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CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

ADDRESS

BY

FREDERIC R. ^{one} COUDERT,

BEFORE THE

CATHOLIC CLUB

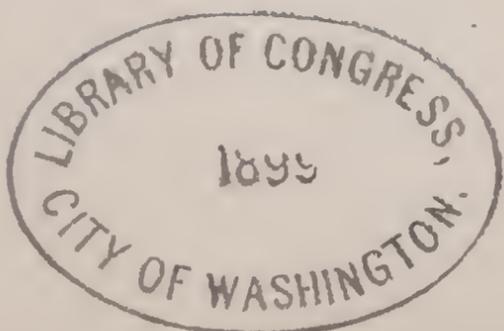
AND THE

U. S. CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

CARNEGIE HALL, OCTOBER 11, 1892.

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CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

ADDRESS BY

FREDERIC R. COUDERT.

CARNEGIE HALL, OCT. 11, 1892.

THE early life of Columbus offers a most alluring field to the historian of a speculative and imaginative turn of mind. The story abounds in doubts and rests upon a nice calculation of probabilities. The writer must make a free use of the potential mode, and may only indulge in positive statements with misgivings as to his own accuracy. While Homer has been claimed by seven different cities, all of them anxious to secure the fame of having given him birth, Columbus may boast even more. Genoa seems to be the first in the race; to make her claims sure a noble Marquis, a few years ago, pointed

out a venerable structure in which he asserts that the great discoverer was born. As nothing can be plainer than the fact that the Marquis speaks only upon information and belief, no imputation upon his veracity is cast by those who name other claimants as entitled to the much coveted honor. Unless the Genoese champion may emulate Pythagoras, who assured his hearers that he had been present, in the flesh, centuries before, at the siege of Troy, in the person of Euphorbus, and proved the assertion by pointing out the shield which he then wore, we require other evidence to sustain the Marquis's assertion. If, however, Columbus was not born in Genoa, who knows whether his eyes did not first open to the light in Corsica? At least a learned Abbé so states, and the town of Calvi has given earnest of its convictions by erecting a monument to assure posterity of the fact and to place it beyond the shadowy regions of historical controversy.

If we may without discourtesy venture to dispute the Abbé and the monument and turn our back on Corsica, we shall find Cucaro, Cugureo, Piacenza and other towns, rapidly increasing in number as time rolls on, to vindicate their claims. It is not here necessary, fortunately for us, to settle the dispute. The part of wisdom is rather to follow the example of the

Chicago Fair, and to photograph all the rival sites, with generous impartiality and unreserved confidence in the judgment of the citizen who shall undertake to decide the question for himself. It is enough to say here that Columbus, more fortunate than Homer, was certainly born and lived and died—so far as such men as Homer and Columbus ever die.

So, too, it may be said by hasty and reckless writers that Columbus was of Italian descent, but even here doubt throttles assertion and bids it pause. Is it quite sure that Columbus did not owe part, at least, of his daring and courage and tenacity to the French blood, which, it is stated by some authorities, flowed in his veins? Not a mean and plebeian blood, but a bluish and gentle fluid, that had run in bright channels through the bodies of gallant men and fair women. An Admiral in the French navy would, according to some, be responsible in the far past for the propensity, invincible and enduring in Columbus, to scour the seas. A clear case of atavism, even if the French ancestor was a bold pirate as well as a noble Admiral. Again it is our good fortune to-night that we need not decide the question. But I deem it my duty to warn you that no inference unfavorable to this theory is to be drawn from the fact that French

writers lay no stress upon the possible circumstance that Columbus may have been warmed and invigorated by the same blood as themselves. They exhibit a curious apathy and indifference in this respect. Do they not pass without notice and without a proper exhibition of exultation, the well ascertained truth that Washington himself was one of their kinsmen? Is it not probable that his strong, cold nature was occasionally warmed up to its boiling point by an ebullition wholly French? If the great, strange oaths that he swore at Lee on the plains of Monmouth had been accurately preserved, they might throw some light upon the subject. What shall we say of a nation that allows Scotland to capture St. Patrick and claim him as her own, without regard to the truth of history or the probable preferences of the good Saint himself? It is idle to pursue this digression; it was only intended to explain why the possible right of Columbus to claim a French ancestry was not diminished by the negligence of French writers of history to uphold it.

Wherever born and from whatever parent root he sprang, Columbus was, for the time, a well educated man. I am tempted to say a well educated gentleman, and upon the whole conclude that this term may be safely adopted, although it is a matter of doubt whether his pa-

rents were of noble rank or simply carders of wool. This subject is not one of great importance, however, if we adopt the suggestion made by an ingenious writer that wool-carding was a very reputable business, in which persons of birth and education not infrequently engaged, so that the two theories may be happily reconciled by the conclusion that neither excludes the truth of the other.

To decide where Columbus received his early education is comparatively easy. There are but two cities seriously claiming the title of pedagogue to the future discoverer. These are Genoa and Padua. The strongest argument thus far advanced in favor of the latter is to the effect that Genoa, being imperfectly equipped with educational appliances, he *must* have imbibed his learning at Paduan fountains. This is very much as though one were to say, of any learned native of Brooklyn or Philadelphia whose Alma Mater was unknown, that he must have studied at Columbia College.

Having thus settled that Columbus was born in Italy or Corsica, that he was a descendant of French or Italian ancestors, that he was born of noble though wool-carding parents, and educated at Genoa or Padua, and without attempting to fix the date of his birth as utterly beyond our ability to establish, the remaining work be-

fore the student of the great man's life is comparatively easy. The doubts and difficulties that beset us are no greater than those that arise when we deal with others of the world's great children. We may trace his struggles and trials, sympathize with him in the bitterness of his disappointments, marvel at the unflinching courage and tenacity of his purpose, and follow him, almost day by day, from the moment when he stepped on his puny caravel to the hour of his death.

It has been the fashion of many admirers of Columbus to look for the elements of a special inspiration in his life, labors, and successes. It has been assumed by them that his fame would be magnified, if he were shown to be the special object of a Divine selection for the accomplishment of great ends. That he was prompted, guided, directed and protected by Divine Providence, and that without this aid he would have failed in the accomplishment of his purpose is merely to state a proposition in which all believers in the ever-present influence of a Divine will may acquiesce. But there is nothing to justify the contention that Columbus, like Joan of Arc, was called by an irresistible command to perform a task which he was not in every way, by nature and education, fitted to perform. The little Maid of Orleans,

who left her peaceful home to save her country, with no knowledge of war, no skill in arms, no taste for shedding human blood, may well stand before posterity and challenge universal homage and tender admiration for deeds that exhibit the luminous traces of special inspiration. It is quite as easy to believe her own pathetic story as to account in any other way for the development of the plain, modest, pious, peasant girl into a skillful, brave and successful warrior. The two cases, of Joan and of Columbus, may serve as illustrations of the dividing line between that impetus which derives its sole force and origin from an unseen and providential cause and the natural, logical and expected result of genius and courage, working under God's Providence to a definite and well-conceived end. Columbus had received the gift of genius, which is of itself a sort of inspiration, to accomplish great things. Genius is not the result nor creation of education, nor the fruit of toil, nor the gift of ancestry; it is a spark that is blown into a flame, without the consciousness of its possessor, and which then lights up the world, for good or for evil. Alexander, Hannibal, Cæsar, Mahomet and Napoleon stand apart from the rest of the world as men thus gifted. Many would add Columbus to the list, although his

title to be ranked in such company is not universally conceded.

We are naturally disposed, after these 400 years, looking through the dim veil of commingled History and Romance, to treat the discovery of America by Columbus as a marvellous and unequaled event, which only a rare combination of circumstances could produce. It is assumed that there was little in the past history of the world, or in the knowledge then held by learned men, to justify the belief that the extremities of the world had not been reached. But such delusions cannot withstand a moment's scrutiny. The marvel is, not that the discovery *was* made, but that it had not been made long before. It was as inevitable that it should be effected at an early date as the discovery of printing was sure to follow the invention of paper. To use a common but expressive form of speech — it was in the air. Proof abounded that there was an undiscovered land far to the West and that a continent, supposed to be the continent of Asia, might be directly reached by sailing in a westerly direction from Europe over the Atlantic. Evidence sufficient to convict the strange land of being a reality had been repeatedly furnished, in almost conclusive form. Navigators driven by storm beyond the Azores had found curiously carved woods, mani-

festly of some other than European origin ; a large canoe, capacious enough to hold twenty rowers had been picked up at sea and also strange trees of a kind unknown to Europeans ; more striking than all perhaps, the bodies of men, of a dark color, had been thrown up by the sea and had shown that somewhere in the West a race of human beings would be found, differing in appearance from any then known, whether of European, Asiatic or African origin. Marco Polo, the great traveller, had returned from his explorations and told strange tales of the countries that he had visited, Tartary, India, China ; these were supposed to extend as far as the continent now known as the continent of America.

But neither the physical proofs thus furnished by flood and tide and storm, nor the narratives of travellers, could extirpate the deeply rooted prejudices of men and overcome the invincible ignorance of the great mass of mankind.

Men had eyes to see, but the lessons taught by the bodies of dead men and strange plants and beasts, they could not read. They had ears, but they would not listen to the tale of travellers, preferring, as sluggish indolence always does, to call them lies and thus end the debate.

We must remember, however, that the world was not plunged in absolute ignorance as to the conformation of the earth. The idea that its form

was spherical was old and accepted by learned men. Ptolemy and the geographers of Arabia had long taught that the earth was in the form of a globe and might be circumnavigated. The loadstone and astrolabe had been invented and had made navigation comparatively easy and safe.

Nor was this all. The fact must have been known to many that there was a new land to the west of Greenland. The hardy Norsemen had put their foot upon it five hundred years before Columbus turned his back on Palos. They had made repeated voyages between Greenland and Iceland. Even were we not assured by positive proof that such was the fact, we must have drawn the conclusion from irresistible evidence. The dauntless sailors who left Norway to settle in Iceland and from Iceland reached Greenland, were not the men to permit the narrow seas to separate them from the continent that was within easy reach. Even had they been willing to leave the neighboring ocean unexplored, some beneficent storm from the northeast must have forced them into a reluctant knowledge of their neighbors. The distance between Iceland and Greenland is 750 miles ; America is but 250 miles from Greenland. The old Vikings, who were never so thoroughly at home as when they trod the deck of a stout ship in a storm, are not open to the reproach of having feared to test the myster-

ies of these unknown waters. The record of northern voyages is too well known to leave a doubt as to their having been made and having resulted in the discovery of America. In the year 986, Bjorne Herjwissen saw the land which we now call New England. It was originally called Vinland on account of the grapes that were discovered there and said to produce good wine. So satisfactory and complete was the evidence of the existence of this remote land, that Pope Paschal 11., as early as the year 1112, appointed Eric Upsi Bishop of Iceland, Greenland and Vinland, and the Bishop, it is said, actually visited Vinland in person during the year 1121. While we have no accurate data as to the spiritual condition of the new diocese, we know that it was extensive enough in point of area. It certainly is interesting to read that nearly four hundred years before Columbus and his people undertook to evangelize the peaceful inhabitants of the West, the church was solicitous enough to send out one of her servants to teach the natives the truths of the Gospel, and to bring them within the fold. Unfortunately, the great plague that well nigh depopulated Norway put an end for many years to schemes of distant philanthropy and foreign adventure.

Nor was Vinland the only section of America

on which the European had set his foot. "Great Ireland" antedates even these early attempts and had long been discovered by men from Ireland when Are Marsen visited that region in 983. They occupied the country south of the Chesapeake Bay, including North and South Carolina, Georgia and East Florida. When in 999, Gudlief Gudlangson and his sailors were driven by storms to America, they landed in an unknown region where they were at once met by several hundred natives whose language was apparently Irish. The methods of these natives were not as courteous and civilized as those of their modern descendants, for they at once seized the foreigners and bound them, thus forcibly signifying their doctrine of home rule and their determination to retain the country for themselves as the rightful owners thereof. They did not harm the unwilling invaders of their territory, however, but allowed them to depart unmolested, after signifying with marked emphasis that it would not be safe to remain. A piece of wise conduct that might have been emulated with advantage by the natives who afterwards received some of the followers of Columbus with open arms.

From the historical fragments left us it is almost certain that Columbus knew of the existence of a continent in the far West. He was by pro-

fession a geographer and earned his living by drawing and selling charts, that were highly esteemed for their accuracy. The study of the physical world was his favorite pursuit. It is to be presumed that he knew of these subjects all that the learned men of his day had acquired ; with these elements of fact to work upon his ingenious mind could reach but one conclusion. A strong additional circumstance lends weight to these considerations. There is no doubt that in or about 1427, Columbus visited Iceland, which has been termed the hinge upon which the discovery of America turned. There he must necessarily have learned something of the traditions which preserved the old Norse discoveries from oblivion. Can it be supposed that he, filled as he was with the ambition of making his way to India through undiscovered seas, never heard of Vinland nor of the Bishop appointed by Paschal? Then, too, Adam von Bremen's account had been published in 1073, if we may speak of publication before the invention of printing, and perpetuated the brave deeds of the Norse navigators. No wonder then that Columbus spoke and acted as though he *knew* rather than conjectured, calculated or imagined. "When he had formed his theory," says Washington Irving, "it became fixed in his mind with singular firmness. He never spoke in

doubt or hesitation, but with as much certainty as if his eyes had already seen the promised land." A very probable statement and a very natural condition of mind if he had read of the Norse discoveries, the Irish settlement, the papal appointment of a Bishop to Vinland, and was familiar with the household traditions of the Norsemen.

We may then assume the truth of the proposition that the condition of the public mind was such that an attempt to penetrate the mystery of the Western seas was inevitable, and the further proposition that of all men fitted for the task none was more competent than Columbus. That he should have become possessed of this one fixed, absorbing thought was not strange. He was ambitious of honors, title, wealth, power and fame ; all these lay on the route to India, the land of Solomon's Mines, the Ophir of boundless promise, the undiscovered country which held in its bosom treasures vast enough to challenge the wildest imagination, to realize the wildest dream.

Why the effort was so long delayed, why Columbus himself, eloquent, learned, enthusiastic as he was, wore away twenty long years in the vain attempt to enlist royal sympathy in favor of his scheme, seems difficult to account for, but some

reasons for the strange lethargy may be advanced.

The natural fear of the Unknown has always fed upon a superstitious fear of Providence. The Roman poet strongly and beautifully expressed it when he condemned the restless spirit of men who leaped over the natural boundaries created by Jove—who dared to sail over the waters which the Deity had interposed as a barrier between dissociated continents and who, by their impious disregard of Divine laws, challenged Jove's wrath and never permitted his thunders to intermit their destructive bolts. A feeling somewhat akin to this still survived and was only beginning to yield before a more general diffusion of enlightened views.

The proposed attempt to brave the horrors of the unknown ocean was looked upon by many as impious and dangerous, at one and the same time. The anger of the sea was less to be dreaded than the wrath of its Master. Men had been warned by Divine lips that they should not tempt the Lord their God; what was this bold venture into the very jaws of death but a challenge and a defiance to the Almighty? Scientific reasons were often brushed aside even by learned men. Some of these, while admitting the rotundity of the earth, still urged the rashness of the attempt.

Grant that the world was round, grant that a hardy navigator might sail far into unknown regions, the moment would come when the Antipodes being reached, the doomed ship must drop from the sea that had thus far sustained her weight and, plunging helplessly into infinite space, meet a fate as dreadful as it was deserved. And if by some strange and hitherto unknown physical law, the fated bark still clung to the slippery waters, how could it be expected that, in defiance of all principles and all rules of physics, she would climb back, upon the liquid and treacherous hill, to the point whence she had started? Thus, a little knowledge proved a dangerous thing; it gave the objector the prestige of scientific acquirements in dealing with the matter, and he was only the more dangerous because he was somewhat less ignorant than his followers.

The arguments from Scripture were especially dangerous, and were perhaps the most difficult to answer. They came from pious and good men, who placed their own narrow interpretation upon isolated passages, and gave them a meaning which condemned such attempts as blasphemous. The prophets and the fathers of the Church were freely quoted as being conclusively opposed to the plans of Columbus. Lactantius was cited as saying that it was the

height of absurdity to pretend that there was such a part of the world as the Antipodes were supposed to represent, where men walked about with their heels in the air and their heads down ; where human beings had their feet directly opposite to ours ; where everything was reversed, the trees growing with their roots in the air and the branches in the ground. No one could deny that such propositions were very absurd, and in fact incredible, if faith in the Antipodes obliged belief in such an upheaval and reversal of physical laws. Then, too, it had been said that all men came from Adam, which was surely not the case if there was another race of men in that fabulous country. Finally, some learned doctors, applying a figurative test to the exigencies of the discussion, cited the passage of the Scriptures wherein it is stated that the Lord stretched the skies over the land like unto a tent, which was clearly impossible if the earth was round. At least so they argued, and with no small success.

Against these and other such adversaries, Columbus waged his battle. He was himself a pious man, deeply imbued with the doctrines of the church. His reply was, therefore, such as a devout Christian would venture to offer ; it was not the sneer of a scoffer, nor the challenge of an infidel. He sought to reconcile the truths of Scripture with those which he gath-

ered from science and experience and to deal gently and patiently with ignorance and prejudice, whatever their origin and whatever the garb in which they were clothed. He was eloquent, enthusiastic, learned, and skilful in debate ; but with all these qualities he might have failed in his purpose but for the timely aid of churchmen whose orthodoxy was beyond dispute. Diego de Deza, in particular, a Dominican, subsequently Bishop of Toledo, gave him his warm support, and lent the color of religious regularity to the advocacy of the new cause. Other religious men joined him to overcome the opposition that had so bitterly assailed Columbus and his strange theories ; but even with this valuable aid, it was a long and weary contest, that wore out the great adventurer's best days. Portugal, Genoa, Spain were each in turn appealed to. The confident hope of a result that would startle the world and enrich the promoters of his cause beyond their dreams was urged in vain to incredulous ears. Inconceivable as was this stubborn resistance to his appeals, it baffled him for years, and he would probably have ended his days without sight of the promised land but for the friend whom a kind Providence placed upon his path, when Hope was well nigh dead. The prior of the humble convent of La Rabida received the weary traveler when his

fortunes were at their lowest ebb ; his charity revived the wanderer when with his young son he turned his back upon great visions to seek for food and shelter. These, with gentle sympathy, the good prior gave from his heart to the baffled and dispirited chart-maker. He filled him with new courage, started him afresh upon his journey, put money in his purse, furnished him with letters of commendation to the Queen, with fitting garments for one who aspired to enter and ask the favor of a Court ; and, more than all, with the assurance that, be the treatment of that Court what it might, the door of La Rabida was ever open and ready to receive its one-time guest with unfailing love. Wherever the story of Columbus is told, the name of Juan Perez should be named with reverence. Amid all the vanities and petty ambitions of the time and occasion, he stands out almost alone as the embodiment of all that is best in human nature. No selfish motives tainted his action. As has been well and truly said, the prior gave Columbus his heart, and, strange to tell, he never took it back.

Thanks to Juan Perez, Columbus had audience of the King and Queen, an admirably assorted couple for the functions in which they were engaged. Ferdinand contributed the caution, Isabella the liberal

qualities necessary to govern the country over which they ruled. Isabella was ready to pawn her jewels for a worthy cause, if funds could not otherwise be secured. Ferdinand would be sure to enquire whether the venture was likely to pay expenses and a profit. Isabella alone would have wrecked the treasury with a glorious disregard of financial results. Ferdinand would have conducted the royal business by strict rules of arithmetic, unrelieved by generous diversions or sentimental deflections, even if these were calculated to secure popular applause and sympathy. He would never go to war for an idea, unless the expulsion of the Moors be deemed such a one ; but there was, even in that attempt to drive out the unbeliever, a practical side. In their dealing with Columbus, the dual nature of the royal association was manifested. Isabella was anxious to plunge into the adventure, without reference to the terms proposed by Columbus ; Ferdinand declined to invest his money except upon such conditions as would make the risk a reasonable one. It must be admitted here that the settlement of the bargain, for such it was, involved no deception or undue advantage on either side. Columbus was quite equal to the occasion, and quite a match for his kingly patron. He was bent on carrying the Faith to the Infidel, of

bringing unnumbered heathen wretches within the pale of the Church; he was eager to push the glory and Empire of Spain to the remotest ends of the earth. This was the argument *ad hominem*, or rather *ad fœminam*, with which he mastered the enthusiastic and pious temperament of Isabella; but Ferdinand was made of harder and more practical material. No doubt his feelings toward his unknown brethren of the remote West were kind enough, but then these people were far away and mysterious, and it was not possible to say in advance how lovable or valuable they would turn out to be. Then the greatness of Spain and her glory, though dear to the King of Aragon, were expensive luxuries to sustain and required a surplus in the treasury; glory and a deficit were incompatible and inconsistent adjuncts to his crown. But when Columbus told him of the treasures that he might secure while he saved the souls of the heathen, and put his finger, as it were, on Solomon's mines, while he extended the Castilian Empire, Ferdinand's desire for profit was quickened into something like sympathy. The parties of the first part and of the second part being agreed as to the expediency of entering into the operation, the party of the third part stated his terms. They indicated in clear language the determination of the explorer to

realize a full share of the financial benefits likely to accrue from the union of the capital to be contributed by his associates, and the labor to be contributed by himself. He did not betray any undue modesty in the statement of his expectations. He required the title and privileges of an Admiral, the powers and prerogatives of a Viceroy, and ten per cent. in perpetuity of the income to be derived from the new possessions, this income to be paid to him and his heirs forever.

These conditions startled the King, who refused to accept them. The titles, no doubt, were well enough, and he might consent to ennoble the successful adventurer and his remotest posterity with lavish profusion, provided the commission on the possible revenues were reduced to a reasonable percentage. But ten per cent. forever! The royal conscience rebelled at such demands; they far exceeded the limits which any subject had a right to touch in negotiating with his sovereign. The King was firm and Columbus obstinate. Isabella was indifferent to the business aspect of the affair. Her motives were of a higher order, and to carry them out she was willing to subscribe to any terms that her intended associate saw fit to exact. Her Consort was strong enough for the time being, however, to carry the day, and Columbus, firmly rooted in the com-

mercial instincts of his Genoese ancestors— if they were Genoese—once more turned his back on the Court and once more sought the society and counsel of his old friend and helper the monk of La Rabida.

But once more, as in the past, the ready hand and heart of Juan Perez did their work, and Columbus, with renewed courage and hope, started to interest the French monarch in his plans. Would the latter have been more generous than his brother King? Would he have added the percentage in cash to the payment in honors and heritable titles? That question cannot be solved. The influence of the good Queen prevailed, the King relented and signified his assent to the demands which he had thus far rejected. What influenced him to this change of spirit we may only conjecture. Perhaps it was a natural inclination to please his gentle wife; perhaps the fear that in striving to save ten per cent. he might lose ninety; perhaps he knew (and he remembered in after days) that agreements between King and subject are always open to Royal revision and may be read in the right spirit, that is as the Royal pleasure may suggest. Like the Lion in the fable, the share of the Monarch is what he chooses to claim: "I take this," says the Lion, "*quia nominor Leo*, because

my name is Lion"—an unanswerable argument, from time immemorial.

Even at this stage of the proceedings the current did not flow smoothly. The money, although promised, shrank timidly from the risks which it was to run. Isabella had threatened to pawn her jewels, but this sacrifice was not exacted from her. The brothers Pinzon had become interested through Juan Perez in the proposed trip to an unknown world, and, thanks to them, the paltry sum was found which made the voyage practicable. By virtue of a slight modification in the agreement, Columbus was to furnish one-eighth of the funds, but this he was able to do through his new friends. The contract, when finally reduced to writing, was executed on the 17th April, 1492; it was really the contract of Isabella of Castile, though signed by both Monarchs; *her* subjects alone were permitted to settle in the new country so long as she lived.

Columbus was not compelled to wait until success had placed the seal on his work to receive some of his reward. His name was changed from Columbus to Colon; he was graciously permitted to use the prefix *Don*, and his son was allowed to serve as a page to the Queen, a privilege which gave him access to the society of young people whose blood was blue.

Thus, to some extent, at least, was he paid in advance. Ferdinand was a munificent king in the distribution of all those rewards the giving of which in no wise diminished the supply at his command.

When Columbus went back to the small monastery and to the faithful friend who loved him still, the good Prior rejoiced as though the victory were his and he were to receive large profits and brilliant titles. He lent a willing hand to the preparations for the great voyage ; he helped to smooth over the countless impediments that still grew, like rank weeds, in the discoverer's path. Three poor caravels had been found, the Santa Maria, the Niña and the Pinta ; they had been made, thanks to the Pinzon advances, fairly seaworthy, but when the time came to man them, the old terror and superstition threatened destruction to everything. Men would not embark on the ill-fated ships, rigged with curses dark as those that brought young Lycidas to grief. Sailors were plenty enough and daring enough, but they all wanted to return from any voyage on which they started, and how were they ever to get back to their own world after they had dropped into infinite ether, or sailed rapidly down the liquid hill ? This difficulty, too, was vanquished. The scum of the seafaring population of the country was forced into the ships, and with a

motley crew of bankrupts fleeing from their creditors, of criminals fleeing from justice, and of adventurers eager to feast their eyes upon and to fill their hands with the promised gold, the three ships sailed.

They left Palos on Friday, the third day of August, 1492, the good Prior watching from the shore to the last, and praying for the friend he had served so well. Then commenced the weary journey, with its dangers and its doubts. A sullen crew, animated by sordid motives, and ever ready to visit disappointment on its master, mutiny in a chronic state, and a strong, brave chief as well-fitted to cope with the rebellion of men as he was able to meet the hostile fury of the waves. Of him, indeed, it might be said that his heart was cased in oak and triple brass, as the poet describes the fearless man who first entrusted his life, in a frail bark, to the cruel sea. From the first day to the last he was undaunted. His assurance of ultimate success was such that the belief grows upon us when we contemplate it, that he *knew* that the land lay before him, and approximately calculated the distance that he would have to sail. That he was wrong, in one respect, no one doubts; he expected to find the continent of Asia, and found America blocking his way. But his confidence can only be explained on the

theory that he had mastered the facts and was serene in consequence of the assurance they gave. As to his discontented and mutinous followers, he dealt with them as men of his stamp alone can deal. He awed them by his majestic bearing ; he encouraged them by his unfailing confidence ; he drew upon his vivid imagination to depict in glowing words the incalculable wealth of the new countries they were about to reach. He used the only argument potential with them. They wanted gold, gold in abundance, without stint, without labor, without hindrance ; he promised that they should have it to their hearts' desire. With these promises and some deception as to the course that they were daily running, he succeeded in keeping them from open violence, until they entered upon the pleasant waters of the South and met unmistakable evidences that they were nearing land. Carved woods, branches with fresh flowers, the limb of a tree, which bore upon its fragile structure a bird's nest, with the mother bird guarding her young covey ; these and other signs left no doubt in reasonable minds that the land was at hand. The balmy sweetness of the air was like their own Andalusian spring-time ; they only lacked the nightingale, said Columbus. But a new panic seized upon the men as confidence was beginning to overcome unreasoning fear.

The wind died out, and days passed with nothing to relieve the anxious monotony that suggested danger in a new form. What if this were a region of endless calm, and they were fated to die one by one in their motionless ships, the victim of one man's folly and reckless ambition? He, at least, was a scape-goat, and might be offered up as a sacrifice or be punished for his crime. But he waited and compelled their patience until the sluggish winds once more filled their sails, and once more the men forgot to compass their leader's death, in the hope that they would reach land and fortune together.

Who first sighted that land is yet a question. Columbus, whether he felt himself unable farther to resist the threats and importunities of his crew, or because he had calculated to his own satisfaction that he was about to reach his goal, solemnly promised that he would turn back and sail homeward if land were not seen within three days. The mutineers consented to this delay, and their murmurs were quieted for awhile. On the second day the signs were so favorable that the seditious sailors fell upon their knees; they besought their leader for pardon, and sang hymns of praise to the kindness of the Creator who had brought them so near the end of their labors and dangers. A reward

had been promised to the man who would first sight the land. As Columbus, sleepless and vigilant, was pacing the deck of the Santa Maria, he saw, or thought he saw, a light ; but previous disappointments had made him wary. He called the attention of two of his fellow-watchers to the light that rose and fell ; one of them saw it, or thought he saw it, but fearing a new disappointment, they all remained silent. In the early morning, however, the Pinta's cannon announced and truly that land was in view ; this was the concerted signal by which the joyful news might be loudly proclaimed to all.

And now we have the culminating point of the great explorer's life. His triumph was without alloy. It was even greater in appearance than in fact. He believed that he had at last found the land of promise and of untold wealth, and as he left his ship and stepped ashore, clad in purple and bearing the insignia of his newly-won honors, he might well exult in the fulfillment of his prophecies and the realization of his dreams. He was now entitled, under his contract, to the rewards which he coveted ; he might now bring the simple and harmless men, women and children who met him on the shore within the fold of the Church. No misgivings entered his mind. The island on which he first set his foot must be at the very door of the

Indies, and with becoming reverence, he baptized it in the Saviour's name, San Salvador.

Then commenced a series of adventures in Dreamland by daylight; at least such it must have seemed to the travellers. The loveliness of the skies, the gentleness of the inhabitants, the songs of the birds, the pure and balmy atmosphere—above all the confident hope of forthcoming gold—were, indeed, such as to fill their hearts with joy, and almost to justify the belief that the Earthly Paradise had been found. If that hope could only be realized, their happiness would be complete; for we cannot close our eyes to the fact that whatever Columbus personally may have felt, the gentle heathen and his salvation were the accessory and not the principal subjects of the general solicitude. The feverish anxiety to secure the yellow metal of which the trinkets were made that adorned the persons of the inhabitants, the numerous inquiries as to the source whence that metal had been procured, the interest exhibited for its acquisition, could not but impress the astonished native, who believed that Gold was the God of his new visitors. Columbus, himself, allowed his great and noble purposes to be deferred to satisfying the greed of his crew, and with earnest appeals to the Almighty, he prayed for instructions that might lead him to fortune. “Our Lord, in whose

hands are all things, be my help," he cries. "Our Lord, in his mercy, direct me where I may find the gold mine." They wandered from island to island—kidnapping a dozen or two of the natives who had never been taught resistance, greed or cruelty—in quest of the undiscovered treasures. Every point that he touched was, according to Columbus' narrative, more beautiful than all the rest; in fact he indulges in such wild and extravagant expressions of delight, that a suspicion is raised (as Prescott has it) that a temporary alienation of mind is shown in the letters which he wrote from Jamaica to the sovereigns. "Sober narrative and sound reasoning were strangely blended with crazy dreams and doleful lamentations. Vagaries like these," adds Prescott, "which came occasionally like clouds over his soul to shut out the light of reason, cannot fail to fill the mind of the reader, as they doubtless did those of the sovereigns, with mingled sentiments of wonder and compassion." Our lamented friend, Dr. Gilmary Shea, has pointed out in his work on Columbus, that "he seems to have succeeded in attaching to himself but few men who adhered loyally to his cause. Those under him were constantly rebellious and mutinous; those over him found him impracticable. To array all these enemies, as inspired by a

Satanic hostility to a great servant of God, is to ask too much of our belief.”

It would extend this paper far beyond any reasonable limit if I sought to enter into anything more than a rapid and cursory narrative of the four voyages that Columbus made to America and thence back to Spain.

The first was the only one which gave him unmixed glory and happiness. He then touched the pinnacle of his fame, and the descent after that to ruin and disgrace was as distressing as it was rapid. Up to the moment of his death he believed that when he set his foot on the soil of Cuba he stood on the Continent of Asia. With that delusion firm and fixed, he died. At least we may assume that it was really entertained by him, although the dramatic conditions that accompanied his first declaration of the fact might shake our belief in his good faith. One of his first acts on taking possession of the island was to impose an oath upon his men, making them declare that they had reached the coast of Asia. Such an exaction seems hardly consistent with entire sanity.

Perhaps nothing can give a better idea of the effect produced by these strange sights upon so strong an intellect as that of Columbus than the fact that he was quite assured that he had seen mermaids in these southern waters. The prosaic

explanation given is that they were probably sea calves, and that their heads, when slightly lifted above the water, bore a general resemblance to the human face. The truth is that everything around him was new and mysterious ; there was no difficulty in believing that such romantic persons lived in the sea.

Columbus received a right royal reception on his return. Both sovereigns rose to receive him standing ; and when he stooped to kiss their hands, they gently and graciously lifted him and bade him sit. Then he told his story, and from time to time produced the evidences of his veracity. He showed the Indians that he had captured, the birds, the skins, the barbaric ornaments and the samples of gold which he had brought with him, and when the *Te Deum* had been chanted, he was treated as a royal guest and assigned lodgings under the royal roof. This period of a few weeks was really the only time of unalloyed happiness that Columbus ever enjoyed. He was not averse to public scenes nor disposed to shrink from the plaudits of an admiring multitude ; when he passed among the excited throngs his face beamed with content. There was no trouble then to find volunteers for another transatlantic voyage ; the specimens of hard and yellow gold were more eloquent than any discourse that had ever been spoken

by Columbus. The curb became more necessary than the spur when the new expedition was fitted out. Capital had lost its shrinking and sensitive modesty, in view of assured success. All the ships in the ports of Andalusia were placed at Columbus' disposal and he was authorized to compel service from those whom he chose to carry with him on his expedition. Military stores were abundantly provided; able and intelligent supervisors aided him; among these we find the name of Americus Vesputius.

The conversion of the heathens to Christianity was formally declared to be one of the most important objects of the enterprise. The King and Queen showed their good faith by designating twelve learned priests to accompany the expedition; one of them was the apostolical vicar. Isabella's kind heart had been moved by the accounts of the gentleness and simplicity of the natives to consider them with tender compassion, and to her credit be it said that she strictly enjoined that they should be treated with the utmost kindness. Columbus was ordered to inflict signal punishment on all Spaniards who should be guilty of outrage and injustice towards them.

About fifteen hundred men started upon the second expedition. They carried with them

goats, sheep, cows and domestic fowls. Once more the fleet entered the beautiful regions of the South. Porto Rico and other islands were visited and taken possession of in the name of Spain. The adventurers met the Caribs, who were said by Columbus to be very fierce and given to eating human flesh. Whether it be true that these barbarous people were actually addicted to such revolting practices may well be doubted. Even Mr. Irving, one of the most earnest defenders of Columbus' fame, ventures to question the reliability of these statements. There is but little to support and much to contradict the charge. Hayti was reached and visited for the second time. The natives had heard of Columbus on his first voyage and still entertained a friendly disposition toward him. They came on board the ship without hesitation or fear. The Admiral had left behind him a colony of men on the former trip, and the fortress that he had built was found and visited; nothing remained except vestiges of ruin to show where it had stood. It had been sacked, burned and utterly destroyed. The story was soon told, and there is no reason to doubt its substantial truth. While Columbus was present he was able to exercise some restraint upon the fierce passions of his men, but no sooner had his ship disappeared in the dis-

tance than the new colonists abandoned themselves to all their brutal instincts. They wandered uncontrolled among the Indians; they robbed them of their gold, of their homes, of everything that was sacred in their domestic relations. If the Indians did suppose, as has been said, that the white men had come down from Heaven to visit them, that illusion was soon dispelled in the wild debauch of unmerciful brutality. Even after these four centuries, it is pleasant to draw a veil upon that scene and many others that accompanied the first settlement of America.

We may turn with comfort from this picture and contemplate the good and holy men, members of the same old faith, who were among the first to explore the wilderness of America for the heathen's sake; the noble martyrs who with the staff and the cross, with no hope of reward except the saving of souls, hungry, worn, persecuted and tortured, walked, alone and unguarded, the wilderness of the lake country, pushed their way to the Father of Rivers, preached the gospel to the savage whom they startled by their audacity, shed no blood but their own, permitted no torture but of their own bodies, pitied all men except themselves, and thought every danger and torment a gain if it promised honor and glory to their God. If we

feel at any time disposed unduly to honor Columbus the Catholic let us evoke the picture of the Jesuit pioneers of the country that he discovered. The testimony of these martyrs will silence History if she exalts him beyond his merits.

The third voyage was another step on the downward plane. The machinations of unrelenting enemies produced their bitter fruit. But for the faithful brothers Bartholomew and Diego, it is not likely that Columbus would have survived to see his home once more. The era of bloodshed had been opened; so-called battles had been fought, and the natives, by thousands upon thousands, were destroyed. Resistance to the steel-clad horsemen was out of the question. We need not wonder that the stranger, with two hundred infantry and twenty horsemen, flanked by twenty bloodhounds as fierce as tigers, was able to meet and conquer one hundred thousand men, nor that the victory of the Spaniards was complete, and that the natives were crushed beyond hope of redemption!

It is pleasing, again, to turn to Isabella, who continued to regard these gentle and unoffending natives as intrusted by God to her peculiar protection. Her disinterested love was not turned into avarice, even by a cargo of five hundred slaves that were sent her. An order

was issued for their sale, but she countermanded it, and directed that the captives should be returned to their own land. Again she sent a special order that the natives should be treated with the utmost kindness. But great wrongs had been perpetrated before this ineffectual evidence of a loving heart reached its destination.

Meanwhile public sentiment was changing as to the value of the discovery. The ship loads of gold had not come in ; a few cargoes of slaves were but a small realization of the brilliant expectations that had charmed the imagination of sovereigns and subjects. Men had come back from these transatlantic voyages worn, disabled, broken in health and spirit. Extreme measures were again necessary to secure crews. Convicted malefactors were offered pardon if they would embark for the colonies. The enthusiasm had died out ; discouragement and distress had set in ; the star of Columbus had grown pale, it was soon to emit its last fitful gleam of intermittent light.

It was on this third voyage that Columbus, for the first time, had a glimpse of the Continent which was to be called America. But Sebastian Cabot the year before had already discovered the continent ; so had Americus Vesputius. The trip was one of great suffering and disappointment. To the mental distress which

well nigh overwhelmed him were added the tor-
tures of gout and failing sight; still he did not
surrender to changing fortune, and with un-
shaken fortitude he revisited the scenes of his
first discoveries and touched from time to time
at new islands.

While Columbus was absent on his unpromising,
ill-omened voyage the clamors against him swell-
ed into a chorus loud enough to reach the
Court. Complaints were many, some of them
perhaps not without foundation. One of his
chief lieutenants rebelled and entered into open
conflict with him. In an unguarded moment,
Columbus requested that an umpire might be
sent out to decide the question. This was the
signal for his downfall. Ferdinand sent out an
umpire in the person of Bobadilla, and the result
was that Columbus returned home in chains.

The Queen greeted her old friend with tears
while he, moved by her compassion and sympa-
thy, fell upon his knees, weeping convulsively.
He was old and worn and broken physically;
nothing but his lofty spirit had stood the cruel
tests to which he had been subjected. The ac-
cusations made by Bobadilla were disregarded.
Favor and affection were once more lavished
upon Columbus, and abundant promises made,
which were never kept. If the account of Las
Casas be true of the condition of the natives

under Bobadilla, the estate of those unfortunate people was made worse by the change of masters.

And now preparations were made for a fourth voyage. Other courts had been gained by the contagion and inoculated with the ambition of great adventures. De Gama had doubled the Cape of Good Hope, and was enriching Portugal with the products of the East. Columbus was to start in quest of a strait, supposed to be somewhere near the Isthmus of Darien and connecting the two great oceans. After many delays, the fleet of four vessels was ready to sail. The largest of the caravels was but seventy tons' burden and his whole company amounted to one hundred and fifty men. He turned his back for the last time upon Spain, an old man, exhausted with anxiety and trouble, and racked with physical sickness. Time and adversity had subdued all but the unconquerable will, and once more his faithful brother Bartholomew accompanied him to guard, protect and defend him.

Columbus now visited Honduras and Costa Rica. He explored bays on the Isthmus of Panama, and found evidence that gold in large quantities was to be had in these regions, but his shattered health paralyzed all physical exertion, while his leaking ships warned him that

he should hasten to return. He attempted to establish a colony on the river Belden, where he intended to leave his brother in command while he returned to Spain for supplies.

The fourth voyage ended in almost total disaster. It was full of disappointment and suffering. Cyclones, insurrections, hunger and the fear of starvation caused Columbus the deepest anxiety. His ships could not be repaired, nor could he build new ones. The situation at Jamaica became so critical that Columbus was constrained to send one of his followers to Hispaniola, in a canoe, a distance of one hundred and twenty miles, to procure relief, for destruction waited upon inaction. They dared not start upon their return with their decayed and broken ships; the dreary weeks ran into months, every day bringing its new weight of woe to the desperate situation. Mutiny was added to the other elements of dissolution. Finally, the Indians could no longer be forced to bring food from a distance and continued to resist until Columbus, working upon their superstitious fears, called them together and predicted a total eclipse of the moon, a sign, he declared, of the Divine wrath, which would soon be directed against the disobedient natives if they did not at once procure supplies. The eclipse came, and the terri-

fied Indians, in trembling submission, helped their persecutors to live.

Finally, after new mutinies and a pitched battle between contending factions of angry Spaniards, Columbus left the new world to return to Spain. He reached his country a weak and tottering old man. His faithful friend, the Queen, was herself upon her death-bed; no greeting from her, as formerly, warmed the drooping spirits of the Admiral. He found his financial affairs in the utmost confusion. His great expectations of brilliant rewards had never borne fruit. Poor as he was when he left Spain in August, 1492, he was actually poorer when he returned home to die. The royal contract, which he had been at such pains to secure, gave him no rights that he could enforce. Ferdinand's conscience was no longer quickened, his generosity no longer stimulated by the presence and kindness of his Queen. The pressure upon his treasury was great, and the relief which he had expected from the promises of Columbus had never come. Gold from America he had seen, but only in such quantities as to sharpen desire, not to satisfy greed. He could not read the future, and he did not, therefore, know that royal revenues were to flow into the coffers of his successors, not so much from the gold mines that time would uncover as from the marvellous

tobacco plant that Columbus had found in Cuba. He may have felt that the exactions which he had been coerced to accept when the agreement was made, had been imposed upon him by a sort of duress. At all events, he turned a deaf ear to the supplications of his one-time associate, and postponed the manifestation of his gratitude until Columbus was beyond the reach either of his favor or his anger. The discoverer was not suffering alone from cruel disease, but for lack of the actual necessities of life. "I live by borrowing," he said; "little have I profited by twenty years' service, with such toils and perils, since at present I do not own a roof in Spain, and for the most time I have not the wherewithal to pay my bill." This came from the man who had actually sat in the presence of royalty, and who had been decorated with the titles of Don, of Admiral, and of Viceroy ! These poor honors were all he had to leave his children. He earnestly besought the king to appoint his son Diego to the viceroyalty, of which he had been so cruelly deprived. "This," he wrote, "is a matter which concerns my honor. Give or withhold, as may be most for your interest, and I shall be content. I believe the anxiety created by the delay of this affair is the principal cause of my sickness." But in spite of this care for earthly honors, distinction and titles for

himself and those that were to follow him, his thoughts were turned to greater things. Be his weaknesses what they may, an ardent love for the Church had been a conspicuous feature in his life, in his thoughts, and in his acts. The sense of responsibility for all that he had done was before him to the end, lightened and brightened by a confident hope, frequently expressed, that his shortcomings would be mercifully condoned. His mind turned with pathetic affection to the small town of Concepcion, in Hispaniola, which he himself had founded, and there, on the new land, which could never be mentioned except in connection with his own fame, he desired that a Chapel should be raised where Divine service should be celebrated for his benefit and that of all whom he loved

Death did not take him unawares or unprovided ; he saw its approach without dismay. Indeed, in his straitened and distressed condition, Death was the only friend upon whose face he could look with anything like hope. Life had and could have nothing in store for him but sickness and heavier sorrow. His fortunes were broken, his glory on the wane, his family poor, his body racked by pain. What wonder that he should have longed for the hour of departure? When the message came, he welcomed it with joy. His last words were uttered in Latin : “ *In*

manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum."

Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

Then being dead and no longer an obstruction in the royal path, or an unpleasant reminder to the royal conscience, royalty once more smiled upon him. A gorgeous funeral atoned, so far as it could, for neglect and injustice. Great honors followed his corpse to the church of Santa Maria de la Antigua. His enemies were silenced and comforted by the reflection that he could no longer interfere with their fortunes. The King was relieved and promptly placed a glorious seal upon the greatest episode of his reign. He was able to balance, by posthumous and inexpensive tributes, the open account pending between himself and his late partner. Isabella gone and Columbus in his grave, the only one of the firm then left was Ferdinand. He could wind up the business to suit himself.

But the remains of Columbus were not permitted to rest in Spain. Once more, but this time in unaccustomed peace, he crossed the Atlantic to find a resting place. It is said that his body still sleeps in the Cathedral of Havana, on that island which he had solemnly declared to be part of the continent of Asia. The claim of Havana to this honor is disputed, but the evidence seems to be conclusive, and we may state with something like certainty that the great Dis-

coverer is now resting in the Cathedral of that city.

Columbus, like all conspicuous actors in the history of the world, has had his critics and his panegyrists. Some have gone to the verge of extreme laudation and others have condemned him with unsparing severity. History will side with neither of these extremists. We may fairly judge him by what he did and what he failed to do. There is no recorded instance of more admirable tenacity of purpose nor of more unflinching devotion to one single idea; none of courage more steadfast in the face of perils of every kind. But if we should measure him by the standard of to-day, nothing that his modern accusers have said in condemnation of many acts alleged against him would be too severe, but the standard of to-day may not with justice be applied to the man who lived four centuries ago.

The accusation against Columbus is the traffic in slaves, but this had been and continued to be the practice of every nation for centuries after him, and of our own country almost to our own generation. It may only be said, and this means much, that he was better than the men who were with him. We may not compare him to the venerable and humane Las Casas, but his name, when placed beside those of

others who shared or marred his fortunes, will shine with a lustre rendered brilliant by comparison. It is much to say of any man that he was better than his day. This can be asserted of Columbus. Personally, he appears to have been, in the ordinary relations of life, humane and just; his pursuit of gold was certainly, in a great degree, the result of his anxiety to satisfy the King. Gold he had promised; gold he was bound to furnish, and it was the failure to perform this promise that poisoned his life, cost him his popularity and hastened his death.

Although the real merit to be attached to his discovery is subject to question because he started to reach Asia and stumbled upon America, yet he is entitled to our gratitude for the splendid service which he rendered, and to be placed on the roll of Humanity's great servants. The obstacles in his way would have daunted any man not of heroic mould. If he showed an indifference to human life in dealing with the natives, we may not forget that life was cheap in the 15th century. Tenderness and hesitancy to shed a brother's blood were not in the morals and practices of the times, indeed they are not now when Nations undertake for their own purposes to impress their civilization on an inferior people. That one of the mo-

tives which impelled and sustained him throughout was the desire to spread the Gospel through new lands can scarcely be disputed. Whether, after weighing these motives in the scales of infallible and eternal Justice, it will be found that this was in truth the main-spring of his action and the pure fountain of his unflinching purpose, or merely incident to a personal end, none can decide. I prefer to accept and to close with the wise and prudent words of the Sovereign Pontiff :

“ The eminently distinctive point in Columbus is that in crossing the immense expanses of the ocean, he followed an object more grand and more elevated than did the others. Not that he failed to be influenced by the very legitimate ambition to earn and to merit the approval of society, not that he despised the attributes of glory, that concomitant of success, whose spurs often cut more deeply than those of the greatest among men, nor did he disdain entirely the pursuit of personal advantages, but above all those human considerations soared the leading motive in the religion of his forefathers.

“ Where, indeed, would he have supplied himself with the necessary constancy and strength of soul to endure what he had to suffer and sub-

mit to, had he not drawn upon a motive superior to human interests? Contradicted by the learned; repulsed by princes; tossed by the tempest on the furious ocean; more than once deprived of the use of his eyes by the strain of the long and weary watches; to these must be added the combats sustained against the barbarians; the infidelities of his friends and his companions; the villainous plots and conspiracies; the perfidy of the envious; the calumnies of the traducers, and the traps set against his innocence—this man must inevitably have succumbed under the weight of such great trials, and such numerous assaults, had he not been upheld by the conscience of his admirable enterprise, in the success of which he foresaw the greater glory of the Christian name, and the salvation of an endless multitude.”



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