

1492.

COLUMBUS, on the third day of August, set sail from Palos in Spain, with three vessels and ninety men, on a voyage the most daring and grand in its design, and the most important in its result, of any, that had ever been attempted. He, as admiral, commanded the largest ship, called Santa María; Martin Alonzo Pinzon was captain of the Pinta; and Vincent Yanez Pinzon, of the Nigna. When the fleet was about two hundred leagues to the west of the Canary islands, Columbus observed that the magnetic needle in the compasses did not point exactly to the polar star, but varied toward the west.¹ This discovery made an alarming impression on his pilots and mariners; but his fertile genius helped him to assign a plausible reason for this strange appearance, and to dispel their fears. Expedients, however, at length lost their effect. The crew, with loud and insolent clamour, insisted on his return, and some of the most audacious proposed to throw him into the sea. When his invention was nearly exhausted, and his hope nearly abandoned, the only event, that could ap-

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pedition was to be defrayed by the crown of Castile, and Isabella reserved for her subjects of that kingdom an exclusive right to all the benefits, that should accrue from its success. Robertson, i. book ii. Throughout this transaction, the conduct of Isabella was truly magnanimous; and though she did not, like the Tyrian queen, conduct the great enterprise in person, yet she has strong claim to similar honour: *Dux famina facti.*

1 He sailed from Gomera, one of the most westerly of the Canary islands, on the 6th of September, "which may be accounted the first setting out upon the voyage on the ocean." Life of Columbus, c. xviii.

2 One of these vessels had a deck; the other two, called Caravels, had none. They are thus described by Peter Martyr: "Ex regio fisco destinata sunt tria navigia: unum onerarium caveatum, alia duo levia mercatoria sine caveis, quæ ab Hispanis caravelæ vocantur." De Nov. Orb. p. 2.

3 Stow erroneously ascribes this discovery to Sebastian Cabot, five years after this voyage of Columbus. It unquestionably was made in this first voyage. With the correction of the name and date, the remark of this venerable antiquarian is just: "Before his time, ever since the first finding of the magneticall needle, it was generallie supposed to lie precisely in place of the meridian, and crosse the equator at right angles, respecting with the points due north and south." Stow's Chronicle, p. 311.