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Columbus
O. C. Howard

Examination Scheme

Written by

Oliver C. Howard

Apr. 5th .. 1850.

Bowdoin College..

Bowdoin College

Columbus.

It is impossible to trace the history of Columbus without a feeling of deep interest, mingled with admiration. The untiring energy & perseverance, with which he pursued an object, at that time, pronounced by the wisest to be a mere idle fancy, impresses so strongly with the conviction of his superiority to common men.

The conception itself, the realization of which has rendered his name immortal, was remarkable. From a few isolated facts his powerful mind conceived the grand idea of a second hemisphere; and this idea quickly assumed, in his view, at least, the form of a reality.

Had he stopped here, Columbus would have been regarded, as nothing more than a superstitious sailor, who fancied that the unknown & boundless ocean was filled with golden isles. But the man, that conceived was the man to execute. Once convinced in his own mind of the truth of his theory, and of its practicable nature, no opposition or danger could deter him from the zealous pursuit of his cherished enterprise.

[But passing over the many eventful periods of his earlier history,] let us bestow a cursory glance upon some later portions of his life and contemplate for a few moments the rewards of genius.

Columbus had devoted his whole life to the realization of that grand conception, which had at an early age taken possession of his heart & imbued his character

and conduct with a loftiness of purpose & a bold enthusiasm. His youthful energy & maturer strength had been unsparingly exerted in the accomplishment of that one object. While seeking assistance in the prosecution of his enterprise, he had wandered from country to country; often on foot, and wholly dependent on the charity of strangers for his daily food. Driven from one Court he had applied to another. Experiencing delay & disappointment in one place, he had repaired to another, though destined to meet a like repulse. Ever inspired with new animation & courage by the least favorable demonstration, and constantly supported & strengthened by the firm & abiding conviction of final success, he had cheerfully submitted to toil, privation & suffering; he had disregarded the sneers & scoffs of his countrymen; and risen superior to the malicious contrivances of his enemies. He had succeeded! He had discovered a new world! The Sovereigns, who had so reluctantly aided his enterprise, had been richly rewarded; and the Spanish crown had acquired a new lustre & importance among the nations of the earth. Now he has grown old in well-doing. The deeply furrowed brow & the silvered locks bespeak both age & life-long care. Yet his step is firm & his form unbent. That natural majesty & conscious strength, which are the emblems of real superiority, discover themselves in every movement. Look upon him & say: is he not happy in the consciousness of the good he has done? Is he not beloved by his Sovereigns & his Countrymen? How can they do less than recompense the hardships of his youth and manhood by kindness and respect! But, alas! few

Sovereigns are ever visited by feelings of gratitude! [Their hearts
have seldom felt the generous warmth of ~~its~~ presence!]
In fact, most of the great benefactors of the human race
have been doomed to some disgrace. Envy, malice & blind
incredulity, and their natural consequence, the spirit of
ingratitude - sometimes in the shape of slander, sometimes
in the garb of bitter, unsparring criticism - but oftener ~~far~~ in
the unmistakable form of open abuse - have chilled the too-
sensitive, too-much-expecting heart. A few perchance have
been fully compensated for toil & study, and have basked in
the sunshine of contemporary favor. But, too often, at the
moment, when the public benefactor feels almost certain of
the admiration & honor of mankind, he is met by cold, unfeeling
neglect, or by an ungenerous persecution. Perhaps this is well
in the end. It may teach men, ^{to look} for something above mere
contemporary praise, - to seek something more noble & more
lasting, than present, transient favor. But hard, hard it
must be for the man of proud spirit to be degraded &
trampled upon by the very recipients of his bounty - by those,
who are bound by all the ties of honor & gratitude to defend &
support him! Even Columbus could not escape this common
fate. He, too, was destined to endure suffering and persecution
- the legitimate offspring of ingratitude! X

While, in "the new world", he is faithfully conducting the
affairs of his Sovereigns, quelling discord & insurrection,
and striving by every possible means to promote ^{true} the interests
of his countrymen, envy & malice are busily at work with
his character. All at once, without warning, without trial,
and even without the slightest knowledge of the nature of

his offence, he is thrown into irons, and exposed to the most humiliating insults. When he learns that this is done by his Sovereign's command, he makes no resistance; he suffers no brother or follower to strike a blow for his deliverance. Crushed in spirit, he bows his head "whitened by age & anxious thought" in humble submission, and receives the heavy iron upon his weary limbs without a murmur. The execrations of the fickle crowd, the lying, false-accusing tongue of the ambitious villain, "pass unheeded by". He feels not these insults, only as they are indications of something else - something worse. It is ingratitude, the ingratitude of friends, of Sovereigns that he feels; this stings his very soul! From them, in whose service he had employed all his life & strength, from them came this insult - this degradation! He shows no resentment, no anger, no sudden outburst of passion, but the natural bitterness of a heart deeply moved by the sense of wrong.

Picture, now, to your mind an old man, whose character is unsullied by a single crime, whose soul has stamped its greatness on every feature - an old man, whose life has been filled up by noble deeds, without one stain of selfishness or avarice; and tell me, to whom could you point more deserving of reverence & love, less open to insult, less liable to abuse? Now follow this noble spirit: behold him under the galling chain - his soul stung with ingratitude and his body aching with pain - the song of hope, that sweet comforter, hushed within him - the past floating before him, as something unreal,

a dream - and the future dark & fearfully uncertain! Can you restrain a feeling of indignation? Can the heart or the head find the ~~least~~ slightest excuse for such treatment?

Nothing is more unnatural, or revolting to our feelings, than the conduct of those, who subjected the old age of Columbus to such unwarranted abuse. None are more deserving of the execrations of posterity, or more likely to receive them, than those vile persecutors, who scrupled not to reward virtue with indignity, & noble actions with humiliation & chains.

Columbus was a Christian. Revenge never mingled itself in his thoughts or his actions. When he appeared at the Court of Ferdinand & Isabella, the tear of sympathy, which his appearance & the recollection of his recent suffering elicited, quickly touched his heart - & dissipated the bitterness of his soul. His pent-up feelings could restrain themselves no longer, but, like the injured child, he burst into tears. He asked not the punishment of his enemies: - he cared not for revenge; but to his rightful honor & his good name, he still clung with eagerness.

These he wished to bequeath to his children and his family, as the wealth due to his services. And these belong to him and are his. Though his lot was hard and his last moments were soothed by none of that favor from his Countrymen or his Sovereign, which gratitude & even decency demanded; yet - he has reaped an ample reward in the regard of posterity: and the name of Columbus, familiar to every child of every nation, will ever be held in grateful remembrance, -

and his fame, untarnished by time, will descend
to the latest generations of men. The parent will
point to him as a noble example for emulation. - The
hero will find in him the model of success. - The
child of fortune will imitate his stability, & decision
of character; - and the Christian will discover in
Columbus a spirit of self-denial, generosity, & forgive-
ness - worthy the source, whence flow all noble qualities
in their purity, the Savior of mankind.

Oliver Otis Howard