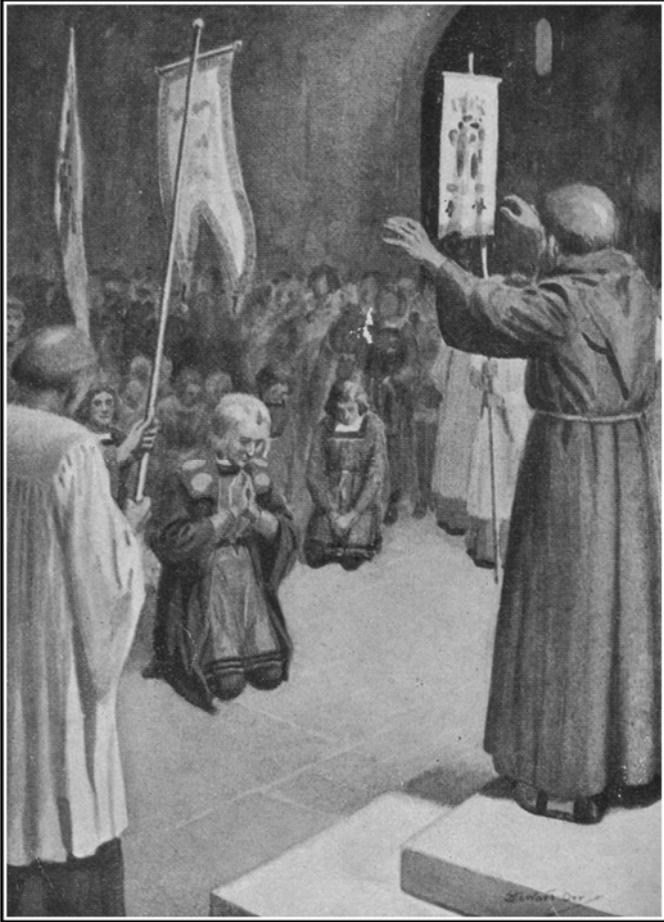


THE STORY OF COLUMBUS



Columbus and his Crew confess and take the Communion before sailing

THE CHILDREN'S HEROES

**THE STORY OF
COLUMBUS**

BY

GLADYS M. IMLACH



YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

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TO ELIZABETH

This book has many joys for you;
Pictures in red and brown and blue;
Clear maps which show the sunlit seas
That hid such wondrous mysteries;
But best of all! you here will read
Of great Columbus' daring deed,
And find how wise he was and bold
Who dreamt of fair, strange lands of gold
Sought the far borders of the main,
And gave new worlds to mighty Spain.

NOTE

The extracts from the Journal and Letters of Columbus here quoted, are taken, with slight alterations from the translations published by the Hakluyt Society.

G. M. I.

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CHAPTER I

**THE UNEXPLORED
SEAS**

IN Genoa, a famous seaport of Italy, walled in by rocky mountains, Christopher Columbus was born about the year 1447. He was the eldest son of a weaver, and had three brothers and one sister. Two of these brothers, Bartholomew and Diego, especially the more daring and vigorous Bartholomew, were afterwards his companions and helpers in his great discoveries.

 Their home was not far from the harbour. Very often the children must have wandered down there, and looked at the great trading ships with their white sails, and the long, narrow war-vessels with their rows of oars. And they would talk to the sailors, and hear their stories, and smell the salt sea smell. So, while Christopher was quite small, the sea mastered him and made him her own, and when he was fourteen years old he went for his first voyage.

 But before this he was sent to the weavers' school, where he was soon taught to read and write.

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He did so well that people said of him that if he had spent his time copying letters and documents in his beautiful handwriting he would have been a rich man. He learned many other things also—arithmetic, and drawing, and painting, and Latin; and he was especially fond of studies that would help him when he became a sailor, such as geography and astronomy, the study of the stars that guide the ship by night. Even when he had left school, and had gone to sea, he made use of his spare time in learning more of these things.

Now, when Christopher Columbus went to sea, sailors did not take very long voyages. In those days, Australia and America and South Africa were not known, and the ships used to keep close to the land as they sailed from one port in France or Spain to another. The Portuguese, who were the bravest seamen of that time, had sailed some way down the west coast of Africa, but, as they had no maps to guide them, their ships were often wrecked on the unknown shores.

Men were not, however, as ignorant as they had been, for they had begun to believe that the world was round like a ball, instead of being flat like a sheet of paper. And they said to themselves, "If it is round, we should be able to sail on and on till we come back to some place we know." Then they said, "What is the most distant country we have heard of?" The answer was "Asia." So they thought, "If some one were to sail to the west over that great Atlantic Ocean, surely he would come at last to Asia." For they did not know that America lay between, and a man must come there first, as Columbus afterwards found. And no man was

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brave enough to try. For the Atlantic Ocean was very terrible with its storms and its unknown miles of sea, and perhaps its huge serpents and monsters; and many ship's captains said, "Ah, yes; but suppose the world were flat after all, and we came to the edge and fell over. No; we will not go."

As Columbus grew up he thought a great deal about this, and wondered continually whether any one would ever be able to sail across the Atlantic.

And he did many brave deeds. Once he went with a ship of war to Tunis, while all his men begged him to go back and ask for help; and there he captured a great foreign vessel. He took part in much of the fighting that went on in those days in the Mediterranean Sea, and he sailed to Iceland and Madeira and many other places. He said himself, "Wherever ship has sailed, there have I journeyed."

When he was about thirty years old he went to live at Lisbon, and he married a Portuguese lady, and got to know many of the Portuguese, and heard about the discoveries they were making. And he read all the books of travel he could find, and wrote to the wisest men who then lived, asking them what was known about Asia, and if they thought it could be found by sailing across the Atlantic. Some of them thought so, and they all told him it was full of gold and silver and diamonds and spices, so that he could fill his ships with riches. The wisest of all, Toscanelli, sent him a map which he had made, in which he showed Asia lying just where America is on the other side of the Atlantic, and told him to sail always to the west, for if

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he missed the most wonderful country, Japan, he would come to China, or India, or some of the places marked on the map, and so would be able to direct his course. He wrote: "I perceive your magnificent and great desire to find a way to where the spices grow. I do not wonder that you, who have great courage, and all the Portuguese people, who have always been men eager for all great undertakings, should be with a burning heart and feel a great desire to undertake the said voyage."

Columbus also talked with sailors, and some of them told him stories of lands they had seen far away to the west; though, indeed, they had probably mistaken some dark ridge of cloud for land. One old man said that a long time ago he had found the bodies of two men lying on the shore, where they had been carried by the waves. They were brown and broad-faced, not like any Christian people, and must have come from an unknown country. Other seamen spoke of strange reeds and trees, and of a carved staff which had drifted from the west across the ocean. And the more Columbus thought, the surer he became that he was the man to go on this strange voyage, and that he would succeed in finding the far-off land.

So, because he was one of those men who never grow careless and lazy, nor forget any great plan they have made, he began, after many years of waiting and thinking, to look for the ship and the crew that would take him across the seas. For he was a poor man, earning his living by drawing maps, and he could not buy a ship, while no ordinary person would lend one for such a dangerous voyage. So it was long before he

THE UNEXPLORED SEAS

was able to sail. Yet all this time he was as certain of his success as if his eyes already saw the land.

CHAPTER II

IN SPAIN

BECAUSE Columbus was living in Portugal, he went first to the King of that country and told him of his plans. King John was a wise man, and wished to have new lands to rule over, but he was also very crafty. He asked his counsellors what they thought of Columbus' proposal, and when they said it would cost too much money to send the ships he listened to them. Then he did a mean thing; he secretly sent a vessel of his own to see whether Columbus was right and there was any land beyond the ocean or no. This ship sailed out for some days, and the crew saw only the waves and the sky, and they became afraid and put back to Portugal, saying scornfully that Columbus was only a dreamer, and that of course no land was there. But when he heard of this voyage, and understood that the King had kept him at Court by false promises only to deceive him, Columbus was very angry, and swore that he would leave Portugal for ever. Then he went to the Courts of many of the princes of Europe, and even to his own city Genoa, and found faith nowhere. He sent his brother Bartholomew to our own King Henry VII. of England, but on his way

IN SPAIN

the ship was captured by pirates, and poor Bartholomew was taken a prisoner to a foreign land, where he remained for a long time.

Meanwhile King John repented of his folly, and sent to Columbus and begged him to come back, promising all he had asked for. But the latter was too prudent to trust any man a second time, who had once played him false.

At last Columbus went to the Spanish Court. Ferdinand and Isabella, the King and Queen of Spain, were rich, powerful, and fortunate, and Isabella was very kind-hearted. She liked Columbus from the first, and he was a man to be liked, for he was tall and dignified, and spoke pleasantly and well. He had a fine head too, with keen blue eyes and a well-cut nose, though his hair grew white while he was still young. And he was sure of the success of his plans, and very proud, and determined that when he found the far-off lands he would not give up all the glory of their discovery to the King and Queen who had sent him. So he told them, "You must make me Admiral of your ships in the new western seas, and Viceroy, or underking, in the lands I shall gain for you. More than that, you must give me a tenth part of all the riches I find, for I shall need money when I am great. And I wish my little son Diego and his children to have these rights when I am dead, so that the family of Columbus may be honoured for evermore."

Ferdinand and Isabella thought that Columbus asked for too great a reward, and their ministers told them that the voyage could never be made; so they

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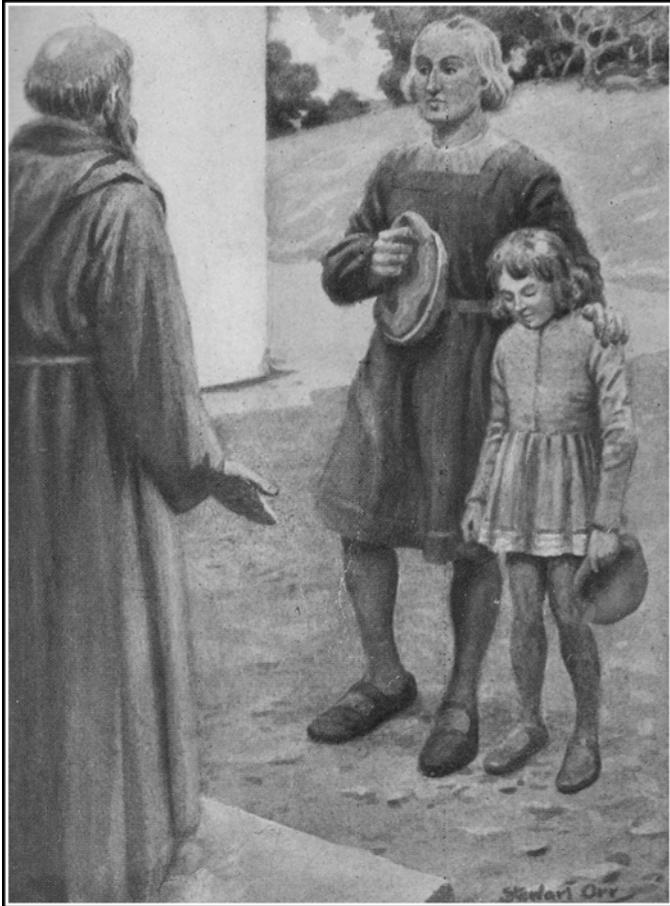
hesitated instead of giving him an answer at once. Then a war broke out, and they were too busy to think of him, though he waited patiently for a long time.

When he could not bear any further delay, he resolved to go to the King of France. On the way he passed through the little port of Palos, from which he was afterwards to sail. Near this port there was an old convent. At its gate Columbus stopped to ask if he and his young son Diego, who was with him, might rest for a little. The friar who came to them readily gave permission, and brought them some bread and a pitcher of water. Columbus talked with him about his hopes, and he became so much interested that he asked the prior of the convent to listen to the strange story. The prior was delighted with Columbus and believed him, and told him not to leave Spain yet, for he would try to help him. Accordingly he sent to his friends among the merchants of Palos, and one of them, Martin Alonzo Pinzon, said he would go on the voyage, and would help to provide the ships.

The prior then rode to the Court to see the Queen, and came to her, and told her that Columbus had given up hope of Spanish help, and was setting off for France. She said, "No, he must not go, even though I sell my own jewels to get the money." And, remembering how poor he was, Isabella sent a mule for him and a costly suit of clothes, that he might not be ashamed to come to Court. When he arrived she summoned him at once, and she and Ferdinand promised that he should be Viceroy, and Admiral, and have part of the riches, if he discovered the lands across the ocean. Lest he should fear to leave his

IN SPAIN

children alone in a strange land, they made Diego page to their own son Juan, and promised to take great care of Fernando, who was only four years old.



Columbus and his son Diego at the gate of the convent.

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So Columbus thanked the King and Queen, and hastened back to Palos to get together ships and men for the long voyage. After all these weary years his opportunity had come.

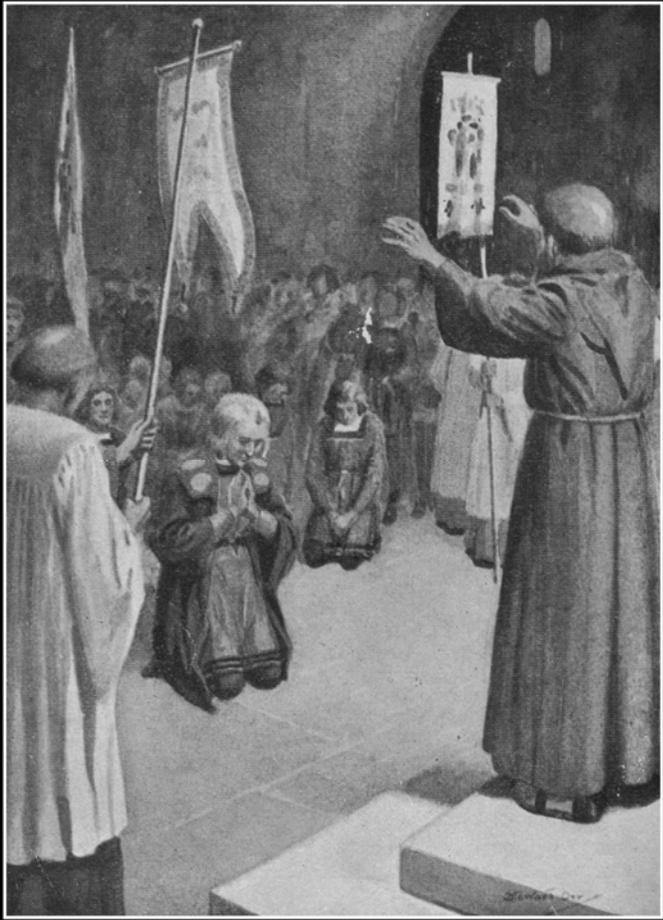
He went to the chief magistrates of Palos and gave them the royal orders to furnish three ships for his enterprise. They marched in a procession to the great church of the town, and from its porch they read these orders to the citizens of Palos.

Then fear spread among the seamen, who said they would not come back from the rash adventure, and among the ship-owners, who thought they would lose their vessels. But Columbus' friend, the prior, reassured them, and Martin Pinzon and his brothers offered to provide one ship. The merchants dared not disobey the King's command, and the other two ships were also found. They were all small—the largest was only sixty-three feet long, the length of a short cricket-pitch—but perhaps that was a good thing, for they were needed to sail among islands and up rivers as well as on the seas; and only one, the *Santa Maria*, was completely decked, the other two, the *Pinta* and the *Niña*, merely had cabins at the prow and stern.

There was trouble with the sailors. Some tried to escape; some hid; some pretended to be ill; some had wives and mothers, who hung about the ships weeping. Columbus was forced to be harsh, and to refuse to let any stay behind; so that before he left Palos he was hated by all the poor people in the port. Besides ninety seamen, one of whom was an Englishman, and another an Irishman, there were on

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board some reckless young men in search of adventure, a doctor, some artisans, and some clerks,— in all about a hundred and twenty persons.



Columbus and his crew confess and take communion before sailing.

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By the beginning of August all was ready, and Columbus made confession and took communion before sailing. So, too, did all the crew. Then, on Friday the 3rd of August 1492, he embarked as Admiral on the *Santa Maria*, Martin Pinzon took command of the *Pinta*, his brother of the *Niña*, and the three ships moved slowly out of Palos harbour. They had begun the great voyage.