

## *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*

the resulting exhaustion, for he sometimes went eight days with less than three hours' sleep. This would seem impossible did he not himself tell it in his writings.

### CHAPTER 61

#### *How the Admiral Completed the Conquest of Española, and What He Did to Make It Yield Revenue*

On his return to Española from the exploration of Cuba and Jamaica, the Admiral found his brother Bartholomew, who, as told before, had gone to treat with the King of England concerning the discovery of the Indies. On his way back to Castile with an agreement in his possession,<sup>1</sup> he learned in Paris from King Charles of France<sup>2</sup> that his brother the Admiral had already discovered the Indies; the King also presented him with a hundred escudos for his traveling expenses. Bartholomew then made all haste to get to the Admiral in Spain, but when he reached Seville, his brother had already sailed with a fleet of seventeen ships.

Complying with the Admiral's written request, Bartholomew at the opening of the year 1494 conducted Don Diego Columbus, my brother, and myself, to the Court of the Catholic Sovereigns to serve as pages to the most serene Prince Don Juan (whom God keep), by order of the Catholic Queen Isabella, who was then in Valladolid. As soon as we arrived, the Sovereigns summoned Don Bartholomew and sent him to Española with three ships. There he served several years, as appears from a memorandum of his in which he writes the following, "I served as captain from April 14, 1494, until March 12, 1496, when the Admiral sailed for Castile. Then I began to serve as governor and continued in that capacity until August 28, 1498, when the Admiral left on a voyage to discover Paria. At that time I once more began to serve as captain,

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continuing as such until December 11, 1500, when I returned to Castile."

Returning, then, from Cuba to find his brother on Española, the Admiral named him Adelantado, or governor, of the Indies. Later there was a dispute over this because the Catholic Sovereigns denied they had empowered the Admiral to make such an appointment. To settle their difference they appointed the Admiral's brother to that office again, and thereafter he was called Adelantado of the Indies.

With the aid and advice of his brother the Admiral had some rest and lived very tranquilly, though much troubled both by his illness and because he found that most of the Indians of the country had risen in revolt through the fault of Pedro Margarit, of whom I spoke above. At the time of his departure for Cuba the Admiral had appointed this man captain over three hundred and sixty foot soldiers and fourteen troopers with instructions to patrol the country and reduce it to the service of the Catholic Sovereigns and to compel the Indians to obey the Spaniards—especially in the province of the Cibao, from which the greatest advantage was anticipated. Instead of treating the Admiral with due consideration and respect, Margarit had paid no heed to the Admiral's wishes. Hardly had the Admiral departed when he went off with all his men to the Vega Real, ten leagues from Isabela, with no intention of patrolling or pacifying the island. Instead he proved to be the prime cause of the discords and factions that arose in Isabela, scheming and contriving to have the members of the council established by the Admiral obey his orders, and sending them insolent letters. In the end, seeing he could not achieve his aim of setting himself above all the others, and being unwilling to await the arrival of the Admiral, to whom he would have had to account for his actions in office, he embarked on the first ships that came from Castile, without giving an account of himself or making any disposition of the men left in his charge. As a result each one went where he willed among the Indians, stealing their property and wives and inflicting so many injuries upon them that the Indians resolved to avenge themselves on any that they found alone or in small groups. Thus the cacique of the Magdalena, named Guatiganá, killed ten Christians and secretly ordered fire to be set to a hut in which there were forty sick men. On his return the Admiral severely punished these actions; for though he could not

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apprehend the cacique, some of his people were seized and sent prisoners to Castile in the fleet of four ships with which Antonio de Torres sailed as commander on February 24, 1495.<sup>3</sup>

He also punished six or seven others who had harmed Christians at various places on the island. Those caciques had already slain many Christians and would have killed many more if the Admiral had not stopped them in time. The Admiral found the island in a pitiful state, with most of the Christians committing innumerable outrages for which they were mortally hated by the Indians, who refused to obey them. The kings and caciques of the island were united in refusing to serve the Christians; and the fact that there were only four principal men among them, whom the other chiefs obeyed, made it easy to obtain the general assent.

These four principal men were Caonabó, Higuanamá, Behechio, and Guarionex. Each had under him seventy or eighty caciques, who rendered no tribute but were obliged to come when summoned to assist them in their wars and in sowing their fields. One of these caciques, Guacanagarí, lord of that part of the island where the town of Navidad had been founded, kept friendship with the Christians; for this reason, as soon as he learned of the Admiral's return, he visited him to let him know that he had no part in the schemes of the other caciques and had given them no aid. As proof of this he recalled the hospitality he had always shown the Christians, of whom no less than a hundred were constantly maintained and supplied by him with all he could provide. For that reason he was hated by the other caciques, especially by Behechio, who had killed one of his wives, and by Caonabó, who had stolen from him another; and that was why he now appealed to the Admiral to restore his wife to him and help him get revenge for his injuries. This the Admiral agreed to do, believing in the good faith of that cacique, for he wept each time he recalled the men who had been killed at Navidad, as if they had been his own sons. Moreover, the Admiral reflected that by taking advantage of the discords among the caciques he might the more easily conquer the island and punish the rebellion of the other Indians and avenge the death of the Christians who had been slain.

On March 24, 1495, therefore, he marched forth from Isabela in warlike array together with his ally and comrade Guacanagarí, who was most eager to rout his enemies. This promised to be a difficult feat, for the rebel caciques had assembled more than one

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hundred thousand Indians, while the Admiral had only two hundred Christians, twenty horses, and as many hounds. But the Admiral, who understood the Indian character and habits, after a ten days' march from Isabela divided his army into two groups, one under himself and the other under his brother the Adelantado. He intended to attack that scattered horde of Indians from different directions, for he believed that the Indians, frightened by a great din arising simultaneously on various sides, would break and flee in panic; and so it turned out. First the infantry squadrons of the two divisions attacked the Indian host and began to rout them with crossbow and harquebus shots; then the cavalry and hounds fell upon them impetuously to prevent their rallying. As a result those cowardly Indians fled in all directions, hotly pursued by our men, who with God's aid soon gained a complete victory, killing many Indians and capturing others who were also killed. Caonabó, the principal cacique, was taken alive together with his wives and children.<sup>4</sup>

Caonabó afterwards confessed that he had killed twenty of the Spaniards who remained under Arana in Navidad when the Admiral returned to Spain from the discovery of the Indies; and that later, feigning friendship, he had visited Isabela with the true design (which our men suspected) of seeing how he might best attack and destroy it as he had done to the town of Navidad. This the Admiral had already learned from others; and it was to punish Caonabó for this first offense and for his second act of rebellion and assemblage of Indians that he had marched against him. Having made him and one of his brothers prisoners, he sent them to Spain; for he was unwilling to put to death so great a personage without the knowledge of the Catholic Sovereigns; he thought it was enough to have punished many of the guiltiest Indians.

This victory and the imprisonment of those men so improved the position of the Christians that though they numbered only six hundred and thirty, most of them sick, with many children and women among them, the Admiral in the space of a year during which he marched through the country completely pacified the island without having to unsheath his sword again. He reduced the Indians to such obedience and tranquility that they all promised to pay tribute to the Catholic Sovereigns every three months, as follows: In the Cibao, where the gold mines were, every person of fourteen years of age or upward was to pay a large hawk's bell

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of gold dust; all others were each to pay twenty-five pounds of cotton. Whenever an Indian delivered his tribute, he was to receive a brass or copper token which he must wear about his neck as proof that he had made his payment; any Indian found without such a token was to be punished.

This system would doubtless have produced the desired effects if there had not arisen discords among the Christians, as I shall presently relate. For after the capture of Caonabó the island was so peaceful that a Christian could safely go wherever he pleased, and the Indians themselves offered to carry him pickaback, as they do nowadays at the post stages. The Admiral ascribed this to the favor of God and the good fortune of the Catholic Sovereigns, else it would have been impossible for two hundred poorly armed men, half of them sick, to subdue such a multitude. But the Lord wished to punish the Indians, and so visited them with such shortage of food and such a variety of plagues that he reduced their number by two thirds, that it might be made clear that such wonderful conquests proceeded from His supreme hand and not from our strength or intelligence or the cowardice of the Indians; for even admitting the superiority of our men, it is obvious that the numerical preponderance of the Indians would have nullified this advantage.

CHAPTER 62

*Of Some Things That They Saw on the  
Island of Española, and of the Customs,  
Ceremonies, and Religion of the Indians*<sup>1</sup>

When the Indians had grown more peaceful and lost some of their fear of our men, much was learned about the resources and secrets of that land: that it had mines of copper, sapphires, and amber; brazilwood, ebony, incense, cedars, many fine gums, and

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different kinds of wild spices that could be brought to perfection by cultivation, such as fine-colored cinnamon (though bitter to the taste), ginger, pepper, and different kinds of mulberry trees for producing silk that bear leaves all year round, and many other useful plants and trees of which nothing is known in our countries.

Our people learned many other things having to do with their customs that seem worthy of being told in this history. Beginning with their religion, I shall cite here the Admiral's own words:

I found neither idolatry nor any other religion among them, but each of their kings (who are many), both on Española and the other islands and the mainland,<sup>2</sup> has a house apart from the town in which there is nothing except some carved wooden images that they called *cemíes*; these houses are used only for the service of the *cemíes*, by means of a certain ceremony and prayer, as is done in our churches. In these houses there is a well-made table, round like a wooden dish, in which is kept a powder that they place on the head of the *cemí* with a certain ceremony; then, through a cane having two branches that they insert in the nose, they sniff up this powder. The words which they spoke none of our men could understand. This powder makes them lose their senses and rave like drunken men. To each statue they assign a name; I believe it must be the name of the father or grandfather or both [of the name *в. к.*], for they have more than one, and some more than ten, all in memory of their forebears. I have observed that they praise one statue more highly than another and show more devotion and reverence to some than to others, as we do in processions to the saints in time of need; and the caciques and villages boast of having the best *cemíes*. When they enter the house where they keep their *cemíes*, they keep watch for Christians and will not let them enter. Indeed, if they suspect Christians are coming they take up their *cemíes* and hide them in the woods for fear they will be taken from them; what is even more laughable, they have the custom of stealing each other's *cemíes*.

It once happened that some Christians entered such a house with them, and the *cemí* gave a loud cry and spoke in their language, from which it became clear that the statue was artfully constructed. It was in fact hollow, and to the lower part was attached a blowgun or trumpet which was connected to a