

king. The popular view, as adopted by most writers, is that he regarded Columbus as having served his day: the ladder had fulfilled its use, and might now be kicked down. It is, perhaps, more reasonable to believe that Ferdinand hardly knew how to act, with his queen still firmly believing in the great discoverer, and so much pressure in other directions being brought to bear from the court and outside. It was determined to send out a commissioner to investigate the affairs of the colony, and the person chosen seems to have been a most unfit agent. He was one Francisco de Bobadilla, a poor knight of Calatrava, who, puffed up with arrogance at his sudden elevation, seems from the first to have regarded Columbus in the light of a convicted criminal. On his arrival in San Domingo he immediately commanded the admiral to appear before him, and without even pretence of legal inquiry, put him in chains, and thrust him into prison. His two brothers, Bartolomeo and Diego, suffered the same indignities. Bobadilla gave orders that he should be kept strictly in irons during the passage; "afraid," says his son Ferdinand, satirically, "that he might by any chance swim back again to the island." It is recorded that the officers who had him in charge would have removed them, but Columbus proudly and bitterly told them, "I will wear them till the king orders otherwise, and will preserve them as memorials of his gratitude." On arrival at Cadiz, it is not to be wondered that the popular indignation burst forth like a torrent, and was re-echoed through Spain; all seemed to feel it as a national dishonour that such indignities should be heaped on the greatest discoverer of his day. Ferdinand understood the weight of obloquy which, rightly or wrongly, would rest upon him, and sent to Cadiz immediately to release him. The king disclaimed all share in the shameful act; while the queen, who was at least honest in the matter, shed tears when the old man came into her presence, and endeavoured to cheer his wounded spirit. But Ferdinand had no intention of reinstating him in his former power, and Columbus wasted nine months in vain solicitations for redress. At the end of this time, another governor of Hispaniola was appointed in his place. During this time Columbus was reduced to poverty, and we have his own statement to the effect that "he had no place to repair to except an inn, and very frequently had not wherewithal to pay his reckoning."

Later he was indeed employed on a fourth voyage, but with greatly curtailed powers. He imagined that there might be a passage through the Isthmus of Darien, which would shorten the passage to the East Indies. It need not be stated that he did not find it, although a ship canal through that neck of land has been and is now being mooted, and may some day become an accomplished fact. He, however, discovered parts of the coasts of Honduras, the Mosquito coast, and Costa Rica. Again we find him making his way to Hispaniola, on this occasion with only two over-crowded vessels, almost wrecks in fact, out of the four with which he had sailed from Cadiz. Here he exhausted his funds in procuring necessities and comforts for his men, even for those who had on the voyage been the ringleaders of vexatious and outrageous mutinies. At length he returned to Spain, where he learned of the death of Queen Isabella, his warm patron. Wearied with illness and disappointment, it was some months before he could proceed on his journey to the court, then at Segovia. Columbus at this period of his life—he was not far from seventy years of age—suffered severely from gout. When he did meet Ferdinand, that monarch gave him fair words,