

The Four Voyages
OF
Christopher Columbus

Being his own log-book, letters and
dispatches with connecting narrative drawn
from the Life of the Admiral by his
son Hernando Colon and other
contemporary historians

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
J. M. COHEN



PENGUIN BOOKS

It happened that at the time of the Admiral's arrival in Palos, Pinzón reached Galicia and decided to go independently to Barcelona to give news of the enterprise to the Catholic sovereigns. But they sent him a message not to come except with the Admiral, with whom he had sailed on this voyage of discovery. This message so pained and annoyed Pinzón that he returned home a sick man and a few days later died of grief.

Before Pinzón reached Palos, the Admiral went by land to Seville, with the intention of going from there to Barcelona, where the Catholic sovereigns were staying. He had to make some slight delays on his journey owing to the excitement in the towns through which he passed, for everyone came from everywhere in the vicinity to gaze at him and at the Indians and other strange objects that he had brought with him.

Continuing his journey in this way, he reached Barcelona in the middle of April, having sent news ahead of him to the Catholic sovereigns of the prosperous outcome of his voyage. They showed infinite joy and satisfaction at this news and ordered that he be given the solemn reception due to one who had done them such signal service. Everyone in the city and court came out to meet him, and the Catholic sovereigns, surrounded by their court, awaited him seated in all their greatness and majesty on a magnificent throne under a canopy of gold. When he came to kiss their hands, they stood up to greet him as they would a great lord, made some demur in giving him their hands to kiss and seated him at their side. Then after some short conversation about the manner and success of his voyage, they gave him leave to retire to his lodging, to which he was accompanied by the whole court. During his stay he enjoyed such honours and favours from their Highnesses that when the King rode through Barcelona the Admiral accompanied him on one side and the Infante on the other, though the King was used to being accompanied by the Infante alone, who was his close relative.

LETTER OF COLUMBUS TO VARIOUS PERSONS DESCRIBING THE RESULTS OF HIS FIRST VOYAGE AND WRITTEN ON THE RETURN JOURNEY

SINCE I know that you will be pleased at the great success with which the Lord has crowned my voyage, I write to inform you how in thirty-three days I crossed from the Canary Islands to the Indies, with the fleet which our most illustrious sovereigns gave me. I found very many islands with large populations and took possession of them all for their Highnesses; this I did by proclamation and unfurled the royal standard. No opposition was offered.

I named the first island that I found 'San Salvador', in honour of our Lord and Saviour who has granted me this miracle. The Indians call it 'Guanahani'. The second island I named 'Santa Maria de Concepción', the third 'Fernandina', the fourth 'Isabela' and the fifth 'Juana'; thus I renamed them all.

When I reached Cuba, I followed its north coast westwards, and found it so extensive that I thought ~~this must be the main-~~land, the province of Cathay.* Since there were no towns or villages on the coast, but only small groups of houses whose inhabitants fled as soon as we approached, I continued on my course, thinking that I should undoubtedly come to some great towns or cities. We continued for many leagues but found no change, except that the coast was bearing me northwards. This I wished to avoid, since winter was approaching and my plan was to journey south. As the wind was carrying

*In the log-book and later in this letter Columbus accepts the native story that Cuba is an island which they can circumnavigate in something more than twenty-one days, yet he insists here and later, during the second voyage, that it is in fact part of the Asiatic mainland.

me on I decided not to wait for a change of weather but to turn back to a remarkable harbour which I had observed. From here I sent two men inland to discover whether there was a king or any great cities. They travelled for three days, finding only a large number of small villages and great numbers of people, but nothing more substantial. Therefore they returned.

I understood from some Indians whom I had captured elsewhere that this was an island, and so I followed its coast for 107 leagues to its eastward point. From there I saw another island eighteen leagues eastwards which I then named 'Hispaniola'.* I crossed to this island and followed its northern coast eastwards for 188 leagues continuously, as I had followed the coast of Cuba. All these islands are extremely fertile and this one is particularly so. It has many large harbours finer than any I know in Christian lands, and many large rivers. All this is marvellous. The land is high and has many ranges of hills, and mountains incomparably finer than Tenerife. All are most beautiful and various in shape, and all are accessible. They are covered with tall trees of different kinds which seem to reach the sky. I have heard that they never lose their leaves, which I can well believe, for I saw them as ~~green and lovely as they are in Spain in May; some were~~ flowering, some bore fruit and others were at different stages according to their nature. It was November but everywhere I went the nightingale† and many other birds were singing. There are palms of six or eight different kinds – a marvellous sight because of their great variety – and the other trees, fruit and plants are equally marvellous. There are splendid pine woods and broad fertile plains, and there is honey. There are many kinds of birds and varieties of fruit. In the interior are mines and a very large population.

*This is referred to in the log-book as Bohio or Bosio.

†Columbus was mistaken; he probably heard the mocking-bird.

Hispaniola is a wonder. The mountains and hills, the plains and meadow lands are both fertile and beautiful. They are most suitable for planting crops and for raising cattle of all kinds, and there are good sites for building towns and villages. The harbours are incredibly fine and there are many great rivers with broad channels and the majority contain gold.* The trees, fruits and plants are very different from those of Cuba. In Hispaniola there are many spices and large mines of gold and other metals. . . . †

The inhabitants of this island, and all the rest that I discovered or heard of, go naked, as their mothers bore them, men and women alike. A few of the women, however, cover a single place with a leaf of a plant or piece of cotton which they weave for the purpose. They have no iron or steel or arms and are not capable of using them, not because they are not strong and well built but because they are amazingly timid. All the weapons they have are canes cut at seeding time, at the end of which they fix a sharpened stick, but they have not the courage to make use of these, for very often when I have sent two or three men to a village to have conversation with them a great number of them have come out. But as soon as they saw my men all fled immediately, a father not even waiting for his son. And this is not because we have harmed any of them; on the contrary, wherever I have gone and been able to have conversation with them, I have given them some of the various things I had, a cloth and other articles, and received nothing in exchange. But they have still remained incurably timid. True, when they have been reassured and lost their fear, they are so ingenuous and so liberal with all their possessions that no one who has not seen them would believe it. If one asks for anything they have they never say no. On the contrary, they offer a share to anyone with demon-

*This did not prove to be true.

†These statements are also inaccurate.

strations of heartfelt affection, and they are immediately content with any small thing, valuable or valueless, that is given them. I forbade the men to give them bits of broken crockery, fragments of glass or tags of laces, though if they could get them they fancied them the finest jewels in the world. One sailor was known to have received gold to the weight of two and a half *castellanos* for the tag of a breeches lace, and others received much more for things of even less value. For newly minted *blancas* they would give everything they possessed, even two or three *castellanos* of gold or an arroba or two of spun cotton. They even took bits of broken hoops from the wine barrels and, as simple as animals, gave what they had. This seemed to me to be wrong and I forbade it.

I gave them a thousand pretty things that I had brought, in order to gain their love and incline them to become Christians. I hoped to win them to the love and service of their Highnesses and of the whole Spanish nation and to persuade them to collect and give us of the things which they possessed in abundance and which we needed. They have no religion and are not idolaters; but all believe that power and goodness dwell in the sky and they are firmly convinced that I have ~~come from the sky with these ships and people~~. In this belief they gave me a good reception everywhere, once they had overcome their fear; and this is not because they are stupid – far from it, they are men of great intelligence, for they navigate all those seas, and give a marvellously good account of everything – but because they have never before seen men clothed or ships like these.

As soon as I came to the Indies, at the first island I discovered I seized some natives, intending them to inquire and inform me about things in these parts. These men soon understood us, and we them, either by speech or signs and they were very useful to us. I still have them with me and

despite all the conversation they have had with me they are still of the opinion that I come from the sky and have been the first to proclaim this wherever I have gone. Then others have gone running from house to house and to the neighbouring villages shouting: 'Come, come and see the people from the sky,' so, once they were reassured about us, all have come, men and women alike, and not one, old or young, has remained behind. All have brought us something to eat and drink which they have given with a great show of love. In all the islands they have very many canoes like oared *fustas*.

They are of various sizes, some as large as a *fusta* of eighteen benches. But they are not as broad, since they are hollowed out of a single tree. A *fusta* would not be able to keep up with them, however, for they are rowed at an incredible speed. In these they travel and transport their goods between the islands, which are innumerable. I have seen some of these canoes with eighty men in them, all rowing.

In all these islands I saw no great difference in the looks of the people, their customs or their language. On the other hand, all understand one another, which will be of singular assistance in the work of their conversion to our holy faith, on which I hope your Highnesses will decide, since they are very well disposed towards it.

I have already told of my voyage of 107 leagues in a straight line from west to east along the coast of Cuba, according to which I reckon that the island is larger than England and Scotland put together.* *Did he think Cuba an island?*

One of these provinces is called Avan† and there the people are born with tails, and these provinces cannot have a

*Cuba is actually considerably smaller than England without Scotland.

†From which the Spaniards took the name La Habana, which they gave first to a town that they built on the southern coast of the island and afterwards to the present city of that name.

length of less than fifty or sixty leagues, according to the information I received from those Indians whom I have with me and who know all the islands.

The other island, Hispaniola, is greater in circumference than the whole of Spain* from Collioure to Fuenterrabia in the Basque province, since I travelled along one side for 188 great leagues† in a straight line from west to east.

These islands are richer than I yet know or can say and I have taken possession of them in their Majesties' name and hold them all on their behalf and as completely at their disposition as the Kingdom of Castile. In this island of Hispaniola I have taken possession of a large town which is most conveniently situated for the goldfields and for communications with the mainland both here,‡ and there in the territories of the Grand Khan, with which there will be very profitable trade. I have named this town Villa de Navidad and have built a fort there. Its fortifications will by now be finished and I have left sufficient men to complete them. They have arms, artillery and provisions for more than a year, and a *fusta*; also a skilled shipwright who can build more.

I have established warm friendship with the king of that land, so much so, indeed, that he was proud to call me and ~~treat me as a brother. But even should he change his attitude~~ and attack the men of La Navidad, he and his people know nothing about arms and go naked, as I have already said; they are the most timorous people in the world. In fact, the men that I have left there would be enough to destroy the whole land, and the island holds no dangers for them so long as they maintain discipline.

*This also is an exaggeration.

†Reckoned to be four (Roman) miles.

‡Columbus is apparently assuming now that Cuba is part of the mainland, but that a further part of the mainland of Asia is still to be discovered.

In all these islands the men are seemingly content with one woman, but their chief or king is allowed more than twenty. The women appear to work more than the men and I have not been able to find out if they have private property. As far as I could see whatever a man had was shared among all the rest and this particularly applies to food.

I have not found the human monsters which many people ^{Caliban} expected. On the contrary, the whole population is very well made. They are not Negroes as in Guinea, and their hair is straight, for where they live the sun's rays do not strike too harshly, but they are strong nevertheless, despite the fact that Hispaniola is 20 to 21 degrees from the Equator.

There are high mountains in these islands and it was very cold this winter but the natives are used to this and withstand the weather, thanks to their food, which they eat heavily seasoned with very hot spices. Not only have I found no monsters but I have had no reports of any except at the island called 'Quaris',* which is the second as you approach the Indies from the east, and which is inhabited by a people who are regarded in these islands as extremely fierce and who eat human flesh. They have many canoes in which they travel throughout the islands of the Indies, robbing and taking all ~~they can. They are no more ill-shaped than any other natives~~ of the Indies, though they are in the habit of wearing their hair long like women. They have bows and arrows with the same canes as the others, tipped with splinters of wood, for lack of iron which they do not possess. They behave most savagely to the other peoples but I take no more account of them than the rest. It is these men who have relations with the women of Matinino,† where there are no men and which is the first island you come to on the way from Spain to the

*Either Dominica or Maria Galante. Reports of monsters seem generally to refer to the Carabis.

†Martinique.

Indies. These women do not follow feminine occupations but use cane bows and arrows like those of the men and arm and protect themselves with plates of copper, of which they have much.

In another island, which I am told is larger than Hispaniola, the people have no hair. Here there is a vast quantity of gold, and from here and the other islands I bring Indians as evidence.

In conclusion, to speak only of the results of this very hasty voyage, their Highnesses can see that I will give them as much gold as they require, if they will render me some very slight assistance; also I will give them all the spices and cotton they want, and as for mastic, which has so far been found only in Greece and the island of Chios and which the Genoese authorities have sold at their own price, I will bring back as large a cargo as their Highnesses may command. I will also bring them as much aloes as they ask and as many slaves, who will be taken from the idolaters. I believe also that I have found rhubarb and cinnamon and there will be countless other things in addition, which the people I have left there will discover. For I did not stay anywhere unless delayed by lack of wind except at the town of La Navidad, which I had to leave secure and well established. In fact I should have done much more if the ships had been reasonably serviceable, but this is enough.

Thus the eternal God, Our Lord, grants to all those who walk in his way victory over apparent impossibilities, and this voyage was pre-eminently a victory of this kind. For although there was much talk and writing of these lands, all was conjectural, without ocular evidence. In fact, those who accepted the stories judged rather by hearsay than on any tangible information. So all Christendom will be delighted that our Redeemer has given victory to our most illustrious King and Queen and their renowned kingdoms, in this great matter. They should hold great celebrations and render solemn thanks

to the Holy Trinity with many solemn prayers, for the great triumph which they will have, by the conversion of so many peoples to our holy faith and for the temporal benefits which will follow, for not only Spain, but all Christendom will receive encouragement and profit.

This is a brief account of the facts.

Written in the caravel off the Canary Islands.*

15 February 1493

At your orders

THE ADMIRAL

After this was written, when I was already in Spanish waters, I was struck by such a strong south-south-west wind that I was compelled to lighten ship, but today by a great miracle I made the port of Lisbon, from which I decided to write letters to their Highnesses. Throughout the Indies, I have always found weather like that of May; I went there in thirty-three days and returned in twenty-eight. I met with no storms except these which held me up for fourteen days, beating about in these seas. The sailors here say that there has never been so bad a winter nor so many ships lost.

Written on 4 March

*Actually Columbus was off Santa Maria in the Azores.

NARRATIVE OF THE THIRD VOYAGE
OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS TO THE
INDIES, IN WHICH HE DISCOVERED
THE MAINLAND, DISPATCHED TO THE
SOVEREIGNS FROM THE ISLAND OF
HISPANIOLA

[... ON my second voyage] by the Grace of God I discovered in a very short time 333 leagues of mainland,* the end of the East, and 700 islands of importance in addition to those discovered on my first voyage, and I sailed round the island of Hispaniola, which is greater in circumference than all Spain, and has a vast population, all of whom should pay tribute.

Then abuse broke out and disparagement of the undertaking began, because I had not immediately sent back ships laden with gold. No one considered the shortness of the time or the many difficulties that I described in my letters. And so for my sins, or, as I think it will prove, for my salvation, I became an object of loathing and objections were made to all my wishes and demands. I therefore decided to come to your Highnesses and prove to you how right I had been in every respect. . . . Your Highnesses replied by smiling and telling me that I need not worry because they did not believe any of those who maligned this enterprise.

I left the town of San Lucar on Wednesday, 30 May, very weary from my journey. I had hoped for some rest on this new voyage to the Indies, but my distresses were doubled. I sailed to Madeira on an unaccustomed route to avoid possible trouble from a French fleet, which was waiting for me near Cape St Vincent.† From there I went to the Canaries, from

* In spite of all evidence Columbus still insisted that Cuba was the extreme eastern extension of the Asiatic mainland.

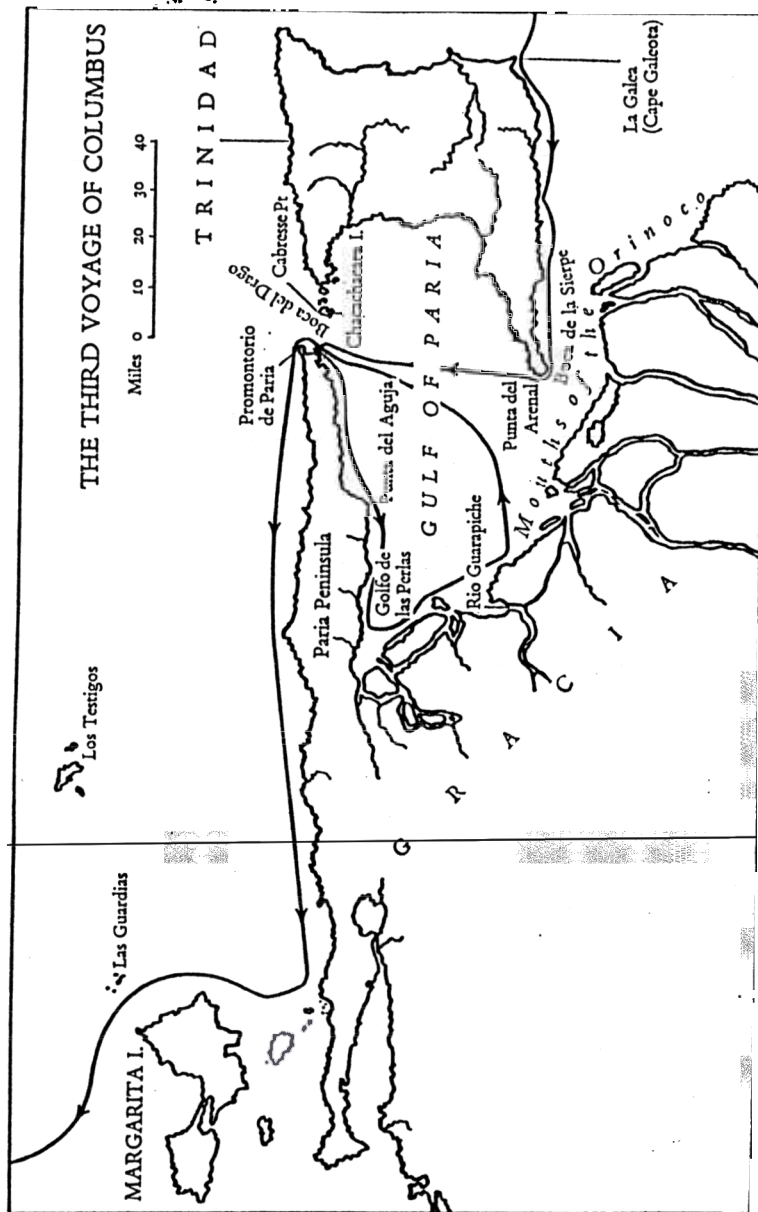
† France and Spain were now at war.

which I sailed with one ship and two caravels. I sent the other ships straight to the Indies, to the island of Hispaniola, and sailed south with the intention of going to the Equator and following it westwards to a point immediately south of Hispaniola.

Having reached the Cape Verde Islands – a false name since they are so barren that I saw nothing green there, and all the inhabitants were so sick that I did not dare to stay there – I sailed 480 miles (which is 120 leagues) south-westwards, where I found the North Star in the fifth degree at nightfall. There the wind failed me and the heat grew so great that I was afraid my ships and crew would be burnt. Suddenly everyone was so prostrated that no one dared go below and attend to the casks and provisions. This heat lasted for eight days. The first day was clear, but on the seven that followed it rained and was cloudy, and yet we found no relief. If these days had been as sunny as the first I do not think any of us would have survived.

I remembered that on each of my voyages to the Indies, as soon as I passed a hundred leagues beyond the Azores, I found a change of temperature, which is the same at all points from north to south. So I resolved that if the Lord should grant me a wind and fair weather to carry me from the place where I was, I would sail no further south and would not turn northwards either but go directly westwards, in hope of finding the same temperatures as I had found when sailing in the parallel of the Canaries, and if this proved so I would then be able to resume my southward course.

It pleased the Lord, when these eight days were passed, to give me a good east wind, but I did not dare to sail further south, because I found a great change in the sky and the stars, but none in the temperature. So I decided to carry on due west on the parallel of Sierra Leone, and not to change course until I reached the point where I expected to find land. There I



COLUMBUS'S NARRATIVE OF THE THIRD VOYAGE

would repair the ship and, if possible, take fresh supplies and water, which had run short.

After seventeen days, during which Our Lord gave me favourable winds, at midday on Tuesday, 31 July, land appeared. I had expected it on the previous day, and had maintained my course till then. But as the sun came up on Monday, because of our shortage of water, I decided to go to the Carib islands, and so changed course.

As proof that the Lord has always shown mercy towards me, on that Tuesday a sailor climbed up to the main top and sighted a cluster of three peaks, at which we said the *Salve Regina* and other prayers and gave many thanks to Our Lord.

I then abandoned my northerly course and made for the land, which I reached about nine o'clock at a cape which I called La Galea.* I had already called the island Trinidad.† The harbour would have been very good if we could have found bottom. There were houses and people and fine cultivated land, as green and lovely as the orchards of Valencia in March. I was sorry that I could not enter the harbour and ran along the coast of this island westwards. After five leagues I found a good bottom and anchored. Next day I continued on my course looking for a harbour where I could repair the ships, take water, and supplement the corn and the scanty provisions that I was carrying. Here I took aboard a hundred gallons of water and then continued until we reached the cape, where I found shelter from the east winds and a good bottom. So I gave orders to anchor, repair the ship and take in wood and water; and I put the men ashore to stretch their limbs after the fatigue of the long voyage. I called this point 'del Arenal'. Here all the ground was printed with the footmarks of some animals which had hooves like goats, but

*Cape Galeota, the south-eastern point of Trinidad.

†From the three peaks and Columbus's special devotion to the Trinity.

although they are apparently numerous we caught sight of none except one carcass.

That day there appeared from an eastward direction a large canoe with twenty-four men, all young and very well equipped with arms, bows and arrows, and wooden shields and, as I have said, they were all young, well built and not black but fairer than the other natives I have seen in the Indies. They were handsome, with fine limbs and bodies, and long straight hair cut in the Spanish manner, and round their heads they wore a cotton cloth elaborately patterned in colours, which I believed to be *almaizares*.^{*} They wore another of these scarves round the body in place of breeches. As this canoe approached, they shouted to us from a distance, but neither I nor anyone else understood them. I gave orders, however, that they should be signalled to approach, and more than two hours passed in this way. Each time they came a little nearer, they immediately sheered off again. I ordered pans and other shining objects to be displayed in order to attract them and bring them closer, and after a while they came nearer than they had come before. I greatly desired conversation with them, but it seemed that I had nothing left to show them which would induce them to come nearer still. So I had ~~a tambourine brought up to the poop and played, and made~~ some of the young men dance, imagining that the Indians would draw closer to see the festivities. On observing the music and dancing, however, they dropped their oars, and picked up their bows, and strung them. Each one seized his shield, and they began to shoot arrows at us. I immediately stopped the music and dancing and ordered some crossbows to be fired. The Indians then put off, making for another caravel, and hastily sheltered under its stern. The pilot hailed them and gave a coat and hat to the man who seemed to be their chief, and arranged with him that he would meet and talk

^{*}Moorish head-dresses.

with them on the beach, to which they immediately rowed their canoe to await him. But he did not wish to go without my permission. When they saw him come to my ship in his boat, they got back into their canoe and rowed away, and I never saw them again or any other inhabitants of this island.

When I reached the end of this Cape Arenal, there was a gulf two leagues wide from east to west between the island of Trinidad and the land of Gracia,^{*} and it was necessary to enter it in order to sail north. I saw some lines of waves crossing this estuary with a great roaring sound, which made me think that there was a reef here with rocks and shallows which would prevent us from entering. Beyond this line of waves was another and yet another, which made a great noise like seas breaking on a rocky beach. I anchored here at Cape Arenal, outside this gulf, and observed that the water was flowing from east to west as furiously as the Guadalquivir in flood. It flowed continuously both day and night, which made me think I could neither turn back on account of the waves, nor go forward on account of the shallows. Late at night standing on the deck I heard a terrible roar approaching the ship from the south. I remained watching and saw the seas rising from west to east, with a swell as high as the ship, which gradually came nearer. On top was a crest of advancing water which rushed onwards with a tremendous noise like that of the other waves I had observed before. Even today I can recall my physical fear that the ship might be swamped when it broke over her. This swell passed and flowed into the gulf, where it was held up for a considerable time.[†]

The next day I sent the boats out to take soundings, and

^{*}This was the mainland of South America at the mouth of the Orinoco.

[†]This would appear to describe a tidal bore, but in fact there is none at this place. Morrison, in *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, attributes it to a volcanic disturbance.

found that the shallowest part of the gulf was six or seven fathoms, and all the time these currents continued to flow, some into and some out of the strait. The Lord was pleased to give me a favourable wind, which enabled me to sail into this strait where I soon found calm. By chance we drew some water from the sea and I noticed it was sweet.

I sailed northwards towards some very high mountains about twenty-six leagues from Cape Arenal. Here there were two other capes,* both very high, the one on the east belonging to this island of Trinidad, and the one on the west belonging to the land which I have called 'Gracia'. Here the strait was very narrow, narrower than at Cape Arenal, and here there were the same waves and the same great roaring of the waters as at that place, and here too the sea water was fresh. So far I had had no conversation with the natives of this country, though I greatly desired it. So I sailed westwards along the coast of this land, and the further I went the sweeter and fresher I found the sea water. When I had gone some distance I noticed a place where the soil seemed to have been cultivated. I anchored and sent the boats to land, where they observed that some people had recently been. The sailors found all the mountains full of wild monkeys, and returned. The whole of this territory was mountainous, but further west the land appeared to be flatter, and might have been inhabited.

I ordered the anchors to be raised and sailed along the coast to the seaward point of this range, where I anchored in a river. Many people then came to us and told us that the name of this land was 'Paria', and that further west it was more thickly inhabited. I took four of them aboard and sailed westwards. When I had gone eight leagues to the west, beyond a cape which I called Punta del Aguja (Needlepoint), I found some

*These are probably Promontorio de Paria and Cabresse Point, which is not on Trinidad but on Chacachacara.

of the most beautiful country in the world, which was thickly populated. I reached it in the morning at nine o'clock, and, on seeing this green and beautiful country, anchored in order to meet its people.

Some Indians immediately came to the ship in canoes to ask me, on behalf of their king, to land; and when they saw that I was not disturbed, great numbers more came to the ship in their canoes, many of them wearing pieces of gold round their necks, and some with pearls tied round their arms. I was delighted by this last sight, and tried hard to discover where they found these pearls. They told me that they found them there and in the northern part of the country.

I should have liked to have stayed, but the provisions – corn, wine and meat – which I had brought so far and at such great labour for the people here* were beginning to perish. All I wanted, therefore, was to bring them to safety and I did not stop for anything. I tried to get some of these pearls and sent the boats to land. These people were very numerous and of good appearance. They were all of the same colour as the natives I had seen before and very obliging. Our men who landed found them very pleasant and were very well received. They said that as soon as the boats reached shore two chiefs (a father and son) came, with their whole people, and led them to a very large house, with a double-pitched roof. It was not round like a field tent, as the others are. In it there were many seats on which they invited their guests to sit and others on which they sat themselves. They brought in bread and various kinds of fruit and different wines, white and red, made not from grapes but probably in various ways from various fruits.† Some of it must be made from maize,‡ which

*In Hispaniola, where the Admiral was writing.

†Perhaps made from the agave and related to pulque, the common drink of modern Mexico.

‡This is the chicha of present-day Venezuela.

is a cereal with an ear like that of wheat. I have brought some back and there is now much in Castile. The best is apparently considered excellent and most highly prized.

The men all sat together at one end of the house and the women at the other. Both the Indians and the Spaniards were much grieved that they did not understand one another, since they wanted to ask us about our country and we wanted to learn about theirs. When the Christians had been given a meal at the house of the elder chieftain, the younger took the Spaniards to his own house and gave them another. They then got into the boats and returned to the ship. I immediately raised anchor, since I was in great haste to save my provisions, which were beginning to perish and which I had brought at such great labour, and also to cure myself, since my eyes were inflamed with sleeplessness. For although, on my previous voyage to discover the mainland,* I was without sleep for thirty-three days, and blind for all that time, my eyes were not so inflamed as now, nor did they run with blood and give me so much pain.

These Indians, as I have said, are all very well built, tall and with finely proportioned limbs. Their hair is very long and straight, and they wear woven cloths round their heads, which look from the distance like silk and resemble, as I have said, Moorish scarves. They wear another, somewhat longer cloth which they wrap round themselves, men and women alike, instead of breeches. These people are fairer than any others I have seen in the Indies. They all wear some jewel round their necks or on their arms, in the local fashion. Many of them have pieces of gold hanging round their necks. Their canoes are very large and better made and lighter than those of the other Indians, and in the middle of each they have a small shelter, like a cabin, in which, as I saw, the chieftains sat

*This was the second voyage and the mainland was - according to Columbus's theory - Cuba.

with their women. I called this place Los Jardines (The Gardens), for the name suited it.

I inquired very carefully where this gold came from, and they all pointed to a land bordering on theirs, to the west, which was very high and not far away. But they all told me not to go there because the inhabitants ate men. I presumed from this that these inhabitants were Caribs like the other cannibals I had met. But I have thought since that they may have meant not cannibals but wild animals. I also asked them where they got their pearls, and they again pointed to the west, and to the north as well, to show that it was beyond their own country. I did not confirm this on account of my supplies and the bad state of my eyes, and because my ship was too large for such an expedition. As the time was short, it all went in questions, and we returned to the ship at evening, as I have said. I immediately raised anchor and sailed westwards.

I sailed on for the whole of the next day in the belief that this was an island, and that I should be able to come out to the northward. I discovered, however, that there were hardly three fathoms of water, and sent a caravel ahead to discover whether the channel was landlocked or if there was some way out. I sailed for some distance, as far as a very large gulf into which four other moderate-sized gulfs seem to open, one of which was the mouth of a very large river.*

We found a constant depth of five fathoms and plenty of very fresh water, of which I have never drunk the like. I was very disturbed, however, that I could not sail out either to the west or north, since I was surrounded on all sides by land. So I raised anchor and turned back to sail north up the passage I have already described. I was not able to go back to the village where we had been, since the currents bore me away from it. Always at every cape I have found the water fresh and clear; the current carried me very swiftly towards the two

*This is probably the Rio Guarapiche.

straits of which I have already spoken. I surmised from the ribbons of current and the swelling seas which flowed into and out of these straits with a great roaring of water that there was a battle between the fresh water and the salt. The fresh water struggled to prevent the entrance of the salt, and the salt strove to prevent the fresh from flowing out. I also surmised that where these straits are there may once have been land connecting the island of Trinidad with the country of Gracia, as your Highnesses can see from the map which I am sending with this letter. I sailed out northwards through this strait and found that the fresh water all the time predominated. When, on the crest of one of these waves, I was blown out by a strong wind, I noticed that behind the swell the water was fresh and in front of it salt.

Each time I sailed from Spain to the Indies I found that when I reached a point a hundred leagues west of the Azores, the heavens, the stars, the temperature of the air and the waters of the sea abruptly changed. I very carefully verified these observations, and found that, on passing this line from north to south, the compass needle, which had previously pointed north-east, turned a whole quarter of the wind to the north-west. It was as if the seas sloped upwards on this line. I also observed that here they were full of a vegetation like pine branches loaded with fruit similar to that of the mastic. This weed is so dense that on my first voyage I thought we had reached shallows, and that the ships might run aground. We had not seen a single strand of weed before we came to that line. I noticed that when we had passed it the sea was calm and smooth, never becoming rough even in a strong wind. I found also that westwards of this line the temperature of the air was very mild and did not change from winter to summer. Here the Pole Star describes a circle of five degrees in diameter, and when it is at its lowest the Guards* point

*These are the Pointers.

towards the right. It then rises continuously until they point to the left. It then stands at five degrees, and from there it sinks until they are again on the right.

On this present voyage I sailed from Spain to Madeira, from Madeira to the Canaries, and then to the Cape Verde Islands. From here, as I have already said, I followed a southward course in order to cross the Equator. On reaching a point exactly on the parallel which passes through Sierra Leone in Guinea, I found such heat and such strength in the sun's rays that I was afraid I might be burnt. Although it rained and the sky was overcast, I remained in a state of exhaustion until the Lord gave me a fair wind and the desire to sail westwards, encouraged by the thought that, on reaching the line of which I have spoken, I should find a change in temperature. On coming to this line I immediately found very mild temperatures which became even milder as I sailed on. But I found no corresponding change in the stars. At nightfall the Pole Star stood at five degrees, with the Guards pointing straight overhead, and later, at midnight, it had risen to ten degrees, and at daybreak stood at fifteen degrees, with the Guards pointing downwards. I found the sea as smooth as before, but not the same vegetation. I was greatly surprised by this behaviour of the Pole Star and spent many nights making careful observations with the quadrant, but found that the plumb line always fell to the same point. I regard this as a new discovery, and it may be established that here the heavens undergo a great change in a brief space.

I have always read that the world of land and sea is spherical. All authorities and the recorded experiments of Ptolemy and the rest, based on the eclipses of the moon and other observations made from east to west, and on the height of the Pole Star made from north to south, have constantly drawn and confirmed this picture, which they held to be true. Now, as I said, I have found such great irregularities that I have

come to the following conclusions concerning the world: that it is not round as they describe it, but the shape of a pear, which is round everywhere except at the stalk, where it juts out a long way; or that it is like a round ball, on part of which is something like a woman's nipple. This point on which the protuberance stands is the highest and nearest to the sky. It lies below the Equator, and in this ocean, at the farthest point of the east, I mean by the farthest point of the east the place where all land and islands end.

In support of this belief, I urge all the arguments which I have stated concerning the line from north to south a hundred leagues west of the Azores. As we passed it in a westerly direction, the ships mounted gently nearer to the sky, and we enjoyed the mildest weather. On account of this mildness the needle shifted by a quarter north-westwards, and continued to shift farther to the north-west as we sailed on. It is this increase of height that causes the changes in the circle described by the Pole Star and the Guards. The closer I came to the Equator the higher they rose, and the greater the alteration in these stars and their orbits.

Ptolemy and the other geographers believed that the world was spherical and that the other hemisphere was as round as the one in which they lived, its centre lying on the island of Arin, which is below the Equator between the Arabian and Persian gulfs; and that the boundary passes over Cape St Vincent in Portugal to the west, and eastward to China and the *Seres*.* I do not in the least question the roundness of that hemisphere, but I affirm that the other hemisphere resembles the half of a round pear with a raised stalk, as I have said, like a woman's nipple on a round ball. Neither Ptolemy nor any of the other geographers had knowledge of this other hemisphere,

*This was the Romans' name for the Chinese, of whom they knew nothing except that they produced the silk which arrived along the caravan trails.

which was completely unknown, but based their reasoning on the hemisphere in which they lived, which is a round sphere, as I have said.

Now that your Highnesses have commanded navigation, exploration and discovery, the nature of this other hemisphere is clearly revealed. For on this voyage I was twenty degrees north of the Equator in the latitude of Hargin* and the African mainland, where the people are black and the land very parched. I then went to the Cape Verde Islands, whose inhabitants are blacker still, and the farther south I went the greater the extremes. In the latitude in which I was, which is that of Sierra Leone, where the Pole Star stood at five degrees at nightfall, the people are completely black, and when I sailed westwards from there the heats remained excessive. On passing the line of which I have spoken, I found the temperatures growing milder, so that when I came to the island of Trinidad, where the Pole Star also stands at five degrees at nightfall, both there and on the mainland opposite the temperatures were extremely mild. The land and the trees were very green and as lovely as the orchards of Valencia in April, and the inhabitants were lightly built and fairer than most of the other people we had seen in the Indies. Their hair was long and straight and they were quicker, more intelligent and less cowardly. The sun was in Virgo above their heads and ours. All this is attributable to the very mild climate in those regions, and this in its turn to the fact that this land stands highest on the world's surface, being nearest to the sky, as I have said. This confirms my belief that the world has this variation of shape which I have described, and which lies in this hemisphere that contains the Indies and the Ocean Sea, and stretches below the Equator. This argument is greatly supported by the fact that the sun, when Our Lord made it, was at the first point of the east; in other words the first light

*Arguin, an island off the west coast of Africa.

hand nearer
to the sky - does
he understand that
earth is nearer!

THIRD VOYAGE: 1498-1500

was here in the east, where the world stands at its highest. Although Aristotle believed that the Antarctic Pole, or the land beneath it, is the highest part of the world and nearest to the sky, other philosophers contest it, saying that the land beneath the Arctic Pole is the highest. This argument shows that they knew one part of the world to be higher and nearer to the sky than the rest. It did not strike them however that, for the reasons of shape that I have set down, this part might lie below the Equator. And no wonder, since they had no certain information about this other hemisphere, only vague knowledge based on deduction. No one had ever entered it or gone in search of it until now when your Highnesses commanded me to explore and discover these seas and lands.

It was discovered that the distance between these two straits which lie, as I have said, opposite one another on a line from north to south, is twenty-six leagues. There can be no mistake in this because I took the readings on a quadrant. From these two straits westward to the gulf which I have mentioned and I called the Golfo de las Perlas* is another sixty-eight leagues of four miles (as is generally reckoned at sea). The water runs continuously and very fiercely out of these two straits towards the east, which accounts for its battle with the salt water outside. In that southern strait which I named the Boca de la Sierpe, I found that at nightfall the Pole Star stood at about five degrees above the horizon, and in the northern strait, which I called the Boca del Drago, it was at about seven. I found that the Golfo de las Perlas itself is almost 3,900 miles westwards of the first meridian of Ptolemy, which is nearly seventy degrees along the Equator, reckoning each degree as fifty-six and two-thirds miles.

Holy Scripture testifies that Our Lord made the earthly Paradise in which he placed the Tree of Life. From it there

*The extreme western end of the Gulf of Paria. No pearls were actually found here.

COLUMBUS'S NARRATIVE OF THE THIRD VOYAGE

flowed four main rivers: the Ganges in India, the Tigris and the Euphrates in Asia, which cut through a mountain range and form Mesopotamia and flow into Persia, and the Nile, which rises in Ethiopia and flows into the sea at Alexandria.

I do not find and have never found any Greek or Latin writings which definitely state the worldly situation of the earthly Paradise, nor have I seen any world map which establishes its position except by deduction. Some place it at the source of the Nile in Ethiopia. But many people have travelled in these lands and found nothing in the climate or altitude to confirm this theory, or to prove that the waters of the Flood which covered, etc., etc.* . . . reached there. Some heathens tried to show by argument that it was in the Fortunate Islands (which are the Canaries); and St Isidore, Bede, Strabo, the Master of Scholastic History,† St Ambrose and Scotus and all learned theologians agree that the earthly Paradise is in the East, etc.*

I have already told what I have learnt about this hemisphere and its shape, and I believe that, if I pass below the Equator, on reaching these higher regions I shall find a much cooler climate and a greater difference in the stars and waters. Not that I believe it possible to sail to the extreme summit or that it is covered by water, or that it is even possible to go there. For I believe that the earthly Paradise lies here, which no one can enter except by God's leave. I believe that this land which your Highnesses have commanded me to discover is very great, and that there are many other lands in the south of which there have never been reports. I do not hold that the earthly Paradise has the form of a rugged mountain, as it is shown in pictures, but that it lies at the summit of what I have described as the stalk of a pear, and that by gradually approaching it one begins, while still at a great distance, to climb

*These abbreviations are Columbus's own.

†Petrus Comestor, author of *Historia scolastica*.

towards it. As I have said, I do not believe that anyone can ascend to the top. I do believe, however, that, distant though it is, these waters may flow from there to this place which I have reached, and form this lake. All this provides great evidence of the earthly Paradise, because the situation agrees with the beliefs of those holy and wise theologians and all the signs strongly accord with this idea.* For I have never read or heard of such a quantity of fresh water flowing so close to the salt and flowing into it, and the very temperate climate provides a further confirmation. If this river does not flow out of the earthly Paradise, the marvel is still greater. For I do not believe that there is so great and deep a river anywhere in the world.

We left the Boca del Drago, which is the more northerly of the two straits I named, on the following day, which was the August Feast of the Virgin, and I found the sea running so strongly towards the west that from ten in the morning to nine at night we made sixty-five leagues of four miles. The wind was not too violent but very gentle, and this confirms the fact that from there to the south there is a continuous ascent, and to the north, where we were then going, a continuous descent.

I strongly believe that the waters of the sea flow from east to west, following the course of the heavens, and that here, in passing this region, they flow more rapidly and have consequently eaten away a large part of the land, which will account for the great number of islands hereabouts. The islands themselves supply evidence of this, for all those that lie west and east or a little more obliquely north-west and

*Las Casas, in Bk I, Chap. 141, refutes this theory on the grounds of Columbus's lack of grounding in Holy Scripture, ancient history and the teaching of the Holy Fathers and secular writers. He excuses the Admiral's poor choice of language and lack of simile by his humble origins and foreign birth.

south-east are broad, and those lying north and south and north-east and south-west are narrow, for they stand in the way of these prevailing winds. All these islands produce precious things, because of the mild climate which comes to them from heaven and because of their proximity to the highest point of the earth. It is true that at certain places the waters do not appear to flow in this direction, but this is only so in particular places where it is interrupted by land, which apparently causes the current to change course.

Pliny writes that the sea and the land together form a sphere, and states that this ocean sea forms the greatest body of water and lies towards the heavens, that the land is beneath it and supports it, and that the two are related like the kernel of the nut and the containing shell. The Master of Scholastic History commenting on Genesis says that the waters are very small, although on the day of creation they covered the whole land. They were then gaseous like a mist. But when they became solid and compact they occupied a very small space. This is confirmed by Nicholas of Lyra, and Aristotle says that the world is small with very little water, and that it is easy to go from Spain to the Indies. This view is supported by Averroes and by Cardinal Pedro de Aliaco, who confirm his statement and that of Seneca (who is of the same opinion). The Cardinal says that Aristotle was able to learn many of the world's secrets through Alexander the Great, Seneca through the Emperor Nero, and Pliny by way of the Romans, who devoted men and wealth and great effort to the discovery of the world's secrets, and their explanation to the peoples. The Cardinal accords greater authority to them than to Ptolemy and the other Greeks and the Arabs. In confirmation of the belief that the seas are small and cover only a small part of the world, the Cardinal opposes to the belief of Ptolemy and his followers a passage from II Esdras,* in which he says that, of

*II Esdras vi, 42 (Authorized version): 'Upon the third day thou didst

the seven parts of the world, six are revealed, and the seventh covered with water. Such Saints as Augustine and Ambrose (in his *Exameron*) quote II Esdras 28, 29, 'Here my son Jesus shall come and my son Christ shall die',* as proof that Esdras was a prophet, which is the belief also of Zacharias, father of St John, and of the Blessed Simeon.† Francisco de Maironis also cites these authorities. As to the area of dry land, many voyages have shown that it is much greater than is commonly believed, which is not surprising, for the further one travels the more one learns.

I will return to my subject of the land of Gracia, the river and the lake that I discovered. This lake is so large that it could rather be called a sea than a lake, because a lake is a small sheet of water, and when it is large, as in the case of the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, it is called a sea. I would say that if this river does not spring from the earthly Paradise it comes from a vast land lying to the south, of which we have hitherto had no reports. But I am firmly convinced that the earthly Paradise truly lies here, and I rely on the authorities and arguments that I have cited.

May the Lord grant your Highnesses long life and health, and leisure to pursue this most noble enterprise in which I ~~believe a great service is being performed for Our Lord, and~~ by which the territories of Spain are being greatly extended and from which all Christians are receiving great joy and comfort, since in this way the name of Our Lord will be spread abroad.

In every land to which your Highnesses' ships sail, I have a tall cross erected on each cape, and I proclaim your Highnesses' greatness to all the people informing them that you command that the waters should be gathered in the seventh part of the earth: six parts hast thou dried up. . . .'

*This is the Vulgate version of II Esdras vii, 28 and 29.

†Luke ii, 25-35.

are lords of Spain. I tell them as much as I can about our Blessed Faith and the creed of Holy Mother Church, which has members throughout the world. I tell them of the civilization and nobility of all Christians and their faith in the Holy Trinity.

May it please Our Lord to forgive the persons who have libelled and do libel this noble enterprise and who oppose and have opposed its progress without considering what honour and glory it brings to your royal estate throughout the world. They do not know what arguments to urge against it except that much money is expended on it, and so far no ships have been sent back loaded with gold. They do not consider how brief the time has been or the many difficulties that have been encountered, nor that in your Highnesses' household in Castile many earn by their merits more in a single year than is needed to finance this whole undertaking. They do not consider either that no princes of Castile have ever before won lands abroad, that your Highnesses have now another world in which our Holy Faith can be greatly extended and from which such great profits can be derived. Although no great cargoes have arrived, enough samples of gold and other valuables have been sent back to ~~prove that great profit will very shortly accrue from these~~ lands. They do not consider either the great courage of the princes of Portugal, who have prosecuted for so long the enterprise of Guinea and are now prosecuting that of Africa, to which they have devoted half the inhabitants of their kingdom, and that the King of Portugal is as much resolved on this enterprise as ever. May Our Lord provide in this matter, as I have said, and lead them to consider what I have written; which is not a thousandth part of what I might write about the deeds of princes who have devoted themselves to gaining knowledge, and making and maintaining conquests.

I have not said all this because I disbelieve in your

Highnesses' will to pursue this enterprise as long as you live. I trust most firmly in your reply to me on a certain occasion by word of mouth, and have seen no change of mind in your Highnesses. But I am frightened by what I have heard about certain persons, since constant dripping wears a stone. Your Highnesses answered me with that magnanimity for which you are famous throughout the world, telling me to take no account of these fears because it was your will to prosecute and maintain this enterprise, even should it produce nothing but rocks and stones.

You said that you thought nothing of the expense, since you spent a great deal more on matters of less importance and regarded the wealth you had devoted and would devote to it as well invested, for you believed that by it the Christian faith and your royal dominions would be greatly extended. You said furthermore that those who maligned this enterprise were no friends of your royal Majesties, and now just as you are receiving information about these lands which I have newly discovered and in which I fervently believe the earthly Paradise to lie, the *adelantado* Bartolomé Colon* is going with three ships well equipped for the purpose, to carry on the exploration. They will discover as much as they can in those regions. ~~In the meantime I will send your royal Highnesses~~ this letter and a map of the land, and you will decide what is to be done in the matter and send me your commands which, with the help of the Holy Trinity, I will carry out with all diligence in such a way as to give service and pleasure to your Highnesses. Thanks be to God.

*Columbus's brother had just arrived in Santo Domingo. After making him *adelantado* or governor, Columbus planned to send him to continue exploration.

THE LIFE OF THE ADMIRAL BY HIS SON, HERNANDO COLON

CHAPTER 73

The Admiral crosses from the mainland to Hispaniola.

THE Admiral sailed along the coast of Paria, gradually departing from it in a north-westerly direction, in which he was driven by the calm and the prevailing currents. Consequently at midday on Wednesday, 15 August, he left the Cabo de las Conchas and Margarita Island to the west. I do not know whether God inspired him to give the island this name on account of its nearness to that of Cubagua, from which a vast quantity of pearls (or margaritas) have since been brought. For, in a similar way, after he left Jamaica he named certain mountains on Hispaniola the Golden Range, and soon afterwards the greatest quantity of gold ever brought to Spain was discovered in them.

But, to return to his voyage, he sailed past six islands which ~~he named Las Guardias and another three which lay further~~ north which he named Los Testigos. And although he discovered much land to the west of the coast of Paria, the Admiral says that he could not give as detailed an account of them as he wished since his eyes had begun to bleed because of many sleepless nights, and he was therefore compelled to leave the greater part of these matters to be recorded by the pilots and sailors who accompanied him. He adds that on this same night of Thursday, 16 August, the compasses, which had so far not deviated to the north-west, suddenly did so by a point and a half, and some of them by a whole quarter, and that there could be no error about this, since they had all the