

SKETCH OF COLUMBUS

Christopher Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy, about the year 1435, and died at Valladolid, Spain, May 20, 1506. He was the eldest son of Domenico Colombo, and after the custom of time he Latinized his name to Columbus. In one of his letters, he says that his ancestors, like himself, followed the seas. By some means he received a good education, though it was a time when many of the nobles could not write. At this period the Genoese were striving with the Venetians for the mastery of the sea, Maritime service was the readiest avenue to wealth and power, and his predictions in that direction were encouraged by his father. In 1449, he entered the maritime service of his native country, in which twenty years were passed afloat, but no continuous record of his career was preserved. In the year 1470, he found his way to Lisbon, capital of Portugal, where he remained for fourteen years, supporting himself by drawing charts, and making occasional voyages. Not long after he became a resident of Lisbon, he married the daughter of Bartholomew di Palettrelo, a distinguished Italian navigator in the service of the King. The lady's father died a short time after the marriage, Columbus received the deceased navigator's papers and journals, (a valuable legacy for one whose mind was already engrossed with the idea of maritime discovery) and resided for a time on his wife's small estate at Porto Santo, one of the Madeira islands. Here he was informed of a piece of curiously carved wood being washed ashore in a westerly gale; of a carved paddle being picked up 450 leagues west of Portugal; that canes of tropic growth had been washed on the Madeiras, huge pines on the Azores, and that even to drowned men, appearance unlike Europeans, had been found on the shore of the island of Flores – all of which had evidently come from the west. These tended to corroborate and establish in his mind any views he had previously entertained. In 1477, he made a voyage to Iceland, and the sea beyond, which he was astonished to find not frozen. But it is not known that his mind had conceived an idea beyond the discovery of the western passage to Asia, that he even expected to discover a new continent, or that he knew he had done so. His expectation was, in sailing west, to reach the Indies. Geographical knowledge was very limited and indefinite at that age of the world. The text book of the time, the *Imago Mundi*, advanced the Idea that the sea extends between Spain and the Indies – *quoque principia Orientis et Occidentis sunt prope, cum mare parvum ea separet ex altera parte terre*. Columbus did not originate the supposition that land lay to the westward, but his matured views were, that the earth is spherical; that Asia extended to a parallel now indicated by about 180° E. from Greenwich, and that a navigable ocean only intervened between Europe and Asia which was not more than one-third of the earth's circumference. History Records that he first applied for aid to make his great voyage of discovery, to his native republic of Genoa, and was refused. Thence to the King of Portugal, who remitted the subject to his special committee of maritime affairs, and likewise to his privy council. These, after many delays, reported against the project, and Columbus. Wearied and disgusted, having spent ten years in fruitless efforts, in 1484, went to Spain. Here he finally succeeded, after numerous attempts and failures, and long, perplexing delays in getting the attention of Ferdinand and Isabella, and again was his stupendous project referred to a council of learned men mostly ecclesiastics, under the presidency of the Queen's confessor. Seven years more of valuable time was uselessly spent; the conference, instead of making prompt investigation of scientific grounds, controverted the project on scriptural texts; and it was not until 1491, after many renewed applications, that the learned commission reported, and then pronounced it "vain and impossible, and not becoming great princes to engage in on such slender grounds as had been adduced." During this long period of hope deferred, Columbus must have possessed with remarkable perseverance, and no one without the most patient temperament could have sustained himself with such undiminished confidence. The report of the committee in 1491 was a death-blow to his hopes, and he meditated laying his hopes before Charles VIII of France. But some friends of Palos, a town where dwelt the most experienced and enterprising mariners of Spain, interceded at the opportune moment, proffered assistance, and aided in again getting the attention of the King and Queen. One of those who espoused his cause was an experienced navigator named Alonso Pinzon, who not only offered to advance the money, but to command a ship. At length, through the offer of the Queen Herself to render the desired aid, at her own expense, an agreement was entered into with Ferdinand and Isabella. The document was signed April 17, 1492, and in three months thereafter the expedition, consisting of three ships, the Santa Maria, the Pinta and the Nina, with full crews and provisions for one year, was ready to sail. In officers and men there were, in all, 120 souls. On Friday morning, August 3, 1492, the little expedition set sail. It is unnecessary, in this connection to trace the incidents of the voyage. At 2 o'clock A. M. of Friday, October 12, 1492, after a prolonged and uncertain voyage of seventy-one days, the signal gun was fired announcing the discovery of land. Rodrigo Triana, a sailor of the Pinta, was the first who saw the new

world. At sunrise the boats were rowed to the shore, and Columbus, bearing the royal standard of Castile, was the first to step upon the beach of one of the Islands of the West Indies. All knelt down, kissing the ground with tears and thanks to God. Returning to Spain on the 15th day of March, 1493, he was received with great honors, and subsequently made his second, third and fourth voyages. It was on the third voyage that he approached and landed at several places bordering on the Mexican gulf, but he never knew that he had discovered a great continent. His last expeditions were all deprived of complete success by the dissensions, quarrels, and mutinies that occurred among his adventurous followers; he suffered many indignities, and was the victim of malice, misrepresentation and ingratitude. A conspiracy against him on his third voyage resulted in his being sent back to Spain in chains. From his last voyage he returned sick, and being seventy years old, broken in body, he died without having received redress for his wrongs or recognition for the great service he had rendered mankind. He was deprived of the honor of associating his name with that of the new found world, and not until after his death was his valuable life appreciated.