

almost nothing is known of him, except that he was afloat during the greater part of that time, battling with storm and billow, fighting pirates and infidels, familiarizing himself with strange lands and men, learning how to lay his hand fearlessly on ocean's mane when its wrath is roused, how to be patient, enduring and watchful of opportunity. Thus the future sea-king served his apprenticeship of twenty years, developing the hardihood and courage that rendered him one of the most skilful and intrepid navigators of his day. About the end of this period he arrived in Lisbon, being then thirty-five years of age. He was attracted, no doubt, by the fame of the Portuguese discoveries, and wished to profit by intercourse with her famous captains. In the prime of life at this time, he is described as tall, muscular, well formed; his eyes light grey, full of depth and fire; his demeanour dignified, indicating one born to command. In Lisbon he settled, married, and was naturalized. For several years he voyaged frequently to the coast of Guinea; and when on shore supported himself by making maps and charts, an art in which he greatly excelled.

Our curiosity yearns to know in what way, and under what conjuncture of circumstances, his great idea first arose in his mind,—at what moment his mighty hope dawned. We only know that during these years when he was voyaging, the thought that afterwards rose to imperial power in his soul was slowly evolved and pondered in the depths of his spirit. In solitude all great thoughts are born:—

"If the chosen soul could never be alone
In deep mid-silence, open-doored to God,
No greatness ever had been dreamed or done.
Among dull hearts a prophet never grew:
The nurse of full-grown souls is solitude."

No great discovery has ever yet been reached at a bound; but slowly, painfully, and with many a hesitating step. It was so in the case of Columbus. A dim expectancy, a trembling hope, (Heaven-awakened surely, as he believed,) began to throb. Each new scrap of knowledge, slowly gathered, fed and strengthened it. Above all was it nourished into power by his religious faith, drawing every element of beauty and strength into its own high, inward service. Dim and vague at first, the idea slowly took definite shape that he, too, by Heaven's grace, might achieve some great discovery, bringing glory to God and good to man. Not without many "fightings without and fears within," did the throbbing thought advance. We may picture him, at this time, pacing the deck of his little bark, the rough, thoughtless sailors around, gazing wistfully over those watery wastes to the west, as yet unfurrowed by a keel, and longing for the hour when he would find himself afloat, with his prow towards the setting sun. And then when night has closed in, we may fancy him in his little cabin poring over Toscanelli's map of the world, by the flickering light of his poor lamp; then opening the marvellous pages of Marco Polo, and pondering his glowing descriptions of Cathay and Cipango; and then turning to the burning words of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, and weighing the meaning of their dark sayings, and at length seeing the foreshadowing of his own high hopes gleaming from the mystic page, and so building up into certainty his formless conceptions, till a sacred rapture pervades his soul.

No special sources of information were open to Columbus, on which to found his great expectancy. The materials at his command were open to all, and were poor enough. These were, the cosmographical speculations of the day, in which imagination largely mingled; the dreams of learned men;