

# LIFE AND VOYAGES

OF

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

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A  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
LIFE AND VOYAGES  
OF  
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

BY  
WASHINGTON IRVING.

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Venient annis  
Sæcula seris, quibus Oceanus  
Vincula rerum laxet, et ingens  
Pateat tellus, Typhisque novos  
Detegat Orbes, nec sit terris  
Ultima Thule.

SENECA: *Medea*.

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THE  
LIFE AND VOYAGES  
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COLUMBUS.

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BOOK XVIII.

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CHAPTER I.

DEPARTURE OF COLUMBUS FOR ST DOMINGO. —  
HIS RETURN TO SPAIN.

[1504.]

ON the 28th of June Columbus took a joyful leave of the wreck in which he had been so long immured, and all the Spaniards embarked, friend and foe, on board of the vessels, which made sail for St Domingo. Oviedo says, that the Indians wept when they beheld their departure; for they considered them as beings

from the skies. From the Admiral, it is true, they had experienced nothing but kind treatment and continual benefits; and the idea of his immediate influence with the Deity, manifested by his prediction of the eclipse of the moon, may have made them consider his presence propitious to their island; but it is not easy to believe that a lawless gang, like that of Porras, could have been ranging for months among their villages without giving cause for the greatest joy at their departure.

The adverse winds and currents, which had opposed Columbus throughout this ill-starred expedition, still continued to harass him. After a weary struggle of several weeks, he reached, on the 3d of August, the little island of Beata, on the coast of Hispaniola. Between this place and St Domingo the currents are so violent, that vessels are often detained months, waiting for sufficient wind to enable them to stem the stream. From hence Columbus despatched a letter by land to Ovando, to inform him of his approach, and to remove certain absurd suspicions of his views, which he had learnt from Salcedo were still entertained by the

-

governor, who feared his arrival in the island might lead to factions and disturbances. In this letter he expresses, with his usual warmth and simplicity, the joy he felt at his deliverance, which was so great, he says, that, since the arrival of Diego de Salcedo with succour, he had scarcely been able to sleep.

A favourable wind springing up, the vessels again made sail, and on the 13th of August anchored in the harbour of St Domingo. Whatever lurking enmity to Columbus there might be in the place, it was overpowered by the popular sense of his recent disasters. Misfortune atones for a multitude of faults, whereas the very merits of a prosperous man excite detraction. St Domingo, where Columbus in the day of his power had been surrounded by foes; from whence he had been ignominiously sent in chains, amidst the shouts and taunts of the rabble; from whence he had been excluded in a time of peril, when commander of a squadron; now that he arrived in the harbour of St Domingo, a broken-down and shipwrecked man, all forgot their past hostility, and were aroused to sudden enthu-

siasm in his favour. What had been denied to his merits was granted to his misfortunes; and even the envious, appeased by his present reverses, seemed to forgive him for having once been so triumphant.

The governor and all the principal inhabitants came forth to meet him, and received him with signal distinction. He was lodged as a guest in the house of Ovando, who treated him with the utmost courtesy and attention. The governor was a shrewd and discreet man, and much of a courtier; but there were too deep causes of jealousy and distrust between him and Columbus for their intercourse to be cordial. Both the Admiral and his son Fernando always pronounced the civility of Ovando overstrained and hypocritical, intended to obliterate the remembrance of past neglect, and to conceal his lurking enmity. While he professed the utmost friendship and sympathy for the Admiral, he set at liberty the traitor Porras, who was still a prisoner, to be taken to Spain for trial. He also talked of punishing those of the Admiral's people who had taken arms in his defence, had killed

several of the mutineers, and taken others prisoners. These circumstances were loudly complained of by Columbus; but in fact, they rose out of a question of jurisdiction between him and the governor. Their powers were so undefined as to clash with each other, and they were both in a situation to be extremely punctilious. Ovando assumed a right to take cognizance of all transactions at Jamaica, as happening within the limits of his government, which included all the islands and terra firma. Columbus, on the other hand, asserted the absolute command, and the jurisdiction both civil and criminal given to him by the Sovereigns, over all persons who sailed in his expedition, from the time of departure until their return to Spain. To prove this, he produced his letter of instructions. The governor heard him with great courtesy and a smiling countenance; but observed, that the letter of instructions gave him no authority within the bounds of his government.<sup>1</sup> He relinquished the idea, however, of investigating the con-

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Columbus to his son Diego, Seville, Nov. 21, 1504. Navarrète, Coll., t. i.

duct of the followers of Columbus, and sent Porras to Spain, to be examined by the board which had charge of the affairs of the Indies.

The sojourn of Columbus at St Domingo was but little calculated to yield him satisfaction. He was grieved at the desolation of the island by the oppressive treatment of the natives, and the horrible massacre which had been perpetrated by Ovando and his agents. Columbus had fondly hoped, at one time, to have rendered the natives civilized, industrious, and tributary subjects to the crown, and to have derived from their well-regulated labour a great and steady revenue. How different had been the event! The five great tribes which had peopled the mountains and the valleys at the time of the discovery, and had rendered, by their mingled towns and villages and tracts of cultivation, the rich levels of the Vegas so many "painted gardens," had almost all passed away, and the native princes had perished chiefly by violent or ignominious deaths. Columbus regarded the affairs of the island with a different eye from Ovando. He had a paternal feeling for its prosperity, and his for-

tunes were implicated in its judicious management. He complained, in subsequent letters to the Sovereigns, that all the public affairs were ill-conducted; that the ore which was collected lay unguarded in large quantities in houses slightly built and thatched, inviting depredation; that Ovando was unpopular, the people were dissolute, and the property of the crown and the security of the island in continual risk from mutiny and sedition.<sup>1</sup> While he saw all this, he had no power to interfere, and any observation or remonstrance on his part was apt to be ill received by the governor.

He found his own immediate concerns in great confusion. His rents and dues were either uncollected, or he could not obtain a clear account and a full liquidation of them. Whatever he could collect was appropriated to the fitting out of the vessels which were to convey himself and his crews to Spain. He accuses Ovando, in his subsequent letters, of having neglected, if not sacrificed, his interests

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Columbus to his son Diego, dated Seville, 3rd Dec. 1504, Navarrete, t. i, p. 341.