

Christopher Columbus and the New World of His Discovery — Volume 3 eBook

Christopher Columbus and the New World of His Discovery — Volume 3

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CHAPTER III

THE VOYAGE HOME

Columbus did not stand out to sea on his homeward course immediately, but still coasted along the shores of the island as though he were loth to leave it, and as though he might still at some bend of a bay or beyond some verdant headland come upon the mines and jewels that he longed for. The mountain that he passed soon after starting he called Monte Christi, which name it bears to this day; and he saw many other mountains and capes and bays, to all of which he gave names. And it was a fortunate chance which led him thus to stand along the coast of the island; for on January 6th the sailor who was at the masthead, looking into the clear water for shoals and rocks, reported that he saw the caravel Pinta right ahead. When she came up with him, as they were in very shallow water not suitable for anchorage, Columbus returned to the bay of Monte Christi to anchor there. Presently Martin Alonso Pinzon came on board to report himself—a somewhat crestfallen Martin, we may be sure, for he had failed to find the gold the hope of which had led him to break his honour as a seaman. But the Martin Alonsos of this world, however sorry their position may be, will always find some kind of justification for it. It must have been a trying moment for Martin Alonso as his boat from the Pinta drew near the Nina, and he saw the stalwart commanding figure of the white-haired Admiral walking the poop. He knew very well that according to the law and custom of the sea Columbus would have been well within his right in shooting him or hanging him on the spot; but Martin puts on a bold face as, with a cold dread at his heart and (as likely as not) an ingratiating smile upon his face he comes up over the side. Perhaps, being in some ways a cleverer man than Christopher, he knew the Admiral's weak points; knew that he was kind-hearted, and would remember those days of preparation at Palos when Martin Alonso had been his principal stay and help. Martin's story was that he had been separated from the Admiral against his will; that the crew insisted upon it, and that in any case they had only meant to go and find some gold and bring it back to the Admiral. Columbus did not believe him for a moment, but either his wisdom or his weakness prevented him from saying so. He reproached Martin Alonso for acting with pride and covetousness "that night when he went away and left him"; and Columbus could not think "from whence had come the haughty actions and dishonesty Martin had shown towards him on that voyage." Martin had done a good trade and had got a certain amount of gold; and no doubt he knew well in what direction to turn the conversation when it was becoming unpleasant to himself. He told Columbus of an island to the south of Juana—[Cuba]—called Yamaye,—[Jamaica]—where pieces of gold were taken from the mines as large as kernels of wheat, and of another island towards the east which was inhabited only by women.

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The unpleasantness was passed over as soon as possible, although the Admiral felt that the sooner he got home the better, since he was practically at the mercy of the Pinzon brothers and their following from Palos. He therefore had the Pinta beached and recaulked and took in wood and water, and continued his voyage on Tuesday, January 8th. He says that “this night in the name of our Lord he will start on his journey without delaying himself further for any matter, since he had found what he had sought, and he did not wish to have more trouble with that Martin Alonso until their Highnesses learned the news of the voyage and what he has done.” After that it will be another matter, and his turn will come; for then, he says, “I will not suffer the bad deeds of persons without virtue, who, with little respect, presume to carry out their own wills in opposition to those who did them honour.” Indeed, for several days, the name of “that Martin Alonso” takes the place of gold in Columbus’s Journal. There were all kinds of gossip about the ill deeds of Martin Alonso, who had taken four Indian men and two young girls by force; the Admiral releasing them immediately and sending them back to their homes. Martin Alonso, moreover, had made a rule that half the gold that was found was to be kept by himself; and he tried to get all the people of his ship to swear that he had been trading for only six days, but “his wickedness was so public that he could not hide it.” It was a good thing that Columbus had his journal to talk to, for he worked off a deal of bitterness in it. On Sunday, January 13th, when he had sent a boat ashore to collect some “ajes” or potatoes, a party of natives with their faces painted and with the plumes of parrots in their hair came and attacked the party from the boat; but on getting a slash or two with a cutlass they took to flight and escaped from the anger of the Spaniards. Columbus thought that they were cannibals or caribs, and would like to have taken some of them, but they did not come back, although afterwards he collected four youths who came out to the caravel with cotton and arrows.

Columbus was very curious about the island of Matinino,—[Martinique] —which was the one said to be inhabited only by women, and he wished very much to go there; but the caravels were leaking badly, the crews were complaining, and he was reluctantly compelled to shape his course for Spain. He sailed to the north-east, being anxious apparently to get into the region of westerly winds which he correctly guessed would be found to the north of the course he had sailed on his outward voyage. By the 17th of January he was in the vicinity of the Sargasso Sea again, which this time had no terrors for him. From his journal the word “gold” suddenly disappears; the Viceroy and Governor-General steps off the stage; and in his place appears the sea captain, watching the frigate birds and pelicans, noting the golden gulf-weed

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in the sea, and smelling the breezes that are once more as sweet as the breezes of Seville in May. He had a good deal of trouble with his dead-reckoning at this time, owing to the changing winds and currents; but he made always from fifty to seventy miles a day in a direction between north-by-east and north-north-east. The Pinta was not sailing well, and he often had to wait for her to come up with him; and he reflected in his journal that if Martin Alonso Pinzon had taken as much pains to provide himself with a good mast in the Indies as he had to separate himself from the Admiral, the Pinta would have sailed better.

And so he went on for several days, with the wind veering always south and south-west, and pointing pretty steadily to the north-east. On February 4th he changed his course, and went as near due east as he could. They now began to find themselves in considerable doubt as to their position. The Admiral said he was seventy-five leagues to the south of Flores; Vincenti Pinzon and the pilots thought that they had passed the Azores and were in the neighbourhood of Madeira. In other words, there was a difference of 600 miles between their estimates, and the Admiral remarks that "the grace of God permitting, as soon as land is seen, it will be known who has calculated the surest."

A great quantity of birds that began to fly about the ship made him think that they were near land, but they turned out to be the harbingers of a storm. On Tuesday, February 12th, the sea and wind began to rise, and it continued to blow harder throughout that night and the next day. The wind being aft he went under bare poles most of the night, and when day came hoisted a little sail; but the sea was terrible, and if he had not been so sure of the staunch little Nina he would have felt himself in danger of being lost. The next day the sea, instead of going down, increased in roughness; there was a heavy cross sea which kept breaking right over the ship, and it became necessary to make a little sail in order to run before the wind, and to prevent the vessel falling back into the trough of the seas. All through Thursday he ran thus under the half hoisted staysail, and he could see the Pinta running also before the wind, although since she presented more surface, and was able to carry a little more sail than the Nina, she was soon lost to sight. The Admiral showed lights through the night, and this time there was no lack of response from Martin Alonso; and for some part of that dark and stormy night these two humanly freighted scraps of wood and cordage staggered through the gale showing lights to each other; until at last the light from the Pinta disappeared. When morning came she was no longer to be seen; and the wind and the sea had if anything increased. The Nina was now in the greatest danger. Any one wave of the heavy cross sea, if it had broken fairly across her, would have sunk her; and she went swinging and staggering

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down into the great valleys and up into the hills, the steersman's heart in his mouth, and the whole crew in an extremity of fear. Columbus, who generally relied upon his seamanship, here invoked external aid, and began to offer bargains to the Almighty. He ordered that lots should be cast, and that he upon whom the lot fell should make a vow to go on pilgrimage to Santa Maria de Guadeloupe carrying a white candle of five pounds weight. Some dried peas were brought, one for every member of the crew, and on one of them a cross was marked with a knife; the peas were well shaken and were put into a cap. The first to draw was the Admiral; he drew the marked pea, and he made the vow. Lots were again drawn, this time for a greater pilgrimage to Santa Maria de Loretto in Ancona; and the lot fell on a seaman named Pedro de Villa, —the expenses of whose pilgrimage Columbus promised to pay. Again lots were drawn for a pilgrimage to the shrine of Santa Clara of Moguer, the pilgrim to watch and pray for one night there; and again the lot fell on Columbus. In addition to these, every one, since they took themselves for lost, made some special and private vow or bargain with God; and finally they all made a vow together that at the first land they reached they would go in procession in their shirts to pray at an altar of Our Lady.

The scene thus conjured up is one peculiar to the time and condition of these people, and is eloquent and pathetic enough: the little ship staggering and bounding along before the wind, and the frightened crew, who had gone through so many other dangers, huddled together under the forecastle, drawing peas out of a cap, crossing themselves, making vows upon their knees, and seeking to hire the protection of the Virgin by their offers of candles and pilgrimages. Poor Christopher, standing in his drenched oilskins and clinging to a piece of rigging, had his own searching of heart and examining of conscience. He was aware of the feverish anxiety and impatience that he felt, now that he had been successful in discovering a New World, to bring home the news and fruits of it; his desire to prove true what he had promised was so great that, in his own graphic phrase, "it seemed to him that every gnat could disturb and impede it"; and he attributed this anxiety to his lack of faith in God. He comforted himself, like Robinson Crusoe in a similar extremity, by considering on the other hand what favours God had shown him, and by remembering that it was to the glory of God that the fruits of his discovery were to be dedicated. But in the meantime here he was in a ship insufficiently ballasted (for she was now practically empty of provisions, and they had found it necessary to fill the wine and water casks with salt water in order to trim her) and flying before a tempest such as he had never experienced in his life. As a last resource, and in order to give his wonderful news a chance of reaching Spain in case the ship were lost, he went into his cabin

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and somehow or other managed to write on a piece of parchment a brief account of his discoveries, begging any one who might find it to carry it to the Spanish Sovereigns. He tied up the parchment in a waxed cloth, and put it into a large barrel without any one seeing him, and then ordered the barrel to be thrown into the sea, which the crew took to be some pious act of sacrifice or devotion. Then he went back on deck and watched the last of the daylight going and the green seas swelling and thundering about his little ship, and thought anxiously of his two little boys at school in Cordova, and wondered what would become of them if he were lost. The next morning the wind had changed a little, though it was still very high; but he was able to hoist up the bonnet or topsail, and presently the sea began to go down a little. When the sun rose they saw land to the east-north-east. Some of them thought it was Madeira, others the rock of Cintra in Portugal; the pilots said it was the coast of Spain, the Admiral thought it was the Azores; but at any rate it was land of some kind. The sun was shining upon it and upon the tumbling sea; and although the waves were still raging mast-high and the wind still blowing a hard gale, the miserable crew were able to hope that, having lived through the night, they could live through the day also. They had to beat about to make the land, which was now ahead of them, now on the beam, and now astern; and although they had first sighted it at sunrise on Friday morning it was early on Monday morning, February 18th, before Columbus was able to cast anchor off the northern coast of an island which he discovered to be the island of Santa Maria in the Azores. On this day Columbus found time to write a letter to Luis de Santangel, the royal Treasurer, giving a full account of his voyage and discoveries; which letter he kept and despatched on the 4th of March, after he had arrived in Lisbon. Since it contained a postscript written at the last moment we shall read it at that stage of our narrative. The inhabitants of Santa Maria received the voyagers with astonishment, for they believed that nothing could have lived through the tempest that had been raging for the last fortnight. They were greatly excited by the story of the discoveries; and the Admiral, who had now quite recovered command of himself, was able to pride himself on the truth of his dead-reckoning, which had proved to be so much more accurate than that of the pilots.

On the Tuesday evening three men hailed them from the shore, and when they were brought off to the ship delivered a message from the Portuguese Governor of the island, Juan de Castaneda, to the effect that he knew the Admiral very well, and that he was delighted to hear of his wonderful voyage. The next morning Columbus, remembering the vow that had been made in the storm, sent half the crew ashore in their shirts to a little hermitage, which was on the other side of a point a short distance away, and asked the Portuguese

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messenger to send a priest to say Mass for them. While the members of the crew were at their prayers, however, they received a rude surprise. They were suddenly attacked by the islanders, who had come up on horses under the command of the treacherous Governor, and taken prisoners. Columbus waited unsuspectingly for the boat to come back with them, in order that he and the other half of the crew could go and perform their vow.

When the boat did not come back he began to fear that some accident must have happened to it, and getting his anchor up he set sail for the point beyond which the hermitage was situated. No sooner had he rounded the point than he saw a band of horsemen, who dismounted, launched the boat which was drawn up on the beach, and began to row out, evidently with the intention of attacking the Admiral. When they came up to the Nina the man in command of them rose and asked Columbus to assure him of personal safety; which assurance was wonderingly given; and the Admiral inquired how it was that none of his own people were in the boat? Columbus suspected treachery and tried to meet it with treachery also, endeavouring with smooth words to get the captain to come on board so that he could seize him as a hostage. But as the Portuguese would not come on board Columbus told them that they were acting very unwisely in affronting his people; that in the land of the Sovereigns of Castile the Portuguese were treated with great honour and security; that he held letters of recommendation from the Sovereigns addressed to every ruler in the world, and added that he was their Admiral of the Ocean Seas and Viceroy of the Indies, and could show the Portuguese his commission to that effect; and finally, that if his people were not returned to him, he would immediately make sail for Spain with the crew that was left to him and report this insult to the Spanish Sovereigns. To all of which the Portuguese captain replied that he did not know any Sovereigns of Castile; that neither they nor their letters were of any account in that island; that they were not afraid of Columbus; and that they would have him know that he had Portugal to deal with—edging away in the boat at the same time to a convenient distance from the caravel. When he thought he was out of gunshot he shouted to Columbus, ordering him to take his caravel back to the harbour by command of the Governor of the island. Columbus answered by calling his crew to witness that he pledged his word not to descend from or leave his caravel until he had taken a hundred Portuguese to Castile, and had depopulated all their islands. After which explosion of words he returned to the harbour and anchored there, “as the weather and wind were very unfavourable for anything else.”

He was, however, in a very bad anchorage, with a rocky bottom which presently fouled his anchors; and on the Wednesday he had to make sail towards the island of San Miguel in order to try and find a better anchorage.

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But the wind and sea getting up again very badly he was obliged to beat about all night in a very unpleasant situation, with only three sailors who could be relied upon, and a rabble of gaol-birds and longshoremen who were of little use in a tempest but to draw lots and vow pilgrimages. Finding himself unable to make the island of San Miguel he decided to go back to Santa Maria and make an attempt to recover his boat and his crew and the anchor and cables he had lost there.

In his Journal for this day, and amid all his anxieties, he found time to note down one of his curious visionary cosmographical reflections. This return to a region of storms and heavy seas reminded him of the long months he had spent in the balmy weather and calm waters of his discovery; in which facts he found a confirmation of the theological idea that the Eden, or Paradise, of earth was “at the end of the Orient, because it is a most temperate place. So that these lands which he had now discovered are at the end of the Orient.” Reflections such as these, which abound in his writings, ought in themselves to be a sufficient condemnation of those who have endeavoured to prove that Columbus was a man of profound cosmographical learning and of a scientific mind. A man who would believe that he had discovered the Orient because in the place where he had been he had found calm weather, and because the theologians said that the Garden of Eden must be in the Orient since it is a temperate place, would believe anything.

Late on Thursday night, when he anchored again in the harbour of San Lorenzo at Santa Maria, a man hailed them from the rocks, and asked them not to go away. Presently a boat containing five sailors, two priests, and a notary put off from the beach; and they asked for a guarantee of security in order that they might treat with the Admiral. They slept on board that night, and in the morning asked him to show them his authority from the Spanish Sovereigns, which the Admiral did, understanding that they had asked for this formality in order to save their dignity. He showed them his general letter from the King and Queen of Spain, addressed to “Princes and Lords of High Degree”; and being satisfied with this they went ashore and released the Admiral’s people, from whom he learned that what had been done had been done by command of the King of Portugal, and that he had issued an order to the Governors of all the Portuguese islands that if Columbus landed there on his way home he was to be taken prisoner.

He sailed again on Sunday, February 24th, encountering heavy winds and seas, which troubled him greatly with fears lest some disaster should happen at the eleventh hour to interfere with his, triumph. On Sunday, March 3rd, the wind rose to the force of a hurricane, and, on a sudden gust of violent wind splitting all the sails, the unhappy crew gathered together again and drew more lots and made more vows. This time

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the pilgrimage was to be to the shrine of Santa Maria at Huelva, the pilgrim to go as before in his shirt; and the lot fell to the Admiral. The rest of them made a vow to fast on the next Saturday on bread and water; but as they all thought it extremely unlikely that by that time they would be in need of any bodily sustenance the sacrifice could hardly have been a great one. They scudded along under bare poles and in a heavy cross sea all that night; but at dawn on Monday they saw land ahead of them, which Columbus recognised as the rock of Cintra at Lisbon; and at Lisbon sure enough they landed some time during the morning. As soon as they were inside the river the people came flocking down with stories of the gale and of all the wrecks that there had been on the coast. Columbus hurried away from the excited crowds to write a letter to the King of Portugal, asking him for a safe conduct to Spain, and assuring him that he had come from the Indies, and not from any of the forbidden regions of Guinea.

The next day brought a visit from no less a person than Bartholomew Diaz. Columbus had probably met him before in 1486, when Diaz had been a distinguished man and Columbus a man not distinguished; but now things were changed. Diaz ordered Columbus to come on board his small vessel in order to go and report himself to the King's officers; but Columbus replied that he was the Admiral of the Sovereigns of Castile, "that he did not render such account to such persons," and that he declined to leave his ship. Diaz then ordered him to send the captain of the Nina; but Columbus refused to send either the captain or any other person, and otherwise gave himself airs as the Admiral of the Ocean Seas. Diaz then moderated his requests, and merely asked Columbus to show him his letter of authority, which Columbus did; and then Diaz went away and brought back with him the captain of the Portuguese royal yacht, who came in great state on board the shabby little Nina, with kettle-drums and trumpets and pipes, and placed himself at the disposal of Columbus. It is a curious moment, this, in which the two great discoverers of their time, Diaz and Columbus, meet for an hour on the deck of a forty-ton caravel; a curious thing to consider that they who had performed such great feats of skill and bravery, one to discover the southernmost point of the old world and the other to voyage across an uncharted ocean to the discovery of an entirely new world, could find nothing better to talk about than their respective ranks and glories; and found no more interesting subject of discussion than the exact amount of state and privilege which should be accorded to each.

During the day or two in which Columbus waited in the port crowds of people came down from Lisbon to see the little Nina, which was an object of much admiration and astonishment; to see the Indians also, at whom they greatly marvelled. It was probably at this time that the letter addressed to Luis de Santangel, containing the first official account of the voyage, was despatched.

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“Sir: As I am sure you will be pleased at the great victory which the Lord has given me in my voyage, I write this to inform you that in twenty’ days I arrived in the Indies with the squadron which their Majesties had placed under my command. There I discovered many islands, inhabited by a numerous population, and took possession of them for their Highnesses, with public ceremony and the royal flag displayed, without molestation.”The first that I discovered I named San Salvador, in remembrance of that Almighty Power which had so miraculously bestowed them. The Indians call it Guanahani. To the second I assigned the name of Santa Marie de Conception; to the third that of Fernandina; to the fourth that of Isabella; to the fifth Juana; and so on, to every one a new name.”When I arrived at Juana, I followed the coast to the westward, and found it so extensive that I considered it must be a continent and a province of Cathay. And as I found no towns or villages by the seaside, excepting some small settlements, with the people of which I could not communicate because they all ran away, I continued my course to the westward, thinking I should not fail to find some large town and cities. After having coasted many leagues without finding any signs of them, and seeing that the coast took me to the northward, where I did not wish to go, as the winter was already set in, I considered it best to follow the coast to the south and the wind being also scant, I determined to lose no more time, and therefore returned to a certain port, from whence I sent two messengers into the country to ascertain whether there was any king there or any large city.”They travelled for three days, finding an infinite number of small settlements and an innumerable population, but nothing like a city: on which account—they returned. I had tolerably well ascertained from some Indians whom I had taken that this land was only an island, so I followed the coast of it to the east 107 leagues, to its termination. And about eighteen leagues from this cape, to the east, there was another island, to which I shortly gave the name of Espanola. I went to it, and followed the north coast of it, as I had done that of Juana, for 178— [should be 188]—long leagues due east.”This island is very fertile, as well, indeed, as all the rest. It possesses numerous harbours, far superior to any I know in Europe, and what is remarkable, plenty of large inlets. The land is high, and contains many lofty ridges and some very high mountains, without comparison of the island of Centrefrey; —[Tenerife]—all of them very handsome and of different forms; all of them accessible and abounding in trees of a thousand kinds, high, and appearing as if they would reach the skies. And I am assured that the latter never lose their fresh foliage, as

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far as I can understand, for I saw them as fresh and flourishing as those of Spain in the month of May. Some were in blossom, some bearing fruit, and others in other states, according to their nature. "The nightingale and a thousand kinds of birds enliven the woods with their song, in the month of November, wherever I went. There are seven or eight kinds of palms, of various elegant forms, besides various other trees, fruits, and herbs. The pines of this island are magnificent. It has also extensive plains, honey, and a great variety of birds and fruits. It has many metal mines, and a population innumerable. "Espanola is a wonderful island, with mountains, groves, plains, and the country generally beautiful and rich for planting and sowing, for rearing sheep and cattle of all kinds, and ready for towns and cities. The harbours must be seen to be appreciated; rivers are plentiful and large and of excellent water; the greater part of them contain gold. There is a great difference between the trees, fruits, and herbs of this island and those of Juana. In this island there are many spices, and large mines of gold and other metals. "The people of this island and of all the others which I have discovered or heard of, both men and women, go naked as they were born, although some of the women wear leaves of herbs or a cotton covering made on purpose. They have no iron or steel, nor any weapons; not that they are not a well-disposed people and of fine stature, but they are timid to a degree. They have no other arms excepting spears made of cane, to which they fix at the end a sharp piece of wood, and then dare not use even these. Frequently I had occasion to send two or three of my men onshore to some settlement for information, where there would be multitudes of them; and as soon as they saw our people they would run away every soul, the father leaving his child; and this was not because any one had done them harm, for rather at every cape where I had landed and been able to communicate with them I have made them presents of cloth and many other things without receiving anything in return; but because they are so timid. Certainly, where they have confidence and forget their fears, they are so open-hearted and liberal with all they possess that it is scarcely to be believed without seeing it. If anything that they have is asked of them they never deny it; on the contrary, they will offer it. Their generosity is so great that they would give anything, whether it is costly or not, for anything of every kind that is offered them and be contented with it. I was obliged to prevent such worth less things being given them as pieces of broken basins, broken glass, and bits of shoe-latchets, although when they obtained them they esteemed them as if they had been the greatest of treasures. One of the seamen for a latchet received a piece of gold weighing two dollars and a half, and others,

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for other things of much less value, obtained more. Again, for new silver coin they would give everything they possessed, whether it was worth two or three doubloons or one or two balls of cotton. Even for pieces of broken pipe-tubes they would take them and give anything for them, until, when I thought it wrong, I prevented it. And I made them presents of thousands of things which I had, that I might win their esteem, and also that they might be made good Christians and be disposed to the service of Your Majesties and the whole Spanish nation, and help us to obtain the things which we require and of which there is abundance in their country. "And these people appear to have neither religion nor idolatry, except that they believe that good and evil come from the skies; and they firmly believed that our ships and their crews, with myself, came from the skies, and with this persuasion,—after having lost their fears, they always received us. And yet this does not proceed from ignorance, for they are very ingenious, and some of them navigate their seas in a wonderful manner and give good account of things, but because they never saw people dressed or ships like ours." And as soon as I arrived in the Indies, at the first island at which I touched, I captured some of them, that we might learn from them and obtain intelligence of what there was in those parts. And as soon as we understood each other they were of great service to us; but yet, from frequent conversation which I had with them, they still believe we came from the skies. These were the first to express that idea, and others ran from house to house, and to the neighbouring villages, crying out, "Come and see the people from the skies." And thus all of them, men and women, after satisfying themselves of their safety, came to us without reserve, great and small, bringing us something to eat and drink, and which they gave to us most affectionately. "They have many canoes in those islands propelled by oars, some of them large and others small, and many of them with eight or ten paddles of a side, not very wide, but all of one trunk, and a boat cannot keep way with them by oars, for they are incredibly fast; and with these they navigate all the islands, which are innumerable, and obtain their articles of traffic. I have seen some of these canoes with sixty or eighty men in them, and each with a paddle." Among the islands I did not find much diversity of formation in the people, nor in their customs, nor their language. They all understand each other, which is remarkable; and I trust Your Highnesses will determine on their being converted to our faith, for which they are very well disposed. "I have already said that I went 107 leagues along the coast of Juana, from east to west. Thus, according to my track, it is larger than England and Scotland together, for, besides

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these 107 leagues, there were further west two provinces to which I did not go, one of which is called Cibau, the people of which are born with tails; which provinces must be about fifty or sixty leagues long, according to what I can make out from the Indians I have with me, who know all the islands. The other island (Espanola) is larger in circuit than the whole of Spain, from the Straits of Gibraltar (the Columns) to Fuentarabia in Biscay, as I sailed 138 long leagues in a direct line from west to east. Once known it must be desired, and once seen one desires never to leave it; and which, being taken possession of for their Highnesses, and the people being at present in a condition lower than I can possibly describe, the Sovereigns of Castile may dispose of it in any manner they please in the most convenient places. In this Espanola, and in the best district, where are gold mines, and, on the other side, from thence to terra firma, as well as from thence to the Great Khan, where everything is on a splendid scale—I have taken possession of a large town, to which I gave the name of La Navidad, and have built a fort in it, in every respect complete. And I have left sufficient people in it to take care of it, with artillery and provisions for more than a year; also a boat and coxswain with the equipments, in complete friendship with the King of the islands, to that degree that he delighted to call me and look on me as his brother. And should they fall out with these people, neither he nor his subjects know anything of weapons, and go naked, as I have said, and they are the most timorous people in the world. The few people left there are sufficient to conquer the country, and the island would thus remain without danger to them, they keeping order among themselves. “In all these islands it appeared to me the men are contented with one wife, but to their governor or king they allow twenty. The women seem to work more than the men. I have not been able to discover whether they respect personal property, for it appeared to me things were common to all, especially in the particular of provisions. Hitherto I have not seen in any of these islands any monsters, as there were supposed to be; the people, on the contrary, are generally well formed, nor are they black like those of the Guinea, saving their hair, and they do not reside in places exposed to the sun’s rays. It is true that the sun is most powerful there, and it is only twenty-six degrees from the equator. In this last winter those islands which were mountainous were cold, but they were accustomed to it, with good food and plenty of spices and hot nutriment. Thus I have found no monsters nor heard of any, except at an island which is the second in going to the Indies, and which is inhabited by a people who are considered in all the islands as ferocious, and who devour human flesh. These people have many canoes, which scour all the islands of India,

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and plunder all they can. They are not worse formed than the others, but they wear the hair long like women, and use bows and arrows of the same kind of cane, pointed with a piece of hard wood instead of iron, of which they have none. They are fierce compared with the other people, who are in general but sad cowards; but I do not consider them in any other way superior to them. These are they who trade in women, who inhabit the first island met with in going from Spain to the Indies, in which there are no men whatever. They have no effeminate exercise, but bows and arrows, as before said, of cane, with which they arm themselves, and use shields of copper, of which they have plenty.

“There is another island, I am told, larger than Espanola, the natives of which have no hair. In this there is gold without limit, and of this and the others I have Indians with me to witness.

“In conclusion, referring only to what has been effected by this voyage, which was made with so much haste, Your Highnesses may see that I shall find as much gold as desired with the very little assistance afforded to me; there is as much spice and cotton as can be wished for, and also gum, which hitherto has only been found in Greece, in the island of Chios, and they may sell it as they please, and the mastich, as much as may be desired, and slaves, also, who will be idolators. And I believe that I have rhubarb, and cinnamon, and a thousand other things I shall find, which will be discovered by those whom I have left behind, for I did not stop at any cape when the wind enabled me to navigate, except at the town of Navidad, where I was very safe and well taken care of. And in truth much more I should have done if the ships had served me as might have been expected. This is certain, that the Eternal God our Lord gives all things to those who obey Him, and the victory when it seems impossible, and this, evidently, is an instance of it, for although people have talked of these lands, all was conjecture unless proved by seeing them, for the greater part listened and judged more by hearsay than by anything else.” Since, then, our Redeemer has given this victory to our illustrious King and Queen and celebrated their reigns by such a great thing, all Christendom should rejoice and make great festivals, and give solemn thanks to the Blessed Trinity, with solemn praises for the exaltation of so much people to our holy faith; and next for the temporal blessings which not only Spain but they will enjoy in becoming Christians, and which last may shortly be accomplished.

“Written in the caravel off Santa Maria; on the eighteenth of February, ninety-three.”

The following postscript was added to the letter before it was despatched:

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"After writing the above, being in the Castilian Sea (off the coast of Castile), I experienced so severe a wind from south and south-east that I have been obliged to run to-day into this port of Lisbon, and only by a miracle got safely in, from whence I intended to write to Your Highnesses. In all parts of the Indies I have found the weather like that of May, where I went in ninety-three days, and returned in seventy-eight, saving these thirteen days of bad weather that I have been detained beating about in this sea. Every seaman here says that never was so severe a winter, nor such loss of ships."

On the Friday a messenger came from the King in the person of Don Martin de Noronha, a relative of Columbus by marriage, and one who had perhaps looked down upon him in the days when he attended the convent chapel at Lisbon, but who was now the bearer of a royal invitation and in the position of a mere envoy. Columbus repaired to Paraiso where the King was, and where he was received with great honour.

King John might well have been excused if he had felt some mortification at this glorious and successful termination of a project which had been offered to him and which he had rejected; but he evidently behaved with dignity and a good grace, and did everything that he could to help Columbus. It was extremely unlikely that he had anything to do with the insult offered to Columbus at the Azores, for though he was bitterly disappointed that the glory of this discovery belonged to Spain and not to Portugal, he was too much of a man to show it in this petty and revengeful manner. He offered to convey Columbus by land into Spain; but the Admiral, with a fine dramatic sense, preferred to arrive by sea on board of all that was left of the fleet with which he had sailed. He sailed for Seville on Wednesday, March 13th, but during the next day, when he was off Cape Saint Vincent, he evidently changed his mind and decided to make for Palos. Sunrise on Friday saw him off the bar of Saltes, with the white walls of La Rabida shining on the promontory among the dark fir-trees. During the hours in which he stood off and on waiting for the tide he was able to recognise again all the old landmarks and the scenes which had been so familiar to him in those busy days of preparation nine months before; and at midday he sailed in with the flood tide and dropped his anchor again in the mud of the river by Palos.

The caravel had been sighted some time before, probably when she was standing off, the bar waiting for the tide; she was flying the Admiral's flag and there was no mistaking her identity; and we can imagine the news spreading throughout the town of Palos, and reaching Huelva, and one by one the bells beginning to ring, and the places of business to be closed, and the people to come pouring out into the streets to be ready to greet their friends. Some more impatient than the others would sail out in fishing-boats

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to get the first news; and I should be surprised to know that a boat did not put off from the little pier beneath La Rabida, to row round the point and out to where the Nina was lying—to beyond the Manto Bank. When the flood began to make over the bar and to cover the long sandbank that stretches from the island of Saltes, the Nina came gliding in, greeted by every joyful sound and signal that the inhabitants of the two seaports could make. Every one hurried down to Palos as the caravel rounded the Convent Point. Hernando, Marchena, and good old Juan Perez were all there, we may be sure. Such excitements, such triumphs as the bronzed, white-bearded Admiral steps ashore at last, and is seized by dozens of eager hands! Such excitements as all the wives and inamoratas of the Rodrigos and Juans and Franciscos rush to meet the swarthy voyagers and cover them with embraces; such disappointments also, when it is realised that some two score of the company are still on a sunbaked island infinitely far over the western horizon.

Tears of joy and grief, shouts and feastings, firing of guns and flying of flags, processions and receptions with these the deathless day is filled; and the little Nina, her purpose staunchly fulfilled, swings deserted on the turning tide, the ripples of her native Tinto making a familiar music under her bowsprit.

And in the evening, with the last of the flood, another ship comes gliding round the point and up the estuary. The inhabitants of Palos have all left the shore and are absorbed in the business of welcoming the great man; and there is no one left to notice or welcome the Pinta. For it is she that, by a strange coincidence, and after many dangers and distresses endured since she had parted company from the Nina in the storm, now has made her native port on the very same day as the Nina. Our old friend Martin Alonso Pinzon is on board, all the fight and treachery gone out of him, and anxious only to get home unobserved. For (according to the story) he had made the port of Bayona on the north-west coast of Spain, and had written a letter from there to the Sovereigns announcing his arrival and the discoveries that he had made; and it is said that he had received an unpleasant letter in return, reproaching him for not waiting for his commander and forbidding him to come to Court. This story is possible if his letter reached the Sovereigns after the letter from the Admiral; for it is probable that Columbus may have reported some of Martin's doings to them.

Be that as it may, there are no flags and guns for him as he comes creeping in up the river; his one anxiety is to avoid the Admiral and to get home as quickly and quietly as he can. For he is ill, poor Martin Alonso; whether from a broken heart, as the early historians say, or from pure chagrin and disappointment, or, as is more likely, from some illness contracted on the voyage, it is impossible to say. He has endured his troubles and hardships like all

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the rest of them; no less skilfully than Columbus has he won through that terrible tempest of February; and his foolish and dishonest conduct has deprived him not only of the rewards that he tried to steal, but of those which would otherwise have been his by right. He creeps quietly ashore and to his home, where at any rate we may hope that there is some welcome for him; takes to his bed, turns his face to the wall; and dies in a few days. So farewell to Martin Alonso, who has borne us company thus far. He did not fail in the great matters of pluck and endurance and nautical judgment, but only in the small matters of honesty and decent manly conduct. We will not weep for Martin Alonso; we will make our farewells in silence, and leave his deathbed undisturbed by any more accusations or reproaches.