MILDRED STAPLEY BYNE

ENRICHED EDITION

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

Mildred Stapley Byne

Christopher Columbus

Enriched edition.

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Table of Contents

Christopher Columbus

Memorable Quotes
Notes

Christopher Columbus

Main Table of Contents

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS
CHAPTER I
CHAPTER II
CHAPTER III
CHAPTER IV
CHAPTER V
CHAPTER VI
CHAPTER VII
CHAPTER VIII
CHAPTER IX
CHAPTER X
CHAPTER XI
CHAPTER XII
CHAPTER XIII
CHAPTER XIV
CHAPTER XV
CHAPTER XVI
CHAPTER XVII
CHAPTER XVIII
CHAPTER XIX
CHAPTER XX
CHAPTER XXI

CHAPTER I COLUMBUS BEFRIENDED BY ROYALTY

CHAPTER II THE YOUTH OF COLUMBUS

CHAPTER III "LANDS IN THE WEST"

CHAPTER IV THE SOJOURN IN MADEIRA

CHAPTER V A SEASON OF WAITING

CHAPTER VI A RAY OF HOPE

CHAPTER VII ISABELLA DECIDES

CHAPTER VIII OFF AT LAST!

CHAPTER IX "LAND! LAND!"

CHAPTER X NATIVES OF THE NEW LAND

CHAPTER XI THE RETURN IN THE *NINA*

CHAPTER XII DAYS OF TRIUMPH

CHAPTER XIII PREPARING FOR A SECOND VOYAGE

CHAPTER XIV FINDING NEW ISLANDS

CHAPTER XV ON A SEA OF TROUBLES

CHAPTER XVI THE THIRD VOYAGE

CHAPTER XVII A RETURN IN DISGRACE

CHAPTER XVIII PUBLIC SYMPATHY

CHAPTER XIX THE LAST VOYAGE

CHAPTER XX THE COURAGE OF DIEGO MENDEZ

CHAPTER XXI "INTO PORT"

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

COLUMBUS BEFRIENDED BY ROYALTY

Spain, as every one knows, was the country behind the discovery of America**[1q]**. Few people know, however, what an important part the beautiful city of Granada**[1]** played in that famous event. It was in October, 1492, that Columbus first set foot on the New World and claimed it for Spain. In January of that same year another territory had been added to that same crown; for the brave soldier-sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, had conquered the Moorish kingdom of Granada in the south and made it part of their own country.

Nearly eight hundred years before, the dark-skinned Moors**[2]** had come over from Africa and invaded the European peninsula which lies closest to the Straits of Gibraltar, and the people of that peninsula had been battling fiercely ever since to drive them back to where they came from. True, the Moor had brought Arabian art and learning with him, but he had brought also the Mohammedan religion, and *that* was intolerable not only to the Spaniards but to all Europeans. No Christian country could brook the thought of this Asiatic creed flourishing on her soil, so Spain soon set to work to get rid of it.

This war between the two religions began in the north near the Bay of Biscay whither the Christians were finally pushed by the invaders. Each century saw the Moors driven a little farther south toward the Mediterranean, until Granada, where the lovely Sierra Nevadas rise, was the last stronghold left them. Small wonder, then, that when Granada was finally taken the Spanish nation was supremely happy. Small wonder that they held a magnificent fete in their newly-won city in the "Snowy Mountains." The vanquished Moorish king rode down from his mountain citadel and handed its keys to Ferdinand and Isabella. Bells pealed, banners waved, and the people cheered wildly as their victorious sovereigns rode by.

And yet, so we are told by a writer who was present, in the midst of all this rejoicing one man stood aside, sad and solitary. While all the others felt that their uttermost desire had been granted in acquiring the Moorish kingdom, *he* knew that he could present them with a far greater territory than Granada if only they would give him the chance. What were these olive and orange groves beside the tropic fertility of the shores he longed to reach, and which he would have reached long ere this, he told himself regretfully, if only they had helped him! What was the Christianizing of the few Moors who remained in Spain compared with the Christianizing of all the undiscovered heathen across the Atlantic!

And so on that eventful January 2, 1492, when a whole city was delirious with joy,

"There was crying in Granada
when the sun was going down,

Some calling on the Trinity—
some calling on Mahoun.
Here passed away the Koran—there
in the Cross was borne—
And here was heard the Christian bell—
and there the Moorish horn."

On that great day of jubilee one man, a stranger, but as devout a Christian as any of the conquerors, stood apart downcast, melancholy, saddened by years of fruitless waiting for a few ships. That man was Christopher Columbus.

When you know that Columbus was present by special invitation, that a friend of the queen's had secured him the promise of an interview with full consideration of his plans just as soon as the city surrendered, you may think he should have looked happy and hopeful with the rest; but the fact was, that for nearly seven years the monarchs had been holding out promises, only to put him off, until his faith in princes had dwindled to almost nothing.

But, as it happened, they really meant it this time. Moreover, it is only fair to Ferdinand and Isabella to believe that they had always meant it, but they had been so preoccupied with the enormous task of welding poor Spain, long harassed by misrule and war, into a prosperous nation, that they had neither time nor money for outside ventures. Certain it is that when Granada was really conquered and they had their first respite from worry, the man who was known at court as the "mad Genoese" was summoned to

expound his plan of sailing far out into the west where he was certain of finding new lands.

Where this meeting took place is not known positively, but probably it was in the palace called the Alhambra[3], a marvelous monument of Arabian art which may be visited to-day. Columbus stood long in the exquisite audience chamber, pleading and arguing fervently; then he came out dejected, mounted his mule, and rode wearily away from Spain's new city; for Spain, after listening attentively to his proposals, had most emphatically refused to aid him. It was surely a sorry reward, you will say, for his six years' waiting. And yet the man's courage was not crushed; he started off for France, to try his luck with the French king.

This is what had happened at the Spanish court. The great navigator talked clearly and convincingly about the earth being round instead of flat as most people still supposed; and how, since Europe, Asia, and Africa covered about six sevenths of the globe's surface, and the Atlantic Ocean the remaining seventh (here he quoted the prophet Esdras[4]), [Footnote: "Upon the third day thou didst command that the waters should be gathered in the seventh part of the earth. Six parts hast thou dried up and kept them to the intent that of these some being planted of God and tilled might serve thee.... Upon the fifth day thou saidst unto the seventh part where the waters were gathered that it should bring forth living creatures, fowls and fishes, and so it came to pass." Apocrypha, 2 Esdras vi. 42, 47.] any one by sailing due west must surely come to land. So clear was his own vision of this land that he almost saw it as he spoke; and his eloquence made his hearers

almost see it too. One after another they nodded their approval, and approval had never before been won when he addressed a Spanish audience. But when Archbishop Talavera, who was spokesman for King Ferdinand, asked the would-be discoverer what reward he expected in case his voyage was successful, the answer was so unexpected that nearly every man in the room was indignant.

This answer is worth looking into carefully if one is to understand why the Spanish nobility thought that Columbus drove a hard bargain. He demanded of their Highnesses,

First: That he should be made Admiral over all seas and territories he might discover, the office to continue for life and to descend to his heirs forever, with all its dignities and salaries.

Second: That he should be made Viceroy and Governor-General of all new territories, and should name the officers under him.

Third: That he should have one tenth part of all merchandise, pearls, precious stones, gold, silver, or spices acquired by trade, discovery, or any other method.

Fourth: That if any controversy or lawsuit should arise over such goods, he or his officer should be the only judge in the matter.

Fifth: That in fitting out all expeditions for trade or discovery he should be allowed to furnish one eighth of the cost and receive one eighth of the profit.

On these conditions and no others would Christopher Columbus undertake his perilous journey into unknown seas; and the grandees of Spain walked indignantly away from him.

"Lord High Admiral!" murmured one. "An office second only to royalty! This foreigner demands promotion over us who have been fighting and draining our veins and our purses for Spain this many a year!" "Governor-General with power to select his own deputies!" murmured another. "Why, he would be monarch absolute! What proof has he ever given that he knows how to govern!" "One tenth of all goods acquired by trade *or any other method*," protested still another. "What other method has he in mind?—robbery, piracy, murder, forsooth? And then, when complaints of his 'other method' are made, he alone is to judge the case! A sorry state of justice, indeed!"

Now, when you see this from the Spaniards' point of view, can you not understand their indignation? Yet Columbus, too, had cause for indignation. True, these soldiers of Spain had risked much, but on land, and aided by powerful troops. *He* was offering to go with a few men on a small ship across a vast unexplored sea; and that seemed to him a far greater undertaking than a campaign against the Moors. His position was much like that of the modern inventor who resents having the greater part of the profits of his invention given to those who promote it. Columbus's friends, the few men who had encouraged him and believed in him ever since he came to Spain, begged him to accept less, but he was inflexible. He was prepared to make the biggest journey man had ever dreamed of, and not one iota less would he take for it. But no such rewards would Talavera promise, and thus ended the interview for which Columbus had waited nearly seven years!

And so he rode away from the lovely Moorish city, weary and dejected, yet hoping for better treatment when he should lay his plans before the French king. His ride took him across the fertile Vega (plain) of Granada and into a narrow mountain pass where the bleak Elvira Range towers three thousand feet above the road. But smiling plain and frowning mountain were alike to the brooding traveler. He noticed neither; nor, when he started across the ancient stone bridge of Pinos, did he notice that horsemen were galloping after him. They were Queen Isabella's messengers sent to bid the bold navigator return. They overtook him in the middle of the bridge, and then and there his trip to France ended.

The queen, they told him, would accept his terms unconditionally. And Isabella kept her word. The next time Christopher Columbus rode forth from Granada it was not with bowed head and heavy heart, but with his whole soul rejoicing. We may be sure that he turned back for a last affectionate look at the lovely mountain city; for it had given him what historians now call "the most important paper that ever sovereign put pen to, "—a royal order for the long-desired ships and men with which to discover "lands in the west."

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

THE YOUTH OF COLUMBUS

Having seen how that great event in Spanish history, the fall of Granada, set the date for the discovery of America, let us see how it was that a humble Italian sailor came to be present among all those noble Spanish soldiers and statesmen. Let us see why he had brought to Spain the idea of a round world, when most Spaniards still believed in a flat one; and why his round world was perfectly safe to travel over, even to its farthest point, while their flat one was edged with monsters so terrible that no man had ever sought their evil acquaintance.

[Illustration: From "The Story of Columbus" by Elizabeth L. Seelys, courtesy of D. Appleton and Company. THE GENOA HOME]

The amount of really reliable information which we possess concerning the childhood of Christopher Columbus could be written in a few lines. We do not know accurately the date of his birth, though it was probably 1451. Sixteen Italian cities have claimed him as a native; and of these Genoa in northern Italy offers the best proofs. Papers still exist showing that his father owned a little house there. Men who have studied the life of Columbus, and who have

written much about him, say that he was born in the province, not the city, of Genoa; but Columbus himself says in his diary that he was a native of Genoa city; and present-day Genoese have even identified the very street where he was born and where he played as a child—the Vico Dritto di Ponticello. In the wall of the house in which he is believed to have lived is placed an iron tablet containing an inscription in Latin. It tells us that "no house is more to be honored than this, in which Christopher Columbus spent his boyhood and his early youth."

More important than the exact spot of his birth would be a knowledge of the sort of childhood he passed and of the forces that molded his character. To learn this we must look into the condition of civilization, and particularly of Italian civilization, in the middle sixteenth century.

Columbus was born in a brilliant period known now as the Renaissance—a French word meaning re-birth—which marks the beginning of modern history. It followed a long, painful period known to us as the Dark Ages, or Middle Ages, namely, the period between ancient and modern times. In the Middle Ages humanity was very ignorant, hampered by all sorts of evil superstitions; while the daily life of the people was miserable and without comforts, lacking many things which we consider necessities. Yet even in those far-away days things were improving, because man has always felt the desire to make his lot better; and the constant effort of these people of the Middle Ages led to that beautiful awakening which we call the Renaissance.

One of the first glimmers of this new life may be said to have come from the Crusades. The Europeans who had

journeyed down into Asia to drive the Mohammedans, or Saracens, out of the Holy Land, came back impressed with the fact that these infidel Asiatics had more refinement and courtesy than Christian Europe knew. The returning Crusaders introduced some of this refinement into their own countries, and it caused people to abandon some of their rude ways. Of course there were many more influences working toward the great awakening, principally the growth of commerce. All Europe became alive with the desire for progress; many new things were invented, many old ones perfected; and before the Renaissance ended it had given us some wonderful discoveries and achievements—paper and printing; the mariner's compass; an understanding of the solar system; oil painting, music, and literature; and lastly, the New World.

Why, then, if it brought all these arts and inventions and discoveries, do we not call it the birth, instead of the *re*-birth? Because many of the beautiful elements of the Renaissance, such as art, science, and poetry, enjoyment of life, freedom to investigate and study nature— all these had existed in the days of ancient Greece and Rome; but after the fall of Roman civilization it took the barbarian peoples of other portions of Europe a long, long time to grow civilized, and to establish some sort of order out of their jumbled affairs; and while they were slowly learning lessons of government and nationality, the culture of the antique world was lost sight of. When it was found again, when young men wished to learn Latin and Greek so that they could read the long- neglected books and poetry of the ancients, human life was made much richer and happier.

This desire came first to the people of Italy. It was very natural, for ancient Rome, where great learning had last flourished, was in Italy; furthermore, the Italian peninsula, jutting out into the much-navigated Mediterranean, was full of seaports, to which came vessels with the merchandise, the language, and the legends of other countries; and when we learn of other countries, we broaden our ideas.

Add to Italy's favorable geographical position the fact that her people were unusually quick of intellect, and were gifted with great imagination, and you will see how natural it was that the Renaissance should have started there. Also, you will see why the great discoverer was a very natural product of Italy and its Renaissance.

* * * * *

Genoa, like other large Italian cities, was teeming with this new spirit of investigation and adventure when Cristoforo Colombo (in his native land his name was pronounced Cristof'oro Colom'bo) was born there or first came there to live. Long before, Genoa had taken an active part in the Crusades, and every Genoese child knew its story. It had carried on victorious wars with other Italian seaports. It had an enormous commerce. It had grown rich, it was so full of marble palaces and churches, and it had such a glorious history, that its own people loved to call it *Genova la Superba* (Superb Genoa).

Although Cristoforo's family were humble people of little or no education, the lad must have had, or made, many opportunities for acquiring knowledge. Probably he *made* them; for, as a boy in those days generally followed his father's trade, Cristoforo must have spent a good deal of

time in "combing" wool; that is, in making the tangled raw wool ready for weaving. Perhaps he was sent to school, the school supported by the "Weavers' Guild." But between working at home and going to school, he evidently made many little trips down to the busy wharves.

Was there ever any spot more fascinating than the wharves in olden days —in that far-off time when there were no books to read, and when a boy's only chance of hearing about other countries was to go and talk to the crew of each vessel that came into port? The men to whom our lad talked had sailed the whole length and breadth of the biggest body of explored water, the Mediterranean. Some had gone farther east, into the Black Sea; and still others—bravest of all—had passed beyond the Straits of Gibraltar and out on to the great unknown ocean. It was to these last, we may be sure, that the adventurous boy listened most eagerly.

Those hardy sailors were the best possible professors for a boy who intended to follow the sea. They were, doubtless, practical men who never talked much about the sea-monsters and other nonsense that many landsmen believed in; nor did they talk of the world being flat, with a jumping-off place where the sun set. That belief was probably cherished by men of book-learning only, who lived in convents and who never risked their lives on the waves. Good men these monks were, and we are grateful to them for keeping alive a little spark of learning during those long, rude Middle Ages; but their ideas about the universe were not to be compared in accuracy with the ideas of the practical mariners to whom young Cristoforo talked on the gay, lively wharves of *Genova la Superba*.

Many years after Columbus's death, his son Fernando wrote that his father had studied geography (which was then called *cosmogony*) at the University of Pavia. Columbus himself never referred to Pavia nor to any other school; nor was it likely that poor parents could afford to send the eldest of five children to spend a year at a far-off university. Certain it is that he never went there after his seafaring life began, for from then on his doings are quite clearly known; so we must admit that while he may have had some teaching in childhood, what little knowledge he possessed of geography and science were self-taught in later years. The belief in a sphere-world was already very ancient, but people who accepted it were generally pronounced either mad or wicked. Long before, in the Greek and Roman days, certain teachers had believed it without being called mad or wicked. As far back as the fourth century B.C. a philosopher named Pythagoras had written that the world was round. Later Plato, and next Aristotle, two very learned Greeks, did the same; and still later, the Romans taught it. But Greece and Rome fell; and during the Dark Ages, when the Greek and Roman ideas were lost sight of, most people took it for granted that the world was flat. After many centuries the "sphere" idea was resurrected and talked about by a few landsmen, and believed in by many practical seamen; and it is quite possible that the young Cristoforo had learned of the theory of a sphere-world from Genoese navigators even before he went to sea. Wherever the idea originated is insignificant compared with the fact that, of all the men who held the same belief, Columbus alone had the superb courage to sail forth and prove it true.