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Letter of Dr. Chanca  
on the Second Voyage  
of Columbus

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## INTRODUCTION

DR. CHANCA of Seville volunteered to go to the Indies, and on May 23, 1493, the King and Queen appointed him surgeon (Navarrete, *Viages*, II. 54). This letter was written to the cabildo or town council of Seville and is the first narrative of one of Columbus's voyages that we have exactly as it was written by a private observer. It is also the first description of the natives that we have from an observer of scientific training. The original text was first printed by Navarrete in his *Viages* in 1825. The original manuscript or a copy came into the possession of the historian Bernaldez, who embodied it with a few trifling changes and omissions in his *Historia de Los Reyes Catolicos*, chs. cxix., cxx. (Seville ed., 1870), Vol. II., pp. 5-36.

Columbus kept a journal on this voyage which is no longer extant. Abridgments of it are preserved to us in the *Historie* of Ferdinand Columbus and in the *Historia de las Indias* of Las Casas. There are other contemporary narratives of the voyage from private hands, but they are either made up from conversations with those who went on the voyage, like the letters of Simone Verde, printed in HARRISSE, *Christophe Colomb*, II. 68-78, or the account in Books II. and III. of the first decade of Peter Martyr's *De Rebus Oceanicis*, or a literary embellishment of some private letters like the translation into Latin by Nicolo Syllacio of some letters he received from Guillelmo Coma who went on the voyage. The Syllacio-Coma letter and Peter Martyr's account in its earliest published form, the Venetian *Libretto de tutta la Navigazione de Re*

*de Spagna de le Isole et Terreni novamente Trovati*, are accessible in English in Thacher, *Christopher Columbus*, II. 243-262, 489-502. These two narratives gave the European public its first knowledge of the second voyage. The Syllacio-Coma letter was published late in 1494 or early in 1495, and the *Libretto* in Venice in 1504.

The translation of Dr. Chanca's letter given here is that of R. H. Major. It has been carefully revised to bring it into closer conformity to the original. Any noteworthy changes will be indicated. Attention may be called to a somewhat important correction of the text on p. 304.

Of Dr. Chanca personally little or nothing is known beyond what has been mentioned except that he devoted himself with zeal and self-sacrifice to his duties. In the report of the Second Voyage which Columbus prepared January 30, 1494, and sent off by Antonio de Torres February 2, he charged Torres as follows in regard to Dr. Chanca. "You will inform their Highnesses of the labor that Dr. Chanca is performing on account of the many that are ill and the lack of supplies and that with all this he is conducting himself with great diligence and kindness in everything that concerns his duties," etc. Major, *Select Letters of Columbus*, pp. 93, 94.

E. G. B.

## LETTER OF DR. CHANCA ON THE SECOND VOYAGE OF COLUMBUS

*A letter addressed to the Town Council of Seville by Dr. Chanca, a native of that city, and physician to the fleet of Columbus, on his second voyage to the Indies, describing the principal events which occurred during that voyage*

*Most noble Lord: —*

SINCE the occurrences which I relate in private letters to other persons are not of such general interest as those which are contained in this epistle, I have resolved to give you a distinct narrative of the events of our voyage, as well as to treat of the other matters which form the subject of my petition to your Lordship. The news I have to communicate are as follows: The expedition which their Catholic Majesties sent, by Divine permission, from Spain to the Indies, under the command of Christopher Columbus, Admiral of the Ocean, left Cadiz on the twenty-fifth of September, of the year [1493, with seventeen ships well equipped and with 1200 fighting men or a little less,]<sup>1</sup> with wind and weather favorable for the voyage. This weather lasted two days, during which time we managed to make nearly fifty leagues; the weather then changing, we made little or no progress for the next two days; it pleased God, however, after this, to restore us fine weather, so that in two days more we reached the Great Canary. Here we put into harbor, which we were obliged to do, to repair one of the ships which made a great deal of water; we remained all that day, and on the following set sail again, but were several times becalmed, so that we were four or five days

<sup>1</sup> There is a gap here in the text of the original which has been filled by taking the corresponding words in Bernaldez's text.

before we reached Gomera. We had to remain at Gomera some days<sup>1</sup> to lay in our stores of meat, wood, and as much water as we could stow, preparatory to the long voyage which we expected to make without seeing land: thus through the delay at these two ports, and being calmed one day after leaving Gomera, we were nineteen or twenty days before we arrived at the island of Ferro. After this we had, by the goodness of God, a return of fine weather, more continuous than any fleet ever enjoyed during so long a voyage, so that leaving Ferro on the thirteenth of October, within twenty days we came in sight of land; and we should have seen it in fourteen or fifteen days, if the ship *Capitana*<sup>2</sup> had been as good a sailer as the other vessels; for many times the others had to shorten sail, because they were leaving us much behind. During all this time we had great good fortune, for throughout the voyage we encountered no storm, with the exception of one on St. Simon's eve,<sup>3</sup> which for four hours put us in considerable jeopardy.

On the first Sunday after All Saints, namely the third of November, about dawn, a pilot of the flagship cried out, "The reward, I see the land!"

The joy of the people was so great, that it was wonderful to hear their cries and exclamations of pleasure; and they had good reason to be delighted; for they had become so wearied of bad living, and of working the water out of the ships, that all sighed most anxiously for land. The pilots of the fleet reckoned on that day, that between leaving Ferro and first reaching land, we had made eight hundred leagues; others said seven hundred and eighty (so that the difference was not great), and three hundred more between Ferro and Cadiz, making in all eleven hundred leagues; I do not therefore feel

<sup>1</sup> Major here translated *algun dia* "one day." It should be "some days." Bernaldez has *algunos dias*, and Coma says the tarry at Gomera was nearly six days.

<sup>2</sup> *La nao Capitana* means the flagship. The name of the flagship on the second voyage was *Marigalante*. *Historie* of Ferdinand Columbus, cap. XLV. (London, ed. 1867), p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> October 27.

as one who had not seen enough of the water. On the morning of the aforesaid Sunday, we saw lying before us an island, and soon on the right hand another appeared: the first<sup>1</sup> was high and mountainous, on the side nearest to us; the other<sup>2</sup> flat, and very thickly wooded. As soon as it became lighter, other islands began to appear on both sides; so that on that day, there were six islands to be seen lying in different directions, and most of them of considerable size. We directed our course towards that which we had first seen, and reaching the coast, we proceeded more than a league in search of a port where we might anchor, but without finding one; all that part of the island which met our view, appeared mountainous, very beautiful, and green even up to the water, which was delightful to see, for at that season, there is scarcely any thing green in our own country. When we found that there was no harbor there, the Admiral decided that we should go to the other island, which appeared on the right, and which was at four or five leagues distance; one vessel however still remained on the first island all that day seeking for a harbor, in case it should be necessary to return thither. At length, having found a good one, where they saw both people and dwellings, they returned that night to the fleet, which had put into harbor at the other island,<sup>3</sup> and there the Admiral, accompanied by a great number of men, landed with the royal banner in his hands, and took formal possession on behalf of their Majesties. This island was filled with an astonishingly thick growth of wood; the variety of unknown trees, some bearing fruit and some flowers, was surprising, and indeed every spot was covered with verdure. We found there a tree whose leaf had the finest smell of cloves that I have ever met with; it was like a laurel leaf, but not so large: but I think it was a species of laurel. There were wild fruits of various kinds, some of which our men, not very prudently, tasted; and upon only touching

<sup>1</sup> The island of Dominica, which is so called from having been discovered on a Sunday. *Historie*, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> The island Marigalante, which was so called from the name of the ship in which Columbus sailed. *Historie*, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Marigalante.

them with their tongues, their countenances became inflamed,<sup>1</sup> and such great heat and pain followed, that they seemed to be mad, and were obliged to resort to refrigerants to cure themselves. We found no signs of any people in this island, and concluded it was uninhabited; we remained only two hours, for it was very late when we landed, and on the following morning we left for another very large island,<sup>2</sup> situated below this at the distance of seven or eight leagues. We approached it under the side of a great mountain, that seemed almost to reach the skies, in the middle of which rose a peak, higher than all the rest of the mountain, whence many streams diverged into different channels, especially towards the part at which we arrived. At three leagues distance, we could see a fall of water as broad as an ox, which discharged itself from such a height that it appeared to fall from the sky; it was seen from so great a distance that it occasioned many wagers to be laid on board the ships, some maintaining that it was but a series of white rocks, and others that it was water. When we came nearer to it, it showed itself distinctly, and it was the most beautiful thing in the world to see from how great a height and from what a small space so large a fall of water was discharged. As soon as we neared the island the Admiral ordered a light caravel to run along the coast to search for a harbor; the captain put into land in a boat, and seeing some houses, leapt on shore and went up to them, the inhabitants fleeing at sight of our men; he then went into the houses and there found various household articles that had been left unremoved, from which he took two parrots, very large and quite different from any we had before seen; he found a great quantity of cotton, both spun and prepared for spinning, and articles of food, of all of which he brought away a portion; besides these, he also brought away four or five bones of human arms and legs. On seeing these we suspected that

<sup>1</sup> One would infer from this that it was the fruit of the *manzanillo*, which produces similar effects. (Navarrete.) On the Manzanillo (Manchineel), see Oviedo, lib. ix., cap. xii. He says the Caribs used it in making their arrow poisons.

<sup>2</sup> Guadeloupe.



we were amongst the Caribbee islands, whose inhabitants eat human flesh; for the Admiral, guided by the information respecting their situation which he had received from the Indians of the islands discovered in his former voyage, had directed his course with a view to their discovery, both because they were the nearest to Spain, and because this was the direct track for the island of Española, where he had left some of his people. Thither, by the goodness of God and the wise management of the Admiral, we came in as straight a track as if we had sailed by a well known and frequented route. This island is very large, and on the side where we arrived it seemed to us to be twenty-five leagues in length. We sailed more than two leagues along the shore in search of a harbor; on the part towards which we moved appeared very high mountains, and on that which we left extensive plains; on the sea-coast there were a few small villages, whose inhabitants fled as soon as they saw the sails: at length after proceeding two leagues we found a port late in the evening. That night the Admiral resolved that some of the men should land at break of day in order to confer with the natives, and learn what sort of people they were; although it was suspected, from the appearance of those who had fled at our approach, that they were naked, like those whom the Admiral had seen in his former voyage. That morning certain captains started out; one of them arrived at the dinner hour, and brought away a boy of about fourteen years of age, as it afterwards appeared, who said that he was one of the prisoners taken by these people. The others divided themselves, and one party took a little boy whom a man was leading by the hand, but who left him and fled; this boy they sent on board immediately with some of our men; others remained, and took certain women, natives of the island, together with other women from among the captives who came of their own accord. One captain of this last company, not knowing that any intelligence of the people had been obtained, advanced farther into the island and lost himself, with the six men who accompanied him: they could not find their way back until after four days,

when they lighted upon the sea-shore, and following the line of coast returned to the fleet.<sup>1</sup> We had already looked upon them as killed and eaten by the people that are called Caribbees; for we could not account for their long absence in any other way, since they had among them some pilots who by their knowledge of the stars could navigate either to or from Spain, so that we imagined that they could not lose themselves in so small a space. On this first day of our landing several men and women came on the beach up to the water's edge, and gazed at the ships in astonishment at so novel a sight; and when a boat pushed on shore in order to speak with them, they cried out, "tayno, tayno,"<sup>2</sup> which is as much as to say, "good, good," and waited for the landing of the sailors, standing by the boat in such a manner that they might escape when they pleased. The result was, that none of the men could be persuaded to join us, and only two were taken by force, who were secured and led away. More than twenty women of the captives were taken with their own consent, and other women, natives of the island, were surprised and carried off; several of the boys, who were captives, came to us fleeing from the natives of the island who had taken them prisoners. We remained eight days in this port in consequence of the loss of the aforesaid captain, and went many times on shore, passing amongst the dwellings and villages which were on the coast; we found a vast number of human bones and skulls hung up about the houses, like vessels in-

<sup>1</sup> It was Diego Marquez, the inspector, who with eight other men went on shore into the interior of the island, without permission from the Admiral, who caused him to be sought for by parties of men with trumpets, but without success. One of those who were sent out with this object was Alonzo Ojeda, who took with him forty men, and on their return they reported that they had found many aromatic plants, a variety of birds, and some considerable rivers. The wanderers were not able to find their way to the ships until the 8th of November. [Navarrete, condensed from Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, II. 7-8.]

<sup>2</sup> Tayno was also the tribal name of these people, who differentiated themselves from the Caribs. Peter Martyr reports the assertions of the followers of Guacamari that they were Taynos not Caribs: "Se Tainos, id est, nobiles esse, non Canibales, inelamitant." *De Rebus Oceanicis*, Dec. I., lib. II., p. 25. (Cologne ed. of 1574.)

tended for holding various things.<sup>1</sup> There were very few men to be seen here, and the women informed us that this was in consequence of ten canoes having gone to make an attack upon other islands. These islanders appeared to us to be more civilized than those that we had hitherto seen; for although all the Indians have houses of straw, yet the houses of these people are constructed in a much superior fashion, are better stocked with provisions, and exhibit more evidences of industry, both on the part of the men and the women. They had a considerable quantity of cotton, both spun and prepared for spinning, and many cotton sheets, so well woven as to be no way inferior to those of our country. We inquired of the women, who were prisoners in the island, what people these islanders were; they replied that they were Caribbees. As soon as they learned that we abhorred such people,<sup>2</sup> on account of their evil practice of eating human flesh, they were much delighted; and, after that, if they brought forward any woman or man of the Caribbees, they informed us (but secretly) that they were such, still evincing by their dread of their conquerors, that they belonged to a vanquished nation, though they knew them all to be in our power.

We were enabled to distinguish which of the women were Caribbees, and which were not, by the Caribbees wearing on each leg two bands of woven cotton, the one fastened round the knee, and the other round the ankle; by this means they make the calves of their legs large, and the above-mentioned parts very small, which I imagine that they regard as a mark of elegance: by this peculiarity we distinguished them.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, II. 8, remarks of these bones, "They must have belonged to lords or persons whom they loved since it is not probable that they belonged to those they ate, because if they ate as many as some say, the cabins would not hold all the bones and skulls, and it seems that after having eaten them there would be no object in keeping the skulls and bones for relics unless they belonged to some very notable enemies. The whole matter is a puzzle."

<sup>2</sup> The name *Caribe* here obviously has begun to have the meaning "cannibal," which is in origin the same word.

<sup>3</sup> This practice still survives among the Caribs. Im Thurn describes it in almost the same words as Dr. Chanca. See *Among the Indians of Guiana*, p. 192.

The habits of these Caribbees are brutal. There are three islands: this is called Turuqueira; the other, which was the first that we saw, is called Ceyre; the third is called Ayay:<sup>1</sup> all these are alike as if they were of one race, who do no injury to each other; but each and all of them wage war against the other neighboring islands, and for the purpose of attacking them, make voyages of a hundred and fifty leagues at sea, with their numerous canoes, which are a small kind of craft with one mast. Their arms are arrows, in the place of iron weapons, and as they have no iron, some of them point their arrows with tortoise-shell, and others make their arrow-heads of fish spines, which are naturally barbed like coarse saws: these prove dangerous weapons to a naked people like the Indians, and may cause death or severe injury, but to men of our nation, are not very formidable. In their attacks upon the neighboring islands, these people capture as many of the women as they can, especially those who are young and beautiful, and keep them for servants and to have as concubines; and so great a number do they carry off, that in fifty houses no men were to be seen; and out of the number of the captives, more than twenty were young girls. These women also say that the Caribbees use them with such cruelty as would scarcely be believed; and that they eat the children which they bear to them, and only bring up those which they have by their native wives. Such of their male enemies as they can take alive, they bring to their houses to slaughter them, and those who are killed they devour at once. They say that man's flesh is so good, that there is nothing like it in the world; and this is pretty evident, for of the bones which we found in their houses, they had gnawed everything that could be gnawed, so that nothing remained of them, but what from its great hardness, could not be eaten: in one of the houses we found the neck of a man, cooking in a pot. When they take any boys prisoners, they cut off their member and make use

<sup>1</sup> These are the native names for Dominica (Ceyre) and Guadeloupe (Turuqueira and Ayay), which consists of two islands separated by a narrow channel.

of them as servants until they grow up to manhood, and then when they wish to make a feast they kill and eat them; for they say that the flesh of boys and women is not good to eat. Three of these boys came fleeing to us thus mutilated.

At the end of four days arrived the captain who had lost himself with his companions, of whose return we had by this time given up all hope; for other parties had been twice sent out to seek him, one of which came back on the same day that he rejoined us, without having gained any information respecting the wanderers; we rejoiced at their arrival, regarding it as a new accession to our numbers. The captain and the men who accompanied him brought back some women and boys, ten in number. Neither this party, nor those who went out to seek them, had seen any of the men of the island, which must have arisen either from their having fled, or possibly from there being but very few men in that locality; for, as the women informed us, ten canoes had gone away to make an attack upon the neighboring islands. The wanderers had returned from the mountains in such an emaciated condition, that it was distressing to see them; when we asked them how it was that they lost themselves, they said that the trees were so thick and close that they could not see the sky; some of them who were mariners had climbed the trees to get a sight of the stars, but could never see them, and if they had not found their way to the sea-coast, it would have been impossible to have returned to the fleet. We left this island eight days after our arrival.<sup>1</sup> The next day at noon we saw another island, not very large,<sup>2</sup> at about twelve leagues distance from the one we were leaving; the greater part of the first day of our departure we were kept close in to the coast of this island by a calm, but as the Indian women whom we brought with us said that it was not inhabited, but had been dispeopled by the Caribbees, we made no stay in it. On that evening we saw another island;<sup>3</sup> and in the night finding there were

<sup>1</sup> They left on Sunday, the 10th of November. Las Casas, *Historia*, II. 9.

<sup>2</sup> The island Montserrat. Las Casas, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The island of St. Martin. Las Casas, *ibid.*

some sandbanks near, we dropped anchor, not venturing to proceed until the morning. On the morrow another island appeared, of considerable size, but we touched at none of these because we were anxious to convey consolation to our people who had been left in Española; but it did not please God to grant us our desire, as will hereafter appear. Another day at the dinner hour we arrived at an island which seemed to be worth the finding, for judging by the extent of cultivation in it, it appeared very populous. We went thither and put into harbor, when the Admiral immediately sent on shore a well manned barge to hold speech with the Indians, in order to ascertain what race they were, and also because we considered it necessary to gain some information respecting our course; although it afterwards plainly appeared that the Admiral, who had never made that passage before, had taken a very correct route. But as matters of doubt should always be brought to as great a certainty as possible by inquiry, he wished that communication should be held with the natives at once, and some of the men who went in the barge leapt on shore and went up to a village, whence the inhabitants had already withdrawn and hidden themselves. They took in this island five or six women and some boys, most of whom were captives, like those in the other island; we learned from the women whom we had brought with us, that the natives of this place also were Caribbees. As this barge was about to return to the ships with the capture which they had made, a canoe came along the coast containing four men, two women, and a boy; and when they saw the fleet they were so stupefied with amazement, that for a good hour they remained motionless at the distance of nearly two cannon shots from the ships. In this position they were seen by those who were in the barge and also by all the fleet. Meanwhile those in the barge moved towards the canoe, but so close in shore, that the Indians, in their perplexity and astonishment as to what all this could mean, never saw them, until they were so near that escape was impossible; for our men pressed on them so rapidly that they could not get away, although they made considerable effort to do so.

When the Caribbees saw that all attempt at flight was useless, they most courageously took to their bows, both women and men; I say most courageously, because they were only four men and two women, and our people were twenty-five in number. Two of our men were wounded by the Indians, one with two arrow-shots in his breast, and another with one in his side, and if it had not happened that they carried shields and wooden bucklers, and that they soon got near them with the barge and upset their canoe, most of them would have been killed with their arrows. After their canoe was upset, they remained in the water swimming and occasionally wading (for there were shallows in that part), still using their bows as much as they could, so that our men had enough to do to take them; and after all there was one of them whom they were unable to secure till he had received a mortal wound with a lance, and whom thus wounded they took to the ships. The difference between these Caribbees and the other Indians, with respect to dress, consists in their wearing their hair very long, while the latter have it clipt and paint their heads with crosses and a hundred thousand different devices, each according to his fancy; which they do with sharpened reeds. All of them, both the Caribbees and the others, are beardless, so that it is a rare thing to find a man with a beard: the Caribbees whom we took had their eyes and eyebrows stained, which I imagine they do from ostentation and to give them a more frightful appearance. One of these captives said, that in an island belonging to them called Cayre<sup>1</sup> (which is the first we saw, though we did not go to it), there is a great quantity of gold; and that if we were to take them nails and tools with which to make their canoes, we might bring away as much gold as we liked. On the same day we left that island, having been there no more than six or seven hours; and steering for another point of land<sup>2</sup> which appeared to lie in our intended course, we reached it by night. On the morning of the following day we coasted along it, and

<sup>1</sup> Dominica.

<sup>2</sup> Santa Cruz. November 14. Las Casas, *ibid.*

found it to be a large extent of country, but not continuous, for it was divided into more than forty islets.<sup>1</sup> The land was very high and most of it barren, an appearance which we have never observed in any of the islands visited by us before or since: the surface of the ground seemed to suggest the probability of its containing metals. None of us went on shore here, but a small latteen caravel went up to one of the islets and found in it some fishermen's huts; the Indian women whom we brought with us said they were not inhabited. We proceeded along the coast the greater part of that day, and on the evening of the next we discovered another island called Burenquen,<sup>2</sup> which we judged to be thirty leagues in length, for we were coasting along it the whole of one day. This island is very beautiful and apparently fertile; hither the Caribbees come with the view of subduing the inhabitants, and often carry away many of the people. These islanders have no boats nor any knowledge of navigation; but, as our captives inform us, they use bows as well as the Caribbees, and if by chance when they are attacked they succeed in taking any of their invaders, they will eat them in like manner as the Caribbees themselves in the contrary event would devour them. We remained two days in this island, and a great number of our men went on shore, but could never get speech of the natives, who had all fled, from fear of the Caribbees. All the above-mentioned islands were discovered in this voyage, the Admiral having seen nothing of them in his former voyage; they are all very beautiful and possess a most luxuriant soil, but this last island appeared to exceed all the others in beauty. Here terminated the islands, which on the side towards Spain had not been seen before by the Admiral, although we regard it as a matter of certainty that there is land more than forty leagues beyond the foremost of these newly discovered islands, on the side nearest to Spain. We believe this to be the case,

<sup>1</sup> The Admiral named the largest of these islands St. Ursula, and all the others The Eleven Thousand Virgins. Las Casas, *Historia*, II. 10.

<sup>2</sup> The island of Porto Rico, to which the Admiral "gave the name of St. John the Baptist, which we now call Sant Juan and which the Indians called Boriquen." Las Casas, II. 10.



because two days before we saw land we observed some birds called rabihorcados,<sup>1</sup> marine birds of prey which do not sit or sleep upon the water, making circumvolutions in the air at the close of evening previous to taking their flight towards land for the night. These birds could not be going to settle at more than twelve or fifteen leagues distance, because it was late in the evening, and this was on our right hand on the side towards Spain; from which we all judged that there was land there still undiscovered; but we did not go in search of it, because it would have taken us round out of our intended route. I hope that in a few voyages it will be discovered. It was at dawn that we left the before-mentioned island of Burenquen,<sup>2</sup> and on that day before nightfall we caught sight of land, which though not recognized by any of those who had come hither in the former voyage, we believed to be Española, from the information given us by the Indian women whom we had with us; and in this island we remain at present.<sup>3</sup> Between this island and Burenquen another island appeared at a distance, but of no great size. When we reached Española the land, at the part where we approached it, was low and very flat,<sup>4</sup> on seeing which, a general doubt arose as to its identity; for neither the Admiral nor his companions, on the previous voyage, had seen it on this side.

The island being large, is divided into provinces; the part which we first touched at, is called Hayti; another province adjoining it, they call Xamaná;<sup>5</sup> and the next province is named Bohio,<sup>6</sup> where we now are. These provinces are again subdivided, for they are of great extent. Those who have seen the length of its coast, state that it is two hundred leagues long, and I myself should judge it not to be less than a hun-

<sup>1</sup> See note to Journal, September 29. Frigate-bird is the accepted English name; a species of pelican.

<sup>2</sup> Porto Rico.

<sup>3</sup> On Friday, the 22d of November, the Admiral first caught sight of the island of Española. Las Casas, II. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Cape Engaño, in the island of Española. (Navarrete.)

<sup>5</sup> Preserved in the Bay of Samana.

<sup>6</sup> See Journal, October 21, and note.

dred and fifty leagues: as to its breadth, nothing is hitherto known; it is now forty days since a caravel left us with the view of circumnavigating it,<sup>1</sup> and is not yet returned. The country is very remarkable, and contains a vast number of large rivers, and extensive chains of mountains, with broad open valleys, and the mountains are very high; it does not appear that the grass is ever cut throughout the year. I do not think they have any winter in this part, for at Christmas were found many birds-nests, some containing the young birds, and others containing eggs. No four-footed animal has ever been seen in this or any of the other islands, except some dogs of various colors, as in our own country, but in shape like large house-dogs;<sup>2</sup> and also some little animals, in color and fur like a rabbit, and the size of a young rabbit, with long tails, and feet like those of a rat; these animals climb up the trees, and many who have tasted them, say they are very good to eat:<sup>3</sup> there are not any wild beasts.

There are great numbers of small snakes, and some lizards, but not many; for the Indians consider them as great a luxury as we do pheasants; they are of the same size as ours, but different in shape. In a small adjacent island<sup>4</sup> (close by a harbor called Monte Cristo, where we stayed several days), our men saw an enormous kind of lizard, which

<sup>1</sup> Of this voyage of exploration there seems to be no record. Our natural sources, the *Historie* and *Las Casas*, are silent. Columbus suspended his writing in his Journal from December 11, 1493, till March 12, 1494. Antonio de Torres sailed for Spain February 2, 1494, when Dr. Chanca sent off his letter. Probably this exploration was begun about December 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Unos gosques grandes*. The French translation has *gros carlins*, "large pug-dogs." Bernaldez calls these dogs, *gozcos pequeños*, "small curs." "Cur" is the common meaning for *gozque* or *gosque*. See Oviedo, lib. XII., cap. v., for a description of these native dogs which soon became extinct.

<sup>3</sup> Bernaldez, II. 34, supplies the native name, *Utia*. Oviedo, lib. XII., cap. I., describes the *hutia*. When he wrote it had become so scarce as to be seen only on rare occasions. It was extinct in Du Tertre's time, a century later. Of the four allied species described by Oviedo, the *hutia*, the *quemi*, the *mohuy*, and the *cori* (agouti), only the last has survived to the present day.

<sup>4</sup> Cabra, or Goat Island, between Puerto de Plata and Cas Rouge Point. (Major.)

they said was as large round as a calf, with a tail as long as a lance, which they often went out to kill: but bulky as it was, it got into the sea, so that they could not catch it.<sup>1</sup> There are, both in this and the other islands, an infinite number of birds like those in our own country, and many others such as we had never seen. No kind of domestic fowl has been seen here, with the exception of some ducks in the houses in Zuruquia; these ducks were larger than those of Spain, though smaller than geese, — very pretty, with flat crests on their heads, most of them as white as snow, but some black.

We ran along the coast of this island nearly a hundred leagues, concluding, that within this range we should find the spot where the Admiral had left some of his men, and which we supposed to be about the middle of the coast. As we passed by the province called Xamaná, we sent on shore one of the Indians, who had been taken in the previous voyage, clothed, and carrying some trifles, which the Admiral had ordered to be given him. On that day died one of our sailors, a Biscayan, who had been wounded in the affray with the Caribbees, when they were captured, as I have already described, through their want of caution. As we were proceeding along the coast, an opportunity was afforded for a boat to go on shore to bury him, the boat being accompanied by two caravels to protect it. When they reached the shore, a great number of Indians came out to the boat, some of them wearing necklaces and ear-rings of gold, and expressed a wish to accompany the Spaniards to the ships; but our men refused to take them, because they had not received permission from the Admiral. When the Indians found that they would not take them, two of them got into a small canoe, and went up to one of the caravels that had put in to shore; they were received on board with great kindness, and taken to the Admiral's ship, where, through the medium of an interpreter, they related that a certain king had sent them to ascertain who we were, and to invite us to land, adding that they had plenty of gold, and also of provisions, to which we should be welcome.

<sup>1</sup> Apparently the cayman or South American alligator.

The Admiral desired that shirts, and caps, and other trifles, should be given to each of them, and said that as he was going to the place where Guacamari dwelt, he would not stop then, but that another time there would be an opportunity of seeing him, and with that they departed. We continued our route till we came to an harbor called Monte Cristi, where we remained two days, in order to observe the character of the land; for the Admiral had an objection to the spot where his men had been left with the view of making a settlement. We went on shore therefore to see the character of the land: there was a large river of excellent water close by;<sup>1</sup> but the ground was inundated, and very ill-calculated for habitation. As we went on making our observations on the river and the land, some of our men found two dead bodies by the river's side, one with a rope round his neck, and the other with one round his foot; this was on the first day of our landing. On the following day they found two other corpses farther on, and one of these was observed to have a great quantity of beard; this was regarded as a very suspicious circumstance by many of our people, because, as I have already said, all the Indians are beardless. This harbor is twelve leagues<sup>2</sup> from the place where the Spaniards had been left under the protection of Guacamari,<sup>3</sup> the king of that province, whom I suppose to be one of the chief men of the island. After two days we set sail for that spot, but as it was late when we arrived there,<sup>4</sup> and there were some shoals, where the Admiral's ship had been lost, we did not venture to put in close to the shore, but remained that night at a little less than a league from the coast, waiting until the morning, when we might enter securely. On that evening, a canoe, containing five or six Indians, came out at a

<sup>1</sup> The river Yaque.

<sup>2</sup> It is only seven leagues. (Navarrete.)

<sup>3</sup> This chief's name is Guacanagari in Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, and in the *Historie* of Ferdinand Columbus, Goathanari in the Syllacio-Coma letter, Guacanari in Bernaldez and Guaccanarillus in Peter Martyr's *De Rebus Oceanicis*.

<sup>4</sup> The admiral anchored at the entrance of the harbor of Navidad, on Wednesday, the 27th of November, towards midnight. Las Casas, II. 11.

considerable distance from where we were, and approached us with great celerity. The Admiral believing that he insured our safety by keeping the sails set, would not wait for them; they, however, perseveringly rowed up to us within a cannon shot<sup>1</sup> and then stopped to look at us; but when they saw that we did not wait for them, they put back and went away. After we had anchored that night at the spot in question,<sup>2</sup> the Admiral ordered two cannons to be fired, to see if the Spaniards, who had remained with Guacamari, would fire in return, for they also had cannons with them; but when we received no reply, and could not perceive any fires, nor the slightest symptom of habitations on the spot, the spirits of our people became much depressed, and they began to entertain the suspicion which the circumstances were naturally calculated to excite. While all were in this desponding mood, and when four or five hours of the night had passed away, the same canoe which we had seen in the evening, came up, and the Indians with a loud voice addressed the captain of the caravel, which they first approached, inquiring for the Admiral;<sup>3</sup> they were conducted to the Admiral's vessel, but would not go on board till he had spoken to them, and they had asked for a light, in order to assure themselves that it was he who conversed with them. One of them was a cousin of Guacamari, who had been sent by him once before: it appeared, that after they had turned back the previous evening, they had been charged by Guacamari with two masks of gold as a present; one for the Admiral, the other for a captain who had accompanied him on the former voyage. They remained on board for three hours, talking with the Admiral in the presence of all of us, he showing much pleasure in their conversation, and inquiring respecting the welfare of the Spaniards whom he had left behind. Guacamari's cousin replied, that those who remained were all well, but that some of them

<sup>1</sup> See Journal of First Voyage, December 25.

<sup>2</sup> The Bay of Caracol, four leagues west of Fort Dauphin. (Major.)

<sup>3</sup> "Toward midnight a canoe came full of Indians and reached the ship of the Admiral, and they called for him saying 'Almirante, Almirante.'" Las Casas, II. 11.

had died of disease, and others had been killed in quarrels that had arisen amongst them; and that Guacamari was at some distance, lying ill of a wound in his leg, which was the occasion of his not appearing, but that he would come on the next day. He said also that two kings named Caonabó and Mayreni, had come to fight with him and that they had burned the village. The Indians then departed, saying they would return on the following day with the said Guacamari, and left us consoled for that night. On the morning of the next day, we were expecting that Guacamari would come; and, in the meantime, some of our men landed by command of the Admiral, and went to the spot where the Spaniards had formerly been: they found the building which they had inhabited, and which they had in some degree fortified with a palisade, burnt and levelled with the ground; they found also some cloaks and clothing which the Indians had brought to throw upon the house. They observed too that the Indians who were seen near the spot, looked very shy, and dared not approach, but, on the contrary, fled from them. This appeared strange to us, for the Admiral had told us that in the former voyage, when he arrived at this place, so many came in canoes to see us, that there was no keeping them off; and as we now saw that they were suspicious of us, it gave us a very unfavorable impression. We threw trifles, such as hawk bells<sup>1</sup> and beads, towards them, in order to conciliate them, but only four, a relation of Guacamari's and three others, took courage to enter the boat, and were rowed on board. When they were asked concerning the Spaniards, they replied that all of them were dead; we had been told this already by one of the Indians whom we had brought from Spain, and who had conversed with the two Indians that on the former occasion came on board with their canoe, but we had not believed it. Guacamari's kinsman was asked who had killed them; he replied that the king of Caonabó and king Mayreni had made an attack upon them, and burnt the buildings on the spot, that

<sup>1</sup> The hawk bell was a small open bell used in hawking. The discoverers used hawk bells as a small measure as of gold dust.

many were wounded in the affray, and among them Guacamari, who had received a wound in his thigh, and had retired to some distance. He also stated that he wished to go and fetch him; upon which some trifles were given to him, and he took his departure for the place of Guacamari's abode. All that day we remained in expectation of them, and when we saw that they did not come, many suspected that the Indians who had been on board the night before, had been drowned; for they had had wine given them two or three times, and they had come in a small canoe that might be easily upset. The next morning the Admiral went on shore, taking some of us with him; we went to the spot where the settlement had been, and found it utterly destroyed by fire, and the clothes of the Spaniards lying about upon the grass, but on that occasion we saw no dead body. There were many different opinions amongst us; some suspecting that Guacamari himself was concerned in the betrayal and death of the Christians; others thought not, because his own residence was burnt: so that it remained a very doubtful question. The Admiral ordered all the ground which had been occupied by the fortifications of the Spaniards to be searched, for he had left orders with them to bury all the gold that they might get. While this was being done, the Admiral wished to examine a spot at about a league's distance, which seemed to be suitable for building a town, for it was already time to do so;—and some of us went thither with him, making our observations of the land as we went along the coast, until we reached a village of seven or eight houses, which the Indians forsook when they saw us approach, carrying away what they could, and leaving the things which they could not remove, hidden amongst the grass, around the houses. These people are so like beasts that they have not even the sense to select a fitting place to live in; those who dwell on the shore, build for themselves the most miserable hovels that can be imagined, and all the houses are so covered with grass and dampness, that I am amazed at the way they live. In these houses we found many things belonging to the Spaniards, which it could not be supposed they

would have bartered; such as a very handsome Moorish mantle, which had not been unfolded since it was brought from Spain, stockings and pieces of cloth, also an anchor belonging to the ship which the Admiral had lost here on the previous voyage; with other articles, which the more confirmed our suspicions. On examining some things which had been put away to keep in a basket, closely woven and very secure, we found a man's head kept with great care; this we judged might be the head of a father, or mother, or of some person whom they much regarded:<sup>1</sup> I have since heard that many were found in the same state, which makes me believe that our first impression was the true one. After this we returned. We went on the same day to the site of the settlement; and when we arrived, we found many Indians, who had regained their courage, bartering gold with our men: they had bartered to the extent of a mark;<sup>2</sup> we also learned that they had shown where the bodies of eleven of the dead Spaniards were laid, which were already covered with the grass that had grown over them; and they all with one voice asserted that Caonabó and Mayreni had killed them; but notwithstanding all this, we began to hear complaints that one of the Spaniards had taken three women to himself, and another four; from whence we drew the inference that jealousy was the cause of the misfortune that had occurred. On the next morning, as no spot in that vicinity appeared suitable for our making a settlement, the Admiral ordered a caravel to go in one direction to look for a convenient locality, while some of us went with him another way. In the course of our explorations, we discovered a harbor, of great security, and a very favorable situation for a settlement; but as it was far from where we wanted to have the gold mine, the Admiral decided to settle only in some spot which would give us greater certainty of attaining that object, provided the position of the land should prove equally

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 289, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> The mark was a weight of eight ounces, two-thirds of a Troy pound. The mark of gold in Spain was equivalent to 50 castellanos, or in bullion value to-day about \$150.



convenient. On our return, we found the other caravel arrived, in which Melchior<sup>1</sup> and four or five other trustworthy men had been exploring with a similar object. They reported that as they went along the coast, a canoe came out to them in which were two Indians, one of whom was the brother of Guacamari, and was recognized by a pilot who was in the caravel. When he asked them "who goes there," they replied that Guacamari sent to beg the Spaniards to come on shore, as he had his settlement near, with nearly fifty houses. The chief men of the party then went on shore in the boat, proceeded to the place where Guacamari was, and found him stretched on his bed, complaining of a severe wound. They conferred with him, and inquired respecting the Spaniards; his reply was, in accordance with the account already given by the others, viz. — that they had been killed by Caonabó and Mayreni, who also had wounded him in the thigh; which he showed to them bandaged up: on seeing which, they concluded that his statement was correct. At their departure he gave to each of them a jewel of gold, according to his estimation of their respective merits. The Indians beat the gold into very thin plates, in order to make masks of it, and to be able to set it in bitumen; if it were not so prepared it could not be mounted; other ornaments they make of it, to wear on the head and to hang in the ears and nostrils, for these also they require it to be thin; since they set no store by it as wealth but only for adornment. Guacamari desired them by signs and as well as he was able, to tell the Admiral that as he was thus wounded, he prayed him to have the goodness to come to see him. The sailors told this to the Admiral when he arrived. The next morning he resolved to go thither, for the spot could be reached in three hours, being scarcely three leagues distance from the place where we were; but as it would be the dinner-hour when we arrived, we dined before we went on shore. After dinner, the Admiral gave orders that

<sup>1</sup> Melchior Maldonado, apparently the Melchiorius from whom Peter Martyr derived some of his material for his account of the second voyage. See his *De Rebus Oceanicis*, ed. 1574, p. 26.

all the captains should come with their barges to proceed to the shore, for already on that morning, previous to our departure, the aforesaid brother of Guacamari had come to speak with the Admiral to urge him to come to the place where Guacamari was. Then the Admiral went on shore accompanied by all the principal officers, so richly dressed that they would have made a fine appearance even in any of our chief cities. He took with him some articles as presents, having already received from Guacamari a certain quantity of gold, and it was reasonable that he should make a commensurate response to his acts and expressions of good-will: Guacamari had also provided himself with a present. When we arrived, we found him stretched upon his bed, which was made of cotton network, and, according to their custom, suspended.<sup>1</sup> He did not arise, but made from his bed the best gesture of courtesy of which he was capable. He showed much feeling with tears in his eyes for the death of the Spaniards, and began speaking on the subject, with explaining to the best of his power, how some died of disease, others had gone to Caonabó in search of the mine of gold, and had there been killed, and that the rest had been attacked and slain in their own town. According to the appearance of the dead bodies, it was not two months since this had happened. Then he presented the Admiral with eight marks and a half of gold and five or six belts worked with stones<sup>2</sup> of various colors, and a cap of similar jewel-work, which I think they must value very highly, because in it was

<sup>1</sup> The familiar hammock.

<sup>2</sup> The original reads "cinco o seiscientos labrados de pedreria," which Major translated "five or six hundred pieces of jewellery," and Thacher "five or six hundred cut stones." The dictionaries recognize *labrado* as a noun only in the plural *labrados*, "tilled lands." Turning to Bernaldez, *Historia de los Reyes Catolicos*, in which Dr. Chanca's letter was copied almost bodily, we find, II. 27, "cinco ó seis labrados de pedrería," which presents the same difficulty. The omission of *cientos* is notable, however. I think the original text of Dr. Chanca's letter read "cinco ó seis cintos labrados de pedreria," *i.e.*, five or six belts worked with jewellery. *Cintos* being written blindly was copied *cientos* by Antonio de Aspa, from whom our text of Dr. Chanca's letter has come down (Navarrete, I. 224), and was omitted perhaps accidentally in Bernaldez's copy. This conjecture is rendered almost certain by the *Historie*, where it is recorded that "the Cacique gave the Admiral

a jewel, which was presented to him with great reverence. It appears to me that these people put more value upon copper than gold. The surgeon of the fleet and myself being present, the Admiral told Guacamari that we were skilled in the treatment of human disorders, and wished that he would shew us his wound; he replied that he was willing; upon which I said it would be necessary that he should, if possible, go out of the house, because we could not see well on account of the place being darkened by the crowd of people; to this he consented, I think more from timidity than inclination, and left the house leaning on the arm of the Admiral. After he was seated, the surgeon approached him and began to untie the bandage; then he told the Admiral that the wound was made with a *ciba*, by which he meant with a stone. When the wound was uncovered, we went up to examine it: it is certain that there was no more wound on that leg than on the other, although he cunningly pretended that it pained him much. Ignorant as we were of the facts, it was impossible to come to a definite conclusion. There were certainly many proofs of an invasion by a hostile people, so that the Admiral was at a loss what to do; he with many others thought, however, that for the present, and until they could ascertain the truth, they ought to conceal their distrust; for after ascertaining it, they would be able to claim whatever indemnity they thought proper. That evening Guacamari accompanied the Admiral to the ships, and when they showed him the horses and other objects of interest, their novelty struck him with the greatest amazement;<sup>1</sup> he took supper on board, and returned that

eight belts worked with small beads made of white, green, and red stones," p. 148, London ed. of 1867. This passage enables us to correct the text of Las Casas, II. 14, changing "ochocientas cuentas menudas de piedra," "eight hundred small beads of stone," to "ocho cintos de cuentas menudas," etc., "eight belts of small beads," and again, *ciento de oro* to *cinto de oro*. In the Syllacio-Coma letter the gift is *balteos duodecim*, "twelve belts." Thacher, *Columbus*, II. 235. Cf. Las Casas's description of the girdle or belt that this chief wore when Columbus first saw him, Dec. 22, above, p. 194.

<sup>1</sup> These were not only the first horses seen in the New World since the extinction of the prehistoric varieties, but the first large quadrupeds the West Indians had seen.

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evening to his house. The Admiral told him that he wished to settle there and to build houses; to which he assented, but said that the place was not wholesome, because it was very damp: and so it most certainly was.

All this passed through the interpretation of two of the Indians who had gone to Spain in the last voyage, and who were the sole survivors of seven who had embarked with us; five died on the voyage, and these but narrowly escaped. The next day we anchored in that port: Guacamari sent to know when the Admiral intended leaving, and was told that he would do so on the morrow. The same day Guacamari's brother, and others with him, came on board, bringing gold to barter: on the day of our departure also they bartered a great quantity of gold. There were ten women on board, of those who had been taken in the Caribbee islands, principally from Boriquen, and it was observed that the brother of Guacamari spoke with them; we think that he told them to make an effort to escape that night; for certainly during our first sleep they dropped themselves quietly into the water, and went on shore, so that by the time they were missed they had reached such a distance that only four could be taken by the boats which went in pursuit, and these were secured when just leaving the water: they had to swim considerably more than half a league. The next morning the Admiral sent to desire that Guacamari would cause search to be made for the women who had escaped in the night, and that he would send them back to the ships. When the messengers arrived they found the place forsaken and not a soul there; this made many openly declare their suspicions, but others said they might have removed to another village, as was their custom. That day we remained quiet, because the weather was unfavorable for our departure. On the next morning the Admiral resolved that as the wind was adverse, it would be well to go with the boats to inspect a harbor on the coast at two leagues distance further up,<sup>1</sup> to see if the formation of the land was favorable for a settlement; and we went thither with all the ship's boats,

<sup>1</sup> Port Dauphin. (Navarrete.)

leaving the ships in the harbor. As we moved along the coast the people manifested a sense of insecurity, and when we reached the spot to which we were bound all the natives had fled. While we were walking about this place we found an Indian stretched on the hill-side, close by the houses, with a gaping wound in his shoulder caused by a dart, so that he had been disabled from fleeing any further. The natives of this island fight with sharp darts, which they shoot with straps in the same manner as boys in Spain shoot their little darts, and with these they shoot with considerable skill to a great distance; and certainly upon an unarmed people these weapons are calculated to do serious injury. The man told us that Caonabó and his people had wounded him and burnt the houses of Guacamari. Thus we are still kept in uncertainty respecting the death of our people, on account of the paucity of information on which to form an opinion, and the conflicting and equivocal character of the evidence we have obtained. We did not find the position of the land in this port favorable for healthy habitation, and the Admiral resolved upon returning along the upper coast by which we had come from Spain, because we had had tidings of gold in that direction. But the weather was so adverse that it cost more labor to sail thirty leagues in a backward direction than the whole voyage from Spain; so that, what with the contrary wind and the length of the passage, three months had elapsed when we landed.<sup>1</sup> It pleased God, however, that through the check upon our progress caused by contrary winds, we succeeded in finding the best and most suitable spot that we could have selected for a settlement, where there was an excellent harbor<sup>2</sup> and abundance of fish, an article of which we stand in great need from the scarcity of meat. The fish caught here are very singular and more wholesome than those of Spain. The climate does

<sup>1</sup> That is, three months from the time the fleet left Spain, September 25, 1493. Neither the *Historie* nor Las Casas mentions the date of landing. In the Syllacio-Coma letter the date is given as "eight days from Christmas." See Thacher, *Columbus*, II. 236, 257.

<sup>2</sup> Port Isabelique, or Isabella, ten leagues to the east of Monte Cristi. (Navarrete.)

not allow the fish to be kept from one day to another, for it is hot and moist, so that all animal food<sup>1</sup> spoils very quickly.

The land is very rich for all purposes; near the harbor there are two rivers: one large,<sup>2</sup> and another of moderate breadth somewhat near it; the water is of a very remarkable quality. On the bank of it is being built a city called Marta,<sup>3</sup> one side of which is bounded by the water with a ravine of cleft rock, so that at that part there is no need of fortification; the other half is girt with a plantation of trees so thick that a rabbit could scarcely pass through it; and so green that fire will never be able to burn it. A channel has been commenced for a branch of the river, which the managers say they will lead through the middle of the settlement, and will place on it grist-mills and saw-mills and mills of other kinds requiring to be worked by water. Great quantities of vegetables have been planted, which certainly attain a more luxuriant growth here in eight days than they would in Spain in twenty. We are frequently visited by numbers of Indians, among whom are some of their *caciques* or chiefs, and many women. They all come loaded with *ages*,<sup>4</sup> which are like turnips, very excellent for food, which we dressed in various ways. This food was so nutritious as to prove a great support to all of us after the privations we endured when at sea, which were more severe than ever were suffered by man; for as we could not tell what weather it would please God to send us on our voyage, we were obliged

<sup>1</sup> *Cosas introfatables* in the Spanish. The translation follows the French version. The text perhaps is corrupt. The word *introfatables* is not found in any of the Spanish dictionaries nor is it a learned compound whose meaning is apparent from its etymology. Professor H. R. Lang suggests that *cosas corruptibles* may be the proper reading. The sentence is omitted in the corresponding passage in Bernaldez, II. 30.

<sup>2</sup> The river Isabella.

<sup>3</sup> I can offer no explanation for this name, which is found only in Dr. Chanca's letter. Bernaldez, who copied Dr. Chanca, gives Isabela as the name of the city, II. 30, and the *Historie* and Las Casas, who preserve for us the gist of Columbus's own narrative, both say that "he named the city Isabela in memory of Queen Isabela." Las Casas, II. 21. *Historie*, p. 150.

<sup>4</sup> Yams, the *Dioscorea sativa*. Columbus had seen the yam in Guinea and applied the African negro name, *igname*, *ñame*, whence the English, yam. See note to Journal, November 4.

to limit ourselves most rigorously with regard to food, in order that, at all events, we might at least have the means of supporting life. This *age* the Caribbees call *nabi*, and the Indians *hage*.<sup>1</sup> The Indians barter gold, provisions, and everything they bring with them, for tips of lacings, beads, and pins, and pieces of porringers and dishes. They all, as I have said, go naked as they were born, except the women of this island, who have their private parts covered, some with a covering of cotton, which they bind round their hips, while others use grass and leaves of trees.<sup>2</sup> When they wish to adorn themselves, both men and women paint themselves, some black, others white, and various colors, in so many devices that the effect is very laughable;<sup>3</sup> they shave some parts of their heads, and in others wear long tufts of matted hair, which have an indescribably ridiculous appearance: in short, whatever would be looked upon in our country as characteristic of a madman, is here regarded by the highest of the Indians as a mark of distinction.

In our present position, we are in the neighborhood of many mines of gold, not one of which, we are told, is more than twenty or twenty-five leagues off: the Indians say that some of them are in Niti, in the possession of Caonabó, who killed the Christians; the others are in another place called Cibao, which, if it please God, we shall see with our eyes before many days are over; indeed we should go there at once, but that we have so many things to provide that we are not equal to it at present. One third of our people have fallen sick within the last four or five days, which I think has principally arisen from the toil and privations of the journey; another cause has been the variableness of the climate; but I hope in our Lord that all will be restored to health. My idea of this people is, that if we could converse with them,

<sup>1</sup> By the Indians Dr. Chanca means the Tainos, the native inhabitants of Española.

<sup>2</sup> "Every woman wears a tiny apron called a *queyu*, suspended by tying its strings around her waist." Im Thurn, *Among the Indians of Guiana*, 194.

<sup>3</sup> On this body painting, see Im Thurn, *ibid.*

they would all become converted, for they do whatever they see us do, making genuflections before the altars at the *Ave Maria* and the other parts of the devotional service, and making the sign of the cross. They all say that they wish to be Christians, although in truth they are idolaters, for in their houses they have many kinds of figures; when asked what such a figure was, they would reply it is a thing of *Turey*, by which they meant "of Heaven." I made a pretence of throwing them on the fire, which grieved them so that they began to weep: they believe that everything we bring comes from Heaven, and therefore call it *Turey*, which, as I have already said, means heaven in their language. The first day that I went on shore to sleep, was the Lord's day. The little time that we have spent on land, has been so much occupied in seeking for a fitting spot for the settlement, and in providing necessaries, that we have had little opportunity of becoming acquainted with the products of the soil, yet although the time has been so short, many marvellous things have been seen. We have met with trees bearing wool, of a sufficiently fine quality (according to the opinion of those who are acquainted with the art) to be woven into good cloth; there are so many of these trees that we might load the caravels with wool, although it is troublesome to collect, for the trees are very thorny,<sup>1</sup> but some means may be easily found of overcoming this difficulty. There are also cotton trees, perennials, as large as peach trees, which produce cotton in the greatest abundance.<sup>2</sup> We found trees producing wax as good both in color and smell as bees-wax and equally useful for burning; indeed there is no great difference between them.<sup>3</sup> There are vast numbers of trees which yield surprisingly fine turpentine;

<sup>1</sup> A species of the *N. O. Bombaceae*; perhaps the *Eriodendron anfractuosum*. (Major.) The English name is silk-cotton tree. The fibre, however, cannot be woven. Von Martius suggests the *Bombax ceiba*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hazard, *Santo Domingo*, p. 350, "the cotton plant which instead of being a simple bush planted from the seed each year, is here a tree, growing two or three years, which needs only to be trimmed and pruned to produce a large yield of the finest cotton."

<sup>3</sup> Probably the so-called Carnauba wax or perhaps palm-tree wax. Cf. the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, art. "Wax."



and there is also a great abundance of tragacanth, also very good. We found other trees which I think bear nutmegs, because the bark tastes and smells like that spice, but at present there is no fruit on them; I saw one root of ginger, which an Indian wore hanging round his neck. There are also aloes; not like those which we have hitherto seen in Spain, but no doubt they are one of the species used by us doctors.<sup>1</sup> A sort of cinnamon also has been found; but, to tell the truth, it is not so fine as that with which we are already acquainted in Spain. I do not know whether this arises from ignorance of the proper season to gather it, or whether the soil does not produce better. We have also seen some lemon-colored myrobolans; at this season they are all lying under the trees, and have a bitter flavor, arising, I think, from the rottenness occasioned by the moisture of the ground; but the taste of such parts as have remained sound, is that of the genuine myrobolan.<sup>2</sup> There is also very good mastic.<sup>3</sup> None of the natives of these islands, as far as we have yet seen, possess any iron; they have, however, many tools, such as axes and adzes, made of stone, which are so handsome and well finished, that it is wonderful how they contrive to make them without the use of iron. Their food consists of bread, made of the roots of a vegetable which is between a tree and a vegetable, and the *age*,<sup>4</sup> which I have already described as being like the turnip, and very good food; they use, to season it, a spice called *agi*,<sup>5</sup> which they also eat with fish, and such

<sup>1</sup> The Spanish here is *linaloe*, but the reference seems to be to the medicinal aloes and not to lign aloes. On lign aloes, see Columbus's Journal, November 12, and note.

<sup>2</sup> The myrobolan is an East Indian fruit with a stone, of the prune genus. Crude or preserved myrobolans were a more important article of commerce in the Middle Ages than now. There were five varieties, one of which, the *Mirobalani citrini*, were so named because they were lemon-colored. Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce du Levant au Moyen-Age*, II. 641. A species of myrobolan grows in South America.

<sup>3</sup> The product of the *Bursera gummifera*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Columbus's Journal, November 4, and note.

<sup>5</sup> *Agi*, also written *Axi*, is the *Capsicum annuum* or Spanish pepper. Most of the cayenne or red pepper of commerce comes from the allied species,

birds as they can catch of the many kinds which abound in the island. They have, besides, a kind of grain like hazel-nuts, very good to eat. They eat all the snakes, and lizards, and spiders, and worms, that they find upon the ground;<sup>1</sup> so that, to my fancy, their bestiality is greater than that of any beast upon the face of the earth. The Admiral had at one time determined to leave the search for the mines until he had first despatched the ships which were to return to Spain, on account of the great sickness which had prevailed among the men,<sup>2</sup> but afterwards he resolved upon sending two bands under the command of two captains, the one to Cibao, and the other to Niti, where, as I have already said, Caonabó lived. These parties went, one of them returning on the twentieth, and the other on the twenty-first of January. The party that went to Cibao saw gold in so many places as to seem almost incredible, for in truth they found it in more than fifty streamlets and rivers, as well as upon their banks; so that, the captain said they had only to seek throughout that province, and they would find as much as they wished. He brought specimens from the different parts, namely, from

*Capsicum frutescens*. In Mexico the name of this indigenous pepper plant was Quauhchilli, *Chili* tree. *Chili* was taken over into Spanish as the common name for capsicum and has come down in English in the familiar Chili sauce. See Peschel, *Zeitalter der Entdeckungen*, p. 139; De Candolle, *Origin of Cultivated Plants*, pp. 289-290. *Encyclopædia Britannica*, art. "Cayenne Pepper."

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Im Thurn, *Among the Indians of Guiana*, 266.

<sup>2</sup> The Admiral, "having described the country at length and the condition in which he was and where he had settled for the Catholic sovereigns and sending them the specimen of gold which Guacanagari had given him and that which Hojeda had brought, and informing them of all that he saw to be needed, despatched the twelve ships before mentioned, placing in command of them all Antonio de Torres, brother of the nurse of the prince Don Juan, to whom he intrusted the gold and all his despatches. They made sail the 2d of February, 1494." Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, II. 25-26. Columbus's letter to Ferdinand and Isabella mentioned here has not been preserved. That part of it which related to future needs was apparently duplicated in the "memorial" which he gave to Torres. This document is given in English in Thacher, *Christopher Columbus*, II. 297-308, and Major, *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus*, ed. 1870, pp. 72-107. See p. 73, *ibid.*, for a reference to letters of the Admiral no longer extant.

the sand of the rivers and small springs. It is thought, that by digging, it will be found in greater pieces, for the Indians neither know how to dig nor have the means of digging more than a hand's depth. The other captain, who went to Niti, returned also with news of a great quantity of gold in three or four places; of which he likewise brought specimens.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, surely, their Highnesses the King and Queen may henceforth regard themselves as the most prosperous and wealthy sovereigns in the world; never yet, since the creation, has such a thing been seen or read of; for on the return of the ships from their next voyage, they will be able to carry back such a quantity of gold as will fill with amazement all who hear of it. Here I think I shall do well to break off my narrative. I think those who do not know me, who hear these things, may consider me prolix, and a man who has exaggerated somewhat, but God is my witness, that I have not exceeded, by one tittle, the bounds of truth.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alonso de Hojeda was sent to explore the region of Cibao with fifteen men. He found Cibao to be fifteen or twenty leagues from Isabella. The other exploring party was headed by Gines de Gorbalan. Further details of these expeditions are given in the Syllacio-Coma letter. Thacher, *Columbus*, II. 258-260. According to Coma, or his translator Syllacio, Cibao was identified with the Sheba of the Bible. Columbus, on the other hand, identified Cibao and Cipango. Cf., e.g., Peter Martyr, *De Rebus Oceanicis*, ed. 1574, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> "The preceding is the transcript of that part of Doctor Chanca's letter, which refers to intelligence respecting the Indies. The remainder of the letter does not bear upon the subject, but treats of private matters, in which Doctor Chanca requests the interference and support of the Town Council of Seville (of which city he was a native), in behalf of his family and property, which he had left in the said city. This letter reached Seville in the month of [March] in the year fourteen hundred and ninety-three [four]." This note is no doubt from the hand of Friar Antonio de Aspa, who formed the collection of papers in which Navarrete found the text of Dr. Chanca's letter. The collection was made about the middle of the sixteenth century. See Navarrete, II. 224. The returning fleet arrived at Cadiz in March, 1494. Bernaldez, *Historia de los Reyes Catolicos*, (ed. 1870), II. 37.