

Stories of Christopher Columbus

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COLUMBUS AND THE EGG

BY JAMES BALDWIN

ONE day Columbus was at a dinner which a Spanish gentleman had given in his honor, and several persons were present who were jealous of the great admiral's success. They were proud, conceited fellows, and they very soon began to try to make Columbus uncomfortable.

"You have discovered strange lands beyond the seas," they said, "but what of that? We do not see why there should be so much said about it. Anybody can sail across the ocean; and anybody can coast along the islands on the other side, just as you have done. It is the simplest thing in the world."

Columbus made no answer; but after a while he took an egg from a dish and said to the company:—

"Who among you, gentlemen, can make this egg stand on end?"

One by one those at the table tried the experiment. When the egg had gone entirely around and none had succeeded, all said that it could not be done.

Then Columbus took the egg and struck its small end gently upon the table so as to break the shell a little. After that there was no trouble in making it stand upright.

"Gentlemen," said he, "what is easier than to do this which you said was impossible? It is the simplest thing in the world. Anybody can do it, — *after he has been shown how!*"



COLUMBUS AT LA RABIDA

BY WASHINGTON IRVING

ABOUT half a league from the little seaport of Palos de Moguer, in Andalusia, there stood, and continues to stand at the present day, an ancient convent of Franciscan friars, dedicated to Santa Maria de Rabida.

One day a stranger on foot, in humble guise, but of a distinguished air, accompanied by a small boy, stopped at the gate of the convent and asked of the porter a little bread and water for his child. While receiving this humble refreshment, the prior of the convent, Juan Perez de Marchena, happened to pass by, and was struck with the appearance of the stranger. Observing from his air and accent that he was a foreigner, he entered into conversation with him and soon learned the particulars of his story.

That stranger was Columbus.

Accompanied by his little son Diego, he was on his way to the neighboring town of Huelva, to seek a brother-in-law, who had married a sister of his deceased wife.

The prior was a man of extensive information. His attention had been turned in some measure to geographical and nautical science. He was greatly interested by the conversation of Columbus, and struck with the grandeur of his views. When he found, however, that the voyager was on the point of abandoning Spain to seek the patronage of the court of France, the good friar took the alarm.

He detained Columbus as his guest, and sent for a scientific friend to converse with him. That friend was Garcia Fernandez, a physician of Palos. He was equally struck with the appearance and conversation of the stranger. Several conferences took place at the convent, at which veteran mariners and pilots of Palos were present.

Facts were related by some of these navigators in support of the theory of Columbus. In a word, his project was treated with a deference in the quiet cloisters of La Rabida and among the seafaring men of Palos which had been sought in vain among sages and philosophers.

Among the navigators of Palos was one Martin Alonzo Pinzon, the head of a family of wealth, members of which were celebrated for their adventurous expeditions. He was so convinced of the feasibility of Columbus's plan that he offered to engage in it with purse and person, and to bear the expenses of Columbus in an application to court.

Fray Juan Perez, being now fully persuaded of the importance of the proposed enterprise, advised Columbus to repair to the court, and make his propositions to the Spanish sovereigns, offering to give him a letter of recommendation to his friend, the Prior of the Convent of Prado and confessor to the queen, and a man of great political influence; through whose means he would, without doubt, immediately obtain royal audience and favor. Martin Alonzo Pinzon, also, generously furnished him with money for the journey, and the Friar took charge of his youthful son, Diego, to maintain and educate him in the convent.

Thus aided and encouraged and elated with fresh hopes, Columbus took leave of the little *junto* at La Rabida, and set out, in the spring of 1486, for the Castilian court, which had just assembled at Cordova, where the sovereigns were fully occupied with their chivalrous enterprise for the conquest of Granada. But alas! success was not yet! for Columbus met with continued disappointments and discouragements, while his projects were opposed by many eminent prelates and Spanish scientists, as being against religion and unscientific. Yet in spite of this opposition, by degrees the theory of Columbus began to obtain proselytes. He appeared in the presence of the king with modesty, yet self-possession, inspired by a consciousness of the dignity and importance of his errand; for he felt himself, as he afterwards declared in his letters, animated as if by a sacred fire from above, and considered himself an instrument in the hand of Heaven to accomplish its great designs. For nearly seven years of apparently fruitless solicitation, Columbus followed the royal court from place to place, *al* times encouraged by the sovereigns, and at others neglected.

At last he looked round in search of some other source of patronage, and feeling averse to subjecting himself to further tantalizing delays and disappointments of the court, determined to repair to Paris. He departed, therefore, and went to the Convent of La Rabida to seek his son Diego. When the worthy Friar Juan Perez de Marchena beheld Columbus arrive once more at the gate of his convent after nearly seven years of fruitless effort at court, and saw by the humility of his garb the poverty he had experienced, he was greatly moved; but when he found that he was about to carry his proposition to another country, his patriotism took alarm.

The Friar had once been confessor to the queen, and knew that she was always accessible to persons of his sacred calling. He therefore wrote a letter to her, and at the same time entreated Columbus to remain at the convent until an answer could be received. The latter was easily persuaded, for he felt as if on leaving Spain he was again abandoning his home.

The little council at La Rabida now cast round their eyes for an ambassador to send on this momentous mission. They chose one Sebastian Rodriguez, a pilot of Lepe, one of the most shrewd and important personages in this maritime neighborhood. He so faithfully and successfully conducted his embassy that he returned shortly with an answer.

Isabella had always been favorably disposed to the proposition of Columbus. She thanked Juan Perez for his timely services and requested him to repair immediately to the court, leaving Columbus in confident hope until he should hear further from her. This royal letter, brought back by the pilot at the end of fourteen days, spread great joy in the little *junto* at the convent.

No sooner did the warm-hearted friar receive it than he saddled his mule, and departed, privately, before midnight to the court. He journeyed through the countries of the Moors, and rode into the new city of Santa Fe where Ferdinand and Isabella were engaged in besieging the capital of Granada.

The sacred office of Juan Perez gained him a ready admission into the presence of the queen. He pleaded the cause of Columbus with enthusiasm. He told of his honorable motives, of his knowledge and experience, and his perfect capacity to fulfill the undertaking. He showed the solid principles upon which the enterprise was founded, and the advantage that must attend its success, and the glory it must shed upon the Spanish Crown.

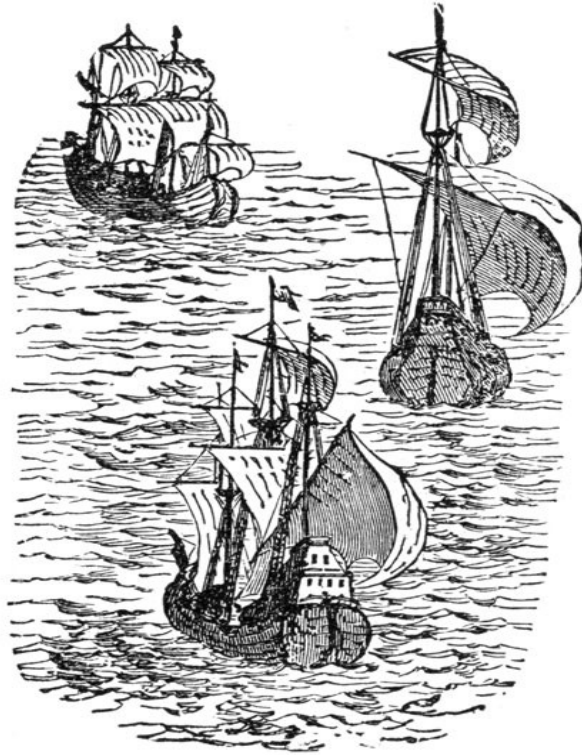
Isabella, being warm and generous of nature and sanguine of disposition, was moved by the representations of Juan Perez, and requested that Columbus might be again sent to her. Bethinking herself of his poverty and his humble plight, she ordered that money should be forwarded to him, sufficient to bear his traveling expenses, and to furnish him with decent raiment.

The worthy friar lost no time in communicating the result of his mission. He transmitted the money, and a letter, by the hand of an inhabitant of Palos, to the physician, Garcia Fernandez, who delivered them to Columbus. The latter immediately changed his threadbare garb for one more suited to the sphere of a court, and purchasing a mule, set out again, reanimated by hopes, for the camp before Granada.



This time, after some delay, his mission was attended with success. The generous spirit of Isabella was rekindled, and it seemed as if the subject, for the first time, broke upon her mind in all its real grandeur. She declared her resolution to undertake the enterprise, but paused for a moment, remembering that King Ferdinand looked coldly on the affair, and that the royal treasury was absolutely drained by the war.

Her suspense was but momentary. With an enthusiasm worthy of herself and of the cause, she exclaimed: "I undertake the enterprise for my own crown of Castile, and will pledge my jewels to raise the necessary funds." This was the proudest moment in the life of Isabella. It stamped her renown forever as the patroness of the discovery of the New World.



THE MUTINY

BY A. DE LAMARTINE

WHEN Columbus left the Canaries to pass with his three small ships into the unknown seas, the eruptions of Teneriffe illuminated the heavens and were reflected in the sea. This cast terror into the minds of his seamen. They thought that it was the flaming sword of the angel who expelled the first man from Eden, and who now was trying to drive back in anger those presumptuous ones who were seeking entrance to the forbidden and unknown seas and lands. But the admiral passed from ship to ship explaining to his men, in a simple way, the action of volcanoes, so that the sailors were no longer afraid.

But as the peak of Teneriffe sank below the horizon, a great sadness fell upon the men. It was their last beacon, the farthest sea-mark of the Old World. They were seized with a nameless terror and loneliness.

Then the admiral called them around him in his own ship, and told them many stories of the things they might hope to find in the wonderful new world to which they were going, — of the lands, the islands, the seas, the kingdoms, the riches, the vegetation, the sunshine, the mines of gold, the sands covered with pearls, the mountains shining with precious stones, the plains loaded with spices. These stories, tinged with the brilliant colors of their leader's rich imagination, filled the discouraged sailors with hope and good spirits.

But as they passed over the trackless ocean, and saw day by day the great billows rolling between them and the mysterious horizon, the sailors were again filled with dread. They lacked the courage to sail

onward into the unknown distance. The compass began to vacillate, and no longer pointed toward the north; this confused both Columbus and his pilots. The men fell into a panic, but the resolute and patient admiral encouraged them once more. So buoyed up by his faith and hope, they continued to sail onwards over the pathless waters.

The next day a heron and a tropical bird flew about the masts of the ships, and these seemed to the wondering sailors as two witnesses come to confirm the reasoning of Columbus.

The weather was mild and serene, the sky clear, the waves transparent, the dolphins played across the bows, the airs were warm, and the perfumes, which the waves brought from afar, seemed to exhale from their foam. The brilliancy of the stars and the deep beauty of the night breathed a feeling of calm security that comforted and sustained the sailors.

The sea also began to bring its messages. Unknown vegetations floated upon its surface. Some were rock-plants, that had been swept off the cliffs by the waves; some were fresh-water plants; and others, recently torn from their roots, were still full of sap. One of them carried a live crab, — a little sailor afloat on a tuft of grass. These plants and living things could not have passed many days in the water without fading and dying. And all encouraged the sailors to believe that they were nearing land.

At eve and morning the distant waning clouds, like those that gather round the mountain-tops, took the form of cliffs and hills skirting the horizon. The cry of "land" was on the tip of every tongue. But Columbus by his reckoning knew that they must still be far from any land, but fearing to discourage his men he kept his thoughts to himself, for he found no trustworthy friend among his companions whose heart was firm enough to bear his secret.

During the long passage Columbus conversed with his own thoughts, and with the stars, and with God whom he felt was his protector. He occupied his days in making notes of what he observed. The nights he passed on deck with his pilots, studying the stars and watching the seas. He withdrew into himself, and his thoughtful gravity impressed his companions sometimes with respect and sometimes with mistrust and awe.

Each morning the bows of the vessels plunged through the fantastic horizon v/hich the evening mist had made the sailors mistake for a shore. They kept rolling on through the boundless and bottomless abyss. Gradually terror and discontent once more took possession of the crews. They began to imagine that the steadfast east wind that drove them westward prevailed eternally in this region, and that when the time came to sail homeward, the same wind would prevent their return. For surely their provisions and water could not hold out long enough for them to beat their way eastward over those wide waters!

Then the sailors began to murmur against the admiral and his seeming fruitless obstinacy, and they blamed themselves for obeying him, when it might mean the sacrifice of the lives of one hundred and twenty sailors.

But each time the murmurs threatened to break out into mutiny, Providence seemed to send more encouraging signs of land. And these for the time being changed the complaints to hopes. At evening little birds of the most delicate species, that build their nests in the shrubs of the garden and orchard, hovered warbling about the masts. Their delicate wings and joyous notes bore no signs of weariness or fright, as of birds swept far away to sea by a storm. These signs again aroused hope.

The green weeds on the surface of the ocean looked like waving corn before the ears are ripe. The vegetation beneath the water delighted the eyes of the sailors tired of the endless expanse of blue. But the seaweed soon became so thick that they were afraid of entangling their rudders and keels, and of remaining prisoners forever in the forests of the ocean, as ships of the northern seas are shut in by ice. Thus each joy soon turned to fear, — so terrible to man is the unknown.

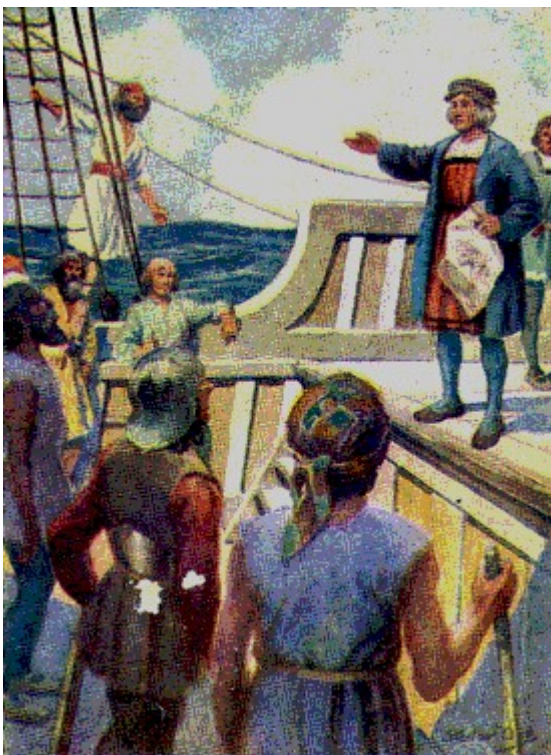
The wind ceased, the calms of the tropics alarmed the sailors. An immense whale was seen sleeping on the waters. They fancied there were monsters in the deep which would devour their ships. The roll of the waves drove them upon currents which they could not stem for want of wind. They imagined they were approaching the cataracts of the ocean, and that they were being hurried toward the abysses into which the deluge had poured its world of waters.

Fierce and angry faces crowded round the mast. The murmurs rose louder and louder. They talked of compelling the pilots to put about and of throwing the admiral into the sea. Columbus, to whom their looks and threats revealed these plans, defied them by his bold bearing or disconcerted them by his coolness.

Again nature came to his assistance, by giving him fresh breezes from the east, and a calm sea under his bows. Before the close of the day came the first cry of "Land ho!" from the lofty poop. All the crews, repeating this cry of safety, life, and triumph, fell on their knees on the decks and struck up the hymn, "Glory be to God in heaven and upon earth." When it was over, all climbed as high as they could up the masts, yards, and rigging to see with their own eyes the new land that had been sighted.

But the sunrise destroyed this new hope all too quickly. The imaginary land disappeared with the morning mist, and once more the ships seemed to be sailing over a never-ending wilderness of waters.

Despair took possession of the crews. Again the cry of "Land ho!" was heard. But the sailors found as before that their hopes were but a passing cloud. Nothing wearies the heart so much as false hopes and bitter disappointments.



Loud reproaches against the admiral were heard from every quarter. Bread and water were beginning to fail. Despair changed to fury. The men decided to turn the heads of the vessels toward Europe, and to beat back against the winds that had favored the admiral, whom they intended to chain to the mast of his own vessel and to give up to the vengeance of Spain should they ever reach the port of their own country.

These complaints now became clamorous. The admiral restrained them by the calmness of his countenance. He called upon Heaven to decide between himself and the sailors. He flinched not. He offered his life as a pledge, if they would but trust and wait for three days more. He swore that, if, in the course of the third day, land was not visible on the horizon, he would yield to their wishes and steer for Europe.

The mutinous men reluctantly consented and allowed him three days of grace.

At sunrise on the second day rushes recently torn up were seen floating near the vessels. A plank hewn by an axe, a carved stick, a bough of hawthorn in blossom, and lastly a bird's nest built on a branch which the wind had broken, and full of eggs on which the parent-bird was sitting, were seen swimming past on the waters. The sailors brought on board these living witnesses of their approach to land. They were like a message from the shore, confirming the promises of Columbus.

The overjoyed and repentant mutineers fell on their knees before the admiral whom they had insulted but the day before, and craved pardon for their mistrust.

As the day and night advanced many other sights and sounds showed that land was very near. Toward day delicious and unknown perfumes borne on a soft land breeze reached the vessels, and there was heard the roar of the waves upon the reefs.

The dawn, as it spread over the sky, gradually raised the shores of an island from the waves. Its distant extremities were lost in the morning mist. As the sun rose it shone on the land ascending from a low yellow beach to the summit of hills whose dark-green covering contrasted strongly with the clear blue of the heavens. The foam of the waves broke on the yellow sand, and forests of tall and unknown trees stretched away, one above another, over successive terraces of the island. Green valleys, and bright clefts in the hollows afforded a half glimpse into these mysterious wilds. And thus the land of golden promises, the land of future greatness, first appeared to Christopher Columbus, the Admiral of the Ocean, and thus he gave a New World to the nations to come.



THE FIRST LANDING OF COLUMBUS IN THE NEW WORLD

BY WASHINGTON IRVING

It was on Friday morning, the 12th of October, that Columbus first beheld the New World. As the day dawned he saw before him an island, several leagues in extent, and covered with trees like a continual orchard. Though apparently uncultivated it was populous, for the inhabitants were seen issuing from all parts of the woods and running to the shore. They were perfectly naked, and, as they stood gazing at the ships, appeared by their attitudes and gestures to be lost in astonishment.

Columbus made signals for the ships to cast anchor and the boats to be manned and armed. He entered his own boat, richly attired in scarlet, and holding the royal standard; while Martin Alonzo Pinzon and his brother put off in company in their boats, each with a banner of the enterprise emblazoned with a green cross, having on either side the letters "F." and "Y.," the initials of the Castilian monarchs Fernando and Ysabel, surmounted by crowns.

As he approached the shore, Columbus was delighted with the purity and suavity of the atmosphere, the crystal transparency of the sea, and the extraordinary beauty of the vegetation. He beheld also fruits of

an unknown kind upon the trees which overhung the shores.

On landing he threw himself on his knees, kissed the earth, and returned thanks to God with tears of joy. His example was followed by the rest. 1

"Almighty and Eternal God," prayed Columbus, " who by the energy of Thy creative word hast made the firmament, the earth and the sea; blessed and glorified be thy name in all places! May thy majesty and dominion be exalted for ever and ever, as Thou hast permitted thy holy name to be made known and spread by the most humble of thy servants, in this hitherto unknown portion of Thine empire."

Columbus, then rising, drew his sword, displayed the royal standard, and assembling around him the two captains and the rest who had landed, he took solemn possession in the name of the Castilian sovereigns, giving the island the name of San Salvador.



THE END

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