

HOME & SCHOOL

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Columbus.

There have come upon the stage of human action in different ages of the world men who far transcend all their contemporaries in the grandeur and importance of the parts they played,—men who, like Saul, towered above their fellows by the head and shoulders—who were giants among giants—who by their achievements gave an entirely new cast to the drama of the age, to the history of the world. Such an one was Columbus, upon whose life and character we purpose to make a few remarks. For many ages no more was known of this western world on which we live than if it were a separate planet—nay, much less, its very existence was not even suspected. Alexander, when he sat down by the side of the farther Ganges and wept for another world to conquer, no more conceived the idea of leading his soldiers across the sea than of invading the moon. Modern research has indeed made it appear that the wild northern Vikings effected a landing on our extreme eastern boundaries. Their landing was brought about, it is most likely, by stress of weather and by the long prevalence of easterly winds, when, driven before the storm like sea-birds in a hurricane, they merely dashed into some sheltered nook until the return of fair weather permitted them to skim their homeward way to their bleak Iceland or foggy Denmark.

Not so Columbus. By long thinking, by the study of the globe, and



COLUMBUS AND HIS SON.

by a dreamy legend of some far Cathay, where gold was for plenty as the stones of the field, and where silver was as the dust of the earth, he conceived the bold idea of reaching, by sailing round the world,

the treasure-house of India, the gorgeous East, which,

“With richest hand,
Shows on her kings barbaric pearl and gold.”

When the genius of science placed

in the hands of Columbus, their apostle of discovery, the magnetic steel wherewith to direct his course on pathless seas, his prophetic soul, pierced through the clouds of ignorance and superstition which long had mantled the popular mind, and declared to an incredulous world the existence of a western way to those golden realms.

Boldly, and in the face of all opposition, he maintained his heterodox opinion, notwithstanding that a council of the learned doctors of Salamanca declared his project to be impossible, proved from Scripture that it was impious, and denounced as heretical all who should presume to entertain it. For twenty years he cherished his fond purpose, without assistance and without sympathy, regarded by all except a few enlightened friends as an enthusiast and dreamer, still strong in the assurance of his heart, hoping on, struggling on, in his weary endeavour to accomplish his design—now closeted with kings—now arraigned before councils—now receiving the hospitalities of some charitable convent—now begging his way from land to land, from court to court, and now selling maps and charts to obtain a scanty subsistence. Some such incident is represented in the picture in which the great discoverer

with his son receive the alms and at the same time the contemptuous pity of the people, as hare-brained dreamers or mad enthusiasts.

At length he succeeds in interesting in his project the warm-hearted and