

illustration of this remark in Columbus. The strong passion for geographical knowledge which he so early felt, and which gave rise to his after actions, was incident to the age in which he lived. Geographical discovery was the brilliant path of light which was for ever to distinguish the fifteenth century,—the most splendid era of invention in the annals of the world. During the long night of monkish bigotry and false learning, geography, with the other sciences, had been lost to the European nations. Fortunately it had not been lost to mankind: it had taken refuge in the bosom of Africa. While the pedantic schoolmen of the cloisters were wasting time and talent, and confounding erudition by idle reveries, and sophistical dialectics, the Arabian sages, assembled at Senaar, were taking the measurement of a degree of latitude, and calculating the circumference of the earth, on the vast plains of Mesopotamia.

True knowledge, thus happily preserved, was now making its way back to Europe. The revival of science accompanied the revival of letters. Among the various authors which the awakening zeal for ancient literature had once more brought into notice, were Pliny, Pomponius Mela, and Strabo. From these was regained a fund of geographical knowledge, which had long faded from the public mind. Curiosity was aroused to pursue this forgotten path, thus suddenly reopened. A translation of the work of Ptolemy had been made into Latin, at the commencement of the century, by Emanuel Chrysoloras, a noble and learned Greek, and had thus been rendered more familiar to the Italian students. Another translation had followed, by James Angel de Scarpia, of which fair and beautiful copies became common in the Italian libraries.¹ The writings also began to be sought after of Averroes, Alfraganus, and other Arabian sages, who had kept the sacred fire of science alive, during the interval of European darkness.

The knowledge thus reviving was but limited and imperfect; yet, like the return of morning light, it was full of interest and beauty. It seemed to call a new creation into existence, and broke, with all the charm of wonder, upon imaginative minds. They were surprised at their own ignorance of the world around them. Every step seemed discovery, for every region beyond their native country was in a manner terra incognita.

Such was the state of information and feeling with respect to this interesting science, in the early part of the fifteenth century. An interest still more intense was awakening, from the discoveries that began to be made along the Atlantic coasts of Africa; and must have been particularly felt among a maritime and commercial people like the Genoese. To these circumstances may we ascribe the enthusiastic devotion which Columbus imbibed in his childhood for cosmographical studies, and which influenced all his after fortunes.

¹ Andres, *Hist. B. Let.*, lib. iii, cap 2.

In considering his scanty education, it is worthy of notice how little he owed, from the very first, to adventitious aid; how much to the native energy of his character, and the fertility of his mind. The short time that he remained at Pavia was barely sufficient to give him the rudiments of the necessary sciences; the familiar acquaintance with them, which he evinced in after life, must have been the result of diligent self-schooling, and casual hours of study, amidst the cares and vicissitudes of a rugged and wandering life. He was one of those men of strong natural genius, who appear to form themselves; who, from having to contend at their very outset with privations and impediments, acquire an intrepidity to encounter, and a facility to vanquish difficulties, throughout their career. Such men learn to effect great purposes with small means, supplying this deficiency by the resources of their own energy and invention. This from his earliest commencement, throughout the whole of his life, was one of the remarkable features in the history of Columbus. In every undertaking, the scantiness and apparent insufficiency of his means enhance the grandeur of his achievements.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY LIFE OF COLUMBUS.

COLUMBUS left the university of Pavia while yet extremely young, and returned to his father's house in Genoa. It has been asserted by Giustiniani, a contemporary writer, in his annals of that republic, and repeated by other historians,¹ that he remained for some time in Genoa, following his father's trade of wool-combing. The assertion is indignantly contradicted by his son Fernando, who, however, gives us no information to supply its place.² The opinion generally received, is, that he immediately entered into nautical life, for which he had been educated, and to which he was prompted by his roving and enterprising disposition. He says himself, that he began to navigate at fourteen years of age.³

In a maritime city, the sea has irresistible attractions for a youth of ardent curiosity, and his imagination pictures forth every thing fair and desirable beyond its waters. Genoa, also, walled and strained on the land side by rugged mountains, yielded but little scope for enterprise on shore; while an opulent and widely extended commerce, visiting every country, and a roving marine, battling in every sea, naturally led forth her children upon the waves as their propitious element. Foglieta, in his history of Genoa, speaks of the proneness of its youth to wander about in quest of fortune, with the intention of returning to settle in their native place; but adds, that of twenty

¹ Anton. Gallo, de *Navigazione Columbii*, etc. Muratori, t. 25.

² Barta Senarega, de *Rebus Genuensibus*. Muratori, t. 24.

³ *Hist. del Almirante*, c. 2.

⁴ *Hist. del Almirante*, c. 4.

who thus departed or marrying in the tempest of public.

The seafaring days, was made enterprises. Even a warlike cruise, to fight his way most legitimate Italian States; the armadas fitted out a kind of kept petty arm ships and squad naval Condottie governments, so of lawless booty nually waged a dered the narrow principally conf counters and try

Such was the was reared, and ing to have ma genius amidst it the hardships a venturer in a s have cherished a fed his imaginat prise. The sev gave him that p resource, that ur command, for w In this way, the to healthful alim piring mind.

All this instr covered with c could have best or has now and perhaps unwilling to reveal the inc father so glorious tered anecdotes esting, as givin venturous life b which we have was a naval exp covery of a crow Genoa in 1459, to make a desec vering that king Renato, otherw In this expediti furnishing ship vate adventurers and engaged u these, we are t