

The humble port of Palos, on the Atlantic coast, was the one from which they were to sail. Preparations hastened to a close, at last all were ready, and the little band repaired to the Church, that they might leave fortified by sympathy and prayer.

The three little vessels rode quietly in the harbor, rocked gently on the rising swell; little dreamed the idle gazers on their humble equipments of the figure they were to make in the annals of the world. The moment came when anchors were weighed, sails unfurled, and the barks sped away. Columbus, whose heart was too full of prophetic hope to allow him to falter, directed their course with a steady voice, while the mariners now fairly embarked upon this uncertain enterprise, and overawed by the strangeness of their situation, yielded to his influence. Every sail was set, a propitious wind hurried them on; and ere the evening star lighted the ocean, the adventurers bade adieu to Spain. What thoughts were theirs!—how sublime was their mission!

How desolate must the ocean have appeared—how narrowed their hold upon the world, as with solemn hearts and voices, those lonely sailors sang their evening song, and from vessel to vessel resounded the answering watch-word; while sinking over the billows fell the veil of night.

Columbus paced the deck of the foremost barque,—the moment was too intensely fraught with emotions of sublimity to admit of sleep. He had launched upon the unknown ocean, and was steering away from land. No human power could aid him, —no human heart could assume the responsibility that rested on him,—how could he sleep with the gushings of that enthusiastic spirit heaving his whole frame? Now he looked out on the silvered furrow ploughed by his vessel, and saw in her wake the lights of the sister vessels, glimmering and dancing, ignis fatuus-like—apt illustration of the uncertainty of his success. Again he cast his eye upon the glorious host of the stars; they shone upon the water, as upon the land; sentinels they seemed, beacons scattered in the grand concave, to remind of that Power who never slumbered or slept; and then to calm his mind he stood by the binnacle light, and watching the needle, called out the passing bells as the night wore on.