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William Desborough Cooley

Excerpt

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THE HISTORY
OF
MARITIME AND INLAND
DISCOVERY.

BOOK IV.

MODERN VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY, FROM COLUMBUS TO
CAPTAIN COOK.

CHAP. I.

COLUMBUS.

SECOND VOYAGE OF COLUMBUS. — GENERAL ENTHUSIASM IN HIS FAVOUR. — ARRIVES AT THE CARIBBEE ISLANDS. — APPROACHES HISPANIOLA. — FINDS THE FORT DESTROYED. — FATE OF THE SPANIARDS WHO HAD REMAINED. — THE CITY OF ISABELLA FOUNDED. — COLUMBUS PURSUES HIS VOYAGE TO THE WEST. — DISCOVERS JAMAICA. — SUPPOSES CUBA TO BE A PART OF ASIA. — RETURNS TO HISPANIOLA IN BROKEN HEALTH. — CONFUSION OF AFFAIRS. — ARRIVAL OF BARTHOLOMEW COLUMBUS. — COMPLAINTS SENT HOME. — JUAN DE AGUADO APPOINTED COMMISSIONER. — COLUMBUS RETURNS TO SPAIN. — WELL RECEIVED. — HIS THIRD VOYAGE. — DISCOVERS THE AMERICAN CONTINENT. — STATE OF THE COLONY AT ST. DOMINGO. — BOBADILLA APPOINTED GOVERNOR. — HE SENDS HOME COLUMBUS IN CHAINS. — PUBLIC FEELING TOWARDS THE ADMIRAL. — OVANDO SUPERSEDES BOBADILLA.

THE grand discovery made by Columbus caused a general transport of joy throughout Europe, and filled the popular mind with sanguine anticipations. He was im-

VOL. II.

B

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[More information](#)

mediately considered as one marked out by destiny for great achievements. The voyage across the ocean, under his auspices, was no longer looked upon with mistrust or gloomy bodings; it was regarded, on the contrary, as conducting to certain distinction and unbounded riches. The honours heaped on the admiral by his grateful sovereigns, as well as the specimens of gold and rare productions which he had brought from the newly-discovered countries, all operated as incentives to the bold and the ambitious, the covetous and the needy. After the court had resolved to furnish the previous expedition, the greatest difficulty had been experienced in equipping three small vessels. That task had been imposed on the port of Palos, a place of some importance in Andalusia; but although sought to be enforced by magisterial authority, yet so many difficulties arose from the disinclination of the people to embark in what they considered a desperate enterprise, that the requisition might perhaps have never been effectually complied with, had it not been for the personal influence of the Pinzons. Martin Alonzo Pinzon, the eldest of the family, was a person of some consideration in this maritime district. His reputation as an able navigator, no less than his affluent circumstances, procured him the regard and deference of his neighbours. He engaged heartily in the enterprise of Columbus, advanced money, provided the ships, and, what was of greater importance, embarked himself with his two brothers to share in all the toils and peril of the expedition. In an unlucky hour he swerved from the line of rectitude and forgot his duty to the admiral: the painful consciousness of having done what was unworthy of him, aggravated his bodily disease, and hastened his death. But the unhappy instability of conduct which contributed to embitter the last moments of this brave man's life, must not lead us to forget the habitual generosity of his character.

When Columbus prepared to embark on his second voyage, no difficulty was found in equipping the ex-

pedition. The public favour, of which he was now the object, rendered every exertion easy. A fleet of seventeen vessels, three being ships of burden, the remainder caravels, was quickly fitted out; and about fifteen hundred persons, many of whom were volunteers, eager to gather in the new world the first harvest of glory and of gold, embarked full of hope and animation.

On the twenty-fifth of September, as the sun rose, the fleet hoisted sail, and stood out of the bay of Cadiz. This appears to have been one of the happiest moments in the life of Columbus. When he first descried the land of Guanahani, the sensations of delight, the sentiments of gratitude, and conscious pride of having earned by his courage, sagacity and perseverance, rank, fortune, and an immortal name, must have filled his bosom with sensations the most powerful and exalting of which human nature is susceptible; but the ocean still gaped between him and the immortality for which he sighed; his glorious task was but imperfectly achieved until he had returned and communicated his discoveries to the world. But now he found himself at the head of a considerable fleet; his merits had been duly appreciated; he was cheered by the applauses of Europe, and the flattering kindness of his sovereigns; he was confirmed in the possession of those titles on which he seems to have laid so much stress; and what perhaps must have gratified him still more, he no longer prosecuted a career opposed to the current of vulgar opinion; the public enthusiasm was now enlisted in his cause, and flattered, with new-born ardour, the darling speculation of his life. Yet the motives which impelled so many to embark under the guidance of Columbus were of a nature essentially different from the enthusiasm which fired his own breast. The principle of dissociation soon developed itself, and harassed with unceasing vexations the remainder of the life of that great man.

The admiral on this occasion steered for the Cape Verd islands, intending to pursue a course to the south of that held in his former voyage. On the thirteenth

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Excerpt

[More information](#)**4 MODERN VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY. BOOK IV.**

of October the island of Ferro disappeared from view; favourable breezes wafted the fleet gently towards the west; and on the second of November an island was descried, to which the name of Dominica was given, from the circumstance of its being discovered on a Sunday. Columbus had now an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the Caribs, that fierce nation, of which the unwarlike inhabitants of Hispaniola had given him such terrific accounts. While the fleet passed along the Antilles or Windward Islands, the Spaniards had many rencounters with the natives, in which they experienced their hardihood and obstinate courage. The women fought as desperately as the men, and when driven from their canoes into the water, still maintained the combat as they clove their way through the boisterous element. At Guadaloupe the Spaniards saw, for the first time, that delicious fruit the anana or pine apple; they also beheld with horror human limbs roasting at the fire, or hanging up as provision for future festivals. This appalling spectacle, however, did not abate their courage so as to prevent them from taking captive some of the warlike Caribs, whom they carried with them to Hispaniola, where they arrived on the twenty-second of November.

On approaching that part of the coast where the fort of Navidad had been established, the Spaniards on board the fleet watched anxiously for the welcoming signals of their countrymen who had remained upon the island. But the dreary silence that reigned along the shore boded something disastrous, and filled them with apprehensions. No canoes were seen paddling round the ships: the natives, so kind and attentive to the Spaniards in their former visit, now kept aloof; but the cause of this mysterious coolness was easily conjectured, when the fort of Navidad was found reduced to ashes, and circumstances traced which left no doubt that the garrison had been destroyed in warfare with the Indians.

The melancholy fate of the first settlers in Hispaniola threw a gloomy damp over the spirits of the newly

arrived adventurers, and a provident mind might have seen in their destruction a portentous indication of future calamities. As soon as some intercourse could be established with the natives, it was ascertained that the admiral had hardly disappeared from the coast, when the garrison of the fort threw off all subordination, and abandoned themselves to the most insolent licentiousness in their treatment of the natives. This simple people therefore soon ceased to regard them with awe and reverence as a superior order of beings; and from the heedless excesses of which the Spaniards were guilty, it was found as easy as it was necessary to destroy them. The misconduct of the colonists themselves was the most instructive part of the tragical story. In order to avoid scenes so likely to make sinister impressions, Columbus resolved to choose another situation for his new settlement; and selected for this purpose a plain bordering on a good haven, at no great distance from the mountain of Cibao, which was reported to contain numerous gold mines. Here he founded the city of Isabella, so called from his royal mistress. The public buildings, such as the church and magazine of the new city, were of stone; the rest were hastily constructed of reeds, plaster, and whatever materials could be most easily procured.

After having explored in several directions the interior of the country, chiefly with a view to discover the mines of gold and other precious metals, and having taken such measures as seemed best fitted to ensure the valuable friendship of the Indians, and to infuse a spirit of order and activity in the infant colony, Columbus prepared to set out on his voyage of discovery towards the west. With this view he appointed to hold the reins of government during his absence a council or *junto*, of which his brother Don Diego was the chief. Matters being thus arranged, he set sail on the twenty-fourth of April, 1494, in three small vessels. His object was to examine the coast of Cuba, from the point where his researches had terminated on his first voyage, and to proceed westward as far as possible

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 MODERN VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY. BOOK IV.

along that land which he firmly believed to be a part of the continent of Asia.

In five days the admiral reached the eastern extremity of Cuba, at present known by the name of Cape Maysi, whence he directed his course along the southern shore. Wherever the ships stopped, the natives came off in their canoes, bearing fruits and other provisions to their wondrous visitors, whom they beheld with astonishment and delight. When questioned respecting gold, they signified by gestures, that it was found in abundance in a great country to the south. This gave a new direction to the route of Columbus: on the 3d of May he stood towards the south, and in a short time the blue summits of Jamaica rose into view. On approaching this fine island, the Spaniards were filled with admiration at its luxuriant shores, its picturesque diversity of outline, and its waving groves of pimento. Its inhabitants appeared to be more warlike and ingenious than those of Cuba or Hispaniola. Their canoes displayed much art in their construction, and were elegantly carved: some of them, hollowed out of a single tree, measured above ninety feet in length.

The hopes of finding gold here, however, were disappointed; and Columbus, with the gratification of having added another noble island to the list of those already discovered by him, returned to his former course along the coast of Cuba. Here, as he pursued his voyage to the West, he fell in with a cluster of small islands, some bare and rocky, while others were clothed with waving trees, and all the richness of tropical vegetation. The birds, too, and the fishes, as well as the trees and flowers, shone with all that brilliancy of hue which nature delights so much to display in tropical climates. The heated imagination of Columbus eagerly embraced the belief that he had at length reached that archipelago of India of which Mandeville and Marco Polo had given such glowing descriptions. The natives also informed him, that towards the west there was a great country called *Mangon*, in which the people wore clothing.

This he supposed to be the *Mangi* of the Venetian traveller. He persevered, accordingly, in steering westward, hoping that he might succeed in circumnavigating the globe, and return to Europe by the lately discovered passage round Africa: but the difficult navigation which he had pursued along an intricate coast had exhausted the spirits of his crews; the ships were also in a crazy and disabled state, so that it was absolutely impossible, for the present, to prosecute the voyage any further.

Columbus, however, would not relinquish his favourite project of western discovery, until every individual on board of his fleet signed a paper, expressing the positive belief that Cuba was a continent, and a part of India. Fernan Perez de Lima, the secretary of the expedition, attended by four witnesses, went from ship to ship to receive the names of those who assented to the admiral's opinion, and to convince those who still remained in doubt. This singular document is still in existence.* Had the voyage been continued two or three days longer, the western extremity of the island would have been reached, and the truth revealed. On the voyage homeward the fleet again made Jamaica, and steered along the southern shores of that island. It then stood over for the southern coast of Hispaniola, where it had to struggle with adverse winds and a succession of violent tempests. At length the weather moderated, and Columbus stood out to sea with the intention of running eastward, so as to complete his survey of the Caribbee islands. But the unusual hardships which he had lately endured completely overpowered his naturally strong constitution. When the moment of repose arrived, his spirits flagged, and he sunk beneath the accumulated weight of toil, broken rest, and anxiety of mind. He lay in a deep lethargy, which led his crew to believe that his dissolution was not far off, and in this state of insensibility he was brought back to the harbour of Isabella.

* Muñoz. *Hist. del Nuevo Mundo*, p. 217. Navarrete. *Collecion de los Viages*, &c. tom. ii. p. 143.

S MODERN VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY. BOOK IV.

A short time after Columbus had set out on his voyage to Cuba, his brother Bartholomew arrived at the new colony; and now, when the admiral returned exhausted in spirits, and worn out with bodily fatigue, this fortunate circumstance contributed not a little to the restoration of his health. Bartholomew Columbus was a man of undaunted courage, possessing an active spirit and great practical talents; he was also an able and experienced mariner, and is supposed to have accompanied Bartholomew Diaz in the celebrated voyage in which the Cape of Good Hope was discovered. The aid of such a friend was now become particularly necessary to the admiral, from the disturbed state of the colony; and he accordingly invested his brother with the powers and title of adelantado, or lieutenant-governor. During his absence the affairs of the new settlement had run into the most lamentable confusion. The greater number of those who accompanied Columbus from Spain were greedy adventurers, who expected to amass unbounded wealth with little or no toil, in a region which they were taught to believe was the grand repository of nature's gifts. But when they experienced some of those hardships which always attend the establishment of a colony in a new climate, their spirits sunk from the extreme of sanguine expectation, to that of utter despondency. They found that considerable exertion was necessary to procure even subsistence; and in the bitterness of their disappointment, they accused Columbus as the author of all their calamities. The general discontent was fomented, as is usually the case, not by those who suffered most, but by the most malignant and restless spirits. The disorder rose to such a pitch, that the insurgents seized on some vessels in the harbour and set sail for Spain. Among these seceders was Friar Boyle, a Franciscan monk, the first apostle to the West Indies, who found means to diffuse through the court his complaints against the administration of Columbus. The president of the council of the Indies, Fonseca, bishop of Badajoz, a determined enemy of the admiral, countenanced the

friar's accusations, and, in consequence, a commissioner was sent out to report on the state of the colony. This commissioner, Juan de Aguado, was a creature of the party opposed to the admiral; and as he collected the materials of his report in the evident spirit of hostility, Columbus deemed it advisable to accompany him on his return to Spain, in order to counteract the force of his misrepresentations.

When Columbus made his appearance at the court of Spain, he was received with distinguished favour. His frank exposition of the disordered state of the colony, his manifest solicitude for its welfare, and his just views with respect to its future management, restored him at once to the full confidence of his sovereigns, and cleared away all the aspersions of his enemies. Ships were despatched to Hispaniola, with fresh supplies of men and provisions; but the revenues of Spain were at this time so much exhausted by the altercations of European politics, that two years elapsed before an armament could be fitted out to carry back the admiral himself.

At length, on the 30th of May, 1498, Columbus set sail with a fleet of six vessels, on his third voyage of discovery. In his second voyage he had steered a more southerly course than in his first, and fell in with a more steady current of favourable winds: he now ventured to proceed still farther to the south, so as to lose no opportunity of extending his experience. From the Cape Verd islands he steered south-west, until he approached within five degrees of the equator. Here the ships were becalmed; and the effects of the intense heat were so violent, as to bring to mind the fable of a torrid zone made uninhabitable by the scorching rays of a direct sun. The stifling glow of the atmosphere was so oppressive and enervating, that it was found necessary, after a few days, to turn towards the north-west; and the ships had not proceeded far in this direction, when they fell in with fresh breezes, a genial temperature, and a clear sky. On the 31st of July land was seen ahead. Three peaks were descried just emerging from the hori-

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[More information](#)

10 MODERN VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY. BOOK IV.

zon, and on a nearer approach were found to be united at their base. From this circumstance Columbus gave the island the name of *La Trinidad*, or the Trinity.

Sailing to the south and west of this island, he entered the great gulf of Paria, and saw land extending to the south as far as the eye could reach. At first he imagined that he had arrived on the coast of some great island; but the sudden swells of the sea within the gulf, and the rapid current running through it towards the north, soon led him to form a different conclusion. He argued, with equal boldness and sagacity, that these phenomena could only arise from some great river flowing into the sea through the low tracts which bounded his view to the south, and having its source in great mountains, situated at an immense distance, and probably beneath the equator. The river whose existence he thus detected was the Orinoco. He remarked, with astonishment, the luxuriance of the country, the mild temperature of the air, and fair complexions of the inhabitants, when compared with the regions of Africa situated under the same parallel of latitude. Uniting observations made in a transport of delight with theories framed under the influence of enthusiasm, he supposed that he had now approached the region of the terrestrial paradise, and that the great river which poured its ample waters into the gulf of Paria descended from the garden of Eden. His spirits were elated also by the quantity of pearls which he here collected from the natives. The ships worked their way with difficulty through the Dragon's Mouth, as the narrow channel is called that runs between the promontory of Paria and the isle of Trinidad; and after following the continent to the west as far as Margarita, they stood away direct for Hispaniola.

When Columbus arrived at the river Ozema, where his brother the adelantado had founded by his order the town of St. Domingo, he found the colony in the wildest state of anarchy and confusion. All subordination was at an end; the turbulent had taken up arms; and, though often defeated by the adelantado, were yet able