

We made a good passage home, having fine weather. After we struck the N. E. trades we averaged ten miles an hour for seven consecutive days, and I have logged the ship fifty miles in a watch of four hours—not bad for an old line-of-battle ship! The first vessel we spoke on the coast gave us the news of the bursting of Commodore Stockton's gun, the *Peacemaker*, on the steamer *Princeton*, at Washington; by this accident several distinguished gentlemen lost their lives, Hon. Abel P. Upshur, who had been secretary of the navy in 1841, among others.

We arrived in New York late in May. We anchored inside of Sandy Hook, and I went up in the gig with our captain, Benjamin Cooper, to Brooklyn, where he lived. It being late when we arrived he told me not to return to the *Columbus*, but to go to the receiving ship *North Carolina* for the night. I did so; and as soon as I got down on her lower deck, I recognized the old smell of rum, tar, bean-soup and tobacco which I had noticed three years before. The next day the *Columbus* came up, and after lying a few days off the battery, went to the navy yard. The men were paid off and discharged, and the officers granted three months' leave of absence. So ended my first cruise.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FRIGATE "POTOMAC"—THE MILLERITE EXCITEMENT—SAIL FOR NORFOLK—LEAVE NORFOLK FOR THE WEST INDIES—THE LANDFALL OF COLUMBUS—GONAIVES—PORT-AU PRINCE—A SAN DOMINGO GAME-COCK—THE YELLOW FEVER—PORT ROYAL—HAVANA—TOMB OF COLUMBUS—PENSACOLA—VERA CRUZ—RUMORS OF WAR WITH MEXICO—RETURN TO PENSACOLA—SHARKS—A LEAK IN THE BOW—A COFFER DAM—THE U. S. SHIP "PRINCETON"—RETURN HOME.

I REMAINED on shore but a few months, and in September was ordered to the frigate *Potomac*, the flag-ship of Commodore David Conner, commanding the West India, or Home Squadron. The *Potomac* was a vessel of 1750 tons; she carried fifty-two guns and was *consequently* called a "44!" She carried thirty long 32-pounders on her main, and twenty-two 32-pounder carronades on her spar deck. These carronades were certainly the most ridiculous guns ever invented; they had neither range or penetration, and were never known to hit anything when fired. The *slides*, though, on which they were mounted were very convenient for *sitting down on*, and the midshipmen made good use of them in their long night watches. When I reported for duty the ship was lying off the navy yard. She had been some time in commission and had but lately returned from the West Indies. The appearance of a fine frigate, in full commission, was not usual in Philadelphia, and she was visited by persons from all parts of the State.

This was the time of what was known as the *Millerite* excitement. One Miller had prophesied that the world would burn up on a certain day in October; and strange to say had found many to believe him. The papers said that on the night appointed the fields in the neighborhood of Philadelphia were thronged with believers in their ascension robes, ready to go

up. In fact, I knew myself a distinguished "society-lady" who was all ready for the event which she fully believed in. There was so much said about it in the papers that I think a good many people felt *uncomfortable*, to say the least.

On the night appointed for the destruction of the world I had the mid-watch, and about 3 o'clock I heard a curious, rumbling noise which I could not account for, and which caused me much uneasiness. The discipline of the ship would not allow of my stepping across the deck and asking the lieutenant of the watch what he thought about it; so I kept my weather eye open for any change in the weather. The noise continued, and when I called my relief at 4 the first thing he said when awake was: "what's that; is the world coming to an end?" It showed how completely men's minds were taken up with the prophecy when *even a midshipman* condescended to pay some attention to it. My relief told me afterwards that the noise was caused by a steamer blowing off steam under water.

We sailed from Philadelphia in November, 1844, and went to Norfolk, where we received on board Messrs. Crump of Virginia, and Bryan of Ohio who were to take passage with us to Port Royal, Jamaica; there they were to take the English mail packet for Chagres. There were no steamers running between New York and the Isthmus at that time, and the trip to California or the ports in South America was very long and tedious. Mr. Crump was appointed *Chargé d' Affaires* to Chili, and Mr. Bryan to Peru. We left Norfolk about December 1st and shaped a course to pass through the Turk's island passage. Our course took us along the eastern side of the Bahama islands, one of which is the first land discovered by Columbus in 1492. Concerning this same *landfall* there is much difference of opinion. All opinions are based upon that portion of Columbus' journal preserved by Las Casas.

When Washington Irving was writing the history of Columbus he got Captain Alexander Slidell Mackenzie of the U. S. navy to investigate this matter, and after an exhaustive

analysis, which received the approbation of Humboldt, the captain decided that the first land discovered was Cat island. It was called by the natives Guanahani, and by the Spaniards San Salvador. [See Irving's Columbus, vol. 1.]

In 1856 Captain A. B. Beecher, Royal navy, after another exhaustive analysis decided that the *landfall* was Watling's island, which is 41 miles S. E. from San Salvador, or Cat island.

Navarette the Spanish historian, (and one might suppose a Spaniard should be the best informed), says it was Turk's island, 280 miles from Cat island.

Fr. Adolph de Varnhagen has published a book to prove that it was Mariguana island, distant from Cat island 160 miles: and finally, in 1882, the Hon. Gustavus V. Fox, who was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy during President Lincoln's administration, came out in an article published in the Coast Survey report, to prove that they were all wrong, and that the *landfall* was Samana or Atkins Kay! This is 100 miles distant from Cat island.

It appears to me that in this investigation it is impossible to determine the first land seen by Columbus by simply taking his journal which gives only the daily *course* and *distance* from the island of Gomera—(one of the Canaries). Let a ship *in this day* sail from Gomera and only give the same *data*, and what seaman will undertake to say what island she would first make in the space comprised between Cat and Turk's islands! He would want to know something more than the course and distance; such as the prevailing winds, the set of the currents, and not only the variation of the compass, but the *local deviation*. This latter point seems to have been overlooked by the investigators.

The compass in use in that day must have been of rude construction, and we do not know anything at all as to how it was mounted. Who knows but that the helmsman occasionally hung his steel helmet, (if he wore one) upon the binnacle, (if there was one)! Bringing into the discussion the *magnetic*

deviation, or variation of the compass as it is called, is, in my humble opinion, *drawing it entirely too fine*; it is painting the lily, as it were.

We know that Columbus first observed the "variation" of the compass; but what means had he of determining it? All his instruments were imperfect. His improved Astrolabe did not hinder him from making many errors in the latitude—he never *did* know his longitude, and he never used the log-line; it was not known then.

It seems to me that the best way to determine the *landfall* is to start from a known point—such as Isabella, on the northern coast of the island of San Domingo, where Columbus built a fort—and "try back" as it were. This was the plan pursued by Mackenzie. But even here we meet with the same difficulties of winds, currents, and local attraction.

Having read much and thought more on this subject I shall continue to pin my faith on Guanahani, or San Salvador, or Cat island, as it is severally called. As Captain Mackenzie says: "Do not disturb the ancient landmarks."

It is worthy of note that in his voyage to the islands and back Columbus was forced by the N. E. trades and the Gulf stream to pursue precisely the route followed by navigators of the present day. On the voyage out he made a straight course for the Bahamas, and on his return was forced to go up to the parallel of 40° in order to get the west winds. He stopped on the voyage back to Spain at the Azores in latitude 39° north. Moreover he sailed from Palos in Spain on his voyage of discovery on a *Friday*, and he first made the island of Guanahani on a *Friday*!

The *Potomac* passed through the Turk's island passage and went first to Gonaives, a small port on the western coast of San Domingo island—from thence we went to Port-au-Prince which is situated at the bottom of a deep bay on the same island. The island of San Domingo was known as Hayti by the natives and called Hispaniola by the Spaniards. At present the eastern half of the island is called Dominica, and the western

Hayti. It was taken by the French in 1677. In 1793 the negroes revolted and massacred nearly all the whites; since which date it has remained in their possession.

Upon our arrival at Port-au-Prince we found the yellow fever raging and the commodore decided to remain but one day. Only the caterers of the messes were allowed to go on shore, and our caterer went with the others. Whether he had underestimated our powers, or not, I do not know; but our stores were exhausted, and we had been reduced to the By-nomeal theorem for some days. With much difficulty we raised ten dollars and sent him on shore. We did not expect much for that sum of money, but we had visions of *yam* and fruit at least. When our caterer returned he brought back a *one-eyed game cock*, for which he had spent all our money! We were inclined to grumble, but as he could *man-handle* any member of the mess we kept our complaints to ourselves. This caterer, who was one of those who go through the world with a "light heart and a thin pair of breeches," said to us: "it's no use to growl; this game cock will give you more satisfaction in the end than the fruit," and he did. We turned him loose upon the main deck where he lived upon the captain's chicken-feed as a kind of free lance; he became a great favorite with the men, and many were the fights he gained. He lived in this way many months and was eventually murdered by the captain's steward. His death caused much indignation in the steerage, and his epitaph was written by our mess poet. It was somewhat after the style of "Old Grimes is dead."

With all our care the yellow fever broke out soon after we sailed from Port-au-Prince; but we only had two cases. Since then I have seen more of this disease than most men, and have had it twice. The first time was at Pensacola in the summer of 1846. I was ashore at the navy yard one night in the gig waiting for the captain, and while there saw that a steamer at the wharf near us was on fire. I gave the alarm and went on board with the gig's crew. The men from our ship soon came to our assistance and we extinguished the fire;

and when that was done, we midshipmen got to skylarking with the hose and were soon very wet. Our captain (God bless him) kept me waiting for him in my wet clothes until near midnight and I was chilled to the bone. When I got on board I found the starboard mess "keeping it up!" Tom Kinloch I remember was making an omelette in a tin cup over three candles. The caterer of the mess having to write orders for the steward to get the next day's marketing, and having kept it up *too high* himself, asked me to write for him. Upon taking the pen I found *I could not see*. I thought it hard times that the others were seeing double, and I not at all; but nevertheless in a few hours I was down with the yellow fever and I did not get to my duty again for a long, long time. As the ship had a spar-deck cabin in addition to one on the main deck, and our captain could not occupy both, (though he tried to) I was removed to it. Just as I had "turned the corner," though still very weak, one-half of our midshipmen were ordered home for their examination as passed-midshipmen. The night before leaving they came to bid me good-bye, and in the excitement of going home and joy at my probable recovery (I am happy to say), one of them, Harry Bluff by name, danced a horn-pipe on the centre-table with his boots on. The next day our captain—a *Tartar* if there ever was one—came in to see me, and on leaving the state-room he noticed the state of the table. "Why! what's all this?" he exclaimed: "Damme, it looks as though some one had been scratching this table with a nail!" I preserved a judicious silence; but I thought to myself, if you had seen Harry Bluff's performance last night you would not be so much surprised.

Less than a year after this, near the close of the war with Mexico, I was returning home in the frigate *Raritan* and again had the yellow fever. My symptoms were the same as in the first attack. We had many cases on board, but I had not feared it; indeed, I was under the impression that I could not have it a second time. I was walking the deck and went to look at the compass to see how the ship was heading, pre-

paratory to turning in. *I could not see the compass* and a few hours after I was down again, and this attack was as bad as the first.

When we left Port-au-Prince one of our midshipmen was ill of the fever and I used to lie in his cot with him while nursing him, and so did some of the other midshipmen; but it did not spread. Altogether, I have seen enough to know that it is not contagious, though it may be infectious. I believe doctors are not certain of it, however. That it can be carried in ships admits of no doubt. In 1855 the steamer *Ben Franklin* conveyed the yellow fever to Norfolk—the men working on her first carried it to Gosport, and it crossed the river into Norfolk with them. This was as plain as a thing could be.

There is much yet to be learned concerning this fearful scourge, and one difficulty, which I have myself observed, is that in one place it is of a mild type, and in another of a very bad one; and even in the same place the fever of one year differs from the fever of another. It prevails every summer on the east coast of Mexico, but is not known, I think, on the west coast. We had on this occasion but two cases; one proved fatal, and the other, being a midshipman, got well.

A few days after leaving Port-au-Prince we arrived at Port Royal, Jamaica, the seaport of Kingston. I have since been much in the tropics, but I have never seen any spot that came up so completely to my idea of "tropical scenery" as Port Royal, with its groves of cocoa-nut trees, thatched cottages and still life.

Our *Chargés* landed here, and in company with many of our officers, visited the governor, Lord Elgin, at his palace, situated somewhere up in the mountains.

This being our first convenient stopping place two of our midshipmen took advantage of it to fight a duel. Neither was hurt and the authorities knew nothing about it.

From Port Royal we sailed for Havana, touching at the beautiful port of Santiago de Cuba by the way. Off Havana

we experienced a heavy "norther," which caused us to lie to under a close reefed main topsail for two days. At 12 o'clock on the third day the commodore determined to bear up for the harbor; I expect he did not happen to bear in mind what a heavy sea there would be off the port. In entering Havana you steer directly for the mouth of the harbor and then haul short round the Moro Castle, which stands on the left hand side. As we went flying before the wind and sea, under double reefed topsails, we commenced rolling our spar deck guns under water as we approached the port. The pilot could not come off, so our captain had to take the ship in; and he soon becoming confused, the commodore took charge of the deck; it was the best thing I ever saw him do. The ship was yawing four or five points, and four men at the wheel could hardly steer her. At one moment she would be heading for the Moro Castle as though she was about to run it down, and the next for the rocks off the *playa* on which the sea was breaking higher than our fore-top. It was an anxious moment with all hands; the braces were led along ready to be manned, and the men were hanging on to the belaying pins, guns, and everything else that would yield a support. On shore the *playa* was crowded with spectators, and as our ship would point her head in that direction as though determined to be among them, there would be an involuntary movement on their part to get out of the way. It must have been a most beautiful sight to them and no doubt they enjoyed it. I was hanging on to the spanker boom myself and could not help thinking at the time what a grand spectacle we must present, and how much I would enjoy it if *on shore!* As Ross Brown says in his description of his horse Saladin running away with him: "It would have been so funny to see somebody else mounted upon Saladin!" As we got nearly abreast the Moro, the frigate gave a heavy roll to port, then to starboard, taking the water in over each bulwark in succession, and nearly dipping her lower yardarms in the water, pointed her bow toward the *playa* for one awful moment, and then with the helm hard a-starboard she slowly

doubled round the castle, and in less than one minute was in smooth water, and nearly becalmed under the lee of the precipitous cliff on which it is situated. Those of us who had been singing to ourselves the long metre doxology drew a long breath, and resumed our every day duties!

Havana was founded in 1511; it was taken by the English in 1762 and restored in 1763. The old town is surrounded by a wall and the streets are very narrow. In the new portion they are wide and there are many handsome public buildings. The Tacon theatre is one of the largest and prettiest I have ever seen. In the cathedral are deposited the remains of Columbus.

Columbus died in Spain on the 20th of May, 1506. His body was deposited in the Convent of St. Francisco, and his obsequies were celebrated at Valladolid. In 1513 his remains were transported to the Carthusian monastery of Las Cuevas of Seville. In 1536 the bodies of Columbus and his son Diego were removed to Hispaniola and interred in the principal chapel of the cathedral of the city of San Domingo. At the termination of the war between France and Spain in 1795, all the Spanish possessions in the island of Hispaniola were ceded to France, and in 1796 the remains were again removed to the cathedral in Havana.

A few years ago in consequence of some discoveries in the cathedral at San Domingo an attempt was made to throw some doubt as to whether the body removed to Havana was that of Columbus or not, but as Navarrette in his "collections" has given a circumstantial account of the proceedings, and has minutely described the precautions taken by the Spanish authorities upon the occasion of disinterring the body, I do not see that there could have been a mistake made or a reasonable doubt as to the authenticity of the narrative.

In February we sailed from Havana and went to Pensacola where we found the other ships of our small squadron; they were the *Falmouth* and the brigs *Lawrence* and *Somers*. The 7th U. S. Infantry was at this time garrisoning Forts Pickens

and Barrancas, and we became well acquainted with the officers. Pensacola was very gay at this time, and many were the balls given, alternately, on board ship, at Fort Pickens, at the navy yard, and in town. Affairs with Mexico were beginning to look squally. General Taylor was assembling a force at Corpus Christi in Texas, which the 7th Infantry soon joined, and Commodore Conner proceeded to Vera Cruz with his squadron.

Upon our arrival there we anchored off Green island, which lies $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Vera Cruz, and no one was permitted to visit the city. We had only occasional communication with the town—a boat coming off now and then with dispatches for the commodore, and taking his in return. I have always understood that Commodore Conner's dispatches at this time were regarded as models in their way, and were highly approved of at Washington.

We remained here for four months and had a hard time of it; there was no place to visit but Green island—a little spot formed of coral. We had frequent and long exercises at the guns, and worst of all a half allowance of water. It was an idiosyncrasy of the commodore's to keep his men on a short allowance of water. There was in this case no earthly necessity for it. We had only to go a few miles up or down the coast to find rivers where we could have gotten all we wanted. It became so unbearable at last that the lieutenants represented it to the Navy Department, and the Secretary issued an order that the allowance should not be reduced unless it was absolutely necessary. It was a joyful moment when we got underway and returned to Pensacola, where we arrived in August, 1845.

In consequence of the advance of our army under General Taylor towards the Rio Grande and the threatening attitude of Mexico, it was thought necessary to make large additions to the squadron and we soon had quite a respectable fleet in Pensacola harbor.

Many sharks were seen in the harbor at this time—the pilots said it was because of the large number of ships in port, which

they followed in. Among them I particularly remember the *Leopard shark*, a horrid spotted monster, about 14 feet long.

In the fall of this year a fishing party came over from Mobile and whilst they were hauling the seine on Santa Rosa island the leader, a large, corpulent man, was seized by a shark and carried off in spite of the shouts and splashings of his companions; I think they did not recover the body.

This is the only case that ever came under my observation where a shark actually took a man off. I believe that such cases are rare, and that a shark only attacks a man, in a crowd, when very hungry.

I recollect that a boat came alongside of us from the *Saratoga* one day with a man's ghastly head in a bucket, for recognition. They had caught a shark and found the head inside. It proved to be that of a man who had fallen overboard from the *Falmouth* the night before. In this case the man was probably drowned before the shark bit his head off.

While on our way from Vera Cruz to Pensacola we discovered a leak in the bow of the *Potomac*, and there being no dock at the navy yard it was thought the ship would be sent north. Mr. Brodie, the naval constructor on the station, however, thought he could get at it by means of a *coffer-dam*, as he had once succeeded in stopping a leak in the bottom of the Delaware, 74, in that way. Accordingly a false bow was built at the navy yard, and finally launched and brought to the ship. I believe we had commenced pumping it out and it would probably have proved a success, but a gale of wind springing up suddenly the other bower anchor was let go, and this with the wind and sea combined, caused the false bow to open and it was forced asunder on the ship's stem. This was a very badly managed affair throughout, and Mr. Brodie did not have the cordial co-operation of our officers; indeed, when the news came aft that the thing was done for, it was received with cheers. Poor Mr. Brodie was seized with an apoplectic fit on the quarter deck, and died before he could be removed to his house.

The commodore transferred his flag to the *Falmouth* and early in December we sailed for Norfolk in company with the screw sloop-of-war *Princeton*, which vessel was sent with us as a matter of precaution.

The *Princeton* was the first screw steamer we had in the navy, and I sometimes think the *best*. She was commissioned in 1843, and during the entire war with Mexico was actively employed. I never served in her myself, but was in squadron with her for three years, and she was always ready for service. At the time of which I am writing screw ships were rare, and the appearance of the *Princeton*, with her sails furled, going along seven knots an hour—like the ship of the Ancient Mariner, “without or wave or wind”—used to excite much astonishment among the merchant craft.

We anchored on the 19th of December in Lynhaven Bay, just inside Cape Henry. The next day was too foggy to proceed up the bay. About noon a merchant schooner passed close to us, and I was sent in a boat to put some officers on board her. She had a fair wind and tide and it was some time before I caught her up. The captain told me he had not seen the land since leaving Boston, yet here he was in a thick fog steering directly for Norfolk.

I had some difficulty in finding the ship again and came near “losing the number of my mess.” Fortunately the captain ordered guns to be fired and the ship’s bell to be rung. When I heard the first gun I found I had passed the ship, and was pulling out to sea. It was nearly four o’clock when I got on board. We arrived at Norfolk on the 20th day of December and, contrary to our expectations, the ship was put out of commission and the crew discharged.

CHAPTER V.

RETURN TO THE FRIGATE “POTOMAC”—LIST OF HER OFFICERS—FIRST IMPRESSIONS—SAIL FOR VERA CRUZ—ARRIVAL—SACRIFICIOS ISLAND—SAN JUAN DE ULLOA—SAIL FOR BRAZOS SANTIAGO—LAND A FORCE AT POINT ISABEL—BATTLE OF PALO ALTO—BATTLE OF RESACA DE LA PALMA—GENERAL TAYLOR AND COMMODORE CONNER—AN ALARM—MAJOR RINGGOLD—CAPTAIN MAY—LIEUTENANT RIDGELEY—BOAT EXPEDITION UP THE RIO GRANDE.

THE *Potomac* was put into dock and the leak soon stopped. She was immediately re-commissioned, a new set of officers ordered to her, and a new crew shipped. Feeling sure that war with Mexico was imminent, I applied to return to her; and after some difficulty received my orders. I reported on board in February 1846.

As the *Potomac’s* officers and men took part in all the naval operations in the Gulf of Mexico during the war, I give a list of the officers so far as my memory serves me: captain, J. H. Aulick; lieutenants, Lockwood, Jas. Rowan, Humphreys, North, Frailey and Doyle; sailing-master, Noland; purser, Bryan; surgeon, Dodd; assistant surgeons, Baxter and Hamilton; marine officer, Garland; chaplain, Lewis, passed midshipmen, Moore, Abbott, Tattnall and Hopkins; midshipmen, Monroe, Carmichael, Powell, Pembroke Jones, McLane, C. Hunter, Murdaugh and Somerville. The forward officers I do not recollect. There were many changes in the ward-room during the cruise, but none among the midshipmen.

My first impressions were not agreeable. I was the last officer to report, and when I arrived I found the ship in commission and nearly ready for sea. Full of zeal, I barely stopped to get my breakfast at the hotel, and then slipping on my uniform I hurried over to the navy yard to report. Our captain