

## A CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF COLUMBUS.

Apropos of the World's Fair, as a matter of course, all Americans and, for that matter, all civilized people, should be familiar with the life of the discoverer whose great achievement is the occasion for the present extraordinary celebration. On the supposition that the reader is already acquainted with much of this biography we offer the following detached chapter as an interesting incident of the hero's life:

After his third voyage to the new world Columbus sent to the Spanish sovereign specimens of the beautiful pearls he had discovered on the coast of Paria accompanied by an account of the coast, and of his own glowing expectation of the newly found land which afterward proved to be the mainland of South America. Charts of the route were also sent and these fell into the hands of his most implacable enemy. This was Fonseca, director of Indian affairs in Spain. Fonseca imparted the information to Alonso de Ojeda, a daring and unscrupulous adventurer who had returned from a former voyage to the new world. He also informed him of the difficulties through which Columbus was passing, of factions and rebellions in the island and jealous suspicions at home with which even the king's mind was not untainted. He did not conceal the fact that he was himself looking forward with confidence and eager expectancy to the final downfall of the admiral; or that he was facilitating that event by every means within his power, legal or illegal. Ojeda foresaw an opportunity of self-aggrandizement, not only through officially seconding and assisting the shameful efforts of Columbus's enemies, but by personal enterprise in snatching the first fruits of the rich pearl fisheries and gold mines of the new world, which were pledged by the crown to be kept inviolate from individual speculation. Contrary to this stipulation, Ojeda was granted the privilege of fitting out a private enterprise to explore the coast of Paria and any part of the new world not discovered prior to 1445. Many wealthy persons assisted Ojeda in fitting out his fleet and many adventurous men accompanied the expedition. Among the latter was Amerigo Vespucci, whose account of this voyage afterward caused his name to be given to the new continent. When Roldan, who was sent by Columbus to inquire into the cause for the presence of Ojeda in a distant part of the island of Hayti, called upon the intruder to give an account of himself, he artfully promised to visit and report to the admiral himself—a promise which he had no idea of fulfilling. When next heard from he was settling himself up as a leader of a rebellious faction in the distant province of Aragua. Upon learning this Columbus again sent Roldan against him, this time with a force of armed men. Ojeda retired to his ships but was brought to terms and promised to return to Spain. This pledge was also broken and he was presently seen in a remote part making up a drove of slaves of the poor natives to be sold in the slave markets of Spain.

Ojeda had told Roldan that the downfall of Columbus was near at hand and that Isabella, his friend and patroness, was sick unto death. The severe difficulties which the admiral (Columbus) had encountered since his first conception of the great enterprise of discovery, and the seeming boldness with which Ojeda prosecuted his piracy, rendered the tale apparently probable. Columbus was grieved but still trusted in the justice and gratitude of his sovereigns. He congratulated himself upon having successfully quelled the mutinies of the island and having established a foundation of peace and prosperity and the peaceful submission of the natives. He thought he could see his way clear for the prosecution of his long-cherished design—a voyage of exploration to the coast of Paria. In his imagination it was to be the fulfillment of his greatest hopes. Beyond that splendid coast of which he had caught just a glimpse, he confidently expected to find the Grand Khan whose rich kingdom was to furnish the mighty wealth which was to compensate the Spanish crown for its belief in him, and which was to redeem, according to his fervent vow, the holy repulcher in which the crusades of past centuries had failed. The dreams of Columbus could never have been surpassed by the paradise of Mahomet; but the serpent in his Eden had always been of no insignificant dimensions. His hopes and splendid designs were repeatedly interrupted by his malicious foe. And thus it happened now.

Every ship load of returning voyagers to Spain recounted tales of disappointment; and ever was repeated the ungenerous, illiberal charge that the Columbus brothers were of foreign and common birth who therefore loved to dominate the high-born sons of Spain. A new slander began to circulate at court and reached the suspicious and jealous ear of Ferdinand. This was to the effect that Columbus designed to throw off his allegiance to Spain and make himself sovereign of the new world or else offer it to some other power. Fonseca was in favor at court and manipulated every suspicion, hint or slander to its fullest extent, leaving not a stone unturned that could accelerate the downfall of the man whom he so unjustly hated.

It was determined to send an inspector to Hispaniola to investigate the affairs of the island. This would have been right but for the injudicious power entrusted in the chosen individual, and was in accordance with the expressed desire of the admiral.

The man who was appointed to this office was Francisco de Bobadilla, an indigent and ambitious courtier. The reward for his services was to be the prerogatives and dignities belonging to the admiral should he succeed in establishing guilt in him! He was, however, commanded to first inquire into the rebellions that had existed in the island and to punish such as were really guilty. He was then to investigate, calmly and candidly, the conduct of the admiral, and to establish his guilt beyond a question or doubt before proceeding against him.

Arrived at the island, Bobadilla proceeded in exactly inverse order. Columbus was in the interior regulat-

ing its affairs at the time of his arrival. Bobadilla took advantage of his absence, seized the reins of government, established himself in the admiral's residence, took possession of all his effects, including his private letters and manuscripts, and gave a generous welcome to every malcontent who could conjure a real or fancied grievance against the admiral. Nay, complaint was even encouraged and amplified that the net of evidence might be woven so firmly around its victim as to insure his ruin, establish the new governor in his usurped position and screen him against the deserved consequences of his own precipitate folly.

When the news of these proceedings was brought to the ears of Columbus he would not believe that they were done with the sanction of the crown; but the letters patent produced by the usurper settled this point. Embarrassed, grieved by the abrupt, insulting manner in which he had been hurled from his position, he slowly and humbly obeyed the arrogant summons to appear before Bobadilla. He had no sooner arrived at San Domingo, than he was ordered to be put in irons. Even his enemies were shocked at so great an indignity being thrust upon the venerable and dignified man, and all refused to perform the disgraceful act of fastening the shackles. At last a mean domestic was found to accept the task. It has been truly said that "there is a noble scorn which swells and supports the heart, and silences the tongue of the truly great when enduring the insults of the unworthy." The superior dignity and virtue of Columbus asserted itself in his present situation. He heard in silent scorn the old charge of outrage upon Castilian pride by imposing labor upon Spanish nobles (in difficult times of emergency when the building of public fortresses was imperative for public safety); of limiting food allowances (when such was the only safeguard against actual starvation); of preventing the conversion of the natives to Christianity that he might enslave them instead, when the truth was that he objected to their baptism without first having been first instructed in the principles of the Christian faith. He was falsely charged with having secreted pearls and gold that belonged to the government, with tyranny in quelling the rebellions of the island, with secret hatred of Spaniards, and with almost any foolish or malignant grievance that could be concocted.

In colonizing the island the hazardous plan of pardoning criminals or rather of commuting their sentences to transportation to the new world had been adopted. What good could be expected from a community of that low, vulgar class? It consisted of the very dregs of society. Shall the reputation of a man of Columbus's high type rest upon the judgment of such as these? Spain had thus flushed the island with miscreants of all kinds who were jubilant over this triumph of falsehood and villainy. Base spirits who had stood in awe of him while fortune smiled upon him reviled and scoffed at him now in chains. He heard their ribaldry with a silent scorn and did not deign to retort or recriminate either the vile rebels or the miserable