the University of Pavia, and here he studied grammar, geometry, geography and navigation, astronomy and the Latin language. But this was as a boy, for in his fourteenth year he left the university and enrolled into "the larger college of the world." The next fifteen years of his life is hard to trace. It was the life of a young seaman, going wherever there was a voyage for him. He says of himself, "I have seen all the eastern Mediterranean Sea, all the western coasts, and the North. I have seen England; I have often made the voyage from Lisbon to the Guinea coast." This he wrote in a letter to the King and Queen of Spain. He says, "I went to sea from the most tender age and have continued in a sea life to this day. Whoever gives himself up to this art wants to know the secrets of Nature here below [Heaven]... Wherever any one has sailed, there I have sailed."

"In 1477," he says, in one of his letters, "in the month of February, I sailed more than 100 leagues\* beyond Iceland... The English, mainly those of Bristol, carry their merchandise, to this island, which is as large as England. When I was there the sea was not frozen, but the tides there are so strong that they rise and fall 40 feet."

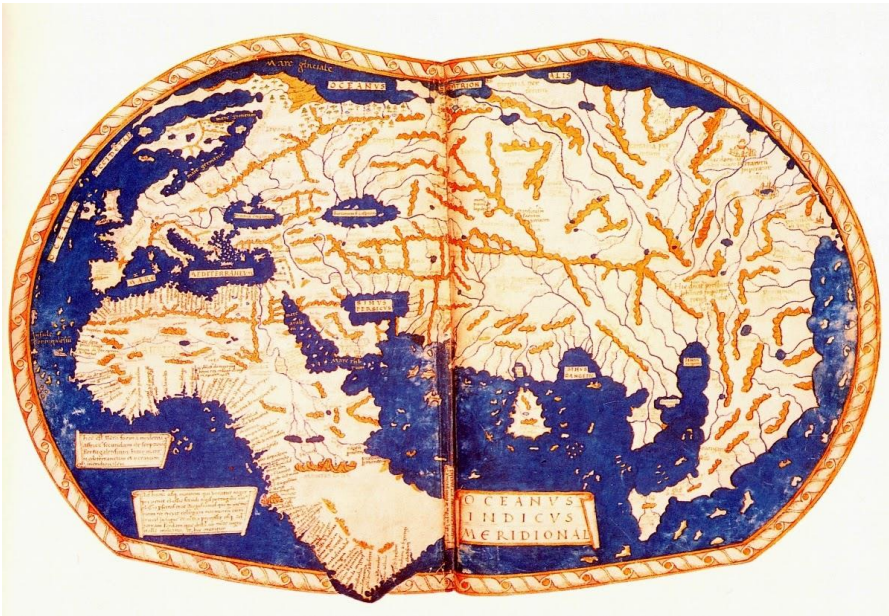
The order of his life, after his visit to Iceland, is better known. He was no longer an adventurous sailor boy, glad to go on any voyage he could; he was a man in his late twenties. It is said that he was in command of one of the ships of his relative Colon el Mozo, when, in the sea near Portugal, his relative engaged four Venetian ships returning from Flanders. A bloody battle followed. The ship that Christopher Columbus commanded fought one of the Venetian ships, which his ship set fire to. Because of gunpowder, there was danger of an explosion, and Columbus saw this danger for both ships before the explosion and flung himself into the sea. He seized a floating oar, and thus made it to shore. He was not far from Lisbon, and settled there

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\* League: 1 league equals 3 miles.

and married.

His wife was named Philippa. She was the daughter of an Italian gentleman named Bartolomeo Muniz de Perestrello, who was, like Columbus, a sailor, and was interested in all of the new advancements that were being made in geography. This was in the year 1477, and the King of Portugal was pressing for expeditions that could link Europe to China and India using the sea. The Silk Road, which brought silk from Asia, had existed for thousands of years already, linking Asia and Europe via land routes; but it took years and great cost. Later on, the King of Portugal's efforts would result in the discovery of the route to the Indies by the Cape of Good Hope.\*



*A 15<sup>th</sup> century map of the entire world, showing mountains and rivers.*

The young couple had to live. Neither the bride nor her husband had any fortune, and Columbus occupied himself as a draftsman, illustrating books, making terrestrial globes (which must have been

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\* The Cape of Good Hope: The water around the southern tip of Africa. See map on page 4.

curiously inaccurate since they had no Cape of Good Hope and no American continents), drawing charts for sale, and collecting, where he could, the material for such study. Such charts and maps were beginning to assume new importance in those days of geographical discovery. The value attached to them may be judged from the statement that the explorer Amerigo Vespucci paid 130 ducats for one map. This sum would be about a quarter to half the total cost of a new car in our time.

Columbus did not give up making money on the sea. He made voyages to the coast of Guinea and in other directions.

It seems clear that, from the time when he arrived in Lisbon, for many years, he was at work trying to interest people in his “great plan” for western discovery. He says himself, “I was constantly corresponding with learned men, some religious officials and some laymen, some Latin and some Greek, some Jews and some Moors.”\*

We must not assume that the idea of the roundness of the earth was invented by Columbus. Although there were other theories about its shape, many intelligent men well understood that the earth was a globe, and that the Indies, though they were always reached from Europe by going to the East via the Silk Road, must be on the west of Europe also. There is a very funny story in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, in which a traveler is represented as having gone, mostly on foot, through all the countries of Asia, but finally decides to return to Norway, his home. In his farthest eastern exploration, he hears some people calling their cattle by a strange cry, which he had never heard before. After he returned home to Norway, it was necessary for him to take a day’s journey westward to look after some cattle he had lost. Finding these cattle, he also heard the same cry of people calling cattle, which he had heard in the extreme East, and now found out that he had gone around the world on foot, turned around and came all the way back by the same route, when he was only a day’s journey from home. Columbus was familiar with such stories as this, and also had the astronomical knowledge that almost made him know that the world was round, “and, like a ball, goes spinning in the air,” he writes. The difficulty was to persuade other people that, because of this roundness,

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\* Moor: Usually an Arab Muslim from Morocco, in Africa.

it would be possible to reach Asia by sailing west.

Now all the well-known geographers assumed that there was not nearly so large a distance as there in fact was between Europe and Asia. Thus, in the geography of Ptolemy,\* which was the standard book at that time, one hundred and thirty-five degrees, a little more than one-third of the earth's circumference, is given to the space between the extreme eastern part of the Indies and the Canary Islands. In fact, as we now know, the distance is one hundred and eighty degrees, half the world's circumference. Had Columbus believed there was such a huge distance, he would never have undertaken his voyage.

Almost all the detailed knowledge of the Indies that the people of his time had, was given by the explorations of Marco Polo (1254-1324), an Italian traveler of the thirteenth century, whose book had long been in the possession of European readers. For them, it was a very entertaining book. Marco Polo had visited the court of the Great Kublai Khan, founder of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). He also brought back stories of Japan, which he had himself never visited. Columbus knew, therefore, that east of the Indies† was Japan, and he aimed at that island because he thought that was the nearest point to Europe. When finally he arrived at Cuba, he thought he was in Japan.

While there were many suggestions made that it would be possible to cross the Atlantic, there was one man who determined to do this. This man was Christopher Columbus. But he knew well that he could not do it alone. He needed money for an expedition, he needed the legal authority to enlist crews for ships, and he needed political power to govern those crews when they arrived in the Indies. In later times such adventures have been conducted by private companies, but in those times no one thought of doing any such thing without the direct assistance and support of a king or queen.

It is easy now to see and to say that Columbus himself was uniquely well suited to take charge of the expedition of discovery. He was an excellent sailor and at the same time he was an educated geographer and a good mathematician. He was living in Portugal and the kings of this country had, for many years, supported the exploration of the

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\* Ptolemy: (pronounced "Tolomy") an ancient Greek astronomer and mathematician.

† Indies: a generic name for southern Asia used by Europeans at the time.

coast of Africa, and were pushing expeditions farther and farther South.



*An illustration from Marco Polo's famous 14<sup>th</sup> century book shows him traveling through Asia with camels and an elephant.*

In doing this, they were making new discoveries. Europe was completely ignorant of the western coast of Africa beyond the Canary Islands when their expeditions began. But all educated men knew that, hundreds of years before the Christian era (B.C.), Hanno, a Carthaginian, had sailed around Africa. The efforts of the King of Portugal were to repeat the voyage made by Hanno. In 1441, Gonzales and Tristram sailed as far as Sierra Leone on the West coast of Africa. They brought back some blacks as slaves, and this was the beginning of the slave trade over the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1446 the Portuguese took possession of the Azores, the most western point that was known by Europeans. Step by step they advanced southward and became familiar with the African coast. Bold navigators were eager to find the East, and at last success came. Under



the King's orders, in August, 1487, three caravels\* sailed from Portugal, under Bartolomeo Diaz, and successfully discovered the Cape of Good Hope and the southern tip of Africa in 1488. Diaz himself was brave enough to be willing to go on sailing all the way around Africa to the Red Sea, but his crews mutinied after he had gone much farther than all of those before him and convinced him to return. He passed the southern tip of Africa and went 40 miles farther. He called it the Cape of Torments because of how terrible the storms were that he met. But when King John heard his report he gave it the nicer sounding name it has carried ever since: the Cape of Good Hope.

In the midst of such endeavors to reach the Indies by the long voyage down the coast of Africa and across an unknown ocean, Columbus was urging all people who cared to try the route directly west. If the world was round, as the sun and moon were, and as so many men of learning believed, the Indies must be to the west of Portugal. The value of direct trade with the Indies, particularly India, would be enormous. Europe had already acquired a taste for the spices of India and had confidence in the medicines of India thanks to the Silk Road. The silks and other articles of clothing made in India, and the carpets of India, were well known and treasured. Marco Polo and others had given an impression that there was much gold in India; and the pearls and precious stones of India excited the imagination of all who read his travels.

The immense value of such a commerce may be estimated from one fact. Thirty years after this time, one ship only of all the squadron of Ferdinand Magellan returned to Spain, after the first voyage around the world (1519-1522). The ship was loaded with spices from Indonesia. These spices were sold by the Spanish government for so large a sum of money that the king made back the whole cost of the expedition, and even made a very large profit—even though the voyage itself cost a large amount when it began. Therefore, Columbus was able to offer adventurers the promise of great profit in case of success; and at this time kings were willing to take their share of such profits.

Columbus wrote to King John of Portugal, explaining the probability of success and distance he thought involved based on the research

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\* caravel: a type of European ship built in the 1400s and 1500s that was well suited for quick travel over long distances.



of the Italian geographer Toscanelli. King John responded politely and meanwhile he secretly entrusted Columbus's plan to another person to try out. He equipped a ship privately and entrusted its command to another seaman, ordering him to sail west in search of the Indies while pretending to be on a voyage to the Cape de Verde Islands. The ship sailed. But, she\* met a terrible storm, and her officers, in terror, turned from the unknown ocean and returned to Lisbon, according to Columbus.



*A 15<sup>th</sup> century French illustration of China. The artist, known as Mazarine, had clearly never seen an Asian person before and was going based on only Marco Polo's description.*

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\* She: It is common practice to refer to a boat with the female pronouns, she and her.

It was in disgust with the bad faith the king showed in this transaction that Columbus left Lisbon to offer his great plan to the King and Queen of Spain.

In a similar way, a generation afterward, Magellan, who was in the service of the King of Portugal and was himself Portuguese, was disgusted by insults that he received at his Court, and went to Spain instead. He offered to the Spanish King his plan for sailing around the world and it was accepted. He sailed in a Spanish fleet, and because of his discoveries Spain owes its possession of the Philippines.

Twice, therefore, did Kings of Portugal lose for themselves, their children, and their kingdom, the fame and riches to go along with such great discoveries.

Meanwhile, the wife of Columbus had died and he was without a home. He left Lisbon with his only son, Diego, in or near the end of the year 1484.

## CHAPTER 2

### A Plan for Westward Discovery

Sometime after this, Columbus returned to his home, Genoa, to take care of his father, who was now an old man. After his visit, he returned to Spain to renew his efforts for westward discovery. He went to distinguished noblemen in the south of Spain who were of adventurous spirit. One was the Duke of Medina Celi and one the Duke of Medina Sidonia. Each of these dukes entertained him at their courts, and heard his proposals.

The Duke of Medina Celi was so much interested in them that at one point he proposed to give Columbus the command of four ships he had in the harbor. But, all of a sudden he changed his mind. The plan was so vast, he said, that it should be under the direction of the Crown. And, without losing confidence in it, he told the King and Queen about Columbus, courteously recommending him.

This king and queen were King Ferdinand of Aragon, and Queen Isabella of Castile. The marriage of these two had united Spain. Their affection for each other made the union real, and the energy, courage, and wisdom of both made their reign successful and glorious. Of all its glories one of the greatest was connected with the life and discoveries of the sailor who was now to approach them. He had been disloyally treated by Portugal, he had not succeeded with the great dukes, and he had been dismissed by countless others. Now he was to press his adventure upon a king and queen who were engaged in a difficult war with the Muslim Moors, who still held a large part of Spain.

The King and Queen were residing at Cordoba, a rich and beautiful city that the Spanish had taken from the Moors. Under King and Queen's rule Cordoba had been the most important seat of education in Europe. Here Columbus stayed at the house of Alonso de Quintinilla, who became a strong supporter of his theory, and introduced him to important friends. By these friends' connections, arrangements were made in which Columbus would present his views to the King. It was not the best timing. All Cordoba was busily preparing for a great military campaign against the enemy. But King Ferdinand made arrangements to hear Columbus. But Ferdinand, although in the midst of his

military cares, was interested in the proposals made by Columbus. He liked the man. He was pleased by the modesty and dignity with which he presented his proposals. Columbus spoke, as he tells us, as one specially appointed by God Himself to carry out this discovery. The King did not, however, at once say yes, but said that a council of men of wisdom should be called together to consider it.



*"Columbus before the Council of Salamanca" by William Henry Powell*

Columbus writes that he entered the service of the King and Queen on January 26, 1486. The council to which he was referred was held in the university city of Salamanca, in that year. It gave to him a full opportunity to explain his theory. However, most of the men who were in the council had already formed their opinions on the subjects involved and were too old to change them. A portion of them were priests of the church in the habit of looking to sacred scripture as their

only authority when the Pope\* had given no specific instruction. Of this group some took literally expressions in the Old Testament, which they supposed to be fatal to the plans of Columbus. In Psalm 104 in the Bible, God stretches out the heavens like a curtain. The expression in the book of Hebrews, that the heavens are extended as a tent, was also quoted, in the same view. These suggested that the world may not be quite as round as Columbus thought.

On the other hand, there were men who courteously supported Columbus's wishes, and there were more when the congress parted than when it met. Its sessions occupied a considerable part of the summer, but it was not for years that it gave any decision.

Meanwhile, the King, Queen, and Court were occupied in war with the Moors. Columbus was again and again summoned to attend the Court, and more than once money was given to him to enable him to do so. He also began new negotiations with King John of Portugal, and from him he received a letter inviting him to return to Portugal. He received a similar letter from King Henry VII of England inviting him to his Court. Nothing was decided in Spain. To this day, the people of that country are thought to have a habit of postponement to tomorrow of anything that puzzles them.

In 1489, according to Spanish noble Ortiz de Zuniga, Columbus loyally fought in battle in the King of Spain's army. In the winter of 1490, when it was announced that the army was to go to battle again and was dedicated to never leaving its camp until Grenada was taken from the Moors, Columbus felt that he must make one last endeavor. He insisted that he must have an answer regarding his plans of discovery. The confessor† of the Queen, Fernando da Talavera, was commanded to obtain the definite answer of the wise men. *Alas!* the answer was fatal to Columbus's hopes. They said that it was not right for great kings to support such journeys on foundations as weak as those that Columbus relied upon.

The King and Queen themselves, however, were more favorable; so was a minority of the council of Salamanca. The confessor was instructed to tell Columbus that their expenses in the war made it

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\* Pope: leader of all the Christian faith in Western Europe at this time.

† Confessor: A priest who hears someone's confession of their sins and gives them a penance (a way, usually through prayer, to make up for it).

impossible for them to send him out as an explorer, but that, when that was all over, they had hopes that they might commission him. This was the end of five years of selling his plan, in which he had put his hopes in kings and queens. Columbus regarded the answer as only a courtesy no, and he retired in disgust from the royal Court at Seville.

He determined to lay his plans before the King of France. He was traveling with this purpose, with his son, Diego, now a boy of ten or twelve years of age, when he arrived at night at the monastery of Saint Mary of Rabida. It is about three miles south of what was then the sea-port of Palos, one of the active commercial ports of Spain. The monastery stands on level ground high above the sea; but a steep road runs down to the shore of the ocean. Some of its windows and corridors look out upon the ocean on the west and south.

At the door of this monastery Columbus asked for bread and water for his boy. The abbot of the monastery was named Juan Perez. He was attracted by the appearance of Columbus, still more by his conversation, and invited him to remain as their guest. In fact, he would end up staying there for about two years.



*Christopher Columbus and His Son at La Rábida (Eugène Delacroix)*



When he learned that his new friend was about to offer to France the advantages of a discovery so great as that proposed, he begged him to make one effort more in Spain. He sent for some friends, Fernandos, a physician at Palos, and for the Pinzon brothers. Together they all persuaded Columbus to send one messenger more to their King and Queen. The man sent was Rodriguez, who found access to the Queen because Juan Perez, the abbot, had formerly been her confessor. She had confidence in him, and in 14 days the friendly messenger came back from Santa Fe with a kind letter from the Queen to her friend, ordering Perez to return at once to Court. Perez saddled his mule at once and before midnight was on his way to see his royal lady.



*The Alhambra, still standing today in Grenada, Spain (not including the palace inside).*

Santa Fe was half camp, half city. It had been built in the large, fertile plain that extends for many miles to the west of Grenada. The Court and army were here as they pressed their attack on that city. Perez had easy access to Queen Isabella, and encouraged her to support Columbus. Perez was supported by one of Isabella's favorites, the Duchess of Moya. In reply to their encouragements, she asked that Co-

lumbus return to her, and ordered that a large sum of money be sent to him for his traveling expenses.

This sum was immediately sent by Perez to his friend. Columbus bought a mule, exchanged his worn clothes for better ones, and started, as he was ordered, for the camp at Santa Fe.

He arrived there just after the great victory, by which the King and Queen had obtained their wish—taking the noble city of Grenada and ending Moorish rule in Spain in January 1492. King, Queen, Court and army were preparing to enter the castle in Grenada, known as the Alhambra in triumph. Whoever tries to imagine the scene, in which the great procession entered through the gates, so long sealed, or of the moment when the royal banner of Spain was first flying out upon the highest watchtower of the Alhambra, must remember how Columbus, joyous at last with hopes of his own, saw the triumph and joined in the display.

But his success was not immediate, even now. Fernando de Talavera, who had the direction of the wise council of Salamanca, was now Archbishop of Grenada, whose position had been conferred on him after the victory. He was not a friend of Columbus. At what seemed the final meeting with the King and Queen, Talavera heard Columbus claim the right to one-tenth of all the profits of the expedition and protested against such lavish payment to an adventurer. He was now the confessor of Isabella, as Juan Perez, the friendly abbot, had been before. Columbus, however, was proud and firm. He would not yield to the terms prepared by the archbishop. He preferred to break off the negotiation, and again retired from Court. He determined, as he had before, to lay his plans before the King of France.

Spain would have lost the honor and the reward of the great discovery, as Portugal and Genoa had lost them, had it not been for Luis de St. Angel, and the Queen herself. St. Angel had been Columbus's friend. He was an important officer, the treasurer of the church revenues of Aragon. He now insisted upon a meeting from the Queen. St. Angel spoke eloquently. The friendly Duchess of Moya also spoke eagerly and persuasively. Isabella was at last fired with zeal. Columbus should go, and the expedition would be hers.

Columbus, meanwhile, was on his way back to Palos on his mule, alone. But at a bridge, a royal messenger overtook him, ordering him to



return. He returned to Isabella and the King slowly and doubtfully agreed. Isabella took the project in her own hands. She and Columbus agreed at once, and a contract was drawn up that gave him the position of Admiral for Life on all lands he might discover; gave him one-tenth of all pearls, precious stones, gold, silver, spices and other merchandise to be obtained in his admiralty; and gave him the right to nominate three candidates from whom the governor of each province would be selected by the King or Queen. He was to be the judge of all disputes arising from the expedition as was proposed; and he was to have one-eighth of the profit, and bear one-eighth of the cost.

With this glad news he returned at once to Palos. He carried with him a royal order, commanding the people of Palos to equip two caravels within ten days, and to place them and their crews under the command of Columbus. The third ship proposed was to be equipped by him and his friends. The crews were to be paid four months' wages in advance, and Columbus was to have full command to do what he chose.

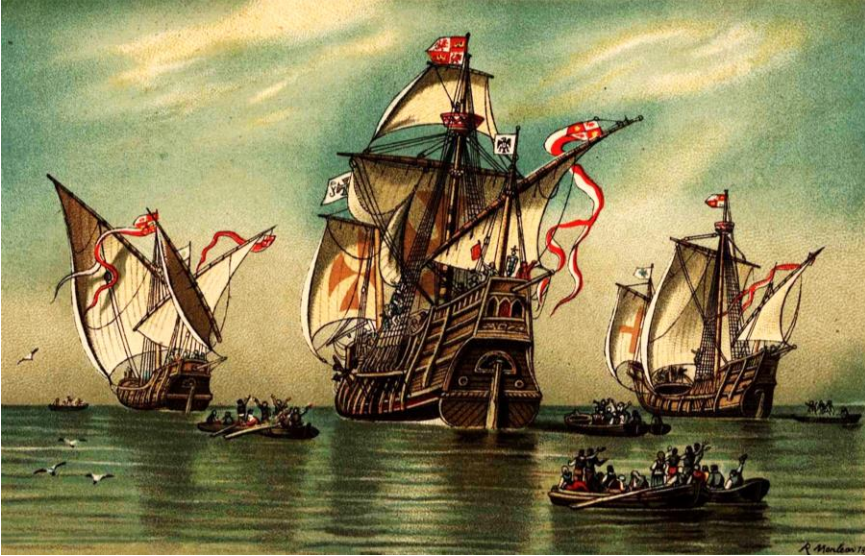
The fleet of Columbus, as it sailed, consisted of the Santa Maria, the Pinta, and the Nina. The whole company in all three ships numbered 90 men.



*A statue in Granada, Spain showing Columbus receiving his orders from Queen Isabella*

## CHAPTER 3

# The Great Voyage



*The Nina, Santa Maria, and Pinta, respectively.*

At last all was ready. The ships were small, but Columbus was satisfied. He says in the beginning of his journal, “I equipped three ships very well for such a voyage.” He had left Grenada as late as the twelfth of May. He had crossed Spain to Palos, and in less than three months had equipped the ships and was ready for sea.

Columbus first sailed for the Canary Islands, which were the most western land then known. His crew ended up having to stay for some time in the Canary Islands. The rudder of the Pinta was disabled, and she proved leaky. It was suspected that the owners, from whom she had been forcibly taken, had intentionally disabled her, or that possibly the crew had injured her. But Columbus says in his journal that Martin Alonso Pinzon, captain of the Pinta, was a man of skill and courage, and that this quieted his worries. From the ninth of August to the second of September, nearly four weeks were spent by the Pinta and her crew at the Grand Canary island, and she was repaired. She proved af-

terwards an effective ship, the fastest of the fleet. At the Canaries they heard stories of lands seen to the west. On the sixth of September they sailed from Gomera and on the eighth they lost sight of land. They would not see land again for 33 days, such was the length of this great voyage. All the time, most naturally, they were wishing for signs, not of land perhaps, but something that might show whether this great ocean were really different from other seas.

On the eleventh of September they saw a large piece of the mast of a ship afloat. On the fourteenth they saw a "tropical bird," which the sailors thought was never seen more than 25 leagues from land; but it must be remembered that, other than the Mediterranean Sea, few of these sailors had ever been farther themselves. On the sixteenth they began to meet "large patches of weeds, very green, which appeared to have been recently washed away from land." This was their first knowledge of the Sargasso Sea, a curious area in the mid-Atlantic that is always green with floating seaweed.

"The continent we shall find farther on," wrote the confident Admiral.

An observation of the sun on the seventeenth proved what had been suspected before, that the needles of the compasses were not pointing precisely to the north. The erratic behavior of the needle at that location, has been a recognized fact since then. The crew was naturally alarmed. Here was evidence that in the great ocean common laws were not to be relied upon. But they had great respect for Columbus's knowledge of such subjects. He told them that it was not the north that had changed, nor the needle, which was true to the north, but the polar star that moved the compass revolved, like other stars. This theory satisfied them.

The same day they saw weeds that he was sure were land weeds. From them he took a living crab, whose unintentional voyage eastward was a great encouragement to the bold adventurer traveling westward. Columbus kept the crab, saying that such were never found more than 80 leagues from land. In fact, this poor crab was at least 970 leagues from the Bahamas, as this same journal proves. On the eighteenth, the Pinta excitedly sailed ahead of the other ships, its captain, Martin Alonso, so sure that he would reach land that night. But it was not to be.

In fact, there was to be a reward for whichever person saw land first, including a silk jacket and a cash prize paid annually, not to mention the fame attached to such a historically significant action.

Every day Columbus announced to his crew a shorter distance had been traveled over the course of the day than what they had actually sailed. He was afraid of their distrust, and did not dare let them know how far they were from home. The private journal, therefore, has such entries as this: "Sailed more than 55 leagues, wrote down only 48."

On the twentieth, pelicans are spoken of; on the twenty-first, "such abundance of weeds that the ocean seemed covered with them," "the sea smooth as a river, and the finest air in the world. Saw a whale, an indication of land, as they always keep near the coast." To later times, this note also shows how ignorant Columbus then was of mid-ocean.

On the twenty-second, to the Admiral's relief, there was a head wind; for the crew began to think that with perpetual east winds they would never return to Spain. They had been in what are known as the trade winds. On the twenty-third, the smoother water gave way to a rough sea, and he writes that this "was favorable to me, as it happened formerly to Moses when he led the Jews from Egypt." Likely this means that Columbus's crew was distracted by the rough sea and stopped thinking about what a terrible situation they were in. For Moses, the rough seas destroyed the Egyptian army that was chasing him.

The next day, thanks to the headwinds, their progress was less. On the twenty-fifth, Pinzon, captain of the Pinta, felt sure that they were near the outer islands of Asia as they appeared on the Toscanelli map, and at sunset called out with joy that he saw land, claiming a reward for such news. The crews of both ships sang "Glory to God in the highest," and the crew of the little Nina were sure that the bank was land. On this occasion they changed from a western course to the southwest. *But alas!* the land was a fog-bank and the reward never came to Martin Pinzon. On the twenty-sixth, again "the sea was like a river." This was Wednesday. In three days they sailed sixty-nine leagues. Saturday was calm. They saw a bird called rabihorcado, "which never lands in the sea nor goes twenty leagues from land," wrote the confident Columbus; "Nothing is missing but the singing of the nightingale," he writes, referring to a bird only found above land.

Sunday, the thirtieth, brought "tropical birds" again, "a very clear

sign of land.” Monday the journal shows them 707 leagues from the Canary Islands. Tuesday a white gull was the only visitor. Wednesday they had shearwaters\* and great quantities of seaweed. Columbus began to be sure that they had passed “the islands” and were nearing the continent of Asia. Thursday they had a flock of shearwaters, two pelicans, a rabihorcado, and a gull. Friday, the fifth of October, brought shearwaters and flying fish.



*A depiction of Columbus facing near mutiny from scared men who want to turn around and go home.*

On the sixth of October, Pinzon asked if the course might be changed to the southwest. But Columbus pressed on. On the seventh the Nina was ahead, and fired a gun and hoisted her flag in token that she saw land. But again they were disappointed. Columbus gave directions to keep close order at sunrise and sunset. The next day he did change the course to west southwest, following flights of birds from the north, which flew in that direction. On the eighth “the sea was like the river at Seville,” the weeds were very few and they took land birds on board the ships. On the ninth, they sailed southwest five leagues, and then with a change of wind went west by north. All night they heard birds passing.

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\* shearwater: a type of sea bird.

On the tenth of October the men voiced their open opposition to continuing further. Columbus begged them to sail west only three days more. But in the private journal of the tenth he says simply: "The seamen complained of the length of the voyage. They did not wish to go any farther. The Admiral did his best to renew their courage, and reminded them of the profits that would come to them. No complaints would change his purpose: he had set out to go to the Indies, and with the Lord's assistance he would keep going until he arrived there."

With the eleventh of October, 1492, came certainty. The eleventh is sometimes spoken of as the day of discovery, and sometimes the twelfth, when they landed on the first island of the New World. The whole original record of the discovery is written by Columbus or his crew, but in the third person perspective. So in truth it should be "we" instead of "they," but that was the style of ship logs at the time. This is the important entry:

Oct. 11, course to west and southwest. Rougher sea than they had known, shearwaters and a green branch near the caravel of the Admiral. From the Pinta they see a branch of a tree, a stake and a smaller stake, which they draw in, and which appears to have been cut with iron, and a piece of cane. Besides these, there is a land shrub and a little bit of board. The crew of the Nina saw other signs of land and a branch covered with thorns and flowers. With these signs every-one breathes again and is delighted. They sail 27 leagues in this direction.

The Admiral orders that they shall resume a westward course at sunset. They make 12 miles each hour; up till two hours after midnight they made 90 miles... At two hours after midnight land appeared, from which they were about two leagues off.

The reward for first seeing land was given to Columbus.

The resistance that Columbus received from his crew and his determination have gone down in history. This episode is vividly captured by the American poet Joaquin Miller, as seen on the next page.





*A photo of the Gates of Hercules, also known as the Pillars of Hercules. Here you see the European “pillar” and in the background you can just barely see the African “pillar.” Between these two is the “gate” where the Mediterranean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean.*

## Columbus

by Joaquin Miller (1837-1913)

Behind him lay the gray Azores ,  
Behind the Gates of Hercules,\*  
Before him not the ghost of shores,  
Before him only shoreless seas.  
The good mate said: “Now must we pray,  
For lo! the very stars are gone.  
Brave Admiral, speak, what shall I say?”  
“Why, say, “Sail on! sail on! and on!””

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\* Gates of Hercules: the high points in Europe and Africa on the sides of the Strait of Gibraltar that connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic ocean.

“My men grow mutinous day by day;  
My men grow ghastly wan and weak.”  
The stout mate thought of home; a spray  
Of salt wave washed his swarthy cheek.  
“What shall I say, brave Admiral, say,  
If we sight naught but seas at dawn?”  
“Why, you shall say at break of day,  
‘Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!’”

They sailed and sailed, as winds might blow,  
Until at last the blanched mate said:  
“Why, now not even God would know  
Should I and all my men fall dead.  
These very winds forget their way,  
For God from these dread seas is gone.  
Now speak, brave Admiral, speak and say”—  
He said: “Sail on! sail on! and on!”

They sailed. They sailed. Then spoke the mate:  
“This mad sea shows his teeth tonight.  
He curls his lip, he lies in wait,  
With lifted teeth, as if to bite!  
Brave Admiral, say but one good word:  
What shall we do when hope is gone?”  
The words leapt like a leaping sword:  
“Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!”

Then, pale and worn, he kept his deck,  
And peered through darkness. Ah, that night  
Of all dark nights! And then a speck—  
A light! A light! A light! A light!  
It grew, a starlit flag unfurled!  
It grew to be Time’s burst of dawn.  
He gained a world; he gave that world  
Its grandest lesson: “On! sail on!”



## CHAPTER 4

### The Landing on the Twelfth of October



*Columbus taking possession of the island for Spain. (L. Prang & Co., Boston)*

It was on Friday, the twelfth of October, that they saw the island—what would be later determined to be one of the Bahamas. Soon they saw people naked, and the Admiral went ashore in the armed boat with Martin Pinzon and Vicente Pinzon, his brother, who was captain of the *Nina*. The Admiral unfurled the Royal Standard,\* and the captain's two religious standards of the Greek Cross, which the Admiral raised on all the ships. When they were ashore they saw very green trees and much water, and fruits of different kinds.

The Admiral called the two captains and the others who went ashore with him and he said that they must faithfully be witnesses to

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\* Royal Standard: an official banner declaring some form of authority.

how he was taking possession, in public, of the island for the King and the Queen, his lord and lady. Soon many people of the island assembled.

Columbus wrote\* the following for the entry dated October 11-12:

So that they may feel great friendship toward us, and because I knew that they were a people who would be better delivered and converted to our Holy Faith by love than by force, I gave to some of them red caps and glass bells that they put around their necks, and many other things of little value, in which they took much pleasure, and they remained so friendly to us that it was wonderful.

Afterwards they came swimming to the ship's boats where we were. And they brought us parrots and cotton-thread in skeins, and spears and many other things. And they traded them with us for other things, which we gave them, such as little glass beads and little bells. In short, they took everything, and gave of what they had with good will. But it seemed to me that they were a people very lacking in everything.

They all went as naked as their mothers bore them, and the women as well, although I only saw one who was really young. And all the men I saw were young, for I saw none more than 30 years of age; very well made, with very handsome appearances, and very good faces; their hair thick like the hairs of horses' tails, and cut short. They bring their hair above their eyebrows, except a little behind, which they wear long, and never cut. Some of them paint themselves blackish (and they are of the color of the inhabitants of the Canaries, neither black nor white), and some paint themselves white, and some red, and some with whatever they can get. And some of them paint their faces, and some all their bodies, and some only the eyes, and some only the nose.

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\* Columbus wrote: this is according to the historian Bartolome de las Casas (1484-1566) who had a copy of the original journal.

They do not bear arms\* nor do they know them, for I showed them swords and they took them by the edge, and they cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron at all; their spears are rods without iron, and some of them have a fish's tooth at the end, and some of them other things. They are all of good stature, and good graceful appearance, well made. I saw some who had scars of wounds in their bodies, and I made signs to them to ask what that was, and they showed me how people came there from other islands that lay around, and tried to take them captive and they defended themselves. And I believed, and I still believe, that they came there from the mainland to take them for captives.



*Columbus trades with the Indians.*

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\* bear arms: carry swords or guns

They would be good servants, and of good attitude, for I see that they repeat very quickly everything that is said to them. And I believe that they could easily be made Christians, for it seems to me that they have no belief. I, if it please our Lord, will take six of them to your Highnesses at the time of my departure, so that they may learn to talk. No wild creature of any sort have I seen except parrots in this island.

[On October 13]

I strove attentively to learn whether there was gold. And I saw that some of them had a little piece of gold hung in a hole that they have in their noses. And by signs I was able to understand that going to the south, or going round the island southward, there was a king there who had large containers of it, and had very much of it. I tried to persuade them to go there; and afterward I saw that they did not understand what I meant about going.

I determined to wait till the next afternoon, and then to start for the southwest, for many of them told me that there was land to the south and southwest and northwest, and that those from the northwest came often to fight with them, and so to go on to the southwest to seek gold and precious stones.

Columbus continued on to what is today Cuba where he had to make an extended stay for a few weeks to repair his ships. It was on this expedition that the first observation was made of that gift, or curse, of America to the world. They met men and women who “carried live coals, so as to draw into their mouths the smoke of burning herbs.” This was the account of the first observers. Later, the historian Las Casas who lived in the New World says that the dry herbs were wrapped in another leaf as dry. He says that “they lighted one end of the little stick thus formed, and sucked in or absorbed the smoke by the other, with which,” he says, “they put their flesh to sleep, and it nearly intoxicates them, and thus they say that they feel no fatigue... they call them tobacco. I knew Spaniards on this Island of Hispaniola

who were accustomed to using them, who, on being criticized for it as a vice, replied that they could not control their hand and stop it from taking it. I do not know what good taste or benefit they found in them.” This is the origin of cigars and cigarettes we know today.

On the eleventh of November, the repairs were completed. Columbus writes that it had seemed to him that it would be good to take some persons, from those of that area, to carry to the King and Queen:

They can learn our language, so as to find out what there is in this country, and so that when they come back they may be interpreters for the Christians, and receive our customs and the things of the faith. Because I saw and know that these people have no religion nor are they idolaters,\* but are very mild and without knowing what evil is, nor how to kill others, nor how to take them, and without arms, and are so scared that from one of our men ten of them fly, although they do play with them, and are ready to believe and know that there is a God in heaven, and are sure that we have come from heaven; and are very quick to learn any prayer that we tell them to repeat.

So your Highnesses should determine to make them Christians, for I believe that if they begin, in a short time they will have accomplished converting to our holy faith a multitude of towns... Without a doubt there are in these lands the greatest quantities of gold, for not without reason do these Indians whom I am bringing say that there are places in these isles where they dig out gold and wear it on their necks, in their ears and on their arms and legs, and the bracelets are very thick.

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\* idolaters: worshippers of evil gods or things.



## CHAPTER 5

### The Discovery of Hispaniola



*Another depiction of Columbus's first landing, (Frederick Kemmelmeyer)*

On the sixth of December they crossed from the eastern cape of Cuba to the northwestern point of the island, which we call Hispaniola, where the two nations the Dominican Republic and Haiti coexist today. He says he gave it this name because “the plains appeared to him almost exactly like those of Castile\*, yet more beautiful.”

He coasted eastward along the northern side of the island, hoping that it might be the continent, and always inquiring for gold when he landed; but the Indians referred him to yet another land, still further south, which they called “Bohio.” It was not surrounded by water, they said. The word “caniba,” which is the origin of our word “cannibal,” and refers to the fierce Caribs, came up often while they talked. The

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\* Castile: an area in Spain.

sound of the syllable "can-" made Columbus more sure that he was now approaching the lands of the Grand Khan of China, of whom Marco Polo had informed Europe so fully.

On the twelfth of the month, after a landing in which a cross had been erected, three sailors went inland, pursuing the Indians. They captured a young woman whom they brought to the fleet. She wore a large ring of gold in her nose. She was able to understand the other Indians whom they had on board. Columbus dressed her, gave her some imitation pearls, rings, and other finery, and then put her on shore with three Indians and three of his own men.

The men returned the next day without going to the Indian village. Columbus then sent out nine men, with an Indian, who found a town of a thousand huts about four and a half leagues from the ship. They thought the population was three thousand. The people approached the explorers carefully, and with gifts. Soon they gained confidence and brought out food for them: fish and bread made from roots.

In the midst of this festival, the woman, who had been sent back from the ship so graciously, appeared borne on the shoulders of men who were led by her husband.

The Spaniards thought these natives of Hispaniola much whiter than those of the other islands. Columbus says that two of the women, if dressed in local European clothing, would be thought to be Spaniards. He says that the heat of the country is intense, and that if these people lived in a cooler region they would be of lighter color.

On the fourteenth of December, Columbus continued his voyage eastward, and on the fifteenth landed on the little island north of Hispaniola. At midnight on the sixteenth he sailed, and landed on Hispaniola again. Five hundred Indians met him, accompanied by their chief, a fine young man of about 20 years of age. He had around him several counselors, one of whom appeared to be his tutor. To the frequent questions where gold could be found, the reply as frequently was made that it was in "the Island of Babeque." This island, they said, was only two days off, and they pointed out the route. The meeting ended in an offer by the king to the Admiral of all that he had.

The chief visited Columbus on his ship in the evening, and Columbus entertained him with European food. With so courtesy a beginning of friendship, it was natural that the visitors should spend two or three

days with these people.

Columbus was always asking for gold. He gave strict orders that it should always be paid for, when it was taken. To the islanders it was merely a matter of ornament, and they gladly exchanged it for the glass beads, the rings or the bells, which seemed to them more ornamental. One of the chiefs, evidently a man of distinction and authority, had little bits of gold that he exchanged for pieces of glass. It turned out that he had clipped the bits of gold off a larger piece, and he went back into his cabin, cut that to pieces, and then exchanged all those in trade for the white man's products. Well pleased with his bargain, he then told the Spaniards that he would go and get much more and would come and trade with them again.

On the eighteenth of December, the wind not blowing well. They awaited the return of the chief whom they had first seen. In the afternoon he appeared, seated in a palanquin, which was carried by four men, and escorted by more than 200 of his people. He was accompanied by a counselor and advisor who did not leave his side. He came on board the ship when Columbus was eating at a table. He would not permit Columbus to leave his place, and eagerly took a seat at his side when it was offered. Columbus offered him European food and drink; he tasted of each, and then gave what was offered to his attendants. The Spaniards found a remarkable dignity in his air and gestures. After the meal, one of his servants brought a handsome belt, elegantly made, which he presented to Columbus, along with two small pieces of gold, also elegantly made.

Columbus observed that this chief looked with interest on the hanging curtains, and made a present of them to him, in return for his offering, with some amber beads from his own neck, some red shoes, and a flask of orange flower water.

On the nineteenth, after these agreeable hospitalities, Columbus's three ships sailed again, and on the twentieth arrived at a harbor that Columbus pronounced was the finest he had ever seen.

The men he sent on shore found a large village not far from the shore, where they were most courteously welcomed. The natives begged the Europeans to stay with them. On the first day three different chiefs came to visit him, in a friendly way, with their entourages. The next day more than 120 canoes visited the ship, bringing with



them such presents as the people thought would be acceptable. Among these were bread from the cassava root, fish, water in earthen jars, and the seeds of spices. These spices they would stir in with water to make a drink that they thought was healthy. On the same day Columbus sent an embassy of six men to a large town that was further inland.

The twenty-third was Sunday. It was spent as the day before had been, in mutual civilities. The natives would offer their presents, and say “take, take” in their own language. Five chiefs were among the visitors of the day. The next day he left these hospitable people, raising anchor in the morning, and with a light wind continued towards the west. At eleven in the evening Columbus retired to rest. The evening was calm when Columbus himself retired to sleep, and the master of the ship followed his example, entrusting the helm to one of the boys. Every person on the ship, except this boy, was asleep.

The inexperienced boy accidentally let the ship drift upon a ridge of rock. So soon as the ship struck land, the boy cried out, and Columbus awoke. The master of the ship found him, but it was too late. The tide was now going out, and the Santa Maria was hopelessly aground. Being aground for a ship is a disaster that leaves a boat unmovable without the right conditions to get it back into deep enough water. It also can severely damage its hull. Columbus ordered the masts cut away, but this did not move the boat.

He sent out his crew with directions to carry its anchor and cable toward the back of the boat, but some of his crew had already gone to the Nina with their tale of disaster. The Nina’s people would not receive them, criticized them as traitors for letting this happen, and in their own ship came to the scene of danger. Columbus ordered the Nina to accept the crew of the Santa Maria.

So soon as it was day, their friendly ally, the Chief named Guacanagari, came on board. With tears in his eyes, he made the kindest and most reasonable offers of assistance. He saw Columbus’s sadness, and tried to relieve him by expressions of his sympathy. The Chief set up on shore two large houses to receive the stored cargo and items of value from the Santa Maria, and appointed as many large canoes as he could to transport these to the land. He assured Columbus that not a bit of the cargo or items would be lost.

The weather continued favorably. The sea was so light that every-

thing on board the Santa Maria was removed safely. Then it was that Columbus, tempted by the beauty of the place, by the friendship of the natives, and by the wishes of his men, determined to leave a colony, which would be supported by the valuables from the Santa Maria, until the rest of the party could go back to Spain and bring or send help. The Chief was pleased with this suggestion, and promised all his assistance for the plan. A vault was dug and built in which the valuables could be placed, and on this a house was built for the home of the colonists.

The Chief sent a canoe in search of the Pinta to tell them of the disaster. But the messengers returned without finding them. At the camp, which was to be a city, all was diligently prepared with the assistance of the friendly natives. Columbus, having no ship but the little Nina left, determined to return to Europe with the news of his discovery, and to leave 39 men ashore.

Based on his account, the men seemed eager to stay. The luxury of the climate and the friendliness of the people delighted them, and they had no need to build substantial houses. What the natives had already provided was sufficient shelter. All the preparations that Columbus thought necessary were made in the week between the twenty-sixth of December and the second of January. On that day he expected to sail eastward, but unfavorable winds prevented him.

He landed his men again, and performed a pretend battle with their European arms, showing the natives the military force of their new neighbors. He fired a shot from a long gun at the wreck of the Santa Maria so that the Indians could see the power of his weapon. The Indian Chief expressed his regret at the approaching departure, and the Spaniards thought that one of his men said that the Chief had ordered the man to make a statue of pure gold as large as the Admiral.

Columbus explained to the friendly Chief that with such weapons as the King and Queen of Spain commanded they could easily destroy the dreaded Caribs. And he thought he had made such an impression that the islanders would be the firm friends of the colonists.

Columbus wrote, "I have ordered them to build a solid tower and defense over a vault. Not that I think this necessary against the natives, for I am satisfied that with a handful of people I could conquer the whole island if it were necessary, although it is, as far as I can judge,

larger than Portugal, and twice as thickly populated.”

He left the 39 men of this first colony with the task of finding the goldmine. In command he placed Diego da Arana, Pedro Gutierrez and Rodrigo de Segovia. Of these three, Diego da Arana was to be the governor, and the other two his lieutenants. The rest were all sailors, but among them there were Columbus’s secretary; an officer of the law; a gunman who was also a good engineer; a tailor; a ship carpenter; a cooper\* ; and a physician. So the little colony had its share of men with practical skills. They all stayed willingly, delighted with the prospects of their new home.

On the third of January, Columbus sailed for Europe in the little *Nina*. With her own crew and the addition she received from the *Santa Maria*, she must have been badly crowded. Fortunately for all parties, on Sunday, the third day of the voyage, while they were still in sight of land, the *Pinta* came in sight. Martin Pinzon came on board the *Nina* and offered excuses for his absence. Columbus was not really satisfied with them, but he tried to be as this was no moment for a quarrel. Although the decision was made to return, another week was spent in slow coasting, or in waiting for wind. It brought frequent opportunities for meeting the natives, in one of which a group of aggressive natives showed an interest in taking some of their visitors captive. This would only have been revenge for a capture made by Pinzon of several of their people, whom Columbus, upon meeting Pinzon, had freed. In this encounter two of the Indians were wounded, one by a sword, one by an arrow. It seems Columbus did not want to show them the power of guns.

This was in the Bay of Samana, which Columbus called “The Bay of Arrows” because of the small battle that took place there. They then sailed 64 miles east, a quarter northeast, and thought they saw the land of the Caribs, which he was seeking. But here, after awhile, his authority over his crew failed. The men were eager to go home. Perhaps, they also did not like the idea of a fight with the man-eating Caribs. There was a good western wind, and on the evening of the sixteenth of January Columbus gave in and they headed home.

Until the fourteenth of February the voyage was prosperous and

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\* cooper: a barrel and bucket maker

uneventful. One day the captive Indians amused the sailors by swimming. But on the fourteenth all this changed. The simple journal describes the terrible storm that endangered the two ships, and seemed to cut off the hope of their return to Europe:

Monday, February 14—This night the wind increased still more; the waves were terrible. Coming from two opposite directions, they crossed each other and stopped the progress of the ship, which could neither go forward nor escape them; and as they began continually to break over the ship, the Admiral ordered the main sail to be lowered.

Columbus lost sight of the Pinta and was himself driven 45 miles towards the northeast. The journal continues:

After sunrise the strength of the wind increased, and the sea became still more terrible. The Admiral all this time kept his main sail lowered, so that the ship could rise along with the waves that washed over it and that threatened to sink it. The Admiral followed at first the direction of east-northeast, and afterwards due northeast. He sailed about six hours in this direction, and thus made seven leagues and a half. He gave orders that every sailor should draw lots as to who should make a pilgrimage to Royal Monastery of Saint Mary of Guadeloupe, to carry her a five-pound wax candle. And each one took a vow that he to whom the lot fell should make the pilgrimage.

For this purpose, he gave orders to take as many dry peas as there were persons in the ship and to cut, with a knife, a cross upon one of them, and to put them all into a cap, and to shake them up well. The first who put his hand in was the Admiral. He drew out the dry pea marked with the cross; so it was upon him that the duty fell, and he regarded himself, after that, as a pilgrim, required to carry into effect the vow that he had made. They drew lots a second time, to select a person to go as pilgrim to Our Lady of Lorette Cathedral. It is a place where many great miracles are reported. The lot fell this time upon a

sailor named Pedro de Villa, and the Admiral promised to give him all the money necessary for the expenses. He decided that a third pilgrim should be sent to watch one night at the Monastery of Santa Clara of Moguer, and to have a mass said there. For this purpose, they again shook up the dry peas, not forgetting that one that was marked with the cross, and the duty fell once again to the Admiral himself. He then took, as did all his crew, the vow that, on the first shore they might reach, they would go in their shirts, in a procession, to make a prayer in some church to thank Our Lady.\*



*Royal Monastery of Saint Mary of Guadalupe*

Besides the general vows, or those taken by all in common, each man made his own special vow, because nobody expected to escape. The storm that they experienced was so terrible that

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\* Our Lady: Jesus's mother Mary, also known as Saint Mary or Santa Maria.

all regarded themselves as lost; what increased the danger was the circumstance that the ship lacked ballast\*, because the consumption of food, water and wine had greatly diminished her load... The solution that the Admiral used was to fill with sea water, as soon as possible, all the empty barrels that had previously held either wine or fresh water. In this way the difficulty was remedied.

The Admiral tells here the reasons for fearing that our Savior would allow him to become the victim of this storm, and other reasons that made him hope that God would come to his assistance, and cause him to arrive safe and sound, so that information that he was carrying to the King and Queen would not die with him. The strong desire he had to be the bearer of information so important, and to prove the truth of all that he had said, and that all that he had tried to discover had really been discovered, seemed to contribute precisely to inspire him with the greatest fear that he could not succeed. He confessed, himself, that every mosquito that passed before his eyes was enough to annoy and trouble him. He attributed this to his little faith, and his lack of confidence in Divine Providence.

On the other hand, he was encouraged by the favors that God had shown him in granting to him so great a triumph as what he had achieved, in all his discoveries, in fulfilling all his wishes, and in granting that, after having experienced in Spain so many refusals and disappointments, such that all his hopes had been at last more than surpassed. In other words, the all-powerful Master of the Universe had, from the start, granted Columbus all of his requests in his expedition, which was for God's greatest glory, but it was not yet completed and he strongly believed that God would keep him safe so that he could successfully complete the work that he had begun.

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\*ballast: a heavy material, such as sand, placed low in a ship to improve its stability.



*Sail boats in a storm (Jan Porcellis)*

For this reason he said he should have had no fear of the tempest that was raging. But his weakness and anguish did not leave him a moment's calm. He also said that his greatest grief was the thought of leaving his two boys orphans. They were in Spain studying. What would become of them in a strange land, without father or mother? For the King and Queen, being completely ignorant of what he had done in this voyage, would not have any responsibility to look after his sons.

The above is the summary written of Columbus's journal by Las Casas.

Despite the terrible sailing, at daybreak on the next day they saw land. The Admiral knew that he had made it to the Azores. He had been steadily directing the course that way. Columbus did not land until the eighteenth, when he sent some men on shore. His news of discovery was received with enthusiasm.

But there followed a period of disagreeable negotiation with Castaneda, the governor of the Azores. Pretending great courtesy and hospitality, but really acting upon the orders of the King of Portugal, he did his best to slow down Columbus and even seized some of his crew and kept them prisoners for some days. When Columbus once had them on board again, he gave up his plans for taking ballast and water on these inhospitable islands, and sailed for Europe.



He had again a stormy trip. Again they were in imminent danger. Again they drew lots for a holy mission. "All the crew, including the Admiral, vowed to fast by eating only bread and water on the first Saturday after the arrival of the ship."

Finally, they arrived at Lisbon, in Portugal. After a reception that was at first courteous, the Portuguese officers showed an inhospitality like that of Castaneda at the Azores. But the King himself showed more dignity and courtesy. He received the storm-tossed Admiral with distinction, and permitted him to resupply his shattered ship with all he needed.

Once he sailed again a few days later he entered the bay and harbor of Palos, which he had left six and a half months before.

His journal of the voyage ends with these words:

I see by this voyage that God has wonderfully proved what I say, as anybody may convince himself, by reading this narrative, by the extraordinary wonders that he has worked during the course of my voyage, and in favor of myself, who have been for so long a time at the Court of your Highnesses in opposition and contrary to the opinions of so many distinguished persons of your household, who all opposed me, treating my plan as a dream, and my goal as an illusion. And I hope still, nevertheless, in our Lord, this voyage will bring the greatest honor to Christianity, although it has been performed with so much ease.

## CHAPTER 6

### Meeting the King and Queen



*Columbus visits the Spanish monarchs after his first voyage*

A letter Columbus sent from Lisbon to the King and Queen was published everywhere. It excited the enthusiasm first of Spain and then all of Europe.

Ferdinand and Isabella directed him to meet them at once at Court. It happened that they were then residing at Barcelona, on the eastern coast of Spain, so that the journey required to fulfill their wishes carried him quite far across the kingdom. It was a journey of triumph. The people came together in throngs to meet this peaceful conqueror who brought with him such amazing illustrations of his discovery.

The letter instructing him to proceed to Barcelona was addressed “To Lord Christopher Columbus, our Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Vice-roy and Governor of the islands discovered in the Indies.” So far was he now raised above the rank of a poor adventurer, who had for seven

years attended the Court, seeking an opportunity to explain his ideas.

As he approached Barcelona, he was met by a large group of people, including many people of high rank. A little procession was formed of the party of the Admiral. Six Indians of the islands, who had survived the voyage, led the way. They were painted according to their custom in various colors and wearing the gold of their homeland, which interested the eyes of those who looked at them.

Columbus had brought ten Indians away with him, but one had died on the voyage and he had left three sick at Palos. Those whom he brought to Barcelona were baptized as Christians in the presence of the King and Queen.

In addition to the Indians, many unusual objects from the islands were brought out, such as stuffed birds and beasts and living parakeets, and rare plants, so different from those of Spain. Ornaments of gold were displayed, which would give the people some idea of the wealth of the islands. Last of all came Columbus, elegantly mounted and surrounded by a brilliant entourage of young Spaniards. The crowd of wondering people pressed around them. Balconies and windows were crowded with women looking at them. Even the roofs were crowded with spectators.

The King and Queen awaited Columbus in a large hall, where they were seated on a rich dais covered with gold brocade. It was in the palace of Barcelona. A group of the most distinguished lords and ladies of Spain were in attendance. As Columbus entered the hall, the King and Queen arose. He fell on his knee so that he could kiss their hands but they made him rise and then sit and give an account of his voyage.

Columbus spoke with dignity and simplicity that commanded respect while all listened with sympathy. He showed some of the treasures he had brought, and said with certainty that the discoveries he made were only a taste of those yet to come. When his short narrative was ended, all the company knelt and united in chanting the "Te Deum" ("We Praise You, O God").

From this time, for several weeks, a series of pageants and festivities surrounded him. At no other period of his life were such honors paid to him. It was at one of the banquets that a flippant courtier—of that large class of people who stay at home when great deeds are done, and afterwards question the doers of them—had the insolence to ask

Columbus if the adventure that was praised so much was not, in fact, a very ordinary matter. He said "a short voyage of four or five weeks; was it anything more?" Columbus replied by giving him an egg that was on the table, and asking him if he could stand it on one end. He said he could not, and the other guests said that they could not. Columbus tapped it on the table so as to break the end of the shell, and the egg stood straight. "It is easy enough," he said, "when someone has shown you how."

The time was not occupied merely in shows and banquets. There was no difficulty now raising funds for a second expedition. Directions were given that it might be set forward as quickly as possible, and on a larger scale. It was feared at Court that King John of Portugal, the rival of Spain in sea adventures, might make his own further discovery.

The second expedition was to be on a large and generous scale and to take 1,500 men. Speed was also important. The King and Queen and Columbus knew that whoever was first on the ground of discovery would have the great advantage. There was a rumor in Spain that Portugal had already sent out ships to the west. Everything was pressed forward with speed. The expedition was to be under Columbus's absolute command. Seamen with good reputations were hired to serve under him. Seventeen ships were to form a colony. Horses as well as cattle and other domestic animals were provided. Seeds and plants of different kinds were sent out. Young men of noble families were eager to try the great adventure.

So rapidly were all these preparations made that, in a little more than a year from the sailing of the first expedition, the second, on a scale so much larger, was ready for sea.

## CHAPTER 7

### The Second Expedition



*Portrait of Christopher Columbus (Giovanni Squarcina)*

The difference between the first voyage of Columbus and the second was dramatic. In the first voyage, three little ships left the port of Palos, most of the men of their crews unwilling, after infinite difficulty in preparation, and in the midst of the fears of all who stayed behind.

In the second voyage, a magnificent fleet, equipped with all that the royal government could command, crowded with eager adventurers who were excited by expectations of opportunity and success, goes on the very same voyage.

In the first voyage, Columbus had just turned the corner after the struggles and failures of seven years. He was a penniless adventurer who had staked all his reputation on a scheme in which he had hardly

any support. In the second case, Columbus would be the governor-general of all the lands he discovered; and he knew enough, and all the men around him knew enough, to see that his lands could be the size of a kingdom.

On the other hand, success brings with it its disadvantages. One hundred and fifty sailors, used to the hard work and simplicity of a seafaring life, are a much more efficient force for purposes of discovery than over a thousand courtiers who have left the presence of the King and Queen in the hopes of personal advancement or of exciting adventure. Those dainty people, who knew nothing about gunpowder, were not men to found states; and the men who have lived in royal courts were not people who cooperate sympathetically with an experienced man out in the world like Columbus. It was no longer blacksmiths and sailors and coopers who surrounded him. These were officers of the Court, whose feudal titles even cannot be translated into modern language. Such men made poor Columbus endless trouble.

The great fleet sailed from Cadiz, Spain on the twenty-fifth day of September, in the year 1493, about 13 months after the sailing of the little fleet from Palos the year before. They touched at the Canary Islands as before, but unlike before their ships were in good condition and there was no dissatisfaction among the crew. This time the voyage across the ocean was short. On the third day of November, a pilot on the ship cried out to the captain that he saw land. Columbus did not keep a journal on this second voyage, but a doctor onboard, named Diego Chanca, did. He wrote:

So great was the joy among the people, that it was marvelous to hear the shouts of pleasure on all hands. And for this there was much reason because the people were so tired by the hard life and by the water they drank that they all hoped for land with much desire.

In this island was such thickness of forest that it was wonderful, and such a variety of trees, unknown to anyone, that it was terrible, some with fruit, some with flowers, so that everything was green. There were wild fruits of different sorts, which some not very wise men tried, and, upon merely tasting them, touch-

ing them with their tongues, their faces swelled up and they had such great burning and pain that they looked as if they were angry. They were cured with cold things.

This fruit was probably what is called today poison guava.

They found no inhabitants on this island and went on to another island that had a tall mountain that “seemed to be trying to reach the sky” and from which a beautiful waterfall flowed, so white with foam that at a distance some of the sailors thought it was not water but white rocks. The Admiral sent a light caravel to coast along and find harbor. This ship discovered some houses, and the captain went ashore and found the inhabitants in them. They ran away at once, and he entered the houses. There he found that they had taken nothing with them when they ran away. There was much cotton, “spun and to be spun,” and other goods of theirs, and he took a little of everything, among other things, two parrots, larger and different from what had been seen before. He also took four or five bones of the legs and arms of men. This last discovery made the Spaniards realize that these islands were probably those of Caribs, inhabited by the cannibals of whom they had heard in the first voyage.

Columbus pieced together that the Caribs occupied three islands and lived in harmony with each other but made war in their canoes on all the other islands in the neighborhood. They used arrows in warfare, but had no iron. Some of them used arrow-heads of tortoise shell, others sharply toothed fish-bones, which could do a good deal of damage among unarmed men. For the Spaniards, it was nothing to fear.

These Caribs carried off both men and women on their robbing expeditions. They slaughtered and ate the men, and kept the women as slaves; they were, in short, incredibly cruel. While moving from island to island, Columbus was joined by some boys who had been captives of the Caribs and had run away.

On November 10, they passed several islands, but stopped at none of them, as they were in a hurry to arrive at the settlement Columbus had left on the island of Hispaniola during the first voyage. On Friday, November 22, they landed at Hispaniola. They coasted along this island for several days to the place of the settlement. While passing one particular area, they set ashore one of the Indians whom they had car-



ried off on the first voyage. This was his home. They “gave him some little things that the Admiral had commanded him to give away.” Another account adds that of the ten Indian men who had been carried off on the first voyage, seven had already died on account of the change of air and food.\* Two of the three whom the Admiral was bringing back, swam ashore at night. “The Admiral cared for this but little, thinking that he should have enough interpreters among those whom he had left on the island, and whom he hoped to find there again.” It seems certain that one Indian remained loyal to the Spaniards; he had been named Diego Colon (the same name as one of the Admiral’s brothers).

The Spaniards arrived outside the port near the Spanish settlement so late that they did not dare to enter it that night. In the middle of the night, a canoe came. The Indians in it asked for the Admiral and the captain of one of the caravels of the first voyage. They were taken to the Admiral’s ship, but would not come on board until they had spoken with him and seen him. They asked for a light, and as soon as they recognized him, they entered the ship. They came from Guacanagari, and one of them was his cousin.

They brought with them golden masks, one for the Admiral and another for one of the captains who had been with him on the first voyage. Such masks were much valued among the Indians and are thought to have been meant to put upon their gods, so that they were given to the Spaniards as tokens of great respect. The Indian party remained on board for three hours, conversing with the Admiral and apparently very glad to see him again. As the Indians went away, however, they promised that they would bring him to visit them the next day.

The next day, however, none of them came back and nothing was seen of the Chief. The Spaniards thought that the Indians might have been accidentally overturned in their canoe, as it was a small one, and as wine had been given to them several times during their visit.

While he was still waiting for them, the Admiral sent some of his men to the place where the settlement had stood. They found that the

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\* Death of Indians: very likely the high mortality rate was due to the new diseases that the Indians were exposed to.

buildings were burned down and demolished. They also found some cloaks and other clothes had been carried off by the Indians, who seemed uneasy, and at first would not come near the Spaniards. This was very different from the welcome that Columbus received on his first journey. Eventually a relative of the Chief and three others came to the boat, and were taken onboard.

These men frankly admitted that the “Christians” were all dead. At one point the Spaniards had been told so the night before by their Indian interpreter, but they had refused to believe him. They were now told that their enemies, the Chiefs Caonabo and Mayreni had killed them and burned the village.

They said that Chief Guacanagari who had treated Columbus so well before was wounded in the thigh and they said they would go and summon him. The Spaniards made them some presents, and they left.

Early the next morning the Admiral himself, with a party, including Dr. Chanca, went ashore. Dr. Chanca wrote:

And we went where the town used to be, which we saw all burnt, and the clothes of the Christians were found on the grass there. At that time we saw no dead body. There were among us many different opinions, some suspecting that Guacanagari himself was connected with the betrayal or death of the Christians, and to others it did not appear so, as his town was burnt, so that the thing was very doubtful.

Later, many Indians approached Columbus to trade gold. They had shown the place where the bodies of 11 Spaniards lay covered already by the grass that had grown over them. They all with one voice said that Caonabo and Mayreni had killed them. But, at the same time, they complained that some of the Spanish colonists had taken three or four Indian wives, and it seemed likely that a just anger on the part of the Indians had something to do with their deaths.

The next day the Admiral sent out a caravel to seek for a suitable place for the founding of a new town, and he himself went out to look for one in a different direction. He found a secure harbor and a good place for a settlement, but he thought it too far from the place where he expected to find a goldmine. On his return, he found the caravel he

had sent out. As it was coasting along the island, a canoe had come out to it, with two Indians on board, one of whom was a brother of Chief Guacanagari. This man begged them to come and visit the Chief. A few men went on shore, and found him in bed, apparently suffering from his wounded thigh, which he showed them in bandages. They judged from appearances that he was telling them the truth.

He said to them, as best he could, that since he was wounded, they were to invite the Admiral to come to visit him. As they were going away, he gave each of them a golden jewel. "This gold," recorded Dr. Chanca, "is made in very delicate sheets, like our gold leaf, because they use it for making masks and to plate other materials. They also wear it on the head and for earrings and nose-rings, and therefore they beat it out very thin as they only wear it for its beauty and not for its value."



*A Native American golden mask from pre-Columbus Colombia.*

The Admiral went on shore and took his top men with him "handsomely dressed, as would be suitable in a capital city." They carried presents with them. Dr. Chanca was among them and wrote the following:

When we arrived, we found him lying in his bed, according to their custom, hanging in the air, the bed being made of cotton like a net. He did not rise, but from the bed made a show of courtesy, as best he knew how. He showed much feeling, with

tears in his eyes, at the death of the Christians, and began to talk of it, showing, as best he could, how some died of sickness, and how others had gone to find the goldmine, and that they had been killed there, and how the others had been killed in their town.

He presented to the Admiral some gold and precious stones. One of the accounts says that there were 800 beads of a stone called *ciba*, one hundred of gold, a golden coronet, and three small calabashes filled with gold dust. Columbus, in return, gave him presents from Europe.

The Spaniards did not know with certainty who to believe; for upon inspection it seemed that Guacanagari's leg wasn't injured at all. But it seemed certain that an attack of some enemy upon these Indians had taken place, and the Admiral decided to continue upon good terms with them. He maintained the same friendly policy toward Guacanagari. How far that chief had tried to prevent the massacre will never be known. The details of the story were never fully explained by the natives. It seems that the Spaniards left in the settlement had been cruel and degenerate in their dealing with the Indians. They had quarreled among themselves, and the angry natives, in revenge, had destroyed them all.

## CHAPTER 8

### The New Colony

Columbus had hoped to send back some of the ships from his large squadron, carrying the gold collected in the year by the colonists at the settlement. However, it was almost too clear that there was nothing but bad news to send back to Spain. Columbus went forward, however, as well as he could, with the establishment of a new colony.

He sent out expeditions of discovery to open relations with the natives, and to find the best places for washing and mining for gold. These officers, in their report, described the operation of gold-washing. The natives made a deep ditch into which the gold-bearing sand settled. For more important work they had flat baskets in which they shook the sand and parted it from the gold. With the left hand they scooped up sand, and handled this skillfully with the right hand, so that in a few minutes they could give grains of gold to the gratified explorers. The Spaniard leading the expedition, named Ojeda, brought home to Columbus one nugget that weighed nine ounces.

They also brought back Chief Caonabo, who they had captured. He was afterwards carried, as a prisoner, on the way to Spain; but died during the voyage.

Columbus was able to send the returning ships, with the encouraging reports brought in about gold mining, but with very little gold. But he was required to ask for fresh supplies of food for the colony—even in the midst of the plenty that he described; for he had found already what all such leaders find, the difficulty of training men to use food to which they were not accustomed. He sent also some Carib prisoners he had taken, begging that they might be trained to a knowledge of the Christian religion and of the Spanish language. He could see already how much he would need interpreters. The fleet sailed on the second of February and its reports were, on the whole, favorably received.

Columbus then founded the second colony on Hispaniola. The colonists were delighted with the fertility of the soil under the tropical climate. They planted seeds of peas, beans, lettuces, cabbages and other vegetables, and declared that they grew more in eight days than they would have grown in twenty at home. They had fresh vegetables in six-

teen days after they planted them; and for melons, pumpkins and other fruits of that sort, they took thirty days.

They had carried there the roots and seedlings of sugarcane. In fifteen days the shoots were a foot and a half high. A farmer who had planted wheat in the beginning of February had ripe grain in the beginning of April, such that they were sure of at least two crops in a year.

But the fertility of the soil was the only benefit of the island. The climate was destructive and unhealthy. The labor on the new colony was hard and discouraging. Columbus found that his colonists were badly suited for their duties, or not suited for them at all. Court gentlemen did not want to work. Priests expected to be put on better diet than any other people. Columbus—though he lost his own popularity—insisted on everyone eating the same food when sharing the supplies he had brought from Spain. It did not require a long time to prove that the selection of the site of the colony was unfortunate. Columbus himself became sick. While he was ill, a mutiny broke out that he had to suppress by strong measures.

Bernal Diaz, who ranked as an accountant of the expedition, and Fermin Cedo, an assayer\*, made a plot for seizing the remaining ships and sailing for Europe. News of the mutiny was brought to Columbus. He found a document in the writing of Diaz accusing Columbus himself of grave crimes. He confined Diaz on board a ship to be sent to Spain with the evidence. He punished the mutineers of lower rank. He took the guns, cannons, and ammunitions from four of the ships, and entrusted them all to a person in whom he had absolute confidence.

Meanwhile, Columbus had sent out men to explore the surrounding islands to find the most promising place for the discovery of gold. It was in the course of this exploration that one of the natives brought in a gold-bearing stone that weighed an ounce. He was satisfied with a little bell in exchange. He was surprised at the wonder expressed by the Spaniards, and showing a stone as large as a pomegranate, he said that he had nuggets of gold as large as this at his home. Other Indians brought in gold-bearing stones that weighed more than an ounce.

In March, Columbus himself, seeing the fortifications of the new

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\* assayer: one who examines metals to find their quantity and purity.

city well begun, undertook an exploration of this island, with a force of 500 men. With his little army, he marched away from the coast into the interior. The simple natives were astonished by the display of cavalry and other men in armor. After a few days of a delightful march, in the beauty of spring in that country, he entered upon the long sought after place called Cibao—in fact this island was what is today called Cuba. He gave up his first idea of founding another city here, but did build a fortress called St. Thomas\*, in joking reference to those who had asserted that these regions produced no gold. While building this fortress, as it was proudly called, he sent a young soldier named Luxan for further exploration.

Luxan returned with stories even greater than they had heard of before, but with no gold “because he had no orders to do so.” With news as encouraging as this, Columbus returned to his city. He appointed his brother Diego Columbus and Pedro Margarita governors of the city, and left with three ships for the further exploration of Cuba, which he had left only partly examined in his first voyage. He believed that it was the mainland of Asia. In fact, this was his belief until the day he died. Cuba was not known to be an island for many years afterwards.

Columbus was now again in the career that pleased him, and for which he was most suited. He was always uncomfortable running a colony, or ruling the men who were engaged in it. He was happy and contented when he was discovering. He had been eager to follow the southern coast of Cuba, as he had followed the north in his first voyage. And now he had his opportunity. Having commissioned Diego and Margarita and appointed also a council of four other gentlemen, he sailed to explore new coasts on the twenty-fourth of April.

During this westward journey beyond the main island of Cuba, one unusual story is recorded in an unspecified location. After they landed at the unknown island or land, a Spaniard went into a forest alone, hunting. Suddenly he saw a man clothed in white whom he thought was a monk of the order of Saint Mary de Mercedes. There was such a monk on the expedition. But, almost immediately, ten other figures

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\* St. Thomas: A saint known for doubting. Specifically: one of Jesus’s twelve disciples who was known for doubting Jesus had really returned to life and wanted to touch Jesus’s wound to prove it.



dressed in the same clothing appeared, and then as many as thirty. The Spaniard was frightened at the multiplication of their number. He called out to his companions and told them to escape. But the men in white called out to him, and waved their hands as if to assure him that there was no danger. He did not trust them, however, and rushed back to the shore and the ship as fast as he could to report what he had seen to the Admiral.



*White robes worn by some orders of Christian monks similar to what the Spaniard thought he saw. In fact, it is unknown who or what he saw.*

Here, at last, was reason for hope that they had found Christian missionaries who had traveled east from Europe to Asia. Columbus and others all thought that they would soon find themselves at the court of the Grand Khan of China. Columbus at once landed a small group, instructing them to go 40 miles inland, if necessary, to find people. But this group found neither path nor roadway, which is what one would expect to find in a highly civilized land such as China. Instead, this land was full of rich vegetation and showed no clear signs of human towns or cities. Another group he sent brought back rich bunches of grapes and other native fruits. But neither group saw any monks. In fact, what the Spaniard saw could not have been monks in Asia since they were not in Asia and what he saw could not have been from those

who had sailed west from Europe since there were not nearly that many Christian monks among them. Who or what exactly the Spaniard saw remains a mystery.

At various times in his meetings with the natives upon the coast, Columbus was delighted with their simplicity, their hospitality, and their kindness to each other. On one occasion, when the Christian mass was celebrated, a large number of them were present, and joined in the service, as well as they could, with respect and devotion. An old man, who looked about 80 years old, brought to the Admiral a basket full of fruit as a present. Then he said by an interpreter:

We have heard how you have enveloped, by your power, all these lands, and how much afraid of you the people have been. But I have to advise you, and to tell you that there are two paths when men leave this body. One is dark and miserable; it is for those who have injured the race of men. The other is delightful and pleasant; it is for those who, while alive, have loved the peace and tranquility of mankind. If you remember that you are mortal, and what these retributions are, you will do no harm to any one.

Columbus told him in reply that he had known of the two paths after death, and that he was well pleased to find that the natives of these lands knew of them; for he had not expected this. He said that the King and Queen of Spain had sent him with the express mission of bringing this news to them. In particular, that he was given the duty of punishing the Caribs and all other men of impure life, and of rewarding and honoring all pure and innocent men.

This statement so delighted the old prophet that he was eager to accompany Columbus on a mission so noble, and it was only because of the urgent begging of his wife and children that he stayed with them. Also, he found it hard to believe that Columbus was lower in rank than any king or queen.

After traveling through the islands further, Columbus crossed back to Hispaniola, where, from the Indians, he received news that the new town he had established was doing well.

With his own indomitable sense of righteousness, he decided now

to go to the Carib islands and deliver to them the vengeance he had ready. But his own body was not as strong as his will. He became extremely exhausted and bedridden. The officers of his ship, supposing he was dying, stopped the ship at the new settlement, which was known as Isabella.

He arrived there "half dead," and his explorations and discoveries for this voyage were thus brought to an end. Nonetheless, he was happy to see his brother Bartholomew Columbus, an experienced explorer himself, had arrived from Europe. Columbus immediately put him in charge of the colony.

Columbus's health improved after this and he sent back to Spain four caravels with 500 Indians whom he felt the Spaniards had justly taken as prisoners of war during their conflicts with the Indians. He offered them to the King and the Queen of Spain in hopes that they could be converted to Christianity and made into interpreters. He also suggested that they could be sold as slaves. Queen Isabella protested against this offering completely. She didn't like the uprooting of these Indians from their homes as she viewed them as lawful Spanish citizens. In fact, these Indians were lucky to be alive at all. In such a situation as that of the Spanish colonists, where supplies, buildings, and manpower were extremely limited, prisoners such as these usually would have been executed. Therefore, the mercy of Columbus was evident in their making this trip at all.

Columbus felt satisfied that the second colony was safely planted where the first one had not been. He planned to go back to Spain because he was certain that his presence in Spain was needed; for he knew that some Spaniards who did not like Columbus's management had already gone back and were speaking poorly of Columbus. Going back would give Columbus a way to protect his own character against the attacks of these Spaniards who had gone before him.

He set sail on the Nina on the tenth of March. He did not arrive in Cadiz, Spain till the eleventh of June, having been absent from Spain two years and nine months.

The excitement and popularity that greeted the return from the first voyage had come to an end. The disappointment that naturally follows unrealistically high expectations was, in this instance, confirmed by the return of discontented adventurers. It was certainly true that the supply

of gold received from the islands was very small as compared with the expenses of the expedition that had been used. The people of Spain, therefore, were prejudiced against Columbus and those who surrounded him. They heard with disbelief the accounts of Cuba that he gave, and were quite indifferent to the geographical theories by which he wanted to prove that it was a part of Asia. He believed that the rich mines, which he had found in Hispaniola, were the same as those of Ophir, in the Middle East. But after five years of waiting, the Spanish public cared little for such guessing games.

As he arrived in Cadiz, Spain he received a gracious letter from the King and Queen, congratulating him on his return, and asking him to come to Court as soon as he had rested and recovered. Columbus was encouraged by the tone of this letter. He had chosen to act as if he were in disgrace, and dressed himself in humble clothing, as if he were a monk.

He went to Burgos, where Ferdinand and Isabella were residing, and on the way made such a display of treasure as he had done on the celebrated march to Barcelona. Caonabo, the fierce Chief of Hispaniola, had died on the voyage, but his brother and nephew still lived, and he took them to the King and Queen. The brother and nephew were dressed in glittering golden ornaments. One chain of gold, which the brother wore, is said to have been worth a small fortune. In the procession Columbus carried various masks and other images made by the Indians in fantastic shapes, which attracted the curiosity that in all nations surrounds the gods of a foreign religion.

The King and Queen received him courteously. No reference was made to the complaints of the adventurers who had returned. They were still confident in Columbus and in his merits, and did not wish to form a judgment based only on the partial accounts of his accusers. On his part, Columbus spoke of the importance of a new expedition to more firmly claim these lands in Asia as part of Spain. He wanted for this purpose eight ships. He was willing to leave two at the island of Hispaniola, and he hoped that he might have six for a voyage of discovery.

The King and Queen agreed eagerly to his proposal, and at the time probably intended to carry out his wishes. But Spain had something else to do more urgent than claiming parts of Asia and exploring.

Therefore this promise made so courteously in 1496, was destined to wait for European war and diplomacy. It wasn't until the thirtieth of May, 1498, that he was able to sail.

## CHAPTER 9

### The Third Voyage



*One of Columbus's caravels sailing (N.C. Wyeth)*

A detailed journal from Columbus himself records the third expedition. On the thirty-first of July, they spotted land, which was on the Southeast of the island that he named Trinidad after the Holy Trinity (Jesus the Son, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit) that was the subject of holiday celebrations when he left Spain. The next day a large canoe from the east with twenty-four men, well armed, appeared.

The Admiral wished to communicate with them, but they refused, although he offered them basins and other things that he thought would attract them. Failing in this effort, he directed some of the boys of the crew to dance and play a tambourine on the deck of the ship. But this friendly offering had as little success as the other. The natives strung their bows, took up their shields and began to shoot the dancers. Columbus stopped the entertainment, therefore, and ordered some cannon balls shot at them, after which they left him.

As he sailed farther westward, he observed a fleet of boats and sent his people ashore. They found no inhabitants at first, but eventually met people who told them the enemy of this country is Paria. The people were of much the same skin color as those who had been observed before, and were ready for conversation, and of good appearance. The house to which the Spaniards were led was large, with many seats. An entertainment was brought forward, in which there were many sorts of fruits and wines. The wine was not made from grapes, however, and he supposed it must be made of different sorts of fruits. The Indians and their guests parted with regret since they could not understand each other's conversation. While sailing down the coast, Columbus found that every 30 to 60 miles they sailed the Indians could not understand each other's language.

After discovering many islands in the Caribbean Sea, Columbus went northwest, and he arrived at the colony of Hispaniola, on the thirtieth of August. He had hoped for rest after his difficult voyage; but he found the island in confusion that seemed hopeless.

His brother Bartholomew Columbus had in hand a problem that could not be solved so as to satisfy everyone. Close around him he had a body of adventurers, almost all of whom were nothing but adventurers. With the help of these adventurers, he had to repress Indian hostilities, and to keep in order the Indians who had been insulted and injured in every conceivable way by the settlers.

He was expected to send home gold to Spain with every ship. He knew perfectly well that Spain was clamoring with indignation because he did not succeed in doing so. But on the island itself he had to meet, from day to day, conspiracies of Spaniards and rebellions by natives. These rebellions consisted simply in their assertion of their rights to the beautiful land that the Spaniards were taking away from them.

At the moment when Columbus landed, there was a brief period of peace. But the natives, whom he remembered only six years ago as so happy, cheerful, and hospitable, had fled as far as they could. They showed in every way their distrust of those who were trying to become their masters. On the other hand, soldiers and other Spaniards were eager to leave the island if they could. They were near starvation, or if they did not starve they were eating food to which they were not accustomed. The eagerness with which, in 1493, men had wished to rush to



this land of opportunity was replaced by an equal eagerness, in 1498, to go home from it.

As soon as he arrived, Columbus issued a proclamation, approving of the measures of his brother in his absence, and denouncing the conspiring Spaniards with whom Bartholomew had been having trouble. He found the difficulties that surrounded him were of the most serious character. He had not force enough to take up arms against both the Spanish and Indian rebels. He offered to pardon them in the name of the King and Queen, but they refused.

In order to maintain any bit of authority, Columbus wrote to the King and Queen asking that they work out an agreement between his brother (the leader of the colony) and Roldan, who was the leader of the rebellious Spaniards. In the letter he also reminded Ferdinand and Isabella of his own eager desire to return to the colony sooner, and attributed the difficulties that had arisen, in large part, to his long delay. He said he should send home the more worthless men in every ship that left. He asked that priests be sent out to convert the Indians and to reform the degenerate Spaniards. He asked for tax collectors and for a wise judge. He begged at the same time that, for two years longer, the colony might be permitted to employ the Indians as slaves, but he promised they would only use those Indians they captured in war and rebellions caused by the Indians.

However, in the same ship that carried Columbus's letter to the King and Queen, the rebellious Spanish colonists sent out letters accusing Columbus and his brother of the most terrible oppression and injustice. All these letters came to Court by one messenger. Columbus was then left to manage as best he could in the months that passed before he could receive an answer.

Columbus was not completely unsuccessful. That is to say, there was no actual fighting between the colonists. But when the answer returned, it was written by a royal advisor who had always not favored Columbus. In the response, Columbus was simply told that the whole matter must be left in suspense until the King and Queen could investigate further. Columbus's hope for some help from home was a complete disappointment.

Roldan, the leader of the rebel Spaniards, was encouraged by this news to take even more action than he had before. He now proposed

that he should send 15 of his men to Spain and also that those who remained should not only be pardoned, but should have lands granted to them; third, that a public proclamation should be made that all charges against him had been false; and fourth, that he should hold the position of chief judge, which he had held before the rebellion.

Columbus was forced to accept terms as ridiculous as these, and the rebels even added a stipulation that if he should fail in fulfilling any of these terms, they could use force against him.

Columbus wanted to return with Bartholomew to Spain, and he made some preparations to do so. At this time he learned that in the western part of the island four strange ships had arrived there. It turned out that they were led by one of his former Spanish captains and were in search of pearls that Columbus had reported on earlier. This captain also seemed to side with Roldan and the rebels. Columbus did not feel that it was safe to leave the colony in such a condition of near-rebellion. He wrote again to the King and Queen, and said directly that his statement to the rebels had been extorted by force, and that he did not consider that the King and Queen, or that he himself, were bound by it.

While he could not yet go back to Spain, Columbus also could not leave the colony and go exploring further as he wished to do. He had to stay there keeping the peace. In Spain, his enemies were doing everything in their power to undermine his reputation. His statements were read more and more coldly, and at last, on the twenty-first and twenty-sixth of May, 1499, letters were written to Columbus instructing him to deliver into the hands of Bobadilla, a new commander, all the fortresses, ships, houses, and other royal property he held, and to give his loyalty and obedience to any instructions given by Bobadilla. That is to say, Bobadilla was sent to take over the whole operation on the spot. He was an officer of the royal household, probably a favorite at Court, and was chosen for the difficult task of resolving all difficulties, and bringing the new colony into loyal allegiance to the Crown. He sailed for San Domingo in the middle of July, 1500, and arrived on the twenty-third of August.

When Bobadilla arrived, he found that Columbus and his brother Bartholomew were both absent from the city, being in fact engaged in efforts to bring order to other parts of the expanding colony. Bobadilla

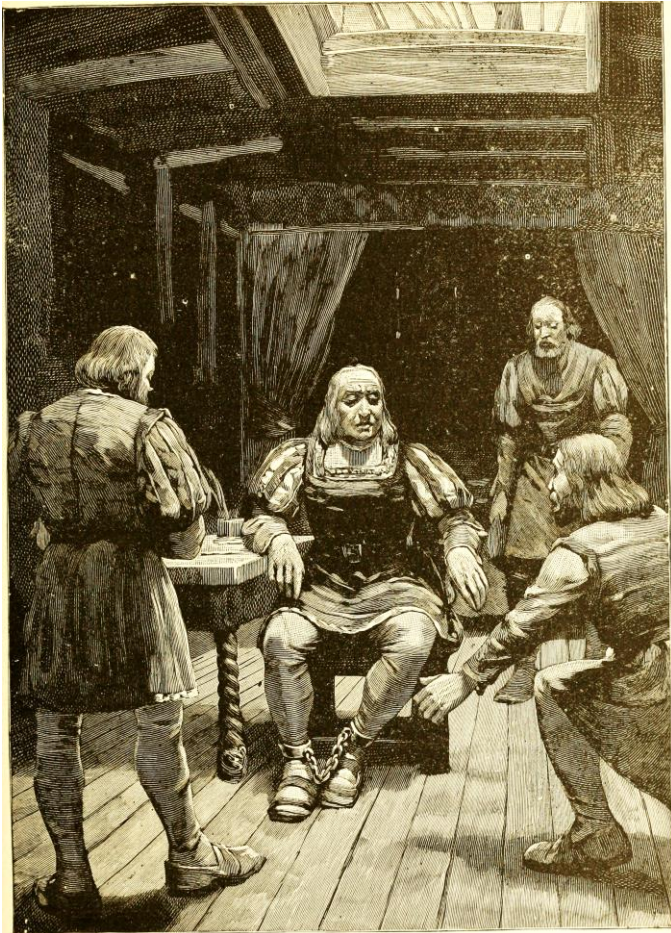
and Columbus exchanged letters and Bobadilla thought Columbus might try to attack him to keep his power when he and his brother returned. Therefore, he made military preparations for Columbus's return to the main colony in Hispaniola.

However, when Columbus arrived, he came by himself without any guards and followed every order given by Bobadilla, showing complete loyalty to the order issued by the King and Queen and removing any suspicion of wrongdoing. Nonetheless, Bobadilla gave orders that Columbus should be put in iron leg shackles—known as “irons”—and imprisoned.

Columbus and his brother were put on a caravel and sent back to Spain. The captain of the ship, Martin, was deeply saddened by the severe treatment of the great navigator. He would gladly have taken off his shackles, but Columbus would not agree. “I was commanded by the King and Queen,” he said, “to do whatever Bobadilla ordered in their name. He has put these chains on me by their authority. I will wear them until the King and Queen order me take them off. I will preserve them afterwards as relics and memorials of the reward for my services.” Columbus's son, Fernando, who tells this story, says that his father indeed did so, that they were always hanging in his cabinet, and that he asked that they be buried with him when he died.



*“Bobadilla Betrays Columbus” by Luigi Gregori*



*Columbus in iron leg shackles ("irons")*



## CHAPTER 10

### Spain 1500, 1501



*Columbus kneeling before Isabella after his third voyage.*

As soon as it was announced in Spain that the great discoverer had been treated so terribly by Bobadilla, a wave of popular indignation swept through the people and reached the Court. Ferdinand and Isabella themselves had never intended to give so much power to their favorite that he would disgrace a man so much his superior.

They instantly sent orders to Cadiz that Columbus should be received with all honor. They did not wait for any documents from Bobadilla. They wrote courteously to Columbus and ordered 2,000 ducats should be paid to him for his expenses, and they ordered him to appear at Court in Grenada.

Columbus appeared there on the seventeenth of December, 1500, attended by an honorable entourage, and in the proper clothing of a gentleman favored by the King and Queen.

When the Queen met him she was moved to tears, and Columbus,

finding himself so kindly received, threw himself upon his knees. For some time he could not express himself except by tears and sobs. His King and Queen raised him from the ground and encouraged him with gracious words. As soon as he recovered himself, Columbus gave an eloquent speech.



*Portuguese Explorer Vasco da Gama before the Zamorin of Calicut (Veloso Salgado)*

This would have been a favorable time for Columbus to propose future plans to the King and Queen. On the other hand, the condition of affairs had completely changed from what it was when he began his great discoveries eight years earlier in 1492. Recently, the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama had succeeded in going around the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa, arrived at the Indies by the route of the Indian ocean, and then successfully returned. This great adventure, with the commercial and other results that would certainly follow it, had excited the mind of all Europe, as the discovery by Columbus had excited it before. Other explorers included the Italian

Amerigo Vespucci, whose eloquent writing and mapping would end up fixing his name on the new continents—the Americas. Sailing to North America, probably Canada, was John Cabot, an Italian explorer who was in the service of the King of England Henry VII (and therefore left behind his original Italian name Giovanni Caboto). Any future expedition by Columbus had to take all of this into consideration, as well as the fact that, at about 50, Columbus was now considered an old man as far as adventurers were concerned.

Meanwhile Bobadilla was removed from his position. But neither Ferdinand nor Isabella chose to place Columbus again in command of the colony. Instead they chose Sir Nicola Ovando, a younger man, to take the place of Bobadilla, to send Bobadilla back to Spain, and to take charge at the colony.

From the colony itself, the worst accounts were received. If Columbus and his brother had failed, Bobadilla had failed more disgracefully. He had favored all rebels, he had pardoned them, he had even paid them for the time they had spent in rebellion; and the natural result was utter disorder.

It does not appear that Bobadilla was a bad man; he was a man completely inexperienced as a leader; he was an unwise man and was weak. He had harmed the Crown in the irresponsible way he rented and sold land in the New World. In order to maintain revenue, he had to make the Indians work with more severity than ever. He knew very well that the system under which he was working could not last long. One of his maxims was, “Do the best with your time,” and he was constantly sacrificing future advantages for immediate results.

The Indians, who had been treated badly enough before, were treated worse now. And during his short administration, if it may be called an administration, he was reducing the island to lower and lower depths. He did succeed in obtaining a large amount of gold, but the abuses of his government were not atoned for by the profit. Worst of all, the wrongs against the Indians so disturbed Queen Isabella that she was eager for him to be replaced.

The preparations being made for Ovando’s expedition, for the removal of Bobadilla, and for a reform, if it were possible, in the governing of the colony, all set back any preparations for a new expedition of discovery for Columbus.



*Portrait of viceroys Nicolás de Ovando*

Columbus himself never lost confidence. He was sure that he was divinely sent, and that his mission was to open the way to the Indies, for the spiritual advancement of mankind. If Vasco de Gama had discovered a shorter way than men knew before, Christopher Columbus would discover one shorter still, and this discovery would be for the glory of God. It seemed to him that the simplest way he could make men understand this was to show that the Holy Land\* must be recovered from followers of Islam, which most Spaniards and Europeans at this time viewed as an evil religion. That is, there was to be a new and last crusade, and the money for this crusade would come from the gold of the farthest East; for he still believed that the continents he had found were Asia. It would succeed where the previous crusades, beginning about 400 years earlier, had failed.

While he was inactive in Seville, and the great squadron was being prepared that Ovando was to command, Columbus wrote what is

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\* Holy Land: the land where Jesus lived, taught, and died, which is in what is today called the Middle East, just east of Europe.



known as the *Book of Prophecies*, in which he attempted to convince the Christian kings of Europe of carrying forward his plan. He urged haste, because he believed the world was only to last 155 years longer; and, with so much to be done, it was necessary that they should begin.

He had the assistance of a monk, who seems to have been skilled in literary work, and the two arranged writings in order, illustrated them with poetry, and collected them into a book that was sent to the King and Queen. Columbus wrote:

Powered as if by a heavenly fire, I came to your Highnesses. All who heard of my plan mocked it; all the scientific knowledge I had acquired didn't benefit me at all; seven years I passed in your royal Court, arguing with people of great authority and educated in all the arts, and in the end they decided it all was impossible. In your Highnesses alone remained faith and persistence. Who will doubt that this light was from the Holy Scriptures, illuminating you, as well as myself, with rays of marvelous brilliance.

## CHAPTER 11

### Stranded in Jamaica

It seems a pity now that, after his third voyage, Columbus did not remain in Spain and enjoy, as an old man could, the honors and respect that he had now earned. But it is to be remembered that Columbus was not a man bound by a love of leisure. His life was an active one.

From time to time, therefore, he wrote new letters to the King and Queen proposing a new expedition; and at last, by an instruction that is dated on the fourteenth of March, in the year 1502, a fourth voyage was approved by the King and Queen. Not one that stopped at Hispaniola, but, to save time, to pass by that island entirely. This was a graceful way of keeping Columbus from getting mixed up in the difficulties of running the colony there.

His orders were, "You will make a direct voyage, if the weather does not prevent you, for discovering the islands and the mainland of the Indies." He was to take possession of these islands and of this mainland, and to inform the King and Queen in regard to his discoveries. The experiences of former voyages, including the greed of Spaniards that Columbus had brought there and of Spaniards who had brought themselves, like Bobadilla, had taught them that great care must be taken to avoid private interests in finding "gold, silver, pearls, precious stones, spices and other things of different quality," which was part of his orders.

Of this voyage we have Columbus's own official account. There were four ships, three of which were caravels. The fourth was very small. The little squadron sailed from the bay of Cadiz on the eleventh of May, 1502.

It so happened that while sailing across the ocean, one of his ships was damaged in a terrible storm. He decided he would stop at the colony in Hispaniola to make repairs. Even though Columbus had been ordered not to stop there and not get involved, it seems he had no choice as the damaged ship was delaying his entire squadron. For this reason he hoped to exchange it for another ship in Hispaniola.

He did not enter the harbor. Instead, he sent a letter to Ovando, now the governor, and asked his permission. He added to the request

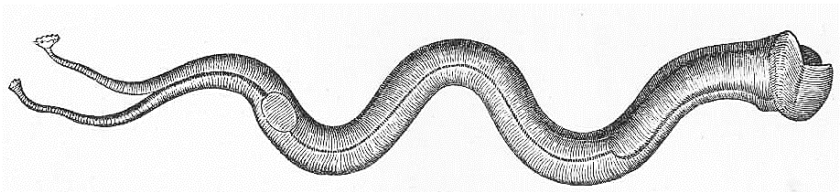
he made a statement that there was a terrible storm that he did not want to meet on the open sea. Ovando, however, refused any permission to enter. He was, in fact, just in the process of sending a fleet to Spain, with Bobadilla, Columbus's old enemy whom Ovando had just replaced.

In a return message, Columbus begged Ovando to delay this fleet from attempting to sail back to Spain until the storm had passed. But the seamen ridiculed him and his storm, and begged Ovando to send their fleet home.

He did so. Bobadilla and his fleet sailed for home. In 10 days a hurricane struck them. The ship on which Columbus's enemies, Bobadilla and Roldan, sailed was sunk and the gold accumulated for years. Of the whole fleet, only one ship, called the weakest of all, reached Spain. This ship carried 4,000 pieces of gold, which were owned by Columbus and were being sent back to Spain for safekeeping.

Meanwhile, Columbus's own little squadron—thanks probably to the seamanship of Columbus and his brother—survived the storm, and he found refuge in the harbor that earlier on he had himself named El Hermoso (The Beautiful), in the western part of Hispaniola.

They sailed onward visiting many islands, including Jamaica. Once he hit the continent all of his orders were to sail toward the southeast. The fact that an expedition for westward discovery was sailing eastward seemed in itself a contradiction that annoyed the crew. On top of this, the wind seemed always against them. Also, the ships were pierced by the teredo, a type of worm that eats through thick wood, and is so destructive that the seamen of later times have learned to cover the hulls of their ships with copper.



*The Teredo worm.*

The seamen thought that they were under the evil influence of some magic spell. After a month more, Columbus gave into their criti-

cism and abandoned his search for a channel to India. He was more ready to do this because he knew that the land he was sailing by was connected with the coast that other Spaniards had already discovered. He therefore sailed westward again.

But the winds could change as quickly as his plans, and now for nearly two weeks they had to fight a tropical storm. At one moment they met with a waterspout that seemed to move directly toward them. The sailors shouted passages from the Book of Saint John in the Bible, which seemed to work, allowing their escape.



*Photo of a water spout.*

Eventually, they made it to a safe harbor at a place he called Puerto Bello (Port Beautiful), as it is still known today in the Central American country Panama. The natives there proved friendly, as he had found them before; but they told him that he would find no more gold upon the coast and that the mines were in a land they called Veragua. It was, on the tenth day of January that, after some delay, Columbus entered the river that led there and had the same name, Veragua.

The people told him where he could find the mines, and were all ready to send guides with his own people to point them out. His men discovered the mines at a distance of eight leagues from the port. The

terrain they had to travel through was difficult, being mountainous and crossed by many streams. They were forced to cross the river of Veragua thirty-nine times. The Indians themselves were highly skilled in taking out gold. Columbus added to their number 75 men. In one day's work, they obtained two or three gold coins worth of gold without much difficulty.

Columbus felt there must be a much larger population inland. He learned from the Indians that the Chief of these tribes was a very important monarch in that region. His houses were larger than others, built handsomely of wood, and covered with palm leaves.

The amount of all the gold collected was stated precisely in the official account book. There were 220 pieces of gold, large and small. Altogether they weighed about 73 ounces (4.6 pounds). Besides these were twelve pieces, great and small, of an inferior grade of gold. This was a promising amount of gold. In total, such gold could buy a luxury car or simple house in today's world.

Columbus collected gold in this way to make his expedition popular at home, and he had financed the voyage, so to speak, by pledging the financial results that could fund a new crusade. But, for himself, the prime desire was always discovery.

Columbus and the Spaniards spent two months in that region, pressing their explorations in search of gold. It seemed so promising that Columbus decided to leave his brother to secure the area and work the mines while he would return to Spain with the gold he had collected and obtain reinforcements and supplies.

The natives, under a leader named Quibian, rallied in large numbers, probably intending to drive the colonists away. When Columbus supposed that he had scared them off, he said goodbye to his brother, as he had intended, and left one of the four ships to his brother.

However, the wind was against Columbus's plan. He sent back a boat to communicate with his brother in the new settlement, but it fell into the hands of the natives. Unsure what had happened, Columbus instead sent a seaman, named Ledesma, who volunteered to swim through the ocean waves and communicate with the settlement. The brave fellow succeeded. By passing through the waves again, he brought back the news that the little colony was besieged by the natives.

It seemed clear that the new settlement must be abandoned and Columbus's brother and his people must be taken back to Spain. This plan was adopted. With infinite difficulty, the guns and supplies that had been left with the colony were brought onto the ships of the Admiral. The caravel that had been left for the colony could not be taken from the river without destroying her, so she was completely dismantled and left as the only memorial of this unfortunate colony.

At Puerto Bello, Columbus was forced to leave another ship, for she had been riddled by the teredo worm. The two ships left were in horrible condition. "They were as full of holes as a honey-comb," he wrote. On the southern coast of Cuba, Columbus had to stop to increase their dwindling food supply with cassava bread. The leaks increased. The ships' pumps were insufficient, and the men bailed out the water with buckets and kettles. On the twentieth of June, they were thankful to sail into a harbor, called Puerto Bueno, on the coast of Jamaica.

He was not far from the colony at Hispaniola, and he and his men welcomed the refuge of the harbor. He was at once surrounded by Indians, ready to trade with them and bring them provisions. The poor Spaniards were hungry and glad for this relief.

Diego Mendez, a spirited sailor, had the oversight of this trading, and in one negotiation, at some distance from the ships, he bought a good canoe from a friendly chief. For this he gave a brass basin, one of his two shirts, and a short jacket. Columbus refitted the canoe, put on a sort of keel, and added a mast and sail.

With six Indians whom the chief had lent him, Mendez, accompanied by only one Spanish companion, set sail in this little craft for Hispaniola. Columbus sent with them a letter to the King and Queen, which gave the account of the voyage.

When Mendez was about 100 miles into his journey, he met a band of hostile natives. They had pretended to be friendly until they had the adventurers surrounded and then they seized them all. But while the natives were quarreling about the spoils, Mendez succeeded in escaping to his canoe, and returned alone to his master after fifteen days.

It was determined that the voyage should be renewed. But this time, an additional canoe was sent under the command of Mendez. He sailed again, storing on his boat cassava bread and calabashes of water.

Bartholomew Columbus, with his armed group, marched along the coast as the two canoes sailed along the shore. Waiting then for a clear day, Mendez sailed northward.



*An illustration of natives in South America and their canoes.*

The months dragged on without any sign of Mendez. The records show that the next eight months were filled with dismal waiting and rebellion. It is pathetic that a little group of men, who had been, again and again, saved from death in the most remarkable way, could not live on a fertile island, in a beautiful climate, without quarrelling with each other.

Two of Columbus's officers, Porras and his brother, led the rebellion. They told the rest of the crew that the Admiral's hope of relief from Mendez was a mere delusion. They said that Columbus was an exile from Spain, and that he did not dare return to Hispaniola. In such ways they sought to rouse his people against him and his brother. As

for Columbus, he was sick on board his ship while the two Porras brothers were working against him among his men.

On the second of January, 1504, Francesco de Porras broke into the cabin. He complained bitterly that they were kept to die in that desolate place, and accused the Admiral as if it were his fault. He told Columbus that they had decided to go back to Spain; and then, lifting his voice, he shouted, "I am for Spain; who will follow me?" The rebellious crew instantly replied that they would do so. Voices were heard that threatened Columbus's life.

Columbus's brother Bartholomew, who was known as the Commander, persuaded Columbus to retire from the crowd and he would bear the whole weight of the assault. The loyal part of the crew, however, persuaded the Commander to put down his weapon, and on the other hand, asked Porras and his companions to go away. It was clear enough that they had the power, and they tried to carry out their plans.

They embarked in ten canoes, and thus the Admiral was abandoned by 48 of his men. They followed the eastward route Mendez had taken. In their lawless way they robbed the Indians of their food and of anything else that they needed. As Mendez had done, they waited at the eastern tip of Jamaica for calm weather. They knew they could not manage the canoes, and they had several Indians to help them.

When the sea was smooth they started; but they had hardly gone four leagues from land when the waves began to rise under a sharp wind. Immediately they turned back to shore. The canoes were carrying too much weight, and as the sea rose, frequently they were taking on water.

The frightened Spaniards threw overboard everything they could spare, retaining their arms only, and a part of their provisions. They even made the Indians leap into the sea to lighten the boats, but, though they were skillful swimmers, they could not make it to land by swimming. They kept close to the canoes and would occasionally seize them to recover breath. The cruel Spaniards cut off their hands and stabbed them with their swords. Thus eighteen of their Indian companions died, and they had none left, except those that were the most help in managing the canoes. Once on land, they wondered whether they should make another effort or should return to Columbus.

They waited a month for another opportunity to go to Hispaniola;



but this failed as before, and losing all patience, they returned westward, to the leader whom they had insulted.

Meanwhile, Columbus with his half of the crew, was waiting. He had established as good order as he could between his men and the Indians, but he had to keep a strict watch over the European food he still had, knowing how necessary it was for the sick men in his group. On the other hand, the Indians, completely unused to regular work, found it difficult to supply the food that so many men demanded.

The supplies became fewer day by day. The natives no longer came down to the harbor; the trinkets with which food had been bought, had lost their charm. The Spaniards began to fear that they would starve on the shore of an island that, when Columbus first discovered it, appeared to be a place of plenty. It was at this time, when the natives were becoming more and more unfriendly, that Columbus made use of his knowledge of astronomy.

He sent his interpreter to summon the main chiefs to a meeting. For this meeting he picked a day when he knew that a total eclipse of the moon would take place. The chiefs came as requested. He told them that he and his followers worshipped a God who lived in the heavens; that this God favored those who did good things, but punished all who displeased him.

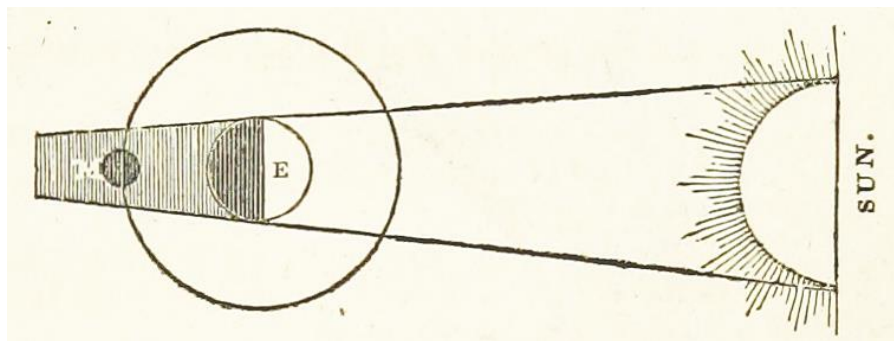
He asked them to remember how this God had protected Mendez and his companions in their voyage because they went obediently to the orders that had been given to them by their chief (that is, by Columbus himself). He asked them to remember that the same God had punished Porras and his companions with all sorts of troubles because they were rebels. He said that now this great God was angry with the Indians because they refused to give food to his faithful worshippers, and that he was planning to punish them with famine and plague.

He said that if they disbelieved the warning that he gave, a sign would be given in the heavens that night of the anger of the great God. They would see that the moon would change its color and would lose its light. They could take this as a sign of the punishment awaiting them.

At this point, the Indians had lost much of the confidence in Columbus that they once had. Some made fun of what he said, some were alarmed, but all waited with anxiety and curiosity. When the night came

they saw a dark shadow begin to cover the moon. As the eclipse continued, their fears increased. At last the mysterious darkness completely covered the glory of the full moon.

There was then no end to their terror. They grabbed all the food that they had, they rushed to the ships, they threw themselves at the feet of Columbus's men and begged him to communicate with his God to stop the disaster he had threatened. Columbus would not let them come in. He shut himself in his cabin and remained there while the eclipse increased, hearing from within the cries and prayers of the natives.



*Diagram of a lunar eclipse*

It was not until he knew the eclipse was about to finish that Columbus came forth, and told them that he had communicated with God, who would pardon them if they would fulfill their promises. In a sign of pardon, the darkness would be withdrawn from the moon.

The Indians saw the fulfilment of the promise as they had seen the fulfilment of the threat. The moon reappeared in its brilliancy. They thanked the Admiral eagerly for his help and returned to their homes. From this time forward, having proven that he knew on earth what was happening in the heavens, they satisfied him with their gifts. The supplies came in regularly, and from this time on there was no longer any lack of food.

But no tales of eclipses would keep the Spaniards quiet. Another conspiracy against Columbus was formed. They planned to seize the remaining canoes, and with them make their way to Hispaniola. But, at the very point of the outbreak of the new mutiny, a sail was seen ap-

proaching the harbor—Mendez had succeeded!

The Spaniards could see that the ship was small. She kept to the open sea, but sent a small boat on shore. As the boat drew near, those who waited so eagerly recognized a Spaniard named Escobar, who had been condemned to death for rebelling against Columbus in Hispaniola, and was pardoned by his successor Bobadilla. To see this man approaching for their relief was not hopeful even though he was called a Christian and was a Spaniard.

Escobar arrived and gave them a letter from Ovando, the new governor of Hispaniola, along with some bacon and a barrel of wine, which were sent as presents to the Admiral. He told Columbus, in a private meeting, that the governor had sent him to express his concern at his misfortune, and his regret that he had no ship of sufficient size to rescue all the people, but that he would send one as soon as possible.

This was not much comfort for men who had been waiting eight months to be rescued. Columbus wrote a reply to Ovando for Escobar to carry back, pointing out that the difficulties of his situation had been increased by the rebellion of the Porras brothers. He, however, expressed his trust in Ovando's promise, and said he would remain patiently on his ships until relief came. Escobar took the letter, returned to his ship, and set sail at once, leaving the starving Spaniards to the same sad fate that hung over them before.

Columbus tried to reassure them. He said that he trusted Ovando, and told them that a ship large enough for them would soon arrive. He said that they could see that he believed this because he had not himself gone back with Escobar, something that he could have done. Instead, Columbus had sent back Escobar as quickly as possible, so that no time would be lost in sending the necessary ships to rescue them.

With these assurances he soothed their hearts. In truth, however, he knew that Ovando's behavior was not quite right. He should not have left them for months in danger and uncertainty with merely a message and a little bit of food to help them.

Columbus supposed that Ovando thought that Columbus's death would be favorable for his own political prospects, and he believed that Escobar was sent merely as a spy by more powerful people in Spain. This same impression is given by Las Casas, the historian, who was

then in Hispaniola. He says that Escobar was chosen simply because of his dislike for Columbus, and that he was ordered not to land, nor to hold conversation with any of the crew, nor to receive letters from anyone except the Admiral.

After Escobar's departure, Columbus sent a group on shore to communicate with the rebels, who were living on the island. He offered to them free pardon, kind treatment, and passage with him in the ships that he expected from Ovando, and, as a token of good will, he sent them some of the bacon that Escobar had brought them.

Francesco de Porras met these messengers, and replied that they had no wish to return to the ships, but preferred living at large. They offered to come back and be peaceful if the Admiral would promise them solemnly that if two ships arrived, they would have one to depart in and if only one ship arrived they would have half of it, and that the Admiral would now share with them the supplies and other valuables, which he had left in the ship.

Columbus refused to accept these demands. Porras had spoken on behalf of the rebels, but they were not so well satisfied with what Porras said. The incident almost led to a rebellion among the rebels themselves. Porras attempted to keep control by assuring them that there had been no real arrival of Escobar. He told them that there had been no ship in port; that what had been seen was an illusion conjured up by the magic of Columbus, who was well experienced in such sorcery.

He reminded them that the ship had arrived just before nightfall, and that it communicated with Columbus only and then disappeared in the night. Had it been a real ship would Columbus not have boarded it and left with his brother and his son? Was it not clear that it was only a phantom, which appeared for a moment and then vanished?

Not satisfied, however, with his control over his men, Porras marched them to a point near the ships, hoping to steal their supplies and to take the Admiral prisoner. Columbus and his brother, however, found out in advance about the approach of this hostile party, and the Commander and 50 loyal followers armed themselves and marched to meet them. The Commander sent messengers, the same whom were sent before with the offer of pardon, but Porras and his companions would not permit them to approach.

They decided instead to engage in battle with the fifty loyal men, thinking to attack and kill the Commander himself. They rushed upon him and his group, but after the first round of battle four or five of the rebels were killed.



*Bartholomew Columbus, The Commander*

The Commander, with his own hand, killed Sanchez, one of the most powerful men among the rebels. Porras attacked him in turn, and with his sword cut his shield and wounded his hand. The sword, however, was wedged in the shield, and before Porras could withdraw it, the Commander advanced upon him and took him prisoner. When the rebels saw this result of the conflict, they fled in confusion.

The Indians, meanwhile, amazed at this conflict among men who they thought had descended from heaven, gazed with wonder at the battle. When it was over, they approached the field, and looked with amazement on the dead bodies of the beings whom they had thought immortal. It is said that at the mere sound of a groan from one of the wounded they ran away.

The Commander returned in triumph to the ships. He brought with him his prisoners. Only two of his group had been wounded, himself and his servant. The next day the remaining fugitives sent in a petition to the Admiral, confessing their misdeeds and asking for pardon.

He saw that their rebellion was broken; he granted their prayer on the single condition that Francesco de Porras should remain a prisoner. He did not receive them on board the ships, but put them under the command of a loyal officer to whom he gave a sufficient number of items for trade, to purchase food from the natives.

This battle was the last major incident. Finally, after one year of hope and fear had passed, two ships were seen standing into the harbor. One of them was a ship equipped, using Columbus's own rightful pay, by the faithful Mendez. The other had been supplied afterwards by Ovando.

The small public, if it can be called that, in the colony in Hispaniola had grown indignant over Ovando's neglect of Columbus, and he had been forced by public opinion to send another ship as a companion to the one sent by Mendez. Mendez himself, having seen the ships depart, went to Spain to help protect the interests of the Admiral.

With the arrival at Puerto Bueno, in Jamaica, of the two rescue ships, Columbus's chief sufferings and anxiety were over. The responsibility, at least, was in other hands. But the voyage to Hispaniola consumed six tedious weeks. Columbus's suffering, and the sense of wrong that he had suffered had awakened the admiration of the people of the colony. Ovando took him as a guest in his own house and the people received him with distinction.

However, Columbus found little to be happy about. Ovando had ruled the poor natives with a rod of iron, and they were wretched. Columbus's own affairs had been neglected, and he could get no help from the governor. He spent only a month on the island, trying, as best he could to bring some order into the administration of his own property; and then, on the twelfth of September, 1504, sailed for Spain.

The ship had barely left harbor when she was dismasted in a squall. He was forced to cross to another ship under the command of his brother, the Commander. This ship also was unfortunate. Her mainmast was damaged in a storm, and she could not go on until the mast

was shortened.

In another storm the foremast\* was damaged, and it was only on the seventh of November that the shattered and storm-pursued ship arrived at San Lucar, in Spain. Columbus himself had been suffering, through the voyage from gout and other illnesses. The voyage was a harsh experience for a sick man, over fifty years old.

He went at once to Seville, to find rest for his body and mind.

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\* foremast: mast nearest the bow (front) of a ship.

## CHAPTER 12

### Two Deaths



*A Statue of Queen Isabella in Granada, Spain (Felipe Bigarny)*

Columbus had been away from Spain two years and six months. He returned broken in health. Queen Isabella, his great advocate who was born in the same year as Columbus, 1451, was also not well. She died on the twenty-sixth day of November, only a short time after his arrival. King Ferdinand was relatively cold toward Columbus, for he was now engaged in many important affairs other than those of discovery.

Isabella was always looking out for Columbus's interests, even while he was stranded in Jamaica for a year. During that time she ap-



pointed him as the body-guard of her oldest son, an honorary position that carried with it a good annual salary. After the return to Spain of Diego Mendez, the loyal friend who had cared for his interests so well in Hispaniola, she had raised Columbus to the rank of a noble. Therefore, it is clear that among her last thoughts was the wish to do justice to Columbus.

On his arrival in Seville, where one might say he had a right to rest himself and do nothing else, Columbus engaged at once in efforts to see that the seamen who had accompanied him in this last adventure should be properly paid. Many of these men had been disloyal to him and unfaithful to their country, but Columbus, with a heart of great mercy, spoke eagerly at Court on their behalf, saying that they had endured great danger, that they brought great news of discoveries, and that the King ought to repay them for all that they had done.

He says, in a letter to his son written during this period, "I have not a roof over my head here in Spain. I have no place to eat nor to sleep except a tavern, and there I am often too poor to pay my bill." This line has been quoted as if Columbus were living as a beggar at this time, and the world has been asked to believe that a man who had a tenth of the revenue of the Indies due to him was actually living in poverty. But this is a mere absurdity of exaggeration.

Undoubtedly, he was frequently short of money on hand. He says to his son, in another letter, "I only live by borrowing." Still he had good credit with the Genoese bankers established in Spain. In writing to his son he begs him to be careful with how he spends money, but at the same time he acknowledges spending large sums of money himself.

In the month of December in Hispaniola, there is a transaction that he made that amounts to enough to buy a house in our present dollars. We must not, therefore, take literally his statement that he was too poor to pay for a night's lodging. On the other hand, it is observed in documents that, on the fifteenth of April, 1505, the King ordered that everything that belonged to Columbus on account of his ten percent should be carried to the royal treasury to pay for debts that the Admiral had. The King had also given an order to the royal agent in Hispaniola that everything Columbus owned there should be sold.

When official documents relating to what happened in Jamaica arrived in Europe, Columbus made an effort to go to Court. However,

he was too weak. At Court, the stories of the Porras brothers were told on the one side, while Diego Mendez represented Columbus. Those representing Columbus around this time also included Amerigo Vespucci.



*Amerigo Vespucci, Explorer and Mapmaker*

In May, 1506, Christopher Columbus passed away. His last words were the same as those of Jesus Christ, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." In his youth Columbus was affiliated with an order of monks, that of Saint Catherine, in Genoa. During his life, on many important occasions when it would have been normal for him to be richly clothed, he instead wore the simple and serious clothing of the religious order of Saint Francis. According to Columbus's son Diego, he died "dressed in the robe of this order, to which he had always been attracted."

In the year 1867, the proposal was made to the Pope in Rome that Columbus should be officially honored and worshipped as a holy saint. Although this never happened, it shows the level of spiritual diligence that Columbus demonstrated and also the miraculous nature of what he accomplished. Part of the reasons he was not made a saint may have

been that Columbus had a mistress whom he had a son with. He seems to have had this mistress after his wife died, so it remains unclear why he had not married her. He treated his son with her as his own legitimate son and sought to take care of him in his will.

The great Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) once stated, “Worship of a Hero is transcendent admiration of a Great Man. I say great men are still admirable! I say there is, at the bottom, nothing else admirable! No nobler feeling than this of admiration for one higher than himself dwells in the breast of man. It is to this hour, and at all hours, the vivifying influence in man’s life.” Christopher Columbus, without a doubt, was a such a hero worth admiring.



*“The Death of Columbus”*

# In 1492

by Anonymous

In fourteen hundred ninety-two  
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

He had three ships and left from Spain;  
He sailed through sunshine, wind and rain.

He sailed by night; he sailed by day;  
He used the stars to find his way.

A compass also helped him know  
How to find the way to go.

Ninety sailors were on board;  
Some men worked while others snored.

Then the workers went to sleep;  
And others watched the ocean deep.

Day after day they looked for land;  
They dreamed of trees and rocks and sand.

October 12 their dream came true,  
You never saw a happier crew!

“Indians! Indians!” Columbus cried;  
His heart was filled with joyful pride.

But “India” the land was not;  
It was the Bahamas, and it was hot.

The Arakawa natives\* were very nice;  
They gave the sailors food and spice.

Columbus sailed on to find some gold  
To bring back home, as he'd been told.

He made the trip again and again,  
Trading gold to bring to Spain.

The first American? No, not quite.  
But Columbus was brave, and he was bright.



*Illustration of a statue of Christopher Columbus  
in Central Park, New York City, by Jeronimo Sunol*

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\* Arakawa natives: Arakawa is a general term for natives in that area and includes by the Taino and Caribes.

## EPILOGUE

If Christopher Columbus had continued exploring and discovering a little bit further into Mexico, Central America, or South America, he would have encountered two larger and more extraordinary civilizations that had formed among the natives, specifically, those of the Aztecs (who built upon the powerful Mayan civilization that was now in decline) and the Incas.

In the years following Columbus's death, the Spaniard Hernan Cortes conquered the Aztecs and the Spaniard Francisco Pizarro conquered the Incas. In all cases, their weapons, armor, and fighting techniques were superior to those of the Aztecs and Incas. However, they were, in theory, vastly outnumbered, perhaps, on the order of one to a thousand. How did they do it then?

Regardless of the motives of these Spanish conquerors, both native civilizations seemed to be fated for destruction. The Aztecs were actively sacrificing humans as part of their corrupted religious practices and there were other native tribes who sought to help Cortes in defeating the Aztecs. The Incas were involved in child sacrifice and also faced discontent in their sprawling empire. Additionally, in both cases, there were prophecies among the natives foretelling the downfall of their civilizations and the arrival of people who would take over.

The prophecy that was among the Aztecs was extraordinarily accurate, in fact. The Aztecs had a legend of a god or priest-king who was white-skinned and bearded, named Quetzalcoatl. In the past, he came from the East to enlighten the people, sharing with them wisdom. After some time, he left on a boat to the West. Before he left, he promised to return and there was a very specific day, corresponding to April 22, 1519, that was understood in this prophecy as the date of his return. Meanwhile, Aztec prophets were reading signs of Heaven's will in nature, known as omens, and concluded that their Aztec civilization was about to come to its end. Cortes and his men showed up on precisely the prophesized day and the Aztec King Moctezuma even had people waiting there to welcome him.

Over and above any human weapons, local discontent, or native prophecies, however, the far larger source of the end of Aztec and Incan civilizations were the diseases brought by the Europeans, to which the Native Americans were unaccustomed. It is estimated that these diseases killed 80 to 90 percent of the natives.

Eventually, in South America, Central America, and Mexico, the Native Americans, Spaniards, and Portuguese would mix together over generations and become one indistinguishable people, today typically known as Hispanic or Latino.



*"Conquest of Mexico by (Hernán) Cortés" depicts the 1521 Fall of Tenochtitlan, in the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire.*