

### III. THE COLUMBIAN LEGEND

#### 1.

Between the work of unparalleled audacity initiated by Prince Henry the Navigator in 1418 and carried out to completion by the Portuguese navigators up to the end of the XVth century, and the no less titanic labours of the Spanish Conquistadores in taming and colonizing the New World during the XVIth century there happened one of those strange phenomena that at long intervals succeed in completely turning the heads of the civilized world. A man of uncertain origin, without sea training, uncultured, boastful, greedy and cruel, bursting with pride and conceit, one of the most successful charlatans the world has ever seen, appeared like a meteor in the midst of the epic age of adventure and geographic discovery, picked the laurels of a thousand immortals which lay scattered in the seven seas, and forced himself on the consciousness of mankind as one of the greatest heroes of all time! Such was Columbus, to whom the credulous public has paid homage for four centuries as to a demi-god, the revealer of a New World, the symbol and synthesis of all maritime enterprise of the XVth and XVIth centuries!

There was never greater historical injustice, never more colossal hoax, played upon an unsuspecting world; for Columbus did not discover the New World; did not discover the Antilles; had no knowledge of cosmography; had never been a seaman; could not make use of the mariner's compass, and was unable to steer a boat on the open sea! His only gift was that of a post-charlatan, of a past-master of bluff and deceit, a lavish maker of promises unfulfilled.

The Western World was then in a trance of crushing expectancy,

with mystic forebodings of impending miracles in the field of geographic discovery, miracles that were to deliver it from the stark poverty and squalid misery of centuries, and bring the Golden Age to the peoples of southwestern Europe. After his sham voyage of discovery, in words that only the prophets had been used to utter, in the name of God of whom he proclaimed himself the Ambassador and new Moses, Columbus announced the long desired tidings: the kingdoms of the Great Kahn and of Prester John had been discovered; the Terrestrial Paradise had been located; the people of these regions were so numerous, and pacific, and well inclined, that it would be easy to convert them to Christianity, and then sell them by the million into slavery; mountains of gold, of precious stones, of spices, were to be found just by walking a little distance from anywhere in these blessed lands, and he — Don Christopher Columbus — had found all of them by the grace of the Holy Trinity!

And so the Western World was stirred to its depths as it had never been before, and Columbus became over night the greatest hero of all History! His exploits were immortalized in literature and art, and his memory was enshrined in the hearts of all who had only a superficial acquaintance with the history of the modern world. To doubt, even for a moment, the greatness of this colossal bold adventure and miraculous destiny would be an insult to the universal intelligence of mankind, and would savour of rank blasphemy to the conscience of those who for four centuries have offered incense at the altar of his own making.

And yet other gods have been pulled down from their pedestals, other heroes of ancient lore have been smashed to pieces and reduced to dust, when their oracles were found to be the voice of greed

and deceit and unquenchable thirst for power. Why should Columbus continue to hold the devotion of the multitudes when his glory and fame rest on a huge hoax which he himself delineated, and his son Fernando and his friend Las Casas succeeded in imposing upon an unsuspecting and credulous public? The only explanation is our intellectual laziness. We are hero-worshippers and would have to fashion new heroes if this one were discarded. Let well enough alone, is the motto of the four-century-old dupes.

### 2.

Few people realize, even today, the relation of cause and effect existing between the discovery and colonization of the New World, and the scientific work, the heroic tenacity, the patience and endurance of the Portuguese navigators of the XVth century, inaugurated by Prince Henry the Navigator, the soul and inspirer of all modern maritime and geographic enterprise.

The finding of the American continent is generally thought of as the crowning event of the age of navigation and discovery, the chief landmark in the history of maritime enterprise. It appears to the indiscriminating beholder as an event of such colossal magnitude that it cannot be related to any other of its kind, while in reality it is only an episode in the much vaster drama that had been, and was still being, enacted in the secluded laboratory of the rock of Sagres. "The whole onward and outward movement of the great exploring age," says Professor Beazley, "was set in motion by one man (Prince Henry). It might have come to pass without him, but the fact is simply that, as a matter of history,

through him it did result." (1)

There were two chief personalities concerned with the great drama that occupied all the minds of the Western World in the XVth and XVIth centuries; one by right, the other by stealth. The former was Prince Henry, the latter was Columbus.

Prince Henry devised its plot, constructed and related its parts, chose and trained the characters that were to play them, and put it on the stage without solat, but with results so brilliant and impressive that the audience, conscious of the majesty and greatness of its impending climax, was getting ready to pay homage, with enthusiastic ovation and well merited applause, to the creator of this unequalled masterpiece of science and art.

Then there was a brief intermission designed to give breath to actors and spectators before the presentation of the last act.

At this psychological moment one of the stage-hands, who had been copying in secret some of the pointers he had seen used in the rehearsal of the great drama, knowing the gullibility of the masses and what acclaim they were storing up for any one who should impersonate the hero in the last act, stole from behind the curtains and presented to the public a clumsy imitation of the heroic climax that everybody was so impatiently waiting for. And the public was not the wiser; and Columbus, the stage-hand, was carried on the shoulders of a public who took the acrobatics of a mountebank for the genius of a Garrick or a Sarah Bernhardt; the phantasmagories of a visionary, for a new world full of aspects of new realities and of definite proofs of a richer life.

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(1) Beasley, loc. cit., p. 329.

Columbus was not a genius, though he might possibly have become a readable poet if he had associated with the Muses instead of associating with mariners. He had neither an original nor an important contribution to offer to the world. He was only a plagiarist without finesse, like some tricky and unscrupulous professor who steals an unpublished manuscript from a colleague, garbs it in his own peculiar style, and publishes it as an original contribution to the sum total of human knowledge.

Two motives impelled him to action: one was preferment and gain, the other was the desire to become the idol of the crowd, of the vulgar, of the indiscriminating public. He felt instinctively that to become a fit object of hero-worship he had to do things spectacular, with a great splurge, regardless of their intrinsic merit. He had, above all, to tell everybody about it, to dramatize it, and use vague terms, cabalistic formulas, words of deep mystery, ambiguous statements, reiterated falsehoods. Even so, he would scarcely ever have attained his objective if kind Fate had not gratuitously thrown at his feet the greatest prize ever offered to the most famous heroes, and if bungling History had not adjudicated this prize to him without any right or reason. For it was not he who discovered America, nor did he ever actually know of its existence. He even resented, almost as an insult, to be told that once by a mere chance, he touched its shores. No, that was pure slender, he thought! What he really had discovered, he reiterated again and again, was Japan, Tartary, the empire of the Great Khan, Cochin-China, India, Persia, Aurea Chersonesus, the Ganges river, the Terrestrial Paradise; all in one and all at the same time, for his favorite authors said

so, and he had more faith in them than in his own eyes or in the scientific findings of the great discoverers, his contemporaries.

### 3.

Columbus is a man of mystery much as the sinister figure of Sir Basil Zaharoff. Even his real name, his real ancestry, his birthplace, are mute questions with him, and, in the words of Professor Charles M. Andrews, "no reconstruction of the events of his life during the years before his first voyage is possible, for the essential facts are few and all of them in dispute." (2) He, who wrote so much of himself on all occasions, is very careful not to commit himself on such dangerous topics. It was great wisdom on his part, for he intended to graft his person on some noble and stately family tree of his own invention. It is a pity that he did not live in our day, for some unknown member of the first cargo of the Mayflower, or William the Conqueror himself, would be glad to supply the demands of the future Admiral of the Ocean. As it is, he traces his ancestry to Scullen, the nickname of the French Admiral William de Gasenove. However, this does not satisfy his vanity. So he proceeds to dig deeper down to the very roots of the noble tree and is rewarded by the gratifying discovery of the Marquis of Montferrat, and still further down he meets the Roman General Colonius, the conqueror of Mithridates, the King of Pontus. And thus Colonius becomes the oldest of his ancestors as far as he cared to go.

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(2) Andrews, loc. cit., footnote on p. 9.



The name Colón, which later on he changed to Columbo and finally to Colomo, was in his time well known in Galicia and Aragón, but was not to be found in Genoa. Some have maintained with brilliant arguments, avers M. André in his magistral book Columbus, that our hero was born in Pontevedra, Spain, while others contend that his parents were from Galicia but had emigrated to Liguria. "There is perhaps equal reason," he says, "for believing him born in Aragón, the son of converted Jews." (3) "His son Fernando," he continues, "enumerates the localities that dispute the honor of his father's birthplace, but he gives preference to none and concludes by saying that he believes his father wishes his birthplace to remain unknown." (4) For his part Columbus always calls himself a Ligurian but does not say in what city he was born. His reticence regarding his own age is just as great, for not even his son seems to know anything about it.

"The dominant note of Columbus' character," says Peterson, "is shown to be a dissimulation magnified to an obsession that distrusts and seeks to deceive his best friends, and even his own son, coupled with an invincible and callous cruelty that in the end turned all the world against him, leaving him at last a defeated, friendless outcast." (5)

Another significant fact in this whole realm of highly suspicious secrecy is that after living the first twenty-two years of his life in Italy, and the next fifteen in Portugal, it is not known that he ever made use of either Italian or Portuguese. On

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(3) André, *loc. cit.*, p. 37.

(4) *Id.*, *id.*, p. 36.

(5) Peterson, *Sat. Rev. of Lit.*, April 21, 1928, vol. 4, p. 782.

the other hand he writes Spanish from the first day of his arrival in Spain, and continues to use the same idiom the rest of his life, even when he writes to Italians.

What could be the object of all this secrecy? For one thing he had to build up a legend about his person that should fit into the frame of the high rank to which he aspired. He despised the poor and hard working weaver of Genoa, so he just forgot all about him. He was more sure of *Colonius*, the Roman general, especially as it would be difficult for any one to disprove his contention, once that his age, parentage, and place of birth were quite unknown. Then he had to establish certain precedents and qualifications, which would be open to investigation should he give definite information regarding his early life. For instance, he claimed that he began his career on the sea when he was only fourteen years of age, and that he had never ceased to exercise this favorite profession ever since. At twenty-two, when, according to later evidence, he was still employed in his father's house as a weaver, he presents himself to us as the commander of one of King René's war-galleys. At thirty, he goes on boasting, he had sailed every sea known to navigators, had conversed and corresponded with learned men of every land on maritime subjects, was an expert in all the sciences pertaining to navigation, could draw maps with great accuracy and was conversant with all the literature of his time, especially cosmography, astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, history and philosophy.

Are these claims the product of self-deception, pure and simple, or a case of deliberate mendacity? Only later on, towards the end of his career, the first supposition would be tenable. The



ultra-mistic state of mind that made him feel the Holy Trinity strike a partnership with him for the discovery of mountains of gold and the exploitation of millions of slaves, makes it clear that he had become by then a raving maniac; but for the time being the preposterous claims he makes in regard to his ancestry and early exploits, and especially of his quasi-universal knowledge, so contrary to the plain facts that historical research has been able to bring to the light of day, cannot be characterized as anything else than deliberate mendacity.

This legend, which started as a small seed in the distorted notions of a mind as full of pride, conceit, and a morbidly exaggerated mysticism, as it was empty of ideas and the results of human experience, grew by leaps and bounds as he advanced in age, until he himself believed, according to André, to be the "Ambassador of God, and interpreted the Bible as prophetic justification of his dreams and calculations, and even turned Christ himself into an accomplice in his historical, geographical and religious errors." (6)

#### 4.

After he arrived in Portugal, at about the age of twenty-two, and for fifteen years afterwards, he was often employed in Portuguese merchant ships as a clerk or as a simple sailor. In these capacities he made several voyages to different points of northwest Africa, to the newly discovered islands, and probably to England and some parts of the North Sea. In 1479 our hero visited Porto Santo and established his residence there for some time.

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(6) André, p. 34.

Here, says Professor Andrews, he "searched the papers of his father-in-law, Bartholomew Perestrello, who had received the island by charter from Prince Henry, thus familiarising himself with what knowledge the Portuguese had obtained up to that time." (7)

As a member of the Perestrello family and brother-in-law of Pedro Correa, then governor of Porto Santo, Columbus had every opportunity to inform himself thoroughly on what at that time was everybody's business—the science of navigation, discovery, exploration and colonisation of new lands and islands, which seemed to rise from the turbulent waters of the Sea of Darkness as if at the touch of a magic wand. It must have been here, too, that he received the rudiments of the general knowledge of his time, for, in the words of Professor Andrews, he "spent his young manhood as a wool carder and trader...He can have had no education during these early years and was probably illiterate when he left Genoa for Portugal in 1478." (8)

Still, in spite of the fact that Columbus had had no early training of any sort, that he lacked experience in seafaring, that his studies, if any, could have been only very rudimentary, the Columbian Legend wants us to believe that he was the only man of his time who knew that the earth was round and that it was possible to reach India by sailing westward. Even the Portuguese navigators, those who had unveiled the mysteries of the Sea of Darkness, are supposed by the Legend to have been incredulous and dumbfounded at the bold conception of the daring Genoese! That Columbus may have known that the earth is round is probable because whatever knowledge

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(7) Andrews, p. 11.

(8) Id., id., p. 9.

he had it was all acquired from the disciples and co-workers of prince Henry the Navigator, and because at that time both "in Spain and Portugal," writes M. André, "almost everyone believed the earth to be round." (9) And this same authority adduces the testimony of the contemporary savant Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini who, under the name of Pope Pius II, wrote: "Mundi formam omnes fere consentiunt rotundam esse," which means the same thing.(10)

One important difference there was, however, between the ideas of Columbus on this subject and those of his contemporaries. Columbus, whose ideas were of a mystico-fabulous origin, was positively and unshakably sure that the distance between Portugal and the Indies was only about one third as great by the west as by the East, while his betters knew from scientific reasoning (a thing rather alien to Columbus' mental equipment) that Portugal was much nearer to India by the East than by the West. But Columbus, who considered himself the Ambassador of God, could not retreat one iota from his divinely revealed idea, could not be convinced, could not be taught.

This fixed idea of Columbus, based on no scientific proof of any kind, but being the mere offspring of excessive mysticism, childish credulity, bull-dogged stubbornness and consummate pride, was the chief reason why the King of Portugal rejected his plans for a voyage of discovery by the West. "King John," says A. de Hovesi, "gave the project of Columbus for examination into the hands of three of his advisers...These gentlemen—the same who

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(9) André, p. 10.

(10) Id., *ibid.*

were later to give to Vasco da Gama the chart of courses by which he eventually reached the Indies—did not share Columbus' convictions as to the proximity of Portugal to the Asiatic coast" (11) (by the West route).

Other reasons for refusing Columbus the means to perform his voyage were the following: a sure and certain route to India had already been found; the finding of this route was not an end in itself but a means to attain a definite goal which was India, or rather, its commerce and trade; the east route to India had the advantage of passing through the whole Portuguese domain over seas, while the west route would only touch one point of it; and, finally, at that very moment the nation was engaged in the preparation of a fleet, and all its necessary equipment, to reach by the East, that same India whose existence and exact position in relation to the eastern route became perfectly known the moment the Cape of Good Hope was rounded by Bartholomew Diaz.

As a matter of fact no famous man in the history of the world could better be dispensed with entirely than Columbus. "That the Portuguese should have lighted on Brazil in their second expedition sent out to the East Indies as a consequence of natural conditions," says Bourne, "is one of the most singular incidents in history, for it shows with almost complete certainty that if Christopher Columbus had never lived, the New World would have been discovered within a few years of the time of its actual discovery, as an inevitable sequel of the activities of Prince Henry the Navigator in promoting geographical exploration.

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(11) de Hevesi, loc. cit., p. 77.

"This fact, of course, does not detract from the genius and courage of Columbus or diminish the immense impetus which he gave to Spanish exploration and colonization; yet it is true, and as strange as true, that one of the most universally celebrated men of all history could have been spared without affecting materially the occurrence of the great event inseparably associated with his career. The loss would have been spiritual rather than material. The western hemisphere would have been found and reported in the natural colors of its virgin life, not clothed in the raiment of the gorgeous East."<sup>(12)</sup>

## 8.

The whole fame of Columbus rests, then, in the idea he is supposed to have had of reaching the East by the West. This he finally succeeded in doing in spite of all obstacles, thus discovering, by accident, first the Antilles and eventually, though indirectly, continental America, that is, the New World. How much truth and how much fiction is there in all these claims? And first, how did he ever think of making a voyage to the East by the West? Was India the real objective of his voyage, or was there anything else which he had hidden up his sleeve?

He had never been a seaman in the real sense of the term. The claim of having commanded King René's war-galleys, at twenty-two years of age, rests only on his own word, which was scarcely worth the paper on which it was written. If he were such a capable captain why didn't he ever have the command of a Portuguese caravel,

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(12) Bourne, loc. cit., p. 74.



having such influential protectors among the Portuguese navigators, who never made any distinction, in this respect, between nationals and foreigners? His position in the Portuguese merchant marine was, however, that of a clerk or simple sailor. As for his inability to steer a boat in the open sea, away from the sight of land, and his lack of acquaintance with the use of the mariner's compass, will be made clear in the sequel.

Why, then, on a certain day after a brief sojourn on the island of Porto Santo, where he had been living a peaceful and monotonous life among relatives, did he hurry to Portugal, ask for an audience with the king and present a simple ready-made plan of discovery of the Indies by the way of the west? Doesn't the miraculous scheme remind one of the birth of Minerva, in all her beauty and glory, out of the brain of Jupiter? It seems as if he had previous knowledge of what he was going to discover for he designated the parallel of the Canary islands as the route to be followed, and the distance of seven hundred to seven hundred and fifty leagues as that to be traveled before reaching his goal. In other words he proposed to go in search of something that had already been found and of which he had positive information. This is why he was adamant in his pretensions of being made an Admiral of the Ocean and the recipient of privileges never given to any other captain of the sea, before having even started on his voyage of discovery. No navigator in his senses would ever think of asking for privileges and distinctions to be enjoyed in his own right before making a discovery that might never materialize.

It is true, however, that Columbus knew something which was not known by most of his contemporaries. Here is his secret.



A shipwrecked pilot named Alonso Sánchez was found by Columbus on the seashore in such a desperate condition, through hunger and exposure, that in a few days he died. Columbus had sheltered him and received from him the commission of going to Father Antonio de Marchena of la Rábida and tell him that Antillia really existed; that he, Alonso Sánchez, had just returned from there, but that his ship and crew had been destroyed in a fierce storm, and that he himself was on point of death. With this intelligence the unfortunate pilot gave Columbus what he thought to be the nearest exact position of the island, that is, seven hundred to seven hundred fifty leagues west, and in the same parallel, of the Canary Islands. (13)

In this revelation lies the miracle that transformed Columbus from a merchant ship's clerk into an Admiral of the Ocean, for such he decided to be by taking advantage of Alonso Sánchez' confession. Father Marchena, who had been instrumental in the expedition of Alonso Sánchez, was not long in extracting from Columbus the exact details of the pilot's revelation. He listened to the wily Genoese, to his boasts of royal ancestry, and of long experience on matters pertaining to the sea, as well as to his vague references to the sciences related to navigation, and, believing that he might be as able, as he was willing, to duplicate the feat of Alonso Sánchez, thus bringing to Castilla a prize which Portugal would otherwise add to the others she already possessed, he became an ardent and enthusiastic champion of Columbus' scheme.

The existence of Antillia was nothing new in the annals of

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(13) see André, p. 26.

maritime discovery. The merit of Alonso Sánchez' perilous voyage, which ended so disastrously for him, but so luckily for the unscrupulous and ungallant Ligurian, consisted in that its approximate position and distance were ascertained, and that its secret was not lost to posterity. Of the knowledge of its existence prior to Alonso Sánchez' voyage, A. de Hevesi says: "Thus, in 1478, by the gift of King Alfonso of Portugal, one Fernão Telles, before his vessel left harbor, found himself regent of all lands which he might discover in the ocean of the Atlantic—including the Seven Cities,' one of the names by which Antillia was known. And again "in 1486 King John II invested Fernão d'Ulmo, by letters-patent, with the large island, islands or continent lying beyond our shores and known as the island of the Seven Cities.

"In 1474," continues Hevesi, "the Canon Fernão Martin wrote to him (Toscanelli) on behalf of the King of Portugal, to ask his opinion on the possibility of reaching the Indies from the West. Toscanelli hastened to reply to the royal query, and enclosed, with his letter dated June 25, 1474, a nautical chart." (14)

Now, at that time books of any kind were very scarce, and the demand for those on such a specialty as cosmography was very great. Such books were freely circulated among those who pursued the science of navigation. Perestrello, who was related to the canon Martin, and one of the old followers of Prince Henry the Navigator, was among the first to have access to the correspondence of Toscanelli, one of the most eminent savants and cosmographers of his time. As a member of Perestrello's family, Columbus was

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(14) de Hevesi, p. 44.

certain to have seen this letter and chart or heard of their contents.

It is evident, therefore, that there was nothing original in the project of Columbus, nothing that marked him as a genius, or as even a second rate expert in cosmography and the art of navigation. The rotundity of the earth was a thing of general knowledge. The existence of Antillia, in about the same position where it is found today, results from the letters-patent of the Portuguese kings. Its approximate position was revealed to him by Alonso Sánchez. The feasibility of reaching the Indies by the West was believed by all well informed navigators when Columbus was still a weaver's apprentice in the house of his father. The existence of the American continent itself was thought of as a possibility by the Portuguese monarchs, as is evident from the letters-patent to Fernão d'Ulmo, and consequently by the Portuguese navigators, before Columbus made his first voyage. It was he who not only did not believe in its existence, or possibility, but persistently and stubbornly denied it afterwards against the positive knowledge of navigators and chartographers of his day. He died with the conviction that the Antilles were contiguous with Asia, and that among them one would sometimes come upon Japan, sometimes upon Tartary, or the empire of the Great Kahn, or India, or Persia, or even the Terrestrial Paradise. Meanwhile his contemporaries believed that between the Antilles and Asia there was an enormous expanse of water. It was Columbus' misfortune to confuse the whole issue and thus retard for many years the conquest and colonization of the American continent. (15)

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(15) André, p. 139, 216, and ff.

## 6.

The scorn with which his strange and, even for that time, antiquated notions of cosmography were received by the Portuguese navigators, and his conversations with Father Antonio de Marchena—himself an accomplished cosmographer—soon convinced him that, if he was to succeed at all in his ambitious schemes, it was imperative for him to obtain at least a prefatory knowledge of the subject he would soon be called to discuss with men eminent in all branches of maritime lore.

Unfortunately he had little inclination for serious and systematic thinking, and his lack of training and want of proper method in the pursuance of any program of studies, were obstacles almost insuperable in the way of self-education in the right direction, of which he was in direst need. But he was tenacious and persistent, and his unenlightened mysticism soon took hold of him and convinced him that he was a man of destiny, the Ambassador of God. So, knowing that he would have to unfold some kind of plan before those from whom he expected aid, he began to devour, rather than study, any books he could lay hands on, assimilating, together with some exact scientific principles, the most absurd and fantastic fairy-tales. He was especially charmed by Mandeville's description of the Terrestrial Paradise, which he was to rediscover in the new lands he should visit.

A hodge-podge of contradictory facts and fancies, which served to confuse his mind more and more, was practically all he got from this desultory reading, and he realized at last that he needed

some consistent theory of the world and of the lands he expected to visit, if he was to convince the advisers of the Spanish kings, and not to appear too ridiculous in the eyes of his censors. He thought that if he could master two or three authoritative books on his favorite subject he would have a better chance of success. Lacking a judicious sense of proportion and critical acumen he chose as the mentors of his famished intellect the Travels of Marco Polo, the Marvellous Adventures of Mandeville and the Imago Mundi of Pierre d'Ailly. Mandeville's book, which was for him a second Bible, and of which he assimilated all that was fabulous and fantastic, served him to great advantage, he thought, in his first voyage. His most raving dreams, however, which were to reach heights hitherto undreamed of, were inspired by D'Ailly's Imago Mundi, which he obtained later and whose margins he literally covered with notes dictated by his own feverish fantasy.

For a man like Columbus, who aspired at becoming a scholar in half a dozen sleepless nights, the Imago Mundi was unequalled. It is a kind of encyclopedia of quotations on cosmography, all taken from the church Fathers and ancient writers.

"Columbus," says André, "carefully made extracts from them, catalogued, and used them in a manner that seemed to indicate he had read the works of every author cited, while in truth he had never opened one of their books. And to the names of writers he added in like manner those of travelers, friends, and other historical personages with whom the same works gave him a slight acquaintance. All these names are found in his letters, his reports, and in the accounts of his third and fourth voyages. In one narrative he inserted an entire page of d'Ailly's work. On one page,



aside from the cardinal's name, are found those of Nicolas de Lyra, Aristotle, Averroës, Seneca, Alexander the Great, Nero, Pliny, Ptolemy, Ezra, St. Augustine and St. Ambrose. And scattered through his writings are also found the following: Strabo, Onseritus, Nearchus, Marin de Tyr, Alfragan, Jules Capitolinus, Solinus, Avicenna, the Venerable Bede, Eratosthenes, Flavins Josephus, St. Isidorus, St. Thomas and a goodly number of others all taken from the works of Pius II and Pierre d'Ailly, not counting those taken from the Bible." (16)

With the assemblage of quotations of every ancient writer and an imposing array of famous names, as if purposely put together to give his charlatanism the appearance of erudition, he was able to make an impression on certain classes of people, especially as he had eloquence and unbridled imagination, and was at heart a poet and a dreamer. The tragic part of it all is that he read in his favorite triad of authors, and took upon himself the task of defending, the most preposterous, antiquated, unseemly, and contradictory views of all those authors cited respecting the shape, size, and composition of the world, even in view of the actual maps and facts that lay before his own eyes and were known all over Europe; facts that gave the lie to his theories and his authors. His belief, because uncritical, was as firm and unshakable as a rock, though its base was no stronger than the flights of imagination of his favorite authors. On such a foundation he formulated the following articles of faith which he maintained as long as he lived: The world is very small (about half of its actual size) and is six parts earth and one part water. The sea between Spain and India,

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(16) André, p. 62.



by the West, is narrow, and contains many undiscovered islands which can be reached in a few days sailing. These islands are adjacent to Asia. In fact he places them all the way from Japan to Persia.

While his contemporaries were disproving, both in the East and West, the falsity of these fanciful theories deduced by him from the fables of the Marvellous Adventures and of the Imago Mundi, and were revealing the whole east coast of continental America both through exploration and by means of maps, spread all over Europe, Columbus adhered tenaciously to his pet delusions and did all in his power to compel Nature to conform with his preconceived ideas. Failing to stumble over the empire of the Great Kahn in his uphazard cruises about the Antilles, he decided to solve this knotty problem by placing Cuba in the Asiatic mainland. And lest any man, in collusion with Nature, ever dare to challenge his authority in the matter of making the world anew to conform to his wishes and to his own interpretation of the fables he had adopted as articles of faith, he "sent," writes M. André, "the Crown notary on board all three of the caravels to obtain from each of the sailors and pilots a deposition to that effect..." (17) An official document containing their declarations was drawn up; in it was specified that "whoever, after having so sworn, claimed the contrary (that is, that Cuba is an island) would have his tongue cut out..." (18)

His delusions, his greed, his heartlessness, and mendacity, are manifest in many of his letters and other documents dating

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(17) André, p. 816.

(18) Id., p. 217.

from after his first voyage. He drags God into his partnership and makes him accomplice of his geographical errors and in his thirst for gold, even were the latter to be slaked by a grand scale slave trade. "Of the islands I have discovered," he says, "only God and I know the location. I shall brave all dangers to discover other secrets hidden deep in the breast of the world, to find the islands...I know exist...rich in gold, silver, precious stones." (19) "...The tidings of the gold which I said I would give are that, on Christmas day, being greatly afflicted and tormented by the wicked Spaniards and the Indians...our Lord comforted me miraculously, saying to me: 'Take courage, be not dismayed nor fear, I will provide for all; the seven years, the term of the gold, are not yet passed; and in this, as in the rest, I will redress thee.'" (20) At another time Christ appears to him and 'with a palpable hand' shows him the route to the Indies, that is to say, to China, India, Japan, the empire of the Great Kahn. In other words Christ returns in person to tell our hero that America does not exist, that Cuba is the mainland of Asia. With this assurance and in order to put an end to his labors he went once from Hispaniola to Cuba in search of The Emperor of China, whose residence he knew to be there. In a letter to Doña Juana de la Torre, he says: "On one occasion, not long since, when I was extremely depressed, He raised me with His divine arm, saying: 'O man of little faith, arise, it is I, be not afraid!...' God made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth, of which he spoke in the Apocalypse by St. John, after having spoken of it by the mouth of Isaiah; and He showed me the

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(19) André, p. 30.

(20) Id., p. 262.

spot where to find it." (21)

As Columbus became more and more absorbed in the absurdities of the Marvellous Adventures and of the Imago Mundi, his dreams are all of China, of Aurea Chersonesus, Ceylon and gold. Referring to Mount Sofora, where Solomon sent his ships for gold, he says to the Kings: It is "the richest mountain of gold in the universe...today the property of your Highnesses. It is in the island of Hispaniola." (22) On the occasion of finding of a place called Cibao, of a lump of gold weighing twenty ounces his chronicler says: "The Admiral believed that he had rediscovered ...the ancient treasures which, it is stated in the Old Testament, King Solomon of Jerusalem had found in the Persian Gulf." (23) And when asked why he had brought to Spain only a handful of the coveted and all pervading metal, he answered among other things: "In the district of Cibao alone there is so much gold that one does not dare to estimate it. One of my men himself found it on more than fifty rivers. In the whole island it can be found on top of the earth anywhere one searches...From the next voyage that I make, my vessels will bring back such an immense quantity of gold that it will cause the greatest admiration. Everything will be done and seen in its time, with the aid of the Holy Trinity." (24) Elsewhere he states: "They (the natives) say that when one of the lords of the country of Veragua dies, they bury all the gold he

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(21) André, p. 261.

(22) Id., p. 235.

(23) Id., p. 226.

(24) Id., p. 227.

possessed with his body. There were brought to Solomon at one journey 666 quintals of gold (1 quint.= about 200 lbs.), besides what the merchants and sailors brought, and that which was paid in Arabia ... This is related by Josephus in his chronicle De Antiquitatibus; mention is also made of it in the Chronicles and in the Book of Kings...etc." (25)

On his fourth voyage he directed his course to Haiti though he was expressly forbidden to do so. After some days he sailed aimlessly across the whole gulf of Mexico and happened to touch the coast of Honduras. Of this visit he writes: "As I found everything true that had been told me in the different places which I had visited, I felt satisfied it would be the same with respect to Ciguare, which, according to their account is nine days journey across the country westwards; they tell me there is a great quantity of gold there... They also say that the sea surrounds Ciguare and that at ten days journey from thence is the river Ganges." (26) So he concludes that he is exactly nineteen days journey away from the Ganges river. Then he adds: "What I learned from the mouth of these people I already knew in detail from Books." (27), meaning, of course, those of Mandeville, Pierre d'Ailly, etc.

That he thought he owed such triumphs to a divine dispensation is clear from what he says later on: "I undertook another voyage to the new heavens and new earth which had been hitherto concealed; and if these are not appreciated in Spain, like the other parts of

(25) André, p. 229 ff.

(26) Id., p. 269.

(27) Id., *ibid.*

the Indies, it is not all wonderful, since it is to my labors that they are indebted for them. The Holy Spirit encompassed St. Peter and the rest of the twelve, who all had conflicts here below; they wrought many works, they obtained the victory." (28)

The extraordinary turbulence of the waters of the Orinoco river, dashing like a charge of cavalry far into the ocean, was an object of great admiration to Columbus. A river that behaved like that could not be but one of the four rivers that flowed from the Terrestrial Paradise. In the Marvellous Adventures of Mandeville he had learned that the world was shaped like a pear and that on the place of the stem is the Terrestrial Paradise. So he cast a glance at that part of the world around him and was satisfied that it corresponded exactly to the specifications given by Mandeville and that the waters of the Orinoco were coming straight from the Terrestrial Paradise. This same Mandeville had said, however, that the Terrestrial Paradise "had but one entry that is closed with fire, burning; so that no man that is mortal dare enter." (29) Columbus, apparently still considering himself an ordinary mortal, did not even try to look at the Paradise from afar as Moses had done with respect to the Holy Land.

## 7.

Whether such fantastic and absurd accounts are simply the product of a deranged mind, or real attempts at deceiving the public, in the guileless conviction that everybody was as ignorant as his absurd and childish notions prove him to have been, it is

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(28) André, p. 248

(29) Id., p. 248



impossible to say. The fact is that in many instances he shows the greatest disregard for truth, and in his writings one can find dozens of instances of palpable falsehood. Aren't some of the incidents given by him of his early life lacking in straightforwardness and in the simplest elements of truth? His three caravels are alternately praised, in his diary and letters, as large, strong, seaworthy, well-built, with all the qualities of first class ships, and condemned for the opposite qualities—old, worm-eaten, of bad workmanship, real sea-traps—; all depending on the thesis he wishes to prove at the moment.

Before arriving at the court on his first return voyage he writes to the Kings: "Their Majesties may rest assured that I will give them as much gold as they may have need of, and with but little aid on their part: also spices, cotton and musk... and I can furnish aloe-wood and as many heathen slaves as their Majesties may choose to command." (30) In another letter he relates how he had had no opportunity to stop in any city except in la Navidad of which he took possession and left in order and safely protected. Of this city, which was not native nor large, but a simple enclosure made up of the wreckage of the Santa Maria, and where he left a few Spaniards so badly protected that they were all massacred before his return to the Antilles, he goes on to say: "It was the most convenient and best situated for working the gold mines and for the commerce with the terra-firma, whether that land proves to be on this side, or on that where are the states of the Great Khan." (31)

(30) André, p. 184 ff.

(31) Id., p. 186.



When the magnetic variation was first observed Columbus says that the seamen were terrified. Of his own terrors he says nothing. Maybe he had none, for he discovered, he says, that the magnetic variation was due to the fact that the star moved from its place while the needles remained stationary.

On his first voyage Columbus says that he decided to count less than the true number of leagues they made each day, so that the crew might not be frightened if the voyage should prove longer than he had told them it was. "This," comments André, "would...have been unlikely in Columbus' case, as he was untrained technically in seafaring matters and must have himself been aware of his lack of skill. Besides, it would have been quite impossible to deceive his officers in that matter." (32) The captains of the Pinta and the Niña, expert seamen, and not too fond of their upstart Admiral, would they have joined him in this deception for which they would have to hold conferences almost every day with the Admiral while sailing apart from each other?

### 8.

But all this was part of his campaign of propaganda which, with the help of his son Fernando, his friend las Casas, and one or other of his future admirers, was to build up the great and amazing Columbian Legend. It was a question of creating a hero out of thin air. The thing has been attempted often. In this case it succeeded as it has once in a while succeeded in the history of the world. To enhance the hero's stature there must be villains in the plot, and these began to appear and take form in the

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(32) André, p. 109.

imaginative and spiteful head of Columbus himself, and their number and qualities were multiplied and developed later on by his apostles and devotees. "To the care," says M. André, "that Columbus himself took to lead his contemporaries astray from the truth were added the myths and open lies invented by others during three centuries and a half." (33)

Of his sudden and secret departure from Portugal Las Casas affirms that it was due to fear that the King of Portugal might detain him in order to steal his plan for the discovery of India by the west. How could the King of Portugal wish to steal from Columbus a plan which was well known by any seaman of his time, but was entirely impractical on account of the immeasurably greater distance to India by the West than by the East, a difference which was also well known by all except the Admiral? A safe-conduct asked for by Columbus and granted him by the Portuguese monarch on March 20, 1492, for his return to Portugal, shows conclusively, by its wording, that its recipient was sought by the officers of justice for some crime not specified in that document. It may be remarked here that no safe-conducts were necessary in Columbus' time except in case of crime or other misdemeanor. (34)

The examination of Columbus' project in the court of Spain becomes again, in the hands of the promoters of his Legend, a fertile field in the idolization of their hero and consequently in the castigation of the indispensable villain or villains of this drama. What humiliations, persecutions, and anguish of spirit, hadn't this intellectual eagle to suffer at the hands of the

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(33) André, p. 35.

(34) Id., p. 39.

dwarfish owls of the Mediaeval Night! His struggles with the ignorance and fanaticism of monks and courtiers were tremendous and titanic! The fact is that the commission composed of Hernando de Talavera and the most competent savants of the realm, appointed by the Queen to examine Columbus' project, did not go very far in its study and made no decision concerning the whole subject for the time being, owing to the fact that the court moved to Salamanca taking Columbus along as a guest of honor.

During that winter (1486-7), the chroniclers tell us, took place the famous conference in which Columbus defended his case, sometimes with hot and violent arguments, against the monks and the others of the Queen's commission. In vain did the Ligurian weaver try to convince these mathematicians, cosmographers and astronomers, professors of the famous University of Salamanca, that the world was round and that it was possible to sail a ship westward and return to the same place by the East. It was impossible to convince these ignorant and fanatic professors, who contended that the world was flat, that even if it were round it would be impossible to reach the regions covered by the Mare Tenebrosum, or that even in case a ship should reach those regions it would certainly never return to tell the tale. Failing to convince the pseudo-savants with scientific arguments, the future Ambassador of God tried the texts of the Bible. "The ardour of his apostle-ship," says Roselly de Lagues, "appeared then to transfigure him in the eyes of his audience. The majesty of his person, the illumination of his countenance, and the keen sonorosity of his voice, gave his language a persuasion that was irresistible to every unprejudiced mind... And he turned against his adversaries, magnificently developing to them those same texts

of Scripture in which they thought they could show him his condemnation." (35)

Isn't it strange that the cosmographers, astronomers and mathematicians, not to mention the theologians, of one of the most renowned universities of Europe at that time should ignore a thing which, according to the savant Pope Pius II, practically everybody in the streets took for granted? Columbus, who was none of these things, and was not even a navigator, knew more than all of them and, through divine inspiration, one must suppose, was able to confound all of them and reduce them to shameful silence! And how did he—the inventor of so many supernatural phenomena—, and all his chroniclers, for the space of 127 years, fail to mention the greatest and the most far reaching debate of his time? For the very simple reason that no such conference took place until the Historia de la Provincia de San Vincente de Chyapa gave it birth in 1619! What a pitiful waste of well-meant-eloquence on the part of Hoselly de Lorgues!

### 9.

Being as ignorant of the art of seafaring as the meanest hand of his crew, Columbus relied on the Pinta, commanded by Martin Pinzón, perhaps the ablest Spanish navigator of his time, to steer his way wherever he went. In consequence he lost completely his bearings—once in the coasts of Cuba, and again on his return voyage, not far from the Azores—when the Pinta, because more skillfully steered or of better seaworthiness, was lost on the

horizon to the sight of the Admiral. For this reason he was caught in a big storm just before he reached the Azores, while Pinzón, who was perfectly at home in those seas, escaped the storm and sailed straight to Spain. Not so the Admiral. After the storm had abated, and not knowing his position nor the means of finding it, he sailed eastward like a blind man. When finally land came in sight he was unable to decide whether it was the Rock of Cintra, near Lisbon, or the coasts of Madeira or of Azores. It proved to be Santa Maria, one of the Azores, whose port he entered at last.

This is not the only proof concerning his ignorance of the art of navigation. Knowing, through Alonso Sánchez, the approximate position of Antillia, why did he not sail straight to it from Palos? Why did he go first to the Canary Islands instead? The reason is that the unfortunate pilot had told Columbus Antillia's position with reference to a parallel situated at a certain point in the archipelago of the Canary Islands. On his next voyage he started again from the same point in order to follow exactly the same line he had followed the first time, a mode of procedure that any mariner would be ashamed to adopt. This time, however, a storm changed the direction of his fleet, and so, instead of reaching his goal, which was Hispaniola, he found himself entangled in the labyrinth of the Lesser Antilles from which he could find no escape. Juan de la Cosa, who was an able cosmographer and had learned the exact position of Antillia from Martín Pinzón, saved the situation for the Admiral without any difficulty, as soon as the Admiral put himself in his hands.

On his second return he again became lost in the Lesser Antilles for failing to adjust his position to the direction of the



trade-winds. After one month of blind sailing, because he was unable to use the quadrant and to correct his former mistake, he was still in Guadalupe when he should have been reaching the coasts of Spain. The provisions for his two hundred and fifty passengers, mostly slaves, were exhausted; so he decided to land in Guadalupe in order to take on provisions. This was another mistake, for the island was inhabited by cannibals, whom he had to fight for ten days while hunting for provisions. These were insufficient and his lack of seamanship retarded the voyage still more, so that when he reached Cádiz more than half of the slaves had died of hunger and exposure.

After all the glowing descriptions he made at the court of the innumerable islands he discovered and the marvelous things he saw, the Queen reminded him of the maps he had promised her of the lands he should discover, showing their longitude and latitude, and their position in relation to other lands already known. The unfortunate Admiral had forgotten all about such unimportant and prosaic matters. How could he make any maps if he did not know how, and the nautical instruments were so many puzzles to him? "Only twice during the voyage," says M. André, "did he try to determine a latitude, and each time made an error of several degrees." (36) A veritable poem on the hundreds of islands he saw, when in reality there were only about a score; on the mountains of gold he learned about, but of which he was scarcely able to get a handful; these and such literary fragments of the rainbow he imagined to be the real business of an Admiral of the Ocean. For

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(36) André, p. 196.



the rest he did not know as much as the humblest member of his crew. The Queen soon perceived how mistaken she had been regarding the knowledge of Columbus about the art of navigation, and had the good sense to send with him, on his second voyage, an able cosmographer, Juan de la Cosa, so that the discoveries made should not suffer the fate of those made by Lief Erickson.

One of such discoveries was that of an island he called San Salvador. He did not make a map of it, did not mark its position on any map already in existence, did not find its latitude and longitude. Instead he made this poetic description of it: "I was apprehensive about landing on account of a reef of rocks, which surrounds the whole island, although within there is depth of water and room sufficient for all the ships of Christendom, with a very narrow entrance. There are some shoals withinside, but the water is as smooth as the bottom of a well." (37) Rather pretty, one must confess, but apparently the geographers have never been able to locate such an island in either of the Antilles.

#### 10.

He indulges in many kinds of falsehood, either to cover up his lack of positive knowledge, to heighten the importance of his person or to stab in the back those against whom he may have had a grudge. The King of Portugal, who spurned his offer to discover what had already been discovered, comes in for much slander and false charges by the Admiral. When he landed on the island of Santa Maria, without knowing whether it was one of the

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(37) André, p. 124.

Azores, or Madeira, or the Rock of Cintra, two priests and a notary came to his ship to examine his letters-patent and the ship's papers, as was customary. "From them, he noted in his diary, the Admiral learned that had the Portuguese succeeded in taking him, he would never have got free, for...the King...had given order to that effect." (38) His son Fernando comments: "It was reported on the island that the King had sent orders to all his subjects to secure the person of the Admiral by any means whatever." (39) Anything pertaining to the Admiral had the growing power of a snow ball; the more it rolls the larger it becomes.

It was already observed how little interested the Portuguese King was in Columbus' discoveries. If there was any reason for his arrest it was of an entirely different order. Perhaps the Admiral wished not only to silence posterity regarding whatever misdemeanor he had perpetrated in Portugal but also to pose as a martyr to a great and worthy cause.

But the falsity of this charge appears more clearly from other circumstances surrounding the same case. In the first place it would be easy for the authorities of the island to effect the arrest of Columbus if they wished or had been ordered to do so. In the second place it is unbelievable that King John II, one of the most magnanimous and ablest statesmen of his time, would so lightly risk a war with Spain, thus putting in jeopardy his great projects in the Orient, which was the main object of Portugal's ambition. Moreover, why, instead of departing for Spain, did

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(38) André, p. 173.

(39) Id., p. 173 ff.

Columbus sail straight from the Azores to the port of Lisbon, where he knew that the Portuguese monarch had sent orders to all his subjects to secure him by any means whatever? Why defy the lion in his own lair? Because what he really knew was that only honors and triumphs awaited him in the court of the gallant and magnanimous king John II of Portugal, honors and triumphs that in fact were bestowed upon him with lavish hand. But his vanity, however prodigious, was not as great as his ingratitude and spirit of vindictiveness, nor his lack of the most elementary logic.

As if that gratuitous and malevolent accusation was not sufficient, the later admirers of the Admiral manufactured another. The Portuguese nobles, they wrote, plotted to assassinate him and discussed their evil intentions with the King himself. However, Providence, which was always on the side of the Admiral, not only delivered him from this new danger but compelled the villains to give Columbus a royal send-off. He never knew of this horrible plot, nor did his son Fernando, but later biographers were certain that one more lie, and many more lies, of this sort would enhance the posthumous glory of their hero.

## 11.

The clearest aim of all the strivings of a hero of the magnitude of our legendary one would be, it seems, the fulfillment of the great idea we assume to have been the chief product of his brain, the most genuine and authentic offspring of the genius we endow him with, that is, the revelation of a new World, the bringing together into one fold the scattered fragments of the human family, without any petty considerations of his own material

gain, distinctions and glory. With Columbus, however, things did not seem to have worked that way.

The exorbitant and unprecedented demands he made of both the Portuguese and Spanish monarchs, in his favor and in that of his heirs in perpetuity, as an absolutely necessary condition of his voyage of discovery, a condition to be fulfilled in its entirety even before his departure, was highly resented by those monarchs, and was, without doubt, a very important cause for the delay of his expedition. The glory of being the discoverer of new worlds was not as important in his eyes as to be known as Don Christopher, Grand Admiral of the Ocean, Viceroy for life over all the lands already discovered and in the future to be discovered by him; to have one tenth of the products derived from the cultivation of such lands, and the right to name their governors! Had he wished, above all, to make this voyage of discovery he would have done so within less than two months of his arrival in Spain, for the Duke of Medina-Celi, immensely rich and very enthusiastic about Columbus' project, offered to defray all the expenses of the expedition, namely, to provide him with three or four caravels, and their crews and to furnish all the necessary equipment and money. But, alas! he was no king, and therefore could not make him the Admiral of the Ocean.

Gain he expected to find to his heart's content in the lands to be discovered because, according to his certain knowledge acquired in the pages of Marco Polo, Mandeville and Pierre d'Ailly his voyage of a few days would take him to the fabulous empires and kingdoms of the East, where huge cities were counted by the thousand, with houses of marble covered with roofs of gold, and where gold, silver, precious stones, spices, and all kinds of rich

merchandise, were as plentiful as sand-dunes in the Sahara desert!

But he was disappointed in these as in many other of his most sanguine expectations. He promised shiploads of gold to the King, he dreamed of mountains of gold arising everywhere in the islands he had visited, he reported on inexhaustible mines of gold which he never saw, he rediscovered in several places the sources of Solomon's cargoes of gold. But apparently Solomon did not leave as much as a sample of the gold he had carried to Jerusalem, and all the gold Columbus spoke of was only the reflexions of his obsession and desire, for gold he did not find enough to satisfy the needs of the poorest member of his crew.

However, as an expert alchemist, Columbus could make gold out of baser substances, and the Antilles, according to his own reports, had great abundance of such materials. "From this single place (a small district of Haiti)," he says, "with the aid of the Holy Trinity, one could export all the slaves that it would be possible to sell; that is to say, forty thousand, who would be worth twenty million maravedies,"(40) of which, of course, he would get two million maravedies, as his share. So, even before ascertaining what the wishes of the Queen might be in this respect, he sent a shipload of slaves to Spain, and he has the distinction of being the first who planned to carry on this traffic on a grander scale than ever before. And in order to deceive the Queen he explained to her that his cargo of human flesh consisted of Caribs, who were cannibals, and that his chief purpose was to correct their inhumane ways and promote the salvation of their souls. As a matter of fact he was not telling the truth, for with the exception of

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(40) André, p. 228.



about a dozen, these unfortunate ones were all harmless Haitians. It is to the credit of the Queen that she ordered the captives to be freed and would never consent to the enslavement of the Amer- indians. Even Las Casas, who more than any other is responsible for the Columbian Legend, has this to say of his hero on the score of the slave trade he inaugurated: "The misfortunes which he suffered were but just chastisement for his treatment of the Indians."(41) And Lummis comments on this dastardly deed of Columbus: "Good Queen Isabella was so indignant at this barbarity that she ordered the poor Indians to be liberated, and sent out Francisco de Boba- dilla, who in 1500 arrested Columbus and his two brothers...and sent them in irons to Spain."(42) Elsewhere he adds: "It has been a fashion to accuse the Spanish Crown of base ingratitude towards Columbus; but this is unjust. The fault was with his own acts, which made harsh measures by the Crown necessary and right."(43) This testimony and, even more, that of his biographer-friend Las Casas, should dispose once and for all of the accusations of ingratitude against Columbus made against Spain in order to exalt the trans- gressor of the laws of humanity and those of his sovereigns and country.

Another case of ingratitude, inhumanity and downright cruelty on the part of the Spanish Kings and people is reported by Columbus himself. He wrote that during seven years, from 1495 to 1492, he "suffered cold and hunger," that during that time "everyone repulsed him," that he was "the laughing stock of all, and only

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(41) André, p. 221.

(42) Lummis (Spanish Pioneers), p. 40 ff.

(43) Id., p. 42.



one poor monk had pity on him." (44) His biographers added a few more romantic details to this lurid story, making him even the victim of persecution by monks steeped "in the darkness of the Middle Ages" who were frightened by his genius and daring. As a matter of fact his greatest protectors were monks whose piety and learning his heart and mind was unable to understand or ever to aspire to. In la Rábida he was well taken care of by Father Antonio de Marchena and his confreres; he found a generous patron in the immensely rich duke of Medina-Sidonia; in the house of the duke of Medina-Celi, who offered to defray all the expenses of his expedition less than two months after he arrived in Spain, he spent about two years. Other important protector was a certain Quintanilla who lodged him, after he left the house of Medina-Celi, and treated him with true Spanish hospitality until he should be provided for by the Kings, which they did, to take effect from the date he arrived in Cordoba, in January 20, 1486. He was paid as if he was at the service of their Magesties and continued under that condition up to 1489. This alone, added to the two years he was with the duke of Medina-Celi, makes five years of comfort and leisure out of the seven he said he went cold and hungry.

## 12.

In conclusion, Columbus was not a mariner. What had brought him in contact with ships, especially during the fifteen years he was in Portugal, and during the last ones he was in Italy, was commerce and trade in whose behalf he made many voyages in

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(44) André, p. 55 ff.

a clerk's capacity. We had occasion to see how unable he was to handle the mariner's compass, and how completely lost he was out in the open sea without the beacon light of the Pinta piloted by the able hand of Martín Pinzón.

"The net result of our analysis," according to a critic of the French original of André's Columbus, "discloses Columbus as...an admiral who could not navigate a ship,...who...brought his men to the verge of famine and mutiny and was saved from death and disaster only by the ability of his subordinates..., a governor without discipline or gift of command, a traitor to his sovereign, who deserved to be shot; a professed Christian apostle who murdered and enslaved his flock; a man without truth, understanding, honor, faith, gratitude or loyalty." (45)

Columbus was not a cosmographer. He had no inkling, worthy of the name, of the science of navigation. He had no conception of the approximate size or shape of the world, things with which all the sea captains of his time were fairly well acquainted. He was unable to recognize in America a new continent long after its coasts were all but discovered, explored and represented in numerous charts by other navigators his contemporaries and published throughout Europe. The natives he met and the products he found in the lands and island he visited, all so different from those found in Asia, had no real message for him as to the identity of the part of the world which he crossed and recrossed innumerable times in a wild chase of the most incredible chimeras.

Columbus was completely ignorant of the positive and available

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(45) Peterson, loc. cit.

knowledge of his time. All he knew were the fantasies and fairy tales, prepared and digested for such as he, by the untamed and apocalyptic imaginations of Mandeville and Pierre d'Ailly, to whose fancies and fables no serious and cultured mind gave the least credence in his time.

Columbus did not discover America. That was done by Cabot, Cabral, Cortereal, Alonzo de Hojeda, Vespucci, Juan de la Cosa, and others, from Labrador, Florida, Venezuela, down to the coasts of Brazil, before he ever touched the continent at any point. And when he did so by a mere chance, and maps were already known all over Europe of its coasts, he failed to recognize it, denied its existence, and was still writing in 1503: "The distance from Panama to the Ganges river is the same as that from Tortosa to Fontarrabia or from Pisa to Genoa." (46) At this juncture two years had already gone by since America had been known as a vast continent at an enormous distance from Asia. Speaking of Venezuela, whose coasts he had touched, he added: "Upon reflexion I continue to believe that in the region of which I have spoken lies the Terrestrial Paradise." (47)

"Notwithstanding that André established the truth of this indictment by an unanswerable array of evidence, he nevertheless maintains the absurd contention that Columbus is to be regarded as the discoverer of America. This is an error all the more flagrant because his own researches and testimony showed that at least three men preceded Columbus, from one of whom (Alonso Sanchez) Columbus

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(46) André, p. 284.

(47) Id., p. 244.

obtained the secret of the discovery (that of Antillia or Santo Domingo)..."(48)

Columbus did not discover Antillia, the real object of his first voyage. Its existence was known for at least twenty years before Columbus' expedition, and its approximate position and distance in relation to the Canary islands were ascertained by Alonso Sánchez, who made them known to Columbus so that this prize might go to the Spanish Crown.

The glory and fame that Columbus has enjoyed for four hundred years do not belong to him. They were stolen from a dying man and from Prince Henry or his coworkers without whom the great movement of maritime enterprise of the XVth and XVIth centuries would not have taken place. We may repeat again the words of Raymond Beasley, Professor of Modern History at Birmingham: "The whole onward and outward movement of the great exploring age," he says, "was set in motion by one man (Prince Henry). It might have come to pass without him, but the fact is simply that, as a matter of history, through him it did result."(49)

Columbus, as our text-books of history persist in presenting him to the juvenile minds, is one of the most colossal frauds of all History.

(48) Peterson, loc. cit.

(49) Beasley, p. 323.