

**CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS
AND THE NEW WORLD OF HIS DISCOVERY**

BY

FILSON YOUNG

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Front Page

COLUMBUS AND THE NEW WORLD OF HIS DISCOVERY

A NARRATIVE BY

FILSON YOUNG

WITH A NOTE ON THE NAVIGATION

OF COLUMBUS'S FIRST VOYAGE BY

THE EARL OF DUNRAVEN K.P.

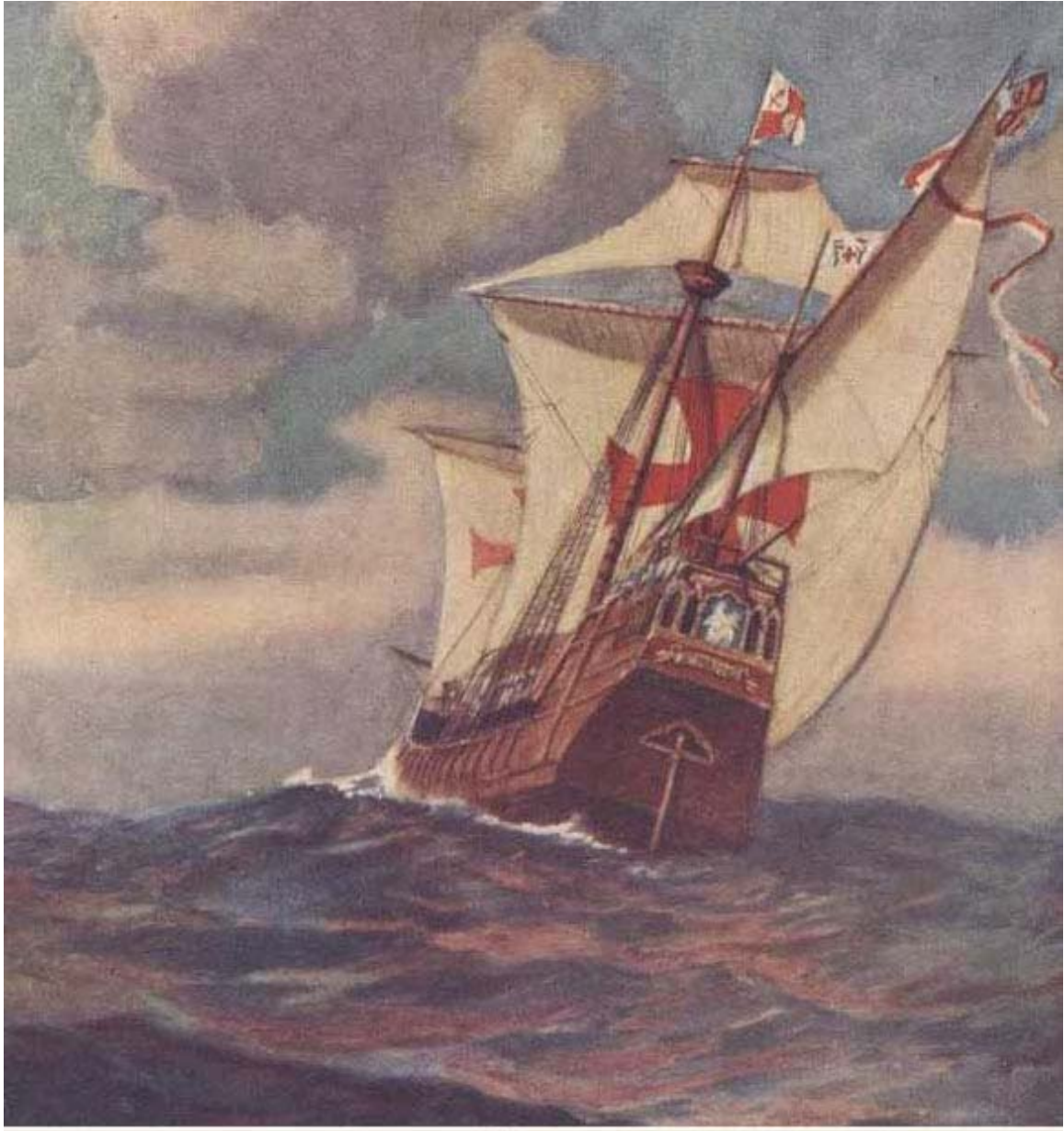
VOLUME I

SECOND EDITION

THY WAY IS THE SEA,

AND THY PATH IN THE GREAT WATERS,

AND THY FOOTSTEPS ARE NOT KNOWN.



**TO
THE RIGHT HON. SIR HORACE PLUNKETT,
K.C.V.O., D.C.L., F.R.S.**

MY DEAR HORACE,

Often while I have been studying the records of colonisation in the New World I have thought of you and your difficult work in Ireland; and I have said to myself, "What a time he would have had if he had been Viceroy of the Indies in 1493!" There, if ever, was the chance for a Department such as yours; and there, if anywhere, was the place for the Economic Man. Alas! there was only one of him; William Ires or Eyre, by name, from the county Galway; and though he fertilised the soil he did it with his blood and bones. A wonderful chance; and yet you see what came of it all. It would perhaps be stretching truth too far to say that you are trying to undo some of Columbus's work, and to stop up the hole he made in Ireland when he found a channel into which so much of what was best in the Old Country was destined to flow; for you and he have each your places in the great circle of Time and Compensation, and though you may seem to oppose one another across the centuries you are really answering the same call and working in the same vineyard. For we all set out to discover new worlds; and they are wise who realise early that human nature has roots that spread beneath the ocean bed, that neither latitude nor longitude nor time itself can change it to anything richer or stranger than what it is, and that furrows ploughed in it are furrows ploughed in the sea sand. Columbus tried to pour the wine of civilisation into very old bottles; you, more wisely, are trying to pour the old wine of our country into new bottles. Yet there is no great unlikeness between the two tasks: it is all a matter of bottling; the vintage is the same, infinite, inexhaustible, and as punctual as the sun and the seasons. It was Columbus's weakness as an administrator that he thought the bottle was everything; it is your strength that you care for the vintage, and labour to preserve its flavour and soft fire.

Yours,

FILSON YOUNG.

RUAN MINOR, September 1906.

Preface

The writing of historical biography is properly a work of partnership, to which public credit is awarded too often in an inverse proportion to the labours expended. One group of historians, labouring in the obscurest depths, dig and prepare the ground, searching and sifting the documentary soil with infinite labour and over an area immensely wide. They are followed by those scholars and specialists in history who give their lives to the study of a single period, and who sow literature in the furrows of research prepared by those who have preceded them. Last of all comes the essayist, or writer pure and simple, who reaps the harvest so laboriously prepared. The material lies all before him; the documents have been arranged, the immense contemporary fields of record and knowledge examined and searched for stray seeds of significance that may have blown over into them; the perspective is cleared for him, the relation of his facts to time and space and the march of human civilisation duly established; he has nothing to do but reap the field of harvest where it suits him, grind it in the wheels of whatever machinery his art is equipped with, and come before the public with the finished product. And invariably in this unequal partnership he reaps most richly who reaps latest.

I am far from putting this narrative forward as the fine and ultimate product of all the immense labour and research of the historians of Columbus; but I am anxious to excuse myself for my apparent presumption in venturing into a field which might more properly be occupied by the expert historian. It would appear that the double work of acquiring the facts of a piece of human history and of presenting them through the medium of literature can hardly ever be performed by one and the same man. A lifetime must be devoted to the one, a year or two may suffice for the other; and an entirely different set of qualities must be employed in the two tasks. I cannot make it too clear that I make no claim to have added one iota of information or one fragment of original research to the expert knowledge regarding the life of Christopher Columbus; and when I add that the chief collection of facts and documents relating to the subject, the 'Raccolta Columbiana,'—[Raccolta di Documenti e Studi Pubblicati dalla R. Commissione Colombiana, etc. Auspice il Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Rome, 1892-4.]—is a work consisting of more than thirty folio volumes, the general reader will be the more indulgent to me. But when a purely human interest led me some time ago to look into the literature of Columbus, I was amazed to find what seemed to me a striking disproportion between the extent of the modern historians' work on that subject and the knowledge or interest in it displayed by what we call the general reading public. I am surprised to find how many well-informed people there are whose knowledge of Columbus is comprised within two beliefs, one of them erroneous and the other doubtful: that he discovered America, and performed a trick with an egg. Americans, I think, are a little better informed on the subject than the English; perhaps because the greater part of modern critical research on the subject of Columbus has been the work of Americans. It is to bridge the immense gap existing between the labours of the historians and the indifference of the modern reader, between the *Raccolta Columbiana*, in fact, and the story of the egg, that I have written my narrative.

It is customary and proper to preface a work which is based entirely on the labours of other people with an acknowledgment of the sources whence it is drawn; and yet in the case of Columbus I do not know where to begin. In one way I am indebted to every serious writer who has even remotely concerned himself with the subject, from Columbus himself and Las Casas down to the editors of the *Raccolta*. The chain of historians has been so unbroken, the apostolic succession, so to speak, has passed with its heritage so intact from generation to generation, that the latest historian enshrines in his work the labours of all the rest. Yet there are necessarily some men whose work stands out as being more immediately seizable than that of others; in the period of whose care the lamp of inspiration has seemed to burn more brightly. In a matter of this kind I cannot pretend to be a judge, but only to state my own experience and indebtedness; and in my work I have been chiefly helped by Las Casas, indirectly of course by Ferdinand Columbus, Herrera, Oviedo, Bernaldez, Navarrete, Asensio, Mr. Payne, Mr. HARRISSE, Mr. Vignaud, Mr. Winsor, Mr. Thacher, Sir Clements Markham, Professor de Lollis, and S. Salvagnini. It is thus not among the dusty archives of Seville, Genoa, or San Domingo that I have searched, but in the archive formed by the writings of modern workers. To have myself gone back to original sources, even if I had been competent to do so, would have been in the case of Columbian research but a waste of time and a doing over again what has been done already with patience, diligence, and knowledge. The historians have been committed to the austere task of finding out and examining every fact and document in connection with their subject; and many of these facts and documents are entirely without human interest except in so far as they help to establish a date, a name, or a sum of money. It has been my agreeable and lighter task to test and assay the masses of bed-rock fact thus excavated by the historians for traces of the particular ore which I have been seeking. In fact I have tried to discover, from a reverent examination of all these monographs, essays, histories, memoirs, and controversies concerning what Christopher Columbus did, what Christopher Columbus was; believing as I do that any labour by which he can be made to live again, and from the dust of more than four hundred years be brought visibly to the mind's eye, will not be entirely without use and interest. Whether I have succeeded in doing so or not I cannot be the judge; I can only say that the labour of resuscitating a man so long buried beneath mountains of untruth and controversy has some times been so formidable as to have seemed hopeless. And yet one is always tempted back by the knowledge that Christopher Columbus is not only a name, but that the human being whom we so describe did actually once live and walk in the world; did actually sail and look upon seas where we may also sail and look; did stir with his feet the indestructible dust of this old Earth, and centre in himself, as we all do, the whole interest and meaning of the Universe. Truly the most commonplace fact, yet none the less amazing; and often when in the dust of documents he has seemed most dead and unreal to me I have found courage from the entertainment of some deep or absurd reflection; such as that he did once undoubtedly, like other mortals, blink and cough and blow his nose. And if my readers could realise that fact throughout every page of this book, I should say that I had succeeded in my task.

To be more particular in my acknowledgments. In common with every modern writer on Columbus—and modern research on the history of Columbus is only thirty years old—I owe to the labours of Mr. Henry HARRISSE, the chief of modern Columbian historians, the

indebtedness of the gold-miner to the gold-mine. In the matters of the Toscanelli correspondence and the early years of Columbus I have followed more closely Mr. Henry Vignaud, whose work may be regarded as a continuation and reexamination—in some cases destructive—of that of Mr. HARRISSE. Mr. Vignaud's work is happily not yet completed; we all look forward eagerly to the completion of that part of his 'Etudes Critiques' dealing with the second half of the Admiral's life; and Mr. Vignaud seems to me to stand higher than all modern workers in this field in the patient and fearless discovery of the truth regarding certain very controversial matters, and also in ability to give a sound and reasonable interpretation to those obscurer facts or deductions in Columbus's life that seem doomed never to be settled by the aid of documents alone. It may be unseemly in me not to acknowledge indebtedness to Washington Irving, but I cannot conscientiously do so. If I had been writing ten or fifteen years ago I might have taken his work seriously; but it is impossible that anything so one-sided, so inaccurate, so untrue to life, and so profoundly dull could continue to exist save in the absence of any critical knowledge or light on the subject. All that can be said for him is that he kept the lamp of interest in Columbus alive for English readers during the period that preceded the advent of modern critical research. Mr. Major's edition' of Columbus's letters has been freely consulted by me, as it must be by any one interested in the subject. Professor Justin Winsor's work has provided an invaluable store of ripe scholarship in matters of cosmography and geographical detail; Sir Clements Markham's book, by far the most trustworthy of modern English works on the subject, and a valuable record of the established facts in Columbus's life, has proved a sound guide in nautical matters; while the monograph of Mr. Elton, which apparently did not promise much at first, since the author has followed some untrustworthy leaders as regards his facts, proved to be full of a fragrant charm produced by the writer's knowledge of and interest in sub-tropical vegetation; and it is delightfully filled with the names of gums and spices. To Mr. Vignaud I owe special thanks, not only for the benefits of his research and of his admirable works on Columbus, but also for personal help and encouragement. Equally cordial thanks are due to Mr. John Boyd Thacher, whose work, giving as it does so large a selection of the Columbus documents both in facsimile, transliteration, and translation, is of the greatest service to every English writer on the subject of Columbus. It is the more to be regretted, since the documentary part of Mr. Thacher's work is so excellent, that in his critical studies he should have seemed to ignore some of the more important results of modern research. I am further particularly indebted to Mr. Thacher and to his publishers, Messrs. Putnam's Sons, for permission to reproduce certain illustrations in his work, and to avail myself also of his copies and translations of original Spanish and Italian documents. I have to thank Commendatore Guido Biagi, the keeper of the Laurentian Library in Florence, for his very kind help and letters of introduction to Italian librarians; Mr. Raymond Beazley, of Merton College, Oxford, for his most helpful correspondence; and Lord Dunraven for so kindly bringing, in the interests of my readers, his practical knowledge of navigation and seamanship to bear on the first voyage of Columbus. Finally my work has been helped and made possible by many intimate and personal kindnesses which, although they are not specified, are not the less deeply acknowledged.

September 1906.

Book I: The Inner Light

The Stream Of The World

A man standing on the sea-shore is perhaps as ancient and as primitive a symbol of wonder as the mind can conceive. Beneath his feet are the stones and grasses of an element that is his own, natural to him, in some degree belonging to him, at any rate accepted by him. He has place and condition there. Above him arches a world of immense void, fleecy sailing clouds, infinite clear blueness, shapes that change and dissolve; his day comes out of it, his source of light and warmth marches across it, night falls from it; showers and dews also, and the quiet influence of stars. Strange that impalpable element must be, and for ever unattainable by him; yet with its gifts of sun and shower, its furniture of winged life that inhabits also on the friendly soil, it has links and partnerships with life as he knows it and is a complement of earthly conditions. But at his feet there lies the fringe of another element, another condition, of a vaster and more simple unity than earth or air, which the primitive man of our picture knows to be not his at all. It is fluent and unstable, yet to be touched and felt; it rises and falls, moves and frets about his very feet, as though it had a life and entity of its own, and was engaged upon some mysterious business. Unlike the silent earth and the dreaming clouds it has a voice that fills his world and, now low, now loud, echoes throughout his waking and sleeping life. Earth with her sprouting fruits behind and beneath him; sky, and larks singing, above him; before him, an eternal alien, the sea: he stands there upon the shore, arrested, wondering. He lives,—this man of our figure; he proceeds, as all must proceed, with the task and burden of life. One by one its miracles are unfolded to him; miracles of fire and cold, and pain and pleasure; the seizure of love, the terrible magic of reproduction, the sad miracle of death. He fights and lusts and endures; and, no more troubled by any wonder, sleeps at last. But throughout the days of his life, in the very act of his rude existence, this great tumultuous presence of the sea troubles and overbears him. Sometimes in its bellowing rage it terrifies him, sometimes in its tranquillity it allures him; but whatever he is doing, grubbing for roots, chipping experimentally with bones and stones, he has an eye upon it; and in his passage by the shore he pauses, looks, and wonders. His eye is led from the crumbling snow at his feet, past the clear green of the shallows, beyond the furrows of the nearer waves, to the calm blue of the distance; and in his glance there shines again that wonder, as in his breast stirs the vague longing and unrest that is the life-force of the world.

What is there beyond? It is the eternal question asked by the finite of the infinite, by the mortal of the immortal; answer to it there is none save in the unending preoccupation of life and labour. And if this old question was in truth first asked upon the sea-shore, it was asked most often and with the most painful wonder upon western shores, whence the journeying sun was seen to go down and quench himself in the sea. The generations that followed our primitive man grew fast in knowledge, and perhaps for a time wondered the

less as they knew the more; but we may be sure they never ceased to wonder at what might lie beyond the sea. How much more must they have wondered if they looked west upon the waters, and saw the sun of each succeeding day sink upon a couch of glory where they could not follow? All pain aspires to oblivion, all toil to rest, all troubled discontent with what is present to what is unfamiliar and far away; and no power of knowledge and scientific fact will ever prevent human unhappiness from reaching out towards some land of dreams of which the burning brightness of a sea sunset is an image. Is it very hard to believe, then, that in that yearning towards the miracle of a sun quenched in sea distance, felt and felt again in human hearts through countless generations, the westward stream of human activity on this planet had its rise? Is it unreasonable to picture, on an earth spinning eastward, a treadmill rush of feet to follow the sinking light? The history of man's life in this world does not, at any rate, contradict us. Wisdom, discovery, art, commerce, science, civilisation have all moved west across our world; have all in their cycles followed the sun; have all, in their day of power, risen in the East and set in the West.

This stream of life has grown in force and volume with the passage of ages. It has always set from shore to sea in countless currents of adventure and speculation; but it has set most strongly from East to West. On its broad bosom the seeds of life and knowledge have been carried throughout the world. It brought the people of Tyre and Carthage to the coasts and oceans of distant worlds; it carried the English from Jutland across cold and stormy waters to the islands of their conquest; it carried the Romans across half the world; it bore the civilisation of the far East to new life and virgin western soils; it carried the new West to the old East, and is in our day bringing back again the new East to the old West. Religions, arts, tradings, philosophies, vices and laws have been borne, a strange flotsam, upon its unchanging flood. It has had its springs and neaps, its trembling high-water marks, its hour of affluence, when the world has been flooded with golden humanity; its ebb and effluence also, when it has seemed to shrink and desert the kingdoms set upon its shores. The fifteenth century in Western Europe found it at a pause in its movements: it had brought the trade and the learning of the East to the verge of the Old World, filling the harbours of the Mediterranean with ships and the monasteries of Italy and Spain with wisdom; and in the subsequent and punctual decadence that followed this flood, there gathered in the returning tide a greater energy and volume which was to carry the Old World bodily across the ocean. And yet, for all their wisdom and power, the Spanish and Portuguese were still in the attitude of our primitive man, standing on the sea-shore and looking out in wonder across the sea.

The flood of the life-stream began to set again, and little by little to rise and inundate Western Europe, floating off the galleys and caravels of King Alphonso of Portugal, and sending them to feel their way along the coasts of Africa; a little later drawing the mind of Prince Henry the Navigator to devote his life to the conquest and possession of the unknown. In his great castle on the promontory of Sagres, with the voice of the Atlantic thundering in his ears, and its mists and sprays bounding his vision, he felt the full force of the stream, and stretched his arms to the mysterious West. But the inner light was not yet so brightly kindled that he dared to follow his heart; his ships went south and south again, to brave on each voyage the dangers and terrors that lay along the unknown

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